CHAPTER: 2

Psychology in Auden’s Poetry

Auden's early poetry is concerned with the analysis and exploration of man’s “anxiety, guilt, and isolation” by largely using the psychological theories of Sigmund Freud and Homer Lane. Lane argues, among other things, that all problems arise from the unconscious conflict and the repression of natural instinct. Unconscious conflict and repression cause psychosomatic illness. On the other hand, trifling with the “id”, the “ego” and the “superego”, according to Freud, can also lead to psychic ailments like hysteria and neurosis. Based on such ideas, Auden tries to find solutions to the problems existing in human society. He discovers that society is rotten from top to bottom and believes that its causes are psychological. So, reforming man and society become the chief motives of his writing. To execute his strong desire of reforming man and his society, Auden lays more stress on the understanding of psychological illness than on anything else, in the early part of his career as a poet. According to John R. Boly, “Auden found his earliest ally in Freudian psychology . . . he added that psychology and poetry share a common mood, disillusionment, and a common hope.” Richard Hoggart points out, “. . . the constant neurotic dread” and “. . . the awful sense of threat” that pervade Auden's early poetry. Thus, Auden commits himself to writing poetry that explores psychological illnesses and their cure.
Auden believed that the First World War was a major cause of man's mental trauma as it adversely affected the social and political life of almost all the inhabitants of the world. He witnessed how during the post-war era the collapse of industry and dislocation of international trade resulted in mass unemployment. Life became very difficult even for those individuals who managed to retain their jobs. It was a time of great uncertainty, at every level, be it economic, social or political. The psyche of man was adversely affected, leading to acute anxiety. Auden attempts in his poetry to bring this anxiety to the fore. This is one of the psychological strains that runs throughout his early poetry and finds expression through various modes. It is not just the common man, the poor worker, who is struggling for survival but the industrialist too is adversely affected and his survival at the economic level is also threatened, often leading to a state of conflict. This conflict finds expression in the poem 'Let History Be My Judge' (1928), wherein the speaker "proposes, with all the deadly reasoning of a self-righteous counter-revolutionary, a justification of repression and control by authority in the face of developing resistance to it. The 'situation' might be a generalized version of the General Strike of 1926." In an argumentative mode, the speaking persona gives in detail the measures taken by the management in order to deal with the crisis and refers to its "old right to abuse," thereby highlighting the suppression and cruelty practiced by the powerful. It effectively mirrors the tension and the tug of war that have become part and parcel of life, be it the poor and the needy, or the rich and the powerful. Here, the resultant anxiety of man, as a psychic ailment among other things, is the focus of attention
for Auden, inspired by the theories advanced by Sigmund Freud and Homer Lane. With its focus on man’s alienation under the capitalist system as well as man’s anxiety which can be interpreted as a by-product of this alienation, the poem has psychological as well sociological overtones.

This prolonged and persistent anxiety that man is suffering from has made him a divided individual and “frightened soul” in the capitalist society where he leads a materialistic life, eating, sleeping and breeding just like “sheep.” Such an existence does not befit human beings. There has been an erosion of moral values at the individual as well as social level. Due to this man has been reduced to the state of a helpless child who has been “weaned from his mother” and is suffering from a feeling of grave insecurity.

Auden believes that change is required in every sphere of man’s life. This change will improve the life of all human beings. In 1929, when Auden went to Germany, he encountered what he calls the “solitary man,” who is a constant sufferer from anxiety and despair caused perhaps by the catastrophic war or by his being destitute. This solitary man is not a particular individual but the modern man in general, who suffers from loneliness, frustration, mental trauma and despair. Auden’s use of the image of the “helpless and ugly embryo chicken” conveys convincingly the state of the individual due to the inner conflict which he is experiencing. Auden refers continually to “the lost, the lonely, the unhappy, the “loneliness”, the sick souls, self-imprisoned, time-obsessed, subsisting on aspirins and weak tea.”

Auden’s concern for man’s loneliness and isolation is effectively communicated in the following lines from the poem ‘1929’:
But thinking so I came at once
Where solitary man sat weeping on a bench,
Hanging his head down, with his mouth distorted
Helpless and ugly as an embryo chicken.
(‘1929’)

Auden sought to cure this illness at both the individual as well social level. He realizes that without this man’s life will remain difficult and unhappy. The social and political systems of the world have become so imbalanced that happiness and peace are a mirage. Man has lost the support that these institutions provide and as a result he feels lonely and helpless. This is the anxiety of common man or “solitary man” that Auden comes across in Germany in 1929. Due to this anxiety, man is also subjected to the inner conflict, a conflict confined within his self. Change is the need of the hour, Auden realizes. For change to take place “social and psychological death and rebirth” are essential. According to Fuller, he “needs to suggest a mysterious interrelationship of various cycles of change, personal, bodily, social and psychological.” This is exactly what he does in ‘1929.’ The poem is divided into four sections. The first part is largely preoccupied with death and rebirth: “... all of those whose death / Is necessary condition of the season’s putting forth.” The second section explores the result of giving freedom to the natural instincts employing the image of ducks. The enjoyment by the ducks in the harbour shows that they are free from anxiety and restlessness. Auden appears to advocate that if man allows his natural instincts to be free, he would be like the ducks. This shows the influence of Homer Lane’s theory that diseases are the result of “disobedience to the inner law of our own nature.” Moreover, the idea of the interdependence of body and
mind also figures in the poem. The imbalance between them leads to diseases like anxiety. The poet also gives expression to the anxiety caused by the police atrocities, but he is hopeful that this shall one day lead to a revolutionary change. As one season follows the next, the revolution, Auden believes, will usher in the new conditions needed for the betterment of mankind. Section three again focuses on man's anxiety and his divided self. In the last stanza the focus is on how seasonal experience prepares us for change in which death is an instrument:

Startle by the violent laugh of a jay  
I went from wood, from crunch underfoot,  
Air between stems as under water;  
As I shall leave the summer, see autumn come  
Focusing stars more sharply in the sky,  
See frozen buzzard flipped down the weir  
And carried out to sea, leave autumn,  
See winter, winter for the earth and us,  
A forethought of death that we may find ourselves at death  
Not helplessly strange to the new conditions.

('1929')

The final section highlights psychological illness, madness and through them the anxiety of man and finally "Death of the old gang" which will lead to a rebirth and change that is desired: "... deep in clear lake / The lolling bridegroom, beautiful, there." A bit of the Christian concept of love and resurrection also play a role, and lend themselves easily to Auden's main argument in the poem.

Another idea that Auden reinforces by his poetry is that in spite of being conscious of the afflictions of society, the intellectuals of the modern world do not take any measures to improve the situation, which, the poet believes, is critical
and needs to be remedied. The rich who are “seen as totally conditioned by their psychological state of mind,”\textsuperscript{9} need to be cured as much as the poor and common people. In such a situation, the intellectuals are not playing the active role that is needed. They are inert and simply ask questions, whereas they should take active interest and try to set things right. The following lines from the poem ‘The Questioner Who Sits So Sly’ effectively describe the attitude of the intellectuals:

\begin{verbatim}
Yet wear no ruffian badge,
Nor lie behind the hedge,
Waiting with bombs of conspiracy
In arm-pit secrecy;
\end{verbatim}

Here, as well as in ‘1929,’ death is seen as a cure to psychic maladies and is “personified as hypochondriac, eccentric, and possibly homosexual.”\textsuperscript{10}

\begin{verbatim}
Will you wheel death anywhere
In his invalid chair,
With no affectionate instant
But his attendant?

For to be held as friend
By an undeveloped mind,
To be joke for children is
Death’s happiness:

Whose anecdotes betray
His favourite colour as blue,
Colour of distant bells
And boy’s overalls.

His tales of the bad lands
Disturb the sewing hands;
Hard to be superior
On parting nausea;
\end{verbatim}

\footnotesize{‘The Questioner Who Sits So Sly’}
Auden stresses illness by employing the image of the "invalid chair" in stanza five that refers to the malaise of society. This image of the invalid chair came to Auden possibly when he saw one of his pupils' father Colonel Solomon who was seriously injured in the First World War, and "was paralyzed from the waist down; he went about in a wheelchair." It seemed that he longed for its replacement by death that "represents this overriding wish of a society to destroy itself." Homer Lane advocated that all illness is of psychological origin. And the "unconscious conflict was the cause of all physical ills." According to him, "all instinctual behaviour is good, not just in a biological sense but in a moral sense as well . . . Instinctual desires are implanted by nature and are therefore inherently good." He is in favour of letting the natural instincts of man be free so that he can grow and live a sound and healthy life. So, initially Auden views human illness in this light. He has often employed Lane's theory of the repression of natural instincts of man and the resultant anxiety while discussing love in his early poetry. The anxiety that results from love that has not been consummated is explored in an argumentative mode in the early poem 'The Secret Agent.' The poem presents man's instinctual desire to find the "new district," which stands for "contact with another human being," that is, his beloved and to enjoy her company. But this instinctual urge of man is often suppressed by him due to the pressure of society. Since the speaker has suppressed his love he functions like a "secret agent" whose love should not be discovered or found out: "He, the trained spy and had walked into the trap / For a bogus guide, seduced by the old
tricks.” The “old tricks” are the conventions of society which prevent man from living an instinctual life. In this condition he feels entrapped and isolated. The bridges that “were unbuilt” stand for his failure to establish contact or fulfil his sexual urges. “They would shoot, of course” gives expression to the pressure exerted by society which guides the conscious will of the speaking persona. He is left longing and dreaming:

The street music seemed gracious now to one
For weeks up in the desert. Woken by water
Running away in the dark, he often had
Reproached the night for a companion
Dreamed of already.

("The Secret Agent")

Thus, man’s failure to understand his natural instincts and handle them properly leads to anxiety, isolation and loneliness.

Man’s anxiety, isolation and loneliness are also explored in another early poem of Auden ‘The Watershed.’ The poem apparently highlights the condition of man in terms of the “arduous life of the lead-miners.” However, it is also the exposition of the dilemma of a traveller or stranger who gazes at a strange land which is “cut off” and “will not communicate” with other human beings. No matter how hard he tries he fails in communicating with the inhabitants. As a result he feels frustrated and worried, estranged and alienated:

Stranger, turn back again, frustrate and vexed:
This land, cut off, will not communicate,
Be no accessory content to one
Aimless for faces rather there than here.
Beams from your car may cross a bed room wall,
They wake no sleeper.

("The Watershed")
The condition that is described here is not that of a particular man but is the condition of modern man in general who suffers from alienation and estrangement. At this point of time, the traveller could see an industry which already lacked energy and was in an unconscious state:

... dismantled washing-floor,
Snatches of tramline running to a wood,
An industry already comatose,
Yet sparsely living. A ramshackle engine
At Cashwell raises water; for ten years
It lay in flooded workings until this,
Its latter office, grudgingly performed.

(The Watershed')

The comatose industry and the sleeping inhabitants of this poem complement each other and effectively give expression to the erosion of emotion among individuals of the modern industrial age.

Auden believes at this stage of his poetic career that with the advancement of science and technology in the modern industrial world, emotional attachment between individuals has been greatly reduced. ‘No Change of Place’ is a poem which highlights the fact that in spite of the improvement in the means of communication people have become impersonal in their manner of communication and fail to connect with each other in a warm and personal way.

“Emotional energy is expended on the anticipation of love letters not on human contact, spring flowers arrive smashed, and the impersonality of the telephone reduces human sympathy to a merely functional response.”16 It is just the professional traveller or writer who makes an effort to understand life through
experience and tries to explore it. Everyone else seems to have been gripped by
a strange apathy which has divorced man from reality and is dangerous for him:
"And all the while / Conjectures on our maps grow stranger / And threaten
danger." According the last stanza, "the knowledge which the 'professional
traveller' may have acquired has something to do with a possible change of
social forms," but no one seems to be interested:

There is no change of place:
No one will ever know
For what conversion brilliant capital is waiting,
What ugly feast may village band be celebrating;
For no one goes
Further than railhead or the ends of piers,
Will neither go nor send his son
Further through foothills than the rotting stack
Where gaitered gamekeeper with dog and gun
Will shout 'Turn back'.

('No Change of Place')

The poem reinforces the idea that change is the need of the times. This idea
finds expression in poems such as '1929' as pointed out earlier.

Since after the end of the First World War there was a reaction against it
and also against "... the generation of leaders who had declared war and had
directed its continuance." So, a lot of poetry written after the First World War
does not celebrate traditional "military heroism." However, as Wilfred Owen
says there was a consciousness that "... men may not perform Great Deeds any
longer, but they can be tough, stoical, and humorous under stress, they can be
loyal to each other, they can feel pity, and they can perform their meaningless
destructive duties faithfully and with skill." Thus, the period after the First World
War, saw the exit of heroes and heroism in the traditional sense. In keeping with this scenario Auden’s poetry projects individuals who are unlike the heroes of old but who, nevertheless are men of achievement and importance. Such men include airmen, climbers, travellers, miners and healers. A poem that effectively captures the mood of the period with reference to heroism is entitled ‘Missing.’ This poem makes an effort to define heroism. The first section of the poem presents a scene that is reminiscent of the world of the sagas. Though the tall leader may be unwounded but his followers are now dead as a result of his decision to indulge in "skyline operation." The leader’s desire to prove his bravery and that of his men is the desire of one who is not a strong man. It is the weak who need to prove themselves. The poem also advocates a change in the mindset of individuals. Since the change that is desired must come from within, it is a psychological change that is being advocated and shows Auden’s belief in psychological theories. While speaking of heroism, Auden distinguishes the Truly Strong Man and the Truly Weak Man. In the words of Edward Medelson, “The Truly Strong Man . . . is an idea that brings into focus Auden’s divided wish for private satisfaction and public responsibility.” Auden himself once wrote that the Truly Weak undertakes “blind action without consideration of meaning or ends.” The tall unwounded leader as well as his doomed companions are examples Auden’s “Truly Weak” men. Weak men undertake “skyline operations” in order to prove that they are strong. Such weak men are responsible for quarrels, wars, bloodshed and destruction that have become so rampant in the contemporary
world. Similar ideas about the " Truly Weak" are found in the first section of 'Shorts':

Pick a quarrel, go to war,
Leave the hero in the bar;
Hunt the lion, climb the peak:
No one guesses you are weak.

Showing his inclination of reforming man, Auden, in the seventh section of 'Shorts,' appeals to his reader to honour and abide by the dictates of the "Truly Strong" represented by the "vertical man," who is presented as the ideal to be followed by mankind. But the people of the modern world neither have the attributes of such a strong man nor follow his command, and therefore, do not have the courage to stand and face reality. They are the followers of the "Horizontal one" who represents the doomed, corrupt and psychically sick people of society:

Let us honour if we can
The vertical man,
Though we value none
But the horizontal one.
('Shorts')

Auden believes that a hero is one who must undertake the challenge of changing the world around him. He must work at both the social as well individual level. The heroes' acceptance of this task of changing the world has been taken up by the Auden in the poem 'O Where Are You Going.' The "rider," the "farer" and the "hearer" have undertaken a journey of quest, undeterred by the obstacles and fears referred to by the "reader," the "fearer" and the "horror." The
aim is to bring about the much needed change. At the psychological level, "reader / rider," "fearer / farer" and "horror / hearer" are aspects of a divided self. About the divided self presented in the poem, Peter Edgerly Firchow states that "the frontier dividing the opposing selves is very small, yet immensely difficult to cross."^22 Auden’s Quest Hero is expected to overcome the psychological barriers that represses man’s natural instincts, ignoring all fear and doubt. Here Auden effectively presents the conflict between the conscious and the unconscious mind. In order to be victorious in this conflict, the Quest Hero must resolutely eliminate his fear and self-doubt. Thus, crossing the psychological frontier or barrier that causes the repressing of natural instincts is also a significant challenge for Auden’s hero.

Auden’s Quest hero, tracing all evils to man’s conscious or unconscious mind attempts to bring about a change and reform society. But, sometimes Auden seems to be pessimistic, because he fails to find the kind of hero that he thinks is needed to bring about the required change in society. The poem ‘Missing’ has effectively tackled this issue. The suffering, the hysteria, the neurosis and other psychological diseases which had become hallmarks of the modern world are focused upon by Auden in his poem ‘Consider.’ In this poem, the reader is urged to bring about the necessary change. “Auden . . . in the Thirties . . . thought of himself as a healer, and did believe that words could affect beliefs and therefore action.”^23 So, after adopting a rational stand, the reader is urged to take action. The focus is on man’s individual self which is divided due to the conflict between his unconscious and conscious mind. The “clouds rift
suddenly” imply the divided self while the “cigarette-end smouldering” stands for the conflict between them. This conflict leads to neurosis. People of the modern age are struggling hard to get rid of or at least alleviate their neurotic anxiety by doing a lot of things like enjoying the beauty of nature, sitting in a restaurant, and listening to music. But they do not pay any attention to the root causes of their neurotic illness.

Auden traces the cause of the deplorable condition of man to the “Supreme Antagonist.” According to some critics, the supreme Antagonist is the death wish. But according to Fuller:

> ... the tautology implicit in death making the highborn mining-captains 'wish to die' seems clumsy. Both the Old English *Bestiary* and *Paradise Lost* (1,200) compare the whale with Satan, as . . . Auden is doing. In Auden’s glossary of Christian and psychological terms (*B M Notebook*, fol. 44) Satan is seen as the Censor, responsible for repressing man’s natural instincts and bringing about that self-consciousness which separates him from the rest of the animal kingdom. It is this division in men and society, keeping them from their real desires, that Auden is anatomizing in the poem.24

Thus, the repression of natural instincts in man leads to psychological illness like neurosis. Man has now been reduced to the "insufficient units" as he has become impotent and incapable of enduring the pangs of a new life. Instead of seeking to
face his problems, man evades them by listening to music or viewing beautiful scenes.

Auden's poetry exhibits his admiration and searching for a "Good Place" ('The Prophets'), a place inhabited by healthy and happy people. But he is unable to find such a place. Wherever, he goes he finds "... silted harbours, derelict works," "In strangled orchards," and a "silent comb." With the use of such phrases, Auden tries to communicate the deplorable condition of man caused by his failing mental health. It is the human psyche which is sick. This sickness of man's psyche is effectively communicated in the poem 'Consider' by phrases such as "Infected sinus", "ruined boys", and "arterial roads". These phrases elucidate Auden's keen observation of man and his life, and his ability to convincingly express his ideas. As said earlier, according to Homer Lane, all physical illness is of psychological origin. This idea of Lane has also influenced Auden's poetry to a great extent. Physical illness resulting from psychic disorder also finds expression in this poem 'Consider.' The suppression of instincts by the conscious mind leads to diseases such as amnesia, mania and other abnormalities. All these diseases accelerate the disintegration of human personality: "To disintegrate on an instant into the explosion of mania / Or lapse for ever into a classic fatigue." Thus, man should not repress his natural instincts. This action of his can change human life for the better.

That the suppression of natural instincts is unhealthy is the theme of another early poem entitled 'Adolescence' which figures in The Orators as well as in Collected Shorter Poems 1927 to 1957. Adolescence is the period of quick
growth which heads to adulthood. The suppression of man’s instinctual life during adolescence adversely affects his physical as well as mental health as an adult. Auden advances the argument that neurosis is the result of this suppression of natural instincts. Moreover, in the poem, Auden has portrayed “adolescent” as the “Truly Weak Man” who is deceived by his mother in his quest for a natural life. This deception makes him suffer from neurosis. Adolescence metaphorically stands for the natural human instincts whereas love for the mother functions as the psychological barrier or the repressor. The adolescent’s obsession with his mother leads to his easy exploitation by her, as Seth Shaw was exploited by his mother in Paid on Both Sides. As a result the mother succeeds in suppressing and deceiving the adolescence. Finally, the mother turned giantess scolds him, accusing him of deception. He was under the mistaken notion that he had embarked on his quest out of bravery, but in reality he had undertaken this quest “to please his mother.”

The adolescent emerges as a “Truly Weak Man” because he does not fulfil his instinctive, sexual urges:

In a green pasture straying, he walks by still waters;  
Surely a swan he seems to earth’s unwise daughters,  
Bending a beautiful head, worshiping not lying,  
‘Dear’ the dear beak in the dear concha crying.  

('Adolescence')

'The Witnesses' “... describes the despair of a hero who discovers that he is ‘not the truly strong man’: his exploits, therefore, though heroic, have been in vain...” and the resultant guilt. At the social level, the witnesses stand for the authority, the hostile atmosphere created by the capitalist society or the bourgeoisie who suppress the common people. They also function as repressors
of the natural instincts. Thus, they are the enemies or repressors of the hero, who finds himself in their clutches. The poem shows the influence of Marxism as well. The dominance and authority of the witnesses or society finds full expression in the following lines:

You are the town and We are the clock.  
We are the guardians of the gate in the rock, 
    The Two.  
On your left and on your right,  
In the day and in the night,  
    We are watching you.

Wiser not to ask just what has occurred  
To them who disobeyed our word;  
    To those  
We were the whirlpool, we were the reef,  
We were the formal nightmare, grief  
    And the unlucky rose.  
    ('The Witnesses')

At the social level the hero emerges as a “radical bourgeois”\(^\text{27}\) while at the psychological level he is a “restless neurotic.”\(^\text{28}\) The atmosphere of fear created by the witnesses or society results in mental illness in man. The first stanza of the poem depicts the tension in the life of common man very effectively:

Young men late in the night  
    Toss on their beds,  
Their pillows do not comfort  
    Their uneasy heads,  
The lot that decides their fate  
    Is cast to-morrow,  
One must depart and face  
    Danger and sorrow.  
    ('The Witnesses')

The “uneasy heads” of the young is the result of persistent conflict between the id and the ego within their minds. Despite such a menacing atmosphere, Auden is
hopeful of changing man and society. But only the action of facing with boldness the reality of life, will bring about the desired change: “The lot that decides their fate / Is cast to-morrow, / One must depart and face / Danger and sorrow.” Auden hopefully says, “This might happen any day; / So be careful what you say / And do.”

Auden’s “tendency to fuse social and psychological elements” finds expression in a number of poems such as ‘Miss Gee’ and ‘Victor.’ ‘Miss Gee,’ a ballad written in the comic mode, narrates how Miss Gee’s cancer has been caused due to the suppression of her natural sexual urge, a suppression that is socially induced. Miss Gee is portrayed as a prude who has consciously, throughout her life been interested in exhibiting her modesty. She looks the other way when she comes across couples making love and buttons up her clothes right up to her neck:

She bicycled to the evening service
With her clothes buttoned up to her neck.

She passed by the loving couples,
She turned her head away;
(Miss Gee')

But she cannot stifle her natural sexual urge altogether. Her sexual instinct finds expression in her dreams. She dreams that while she is riding her bicycle, a bull with the face of the Vicar of the Church of Saint Aloysius charges her with his “lowered horn.” The “lowered horn” functions as a phallic symbol and in the light of psychological theories can be interpreted as her hidden wish to be chased and assaulted:
She dreamed a dream one evening
That she was the Queen of France
And the Vicar of Saint Aloysius
Asked Her Majesty to dance.

But the storm blew down the palace,
She was biking through a field of corn,
And a bull with the face of the Vicar
Was charging with lowered horn.

('Miss Gee')

That Miss Gee ends up with a cancer, introduces an element of seriousness in the ballad. “The idea that if you refuse to make use of your creative powers, you produce a cancer instead, was one of those implicit in the psychosomatic theories of Homer Lane . . . Auden would have found it also in Groddeck, who makes much of the idea that even male cancer can be a compensation for the inability to become pregnant.”

‘Childless women get it
And men when they retire;
It’s as if there had to be some outlet
For their foiled creative fire’.

('Miss Gee')

Like Miss Gee, many people of the modern age do not allow their natural instincts to function properly and evade an essential aspect of life, due to social pressures. This repression can lead to diseases like cancer. Despite this, preventive measures are not taken and disaster strikes “like some hidden assassin.” This poem appeals to its readers not to trifle with their instincts.

Besides Miss Gee, Auden has portrayed another “repressed personality” in another ballad ‘Victor,’ a companion piece to ‘Miss Gee.’ The entire tale of Victor is a serious one, narrated in comic mode. Auden shows that like Miss Gee,
Victor also has psychological problems that are socially induced. “Like Miss Edith Gee, his “creative fire” has been foiled by a narrow-minded tradition that confuses chastity with goodness, but in his case, instead of turning inward and causing harm to himself, he is impelled by his “Father” to go after his unfaithful spouse with a carving knife.” Victor too, like Miss Gee, is a prude. Not only that, he suffers from grandeur neurosis since he imagines himself to be the Son of Man or Christ:

He sat as quiet as a lump of moss  
Saying, ‘I am the Son of Man’.

Victor sat in a corner  
Making a woman of clay:  
Saying; ‘I am Alpha and Omega, I shall come  
To judge the earth one day.’  
(‘Victor’)

The influence of Homer Lane’s ideas is also apparent in Victor. “Lane made love central to his psychology.” Lane’s concept of love also includes the concept of hate: “If he hates, his behaviour is untrue to himself, to mankind and to the universe, but the energy is still love, for his act of hatred is love perverted. The hateful act is destructive of the man’s self and also of the happiness and welfare of mankind, thus retarding the perfection of the universe. It is wholly unnatural.” This is fully applicable to Victor’s behaviour in this ballad.

Man’s psychological problems induced by society are also highlighted by Auden in another ballad entitled ‘As I walked out one Evening.’ The poem explores the happy mood of a lover who sings a song expressing his love. The intensity of the lover’s love for his beloved, which springs out of his unconscious
mind, is clearly expressed in the third, fourth and fifth stanzas of the poem. But he is unfortunate to live in a world where rules of morality have been reversed. Using nursery rhymes Auden portrays a world where “morality has been thrown to the wind.”\(^{35}\)

\[\text{‘Where the beggars raffle the banknotes} \\
\quad \text{And the Giant is enchanting to Jack,} \\
\quad \text{And the Lily-white Boy is a Roarer,} \\
\quad \text{And Jill goes down on her back.} \\
\quad \text{('As I walked out one Evening')}\]

At the same time, he is conscious of Time that “destroys youthful joy in two ways: it destroys actual manifestations of it in physical exuberance and prowess . . . and it also destroys it in the metaphor of a girl’s party dress, breaking her necklace and her ‘brilliant bow’.”\(^{36}\) Thus, the lover is frightened by both time and society that act as the repressors of his natural instincts, leading to neurosis.

Social and psychological elements are also blended by Auden in another poem entitled ‘The Decoys’ which is a part of The Orators and is included in the Collected Shorter Poems from 1927 to 1957. Like in ‘Adolescence,’ the suppression of man’s natural instincts and its consequence also finds expression here. The poem can be interpreted at two levels. Metaphorically, “these valleys” in the opening line of the poem stand for capitalism, whereas “some birds” refer to the capitalists or the dominant class of society which are well trained to entrap the “real unlucky dove” that symbolizes the suppressed common people. About the situation of man explored in the poem, Edward Mendelson states that ‘The Decoys’ “exposes an innocent seeming landscape as fatal trap.”\(^{37}\) According to
Barbara Everett “the ‘real unlucky dove’ is caught by the ‘intimate appeal’ of its trained doubles . . . is locked within a landscape donated by the false ‘They’. But, psychologically, the “real unlucky dove” stands for the natural instincts of man, whereas “some birds” refer to the repressors of natural instincts. Suppression of natural instincts produces the “real unlucky dove,” one who suffers from psychic ailments.

Often the conflict between the political and the social on one hand and the instinctual on the other is presented very effectively in Auden’s poetry ‘O What Is That Sound’ is one such poem. This poem shows a soldier lover who has to go to war leaving his beloved behind, though she is persuading him not to go. This shows the beloved’s strong desire for her lover to stay with her. But the situation is such, according to the soldier, that he is compelled to go. As a result, fear and tension emerge in their relationship. Thus, the circumstance forces the beloved to repress her desires, and she is left in a state of fear. This fear and tension find expression in the following stanza:

O where are you going? Stay with me here!
Were the vows you swore deceiving, deceiving?
No, I promised to love you, dear,
But I must be leaving.
(‘O What Is That Sound’)

Thus, both the soldier lover and the beloved are forced to repress their natural instincts, as he is unable to do what his heart desires, and can no longer enjoy the company of his beloved. He must leave because he has to fulfil his obligation towards society or the country that he lives in.
Love is one of the most dominant themes in Auden’s poetry. But throughout his poetry his concept of love does not remain static. It keeps changing in keeping with the intellectual influences of thinkers such as Homer Lane, Freud, Marx and Kierkegaard. Among literary writers Blake and Lawrence have played a significant role in shaping Auden’s concept of love. According to Auden, “Love . . . is “the flood on which all move and wish to move” . . . is the source of all that is ‘lucid’ and ‘civilized’ . . . in human societies; it encourages . . . a “natural climate”, the “birth of natural order” . . . is a creative force . . . refused a normal growth, it may take a horrible disguise.” Thus, love is the only seed which sprouts into a tree that nurtures human beings. But at the same time the poet warns his readers of the disastrous effects of self-love or perverted love. Auden is not reluctant to ridicule love that is linked with materialism and acquisitiveness, and the love in which sex is sterile and not productive. He favors love that is pleasure-giving, protective and productive, peaceful and healthy, which function as a bond between men and women and helps in their survival. The poet wants love to grow in the heart of man and to be instrumental in bringing about a change in every aspect of life. Auden seems to urge man to become conscious of the role that love can play in building our life at the social as well as individual level. Absence of love leads to emptiness in the life of individuals as well as society. Auden talks about both carnal love i.e. “Eros” and universal or spiritual love i.e. “Agape”. He tries to find solutions to all problems concerning human life in “Agape”, and man, he thinks, should take shelter in
“Agape”. The second stanza of the poem ‘Lullaby’ shows Auden’s hope that “Eros” can be transformed into “Agape.”

In Auden’s early poetry “Love” is projected as “. . . a form of mental therapy, a gloriously effective psycho-analysis, a liberator, a cleanser, a releasing and enlarging power.” So, Auden considers love to be very important for human life and human relationships, and thereby, in the formation of a congenial social atmosphere. He accepts Freud’s concept of love that “the nucleus of what we mean by love naturally consists . . . in sexual love with sexual union as its aim.”

According to Freud, “libido” is the energy of the instincts involved in the activities of love. Love permits the freedom of libido, and hence, it helps in the formation of a sexual relationship between two partners, so that they can lead a blissful and healthy life, blessed with their offspring. It plays a vital role not only in making the social environment amicable but also in perpetuating the human race.

Sexual love that leads to the union of two lovers finds expression in the group of poems entitled ‘Five Songs.’ In the first song, D. H. Lawrence’s idea that “mind is the dead end of life” seems to have influenced Auden. The thought that if the conscious mind represses the “Eros” or sexual love, both the lovers may be adversely affected finds expression here. The poet does not believe in the suppression of libido or sexual impulse, as said earlier, but rather advocates its full expression:

Open your eyes, my dearest dallier;
Let hunt with your hands for escaping me;
Go through the motions of exploring the familiar;
Stand on the brink of the warm white day.
Rise with the wind, my great big serpent;
Song I ('What's in your mind, my dove, my coney,')

The second song explores the lovers' excitement as well as tension because of their sexual passion. They are both exited and tense because they are aware that at night they can fulfil their sexual urge but the morning acts as a suppressor of their erotic impulse:

That night when joy began
Our narrowest veins to flush,
We waited for the flash
Of morning's leveled gun.

Song II ('That night when joy began')

The third song stresses Auden's affirmation of "instinctive gratitude for a happy love affair. Sex is seen as a necessary exchange . . ."43:

Who goes with who
The bedclothes say,
As I and you
Go and kissed away,
The data given,
The senses even.

Song III ('For what as easy')

Thus, these songs explore love's pivotal role in creation and how it leads to a healthy, pleasurable and fruitful life. They also express the importance of sexual expression and highlight how lack of an outlet to this instinctual energy can cause anxiety, tension and fear.

Perverted love which results from the repression of love's natural instincts is the subject matter of the poem entitled 'Easy Knowledge':

...
And the fatigued face,  
Taking the strain  
Of the horizontal force  
And the vertical thrust,  
Makes random answer  
To the crucial test;

Man’s “fatigued face” is the result of perverted love. To Auden, the “horizontal force” stands for the psychological frontier or repressor which is responsible for the repression of the “vertical thrust” or love’s natural instincts. According to the poet, people of the modern society are unable to understand their act of stifling the function of natural love. The violation of the “vertical thrust” produces neurosis. The poet highlights the idea that failure to go beyond the “. . . edges of the town” or the repression of man’s natural instincts is injurious for the psychological health of man.

In some poems like ‘May’ Auden points out the insufficiency of erotic love and how it leads to neurosis. May stands for spring, a month of abundance in nature. It “seems to symbolize a dawning of maturity . . . both personal and historical. On the personal level, the awakening is sexual.”44 But the poem points out how mere erotic urges are inadequate, as they fail to “account for the lost world of traditional morality”45 and the resultant neurosis and death wish are clearly revealed:

The real world lies before us,  
Brave motions of the young,  
Abundant wish for death,  
The pleasing, pleasured, haunted:  
A dying Master sinks tormented  
In his admirers’ ring,  
The unjust walk the earth.  

('May')
Auden's belief that society is sick psychologically and needs to be cured, is the motivating force of the poem.

The repression of natural impulses is explored by Auden in terms of schoolchildren being held captive in cells in the poem entitled 'Schoolchildren.' The schoolchildren are restrained in school which acts as a suppressor and is strongly reminiscent of Blake's poem 'The Schoolboy.' Living in such condition hinders the normal growth of the children. Auden believes that the children should be treated with love and affection, and allowed to grow in a free environment. The idea that the suppression of the natural impulse leads to neurosis also finds a place here, like elsewhere. Freud's belief in infantile sexuality is also expressed here. Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right' according to which "it is through love and obedience that the groundwork of the ethical character is laid in childhood" is also challenged. According to Fuller:

Auden is questioning the validity of Hegelian education in the light of a real 'rebellion': how can the child become a free personality, as Hegel professed, when the educators are themselves 'condemned' and unable to become free? How can the child's touching trust and fidelity ever of itself germinate 'the new life,' when adults themselves are unable to break loose from the easy tyranny?

Auden presents love as an important source of pleasure in his poetry. He even focuses on different kinds of love like "Eros" and "Agape." The former is physical or carnal love whereas the latter is spiritual or universal love. According
to his poetry, it is possible to transform physical or carnal love into spiritual or
universal love. These ideas find full expression in his fine lyric ‘Lullaby.’ The lover
accepts his defeat to time because man is subjected to death and decay, as the
human is “mortal, guilty” and “the child ephemeral.” The poem echoes the
psychological theories of Sigmund Freud. According to Rodway, “Freud’s
influence is pervasive, but most evident in the second and fourth stanzas.”\(^{48}\) The
first stanza of the poem highlights the dominance of time over human life. The
second stanza explores the pleasure derived from love-making, which is
equivalent to the ecstasy experienced by a hermit when he is in mystic union with
God. This stanza highlights how “man is a psychosomatic unity, as Freud,
Groddeck and Homer Lane had taught. Lovers are shown to move from the
physical – culminating in an ‘orgasmic swoon’... On the other hand, the hermit,
starting from an ‘abstract insight’ into the supernatural, and universal love and
hope, ends in accordance with Freudian theory, in what is essentially a sensual
ecstasy.”\(^{49}\) The third and fourth stanzas explore the gratification of carnal passion
and also emphasize its transience. However the fact that this love existed will
serve as a “reservoir that may provide salvation in time of drought”\(^{50}\):

Every farthing of the cost,
All the dreaded cards foretell,
Shall be paid, but from this night
Not a whisper, not a thought,
Not a kiss nor look be lost.

(‘Lullaby’)

The theme of Auden’s verse play ‘Paid on Both Sides’ has been greatly
influenced by his knowledge of psychology. This play is a portrayal of a
psychologically sick society and simultaneously of “an individual psyche, sick and irrevocably divided (Fuller, 15).” ‘Paid on Both Sides’ has political implications as well, since “. . . The Nower-Shaw family feud also represents the German-Jewish conflict (Fuller, 14) which was one of the major issues of Auden’s time.

Thus, largely assimilating ideas from Sigmund Freud’s and Homer Lane’s psychological theories, Auden’s early poetry seeks to resolve the problems faced by man. But subsequently, he realizes that these psychological theories alone are inadequate for solving man’s problems. Highlighting the condition of Auden at this juncture, Firchow states, “After discovering to his dismay that, despite his efforts to cure them, his English patients stubbornly insisted on remaining unwell, and, indeed, from the standpoint of economic health, were even becoming worse, he shifted from advocating primarily psychological remedies to proposing socioeconomic ones.” In this way, Auden’s poetic wheel starts to roll over the road which is constructed by Marxism, opening the door of the next phase.
References:


7. Ibid., p. 41.


10. Ibid., p. 40.


16. Ibid., p. 35.

17. Ibid., p. 35.


19. Ibid., p. 23.

20. Ibid., p. 23.


25. Ibid., p. 54.

27. Ibid., p. 84.
28. Ibid., p. 84.
31. Ibid., p. 117.
34. Ibid., p. 130.
36. Ibid., p. 108.
40. Ibid., p. 130.
44. Ibid., p. 106.
45. Ibid., p. 106.
46. Ibid., p. 105.
47. Ibid., p. 105.
49. Ibid., p. 123.
50. Ibid., p. 123.