CHAPTER V
"FROM HOMER LANE TO MARX TO KIERKEGAARD"

(THE THEMES IN AUDEN'S POETRY)

Stephen Spender's well-known remark that Auden moved "from Psychology to Communism to Christianity" has oversimplified the task of a student who aims at studying the various stages in Auden's evolution as a poet and the recurring ideas and themes in his poetry. These are indeed the three very clear phases in his thinking. It is so evident that even a rough division among his different works belonging to these different ideologies can be made "Poems" (1930) and "The Orators" (1932) reflect mainly his psychological interests. With the appearance of "The Dance of Death" (1933) in which he puts Marx himself on the stage, starts his Marxist-phase, which continues till 1940. Towards the end of the decade, religious ideas begin to appear in his poetry — a trend that culminates in "The New Year Letter" (1941) which is his first long poem after his migration to America and the last major work he produced before he accepted orthodox Christianity.

But while making such bifurcations, one has to be careful. For many of his readers, these shifts in his thought have been very upsetting, mainly because they were taken as sudden dramatic changes and not as mere shifts in attitude. In fact, they were, as Nibir K. Ghosh points out,
"a transition in a continuous process of evolution of a poetic mind yearning to take society to the Good Place."\(^2\) They did not imply a sharp break in his view of life. The ideas presented in his later poetry were the developments and extensions of the ideas he presented in the 'Thirties. They were the culmination of an ever-restless mind and not a result of any sudden reversal of opinion.

Auden has also been severely criticized for 'inconsistency' — a term used in place of 'shifts in ideas.' Auden's poetry, it was held, lacks a sense of wholeness. Even a critic like J.W. Beach's patience and understanding, declares that Auden's "peculiar brand of psychiatry gets mixed up with the social doctrine of 'disciplined love,' and these two, unequally yoked together, begin to be combined with -- the concept of the divine Agape."\(^3\)

This and such other charges can be forcefully refuted if we take into account the tremendous human concern of Auden's poetry. Auden's famous analogy of a Wanderer — a man on a Quest — perfectly applies to Auden himself. His final goal was to cure the sick and frustrated masses and to bring them out of the deep realms of hopelessness and misery to the Place of Joy and Hope. It is in his search for a Cure that he passes from phase to phase, not adhering permanently to any particular creed or "ism." At an early stage, he finds society full of 'sick' or 'diseased' people and finds their cure in Freud's psychological theory that a complete release of "Id" — the instinct or the life-force—
can make them healthy and happy individuals.

At a later stage, when the famous crisis of the 'Thirties makes itself evident and he witnesses the groaning masses crushed under the plight of poverty, unemployment and economic disorder, he finds the theories and doctrines of Marx fascinating and turns to them only for finding out bliss and solace for the suffering proletariat in them.

At a still later stage, it is Agape — the Christian concept of universal Love — which overwhelms him with its tremendous power to regenerate and rebuild a Just City. Man's spiritual sickness is conceived more significant and harmful than either his psychological or social one. He embraces Christianity and invites his fellow men to seek refuge under its infinite blessings of Hope, Love and Charity.

Seen in this light and remembering particularly the genuine human interest he always possessed, the various stages in his mental and poetic development not only seem to be correct and natural but make a fascinating study, if closely examined.

We start with Psychology because it forms much of the bulk of Auden's early writings.

(I) PSYCHOLOGY :-

Auden's psychological interests date back to the very beginning of his poetic career. Poems like "Taller To-day" and "The Secret Agent", which are most 'Audenesque' in
nature belong to that first hand-printed edition of 1928 published by Spender. Much of the psychological matter in his early poetry revolves around the ideas of Homer Lane and John Layard that all illness is mental and spiritual in origin and the greatest sin is to suppress the natural desires.

In "Idols and Shadows," Isherwood paraphrases a letter from Layard to Auden. It reads:

"There is only one sin; disobedience to the inner law of our own nature. The results of this disobedience show themselves in crime or in disease; but the disobedience is never, in the first place, our own fault—it is the fault of those who teach us as children to control God (our desires) instead of giving Him room to grow. The whole problem, when dealing with a patient, is to find out which of all the conflicting things inside him is God, and which is the Devil. And the one sure guide is that God appears always unreasonable, while the Devil appears always to be noble and right. God appears unreasonable because He has been put in prison and driven wild. The Devil is conscious control, and,
is, therefore, reasonable and sane. "

All this seemed heady stuff to Auden and he became an enthusiastic admirer of Lane's ideas which reached him through Layard. Holding that physical illness was an outcome of psychological sickness, he declared that lying had caused Isherwood's tonsilitis. Refusal to make use of one's creative powers, he believed, produces cancer. Obstinacy finds physical expression in rheumatism. Blindness and deafness were an indication of a desire to shut out the physical world. Stephen Spender was tall because he aspired to heaven.

All these misfortunes can be easily avoided by being "pure-in-heart". Auden was very solemn while delivering all these utterances and hence there is no place for treating any part of it as mere burlesque or parody. The way he availed himself of all this psychosomatic stuff in one of his highly serious poems, confirms his solemnity about it:

"Sir, no man's enemy, forgiving all
But will its negative inversion, be prodigal:
Send to us power and light, a sovereign touch
Curing the intolerable neural itch.
The exhaustion of weaning, the liar's quinsy,
And the distortions of ingrown virginity."
A deep insight into the ideas of this prayer which ends "Poems" (1930) and which was later on included in "The Collected Poetry of W.H. Auden" (1945) with the title of "Petition," can reveal the extent to which Auden had absorbed Lane by 1930. Both in its matter and manner, it is typical of Auden's early poetry. With its abrupt and ambiguous beginning in the manner of Hilke, it invokes "Sir" whose identity is questionable. He may be God or father or either Layard or Lane, for they were the Supreme Healers for Auden in 1930. What is special about Him is his infinite benevolence. He forgives all vices in Man except one: the "negative inversion" of "will" which is, for him, a heinous crime, for, it represents 'death-wish' which is the greatest of all sins and which indicates total misuse of the power of the mind over body. The other diseases may be cured by a simple touch of "power and light" possessed by "Sir." If these diseased persons are spotted and are stopped at the right time, they may take the right course and turn to the great healers, who would surely suggest 'a change of heart' as a possible cure. Reaching the end, the nature of 'Sir' becomes clear. He is, though not the 'Cure' itself but the one who can guide to it. Society can be happy and healthy with a change in its individuals. If psychologically cured, the individuals of society, can build a New City. "Petition" stands at a very crucial stage in Auden's development. It gives a clear hint that with the belief of the possibility of reform, Auden entered the 'Thirties.'
In fact, Auden's deep interest in the human heart results from his vast studies of psychology and various sciences at an early age. We have Stephen Spender's description that by the age of twenty-one, Auden had developed a profound interest in "poetry, psychoanalysis, and medicine" with "an intensive knowledge of the theories of modern psychology, which he used as a means of understanding himself and dominating his friends." 6 Overwhelmed by his sincerity and impressed by the truth of his eloquence, often, they admitted the psychological guilt in them, as, when Isherwood once complained about his sore throats and Auden at once declared them as "the liar's quinsy" and explained it in Lane's terms that they are symptoms of untruthfulness in one's life, and Isherwood willingly admitted that "his life in England was basically untruthful, since it conformed outwardly to standards of respectability which he inwardly rejected and despised." 7

But from the earliest, his aim, behind all such diagnosis, was to instruct people, to make them aware about the malignancy of disease and to ask for a certain honesty in their ways of living. As Gerald Nelson points it out, "Auden's chief concern from his earliest days was to help others and to teach or to instruct." 8
For Auden our psychological ills are greater and hence more important than either the political or the social ones. In fact, his belief is that society has degenerated because its individuals are ‘sick’. He, mercilessly and with the detachment of a physician, diagnoses their various psychic diseases, maladjustments and perversions. Reading his poetry of the early 'Thirties is often to pass through a land of diseased individuals, who, unable to live and adjust, are wishing for death. It is a gloomy and pitiable picture and shows the poet's concern for the 'sick' souls, the 'lonelies,' the 'anxious,' and for the man who is:

"afraid of the clock, afraid of catching his neighbour's cold, afraid of his own body — — —
An isolated bundle of nerves and desire suffering alone. "

'Symptom' and 'cure' are the two highly favourite ideas with Auden, and it is around them that his psychological interests centre. All the symptoms of diseases are collectively explored and presented under the heading of 'death-wish' which is presented through the figure of the Enemy, who for the first time appears as the Adversary in poem XVI of "Poems" (1928), and whose intricate workings are depicted in "The Orators." In a highly characteristic poem of 1930, entitled "Consider," he is addressed as the "Supreme Antagonist," who is responsible for the decadence of the contemporary bourgeois society, which is a spiritual
waste land, rotten to the core! The diseased individuals of this society are timely warned against a neurotic malady which Auden regards as a threat to the soundness of English society. Their disease is psychological and its effects social, moral and spiritual. In the opening section, Auden uses the medium of verse as a film-camera presenting the different shots of these sick persons, celebrating "the first garden party of the year." The terse comments Auden passes on their artificial existence are remarkable. Inwardly they are completely 'sick' and horrified by this sickness, they are hankering after material joys. The inner gloom and shallowness of their life is put naked before us. Emotionally they are dead, for, the healing fountains of love and harmony have dried up within them. It is through the "plate-glass windows of the Sport Hotel" that they admire the view of beautiful mountains. Feelings are supplied to them by "an efficient band" of musicians.

In the middle-section, the workings of "the Supreme Antagonist" — the death-wish or in the Freudian term "super-ego" which stands for rational mind who is the enemy of all life-force ("It" in Groddeck's theories and "Id" in Freud's concepts) and natural human instincts which are unnaturally suppressed by it, are explored: "The Supreme Antagonist" is more powerful than "the great northern whale" — i.e. Satan himself. With its infinite powers, it afflicts the bourgeois civilization and dooms the 'highborn mining captains' as well as the 'handsome and diseased
youngsters. The poem presents a bleak picture of modern life in which satire is aimed at the bourgeois pleasure-seekers whose complacency is pitiable. As Cleanth Brooks puts it the satire in "Consider" is directed against "an essential frivolousness of mind — a stodgy, comfortable, unconscious complacency which makes men disguise losses and injuries, or even accept them as a part of the natural order of things. "10

In the final section of the poem, these dry and feeble fugitives, the "seekers after happiness, all who / follow/The convolutions of your simple wish" are warned. Their sickness is already in an advanced stage. They are likely to "disintegrate on an instant in the explosion of mania/or lapse forever into a classic fatigue." The situation has become highly pathetic, for, the Adversary is on his mission to seize them "with immeasurable neurotic dread," and the fate of the bourgeoisie is to end in psychosis.

Auden's chief interest, among all the diseases of the psyche, is in "Fear" and "Anxiety." His early poetry is full of references to "the lonely, the lost and the unhappy". All around him, he sees sick souls, self-imprisoned and time-obsessed, and declares England as a place "where nobody is well," and with great accuracy, he presents their neurotic loneliness.

Among the other morbid diseases or the forms of the Adversary, what Auden hates most is the self-regard. He
thinks it the root cause of many of our psychological illnesses like frustration, cowardice, nostalgia, loneliness etc. Often, we see him, describing these sufferings of his patients, with a certain sarcastic delight and veiled seriousness. In "Miss Gee," for example, he heartily mocks at this strange victim of neurosis, whose attempt to preserve her virginity results in cancer. Auden is always very clear and outspoken while depicting the malignant results of repressing the vital human forces. In several poems of his early phase, he examines the history of cultural decline, from the vigorous and healthy past to the neurotic and repressed present.

Among the different Cures Auden suggests for the unhealthy masses of his period, there are chiefly three about which he is very sure and which are continuously repeated by him in his poetry. The first direction shown towards a free and healthy existence is "to be Pure-in-Heart" which has boundless power to cure all those psychological ailments which result in physical sufferings. It is his firm belief that: "The Pure-in-Heart is never ill." 11

Secondly, to the psychologically, perverted persons, he asks for a complete break with the sick culture. Health will come largely through release of the repressed unconscious forces of human nature. A natural and happy life demands their free outlet — an affirmation from human beings of their existence — and not their heinous suppression, which stands for their sheer negation and is a hindrance in
the way of leading our lives truthfully and honestly.

Thirdly, self-love prevents our personality from its natural development. It can be avoided by living in the community. Communal love is a beautiful way of redeeming oneself from self-regard, loneliness, despair and 'dread'. It is also a powerful answer to the most significant ailment -- the death-wish. We can free ourselves from the shackles of the Enemy, "the formless terror in the dream," by "loving our neighbours as ourselves." The ultimate responsibility of the choice between selfish love which leads to a sick life or the disciplined love which guarantees a healthy life is laid on the individuals of society.

Though Auden's Psychological interests abide till the very last phase of his writing, they are mostly displayed by the works of early 'Thirties. Quite a considerable part of his psychological musings and broodings is to be found in "Poems" (1930), "The Orators," "Paid on Both Sides," and in the lyrics of 1936 volume entitled "Look, Stranger!" But it is "The Orators" (1932) which largely sums up Auden's psychological preoccupations.

"The Orators," powerfully expresses Auden's abhorrence of "the enemies of mankind," those 'lonelies' and the lunatics whose neurosis has converted the entire society into a big sanitorium. As to the real nature of this work, it may be held that it is not a collection of different poems but a strange kind of notebook in prose and poetry with a unified theme or a series of themes. It consists of three parts or
'books,' with a Prologue and Epilogue. Book I, "The Initiates," and Book II, "Journal of an Airmen" are in prose, while Book III, "Six Odes," is entirely in verse. Despite its various imperfections (which will be mentioned later), the importance of "The Orators" remains. It attacks the diseased morality of a bourgeois society and seeks to cure its individuals through mental, social and moral therapy. They are presented on the line of Dante's sinners, who are the excessive lovers of self. In "Address for a Prize Day," which forms a part of Book I, after making this allusion, Auden bitingly criticizes them for their self-regard and self-complacency. The dualistic idea of Symptom and Cure runs throughout this work and is expressed through two powerful elements — humour and psychoanalysis. The central problem, with which the work deals with in detail, is raised in the opening lines of "Address for a Prize Day":

"What do you think of England, this country of ours where no one is well?"12

This sickness of the members of a decadent English society is highly deplored and its symptoms have been thoroughly explored in the whole work. More than economic or social or any other cause, it is the psychological disorder which has been considered the root cause of the pervasive general malady and anxiety. The golf-playing, tea-drinking, church-going eccentric middle-class with its school-masters, parsons, spinsters and gentry is scoffed at for its numerous psychological ailments such as depression, inability to
adjust, inhibitedness, lethargy, longing for death, cowardice etc. These are considered as the different powerful agents of the Enemy, who, at different places in the book, has been addressed with various contemptuous titles, such as, "the dragon," "the devourer," "the Adversary," "the Destroyer of all life and creation and love." He stands for all fear and negation and deadens the healthy human emotions. Thanks to his existence, the old, dry and dead morality works successfully among the individuals of a sick culture.

Time is ripe to destroy this Destroyer of Life and none else than the Airman, the Really Strong Man, (just opposed to the Really Weak Man who is the victim of the Enemy) the Healer can perform this feat. He is a very beautiful symbol, created by Auden's wonderful imagination, of all healthy human emotions and life values. He is all love and Courage and can threaten the Enemy who is all Fear and Despair. He stands for all those ancestors who fought with the Enemy and stood firm for life-values. He is all those healers, particularly the great poets and the psychologists who with their sharp intellect, helped to recognize the Enemy in its various forms and taught how to defeat it. In short, he is the one who can guide the members of a ruined society to a way-out. His complete detachment from the earth is another remarkable feature of his being. Observing the earth from a certain distance and yet concerned with the problems of the earth, gives him a 'clinical' quality (a physician's concern for the health of the victim}
and at the same time his detachment while diagnosing the ills of the patient!) which Auden wanted, at this stage, his poetry to have!

"The Orators"'s themes are those which are generally associated with the poetry of his psychological phase. The bourgeoise are leading a mentally sick life. They are suffering from numerous psychological diseases. There is an urgency for psychic balance and a change of heart. Discarding all the inhuman and false values of an old social order, man should favour a natural and healthy existence. If action is delayed or denied, the doom of the bourgeoise is certain. Satire, irony, pathos, humour and burlesque are perfectly blended in order to achieve the desired ends. In fact, the purest Auden of the early 'Thirties is to be found among the pages of "The Orators".

It is with some diffidence that this summing-up of the ideas in "The Orators" is made. It is, in fact, a simplified (perhaps over-simplified) gist of contents very vague and obscure at first reading. After all, it is one of the early works of a middle-class intellectual who (naturally!) has a lot to say with a youthful enthusiasm and a certain disgust for the horrors he perceives around him. Its main drawback is, perhaps, the fact that the mind of the poet is full of striking ideas and brilliant fancies, but which are, unfortunately, not expressed or executed properly, and the total impression a reader gathers from it, is of
perplexity and confusion. This goes to explain why "The Orators" received such mixed and varied comments from critics. They stand poles apart from one another and make an interesting reading. While John Hayward declared it as "the most valuable contribution to English poetry since 'The Waste Land',"¹³ the reaction of Auden's noted contemporary John Sparrow was furious, who felt that "The Orators" was "a work in which no single intelligible purpose is to be discerned, a jumble of images and jottings."¹⁴ And, in fact, despite its very careful exploration of the crusted ideas that weaken the morale—all that is related to the bourgeois mentality—the obscurity of "The Orators" remains. It helped in creating the element of the celebrated ambiguity generally associated with Auden's name. Auden too detected a certain vagueness or slipperiness of tone in it. Eighteen years later, in the 'Preface' to his "Collected Shorter Poems", he referred to it as a "fair notion fatally injured". This fatal injury was caused, perhaps, because of the obscurity of its many private references. But despite its mystification, it succeeded in communicating the ideas of the poet—a quality shared by a very few books indeed!

Auden's poetry is, in fact, a memorable expression in verse of the psychological findings of the great 'healers', a list of whom contains names like Freud, Jane, Groddeck, Blake, Lawrence, Hopkins, Hardy and many more.
He was widely read in psychology and to these vast readings he added his own beliefs and created his own philosophy which is much different from the morality of the "professional moralists" and has a scientific basis. It has often been suggested that his psychological interests were deeper and firmer than either his political or social ones. But such an assessment is misleading. In fact, his interests in Psychology or Marxism or Politics indicate only his profound social concern. His only intention is to replace a sick and unhappy society with a healthy and happy one. In his quest for means to achieve this goal, he wanders from one solution which seems proper to him at a particular stage, to another which seems more appropriate at a later stage. It is his human and social interests which are supreme and lasting. Psychology fascinated him much, particularly in the beginning of his poetic career, and he considered the psychological ailments the chief cause of society's sickness. "So many are so lonely as they die"—was a painful observation and he suggested the cure of a change of heart, but only to change the society. A social revolt is possible, he held, if the mind is liberated from inhibitions and unnatural restraints. Whatever he preached, he did it to uplift and help the individuals who, if cured, would make a lovely society and bring out the existence of a Good Place. Auden's human concerns should never be overlooked or underestimated.
II MARXISM AND POLITICS

"But we have to choose, every one of us. we have the misfortune or the good luck to be living in one of the great historical periods--it is idle to lament that the world is becoming divided into hostile ideological camps; the division is a fact. No policy of isolation is possible."\(^{15}\)

This call for action, for doing something constructive, for perseverance in order to achieve the possibility of a Good Place, is not typical of Auden’s art alone. It was voiced forth by every sensitive artist in the 'Thirties. In 1933, Stephen Spender puts forth his oversentimental plea "to rebuild":

"O young men, oh young comrades
it is too late to stay in those houses
Your fathers built where they built you
to breed money on money--
O comrades step beautifully from the solid wall
Advance, to rebuild -- --."\(^{16}\)

For sometimes in the early 'Thirties, Auden, too, made a move towards Politics and showed a keen interest in the theories of Marx with the same intention which had driven him towards Psychology earlier, i.e. to bring a change in
society. From Freud to Marx was an easy transition, because both Marxists and psychologists stressed the need for change. The psychologists suggested "a change of heart", a change in the individual to change society. The Marxists, on the other hand, believed in a change of social environment for the well-being of men. The earlier teach to fight against repressive internal forces and the latter the repressive external forces. For Auden, both these camps proved fascinating as they proclaimed the same need of a vital change which was the main subject of his poetry in the 'Thirties, and as the emphasis on change is present in both the groups of thinkers, Auden's is a natural move from Psychology to Marxism and does, in no way, show an abrupt or complete break in ideas as thought by many.

In the Marxist phase, Auden hailed the belief that a change in society should precede a change in mind and heart, i.e., social revolution should precede the psychological one, for, of what use it is to send the sick souls back to a degraded society after they are psychologically cured? He proclaimed this thought very clearly, in one of his writings of early 'Thirties:

"What is the use of trying to remove complexes from individuals when the society in which they will go demands that they should have them? -- -- --
You cannot train children to be good
citizens of a state which you despise".

It is highly unfair to demarcate the years from 1928 to 1933 as a purely psychological phase in Auden's thinking. Auden's sympathy for "the proletariat" and his delight in the war "of proletariat against police" goes back to as early as 1930 as is clear from poem XVI of "poems". Again, in poem XIII of the same volume the poet's concern for the 'terrors' which are drawing closer and closer' and his perception of 'doom's approaching footsteps' are clearly depicted. But it is true that in the earlier writing or in the poetry of the psychological phase the number of such poems counts very little. In fact, in these years, Auden's approach to politics is very oblique. May be it was because of his dislike for the disgusting, didactic ways of propaganda literature. But surely, he avoided writing poem of a thoroughly political nature, or in other words, psychology and politics are deliberately fused here. Many of the 'Social' poems can not be labelled as completely social or 'Socio-Political', for, though the idea that 'society must change or die' is present there the changesuggested is 'the change of heart' and not the change in the existing conditions. These are not the proletarian poems, asking the workers to revolt, but appeals from a disillusioned bourgeois to his own class. Years later, in 1955 Auden himself wrote in this regard:

"Looking back, it seems to me that the interest in Marx taken by myself and
my friends — was more psychological than political; we were interested in Marx in the same way that we were interested in Freud, as a technique of unmasking middle-class ideologies, not with the intention of repudiating our class, but with the hope of becoming better bourgeois — — "18

The causes which drew Auden and his contemporaries towards political interests are too obvious. The 'Thirties was a very turbulent decade. 19 Literary history cannot be separated from social and political history. Auden's poetry depicting his socio-political interests belongs to the 'Thirties described as "a very bad time" by Graham Hough. 20 It is to the crisis and the temper of this age that Auden gives voice in his poetry. He had found himself in a world that could hardly be ignored by even the most firmly non-political temperament.

The year 1933 marks Auden's slow transition from Freud to Marx. It was the year when the threat of fascism, which had turned a number of writers to the left, had become more intense with Hitler's rise to power in Germany which Auden knew so well. Isherwood was in Germany that time and from him Auden heard a lot. In 1933 itself Auden's friend and colleague Cecil Day Lewis published his first political poem "The Magnetic Mountain" which was a fusion of ideas from Marx and Lawrence. In the previous year, Edward Upward
had declared himself a Communist. So Auden's change was a part of a general change prevalent among writers. But from the very beginning, Auden has been very careful and clear about his political intentions. In fact, his was not a sudden and whole-hearted acceptance of Marxism. Even in "The Dance of Death" which is usually considered a work with clear Marxist leanings, politics are conceived largely in psychological terms, for the central figure, the dancer, is a personification of death-wish. We see Auden making psychological analysis of fascism and other cultural diseases.

But, surely enough, after 1933, the psychological cure for cultural illness is left behind. "Brothers, Who when the sirens roar" (originally entitled "A Communist to Others" and first published in 1933 at the Hogarth Press by Leonard and Virginia Woolf) marks a turning-point in Auden's thinking. With this poem, Auden adopts a heretofore unrevealed leftist pose and declares a clear sympathy for the proletariat. In the Original version, in the first line, instead of 'brothers', we have 'comrades' which is definitely the more Marxian form of address. Spender has rightly suggested that Auden was writing as though from the point of view of a Communist rather than in his own name, for, it is too full of radical partisan propaganda. He addresses directly to the workers from 'office, shop and factory' who have been reduced to passive nonentities by their fear of the bosses. They have been advised to co-operate against the common enemy. The language is
beautifully simple, the style penetrating and the irony, perfect and terse. The handsome young oppressor is satirically addressed:

"O splendid person, you who stand
In spotless flannels or with hand
Expert on trigger;"

But he is not, unfortunately, really favourite of the Lady (the future) he and his kind are wooing. The future belongs to their "nasty sight" — the proletarians. The allies of the 'splendid man' are clearly pointed at. Among them are listed the "dare-devil mystics", the ones who delude the workers, by telling

"The starving that their one salvation
Is personal regeneration
By fasting, prayer and contemplation."

The next target is the humorous "wise man", for whom "our misery's a rumour,/ And slightly funny." Closely connected with the 'wise man' are the Cambridge liberals, the "great malignant/Cambridge ulcer", who with their bright utterances, have long exploited the workers by declaring that 'wealth and poverty are merely/ Mental pictures." The Communist fully expresses his contempt for these intellectuals who pronounce their friendship with the proletarians, but at heart are false and wicked for they are mere instruments in the hands of the factory-owners. All these supporters of the oppressor, are harshly
condemned and cursed by the speaker:

"Let fever sweat them till they tremble,
Cramp rack their limbs till they resemble
Cartoons by Goya ----"

However, the speaker believes in the downfall of capitalism and the victory of the workers. He predicts the ruin of "the splendid persons":

"But you shall see them tumble down
Both horse and the rider."

And, still more optimistically, he celebrates their victory over the types of people who extend their helping hand to the bourgeois:

"Their splendid people, their wise acres,
Professors, agents, magic-makers,
Their poets and apostles
Their bankers and their brokers too.

Shall fade away like morning dew."

Among the deluders of the workers, the "Unhappy poet" too is included and is regarded as an escapist who "fled in horror from all these/To islands in your private seas."

However, his infinite powers to help the oppressed ones are acknowledged and a friendly hand is extended to him:

"You need us more than you suppose
And you could help us if you chose."

The end, however, is quite startling. The workers, as one expects with such a thoroughly Marxist preaching, are not
advised to organise their powers and to fight, but, on the contrary, are guided to the direction of love — which has mysterious powers:

"Remember that in each direction
Love outside our own election
Holds us in unseen connection:
O trust that ever."

Auden's leaning towards Communism is fully exhibited by this 1933 composition. It is, in fact, direct Marxist propaganda, based on the concept of class-struggle and a very clear answer to those who doubt whether a really communist phase, (however brief!), did exist in Auden's poetic process or not! How far did such preaching succeed and achieve its goal is another question, but Auden's affection for the workers, his thoughtful consideration for a class to which he himself didn't belong, are unquestionable.

Quite a number of poems which were composed during 1930-39 carry the theme of the decadence of the old order, and foretell an ominous political future for England and her bourgeoisie. "Consider" (first published in "Poems", 1930), is, in several ways, a remarkable tour de force. It is a fine blending of Freudian and Marxist ideas — "— what Freud saw as the death-wish corresponds to what Marx saw as the inevitable decay of the bourgeoisie." With the detachment of a clinician and a comic observer, Auden depicts the 'ruined lives' of the inhabitants of an effete society, facing constantly the 'neurotic dread,' 'a polar peril' and
a 'prodigious alarm.' Together, they predict a complete break-up of this capitalist society 'scattering its people, as torn-up paper -- --'. "The game is up" — the financier is informed in the final section. The game is also up for those

"Who, thinking, pace in slippers on
the lawns
Of College Quad or Cathedral close,
Who are born nurses, who live in shorts,
Sleeping with people and playing fives."

The capitalists and all their allies would soon discover that "It is later than you think." "Consider", with its bold imagery and rich irony, is, in fact, a left-wing lament for those 'diseased' pleasure-seekers who are standing at the very brink of collapse.

An extremely fine poem belonging to this period is "Dover," which manages to handle so much matter in so little space. In its fifty lines, Auden touches on a wide number of related themes. Dover is the port which links England with Europe. It is depicted as non-productive and the "territory of the old gang." Dover is the place of departure for migrants for new places. So Auden, by centring the poem around this port, gets an opportunity for commenting on the condition of Europe and England's relation to it. The frontier towns are presented as places of the bureaucrats and experts, of the lonelies — of whom "each one prays in the dusk for himself." The prophecy regarding the future of
England is not pleasant:

"The aeroplanes fly in the new
European air,
On the edge of that air that makes
England of little importance."

In "Get there if you can" (Poem XIII in 'Poems', 1930) the irony is too direct and the contents highly suggestive. Thematically, it stands close to "The Waste Land," but its mood differs from that of "The Waste Land." It is not sad, on the contrary it is almost impatient. After giving a very pathetic picture of England in decay and a severe condemnation of her shattered economy, the smugness of the bourgeoisie is lamented and they are openly warned:

"Drop those priggish ways for ever, stop
behaving like a stone:
Throw the bath chairs right away, and learn
to leave ourselves alone.
If we really want to live we'd better start
at once to try;
If we don't it doesn't matter, but we'd
better start to die."

It is a warning very serious and grim for it is to the bourgeoisie from one who belongs to it! It should change itself or die — is Auden's very straightforward option put before his class and sums up much of what he really wanted to say in the poetry of these years!

By the year 1933, Auden had acquired the reputation
of a man with firm philosophical views on Man and History in their scientific, social and political aspects. His reading public recognized him as a leader in a new and promising literary movement. In this year not only a new, revised edition of "Poems" (1930) was published but quite a good number of his poems were published in leftist magazines and collections of poetry. A less-known yet equally significant poem which established his position as a writer with genuine socio-political purposes, was the "Song" that appeared in the very first number of "New Verse." It is a ballad in the form of a dialogue between a rich young man who, still living in the fools' paradise, thinks it absurd to believe that he owns a world for which death is inevitable and a critical friend who is completely disillusioned now and thus can inform him better. The former thinks of a number of ways to rescue himself from the coming final disaster and the latter points out to him the futility of all those ways. The young snob decides to throw his money in the gutter for labourmen to pick it up. But he is assured by his enlightened friend that they would not accept it; it would be used by the armament firms to shoot him and his class. Further, in sheer desperation, he thinks of getting a factory job and to make friendship with the workers but again he is assured that they would not accept him as their equal, because they are now aware that doom is certain for him and his class. It is too useless for him to seek resort in an island for the natives there do not welcome escapists.
from a ruined class. It is also equally futile to go to brothels or intoxications or to consult a priest in the hopes of going to heaven at least, for, at heart he knows that they would not offer him any comfort and he has no faith in priesthood either! He would make a still more disastrous failure at the war-front. His son may be a good fighter and would carry a gun in the next war, but himself he knows nothing of soldiery and heroism. So this poor rich man has no way-out except to "go down with your world that has had its day."

However, such prophetic pronouncements should not be overdramatized. Though Auden did have a political or a Marxist phase in his poetic evolution, like his other interests, it too was not consistent and long. And just as, his social preoccupations had directed him to the course of Psychology, the same were the underlying causes of his fascination for either Politics or Marxism. His unorthodox Marxism, may be considered as another dimension added to his principle of liberal-humanism. Auden was never interested in politics for politics' sake. Nor did he accept Communism for the sake of fashion, as many did in that age. He had a genuine appreciation for Marxist ideologies. It was Marx's tremendous concern for class-distinction (better known as 'class-struggle') which fascinated Auden. The huge and the hateful difference between the lives led by the oppressed and the oppressors, the inhuman exploitation of the proletarian class by the bourgeois, moved Auden and, like the
other followers of Marx, he too dreamt of the existence of a classless society in which there would be a just distribution of the gains of industrialisation and the workers would have full rewards of labour! In a number of poems of this period, Auden sings for the proletariat and scorns and scolds those who held the reins of power:

"Shut up talking, charming in the best suit
to be had in town,
Lecturing on navigation while the ship is going down." 22

A very moving picture, Auden presents, of the English middle-class suffering under the heavy pressure of economic depression and of the ugliness and the horror of the life of the proletariat. He declares that if the political Giants, with their false pity and lip-sympathy, have turned to be —

"Pygmies, poor dears
Beside the Giant Sloths and the Giant Despairs," 23

the artists should become 'the warners of the age.'

To this extent only, Auden had his association with Politics. In other words, the prevailing social surroundings brought him to Politics. May be, these very facts made Justin Replogle to declare:

"Yet now that we can look back on Auden's work, apart from partisan fervor of the 1930's, his poetry scarcely looks "political" at all." 24

In fact, it seems better to apply the epithet 'social'
to Auden's poetry than 'political,' for, his poetry is concerned with man as a social creature. It is enlightening to know that Auden never had adolescent interests in politics in the 'Twenties. Really speaking, the well-to-do upper middle classes had a self-complacency which makes one marvel at their attitude today. Stephen Sperber aptly remarks that "the war had knocked the ball-room floor from under middle class English life." 25 At Oxford, Auden recalled in 1965, "we imagined that the world was essentially the same as it had been in 1913, and we were far too insular and preoccupied with ourselves to know or care what was going on across the Channel. Revolution in Russia, inflation in Germany and Austria, Fascism in Italy --- went unnoticed by us. Before 1930, I never opened a newspaper." 26

The last statement, of course, need not be taken too literally. But Auden's recollection reflects his general mood during the late 1920's. Sperber's recollection of Auden's saying in the Oxford days that "poets must in no way be concerned with politics." 27 strengthens it. In those days, he even hated the idea of poets becoming preachers, and strictly held that poetry is not prophecy. Shelley's belief that poets are "the unacknowledged legislators of the world", was, according to Auden "the silliest remark ever made about poets." 28 Believing in poetry's clinical functions, he regarded politics not a proper subject for poetry, and had little patience for the "flat ephemeral pamphlet and the boring meeting." 29 The idea about a certain fascination for
Communism was totally unthinkable in the late 1920's. Edward Upward's joining of the Communist Party had come as a shock to Auden and his friends. Spender recalls in his autobiography:

"Communism, to us, was an extremist, almost unnatural cause, and we found it hard to believe that any of our friends could be Communist." 30

Auden himself agrees thirty years later that at Oxford "we were politically ignorant and indifferent." 31

They had political awareness and interests when they had a personal encounter with a politically ravaged Germany, along with the apparent failure of parliamentary democracy in Britain during the early 1930's. In poem XVI of "Poems" (1930), later entitled "1929", Auden recalls a very touching incident which added to his understanding and awareness of the political atmosphere:

"Walking home late I listened to a friend
Talking excitedly of final war
Of proletariat against police —
That one shot girl of nineteen through the knees
They threw that one down concrete stair —
Till I was angry, said I was pleased."

Despite the fact that Auden never declared himself a Communist or made any political pronouncements, it is evident that Auden's sympathies here are on the side of the girl
(and the proletariat) and his anger at the police (and the ruling class). It was an era in which Western society seemed to be collapsing, and democratic governments, powerless as they were, could not stop the decline. The fact that Russia alone had escaped the general corruption made Marx's theories respectable. Day Lewis' words best sum up the complex intellectual situation of this period:

"It is a truism that a sound society makes for sound individuals and society (is) undeniably sick."

He felt that there were only two alternative cures, both revolutionary—one the way of the psychologists—to begin by bringing a change in the individuals of society. The other was the way of the Marxists—to begin by changing the environment. In other words either the idea of a change of heart that should change society or the idea of a new society making a new Man. Day Lewis, Spender and many others combined Marx and "current psychological doctrines" in their writings. Auden alone stands apart from them by virtue of the fact that nothing he ever wrote (except of "On the Frontier" and that too written in collaboration with Isherwood) shows him supporting Marxism as an active political programme. But, being the writer of the same age, he was not completely outside the contemporary intellectual climate either, and he could not but avoid a certain leaning towards Marxist ideas. Peter E. Firchow's investigation is worth-quoting here:
"In his important unpublished book-length manuscript, "The Prolific and the Devourer" (1939), now in possession of the Humanities Research Center of the University of Texas, Auden also indicates that it was round about 1931 that politics began to strike a number of young writers as an exciting new subject."

Truly speaking, Auden too, even though for a brief duration, could not keep himself free from the fetters of this "exciting new subject." And as his thoughts drifted in this direction, the ideas in his poems, particularly after 1933, took a different course. The old change-of-heart cure for a sick society and self now, slowly, began to disappear. A diseased society's complete cure demands not a release of 'Id', the prisoner, as much as it requires a change in something outside the self—in the social machinery itself. The Social conditions, not the human heart, need to be changed.

The characteristic writings of this period appeared in the two most prominent periodicals, "New Writing," and "New Country" and in the anthology "New Signatures." "New Writing" had been founded by John Lehmann in 1936 and had a Communist bias. Auden, Spender, Day Lewis and others appeared regularly in it. A specimen fragment by which Auden was represented in it is as follows:

"It's farewell to the drawing-room's civilized cry

The professor's sensible where-to and why,
The frock-coated diplomat's social aplomb.
No matters are settled with gas and with bomb." 34
And none of the contributors to "New Country" (which included Auden) is known to have objected to Michael Roberts' prefatory remark:

"I think, and the writers in this book obviously agree that there is one way of life for us: to renounce that system (of capitalism) and to live by fighting against it."

And though the contributors to the early "New Signatures" were less political of nature, yet, about that too, John Lehmann later remembered that they were trying to make a new intellectual and imaginative synthesis that would be positive, not negative and pessimistic in its attitude to the problem of living in the 20th century. So whatever Auden wrote during these years (particularly between 1930-40) though not labelled either "political" or "Marxist" by him, yet, very clearly, it was in tune with such writings produced by his contemporaries!

The question, however, remains -- What is Auden's Marxism, (if at all he had any Marxist phase)? The answer is that it is the empirical aspect of Marxism which is more significant to Auden. To most of his friends 'Marxism' meant a synonym for political organization or an active agitation against an old social order. Auden never exhibited an interest in this political Marxism. His poetry is not
concerned with Marx as the stern and active social revolutionary or the political economist. He was concerned with that part of Marxism which suggests a diagnosis of social illness. In other words the rational aspect of Marx's philosophy fascinated him much. He was drawn to the ideas that man must observe his environment carefully and verify experimentally the observed facts. It is in this way that true knowledge is gained and knowledge enables man to change and control his environment. It is in this way that human nature can evolve. The world cannot be left to grow in its own wayward way. Philosophers have only explained this world, the need now is to change it. It is man's responsibility to control his world and consequently make his world. As J. Replogle simplifies this theory:

"Freedom means control of self and nature, and control demands action. Most important, action demands choice. At every point in their existence men must choose to act, choose to control, choose between good and evil."

Auden gives poetic expression to these very ideas in one of his celebrated eloquences:

"Yours is the choice to whom the gods awarded
The language of learning and the language of love,
Crooked to move as a moneybag or a cancer,
Or straight as a dove."
It is our responsibility to choose what to do, and we must choose if we want to have complete aloofness from animal behaviour. By choosing and acting humanly, men should make their own history, and the more we make our history ourselves, the less would be the influence of uncontrolled and unseen forces upon our history. It is this highly fervent view Auden cherished from Marxism that human fate can be controlled if human environment and nature are controlled. It is in the sonnets and the verse "Commentary" of "In Time of War" (1939) that he gives very vivid expression to these ideas. At one place he puts it rather too directly:

"Evil is always personal and spectacular,

But goodness needs the evidence of all our lives,

And, even to exist, it must be shared as truth,

As freedom or as happiness." 37

In fact, the freedom-necessity-choice philosophy lies at the heart of Auden's work. Freedom is the awareness of necessity to control the environment and such control comes from right 'choice' or decisions which depend upon knowledge. If men do not choose at every point to gain knowledge and control their environment with it, the environment will control them instead. In Sonnet III of "In Time of War" (which is the culmination of that intellectual change which had occurred in Auden's thinking in 1933) when some persons, the exiles from Eden, try to avoid their responsibility and become "abject,/ And to (their)own creation became subject."
In Sonnet IV a farmer who rejects the responsibilities of being human and does not control his environment, grows "in likeness to his sheep and cattle." The idea revolves around the Marxian notion that, failing to act and control, men become beasts once more. In the post-Eden world, they should act to know, know to control and control to be free.

Alienation from environment or society results in total decline of human beings, as it happens with the poet in Sonnet VII whose voice is considered the voice of God by his tribe and who is, therefore, worshipped and kept apart from them which proves to be his destruction.

Being a poet himself and that too of a "Crisis Generation" Auden avoided that social alienation deplored by him in Sonnet VII of "In Time of War." From the very beginning, his poetry expresses the indirect relation of poetic art to the world of fact and action. In one of his essays Auden writes:

"I am not trying to suggest that art exists independently of society. The relation between the two is --- intimate and important ---."

And as a poet of society or of sociological importance, he directs his people to the Eldorado of their desires, which will be attained through struggle and positive action. His plea to the snobs of his class is:

"Let us honour if we can
The vertical man/Though we value none
But the horizontal one. \textsuperscript{39}

He had a mind full of Mortmere phantasies and wanted to bring about the existence of that private world of Mortmere in his own land—England. In the poem, "The Month was April, the year", Auden recalls a dream he once had in Oxford in which he found himself changed into a seagull perched on the deck of a ship which was sailing ahead and owned his own name "Wystan Auden Esquire." It sailed towards:

"The islands of Milk and Honey
Where there's neither death nor old age
And the poor have all the money."

How he longed to see the poor around him having "all the money", and enjoying a just distribution of all productions of machinery and above all to convert his country into that very island of Milk and Honey is apparent from a number of his poems.

Auden has all anger and censure for an inactive Utopianism. Mere dreaming of Good Place would lead us nowhere. He bids us to see that "we rebuild our cities, not dream of islands." Rebuilding of City calls for a willing sacrifice of all those special rights a bourgeois enjoys.

It is in the consistent theme of a call for immediate action that it becomes apparent that his interest in politics and Marxism were because of his profound social concerns. He yearned to save a decaying culture and developed an interest in politics for the sake of a social revolution. At one place, he asserts that the condition of the world is
"so miserable and degraded that if anyone were to say to the poet: 'For God's sake, stop hunting and put the kettle on or fetch bandages. The patient's dying,' I do not know how he could justifiably refuse." Poem XVII of "Look! Stranger" ("Here on the cropped grass of the narrow ridge I stand") contains the gist of Auden's change and action theme. Society needs change and change will come largely through action:

"These moods give no permission to be idle.

For men are changed by what they do;"

The forces of capitalism and fascism are made targets of a bitter irony in a number of poems and the numerous hints at the necessary death of the old order establish Auden's position as a leftist liberal. In fact, the prevailing social and political conditions were such as to turn many a passive and non-committed writer towards political thinking. Even E.M. Forster, everybody's ideal of a quiet and peace-loving English gentleman declared that he would have been a Communist if he had been "a younger and braver man." Forster's announcement is the heart-felt voice of many a sensitive writer and thinker of the age. The reasons for their leaning towards Communism are apparent. It gave them the assurance of being on the right side—the side of history. It also fulfilled the semi-religious need for community and, to many, offered an escape from private guilt—the guilt of belonging to a privileged and exploiting class, as Louis MacNeice puts it in his biography:
"The strongest appeal of the Communist Party was that it demanded sacrifice; you had to sink your ego."\textsuperscript{42}

Auden, as has been mentioned earlier, never declared himself a Communist. Yet his poetry remains the sure proof to know which side his political mind was moving. Often, in his prose-writings he pointed at the vast differences between fascism and socialism and declared:

"I judge them differently because I think that the socialists are right and the fascists are wrong in their view of society."\textsuperscript{43}

But politics proved to be the most transitory phase in his career. It was, indeed, a purely transitional stage in his thinking. By 1940, he stands before us as a completely disillusioned person, giving up all political interests. The outcome of this much-proclaimed Marxism was disappointingly poor in England, and Auden was right in no longer believing in the efficacy of any political action a poet might undertake. Now he accepts the sad, plain fact that no writings of a poet or any author, however impressive and truthful, can change the course of historical events or influence the public world. In an essay published in 1939, Auden writes:

"Art is a product of history, not a cause
--- the honest truth --- is that,
if not a poem had been written, not a
picture painted, not a bar of music
composed, the history of man would
be materially unchanged.\textsuperscript{44}

Poetry can't stop treachery and cruelty, it can only
point them out, or, still more directly poetry can't make
anything happen. In a much recent interview, he gave the gist
of his long meditation over the subject of the relationship
between art, world and history:

"Over the centuries Europe has had poets
such as Dante, Shakespeare, Milton. I
don't think the course of events there
would have been very much different
without them. Yet they make Europe
interesting. \textsuperscript{45} Without communication
life would be difficult and uninteresting.
However, poets don't change the course
of history. I wrote about Hitler in the
'Thirties, but that didn't save one Jew
from going to the gas chamber, or
postpone the war even five seconds."

This assertion makes Auden's views about a poet's
role in a country's politics, its political revolutions, its
political history and public world very clear. The way he
speaks about the helplessness of artists in moulding the
fates of the masses is terse and gloomy but it is very true
also. The history of his own country bears testimony to its
truthfulness. Disillusioned in this way, Auden discarded many of his poems belonging to the political phase, from his later collections of poetry. Spender's remark is illuminating in this regard:

"Auden's rejection of his 'Thirties' past is shown most specifically in his censoring his work which contains Marxist ideology and his avoidance of any continuous autobiographical theme."  

Even "Brothers, who when the sirens roar," a poem usually regarded Auden's most eloquent political commitment, was later suppressed from his books. When Auden was revising his work for his "Collected Poetry" (1945) he wrote a comment about this poem in the book he was using as printer's copy. It reads: 'O God, what rubbish!' and suppressed it completely. Again, it was not printed in "The Collected Poems" published in 1950. The reason may be, as Dennis Davison points out, Auden's understanding that he and his friends had no real knowledge of proletarian life and its problems and that it had much political propaganda which he disliked.

In fact, it was characteristic of the later Auden to read too literally the Auden of 1939. "September 1, 1939", again a significant poem written at a time when the world's political history underwent one of its highly crucial events, best illustrates Auden's dissatisfaction and disillusionment.
with his earlier interests. It was first published in October, 1939, in 'New Republic'. Years later, Auden described it as a hangover from his English period—the kind of poem he had left England in order to avoid writing. Similarly, a highly topical composition like "Spain" too was saved from the critical examination of posterity. Its much celebrated term "necessary murder" was softened to "the fact of murder" in its republication in 1940, and later, after announcing that false beliefs lead to "bad poetry", Auden expunged the poem from his collected works as "all lies". He looked back on the 'Thirties with great disgust and by 1940 both Auden and Day Lewis had bandoned politics for good!

III TURN TO RELIGION

By the end of 1930's, Auden had lost his fascination for the much - professed doctrine of Liberal Humanism. The reasons for this disillusionment have been pointed out earlier. One of Auden's own assertions, however, needs a mention here, for, it throws light on his mental turn and artistic evolution in the late 'Thirties:

"We assumed that there was only one outlook on life conceivable among civilised people, the liberal humanism in which all of us had been brought up, whether we came from Christian or agnostic homes.--"
To this the theological question seemed irrelevant since such values as freedom of the person, equal justice for all, respect for the rights of others, etc., were self-evident truths. However, the liberal humanism of the past had failed to produce the universal peace and prosperity it promised, failed even to prevent a World War."48

It was very natural, then, for Auden to take on a new quest for new beliefs. It was a period rightly called as that of his "isolation" by Francois Duchene, the one "When the poet began to lose touch with his followers and become less the leader of a movement and more the isolated artist like others before and after him."49

To put it simply, these were, again, the transitional years — a period in which there was a shift in ideas and attitudes. As it happened with Auden's Freudian and Marxist phases, the transition of 1933-40 too was thought by many a complete break, a total change from the earlier beliefs and a complete reversal of opinion on Auden's part. It was, in fact, an indication of a continuous development of an honest and subtle mind, engaged in a mission of quest for the happiness of his people, ever expanding and availing of its field of experience. Richard Hoggart clears away this 'shift-in-outlook' controversy very candidly:

"The road which led from Marxism and
Freudianism in the 'Thirties to Christianity today is a long, difficult and torturous one; but, it is a single road."  

It was exactly that sort of a journey which has to do with the age-old notion that 'when everything fails, prayer remains.' This 'hop' (not 'leap' as J. Replkogle calls it) from an appreciation of Marx's ideas to a mild and prayerful invocations of works after 1940 was upsetting for many. For Randall Jarrell and many of his agnostic and communist readers it was like 'the captain has deserted the ship.' To a certain degree, their bewilderment and resulting fury, was justifiable. A poet who once firmly held that human fate can be controlled by a control over human environment and nature and declared:

"Nothing is given; we must find our law

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We have no destiny assigned us"  

whose change-of-environment-cure had such unshakeable roots as to smell of airs of pure agnosticism:

"-- the religious approach is the method of those who see no hope of understanding and altering the environment."  

came, in the last resort, to respond with a Christian affirmation of faith and joy and declared humbly:
about
catastrophe or how to behave in one
I know nothing except what everyone knows—
if there were grace dances, I should dance." 53

But, perhaps, this class of "easily-excited," was not aware that to arrive at the Christian faith was an easy transition for Auden. He had been brought up in an atmosphere not away from religion and its teachings. His mother was a devout Anglican and from her, Auden had imbibed religious leanings. And although, his acceptance of Christian theology was confirmed roughly from the time of his emigration (with the appearance of "New Year Letter" in 1940), but the process by which he arrived at that acceptance had begun by the time he left Oxford. His early poetry is full of prayers, mild addresses to someone who can really help and admissions of his own modesty before someone who is really powerful.

"Petition", which starts with a line like "Sir, no man's enemy, forgiving all" (if its 'Sir' is to be taken for a reserved bourgeois' address to a Christian God!) dates back to 1930. Even in a 1936 poem of a thoroughly Marxist nature entitled "Brothers, who when the sirens roar," Auden talks of 'disciplined love', which "holds us in unseen connection." It suggests a religious concept of a divine, unifying, protecting Providence! Michael Ransom's prayer in "The Ascent of F6", is movingly appealing:

"Save us, save us from the destructive
element of our will, for all we do
is evil."

In the final chorus of Eric and Anna in "On the Frontier"
a note of Christian humility is apparent, though the reference
throughout is to man and earth, not to any supernatural powers:

'Pardon them their mistakes,
The impatient and wavering will
They suffer for our sakes,
Honour, honour them all.'

The beginnings of Auden's turn to religion have
something to do with his concepts of 'Love' and 'Good Place.'
It would not be unfair to say that it was his yearning for
"Good Place" which brought him to this final destination of
Faith, and, as regards his concept of Love, after passing
through its various phases and definitions, it was, ultimately,
its Christian sense of Universal Love (Agape) which had
satisfied him most and had, the greatest significance for
him, playing a vital role in his poetic evolution! To put
it plainly, he was directed to a religious standpoint by his
social and human interests.

This transition which became slightly evident in
the poetry between 1936-39, hastened when Auden came to
discover Kierkegaard. We have Auden's own account to the
effect that the rise of Fascism had left him completely
disillusioned with his earlier faiths. He even doubted
whether man was really capable of bringing about his spiritual regeneration. When in Spain, during the Civil War, in Barcelona, he saw all the churches closed and met no priest at all, the discovery left him "profoundly shocked and disturbed." He makes a candid confession:

"I could not escape acknowledging that, however I had consciously ignored and rejected the Church for sixteen years, the existence of churches and what went on in them had all the time been very important to me." 

Shortly afterwards, in a publisher's office, he met "an Anglican Layman" (Charles Williams), in whom he felt a personal sanctity and got "transformed into a person who was incapable of doing or thinking anything base or unloving." 

Consequently, he started reading some theological works, Kierkegaard in particular and began going "in a tentative and experimental sort of way", to church. 

Auden, obviously, was impressed by Kierkegaardian philosophy that life, in spite of its failings and glooms, is, on the whole, blessed and, therefore, it must be accepted. Auden's interest in changing the world and exposing the bourgeois complacency, naturally, faded and a new belief that whatever is, is right and beautiful, took its place. Auden's poetry, afterwards, becomes not only an eloquent declaration of the statement that life is blessed but a celebration of
its blessedness!

Kierkegaard has divided life into two different parts—the human and the divine. The first half of his conception agrees completely with Marxian thought. There is the same emphasis on freedom—necessity—choice relationship. Human action is considered, by Marx and Kierkegaard, of supreme importance. It is action which makes a thing evil or good. It is the other part (the divine conception) of Kierkegaard's philosophy, shared by the Christian transcendentalists, idealists and religious thinkers, which insists on the phenomenon that God exists—which is unlike Marx's view. Even before reading or meeting Kierkegaard, Auden had declared in 1936 that "a theology which stresses on absolute gulf between God and man, and the inevitable corruptness of the world is not really consonant with (Christ's) teaching." Reading of Kierkegaard, as was natural, generated a belief in Christian theology. Hence, a transition from Marx to Christianity was not such a great one as to make many a reader gape incredulously and consider it a sudden and surprising break in the poet's way of thinking! However, it is remarkable that within a short period of a decade, Auden had journeyed through the worlds of Freud, Marx and Kierkegaard and what is still more notable is the fact that he did so without hypocrisy, inconsistency or philosophical uncertainty.

It is in the longer works, produced in the 'Forties, that a tendency towards Christian theology is best reflected.
This journey towards a new direction starts with "New Year Letter", entitled very appropriately, as "The Double Man" in American editions, because the central idea is that of the divided human consciousness which compels us to disbelieve what we believe and to own what we condemn! At heart, we feel the necessity of faith, but, since, we want to be free, we do not obey it and hence the resulting sin and misery!

Since the poem is written immediately after the Second World War, a profound sense of gloom, which is an outcome of the perception of human misery, pervades it and because Auden, by this time, has learnt something of theological nature from Kierkegaard, this misery is ultimately linked to a lack of spiritual faith. It is written in three parts corresponding to the three different categories of existence—namely the Aesthetic, the Ethical and the Religious. The first two are felt inadequate and so discarded ultimately, and, it is the Religious category whose vitality is accepted.

It is, therefore, very easy to label this poem as the one which marks and confirms Auden's conversion to Christianity. It is remarkable that the poem has no announcement of the personal belief of the poet. On the contrary, it is to the social issues that the religious philosophy has been applied. Religion is suggested as a means of regaining the lost social peace and order the world badly needed after a ghastly War. The doctrines related to human mind are thought to be weak to solve prevailing human problems. Now, it is time Man should turn to those principles related to
human heart. The "healing fountains" of Love and Faith lying within it are, therefore, considered the final and reliable means of redemption. The "Asiatic cry of pain" is regarded as an outcome of "vast spiritual disorders." The old formulas "look strange" by the advent of Time, but they offer "one good result" that "the Good is difficult", but to aspire to achieve it should be man's goal.

It is the "Epilogue" which communicates better the personal faith, newly arrived at. Love (Agape) is looked up to as the only redeeming source which can again illumine the City and that One omni-Potent Spirit is regarded the only Power which can really help a lost and miserable world. Auden's complimentary verses in praise of Him have a unique simplicity and pathos:

"We fall down in the dance, we make

The old ridiculous mistake,

But always there are such as you

Forgiving, helping what we do."

CP, p.193

The subject of "The Sea and the Mirror" is the relationship between Art and Life. Its symbolic framework helps Auden to express his abstract ideas concretely. It is subtitled as 'A Commentary on Shakespeare's "Tempest"' and its structure is skilfully used to convey the different themes. The most significant of them — the incompetence and inadequacy of Art in solving the mystery of Life—
expressed through the speech of the stage-manager:

"- - - - but how
Shall we satisfy when we meet,
Between Shall-I and I-Will,
The lion’s mouth whose hunger
No metaphors can fill?"

CP, p. 311

The entire play is woven round the central theme of the significant contradiction between the world of art and the world of reality — the imagined and the real, and in the end Art’s failure in solving the problem of evil in the will is depicted which brings out the final declaration that “Art is not enough.” Like the “New Year Letter,” “The Sea and the Mirror” too is mainly drawn on Kierkegaard’s three phases of existence — the Aesthetic, The Ethical and the Religious. The Aesthetic existence which represents all imagined possibilities of Salvation, bliss and peace is regarded as the one which carries us far away from the Ethical fulfilment and the Religious existence which carries us close to the real Joy and Bliss. Our acceptance of the Aesthetic stage is an escape from life as felt by Prospero that in Ariel’s companionship he led a false existence “Sketching imaginary landscapes, chasms and cities,” and after his departure alone has he been able to see the difference between “moonshine and daylight,” i.e. the false and the actual Life.
"The Sea and the Mirror" presents a Christian view of man which Auden shaped with the help of Kierkegaard which is clearly portrayed through the wonderfully charming speech made by Caliban. To an audience Aesthetically and Ethically complacent, Caliban points out the Religious Way. The artist, Caliban observes, is concerned not with Art versus Life but with both versus the Divine. We should understand that neither the Aesthetic nor the Ethical route is an end in itself but indirectly both lead to the Religious one. When all the secular ways have failed, the Religious leap can be taken.

But paradoxically enough, the Religious existence does not suggest a negation or a rejection either of the Aesthetic or the Ethical existence. It does not advocate an escape from the human existence. On the contrary, it is the Religious illumination which makes it clear that it is not without sinfulness ('the massacres, the lies, the whippings and all their carbon copies') with it that we are blessed by that Wholly Other. So both the Aesthetic and the Ethical routes should be taken and their dreadful directions must be followed, for, there exists a need to accept secular life. Before taking the Religious leap, it is essential to live fully the Aesthetic and the Ethical stages of existence. Man should not try to transcend these stages but should experience their blessedness. In the soft and serene words of Caliban "it is just here, among the ruins and the bones, that we may rejoice in the perfected Work which is not ours."
and whose voice "speaks through our muffling banks of artificial flowers".

"For the Time Being" (1945), subtitled as "A Christmas Oratorio" may be regarded as the culmination of Auden's intellectual Quest for a religious belief. It is rightly dedicated to his mother - a devout Anglo-Catholic nurse, and has much light and amusing stuff on serious issues. It is charming and coherent and contains passages of fine 'wit' and profundity of a matured mind which, by this time, had illuminated great truths regarding Life, Art, Ethics and Religion to himself by learning, knowing and experiencing valid facts. Its significance as a work which carried Auden close to Christianity is unquestionable! The Biblical figures have been given a modern tinge. There exists an enormous difference between Auden's Simeon, Joseph, Mary etc. and their original prototypes. For instance, Auden's Joseph, having a modern usage, speaks:

"My shoes were shined, my pants were
    cleaned and pressed,
And I was sitting down to wait
My own true love."

The immediate reaction to lines like these may, in other cases, be of sheer astonishment. But, here, from the very beginning, we are so carried by the sweeping force of parody and pleasant rhetoric that we simply forget the real Herod and Simeon and see and think about them in the way
their creator did! It is a still more fascinating aspect of this Christmas Oratorio that the profound ideas and serious contents it has, do not, in the least suffer and lose their dignity, due to a light and amusing presentation of characters.

At the thematic level, "For the Time Being" has a lot to say on the theological issues like Sin, Trust, Love, Obedience, Petition, Incarnation, Truth etc. Joseph's temptation in the third section to doubt Mary's virginity is an ordinary person's attitude whose mind does not accept anything without full assurance. Mary's purity symbolizes her Creator Himself who is not trusted by doubtful men. In the same way, the Three Wise Men in "The Summons" and the shepherds in "The Vision of the Shepherds" represent common men who are all sinners. But unlike the common men, they are not lost in dread and despair. They have faith in the arrival of Good News which is revealed to them as serious and disciplined Love.

All these miserable persons are repeatedly directed to the course of Prayer by Chorus, semi-Chorus, the Star, the Narrator etc. They should pray for themselves and for those sinners who follow them. Temptation and Suffering are not considered evil. These are the preliminary stages in the way of Knowledge and Truth and Redemption. Only Man should not take to dejection while passing through these transient phases.
"Let us therefore be contrite but
without anxiety,
For Powers and Times are not gods but
mortal gifts from God;
Let us acknowledge our defeats but
without despair."

The message of the play is, however, summed up in the final speech of the Chorus in the last section "The Flight into Egypt". Conveying the Christian doctrine of 'loving all that is created in order to love the Creator,' it is one of the most memorable poetic expressions of simple, religious truths given by Auden:

"He is the Way.
Follow Him through the Land of Unlikeness;

He is the Truth.
Seek Him in the Kingdom of Anxiety;

He is the Life.
Love Him in the World of the Flesh;".

"The Age of Anxiety" may be considered as the climax of the ideas peculiar to Auden's mind in the poetry of his mid-career. In spite of the looseness of form and its tremendous obscurity, it remains Auden's most representative work. Auden's usual and favourite themes of human 'anxiety', 'despair' and 'dread', after receiving an elaborate treatment
in this work, reach a conclusion with this work because from "Nones" (1951) onwards, he deals with the happy sides of human existence like universal love, peace and reconciliation. Auden's journey towards a religious belief which starts with "The New Year Letter" too attains its destination in this work. The anxiety experienced by the four characters is typical of that anxiety, anger and dread which have overpowered the people of the modern age. Its root cause, as suggested in the poem, is our alienation from God. The source of our malady is spiritual:

"We're quite in the dark: we do not
know the connection between
The clock we are bound to obey
And the miracle we must not despair of;"

CP, p.407

Human condition is so because of a lack of Faith which alone can conquer man's original anxiety:

"Therefore at every moment we pray that,
following Him, we may depart our
anxiety into His peace."

The four characters, though materially successful, are lacking in something or the other which makes them lead horrified and dissatisfied lives. Their lives are dreary and despairing, without purpose and faith. Their mental states are clearly depicted in the beginning of the poem. They are empty, lonely and frustrated and have "lost a world they never understand." They are again all alone when the
poem ends. They want to escape to something but do not know that only a religious leap can save them. The other three wish to escape to an Aesthetic Paradise. It is only Malin, Auden's main spokesman, a brooding intellectual and an ethical man who feels that something higher remains to be achieved. In his final speech Malin nearly reaches the truth by asserting that the world of non-belief must be accepted and that the source of all suffering goes to a grand Divine Plan:

"-- our least matter dear to Him,
His Good ingressant on our gross occasions."

IV LOVE-THE VITALIZING FORCE

The history of Auden's spiritual development is connected to Auden's idea of 'Love' which is a recurring theme in his poetry from the earliest. The word 'Love' as used by Auden may be interpreted in a number of ways. As Auden passed through various phases in his attitudes, his concept of 'Love' too underwent vital changes of meaning. However, the one consistent quality in his treatment of this age-long subject is his thoroughly anti-romantic and rational approach to it. The romantic idea of paying glorious compliments to the beloved and her physical charms or singing passionately about love's sublimity like the 19th century poets is absurd for Auden. He has a plain, down-to-earth attitude in this regard. He celebrates love as a dynamic, vitalizing power and suggests it as an effective tonic for the health and happiness of a
'sick' society. Love is not presented as a sentimental or personal experience. Auden's poems in which he 'talks' about Love appeal to our intellect rather than to our hearts. It has often been remarked that there is a severe lack of profundity of feeling and intensity of emotion in Auden's poetry generally, and in his treatment of love-theme particularly. However, it should also be admitted that Auden's bold, straightforward and realistic attitude towards Love makes his 'Love-poem' as fascinating as any Victorian or Romantic love-poem can be.

A poem of wonderful clarity and unusual appeal may be illustrated to show how as early as 1937 Auden had acquired striking notions regarding Love. The title is "Lullaby" and, in fact, it is a unique lullaby of its kind in English poetry. The opening line, with its deceptive softness, makes one expect a tender lyric of love and its glories, but the very next line 'Human on my faithless arm' disenchants the early spell. Auden has no illusions about love and therefore cannot sing about love's immortality or the beloved's perfect loyalty. He accepts the limitations by which human love is bound to be surrounded. She is a human being, so no wonder if she has human imperfections, just as, he, as a human being, is bound to be inconstant. Even love is subject to decay and death, for, everything is 'ephemeral.' The real bliss lies in accepting life with all its imperfections. The present moment and its joy should be exalted by those who love. Auden's compliment to the beloved, though highly novel, is too beautiful to be summed up in words:
"Mortal, guilty, but to me
The entirely beautiful."

CSP, p.107

Carnal love, though its insufficiency and inadequacy are felt, is not considered low or base. On the contrary, the lovers experience mystical ecstasy in their physical union. For the moment, their souls break the bonds of the body and they possess one entity. They enjoy the same bliss in physical oneness as experienced by hermits during their mystical union with God. The lovers become "the saints of love."

But the joys of physical love are very short-lived. They bring a sense of satiety in their train and the lovers have to pay the full price for their sexual gratification in terms of sufferings. With the morning "the beautiful vision" disappears and there comes disillusionment and they grow indifferent to each other. The fountains of love dry up within them and they become spiritually wretched.

Auden suggests only one cure for this mental boredom and spiritual gloom. Physical love is transitory, yet the lovers have a beautiful world to live in. And even though this world too is 'ephemeral,' they should "find our mortal world enough," as and should have "human love" which alone can save them from "the noons of dryness." Our world, our life remain a blessing in spite of their imperfections and they should thank God for it and love all the creatures of God. In short, Eros (selfish love) should be transformed
into Agape (selfless, universal love) which is a great
dealer and has infinite powers to protect men from insults
and anxieties. This is the very core of Auden's philosophy
of love.

It is remarkable indeed that "Lullaby," a single,
compressed piece of writing is a conglomeration of Auden's
different interpretations of love. The opening stanza is
clearly a celebration of spontaneous, carnal love, rushing
forth from a released 'id' or the Freudian inhibition. It
is presented in the form of a healthy, natural and
unsuppressed instinct, which is an embodiment of all life-
force.

In the following two stanzas, the limitations of Eros
are depicted and it is suggested to be replaced by Agape
while in the final stanza, hymns are sung for disciplined,
controlled human love. These are, in fact, the characteristic
shifts in his ideas of love throughout his poetry. Hence,
"Lullaby" becomes the most representative love-poem (in the
most unconventional sense of the term) of Auden.

In fact, love is the one constant theme throughout
Auden's poetry, conceived in vivid patterns -- as an essential
individual need, as a vitalizing social force and as a
unifying, redeeming power. Often it seems a highly elusive
term with Auden. In Poem X of "Poems" (1930) Auden had
himself acknowledged human inability to capture it in the
network of meanings:
"Love by ambition
Of definition
Suffers partition
And cannot go
From yes to no ".

Again, in "In Memory of Ernst Toller," it is described as a power whose boundless strength we can never fully comprehend:

"--- we are lived by powers we pretend to understand."

CSP, p.144

Elsewhere, it is conceived as a bewildering phenomenon:

"Love like matter is much
Odder than we thought."

CSP, p.153

However, the poet's faith in its infinite virtues is so firm that he goes to the extent of asserting:

"For love's more important and
powerful than
Even a priest or a politician. "59

In the early psychological phase, it is thought in terms of Freud's 'erotic instinct' ("The flood on which all move and wish to move.") and has deep connections with sex-instinct (libido), which if suppressed may play havoc. Auden concentrates on this issue at length in "Miss Gee" where the spinster, since sexual gratification is denied to her, produces her own cancer. In a highly pathetic way, by
creating an equally ridiculous situation, Auden successfully brings home the idea that if the pleasure of child-bearing is denied, the result is tumor in the womb," and hence, Eros (the libido) must be given free play, for, therein lies health, vitality and the natural growth of a balanced personality. Auden has profound faith in the tremendous strength of this Life-Force. It has infinite power to create and destroy. It can devour the distorting elements and agents (Miss Gee, for example) of a diseased society:

"We know it, we know that love
Needs more than the admiring excitement
of union — —
Needs death, death of the grain, our death,
Death of the old gang." 60

In this Freudian phase Love is considered as an effective means of mental therapy — a cleanser and a releasing force which would surely cure the neurosis and disease in the people of a sick society:

"Was there a dragon who had closed the works
While the starved city fed it with the Jew?
Then love would tame it with his trainer’s look." 61

This is the concept of Love as something highly dynamic and spontaneous and at once reminds us of the one-time celebrated theories of love as a form of 'hopeful behaviour' and 'a natural power of goodness.' Lane interprets this 'enlarging power' very clearly:
"The motive power of goodness is love, and love is compulsory. If a man does not love mankind or the universe, he is not true to his nature. Man does not choose to love: he must love." 62

And again:

"Every man must choose for himself. No man can be compelled to love, for love is itself the highest form of compulsion." 63

To early Auden, engaged in eager search for removing the psychological ills from among his people, these definitions seemed fascinating. Fully agreeing with Lane, he preached the same doctrines. Though hate is large ("Far larger than man can ever estimate" 64) but Auden believes in Love's supremacy over all base passions. Evil forces may gain a momentary victory but Auden sings for Love which is great and whose spirit is invincible, as Anna puts it in her final speech at the end of "On the Frontier";

"A moment, and time will forget
Our failure and our name
But not the common thought
That linked us in a dream." 65

Hatred begets disease in a community and makes its individuals sick. By obeying the inner wish of loving and getting loved, mankind may progress towards perfection.

In a number of poems of the 'Thirties, Auden expresses
his deep abhorrence of selfish-love which finds its heinous expression in different forms of self-regard. We are a miserable lot because we do not extend love to a larger community but long for it for our own selves. In "September 1, 1939," Auden openly pities and ridicules the victims of self-love:

"For the error bred in the bone
Of each woman and each man
Craves what it cannot have
Not universal love
But to be loved alone."

Eros should be a healthy, unifying instinct—a source of strength, but if perverted to a narrow and selfish physical love, it can become self-destructive and enfeebles the will of the lovers. This idea is beautifully expressed in an allegorical form in a sonnet "Fleeing the short-haired mad executives." The beloved's companionship made the course of life easy for the lover. He became free from fears but since they looked at each other only, they could not have a complete view. In other words, since they restricted their feeling for themselves only, they failed. The guilt is confessed by them:

"Saw nothing but ourselves, left-handed, lost;
Returned to shore, the rich interior still
Unknown. Love gave the power, but took the will."66

So, at a later stage, when Eros' limitations are recognized, Auden looks suspiciously at the private pleasures
of love and points out their inadequacy:

"Before the evil and the good
How insufficient is
The endearment and the look," 67

Now he turns to selfless and disciplined love, which is a source of all that is "lucid" and "civilized" in human societies, and which though it is a creative force, "needs more than the admiring excitement of union." Still reluctant to accept Love's Christian definition, he associates it with positive action, to a scientific and social discipline. Real fulfilment of love, he believes, lies in the renunciation of personal interests for the sake of the larger social interests. Social environment is bleak and people are unhappy because hate has pushed out genuine, selfless love:

"While the disciplined love which alone could have employed these engines
Seemed far too difficult and dull, and when hatred promised
An immediate dividend, all of us hated." 68

In the poetry of the late 'Thirties and the 'Forties, at numerous places, Auden suggests this 'disciplined love' as a proper guide to our use of modern scientific forces whose absence among human beings has led them to distortion and ruin:

"- - the major cause of our collapse
Was a distortion in the human plastic
by luxury produced." 69
With the poems of "Another Time" (1940) Auden's concept of love takes a highly humanistic turn. The limitations of human love are accepted as but natural and he adopts a thoroughly human attitude towards love. Love, here, is not thought in terms of individual experience, or as a means of achieving social harmony and order but as a beautiful way to achieve our fulfilment as human beings:

"Through it we discover
An essential secret
Called by some Salvation
And by some Success: "70.

All this while, we find Auden struggling hard to achieve the real meaning of love. It is only after his turn to Christianity that he finds what it really is. In the last and the final phase, he whole-heartedly accepts the Christian doctrine of universal and divine Love known as Agape. Its connotations are very vast. It instructs us not only to love our neighbours as ourselves but also to love in spite of our wish. We wish to love only that which is beautiful but Agape compels us to love that too which is not beautiful, for, pure love is an order and whether we enjoy obeying an order or not is irrelevant. Since Agape is rejected by us, we are degraded and unlucky:

"Our claim to our own bodies and our world
Is our catastrophe." 71

Instead of paying too much attention to "our world," we should love "all homeless objects that require a world."
It is this definition of Love which fully satisfies Auden. It is, so he believes, what this unfortunate world requires most. What "we must but cannot do alone" in "this modern void," we can achieve by following the dictates of Agape, and human societies will remain inadequate unless informed by this kind of Love. Thus loving self-forgetfully we can cure ourselves and can do what no law or experience or science can do for us.

Agape, defined as a form of "intense and active, but also pure in the sense of unselfish, devoted, outwardly love—the emotion that the spiritual man feels to exist between him and God and fellow Christians" by J.B. Broadbent, has been gloriously celebrated in Auden’s poems after 1940 and is constantly contrasted with the false forms of self-regarding love. Agape proves to be the final destination, both of Auden’s religious quest and of the journey to seek an effective solution for the psychological, social and moral problems people of his age were facing. It is the ultimate message, the very heart of his philosophy that:

"We need to love all since we are
Each a unique particular
That is no giant, god, or dwarf,
But one odd human isomorph."