CHAPTER III

BE HAPPY AND YOU WILL BE GOOD

Among the men of letters it is very difficult to find one in whom a mixture of spiritual and philosophical trend combine effectively. If found, it is the result of the influence of the times they live in and only a study of these influences will reveal the true extent of the depth of the writer.

English Phase

The harrowing life experiences produce in a man, the making of a philosopher. Spirituality is only a step ahead of philosophy. W.H. Auden the English poet of the thirties and V.K. Gokak the Indian writer in English of the same period, had gone through such life experiences to reach the philosophical sphere and from there on to spirituality. Their poems of the relative period state emphatically, declare openly and prove beyond doubt the move to spirituality through life experiences.

Philosophy and spirituality should be a way of life for the modern man. The reason is stated by T.S. Eliot in his poem *The Waste Land*, as he presents the fragmented self of the war-torn man. The first World War
followed by the second helped to bring about only disillusion and disorientation among the people of the West since they were the people who suffered the atrocities of war. The writers of the time, especially poets like Auden, Cecil Day Lewis and Stephen Spender were more confused than disoriented. When Eliot spoke of the fragmented self in his poem, he was only putting into words what many people felt at that time. Thus Tiresieus in The Waste Land stands as the symbol of the fragmented self of the man of the times. Eliot knew quite well that the solution for this dilemma lies in the East, the Orient, where the Shanti mantra – Datta, Dayadvam and Damyatha-- would bring about the coherence for the modern, fragmented self. The West also has much to offer for this dilemma, through its philosophy for the well-informed, and through religion or spirituality for the others. Yet the progress of science had made the moral views of people quite meaningless since the futility of life made the sensual pleasures all the more desperate. This outlook of the western man had its origin in the Victorian dilemma of the nineteenth century with the publication of Darwin’s Origin of the Species. Reinhold Niebuhr in his book The Children of Light and The Children of Darkness, which is an indictment of democracy, says

[...] The Darkness attributed a moral historical significance to the struggles of nature. They failed to understand that human society is a vast moral and historical artifact, which
Niebuhr feels that the pace of modern history is indeed rapid. But

[. . .] a free society prospers least in cultural, religious and moral atmosphere which encourages neither a too pessimistic nor too optimistic view of human nature. (viii)

Niebuhr's ideas about a world community are echoed by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan. With the rapid progress of science during and after the two World Wars, the philosophers felt that there was a chance for a world community, which they hoped would bring about peace and an end to war. The effort of Hitler to unify the world under a Nazi regime was an example of how this same noble idea could be used by corrupted minds for egoistic ends. Yet Niebuhr is not disheartened:

The pride of nations is not easily brought under the dominion of the universal principle, even when the latter is doubly armed. One reason why this is so is that some of the armament of universality is appropriated by egoistic forces in history. The same technical situation which makes a universal community ultimately imperative, also arms particular nations, empires and
centres of power with the instruments which make the unification of the world through imperialistic domination seem plausible, if not actually possible. (60)

This outlook became acceptable to Auden only much later, after taking part in the Spanish civil war and also after writing the poem Spain 1937.

Mankind, with its particular taste for dominance, became more and more egotistic. The sacrifice of a nation, its people, its civilization is of no value for the modern man and the ultimate result is not the establishing of a new civilization but merely a show of his will and power over others. This war with the world and also with the self makes him a very troubled creature. The need for action takes him to some extreme measures like drugs, homosexuality, free-sex etc., which had become the hall-mark of the sixties. But the one power which can supersede all the weaknesses, the Self or the Atman, is yet to be realized. The Bhagavad-Gita admonishes man to realize this self which is indeed the friend as well as the foe of man.

Let a man raise himself by his self, let him never lower himself; for he is the friend of himself and he alone is the enemy of himself. He who has conquered himself by the self, he is the friend of himself; but he whose self is unconquered, his self acts as his own enemy like an external foe. (VI: 5-6)
This fighting with the Self, which is an enemy of the modern man, is tempered with psychology, philosophy and spirituality. Of these, the more scientific is psychology developed during the World War, when it became instrumental in dealing with the shell-shocked soldiers' and the drug-addicts' trauma. Freud and Jung developed psychology, the science of the mind, based upon the studies of human behaviour. They did not keep morality apart from psychology.

Auden discovered the fascinating world of psychology very early in his life. He discovered the fascinating world of psychology as a young boy reading the eclectic collection of books in his father's library. He was indeed a precocious child. Psychology had fascination for him even then. Auden, being the youngest child of a family of male children, was obviously his mother's pet. He was fair and the mother's love for him was only natural. His admiration for his father is also evident in his nature. But how this influenced Auden in his later life can be seen from his life, relationship with other people, especially men. His acceptance of religion and morality was imbibed from his early life with his parents and brothers. Later when he became a public school boy, living in the boarding house with other boys, he stood out among them with his superior knowledge. This knowledge was gained from reading books in his father's library. This eclectic collection was more for adults than for
children. Auden being a voracious reader, started reading without
discrimination and also without proper guidance. The result was that he
gained knowledge of literature, science and philosophy. His father's
scientific interests were also fascinating to the young boy. Altogether
psychology which is "fundamentally a rationalist monument" attracted
Auden. Speaking of psychology, he feels that it is "principally an
investigation into the nature of evil. Its essential problem is to discern
what it is that prevents people having the good will." He adds, "It aims at
making each discover for himself his unique treasure." (EA 348)

Self-discovery or self-knowledge helps a man to rationalise and
make his choice of good and evil. It is the unique characteristic of a
human being. Psychologists help us to realise this. Auden's problems
were troublesome to him. His friendship with men was alright in the
literary circle. The society, especially the English, frowns upon such
behaviour. At Oxford, he was undeniably the best undergraduate poet.
Though he became an accepted poet, still he kept himself to the literary
circles, where there would be no demarcation as a result of his homo-
sexual nature. Such oddities of nature are usual among the artistic
people. Moreover, Auden firmly regarded women as companions. His
defense of this topic is remarkable:
the reason given in V.18 of the Bible for the creation of Eve is not biological, but personal, 'It is not good that the man should be alone.' (EA 119)

Christopher Isherwood and Chester Kallman, to whom he dedicated his Collected shorter Poems 1930-1944, belonged to this same circle.

The campus life after the boarding school provided enough scope for exhibiting his talent as a poet and also, on a personal level, gained him a lot of friends. The confidence this combination produced in Auden was remarkable. Totally governed by literature, the intelligentsia of Oxford and Cambridge almost totally alienated themselves from the English society. At first they could not accept the conventionality of the English; they had more in common with their brethren in Europe. Revolutionary theories including Communism were acceptable to these scholars. Religion and religious practices were put aside in favour of politics.

Auden’s duality, as a human being and as a poet, came into prominence during his student days. The state of the world in the thirties was ample inspiration for the poetic mind. Even though Communism became the trend of the day among the intellectuals, Auden had no desire to become a member of the Communist Party unlike his friends, Stephen Spender, Arthur Koestler and Cecil Day Lewis. He was justly inspired by
the ideals of communism but he was not prepared to commit himself totally to the party. Unlike his friends who suffered disillusionment, Auden's disillusionment was not permanent. He was able to bounce back to his former self and find another solace within no time at all. The left wing poets and writers of the time were not so lucky since their involvement went much deeper. To them, like the romantic poets Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats and Shelley, Communism was the ideal, which they hoped, could bring about an equality among human beings. So did the romantic poets think of the French Revolution; when it took a bloody turn, these poets were deeply disillusioned and it took a long time for them to recover and find solace. The enhancement and the enthusiasm, the feeling that they are doing something for their fellow human beings, make these dreamers push themselves forward in spite of the oddities.

Marxism as an ideal is something Auden can understand but as a way of life, it is too restricted or limited and as bad as capitalism. But the idealistic Auden realized this only later. The time was ripe for him and his friends to be converted into this short-lived period of optimism i.e., from 1931 to 1937 which Koestler terms as “that abortive spiritual renaissance, later known as the Pink Decade.” Various reasons are pointed out for this spurt of spiritual renaissance; most common being the
guilt feeling of the middle-class writers for living a better life during the "slump" years, 1930s, when the economy had made the poor people poorer and the rich and the average comfortably off. The watch words of Marxism, like classless society, equal distribution of wealth, were like a beacon to the intelligentsia of the times in Europe and England. The Western world readily took up Marxism with great fervour and Russia to them symbolised the Utopia of their dreams. Another reason for this conversion was the personal crisis, as a result of the changing moral values of the world, and also the time, after the first World War, was ripe for it. Arthur Koestler confesses in his article on why he became a communist and why he had left the party, in the book *The God That Failed*:

I was ripe to be converted, as a result of my personal case-history, thousands of other members of the intelligentsia and the middle classes of my generation were ripe for it, by virtue of other personal case-histories; but, however much these differed from case to case, they had a common denominator, the rapid disintegration of moral values, of the pre-1914 pattern of life in post war Europe, and the simultaneous lure of the new revelation which had come from the East.

(Crossman 19)
This lure was taken up with much fervour and became the pivot of existence for the intelligentsia. Richard Crossman, who had compiled the renunciation of the six ex-communists, like Arthur Koestler, Richard Wright, Louis Fischer, Ignazio Silone, Andre Gide and Stephen Spender, in his book *The God That Failed*, analyses the reason for the lure of Communism:

The attraction of the ordinary political party is what it offers to its members; the attraction of communism was that it offered nothing and demanded everything, including the surrender of spiritual freedom. (6)

According to Crossman the intellectual has another reason:

For the intellectual, material comforts are relatively unimportant, what he cares most about is spiritual freedom. The strength of the Catholic church has always been that it demands the sacrifice of that freedom uncompromisingly, and condemns spiritual pride as a deadly sin. The communist novice, subjecting his soul to the canon law of the Kremlin, felt something of the release which Catholicism also brings to the intellectual, wearied and worried by the privilege of freedom. (6-7)
After the renunciation, the true ex-communist has the shattered pieces to pick-up. As Crossman says:

In the case of Koestler, this inner conflict is the mainspring of his creative work. The Yogi looks in the mirror, sees the Commissar, and breaks the glass in rage (11).

The words of Koestler and Crossman may be describing Auden and his inner conflict and disillusionment much more aptly than Auden himself would have done. The battle fought in Spain in 1937 was the culmination of republican thoughts for Auden and the group of intellectuals who believed in the universal brotherhood that communism preached. It is this enthusiasm and total devotion that prompted Auden and his colleagues to join the Spanish Civil War; it was a symbol for them, though the war was a failure. But it brought forth the real genius of Auden in the form of the famous poem Spain 1937. The royalties from the poem were given to Medical Aid for Spain. In spite of the refrain ‘But today the struggle’ which mars the beauty of the poem, Auden expresses the feelings of the generation towards war in this poem. The craving for the ‘Just City’ is the craving of the ideologists for a society based on equality as Marxism preached, but which failed to establish effectively. In the poem, Spain is presented as:
... that and square, that fragment

snipped off from hot

Africa, soldered so crudely to inventive Europe,

On that table land scored by rivers,

Over fever’s menacing shapes are precise and alive.

(EA 210)

After the war, the disenchantment and disillusionment lead to despair and it finds expression in the last stanza:

The stars are dead; the animals will not look:

We are left alone with our day, and the time is short and

History to the defeated

May say Alas but cannot help or pardon. (EA 212)

According to Stephen Spender, Auden’s friend and fellow-poet, the Spanish war was not merely the fight between the Republicans and Fascists of Spain:

The European Fascist versus anit-fascist struggle was dramatized in Spain as in a theatre. The peculiar Spanish passion, idealism and violence of temperament, and even the
Spanish landscape, colored the struggle and gave it intensity and a kind of poetic purity which it scarcely had before or afterward [. . .]. It was in part an anarchist's war, a poet's war. (Crossman 247)

But it was more than that; it was a war with which the Communists fought to gain power and rule the country with the Republican camouflage. During the war and immediately afterwards, this was not evident to Auden’s group of intellectuals. Later, the realization brought disillusionment which was not at all relieved by the condition of Europe immediately afterwards. The second World War had been the proverbial last straw for Auden. He was forced to abandon his politics and return once again for good to his verse. It was more or less like Wordsworth returning to nature, after the disillusionment of French Revolution. Here only the return is the same; whereas Wordsworth found peace and tranquility in nature Auden had no such comforts. Peace and tranquility were still a chimera to him. All around him the world was disintegrating into nothingness leaving no foothold for a sensitive creature like him; the tidal wave pushed him forward into nothingness; to fight against it would have been disastrous. The only way of escape seemed to be like a flotsam and exist rather than live.
As the leader of the left wing writers, specially poets, Auden had a tremendous responsibility towards his contemporaries. The noble dream of improving the conditions of the working class and establishing a classless society, remained a dream. More than that, the working class people did not consider the intervention of these intellectuals as help; on the other hand, it was more hindrance and disaster as was demonstrated in Spain. The intelligentsia could only stand back and watch helplessly as the hatred and craze for power brought about wars, involving all the nations of the world, bringing with it unbearable agony, immense suffering and nameless atrocities, not to say the havoc wrought to economy. It was by no means a comforting thought to Auden who longed for the 'Just City.' The rising prices and lowering morality no longer provided equality, the broken dreams and futile attempts to patch up life were not easy tasks. The very notion of existence posed a question not of mere alienation but of faith as well. Auden’s meeting with Layard, an anthropologist and psychologist, was an important turning point in his life. Layard was a pupil of Homer Lane, an American psychiatrist, who had his own views about some of the theories of Freud, especially about the repression of unwelcome impulses in the manner of awareness. Allen Rodway mentions John Layard in his *A Preface to Auden* and states his influence on Auden as Auden himself had done in his autobiographical poem, *Letter to Lord Byron*:
I met a chap called Layard and he fed
New doctrines into my receptive head.
Part came from Lane, and part form D.H.Lawrence;
Gide, though I didn’t know it then, gave part.
They taught me to express my deep abhorrence
If I caught anyone preferring Art
To Life and love and being Pure - in heart. (EA 2 14)

D.H.Lawrence, the English writer and Andre Gide, the most influential
French writer of the post war Europe, contributed to the making of
Auden. No doubt Auden took their advice to heart. The poems of the
year 1937, which number a total of fourteen, from January to December,
show a variance, at times comforting and at times psychological -- ballads
like “Miss Gee,” “Victor” and, occasionally, a story poem like “James
Honeyman.” James Honeyman of the poem of the same name, invented
the poison gas ‘N.P.C’ which fell into the hands of the enemies of his
country. In a Frankeinstein fashion, it killed Honeyman and his family
and his countrymen. The desperate need for recognition in the world,
when his country had failed to take notice of him, had prompted
Honeyman to give the formula for N.P.C to the enemies.
The ballads with psychological themes, "Miss Gee" and "Victor" are Auden’s experimentation with Freudian themes and theories which he had summed up in his prose writing entitled "Psychology and Art Today." After enumerating the chief points of Freud’s writing, Auden concludes his observations:

[. . .] psychology is opposed to all generalisations; forces people to hold a generalisation and there will come a time when a situation will arise to which it does not apply. Either they will force the generalisation, the situation, the repression, when it will haunt them, or they will embrace its opposite [. . .]. You cannot tell people what to do, you can only tell them parables; and that is what art really is, particular stories of particular people and experiences, from which each according to his immediate and peculiar needs may draw his own conclusions. (EA 331)

Thus the sarcoma of the spinster Miss Gee, and Victor, killing his wife and going stark raving mad, become the parables from which the readers might draw their own conclusions. Scientific conclusions are also made concerning the reason of the illness as in the case of Miss Gee. She had cancer and her doctor, Dr. Thomas remarks:
... 'cancers' a funny thing.

Nobody knows what the cause is,

..............................

Childless women get it,

And men when they retire;

It's as if there had to be some outlet

For their foiled creative fire. (EA.215)

This type of summing up comes only after an extensive reading of the progress of science and also observing the psychological pattern. Auden did both; being a voracious reader - he read indiscriminately and with equal fervour. A book on insects and a book on existentialism were treated with equal enthusiasm; more than that, the ideas thus gathered spurted effortlessly in verse form within no time at all.

Conscious of the imminence of war, Auden experienced a sense of forlornness and nothing seemed to comfort him. Even though he himself was a homosexual, he was able to write a love lyric as "Lay your sleeping head, my love," with its touching sensual pictures of the love lost in a world of their own, totally unconscious of the 'mortal world,' with its 'Noon of dryness' and 'Nights of insult.' The poet's blessing is on the
lovers; a protective feeling and all the sweetness, joy and purity of love can be traced here. The erotic picture of the lovers is not merely physical; on the other hand, the spiritual beauty of love is brought out in the poem. With the same pen, in the same month, that is, January 1937, he could write about the Devil who has ‘broken parole and arisen,’ in the poem “It’s farewell to the drawing room’s civilised cry,” and he, the poet, is the self appointed one to rid the earth of the Devil

For I, after all, am the Fortunate One,

The Happy-Go-Lucky, the spoilt Third Son,

For me it is written the Devil to chase

And to rid the earth of the human race. (EA 208)

For, whom should he fear among the human race? None. Men had made this earth ‘A sedentary Sodom and slick Gomorrah,’ the biblical cities which were destroyed by God for their evil way of life. This new Sodom and Gomorrah should be wiped out from the face of the earth. So also mankind; ‘Mankind is alive, but Mankind must die.’ Why should the others join him in his crusade? The poet has an answer for this also:

For it’s order and trumpet and anger and dream

and power and glory command you to come;
The Graves shall fly open and let you all in,

and the earth shall be emptied of mortal sin. (EA. 209)

Auden’s morbidity goes a step further in the poem “Blues” written for Heidi Anderson, in which he writes about Death, watching the people in the room and wherever they go. The condition of the world was such that, the thought of imminent death was always with people whether they liked it or not. Death is personified here in various personae:

As a high-stepping blondie with eyes of blue

In the subway, on beaches, Death looks at you; (EA. 209)

Again ‘Death is a G-man,’ who will finally ‘. . . get you for the crime of being born, my friend.’ Sometimes with grim humour the poet presents Death as a doctor with first class degrees:

Death as a doctor has first class degrees;

The world is on his panel; he charges no fee;

He listens to your chest, says - you’re breathing.

That’s bad.

But don’t worry; we’ll soon see to that, my lad (EA. 209)
As real estate seller and as a teacher, Death is ‘simply grand’. Wherever you are, whatever you do, Death will finally get you. Auden seems to be taking too much pain to get this idea across to the masses. In a world of disillusionment, shaky economic systems, shifting moral values, Death seemed to be the only certainty for the Auden generation. The conflict in Spain, which was the ideal of the generation, did nothing to help them restore their faith in humanity.

It is after his political disillusionment that Auden turned much more effectively to psychology. The European politics after the first World War was a lot of suspicious, bitter, one-upmanship which finally ended with Hitler and his Nazi regime trying to overpower the world with their destructive manifesto. Auden and his literary friends had a leaning towards Communism but they were not ardent party members who were willing enough to remain with the party till the last. They were more ‘pink’ than ‘red’.

The enthusiasm for helping out the downtrodden remained for some more time after Spain. Colonialism was also much criticised by the Auden group at a time when most of the British colonies were getting their freedom. In the modern times when Macao, the Portuguese colony in China was finally given over to the authorities of China on 19 December, 1999 after 442 years of colonialization, the poem that Auden
wrote on *Macao* becomes relevant. He calls it ‘A weed from Catholic Europe,’; the ironic comment just shows how he regards religion: Churches beside the brothels testify / That faith can pardon natural behaviour. (EA 48). In fact, Macao was the last European colony in Asia. It also means an end to the colonial powers in this day and age. It should also be remembered that Auden has written about this as early as 1930s.

Auden’s interest in the theatre world goes back to his student days. Along with his friend Christopher Isherwood, he tried his hand at various forms of drama and other theatrical productions like *Dog Beneath the Star*, a Christmas Oratio, *Ascent of F6*, etc., Unfortunately, they did not get accepted as good theatrical productions. On the other hand, their verse was appreciated but something was lacking with his theatre productions. He made the acquaintance of several good directors and dramatists but still the theatre world did not welcome Auden’s attempts.

After his Oxford student days he spent a year abroad during 1928 in Berlin. According to Allen Rodway he did this “less out of political interest than for its kinky sex, toleration of homo-sexuality and experimental music.” *(A Preface to Auden 25)* His contact with Brecht, the German dramatist, and various psychologists, starts here. It was the German psychologist George Groddeck who connected psychology and philosophy and made Auden think on those lines. Auden’s later
continental phase is an aftermath of his visit to the continent before the second World War, in his younger days. He wanted an existence only as a poet but he was not averse to a job. When he wrote "The Poet and the City", an essay on poets, their requirements and their life, he was writing more from his experience than from imagination. To him

A poet has not only to educate himself as a poet, he has also to consider how he is going to earn his living. Ideally, he should have a job which doesn't in anyway involve the manipulation of words[...]. In earning his living, the average poet has to choose between being a translator, a teacher, a literary journalist or a writer of advertising copy and, of these, all but the first can be directly detrimental to his poetry, and even translation does not free him from leading a too exclusively literary life. (EA 316)

Various teaching jobs, talks given to student community at various universities, reviewing books for the various media were all jobs that Auden himself found to earn a living. Without forgetting the fact that his vocation was mainly that of a poet, Auden undertook these jobs as means of livelihood. He found time to visit various countries in Europe and America and made contacts with men of letters. Such was his acquaintance with Brecht and literary kinship with Goethe. Wherever he
went, the ability to be part of the literary circle of that country was a speciality of Auden. He learned much from these contacts and in the war-torn Europe, the meaning of *The Waste Land* became a reality to Auden. When he returned to England, it was only natural that he should feel the familiar itch for travelling. Since England at that time had no attractions for Auden, it was inevitable that he should shift to America, the new world.

Auden’s psychological predictions took root more in Germany than in America. The contacts with the psychologists and their new discoveries in their field held much fascination for Auden who was eager to learn. It was also at this time that philosophy attracted him. The feeling of unrest took him to Kierkegaard, Tillich and Niebuhr. Never in his life did Auden deny religion; it was just that he did not care for religious practices at this stage in his life. Though Auden was a Catholic he was so because of birth and not because of choice. Along with his work on theatrical productions with his friends, he was also avidly interested in the new branch of science that was gaining momentum during the times of war; that is to say, psychology, as Sigmund Freud, the Jew, had formulated. This science fascinated him for various reasons. One important reason was the understanding of the motivation of human beings in whatever they did. He recognized the scientific method as the
only way of asking questions to obtain valid knowledge, and he also drew a distinction between belief and faith. Belief, which is verifiable with faith and faith, which is an absolute pre-supposition, are attitudes often mistaken, one for the other. It is here that the morality of his actions posed questions to the poet's mind.

The connection between psychology and morality in Auden's life was the result of a Catholic upbringing and a need to break free of the rigidity of the English society which was only too natural. In fact, the psychologists were ready to recognize the place of morality in human life. Dr.Tillich, an eminent theologian philosopher, in his book Morality and Beyond examines the difference between Catholic and Protestant conceptions of moral imperative and explains how these two conceptions which are of conflicting nature can be reconciled. According to Tillich, Auden's favourite author,

The world is conceived as a symptom of eternal structures, performed in the divine mind, which are substance and essence of everything and which establish the norms and laws for man's personal and social practice. (82)

This kind of hierarchical system is similar to that of the church, which teaches it and defends it against new systems successfully. Their remarkable success with Pope as the living authority, adapts itself to
change, thus bringing about a stability as a result of its flexibility. Even
then, the church failed in dealing with the demands of the bourgeois. In
fact, Tillich cognized that Protestantism created a new code of ethics as
opposed to the medieval church. This adaptability and the resultant
success over the bourgeois consciousness made Protestantism the popular
religion among the Europeans. Auden's mother came from a good
religious family and she had ingrained moral values in young Auden and
his brothers. The Anglican atmosphere and the boarding school
education of England were not too conducive to the young Auden.
Perhaps he felt more American than European even in his younger days.
The school education of England during the time of Auden created in him
a feeling of being trapped. So it was only natural that he should try his
level best to overcome this feeling. With a lot of friends who appreciated
his wise acts he was able to achieve this to a certain extent. Still the
feeling lingered, even when he became a young man. In his essay entitled
"Problems of Education," on commenting on Bertrand Russell's book
Education and the Social Order, Auden correctly points out the reasons
for the failure of modern education.

The future of modern education lies not in its attention to
individual needs, nor to methods, nor even to the moral ideas it
preaches, but in the fact that nobody genuinely believes in our society, for which the children are being trained. (EA 315)

Certainly, when he became a full fledged poet, Auden deemed it necessary to shift to America.

American Phase

For long the enfant terrible of English poetry, Auden shifted to America at a time when the Americans craved for the traditional stability of England. His attraction towards America and Americans can be seen reflected in his introduction to The Criterion Book of Modern American Verse, which he had edited. Speaking of diversity, an American phenomenon, he goes on evaluating the difference between the English poets and their American counterparts and comes to the conclusion that religion and philosophy had indeed influenced poets the world over especially the English and the American. Speaking of this, in this criterion Auden remarks that:

[...]. Christianity might have deprived Aphrodite, Apollo, the local geneses, of their divinity but as figures for the forces of nature, as a mode of thinking about the creation, they remained valid for poets and their readers alike[...]. Even when nineteenth century biology began to trouble men’s mind with
the thought that the universe might be without moral values, their immediate experience was still of a friendly and lovable, nature. Whatever their doubts and convictions about the purpose and significance of the universe as a whole, Tennyson’s Lincolnshire or Hardy’s Dorset were places where they felt completely at home, landscapes with faces of their own which a human being could recognize and trust. (12-13)

When Auden, the poet shifted to America, it was not an alien country or culture that accepted him. He felt at home with the country and people even though he was able to uphold the aloofness of an English man there. The fascination that America held for him was indeed on different levels as he himself remarks:

In America, [...] to move on and make a fresh start somewhere else is still the normal reaction to dissatisfaction or failure. Such social fluidity has important psychological effects. Since movement involves breaking social and personal ties, the habit creates an attitude towards personal relationship in which impermanence is taken for granted. (Criterion 14)

As an authority on English poetry, Auden’s comments were indeed true as also were his comments on American poets. These comments were not desultory mumblings; on the other hand, they showed a great
understanding of the dilemma a poet on both sides of the Atlantic faced. Revelations of this kind serve to understand Auden, the poet, all the more. The unusual perception with which he could understand others and their behaviour is quite worth noting. It shows a sensitive and imaginative mind which is sharpened by the exposure to different cultures. The innate craving for meeting people of different cultures must be another reason for the change over to America for Auden, the distinguished poet who had held the chair of poetry at Oxford since Matthew Arnold. The brave new world, America, accepted him and Auden was able to carve out a small but significant niche for himself in the literary circle. His teaching posts at various places and the contact with new people altogether widened the intellectual sphere of the poet. While some remember him with great adoration and affection, others recognize him as a famous poet. None denied his greatness. As day after day he produced poems for publication, he contradicted the critical opinion that he was not able to produce much good work after his desertion of England. Opinions of this kind could be taken only as expressions of prejudiced minds. In fact, some of the best poems were produced during his life in America. *Nones*(1951, 1952), *Homage to Clio* (1960) are some of them. These collections show a depth and maturity along with a philosophical nature as if he had seen all that had to be seen and that he could stand aloof from the world around him even though he
was also part of that world. Though lack of seriousness was one of the many criticisms directed against the work that was produced, the ease with which he could write shows his mastery over this genre. Absorbing the changes taking place around him, his life and dreams continued and thoughts found words. As Richard Eberhart, another well-known American poet, says in his "A Tribute to W.H. Auden"

He became a monumental figure, leaving England to live in America from 1939 and becoming an American citizen. Yet his voice was always English and he was no more American than Eliot was British, who left our shores to become a prime literary figure in England. (*The Harvard Advocate* 30)

After this ambiguous statement, Eberhart goes on to say that even though Auden "mated with his times," his whole life was rather prophetic. It is the duty of the poet to conform to the people around him and this Auden does very well.

Yet this repenting Auden was severely criticised by poets like Thom Gunn and Philip Larkin, for exhibiting a laxity of style and surrendering his intelligence. It is this contradictory attitude of the literary intelligentsia which paved way for the next phase in Auden's changing life.
Though acknowledged by all as the most talented poet of the 1930s and also as a

[...] writer with two manners, one cerebral and elliptic, the other spontaneous, overflowing with humour to the verge of doggerel” (Seif 61)

he was still acknowledged as the machine man of the movement, who diagonised the diseases of a sick society and, in particular, of its middle class sufferers, with an air now boisterous, now sympathetic. (Seif 62)

The capacity to be the medicine man seemed to waver, once he landed in America. The constant change of jobs, the various changes of place, in fact the struggle for eking out an existence without abandoning his vocation of being a poet, proved to be a real hazard. The American society is not the staid conformist English society. One can’t suggest any remedy for the sickness of that society since the patients do not crave for a healthy existence. The total indulgence of a sensual kind seemed to be the watch word of the society. Auden did not stand apart; he just floated along with the others thus becoming a true American in every sense. There is not a vestige of the former leftwing revolutionary in Auden. He has now become almost a sybaritic. The use of drugs, liberal sex, a
hallmark of the Hare Krishna movement in the 1960s, had its beginning during Auden’s early life in America. Auden experimented with all these. He acquired a lot of friends at this time, all eager to listen to his recital of poetry and to be a part of the magic circle that Auden created wherever he was.

Once settled in America, for all ends and purposes, Auden was happy to shuttle back and forth to England on various literary assignments and otherwise. For some time he was in the army, but did not take part in any active fighting. After his stint in the war of Spain, this work in the army was voluntary. The feeling that he was also doing something worthwhile created a pleasant feeling in him. Even then he did not forget his true profession, that is that of a bard. The new life helped him to maintain his European connections, the habit of spending some time in Europe during his vacations enhanced and enriched his poetic ideas. These frequent visits to the continent helped him to maintain constant contact with European literature and the continental scenario. These in turn were much appreciated by his American friends. Altogether Auden had become more cosmopolitan in his nature. The changing scenario in turn influenced his writing.
The Continental Phase

Auden was involved in a lot of activities so often that it is almost impossible to assign him to any one category. He is poet, essayist, translator, dramatist, all rolled into one. Whatever be the genre, he makes it conform to his thinking and masters it effectively. In his introduction to the new translation of Goethe's *Italienischer Reise*, he is extremely explicit as to why a new translation of Goethe is necessary:

*Italian Journey* is not only a description of places, persons, and things, but also a psychological document of the first importance dealing with a life crisis which in various degrees of intensity, we all experience somewhere, between the ages of thirty-five and forty-five. (Encounter 61)

Auden who had experienced this crisis in his life, as a result of the change from England to America, recognized it immediately in Goethe. Moreover, he recognizes the need for change in Goethe, having gone through the same crises. It is his life experience that prompted Auden to remark that,

If he [Goethe] were to develop as a poet, the best companionship for him at this point, failing a real literary equal like Schiller, was an unliterary one or, at least, a company
whose literary judgements he did not have to take seriously

(Encounter 63)

For a poet to bloom to the maximum, a favourable climate is necessary. When England became too much for Auden, he went over to America to spread out. That American social climate did help him in this attempt is a fact which can be affirmed by the constant out-pourings with which Auden blessed the literary world in the form of poems, essays, book reviews etc. though some of these out-pourings did not come up to the standard of his poems of the English period. Yet they epitomise the nature of the Self, in his writings which was acceptable to the American society and the American literary world. The next phase in his life was built on these strong foundations, as it tops the poet’s life as the European phase.

European Phase

The wandering life for Auden, had by now become too much. The need to settle down and live in peace became an inner craving. The desire to have a house, to own one, to put roots in the world before leaving it forever, thus trying to hold on desperately to mortality, in the hope of becoming immortal, is only a natural dream of a person who recognizes the fact that the end is near. The flowering of this dream took some effort but he was able to invite his friends over and give them a
house warming party. In the war-torn Europe this gesture, by a soul wearied by the holocaust war had produced, stands out as a toast to death and destruction around him. Between his constant visits to England and spending the autumn in Ischia, Auden managed to settle in the house he had bought at Kirchstetten, near Vienna. The house was near the village church. Since his visits to Ischia became constant, he had started the habit of attending the Sunday communion in the nearby church. It seems Auden deliberately sought living at a place near churches. It was during this time that he gathered a lot of friends other than his usual literary-homosexuals. His connection with the opera, in the form of occasional operatic verses, which failed to gain success pulled him into the midst of theatrical people and his constant need to be cleared of the religious doubts, made him friends with theologians. Flitting from these varied, opposing groups, Auden was able to maintain a modicum of social life, despite his advancing age. At Kirchstetten, Auden and Chester were able to offer hospitality to a lot of their literary friends who had been with them throughout their life in England and America. Stephen Spender and his family was one of them. The life in Austria was more productive and Auden and Chester Kallman were able to produce good translations and occasional libretti. It was an ideal partnership of the minds, and literary-wise, it was a great success.
Auden's constant trips to New York and England were to give lectures which offered enough money as payment, now that he has become a great literary figure. In spite of the comfort of owning a house and having enough money, Auden didn't stop working. To him writing became a routine without which he just could not live. It had become the life-breath of his existence. The theme for his writings varied with his change of places and situations. Still he was able to hold on to that literary genre, poetry, which was the main interest in his life. He celebrated the joy of owning a house in the only way that he knew well, by writing a poem *Thanksgiving for a Habitat*. The habit of putting everything, the joy, the anxiety, the depression, etc., into words had not been lost to Auden as this poem proves. In fact, the poem confirms the view that Auden is more literal than verbal. To get to know him, a journey through his writings, especially his poems, will be enough. No other secondary sources are necessary to know this poet well. His changing interests, his preoccupations with people, places, themes and even physical discomforts and comforts, all come out through his poems. Unlike poets like Yeats and Thom Gunn, Auden is definitely personal in his writings. Each of his poems can be regarded as an entry in his personal diary. So also his essays and other writings show the reaction of the poet towards certain articles published, or books written or even poems written. This rainbow world is not restricted to literature alone. It
is when we go through his poems that we realise the extent to which Auden's reading capacity had taken him. Being a voracious reader, if he was pleased with one author, he seemed to take equal pleasure in reading other works of the same author. Whether it be a theologian, philosopher, psychologist or whatever, once a person interested him, he was hooked to the person. More than that, his opinions on what he had read came out in the form of verse.

As a poet of great renown, his opinions were much sought after in England, America and also in the Continent. Opinions of controversial issues were written and published almost immediately. More than a source of income, he enjoyed writing like no other poet. The book reviews and introductions were valued by the leading writers, if they were done by Auden. It was altogether, a contented, happy man that one finds in the Auden of the later years. A face with lines of experience and wisdom, Auden's advancing age did not trouble him much. As a true poet he knew his last years were to be spent in writing and publishing poems. To him there was no existence other than through poetry. Yet that was the outpouring of a soul who was very much private in public life. The strength of these outpourings lies in his spiritual maturity as a result of his understanding of his own self. If Yeats was a 'public figure,' Auden was more conservative about his public figure unlike
Yeats, Auden was much more reserved and, moreover, he criticized Yeats for being an exotic even when he admired the real talent of Yeats. Such a poet, with aspirations for his poetry but none for his own self, deserves all the fame that had come in his way during his life time and even after.

*The Rake's Progress* was first performed at the Theatro La Venice, and its music was set to by Stravinsky. Both Auden and Chester Kallman, whose collaborative work it was, had been on tenterhooks about its public reception. Since Auden's dreams about a theatrical career depended upon this opera naturally he was anxious. Somehow it turned out to be a successful modern opera, and was accepted as such by the people. His important poetic collections like *The Shield of Achilles* and *Horae Canonicae* were published during this time and these were also accepted well; though they were severally criticised. His summer days spent in Ischia were really fruitful in that he was able to write good poems and get them published.

The title poem of the collection entitled "The Shield of Achilles" displays the desolation of the war-torn western world juxtaposed with the classical mythological scene of another war which brought equal desolation to the people of those times. War, anywhere, at any time, brings only desolation, despair and immense sadness inspite of the victory achieved, which is at a great price. The modern society also had not
deviated from this fate of war even though centuries had gone by in the history of mankind and civilization had suffered drawbacks as well as progress. Yet war is considered as a setback of civilization; bringing to the forefront the hidden barbaric savagery in the human being. However, well-defended, no one can justify war because of its atrocities to human beings and to human society.

Auden who had retreated from his communist leanings, started once again on his literary career and he was appointed professor of poetry at Oxford from 1956 onwards. Shuttling between Europe-England and America, Auden was as busy as any other acclaimed poet. After he had shifted his life to America, the main place of stay in England was with Stephen Spender, who still remained his friend, personal and literary. Stephen Spender’s home was the one place that Auden enjoyed to stay at. Throughout the thirties and even later, Stephen Spender and Auden remained friends. When Auden settled in Europe, at Kirchstetten, Stephen Spender visited him there, thus affirming a life-long friendship.

Auden, in his old age, was not an appealing figure; in fact he had become quite obnoxious with his tyrannical views and attitudes and with his lopsided dressing. The people whom he knew as friends had become old and were either dead or in old age homes. Auden retained his individuality and tried to remain as independent as possible. He had
made peace with himself through religion. It is in this that the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard's philosophy helped him. Auden was attracted to the theologian philosopher Kierkegaard quite early since Marxism and even Communism as a philosophy failed to bring about the goodness that Auden envisaged for the society. After a time the idea of improving the society and establishing socialism had lost its appeal. The next interesting ideal was self improvement. Quite early in his life, Auden had realized that self-improvement is the result of self-realization. The question of existence and existentialist dialect leads on to self-realization. Kierkegaard had spoken extensively of this in his Either/Or. The stages that Kierkegaard speaks of resembles the Hindu ashramas. The Hindu ashramas of Brahmacharya, Grahasthyam, Vanaprastham and Sanyasam represent the different stages in the life of man, which, followed in order lead to Sanyasam or self-realization. It is with this self realization that a human being achieves meaning in his life which leads him towards the religious, and finally, the atman becomes one with God. The equivalent of this in Kierkegaard's philosophy has only three stages. They are the aesthetic stage, ethical stage and the religious stage.

The aesthetic man of Kierkegaard's theory lives for the moment and his life is one of cynical non-involvement; he is merely a spectator. He is moreover governed by sense, impulses and emotions. He hates all
that would limit his field of choice and never gives a definite pattern to his life. He is led to a state of being lost and faces two alternatives—Either/Or that is, either he has to remain in despair or he can move on to the next level by self commitment. The ethical stage is possible only if man makes a choice for himself. This decision making on the part of man is a step towards self mastery. His probing into the depths within himself reveals the real state of sinfulness and this realization takes him towards divine forgiveness. From here he is taken towards the next stage i.e., the religious stage. It is a non-rational leap of faith. The religious man does not leave the world but remains in it. He transforms his outward activity into an inward matter, by admitting that he can do nothing by himself. Here the individual does not merely subordinate himself to an impersonal universal law but stands in an immediate relation by faith to the absolute. Thus the religious mode of existence suspends or absorbs the ethical. Every aspect of the religious man’s life is determined by his God relationship. Thus in all aspects, the Hindu ashramas of Brahmacharya, Grahasram, Vanaprastham and Sanyasam can be juxtaposed with that of Kierkegaard’s three stages and one will find a lot of similarities there, especially between the last two stages Vanaprastha and Sanyasa which resemble the third stage of Kierkegaard’s, the religious stage. This last stage in both cases is the ultimate step of a man’s self-realization. Auden, who had gone through the aesthetic and ethic stages in his life,
finds this religious stage with the help of Kierkegaard. To him, Kierkegaard's writings were as though written for his moral dilemma. Hence his return to religion through Christianity. The acceptance of religion made him a good Catholic. Life in the Continent was really conducive to practising religion. It must be said of Auden that the poems like "The Shield of Achilles," "Horae Canonicae," and "About the House," were the result of his years of peace with the world and also with himself.

In his introduction to Anne Fremantle's book The Protestant Mystics, Auden speaks of religion and religious mystics. He distinguishes between four kinds of mystical experience: The Vision of Damekind, The Vision of Eros, The Vision of Agape, and The Vision of God. Of these mystical experiences, Auden gives his own personal version of the meanings of various experiences of the mystics. His version is so scientific, that not even an atheist will find fault with it. As a Protestant, he feels that not even a Catholic will find anything opposed to his faith and morals in the book, since Protestants based their claims of man's relation to God on the conversion of St. Paul, which is of as much importance to Catholics. In fact he is arguing more for the unity of churches than for Protestant mystics. What he had envisaged then had become almost a reality in modern times. As a visionary Auden stands
apart from his contemporaries. Auden’s arguments become acceptable because his reasoning is supported by scientifically proven facts that none can refute. Even if one is totally opposed to certain views expressed by Auden, all opposition becomes null and void in the light of his supportive arguments. No wonder the younger generation admired him even in his old age. The charisma and persuasive power of Auden remained with him till the very last. Though old age and its infirmities made him awkward even to his friends, his achievements could not be ignored. The introduction to *The Protestant Mystics* in 1964 proves that even in his old age, his opinions were indeed ultra modern or those befitting a post modern writer and not merely a post war generation writer.

Thus Auden fights his battles of age with is words; words which had the power to reform and convert even the most staid atheist of the times. Auden himself speaks of conversion:

> There are two kinds of conversion, the conversion from one faith—it may be atheism to another, and the transformation of an unthinking traditional faith into a personal conviction.

*(The Protestant Mystics 35)*

It is for the second type of conversion that he is craving for. It is also what he wants of the people around him. He does not want a wasteland or the aridity and the unpleasant consequences of the fragmented
self. The whole is what he is now aiming for. The nether regions of belief and non-belief give a purpose to life. It makes life worth living for. Religion aims at nothing more. Knowing very well what it is that the human beings are aiming for, the religious people had fashioned religious beliefs accordingly; giving faith, giving hope and at the same time having love for fellow human beings. No religion is exempt from the above principles.

Auden’s hurricane days have come to an end; the desire to cause turmoil and turbulence had diminished. It is to be concluded that as a person and as a human being he had made his peace with the world and with his Maker. Thus “Horae Canonicae,” with its secular implication carries the remainder of religious ideas. The canonical hours of the monasteries, practised to remember the Lord in prayer at every significant movement of the sun, reminds Auden often of the passage of time. The European dwelling, with its proximity to church, made Auden practise his religion like any devout catholic. It is this European influence and its religious atmosphere that gave solace to the troubled mind of Auden. Like the atmosphere of freedom that exists in America and the atmosphere of convention that exists in England, the European continent has the atmosphere of religion. Experience in the continent had taught Auden much during his yearly visits to the continental countries. When
the time came for a semi-retired life, retreating from the social scene but continuing with poetry, Auden chose the continent. This preference is only understandable since the hectic life of America no longer suited his health and his old-age temperament. The buying of the house at Kirchstetten with his friend Chester Kallman provided him with a stable background of home and hearth much loved by the Englishman, as at heart Auden remained forever an English man inspite of his life away from his homeland, England.