CHAPTER V
THE PRIVATE AND THE PUBLIC WORLD — STEPHEN SPENDER'S
WORLD WITHIN WORLD

The Crisis — within and without

Spender, in the very beginning of the introduction to his autobiography admits that the true purpose of his autobiography is to write of experiences from which he feels, he has learnt how to live. He limits the subject of his autobiography to "a few themes; love; poetry; politics; the life of literature; childhood; travel; and the development of certain attitudes towards moral problems" (WWW, p. vii). These themes are traced in his life during the thirties. The major political and social developments of this decade have also necessarily been interwoven with the personal development of the author. This arrangement enabled the author to follow a more liberal approach to the autobiographical form. He does not follow the conventional norms by starting his autobiography with his childhood which was uninteresting and also unreliable. He, therefore, made it the end of his autobiography. He calls his period of childhood, "the end and beginning, introduction and explanation" (WWW, p.viii). So, a typical chronological routine is left out, instead delving deep down into the growth of the self.
Spender makes another revealing statement about the autobiographical influence in his works, right at the end of his memoirs:

I myself am, it is only too clear, an autobiographer. Autobiography provides the line of continuity in my work. I am not someone who can shed or disclaim his past. This is not merely an admission... I see pretty clearly that in this particular case -- my own -- of the self-discoverer, the ideological has been a trap into which I have too often fallen, and from which I have only saved myself by going back to my personal as distinct from my public life. Nevertheless, coming from a political family, for me interest in politics has always been just round the corner. Perhaps it was his realization that with me the personal and the public risked being interchangeable that caused Auden to address to me the lines in the Orators:

Private faces in public places
Are wiser and nicer
Than public faces in private places.¹

The writers belonging to the thirties became more and more aware of their personal selves as they realized that they were constantly living under the shadow of war. Spender says in one of his poems:

Who live under the shadow of a war,
What can I do that matters?²

Samuel Hynes elaborates on the meaning:

The metaphor is the same, but the shadows are different, cast by different wars; it is one of the peculiar burdens of the 'thirties generation that it moved, into the shadow of the coming world war before the shadow of the past war had faded.³

This made the Auden generation feel that they were living in a historical crisis. Everyone believed that there
was a crisis — whether it related to monetary matters, ideologies or the threat of another war. The same point is made by Grigson in *New Verse*:

Every active worker or sharer of an attitude is now observed with the quick arrival of the Doomsday of human culture. Things are all threatened.⁴

Spender, too, was aware of the looming apocalypse and it becomes evident in the following lines from his play, *Trial of a Judge*:

Then let them turn their face to a future
Of solemn words broken by rule,
Of spiritual words burned up with libraries,
And the triumph of injustice;
Of tyrants who send their messages of terror
Against the civilized and helpless
O let them witness
That my fate is the angel of their fate,
The angel of Europe,
And the spirit of Europe destroyed with my defeat.⁵

In his *Journals*, he writes that the very first journal "is a very personal cri de coeur written at a time of great public, and greatly exaggerated private crisis in my life: the outbreak of war and the collapse of my first marriage."⁶ There was crisis — both within and without his world. The outside world of liberal democracy was threatened by the rise of Nazism and Fascism. It is aptly remarked by Justin Replogle that "Hitler's assumption of power in the spring of 1933, symbolic of social and political failure, really ushered in the 'spirit' of the 1930's."⁷ After witnessing the alarming rise of Hitler, Spender was even more affected by the Spanish Civil War, and he, in fact, did go to Spain — unlike Day-Lewis.

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Spender was aware that the political and social milieu was a part of his life which could not be neglected, unlike his predecessors Eliot and Yeats who were "the civilized spectators who watched the destruction of civilization, as it were, from the outsides."8

He felt that the harsh reality outside could not be ignored and in fact, something had to be done about it. The artist owed some moral responsibility to the people, even though it came in the way of his art. He makes the point more clear, when he says:

For with the unemployed in the industrial cities of Europe and with intellectuals in the concentration camps of Germany and Italy, he (the writer in the 'thirties) was no longer an outsider, unrelated to anything but his work, responsible to nothing but his artistic conscience.9

Although he realized that poetry ought to portray the reality outside, he did not make politics the ultimate goal in his life. Rather, he felt that the term political was used "in a very wide sense, to cover a fatality which I felt to be over-taking our civilization and which influenced our modern writing more explicitly than was generally realized" (WWW, p. 249).

Spender was deeply involved in the struggle between the private and the public which he could not ignore. To some extent, the crisis outside made the literature of the thirties a social event. The public events seemed to cast
their shadow in each and every nook and corner of the private world. No one could escape from the effects of the Depression, political up-heavals both within England and the outside world. He wrote about this period in his autobiography, "From 1931 onwards, in common with many other people, I felt hounded by external events" (WWW, p.137).

Samuel Hynes interprets these words to mean that he is talking about the pressure of the public life upon the private, the sense of immediate history as an aggressor against the private man. He goes on to explain the meaning further and says that:

External events, if they are dire enough -- a war, or the collapse of a society -- challenge the value of private acts, and put the personal life to test. For a young man (Spender was twenty-two in 1931) such a crisis, coming at a time when he was trying to define himself and his place in the world, must have been profoundly disorienting and disturbing.10

Poetic Sensibility

The poets of the time had to deal with two opposing ideas -- whether to write poetry which was purely subjective or to write something which was more demanding of the situation. Spender was a very sensitive poet and his poetry reflects the misery present in the world. His poetry is an intense search for values which may serve as a living creed in a time of the general breakdown of traditional values.11

According to S.N. Pandey, there are three marked phases of his poetic development. The first phase stretches
from *Nine Experiments* (1928) to *Poems* (1933), when he was more involved in the contemporary social scene; the second phase begins with *Vienna* (1934). This is where he seems to be hopeful of finding a solution to the social evils. It ends with *The Still Centre* (1939). After 1939, he turned to introspection for peace of mind.\(^{12}\)

The development in science and the change of values made it clear to him that there was a need to change the traditional themes used for poetry and even terms such as pylons, gasworks, aeroplanes and trains could provide as good or bad a subject as the past themes. This is seen in the poems that he wrote during this period — "Come, let us praise the gasworks," "Ovation for Spring," "The Pylons," "Landscape near an Aerodrome," "The Express" and so on. He writes:

Walking beside a stenchy black canal,  
Regarding skies obtusely animal,  
Contemplating rubbish — heaps and smoke,  
And tumid furnaces, obediently at work.\(^{13}\)

He is so depressed with the harsh reality that even the beauty of spring can no longer arouse his feelings. In his poem, titled appropriately — "Ovation to Spring," he talks about this feeling:

She (spring) cannot stir me with her sound,  
Her light no longer makes me burn.  
I only see earth wake and turn  
Again in penitential round.\(^{14}\)
Spender was right in regarding the literature of his generation as "time-obsessed, time-tormented, as though beaten with rods of restless days" (WWW, p. 137). In his book, The Destructive Element written in 1935, Spender comes to the conclusion that the thirties artist inhabits a "dream of violence." He, himself suffered from "terrible daydreams" in which he felt like Lear in the storm -- "life filled with madness from within and without." The war was responsible for funnelling these morbid feelings amongst the writers and poets. This, in turn made them extraordinarily obsessed with the feeling that death was waiting for them round the corner.

"Shapes of death haunt life" writes Spender in one of his poems (No.XIX in his Poems, 1934). Another of his poems is titled "Beethoven's Death Mask." In fact, Cunningham observes that:

The period's writers address death, they sing about it, they offer it overtures, they dance with it, they visit funerals, they make journeys to wars, they watch dying and killing, they attend closely to its 'soft answer' its 'coercive rumours' and 'enticing echo'.

According to Spender, death is simply "another milestone on their way." In his poem, "The Funeral," death is not seen as something to grieve about, but it is made an occasion of rejoicing by the dead person's living companions. They are grateful to him for all that he has done for their cause, during his life-time.

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This is festivity, it is the time of statistics
When they record what one unit contributed.
They are glad as they lay him back in the earth
And thank him for what he gave them.

(Poems, pp. 51-52).

"Beethoven's Death Mask" also shows the relationship between life and death. The poet takes us back to the time when Beethoven was alive, thus making us more aware of the inevitability of death. Though he tries to soften the ugliness of death with some music, it is immediately fused with the harsh dramatic notes. The death-wish is also prevalent in another poem, "An 'I' can never be a great man."

The great 'I' is an unfortunate intruder
Quarrelling with 'I tiring' and 'I sleeping'
And all those other 'I's who long for 'We dying'.

(Poems, p. 18).

The looming War seemed to colour every aspect of their writing and the two poems that Spender wrote in 1931 also reflect how he was deeply disturbed by the world crisis at that time. They are "What I expected" and "I think continually of those who were truly great." Allen Tate rightly observes that, "within the general terms of the intellectual crisis of the age, Spender has defined (in Poems) a personal crisis of his own."17

These poems were published in February and November respectively and they both deal with heroism -- not in action but his vision of ideal personal behaviour. In the first poem, the poet describes the horrors of the War and
its repercussions. The times demanded personal heroic action in a time which had lost its values and hence was chaotic. It also deals with the disillusionment of growing up in the world and facing the reality. As a young man, the poet dreams of a heroic adulthood — but soon realizes that entering maturity is also grasping the truth about heroism and adulthood. It is not possible to achieve the ideal goal or even come near it.

What I expected was
Thunder fighting,
Long struggles with men
And climbing.
After continual straining
I should grow strong;
Then the rocks would shake
And I should rest long.

(Poems, p. 25)

The poem uses the common literary terms of the thirties — fighting, climbing, straining — all the verbs are without objects and lay emphasis on the meaningful struggle of the individual. This is what he strives for — but the reality is different:

What I had not foreseen.
Was the gradual day
Weakening the will
Leaking the brightness away....

(Poems, p 25)

The disillusionment comes not only from personal sensitivity but also from the external public events of the thirties.
The wearing of Time,
And the watching of cripples pass
With limbs shaped like questions
In their odd twist,
The pulverous grief
Melting the bones with pity
The sick falling from earth --
These, I could not foresee.

(Poems, pp. 25-26)

The misery present in the outside world appalled him -- promoting him into action. The outburst is a form of action, even though it is a symbolic one. The young man in the poem is inspired with the deeds of the great men and wishes to imitate them. He thinks continually of their greatness, but is unable to share their glory, because they are no longer there. So, in this poem, too, "the separation of the present from the heroic past, and of the self from the Hero, is made."18

This reveals the emotional condition of the poet -- representing the middle class intellectual who was caught in the throes of war and economic depression and consequently, hoped for something better. It was also necessary for the common man to have something to look up to -- which he could not find in the present socially and economically torn society.

Perhaps, this was one of the reasons for the poets of the time to get attracted towards Communism. They were of the firm belief that this ideology was the only ray of hope for them which could redress the economic injustices of the Depression and combat the Fascist forces. Spender,
Auden and Day-Lewis became Communists. Spender observing the Berlin Communists at work, was impressed by the overwhelming accusation made by Communism against the bourgeois society. It offered the only possible solution in the face of Franco's and Hilter's Fascism. They realized that the rise of Hilter shown how easily the values of liberalism -- which they valued so much -- could be thrown away.

The Double Perspective -- Action or Introspection

Though Spender relied completely on Communism to show him the way to happiness and salvation, it was difficult for him to abandon the concepts of freedom and truth. He says in his autobiography:

When I had admitted to myself the force behind the Marxist arguments, I still found in myself a core of resistance to the idea that if I was a Marxist, my conceptions of freedom and truth must simply be behaviour and facts dictated by Marxist expediency. This hard core was the point in my self-examination when the rather abstract phrase 'freedom of the individual' became replaced by the more concrete one, 'independent witnessing'. However much a projection of class interest the mind of the individual may be, I was persuaded there was a point where he chose simply to witness truths which served no interest (WWW, pp.135-136).

The main aim in adopting Communism as a faith was to build a happier, if not an ideal society, where the basic needs of human beings would be met. So, Spender was keenly involved with the betterment of the society and resolved to
abide by the decisions he had taken to help the people. He
was emotionally involved too -- and this made him more
anxious in his poetry.

The struggle continues in his poetry to try and
adopt his individualism to his social views. He did not
accept things passively, but tried to do something about
them. His literature moved some of the young men so much
that they turned to the Left. These young men might have
become Fascists, were it not for Spender's keen interest in
the world around him. Scarfe says, "No political or social
doctrine can make much headway in the minds of a people
unless it is constantly reinfused with passion and
indignation."\textsuperscript{19} This is exactly what Spender's expression
was like in his poetry and literature. He was passionately
involved with the contemporary situation and even tried to
find an answer to its problems. And, he was indignant at
the misery around him, at the senseless warfare where man
was brutally killing man. I quote again from his poem, "Who
live under the shadow of a war":

\begin{quote}
Who live under the shadow of a war,
What can I do that matters?
My pen stops, and my laughter, dancing, stop,
Or ride to a gap (\textit{Poems}, p.31).
\end{quote}

This clearly shows Spender's intense involvement
with the contemporary times -- he even seemed to have a
vision of the massive destruction this aimless warfare
caused. He sympathised with the people and tried to
revolutionize literature in the hope of revolutionizing the society. He felt "haunted by these images" (Poems, p.30), and tried to find a cure to the ills of society.

All this, however, made him realize how much he benefitted from his middle class background. He suffered from "guilt and the suspicion that the side of me which pitied the victims of revolution secretly supported the ills of capitalism from which I myself benefitted."20 This feeling of guilt was present in him for a long time. He believed that the present state of affairs could only change through a revolution. He is optimistic of a bright future:

Through torn-down portions of old fabric let their eyes
Watch the admiring dawn explode like a shell
Around us, dazzling us with its light like snow
(Poems, p.48).

Spender is only too aware of the destructive side of the revolution as he compares the beauty of the dawn to an exploding shell. The dawn emerges, in all its splendour, just as the revolution will emerge after darkness. It destroys only to create. Herbert Read, while acknowledging Spender's active involvement in the social and political events -- also took note of his lyrical abilities. He says in Adelphi:

Mr. Spender is conscious of his social heritage of chaos and despair ... perhaps the book's most notable quality is its social consciousness and the perfect fusion of this often too intractable material with the poetic idiom. Another Shelly speaks in these lines.21
Spender's personal life was shaped by the public life in every aspect. The article written by him, at the end of the year, expresses his belief in this matter:

At the beginning of this year something happened in Germany which has added to the political self-consciousness of almost every contemporary writer in Europe. The Hitler party came into power in February, and in March the books of writers who have had the greatest influence on European literature since the War, were banned and even formally burnt in public squares.22

This made him think of the truly great people in the past, in history, who had inspired people with their ideas.

who in their lives fought for life
Who wore at their hearts the fire’s centre.
Born of the sun they travelled a short
while towards the sun
And left the vivid air signed with their honour
(Poems, p.46).

Spender reminisces about the past and the great personalities of that time like Lenin, Marx, Shelley or T.E. Lawrence -- who lived for a short while -- but even in that short duration, they lived their life to the hilt as they were consumed by a passion to achieve their goal. Another quality that the truly great of the past possessed is the fine equilibrium of soul and body. Without dimming the fire of ambition in their hearts, they also:

hoarded from the spring branches
The desires falling across their bodies
like blossoms (Poems, p.45).
The modern poetic innovations and imagery used by Spender in his poetry corresponded to his revolutionary zeal. He did not ignore the modern day development. He did not think the mechanical phenomena too mundane and unpoetic. Rather, he thought that:

the accepted symbols have become so worn or misused that they cannot state the experiences of the contemporary situation. Values have to be created by the total submission of poetic sensibilities to contemporary reality or by the pursuit within subjective life of symbols which can be isolated from and defended against that reality.23

The traditional ideal of heroism had been destroyed by the First World War. The bombed buildings and the misery were replicas of the past. Instead of looking up to the heroes of the War, people now looked up to those people who could conquer the air and the mountains around them.

The thirties poets, in fact, came to be known by the name of Pylon poets. The name came from one of Spender's poems. He describes the pylons in the poem of the same name:

Like whips of anger
With lightning's danger
There runs the quick perspective of the future
(Poems, p.57).

By scaling the high mountains, by conquering the air in an aeroplane, man could show and prove to himself how courageous he was. So, even terms like air, aeroplanes, express trains, gasworks -- all became part of poetic imagery. He employed the mechanical jargon because of "a
belief in the inevitable approaching salvation of society through the use of machinery."24

In the poem, "The Express," the reader is made familiar with the dirty gasworks, the misery of the poor people living in small and crowded houses and "the heavy page of death, printed by gravestones." After passing through a period of recession, the song of the train's whistle and wheels conveys the feeling to us that there are better times ahead and all is not lost yet.

It is now she begins to sing -- at first quite low Then loud, and at last with a joyous madness The song of her whistle screaming at curves, brakes, innumerable bolts. And always light, aerial, underneath Goes the elate metre of her wheels (Poems, p.53).

The Auden Generation felt that the ideology of Marx and Lenin could provide them with a better future. The Express sees a hopeful future in the "streamline brightness of phosphorus on the tossing hills" and is compared to a comet.

Ah, like a comet through flame she moves entranced Wrapt in her music no bird song, no, nor bough Breaking with honey buds, shall ever equal (Poems, pp. 53-54).

Even the music of the bird-song is no comparison to the bright and secure tomorrow promised by the train's song. It will establish "an order superior to that of nature."25 Kulkarni says that the final image of the "bough breaking with honey buds" is suggestive of a land of plenty
over-flowing with milk and honey and is a proclamation of man's final entry into the promised land.\textsuperscript{26}

Among the thirties intellectuals, Spender was the first one to address himself to the relation between art and action. "Poetry and Revolution" is a revealing and important essay as it is honest, critical and lucid. In the beginning, he defends the artist, "Of human activities, writing poetry is one of the least revolutionary."\textsuperscript{27} He goes on to say that if a man is truly an artist, his work will perform art's historic role of revealing to men the reality of the present and past. In this way, art will serve the revolution by telling revolutionaries the truth. According to him, an artist should not be led astray into practical politics. Hynes supports the judgement of Spender:

He based his argument on the conviction -- which he held throughout the thirties -- that there is a deeper sense of political, beyond party politics, which is simply the truth about historic public issues, and which it is the artist's responsibility to reveal.\textsuperscript{28}

Though he had strong political sympathy, he did not think that the language of poetry should be the language of propaganda. He wrote in his essay:

Poetry should remain a most important function of speech and emotion. Poetry records the changing uses of words, it preserves certain words in their pure and historic meaning, it saves the language from degenerating.\textsuperscript{29}
Poetry seemed to fulfill a certain need in the demanding situation. Even if it was not a direct action, it was a symbolic one. This became necessary because it was difficult for the ordinary man to take significant direct action on public issues, but it became even more difficult, when the issue was a vast and threatening abstraction confronting them -- Poverty, Fascism, War. This made it almost mandatory for a work of art to be socially based. Julian Symons says in this context:

At the heart of the Thirties dream, there was a conception of social morality. A painting, a play, a novel, even a lyric is ... first of all a social event. It does not exist as something pure and absolute, a thing in itself, and we cannot consider it apart from the society in which it was created. It follows that the first approach to a work of art must always be the social one.

Breaking away from Politics

Spender was not a hard-core Communist, even in the beginning when he joined the party. He and the other intellectuals saw it as the only ideology which could work against Fascism. For him, like Yeats, the word politics, as mentioned earlier, had a wider connotation. So, it was difficult for him to confine himself within the narrow dimensions of the Communist ideology. He objected, among other things, to the "world-provincialism of Marxism." He explains this in detail to illustrate how philosophic speculation, unpropagandist art, and even scientific
research which do not serve the interest of the workers, are labelled idealistic, untruthful, escapist and reactionary (WWW, p.136). Consequently, the people develop an attitude which is lacking in all human values.

Though, he could foresee that socialism imposed limitations on art, the writers of the thirties could not ignore the "angry noise of history grow louder, like the noise of a landslide on an island coast." They could not ignore the circumstances which seemed to affect each and every personal thought and action. They were a new generation. Spender points out the difference between the 1920's and them, in his autobiography. He says:

Perhaps, after all, the qualities which distinguished us from the writers of the previous decade lay not in ourselves, but the events to which we reacted. These were unemployment, economic crisis, nascent fascism, approaching war, which I have described (WWW, p.139).

The events seemed to force themselves into the literary minds so that it was felt as a powerful force in motion, disrupting their personal lives. Hynes says, "one touch of fascism makes the whole world kin." So, it was but inevitable that in this period of fear and foreboding -- whatever style came into the front was out of despair. The rise of Hitler influenced the whole world, especially the power and sovereignty of England over the world. Amongst the British authors, it broke the long standing tradition of
the writers to write in terms of the English tradition. The widespread sadness, during this period arose from the changing political scenario of the whole world. Spender, overcome by the violence and destruction around him, wrote in August 1939, that, "Being an artist ... is just a kind of disease of suffering."33

The same fear and a sense of despondency is apparent at the end of his play, Trial of a Judge. The defeated Reds look forward to the future when they will be free, but the judge soon dispels their illusion with these words:

All will be the same; only
Those who are not oppressed will be oppressors,
The oppressors the oppressed.34

Spender was also deeply moved by the February uprising in Austria to compose the poem "Vienna." Though based on a political event, the poem does not move chronologically, neither does it reveal the entire chain of historical events rather, it is the poet's personal expression of grief at the social disorder and strife around him. Spender experienced the feelings of despair and torment that arose after the failed heroic action.

Hynes observes that Spender was influenced by the worker's action and also politically inclined towards them. On the other hand, he says, Spender was also more inclined to a subjective outlook to the events:
But he was also a young man living a troubled and emotional private life, and elements of that life are also part of the poem. This gives it, along with its epic side, something of the character of a long lyric poem, in which all events are filtered through a private sensibility.35

There is no logical inter-connection between the private and the public theme in this poem -- except that these changes and upheavals in history necessarily bring about a change in the private lives of the people living in that era. Samuel Hynes has put it in a very concise manner, "that in a time of public catastrophe private lives will be catastrophic, too."36

The poet tries to analyse the present situation as to what has gone wrong:

What is wrong?
Fear, fear in armies
BBreeds death
Would he forgive us?
Would he
Glance at a minister who smiles and smiles
`How now! A rat? Dead for a ducat'. Shoot!
(Poems, p.25).

In the third section, "The Death of Heroes," the poet comes to the conclusion that the uprising failed because of the "Social Democrats," "fatal unconfidence" and their failure to "shoot" and combat force with force. Two worker - heroes are then depicted who try to undo the wrong and are mythologised -- in the spirit of the thirties. But, it is not a very successful attempt as the poet tries to
create an instant myth -- rather than letting it emerge on its own. The poem also fails to make a proper impact on the reader, because it does not mix the public events and the poetic self. They seem to be working in two opposite directions. According to Hynes, Yeats was the only modern poet who managed to unite his public and private self. Spender admits of his own shortcomings at that time, in his autobiography:

In poetry I was confronted with the dilemma of stating a public emotion which had become a private one, and which yet never became completely my own inner experience because, as I have explained, it involved my personality rather than sprang out of it. ... To write about Fascism was then to write about the experience which had usurped the place of more personal ones. Yet I tried to relate the public passion to my private life (WWW, p.191).

He tried to mingle both -- but rather unsuccessfullly. He speaks of this ambivalent attitude, characteristic of his generation, in his autobiography, "But we were divided between our literary vocation and an urge to save the world from Fascism. We were the Divided Generation of Hamlets who found the world out of joint and failed to set it right (WWW., p.202). Spender is very forthcoming on his shortcomings. He is a very sharp and acute observer of his own works as well as those of others, not hesitating to criticise a work -- even if it is his own. He realized his own failing in trying to mingle his public and personal self in "Vienna" and so comments:
The most ambitious -- and perhaps the least successful -- attempt I made to solve the problem of making such a statement was in a longish poem called Vienna ... In part, this expressed my indignation at the suppression of the Viennese Socialists by Dolfuss, Fey and Starhemberg; but in part also it was concerned with a love relationship. I meant to show that the two experiences were different, yet related. For both were intense, emotional and personal, although the one was public, the other private. The validity of the one was dependent on that of the other: for a world where humanity was trampled on publicly, private affection was also undermined (WWW, p.192).

Spender, here again emphasizes how the public events "undermine private feelings" and how "political emotions may overpower and mask private ones." So, he realizes, the poem's failure is partly due to the political tone.

The only ray of hope he saw through all this darkness was in victory for the workers by defeating the Fascists. It was to achieve this goal that the Communists were constantly and consciously mythologizing their party leaders -- Viennese socialists and Spanish revolutionaries. So, the man of action became the hero in the thirties -- instead of the sensitive, neurotic, anti-hero of the twenties. Dilys Powell observed in 1934:

When, however, we come to the new generation, to the work of Mr. Auden, Mr. Day Lewis, Mr. Spender, the nature of the conflict has changed. It has become externalized; it has become a battle, not within the poet, but between poet and environment. And the mood has suffered a violent reversal. The new verse has ceased to doubt and look back; it has begun to hope and look forward.
Spender also realized the different role literature had begun to play in his times. The thirties writers had to believe in a brighter future and so establish means to secure it, through the writings of the period. Spender, writing in *Writers and Manifestos* in 1935 says:

'We can no longer permit life to be shaped by a personified ideal, we must serve with all our faculties some actual thing', Mr. Yeats has written in a recent preface. This seems to me to be true. The 'actual thing' is the true moral or widely political subject that must be realized by contemporary literature, if that literature is itself to be moral and serious.\(^8\)

This also meant, writing a literature which appealed to the masses, which had some relevance for the people. It could only be of relevance and form a necessary part, if it played some kind of role in the historical change taking place. Spender meant the same, when he said:

The great art and literature of the past five hundred years will be appreciated and criticized by a far wider audience than ever before and will affect the lives of a great many people, who will not only have galleries and libraries thrown open to them, but also a background of education, leisure and moderate comfort.\(^9\)

This meant that they had to choose direct and simple language, which could be comprehended by common man. Rhetoric and intricate style was to be avoided and instead topics of contemporary interest using imagery from contemporary, modern life were used by Spender and his colleagues. So, poetry which was easily accessible and
understood by the people was written by the poets of the thirties.

The other point emphasized upon by the thirties left inclined writers was realism. Spender announced in an article in the No. 20 of magazine Fact, in Dec. 1938, "It will not henceforward be the policy of FACT to review novels, unless they derive from a basis of factual material such as might form a number of FACT itself."\(^40\) He hoped that by publishing such factual material, Fact was helping to hasten the revolution which, in turn would usher in a brighter future. In his book, Forward from Liberalism Spender elaborates on the kind of literature, revolution must produce. It will produce documentary literature which will record the changes taking place in society and its effect on the group or on the individual. These books could be in the form of diaries, political propaganda or novels, making it necessary for the writer to be more concerned with his subject and less with wondering whether he is a poet. Later on, he contradicts these views in his autobiography. He states very explicitly, "In this book I did not succeed in stating the case in my own idiom of personal experience. Instead, I strayed into realms of historical analysis and political ratiocination, a task for which almost any university student of history was better equipped than I" (WWW, p.201).
The political involvement of Spender ends with his book, The Still Centre. The second and third sections deal with his involvement in the Spanish Civil War. He wrote of his first reactions, when he heard about the War, in his autobiography. He was in Vienna in July 1936, when the newspapers reported the beginnings of the Spanish Civil War. He remarked that after a few weeks, Spain became a symbol of hope for all anti-Fascists and "it offered the twentieth century an 1848: that is to say, time and place where a cause representing a greater degree of freedom and justice than a reactionary opposing one, gained victories" (WWW, p.187).

Spender even went to Spain to take part in the War, without which it was impossible to even think of reading and writing poetry in the modern society. What he saw in Spain, affected him deeply and he realized how hollow and deceptive war-rhetoric is. The foreword to the book says it all:

As I have decisely supported one side -- the Republican -- in that conflict, perhaps I should explain why I do not strike a more heroic note. My reason is that a poet can only write about what is true to his own experience, not about, what he would like to be true to his experience. Poetry does not state truth, it states the conditions within which something felt is true. Even while he is writing about the little portion of reality which is part of his experience, the poet may be conscious of a different reality outside.
Cunningham says that the thirties Leftists were guilty of wish-fulfillment. They "tended to step easily from what was, to what they wished were the case, an elision eased by their confused rhetoric of a future always coming into being." They wished for everyone to become socialists and win the revolution. This did not, however, blind Spender to the harsh reality -- which was senseless and brutal killing of man by man. Even innocent children were not spared. Spender describes the havoc caused by war, in the following lines:

Machine-gun anger quickly scythed the grasses;
Flags and leaves fell from hand and branches;
The tweed cap rotted in the nettles.

He ends the poem by asking a question to which no one can give an answer, even today:

Was so much expenditure justified
On the death of one so young and so silly
Lying under the olive trees, O world, O death?

The soldiers on both sides are tired and become insensitive to the cause of their fight. In fact, they are like "tormented animals" and are just waiting for the war to finish.

When the machines are stilled, a common suffering
Whitens the air with breath and makes both one
As though these enemies slept in each other's arms.

The other poems, e.g. "Thoughts During an Air Raid," "Ultima Ration Regum," "Two Armies," "At Castellon" and so on -- all depict needless human suffering which could have been avoided. The poems also make an appeal to the
people to do something to save the human race from degeneration. This appeal transcends all political barriers and even the barrier between the enemies. All are equal as human beings. He views the war philosophically:

Suddenly the front seemed to me like a love relationship between the two sides, locked in their opposite trenches, committed to one another unto death, unable to separate, and for a visitor to intervene in their deathly orgasm seemed a terrible frivolity (WWW, p. 223).

Spender gives an accurate picture of the War, even though he did not take part in it. He is a witness to everything -- but from a distance. The following lines seem to convey his position:

And I am left alone on the bridge at the exact centre
Where the cleaning river trickles like saliya.
At the exact centre, solitary as a target.

Witnessing death in a most horrifying and abundant manner, he warns the people about glorifying heroes:

I tell this story in order to counteract the propaganda about heroes in wars. The final horror of war is the complete isolation of man dying in a world whose reality is violence. The dead in wars are not heroes: they are freezing or rotting lumps of isolated insanity.

Spender realized that politics alone was not enough to produce art but it was adequate only to use art to serve its own purposes. What he wanted the artist to find was the "real moral subject." He elaborates this point in his book, The Destructive Element:
if one conceives that the subject of writing is the moral life of one's time, in the same way as the subject of Greek tragedy is moral, and Everyman is a morality, and the subject of Tao Te Chung is the art of ruling and being ruled; then today one is in a very difficult situation. The precise difficulty is to write about this moral life in a way that is significant: to find the real moral subject.

The decision lies with the artist -- to decide what is moral. The artist can shape the truth with his imagination -- invent parables. This went against the ideology of the Left Review. He was of the opinion that a work of art that is truly concerned with a serious moral-political subject, will have moral weight. It was impossible for Spender to detach himself from the current events completely which were always weighing on his mind. He admits so in his autobiography and also elaborates on what should be the writer's perspective of them:

The writer's life should, in fact, be one of entering into external things and then withdrawing himself from them. Without entering in, he lacks experience of the world; and if he cannot withdraw, he is carried away on the impulse of literary politics, success and the literary career (WWW, p.173).

He also emphasizes later on, that the writer belongs to the world and has no option out of it. He should involve himself objectively in the external events and write only out of the inner necessity of a unique occasion.
Spender realized that if one had to survive in these times of despair and darkness, one must be able to view the civilization far-sightedly and then reconstruct his own personal life. The personal values should be permanent and not affected by the politics of the day. He brings out these feelings in his memoirs:

What one wants is people who can create more strongly than bombing planes can destroy and burn more fiercely with life than incendiary bombs do with death. We want strength, lucidity, a clear line in writing, intellectual conviction, faith in life, a calm indifference to systematized political thought.\textsuperscript{50}

It was his belief that anyone who was strong in his beliefs and aware of what was happening around him could, if he wished, prevent the whole world from destruction. It was not necessary if he succeeded or not -- what was necessary was his belief in himself -- in what he was doing. In an argument with his friend Aulach whom he met at the British Officers' Transit Mess in Germany, he tells him:

We are history. Human consciousness is history. Anyone who puts an idea into the heads of his contemporaries to persuade them to take an effective social action has influenced the course of history.\textsuperscript{51}

The same spirit of achieving something, by simply being alive to his surroundings is to be found in his poetry. Contradicting this and appearing side by side is the feeling of his being an individual isolated in the
universe. He makes the following soul-searching statement in his autobiography:

After my return from Spain I reacted from the attempt to achieve Communist self-righteousness towards an extreme preoccupation with the problems of self. I wrote poems in which I took as my theme the sense of being isolated within my personal existence: but I tried to state the condition of the isolated self as the universal condition of all existence (WWW, pp.254-55).

In March 1939, the Spanish Civil War came to an end. It was a fateful blow to the Communists. Czechoslovakia surrendered to Germany. The Leftists were further disillusioned to learn that Russia had signed a pact with Germany in August 1939. All this led Spender to turn his gaze to introspection, to search for the inner I. He was no longer under the illusion that the world could be saved from Fascism and War. Corresponding to this mood, he wrote some poems and justifies their existence in his foreword to the book The Still Centre:

I think that there is a certain pressure of external events on poets today, making them tend to write about what is outside their own limited experience. The violence of the times we are living in, the necessity of sweeping and general and immediate action, tend to dwarf the experience of the individual, and to make his immediate environment and occupations perhaps something that he is even ashamed of. For this reason, in my most recent poems, I have deliberately turned back to a kind of writing which is more personal, and I have included within my subjects weakness and fantasy and illusion.
It was never Spender's intention to sacrifice literary standards for the sake of politics. He was first and foremost an artist, a poet, and his priorities were primarily with the private imagination of the self and the techniques employed to portray it -- though he tried to do so in the context of public, political demands. In his book *Forward from Liberalism* written in 1937, he spoke of his dissatisfaction with the Leftist views, which ignored the individual person. Later on in 1953, in *The Creative Element: A Study of Vision, Despair, and Orthodoxy Among Some Modern Writers*, he gives reasons for becoming a socialist. He says that he was greatly affected by the condition of the people during the Depression. These very people, once formed the backbone of the nation and now were reduced to lifeless masses. Seeing the poverty and misery around him, made Spender realize that something needed to be done at once. This made him turn to Communism -- to cure the ills from which the society suffered. But, even then, he suffered from a sense of guilt. He realized that they would remain bourgeois revolutionaries, maintaining a certain standard of life:

It was during the slump that the more sensitive and intelligent bourgeois intellectuals began to feel that the very system which gave them their privileged position in society also undermined the lives of the fellow human beings by producing mass unemployment. ...These made their own advantages in some sense intolerable to them.
His parents laid stress on morality which made him "rebel altogether against morality, work and discipline" (WWW, p.9). It even drove him towards the depraved and outcasts, wanting to give them that love which they were denied by respectable people. He found the notions of his parents to be full of cowardice, inculcating "a fear of finding out some final wickedness in ourselves, some unspeakable shame of ultimate depravity" (WWW, p.9). This was against his idea of the self which was to love -- even what he judged to be the inadmissible worst qualities in himself. After the acceptance of these qualities, he tried to convert them into something more positive and creative, and not let them remain as they were. This positive attitude sustained him throughout his life -- in his work as well as human relationships.

This is one of the reasons, why he turned to introspection. He saw this as the only means of hope in a derelict and crumbling world -- where violence and misery prevailed. It asserts, once again his hope in the world. He had already seen and tested the political theories which had failed miserably. Now he hoped to gain "the still centre" in the reign of terror. Harper remarks:

'the still centre' is a symbol for the position from which the poet can stabilize his values and thus come to terms with his world. It is the nebulous goal toward which Spender is consciously striving.
The title, *The Still Centre* has been taken from the poem "Darkness and Light" which is also printed right in the beginning of his autobiography. The poem sums up the conflict in the poet's mind and his wish to resolve it.

To break out of the chaos of my darkness
Into a lucid day is all my will.

But, in the next stanza, he contradicts this wish:

Yet, equally, to avoid that lucid day
And to preserve my darkness, is all my will.\(^5^5\)

The objective reality and the subjective self form a constant struggle in his mind. According to S.N. Pandey:

Day and darkness, the objective world and the self are imaged as the centre and the circumference of a circle -- the antithetical impulses towards and away from subjectivism, which are equally part of human identity. The resolution of the poem is an acceptance of both in the whole circle of the self.\(^5^6\)

This acceptance is portrayed at the end of the poem:

I grow towards the acceptance of that sun
Which hews the day from night. The light
Runs from the dark, the dark from light
Towards a black and white total emptiness.
The world, my life, binds the dark and light
Together, reconciles and separates
In lucid day the chaos of my darkness.\(^5^7\)

His involvement with the self becomes more pronounced now. With the writing of the book *The Still Centre*, he almost stops meddling into politics and this book, therefore "announced the end of Spender's uneasy alliance with Communism."\(^5^8\)
He echoes the same feelings, announcing his change to shift his focus from the public to the private, in his autobiography:

Within even a good social cause, there is a duty to fight for the pre-eminence of individual conscience. The public is necessary, but the private must not be abolished by it; and the individual must not be swallowed up by the concept of social man (WWW, p.312).

There was always to some extent, a struggle in Spender's mind, because he could not believe in the absolute necessity of one thing, which in turn meant complete adherence to a particular set of rules. Hence, the break from politics. He says in his autobiography, that form lies in the struggle of certain living material to achieve itself within a pattern. The continuous struggle meant that one could not accept a static idea of oneself -- based on the acceptance of past experience. He says so in his autobiography, "Being is neither past disillusionment or future illusion, it is a perpetual state of moving from what was towards a further aim of existence" (WWW, p.314).

This clearly states that Spender did not think that the past events that he had narrated in his autobiography form a true picture of reality. Paul Jay says that the past events recollected in such a process may not in fact be "events" at all but rather, imagined moments in a "history" being created in and by the act of analysis itself.59 This
symbolic representation is brought out in the depiction of his friends' characters. Talking of Auden, he says, "But it also follows that when I paraphrase his views, I may have modified them, or even reformulated them, out of what I came to understand later. Conversations I quote consist, however, of phrases little altered which have stuck in my memory" (WWW, p.53). Even Isherwood is given an exalted place in his memoirs. Spender projected his desires of adventure and excitement on him -- so much so, that Isherwood played up to his ideas and wrote in his letters what was expected of him by Spender. Finney elaborates about Spender's habit to caricature:

Although Spender claims in his Introduction that only once or twice does the narrative diverge into satire, his use of caricature is more widespread than he suggests. His brother Michael with his mania for competence and efficiency is exhibited like some wierd freak at a funfair in order to castigate the rational approach to life which Spender felt threatened his own poetic sensibility.60

In fact, Auden, Isherwood, Humbert Wolfe, Priestly and many other people are satirized for a similar subjective end. Isherwood also comes to the same conclusion that Spender satirizes himself in reaction against the fool his father made of himself in public appearances. He says that Spender "began ... by a self-protective instinct to accentuate those clownish, self-mocking elements in his own personality which would prevent him from ... turning into a pitiful bore like poor Harold."61
The use of self-caricature is a sophisticated autobiographical device, according to Finney, to counter the unavoidable subjective bias of his self-portraiture. He says that, "it helps detach the reader from the protagonist and invites him to accept the judgement of a narrator who shows himself able to mock his protagonist's past actions with as much gusto as those of his contemporaries." 62

He is thus able to view his past self, objectively, even though it is objectionable to his present self. He can view himself from the outside bringing in the double perspective of both subjectivity and objectivity. He confesses in his autobiography, "there was something withdrawn, inaccessible and unexplained... about the motives of others," which he thought made him more truthful in his description of them. He also revealed himself more, while describing others. He recognizes certain traits in his father which he despises, such as Discipline, Work, Fame -- so much so, that he even wishes him dead. When he does die, he feels that, "His death seemed a function of our living. We flourished after it" (WWW, p.20). Later on, he recognizes the same traits in himself -- his thirst for fame and his love for poetry, among others.

He believed that by writing of these experiences, he has learnt how to live. Spender observes in his essay, "Confessions and Autobiography" that subjective experiences
are of no use unless they are objectified. They ought to have some relevance to the life outside, otherwise the reader will be unable to share the experience and feel left out.\(^63\) This is what he tends to do in his autobiography and in his poetry. He does not view the event subjectively but interprets it to give it a wider meaning, in the whole context. He tries to discover something of permanent value which sometimes results in a conflict between his romantic self and social concern.

Yet there are eyes which float upon the wreckage
Secretly clinging to a gleaning straw.
Some acts of kindness wave their handkerchief.
A trickling life runs through clogged veins
And streams flow backward buried under flesh.\(^64\)

No event can be seen in total isolation as no man is an island, entire in himself. He is a part of the whole cosmic scheme of things. So, the outbreak of the Second World War put things in a different perspective. The year 1939, in particular, was a bad one for Spender for two reasons. He received terrible blows both in his private and public life. He felt that he could never write again, as his mind could never hope to recover from these blows. However, he makes an attempt to write and starts a journal:

I feel as if I could not write again. Words seem to break in my mind like sticks when I put them down on paper. I cannot see how to spell some of them. Sentences are covered with leaves, and I really cannot see the line of the branch that carries the green meanings.\(^65\)
The Journal mixes the personal defeat — of Inez leaving him and the tragedy of War. Though the two have no connection as such; still he is lonely and corresponding to his personal grief — the streets of London are also empty and dark at night. His life seemed to be suddenly devoid of all meaning. This made him even more depressed and he felt that he could not write anymore. However, he soon realizes that self-pity is an indulgence he cannot afford, and it is important to learn from one's failures. He takes an optimistic view and peers objectively at his self. He comments on his weak feelings and comes to the conclusion that:

Weakness isn't going to help anyone today. It is only going to encourage a mood of self-pity which at once isolates people and drains away the energy around them. . . . The important thing is to criticize and learn.66

Corresponding to this, the poetic phase of Spender is more creative and soul-searching. Ruins and Visions is the "search of a universal experience through subjective contemplation."67 The book is divided into four parts. The first three parts — "A Separation," "Ironies of War," and "Deaths" — provide a picture of ruin at all levels, i.e. personal, political and universal. The last section, "Visions," deals with the view that one should not lose hope but renew faith in oneself through the ruins of failures.
The personal loss is depicted in "A Separation":

When under sleep, under the day,
Under the world, under the bones,
The unturning changeless heart
Burns in suns and snows of passion,
Makes its mad protestations
And breaks, with vows and declarations?68

Though, in his foreword to The Still Centre, he had decided to withdraw into his personal world, yet it was difficult to ignore the seamy side of life -- especially when there was so much senseless violence everywhere.

Driven by intolerance and volted with lies
We melt down the whirring bodies of boys
And their laughter distil
To plough metal hatred through the skies69

The horror and destruction of War had made man forget the importance of the feelings of love and faith. He says that love forms an important part of a man's life and "loss of it is the will which enters certain bodies and tears the life around them into shreds. The degradations of the loveless and the homeless, who seek power over their fellow beings, can be seen everywhere today."70

War had made the life of everyone miserable. They became hopelessly depressed and dejected, making the world desolate of ideas. People seemed to have lost faith in the future and the revolutionary ideas didn't seem to incite them anymore, as everything had been taken away from them. Only a confusion of ideas prevailed and the poems convey the
hurt and dejection of a person whose belief in human sanctity has been destroyed.

The poems on death portray these emotions, but, they also reaffirm his faith in life, despite the devastation caused by war and disease. In the poems, "The Fates" and "The Ambitious Son," he describes the character of man and how it drives him to his tragic end. In the last section, "Visions," he tries to "lay bare" the "universe" which is present in every human being:

Yet all experience, like stars...
Hangs in your eyes the lights
Of sustained co-existence.\(^71\)

He visualises a brighter future:

All players are on the side of
Giving strength to innocence,
So I pray for nothing new,
I pray only, after such knowledge,
That you may have the strength to become you.\(^72\)

With the shift of focus to the self, Spender's style and imagery also undergo a change. From the harsh, mechanical imagery in his poetry, he now turns to a softer, romantic tone. In the poem, "Summer," he uses lyrical and erotic over-tones:

Through the August days
She drinks his acres of light
Which, quivering through dark dreams
Beyond mind-sight and eye-sight,
Reach a womb where his rays
Penetrate her night,
In brilliant black commingling streams.\(^73\)
One symbol, extensively used by Spender is island which denotes isolation but not complete isolation. He brings out the idea clearly in "The Angel," where he points out that all human beings are individuals in their own right, yet cannot ignore the realities of the world.

Another symbol, exile also occurs frequently. Initially, he uses it to portray hope for a better tomorrow -- for those exiles who had to leave their homeland for their revolutionary ideas. In the negative sense, it can be compared with Yeats's and Eliot's use of the word to signify purification from the flames of desire. He wishes to be recalled from this exile and to be united with himself.

The sense of being isolated, in exile or being an island is stated throughout his autobiography. At the end, he remarks that beneath every man is an "isolated existence" which only he is aware of. He puts on a mask for the others, so that no one comes to know the real self. His feelings are hidden, which only want love as he feels isolated surrounded by the unknown of time and space and other human beings (WWW, p. 334). In another situation, he describes how alarming it was for him to be standing alone in the darkness in the fire-station (WWW, p.319). He explains this in his essay, "Confessions and Autobiography" as, "the very sensation of being alive and being alone." In the same essay, he goes on to say that an artist is a person who retains the sense of wonder in everything he
experiences. Artists realize that every person is unique and what he experiences is also a "unique event in time and space" which perhaps occurs, for the first and last time.

He justifies the writing of his autobiography, using the singular first person pronoun, I. Fiction and perhaps even an in-depth analysis of a person's account may reveal more about the human personality, but they would fail in describing fully the self. They only "offer avenues of escape from the glaring light of consciousness of him who says: 'I am I'" (WWW, p.310). He feels that the autobiographer has to face two selves -- the double perspective. One is to see himself, as others see him -- the social or historic personality; and the other is as he views himself -- the inside self which only he knows. He says that, "This inside self has a history that may have no significance in any 'objective history of his time'. It is the history of himself observing the observer, not the history of himself observed by others."75

His autobiography deals with both the selves. He always "sought to discover my real self by behaviour which outraged my ideal self" (WWW, p.311). Later on, when he was attracted towards Communism, he thought that he had found his real self. On another occasion when he had gone to Spain, with the other writers, it provided a lot of opportunity for him to observe the others, as well as
himself. He says, "I observed my own behaviour with as much cynicism as I did that of others" (WWW, p.243). If the camera happened to be pointing at him, he would pose rather consciously for it -- only to realize in a childishly disappointing manner that the photographer was concerned with someone else. He observes himself very objectively and does not hesitate to lay bare the facts of his real self even if they are not pleasing to his ideal self.

After a few days, when the group of writers left for Paris from Port-Bou, the delegates ran inside the train screaming and physically assaulting each other to get inside their sleeping cars. It was an appalling sight to see the distinguished intellectuals fighting and jostling each other. While he was observing them, it struck him that he was also an object of satire to himself. He wondered if the journey to Spain was of any use -- yet the delegates had undergone risks to show their sympathies with the Republican cause.

Spender always espoused moral values. In Spain, he realized the truth about Communism. In their eyes, truth lay in the need of the hour -- even if it was necessary to hide the facts. That is why he started writing poems based upon love, life and death -- concepts which are not based on time.

The volume, The Edge of Being begins with a remarkable poem, "O Omega Invocation." It unites all the
opposite concepts like beginning and end, life and death in almost the same way as Yeats visualised them in the Unity of Being. The letter 0, itself denotes the beginning or zero or final emptiness as well as the end, as it is the last letter in the Greek alphabet.

The poet withdraws into introspection to find the real meaning of life. As he cannot see any meaning in the indiscriminate bloodshed and violence around him, he repents:

My life, which never paid the price of their wounds,
Turns thoughts over and over like a propellor,
Assumes their guilt, honours, repents, prays for them.75

He realizes that nothing can be achieved through violence and brutality. Man can only hope to realize something through love and generosity. Right from his childhood, Spender had the ability in him to be able to achieve what he had in mind. He always got the best out of a situation, instead of being bowed down by it.

Having mixed blood really puts one in the position of being able to choose whether or not to think oneself as a Jew. One has the power, more or less, to become what one thinks (WWW, p.14).

So, Spender realizes the futility of ignoring the self and now he sees hope and life through realization of the self. It is in one's own vision what one wants to see. He now transcends the temporary world by reinforcing life.
through the dead. Life is a continuous process which goes on and on:

a turning wheel and are hurled
Beyond evil and good
A turning wheel scatters
Stars upon the wind. 77

The introspection intensifies with the last volume of poems, The Generous Days, published in 1971. Here also, Spender is more involved with the mystery of life and trying to solve it. He accepts death as the inevitable outcome of life and so tries to live his life passionately, savouring each moment of it. Like Yeats and Eliot, he believes in rejoicing life, and looking at everything in a promising manner. Just as Yeats is sure that:

All things fall and are built again
And those that build them again are gay
They know that Hamlet and Lear are gay;
Gaiety transfiguring all that dread;

(SP, pp. 181-182).

In the same way, Spender notes:

What gives edge to remembering
Is death. It's that shows, curled
Within each falling moment
An Antony, a world. 78

The self-portrait of Spender is mirrored in his poems. They reveal a truth which is broader and more complex than the stating of mere facts. Even though he relies on journals and diaries for facts, in the end, it is memory that he has to rely upon, to select the incidents and portray them with intensity.
G.K. Chesterton states the paradoxical nature of memory, on which all autobiographers are dependent:

Really, the things we remember are the things we forget. I mean that when a memory comes back sharply and suddenly, piercing the protection of oblivion, it appears for an instant exactly as it really was. If we think of it often, while its essentials doubtless remain true, it becomes more and more our own memory of the thing rather than the thing remembered... This is the real difficulty about remembering anything; that we have remembered too much -- for we have remembered it too often.79

Spender also believes in using his memory judiciously and gives us an autobiography which is, as Roy Pascal puts it, "the story of a life in the world" offering "events which are symbolic of the personality as an entity unfolding not solely according to its own laws, but also in response to the world it lives in."80 This brings out a balance between the subjectivity and objective outlook of the autobiographer. Finney, agreeing with Pascal says that this is the best kind of autobiography as it "certainly avoids the discursiveness of the reminiscence and memoir on the one hand, and the tendency to narcissism on the other."81

Spender achieves the same by giving equal importance to both his public and private selves. He believed that in the wider context there was a connection between politics and literature. No sensitive person could afford to ignore his political fate, as it would eventually influence the life of every person. On the other hand, he
justified the writings of those persons who did not believe in intermingling their beliefs with the current political ideology. According to him, these writers might achieve much more by concerning themselves with values which were of everlasting importance to mankind and could not be allowed to fade away. In his own writings too, he tries to justify his own stand -- according to the situation he is in.

Thus, he succeeds in his poetry and prose in universalizing his personal experiences through the medium of memory.

At the end of his autobiography, the author reviews his life right from his childhood and comes to the conclusion that memory is not a dependable source -- it only transforms the past actuality into a present myth, which becomes a totally new experience. Paul Jay also remarked in this context that memory cannot mirror things itself but can only form "images" of them.

In the light of this, Spender also arranges or rather, rearranges his life so that all the events have a relationship with each other and in the process, he succeeds in making a meaningful pattern, giving his readers an insight into the meaning of life.
NOTES

2. Stephen Spender, Poems (London: Faber & Faber, 1933), p.31. All subsequent quotations from the book are from this edition and will be referred by the name Poems and a page number in parentheses.
10. Samuel Hynes, p. 67.
15. Quoted in Cunningham, p.43.
16. Ibid., p.57.
25. S.N. Pandey, p.56.
32. Samuel Hynes, p.123.
36. Ibid., p. 146.
43. Valentine Cunningham, p.29.
45. Ibid., p.58.
46. Ibid., pp.55-56.
47. Ibid., p.72.
51. Ibid., p. 112.
55. Stephen Spender, The Still Centre, pp. 77-78.
56. S.N. Pandey, p. 96.
57. Stephen Spender, The Still Centre, pp. 77-78.
58. Samuel Hynes, p. 366.
60. Brian Finney, p. 247.
64. Stephen Spender, Ruins and Visions (London: Faber & Faber, 1942), pp.77-78.
66. Ibid., p.100.
72. Ibid., pp.73-74.
75. Ibid., p.116.
77. Ibid., p.54.
81. Brian Finney, p.228.