

THE MOTIF OF THE 'QUEST'  
IN THE EARLY WORKS  
OF W. H. AUDEN

by

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## Introduction

In a review, published in The Spectator of July 15 1960, Philip Larkin establishes the essential dichotomy in the poetic development of W.H. Auden:

I have been trying to imagine a discussion of Auden between one man who had read nothing of his after 1940 and another who had read nothing before. After an initial agreement by adjective - 'Versatile,' 'Fluent,' 'Too smart sometimes' - a mystifying gap would open between them, as one spoke of a tremendously exciting English social poet full of energetic unliterary knockabout and unique lucidity of phrase, and the other of an engaging, bookish American talent, too verbose to be memorable and too intellectual to be moving. And not only would they differ about his poetic character: there would be a sharp division of opinion about his poetic stature.

After 1940 and following closely on Auden's emigration to America, his poetry exhibits 'that loss of vividness, a tendency to rehearse themes already existing as literature, a certain abstract windiness'<sup>1</sup> which is in such marked contrast to the relentless energy and formal experimentation manifested in his earlier work. In 1936, F.R. Leavis had argued that:

He has no organization. He hasn't at any rate the organization corresponding to his local vitality, to the distinction of his phrasing and imagery at their best.<sup>2</sup>

And this sense of a poetry about to dissolve into a purely personal mythology,<sup>3</sup> formless and obscure, has haunted critical evaluation of Auden's early work. Critics have assumed a fragmented intelligence and passed judgement on seemingly unrelated texts, their generalizations depriving the poetry of its restless activity.

In Another Time, published in 1940, Auden introduces a sonnet sequence unified by a motif which will dominate his later writings. Richard Hoggart has pointed out that this motif, entitled 'The Quest', is the essential framework of New Year Letter (1941), 'The Sea and the Mirror' (1944), The Age of Anxiety (1948), and The Enchafed Flood (1950).<sup>4</sup> The awareness of a recurring structure in the poetry has enabled the critic to approach Auden methodically, noting his poetic development and evaluating the individual volumes through the poet's varying treatment of a constant motif. For example, Monroe K. Spears, referring to The Age of Anxiety, says:

Aesthetically, perhaps the central weakness of Age is that the Quest is largely internal; the social-psychological diagnosis of contemporary anxiety, isolation, and anonymous solitude is represented in subjective terms, with all the action psychic and no real interaction among the characters.<sup>5</sup>

That no such approach has been made to the Auden of the 'thirties explains the broadly differing critical estimates of the work written during this period.

Certainly, the motif of the 'Quest' has been seen as the theme of select volumes, particularly The Dog beneath the Skin and The Ascent of F6, and the Wanderer, the man on the 'Quest', has been cited as the main character of The Orators,<sup>5a</sup> but no attempt has been made to understand that 'one of the great mythic patterns of mankind'<sup>6</sup> binds together all Auden's

work at this time. It is a point which Barbara Everett initially makes but fails to utilize in her analysis of the individual works.<sup>7</sup> Whereas Monroe K. Spears, in a periodical article, sees the myth as only one amongst six major image-clusters in Auden's work,<sup>8</sup> it is my contention that the motif of the 'Quest' is the sole unifying image of the early Auden. By examining in detail the poet's work between 1930 and 1939, I wish to describe the development of the motif and probe Auden's poetic and intellectual interests, for, as Justin Replogle has pointed out, 'Auden's use of the myth was determined by the philosophical beliefs on which his early poetry rests.'<sup>9</sup> By investigating these informing sources, it is possible to see Auden's development in terms of his involvement with current intellectual idols and the excitement they generate within his poetry. For example, the exotic panel of psychologists culled before 1933 introduces into his poetry a feverish dissection of psychic ills in which Auden urgently beseeches the individual to undertake his own quest for psychic health, establishing in the process his necessary 'Change of Heart.' As the 'thirties progress, Auden dabbles superficially in Marxism and at this point, the means to achieve the ends of the 'Quest' becomes the familiar 'Change of Environment' popularized by John Strachey in The Coming Struggle for Power.<sup>10</sup>

However, in discussing the poet's attitude towards his concept of the 'Quest,' it is necessary to view it as an extension of Auden's own search for an artistic identity during which the poet, with his consuming interest in psycho-analytical material, gives way to the Christian Healer whose abstract thought and generalized commentary transforms the earlier urgent probing of the areas of the unconscious. The essential change is from restlessness to stability, from a breathless energy to complacency,



from the issuing of urgent warnings to man to an acceptance of those very neuroses he had earlier denounced.

In the article on Auden's 'Gang Myth', published in 1962, Justin Replogle remarked that:

Something that resembles a quest is frequently undertaken by a hero or leader with a small following....<sup>11</sup>

Such a statement typifies the reaction of Auden's critics who appear unable to define fully the rich motif of the 'Quest'. It is an inability further seen in the work of Monroe K. Spears:

the individual is singled out for a terrifying responsibility, is required to leave his comfortable life for a dangerous mission... In the early verse, this pattern has no very definite conceptual meaning. The individual chosen has no special qualifications, is not a Hero; no distinction between the Average and the Exceptional is implied.<sup>12</sup>

Richard Hoggart also ignores the individual concerns in Auden's treatment of the 'Quest' and improvises a nebulous end:

...Quest is not undertaken for its own sake. That would be a romantic delusion, and Auden has never had much patience with the self-regarding romantic personality. The Quest is for order, for pattern and meaning, in life.<sup>13</sup>

Despite, however, critical generalizations with their necessary elements of truth, the major philosophical premiss underlying the motif of the 'Quest' is that each individual is responsible for creating a personal order out of a chaotic and decadent environment. It is this basic concept that unifies all Auden's work during the 'thirties. In the poet's delineation of this constant, each volume serves to emphasize a different aspect of the 'Quest' motif whilst stressing its relationship to the motif as the unifying structure. For this reason, I have chosen to

examine the volumes appearing in the 'thirties individually rather than by theme. In this way, Auden's subtle shifts of emphasis will reveal his developing intellectual concerns.

Randall Jarrell has stated that 'The basic structural picture (in Wittgenstein's sense) underlying these poems is that of the long struggle of genetic development, of the hard, blind journey of the creature or its kind.'<sup>14</sup> Poetically, this struggle is manifested in a journey which, under the conditions imposed upon him by a threatening, death-wishing society, Man is unable to complete. It is significant that in Poems, including the charade Paid on Both Sides, the journey is a simple projection of Auden's desire for such a Quest. The 'Quest' itself is never undertaken and the poetry reflects the urgency of Auden's warnings to the individual that he must prepare himself psychologically for the strenuous ordeals of a subsequent 'Quest.' In The Orators, and especially in the plays, the journey forms the backbone of the work. At no time, however, can the journey be brought to a successful ending. For example, as the Airman closes his diary full of frantic mental jottings, he is only on the point of actively commencing his personal 'quest.' Even in The Ascent of F6 where the journey does appear to have reached some conclusion in Ransom's embrace of his Mother on the summit of the mountain, it is merely the victory of the death-wish long dormant within him. It would then appear that the 'Quest' denies any final resolution, demanding a continuous seeking out during which Man will find himself. Contentment and complacency will only lead to Man's final spiritual dissolution. In The Dog beneath the Skin, Alan Norman's search for Francis, the missing heir, is only the preliminary stage of preparation for the true 'Quest.' This preliminary effort, which includes all those

false questings, described by the Airman in The Orators, is a process of purification, of cleansing the individual in readiness for the journey towards psychic health.

It is essential to understand that Auden's view of his world was satiric. In the tradition of the Satirist, particularly in the tradition of Swift and Butler, he relates his incisive observations one to another by utilizing the motif of the journey or 'Quest.' As in Swift's Gulliver's Travels and Butler's Erewhon, such a firm structural unity allows the artist time and confidence to probe society's flaws. Viewed allegorically, however, the journey or 'Quest' records the individual's development throughout his life and the development of Man as a species under the pressures of evolution. As a logical corollary to these latter points, the satirist employs the motif of the 'Quest' to examine the experience accumulating through such serpentine wanderings and to ascertain what profit has resulted.

The origins of the journey are obvious. The individual commences his at birth and takes the direction signposted by his parents. This statement helps us to comprehend the obsessive emphasis Auden attached to the great Oedipal Mother - 'the limiting matrix' of Look, Stranger! Mankind's journey grew from 'The barren spiritual marriage of stone and water,' through 'the undared ocean'<sup>15</sup> where the race developed a characteristic nobility and courage and on into the present generation. Such a development records the tottering moral stature of Man through to his immediate degeneracy.

In so allegorical a light, it is clear that the 'Quest' cannot reach a conclusion. If a conclusion is attempted, the 'Quest' results in failure - the death of the individual or the total disintegration of the social framework. And this is not the satirist's intention. For while

he employs the motif of the journey to examine Man's progress in History, the journey remains the allegorical projection of his hope and desire that Mankind continue to better its environment and the individual to expand the areas of his conscious mind.

In his delineation of the 'Quest' Auden addresses himself to Man as a psychoanalyst delving into the diseased psyche of a patient he is treating, particularly in Poems. Poetically, the images of this aspect of his work recur frequently in the figures of the Airman and the Hawk, both of whom see 'the one concentrated spot where beats the life-heart of our prey.'<sup>16</sup> In the period of youthful omniscience (before 1933), the psychic ideal towards which the individual is making his symbolic journey remains illdefined. Nevertheless, the urgency with which Man's static condition is declaimed by juxtaposition suggests a close association with the poet himself. In part, this results from Auden's sense of a developing responsibility towards his reader, demonstrated emphatically in his delineation of the 'Quest.' Primarily, the 'Quest' is unmediated but an important part of later 'Quests,' particularly those outlined in The Ascent of F6 and The Dog beneath the Skin, is the search for a perfect leader, a Truly Strong Man who will serve as psychic and social mediator between the individual and his final perfection. In understanding this, we are then prepared for Auden's subsequent conversion to Christianity where the poet's personal seeking out reaches some resolution.

The motif of the 'Quest' encourages a poetry of 'diagnosis' through which Auden seeks for the panacea to all Man's problems. It is a poetry of symptom and cure in which the poem becomes the warning instrument to a society threatened by insensitivity. As Stephen Spender said at the time:

Apart from the direct threat to freedom of expression, the writer is forced to realize

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that the liberal assumptions of progress and freedom which form the so respectable background of most bourgeois literature today, are being challenged by the violent and destructive methods of power politics. He must submit to this challenge, reconsider the moral assumptions that flow so easily into his writing, or come out with a new set of values.<sup>17</sup>

Auden's repeated use of the motif of the 'Quest' suggests the poet's concern with contemporary values. In the individual volumes, however, rather than formulating a 'new set of values', the poet preferred to castigate that of current England, imposing upon Man the knowledge of his individual responsibility in actively assessing and discarding the old morality. Any hints of the poet's promise for the future of the average Englishman must be gleaned from the two images of radical change in Auden's poetry - the conventional images of Spring and Dawn - which symbolize the destruction of the Old Order and Man's basic point of departure towards the New.

If these images represent stimuli for the Man on the 'Quest,' then War 'as the most obvious and most constant symbolic pattern in Auden's poetry'<sup>18</sup> provides the background. Indeed, the questing man is often conceived of as a trained spy of one army infiltrating the diseased trenches of the other. Basically, this background is 'an intensification of man's perennial situation of insecurity and danger,'<sup>19</sup> capturing both the poet's belligerent mood and the fearsome dangers he envisages for the individual undertaking the Quest. The cry for revolutionary zeal by which critics have conveniently labelled Auden a social poet, is, in fact, no more than a clarion call to the individual to accept change, danger, and an arduous existence as essential companions at the commencement of his journey. Like the soldiers who are their allegorical projections, the individuals who seek the ends of the 'Quest,' must develop a true

psychic discipline through a stringent self-appraisal. The route to this knowledge of oneself is strewn with obstacles each of which represents a possible false quest for the seeking man.

Thus, the journey, occasionally conceived of as a military advance against a fierce if disillusioned enemy, takes the individual away from the environment which was slowly, inexorably strangling his creativity. Whether the route passes through the dark realm of the unconscious or via the revolutionary chaos of an emerging state, its importance lies in the fact that it is leaving behind an area of destruction in which the individual formerly wallowed. This explains the importance of those scenes of industrial desolation so prevalent in the work of the Auden of the 'thirties. These scenes are no more than allegorical projections of the decadent psyche:

Hearing of harvests rotting in the valleys,  
 Seeing at end of street the barren mountains,  
 Round corners coming suddenly on water,  
 Knowing them shipwrecked who were launched for islands,  
 We honour founders of these starving cities  
 Whose honour is the image of our sorrow...<sup>20</sup>

This psychic decay is the direct result of Man's inability to respond adequately to the challenge of the continuous evolutionary pressures upon him. He has preferred the comparative safety of death, symbolically yearning, as Michael Ransom, for the mother-image. This mother-fixation reduces Man to the activity of a stagnant pond and it is only the violence of the previously mentioned change that can rouse him from his withdrawal from the real world. If the process of purification is completed successfully, Man, it can be assumed, may undertake the 'Quest' with some hope of triumph. However, for those depicted in process of journeying, Auden offers little hope. The innate corruption of society manifests itself in the individual's psychosomatic disease (Poem XXX) which renders him an

invalid and thus unable to cross into the land of the healthy, the realm of the unknown, like the Airman of The Orators and the numerous failures recorded in Poems. If the cleansing is thorough, the individual may appear to have rid himself of all latent neuroses. Nevertheless, the chances are that they will return at some point in his journey, causing him a nightmare existence and leading ultimately to a self-imposed destruction.

For the individual, the point of purification is the Test which I have detailed more fully in Chapter 1. This Test, a proving of Man's worthiness to undertake the 'Quest,' is far more important in the early 'thirties than the 'Quest' itself. The poems in this period are impetuous battle-cries to the searching Man as he prepares himself for his ensuing struggle. Basically, it is a contest which lies within him, as he attempts to conquer the inherent flaws in the realm of the conscious mind, already corrupted by Man's Parents and Teachers, the representatives of his super-ego. Poetically, this moment of truth and decision is represented by the image of the Frontier. 'The hero crosses or attempts to cross the border into the land of the healthy. He may fall short, a victim of his own fears: or he may succumb to temptations or the importunities of those who defend the sick society.'<sup>21</sup> It is only when this border is reached and crossed that the real 'Quest' for psychic health can commence. In this light, for example, The Orators does not define a 'Quest' at all. It exhorts the individual to undertake his personal psychic exploration by showing one totally diseased individual in the last stages of preparation before undertaking the Test. Through 'The Journal of the Airman' we realize the hopelessness of his predicament. It is yet another testament of despair.

Although Auden stresses Man's complete responsibility for his own quest, it is the power of love in the world which serves both as motivation for the individual and as the psychic ideal already noted. As the 'thirties close, the power of love is the 'Quest' in itself, serving not merely as means to an end but as end in itself. As Hoggart has said:

Auden's spiritual history is the history of his growing realization of how much this change of heart implied, and just what 'the place of Love, the Good Place' might mean.<sup>22</sup> /

In attempting to define this activating concept of Love, Auden alters considerably in his attitude towards the Quest-motif. The development throughout the 'thirties is from a Love, basically the Freudian Eros, in which Man can find gratification for the instinctual drives he would otherwise be compelled to repress. As the work of the 'thirties progress, this original concept is seen as a selfish and isolating factor in human relationships, leading to islands of loneliness. Gradually, the new Love develops as a social and unifying power which allows for complete communication among Men. After 1940, Auden embraces the Christian Love which he has carefully worked towards throughout the period, particularly in the numerous prayers addressed ostensibly and sometimes playfully to the personification of Love, often God himself.

In the early verse, Auden spends vast resources on this concept of Love, not in defining its ideal constituency but in attacking its perversions within society. Basically, Auden stresses its real strength in personal and social relationships. It is not a romantic or ideal love. It is not to be considered a mere fabrication for

...the word is love  
Surely one fearless kiss would cure  
The million fevers, a stroking brush  
The insensitive refuse from the burning core.



In this poem, published in Look, Stranger! in 1936,<sup>23</sup> Auden gently mocks the narrow and restricted conception of Love he himself had held only six years previously. But the importance of Love in this early verse cannot be overstated. It is the essential motivation for the Man on the Quest, being in deadly conflict with the destructive demands of the death-wish. In one sense, the Quest is essential for the Man who feels the stirring of this love within him. If he fails to respond to the energetic impulses deep inside and represses these instinctual demands, he perverts his creativity into forces which work against him. In this way, the Airman of The Orators is overwhelmed by those pressures for which he can find no outlet, and eventually he moves to self-destruction.

Throughout the period of the 'thirties but particularly in The Ascent of F6, Auden examines the force and the quality of the Love which activates the seeking individual. If it is inherently corrupt, it results in his death, as Ransom ultimately returns to his Mother, the symbolic representation of the death-wish. Emanating from this examination of Love, Man's psychic ideal and the effective healer of Man's diseased condition, is the poet's probing of all Man's leaders, both political and social. The damage they suffer through Auden's satirical incisions depends upon the extent to which they have perverted the potential for Love within them. For example, his emphasis on the Capitalist Leaders, that quasi-fascist clique who control Pressan Ambo in The Dog Beneath the Skin, is particularly vicious, for they have discarded Love for a corrupting physicality which renders them impotent against the incursions of the death-wish. Look, Stranger! owes its very importance to its delineation of somewhat differing concepts of Love in the one volume. Its theme, as Monroe K. Spears has pointed out, is that 'our troubles,

public and private, result from a failure of love, that the problem is to unlearn hatred and learn love...'<sup>24</sup> 'To unlearn hatred and learn love' is Auden's own phrase<sup>25</sup> and describes his concept of a Quest through which Man learns to love free from the debilitating hatred so prevalent in Society, particularly in those infirm areas of the conscious corrupted by the unthinking control of the Authorities. In his determination to force this idea upon his audience, Auden moves to the Theatre in collaboration with Christopher Isherwood. Here the ideal of a parable art has a contemporary confirmation in the work of Bertholt Brecht in Germany where the theatre becomes a didactic instrument. In these dramatic surroundings, the motif of the 'Quest' is used most effectively to stimulate Man to activity, to attempt to change the slow death he endures in contemporary society.

Through Love, Man will achieve his personal quest by creating out of the destructive demands both within him and outside in Society, a totally constructive force which, in the early poetry before 1933, would see Man realizing his full potential. With no distinction made between the average and the exceptional Man, Auden demands a harmonious interrelationship of Man to Man, reminiscent of D.H. Lawrence. But it lies within the individual to realize fully the importance of this love by striving for it constantly throughout his life. In this broader sense, the Quest will involve an activity requiring no less than a lifetime to fulfill. It is now somewhat easier to appreciate the character of the failures who attempt the Quest and understand why so many are to be found in Auden's work in this period. It is also possible to understand the poet's concern with Youth, for, primarily, they represent the moment of Man's least resistance against the incursions of the death-wish stimulated artificially

by the Parents and Teachers, the debilitating super-ego. The ironic sorrow Auden wrings from the young stems from his understanding that it is they who have the greatest chance of successfully completing the Quest and yet it is they who are totally unprepared to commence. This explains Auden's concern for the 'ruined boys' of Poems who are addressed in The Orators by hysterical schoolmaster figures demanding activity. The natural result of the poet's urgency over this stage of Man's development lies in the Ode to John Warner, the fifth ode in the Third Book of The Orators. In the poem, Auden's concern escapes the ironic control in which he masks his feelings.

'Before 1933 nearly everything Auden wrote reflected his totally non-Marxist belief that a sick society could be cured only by removing the psychological illness of individuals.'<sup>26</sup> In Poems and in The Orators, Auden sees the Quest in terms of a journey through the uncharted regions of the unconscious, in a continual session of self-psycho-analysis. Stimulated by the work of Freud, Groddeck and Lane, the poet attributes Man's essential decay to certain innate, destructive tendencies which manifest themselves in purposive neuroses. The delineation of the quest is in terms of a change to psychic health where each individual, regardless of rank, takes personal responsibility for his own psychic hygiene. Gradually, in the 'thirties, Auden argues that Man must reject the root causes of his inner sickness by personally refusing to acknowledge his social leaders, under whose guiding power Man has been led astray. It is significant that this latter point is made most emphatically in the last play he wrote before leaving for America. On the Frontier is a play without energy, without the intellectual excitement Auden usually generates within his work. Although Auden maintains an academic interest in the

motif of the 'Quest', maturity or perhaps a kind of complacency or both, have deprived his writing of that feeling of urgency he had imparted to readers of his earlier poetry.

Auden's development of the Quest-motif through the 'thirties is integrally related to his personal search for artistic identity. As an artist he looked for a 'verbal contraption,' an 'artistic fabrication' that would present a faithful analogy to the Good Life and the Good Place he had offered as nebulous climaxes to the individual's seeking out. As Auden himself has stated:

Every poem...is an attempt to present an analogy to that paradisaical state in which Freedom and Law, System and Order are united in harmony. Every good poem is very nearly a Utopia. Again, an analogy, not an imitation; the harmony is possible and verbal only.<sup>27</sup>

In the earliest work, Auden's basic poetic tone is that of the urgent warning to mankind to undertake a quest and to beware false prophets expounding false ideals which tempt Man from his endless seeking. In consequence, the poetry is vital but obscure, directed towards a group of initiated intellectuals who share Auden's own knowledge and love of that personal mythology Christopher Isherwood has described in his autobiographical novel, Lions and Shadows. In the later work the tone changes to a calmer, more lucid style which culminates in the theatrical parables Auden wrote in collaboration with Christopher Isherwood. The effect on the quest-motif of Auden's attempts to reach as large an audience as possible, is to reject the breathless vitality of the earlier warnings and to examine with an intellectual hardness the implications of the rich motif he has been using to unify his work. At this point Auden commences an examination of those spiritual and social leaders he has previously

satirized. It is the moment of his realization of artistic responsibility towards his readers.

In his later delineation of the 'Quest,' Auden's developing involvement with it manifests itself in his concern for England and his growing relationship to a country which has provided a consistent back-cloth to the peregrinations of his questing individual. His poems record the specificity of his physical position as they relate it constantly to the larger social flaws in the nation. With Auden's growing concern for the state of England comes his implied panacea for 'this country of ours where nobody is well.'<sup>28</sup> This panacea of Love is exemplified in the work and lives of those friends to whom Auden dedicates his individual volumes.<sup>29</sup> It is significant that the images of hope which appear scantily throughout the poet's early canon become associated with the mysterious appearance of one of these close friends. Here the most obvious examples lie in the homage paid to Rex Warner's son, John, at whose birth Auden recorded his own ironic vision of the future, and the tribute paid to Christopher Isherwood to whom Auden addressed his most compelling words on artistic responsibility. Without calling the clique, as visualized by Auden, a community, it is significant that in a period of supposed Marxism, his solutions for the final fulfillment of the Quest are drawn far from any sympathies with the common people. Only in the Truly Strong Men amongst his friends - in a friendship which is almost an image in Auden's poetry - is there a suggestion of the successful completion of the Quest.

Northrop Frye, in the Anatomy of Criticism,<sup>30</sup> unravels the complexity which surrounds the 'Quest' as a literary motif based on a popular myth. He divides the 'Quest' into three distinct stages. The first stage is AGON or the stage of the perilous journey corresponding in Auden's work

to the Hero's descent from the mountains of his isolation to the valleys of stagnation and despair which serve as battleground for the second stage. This is PATHOS or the stage of the crucial struggle in which Auden's Hero must defeat those elements within, those latent neuroses which threaten to break out and destroy him. In the poet's treatment of the myth, this second stage of the journey is represented by the 'Test.' The last stage involves the exaltation of the Hero or ANAGNORISIS even if he does not survive the conflict. This stage corresponds to the glorification of the failures who abound throughout Auden's work in the 'thirties.

The central element of this 'Quest is conflict and it assumes two main characters - a hero analogous to the mythical Messiah or deliverer and an enemy analogous to the demonic powers of a lower world. Such a struggle takes place in the real world of Man and is characterized by the cyclical movement of nature. As in Poem XVI of Poems, the enemy is associated with winter and the accompanying darkness, confusion and sterility of the conventional mind. In this same poem, the hero is linked directly to spring, dawn, order, fertility, vigour and youth.

Frye cites as the reward for the 'Quest' a bride:

This bride-figure is ambiguous:  
her psychological connection with  
the mother in an Oedipus fantasy is  
more insistent than in comedy.<sup>31</sup>

The bride-figure is often found in a perilous place, inaccessible to all but the most fearless of champions. Thus, in a further statement of Man's failure, Auden, in Poem XVI of Poems, sees his hero:

deep in clear lake  
The lolling bridegroom, beautiful, there.

And, in a supposedly successful conclusion to a 'Quest,' Michael Ransom

embraces his Mother on the summit of F6 - a mother who wears the horrific gowns of a new bride. Such allegorical portraits of continual failure find their parallel in Frye's discussion of Dante's 'Quest' in the

Commedia:

The human nature of Dante's quest is established by the fact that he is unable to overcome or even to face the monsters who confront him at the beginning: his quest thus begins in a retreat from the conventional knight-errant role.<sup>32</sup>

In conclusion, Frye says of the quest-romance itself that it is:

the search of the libido or desiring self for a fulfillment that will deliver it from the anxieties of reality but will still contain that reality.<sup>33</sup>

Auden's poetry, often controlled by his ironic vision of society, attacks the prevailing intelligence of that segment of society of which he is a member. As the Airman of The Orators, he may understand the need for change, but he remains partially in love with the decadence he attacks.

By looking closely at the motif of the 'Quest' as it unifies each volume of Auden's work during the 'thirties, I intend to trace the poet's changing attitude towards it and attempt to uncover an organizational impulse deep within the poetry which holds the restless energy of the verse in tight control. For this purpose, I shall refer to the following volumes, devoting one chapter each to Auden's Poetry and his Plays:

Poems (Basically, the 1933 volume with reference to the editions of 1928 and 1930), (2 Nov., 1933)

The Orators ( 19 May, 1932)

The Dance of Death ( 9 November, 1933)

The Dog beneath the Skin ( 30 May, 1935)

The Ascent of F6 (24 September, 1936)

Look, Stranger! (22 October, 1936)

On the Frontier (27 October, 1938)<sup>34</sup>

These main texts will be supplemented by reference to the numerous, uncollected poems published during the period and to set-pieces such as 'Spain'; Letters from Iceland (1937); Journey to a War (1939); and Another Time (1940). What I am primarily concerned with, however, is Auden's changing poetic and intellectual interests as manifested in his varying treatment of the quest-motif before his emigration to America in 1939. The very Englishness of his verse and the natural relevance of England to his own temporal and spatial identity is peculiarly ignored by critics. I intend to show that Auden's emigration to America marked the personal culmination of the advice he had been giving to his countrymen over the preceding decade.



## NOTES TO THE INTRODUCTION

- 1 Larkin, The Spectator, p.104.
- 2 Leavis, rev. of W.H. Auden, Look Stranger! (London, 1936), Scrutiny, V (December 1936, 323-327).
- 3 Justin Replogle's 'The Gang Myth in Auden's Early Poetry,' JEGP, LXI (July, 1962), 481-95, has done much to dispel critical bewilderment over the seemingly meaningless characters and objects recurring frequently in the early poetry of W.H. Auden.
- 4 W.H. Auden, Writers and Their Work, No.93 (London, 1957), p.9.
- 5 The Poetry of W.H. Auden, (New York, 1963), p.241.
- 5a See, for example, Richard Hoggart's observations on the early journey in W.H. Auden, (London, 1957), p.9.
- 6 Louise Bogan, Shenandoah, Vol. XVIII, No.2. (Winter, 1967), 45. This issue of the Periodical was in commemoration of the sixtieth birthday of W.H. Auden.
- 7 Auden, (London, 1964).
- 8 'Dominant Symbols of Auden's Poetry,' Sewanee Review, LIX (1951), 392-425. M.K. Spears noted that War; Paysage Moralise; Love (Eros, Logos and Agape); The City, Psychosomatic Disease and the Quest dominated the image-clusters of Auden's poetry.
- 9 'The Gang Myth,' p.485.
- 10 Nevertheless, in delineating Auden's development in this way, it is imperative to understand that for the individual his 'change of heart' depended on his own defiance of the authoritative environment which was the original cause of inner decadence. Because of the educative factors of Man's parents and Teachers, the gulf between a 'Change of heart' and a 'change of environment' involved Auden in but a slight change of emphasis.
- 11 'The Gang Myth,' p.483.
- 12 The Poetry of W.H. Auden, p.138.
- 13 W.H. Auden, p.9.
- 14 'Freud to Paul: The Stages of Auden's Ideology.' Partisan Review, XII (1945), 437.
- 15 Poem I of Look, Stranger!.

- 16 D.H. Lawrence, Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious and Fantasia of the Unconscious, (New York, 1962), p.103.
- 17 'Politics and Literature in 1933,' Bookman, LXXXV (1933), 147.
- 18 'The Dominant Symbols,' 393.
- 19 loc. cit.
- 20 Poem VII of Look, Stranger! First printed in Criterion, July, 1933. Reprinted in the Collected Poems as 'Paysage Moralise.'
- 21 'The Gang Myth,' 485.
- 22 Auden: An Introductory Essay, (London, 1951), p.145.
- 23 Poem XXX. It was first printed in New Verse, October-November 1935, under the title 'To a Writer on his Birthday.' It is addressed to Christopher Isherwood.
- 24 'The Dominant Symbols,' 404.
- 25 The phrase is taken from Auden's essay 'Psychology and Art' which Geoffrey Grigson included in The Arts Today (London, 1935).
- 26 'The Gang Myth,' 485.
- 27 Quoted by Barbara Everett, Auden, p.63.
- 28 The Orators (London, 1932), p.8.
- 29 Poems (1930 and 1933) were dedicated to Christopher Isherwood; The Orators (1932) to Stephen Spender; The Dance of Death (1933) to Robert Medley and Rupert Doone; The Dog Beneath the Skin (1935) to Robert Moody; The Desert of F6 to John Bicknell Auden; Look, Stranger! to Erika Mann and On Frontier to Benjamin Britten.
- 30 The Anatomy of Criticism, (Princeton, 1957). See, in particular, pp.187-90, 192-96, 316-24.
- 31 Frye, p.193.
- 32 Frye, pp.317-18.
- 33 Frye, p.193.
- 34 All the editions used are the original English editions and I have retained the appropriate English titles to avoid confusion with their American counterparts.

CHAPTER ONE

Poems; The Orators;  
Look, Stranger!

(i)

In the poetry written during the 'thirties, Auden was preoccupied with the psychic condition of his fellow-men. This deep concern sprang from his activities as a satirist, for, as Henry Fielding once wrote:

The satirist is to be regarded as our  
physician, not our enemy<sup>1</sup>

and the poetry of Auden records such a diagnostic eye. Having probed Man's basic weakness, the poet prescribes a course of treatment. This treatment is the direct result of his consuming interest in psychoanalysis. Man's road to the recovery of his former psychic health is allegorically drawn in the image of the 'Quest.'

In his delineation of the 'Quest', which structures his analyses, Auden made sustained use of Freudian psychoanalysis and its derivatives, in particular four critics of Man's present psychological disorder - Freud<sup>2</sup> himself, D.H. Lawrence,<sup>3</sup> Homer Lane<sup>4</sup> and Georg Groddeck.<sup>5</sup> In a synthesis of their findings which retains their imagery and tone of exhortation, Auden attempts a poetic parallel to their investigations into the psyche of the individual. The results of these psychic perceptions manifest themselves in Poems where the poet's desire for the rehabilitation of his fellow-man is allegorized by the image of the 'Quest' which unifies the volume. Nevertheless, the energy behind the 'Quest' stems directly

from the informing sources of psychoanalysis.

Freud's conception of the mind as a 'map'<sup>6</sup> outlining the three territories of the Id, the Ego and the Super-Ego constitutes the allegorical backcloth to the Quest.<sup>7</sup> The essential conflict which motivates the Wanderer in his spiritual pilgrimage is here depicted in two ways. Firstly, the primary, instinctive demands of the Id ruled by the 'pleasure principle' is seen by Freud to struggle extensively with the 'reality principle' which activates the Ego and the auxiliary Super-Ego. Man externalizes the inner conflict in purposive neuroses by which the Ego defends itself against the excessive demands of the Id. Secondly, conflict is developed between Man's instinctual drives - the Life instincts (Eros) which Auden groups under Love, and the Destructive instincts (Death). Modern Man, his conscious behaviour a repressed reflection of his true nature, is attracted by the temptations of Death reflected in 'inertia.'<sup>8</sup>

The disciplined analysis which characterizes the work of Freud is extended by Lawrence into a dogmatic assertion of Man's frustrated libidinal nature. In his prose treatises Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious and its successor Fantasia of the Unconscious, Lawrence investigates the transference of control within the individual from the Lumbar to the Thoracic ganglion. The primary centre of dynamic activity, located in the Solar Plexus and acknowledging the instinctive life, is seen by Lawrence to have been renounced for a new source of authoritative control from the Thoracic ganglion. The resolution of this conflict manifests itself in an individual overwhelmed by 'idea-driven control.'<sup>9</sup> In Modern Man, the mind - 'a gangrene'<sup>10</sup> - denies true representation to inner needs and results in his repression.

The ideal mind, the brain, has become the vampire of modern life, sucking up the blood and the life. There is hardly an original thought or original utterance possible for us. All is sickly repetition of stale, stale ideas.<sup>11</sup>

Christopher Isherwood, in his autobiographical 'novel' Lions and Shadows, paraphrases the doctrinal debt Auden owes to Homer Lane:

There is only one sin: disobedience to the inner law of our own nature.<sup>12</sup>

The disobedience manifests itself in psycho-genetic disease, the responsibility for which rests not so much with the individual as with his parents and teachers. Essentially Lane's attitude, as quoted by Isherwood, is as follows:

If the conscious mind were really the controlling factor, God would remain in prison, the world would become a bedlam in a few generations, and the race automatically die out. So diseases are neuroses come to kill off the offenders or bring them to their senses. Diseases are therefore only warning symptoms of a sickness of the soul; they are manifestations of God -- and those who try to 'cure' them without first curing the soul are only serving the Devil.<sup>13</sup>

Georg Groddeck's Book of the It restates the essential conflict existing within the individual. Personifying Freud's id as the It and the force of the Ego by the figure of the Mother, Groddeck sees frustration as the base of Man's psychological disorder. Repression takes physical shape once again:

Thus extravagance is changed to diarrhoea; parsimony into constipation; the desire to give birth into body pains. The sexual act appears in dancing, melody, drama, or builds itself up, for all men to see, in a church with a projecting male tower and the mysterious womb of the vault, or shows itself in the tender of an engine or the

rhythmic stamping of the road plasterer,  
or the swing of the woodcutter's axe.<sup>14</sup>

The Oedipus Complex, the primary cause of Man's restraint, leads to an unnatural craving for Death. Man's emotional life 'reaches after this mother-*imago* as long as he lives, reaches so longingly, that the yearning for sleep, for rest, for protection, for death, may well be regarded as a yearning for the mother-*imago*....'<sup>15</sup>

Auden, through his informing sources, sees Modern Man in a perpetual state of turmoil. The Ego, the custodian of the values of Society, is constantly called upon to repress the exertive demands of the inner man. The loss of this instinctual life, glimmerings of which persist only in the Unconscious, result in the diseased condition of Man, becoming part of the 'filthy swarm in the recesses of the soul, the poisonous swarm which corrupts the unconscious.'<sup>16</sup> Lawrence views the resolution of conflict as 'the nullification of all living activity, the substitution of mechanism, and all the resultant horrors of ennui, ecstasy, neurasthenia, and a collapsing psyche.'<sup>17</sup> However, the work of the psychoanalysts does not end in a statement but in an exhortation. It is in this address to the individual to look deeply within himself for a cure that the primary motivating drive for the 'Quest' is found. Significantly, the dominant force of Auden's early poetry is that of urgent encouragement.

In his essay 'Psychology and Art', Auden follows Freud in tracing and emphasizing the parallel between Art and Psychology:

The task of psychology, or art for that matter, is not to tell people how to behave, but by drawing their attention to what the impersonal conscious is trying to tell them, and by increasing their knowledge of good and evil, to render them better able to choose, to become increasingly morally responsible to their destiny.<sup>18</sup>

What Freud suggests, and what Auden restates in Poems, is the individual's need for greater self-knowledge through a more stringent self-examination.

Lawrence's disgust for Man's present condition is tempered by his optimism that 'nothing will ever quench humanity and the human potentiality to evolve something magnificent out of a renewed chaos.'<sup>19</sup> He urges Modern Man to break out of their conditioned responses, to plunge fearlessly into the recesses of their soul to find their true selves. His exhortation to the individual is for a purpose. He believes 'We have got to get back to the great purpose of manhood, a passionate unison in actively making a world.'<sup>20</sup> In this way Man may witness once more the evolving of 'the great spontaneous gestures of life.'<sup>21</sup>

Georg Groddeck and Homer Lane encourage the individual to examine himself, thus reiterating Freud's point that man's first duty is total self-knowledge: Groddeck, for example, believes:

that the essential thing is that one should begin with oneself, that one should first look into one's own nooks and corners, one's own cellars and dining-rooms; that one should first have the courage to see oneself, one's own vileness, or as I prefer to say, one's own human nature. Whoever does not know that he himself has stood behind every hedge and every door, and whoever cannot say what sort of muck heaps lie behind such a hedge, and how many heaps he has himself put there, such an one will not get far. The first requirement then is honesty, honesty to oneself.<sup>22</sup>

This 'honesty to oneself' is only attainable by an investigation of the realm of the unconscious. In a tone of characteristic enthusiasm, Groddeck encourages the individual to rise to this greater knowledge:

Come then, my pretty Dr. Faust, the mantle is spread for the flight. Forth into the Unknown....<sup>23</sup>

This urgent call to Man, amplified in the work of the psychoanalysts, finds reinforcement in another of Auden's beliefs. Just as Man is



paralysed by mental processes and thus unable to commit himself to action, so he is unable to respond correctly to the force of evolution which changes each generation. This further conflict in which man is engaged has two proposed sources. Joseph Warren Beach, in The Making of the Auden Canon, detects the influence of Gerald Heard whose argument is summarized by G. Lowes Dickinson, in his introduction to The Ascent of Humanity:

...there begins to emerge a new form of consciousness. It is above the individual as the earlier form was below him. Henceforth it begins to be the business of man not to acquire but to understand by a cooperative effort. The age of science has dawned and at its dawn we stand. The problem before us is whether the higher consciousness thus emerging will be able to control the lower, that is bursting all about us, with the cry of individuals newly released for the fruits that have turned so sour in the mouths of their predecessors.<sup>24</sup>

A vague recollection of a remark made by Lenin to the effect that 'in the most general sense Marxism is a theory of evolution'<sup>25</sup> leads Randall Jarrell to see this evolutionary pressure upon Man in terms of a political identity. Whatever the source of this pressure, however, it merely adds to the urgent necessity within the individual to adapt his personal needs to a changing environment.<sup>26</sup>

Consequently, the conception of this psychological investigation in terms of a 'Quest' underlines the two primary needs of the Modern Man - the need to change and the need for activity as the means to that end. Nevertheless, as I shall point out later in this chapter, Poems simply reflects Auden's concern with Modern Man's psychic condition and his 'Quest' represents that concern. The 'Quest' itself is never undertaken.

The actual journey suggested by Poems is an allegory of the individual's search into his soul to discover the courage to attempt the real 'Quest' into the realms of the Unconscious. It is this suppression, both in Poems and later in The Orators, that lends the tone of impatience and vitality to Auden's early poetry. In this light, the 'Quest' within the mind of the individual is for a decision which will commit him to an intense self-dissection. The moment of decision is represented by the image of the Frontier and the crossing of this natural barrier is 'The Test'<sup>27</sup> which, as Christopher Isherwood has pointed out, characterized the work of many of his contemporaries. In his autobiographical novel, Lions and Shadows, Isherwood tells how he once planned to write a novel with this theme:

'The truly strong man,' calm, balanced, aware of his strength, sits drinking in the bar; it is not necessary for him to try and prove to himself that he is not afraid, by joining the Foreign Legion, seeking out the most dangerous wild animals in the remotest tropical jungles, leaving his comfortable home in a snowstorm to climb the impossible glacier. In other words, The Test exists only for the truly weak man: no matter whether he passes it or whether he fails, he cannot alter his essential nature. The Truly Strong Man travels straight across the broad America of normal life, taking always the direct reasonable route. But 'America' is just what the truly weak man, the neurotic hero, dreads. And so, with immense daring, with an infinitely greater expenditure of nervous energy, money, time, physical and mental resources, he prefers to attempt the huge northern circuit, the laborious, terrible north-west passage, avoiding life; and his end, if he does not turn back, is to be lost for ever in the blizzard and the ice.<sup>28</sup>

For Auden's neurotic individual this 'Test' signifies an assessment of his potential ability to Change. Prior to coming to this barrier, the individual walks into the wilderness to contemplate, to regroup his inner

resources. He is seen by Auden as a Christ in poem 3, or a St. John the Baptist in poem 6, renouncing the fleshly world for an ascetic existence. In attempting 'the crucial test' of poem 4, the fleshly world is an inexhaustible supply of temptation.

Primarily, the 'Test' involves an ability to overcome the temptations of a state of mind complacently composed, knowing intimately the realm of consciousness it holds and content to restrain its activities within that realm. The stagnation which results from this complacency characterizes the group known as 'They.' The individual's psyche is part of that general degeneracy Auden labels 'the enemy' Such personal stagnation can only be removed by exploration of the previously uncharted regions of the mind.

In Poems, Auden sees this state of mind reflected in that social class of which he was a member and which, for convenience, critics have called the Bourgeoisie. However, as Justin Replogle has pointed out, this sense of a cultural decline results not from an adherence to Capitalist ideology but 'to an inadequate development of the instinctual life.'<sup>29</sup> The reflection of inner disease manifests itself in these socialized forces<sup>30</sup> who reside on the 'shore.' The significant security implied by this remark is reinforced by lines in Paid on Both Sides, the literary charade included in both 1930 and 1933 editions of Poems, where the New Order is expected to... 'wear down to stumps old systems/which await/The last transgression of the sea.' In Poems VII and VIII, the voice of the enemy is heard. As a personification of a stagnant state of mind, it declares to the individual the necessity for maintaining a static position. It is a clear warning:

On neither side let foot slip over  
 Invading Always, exploring Never,  
 For this is hate and this is fear.

On narrowness stand, for sunlight is  
 Brightest only on surfaces;  
 No anger, no traitor, but peace.

This psychic Establishment is grotesquely caricatured in Poem XII.

Spoken by a diseased but amiable Enemy in dry, logistical language the poem turns on the ironic use of 'Living.' Life, to this Enemy, based on certainty and routine, involves 'Our honour at least,/And a reasonable chance of retaining/Our faculties to the last.' In their last stages of decay before total extinction, they retain confidence in 'Our old right to abuse.' A bitter description of a mind relaxing with the status quo is seen in Poem XXII:

Smokeless chimneys, damaged bridges, rotting wharves  
 and choked canals,  
 Tramlines buckled, smashed trucks lying on their side  
 across the rails;

Power-stations locked, deserted, since they drew the boiler  
 fires;  
 Pylons fallen or subsiding, trailing dead high-tension  
 wires;

Head-gears gaunt on grass-grown pit-banks, seams aban-  
 doned years ago;  
 Drop a stone and listen for its splash in flooded dark below.

The paysage moralise, however, is important not only in its statement of irrevocable decay. Its image of abandoned industrial workings suggests a once productive force which has gradually fallen into disrepair. The reasons for that dissolution are essential knowledge to the Wanderer for they represent another obstacle to the successful completion of the Test.

Of central importance to the successful completion of the Test and the means to recovery of the individual is Auden's conception of Love, his panacea. Despite critical analyses of its constituency, Love remains

an inexplicable creative force in Man. Hoggart, for example, sees a debt to many of Auden's psychic subscribers in the composition of the word. The important remark remains his own:

Love is the source of all that is 'Lucid'  
and 'civilized'...in human societies; it  
encourages -- and for this Auden always  
finds a landscape image -- a 'natural  
climate,' 'the birth of a natural order.' 31

Certainly, Love has universal application 'operating not only in obvious sexual relations but throughout all private and social behaviour,'<sup>32</sup> and its perversion is the main characteristic of the 'Enemy.' Thus, the scene of desolation in Poem XI is the allegorical representation of their negative and sterile attitude towards the only means to their salvation. It is, in fact, through negative definitions of Love that we can understand the energies within the individual which it involves.

Primarily, Love demands action. Unlike the Moon which is evoked as a symbol of an idealized and therefore false love, it necessitates the active participation of the individual. The warnings popularized by Auden's reviewers are thus urgent counsel to questing individuals to beware the incorrect approach. In Poem XIX, Auden cites examples of comic-book heroes who found success in face of great opposition. The danger lies in believing that what the 'silly fool, the youngest son and the orphan' achieved with such comparative ease, can be attained by the individual simply by reading about them. It requires a total involvement to prevent Love becoming 'love in love/And tales in tales/Where no-one fails.'

As the exemplar for a correct attitude towards Love, Auden stresses the 'Ancestors,':

Who brought and taught  
Unusual images  
And new tunes to old cottages (Poem XXI)

This ancestor-worship reaches its fullest explanation in the Airman's Uncle Harry in Book II of The Orators. In Poems, they are cited to throw into relief the shallow borrowings of contemporary Man as in Poem XXI where cultural decline is attributed to succeeding generations who fail to respond in new and healthy ways to the demands of life. Here the Ancestors who established their new regime by diligence and activity are followed by those who, refusing to acknowledge danger, repress their fear until '...in the night/Is waking fright.' Like the Moon, the example of the Ancestors has been so idealized that it can no longer have a function in everyday life. What was a way of life, a 'livelihood' has degenerated:

Is tallness, strongness  
Words and longness,  
All glory and all story  
Solemn and not so good

What Auden denies in Poems is the 'strangely exciting lie' that love operates mysteriously and what is emphasized is love's practical operation at all levels of Man's activity. In this sense, it comes closest to the sexual energy of the Freudian Eros. Whatever its composition, however, it is Love which must recover 'What has been dark and rich and warm all over' (Poem XXVII).

In this light, we are better able to understand the group anonymously classified as 'They.' Subject to perversions of Love, they have renounced their sexual energy by repressing it and this has led to:

...the warning from the iron wood  
...the inertia of the buried: (Poem IV)

Inertia, personified in Poems as one who accepts all meaningless conventions, begets the Death-Wish. The individual, paralysed by a desire for death, stagnates and illustrates the decay and corruption which abound in the

mental landscape Auden evokes. Thus in Poem I, in which the Individual is warned by his psychic ideal, the Test is seen as an ability to reject the confinement of the conscious areas of the mind which can only be part of 'Death's happiness.' This call for expansion finds literary manifestation in the motif of the 'Quest.'

Poem XII typifies the 'Enemy' mentality. The irony which controls the movement of the poem emphasizes the pathos with which the enemy are to be regarded. Auden locates this state of mind socially in his own sphere of Upper Middle-Class England. The poet's ironic control of their dispassionate language belies their distortion of human beings, their murder of spontaneity in 'mere boys.' Sterile and belligerent, with no concrete objectives in mind, all they can look ahead to is

Our honour at least,  
And a reasonable chance of retaining  
Our faculties to the last.

It is interesting that none of the individuals in Poems are successful candidates for the 'Quest.' Their soliloquies are statements of failure as they feel within themselves the unmistakable stirrings of inherited disease. In Poem IX, this disease is accentuated by the form of the poem which parodies the popular song. Here Auden depicts the hopelessness of any action by reaffirming the Mother-fixation and the inexorable process of evolution at work within the individual. He is consequently reduced to asking unanswerable questions:

What's the good of going to Wales?  
Here am I, here are you:  
But what does it mean? What are we going to do?

His failure emphasizes within him the aridity of Life:

I've come a very long way to prove  
No land, no water, and no love.

This sense of ineradicable disease characterizes many of the individual poems in the collection. What gives Poem XXII its authority is the speaker's understanding of his own predicament and his attempt to communicate that knowledge to his fellow-men. The poem also restates many of the points already proposed in this Chapter. The first section returns to the allegorized landscape in which a new generation has failed to respond to the challenge of a new life. The second section attempts to find the root causes of this decay and blames 'the healers' who, ignoring Activity which would lead to an invigorating 'Quest' for psychic health, have confined Man within the limitations of his intellect.

These who have betrayed us nicely while we took  
them to our rooms.

The example of Parents, who, invariably, are 'bad' ancestors, is also tainted with guilt. The speaker's warning to his fellow-men rejects both ways in which their influence could be a danger to the Individual:

Perfect pater. Marvellous mater. Knock the critic down  
who dares --  
Very well, believe it, copy, till your hair is white as theirs.

Yours you say were parents to avoid, avoid then if you  
please  
Do the reverse on all occasions till you catch the same  
disease.

In this society, the values of which are completely inverted, those who were in a position to help have been banished:

Lawrence was brought down by smut-hounds, Blake went  
dotty as he sang,  
Homer Lane was killed in action by the Twickenham  
Baptist gang.

As the poem draws to its conclusion, it generates an increasing urgency. The speaker, realizing in vain the proximity of Death, proclaims a warning remarkably similar to the closing lines of Lawrence's Fantasia of the Unconscious:



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.

Lawrence had earlier said:

But still - we MIGHT live, mightn't we?  
For heaven's sake answer plainly 'No', if you feel like  
it. No good temporizing.<sup>33</sup>

Knowledge of their internal decay dominates the individuals who undertake the Quest. In Poem XV, the 'Trained spy' is quickly seduced by the temptation of a static mind and falls into slothful ease which, aggravated by nightmare, leads inevitably to Death. Poem XI, however, makes it clear that the failure of the individual stems directly from a wrong approach to Love. The latter section of the poem is, indeed, a strong warning to those who would embrace a false Love to remain within the areas of the mind with which they are most familiar. Outside, the dangers are numerous and ubiquitous for 'This land, cut off, will not communicate.'

In an attempt to synthesize the many strands of the 'Quest' and to show their concrete operation within Poems, I shall now examine in some detail Poem XVI, probably the key to the volume of thirty poems. Its title in the Collected Shorter Poems (1950) is '1929' and in its image of revolutionary change it owes much to Yeats' 'Easter, 1916.'<sup>34</sup>

Poem XVI, divided into four sections with each section approximating a season of the year, opens at Easter -- the prelude to Spring, season of change. '...on the arm/A fresh hand with fresh power.' Despite the tone of hope and optimism, Death remains 'the necessary condition' of change. And the psychic reformation demanded will lead to pain and sadness for the common man:

But thinking so I came at once  
Where solitary man sat weeping on a bench,  
Hanging his head down, with his mouth distorted  
Helpless and ugly as an embryo chicken.

This 'Everyman', unable to relinquish all he has known, looks back nostalgically and is immediately committed to the Death-wish. It is significant then that the final image in the first section is one of destruction as '...on the public ground/Lay fallen bicycles like huddled corpses:'

The second section introduces the individual who, desperately needing change within his stagnant psyche, undertakes the 'Quest' for reform. The means to this end is allegorically represented by a journey whose arduous nature undermines all glib statement of reward. Primarily, the individual is attempting to live in accordance with Lawrence's call for the harmonious yoking of powers within man, especially his image created in Apocalypse:

The rider on the white horse. Who is he, then?  
He is the royal me, he is my very self and his  
horse is the whole MANA of a man. He is my very me,  
my sacred ego, called into a new cycle of action  
by the Lamb and riding forth to conquest, the conquest  
of the old self for the birth of the new self.  
It is he, truly, who shall conquer all the other  
'powers' of the self. And he rides forth, like  
the sun, with arrows, to conquests, but not with  
the sword for the sword implies also judgement,  
and this is my DYNAMIC or potent self. And his  
bow is the bended bow of the body, like the crescent moon.<sup>35</sup>

Austerely concentrated by Auden into the first three lines of this section, the clarion call activates the individual:

Coming out of me living is always thinking,  
Thinking changing and changing living,  
Am feeling as it was seeing----

But, in the season of violent reform, others attempt change. Ignoring its severity, they popularize their strenuous internal struggles as the 'final war/Of proletariat against police.' The individual, 'Tiny observer of enormous world', sees his generation characterized by the repressive force of the Oedipus Complex with its accompanying desire for Death,

'that loving wish.' Even the individual at times, viewing the supposed security of object and animal around him, envies those content with the restful areas of the mind. However, what he takes for completeness is indifference and what he sees as change is hysteria. The section ends with the individual's resolution:

To love my life, not as other,  
Not as bird's life, not as child's,  
'Cannot,' I said, 'being no bird now nor a child.

The third section, as the summer turns quickly into autumn, is an urgent statement of Man's need to change or die off. The individual, part of an overwhelming evolutionary process, is nevertheless tempted to return to those thoroughly explored areas of the psyche where he no longer feels bewildered and lonely. Consequently, he seeks refuge from his continuous mental probing in the unthinking nature of other life-forms. 'Happy only to find home, a place/Where no tax is levied for being there.' As he recommences his psychic revaluation by 'Moving along the track which is himself' he abandons the conventional and stagnant areas of the mind which characterize his fellow-man. Of particular importance is the fact that the individual must develop by trial and error -- there are no large organized patterns which his mind will fit. The area of the unconscious is important in that it lacks a definite and thus debilitating shape. In this way, Autumn, as a period of change, is far more violent than Spring. After various evasions the individual must strive sincerely for revaluation. The warning remains that if the cure is not affected immediately, the disease of his fellow-men will bring down the 'frozen buzzard' of Death.

In the final section of Poem XVI, Winter is evoked as the season of ultimate Death - 'the destruction of error.' Man, paralysed, unable to act, repressed by the limiting figure of the Mother, moves closer to the

end promised by his death-wish. On the other hand, the individual, retaining his psychic drive, must subjugate 'the intricate play of the mind' which has brought him conformity and orthodoxy and deprived him of instinctual drive. This frustrated, libidinal nature of Man has transformed him into 'the articulate skeleton.' In the last paragraph, in which the psychic ideal once again converses with the Wanderer, Love is seen as panacea. It is, nevertheless, based on an energy which manifests itself in the Wanderer's strenuous 'Quest' and involving an activity in forging new areas of the psyche by a violent reversal of values. Love, indeed;

Needs death, death of the grain, our death,  
Death of the old gang;

As the poem reaches its climax in the horrific 'lolling bridegroom', the 'Quest' is once again suppressed. The exhortations, the warnings, the violent statement of the necessity for Change are all strenuously applied to the individual. But the actual journey delineated within the poem is the neurotic progress of the individual as he faces his decisive Test. The intense excitement generated by this attempt to reach a decision is aided by the cyclic nature of the poem, stressing a repetitiveness which arouses traits of triviality and impatience and catches the mood of the entire collage of Poems.

(ii)

The thematic unity of Poems, based as it is on the collage of thirty poems, is held together less by the 'Quest' in itself than by an urgent exhortation to Man to undertake his own psychic examination. In this way the emphasis in the volume rests rather on the decay and corruption of a static mind than in formulating an exact solution to the internal disease which results from it. Certain basic assumptions can, however, be made about it. Primarily, the Quest depends on Change, on an activity which rejects completely the complacency of an enemy mind. For the successful completion of the Quest and as a necessary preliminary to it, the individual must brace himself for a strenuous ordeal. The decisive moment of his acceptance of that ordeal is poetically represented by the Test. It is then the purpose of Poems to stress the need and importance of this Test, of the successful crossing of the 'Frontier.'<sup>36</sup> Certainly the 'Quest' in itself demands an irrevocable commitment on the part of the individual (Poem 11) and the process of internal reclamation is long and exhausting (Poem IV) but concrete results are not fully drawn. For this reason, the images of Spring and Dawn are particularly relevant for they capture the tone of optimistic prophecy essential in the initial stages. The journey of the Quest marks the progress of the nervous agitation within the individual as he discovers his own path to psychic health. That the

journey is frequently conceived in terms of a military advance accentuates its difficulties and the belligerent attitude of the mind towards change. In Poem XIV, where an examination is made for possible points of entry in the individual as a starting-point for the Quest, the Mouth is selected. It is significant that Lawrence has said:

The face is of course the great window of the self, the great opening of the self upon the world, the great gateway.... The mouth is primarily the gate of the two chief sensual centres. It is the gateway to the belly and the loins. Through the mouth we eat and we drink. In the mouth we have the taste. At the lips, too, we kiss. And the kiss of the mouth is the first sensual connection.<sup>37</sup>

And later he adds that it is also 'the gate by which we breathe.'<sup>38</sup>

Consequently, for Lawrence the mouth has reference to both Man's intellect and his sexual drive. It is, similarly, for Auden, the logical place to begin their harmonious interaction. The Quest, therefore, is for two main purposes: one, it expands the conscious areas of the mind which, under repression, merely stagnate; two, it demands the transference of power within the individual from the mind to a balance of powers in which the heart of Man, his instinctual drives, counteract the socially appointed pressures of the diseased intellect.

(iii)

In summary, it is essential to see Poems as a preliminary assemblage of those Audenesque themes which recur with increasing frequency throughout the first half of the decade. The control and internal activity of the individual poem within the volume depends upon four major factors. Firstly, the terrible certainty in the poet's knowledge of Man's public and personal decay describes a framework of extreme urgency, and a sequence of allegorical portraits of internal disease. Secondly, the volume exhibits that desire to change Mankind which is manifested in the motif of the 'Quest.' In this light, the individual poems are exhortations, their internal structure dependent upon Auden's sense of the urgency of Man's predicament. Thirdly, Auden stresses the power of Love in the world as the means to affect that change at both public and personal levels within society. Such a force is neither an illusory agent, romantically delineated, nor an academic formula. It is a real and practical power in men's lives. Lastly, as an exemplar of Love to Man, Auden introduces the idea of a psychic ideal. This authority is thinly drawn and at times is secular and at times divine. Poem XXX, which closes the volume in prayer, prepares us for Auden's announcement of 'conversion' in the early 'forties. In Poems, however, Auden often conceives of Love as a Christian Love - a creative force within Man.

In Auden's second book, The Orators, every tendency in the first book is continued. But the subject is a large one, namely, the state of England. Consequently, the poet's difficulties and conflicts as a poet are increased and displayed broadly. Apparently, The Orators was started with a good plot in mind, that of a romantic quasi-Fascist conspiracy to purge and reform England under the leadership of an airman and by means of subversive speeches throughout the countryside, especially to schoolchildren and especially against the parasitic values and habits of the lower middle-class.<sup>39</sup>

The Orators, first published in 1932,<sup>40</sup> has resisted intense analysis. Bewildered, critics of the book have chosen to attack its style rather than its content. 'Exhibitionist'; 'wilful';<sup>41</sup> 'impenetrably obscure'<sup>42</sup> are some of the phrases resorted to. Through this inability to penetrate a work Auden himself has called 'the fair notion fatally injured',<sup>43</sup> the critic is compelled to undertake generalizations like those of Delmore Schwarz above. Taking its sub-title 'An English Study' at face rather than allegorical value, he has seen the book as an obscure, social tract by 'someone talented but near the border of sanity, who might well, in a year or two, become a Nazi.'<sup>44</sup> All agree, however, that despite being based on the 'associational logic of a succession of images',<sup>45</sup> it is an 'explosive book.'<sup>46</sup> Alan Pryce-Jones wrote '...I cannot throw away The Orators as worthless bosh. It appears to be the work of a sane imagination without a mind - a far more complicated state than the paranoid's - working on fragments of knowledge and experience.'<sup>47</sup> Recently, this frenzied obscurity has been seen as an extension of the tendencies in Auden's Poems. Beach says:

Virtually everything...is devoted to the poet's double program of freeing men's minds from their chains and at the same time promoting the discipline of character, especially among the Initiates - those enlisted in the struggle to



make men over and save them from the decadence  
that was undermining English society.<sup>48</sup>

In this sense, the 'Quest' is once again important. What has altered is the emphasis. Rather than concentrating his poetic powers on general projections of his belief in the necessity for Man to undertake a personal 'Quest' for personal order, Auden is more interested in 'simply defining the state of the world.'<sup>49</sup> This has led Justin Replogle to exclaim that 'The Orators is a huge storehouse of odd characteristics Auden used to identify his neurotics.'<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, a definition of the causes of the world's inevitable decay - so violent in its detail - is accentuated all the more by Auden's concern for humanity. In the 'Journal of an Airman', he concentrates his poetic activity on a single figure, thus dramatizing Man's tragic predicament.

Critical opinion has not faltered in its determination to overlook any unifying structure to the volume. It is more than a 'volume of revolutionary poems.'<sup>51</sup> The Orators is basically a statement of failure. The three Books of which it is composed define a state of mind in which successful undertaking of the 'Quest' is impossible. Even the images of hope, in particular the elevation of Rex Warner's son, John,<sup>52</sup> to the level of 'healer' are overwhelmed by satirical incisions into the Enemy mind. Thus, structure in the book is based on statement and exhortation. Book I, 'The Initiates,' 'persuasively puts forward a critique of society recognisably related to that found in the earlier Poems.'<sup>53</sup> This critique is included in an oratical address to the 'ruined boys' of the earlier volume to become 'initiates' in the sacred ceremony of self-sacrifice necessary for psychic analysis. Book II, 'Journal of an Airman,' describes the furious efforts of a would-be questing individual to leave behind a state of mind embodying 'the securities of an established system after its justifying sanctions have

disappeared.'<sup>54</sup> The Book ends, inevitably, in failure. The third Book, consisting of six odes, offers little hope for future 'Quests.' But all the work can do, as Owen had earlier said, is to Warn.<sup>55</sup> Such a warning is implicit in the persistence of the social satire but offers little promise of success in face of such overwhelming temptations. It contains a 'premonition of a new and terrible time coming - a time of struggle and rebirth...and the feeling that 'you can't escape, it's impossible to try' grew more urgent and explicit.'<sup>56</sup>

In The Orators, the statement and the exhortation are based on the same informing ideas that organized Poems. Lawrence, Freud, Groddeck and Lane retain their place on Auden's council of 'healers.' Their ways to psychic health, allegorically and collectively grouped under 'Love', motivate the encouragement the individual receives before attempting the 'Test.' Once again the 'subject of love is indeed elusive and protean' and once again it is 'the great constructive force in human living.'<sup>57</sup> The Enemy mind is thus seen as a perversion of love, involving a desire for the status quo and thus refusing 'to search out anew a direct connection to the spontaneous sources of life on which all new healthy cultures depend.'<sup>58</sup> The cure from this ossification by generations of unchanging customs lay in releasing the individual's instinct, especially the instinct of love, or sex. Within the structure of The Orators, the exhortation to the individual to undertake the 'Quest' by the successful completion of the 'Test' is a demand to release these atrophied instincts.

Book 1 opens with the 'Address for a Prize-Day.' Stephen Spender has called this 'a kind of agnostic prayer against self-deception, the denial of life-forces by frustrating conventions, and on behalf of an open conspiracy of living in which love, whether social, personal or sexual, is the stated aim of living.'<sup>59</sup> It is rather more a declamation than a prayer

in which the Orator urgently outlines the symptoms of disease in Man. Primarily, all disease stems from a perversion of love. Here it is subdivided into three groups after the example of Dante. The first group are guilty of excessive self-love or are over-indulgent in their love for their neighbours. The former leave behind 'diaries full of incomprehensible jottings (surely a clue to the character-identification of the Airman) whilst in the latter there has been a 'gradual abdication of central in favour of peripheral control.' Equally Lawrentian is the cure for their psychiatric condition - 'They need love' - and equally emphasized is the responsibility of the individual in this matter. 'But isn't it up to you to help?' The second group are the defective lovers. Here ruined landscapes suggest the decay and corruption of their psyche.

Systems run to a standstill, or like those  
ship-cranes along Clydebank, which have done  
nothing all this year. Owners of small  
holdings, they sit by fires they can't make  
up their minds to light, while dust settles  
on their unopened correspondence and inertia  
branches in their veins like a zinc tree.

The remedy for so static a psychic condition is a violent change - a suggestion similar to those of Lawrence and Lane. According to Christopher Isherwood, Homer Lane had said that, 'Pity...is never a healer, always a destroyer.' Lane had once knocked down a 'Timid, retiring young man... to make him hit back.' Auden's Orator recommends the same:

Give them regular but easy tasks and see  
that they do them properly. Hit them in  
the face if necessary. If they hit back  
you will know they are saved.

In the third group, psychosomatic disease characterizes the perverted lovers. Their disobedience to the inner law of their own nature manifests itself in such minor traits as a 'slight proneness to influenza.' Disease makes them 'haters of life, afraid to die.' And this death is 'the hard

death of those who never have and never could be loved.'

Thus, in 'Address for a Prize-Day', a sense of profound disillusionment within the contemporary mind prevails. The need for the individual to accept his personal responsibility in the crisis is part of the Orator's constant cry for action. In 'Argument', however, the progress of one who has undertaken such a 'Quest' is defined. This section describes him as he awakens 'with an idea of building.' The prevailing mood of enemy mentality is characterized by a generation who have repressed their instinctual drives, whose 'prisoned blood' has overactivated the intellect. Thus, they are conditioned by 'designs' and 'Theories inter-relating the system of feudal tenure with metabolic gradients.' The individual, 'At the frontier getting down', begins the long and arduous trek to pass his 'Test.' His excessive love for his Leader, the psychic ideal, makes this Truly Weak Man unable to take the most direct route to personal health. Instead, compelled to exorcise his hero-worship, he must take the circuitous passage through the North-West - a voyage inevitably doomed:

The waving handkerchiefs recede and the  
gulls wheel after screaming for scraps.  
Throb of turbines below water, passing the  
mud islands, the recurrent light. Past.  
Handrail, funnel, oilskins, them, His will.  
The lasting sky.

This continuing presence of gloom and despair throughout the Book, accentuated as it is by the tragic destruction or irony, is further deepened by the second section of 'Argument.' This parody of a prayer for deliverance from purposive neuroses is addressed not to the 'Saviour' but to the heroes of detective stories and British pubs who share part of the responsibility for the seduction of the mind. The emphasis is on

the all-pervasive qualities of the disease, its manifestation through all ranks of society.

For those who cannot go to bed; for those in dormitories; for those in pairs; for those who sleep alone,

O Bull at the Gate, hear us.

In the third section of 'Argument' we return to the perverted love of the generation 'who on the snow-line were in love with death, despised vegetation.' This perversion is shown as the result of the individual's failure to follow the example of the psychic ideal. 'After we had failed him at the Roman Bridge' the full manifestations of disease return to plague society. Love, synonymous with the psychic ideal, is basely transformed to 'influenza and guilty rashes.' The mind, barren and complacent; is unaware of the magnitude of its loss and

On the steps of His stone the boys play prisoner's base, turning their backs on the inscription.

To emphasize the extent of internal decay, 'Statement' defines the ideal psychic condition - a definition which points to the effects within the individual and his relationships throughout society. As W.H. Sellers has pointed out, the new society is essentially that which Lawrence envisioned in Fantasia and later in The Plumed Serpent (1926), 'a society in which all individuals, under the guidance of a few wise leaders, achieve complete self-fulfillment and undisturbed happiness:'<sup>60</sup>

Men pass through doors and travel to the sea, stand grouped in attitudes of play or labour, bending to children, raising equal's glass, are many times together, man with woman. To each an award, suitable to his sex, his class and the power.

This vision of a refashioned society is the end of the 'Quest.'

This idyllic interlude in Book I is, however, followed by a statement of the actual psychic condition which, thus, accentuates the need for such a 'Quest.' Contemporary society is described in which the individual takes responsibility for one unrelated fragment of life - lost is the all-embracing quality of Love. In an arid analysis of his environment, Man has so reduced the area of his consciousness that he is resigned to 'fostering snowdrops in a green bowl.' Those who have attempted a 'Quest' to escape this analytical destruction have fallen victim to dormant neuroses. Some, believing that they have achieved success, rest on the rewards of a materialistic mind. This group include the one who 'makes a fortune out of a locking device for lifts' and the one whose mayorship is 'commemorated by a public lavatory at the cross-roads.' But for all, the final prophecy of failure comes with the ominous image of the 'red bicycle' -- 'and the cancelling out was complete.' Their failure is the result of their inability to change. This means to the end of the 'Quest' is potential within all men but demands either a move to an unexplored region of the unconscious or a radical reorganization of the old areas confined by the psyche. It is in fact the 'change of heart' of Poem XXX and it will bring a society reactivated by the power of Love - here easily identifiable as the sexual drive of Eros. The expansion of the area of the conscious will restore the balance of powers within the individual - the harmonious relationship of heart and mind. Once this is established, Man can progress beyond the mere physical advancement of the animals.

Sun is on right, moon on left, powers to  
earth. The action of light on dark is  
to cause it to contract.

The 'Letter to a Wound' demonstrates one reason for failure to

undertake the 'Quest.' In style, it is at once 'a parody of a love-letter,'<sup>61</sup> based on Groddeck's epistolatory style in The Book of the It, and an extension of Auden's characteristic disease metaphor. The over-indulgence which the individual displays towards his wound is symptomatic of an excessive self-love, thus weakening Man's capacity for an effective power of Love within him. Auden restates this concept in New Verse, in the second of a sequence of five poems:

There is a wound and who shall staunch it up?  
 Deepening daily, discharging all the time  
 Power from love.<sup>62</sup>

Thus, excessive self-love draws power away from the instinctual sexual drive in the individual. It is a 'debilitating self-deception, a sure sign of decadence, and essentially an expression of a death-wish.'<sup>63</sup>

Violence is restressed as the only path to a cure: 'the need of the surgeon's knife, and the necessity of accepting the wound as a condition of any return to health.'<sup>64</sup> 'Journal of an Airman' disproves the theory that The Orators has

the related theme of brave men banded  
 together in secret in a crusade that  
 requires them to work underground  
 until the day of open conflict, and  
 who must be in perfect training to  
 meet the attack of an enemy that is not  
 to be despised or trusted.<sup>65</sup>

This second book emphasizes the fact that responsibility for change rests entirely within the individual, here represented by the figure of the Airman himself. The recurrent images of spies, warfare and open conflict between warring groups, sharply divided into 'US' and 'THEM', are merely fantastic projections in the mind of the individual as he realizes the extreme hardships which impede any desire to change. And it is this determination to change which activates the obscurity of much of the

'Journal.' For the Airman's desire to change is modified by his innate corruption - 'Like the flawed heroes in the mountains, Auden's Airman seeks Health but carries sickness with him.'<sup>66</sup> As his realization of this corruption increases, the frenzied impatience mounts and his mental meanderings organized by a diary become less intelligible. Eventually, as the 'Journal' closes, the Airman is compelled to resolve his inner sickness by undertaking the 'Test.' It seems arguable that in 'Journal of an Airman' that 'Test' ends in self-destruction as he fails to overcome his inherent distaste for life.

The figure of the Airman thus becomes a symbol for all those individuals who seek to remedy their internal decay only to discover in the process the extent of their disability. To show how easily recognisable the symbolic value of the Airman had become during the 'thirties, Julian Symons quotes a poem by the American poet, Frederick Prokosch, where the Airman's hovering position over Society plays an essential part in probing to the heart of the Enemy mentality:

We see men now as an airman sees them: beautiful, yes,  
 But only fragments in a territory so vast a drama so  
     Obscure and intricate, we are learning merely  
     To feel and not understand:  
 The perpetual eagle hanging over the cliffs, remote  
 And oreless as a mineral, is a symbol of vitality  
     Linked with doom.<sup>67</sup>

Auden, like Prokosch, weaves elements of optimism and inevitable failure into the symbolic figure as characteristics of the Airman's efforts to uncover psychic health. Justin Replogle has pointed out the prevalence, in the literature of the Auden 'Group' of the figure which hovers over society and has the ability to penetrate to its innermost decay.<sup>68</sup> What has not been stressed is the peculiar Lawrentian quality of this image as in Fantasia of the Unconscious:



But there are, of course, also the two ways of volitional vision. We can see with the endless modern critical sight, analytic, and at least deliberately ugly. Or we can see as the hawk sees the one concentrated spot where beats the life-heart of our prey.<sup>69</sup>

In Auden, the portrait of society the Airman sees around him is merely a projection of his own chaotic psyche. But in understanding the general consequences of such confusion within society and understanding their microcosmic operation within himself, he can begin to remove their root causes. He cannot, however, symbolize 'the forces of release and liberation,'<sup>70</sup> but can only point to Man's potential for change, presently without organization.

The power of the Airman, therefore, lies in his diagnostic ability and his fatal weakness is his inability to transform that diagnosis into immediate cure. His uncertainty, bred of inner decay, causes him to postpone the essential 'Test' in a series of mental meanderings. The Airman's critical insight into society defines the sharp division of the elements of conflict within the 'Journal.' 'Us' and 'Them' are no more than allegorical representations of areas of the Airman's mind in which the enemy mentality typifies the decadent areas of his own psyche. 'Us' - the true forces of health - are less marked in their characteristics and point to the uncharted regions of the unconscious - the wilderness where, like Christ and John the Baptist, the questing individual is subjected to the temptations of the world as trial of his determination and discipline to undertake the 'Quest.' He is armed with Love which, if it can remain untainted, will direct the individual to the ends of the journey. Auden draws the Airman as the agent of this 'central awareness' of Love through whose revolutionary force the change within the psyche of the individual can take place. Change remains the great salve:

Sooner or later, the change comes to all and, once this happens, it is decisive and irrevocable - for, whatever the field, once the mind becomes conscious of alternatives, retreat into habit is cut off; either a man must make a deliberate choice (that is to say become a critic as well as an actor) or become paralysed.<sup>71</sup>

It is the Airman's function to suggest the urgency to disrupt that portion of the mind into which the enemy has introduced 'inert velocities ... (called by him Laws or habits) interfering with organization.' Hoggart sees this enemy mentality as:

the destroyer of life and love, whose agents are malaise, cowardice, inability to 'cope', inertia, the longing for death, frustration, the ingrown will, reason without emotion, self-regard.<sup>72</sup>

The 'Journal' sees the grotesque landscape of Poems from a greater height and a narrower angle.

The bitter irony that controls the tone of the 'Journal of an Airman' gains its effectiveness from the fact that the central figure is summoning his inner resources to fight against those elements of the enemy he himself is part of. For, just like the Airman, the enemy have 'Their extraordinary idea that man's only glory is to think.' Their reliance on Man's intellectual powers disrupts the fine balance of forces within them. Auden describes the basic difference between the two groups through psychological puzzles:

A Sure Test.

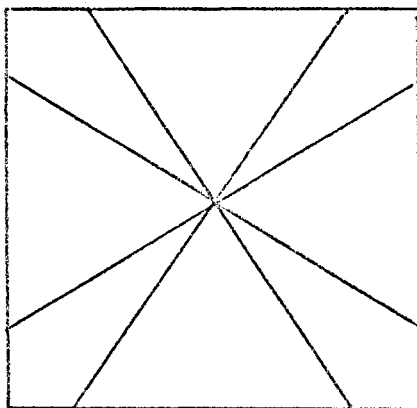


Fig. 1

Give the party you suspect the above figure and ask him to pick out a form from it.  
If he picks out either of the two crosses below (Fig. 2)

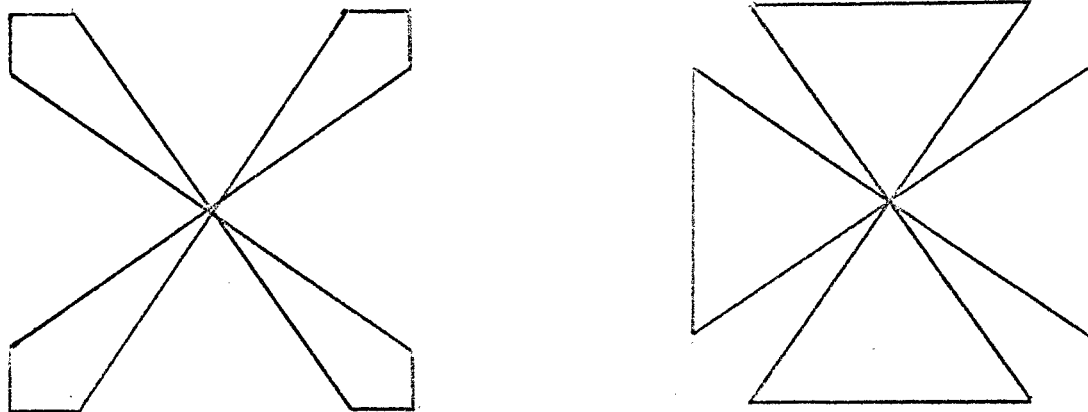
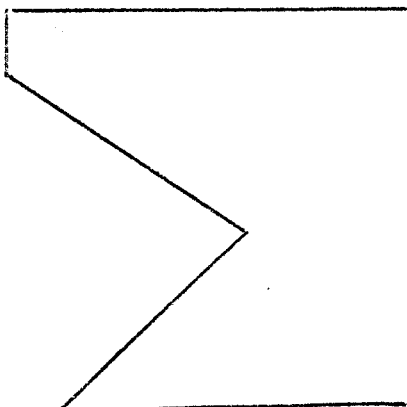


Fig. 2

You may accept him as a friend, but if he chooses such a form as Fig. 3



it is wiser to shoot at once.

The Airman recognizes also the need for activity to bring about a change within him. 'Man miserable without diversion. But diversion is human activity. A man doing nothing is not a man.' In his 'Journal' this activity is suppressed in a series of adolescent scribblings as he fully understands the nature of a disease which inhibits any desire to act. As the book closes the repressed forces within him can no longer be sustained in fantastic projections of a warring enemy. They turn inward, upon the Airman himself, and eventually destroy him.

In much the same way, Book 11 of The Orators includes insights into other quests which have failed inevitably. It must be pointed out that apart from the successful achievement of the Airman's Uncle which serves as the exemplar for the activities of the Airman, the failures recounted by the Airman are allegorical attempts by him to pass the 'Test.' This view gains credence from the fact of the Airman's own knowledge of his inner corruption. Despite the urgency with which he is preparing himself psychologically for the 'Test':

Little did they guess when they chaired me  
what kind of person it was to whom they were  
awarding that honour.

Such lack of confidence is eventually seen as the familiar desire for Death:

Again, Always the same weakness. No progress  
against this terrible thing.

The psychic condition develops within the Airman as a consuming interest in his hands. Critics have seen this as a purposive neurosis symbolizing Kleptomania or Homosexuality.<sup>72a</sup> Whatever its origin, it presents an insurmountable barrier to the individual on his 'Quest.'

This has been demonstrated in the Airman's other attempts to achieve psychic health. In one, he was too easily reassured by the cry 'A treaty has been arranged' after which he returned to the false questings of the established mind. During another, the Airman palliates his own failure by attributing it to a 'friend.' But in the statement 'Derek was killed' lies his own attempt to ignore the realities of the situation.

His final attempt to pass the crucial 'Test' is recorded in a series of count-downs to action. Here the twenty-eight days of mobilization, with its accompanying imagery of War, its frontiers, its spies, could be conceived of as 'convulsions taking place in the minds and souls of men in the process of making themselves over.'<sup>73</sup> Convulsions, presumably, which destroy the unsuccessful applicant. The diary entries which parallel the preparations of the Airman recount this final attempt leading to the destruction of the enemy with its manifestations of the dormant death-wish through purposive neuroses or larger characteristics of 'keeping disorderly houses, mental cruelty, loitering, nepotism, onanism, piracy on the high seas.' But so inevitable is the failure of such a mission that an impossible task is set the applicant.

At 6 p.m. passages of unprepared translation from dead dialects are set to all non-combatants. The papers are collected at 6-10. All who fail to obtain 99% make the supreme sacrifice. Candidates must write on 3 sides of the paper.

In his efforts to resist his fate, the Airman is driven to consideration of desperate ends. The dominant analogy is to a captive breaking out of a psychic prison 'calculating the drop formula by practical experiment, employing warders of varying weights.' But the attempt is in vain. After 25 days of mounting pressure, certain dormant weaknesses break out into the open - weaknesses which compell the Airman to an intense analysis

of his self-deception:

My incredible blindness, with all the facts staring me in the face, not to have realized these elementary truths.

1. The power of the enemy is a function of our resistance, therefore

2. The only efficient way to destroy it - self-destruction, the sacrifice of all resistance, reducing him to the state of a man trying to walk on a frictionless surface.

3. Conquest can only proceed by absorption of,

i.e. infection by, the conquered. The true significance of my hands. 'Do not imagine that you, no more than any other conqueror, escape the mark of grossness.' They stole to force a hearing.

The exorcism completed, the Airman prepares to undertake the 'Test.' The bitterly tragic irony of the entire situation of 'Journal of an Airman' lies in the fact that to pass the 'Test' successfully, the Airman must remove from himself all traces of inherent disease. His only means to that end lies in self-destruction. Like Derek and his true Ancestor, Uncle Henry, the Airman's death is self-inflicted. This is the ironic victory he gains over the parts of his mind occupied by enemy forces.

In conclusion, Richard Hoggart has called the Airman, 'the Healer, the truly strong man, the friend of life and of creation, the symbol of the refusal to be afraid, of the ability to rise to a large gesture.'<sup>74</sup> In fact, it is in the Airman's complete inability to gain the courage to Change that his tragedy lies. His heroic stature in Audenesque terms is part of his determination to attempt the 'Quest' in spite of his basic weaknesses. And the main theme of Book 11 remains the need for revolution in 'this country of ours where nobody is well.' It is, however, a revolution according to Blake, Homer Lane, Lawrence, Groddeck and Freud. At this stage Marx is effectively denied by 'Auden's messianic mythologizing

and his direct Skeltonic sneers at the working class.'<sup>75</sup> As we shall see, the Marxist solutions for the 'Quest' receive a somewhat fuller treatment in Auden's later works during the Thirties.

Book III contains six odes, each of which accentuates a part of the 'Quest' motif. In all cases, however, the Orator is an individual for whom the 'Quest' is impossible. Perverted and rendered impotent by internal disease, his essential task is to warn. For example, in the first ode, the Orator sees two reasons for the general atmosphere of 'that year decaying' - the death of Lawrence and the Rise of Fascism, another manifestation of the enemy mind. Although understanding the need to rectify the situation, he is unable to act, affected as he is by symptoms of disease in night-dreams and 'with a wound hurting.' He is restricted to warning society and the urgency and vital drive within the poem result from his desire to commence the task. This desire adds strength to the rhetorical questions which end the poem:

Have you heard of someone swifter than Syrian  
horses?  
Has he thrown the bully of Corinth in the sanded  
circle?  
Has he crossed the Isthmus already? is he seeking  
brilliant  
Athens and us?

One important point raised by this Orator, however, is the warning to the individual to beware the false healers - 'granny in mittens, the Mop; the white surgeon,/And loony Layard.' What he emphasizes is the necessity for the individual who undertakes the 'Quest' to follow a true psychic ideal, one of the healthy members of the tribunal already enumerated in Poem XXII.

Initially, the second ode is a joyous celebration of Sedbergh's rugby victory over Sandroyd in 1927. Gradually, however, as the poem develops,

the characteristics of the two teams become identifiable with the fundamental qualities of the two groups known as 'Us' and 'Them.' Thus, the winning team are characterized by their activity 'aligned like a squadron of Bombers,' and become associated in the last four stanzas with the forces of Eros as both win unexpectedly against overwhelming odds. Once again, activity is the key to psychic wholeness, so that each night, 'Joy docked in every duct, we to the right sleep come.' On the other hand, the losers become associated with the forces of the enemy as like 'Them':

Defeats on them like lavas  
Have fallen, fell, kept falling, fell  
On them, poor loviess.

And like them, unaware of maintaining harmonious balance within, they court danger by their 'purse-proud, swank-limb, cock-wit' and wage ineffectual battle.

The third ode is a statement of failure by those who have attempted the 'Test.' As a result of its unsuccessful completion, the mind becomes paralysed by meaningless social conventions. The individual, thrown out of balance, becomes a mere observer of life for whom the future holds nothing more than a 'Promise of picnics.' Unable to change, they are likened to patients in a Sanatorium whose tragic irony is summed up in the phrase 'We are here for our health.' Finally, their confidence in the status quo leads to a complacency which in turn leads to stagnation. Although they may 'rest without risk,' this inertia can only lead to Death. These conditions of disease, unnatural barriers to the successful undertaking of the 'Quest', reach their final definition in the last stanza:

Hear last in corner  
The pffwungg of burner  
Accepting dearth  
The shadow of death.



The fourth ode introduces the individual born to complete the 'Test' with success. His ideal presentation as a leader is, however, somewhat overshadowed by the insistence within the poem on the portrait of England in its present 'obsolete' condition. It is an island inhabited by an 'Ashamed, uninteresting and hopeless race,' suffering, through repression, from neurotic traits. An element of perversion enters their very observation of life as they continue:

Spying on athletes playing on a green,  
Spying on kisses shown on a screen.

Their present 'healers' are bogus figures. The political figures are summarily dismissed: 'We're getting a little tired of boys, / Of the ninny, the mawmet and the false alarm.' They remain defenders of the status quo and progenitors of disease and internal conflict. There is little promise in England's present youth who simply 'bolt for mama.' It is left for 'John, son of Warner' who 'Will/Save.' In the ode he is aided by the evocation of Spring, season of change. But although his need has been seen as purely social in the poem, it is within the individual that his saving graces will be most needed:

To each unhappy Joseph and repressed Diana  
Say Bo to the invalids and take away their rugs,  
The war-memorials decorate with member-mugs,  
The gauche and the lonely he will introduce of course  
To the smaller group, the right field of force:

If cured, the individual would project his inner health in a society at harmony with the ideals of its members. The obvious assumption is that this new society will be in bitter conflict with the present one whose inhabitants are:

Living in one place with a satisfied face  
All of the women and most of the men  
Shall work with their hands and not think again.

To activate so radically different a vision in 'the season of change of

heart,' the poem restates the urgent need for a 'healer' who will guide Man towards the ends of his 'Quest' for selfless reasons. This act of Love will restore England to 'The Directed calm, the actual glory.'

The fifth ode, 'Ode to my Pupils', sees the life of the individual in military terms as he maintains a constant battle against any perversion of a world, originally wrought by his ancestors: 'the tall white gods... skilled ...appointing our/feast days.' The Orator, adopting the tone of a schoolmaster addressing his pupils, stresses the preparation necessary for so continuous an internal struggle:

Are you in training?  
Are you taking care of yourself? are you sure of  
passing  
The endurance test?

The constant battle is seen as a fight against tempting sins which, together, are on the side of Death against the unity of 'Heart and head.' The individual, a fallen victim, has failed the test and the result is a psyche conceived in terms of Auden's usual scene of depressed industrialism:

There's no fire in the waiting-room now at the  
Climber's Junction,  
And all this year  
Work has been stopped on the power-house; the  
Wind whistles under  
The half-built culverts.

Yet again, energy is the cure but not a restless, ill-defined energy, which is inevitably destructive. The Orator sees the need for the individual to harness his energy to undertake the 'Quest.' What is strongly emphasized in the poem is the directed energy as 'All leave is cancelled to-night; we must say goodbye.' We must assume that such vital driving power within Man is only released in the activity of Love.

The first five odes see Man's present psychological condition

incapable of the Test's successful completion. Thus, the sixth ode is addressed to God beyond the tainted reach of Man. It sees the individual's psychic turmoil caused by Man setting his 'maddened foot' 'Against your direct light' - the light of a psychic ideal. In this sense God is seen as the means to achieve the Love which has been stressed as necessary to effect Man's change. The last lines of the last ode in the volume are a direct appeal for divine intervention. The Orators concludes on a note which mingles hope with unsurmountable despair:

Be not another than our hope;  
 Expect we routed shall  
 Upon your peace; with ray disarm,  
 Illumine, and not kill.

It has been said that:

One sees then in The Orators, the victory of the idea of a psychological cure, which is always predominant as an aspect of Auden's work.<sup>76</sup>

If we see in The Orators the victory of an idea, we are not witness to its successful application to reality. To attempt so necessary a transformation, Auden permeates his second volume with urgent warnings to Man on his present psychological condition and exhortations to Man to change that disorder. In his 'Epilogue,' the poet reassesses the situation:

'O where are you going?' said reader to rider,  
 'That valley is fatal when furnaces burn,  
 Yonder's the midden whose odours will madden,  
 That gap is the grave where the tall return.'

'O do you imagine,' said fearer to farer,  
 'That dusk will delay on your path to the pass,  
 Your diligent looking discover the lacking  
 Your footsteps feel from granite to grass?'

'O what was that bird,' said horror to hearer,  
 'Did you see that shape in the twisted trees?  
 Behind you swiftly the figure comes softly,  
 The spot on your skin is a shocking disease?'

'Out of this house' - said rider to reader  
 'Yours never will' - said farer to fearer  
 'They're looking for you' - said hearer to horror  
 As he left them there, as he left them there.

Here, the defenders of the status quo - the reader, the fearer and their habitual reaction to change in horror - are in direct opposition to the rider, the farer and the hearer for whom activity is an essential part of life. As The Orators closes, we see Man in one last attempt to leave behind his former state of conflict, to undertake his 'Quest:'

As he left them there, as he left them there.

Look, Stranger!, published in London in October, 1936, contained thirty-one poems, twenty-four of which had appeared in periodicals and anthologies over the preceding four years.<sup>77</sup> Whilst the volume as a whole is not unified thematically by the motif of the 'Quest' as was Poems, Auden views as intolerable the present spiritual condition of Man. It is immediately noticeable that the seven unpublished poems of 1936 exhibit a tranquility in clashing contrast to the urgent internal activity of those previously published. Herein lies a slight pointer to the Audenesque search for Claritas which has eventually led him to the Theatre and, in particular, On the Frontier. Three reasons can be put forward to account for this development. Firstly, Auden has simply lost interest in the motif as evidenced by the occasional quality of Poem XXII and his growing output of such verse in the early 'forties. Secondly, so distinct a loss of urgency may result from Auden's growing awareness of his own artistic responsibility towards his public. Certainly, the didactic element has always been prevalent in his poetry, particularly in the exhortatory verse of Poems, but the work in and after 1936 is significantly less confusing and draws less on that personal mythology Auden created with Isherwood whilst at Oxford. Lastly, I would suggest that Auden is losing confidence in Man's ability to change.

The 'Quest' remains as Auden's hope for Mankind but its delineation acquires a greater formality. Whatever the reasons, Look, Stranger! demonstrates a marked difference in tone from the earlier volumes:

It has fluency, wit and acute reporting; it is not unnecessarily difficult; but it lacks the precision and compression of the best early work. Some of the clarity of these middle-thirties has been gained at the expense of the cutting-edge of the 1930 volume. Look, Stranger! relies too much on virtuosity and is over-conscious of its audience.<sup>78</sup>

In Poem XXX, addressed to Christopher Isherwood, the poet's personal frustration points out those incurable dilemmas which characterize Look, Stranger! as a 'profoundly pessimistic volume.'<sup>79</sup> Although the poem is not primarily concerned with allegorical representations of the 'Quest,' it does look back to a period when both Auden and Isherwood were extremely sensitive to problems concerned with psychic degeneration. But the urgency which drives the internal activity of the poem reflects not the need for a cure but Auden's present preoccupation with the function of the artist. He conceives of Isherwood's 'strict and adult' pen as a powerful instrument to deter Man from spiritual impotency, to propose the case for 'action urgent:'

So in this hour of crisis and dismay,  
What better than your strict and adult pen  
Can warn us from the colours and the consolations,  
The showy arid works, reveal  
The squalid shadow of academy and garden,  
Make action urgent and its nature clear?  
Who gave us nearer insight to resist  
The expanding fear, the savaging distance.

This call for a disciplined activity illustrates a major stage in Auden's poetic development, for, throughout his work in the 'thirties, the amount of satirical observation extraneous to the main direction of the individual volume has decreased. With his realization that a personal mythology

based on grotesque and unexplained creations by no means provided a suitable framework for a 'Cure' for psychic ailments, Auden's later social comment probes in sorrow the serious flaws within society. It is now a time 'of crisis and dismay' occasioned by the deepening isolation of Modern Man as he is driven by false loves. Paradoxically, this false love is the panacea to psychic ills Auden had himself proposed in Poems:

the word is love.  
 Surely one fearless kiss would cure  
 The million fevers, a stroking brush  
 The insensitive refuse from the burning core.  
 Was there a dragon who had closed the works  
 While the starved city fed it with the Jews?  
 The love would tame it with his trainer's look.

In a mood of sad reflection, the next stanza begs pardon for all these childish beliefs, for 'private jokings in a panelled room,' for believing 'the whisper in the double bed' - 'pardon for these and every flabby fancy.' The sense of personal frustration which informs the poem stems from Auden's realization that he has no alternative to these summarily dismissed cures. He, in his advice to Isherwood:

Can warn us from the colours and the consolations,  
 The showy arid works, reveal  
 The squalid shadow of academy and garden.

and even propose a disciplined and directed action, but, finally, the Artist too must beat the wind. Within the structure of this single poem, the clarion call for action is overwhelmed by a compassion for humanity strangely absent in the earlier works. There, the concentrated energy of satire was directed against the social leaders, gross parodies of Auden's conception of psychic ideals. In this poem and in the volume as a whole, the concern is for the people themselves and for their leaders - the Artists. It is the latter's task to disturb the dull and dangerous situation described in the opening stanza:

August for the people and their favourite islands.

Daily the steamers sidle up to meet  
 The effusive welcome of the pier, and soon  
 The luxuriant life of the steep stone valleys,  
 The fallow oval faces of the city  
 Begot in passion or good-natured habit,  
 Are caught by waiting coaches, or laid bare  
 Beside the indiscriminating sea.

Thus, in its statement of inevitable decay, in its pessimistic appraisal of solutions to that decay, Poem XXX unifies the volume. Addressed as it is to Christopher Isherwood, the poem also continues that image of friendship so noticeable in the Odes of the third book of The Orators. The intimate juxtaposition of the motif of 'the Quest' and the names of Auden's intimate friends suggests the poet's innate belief that it is only in the circle of his friends that a worthy questing individual can be found. Despite the irony by which he controls the ode to John Warner, Auden advances his view of the reliability and inherent nobility of his friends. After Paid on Both Sides and Poems in which Mankind was urged to begin preparation for the 'Quest,' it is a significant development that in Look, Stranger! Auden's confidence in the potential of humanity to redeem itself is markedly weakened.

Thus, within the volume, Auden's development, in particular his shifting attitude towards Love - the means to the end of the 'Quest' - is amply demonstrated. The prologue, structured like a conventional prayer to God, comes closest to defining a 'Quest' and was originally published in 1932. This address to the sacred person of Love reiterates Auden's earlier concern with Eros, conceived originally in Freudian terms to include both ego- and object- love, the urge to self-preservation and preservation of the species, as well as sexual love. Here Eros is asked to arouse Man out of this innate corruption manifested in the state of perpetual nightmare in which he lives - that dream of 'uniting the dead into a splendid empire' which resulted in the numerous scenes of psychic



desolation. The example of the ancestors is lost. They who were 'far-sighted as falcons' have been superceded by a generation who 'inertly wait.' At this point the motif of the 'Quest,' retains its promise for the individual members of society and the 'Virgin roadsteads of our hearts.'

In the volume, Auden insists upon the 'Englishness' of the widespread decay and has placed himself in an exact relationship to it. In this way the poet continues the theme of The Orators, sub-titled 'An English Study,' where he diagnosed the ailments of 'this country of ours where no-one is well.' Spears says on this matter:

The poet speaks frequently in his own person,  
locating himself specifically in time and  
place ...; this gives solidity to the  
larger vision of England in her relations to  
geography and history.<sup>80</sup>

In the previously unpublished poems of Look, Stranger!, however, references to the English locale grow less numerous. 'The Quest' loses its centre of reference and its impact although Auden still seeks out those worthy of Love to undertake his search. In the controversial 'A Communist To Others' (no.XIV) we receive the first intimation of whom Auden considers worthy to carry out Love's cure. Despite its overtly Marxist facade, the poem is an exercise, an adoption of a persona by Auden, characterized by a total lack of confidence in the very people he is trying to arouse. The 'masses' are not those people capable of resolving the 'Quest' for themselves; their fate is to remain passive spectators of those events which shall alter their lives radically. It is the 'we' of the poem who must take responsibility for the future and in Poem X, Auden's concern with friendship shows that responsibility to be in the hands of a few personally known to him:

Love, satisfaction, tone, delight,  
To these players of Badminton to-night,  
To Favel, Holland, sprightly Alexis give.

Despite its obvious ironic overtones, the poem represents one further example of Auden's concern with the worthiness of those who undertake the 'Quest.' In one sense, it is a development of Lawrence's own Fascism and the logical corollary to Auden's belief in the Truly Strong Man. Nevertheless, in Poem XIV the poet's concern with 'Brothers' is symptomatic of his changing concept of Love. The earlier Eros is now viewed as an isolating and selfish pressure within Man. Poem VII uses the analogy of Modern Man as a castaway on a deserted island yearning for the water which he may share with his companions. He believes implicitly in the ease with which he can attain the ends of the 'Quest:'

Where every day was dancing in the valleys,  
And all the year trees blossomed on the mountains,  
Where love was innocent, being far from cities.

It is his immediate 'guilty love' which renders him incommunicate and easy prey to the death-wish in the 'isolated personal life' of Poem X.

In 'A Communist to Others' Auden attacks those he holds responsible for Man's intense loneliness. Like Homer Lane, he blames the Parents and Teachers - those natural leaders in Man's 'Quest' whose substitutes Auden perpetually seeks:

O splendid person, you who stand  
In spotless flannels or with hand  
Expert on trigger;  
Whose lovely hair and shapely limb  
Year after year are kept in trim  
Till buffers envy as you swim  
Your Grecian figure:

The satire gains in intensity by its relationship to the whole motif of the 'Quest' in which the above figure is but one of a series of grotesque caricatures of Man's present social and psychic leaders.

Poem XX treats the 'Quest' in terms of a strenuous mountain-climb and brings into focus all those elements individually demonstrated else-

where. The poem is the natural predecessor to The Ascent of F6 where corrupt motivation for the ascent results in a barren and spiritually unrewarding climb. Stimulated improperly by fear of contemporary conditions - 'the short-haired mad executives' - and by a self-love which has placated the change activated by the will, the individuals are bitterly frustrated. At the completion of the journey, although only at the beginning of their 'Quest';

it was eyes we looked at, not the view;  
saw nothing but ourselves, left-handed, lost:

And this loss of communication between men is the result of the wrong approach, both psychic and social, to Love which is now unselfish, not natural but the result of effort and discipline. The poet describes his reactions to Man's decay in illuminating allegorical terms:

Hearing of harvests rotting in valleys,  
Seeing at end of street the barren mountains,  
Round corners coming suddenly on water,  
Knowing them shipwrecked who were launched for  
    islands,  
We honour founders of these starving cities,  
Whose honour is the image of our sorrow.

In the poems of 1934, the motif of the 'Quest' is overwhelmed by the poet's preoccupation with Death and the inability of the individual to curb this relentless desire within him. Death is particularly welcomed by those overtly diseased who see in it a means to change their stagnant state (Poem XI) but even the Truly Strong Man, who, as 'the greatest figure of his day,' displays a healthy facade and performs great exploits, is secretly in love with death - that death resulting directly from the trivia of a daily routine. Thus:

he sighed for one  
Who, say astonished critics, lived at home;  
Did little jobs about the house with skill  
And nothing else; could whistle; would sit still  
Or potter round the garden; answered some  
Of his long marvellous letters but kept none. (Poem XIII)

With the threat of death on the individual, vows of love break easily and the resultant fear and confusion cause psychic degeneration (Poem VI). Poem IX explores death's appeal and demonstrates its parallel in the false 'Quest.'

The mirror world where logic is reversed,  
Where ages become the handsome child at last.

In this false 'Quest' we return to the world of legend and romantic love which, as Auden said in Poems, is responsible for Man's total deception and his inability to undertake the 'Quest' for reasons demanding discipline and abundant if controlled energy.

Once again, in Poem IX, Auden attacks the Parents' education of the child which he holds responsible for Man's psychic decay. This accentuates the horrific irony of the opening stanza, particularly 'All our traditional sympathy with birth' against which the reader weighs the 'ruined boys' of Poems and the schoolboys to whom the speeches of The Orators are addressed. Auden sees the death-wishing world characterized by as strict a conformity 'as a naval school' by which love is 'at once informed on and suppressed.' Lack of this love results in an arid and debilitated child whose future development is seen in terms of false questings. To this point the poem is an ordinary Audenesque account of a society oppressed. But the personal elements intrude in the later part of the poem and from an atmosphere of death and decadence embracing the whole of England, we turn to the personal life of the speaker in which pressures of parent and teacher have destroyed the twin impulses of love and action. In magnificent sea-imagery, the 'Quest' is revoked as Man's total response to his environment throughout his life:

My sea is empty and the waves are rough:  
Gone from the map the shore where childhood played

Tight-fisted as a peasant, eating love;  
 Lost in my wake the archipelago,  
 Islands of self through which I sailed all day,  
 Planting a pirate's flag, a generous boy;  
 And lost the way to action and to you.

This stanza clarifies Auden's total conception of the motif of the 'Quest.' Man's search for order and meaning in his life cannot be limited to one segment of his life-span or to one part of all his activities as a human being. The 'Quest' is a continual search whose rewards, if any, are only those related to the mental activity and discipline Man earns through his seeking. This explains the poet's concern with the childhood of Man, when the individual can be deprived of a true 'Quest' by a perverted love developed through faulty educative forces upon him. This is the theme of Poem III where the example of the ancestors - 'Our hunting fathers' - has been corrupted by a generation who failed to respond adequately to new evolutionary pressures. For Man, the poet's demand for change takes the shape of a 'Quest' to attain 'the rightness of a god.' But the poem ends in gloom, depicting Man's:

mature ambition  
 To think no thought but ours,  
 To hunger, work illegally,  
 And be anonymous.

The poems published in 1935 rely less on a statement of the death-wishing nature of society than on the means to cure that illness. Poem XXIV captures the mood of senseless repetition in a repressed and 'heartless' world by the refrain:- 'Cried the six cripples to the silent statue,/ The six beggared cripples.' Auden's reaction to this state of frustration is expressed in Poem XXI where, in an address to 'A Bride in the Thirties,' he delivers a controlled attack on Eros conceived of here as an isolating and selfish escape from reality which 'Makes worlds as innocent as Beatrix Potter's.' Such a love involves a romantic self-deception, the effect of

which is a gradual sapping of the purposeful and constructive energies within Man. This manifests itself at the social level in the individual's total subservience and hysterical acclamation of such dictators as Hitler and Mussolini who inflate the ideal of love. It is quite clear, however, where responsibility lies:

But love, except at our proposal,  
Will do no trick at his disposal;  
Without opinions of his own, performs  
The programme that we think of merit,  
And through our private stuff must work  
His public spirit.

Out of a scene of selfish decay occasioned by so perverse a love, there arises Man's ultimate choice in deciding whether or not he is capable of successfully completing the 'Quest.'

Yours is the choice, to whom the gods awarded  
The language of learning and the language of love,  
Crooked to move as a moneybug or a cancer  
Or straight as a dove.

Both Poem V and Poem XVI insist upon the growing specificity of the poet in his relation to past time and space. From his position close beside 'the swan-delighting river' and his cry to 'Look, stranger, at this island now,' the poet is aware of the mighty evolutionary pressures upon him. His present stance is threatened by 'the common wish for death' and by Man's inherited spiritual degradation with 'the dangerous apple taken.' Once more, Love, as panacea, lies not in the sexual demands of Eros but in the all embracing Love which unites Man with Man and soothes conflict. It nevertheless demands an activity for:

How insufficient is  
The endearment and the look.

This unselfish love '... produces social consciousness, aims at the 'really better' world to be produced by political action.'<sup>81</sup>

The poems which mark Look, Stranger! as a 'profoundly pessimistic' volume are those first published in 1936. Such pessimism is at once the result of the poet's vision of inevitable failure in the world around him and his consequent certainty that Man cannot approach his personal 'Quest' with any serious chance of success. This loss of confidence manifests itself in a loss of energy within the poem. In 'Spain' which follows in 1937 and On the Frontier, produced in 1938, the loss is most evident. Having witnessed the failure of earthly love, Auden is growing gradually towards the concept of Divine Love and his 'conversion' in the early 'forties. Poem XIX demands that the individual accepts and understands his responsibility for his actions, even when those actions appear superficially. Possibly, they preface a death-wish or debilitating neurosis but self-questioning is a vital stage in the individual's psychic reclamation in his approach to the 'Quest:'

Who are you with, from whom you turn away.  
At whom you dare not look? Do you know why?

Auden's theory of artistic authority here receives his personal confirmation for he asks the questions as models for his searching audience.

Thus, it is this lack of involvement which characterizes the poetry published in 1936. Certainly the old themes are repeated. Man's debasement of the example of his ancestors (poem XII); his consequent knowledge and desire for death (Poem IV) and even a reworking of the Lawrentian ideal of the complete Man in whom thought and action are inextricably mingled (Poem XXII). But, basically, with the loss of the personal mythology of the earlier poetry, with the desire to reach a larger audience and the resultant lucidity and calmness of tone, the Volume lacks that sense of personal involvement in the motif of the 'Quest.'

In Poem VIII, however, an 'Angel' and a 'white waterfall' suggest the final goal for the questing individual and hint at the reasons for Auden's growing certainty in the world around him.

The Epilogue to Look, Stranger! illustrates the mood of nostalgia which permeates the volume as a whole and suggests reasons for Auden's lack of involvement with his immediate social environment. In Poem XXXI the city is seen as an extension of Man's natural activities as a human being and a reflection of his innate corruption. It is used by Man's false leaders to concentrate rumours and lies in one tight spot. Thus, in the city, corruption is at its most obvious. And Man's desolate isolation is owing to the banishment or death of Man's true Leaders: Nansen/Schweitzer and then:

There were Freud and Groddeck at their candid  
studies  
Of the mind and body of man.

The poem also continues Auden's belief in the function of the artist within society. He is now the instigator of Man's 'Quest' - not a 'comforter and a liar' but one who probes within Man's memory disturbing complacency, and activating the necessary desire for change. Thus:

Lawrence revealed the sensations hidden by shame,  
The sense of guilt was recorded by Kafka,  
Then there was Proust on the self-regard

but to this point there has been failure. Partly the essential stupidity of the English people, partly the unyielding course of evolution is responsible for the continuing psychic disorders. But, in the future, Auden looks to the artist to serve as Man's psychic ideal, leading him by strict and honest endeavour on his 'Quest' to discover order and meaning in his life.



## NOTES TO THE FIRST CHAPTER

- 1 Quoted by Louis A. Landa in his introduction to Gulliver's Travels, (Boston, 1960), p. viii.
- 2 W.H. Auden includes Sigmund Freud on his tribunal of 'healers' in Poem XXII of Poems: He also makes direct reference to the psychoanalyst in his essay 'Psychology and Art Today' and, in Another Time (1940), acknowledges his debt to Freud in a poetic tribute.
- 3 Auden also mentions D.H. Lawrence by name in the same poem of Poems. His indebtedness to Lawrence is better seen in the numerous ideas adapted and used throughout Auden's early work, and recorded in part by Replogle in his essay, 'Social Philosophy in Auden's Early Poetry,' Criticism, 11 (Fall, 1960), 351-61.
- 4 Homer Lane's influence on the poet is recorded by Christopher Isherwood in his autobiographical novel, Lions and Shadows (Norfolk, Conn., 1947), p. 299-300.
- 5 Georg Groddeck's Book of the It seems to have furnished some ideas for the early Auden even if those ideas are used ironically. In Letter to Lord Byron, this 'indebtedness' is parodied in a typically Audenesque manner:
 

I can't think what my It had on its mind,  
To give me flat feet, a big behind. (p.202)
- 6 Reuben Osborn in his book, Marxism and Psychoanalysis (London, 1965) elucidates Freud's allegorical conception of the mind as a map divided into distinct and separate territories.
- 7 Freud's own conception of psychoanalysis was itself allegorical, the intense probing of the psyche represented by a journey through undulating terrain.
- 8 The word is actually used in Poem IV of Poems. In fact, it characterizes a whole generation of Audenesque figures.
- 9 D.H. Lawrence, Fantasia of the Unconscious, p.119.
- 10 Ibid., p.122.
- 11 Ibid., p.106.
- 12 Lions and Shadows, p.300.
- 13 The Book of the It (London, 1950), pp.100-101.

- 14 Ibid., p.73.
- 15 Ibid., p.67.
- 16 Ibid., p.32.
- 17 Fantasia of the Unconscious, p.119.
- 18 'Psychology and Art,' 18.
- 19 Fantasia, p.123.
- 20 Ibid., p.144.
- 21 Ibid., p.145.
- 22 The Book of the It, p.23.
- 23 Ibid., p.16.
- 24 Joseph Warren Beach, The Making of the Auden Canon (Minnesota, 1957), p.118.
- 25 'Changes of Attitude and Rhetoric in Auden's Poetry,' Southern Review, VII (1941), 326-349.
- 26 For a more detailed explanation of this point, see Jules Replogle's 'Social Philosophy in Auden's Early Poetry.'
- 27 The widespread popularity of this 'Test' can be judged by Gavin Ewart's parody of it in his poem 'Audenesque for an Initiation,' where he asks of Society in general and the Literary Establishment of F.R. Leavis in particular;  
Are they up to the Full Fruit Standard, would they pass the Spelling Test?
- 28 Lions and Shadows, pp. 207-8.
- 29 'Social Philosophy,' 355.
- 30 See, in confirmation, Geoffrey Bullough's Mirror of Minds: Changing Psychological Beliefs in English Poetry. (Toronto, 1962), pp.234-242.
- 31 Richard Hoggart, Auden: An Introductory Essay, (London, 1951), p.131.

- 32 Bullough, Mirror of Minds, p.234.
- 33 Fantasia, p.192.
- 34 The interplay of change and death suggest also the influence of T.S. Eliot, particularly 'The Journey of the Magi.'  
For a brief statement of poetic influences on Auden, C. Day Lewis' A Hope for Poetry (London, 1934) is still quite useful. In particular, note the first three chapters.
- 35 This quotation is used by G.S. Fraser, spokesman for the Apocalypse movement, in his introduction to the white horseman (London, 1942).
- 36 The recurrence of this image has been traced by Replogle in his essay 'The Gang Myth.'
- 37 Fantasia, p.98.
- 38 Ibid., p.99.
- 39 Delmore Shwartz, 'The Two Audens,' Kenyon Review, I (1939), 34-45.
- 40 In this and all subsequent chapters, all quotations are taken from the first edition of The Orators, published in London, 1932.
- 41 Hoggart, Auden, pp. 13, 17.
- 42 Everett, Auden, p.27.
- 43 In his introduction to the Collected Poetry, published in New York in 1945.
- 44 Auden's own introductory statement to the latest and revised edition of The Orators, (London, 1966).
- 45 J.G. Blair, The Poetic Art of W.H. Auden, p.29.
- 46 Stephen Spender, 'It Began At Oxford,' New York Times Review, (March 13, 1955), 4-5.
- 47 The London Mercury, XXVI (May 1932), 171.
- 48 Beach, The Auden Canon, p.78.
- 49 Blair, The Poetic Art, p.29.

- 50 'The Gang Myth,' 490.
- 51 Beach, p.13.
- 52 See, in particular, the fourth ode of Book III of The Orators.
- 53 Everett, p.29.
- 54 D.A. Traversi, 'Marxism and English Poetry,' Arena, 1(Oct. Dec. 1937), 199.
- 55 The special significance of this remark for the poets of the 'thirties is dealt with by C. Day Lewis in A Hope For Poetry, in particular, Chapter 3.
- 56 Lehmann, p.32.
- 57 Beach, pp.18-20.
- 58 Replogle, 'The Gang Myth,' 485.
- 59 Quoted by Beach, p.17.
- 60 'New Light On The Orators,' PMLA, LXXXII (Oct., 1967), 455-464.
- 61 Monroe K. Spears, 'Late Auden: Satirist as Lunatic Clergyman,' Sewanee Review, (Winter 1951), 50-74.
- 62 One of 5 poems published in New Verse, 5(October, 1933), 14-17.
- 63 Beach, p.17.
- 64 Traversi, 'Marxism and English Poetry,' 208.
- 65 Beach, p.96.
- 66 Replogle, 'The Gang Myth,' 490.
- 67 Quoted by Julian Symons in 'Of Crisis and Dismay: A Study of Writing in the 'Thirties,' Focus, Vol. I, 1945, 101.
- 68 In particular, 'The Gang Myth.'
- 69 Fantasia of the Unconscious, p.103.

- 70 Hoggart, An Introductory Essay, p.28.
- 71 The 'Introduction' to The Intimate Journals of Charles Baudelaire, trans. Christopher Isherwood (Boston, 1957), XX. First published in 1947.
- 72 Hoggart, p.117.
- 72<sup>a</sup> Spears, in The Disenchanted Island, suggests 'homosexuality, which would fit in with the public school theme and explain the airman's extreme sense of guilt and isolation'. (p.51)
- 73 Beach, p.79.
- 74 Hoggart, p.117.
- 75 From a review in TLS, Oct., 6, 1966, 918.
- 76 Quoted by Everett, Auden, p.49.
- 77 For details of the book's composition, see Bloomfield's Bibliography, pp. 19-22.
- 78 Hoggart, p.95.
- 79 Spears, The Disenchanted Island, p.24.
- 80 Spears, p.24.
- 81 Spears, p.125.

## Chapter Two

The Plays: The Quest Motif in Paid on Both Sides;  
The Dance of Death; The Dog beneath the Skin;  
The Ascent of F6 and On the Frontier.

INTRODUCTORY:

In his 'Childe Roland To The Dark Tower Came', Robert Browning makes use of the myth of the 'Quest.' The searching individual, presumably the 'strong man' of 'Prospice,' remembers 'The Band' - that group of friends who 'to the Dark Tower's search addressed/Their steps,' and, from this memory, he gains confidence. Although mindful of their desperate ends, the searching individual cannot conceive of a Messiah coming from outside the intimate environs of this clique. Giles and Cuthbert may have failed in their respective 'Quests' but the community beyond are characterized by a familiar moribund landscape, scarred and ravaged:

No! penury, inertness and grimace,  
In some strange sort, were the land's portion.

Only the individuals inside 'The Band' are capable of saving themselves and serving as exemplars to the rest of mankind.

Browning's 'Band' suggests a remarkable parallel to Auden's Oxford companions, sometimes called 'The Gang.' Auden and Isherwood were leaders in this group of writers who included C. Day Lewis, Rex Warner and Edward Upward. Of the individual volumes which resulted from this close friendship, all were structured by the myth of the 'Quest.' Rex Warner's The Wild Goose Chase, Edward Upward's Journey To The Border and Lewis'

The Magnetic Mountain remain typical of their output. Some collaboration was inevitable amongst companions who insisted upon the exclusive nature of the caste and dedicated their volumes to one another.

Auden's collaboration with Christopher Isherwood began in the intimacy of a vacation together on the Isle of Wight in the summer of 1926, after a chance meeting late in 1925 during Auden's first year at Oxford:

On this island, amid private jokes and horseplay, Auden and Isherwood fashioned a private myth of their own.<sup>1</sup>

In 1928, with the publication of his first novel All the Conspirators, Isherwood gives tentative shape to this mythical world and employs the image of the 'Quest':

The painter has defied his family and run away from an office job in the city.<sup>2</sup>

Significantly, the work ends in failure as the painter withdraws from a painful isolation into the comfortable Oedipal figure. In the same year Auden had published, on Stephen Spender's hand-set press, a volume of twenty-eight poems. Nine of the poems were reprinted in *Poems* (1930), and of these, four were retained for the second edition in 1933. As I have already shown, this latter volume is unified by the myth of the 'Quest.' Obviously, therefore, for their later theatrical collaboration, both men drew widely upon a common stock of allusions and a profound confidence in the image of the 'Quest' to structure them.

In 1928-29, Auden visited Berlin and came to admire the German playwright Bertolt Brecht whose influence I shall discuss later. About the same time, Isherwood, too, visited Berlin and his experiences there formed the basis for his Berlin Stories. He was also to become an admirer of Brecht and, with D. Vesey, translated Brecht's Dreigroschenroman.<sup>3</sup>



In this way, the collaboration was based not only on a mutually acceptable structure but also on similar conceptions of theatrical presentation.

It seems logical to assume that whilst Auden performed eloquent poetic solos, it was Isherwood who was responsible for maintaining the continuity of the play. As late as 1937, Isherwood said:

When we collaborate, I have to keep a sharp eye on him - or down flop the characters on their knees....: another constant danger is that of choral interruptions by angel-voices. If Auden had his way, he would turn every play into a cross between grand opera and high mass.<sup>4</sup>

After each of the three plays was completed, Rupert Doone attempted the stage version for production in the Group Theatre and had much pruning and re-shaping to do before the final copy. He, indeed, suggested the title for The Dog Beneath The Skin. And it was the stage version, in each case, that was published by Faber & Faber.

In his Bibliography, B.C. Bloomfield records a correspondence about the origins of that play and, in so doing, presents a vivid picture of their working arrangement:

Isherwood tells me that early in 1935 Auden sent him the fully revised version of a play titled The Chase, which was announced for publication by Faber and Faber on 21 March 1935. He, Isherwood, suggested some revisions and improvements, and in this way they 'drifted into a collaboration.' When Auden visited Copenhagen, where Isherwood was staying, a final draft was evolved. Isherwood suggested that the collaboration arose because he was, at that time, still acting as censor to much of Auden's poetry. Meanwhile, Rupert Doone had got a copy...He it was who gave the play its present title...Isherwood says most of the play is by Auden.<sup>5</sup>

In 1932, in collaboration with Rupert Doone and numerous friends, Auden founded the Group Theatre<sup>6</sup> in London. The Theatre had:

aesthetic ideas, it had a social attitude;  
the first springing largely from Doone,  
the second from Auden.<sup>7</sup>

Strongly influenced by Bertholt Brecht in both form and direction, the plays written under the collaboration of Auden and Christopher Isherwood are the logical corollary to the poet's consuming interest in the 'Quest' motif. It was natural for a poet whose conception of the poem was as a social instrument to teach, exhort and warn Mankind, that he would eventually turn to the theatre and to the more obvious didactic possibilities of the theatre.

The belief in parable art that Auden outlined in 'Psychology and Art To-Day', suggests striking parallels to Brecht's theory of the epic theatre. The following table illustrates the difference the German playwright described between the conventional 'Dramatic Theatre,' and his own 'Epic Theatre:'

The Dramatic Theatre

The stage embodies a sequence  
of events  
involves the spectator in an  
action, and  
uses up his energy, his will to  
action  
allows him feelings  
communicates experiences  
the spectator is brought into  
an action  
is plied with suggestion  
sensations are presented  
man is given as a known  
quantity  
tense interest in the outcome  
one scene exists for another  
linear course of events  
natura non facit saltus  
the world is what it is  
what man should  
his instincts  
thought determines reality

The Epic Theatre

The stage narrates the sequence  
makes him an observer  
but  
awakes his energy  
demands decisions  
communicates pieces of knowledge  
is placed in front of an argument  
with arguments  
till they become insights  
man an object of investigation  
tense interest in what happens  
each scene exists for itself  
curved course of events  
facit saltus  
the world is what it is becoming  
what man must  
his reasons  
social reality determines thought.<sup>8</sup>

Such a table becomes particularly relevant to Auden's didactic purpose when it is remembered that the poet conceived reality as a social conscience through which it was possible to make action urgent and its nature clear,<sup>9</sup> to mankind. It is particularly significant that Rupert Doone had suggested that it was the purpose of the Theatre to depict 'a life of action and the sense.'<sup>10</sup> Watching the dramatic portrayal, the audience comes to terms intellectually with the problems facing it. Its emotional alienation from the dramatic activity rejects any dissipation of that inner discipline and objectivity so essential in conquering such difficulties. Consequently, the plays emphasize:

the emotional distance set between the author and his subject-matter, between the spectator and the story, and even (if possible) between the actor and the character he impersonates. The intention is to keep the spectator from using up all his emotional force through his participation in the drama, and to bring him rather, as a thinking and acting being, to intellectual conclusions that may form a basis for action.<sup>11</sup>

The theory, in this way, asserts boldly all that Auden had been obscurely shouting for the bewildered reader of his poetry. Hoggart calls the plays 'external:'

they are purposive; they throw their beams outward, and invite action. The spectator is not required to submit himself imaginatively to the story, nor to identify himself externally with the characters. The emotions may be touched, but the mind should remain in control, stimulated, commenting, judging, criticising, deciding.<sup>12</sup>

Auden's questing individual, addressed in the theatre, is required to understand completely the intellectual problems he is facing. Once understood they form the basis of future activity in the quest. 'The plays themselves thus are fables, modern morality plays; they are

intended to appeal to the minds and not the emotions of the audience, to be educational and politically didactic.'<sup>13</sup>

Auden's preoccupation with obscure symbolism, jaggedly ambiguous interventions, melodramatic entrances, ballet sequences and all the accoutrements of an eager mind, is explained by his attitude towards the 'Quest.' Through this seemingly haphazard detail and loosely constructed plot, he asks the audience to search for meaning. The charade becomes a microcosm of their lives, in which their own intellectual activity assumes responsibility for their salvation. We are now able to understand Auden's use of the charade which suggests that 'the piece is not to be read as a play, that it will have hidden meanings, and that it is intended to be entertaining.'<sup>14</sup> In speaking of Paid on Both Sides, Monroe K. Spears says:

The piece is indeed on one level a quessing game in which tableaux and actions represent, not words, as in most charades, but ideas; and in which the appeal to the interest and challenge of riddles is constant.<sup>15</sup>

And in these riddles lie the answers to Man's constant questioning.

At one practical level, Auden's dramatic quest resulted in failure. Intended for a wide and youthful audience as exhortation and as propaganda, it played to the interests of the very section of the community it was attacking. As Julian Symons says, 'The Group Theatre...was a gesture made by middle-class radicals to a middle-class liberal audience.'<sup>16</sup>

Paid On Both Sides, first published in Criterion of January, 1930, was included in both the 1930 and 1933 editions of Poems. In its representation of a hopelessly doomed culture, the literary charade projects those themes, ideas and images which so permeate the work of W.H. Auden throughout the 'Thirties. In POems, the elements of conflict were drawn within Man's diseased psyche; in Paid On Both Sides, the elements are placed in a cultural landscape in the form of an endless feud between two equally irredeemable groups. Nevertheless, poetry and play depend upon the motif of the 'Quest' for their thematic unity and demonstrate the basic Audenesque premiss that 'if Man is to be healthy he must break away from the decadent life in which he finds himself.'<sup>17</sup> The rich implications of such an exodus from the 'old systems' (p.13), however, remain sketchily drawn, for Auden, like his unsuccessful applicants for the 'Quest,' concentrates his poetic powers on bitter statements of social and personal decadence. Essentially, the image of the 'Quest' suggests Auden's search for the panacea to Man's decay and allows us to view the charade as something more than 'a tragic story of a border feud between rival houses whose males, inspired by their vengeful mothers, kill each other off from generation to generation.'<sup>18</sup>

The charade opens in Death, despite the birth of a son to Joan Nower. For whilst a baby should promise an expansion of the old social order, he

here merely emphasizes the inability of new generations to respond to the challenge of a changing world. In its premature delivery, the child is unprepared for the violent war he must wage against the slow stain of poisonous conformity spreading within society. A major cause of this defencelessness is the Mother who, as the play opens, is already aware of the frightening power she wields over her son. She knows: 'There'll be some crying out when he's come/there.' (p.10) In so degenerate a social system, however, such oedipal restraint is but one strain of bacillus in the diseased and dying end of a worn tradition:

Our fathers shouted once. They taught us war,  
To scamper after darlings, to climb hills,  
To emigrate from weakness... (p.16)

Perversions of ancestral love embroil the characters in a state of perpetual conflict. The poet's exhortation to the individual to flee his environment is illustrated in Dick, the prototype for all questing heroes in Auden's work. Despite his certain knowledge of society's depravity, he admits his difficulty in leaving:

I have thought it all over and I think  
it is the best thing to do. My cousin  
writes that the ranch is a thoroughly  
good proposition. I don't know how I  
shall like the colonies but I feel I  
must get away from here. There is not  
room enough...but the actual moving is  
unpleasant. (p.10)

In a culture schismatized by petty conflict, clandestine plotting and supremely amoral machinations, the theme of the charade develops. This narrative must hold together the important choral commentaries and the chaotic centre to the play which analyzes symptom and cure for social illness. The pivotal incident is the capture of a spy by Nower's men, following which John Nower examines the feelings of guilt he has to that point repressed within himself. In a dream-vision, John, in the ironic

role of prosecutor, states the vital issue:

Yes I know we have and are making  
terrific sacrifices, but we cannot  
give in. We cannot betray the dead...  
No, we must fight to the finish. (p.18)

The solution John Nower outlines when he produces his revolver is no answer to the problems confronting the spy, the representative of the doomed society. Immediate death simply gratifies the persuasive death-wish nurtured by the mother-imago.

The trial-scene proposes that Man attain wholeness through new and vital responses to the demanding pressures of evolutionary life-force. 'For memory is death' accentuates the dangers of maintaining the status quo. The means to salvation is:

by taking leave,  
Parting in anger and glad to go  
Where we are still unwelcome. (p.19)

In this way, Auden makes use of the motif of the 'Quest.' The movement basic to the motif parallels the poet's belief in psychic regeneration as Man's only cure within society. As in poems, such a reawakening can only result from the power of Love, stimulated into activity. The Love is not the narrow and confining force which presently serves to restrict the individual to points of isolation '... to accept/An island governorship, back to estates/Explored as child ....' (p.23) The true power of Love is expansive enough to promote freedom for Man in all his social relationships.

The sense of hopelessness which pervades the very arguments of the trial scene is alleviated by the humane figure of Father Christmas. To the prisoner, repressed and perverted in the exercise of his love, he says:

Leave him alone. This fellow is very very ill  
But he will get well. (p.23)

Such a glimmering of hope in a darkening culture is immediately extinguished by the reply of Man-Woman which reinvokes the former despair. This character, 'in the guise of the Man-Woman as a prisoner of war behind barbed wire, in the snow,' represents the suppressed life-force within the individual. Although it points to Man's potential for change, it emphasizes the rejection of activity by Man who prefers the established patterns of social behaviour:

Love was not love for you but episodes,  
 Traffic in memoirs, views from different sides;  
 Nothing was any use; therefore I went  
 Hearing you call for what you did not want.  
 I lay with you; you made that an excuse  
 For playing with yourself, but homesick because  
 Your mother told you that's what flowers did  
 And thought you lived since you were bored, not  
 dead,  
 And could not stop. (p.24)

Conventional treatment for Man is ridiculed by the figure of the Doctor who points to the folly of a medical cure for so frustrated an individual. In Poems, Lawrence, Freud and Lane will be called upon to perform a psychological examination. All the Doctor can diagnose is 'Tennis elbow, Graves' Disease, Derbyshire neck and Housemaid's knees.' (p.25) Nevertheless, he shows the way to future cures by discovering that the spy is suffering from a dominating intellect which has repressed his instinctual drives and killed the power of Love within him:

Um, yes. Very interesting. The conscious  
 brain appears normal except under emotion.  
 Fancy it. The Devil couldn't do that. This  
 advances and retreats under control and poisons  
 everything round it. My diagnosis is:  
 Adamant will, cool brain and laughing spirit. (p.25-26)

The area of concern within Man is not in the body but in deeply withdrawn territories of the psyche.

Auden focuses his concern for Modern Man on the character of John.



In him, the poet sees the essential strength needed by a questing hero and the inevitable flaws which deny him success. Within the context of the charade, John's continual search for a solution to the state of perpetual conflict in the world around him is a constructive element. This element, however, is doomed to failure, in a world which, ironically, is not prepared for a Redeemer. John's love remains the instrument by which he may achieve salvation, but such a force is warped by the Mother-fixation:

But love, sent east for peace  
From tunnels under those  
Bursts now to pass  
On trestles over meaner quarters  
A noise and flashing glass. (p.28)

At this individual tragedy, 'one is left with a powerful sense of man's unalterable misery and fate.'<sup>19</sup> But, the Choruses help to make John's tragedy an emblem of all that is wretched and irredeemable in the human situation:

You have tasted good and what is it? For you,  
Sick on the green plain, healed in the tundra, shall  
Turn westward back from your alone success,  
Under a dwindling Alp to see your friends  
Cut down the wheat. (p.34)

Replogle states the basic problem confronting Mankind: 'By clinging to a tradition now outmoded, to habits now the cause of degeneracy, the society dooms itself.'<sup>20</sup>

The suppression of the 'Quest' in all but its most tentative form in Dick's emigration and its delineation of failure for John Nower is the result of a darkly pessimistic view of the contemporary situation. As Monroe K. Spears says of Paid On Both Sides:

What is responsible for the  
tragedy is and is not just a  
corrupt society or mistakes in  
the raising of children; it is

also the unchangeable human condition.<sup>21</sup>

It is interesting to compare this formula for a 'Quest' with the one implied by the first poem of accompanying Poems. In Paid On Both Sides, the direction of the individual's path to psychic rebirth is away from the strictures of his diseased society - 'to emigrate from weakness.' In 'Will you turn a deaf ear,' the individual's psychic ideal warns him of the temptations of a system within whose bounds he will be compelled to work subversively, like the spy of the charade. What is suggested by two such antithetical methods of delineating the 'Quest' is a total renunciation of society in Paid On Both Sides, and a growing concern for its problems in Poems. In the charade, the 'Quest' is poorly drawn and but weakly suggestive of success in the recurring images of Spring, season of change. In the Poems, the demand for a Quest is declaimed from the great height of the poet's position.

The Dance of Death was first produced by the Group Theatre in its season at the Westminster Theatre from October 1st, 1935. In the programme accompanying the performance, 'in a collection of aphorisms,'<sup>22</sup> Auden stated certain of the dramatic beliefs he shared with Rupert Doone:

Drama began as the act of a whole community. Ideally there would be no spectators. In practice every member of the audience should feel like an understudy.  
Drama is essentially an art of the body. The basis of acting is acrobatics, dancing, and all forms of physical skill. The music hall, the Christmas pantomime, and the country house charade are the most living drama of today.<sup>23</sup>

Despite so confusing an amalgam of technical forms, the charade is unified by the motif of the 'Quest.' It is at once a 'sort of masque, or ballet-recitation'<sup>24</sup> and a 'revue a thèse, its style perhaps based on Eliot's Sweeney Agonistes.'<sup>25</sup> Beach calls it 'a sort of modernistic musical show, all song and dance and pantomime with occasional bits of comic dialogue.' Later, however, he adds, 'It is symbolical and didactic.'<sup>26</sup>

Such critical confusion results from Auden's use of the charade to create a Brechtian alienation between play and audience, where, in the confusion of song, dance and slapstick, the symbolism of the 'Quest' is deliberately obscured. In consequence, the audience, like Auden's questing hero, must search for order and meaning amidst molten chaos. As Auden understands the increasing dangers facing Society, the charade

gives way to the full-length play, the aim of which is overtly didactic. In the last play of the decade, On the Frontier, the directness of the 'Quest's treatment and the strength of its informing ideas have produced a clarity in sharp contrast to the earlier obscurity.

Fundamentally, The Dance of Death examines and rejects various means to accomplish the 'Quest' successfully. Whilst probing common examples of deluded Man on false 'Quests,' the charade stresses the need for each individual to assume personal responsibility for psychic and social health. John Lehmann supports this view:

The Dance of Death is another essay on Auden's favourite theme, that bourgeois society is dying, because it has the subconscious wish to destroy itself.<sup>27</sup>

The Announcer, from his familiar position of Audenesque height, makes this clear at the very beginning of the play:

We present to you this evening a picture of the decline of a class, of how its members dream of a new life, but secretly desire the old, for there is death inside them. We show you that death as a dancer.

Subsequent action in the play involves the efforts of The Audience to seek out this 'dream of a new life' and, by activating it, cleanse Man of his inherently diseased soul. The importance of Lehmann's comment that 'The Announcer...persuades both the chorus and the audience to follow him on an extremely vague quest for an 'English' revolution'<sup>28</sup> lies in its statement of the specific relationship of the dream to England, the death-wishing society. Throughout the 'thirties, Auden is concerned with the quest in relation to the social and psychological problems of the Englishman. In The Dance of Death the emphasis is primarily on psychic probing as the means to inner health. 'You can refuse/The invitation/To self-examination,' but the consequences will be an individual in a

perpetual state of chaos.

Conflict in the play centres on the bitter struggle between Life and Death for control of Man. The forces of Life in the play are symbolically demonstrated by the impulsive movements and decisions of the cast in instinctively rejecting the masks of Death. The Dancer who represents the death-wish prevalent in modern society, is supple and so malleable that he can assume all shapes, thus enabling him to placate the desires of the whole community. Death, seen as 'The new life, the true life/ The life for you,' is responsible not only for the perversion of Man's natural energies which would be better spent in pursuit of psychic health, but it is in itself a false quest. Through its promises of an ideal future, requiring little effort after the initial acceptance of the slow inexorable decay, Man sees in Death a mirror world of ideal proportions where he can find that which he wishes to find:

Vital young man  
 Do what you can  
 For our dust  
 We who are weak  
 Want a splendid physique  
 You must, you must.  
 Do not forsake us, make us, give us your word  
 As strong as a horse as quick as a bird.  
 You're our ideal  
 Make it come real  
 For us.  
 Vital young man  
 Do what you can  
 You must.

Consequently, Death means and promises an evasion of social and psychic ailments. Auden stresses, in his exhortation to the individual, a disciplined drive which will enable him to face these problems and to probe secrets, hidden and dangerous. Death betrays all those who trust in him, crudely shown on stage by the theft of clothes, and Man cannot regard this contest with Death in anything like affectionate terms. In

Poems and The Orators, Auden's quest is conceived of in terms of an armed insurgence against a decadent society protected by an obdurate army. This present embracing of Death, through the lack of awareness of its threatening nature, is emphasized by the marching song from the First World War. The irony masks an extreme seriousness:

They are ever stepping onward  
 They are eager with the hope of youth.  
 They never fear the foe  
 But strike a gallant blow  
 For God and the cause of truth.

This caricature of the questing hero is in stark contrast to the blind acceptance of Death by the cast. Even when seeking a means to end their basic illness, they choose those forms which point to a symbolic representation of the death-wish within them. Thus, having decided that 'The English Revolution/Is the only solution,' they are restrained from their quest by the Dictator, that 'healer' who is such a gross parody of the psychic ideal already suggested in poems. In the resultant Fascism, the love which formerly was seen as the motivating agency in Man, is perverted into an excessive love for one's country, a relishing of physical strength and a corrupt power in which the individual loses all importance. The cast may say in their love of fascism:

We'll steer through them all to what we require  
 Over monsters deadly in the deep sea sand  
 Our keel rides on to the Promised Land.

but, in facing danger and encountering obstacles to the quest, their innate corruption returns.

When the dancer falters in the play, the death-wish in Man decreases and Man's true instinctual drives reassert themselves. Free of restraining weaknesses, they envisage an essentially Lawrentian society: <sup>29</sup>

Be true  
 To the inner self. Retire to a wood  
 The will of the blood is the only good  
 We must learn to know it.

At this point, the dancer is artificially stimulated by the figure of the Doctor,<sup>30</sup> suggestive of those medical practitioners who prefer to treat Man's symptoms and not his basic disease. In this way, they, too indirectly stimulate the death-wish in their patients. With the resurgence of Death's activity and power, Man retires into an ideal colony farm where he imagines he has discovered the ends of the quest. But it is a romantic delusion, in which Man discovers nothing except trivia:

We live day and night  
 In the inner light  
 We contemplate our navels till we've second sight.

Man's true quest, it is restressed, is for psychic health not earthly glory. The means to that end is the driving force of Eros, the isolating power of Love:

He who would prove  
 The primal love  
 Must leave behind  
 All love of his kind  
 And fly alone  
 To the Alone.

In this quest, Man needs a leader, a psychic ideal to answer the question: 'Who will be the one/To teach us how to fly from the alone to the Alone?' In the figure of the Pilot, Man discovers yet one more false leader. The Pilot personifies the death-wish. He is pampered and petted by a society of invalids. Their mentality finds its microcosm in a nightclub:

Who is ugly  
 Who is sick  
 Who is lonely  
 Come on quick.  
 Hither.

The Audience responds eagerly to this request, each member's personal and debilitating neurosis coming rapidly to the surface in a death-wish. Such an infection threatens all members of society - a point which is restressed in Death's will in which the beneficiaries are typically diseased products of a corrupt society and include Blackmailers, Coiners, Boys, Thieves, and Old Hacks and Tots.

When all means to the ends of the quest have been thoroughly explored and rejected, Karl Marx appears on stage. His words suggest the final solution for the English Revolution earlier in the play:

The instruments of production have been too  
much for him. He is liquidated.

But the banishment of Death is not directly related to the appearance on stage of this caricature of Karl Marx. What Auden is trying to suggest is the possibility of a cure for a diseased society, manifested in a political and social character. It is the appearance of an example from the past, ironically handled by the playwright to suggest both current sloth and an image of optimism for the future.



What was all this agreeable nonsense about  
 a man dressed up as a dog (and a long-lost  
 heir too) to do with choruses proclaiming  
 that:

Under the local images your blood has conjured,  
 We show you man caught in the trap of his terror,  
 destroying himself.<sup>31</sup>

The Dog Beneath the Skin, the first of the plays written in collaboration with Christopher Isherwood, was first produced by the Group Theatre in the autumn of 1935. Originally titled The Chase,<sup>32</sup> the play marks a significant development in Auden's delineation of the 'Quest' motif. Following the earlier charade paid On Both Sides and the slightly drawn sketch of psychological decay in The Dance of Death, The Dog Beneath the Skin illustrates that belief in the value of parable-art Auden first outlined in his essay 'Psychology and Art To-day:'

There must always be two kinds of art,  
 escape-art for man needs escape as he  
 needs food and deep sleep, and parable-art,  
 that art which shall teach man to unlearn  
 hatred and learn love....

The elements of escape-art in Auden's work before 1935 define a 'Quest' concealed by youthful enthusiasm and a deliberately private world based on a personal mythology.<sup>33</sup> As the need for such a 'Quest' became more urgent in the poet's eyes and as Auden sought positions of greater height<sup>34</sup> from which to expound Man's responsibility to himself, he came to

understand the full potential of the drama as a didactic instrument. In the same essay he relates the 'task' of art:

The task ... is not to tell people how to behave, but by drawing their attention to what the impersonal unconscious is trying to tell them, and by increasing their knowledge of good and evil, to render them better able to choose, to become increasingly morally responsible for their destiny.<sup>35</sup>

This attempt is not completely successful in The Dog Beneath the Skin, although the 'Quest' motif is the manifest theme of the play. John Lehmann best describes critical reaction:

Its real weakness, however, is the excess of private allusions and obscure jokes which was so noticeable in The Orators; and the appeal is still to a sophisticated 'University' audience, even more perhaps than The Dance of Death.<sup>36</sup>

But, within the structure of the play, the private allusion is overshadowed by the strong central 'plot' and by the poetry of the choruses which raises Alan Norman's personal search to an urgent national level. His naively comic 'Quest' which Auden hopes is obvious to the audience, has a serious psychological base - the overwhelming psychic decadence of the Englishman.

The play is, in fact, a succession of tableaux, each responsible for depicting one aspect of the entire corruption. In an attempt to demonstrate the widespread prevalence of such corruption, the scenes remain in juxtaposition 'without adequate interrelation or logical sequence.'<sup>37</sup> So much so that 'the movement of the play resembles not a movie film but a series of slides.'<sup>38</sup> In their assemblage, Auden unfolds the full worthlessness of the contemporary mentality, in a series of scenes where a political identity reveals the psychic weakness in its most irredeemable state.

The impression the play creates is the 'sense of insurmountable human limitation'<sup>39</sup> through which the questing individual must find his own way.

The opening scene in *Pressan Ambo* states the problem of the play in bitterly satiric terms and proposes a solution. It is a statement of the psychic condition of modern man allegorized by the caricatured figures of Village's Establishment - 'its location/Wherever your heart directs you most longingly to look; you/are loving towards it.' The Vicar, the General and his wife, and Iris Crewe produce in this village of the heart a gross fragmentation represented dramatically by the dislocated speeches of the villagers. Their disunity is the result of inept and deceptive leadership and savagely throws into relief the vicar's claim:

I labour to expound the truth  
To train the tender plant of Youth  
And guard the moral order.

This lack of leadership emphasizes the Villagers' urgent need for a 'Healer.' Alan Norman's 'Quest' fulfills this basic need, for in locating Francis, Alan restores direction to their lives. As they lamented previously:

Without his face we don't know what to do,  
We're undone.

The 'Quest,' however, is also delineated at the individual level. In seeking out Francis, Alan finds his true vocation in life which is to maintain the order and meaning he has found through his search by pursuing similar objectives all his life. Such constant change is the antidote to the poisonous stagnation of a society in love with the status quo. Thus, the play records Alan's development from the time he is under the control of the established mind, shown in his profuse deference to the established

established clowns of Pressan Ambo, until his complete rejection of the past as the play closes. In this latter scene, the Establishment is reduced to a chorus of yapping animals - the logical end for those who fail to react to new evolutionary pressures.

Once again there is severe warning throughout the play that other applicants have attempted the 'Quest.' Nobby Sollers, Sorbo Lamb and friends represent those 'Truly Weak' men who have tried the arduous North-West passage to psychic health and failed miserably. Alan locates Lamb in the Ostnian red-light district 'seduced by the Old Tricks.' His failure is seen as part of a dormant death-wish which rose to prominence on the 'Quest' itself:

When we are dead we shan't thank for flowers,  
 We shan't hear the parson preaching for hours,  
 We shan't be sorry to be bare white bone  
 At last we shan't be hungry and can sleep alone.

Chimp Eagle, for example, is discovered awaiting surgery in the Paradise Park Hospital. It is made quite clear that such a remedy can deal only with the symptoms and not with the deep-rooted cause of the malady. The result, once again, is death - that fatal longing of the questing individual.

In the opening scene, a familiar solution to the inherited disease of the individual is proffered. Love remains the means to the fulfillment of the 'Quest.' Throughout The Dog Beneath the Skin, Alan's search is mis-directed or interrupted by perversions of Love and it is only with the help of his psychic ideal, Francis, that he is able to overcome their temptations. Its true nature is declared by the Semi-Chorus in the first scene:

Enter with him  
 These legends, love,  
 For him assume

Each diverse form  
 As legend simple  
 As legend queer  
 That he may do  
 What these require  
 Be, love, like him  
 To legend true.

Auden sees Love as a versatile creative force operating in all aspects of human activity. Its generous breadth is contrasted strongly with the narrowly confining love of Alan and Iris which in itself presents a false end to Alan's 'Quest.' It is for this reason that Francis growls 'Just as though he were jealous', when Alan shows him a picture. Paradise Park acts as a vast sanctuary for those who, through fear, seek to retire from the world and the vigorous hazards that accompany Love's operation in human relationships. For the mind, momentarily overcome by temptation, Paradise Park offers a stagnant peace, a thoughtless refuge. Its inhabitants are invalids revelling in the atmosphere of a Convalescent Home called England. The poet, for example, is guilty of an excessive self-love which he uses to create a world of fantasy as protection against reality:

poet (tapping his forehead): Here. Everything's here. You're here. He's here. This park's here. This tree's here. If I shut my eyes they all disappear.

The lovers too, 'dressed in nursery-teapot-Dutch costumes', evade reality and the only end of the 'Quest' by conjuring their own dream world. Their love is the excessive neighbour love already outlined in the first book of The Orators:

Little white dove, it's you that I love,  
 Fairer than hollyhocks far!  
 How nice and how neat  
 Are your dear little feet!  
 You make my heart beat!  
 How terribly sweet, how terribly sweet,  
 How terribly sweet you are!

The female invalids, in love with their wounds, represent the defective lovers whose faith rests in the surgeon's knife as the prime factor of Change. But their need for an operation is a mere perversion of love. It is a psychic revaluation that is urgently required. Paradise Park hospital, then, allegorically represents a psyche inhabited by false loves. Their basic disobedience to the inner law of their own natures results in the inoperable psychosomatic disease. The means to such a recovery is a 'Quest' like that of Alan Norman. But in the hospital:

See passion transformed into rheumatism; rebellion into paralysis; power into a tumour.

As in Paid on Both Sides, the figure of the doctor is grossly caricatured. His position in the world as a 'healer' is satirized in parodies of religious creeds:

...I believe in surgical treatment for duodenal ulcer, cerebral abscess, pyloric stenosis, aneurism and all forms of endocrine disturbance.

Needless to say, such surgery is inadequate and death intrudes.

It is now possible to understand the 'picaresque'<sup>40</sup> structure of The Dog Beneath the Skin for the many and varied settings within the play simply represent states of mind, each of which is content with a false and perverted love. In his 'Quest', it is Alan Norman's task to grapple with and overcome the temptations offered by such diseased psyches. As in the first poem of poems, the psychic ideal leads the individual back into those diseased areas which offer the greatest temptation of Death. The successful completion of the 'Quest' demands a complete rejection of the death-wish in which evasion of the real-world is seen at its highest pitch. The savage terms in which the Ostnian town is described suggests the extreme dangers inherent in such false questings:

A human forest: all by one infection cancelled.  
 Despair so far invading every tissue has destroyed in these the  
 hidden seat of the desire and the intelligence.

Two reasons are forwarded for the irredeemable corruption. One, 'the tyranny of mothers' and two, 'the self-deceptions necessary to life' drive the individual to the extremes of perverted love found in the Ostnian red-light district. Here, whores, sadistic sexual pleasure, homosexuality and drug addiction attempt to divert the questing individual from his true goal.

In Westland, the sanatorium represents those psyches which have evaded real values. The inmates hold conversations very similar to those in Ostnia and Pressan Ambo and once again their leaders, in this case the Medical Orderlies, prove more certifiable than their charges. Westland is a totalitarian state. The Leader's voice, and the Cinema represent the seductive forces at work upon the individual. In Act Three, the Nineveh Hotel is one more microcosm for a diseased world and macrocosm for a diseased intellect. The stage directions capture this state of mind. 'The entire setting of this scene should convey an impression of brutal, noisy vulgarity and tasteless extravagance.' And the Nineveh Girls represent 'All that is mechanical, shallow, silly, hideous and unbearably tragic in the antics of a modern cabaret chorus.' In this decadent atmosphere, the mind is hopelessly perverted. Madame Bubbi parodies the insularity of love when she declaims: 'Remember British Love is quite the best.' In this same scene a diner, unable to Love correctly, commits a violent travesty upon Love, by ordering one of the Nineveh Girls for dinner:

Will you have her roast, sir,  
 Or on Japanese Toast, sir?  
 With Sauce Allenagne, sir,  
 Or stewed in white wine, sir?

It is not surprising that in such an environment Man's destructive, brutal instincts are indecently stimulated. Destructive Desmond epitomizes the vast, directionless resources in Man. Without the leadership of Love, the individual loses his ability to create.

A further seduction away from the true 'Quest' is represented by the figure of Lou Vipond, the tailor's dummy from whom Alan Norman receives all those replies he wishes to receive by speaking for her. This idealized love is another obstacle the questing individual has to overcome. For in proving himself to his loved one, the individual expends valuable energies:

I would hunt the enormous whale in the Arctic lowlands,  
I would count all the starlings in the British Islands,  
I would run through fighting Europe in absolute silence.

The succession of tableaux in The Dog Beneath the Skin accentuates Auden's point that man's psychic 'Quest' is not to be achieved in isolation. Temptations involve the trial of the soul but once they are repulsed, the individual, like Christ in the wilderness, is restored to full psychic health.

Do not speak of a change of heart, meaning five hundred a  
year and a room of one's own...  
Visit from house to house, from country to country: consider  
the populations  
Beneath the communions and the coiffures: discover your im-  
age.  
Man divided always and restless always: afraid and unable to  
forgive:

For complete salvation there are three prerequisites. They are to Repent, involving a change of heart; to Unite, meaning the harmonious union of heart and mind and not a social brotherhood; and to Act, in which a constructive energy reactivates the stagnant psyche. Possibly, as Robert Bloom argues, these 'terms sound rather hollow; too much that is perverse,



unchanging, and inherent has gone before.<sup>141</sup> But surely Alan's 'Quest' has proved successful. His initial reaction to the hierarchy of Pressan Ambo suggests a mind operating within specified social patterns, stagnant and demanding change. When Alan returns to the village, it is obvious that his 'Quest' has stripped away his stupidly ingrown beliefs about society. At the climax of the play it is not Pressan Ambo that has changed but Alan's attitude to it and it is through his eyes eventually that the audience is asked to judge their society. In this sense, Alan has been a guide to the Audience, suggesting questings they may care to undertake.

As the play draws to its close, the stifling environment is rejected by a select band who see the 'Quest' as a running and perpetual battle against stagnation. Though a group, it is through their individual efforts to change that they can achieve success. As Francis, the group's psychic ideal, says:

You are units in an immense army: most of you will die without ever knowing what your leaders are really fighting for or even that you are fighting at all. Well, I am going to be a unit in the army of the other side: but the battlefield is so huge that it's practically certain you will never see me again. We are all of us completely unimportant, so it would be very silly to start quarelling, wouldn't it? Goodbye.

Whilst the established mind sinks logically to a base bestiality, Francis, Alan, the T.S. Eliot - Curate, a boy and three other villagers continue the expansion of their minds. It is significant that the play ends on a note of optimism. After Alan's successful completion of the preliminary part of a 'Quest' which will take his entire life, Auden forecasts an ideal time for the individual:

Where time flows on as chalk stream clear  
And lovers by themselves forgiven  
The whole dream genuine, the charm mature  
Walk in the great and general light  
In their delight a part of heaven  
Its furniture and choir.  
To each his need: from each his power.

It is significant that in 1935 Auden's 'Quest' remains motivated by his vision of psychological disorder. As in Dance of Death, the trappings but not the convictions of Marxism appear. Social and political satire merely point to the extent of Man's psychological disorder. In the drama, it is not until 1938, in On the Frontier, that the destructive force of satire is modified by that social awareness which demands not a psychological but an environmental rebirth.

Ghosts whom Honour never paid,  
 In the foolish battle made,  
 Wandering through the stricken grove  
 Pluck the bitter herb of Love.<sup>42</sup>

The Ascent of F6 was first performed by the Group Theatre at the Mercury Theatre in London on 26th February, 1937. In a conversation with B.C. Bloomfield, Christopher Isherwood stated that the two dramatists demanded a 'more definite plot'<sup>43</sup> to the play following the bizarre formlessness of The Dog Beneath the Skin. Since 1937 they have received critical applause for a 'fairly well defined plot in which a serious psychological problem is developed in terms of dramatic action.'<sup>44</sup> As in poems and all Auden's work after 1930, unity is achieved by the delineation of the myth of the 'Quest' - here, conceived imaginatively in 'the climbing of the mountain and its significance for Michael Ransom.'<sup>45</sup> In this light, the play appears to follow the theme of a Quest for psychic health which so permeates the other work. There has been, however, a subtle shift in emphasis. Michael Ransom is not the Truly Weak Man whose attempts at a psychological rebirth have previously encountered such little success. He suggests the psychic ideal itself, whose warnings serve as stimuli to the Truly Weak Man. 'His prototype appears in poems around 1930 as 'The tall unwounded leader/Of doomed companions.' He re-emerges as a shadowy leader-saviour in The Orators referred to only as 'Him.'<sup>46</sup>

Auden had earlier examined the problems confronting the questing individual as the attempted parallel to the activities of his 'healer.' In The Ascent of F6 he probes the psychology of the motivation which prompts such a 'healer' to lead. All else is subordinated to 'a detailed study of the hero figure and the problem of the will to power....'<sup>47</sup> Auden is thus reversing his normal approach to his unifying myth.

He appears to reach a grossly pessimistic conclusion. For Ransom, 'The Truly Strong Man' to his companions, is essentially flawed, inevitably doomed to lose both the inner battle of the 'Truly Strong Man' against the temptations of authority and the battle against the corrupting relationship with his mother and brother. His strength is revealed in the play's long prose soliloquies and his inherent weakness in his conversations with the Abbot and the four companions who accompany him on the 'Quest.' As Blair has said;

'Michael's strength in relation to his own group is dramatized in his ability to reconcile opposites, a necessary characteristic of the truly strong man...In Auden's eyes, the truest strength lies in the ability to rise above simple opposition to a higher synthesis.'<sup>48</sup>

In the face of opposition, the dormant disease in Ransom manifests itself in the final desire for the mother-imago. The progressive disintegration within Michael is paralleled in the dramatic action by the gradual destruction of his companions.

The Ascent of F6 probes beneath the surface health of the Truly Strong Man - 'the exceptional man who transcends the limitations of ordinary humanity.'<sup>49</sup> The resulting diagnosis explains why 'The Ascent of F6 is an allegory of love gone wrong'<sup>50</sup> in which Ransom's search for a Love which is not selfish, but pure and ennobling, is frustrated by the narrow and confining Mother-Love.

True, Love finally is great,  
 Greater than all; but large the hate,  
 Far larger than Man can ever estimate.

This explains Ransom's obsession with power 'for the desire for power is a perverted desire for love.'<sup>51</sup> In fact, Ransom's dilemma

'arises from the realization, by a man of exceptional gifts, that corruption seems inevitably to follow from the use of power, that the will is usually impure, but that to react therefrom into isolation may be itself another form of sin.'<sup>52</sup>

part of this corruption stems from Ransom's innate distrust of the 'common people.' - 'those ragged denizens of the waterfront.' It is a basic flaw which has led John Blair to call him 'an uncompromising idealist'<sup>53</sup> and John Lehmann a 'super-prig.'<sup>54</sup>

Like Marlowe's Dr. Faustus, Michael Ransom has attained the peaks of earthly fame. From his vantage-point on 'The Summit of the Pillar Rock, above Wastdale,' he contemplates his fellow-men in the valley below in 'all its varieties of desperation.' Sensing their inverted values and deeply entrenched corruption, he evades their need for a psychic ideal by accusing Dante of imposing a false motivation on Odysseus - their 'Quest' was based on the dream of an inactive future:

the ugly and cowardly who foresaw in a virgin land  
 an era of unlimited and effortless indulgence.

In contemplating a revivification of values within Mankind, Ransom accepts the inevitable frustrations which will drive him for shelter into the arms of his Mother. For, in this opening prose soliloquy, Michael Ransom sees Life as evil and corrupting. The strength of this Truly Strong Man lies in his very isolation, in his introspection. In his tenuous connection with Mr. and Mrs. A. lies one of the relationships which compel him to examine his motives with the most stringent care.

Mr. and Mrs. A. inhabit a world on stage which, by its illumination, suggests a nightmare existence of narrow and restricted action. Although the world of the A's and Ransom's more expansive empire never meet, their very juxtaposition suggests the internal conflict which ravages Ransom's soul. It is a conflict which has no resolution. Having considered the Abbot's suggested courses of action, Ransom rejects the total abnegation of the Will by returning to the world of his companions. But, in trying to remain selfless, he shuns all responsibility for their activities and asks his companions whether or not they wish to continue with the climb.

The A's represent the total descent of the mind:

The drums of an enormous and routed army,  
Throbbing raggedly, fitfully, scatteredly, madly.

Their futile efforts to help themselves are typified in their nervous and wasted outbursts of 'We are lost. We are lost.' Beach says that:

Mr. and Mrs. A. represent the ordinary home-keeping people (suggesting the PETITES GENS of Laforgue and of Eliot in Murder in the Cathedral, as described by Louis Unger in The Man in the Name.) They have no inclination for heroism and do not even care to hear too much about it in others.<sup>55</sup>

But, far more importantly, they represent that degraded mentality which results from the absence of an individual objective. Such a 'Quest' has given Ransom some measure of health. In this partial success he has turned towards the uncharted regions of the psyche, like the earlier heroes in Auden's work. Ransom, however, has the ability to communicate.

In place of a psychic ideal whose motivation appears basically untainted, the A's are dominated by a mentality typified by its setting in the Colonial Office. This segment of the Establishment serves as a macrocosm for a diseased mind, and as a microcosm for a world controlled

by those whose motives are based on personal gain. The 'simplified assaults on such things as the unscrupulous press, the technique of sensation, imperialism and threadbare public-speaking' are important only in that they point to Man's current social ideals. Such leaders deprive Man of his ability to act and reduce him to an ineffective shadow.

What have they ever done, I ask you? What are they  
ever likely to do  
To make life easier, make life happier?

Critics commonly regard the 'healers' in the Colonial Office as Capitalist puppets and the A's as victims of an economic conspiracy.

John Lehmann says that:

An important idea in the play is the cynicism with which a modern imperialist state can cloak its aims of warlike aggression for profit and power, and misuse the fears and dreams and noble impulses of those who would abhor its motives if they were nakedly revealed.<sup>56</sup>

But, with the cry 'Give us something to live for,' Auden is simply stating the fact of their internal decay. The Colonial Officials are part of Auden's tradition of decadent psychic physicians whose attempts at a 'cure' he has consistently parodied. The prototype is the Doctor in Paid on Both Sides and the line extends through the schoolmaster's statement of symptom and cure in The Orators to all those who seek only the physical cure to illness and ignore its psychology.

Michael Ransom's desire to accept the responsibility for Man's psychological rehabilitation is shared neither by his companions nor by the Establishment of his brother. Three of the four men who accompany Ransom on his personal 'Test' to climb F6 are also individuals on a 'Quest.' But their motivation is undeniably corrupt. Shawcross keeps a diary like the flawed Airman of The Orators and indulges in excessive hero-worship of

his leader. Gunn is a kleptomaniac whose restless energy represents the wastage of human potential in refusing to accept discipline as an integral part of any 'Quest.' For the searching individual must remain dedicated to the ends of the 'Quest'. For Gunn, the ascent of F6 is an escape from boredom:

Gosh, I'm bored. If I had a thousand pounds, I'd buy an aeroplane and try to fly across the Atlantic: if I had five hundred pounds, I'd go to Africa and shoot lions. As it is, I've got seven and elevenpence, so I suppose I'd better get drunk.

In Lamb, a primary Enemy occupation is manifested - collecting. Here, the range of energy is so concentrated that it fades into insignificance. On the mountain, his fascination for flowers produces a diseased condition suggested by the very names of the flowers he collects. All have peculiarly psychological causation: *Polus Naufrangia*, *Stagnium Menengitis*, *Frustrax Abominum* and *Rossus Monstrens*. The Doctor is not seriously concerned with the 'Quest.' Primarily, his presence is not essential on a 'Quest' for purely psychic health, and his close association with the death-wishing society he is loath to leave behind, is gently satirized by his fatness and his inactivity. His own comment illustrates the stage of decay he has reached: 'I've got to a stage where I can believe almost anything.' Thus, all members of Auden's group are truly weak men whose dormant corruption breaks to the surface on the final attack on the summit of F6.

In Michael Ransom, Auden sketches the qualities of the Truly Strong Man - what Staggmante calls a 'Scholar and man of action : an unusual mixture.' His energies are distributed over a wide area of disciplines, establishing the breadth and activity of his mind. His favourite pastime



is chess - a game in which Auden can demonstrate that imagination and intellectual analysis vital to the Truly Strong Man. In F6, Ransom, obsessed with the idea of continually 'testing' himself, sees the symbol of his ultimate 'Quest.'

Since boyhood, in dreams, I have seen the  
 huge north face. On nights when I could  
 not sleep I worked up those couloirs, crawled  
 along the eastern arrete, planning every  
 movement, foreseeing every hold. Through  
 how many thousand years have those virgin  
 buttresses been awaiting me. F6 is my fate....

But, in assuming the responsibility for his Fate, Ransom sees the need for untainted motivation. He refuses his brother's request, understanding the corruption of 'Cash, and lots of it.' At another level, Ransom is paralysed by his brother-hatred fostered during his Mother's constant attention to James and constant denial of himself. Into this situation steps Mrs. Ransom, the Oedipal mother, 'who in effect draws the manhood from Michael, makes him a child again, soothes him with childhood's dreams, and seduces him into making the ascent.'<sup>57</sup> Thus, the mission or 'Quest' which was to have been undertaken for the achievement of 'love of mankind', is now undertaken for an unhealthy love, selfish and impure. The tragedy of the Truly Strong Man is dramatically inevitable. This accentuates, all the more, the desperate condition of the common people who seize hope in the expedition:

Follow the progress of this mountain mission,  
 Day by Day let it inspire our lowly condition.

The conquest of F6 is their substitute for a 'Quest' and even in the substitution they are disappointed. In the attack on the summit:

The invalid, sheep-counting all the night,  
 The small, the tall, the black-haired and the white  
 See something each can estimate,  
 They can read of these actions and know them great.

The dissolution of the group represents the gradual disintegration of any hope for psychic salvation. It is a dissolution which begins with the crystal ball.

The monastery on the lower slopes of F6 marks a particular stage in the 'Quest.' Its 'mystico-psychological hocus-pocus'<sup>58</sup> centres around the crystal ball in the reflection of which each mountaineer penetrates to the essence of his dilemma. The Abbot clarifies:

For all men see reflected there some fragment  
of their nature and glimpse a knowledge of  
those forces by whose free operation the  
future is forecast and limited.

Basically, it probes the individual weakness, symbolically representing the inevitable failure of the 'Quest'. Thus, the Doctor's fatness and consequent inertia is suggested by his sitting in an armchair in the Reform Club. Lamp sees the flowers which mark his internal decay while Gunn's dissipated way of life and basic death-wishing character is represented by a woman, dressed all in black, who 'seems to be at a crossroads.' Shawcross, who refuses to look into the ball, is the Truly Weak Man whose basic fault lies in his inability to see that only a psychic 'Quest' can lead him back to complete health. Ransom hears the two voices which suggest the means to the successful completion of the 'Quest' by warning of the temptations of the world. Each voice argues for one side of his nature, now in conflict - the Heart and the Intellect. When they harmonize momentarily, they expound the means to personal salvation:

Make us kind  
Make us of one mind  
Make us brave  
Save  
Save  
Save  
Save.

In the ball, Ransom sees himself once more as a World-Healer. His question repeats his basic predicament:

Was it to me they turned their  
rodent faces, those ragged denizens of the waterfronts,  
and squealed so piteously: 'Restore us. Restore us to our  
uniqueness and our human condition.'

The monks' asceticism, involving the 'complete abnegation of the will,' points to one means of salvation. By this, he could evade the temptation to subjugate the will of others to his own and rule men 'by appealing to their fear and their lust.' In refusing to stay in the monastery as a religious ascetic, Ransom rejects one of the ways of death already outlined in The Dog Beneath the Skin - 'some...have escaped to the ascetic mountains.' At this point, he can either return home and allow the others to continue without him, or he can lead the climb which the others in the party are incompetent to do. He rejects the first and accepts the second because 'one must work out his salvation in an imperfect world rather than stand aloof and wait for the perfect opportunity for action to arise. To do nothing is wrong, yet every act is tainted with imperfection.' And yet, once more, Ransom's motivation in continuing the expedition is suspect, for, through fear of his own will, he has placed that responsibility firmly on the shoulders of his group.

The scenes on the mountain reveal the small amount of progress the individuals have made on their 'Quest.' The doctor has lost 'At least two stone. That's one comfort,' but in so doing is only removing from the surface a symptom of what is essentially a deep-rooted disease. Lamp's intense obsession with flowers leads directly to his death:- 'He was just stooping to pick the flower, when/the first stone got him.' The mountain to psychic health, however, has claimed many victims. One is Shawcross, 'a feverish invalid,' whose hero-worship of Ransom has decomposed into envy and desperate jealousy. As he himself says:

Even my admiration of you was only another kind of conceit. You were just an ideal of myself.

Like the Airman of The Orators, Shawcross is led inevitably to self-destruction. Gunn's death results from his lack of stamina and his inability to dedicate himself entirely to the strenuous 'Quest.' His death is seen as 'good luck' by Ransom, thus consummating the latter's death-wish shown in the opening scene of the play:

O, happy the foetus that miscarries and the frozen idiot that cannot cry 'Mama'. Happy those run over in the street today or drowned at sea, or sure of death tomorrow from incurable diseases.

The last scene in the play parallels the dislocation of Ransom's mind. It is 'a strange mixture of allegory and burlesque, at the same time that the dialogue continues to pursue a serious and somewhat mystifying psychological theme.' The fragmented images which compose this last scene take place in Ransom's mind, in the final stages of delirium before death. They suggest, symbolically, Ransom's destruction of his brother and his final dissolution. They probe beneath his surface strength and locate the malignant growth.

As in The Dog Beneath the Skin, the Chorus, with its moral commentary on the action, serves to raise the individual dilemma to a wider, allegorical level. Their remarks are concerned with more:

'serious and realistic matters - justice violated, memory beset by fear, a 'world turning in the dark', the greatness of Love in the end, and the eternal freedom of choice. This all serves to point up the contrast between the showy falsities of self-regarding sentiment and the stern inspiring realities of an ethic based on true and 'disciplined' Love.'<sup>59</sup>

They also evoke the background from which the 'Quest' must be made:

Let the eye of the traveller consider this country and weep,  
 For toads croak in the cisterns; the aqueducts choke with  
 leaves;  
 The highways are out of repair and infested with thieves;  
 The ragged population are crazy for lack of sleep:  
 Our chimneys are smokeless; the implements rust in the  
 field  
 And our tall constructions are felled.

The Dragon of Death, of inhibited or perverted Love, of inertia, is responsible for the psychic condition. politically, the Dragon is represented by James Ransom, the man responsible for false powers of healing. In his delirium, Michael confronts his enemy with a campaign too subtly conceived as a Chess game to force any conclusive result. The stagnant mind, represented by the Establishment of the Colonial Office, may descend to bestiality but its presence remains as a further cause of the disillusionment of the questing Individual. The final scene of farce, vision and psychological analysis leads Ransom to a partial understanding of his failure:

Forgive me. It was all my fault.  
 F6 has shown me what I am. I'm a coward  
 and a prig.

Such a realization of one's guilt is an essential preliminary to the 'Quest'. But he cannot overcome his intense self-love, revealed in his yearning for the Mother-imagó and his constant introspection. Complete as a 'Questing' individual in the first scene of the play, an over-elaborate analysis of his motivation deprives him of the opportunity to be Truly Strong in the last scene. Here, he has retreated further into himself and his weaknesses. He has failed conclusively in his 'Quest.' As the play closes, the Hidden Chorus restates the main theme of the play:

Free now from indignation,  
 Immune from all frustration  
 He lies in death alone;

Now he with secret terror  
 And every minor error  
 Has also made Man's weakness known.

Whom history has deserted,  
 These have their power exerted,  
 In one convulsive throe;  
 With sudden drowning suction  
 Drew him to his destruction.  
 But they to dissolution go.

In The Ascent of F6, Auden and Isherwood reject the simple and direct solution to Man's psychic illness. The play is a statement of despair, a chronicle of Man's inability to escape the responsibility for his own psychic cure. What is significant is that only a small percentage of the population is eligible for the 'Quest.' It corresponds not surprisingly with Auden's own social position and his awareness of the rodent-lives society has manufactured for Mr. and Mrs. A. Born to be led, they are totally dependent on their spiritual healers. But all men, as the group on F6, are inevitably flawed and unworthy of that Leadership. The problem is partially resolved by the Abbot but even he, closest to Auden's psychic ideal, is essentially unworthy:

Sometimes, when I am tired or ill, I am  
 subject to very strange attacks. They  
 come without warning, in the middle of  
 the night...suddenly into my mind strange  
 words, snatches of song and even whole  
 poems...And when I come to myself again  
 and see these monastery walls around me,  
 I am filled with horror and despair.  
 For I know that it is a visitation of the  
 Demon. I know that, for me, nothin  
 matters any more: it is too late. I  
 am already among the lost.

Auden's rejection of all earthly authority for the leadership of the individual 'Quest' leads to the assumption of a supernatural authority. As Spender says, despite the political background and the inconclusive ending, the struggle in the play is 'really religious.'<sup>60</sup> The authority

that Auden called upon in poem XXX of poems, the 'Father' of the fifth ode of The Orators, is now asserted as the final authority for the 'Quest.' Replogle is correct when he says that:

Certainly the play seems to emphasize a theme that Auden later stressed: man is a sinner whose every action is doomed to failure; his first concern is his relationship (however imperfect) to God. The play may be the first important indication of his shift to a religious frame of reference.<sup>61</sup>

At the end of the play, this vision of an end to the 'Quest' overshadows the actual spiritual condition of Man so seriously presented by Auden and Isherwood in its many stages of disarray. Although the individual 'Quests' are unsuccessful, the authority on which future successful 'Quests' will be based are securely established.

The drums tap out sensational bulletins;  
 Frantic the efforts of the violins  
 To drown the song behind the guarded hill:  
 The dancers do not listen; but they will.<sup>62</sup>

On the Frontier, first produced on November 14th, 1938 by Rupert Doone at the Arts Theatre, Cambridge,<sup>63</sup> was written 'specifically for a left-wing audience.'<sup>64</sup> Of the plays written in collaboration with Christopher Isherwood, it is the 'least confused and best constructed dramatically'<sup>65</sup> although the concern with a tidy structure has deprived the play of Auden's restless energy. That 'many of their most characteristic talents are largely subdued'<sup>66</sup> may account for the doctrinal quality of the play's Marxist borrowings. As Beach says:

his propaganda is entirely conducted on the level of the overt facts of human society without the remotest reference to the complications of psychology and the transcendentals of religion.<sup>67</sup>

On one level, of course, this is an adequate interpretation of a play to all extents 'as bold as a poster, startling in its contrasts, obvious in its propaganda and unambiguous in its assaults.'<sup>68</sup> And in its promise of the 'Good Life' the 'Quest' is conceived along orthodox party lines in which Revolution replaces the Change of Heart described in poems. In another sense, however, the play's attempt to define Authority relates logically back to The Ascent of F6. Simply, Auden and Isherwood have



transferred all their attention away from Man's spiritual Leaders to their perverted travesty in political and social figures. Valerian, like James Ransom, is a 'shell of a man' whose leadership is motivated solely by personal gain.

It is a leadership aided and abetted by the Mass Media in a play where the newspaper and the radio are responsible for the ideological hostility between two ordinary families. During the 1930's, this was a favourite socialist point:

The power of the capitalist class now rests predominantly upon their control over what we have called the means of production of opinion: upon their control over men's minds. If their power to keep men in ignorance and unconsciousness of social processes could be removed, then the process of social transformation could be swift, easy and bloodless...we must take it as a constant factor in the social equation that the capitalists will succeed in obscuring, both from the workers and from themselves, that vital knowledge (of Marxism) without which the process of social change is bound to be arduous, blind and therefore to some extent violent.<sup>69</sup>

In On the Frontier, the two families show the extent of human degradation in a society without direction. This helps explain Julian Symons' remark that the play was marked 'by that distaste for the 'ordinary people'.<sup>70</sup> In fact, Auden is using the ordinary people to project his own anxiety with social leaders. In the scene before the curtain, the individual is seen struggling against a system which denies him any form of self-expression and reduces his life to a pointless routine resulting in the death-wish:

The assembly-belt is like an army on the move;  
It's stronger than hate, brother: it's stronger than love.

But within Man is the desire for change, now more the Marxist change in environment that the intensely personal change of heart announced in poem

XXIX of poems: 'The day is coming, brother, when we shall all be free.'

This change in environment can only be effected by the overthrow of the corrupt power behind the throne - Valerian. In this grotesque caricature of Auden's psychic ideal, love of money and dedication to the Machine have reduced Love to a minimum. Instead, a corrupt love of power rules his activity with its aim - 'absolute control of mankind.' This is Valerian's 'Quest' and it is doomed more clearly to failure than Auden's earlier wanderers. His disregard for the 'patient sheep', the workers, is a complete contrast to Ransom's concern over his diseased individuals, although he too is fatally stricken. Scorn and cynicism complete Auden's portrait of the truly corrupt Man:

Make your little protest. Get a new master  
if you can. You will soon be made to realize  
that he is as exacting as the old, and  
probably less intelligent.

It is a leadership which effectively smothers the individual's desire to 'Quest' for the freedom each has lost under the capitalist system. Eric and Anna at once symbolize the extent to which personal relationships have been destroyed within society and Man's activity in revitalizing them. Their love easily crosses the artificial man-made frontiers whose grotesque arbitrary nature Auden represents on stage. It is a love which, as I shall point out, moves out from an intensely personal love between two young people to a Love capable of resolving the World's problems in a Christian 'Quest.'

On the Frontier presents two families, subjected to dissimilar pressures, who demonstrate Man's complete inability to overcome the insidious temptations of a social organization. The artificial frontier which separates Westland's Thorvalds from the Ostnian Vrodny-Husseks, which

divides Fascists from comfortable reactionaries and Monarchists, ironically emphasizes the basic similarity between nations and individuals. Their differences are the result of the pressures exerted upon them by the Mass Media and controlled by maliciously false 'leaders.' The play records Auden's preoccupation with the theme of leadership - the natural corollary to the motif of the 'Quest' in which the seeking individual models himself on a psychic or social ideal. In Valerian, Auden grotesquely parodies Man's contemporary 'healers' and, at the same time, places the burden for Man's future on the young. That the young are unable to achieve anything in so corrupt a system and die as the play closes, suggests Auden's deep and bitter disillusionment with a society in which change is so difficult. The play is an unenlightened social tract in which, possibly unintentionally, the delicate and ephemeral love of Eric and Anna serves to throw social evil into greater relief. The young people in the play, those on whom the mass media have had little or no time to work, are basically naive and idealistic but, by contrast to the political machinations around them, sincere and practical:

Well, I think that if people-the ordinary decent  
people in both countries-would only get together,  
- we could...

The play thus continues the idea of the power of love in the world. Between Eric and Anna, there is a bond which crosses all crude man-made boundaries - an arena of peace beyond all political squabbings:

Our love  
Is the far and unsuspected island  
Their prestige does not hold.

This love - a quietly constructive force within human relationships - is stifled in a state system where all sides prefer the cliché to humanity; 'Tradition and breeding count./You can't wipe out the history of a thousand

years.' typify the public reaction to the appeal of Love. At this point Auden accepts the Marxist change of environment as necessary before Man can attain a healthy Love. Nevertheless, the means is totally subordinate to the end where the goal is to be accomplished at a purely individual level. Thus, it is relatively easy to make the transition from the 'change of heart' demanded in poems to the call for social revolution demonstrated in On the Frontier.

As in The Ascent of F6, where Michael Ransom's 'Quest' fails through a corrupting motivating force within him, so, in On the Frontier, the leader's will and the glorification of the power of that will - 'The immutable, unconquerable will of the Westland nation' - leads to a personal degradation. This inherent corruption results in a senseless war which reverberates back onto the people. Allegorically, they die of an intense plague which spreads quickly from the soldiers themselves. It shows no particular malice but instigates a general destruction as Martha, Oswald and the Grandfather all die a meaningless death. In the closing speech of Eric and Anna, we see this failure of the human will as the direct will of love. In fact, it is the dream of youth:

To build the city where  
The will of love is done  
And brought to its full flower  
The dignity of man.

One idea is heavily underlined, however. For Eric and Anna the means to change must stem directly from their engagement in present society. Mass retreat, or an isolating withdrawal are not the means to accomplish the 'Quest.' Eric, the pacifist, boldly says:

We cannot choose our world,  
Our time, our class. None are innocent, none.  
Causes of violence lie so deep in all our lives  
It touches every act.

And once again, Love is the panacea to all social ills as it was for all psychic ailments in the earlier poetry. It is Auden's purpose to 'teach man to unlearn hatred and learn love' which leads to Eric's analysis of hatred in these terms:

The hatred of our enemies  
Is the destructive self-love of the dying,  
Our hatred is the price of the world's freedom.

As the play closes on a bitter and disillusioned note, Auden sees hope only at the very personal level. It is the individual's responsibility to undertake his own 'Quest' without the corrupting influence of his political leaders, by they Dictators or Monarchs. It is significant, however, that Eric and Anna's last speeches are in the form of a prayer, implying the type of leadership which is certain to save them:

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

Dry their imperfect dust,  
The wind blows it back and forth.  
They die to make man just  
And worthy of the earth.

On the Frontier thus continues the development recorded in The Ascent of F6 where Auden is no longer concerned with the questing individual, but the ideal for which he is searching. previously, it was enough to leave behind the stagnant areas of the psyche in expectation that any slight change must be advantageous to the individual concerned. In this later work, Auden's concern is for the direction that this energy must take. Earlier the Love was Freudian Eros, involving directionless but essential energies. At this point Love becomes the means to God - Man's spiritual leader. This knowledge, in a superficially left-wing play, conditions the reader to an understanding of Auden's later acceptance of Christianity

and his emigration to America. It also gives a balancing optimism to Anna's remark that 'There is no place in the world/For those who love.'

## NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

- 1 Spears, The Disenchanted Island, p. 39
- 2 Isherwood, Lions and Shadows, p. 174
- 3 Spears, p. 158
- 4 Spears, p. 12
- 5 Bloomfield, pp. 13-14
- 6 The composition and ideals of the Group Theatre are soundly examined by Forrest Earl Hazard in an unpublished dissertation: The Auden Group and the Group Theatre: The Dramatic Theories and Practices of Rupert Doon, W.H. Auden, Christopher Isherwood, Louis MacNeice, Stephen Spender and Cecil Day Lewis. DA XXV, 1913-14 (vis.).
- 7 Symons, The 'Thirties, p.79.
- 8 Quoted by John Willett in Brecht on Theatre, (New York, 1964), p.37.
- 9 poem XXVI of Look, Stranger!
- 10 Symons, p.79.
- 11 Beach, The Auden Canon, p.149.
- 12 Auden: An Introductory Essay, p.72.
- 13 Spears, The Disenchanted Island, p.91.
- 14 Ibid., p.15.
- 15 Ibid., p.16.
- 16 The 'Thirties, p.80.
- 17 Beach, The Auden Canon, pp. 143-4.
- 18 Replogle, Thesis, p.82.
- 19 Ibid., p.83.
- 20 Robert Bloom, 'Auden's Essays at Man,' Shenandoah, p.36.
- 21 Spears, The Disenchanted Island, p.16.

- 22 Symons, The 'Thirties, p.79.
- 23 Quoted by Julian Symons in The 'Thirties, p.79.
- 24 Lehmann, New Writing, p.66.
- 25 Everett, Auden, p.49.
- 26 Beach, The Auden Canon, p.148.
- 27 New Writing in Europe, p.66.
- 28 Ibid., p.67.
- 29 Everett, p.50.
- 30 It is interesting to compare Auden's hatred of the Medical profession with his own education under his father, a doctor.
- 31 Symons, p.84.
- 32 For further information on the performance proper, and Isherwood's remarks on their collaboration, see the Auden bibliography compiled by B.C. Bloomfield, particularly pp. 13-14.
- 33 This personal mythology is adequately examined by Justin Replogle in his essay, 'The Gang Myth in Auden's Early Poetry,' JEGP, LXI (July, 1962), 481-95.
- 34 Such positions are represented poetically by the images of the Hawk and The Airman.
- 35 'psychology and Art,' p.18.
- 36 Lehmann, p.69.
- 37 Blair, The poetic Art, p.103.
- 38 Ibid., p.104.
- 39 Bloom, 'Auden's Essays at Man,' p.38.
- 40 Lehmann, p.67.
- 41 Bloom, p.39.



- 42 The dedication of the play to John Bicknell Auden.
- 43 Bloomfield, p.18.
- 44 Beach, p.181.
- 45 Hoggart, p.79.
- 46 Blair, p.100.
- 47 Hazard, The Auden Group and the Group Theatre, p.156.
- 48 The poetic Art, p.101.
- 49 Bloom, 'Auden's Essays at Man,' p.38.
- 50 Nelson, Hugh Alan. Individuals of a Group: The Nineteen-Thirties poetry of W.H. Auden, C. Day Lewis and Stephen Spender. DA, XIX (1958), 1389 (Northwestern), p.152.
- 51 Ibid., p.154.
- 52 Hoggart, p.80.
- 53 The poetic Art, p.101.
- 54 New Writing, p.70.
- 55 Beach, p.182.
- 56 Lehmann, p.69.
- 57 Nelson, Individuals of a Group, p.156.
- 58 F.R. Leavis in a review in Scrutiny, V (December, 1936), p.326.
- 59 Beach, p.183.
- 60 Loc. Cit.
- 61 Replogle, The Auden Group, p.145.
- 62 The dedication of the play to Benjamin Britten.
- 63 Bloomfield, p.27.

64 Hoggart, p.86.

65 Beach, p.185.

66 Everett, p.59.

67 Beach, p.185.

68 Hoggart, p.86.

69 Strachey, The Theory and practice of Socialism, p.177.

70 The 'Thirties, p.83.

In Conclusion

In 1939, W.H. Auden left England to take up residence in America. In his introduction to The Faber Book of American Verse, the poet explains the motives which impelled him to leave the country which had been the subject of his particular concern during the preceding decade:

In America...to move on and make a fresh start somewhere else is still the normal reaction to dissatisfaction or failure. Such social fluidity has important psychological effects. Since movement involves breaking social and personal ties, the habit creates an attitude towards personal relationships in which impermanence is taken for granted...To be able at any time to break with the past, to move and keep on moving lessens the significance not only of the past but also of the future which is reduced to the immediate future, and minimizes the importance of political action.

That change, movement and activity formed the basis of Auden's advice to his fellow countrymen in the 'thirties, seems to confirm that his emigration to America was the logical conclusion to those poems of exhortation. Indeed, at this stage in Auden's career, the motif of 'The Quest' and the man himself appear to become inextricably mingled.

Two years prior to Emigration, Auden visited Spain during its horrific Civil War. He went there to offer his services as 'a stretcher bearer in an ambulance unit,' wrote Stephen Spender in his autobiography, 'but

returned home after a very short visit of which he never spoke.<sup>1</sup> It is clear even from his cold, dispassionate poem on 'Spain' that this journey held some special significance for him. Later, in fact, in an untitled essay which appeared in Modern Canterbury Pilgrims, Auden sees the visit as one of three major steps to his eventual 'conversion' to Christianity. But, certainly, within the context of the poem, Spain becomes a symbol, clearly identifiable with the earlier symbols in Auden's work - the symbols which illuminated the ends of the 'Quest' motif itself. For Auden and his entourage of British intellectuals, Spain gave a single, dramatic manifestation to the hopes, ideals and theories of an entire decade. The emotional excitement generated by the Civil War is best captured by Stephen Spender in his introduction to poems for Spain which he edited with John Lehmann:

The struggle of the Republicans is a struggle for the conditions without which the reading and writing of poetry are almost impossible in modern society.<sup>2</sup>

The editors see, in the symbol of Spain, the choice between Right and Wrong, between Death and a future of Dust. A similar vision of the conflict stimulated Auden to see Spain as a possible end of his personal 'Quest.' It is worthwhile remarking, at this stage, that the poem ends on a view of the future which is deeply tinged with despair and disillusionment.

As in the delineation of the 'Quest' in the earlier poetry, 'Spain' establishes three distinct areas of human activity. In the past, Man has refused to accept the confining conventions and knowledge of his time and demanded innovation and change. By contrast, in the second stage which encompasses the present, Man is an animal who tepidly waits for

some divine intervention in his affairs. This unfaltering belief in an omniscient deity has prevented Man from realizing his full potential as a human being. Spain represents an opportunity to impell Man into a radical change of heart, transforming its current ideal constituency into a vital reality. Despite conventional loyalties to a suckling country, Man finally acts on his beliefs. In this activity, the future, the third area of action, promises an expansion to Man's potential:

Tomorrow, perhaps, the future: the research of fatigue  
 And the movements of packers; the gradual exploring  
 and all  
                   Octaves of radiation;  
 Tomorrow the enlarging of consciousness by diet  
 and breathing.

However, without Man's determination to involve himself in the issues confronting his society, Auden warns of a return to the death-wishing days of the earlier 'thirties. Indeed, the last stanza projects this pessimistic vision of life:

The stars are dead; the animals will not look;  
 We are left alone with our day, and the time is short and  
                   History to the defeated  
 May say Alas but cannot help or pardon.

In 'Spain' Auden reiterates the basic premiss of his early poetry that the individual must seek out order and personal salvation from his decadent and chaotic environment. Certain textual emendations in the poem, nevertheless, suggest Auden's dissatisfaction with the means he has advocated in re-defining the ends of Man's 'Quest.' Hugh Ford, commenting on this point, has stated that 'Spain' 'is Auden's most ambitious Marxist poem, being a kind of projection of what a successful socialist revolution might accomplish...in addition it contains an implicit condemnation of Marxism.'

Ford continues:

When Auden wrote of 'the conscious acceptance of guilt in the necessary murder,' he was mindful of something besides being in the unhappy position of having to kill your enemy before he killed you. He was cognisant, as well, of the consequences of the Marxist hypothesis which condoned the most reprehensible conduct so long as it advanced the socialist cause. Whether for some reason Auden had never before considered the theoretical or practical applications of the hypothesis cannot be conclusively determined. But that it began to bother him following his return from Spain seems certain. To Spender, 'he stated emphatically that political exigence was never a justification of lies.'<sup>3</sup>

This statement of disillusionment,<sup>4</sup> of major poetic and personal importance, is Auden's last serious statement before his emigration to America. In his next works he discards the unifying image of the 'Quest' completely although the framework is retained in Letters from Iceland, essentially a travel-book in intent. The journey, nevertheless, is seen by Barbara Everett, as 'a quest for some private image of the North, which is tested against reality.'<sup>5</sup> Within this volume, the supreme casualness of poetic tone implies Auden's total lack of involvement with his image. Certainly, in Journey to a War and Another Time, he is very much between beliefs, reflected in the occasional nature of many of the poems, lightly humorous.

Another Time, however, is important in evaluating Auden's supposed 'conversion' in the 'forties. Following his discussion of leadership in The Ascent of F6 and On the Frontier, the poet acknowledges his admiration for the leadership qualities manifested in the work of fellow artists. The early search for the 'Truly Strong Man' which so dominates

the work of the 'thirties finds consummation in such poems as 'Museum des Beaux Arts,' 'In Memory of Sigmund Freud,' and 'In Memory of W.B. Yeats,' each of which reflects Auden's present 'gospel of eclectic humanism.'<sup>6</sup> This is put most plainly at the end of 'Epithalamion':

Vowing to redeem the State,  
Now let every girl and boy  
To the heaven of the Great  
All their prayers and praises lift:

Significantly, such 'secular saints or substitute gods'<sup>7</sup> have replaced Auden's artistic friends as the 'healers of mankind.' Christopher Isherwood, Stephen Spender, Edward Upward and Rex Warner no longer make sudden and mysterious appearances to create an optimistic vision of an England wherein man is successfully attempting the 'Quest' under safe tutelage. With the omission of his friends, Auden withdraws further from the motif with which he was so involved during the 'thirties. That desire to locate himself in the immediate time and space of England's predicament, the personalism of Look, Stranger!, is overwhelmed by the distance Auden achieves between himself and his subject in the occasional poem. Previously, the poet had spoken frequently in his own voice: 'Out on the lawn I lie in bed'; 'Now from my window-sill I watch the night'; but now, in the early 'forties, the sense of personal anticipation has drained away. We find Auden in America, having left behind the society which provided him with his energy and his intellectual excitement.

It is perilous for the critic to attempt the type of projected psychoanalysis Auden himself undertook and exploited in the early work, but the lack of zest, the youthful confusion, the absence of an unyielding excitement with his thoughts so characteristic of the young poet and so evidently lacking in the later volumes is attributable to more than the passing of time. For these later works exhibit a stability and a calmly



objective eye reflecting an inner peace of mind. Certainly, in The Double Man, Auden appears to have discovered the type of psychic ideal for which he had been seeking so strenuously in his poetry for more than a decade. In an untitled essay, which appeared in Modern Canterbury Pilgrims, he recounts his gradual conversion to Christianity. In particular he relates his experiences in Spain which had that cathartic effect I have already pointed out:

With this and similar questions whispering at the back of my mind, I visited Spain during the Civil War. On arriving in Barcelona, I found as I walked through the city that all the churches were closed and there was not a priest to be seen. To my astonishment, this discovery left me profoundly shocked and disturbed. The feeling was far too intense to be the result of a mere liberal dislike of intolerance, the notion that it is wrong to stop people doing what they like, even if it is something silly like going to Church. 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.<sup>8</sup>

In fact, the 'conversion', as we have seen in the poetry and plays, was far from sudden. With the exception of The Ascent of F6 and Look, Stranger!, Auden's delineation of the 'Quest' motif ends in prayer. Despite the usually ironic overtones to this prayer, the basic plea for an omniscient and gentle authority to lead Man through a satisfying life of search is serious enough. Even the supposedly Marxist tract On the Frontier ends in prayer:

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

Dry their imperfect dust,  
 The wind blows it back and forth.  
 They die to make man just  
 And worthy of the earth.

Auden's concern with moral and spiritual leadership, continually probing and satirizing Man's temporal 'healers' as he does, demonstrates that peculiar intertwining of personal and poetic seeking. In particular, Auden is obsessed with the concept of Love, both as a means to the end of his 'Quest' and ultimately as the end of the 'Quest' itself. His poetic record reflects his growing development of this concept of love, exactly what he meant by it and what it could mean to Man. That the Freudian Eros is displaced by a selfless and unifying love, that Man is continually referred to an ideal of Love the poet is unable or unwilling to describe, prepare the careful reader for Auden's conversion. In the 'forties, his adaption of the philosophy of Kierkegaard and to a lesser extent Niebuhr, is in keeping with the temperament of the young poet who, in 1930, embraced so feverishly the probings and discoveries of the psychoanalysts. For the poet it was simply a new tribunal of names he called into evidence in The Double Man:

Blake shouted insults, Rousseau wept,  
 Ironic Kierkegaard stared long  
 And muttered 'All are in the wrong,'  
 While Baudelaire went mad protesting  
 That progress is not interesting  
 And thought he was an albatross...  
 The world ignored them; they were few.  
 The careless victor never knew  
 Their grapevine rumour would grow true.

As with Freud, Homer Lane, Georg Groddeck and D.H. Lawrence, W.H. Auden embraces his new intellectual interests greedily and moulds their teachings within the structure of his well-used 'Quest' motif. And just as the teachings endow the 'Quest' with substantial motivation, so the 'Quest'-framework provides Man's 'healers' with a convenient vehicle for

their efforts at his spiritual amelioration.

Thus, the 'Quest' motif has varied according to the intellectual forces currently at work on the poet. In the poetry of the early 'thirties, Auden, influenced by Lane, Freud and Lawrence, used the motif to press his realization for Man's psychic wholeness, demanding the restitution of Man to his former greatness as an intellectual being. As he comes gradually under the control of the group of radical intelligentsia he has surrounded himself with, Auden's 'Quest' has certain Marxist borrowings, being a quest for a society composed of harmonious relationships between men. It is, nevertheless, difficult to decide whether the ideal of society thus conceived by Auden owes more to Marx or to the D.H. Lawrence of the Fantasia of the Unconscious. Although outside the demands of the thesis, Auden's sonnet sequence entitled 'The Quest', and incorporated into The Double Man of 1941, retains the early image but uses it to point to the explicitly Christian quest he is now undertaking. The difference in tone between Auden's treatment of the different 'Quests' depends totally on Auden's ability to undertake the 'Quest' himself. With the call for a psychic and a social search, the poet's work of a decade is steeped in that restless vigour which only comes with the frustrating impossibility of the task he had asked Man to perform. With the Christian 'Quest', however, his tone is calm and under control. He is able to project the motif with a greater clarity because of his own personal belief in its success.

After 1941, the motif of the 'Quest' appears frequently in Auden's major writings and has attracted ample critical analysis. The works of most obvious interest, being unified by this central image, are, in chronological order:

'The Christian Tragic Hero.' New York Times, 16 December 1945, section 7, pp.1, 21.

'K's Quest.' Published in The Kafka Problem, ed. A. Flores. New Directions. New York. 1946.

'The Guilty Vicarage: Notes on the Detective Story by an Addict.' Harper's Magazine, cxcvi, 1176 (May 1948), 406-412. The Introduction to The Portable Greek Reader. The Viking Press. New York. 1948.

'The Ironic Hero: Some Reflections on Don Quixote.' Third Hour, iv, (1949), 43-50.

The Enchafed Flood. Random House. New York. 1950. Introduction to Tales of Grimm & Anderson. The Modern Library. New York. 1952.

'The Hero is a Hobbit.' New York Times, 31 October, 1954, Section 7, p.37. A review of The Fellowship of the Ring by J.R.R. Tolkien.

'The Quest Hero'

The Dyer's Hand, with particular reference to 'Genius and Apostle.'

## NOTES TO THE CONCLUSION

<sup>1</sup> World Within Worlds, p.49.

<sup>2</sup> Poems for Spain, p.iv.

<sup>2a</sup> Compare this view of Spain with the orthodox critical stance. For example, C.K. Stead in a recent periodical article states that the poem is 'the logical and imaginative climax of that decade.' (p.42). Monroe K. Spears, in The Disenchanted Island, sees the poem as overtly 'political' (p.89). Both, presumably, equate the 'defeated' of the last stanza with the Fascist forces of Franco. In terms of Auden's poetic and intellectual development during the 'Thirties, however, I see it as a reference to the inevitable failure of Mankind to change and advance. I take the poem as a statement of disillusionment, its conventional images of a just future tempered by the poet's inability to guard his adolescent energy against his mature cynicism. M.L. Rosenthal, in The Modern Poets, affects a compromise. In acknowledging its 'propagandistic' intent, he says:

it maintains the seriousness of revolutionary politics and the passion of its oratory while at the same time leaping clear of the obvious clichés that could so easily drag down such poetry. (p.192)

More important is his consideration of the final stanza, in which he recognizes the 'defeated' view of the poet himself:

The closing stanza, . . . , leaves the poem more failure than heroic, as though the poet already foresaw the failure of the Republic and with it the loss of the future. (p.193)

<sup>3</sup> A Poet's War, p.207.

<sup>4</sup> Auden, p.61.

<sup>5</sup> Spears, in The Disenchanted Island, quotes a letter he received from Auden in 1963:

I was not excusing totalitarian crimes but only trying to say what, surely, every decent person thinks if he finds himself unable to adopt the absolute pacifist position. (1) To kill another human being is always murder and should never be called anything else. (2) In a war, the members of the two rival groups try to murder their opponents. (3) IF there is such a thing as a just war, then murder can be necessary for the sake of justice. (p.157)

<sup>6</sup> Spears, p.133.

<sup>7</sup> Loc. Cit.

<sup>8</sup> The book is now out of print. It was originally edited by James A. Pike and published in New York in 1956.

## APPENDIX

The purpose of this appendix is to clarify certain key terms which I have used in the main body of the thesis. I have referred, unsparingly, to the 'Quest' as Motif, Symbol, Image, Theme and Myth and I have not always been successful in their exact definition. I hope to elucidate the subtle distinctions which exist in their usage.

Motif: The 'Quest' is the organizational impulse deep within Auden's work which unifies his current intellectual concerns. Motif denotes that the 'Quest' is the prevailing idea in Auden's work.

Symbol: Auden's obsession with the concept of a 'Quest' directly represents his overwhelming concern for the social and psychic condition of his fellow-man. In this way the 'Quest' is a symbol in that it points to Man's future by suggesting paths out of his present. The conception of the 'Quest' as a journey gives pictorial representation to Auden's spiritual abstractions.

Image: The 'Quest' as an image suggests the attitude Auden adopts towards his concerns. Thus Auden uses the image of the 'Quest' to suggest his optimistic vision of the future world populated by successful questing individuals. As an image, the 'Quest' works within the individual poem.

Theme: The theme of the individual volumes of Auden's 1930's work is his treatment of his conception of the 'Quest.' Whilst the motif remains a recurring concern in this early poetry, the theme changes from volume to volume. Poems, for example, represents the poet's desire for Mankind to better itself whilst The Orators projects one unfortunate individual in the act of an unsuccessful 'Quest.' Theme implies the particular emphasis Auden imparts to one or more stages in the 'Quest.'

Myth: I here mean to suggest that Auden has modified and rejuvenated a motif which runs through much past literature. I have already noted the elements of the 'Quest' common to both Auden and his Tradition. My emphasis, in this thesis, has been on the extent to which Auden's changing intellectual interests have embellished, disfigured and reinvigorated this Myth.

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