CHAPTER III

Stephen Spender's World Within World: A Framework of Public Events
Autobiography and the novel, as literary genres, have many features in common, for instance, a story structure, but these similarities are in fact deceptive and only superficial. Both the forms of literature have a narrative structure, but it is handled in the novel and in autobiography in different ways. An autobiographer imagines a story of the self that he discovers or composes, the story which "is formed from events that presumably really took place;" whereas the novelist imagines a narrative which he entirely invents, or a story having no real basis at all. Or again, an autobiography deals with a real self, whereas a novel deals with fictitious characters.

In the twentieth century, however, the differences between the two genres seem to narrow down because, "twentieth-century autobiographies deliberately adopt the technique of novels. Twentieth-century novelists write thinly veiled autobiography...." Techniques that the autobiographer and the novelist borrow from each other

2 Ibid., p.300.
only add to the "confusions of genre."³

This "confusions of genre" appears to have affected Spender's work. Thus, towards the end of his autobiography, after having read over the draft, Spender asks himself if he would have done better to choose to write an autobiographical novel instead. He states:

"Reading over what I have written, I ask myself whether I would not have done better to write my autobiography as a novel. Many of the experiences would be easier to express in the kind of fiction which people recognize as autobiography, without their being confronted with the immediacy of the writer who says: 'the hero is I'."⁴

It may be noted here that a similar question occurred to Edwin Muir. Like Muir, though for different reasons, Spender too feels, at times, that it would be easier to present his self-history in a fictional form. But Spender ultimately prefers this genre, autobiography proper, for he knows that in that form he will be able to establish a rapport with his readers. Roy Pascal supports Spender's choice of the autobiographical form when he asserts: "... it would mean a more honest relationship between him and his work, and between the

³ Ibid., p.300.

reader and the author." Moreover, Spender felt, by
confining himself to a factual and straightforward rendering
of his account he would avoid the temptation of escaping
"from the harsh reality of himself,..." Spender feels he
must learn to face life as it is. He wants no escape or
short-cut to an ideal fictitious world.

Spender's narrative structure is at once in evidence
in the introductory passage to his autobiography: "... I saw
the advantage of having a framework of objective events
through which I could knock the holes of my subjective
experiences." (WWW vii) He makes this choice only after
examining one or two alternative patterns for finding a
suitable structure to narrate his subjective experiences,
and he finds "this general structure" (WWW vii) the
strongest and most accommodating to unfold his narrative.

Stephen Spender asserts in World Within World how
he will limit himself "...within the framework of an
autobiography intended to be a projection" (WWW 202) of
his personal existence. The central issue of the
autobiography then is an assertion of a self undergoing
various experiences in life in relation to a framework of

5 Roy Pascal, Design and Truth in Autobiography, p.163.
6 Ibid., p.163.
objective events. It is rather a process of integration or of linking up the self with the outside world, joining one's private being with the world of public events, and finally of connecting the individual with the society.

Very appropriately and meaningfully Spender has chosen the poem "Darkness And Light" from The Still Centre to preface his autobiography. The first two stanza read as follows:

To break out of the chaos of my darkness
Into a lucid day, is all my will
My words like eyes in night, stare to reach
A centre for their light: and my acts thrown
To distant places by impatient violence
Yet lock together to mould a path
Out of my darkness, into a lucid day.

Yet equally, to avoid that lucid day
And to preserve my darkness, is all my will
My words like eyes that flinch from light, refuse
And shut upon obscurity; my acts
Cast to their opposites by impatient violence
Break up the sequent path; they fly
On a circumference to avoid the centre. 7

For Spender, it appears, the autobiographical process is a process of self-analysis, and this poem outlines the dual movement between the polarities governing the process.

For this purpose, Spender uses one or two major metaphors, the metaphor of an interplay of light and darkness, and of a movement to and fro, from the centre to the circumference.

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7 The poem, "Darkness And Light" is from The Still Centre (London: Faber & Faber Ltd., 1939), p. 77 which is chosen as a preface to WWW with some alterations.
and back again. It is within the framework of these larger metaphors, especially of the circle and circumference, that Spender creates a myth of himself. The back and forth movement leaves him disillusioned at times and, at others, it brings him enlightenment regarding the real nature of the self. Sometimes he prefers to stick to the centre, and at other times he hovers about around the circumference to get a clearer image of himself. In the course of this process of self-analysis, Spender feels:

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\text{The light} \\
\text{Runs from the dark, the dark from light} \\
\text{Towards a black and white total emptiness.}^8
\]

He acknowledges at one moment that the

\"Centre and circumference are both my weakness.\"^9

Nevertheless, the poem ends on a happy note of reconciliation of these polarities.

Throughout the autobiography, Stephen Spender tries to strike a balance between outer and inner life. When it comes to presenting his self, he knows that one can hardly give a true picture of oneself, for he is aware of the disparity that lies between the subjective and the objective aspects of oneself. As regards an objective view of oneself, he believes that such an account of the self

\[\text{Ibid., p.78.}\]
\[\text{Ibid., p.77.}\]
could hardly be called an autobiography, and it would be fitting to call such a view a biography of oneself. Thus, for Spender, arriving at a consistent view of subjective and objective worlds is a problematic task to the self-narrator.

One striking feature of *World Within World* is that Spender breaks away from the "unnecessary convention" (WWW viii) of following a chronological order, beginning with one's birth, and passing through childhood, adulthood and the like, in giving his account. An autobiographer's "typical obsession with the linearity of time"\(^1\) does not affect Spender hence, he does not follow a time-pattern "which begins with his birth and runs up to the present of writing."\(^2\) Instead, Spender begins and ends his autobiography with a narration of his childhood days. As he states: "So childhood is like wheels within wheels of this book, which begins, and revolves around, and ends with it. It is end and beginning, introduction and explanation." (WWW viii) Within this circular movement Spender finds a time pattern of his own that will trace the various stages of his development. Spender, like other modern autobiographers, as Blanchard says, "seeks

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\(^{11}\) Ibid., 327.
to capture something other than a mere chronological sequence.\footnote{12}

As Spender sets out to trace the various stages of his development, within a defined circular structure, he touches upon those "spots of time" that hold some special significance for him, and this gives a new dimension to his self-portrait. Keeping in mind the metaphors he chooses to define his self, one might well say that his portrait achieves a three-dimensional quality as it illumines every aspect of Spender's life - his political commitments, his personal life and his religious convictions. To speak in terms of the Cartesian experience of doubt, it is a movement from doubt to certainty, or from the chaos of one's darkness to the lucidity of one's day.

As Spender proceeds in his narration of the various aspects of his life, his autobiography takes on an appearance peculiarly its own, and it reads like a socio-political document or study rather than a self-history. This is so, because Spender tends to speak more about others than his own self. But this again is a modern tendency. Francis Hart speaks of the elements of modernity

\footnote{12}Marc Eli Blanchard, "The Critique of Autobiography," Comparative Literature, Vol.34, No.2 (Spring 1982), 104.
in Spender's autobiography: "The movement of Spender's World Within World is comparably complex: a historico-cultural journey through a decade of crisis; ... a quest for the "wheels within wheels," the repossessed childhood that at last affirms and encompasses the integrity of the adult. No one has understood better than Spender the complexities of the autobiographical form and its relation to the confessional intention." Spender's approach to his task of self-delineation, as Francis Hart rightly points out, is very different in intention from the confessional autobiographies of the pre-Romantic era.

II

World Within World contains a narration of events to which Spender actually "bore witness," (WWW 334) events in the religious and political spheres, and also in terms of his personal affairs. Spender's highly intelligent, keenly observant, mind and sharply sensitive nature allows him not only to give a just appraisal of the various phases of the intellectual and social life around him, but also to highlight certain aspects of his own life, and especially his efforts to fit in well with the circumstances he has had to face.

Spender's response to the political events of his day comes close to that of the other intellectuals of his day. His persistent reference to the external events as having a great effect on private lives, is but an expression of the general character of the period. Spender constantly speaks of external events "dwarfing individuals" (WWW 284), or individuals being controlled more and more by "public fate." (WWW 285) In World Within World, he accordingly focuses his attention on the "background of events from 1928-1939." (WWW vii) These are also the formative years of his personal life. Spender's chief endeavour in his life-history, is to point out the effect of those years on his own life and also on the lives of others. Europe faced a number of political upheavals during the years 1928-'39. A number of writers of the 'thirties have tried to portray the events of the period in some form or the other. The writers of the generation share a grave concern for the happenings in Europe at the time, this being their common theme. To name a few writers, for instance - Auden in Orators (1932), Auden and Isherwood in The Ascent of P6 (1936), Louis MacNeice in Autumnal Journal (1939) or C.Day Lewis in Nabara (1933) - have the same tale of incertitude, hopelessness or conflict to relate in their respective works. Almost all
of them realize the urgent need for a new initiative to save the situation.

The works of these writers also reflect their awareness of how events in public life affect private lives. In Auden's famous phrase this was the time when the writers realized the need to "make action urgent and its nature clear." The picture that they draw is that of a sick England and of a sick society, the sufferers comprising the middle classes mainly, the unemployed, the idle workers. They are shown as looking about them helplessly for a change, though they are not sure if the change will bring about any good to them. In terms of what is a recurrent metaphor, they aspire to journey beyond the border and start life anew.

To Spender, these problems are not new. His complaint of being "hounded by external events" (WWW 137) is evidence of his being aware of the helplessness felt all over Europe, which is referred to in almost all his writings. He believes that public events happen "more or less incalculably" and they are the "result of clashes

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15 See for instance, Stephen Spender's The Thirties And After; Poetry, Politics, People (1933-75), p.22 for a description of the condition of Europe during the 'thirties.
of interests, economic factors, the influence of outstanding personalities in political life." (WWW 134)

During the 'thirties, Spender's travels across Europe made him conscious of the true political situation all around, and he was to react sharply like most of the intellectuals of the period. He abhorred war, wanted social justice, and was attracted for sometime towards Communism. But in the end, in his efforts at resisting evil he could not think of giving up freedom as a value. He did not want to accept dictatorship and the methods of revolutionary violence. As narrated in World Within World, a character called Chalmers (Isherwood's friend who is referred to as "Chalmers"), on hearing of Spender's notions of bringing about a peaceful revolution in Europe through the establishment of a just international society, refers to "Gandhi." This same incident is recalled in Spender's The God That Failed (p6236–237).

Spender was conscious of various political parties trying to achieve their several goals and promote their interests, no matter at what cost. He found the Nazis and the Communists wooing the working class people during the chaotic period in Germany. And conditions in general, all over Europe, were the same to a greater or lesser degree. The aristocrats tried to preserve the "noblest German tradition against foreign elements and proletarianization."
The united middle class blamed the Jews and Polish refugees for their condition. Spender was quite puzzled by the accusations the communists made against bourgeois society. At this stage of life he longed to get away from the bourgeois camp, to which he belonged, and to join the "setters-up of world socialism." But he states that even though this feeling came to him, he was not quite convinced of the essential rightness of the position adopted by the Communist party. He joined the Party in 1936 for a short time, and broke away in 1937 for he was not ready to give up his own liberal concept of freedom and truth. He could not reconcile himself to the behaviour of some of the members of the Communist party, for instance, the lies they uttered for their own selfish gains, or their attempt to expose the atrocities of the Republicans during the Spanish war, or their hesitancy in acknowledging their own mistakes. In the final analysis, he could not rely on "proletarian virtues" and the promises of the emergence of a "classless society" for the removal of the evils of bourgeois society.

Spender's brief contact and final break with the Communist Party is more fully described in The God That Failed (1950) than in his autobiography. As Surya Nath Pandey writes, "The God That Failed is a painful record of despair that overtook Spender and his contemporaries as their hopes of bringing millenium upon the earth through Communism failed to materialize." Stephen Spender; A Study in Poetic Growth (New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann Pvt.Ltd., 1982), p.20.

16 As Surya Nath Pandey writes, "The God That Failed is a painful record of despair that overtook Spender and his contemporaries as their hopes of bringing millenium upon the earth through Communism failed to materialize." Stephen Spender; A Study in Poetic Growth (New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann Pvt.Ltd., 1982), p.20.
Failed, for instance, he observes that when he joined the party, he behaved like his comrades. He explains:

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\text{"When I saw photographs of children murdered by the Fascists, I felt furious pity. When the supporters of Franco talked of Red atrocities, I merely felt indignant that people should tell such lies. In the first case I saw corpses, in the second only words."}^{17}
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But his membership of the Communist Party made him aware of the realities of the situation. He realized:

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\text{"They have adopted a theory of society which encourages a human vice: to regard their own cause and their own supporters as real, and all other causes and their exponents as abstract examples of outmoded theoretical positions."}^{18}
\]

His conscientious analysis of the workings of the Communist Party made him aware of the indifferent, negligent and partial manner in which they treated their members. He narrates, for instance, the incident of a lady, whose husband was arrested in Moscow on the day of their arrival there, but was not heard of thereafter. The lady's enquiries were ignored. (The God That Failed 262) Again for instance he speaks of an influential statesman's nephew, a member of the International Brigade, who was spared from going into the battle. (The God That Failed 262)

As Spender speaks of the background of the years 1928-'39, he also refers to the general fear, disillusionment.

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18 Ibid., p.254.
and desperation of the people. Such a state of affairs clearly pointed to the evil days that were in store for them. The turbulent situation was further aggravated by the out-break of the Spanish Civil War in July, 1936. Due to foreign intervention, the war took a different turn. As he puts it: it was a war fought between foreign people on a foreign land, in which the people of Spain had hardly any participation. In his autobiography, Spender brings out the impact of the Spanish Civil War and the peculiar nature of the dilemma he faced at the time with other intellectuals. In Spender's own case, as he states in World Within World, he joined the Fire Service in a bid to do something for a good cause.

One dreadful aspect of the Spanish War left a deep scar on Spender's mind, viz., the death of "heroes" in the Civil war. In World Within World, he inserts extracts from

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19 See Stephen Spender's World Within World, p.215 and also James Joll's analysis of the political situation in Europe which provides an exhaustive explanation: "... both Italy and Germany were giving substantial help to Franco, while the Soviet Union responded by sending supplies and advisers to the Republicans. The intensification of the civil war in Spain by foreign intervention had political and emotional repercussions which affected all Europe. It was widely believed that the confrontation in Spain between Germany and Italy on the one hand and the Soviet Union on the other was the first round of a world-wide struggle between Communism and Fascism." - Europe Since 1870: An International History (London: Weidenfield & Nicholson Ltd., 1973), p.252.
a letter that Jimmy Younger sent him from the front, describing large numbers of men dying in action. (WWW 214) During this critical decade, a group of writers like Wilfred Owen (1893-1918), Julian Bell (1908-1937), Christopher Caudwell (1907-1937), and John Cornford (1915-1936), were in Spain. Some of them were there as observers, others took part in the action and a number of them were killed. Spender was there as a war correspondent. Spender shares Owen's belief that people who died as combatants are not heroes. He abhors the false lure of glorified death that led people to become fictitious heroes. How acutely and deeply he must have felt the impact of the Spanish Civil War may be judged from his poems of this period.

In World Within World, Spender's vision does not remain confined to his own realm, but enlarges itself to encompass the humanity at large; and he speaks of the "universal nature of the disaster overtaking civilization." (WWW 284) At the same time, he looks forward to an ideal

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20 Owen stands strikingly close to Spender in his assertion of deaths in the battlefield as a critic points out: "Owen recognizes with startling modernity that death can be as certain out of battle as it is, and dispiritingly inglorious." - Twentieth Century Poetry: Critical essays and documents Ed. Graham Martin and P.N.Turbank (Milton Keynes, Walton Hall: The Open Univ. Press, 1975), p.215.

21 The poems that deal with the Spanish War are discussed later.
social order in which people will enjoy justice, peace and freedom. In *Forward From Liberalism* (1937), he has chalked out such an ideal picture. As he explains in his autobiography:

"In *Forward From Liberalism*, I argued that Liberals must reconcile Communist social justice with their liberal regard for social freedom, and that they must accept the methods which it might be necessary to use in order to defeat Fascism."

Spender's dream of an ideal society is almost a utopian image, belonging to the past. But late in life he realized that a middle course between any two extremes could be reached if an individual became conscious not only of himself, but of others and this would ultimately lead him to a better understanding of himself and the world at large, so as to bring about a concord between the personal and the public realms.

(ii)

To what extent events in the public realm affect one's personal life is illustrated in Spender's own case. In *World Within World*, Spender constantly complains of an...

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22 See Spender's, *Forward From Liberalism*, where an idealized vision of society is presented: "A freedom which rests on the basis of international peace without competition or rivalry, the economic security of every individual who is willing to work for the benefit of society;" (London: Victor Gollancz, 1937), p.171.
individual's inner autonomy being curbed by outer events. This becomes explicit when he says:

"External things over which I had no control had usurped my own deepest personal life, so that my inner world became dependent on an outer one, ... on a more superficial level, the existence of this vast immoral spiritual demonism in the world which was Fascism, dwarfed my own personal problems." (WWW 190-191)

During the 'thirties, Spender travelled widely across Europe, and the public turmoil in Europe affected him in a profound way. How events in the wider world of public events affected Spender directly, is evidenced in his account of his relationship with Jimmy Younger, an unemployed youth.

His involvement with Jimmy was so intense that there came a time when he simply could not think of getting along without him. When Jimmy took advantage of this, Spender could not think of getting rid of him, considering his responsibility towards him, since he was unemployed. (WWW 183) Jimmy's case is a reminder to him of "millions of the unemployed" (WWW 177) like him. He admits that he was responsible for Jimmy's hopeless dependence on him, but he feels it "was also a social phenomenon with an entirely public aspect." (WWW 183) The same public issue, viz., unemployment affects him personally, when Walter, another jobless youth, keeps on asking him for money on false pretexts of undertaking some journey or the other, journeys which were in fact never made. Examining Walter's
case critically Spender feels guilty; as he puts it: "... I felt that as a member of a more fortunate social class I owed him a debt." (WWW 118) When Spender realized the ill-effects Jimmy's relationship had on him, he thought of taking steps and putting an end to their companionship. According to the account given in World Within World, this was also the period marked by his involvement with Elizabeth. (WWW 193-201)

Another instance of external events affecting Spender's personal life is seen in his narration of the unhappy experiences relating to his first marriage. About his hasty marriage to Inez, he explains:

I was forced to act because I had reached that stage where work is not enough to fill the emptiness of living alone, friends had failed, and therefore marriage seemed the only solution. (WWW 205)

Inez was only temporarily able to fill in the void he experienced before marriage. Inspite of some happy years they spent together, Spender was not able to remain fully absorbed in his personal life and cut himself off from the outside world. He states:

throughout the whole duration of our marriage I was obsessed as I have never been before or since; by hatred of Fascism, by the Spanish war, by the anxiety on Jimmy's account. All these things Inez understood, was patient about and sympathized with. But she was not reassured when she needed reassurance. (WWW 258)
About World Within World, E.E. Leavis says in Scrutiny (Vol. XVIII, 1951) that Spender's description of his Oxford years is perhaps the most interesting part of the autobiography. The reason lies in the fact that Spender here recalls those formative years when he was maturing as a writer. Oxford he found not as he "imagined it would be." (WWW 33) The experience of attending a public school was not very pleasant for Spender and his repulsion for public schools is expressed in his autobiography (WWW 34-37) and is very similar to the views expressed by Louis MacNeice in his autobiography, The Strings are False, (p.80) or C.Day Lewis in The Buried Day (p.209).

The Oxford phase in Spender's life is of particular significance as it contributes to Spender's development as a writer, and particularly as a poet. This is also the phase when he begins to look outside himself and becomes acquainted with writers like T.S.Eliot, W.H.Auden, Virginia Woolf, John Lehmann, C.Day Lewis, Louis MacNeice among others; and some of them were to have a great influence over him. Like other literary men of this period, he too considered Auden as an unacknowledged leader of the 'thirties
generation. As Spender observes, these writers belonged to the "Divided Generation of Hamlets who found the world out of joint and failed to set it right." (WWW 202)

Nowhere in World Within World, is this more clearly specified as in the Writer’s Congress episode. The Writer’s Congress at Madrid in the Summer of 1937 brought a number of writers together to show their "opposition to Fascism" (WWW 241) and also to "discuss the attitude of the Intellectuals of the World to the Spanish War." (WWW 240) But the purpose of the meeting was not served, for in spite of the good features the Congress had, it also had an atmosphere of a "spoiled children’s party" about it. The "strong experience" Spender gained there led to a sense of "deep dissatisfaction."

23 a) Spender says: "The thirties are often described as a literary movement, and Auden is supposed to have been its leader." - The Thirties And After: Poetry, Politics, People (1933-73), pp.18-19.

b) In Poetry Since 1939 Spender observes about Auden and his generation: "... they were rather a group of friends, contemporaries at the universities of Oxford and Cambridge influenced each other in a personal way. The chief influence was undoubtedly the powerful intelligence and personality of W.H. Auden." (London: Longmans, 1946), p.23.

As an artist, Spender is well aware of the difficulties a writer faces in articulating his response to the existing state of affairs and this is reflected in his various writings, as also in his autobiography. Spender wonders whether it is "possible for the artist to discover a system of values that are not purely subjective and individualistic, but objective and social; ..."24 This quest leads him on to state how the artist can possibly interpret his own position especially in relation to others. He explains:

"... we have got to make some choice outside the private entanglements of our personal life. We have got to try somehow to understand that objective life moving down on us like a glacier, but which, after all, is essentially not a glacier, is an historic process, the life of people like ourselves, and therefore our 'proper study.'"25

One might also take a look at what Spender says about modern literature: "The tendency of modern literature has been for writers to relate particular spheres of individual vision to this larger condition, the small shadow to the larger shadow."26 But he also knows that "the public is necessary, but the private must not be abolished by it; and the individual must not be swallowed up by the concept of social man." (WWW 312)

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25 Ibid., p.223.
A modern autobiographer, as pointed out earlier, has to discover his own pattern in his work, and, therefore, each lays stress on that aspect of his experience which will enable him to project his personal history in the most cogent and convincing way. With Spender, as it appears, his aim is not only to trace his own development, but also to provide a personal, and yet as far as possible an objective account of the period. Suggestively enough, however, one particular aspect of Spender's life, viz., his religious convictions, does not find a full exposition in *World Within World*.

Nevertheless, a curious reader may infer from Spender's autobiography, the general direction of his thought. Spender's attitude is perhaps influenced by his "Puritan upbringing" (*WWW* 299), and in his case his awareness of "Puritan decadence" (*WWW* 314) is heightened by the liberal tradition he was brought up in. Nowhere in his autobiography does Spender claim to be an avowed Christian.

Spender's rational approach to the changing values of religion may be inferred, for instance, from the statement Spender makes in "Confessions and Autobiography," about the Christian practice of confession. Here Spender
takes first the case of St. Augustine who lays bare "his soul before a God," and then of Rousseau, who shares the secrets of his heart "with other human hearts." This, as Spender further explains, is the result of the value people attach these days to confess one's innermost feelings to a psychiatrist rather than a confessor belonging to the church.

Spender's attitude to questions of religion and of faith is reflected in this statement he makes in *The Creative Element*:

"One thing I suggest is that the writers who rejected the Churches and society during the last century raised questions about the relationship of spiritual life, not just to some kind of abstract materialist philosophy, but to the material structure of all modern societies. These questions do not seem to me at all to be answered by today's Catholic and Anglican writers."  

According to Spender, modern writers have found a substitute to fill in the void created by the "spiritually barren external world" they live in, by creating "their own values within their inner lives." The divorce between religion and literature, in the modern context that he speaks of, in *The Creative Element*, could very well serve as an

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29 Ibid., p. 22.
explanation of his reticence in his autobiography about his own beliefs: "Poetry could not become a substitute for religion, but it could draw or create a picture of the blank of religion and describe the modern human experiences to which the religions no longer seemed to apply." The same thought is reflected in the following observation: "The poet is put in the position of having to project patterns of experience in which man is outside everything but himself, expelled from God and the past by the contemporary state of scientific knowledge."

The attitude he seems to be taking here tempts one to label Spender as an agnostic. But a close examination of his tenets in life gives one the impression that Spender's overt attitude to religion is perhaps deceptive. Religion which acts as a source from which a person draws his inner strength, is not wanting in Spender's case, for it is this very strength that helps him to make his life meaningful, in spite of the fact that in the present age man finds himself shut off "from God and the past, and inside the cage of contemporary attitudes."

30 Ibid., p.177.
32 Ibid., p.25.
The very fact that an autobiographer undertakes to narrate his life-history suggests that he is guided by a sense of wholeness. The autobiographer, obviously, writes his self-history on the assumption that he has come to terms with life. This sense of wholeness is reflected in the autobiographer's recourse to some all-inclusive metaphor.

Such a metaphor in Muir's case is the Biblical myth. With Spender, the question is: even though his autobiography lacks any explicit reference to religion, does he have recourse to any governing metaphor? The governing metaphor used by Spender is, that of the centre and the circumference, as exemplified in World Within World. The metaphor is essentially abstract - a personal metaphor - not a shared one as in the case with Muir. The fact that Spender can achieve a degree of wholeness with the help of a metaphor of this type, is an indication of his position in relation to belief.

If Spender believes in anything, it is in the liberal humanist ideal, viz., adjustibility of one's inner self with the outer self, one's subjective world with the objective world. This preoccupation is expressed by Spender in his foreward to The Still Centre:
The violence of the times we are living in, the necessity of sweeping and general and immediate action, tend to dwarf the experience of the individual, and to make his immediate environment and occupations perhaps something that he is even ashamed of.  

Such a statement, in a sense, sums up Spender's awareness of the demands made on the self by outward circumstances prevailing during the 'thirties, and his attempt to bring about a balance between his private and public selves. This tension and the resulting dialectic, is an all-pervading theme in Spender's other writings as well. For instance, if in The Destructive Element (1935), his advice to the writers is that the only "reasonable act" was for them "to immerse themselves in 'the destructive element,'" 34 in The Creative Element (1953) his advice to them is to go beyond, because "beyond the 'destructive element' lay a renewal of creativeness through the writer siding with those forces in society which would save it from destruction." 35

Taken in a wider context, these polarities: of two-fold destruction and creation, immersion and emergence, which underlie Spender's thinking make for an interaction between the subjective and the objective aspects of experience. This conflict between the inner and outer worlds provides

34 Stephen Spender, The Destructive Element, p.278.
also the central theme of *World Within World*.

True to his poetic temperament, Spender tended to be idealistic. Such a view of life may be traced in the following statement he makes in *World Within World*:

> Thus in all my attitudes I had already, at the age of nineteen, arrived at a point where fulfilement seemed only possible through compromise, and compromise meant self-betrayal. In love, I wished for a transcendence of physical desire, an escape from the real. In politics, I wished for a social revolution which would achieve justice without introducing new injustices into the methods used to make the revolution. In poetry, I wished to achieve a purely inspirational kind of writing which rejected the modern life of day-to-day living. 36

This problem of bringing about a compromise between the ideal and the real is in a way but another version of the problem of the "disintegrated consciousness," or of the "alienation of the self," or the "loss of selfhood" peculiar to the modern age. 37 An individual in modern society finds it best to "draw the sentiment of his own being" from the judgment of others and in this sense "alienation of self is really self-preservation." 39 How


39 Ibid., p.38.
Spender tackles this problem is revealed in World Within World:

"The cure for my idealism was to accept loss, and plunge myself in living, in the hope that after a period of aberration I could recover integrity of purpose, based, though, on an acceptance and not a rejection of reality." (WWW 32)

It is on this determination of accepting reality and not rejecting it, that he begins to build up a new self and live a renewed life. 40

By the time Spender rounds off his autobiography, it becomes clear how well he has been able to arrive at a compromise between the inner and outer selves. Roy Pascal is right in pointing out that "Stephen Spender is preoccupied by the problem of reconciling social and moral responsibilities with his need to remain intact." 41

Spender's autobiography perhaps serves as an answer to the question: How to remain intact in spite of conflicts? His autobiography, as he himself says, is intended to be "useful to at least a few readers." (WWW ix) And he serves as a model to the modern man, for he demonstrates in his

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40 Surya Nath Pandey's comment on Spender may here be noted: "Brought up between the two catastrophic wars, his life became a ceaseless struggle to achieve wholeness of living in a situation of major cultural crisis." Stephen Spender: A Study in Poetic Growth, p. 38.

41 Roy Pascal, Design and Truth in Autobiography, p. 146.
life-history how a person might remain intact, in spite of the hazards he has to face.

When Edwin Muir looks back upon his life, in retrospect, he pays a tribute to his early childhood days he spent in Orkney and feels that the calm and happiness he enjoys late in life is the result of a "solid foundation" laid in Orkney, in his childhood. When Spender recalls his past, he too pays a like tribute to his childhood period:

"... my early childhood was marked by a quite exceptional harmony, and it is perhaps this which has enabled me to retain throughout life a central calm and happiness, amid violent divisions of my own nature." (WWW 311)

The conflict between the private and the public aspects of life which forms the central theme of *World Within World* is also one of the "key themes" of the twentieth century, as V.S. Pritchett states:

"*World Within World* is a very apt title for Mr. Spender's autobiography. It marks the conflict between public and private life which is one of the key themes of our age." 42

In one's attempt at solving personal and impersonal conflicts, according to Spender, much depends on the sense of moral responsibility that guides an individual. And this sense belongs to the inner sphere. As Spender states: "it is only within the inner life that man can will

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42 See V.S. Pritchett's Review on Spender *New Statesman & Nation* (14 April, 1951), 426.
himself to be a coherent whole..." (WWW 287) This moral assumption, as evidenced in Spender's autobiography, helps him ultimately to win 'secular salvation.'

Spender's work is criticized for its want of a proper resolution at the end. On the contrary, one might argue that Spender emerges in World Within World as a man who has waded his way through troubled waters and has learnt how to maintain a balance between his private and public selves. The all-inclusive symbolism of centre and circumference, and light and darkness, he chose to define his self, comes back to one's mind:

"The world, my life, binds the dark and the light
Together, reconciles and separates
In lucid day the chaos of my darkness."

Spender's motive in writing both his life-history, World Within World, and his poetry, is largely the same:

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43 A reviewer says in Times Literary Supplement about Spender's World Within World that "At the close of Mr. Spender's book... there is no resolution" or again he comments "... he has not resolved his personal equation." - "A Liberal Inheritance," TLS (13 April 1951), 228.

44 Stephen Spender, "Darkness And Light" - taken from The Still Centre he chose to preface his autobiography, as stated earlier with some alterations.
namely, to delineate the various stages of his personal growth against the general background of the 'thirties. It is interesting to relate Spender's autobiography to his poetry. Quite a number of Spender's major formal devices in his autobiography as also his poems, are influenced by the essentially personal way in which Spender responded to the various events of the period. The autobiographical account touches on almost all the public events as also the few important personal relations which left a deep mark on Spender. In the most general sense, this account provides some idea of the particular setting - the setting in terms of personal history, as also of the history of the main public events of the period, in which a poem was originally composed and had its source.

Spender's autobiography, when read in relation to his poetry, in this sense, reveals three conspicuous features. First of all, one might consider Spender's awareness of the major public upheavals in Europe and the peculiar manner in which he responds to them. This forms the central issue in his self-history as well as his poetry. Second, Spender's "subjective world" tends to acquire more prominence in his poetry than in his autobiography. Third, there is a striking resemblance between the factual account of some episodes presented in World Within World and again in some of his poems. In some cases, this similarity is
carried further, even in terms of word and image.

A perusal of Spender's *World Within World* and his poetry yields a common theme: a chain of interactions between the writer's own self and the outside world, which ultimately leads him on to complete self-development, a self which is a "coherent whole," a self that has at last learnt to reconcile itself with the outside world. The theme of a conflict between the two selves, the private and the public, which occupies a significant place in Spender's autobiography also finds its way in his "longish poem" (WWW 192) *Vienna* (1934). Vienna contains history, both public and personal. The political upheaval during February 1934, provides the theme. The poem was written to express Spender's indignation at the suppression of the Viennese socialist by Dollfuss, Fey, Starhemberg. Spender was in Vienna when the crucial happenings took place. The poem contains autobiographical overtones.

The picture of havoc and despair that Spender depicts in the poem are very much those that he himself must have seen while he was in Vienna. Like Spender, when the stranger in the poem arrives at the city, he finds signs of

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45 What Surya Nath Pandey says of Spender's poetry is also true of his autobiography: His poetry is partly an expression of that intense search for harmony and synthesis between the apparently warring claims of a visionary and a man of action. "Stephen Spender: A Study in Poetic Growth, p.6."
havoc around him. The living seem dead, the neglected dead lie scattered about the streets. The obnoxious picture of death and decay is mirrored in the following lines:

- His wound a wound, his life a life, his death
- Opening to life a flower him overarching -
- Yes, the tube struck in his stomach, and the rotten
- Waste
- Dripping in flasks; eyes red, jaw dropped, his mouth
- A printed O;  

Again, for instance the account of the intensity of the atrocities practised on men, women and innocent children by the leader of the ruthless right can be measured in lines like:

- Lucky : those who were shot dead :-
- Outright not being and not being those
- Throw down cellar and trampled with nailed boots;  

Spender like the protagonist in the poem desired some "alteration" in the whole social set-up. The executives in the second section of the poem, call for show, pomp and pageantry, while the unemployed move about listlessly, aimlessly and indifferently:

- Dispersed like idle points of a vaguer star;  

Wallish in the poem, is a replica of a real Viennese worker who laid down his life for the cause of his fellow-workers. The last section in Vienna is a projection of the real

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47 Ibid., p.27.
48 Ibid., p.17.
49 Ibid., p.19.
scene in Europe when people looked out for a redeemer, a savior, a healer to save the sick society and to cure it of its mental as well as physical illness. But unlike the real situation, a savior does emerge in the poem.

Apart from political happenings, Vienna contains something more. As Spender himself explains: "... in part also it was concerned with a love relationship. I meant to show that the two experiences were different, yet related." (WWW 192) The poem does throw light on the personal tensions that Spender experienced when he wrote it in 1934. Spender, as mentioned earlier, was staying with Jimmy Younger during those years, but was growing tired of him and felt the need of the companionship of a woman. And it was at this time that he became acquainted with Elizabeth, a beautiful young lady with "black hair and eyes, a clear complexion slightly tanned but not expressionless with sunburn." (WWW 193) His growing attachment for this lady is laid bare in his autobiography. Spender must have got a shock when he learnt of Elizabeth's engagement to an Austrian worker, just when he was thinking of settling down with her. In Vienna, the stranger, like his creator, is also looking out for some companionship when he visualizes a woman whose description comes close to that of Elizabeth's:
The 'love relationship' that occurs in the poem is obviously his involvement with Elizabeth that he is recalling. In spite of his sincere efforts to juxtapose inner and outer selves, the poem did not quite succeed.  

In the poetic drama *Trial of a Judge* (1938), Spender expresses his realization that liberal values in a fascist dominated state do not hold good. The judge in the poetic drama stands for liberal values, who in the end is executed. Interwoven with this public theme, is also a personal theme, viz., the destruction of love by the power of hatred. This personal theme, is represented by the judge's wife Petra and her lover.

One cannot overlook Spender's statement in his autobiography about "the end of a Liberal phase of history" (WWW 290) during the nineteen-thirties and also about what he says of "the general political fate in which almost everyone today is involved" (WWW 249) and these appear as restatements of the personal-public events portrayed in his verse-play.

50 Stephen Spender: *Vienna*, p.20.

51 Spender himself finds an explanation as to why the poem did not win much acclaim. He says he was unable to "fuse the two halves of a split situation, and attain a unity where the inner passion becomes inseparable from the outer one" (WWW 192).
In the introduction to the *Collected Poems: 1928-1955* published in 1955, Spender speaks of the arrangement of the poems therein: "... I have, I think, improved this order, by relating it to the autobiographical development behind the poetry, ..." He further explains how it is a poet's obligation "to remain true to the felt experience from which the poems, when they were first written, arose. Poetry is a game played with the reader according to rules, but it is also a truth game in which the truth is outside the rules."

A comparative study of the poetry in relation to the autobiography, would help one to understand Spender and to trace his inner growth as man and writer. Spender's poetry reveals a sensitive man deeply pained to see the marks of distress, decay, demolition all around him. His earlier poems deal with the problems of unemployment, oppression, hunger, war and above all of man wanting to destroy man. Spender's sharp awareness of the crisis Europe experienced during the Spanish Civil War finds expression in *World Within World* and also some of the poems that appear in *The Still Centre* (1939) later included in the *Collected Poems*. The evils of the Spanish War like unemployment, the

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53 Ibid., p.13.
plight of prisoners, the devastation caused by air-raids, the death of 'heroes,' are taken up in his self-narration. His poems dealing with the war contain the same truth. The difference lies in the fact that in his self-history he recalls the details of the various actual episodes, whereas in his poems, the tendency is to generalize the truth, even though the particular poem may have been based on his real experience. Nevertheless, both in his autobiography and in his poems he has remained true to his intensely felt experiences.

In *World Within World*, Jimmy Younger and Walter represent the problem of the unemployed young men during the thirties. Through Jimmy's and Walter's case-histories, Spender got a closer view of the sufferings of the unemployed. The same problem, for instance, finds a poetic rendering in one of his poems in which he speaks of these idlers who "sleep long nights and rise at ten" for there are no "tall factory hooters"\(^{54}\) to summon them to work.

Jimmy also serves to demonstrate the plight of prisoners in *World Within World*. The miserable condition of prisoners is recorded in some of Spender's poems and

\(^{54}\) Ibid., p.36.
also some of his other writings. Here again the source of these poems appears to be the first-hand reportings of Jimmy to Spender from his prison cell. In the poem "The Prisoners," for instance, he points out that the imprisoned men see no difference between day or night, as they have lost the capacity to feel grief or pain.

Another sinister aspect of the Spanish war that affected Spender was the devastation caused by air-raids. The picture of destruction resulting from aerial attacks figure in *World Within World*. For instance, during Spender's stay in Marshal Field, the place was bombed, and he recaptures the scene vividly in *World Within World*, describing how people rushed out and watched with "wordless dignity" (*WWW* 309) their houses being grounded by the air-raid. The poems "Thoughts During an Air-Raid" and "Air Raid Across the Bay at Plymouth" are obviously based on incidents of ruin and destruction Spender himself witnessed.

There are other aspects of the tragic period like the death of war heroes, the futility of war, the possibility of a solution, which are covered in *World Within World* and perhaps find a better expression in his poems. For instance,

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55 See for instance Stephen Spender, *The Thirties and After*, p.22 and the article entitled "The Prisoners" in *Encounter* (Nov.1955), and also *WWW* 71.
Spender's heart-felt sympathies for the war heroes find a more articulated expression in his poems than in his autobiography. In his self-narration, he speaks of the 'moaning' of the dying heroes or the "expression in the eyes of the dying." (WWW 213-214) In a poetic counterpart of an event describing the neglected heroes, he depicts the "final loneliness" with which the hero meets with his death.

Spender's consciousness of the futility of war is well-known and he makes numerous references to it in World Within World. He makes the same references in some of his war poems. He knows that the combatants,

... hates the cause and distant words
That brought him here, more terribly than bullets.

But

"No one is given leave
On either side, except the dead, and wounded." 58

Spender's visit to Spain during the Spanish war led him to witness pathetic scenes. One such scene is of the two opposite armies lying side by side. He says about it:

... the front seemed to me like a love relationship between

56 See for instance, the poems "A Stopwatch And An Ordnance Map" (Collected Poems, p.100), "Ultima Ratio Regum" (Collected Poems, p.99) or "The War God" (Collected Poems, p.127).


58 Ibid., p.97.
the two sides, locked here in their opposite trenches, committed to one another unto death..." (WWW 223) This account given in one of his poems seems to complete the picture when he says:

"Clean silence drops at night, when a little walk divides the sleeping armies, each huddled in linen woven by remote hands. When the machines are stilled, a common suffering whitens the air with breath and makes both one as though these enemies slept in each other's arms." 59

In spite of Spender's constant references to a world full of travail and turmoil where:

"Man hammers nails in Man," 60 he does not give up hope. Spender asserts the ambivalent nature of humanity - one side which produces war, and the other side which is capable of love. These questions of possibilities of putting an end to war and restoring peace in society are echoed in lines like:

"Why cannot the one good Benevolent feasible Final dove, descend?

And the wheat be divided?
And the soldiers sent home?" 61

How intellectuals (including himself) of the period respond to the Spanish conflict is best stated by Spender when he says: "... these poets at last seemed to have found a cause in which their liberal values were fused with a public

59 Ibid., p.98.
60 Ibid., p.130.
61 Ibid., p.127.
The 'Spanish conflict' demonstrates perhaps best of all the inter-relationship that exists between one's inner and outer life as demonstrated in Spender's autobiography as well as in the poems that deal with the Spanish War.

In the introduction to World Within World, Spender speaks of presenting "the true tension between these inner and outer, subjective and objective, worlds." (WWW viii) In this connection, his poems that deal with intimate relationships with people assume a certain significance. His inner world is particularly illumined in sections like "Love And Separation," "Meetings And Absence" of his Collected Poems. The section entitled "Love And Separation" deals with his first marriage, which proved a failure. The poems contained in the section depict the pangs of separation he experienced when his first wife, Inez, forsook him for another man. These thoughts bring back to his mind the happy days they spent together. He remembers the little incidents that kept both of them happy. But "Those were the Springs of yesterday." Now "Everything is dragged down and away." Spender was separated from his first wife within three years of their marriage, during the year 1939. In his autobiography


he narrates how their marriage was a happy one. Both were fond of each other, respected each other's activities, understood each other well. Yet behind it all there was one thing that was lacking, viz., their imaginations were incompatible. He inhabited "a mental world which terrified her." (WWW 209) In his self-narration, a strain of repentance is noticed when he thinks of his separation from Inez. (WWW 258) Even when Inez took to another suitor, Spender did not protest. He was too polite and decent to force her to act against her inclination. He knows that he is to be blamed for this state of affairs as echoed in his poem "Song." He recalls:

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Ligh'tly, ligh'tly, from my sleep
She stole, ...
...
Another love to take;
Her happy happy perfidy
Was justified was justified.
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In the same poem he laments that all pleasure-seeking men attracted her by their beguiling lies but this is because he is at fault. In his self-history, there are no over-statements about the pain of separation. There is no attempt made to trace the day to day life of their married bliss and its aftermath. In his poems, however, there is a tendency to express these feelings more uninhibitedly and to dwell in greater detail on particular episodes. The heart-felt pain

64 Ibid., p.116.
of separation is expressed in his poem "No Orpheus No Eurydice":

> How can he believe His loss is less than his? True it may be, she did leave Me, for another's kiss; Yes our lives did so entwine that the blank space of my heart Torn from hers apart, Must have torn hers, losing mine. 65

Such sorrowful notes also figure in his autobiography when he recalls his life with Inez but the intensity of pain experienced is missing in his autobiography.

Spender's second marriage with Natasha took place in April 1941. In World Within World, Spender does no more than just report the fact of this marriage and states how a strong foundation of a happy married life was laid. This elusive attitude perhaps has its source in the fact that the poetic form calls for a deeper and more detailed delineation of one's personal history; a prose narration does not allow such voluble expression of one's inner feelings. One may, for instance, turn to the poem "Trance" where Spender speaks of the mental understanding and forgiveness which makes marriage perfect:

> But each each forgives and greets, And their mutual terror heal Within our married miracle. 66

65 Ibid., p.118.
66 Ibid., p.182.
These above mentioned lines, remind one of Natasha's assurances to her husband in World Within World that there was "no question of blame." (WWW 279-280) No details are given about this particular relationship. What remains unsaid in World Within World about Spender's longed-for-joy and peace in married life and its fulfilment is reflected in one of his lyrical renderings:

At last' you sang, 'there comes the peace
Beyond War's separating will,
Where we are alone face to face
We were the two sides of one vase
Gaze flowed into gaze
Under the surfaces
Our eyes see with each other's eyes
Half a world between us lies.
Your night holds my light'
My day's mystery is your night."

He appears to have taken a firm decision now of making his conjugal life more meaningful, peaceful and permanent.

It would not be out of place to mention one particular relationship which meant so much for Spender, that with his sister-in-law. For in both his self-narration and in his poems, Spender's attachment for her is demonstrated. He recalls in his life-history, how he tried to identify his misfortunes with hers. This was when she was seriously ill and he himself was suffering the pangs of separation from

67 Ibid., pp.177-178.
his first wife. When Spender lived in the same house where Margaret and Humphrey lived, he watched with admiration the way in which she bore her illness and especially the brave and confident manner in which she breathed her last. He says: "In the warmth of her room she died, confident that death was only a temporary separation from those she loved, whom she would soon meet again." (WWW 310) Spender's attachment for his sister-in-law can be found in the fact that a whole section of poems in his *Collected Poems,* and also the volume *Poems of Dedication* (1947) are inscribed to the memory of Margaret Spender.

The third striking feature about *World Within World* and his poetry when read in juxtaposition is that some of his poems appear like an almost exact transcription of passages recorded in his autobiography. For instance, the following passage closely resembles a poem entitled "The Chalk Blue Butterfly": "Sometimes, stuck as though glued to the stem of a flower, just below the cup of the petals, there was a chalk blue butterfly – milky blue its widespread wings; ... In the sun the butterflies expanded and then shut close their wings with the exact movement of a hinge." (WWW 323)

The poetic counterpart of this description is found in the following lines:
A harebell stem, where it loops
Its curving wire-fine neck

Opens now, how shuts its wings,
Opening, shutting, on a hinge
Sprung at touch of Sun or shadow.

Again, in *World Within World*, Spender describes an incident at Port Bou which bears a striking resemblance to the poem "Port Bou." Spender recalls in his self-narration, how he sat reading a newspaper at Port Bou, when a lorry carrying military men passed by. They enquired of Spender if their struggle over the frontier was reported in the newspaper. The event also speaks of an old man jogging past him who called "pom-pom-pom" in a "blissful imitation of the firing." (WWW 219) One might turn to his poem "Port-Bou" for a more detailed description of the event:

So the earth-and-rock arms of this small harbour
Embrace but do not encircle the sea
Which, through a gap, vibrates into the ocean,

A lorry halts beside me with creaking brakes
And I look up at warm downwards-looking faces
Of militia men staring at my (French) newspaper.

How do they write of our struggle over the frontier?  

An old man passes, his mouth dribbling,
From three rustled teeth, he shoots out: 'pom-pom-pom.'

The same subject-matter is treated differently in the two different genres. In the autobiography, it appears more like

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a documentation of a factual event, while in the poem, it is expressed as a keenly felt experience.

Reading Spender's autobiography in relation to his poems one might come to the conclusion that his autobiography provides us with another range of clues to some of his poetical work. Spender's autobiography is a distinctive piece of work precisely because it is not merely a factual account. In its own way, the autobiography also seeks to get at the kernel of personal truth which lies at the core of a particular experience as well as giving a factual account of that experience. One might here bring to mind Spender's commitment to a theory of poetic communication.

"... the poet is not dealing in purely aesthetic values, but that he is communicating an experience of life which is outside his own personal experience. He may communicate his own experience, yet he is not bounded by that, but by his understanding."

His emphasis then is on the conveyance of the truth of one's experience. He generalizes from the personal truth he experienced, in both his poetry and his autobiography. In this sense, the account of a particular episode, or a sequence of private and public events given in his autobiography is meant to be complementary to his poems.

One might draw a parallel between Spender's approach

and that of Eliot in this regard:

Eliot's technique of basing a poem on a particular scene glimpsed or an event experienced in private life in order to illuminate experience in general has been successfully employed by Spender in his poetry.  

Surya Nath Pandey, Stephen Spender: A Study in Poetic Growth, pp. 31-32.