CHAPTER V

POETIC CRAFT OF AUDEN

A survey of the poems of Auden giving emphasis to his poetic craft seems superfluous in the light of the amount of critical works published on the topic. Yet an attempt is necessary here in order to delineate the man and objectively assess his worth as a skilled poet and a remarkable person that he had become, through the fire of purification. The most provocative of the poets of 1930’s, the most varied in the themes, the most valuable in his utterances, Auden stands unique among his contemporaries. Critics found him a fascinating subject with the result that the literary field is alive with Auden criticism. In fact, he is the most live poet among the critics. So it becomes an absolute necessity to go through his works to get a glimpse of the working of the mind which had created such a provocative variety.

Writing as Self - Expression

Born in the pre-war year, Auden had to face the real live memories during and after the first World War which was enough of a subject matter for a precocious boy like Auden. His writings of the 1920’s, that is, the early published writing, reflect the atmosphere of England during the post war period as understood by a student. More than that, the pure
poetic mind of Auden, unadulterated by the events of the world, is seen reflected in lines.

Bones wrenched, weak whimper, lids wrungled, first dazzle

known,

World-wonder hardened as bigness, years, brought

knowledge, you:

Presence a rich mould augured for roots urged-but gone,

The soul is tetanus; gun-barrel burnishing

In summer grass, mind lies to tarnish, untouched, undoing,

Though body stir to sweat, or, squat as idol, brood,

Infuriate the fire with bellows, blank till sleep

And two-faced dream – ‘I want’, voiced treble as once

Crudely through flowers till dunghill cock crow, crack at

East (EA 21)

The moment before awakening in the early morning is the moment the body and mind slowly wake painfully to the dazzling day through a dream. The body wakes up with ‘lids wrinkled’ and the realization of the partner; the ‘soul is tetanus’ and the mind waits to be tarnished with the present but as such ‘untouched, undoing.’ The need and desire cry out ‘I want’ but along with it comes the necessity to conform, subduing the desire to breakout. The fire of rebellion is fanned to flames ‘with bellows,’ a half-mechanical, half-human process and controlled at will
by the user, and is significant of the younger days of Auden before breaking free finally shortly after. Words used sparingly but precisely bring to the forefront the control exercised in curbing the passionate outpourings that remain in the mind. The poem dated June 1927 shows the restraint that the poet uses to channel his thoughts to his readers in the typical manner of a Modern Poet. Auden's penchant for end rhymes is not evident here; on the other hand, this poem brings out the sharpness of the brilliant mind, all polished and shining.

Some critics consider the poems that he had written while in England as the best of the lot while others view his later poems as desultory. In spite of these contrasting views, the critics unanimously agree on the greatness of Auden. As one who hates titling his own poems, Auden gets the top rank since his early poems are just poems without titles unless one can give the general title Poems to all the poems included in the book. The man stands revealed through these untitled poems as though he expects his readers to go through the poems line by line and form their own opinion rather than be guided by the title that the author gives. Moreover, the difficulty in understanding and interpreting the lesser known poems of Auden poses a challenge to the readers as well as the critics who avoid them at all costs and concentrate on only the most popular ones. In the second book of *The Orators* entitled "Journal of an Airman," Auden uses prose verse, diagrams as well as
poetic verse to create the idea. A mind which has the precision of a
scientist grapples with the problems of the day and using science,
mathematical skills, and English literary verbosity creates something
unexpected for the readers. The technical skills may be a device to get
the attention of the readers; they can also be an approach to present
things suitably borrowing liberally from life sciences. The rambling
ideas prevalent in *The Orators* give the impression of an erudite poet
who does not confine himself to literature but uses language and
literature to convey an idea. Written in the year 1931 between a Prologue
and Epilogue, both in stereo-typed verse form, lies a whole world of
non-verse poetry presenting thoughts, not in an orderly manner but more
in a rambling style. The poet with his genius is irrepresible. In “Letter
To Lord Byron,” the style of writing is more like a friend talking to his
dear friend rather than an epistle, recalling events, people and situations
common to them. A poem in five parts, it exhibits the scholarship of the
poet, at the same time maintaining the image of a friend of Byron,
bringing up to date the events of the world as well as the literary field.
Personal details also crop up in this long-winding poem with a doubt as
to where to send the letter. The obvious choice is ‘c/o Saint Peter or the
Infernal Press?’ Naturally the philosopher in Auden comes out with a
conclusion to this dilemma: ‘For Heaven gets all the lookers for her
pains / But Hell, I think, gets nearly all the brains!’ (EA, 198). He calls this letter his ‘conversational song’, which is exactly what it is.

The conversational tone is kept up in Journey to Iceland [1936] and the untitled poem “Lay your sleeping head, my love,” in the collection, Poems 1936-1939, while the eight-lined poem “Orpheus” resonates with Shelley’s optimistic ending of the poem “Ode to a West Wind”. The song hopes to bring in warmth. But “if winter really / Oppose, if the weak snowflake / What will be wish, what will the dance do?” (EA 213). The ending is in a question form not at all suggestive of an optimistic ending. Shelly’s Ode though in a question form is more a query than an out right question. ‘O wind, if winter comes / Can spring be far behind?’ and is more answering, assuring and hoping while “Orpheus” is without any such feeling. Reminiscent of W.B.Yeats’ “Among School Children,” Auden too wrote a poem “School Children” Where as Yeats takes the opportunity to dwell upon the thoughts of his beloved Maud Gonne, Auden finds school children captives doomed to be prisoners behind the bars, all rebellion suppressed. The only rebellion seems to be

The improper word

Scribbled upon the fountain, in that all the rebellion?

The storm of tears shed in the corner, are these

The seeds of the new life? (EA 217)
The ballads "Miss Gee," "Victor" and "James Honeyman" show another phase of Auden, the poet and Auden, the lover of stories of a didactic nature. This phase moves over to titled short poems and takes over from there. The poems "The Traveller," "Macao," "Hong Kong," "The Capital," "Brussels in Winter," *Gare du Midi* and *Musée des Beaux Arts*, followed by personal addresses to persons, "Rimbaud," "A.E.Housman," "Edward Lear," "Voltaire at Ferney," "Matthew Arnold" and ending with the long poem "In Memory of W.B.Yeats" show the ease with which Auden could change the mood and nature of a poem. The persons on whom he has written poems are remarkable so also the poems for the summing up of their character giving it more of a biographical touch thus placing the man in his right context. His poems on Freud, Yeats, Voltaire, Pascal and Brueghel not to mention "Letter to Lord Byron" remain forthright opinions on these important personalities. The poem "In Memory of W.B.Yeats" is both a tribute to the much admired poet of the times as well as an occasion to view and assess the literary field while following the elegiac tradition towards the end. While following the elegiac tradition, the conversational tone creeps up, since Yeats was more a contemporary writer than a mere public figure for him.

*In Time of War* sub-titled *A Sonnet Sequence with a Verse Commentary* with twenty seven sonnets and a verse commentary, is Auden’s experiment with the flexibility of the literary style showing the
dexterity with which the form sonnet can be handled. Beginning with a sonnet dedicated to E.M. Foster, Auden's sonnets are all octaves followed by sestets after the Petrarchan mode and are far removed from the traditional themes on which sonnets were written. Following the master Shakespeare, Auden shows a versatility in his sonnets presenting montages of a war torn world. The titled sonnets "The Novelist" and "Hong Kong 1938" included in the collection *Collected Shorter Poems* are more meaningful because of the title. Reading the poem sans title, the reader faces a dilemma as to the subject. Written with scant regard for either the pattern or the rhyme scheme, the two sonnets are more important thematically than structurally. While the 'he' of "The Novelist" must be understood as the novelist struggling to make a name for himself in the world, a poet in comparison is a talented glorified creature:

Encased in talent like a uniform.

The rank of every poet is well known;

They can amaze us like a thunderstorm,

Or die so young, or live for years alone.

They can dash forward like hussars (CSP 54)

This romantic notion about poets is part of the make up of the poet Auden. The superiority that he feels at his success as an acknowledged and much acclaimed poet prompts him to face the reality that a novelist
faces the agony of the mind in creating the characters and getting involved in the world he creates as the destined life of a novelist. Corresponding sympathy to the life of the expatriots in Hong Kong, reflected in the poem "Hong Kong" of the year 1938, was more Westernized than oriented. The imminence of a world war creates tension the world over. The colonies also reflected this uneasiness of the western world in their own fashion. The life and property of the foreigners in Hong Kong were at peril. The background din of war was hinted at and the gap between the native land and the adopted land widens and memory plays tricks on even dear memories. Blaming none but one's own free will for what one had become, the poet was moving more towards philosophy than to either aestheticism or spiritualism. Thus the period, till the 1930's was one of fluctuation regarding views but the skill and ease of the verse he wrote had, by this time, made Auden one of the youngest brilliant poets of the universities as well as that of England, so that when he moved over to Europe and then on to America, there was a sure confidence in his own abilities. Hence the search for a position in the literary and educative field rather than in any beaurocratic establishment. Personally speaking this was a period which made him sit back and assess the world situation seriously though he had made impulsive plunges occasionally.
Established Poet

The ten years from 1930 to 1940 in the life of Auden can be regarded as hectic, halcyon days of movement and memory of places and persons of theatre, film and radio or what he wrote for them, most often unsuccessfully. The enthusiasm with which he went over to Spain remained during this decade even in his writing. *Look, Stranger!* portrays the sensual pleasures of the human, enhanced by the untitled dream poem XII (EA, 130) in which Auden sitting in the garden basking in the sunlight dreams of forgetting his book. The dream journey is in a ghost-ship named ‘Wystan Auden Esquire.’ The captain turned out to be “... a woman / Of rather uncertain age.” (131) hinting at the feminine impulses that make a man a totality. The cook, the engineer, the Professor, the mate and even the Duke and his cabin boy with their open homosexual intentions all constitute the person Auden. ‘The ship’s not as young as she was / And it’s getting very rough’ (134) very aptly put the situations of the poet in clear terms; the going is rough and he is not that young but getting on in years. On waking up from his noon nap, a very normal English tea awaits him, either to assure him or to bring him down to the earth. Yet another untitled prose poem of 1933 could be regarded as a flight from the usual verse poem. There is a fluctuation from God and Eternity to the present and the real. The oratorical tones employed in the prose–poem is indicative of the feeling that Auden is directly
addressing God on an equal level. And when it ends with the concluding paragraph, ’Oh father, I am praising thee, I have always praised thee, I shall always praise thee!’, the readers continue to read a new meaning to the last few lines that is, the sense of a traveller homing to the base. Though the tone used is playfully satirical but conversational, the infinite variety of Auden the poet is once again revealed. As Joseph Warren Beach assesses:

He has seen a good deal of the world and witnessed history in the making. He has been very much aware of the main contemporary currents of thought in political theory, science and psychology, the fine arts and literature, philosophy and religion. He has been a prodigious reader and remarkable for the ease and suggestiveness with which he has made use of his reading for the nourishment of his creature facilities. (The Making of the Auden Canon 244)

The ease with which Auden moves from one topic to the other is evidence enough to support the view of Joseph Warren Beach. The equality with which he regarded communism and psychology, science and philosophy, makes one wonder at his infinite variety. It is accepted that very few poets have considerable learning beyond what is expected of them and Auden is regarded as one of the privileged few. In keeping with his times Auden had looked here and there and had added to his
knowledge by reading books that belonged not merely to the literary genre but to physical science, philosophy, geography, politics and even psychology. This enhanced the thinking process of the poet thereby making it possible for him to create poems which reflected his thoughts. Fredrick Schiller the most famous German playwright and Goethe’s closest friend in his *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, speaks of art as the harmony within the individual and society when he says

> Supreme stupidity and supreme intelligence have a certain affinity with each other in that both of them seek only the real and are completely insensitive to mere semblance. Only by objects which are actually present to the senses is stupidity jerked out of its quiescence; only when its concepts can be referred back to the facts of experience is intelligence to be pacified. In a word, stupidity cannot rise above actuality and intelligence cannot stop short of truth. (*Aesthetics: The Classic Readings* :25-6)

With Auden, Schiller’s statement is appropriate as his intelligence demanded more and more which was pacified by the wide reading. Once the truth is known, it must be acknowledged, especially for Auden, thus exhibiting a “Chameleon quality of the poet’s mind.” (Beach 247) The sonnet sequence *In Time of War* with a verse commentary written over an interrupted period of two years from 1936 to 1938 mingles with it the
occidental and the oriental experience of war. The two sonnets added to
the sequence have titles “Press Conference” and “Air Raid,” while the
earlier ones have only numbers. In the sonnet “Press Conference,” the
obvious shallowness of the information given and accepted while the real
truth is hidden from the press is depicted. The journalists with their
sense of perceptions attuned to the slightest change know for sure that
the press conference is a necessity for bureaucrats and the information
given out for press release is the scanned and censored version. When he
says that ‘The quick new West false” (EA 426) it is the perception of
the man that shrieks out. The cigarettes and tea offered by the officials
are taken to create a very false impression that they are among friends
while the coldness of war whirls outside the room. The last three lines of
the sestet are exactly the same as that of the last three lines of the sestet
of sonnet XIII. Since “Press Conference” is included as part of Appendix
II in EA and not as a regular poem of the sonnet sequence, it is to be
assumed that in order to complete the sonnet a few lines from another are
added. If it is added by Auden himself, the meaning is evident that the
dominant feeling is that the West is wrong in its assumption and
destructions while the Eastern civilizations aim at constrictive purposes.
Evidently his visit to China had influenced his writings a great deal more
than either the critics or readers had thought of. The subtlety with which
the feeling is let forth makes the readers think that Auden was greatly
influenced by the East but that he is not willing to throw over his Western civilization in favour of the Eastern.

A Poet of the Universe

The war had torn and twisted the mind of humanity and when it was over, there was left bare little optimism. The static conventions made life just tolerable. Among the literary intelligentsia, there appeared a Wordsworthian attitude of returning to nature. With Auden this seemed an impossibility because of various reasons. The first and the main reason was the fact that the poet adored the company of his friends too much. Forgetfulness cannot be had with nature since Auden flourished in cities rather than in the rustic background. An occasional holiday in communion with nature was bearable to a certain extent and of course in the right company. Otherwise Auden preferred an urban background rather than a rural one. So it is surprising to note that his poem "Bucolics" smells of the rural but tastes of the urban. With seven poems, this collection deserves the title it is given. The poems included are "Winds," "Woods," "Mountains," "Lakes," "Islands," "Plains" and "Streams." Auden had not let out anything of significance when he wrote these seven poems which smell of the bucolics. Instead of the idyllic rural life, these are occasions for dwelling on how people use and misuse these places and events, and thoughts provoked by expanses of natural scenery appear as themes here. Each form is dedicated to a person, each
giving the readers an idea about the extensive friendship that Auden had. These are not mere woods and streams and mountains and lakes. On the other land, they are first images from which the poet can retrace his thoughts to the realms of knowledge that he had enhanced by his reading. Thus when one finishes reading "Bucolics," the feeling that remains in the mind is similar to the feeling created by visits to places of historical importance. One can only marvel at the scholarship exhibited through these poems. Thus when he reels off names like "Moraine, pot, oxbow, glint, sink, crater, piedmont, dimple" (CP 431) in the poem "Lake," the reader is left with the sense of breathlessness on having kept up with the pace of the poet, a geographic lesson given with the ease of a born teacher. The structure of the poem also suits the title as when he writes "Woods." The lines start in a regular order with slightly rhyming ends and "Mountains" in irregular regularity of stanzas followed by the short lined verses of "Islands." It is no doubt that Auden had taken pains to write "Bucolics" and perfect its structure so that it appears as one of the best works of his years in Europe.

Again this kind of logical poems appear in the 1950s when he wrote of the five senses in "Precious Five." The abrupt conversational beginning is something that Auden is good at. Here also he makes use of this technique to get the attention of the readers and uses words sparingly to keep the impact till the end. A moral is added to each
stanzaic end, reminding the readers of the regret for things not having been done even when one had the facilities. Thus when he speaks of lands ending up with A tight arthritic claw / Or aldermanic paw he is predicting the future for our physical sense organs, which makes him admonish

Grow, hands, into those living
Hands which true hands should be
By making and by giving
To hands you cannot see. (CP 448)

To this category belongs the famous poem "The Shield of Achilles" which had become the title song for the war-torn Europe. Auden who had witnessed both world wars understood the second World War better and juxtaposed it with the great war between the Greeks and the Trojans. The description was so realistic and apt that there was not a word to be either deleted or added. The barrenness and the utter desolation, though a recurring theme of his poems, assume meaning with the right approach. Auden had seriously taken the matter to hand and had produced a delightful reality with the poem.

Of the four poems included under the title "Memorial of the City" a certain evolution of thought can be traced leading finally to conscience. The zooming lens of the camera and the eyes of the crow in the first poem, see the same picture which ought to be the true pictures.
As the saying goes the lens of the camera does not lie, but in Auden’s poem, it is emphatically stated that “the steady eyes of the crow and the cameras candid eye / See as honestly as they know how, but they lie.” (CP, 450). What one sees in the battle field is the carnage left after a war almost similar to the battle field of the Greeks described by Homer. The ancients had a cause which had nothing to do with their self, still they participated in war; hence there was despair as a result of the futility. But in the modern world ‘As we bury our dead / We know without knowing there is reason for what we bear’ (CP 451), people fortify themselves by accepting the blame and the causes; hence Auden’s admonishing ‘We are not to despair.’ (CP 451) The second section is devoted more to the Roman Catholic Empire with Pope Gregory as its head rather than to a war-torn Europe. Even then, the different stages through which the Roman Catholic Church passed, are traced once again in a precise manner taking the Church to mean the ‘City’ in the poem. From the ‘New City’ it passes on as merely ‘City’ till the fourth stanza where the city becomes ‘Sinful City’ and again back to ‘City’ where nothing untoward happens till it reaches stanza seven where it turns to be the ‘Rational City’ tracing the progress to date historically. In the following stanza Auden’s name for the church is the ‘Glittering City’ and in the final stanza it becomes the ‘Conscious City.’ The campaigning spirit and the missionary zeal had crossed all borders, thus enlarging
Christendom while the church itself was ready to accept changes redefining the rules and regulations, accepting world and world situations, growing rather than remaining unchanged and stale. Again in section three, there is a return to the world of war and the 'barbed wire' (452) the forbidden territory, 'the abolished City' (452) 'Across the square,' 'Across the Plains' and even 'Across the sleep the barbed wire also runs.' The Self which is regarded as 'our image' in the poem, remains the same despite the changes; the Self which is our hope, that propels us to move forward in spite of the despairing conditions, is the new 'Adam waiting for His City' (453), -- the poet is adding a redeeming quality to mankind. Considering the publication date of the poem, June 1949, this collection must have been a soothing balm to the reader of those days. This new Adam in section four, undergoes a metamorphosis and becomes the conscience which existed in the world throughout the centuries, across the literatures of the world and through mythologies. The unseen, unmentioned conscience was present as early as the fall of man as presented in 'Paradise Lost.' A quick survey of the occasions, in Greek literature where conscience was present, is also traced with brief digressions to English and Italian and even to American literature. The seriousness with which Auden had started the first section of the poem gives way to some frivolity when one recognises literary characters in the last section and then is brought suddenly to the crowded, busy
modern world. The voyage, since the poem starts with Homer’s Greece, is actually a European tour across the border, across culture and literature. As stated earlier, it takes wide reading, knowledge, perception and sense of history to keep pace with Auden. “Memorial for the City” establishes this beyond doubt. It is impossible to chain him to either one place or even one country. He had gone beyond that; surpassed the ‘barbed wires’ to a universe without borders, keeping in tact the Self which is the only thing that matters. Throughout the years Auden had indeed led an almost voluptuous life with drinks, drugs and licentious living which had in turn led to boredom rather than peace. His shifting tendencies reveal a restless spirit; his European days later brought him a sense of peace, steadiness and an awareness of his physical limitations. He remained a healthy man with occasional bouts of illness, till he died in 1973. It was the inner peace and the knowledge of the Self that made him put roots in Europe and acquire a dwelling place.

The Man and the Poet

All poets reveal themselves through their poems however much one may adhere to Eliot’s impersonality theory which states that “Poetry is not the expression of the personality, but an escape from personality” (Enright and Chickera 300). With Auden such an impersonality is impossible because he is too warm hearted by nature to keep back himself from his poetry. Thus it is that we have poems like “Academic
Graffiti” (CP 501-18), where you have all the important literary figures and philosophers and musicians described in just four lines each in rhyming verse ending with Yeats since the poem began with Auden, both being enlightening as well as wickedly humorous. “Marginalia” (CP 589-602) in five parts lacks humour but is filled with nostalgic, painful, sweet snatches of memories and impersonal observations in short, rapid lines. Similarly, “Symmetries & Asymmetries” (CP 549) has no real topic but is a wandering, though again in short, limited easy to read lines and has a wealth of meaning in the three short lines which comprise one stanza. If one asks for the theme of the poem, there is nothing much to tell; Auden found the ordinariness of life boring and this boredom is seen reflected in the poem also where he summarises ‘Their lives were boring and indignified / They worked a little, they consumed, they died’ (CP 553). Put it in such a manner and there is nothing interesting about such a life story except that it is the life story of so many thousands of nameless soldiers and common people the world over. Yet this is human life described in an utterly dejected manner, since nothing unexpected and thrilling happens with most of the people. It is those few ‘others’ who have it in them to stir the attention of the others that matter and win over. They dispel the boredom of others that matter and wins over either with their lives or with their talents. Taken in a neutral sense these are the things of the world one has to be content with. Auden’s life in USA
was filled with a long list of engagements. He has to give talks on poetry and recite his own poems at several gatherings. Naturally this life also becomes boring when it goes on and on without much change. Of course people and places change but what he does, does not change even when he has reached the age of fifty six. "On the Circuit" (CP 548) written in June 1936 was just thoughts put into words as the poet was travelling 'From talking site to talking site / Am jet-or-prop-propelled' (CP 548) and the number of occasions had become so many that he has forgotten where he had been two days earlier. Though the spirit is willing the body which had already become old refuses to comply with the spirit. This lack of co-ordination of the spirit and the flesh hinders efficient functioning. He knew what it is to be fifty six.

A sulky fifty-six, he finds

A change of mealtime utter hell

Grown for too crotchety to like

A luxury hotel. (CP 548)

When the poem ends with 'God bless the U.S.A. so large, / So friendly, and so rich' (CP 549) Auden had passed through the darkness of despair and anxiety and had found hope in that which awaited him when the plane landed. He can think now of his adoptive country U.S.A. with gratitude for having given him such opportunities.
Under the title “Eleven Occasional Poems” Auden remembers people who were his friends except for “Elegy for J.F.K” (567) and a poem entitled “Josef Weinheber” (1892-1945) (568), the last two being public figures than personal ones. Individually taken, each poem is an occasion to remember these people and their nature as he does in the poem “In Memory of W.B. Yeats.” Evidently the detached onlooker’s observation is created in these poems also as in the poem on Yeats, thus pointing to yet another aspect of Auden’s character. Though he may be thoroughly personal in his outlook on the actions and deeds of the characters of his verse, he is careful enough to maintain a sort of clinical detachment more common to doctors teaching medical science than to a poet. The reader gets all the details of the person to whom the poem is addressed and at the same time there is a lack of the warmth of friendship in most of the poems. At other times the most unlikely of persons are remembered with more warmth than is called for, like the housekeeper of the house where Auden lived in Europe. The detachment of these poems continues in other poems like “Marginalia” with its five sections which give cryptic statements about people, bureaucracy and even just wisecracks like ‘A dead man / who never caused other to die / seldom rates a statue’ (CP 592) and ‘When Chiefs of State / prefer to work at night, / let the citizens beware’ (CP 563) and even lines like ‘Ancestorless the upstart warrior proclaimed / the Sun his Father.’ (593).
Auden cannot be imagined without his audacity as these lines certify. But he was also able to write a poem “Prologue at Sixty” (CP, 622) which he dedicated to Fredrich Heer in 1967 when he reached the age of sixty. The fun and frivolity which had been the part and parcel of Auden’s poems refuses to lag on to the poems that he has written after 1967. Till 1973 he was able to write little but what he wrote during these six years reveals Auden the man and Auden the poet. The effectiveness of this contribution is reflected in the poems of this period verifying the truth that poetry reflects the change of outlook, mood, and the milieu of the poet can be detached and understood better.

In “Six Commissioned Texts” a light hearted vein is adopted by the poet to suit the tone of the occasion as when he wrote “The Ballad of Barnaby” and “United Nations Hymn.” A conversational tone is adopted for “Epistle to a Godson,” the godson being Philip Spender, son of his close friend and poet Stephen Spender so that no formality is required there. Thoroughly conscious of his old age, Auden still tries to appear sprightly at least in his poems. The godson symbolises the generation gap which he deliberately tries to overcome, by using the conversational friendly tone after the epistle-like beginning of the poem. The responsibility of a Godfather is a serious one in Christianity. It is the duty of the godfather to give instruction to the child to lead a virtuous life, along with proper gifts on memorable occasions. In the absence of a
father, the duty of a Godfather includes fatherly care and attention. Moreover, the life of the godfather must be exemplary since the godson is to take him as a model. In the case of Auden, all these duties lie unremembered until the occasion comes to greet the child who had now become a young man. The relationship between the two is such that there is an easy camaraderie between them as the last stanza of the poem reveals.

I'll close this letter with some worldly maxims:

*Be glad your being is unnecessary,*

*then turn your toes out as you walk, dear,*

*and remember who you are, a Spender.* (CP 626)

The advice from a worldly-wise godfather like Auden is worth considering since it is offered in a lackadaisical manner with no overcompulsion and hence may be acceptable to the young generation. The feeling that he is getting old finally had gripped Auden and traces of it could be found in the poems of the period 1967-1973. Some of them are “Doggerel by a Senior Citizen” (CP 638) “Old Peoples’ Home” (CP 645), “Loneliness” (CP 649) along with poems with titles such as “Talking to Dogs” (650-51), “Talking to Mice” (CP 651-52) and “Talking to Myself” (CP 652-54). If one takes talking to no one particular as an inevitable aspect of old age, the three poems mentioned last make the readers also feel that Auden is indeed getting old and is
fighting it in his own way, trying to be as independent as possible, inspite of the infirmities that he had been plagued with towards the end. The sentimental tone becomes more pronounced towards the end leaving the direct manner of addressing employed in the earlier poems. When his life ended in 1973, his poetic career also ended with “A Thanksgiving” written in the same year. Auden the man and Auden the poet finished life together. Circumstances made it possible for him to continue his poetic career even towards the very end of life. Poetry had become the life force for Auden the man that to live without it would have been disaster equalling to the stopping of breath. When he refused to write an autobiography, he had his own reasons for it; but for a devoted reader of Auden’s poems the biography is presented in the poems themselves. What they do not tell the readers is not worth knowing. Both his poems and prose works are revealing enough that even the inner self of Auden is exposed bit by bit. Justin Replogle in his book *Auden’s Poetry* tracing the “Pattern of Personae” names the two selves in Auden as “Poet and anti poet,” who “owe their existence in part to the differences between Art and Life” (*Auden’s Poetry* 92). It is true that such a crisis was part of the life of the poet more than any other poet of the same period. But he had something to hold on to in times of crisis and that was his religion. So it is not a case of anti poet; it is indeed the poet and the man, Auden.
Conclusion

It is indeed extremely difficult to understand and analyse the poems of Auden. He is neither a regional poet nor a poet of one particular country of England. After a few years of his youth, he had gone beyond his native land to the continent and from there to the rest of the world. Each visit had been an experience which he absorbed and later reproduced in his poems. The technique also varied according to the mood of the poem along with the tonal variations which mark his poems individualistic. Moreover Auden is the only surviving poet from the Auden generation of poets who had lasted to mingle with the Beat Generation and the Movement poets. The capacity and willingness of the poet to absorb and accept anything that is new is also seen in his poems. While keeping abreast of the times, Auden forgets his age and sometimes ideologies for which he had given so much. A reforming of the mind and principles, he was always willing to do and did, even though he was criticized profusely for such an action. The freshness of the poems of Auden has its base in his ability to keep pace with the changes in the literary field. In fact he is the only poet who didn’t go stale with his writing and one of the best reasons for it may be the way he absorbed from the younger generations without totally losing his individuality. The younger generation in turn had much respect for Auden and freely acknowledged their indebtedness to him. Thom Gunn, while criticising
Auden keeps his respect for the older man and acknowledges his greatness (ACH 421) "Workman like and witty," "brilliant and demonstrative" "the Great Ruminator of modern poetry" (ACH 393) "original one" (94) "extraordinary composition" (98) "precise [. . . ] pointed" (183) are some of the terms used to describe Auden the poet and his poetry. An exhaustive list of eulogical terms will be impossible to be included here. Even from the few mentioned, the variety that enhances the poems of Auden is brought to the forefront. The drastic changes that had taken place in the world had changed the poet also but for the better. He had travelled much in his life and in his experience to reach the eminence he has in English literature. Undoubtedly he remains the most influential poets of English literature.