

MA in Literary Studies

Department of English

Faculty of Arts and Humanities

Al-Baath University



The Image of Modern Life in Auden's Poetry

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
of the degree of Master in English Literature

Submitted by

Reem Deeb

Supervised by

Dr. Bassima Mahfoud

Assistant Professor

2020



جامعة البعث

كلية الآداب والعلوم الإنسانية

قسم اللغة الإنكليزية

ماجستير في الدراسات الأدبية

صورة الحياة المعاصرة في شعر أودن

أطروحة أعدت لنيل درجة الماجستير في اللغة الإنكليزية

تقديم الطالبة

ريم ديب

إشراف

أ.م.د. باسمه محفوض

2020

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Acknowledgments

First, I would like to thank Dr. Bassima Mahfoud for her patience and help as well as her invaluable guidance on everything. I would also like to thank the staff at the Department of English at Al-Baath University for being generous with advice. My thanks go to my family who supported me especially my sisters. My main debt of gratitude is for my mother who encouraged me to continue my studies and worked hard to help me achieve my dream. I wish she were with me now. May her soul rest in peace. Finally, my heartfelt thanks are for my friends who stood by me in good and bad times. I also appreciate their support and immeasurable care and attention.

Abstract

This thesis seeks to explore the image of modern life in Auden's poetry and it concentrates on two phases; the English Phase and the American Phase. Chapter one discusses the English phase that is about Auden's early poems. Auden's poetry in this phase depicts England as a "wasteland" where nobody is happy. These poems also reflect homosexuality that spread in England at the beginning of the twentieth century. Homosexual relations were forbidden so some people managed to hide such relations but others did not. In addition, Auden's early poetry shows modern people's indifference to great norms and traditions after WWI. This war affected them negatively so that they became selfish and careless about the suffering of others. Chapter two is about the American phase. This chapter shows how Auden depicts WWII and its disastrous effects. In his American poetry, Auden also talks about politicians and their brutal actions that led to WWII. Politicians in that period were dictators whose tyrant policies caused suffering for people. In addition, Auden's American poems reflect the negative effects of this war on modern people. Consequently, they became slaves to the war and authorities. During war time people were submissive to their governments just to live peacefully during this chaotic period. Moreover, modern people who endured war time became apathetic about great incidents and others' suffering. They lost their interest in great things. In summary, modern people lived in an age that was full of worries and anxiety because of wars and conflicts. The conclusion is a summary of how modern life is portrayed in Auden's poetry.

الملخص

تتناقش هذه الأطروحة صورة الحياة المعاصرة في شعر أودن من خلال مرحلتين؛ المرحلة الإنكليزية والمرحلة الأمريكية. الفصل الأول يناقش المرحلة الإنكليزية التي هي عن شعر أودن الأولي. شعر أودن الإنكليزي يصور انكلترا كأرض قاحلة عديمة النفع حيث لا أحد يشعر بالسعادة. هذه القصائد تصور أيضا المثلية الجنسية التي انتشرت في انكلترا في بداية القرن العشرين. هذا النوع من العلاقات كان محرما لذلك حاول بعض الناس تخبئة هذه العلاقات لكن بعضهم الآخر لا. بالإضافة إلى ذلك شعر أودن الأولي يظهر عدم مبالاة الناس بالأفعال العظيمة بعد الحرب العالمية الأولى. هذه الحرب أثرت عليهم سلبيا لذلك أصبحوا أنانيين وغير مهتمين بمعاناة الآخرين. الفصل الثاني من الأطروحة هو عن المرحلة الأمريكية. هذا الفصل يظهر تصوير أودن للحرب العالمية الثانية ونتائجها الكارثية. في شعره الأمريكي، يتحدث أودن عن السياسيين وعن أعمالهم المتوحشة التي أدت إلى نشوب الحرب العالمية الثانية. في تلك الفترة كان هؤلاء السياسيون يتعاملون بطريقة ديكتاتورية واستبدادية مما سبب المعاناة للناس. تعكس قصائد أودن الأمريكية النتائج السلبية لهذه الحرب على الناس المعاصرين فأصبحوا عبيد للحرب والسلطات. خلال فترة الحرب عاش الناس بخنوع لكي يعيشوا بسلام في فترة مليئة بالفوضى. علاوة على ذلك، الناس الذين تحملوا مشقة الحرب أصبحوا عديمي الاهتمام بالأحداث الكبرى وبمعاناة الآخرين. لقد فقدوا اشغفهم بالأفعال العظيمة. باختصار، عاش الناس المعاصرون في عصر مليء بالحروب والنزاعات. أخيرا تأتي الخاتمة وهي عبارة عن ملخص حول كيف تم تصوير الحياة المعاصرة في شعر أودن.

Introduction

This dissertation discusses the image of modern life in Auden's poetry. It aims at showing how modern life is portrayed in Auden's poems through two phases; the English and the American phases. Auden is an English-American poet, playwright and critic. He was famous for writing poetry more than prose. He was born on 21st February in 1907 in York, the United Kingdom. He came from a middle class educated family. Auden's father, George Augustus Auden took a first-class degree in natural sciences in 1893 then he trained in medicine at St Bartholomew's Hospital in London. Auden's mother, Constance Rosalie Bicknell, was a devout Christian nurse with high church tastes. Seemingly, Auden has a strict Christian background. This might be what made him abandon his Christianity in his early youth and tend to be a leftist. "Auden grew up in Birmingham, England, and was known for his extraordinary intellect and wit. He was taught in private schools. Then he moved to Oxford University to study English. He had an MA degree in English."¹

W.H. Auden is considered one of the most skilled and creative mid-20th century poets who regularly wrote in traditional rhyme and meter. He travelled to many countries. His most important visit was to Spain where he experienced the Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939. Then, he migrated to America in the late of 1939.

¹ Richard Davenport-Hines. *Auden*. (London: Mandarin Paperbacks, 1996), p. 48.

All biographical information about Auden is taken from *Auden* by Richard Davenport-Hines. Thus, future references will be to the author and page numbers.

He lived most of the rest of his life in America. He also visited Germany, Iceland and China. Auden worked as a reporter during WWII in Germany. He served as a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets from 1954 to 1973 and divided most of the second half of his life between residences in New York and Austria. He witnessed WWI and WWII so that he seems to be affected by the inter-war period. Auden's poetry focuses mainly on the consequences of the two world wars both socially and psychologically. This is a crystal-clear feature of a Modernist poet.

Modern poetry is a mode of writing that started in the late 19th century and lasted until mid-twentieth century. Modern poetry is different from Victorian and Romantic poetry. There are many features of modern poetry that make it different. The first feature is the use of irony that Auden tends to use in most of his poems. Every poem written by him has an ironic tone. In this sense, readers should read between the lines. For example, by reading "The Unknown Citizen", readers come through a happy man who is honoured by the government since he is blessed to serve his country in a perfect manner. This person is apparently a normal citizen who has all his rights. Yet, the shock is that the truth is the opposite if readers discover the hidden meaning of the poem. They end to know that this citizen is miserable and maltreated and this is irony.

Another example of irony is Auden's poem "Musee` Des Beaux Arts" in which Auden mocks many things. For example, he talks about how people see the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as a normal action, and how this miraculous incident is not taken seriously by people. He says during the scene of sacrifice there is a horse that scratches its back with a tree because there is an insect which irritates him. This is an ironic tone used by Auden to show how the sacrifice is ignored. The second irony in the poem is the fall of Icarus, the great man who tries to fly. This man has

a super power but unfortunately he is seen as a normal person and his attempt is not important for others. Icarus falls from the sky and no one notices him. A farmer, who is near to the sea that Icarus is falling into, never notices him and a passing-by ship continues its journey without paying attention to this heroic try. The irony here is despite the importance of Icarus's try to fly no one appreciates it.

The most important feature of modern poetry is the relationship between the present and the past. In order to explain the terrible lack and confusion of the present, a number of Modernist poets developed ideas of history which they saw as circular rather than linear. In many of his poems, Auden uses past events to express a present situation. For him, history repeats itself. He mentions this idea in "September 1, 1939". In the third stanza, he talks about Thucydides who is an ancient Greek Historian. This historian suffers from injustice in his age. Thucydides wrote in his book about democracy that was a lie and talked about dictators and their violent actions. This was the case of leaders and democracy in Thucydides's age, and it is the same in Auden's time. Auden uses an example from the past to express the current life in his era. Modern poetry is accompanied with religious skepticism and loss of faith in God. The effect of Christian teaching starts to fade and this happens essentially after WWI. In one of his articles about religion, Charles W. Gilkey writes:

In the last year of the first World War a friend who had a very gallant Son at the front said to me that the young men had attained such an exaltation of spirit as to make them live on a plane higher than we had done. I am afraid it shocked him terribly when I remarked that, on the contrary, this year would be followed by an era of materialism. To a meeting of clergymen the same statement was later made with suggestion that the churches should be prepared to meet the condition. Of course they did not believe it, and yet there was historic evidence from modern wars to

make it seem probable.²

This war ended with millions of dead, wounded and homeless people. It had disastrous effects. In this light, losing faith in God and His mercy was a dominant reaction. This pushed many people to choose anti-Christian behaviour. One issue that spread in modern times was homosexuality. Although homosexuality was forbidden in Christianity, many modern people had such kind of relationship. They never thought about religion and they did whatever they wanted. To follow God was not a priority for them. Auden was one of those who disobeyed Christianity in his early youth. He felt religious rules as prejudice that prevented him from enjoying his normal life. He once said, “Were it possible to escape from our duties to God and our neighbor people would retreat with those books which, read in childhood, formed our personal vision of the public world.”³

What is common in modern poetry is the use of myth to introduce a substantial topic. This appears in “The Shield of Achilles” where Auden uses the Greek myth of Achilles, the great warrior who participated in The Trojan War. Auden uses this myth to embody war. Also, he goes back to the past to describe the present. Icarus is another mythic figure used by Auden to show people’s indifference to great actions.

Modern poetry can be identified with keeping up with changes. For instances many things were invented in the twentieth century. These inventions led to the creation of a new language of poetry; the language of science in general. For example, Auden wrote a poem whose title is “Night Mail”. The title denotes the

² Charles W. Gilkey. “Religion in the Post-War World”. (*The Journal of Bible and Religion*. Vol13, No.1, 1945), p.3.

³ Richard Davenport-Hines, P. 17

period when the mail was invented. This was not found before so it is clear that the poem belongs to the modern era. Auden says:

This is the night mail crossing the border,
Bringing the cheque and postal order,
Letters for the rich, letters for the poor
The shop at the corner, the girl next door.⁴

In “The Unknown Citizen”, few inventions in the twentieth century like gramophones, radios, cars and frigidaires are mentioned, “And had everything necessary to the Modern Man,/ A gramophone, a radio, a car and a frigidaire.”⁵

Another thing that distinguishes modern poetry is the dominance of the great two wars on most of the poems. No modern poet can deny these two wars and Auden is no exception. Auden tackles these wars differently. In his poetry, he tries to show the negative effects of them on people. He wrote “Epitaph on a tyrant” in which he criticises the policy of the dictators that led to the outbreak of WWII. He wrote “September 1, 1939” about the same theme which is war.

These are the characteristics of modern poetry in terms of ideas. As for form, free verse is the dominant figure. Free verse describes the poetry which rejects the regular metre and rhyme of conventional verse. It was mainly adopted by many poets in the early of the twentieth century as it helped them to explore new themes and ideas. “Free verse in this century can thus be seen as a revolt against the deadness of decadent late Victorian and Edwardian versification and as a search for new models and ideas in many places”⁶ In contrast, other modern poets prefer to keep using some of the traditional poetry but with half-rhyme scheme. Auden is

⁴ W. H. Auden. *Selected Poems*. Edward Mendelson. ed (New York: Vintage Books, 1979) “Night Mail”, lines 1-4. Future references are taken from *Selected Poems* by W.H. Auden. Thus, the references will be to titles of poems and line numbers.

⁵ “The Unknown Citizen”, lines 23-24.

⁶ G. S . Fraser. *Metre, Rhyme and Free Verse*. (New York: Routledge, 2018), p. 73.

a modern poet who does not use free verse completely but tries to strike a balance between the two. He once said, “I can’t understand strictly from a hedonistic point of view how one can enjoy writing with no form at all. If one plays a game, one needs rules, otherwise there is no fun.”⁷ For him, it is not an issue to introduce modern poetry with traditional form. He thinks that the organised form is needed. He has experiments with a variety of forms; lyric poetry, odes, ballads, meditations, arguments, satires, conversations and more. He uses formal and free verse.⁸ “Many of Auden’s early poems exploit half-rhyme, usually more persistently than in Yeats. Auden even gives himself the license to rhyme solely an “open” unstressed final syllable, as in the pairs beauty/ early and quinsy/virginity.”⁹ In his early writings, Auden tried to keep some rhyming even if the two words have one similar sound only.

Clearly, Auden never abandons rhyming completely. Instead, he uses pararhyme¹⁰. This kind of rhyming is preferable by Auden because his poetry in general focuses on the deteriorating of England, the disastrous effects of WWI and WWII, loss of identity, gloomy life of modern people, lack of true love and pessimistic themes. It is not strange to see such pessimistic image by Auden since his poetry reflects the life of people in the early decades of the twentieth century. These decades were full of worries and fighting and the life of English people

⁷ Tony Sharp. *W.H. Auden in Context*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), P. 370.

⁸ Stan Smith. *The Cambridge Companion to W. Auden*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.172.

⁹ Chris Baldick. *The Modern Movement*. Jonathan Bate. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), P. 78.

¹⁰ Pararhyme is the rhyming of two words with identical or similar consonants but different stressed vowels, such as hall and hell, of which the second is usually lower in pitch. (pitch means the degree of highness and lowerness of a sound).

Mary Ann Gillies & Aurelea Mahood. *Modernist Literature: An Introduction*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p.95.

changed to worse after WWI. As a result, pararhyme technique is suitable for such kind of themes that are all about negative issues.

What distinguishes Auden's poetry is the variety of themes. Auden's poetry is about various topics. His poems' themes are: social, religious and political. There are also poems about nature and landscapes. Randall Jarell talked about the variety of Auden's poetry. He says, "One of the most noticeable virtues of Auden's poems is their great variety cannot think of any poet, ever who has written more different sorts of poems."¹¹

In his early poems, Auden depicts social and political themes. He is concerned with life in England. He also talks about love in general and the case of love in his country in specific. He discusses WWI, its events consequences. England is represented as a waste land where nobody is happy. According to Auden, the signs of ruins and misery are everywhere. England lacks life because of war. "Auden did not only capture earlier than other poets of looming catastrophe he gave it a special imaginative force through."¹² Auden's poems reveal a psychological study of many things. He goes deeper to the extent that the reader feels Auden as a philosopher who understands life in a different way. He never forgot religion although he was not that believer at first. To be unbeliever was a reaction against his mother's strict Christian values. He sometimes sympathised with people feeling that they were miserable. He gave a gloomy image in most of his early poems, hence, many critics agreed that he is a pessimist. The themes of Auden's poems gave this impression to the readers and critics.

¹¹ Randall Jarell. *Randall Jarell on W. H. Auden*. Stephen Burt, Brook Molt. ed (New York: Colombia University Press , 2005), p. 974.

¹² Chris Baldick, p.42.

As for his early poems, they are those that he wrote in England when he was young. Auden's poetry is mainly divided into two phases: the English phase and the American phase. This is because he lived his youth in England and he moved to America later on. Talking about themes of his American poem is essential because his departure to USA coincided with WWII events. In that period, many of his poems were political. He wrote either about political dictators or about war itself. He witnessed the war so it was easy to reflect his experience in his poetry. As usual, Auden wrote in a sarcastic way to criticise politicians whose tyrannical actions were the main cause of the outbreak of WWII. In Auden's point of view, the violent and wrong policy of these politicians led to the killing of many innocent people in the war. In his late years, he went back to Christianity and stopped attacking it. Auden believed in God again, and he asserted his idea in one of his late poems that he wrote months before his death:

Finally, hair-raising things
that Hitler and Stalin were doing
forced me to think about God.
Why was I sure they were wrong?
Wild Kierkegaard, Williams and Lewis
Guided me back to belief.¹³

Auden's poetry gives the readers a full image of modern life in the era between 1920s and 1970s. Many historical events have been mentioned. This poetry describes the way people lived. Also, it talks about war and technological development. Auden's poetry has historical background since many of his poems document historical events. For example, he recorded WWI, the Spanish Civil War, WWII, the Cold War and the Vietnam War events.¹⁴ He also documented the

¹³ "A Thanksgiving" lines 13-18.

¹⁴ Auden wrote "August 1968" after the United States was embroiled in a conflict in Vietnam.

German pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer's execution in "Friday's Child". In this case, Auden's poetry and history are related to each other. Carolyn Steedman asserts this idea when she says that, "Auden is so much present because I believed, for a very long time, that his poetry could teach me what kind of thing 'history' is and what one is up to when doing it."¹⁵ In other words, when people read Auden's poetry they discover that it reflects historical events happening in the twentieth century.

Most critics who wrote books about Auden divide his poetry into the early and the later. Therefore, his poetry is split into two phases; the English and the American phase. There is a difference between the types of poetry he wrote in each phase. His poetry in England is more traditional and does not give him a clear identity. This is because he was influenced in his early career by many poets. "He started writing at the age of fifteen."¹⁶ As a young poet he had a role model in writing poetry. He initially was impressed by Thomas Hardy. Later on, he was clearly influenced by T. S. Eliot, Yeats and Robert Graves in 1920s.¹⁷ Auden admitted many times that he was affected in his youth by the poets mentioned above. He seemed to be proud of that. Many writers focused on Eliot's influence on Auden's poetry and Auden himself, in one of his later poems, mentions those great poets' influence on his early writings. He writes:

Thus when I started to verse,
I presently sat at the feet of
Hardy and Thomas and Frost,
Falling in love altered that,
Now someone, a least, was important:
Yeats was a help, so was Graves.¹⁸

¹⁵ Carolyn Steedman. *Poetry for Historian: or W. H. Auden and History*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), p.2.

¹⁶ Richard Davenport-Hines p. 34.

¹⁷ Rachel Wetzseon. *Influential Ghosts: A Study of Auden's Sources*. William E. Cain ed.(New York: Routledge 2006), p.1.

¹⁸ "A Thanksgiving", lines 4-9.

Auden was influenced by the poets that he mentions in his poem because he read their poetry. He shows respect to many of his fellows. For example, he wrote a poem about Yeats mourning his death. In this poem he glorifies the great poet.

Most of Auden's early poems were traditional in form but modern in content. This is possibly a reflection of Auden's character at that period. He came from a religious family. He pointed out that "both of his grandfathers and four of his uncles were Anglican priests."¹⁹ When others know this fact, they might think that Auden is a strict Christian believer. This is expected, yet the truth is the opposite. People will discover that Auden is secular and he is far away from his Christian background. In this sense, he is the same as his early poems that had traditional forms, yet modern content since he kept using the conventional style of writing in these poems with introducing modern themes. He has a conventional atmosphere concerning family and Christian background. On the other hand, he has a rebellious character. His rejection of religious beliefs and being a leftist proves this idea. "Auden always considered sermons extrinsic and avoided them whenever he could."²⁰ This clarifies Auden's tendency in his early age to follow science which is contrasted with religion. For him, it is better to follow science and its theories than to follow religion that should be judged. Auden believed that faith is unsubstantial and a person can live normally without faith in God.

Being heathen in his early life is contrasted with his late life. After Auden's migration to America, he announced his return to Christianity "In 1940 Auden formally returned to the liturgy and faith in his childhood".²¹ His going back to faith did not happen accidentally. There were reasons that evoked faith inside him.

¹⁹Arthur Kirsch. *Auden and Christianity*. (New Haven: Yale University Press,2005), P. 1

²⁰ Arthur Kirsch p. 2

²¹ Arthur Kirsch p. 13

The first reason is the Nazi ideology that is based on cruelty and injustice. The Nazi attacked Christian teachings for producing weak people since its pillars are forgiveness and justice. A second source of Auden's religious renewal is his visit to Barcelona, Spain, in 1937 during the Spanish Civil War. When he walked in this city he saw all the churches closed and he could never see a priest. This gave him a strange feeling of bitterness and disturbance. At that moment he discovered the Auden that missed his religion with which his life, he believed, would be better. In addition, he realised that religion has a place in his heart. This is a kind of awakening "Both these events, the rise of the Nazis and the destruction of the churches in Spain, antedate Auden's formal conversion by several years, and his reaction both suggest, as do his writings in the late 'thirties', that his faith was reviving."²²

Auden wrote many religious poems that assert his faith renewal like, his poem "New Year's Letter" and his great work *The Sea and the Mirror* a mixture of prose and poetry. Auden's faith is clear in his poem "Friday's Child" that is dedicated to a German priest Dietrich Bonhoeffer. This religious man was fated to death just because he went against the Nazi's will. He was executed among the public just like Jesus Christ who was crucified to save humanity. From Auden's view as a Christian person, the priest did not deserve to be killed since he obeyed God and never hurt anyone. This is painful because while God is merciful and gives people the free will to choose, politicians are brutal and tyrant. This shows that Auden admires his religion because it saves the lives of people and preaches others to be merciful and sympathetic.

In brief, Nazi extremist ideology and its oppressive policy led Auden to rethink about his religious belief. He realised how much important Christianity was

²² Arthur Kirsch, p. 22

to fight this kind of way of thinking. He ended with the fact that Christianity was the best solution in such cases.

Chapter one shows how Auden depicts human life in England in the post war period. England is characterised as a waste land whose people are unhappy. This idea is discussed through three poems. The first poem is “Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed”. In this poem, there is a stranger who is lost in a countryside area where there is no sign of life. He does not find any way of communication among people in this region. The state of this stranger is a reflection of modern people after WWI where their life is considered meaningless. The second poem is “O Where are you Going? Said the Reader to the Rider”. This poem talks about England that is a dark place where people live a miserable life. Their life is full of worries. The third poem is “As I Walked out One Evening” in which love in England is portrayed as sterile and immortal love. In this case, even love has no place in London.

Homosexuality is another idea examined in chapter one through two poems. These poems present Auden as gay. Auden is one of many people in England who has homosexual relations. It was a phenomenon that spread in the beginning of the twentieth century. The two poems are about a love scene between anonymous lovers who are having sex. They are in a chaotic situation because they will suffer out of their illegal relation. Such relations were forbidden in England and punished harshly. On the other hand, many people from high classes had homosexual relations openly. The last idea this chapter deals with is the state of numbness. After WWI people became indifferent to great actions. They did not care about others’ suffering. This idea is introduced in Auden’s poem “Musee` Des Beaux Arts” through two scenes. In this poem, Auden uses “Icarus” a mythic figure who tries to fly but he failed and fell in the sea. His try is not seen as a great thing.

Another scene that shows the carelessness of people about important incident is the crucifixion of Jesus Christ who is considered as another person dies. In both cases, modern people are apathetic about the suffering of Icarus and Jesus Christ who died without any try to save their lives.

Chapter two, it is about the American phase. It starts with referring to the reasons behind Auden's departure to America. In addition, it deals with politics before WWII. Auden highlights the dictatorship of the politicians that caused the war. In his poem, "Epitaph on a Tyrant" Auden shows the nature of tyranny. It addresses every dictator in the world in general and Hitler in specific. These political leaders are horrible and threat people violently. The tyranny of politicians is shown in "Friday Child" where there is a religious man who is killed because of his political beliefs. Then this chapter discusses the idea of war. Auden's American poetry concentrates on war because with Auden's arrival to America WWII took place. War events appear in "September 1, 1939". It talks about the first day of war with the odour of death offends the night of war. War is also discussed in another poem; "Memorial for the City". This poem shows the world of war (WWII) that is full fighting, suffering and ruins. Also, the Cold War is reflected in "The Shield of Achilles". Auden's poem "The Unknown Citizen" shows the conformity of people during war time because they want to live peacefully in an unpeaceful period.

This chapter argues that humanity in the modern world is deteriorating. People do not care about others' sufferings. Auden introduces this idea in many poems like; "The Shield of Achilles", "September 1, 1939" and "The Unknown Citizen". It ends with democracy in the modern world was a lie. Modern governments have a double standard policy. They pretend to treat their people in an elegant manner but the truth is the opposite. They keep treating them violently. Finally, the conclusion.

summarises Auden's view about modern life. Readers discover that Auden is pessimistic about this world. He portrays it as a chaotic world full of war and conflict. People experienced hard times. In brief, the modern world is the world of anxiety.

In conclusion, Auden wrote modern poetry that has different features. These features distinguish it from other kinds of poetry. , He uses irony, free verse, mythic figures to talk about current events. He does not abandon the traditional way of writing. Instead, he uses pararhyme scheme to give a sense of depression in the modern life. His poetry focuses on politics and war. He wrote about the two great wars and the Spanish Civil War and their negative effects on modern people. These wars caused pain and psychological problems. It is shown that Auden was unbeliever in his early youth but a devout Christian at his later years especially after his departure to America. At that time, he discovered that Christianity can fight terrorism.

Chapter One

The English Phase

1. England as a “wasteland”

This chapter discusses the image of modern life in England as depicted in Auden’s poetry. Through his poems, Auden draws an image of England as a “wasteland”. Auden once said that “The England of 1925 when I went up to Oxford was *The Waste Land* in character.”²³ England changed from a flourishing country before WWI to a declining one in terms of economy and social life. After the war, Britain endured debts to America, “Britain owed the United States \$4.7 billion”²⁴. Furthermore, the end of the war did not witness a swift return to pre-war normality for the British economy. Many British people were involved in strikes in 1919 and “unemployment rose to a peak of 16.9 percent of insured workers in 1921”²⁵. It sounds hard for the British people to compare their previous life (before the war) with the present. Their after war life was full of economic problems and identified with unstable period. They also lack peace. There was a sense of misery. Auden in that period was one of those leftists and liberals who blamed the old-style policy of the British government that had caused the war. In addition, the English poetry of Auden depicts human suffering after WWI. “Human suffering always seemed to Auden the essential fact to be addressed.”²⁶

Auden’s view about England as “wasteland” in character means that England is the same picture which was portrayed by T. S. Eliot in his poem *The Waste*

²³. Stan Smith, P.26.

²⁴ Patrick O. Cohrs. *The Unfinished Peace after World War I*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 68.

²⁵ Stephen Constantine. *Social Conditions in Britain 1918-1939*. (London: Taylor&Franciise Library, 2001), p. 6.

²⁶ Hugh Underhill. *The Problem of Conscious in Modern Poetry*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 246.

Land. In this poem, the modern city is depicted as dark and hopeless. It lacks passion and is characterized by lifelessness. Through Eliot's description of the modern human being, he expresses his feelings of disgust towards the modern world. He feels alienated from this world in which the living dead people roam. In this world, communication is missed. Like Eliot, Auden draws a similar image of the modern world ,in general, and England in particular. Stan smith talks about Auden's English poetry, "His early poems are set in a world suffered with threat and mysterious urgency, yet oddly detached from history, and are in that sense mythic."²⁷

"Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed"

In his poem "Who Stands the Crux Left of the Watershed", Auden uses an abandoned coal mine to lament the emergence of a new world in which a stranger is alienated from. It shows the loss of ultimate values that are brought by modern materialistic civilization. The speaker starts the poem with a description of the position of an anonymous person that later on is called "stranger" .This person stands "between the chafing grass" which means that the grass is harmed. He is also surrounded by demolished lands. From the beginning of the poem, it is clear that the land is in a degrading situation. In order to picture the land, Auden uses suggestive adjectives like "chafing", "dismantled" and "snatches". His purpose is to tell the reader that this land is unsuitable to live. Here, the land is an indication to England that is ruined by modernity. He says:

Who stands the crux left of the watershed,
On the wet road between the chafing grass
Below him sees dismantled washing-floors,
Snatches of tramline running to wood,²⁸

²⁷ Stan Smith, p.25.

²⁸ "Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed", lines 1-4.

Contrary to the stereotypical concept of the old times where England was pictured as a good place with all of its people feeling happy, the poet describes England as a “wasteland”. The old England was the country of power, peace and economic stability is different from the current England that is characterized with problems and unsuitable place to live. Coal miners were affected negatively after WWI just like the English industry that started to decay. British people in the twentieth went on a strike and Auden was one of them; “Nearly half of Great Britain six million trade-unionists had gone on strike in support of the coal miners.”²⁹ This is the new world discussed in Auden’s English poetry. “His poems written in England are marvelous testimony to how he could turn those private anxieties into a measure of a public world gone terribly wrong.”³⁰ . In the poem, the scene which the stranger sees is an image of a deteriorating industrial economy moving into its last ruinous stages. It also shows the psychological malaise accompanying such ruin. The people who live in such a world are themselves sterile, frustrated and vexed. The poem shows the signs of economic decay and distress. “In Auden's early poems the decline of England is a recurring theme.”³¹ In “Who Stands the Crux Left of the Watershed” there is a scene where industry is “comatose” and there is an old vehicle to indicate that the English industry is deteriorated. This idea is introduced in these lines:

An industry already comatose,
Yet sparsely living. A ramshackle engine
At Cashwell raises water; for ten years
It lay in flooded workings until this,
Its latter office, grudgingly performed,³²

²⁹ Charles Osborne. *W. H. Auden :The Life of a Poet* .(London: Michael O. Mara Books Limited, 1979),p.42.

³⁰ Charles Altieri. *The Art of Twentieth Century American Poetry*.(Malden: Blackwell Publishing 2006), p. 147.

³¹ Stan Smith, p.26.

³² “Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed”, lines 5-9.

Additionally, Auden presents in the same poem a very unfortunate and lamentable aspect of the life of a human being who is moving without direction or purpose as if this person is lost and has no principle. In this sense, Auden agrees with Eliot that the communication among people in the modern world is absent. The latter discusses this idea in his great work *The Waste Land*. According to Auden, no one in England communicates with the other hence, this country is metaphorically dead since communication is a sign of life. This is exactly what happens with the stranger who cannot find someone to communicate with. In the same vein, Edward Mendelson denotes this idea when he says:

The stranger has freedom and mobility but can affect nothing: beams from his car will wake no sleeper..... The natural world avoids him. The spiritual barrier between the land and the stranger is also the barrier in time....The stranger can neither communicate with past nor decide on a plausible future.³³

The aforementioned stranger is utterly lost and cannot even locate his task. Auden wants to show that this is the modern English human being who is lost and has no role or meaning in life. This asserts that England is no more a good place for its people because they have no attachment and are unable to do their tasks as human beings. They lack communication which leads to a state of loneliness and loss. Relatively, Auden says:

Go home, now, stranger, proud of your young stock,
Stranger, turn back again, frustrate and vexed:
This land, cut off, will not communicate,
Be no accessory content to one
Aimless for faces rather there than here.³⁴

³³ Edward Mendelson. *Early Later Auden: A Critical Biography*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), p.64.

³⁴ "Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed", lines 19-23.

The speaker carries on describing the scene. He says that in the place where the stranger is, the sun beams that are a sign of life and vitality are useless and ineffective. They cannot even wake a sleeping person. In contrast, there is a strong wind which can be heard all over the place. The wind is an indication of a deserted place where no one is left. In this case, England is just like the desert where conditions are difficult for people to live. It is an abnormal place that people are unable to live in it anymore. Auden expresses this idea by saying, "Beams from your car may cross a bedroom wall, / They wake no sleeper; you may hear the wind/ Arriving driven from the ignorant sea."³⁵ The poem ends with the view about losing hope in this destructive world. The speaker finds the stranger in a world which is waiting for catastrophic destruction and is in its last stages of fear, sterility, and death. Auden says, "Near you, taller than grass, / Ears poise before decision, scenting danger."³⁶

This is Auden's vision about England in his early poems. There is also another issue that caught his attention in that period. He sheds a light on a very important idea that Fascism was a great threat to European civilization in the thirties. In his opinion, Fascism had bad consequences on people in the twentieth century. That sounds true because the fascist ideology of killing others who have different opinions and spreading terror in Europe is the main cause of WWII. Auden mirrors this dangerous phenomenon in his great work *The Orators* ³⁷ at first and exposes this Fascist system in many later poems that will be discussed in details in chapter three. Fascism was a threat out of its brutal ideology that is based on cruelty, terror and injustice. Leon Surette talked about the risk of Fascism:

³⁵. "Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed", lines 24-26.

³⁶ "Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed", lines 29-30.

³⁷ *The Orators* is a long poem in prose and verse that is divided into three sections; "Address for Prize Day", "Journal of an Airman", and six odes. It is framed with "Prologue" and "Epilogue".

In the thirties, the Fascist revolution successfully drove communism out of Western Europe. Of course, it also drove out democracy, liberty, and human decency. Mussolini was the first Fascist leader to export his revolution by arms- to Ethiopia. Spain was next to the list of recipients of Fascist revolution, and soon Hitler (with Mussolini along for the ride) had conquered pretty much the same territory as Napoleon had done. England and Russia remained beyond the grasp of the both of them.³⁸

This means that the fascist and the Nazi systems threatened the life of modern people through their violent policy of killing and fighting. These two issues helped the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. Frances Lannon mentions in a book about this war that "The war began in the middle of July 1936, when a group of generals attempted a military coup against the democratically constituted government of the Second Spanish Republic."³⁹ In the same book the writer tells that politicians of other countries tried to participate in this war. He says "Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin all took with the first option, with the Nazi and Fascist regimes supporting Franco, and the Soviet Union supporting the Republic- with momentous consequences for the war in Spain".⁴⁰

"Spain"

Auden wrote "Spain" to show how much the Spanish people suffered out of this bloody war. He wrote it after his return from Spain. He went there to volunteer and worked as an ambulance driver. This poem draws contrasts between the Europe of Yesterday that Spain is a part of it and the conflicting present. It describes the history that led to the war "yesterday" then the war itself "today" and foresees a possible future that may result from the war "future". In this case, the dictatorial policy of Franco caused this war. Moreover, the support from Hitler and

³⁸ Leon Surett .*Poetry of Modernism*. (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), p. 76.

³⁹ Frances Lannon . *The Spanish Civil War 1936-1939*.(Oxford: Ospery Publishing, 2000), p.14.

⁴⁰ Frances Lannon, p. 15.

Mussolini played a major role in the continuation of this fighting. This means that Fascism and Nazism were a threat on Europe in the thirties.

The poem starts with describing the flourishing past that is characterised with the growth of industry, exploration and conquest, and various inventions; “Yesterday the invention/ of cartwheel and clocks, the taming of/ horses. Yesterday the bustling world of the navigators.”⁴¹ But yesterday is unfortunately gone when war started everything changed. There are several figures in the “today” of the poem. “Today” represents war time that is full of terror and misery. People are worried about their lives. For example the scientist looks through the telescope but thinks about the lives of his friends. People in Spain are anxious all the time. They feel unrest because of fighting that takes place around them. Also, the Spanish impoverished citizens in their “fireless lodgings” read the newspapers then realise that they have nothing left to lose. The country entirely burns. Auden introduces this idea in the ninth stanza:

And the poor in their fireless lodgings, dropping the sheets
Of the evening paper: “Our day is our loss, O show us
History the operator, the
Organiser, Time the refreshing river”⁴²

The poem then turns to the future which is presented as hopeful time filled with research, romance and love, bicycle races and peaceful walks but it is just an imaginary time. This is the future that most people need to get rid of the bad memories of the war but this future cannot be reached easily. There is no sign to have such a bright future. According to the poem there is no exterior force that can solve the people’s problems in Spain.

⁴¹ “Spain”, lines 7-9.

⁴² “Spain”, lines 33-36.

“Spain” consists of twenty-five stanzas; six of them start with “Yesterday” that talks about the past, four stanzas begin with “To-morrow” that talk about the future and the rest stanzas start with “To-day” that are the present. This indicates that present life (war time in Spain) is the most important period that its events will affect the whole region. In addition, each stanza contains four lines and the third line is shorter than the previous two ones. There is no harmony between the first two lines and the third in terms of form and rhyming. This indicates that the third line represents the future that is different from the past and present and it is shortened. In other words, if this imagined bright future comes, it won’t last for a long time.

“O where are you Going? Said the Reader to the Rider”

Auden aim was to tell his readers about the thirties and the worries that people felt during this decade. This is shown in his poem “O Where are you Going? Said the Reader to the Rider”⁴³. The speaker presents a conversation between two people; the reader and the rider. The reader asks the rider many questions with a tone of fear and tension increasing along the poem. The first three stanzas echo the hallucinatory fears and despair of the decade as there is a hidden evil under the beauty of the valley (the rider’s destination). The reader lives in fear of the rise of Fascism and suffers from compromises and cowardice of what once termed “a low dishonest decade”⁴⁴ which means the thirties. The poem is full of symbols. For example, the valley is an indication of England; the reader is possibly Auden himself because he is an educated man and is able to understand and

⁴³ This poem is taken from *The Orators*

⁴⁴ It is a term by Auden to describe the thirties. This term appears in Auden’s poem “September 1,1939”

analyse what is going around; and finally the rider symbolises the inhabitants of England. This shows that these people live in the valley which is "fatal". Thus, this place (England) is dangerous and unfit to live a happy life. Above all, Auden points to the pollution caused by furnaces and perhaps steel mills since he grew up in England. He metaphorically points to the darkness that resides in the hearts of men. To add, there is a lot of rubbish beside houses and there is a bad smell coming out of this rubbish. "Auden is the foremost poet of the thirties; Auden's poems depict the industrial decline in England North".⁴⁵ In this case, Auden draws a gloomy image about England of being a nasty place to live and a country with a bad reputation. He says:

O where are you going? Said the reader to the rider,
That valley is fatal where furnaces burn,
Yonder's the midden whose odours will madden,
That gap is the grave where the tall return.⁴⁶

The poet continues that this land is dark and provides nothing for its people to have a prosperous life. He mocks this state by making the reader ask the rider another question, "Your footsteps feel from granite to grass?" This stands for a hard life since granite is a hard and inflexible stone. Therefore, this hard life will not change to "grass" - an easy and relaxing life. In this poem, Auden wants to say that people in the thirties were fated to suffer and have severe life, and there were no indications for any kind of change to a better life. England which suffered from wars and inner conflicts cannot provide relaxation and privileges to its inhabitants. Auden introduces these ideas by saying:

O do you imagine," said fearer to farer,
That dusk will delay on your path to the pass,

⁴⁵ Rainer Emig. *W. H. Auden Towards a Postmodern Poetics* (Houndmills: Macmillan Press Ltd, 2000), p.2.

⁴⁶"O Where are you Going? Said the Reader to the Rider", lines 1-4.

Your diligent looking discover the lacking
Your footsteps feel from granite to grass?⁴⁷

Not only people are miserable in this place but also animals. The bird, for instance, hides among trees, dares not to come out because it does not feel safe. This is an indication that both people and animals are at unrest. They lack peace and continuously feel endangered that their lives become inconstant. This is the case of the world in the thirties where Fascism and Nazism were at their peak. Consequently, these two strict systems deprived people to live peacefully as Auden says:

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?⁴⁸

This poem that expresses depression about England as being a waste land where nobody is happy has an interrogative tone. It includes many questions. The speaker is wondering all the time as if he had no answers or he wants people to find answers. The poem consists of four quatrains. It has organised ideas and form but sometimes the sequence is interrupted by those questions. It is possible that Auden tries to convey a message that English people have an organised life but there are things that disturb them just like what the questions do. It is possible that the power of Fascism and Nazism in the beginning of the thirties causes anxiety to people in England. This issue shakes their inner peace. This poem is taken from Auden's great work *The Orators*. It expresses the same idea of the whole work:

The Orators, which envision England as a sick and dysfunctional blend
Of public school, clock-and dagger battleground, and industrial decay.

⁴⁷ "O Where are you Going? Said the Reader to the Rider", lines 5-8.

⁴⁸ "O Where are you Going? Said the Reader to the Rider", lines 9-12.

The steaming engines and belching factories that had heralded the birth Of the modern had, by Auden's time, become the rusting hulks and abandoned mines of his early poems. Auden's response is to idealize these emblems of industrial collapse, reclaiming the barren landscape and mechanistic imagery of the Modernist land for his own private romance.⁴⁹

"As I Walked out One Evening"

Auden asserts that England is an unsuitable place for a fair life through talking about infertile love. This love unfortunately has no place in England. Through his poems, he cares about presenting a live image of England. In his poem "As I Walked out One Evening", he introduces to his readers a scene of London once the persona is walking on a street which is very crowded. In this street, a lover catches his eye. This lover sings happily for his beloved who is beside him. Through this song the lover expresses his strong love which according to him is an eternal and special love. Also, he tells the public that their love has no end and their relationship cannot be broken. Auden says:

I'll love you dear, I'll love you
Till China and Africa meet
And the river jumps over the mountain
And the salmon sing in the street.⁵⁰

However, the irony is that the clocks in the city start to whirr giving the sense of opposing the lover. These clocks tell him that his love is not eternal and he cannot conquer time. Hence, the clocks announce that love in London is a nightmare which contrasts with what the lover thinks because this kind of love cannot be found in London. The clocks warn to stop dreaming and start

⁴⁹ Aidan Wasley. *The Age of Auden: Postwar Poetry and the American Scene*. (New York: Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 154.

⁵⁰ "As I Walked out One Evening", lines 9-12.

discovering his surroundings and see the truth. This truth is that London is full of headaches and worries and nothing is clear because life is vague, too. Here there is an indication that the future of London is unknown. In other words, the clocks foresee of something bad that will happen in the future. It is possible that Britain will face hard times. Therefore, it is better for people to get prepared to live these bad days rather than living in fantasy and dream about romantic love. In this case, England will not be a place for love or peaceful life but a place for war and unstable moments. After two years of writing this poem, WWII started. Here, Auden once again presents an ugly image of London as it is unsuitable for true love. Love in it is, in contrast, a nightmare and it will not have a happy end. So, the lover should be aware of this bitter fact and know that his love is going to be fated to fail because there is no justice in this city. Auden asserts this by these lines:

In the burrows of the Nightmare
Where Justice naked is,
Time watches from the shadow
And coughs when you would kiss.⁵¹

After the warning of the clocks about the temporality of love, the two lovers leave the street, and at the same time life goes on. They themselves realise that their love will have an end and they are not able to taste eternal love in London. The same idea introduced in “Love by Ambition”. Auden talks about the futility of love; “Love is not there/ Love has moved to another chair”.⁵² It means that “the present cannot offer happiness because even as love begins it knows that it will come to an end that it will die as it has done before.”⁵³

⁵¹ “As I Walked out One Evening”, lines 25-28.

⁵² “Love is Ambition”, lines 5-6.

⁵³ Michael O’ Nelle & Gareth Reeves. *Auden, Macneice, Spender. Thirties Poetry*. (New York: St. Martin’s Press Inc, 1992), p. 24.

Every time eternal love relations are fated with failure. Love is temporal in modern world.

In “As I Walked out One Evening”, the clocks stopped after the lovers' discovering of the cruel truth and leaving the street. This poem talks about human suffering; even love has changed to a temporal one. In this poem, though the underlying theme is that of love, it is also about the futility of life, its uncertainties and the misery during post-war period, when a radical change came to be visible in the social order in general and more particularly in the lifestyle. Stephen Constantine argues his book the period of the thirtieth in Britain:

In the popular view, these years and especially the 1930s were a time of unbroken depression, deprivation and decay. It is an image coloured in dark tones, a palette made up of dole queue, hunger marches, slum houses, malnutrition and bitter class and industrial relations. Sometimes these bleak impressions of the past have been consciously and more recently evoked, because the period remains a reference point in many of our own contemporary political arguments.⁵⁴

This means that the period of thirties in England is infamous of being crucial. There were political challenges and miserable social conditions. People were depressed because of these issues and other things like the political changes especially after Franco's victory in the Spanish Civil War with the support of Hitler and Mussolini. This incident is a warning that WWII was on the road. Relatively, in the poem, the clocks' whirring to stop dreaming of love and sweet life is to alert people about the catastrophic future that will be threatened with war and fighting. In other words, London is not a place for love but for headaches and

⁵⁴ Stephen Constantine, p.1.

dilemmas. Above all, the poem is a reminder of the passage of time and what changes occur in life, causing suffering, as time goes by. Auden says:

But all the clocks in the city
Began to whirr and chime:
'O let not Time deceive you,
You cannot conquer Time.⁵⁵

In brief, Auden's early poetry reflects the era after WWI. This poetry represents the crisis of his age. He shows that period was full of fear and worries. He depicts England as a waste land that is unsuitable for people to live in. His poetry also presents modern life in the light of political changes with the increasing power of the two dictatorial systems Fascism and Nazism that threatened the European peace.

2. Homosexuality

Another different understanding of love discussed by Auden indirectly in many of his poems is the forbidden love. This love is between lovers of the same sex; the homosexual love that spread in London especially after WWI. Since the beginning of 20th century, culture has been dominated by attempts to keep homosexuality hidden. A number of homosexual writers in that period maintain public silence about their sex lives like "E. M. Forster."⁵⁶ Instead, they present their homosexual themes indirectly and one of those writers is Auden who wrote poems dedicated to unclear lovers, and the setting was obscure, too. The lovers he

⁵⁵ "As I Walked out One Evening", lines 21-24.

⁵⁶ Richard Bozorth. *Auden's Games of Knowledge: Poetry and the Meaning of Homosexuality*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p.4.

addresses in his poems seek safety and freedom. They fulfill their desires through the obscure nights with their lovers.

Historically speaking, it is noticed that the start of homosexuality was in the 18th century. Yet, it increased clearly and openly at the beginning of the 20th century due to a number of reasons. In this respect, Lucy Delap says, “There was notable change in moral attitudes in the decades after WWI; sex education became more widely available; plus, sex and sexual pleasure became more openly discussed.”⁵⁷ She also provides another important reason of the spreading of homosexuality in London in that period which is the spreading of psychoanalysis of Freud which talks about sex openly and unconventionally:

The growing significance of psychoanalysis was a further important influence on 20th century sexual cultures. Psychoanalysis provided a language to name and theorise homosexuality. Freudian ideas problematised sexual 'normality' and displaced earlier, more hostile languages of deviance and sin. Freud argued that all humans could be homosexual if they failed to resolve the complexes and fantasies of infancy and childhood.⁵⁸

This agreement proves Freud's psychoanalysis theory's effect in creating a new language about sex. To some extent, it justifies homosexuality of being a normal illness out of not succeeding the sexual complexes. People started to rethink about this issue and stop treating it as a taboo. It seems that psychoanalysis theory legalises homosexuality. It suggests that all people are subjected to be homosexual if they fail to resolve the aforementioned complexes.

Auden as an Englishman was affected by what was happening around him. He was known to have more than one relationship with his male friends. He firstly had

⁵⁷ Lucy Delap. *Campaigning for Change. Camping for Homosexual Rights in 20th Century Britain.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2007), p.116.

⁵⁸Lucy Delap, p.118.

a sexual friendship with his friend Isherwood in 1927 and in 1939; Auden fell in love with Chester Kallman and regarded their relationship as a marriage. It is not strange for both friends Auden and Isherwood to have such illegal relation. They suffered from strict Christian teachings. This is a kind of reaction against these teachings. “One common point between Auden and Isherwood was their rebellion against the small, smothered morality of their mothers”⁵⁹. Each relation of Auden with his friends is different. The relation with Isherwood was completely hidden because it was in 1927 in a period where this kind of relationship was forbidden. In contrast, his relation with Kallman was announced, since later in 1939, the spread of homosexuality became clearer because people started to change their way of thinking. They became more open-minded about sex. Most people thought that they were free regarding their desires and how to fulfill their passion the way they want. Homosexuality started among high class people out of bore and leisure. George Woods says:

If to some limited extent 'fashionable', then, between the wars, male homosexuality adopted different styles in the two decades. The symbolic queer figure of the 1920s was an affluent and whimsical queen, dedicated to aestheticism and leisure, with a wandering eye for a burly sportsman.⁶⁰

There is another opinion about the emergence of homosexuality clearly in the early decades of the 20th century that is separation of boys and girls at schools. This played a major role to have relations among boys especially the rich boys who studied at a boarding school, “Homosexuality had been on the increase among the upper classes for a couple of generations, though almost unknown among working

⁵⁹ Richard Davenport- Hines, p.54.

⁶⁰ Tony Sharpe, p. 90.

people. The upper class boarding-school system of keeping boy and girl away from any contact with each other was responsible.”⁶¹

This behavior to separate boys and girls from each other, boys start to have sex among themselves. This means that homosexuality started at schools in that period. The general conditions of the post-war period notably affected the thinking of most people. Even the church started to be less strict just to relief the people even “the Church of England began to view sex as pure and sacred rather than dirty and profane”⁶² Besides, the spread of Freud's ideas about sex created an acceptable sexual language. Auden's homosexuality is possibly a kind of negative reaction against the repressiveness that he faced in London.

“Lay Your Sleeping Head, my Love”,

Auden's homosexuality appears in many of his poems especially “Lay Your Sleeping Head my Love” and “This Lunar Beauty”. “Lay Your Sleeping Head my Love” begins with a command from the speaker where he asks his lover to put his hand on the speaker's arm. It seems that the two lovers are in bed. Perhaps they are in a post-coital situation. Since it is known that Auden is homosexual, it is easy to assume that the beloved is a man. This poem is written in 1937, so it is dedicated to Isherwood with whom Auden had a relation in that year. The scene itself shows that they have pleasure. Commenting on this love scene, Richard Davenport says: “After a few months Auden and Isherwood began to have sex together: not in a spirit of romantic passion, but as two men who understand one another well, giving and sharing pleasure, relieving tension and having fun.”⁶³ The tryst of love in the poem is obscure but the time is night. The speaker enjoys looking at his lover's

⁶¹Tony Sharpe, p.89.

⁶² Lucy Delap, p.117.

⁶³ Richard Davenport- Hines, p. 54.

beautiful and innocent face. On the other hand, he laments the fact that this beauty will fade one day. He thinks that his lover's beauty is just like children's beauty which will be destroyed through time and fever. The speaker is afraid of the cruel truth that he will lose this beauty and stop enjoying it in the future. Auden says:

Lay your sleeping head, my love,
Human on my faithless arm;
Time and fevers burn away
Individual beauty from
Thoughtful children, and the grave
Proves the child ephemeral:
But in my arms till break of day⁶⁴

The poem continues expressing the situation of the two lovers. The speaker wants his lover to lie with him for long hours. He describes their laying as "mortal" and "guilty" which means that their relationship is forbidden and will end soon. This illegal relationship does not prevent the couple from enjoying sex because the speaker considers that this situation is beautiful in all of its aspects: "Let the living creature lie/ Mortal, guilty, but to me/The entirely beautiful."⁶⁵

The first lines of the poem tell that homosexuality in the modern world was a sin and homosexual people could be punished severely in England. By the word "faithless" means that homosexual people were considered unfaithful because this issue went against Christian teachings. In this case, they were not Christian believers.

Now the feelings of the two lovers are contradicted. Here we have chaotic passions. First, both of them swoon after the coition and they are happy. They feel that they are united and there is no bound between their bodies and souls. On the

⁶⁴ "Lay Your Sleeping Head, my Love", lines 1-7.

⁶⁵ "Lay Your Sleeping Head, my Love", lines 8-10.

other hand, they are oppressed because their relation is unacceptable and should be hidden. These two lovers who cannot announce their feelings urge the sympathy of Venus, the goddess of love. She sympathises with them because their joy is incomplete out of the obstacles of their society. Even the hermit feels pity for them and he is affected by the pangs of love:

In their ordinary swoon,
Grave the vision Venus sends
Of supernatural sympathy,
Universal love and hope;
While an abstract insight wakes
Among the glaciers and the rocks
The hermit's sensual ecstasy.⁶⁶

The poem shows that these moments of love and pleasure will be paid by the two lovers. This means that they will be punished. Even the cards support that they will suffer because of their illegal relationship. Since they are aware of the destiny of their love, they exploit every second by whispering and kissing:

Every farthing of the cost,
All the dreaded cards foretell,
Shall be paid, but from this night,
Not a whisper, not a thought,
Not a kiss nor look be lost.⁶⁷

After these bitter moments of thinking and enjoying love, the speaker tells that this night is about to end as if he wanted to show that everything has an end, just like the two lovers' relationship. The speaker mourns the future loss of the beauty of his lover which will fade step by step. Also, the sun is going to come out announcing the end of the love night. Auden continues drawing the gloomy image of this meeting. He describes this night as sweet as chocolate, but unfortunately

⁶⁶ "Lay Your Sleeping Head, my Love", lines 14-20.

⁶⁷ "Lay Your Sleeping Head, my Love", lines 25-29.

this sweetness is found in a mortal world where nothing lasts forever especially happiness. He says:

Beauty, midnight, vision dies:
Let the winds of dawn that blow
Softly round your dreaming head
Such a day of sweetness show
Eye and knocking heart my bless,
Find the mortal world enough;
Noons of dryness see you fed
By the involuntary powers,⁶⁸

The persona concludes this scene by describing the sweet night of the two lovers as one of “nights of insult”⁶⁹. This may indicate that this night of enjoyment will cause insult for them in the future. If the two lovers’ relation is exposed, they will be disdained. Auden says, “Nights of insult let you pass/Watched by every human love.”⁷⁰

“This Lunar Beauty”

Another poem by Auden is thought to be dedicated to a man is "This Lunar Beauty". In this poem the speaker compares his lover to the moon that, in his opinion, is impressive. He looks at his lover's face profoundly. This love scene is just like a dream which is lost. This dream lasts for a short time. The poet uses a metaphor to describe the time of love by saying “For time is inches”⁷¹; as if the time the two lovers spend with each other is short. They occasionally meet each other. It is understood that the lovers’ relation is like a ghost that is “hunted” but “wanted”. It points that others will not respect this kind of love. It is similar to a ghost that most people are afraid of. Homosexuality was unwelcomed in modern

⁶⁸ “Lay Your Sleeping Head, my Love” lines, 30-37

⁶⁹ “Lay Your Sleeping Head, my Love” line, 39

⁷⁰ “Lay Your Sleeping Head, my Love” lines, 38-39

⁷¹ “This Lunar Beauty” line, 12

era and modern people were afraid to have such a relation. Although, the lovers' relation is undesirable by others, the speaker thinks that this love is necessary and important for him and for his lover. By this relation they fulfill a need. Auden says:

For time is inches
And the heart's changes
Where ghost has haunted
Lost and wanted.⁷²

By comparing this love to a ghost the poet shows that this love appears at night and disappears when the dawn comes. Since the two lovers realise that their love is a ghost, they try their best to take advantage of time. They enjoy every second of the sweetness of love, and they do not allow anything to spoil this sweet night. In the last line of the poem, the speaker indicates that his partner is "male" when he addresses him with "his":

But this was never
A ghost's endeavour
Nor finished this,
Was ghost at ease;
And till it pass
Love shall not near
Nor sorrow take
His endless look.⁷³

As it has been mentioned before, homosexuality mainly appears in two of Auden's poems; "This Lunar Beauty" and "Lay your Sleeping Head, my Love". He wrote the first in 1930 but the second in 1937. "This Lunar Beauty" consists of three stanzas. The lines have three or four words only. This may indicate that at that time when he wrote this poem, Auden made his effort to tell little information about his relation. As if he wanted to keep his relation with Isherwood as a secret.

⁷²"This Lunar Beauty" lines, 12-15

⁷³ "This Lunar Beauty" lines 16-24

On the other hand, “Lay Your Sleeping Head my Love” consists of four stanzas and has long lines. In this poem, he tells a love story in details. After seven years of relation with Isherwood, Auden is ready to declare his homosexuality. The poem is about a situation after coition. Auden uses words “lie” and “swoon”. “This Lunar Beauty” has different number of lines 7, 8, 9. This denotes that their relation is unstable at the beginning. However, in “Lay Your Sleeping Head my Love”, each stanza has 10 lines. It indicates that their relation is organised and now each one understands the other and knows what he wants from him. Auden once talked about this relation “Without these prohibitive frontiers we should never know who we were or what we wanted”⁷⁴

In both poems, Auden uses “pararhyme” scheme like (later/lover), (haunted, wanted) and (away/day) to tell that this relation will fail. This technique is used to express negative meaning as Gilles says:

“Wilfred Owen, T. S. Eliot, and W. H. Auden are among other well-known twentieth-century poets who regularly used pararhyme. The technique often produces a feeling of dissonance, failure, and unfulfilment, which in the case of Owen’s war poetry reinforces the works’ basic themes.”⁷⁵

In other words, using “pararhyme” technique symbolizes the temporality of homosexual relations. The destiny of such relations is failure. Homosexual love was opposed by social and religious traditions so it will not be successful. The English society refused this type of love. Piotr Gwiazda supported this idea when talking about Auden’s experience in love, “He often spoke of feelings of inadequacy, frustration, guilt, doubt, isolation, and especially infidelity that are part of homosexual experience.”⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Richard Davenport- Hines, p. 55.

⁷⁵ Mary Ann Gillies & Aurelea Mahood, p. 95.

⁷⁶ Piotr Gwiazda. *James Merrill and W. H. Auden Homosexuality and Poetic Influence*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 31.

Consequently, there are many factors that led to the appearance of homosexuality in Britain at the beginning of the twentieth century. Men found themselves attracted to other men as a reaction to some traditions in their society. Lucy Delap and Morgan say:

The historiography of modern masculinity has tended to focus on fairly large scale social changes including warfare, the end of empire, industrialization and changing labor markets, changing family structures and sexual cultures, new leisure opportunities and a more interventionist and domestically oriented state as the significant factors giving rise to shifting or recurrent modes of British masculinity.⁷⁷

3. The State of Numbness

Although homosexuality is a key theme in Auden's poetry but it is not dominant. The dominant topic of his poetry is war especially the effect of war on the Europeans in general and on the British in specific. For example, Auden wrote his poem "Musee Des Beaux Arts" in 1938 in a chaotic period which was full of wars. First, there was a civil war in Spain that lasted for four years. Then there were combats among great countries in the world which led to WWII later on. As a result of all these bad conditions, people became lost because their inner peace disappeared out of the violence that took place around them. All these issues caused a state of numbness that meant the lack of physical and emotional feeling. Therefore, the British people were numb because they lived WWI and it affected them in a negative way psychologically and socially. Then the Spanish Civil War also gave a horrible atmosphere. As it is mentioned before, this war was between two conflicted powers; the nationalists who were supported by Fascist Italy and

⁷⁷ Lucy Delap and Sue Morgan, p.10.

Nazi Germany and the Republicans who received aid from the Soviet Union and the United States. This war was bloody to the extent that the number of the people killed from both sides was about “one million” including not only those who were killed in the battle but also the victims of bombardment, execution and assassination. “After three years of bitter fighting, during which about three-quarters of a million lives were lost (both combatants and civilians), Franco was victorious and established himself a dictator.”⁷⁸ This is a horrible number. Terror and tyranny took place all over Spain. All these violent events affected other European countries negatively.

While people in Spain were killed and treated badly, other people in the neighbouring countries continued their lives normally without caring about the suffering of the Spanish people. They were selfish and they enjoyed their lives regardless of what was happening in Spain. This carelessness was a kind of reaction against war time. This was because the region was inconsistent in that period. No one felt safe and violence dominated. This led to the state of numbness for people who became no longer patient and could not face problems. They were tired, and they could not forget WWI and its disastrous results. They wanted to live peacefully so they tried to isolate themselves from the surrounding conflicts. After all these miserable circumstances they became numb and emotionless, and they lived without caring about anything even the suffering of others. Those people lost their inner peace because of WWI and the Spanish Civil War. Norman Page mentions that:

How then can human nature have suddenly become so much worse as it seems to have done in some foreign countries which we looked upon as our friendly rivals in civilization?

I have no doubt that the Great War accustomed men to scenes of death and

⁷⁸ Norman Page. *The Thirtieth in Britain*. (London: Macmillan Education Ltd, 1990)., P.84

suffering, and introduced a harsher tone into human society. But it is unhappy also true that our humanity is only skin deep.⁷⁹

Through this speech, the writer shows the negative effect of war on people by showing that the nature of modern human beings changed negatively after WWI. They were selfish so that they stopped sympathizing with other people's suffering. Their inner peace was stolen by war and its horrible events. As a result, humanity was lost.

"Musee` Des Beaux Arts"

Auden highlights the state of numbness in his poetry in his poem "Musee` Des Beaux Arts". At the beginning of the poem Auden talks about the "Old Masters" that they were right when they talked about human suffering. According to the speaker, human suffering takes place while someone is eating, drinking, opening the window or just walking dully. People are careless about others' suffering. They just keep going on their own lives. They are emotionless and hard-hearted people. Auden says:

About suffering they were never wrong,
The old Masters: how well they understood
It's human position; how it takes place
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just
Walking dully along,⁸⁰

By "old masters", the poet means Brueghles the painter of *The Fall of Icarus*. This painting, which was painted a long time ago, embodied human suffering. The poet believes that Brueghles was never wrong when he introduced in his painting the ignorance of others' agony. The same case is found in the modern world.

⁷⁹ Norman Page, p.115

⁸⁰"Musee` Des Beaux Arts", lines 1-5

Then Auden talks about old men who are waiting for a miraculous birth (to regain their youth). They are old and suffer from diseases so they wish their youth to come back. On the other hand, children are skating happily not caring about the disappointment of the elderly who are dreaming of having younger bodies. The idea of skating is a reflection of the real life in the 1930s. People were trying to run away from the memories of the war so they used to have dancing and drinking parties. They wanted to live a life that is full of self-indulgence and entertainment regardless of the suffering that was taking place around them:

How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting
For the miraculous birth, there always must be
Children who did not especially want to happen skating
On a pond at the edge of the wood: ⁸¹

Auden gives another example of ignoring others' pain when he talks about the crucifixion of Jesus Christ who sacrifices himself for the salvation of humanity but unfortunately no one cares about this great action. They judge this scene of the martyr (Jesus Christ) as another person's death. He introduces this idea in an ironic way. There is a scene of a dog and a horse which also pay no attention to the heroism of Christ. The horse is worried about the insect that is irritating it so the latter scratches its back on a tree. In this case, the suffering of Christ and his great sacrifice was completely ignored by others:

That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot
Where the dog go on with their doggy life and the torture's horse
Scratches its innocent behind on a tree. ⁸²

⁸¹ "Musee` Des Beaux Arts", lines 5-8.

⁸² "Musee` Des Beaux Arts", lines 11-13.

The idea of corner is not mentioned accidentally. It is Auden's indication of the position of the poet in society, it is just like a corner. This idea will be elaborated in chapter two. The poet or the writer is no longer in the center. He is in the outskirts of the society. He has no importance. Here Auden wants to say that the poet is just like Jesus Christ. Although poets write great works and try to educate people through their valuable works, no one cares about their writings and their significance in society. Auden once said:

But if a stranger in the train asks me my occupation, I never answer 'writer' for fear that he may go to ask me what I write, and to answer 'poetry' would embarrass us both, for we both know that nobody can earn a living simply by writing poetry..... Some writers even some poets become famous public figures, but writers as such has no social status, in the way that doctors and lawyers, whether famous or obscure have.⁸³

Trying to support his idea about human suffering, the poet writes about Brueghel's painting *The Fall of Icarus*. This painting reflects the myth of Icarus, the Greek hero, who tried to fly with wax wings. Although his father Daedalus warned him not to go close to the sun or the wings will melt, Icarus in his enthusiasm goes close to the sun and falls in water. Brueghel captures the moment of the falling where everyone ignores the disastrous fall. The only indication of the Icarus problem was that his legs were sticking out of the water. In the poem, there is a farmer who continues his work without paying attention to Icarus's heroic action of flying. Although the farmer must have heard the cries of Icarus and the splash that he made when he touched the water, he did nothing to save him. In addition, the poem talks about a ship whose crew cannot see the greatness of Icarus's attempt to fly. It does not even stop to save his life because it has a schedule to follow. The ship is a symbol of capitalism. It is interested in its

⁸³ W. H. Auden. *The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays*. (New York: Random House, 1989), p. 74.

schedule. It has no time to save the life of Icarus. The ship represents the people of the twentieth century. They are too much absorbed in their commercial life. In this case, human suffering for them is no longer important.

Here Auden universalises the idea of indifference of human suffering. Humanity was apathetic to the other suffering in ancient times when Icarus fell, it was indifferent in later time when Christ was crucified and it is also equally indifferent today. Auden says:

In Brueghel's *Icarus* for instance:
How everything turns away.
Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
But for him it was not an important failure, the sun shone.
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green
Water; and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.⁸⁴

In conclusion, Auden mirrors the state of numbness of people in the twentieth century. They are careless about the great action of others. For example, they see Christ's sacrifice as a usual action and Icarus as a boy falling out of the sky. Both examples represent the case of the poet in that period. Auden wrote great poems and did his best to lead people as an educated man, but he was marginalized by others. In his opinion, he deserved more attention because he was a great poet.

To sum up, this is the image of modern life in England. Auden's early poetry portrays England as a "wasteland" where people are miserable. Here, Auden seems to be pessimistic because his poems show that everything is worse than before.

⁸⁴"Musée des Beaux Arts" lines, 14-22

Life became worse for many reasons like; WWI, the increasing power of Fascism and Nazism and The Spanish Civil War. These events caused a chaotic situation and psychological problems. Also, homosexuality is reflected in Auden's poetry that spread at the beginning of the twentieth century. His poetry presents homosexual love. Piotr Gwiazda says, "As it turns out, Auden continuously performed the work of gay philosophy, not only in his letters and journals and occasionally in his published essays but also- and certainly most compelling- in his poetry."⁸⁵

In addition,, readers can explore the state of numbness where people lost their interest in great actions. This state of carelessness was a result of WWI. Auden cares to show the negative effects of this war in his English poetry. This affirms that Auden wrote his poems depending on his experience in England. First of all, he is an English citizen and cannot isolate himself from the events that take place around him. Consequently, he feels just like normal people and can picture their pain in his words so that human suffering is a key theme in his poetry.

⁸⁵Piotr Gwiazda, p. 29.

Chapter Two

The American Phase

This chapter discusses the image of modern life in Auden's poems written during the American phase. It portrays the era between the 1940s and the 1960s. Since his departure to USA, Auden started a new life as well as a different type of poetry. He escaped anything related to England. For him, a new life with a new poetry should be adopted. He went to America in 1939 at the beginning of WWII. Therefore, the most important characteristics that marked this period were related to politics and war in which the whole region was involved. Auden could not isolate himself from what was happening around him either as a normal person or as a sophisticated poet. This was the reason why most of his poetic topics were politics in general and war in specific during that period.

Before talking about Auden's poetry in America, readers wonder why Auden, the great poet, who has a big fame in England, decided to leave for America. In fact, he has visited America and experienced its lifestyle as a tourist. This has inflamed his desire to live this place where he felt relaxed. Another reason was Auden's feeling of unrest in England because of his political stances. He was a Leftist and that caused him discomfort and uneasiness in England. He mentioned that America is an "open society" and "tolerant"⁸⁶ One more reason was Auden's homosexuality. He found himself opposed for this issue. He has been ashamed for being homosexual in a conservative society like England. As a result, he searched for a place where he can live openly without oppression. He cleverly thought to escape all the things that get him in troubles. He found that the best solution is to

⁸⁶ Aidan Waseley, p.5.

migrate to a better place that fits him as a homosexual Leftist. Alexander McCall Smith argues that:

Auden was born into an England in which homosexuality was not officially tolerated..... The authorities could be brutal and would not hesitate to prosecute and imprison men who were found to have engaged in sexual activity with other men.⁸⁷

In this light, America was the best place for Auden to live a normal and comfortable life. In that period it was known that America is the mother of all people, in fact an exile for all. It is an open society in which people have their freedom.

Two more reasons for Auden's departure can be added according to Lucy Collins and Stephen Matterson. The first reason is his new intellectual development and his friendship with the Americans Ursula and Reinhold Niebuhr. They were Lutheran theologians and Auden was greatly affected by them. Those two people encouraged Auden to move to America. It is mentioned in Collins and Matterson's book that "Firstly, Auden undergoes a reconsideration of his religious beliefs, which moves him intellectually away from the devotion to Marx and Freud that he has articulated in the 1930s."⁸⁸ In the same book it is said that Auden is impressed with these two Americans "Reinhold Niebuhr was a social activist who opposed pacifism and insisted on the church's need to engage directly with social and political issues."⁸⁹ Auden possibly felt that he had something in common with this person who somehow motivated him to leave England and start a new life.

⁸⁷ Alexander McCall Smith. *What W.H. Auden Can Do For You*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), P.42.

⁸⁸ Lucy Collins and Stephen Matterson. *Aberration in Modern Poetry Essays on Atypical Works by Yeats, Auden, Moore, Heaney and Others*. ed. (London: McFarland & Company, Inc. 2012), p.45.

⁸⁹ Lucy Collins and Stephen Matterson, p.45.

1. Politics and Tyranny

Auden moved to America in 1939 and in the same year he wrote many poems. He discussed many things related to his surroundings. Since his departure was accompanied with the start of WWII, his poems definitely discussed a political side. He was unable to free himself of what was going on around him. Politics took a big part of his thinking as a poet and as a normal citizen. Auden was a good observer as he continuously used to read newspapers and listen to the radio news. This helped him make a full mental image of the world. Andrew Hass asserts this idea. He says:

In between the height of modernism and the present late modernism stand the two great wars. Auden was too young to participate in the first world war, and too old to join the ranks of soldiery in the second. He nevertheless felt compelled to address politics and play his part, and as a rising and leading star of a young Oxford circle of poets and writers.... he sought to improve society by charging his poetry with Marxist socialism.⁹⁰

This speech declares that it was a duty for Auden as a modern poet to write political poetry. He felt that he had to play his role in exposing politicians in his age. The whole region was in a state of war, fighting for benefits or interfering in other countries affairs. Politics drew the map of Europe and other countries. Political systems were at their peak like Fascism and Nazism. In this case, Auden was affected by all these issues and wrote about them. In his opinion, The modern era especially the thirties was a critical period that should be discussed in his poetry.

⁹⁰ Andrew Hass. *Auden's O :The Loss of Sovereignty in the Making of Nothing*. (New York: State University of New York, 2013), p. 164.

In his poetry, Auden depicts politicians and the consequences of their behaviour on their peoples and other peoples. He thought that politicians' actions led to the Great War and The Spanish Civil War. This war as it is mentioned in chapter one is caused by the wrong and tyrant policy of Franco. Auden believes that the dictatorship of many political leaders is the main reason to the outbreak of WWII. He tends to show the nature of tyranny of those politicians. He wants to make everything clear about those tyrants. Through his poetry, he talks about dictators and their treatment towards their people.

In the period of Auden's presence in America, Fascism and Nazism were at their peak. The leaders of these two political regimes were the Nazi Adolf Hitler in Germany and the Fascist Benito Mussolini in Italy. At that time, Auden wrote "Epitaph on a Tyrant". The title shows that the poem is dedicated to a politician. It addresses every dictator all over the world in general and Hitler in particular. Dictators were infamous for their horrible actions and for treating people violently. They are heartless rulers. Most of them came to authority by force or bloody fight. This is the case of Hitler who became the chief of his party by force. These leaders maintained dictatorial policy just like Hitler. These are some of Hitler's rules:

By the beginning of February the Hitler government had banned all Communist meetings and shut down the Communist Press. Social Democrat rallies were either forbidden or broken up by the S.A. rowdies, and the leading Socialist newspapers were continually suspended. Even the Catholic Center Party did not escape the Nazi terror.⁹¹

⁹¹ William L. Shirer. *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich. A History of Nazi Germany*. (Berlin: Huchinston, 1999), p. 169.

Mussolini was just like Hitler. He also adopted a tyrant policy. At first, Mussolini was the Prime Minister of Italy. The moment he came to authority, he dropped the presence of democracy and established a dictatorship. Mussolini adapted a new policy to terrify his people.

“Epitaph on a Tyrant”

Auden mirrors all these issues about tyrant leaders in his poem “Epitaph on a Tyrant”. It is a short poem written in six lines but pregnant in meaning. He states that, for the tyrant, perfection is total obedience. Here, Auden uses "his" not "her" because he specifies the tyrant by the word "his" so that the dictator is a male not a female because in Auden's age political leaders were mostly men. Perfection for the tyrant may also mean the freedom to change laws any time for selfish purposes. In this case, this dictator is greedy and has excessive lust for power. He is greedy for getting high positions. The speaker of the poem compares the tyrant with an artist. Both of them have art and talents. The artist draws what he wants. The dictator is just like an artist who draws the shape of the country the way he likes. Here the freedom of people is completely ignored. The policy to treat people brutally is clear like the light of the sun for everyone. As a result, the tyrant manipulates and controls people by having strict punishments like hanging which was popular in Auden's age. This policy is successful because the tyrant knows the human psyche as he knows “the back of his hand”. He knows that since people are afraid of someone, they obey him blindly to avoid his evil actions. This pushes the dictator to do a wide range of violent actions to dominate those foolish people. Auden says, “Perfection, of a kind, was what he was after, / And the poetry he

invented was easy to understand; / And knew human folly like the back of his hand,”⁹²

This gives the tyrant a great popularity, not out of love but of fear. The senators who should be supportive to people are unfortunately conformist to the tyrant. They are submissive and they obey the tyrant's rules to save their lives. The irony is that when the dictator laughs when telling a joke the senators also laugh out of fear. Moreover, when the tyrant gets angry children will have their destiny (to die in the streets). People's lives depend on the mood of the tyrant. In other words, most of the tyrants' decisions are illogical and this causes suffering to the public especially children. In other words, where there is a dictator there is terror. “A dictator exists in “Epitaph on a Tyrant”, his death will bring no peace; terror will find other agents.”⁹³ This means that terror is one of the characteristics of the dictator who oppresses others and causes suffering for children. If the dictator dies, peace will not replace terror because there are other dictators who will maintain the same dictatorial policy of the previous ones.

The poet mocks the status of the senators who should be loyal to their position, but they are completely obedient and powerless: “When he laughs, respectable senators burst with laughter, / And when he cried the little children died in the streets.”⁹⁴

This is the image of politicians shown in the poem. They are dictators and known of their irrational actions. Some of these actions caused war and suffering:

As for Auden's simplifying fantasy that no one was consciously responsible for political catastrophe, that Hitler and Franco were trapped in involuntary manias, that totalitarianism was a problem in medicine not

⁹²“Epitaph on a Tyrant”, lines 1-3.

⁹³ Edward Mendelson, p. 281.

⁹⁴ “Epitaph on a Tyrant”, lines 5-6.

ethics- the six lines of “Epitaph on a Tyrant” repudiate all this.⁹⁵

“Friday’s Child”

Auden talks about tyranny in another poem entitled “Friday’s Child” which tackles the notion that history repeats itself. The same strategy is followed by the political leaders. They are brutal, their lust of power increases and their rules are unfair. Auden discusses the idea of the death of people because of their political beliefs. These citizens have to obey the strong in order to stay alive. They cannot express their opinions or go against the political leader's will. If they rebel, they will be tortured or killed. This is what exactly happened with Dietrich Bonhoeffer who was killed because of his political stances. Dietrich Bonhoeffer is a German pastor and also a participant in the German resistance movement against the Nazis. He was arrested and eventually executed shortly before the end of WWII. Auden heard about this horrible incident that inspired him to write his poem "Friday's Child". This poem addresses Bonhoeffer, the victim of Hitler's tyranny. Auden says:

It might be jolly if we felt
Awe at this Universal Man
(When kings were local, people knelt);
Sometry to, but who can?⁹⁶

Here, Auden sees Bonhoeffer as a universal character. That is, the case of this man applies to all people who dare to oppose the tyrant's will. Even if this person has a high position in the government, that does not protect them from the violence of

⁹⁵ Edward Mendelson, p. 381

⁹⁶ “Friday’s Child”, lines 17 – 20

the dictator. The only way to survive is to follow the tyrant's rules blindly. In the last line, Auden mocks the fact that no one dares to be in the position of Bonhoeffer and rebel against the dictator's policy. He says:

To guess from the insulted face
Just what appearance he saves
By suffering in a public place
A death reserved for slaves.⁹⁷

Here, the scene of Bonhoeffer's execution is described when he was prepared to be hanged in public. His face does not show fear but insult. He is humiliated to the extreme. He feels that he is disgraced because he is a pastor who teaches others to worship God, and his goal in life is to preach peace. Being insulted by the authority is painful for Bonhoeffer. What is even more painful is his suffering alone with no one standing by his side. He is helpless with no support. The irony is that Bonhoeffer is a free man who remains constant to his beliefs unlike those slaves who watch his execution without taking any action. Although he is caught by the authority, he is not a slave. The slaves are those who are submissive and have no existence in their country. Auden presents Bonhoeffer as a public hero and the rest of the people should learn from his heroism.

2. WWII and the Cold War

Modern world is featured with war. Modern people witnessed two great wars. Therefore, war is one of the most important topics in many of modern poets' writings like W.B. Yeats, Robert Graves and W. H. Auden. By and large, war is a dominant theme in Auden's writings in general because he witnessed WWII and observed the events closely. "He joined the US army and worked in Germany

⁹⁷ "Friday's Child", lines 45- 48

reporting on how civilians were psychologically affected by the allied bombings. Granted the temporary status of Major, he witnessed firsthand the appalling effects of war." ⁹⁸ This job made Auden qualified to draw a real image of Europe and America during the war. For Auden, writing about what happened made no sense. The most important issue was to show the negative effect of this war on people psychologically and physically. In his opinion, the brutal actions of the tyrants led to the violent war. These dictators were mainly responsible for the destruction and the suffering of people so they were guilty. Their lust for power and their arrogance caused the Great War. Each leader thought that he was right and wanted to invade other countries for personal purposes not for the benefit of the people.

“September 1, 1939”

In his poem “September 1, 1939”, Auden talks about WWII. This poem coincides with Nazi Germany’s invasion of Poland on 1st September 1939. The speaker expresses his shock at the news. The persona in the poem sits in a dive bar on 52nd Street. He is disappointed because of the “low dishonest decade” of 1930s. The decade’s recent events have consumed people's private lives. For modern people, the thirties as it is mentioned in chapter two is a disastrous decade that is marked with war and hard times. The odour of death offends the night of September. This is a sign that this war will bring death and distress. From the first day of the war, the speaker expects horrible effects of the war. He predicts that destruction and death will overwhelm: Auden comments:

I sit in one of the dives
On Fifty –Second Street
Uncertain and afraid
As the clever hopes expire
Of low dishonest decade:

⁹⁸ Lucy Collin, p.45.

And darkened lands of the earth,
Obsessing our private lives;
The unmentionable odour of death
Offends the September night.⁹⁹

The speaker ensures that the offence has constantly been made by the dictators since the age of Martin Luther King. The shameful actions of the tyrants create a mad European culture. Future schools will tell the post-war generation about the cultural problems that have existed from the time of Luther to the time of Hitler. Here the speaker mentions "Linz" which is Hitler's hometown. This tells that Hitler is responsible for the madness of culture. He says that Hitler is god, but the kind of god that is psychopathic, and this is of course irony. This god has mental disorder which means he is unqualified to be followed. Auden says:

Accurate scholarship can
Unearth the whole offence
From Luther until now
That has driven a culture mad,
Find what occurred at Linz,
What huge imago made
A psychopathic god;¹⁰⁰

In this sense, a proverb can be applied that is "what goes around comes around". For example, if you treat someone badly, he/she will treat you badly in return. This is what happened with Hitler. He had unhappy childhood that was full of fear and suffering and that made him psychopathic. As he was treated violently, he maintained to treat the current generation the same way. Alexander McCall Smith says, "In 1st September 1939 Auden seems to sympathize with Hitler. He tries to justify Hitler's brutal actions. Maybe he has a horrible childhood since

⁹⁹ "September 1, 1939", lines 1,2,3,4,5,8,9,10,11.

¹⁰⁰ "September 1, 1939", lines 12-18.

Auden mentions Linz Hitler's hometown."¹⁰¹ No one denies Hitler's psychopathology. He is mentally disordered and the reader may sympathise with him or never since his brutal actions cannot be forgotten. The poem says:

I and the public know
What all schoolchildren learn,
Those to whom evil is done
Do evil in return.¹⁰²

Auden in this poem asserts the idea of the dictatorship of the political leaders. He says that since the age of "Thucydides", a Greek historian. In one of his books he describes the nature of the speech about democracy. Their speech about freedom is full of lies. They promise and achieve nothing, and they also say things and do the opposite. They cheat their people. Their speech as Auden says is "elderly rubbish". It is meaningless, so democracy is a big lie. This is the case in ancient times and it is the same in the time of WWII. This means that dictatorship has not changed. The age ruled by the tyrant is dark and void of knowledge and freedom. The main two characteristics of the dictator rule are mismanagement and grief. All dictators' actions cause suffering to people and happiness is missed. The speaker in the poem predicts that this suffering will be repeated again with the generation of the war. Auden says:

Exiled Thucydides knew
All that speech can say
About Democracy.
And what dictators do.
The elderly rubbish they talk
To an apathetic grave;

¹⁰¹ Alexander McCall Smith, p.49.

¹⁰²"September 1, 1939", lines 19-22.

Analysed all in his book,
The enlightenment driven away,
The habit-forming pain,
Mismanagement and grief;
We must suffer all them again.¹⁰³

When the whole Europe is in the fire of war, America is neutral. American people free themselves from the bad news of the war. America in this period is demonstrating the power of the collective man to do great things. It did not care about what was happening around, but it was busy in staring the face of imperialism. Auden shows that the Americans were selfish because they did not pay attention to the suffering of other countries that are burning out of the war. They act as if this war will never affect them. They think they are away from its bad incidents. But can anyone know the results or protect him/herself from this war?! It seems that American people were not precise because they cannot isolate themselves from this horrible war. Auden introduces this idea when he says:

Into this neutral air
Where blind skyscrapers use
Their full height to proclaim
The strength of Collective Man.
Each language pours its vain
Competitive excuse:
But who can live for long
In an euphoric dream;
Out of the mirror they stare,
Imperialism's face
And the international wrong.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ "September 1, 1939", lines 23-33.

¹⁰⁴ "September 1, 1939", lines 24-34.

In a way or another, Auden blames those people who do not care about the countries that experience war. They live their everyday lives normally without feeling sorry. Those citizens keep on listening to music and doing their daily activities. Unfortunately, this never hides the fact that even if the Americans live a normal life, they are unconsciously lost in a haunted wood. Even the children are not safe and are scared of being killed or tortured. The war is a curse. In this case, the American people live a fancy life, which means they are internally afraid, but they behave as if they were good and safe. This notion is asserted by Auden when he writes:

Lest we should see where we are,
Lost in a haunted wood,
Children afraid of the night
Who have never been happy or good.¹⁰⁵

Auden observes the lives of people in America during the war. They go to work as usual. They trust their government that it will keep them away from the disasters of war. He knows that those poor people will be cheated by the authority. The speaker of the poem feels fake feelings. The mission to make the Americans awake is difficult. They deceive themselves because they are unable to realise the danger they are in. They are imprisoned by their own thoughts so that they need someone to awaken them. Auden says, “Who can release them now, / Who can reach the deaf,/Who can speak for the dumb?”¹⁰⁶

In the speaker’s opinion, the poet should be loyal to his writing. Truth is his goal. He has a noble role in life and his only army is his voice. He says,¹⁰⁷ “All I have is a voice / To undo the folded lie.” All what he can do is advising the

¹⁰⁵ “September 1, 1939”, lines 42-45.

¹⁰⁶ “September 1, 1939”, lines 65-68.

¹⁰⁷ “September 1, 1939” , lines 46-47.

American citizens to stand hand by hand in the face of war. The best solution to resist the war is love. He advises people to love one another or, for him, it is better to die. He thinks if people never unite to stop war, it is better to have their destiny. Here, there is a call that love solves all problems and hatred is the cause of disaster. The people and the authority should be one hand to face the war or all of them will suffer. He says, “We must love one another or die.”¹⁰⁸

This line suggests that love is the best solution to overcome the crisis of war. But later on, Auden changed it; “We must love one another and die”¹⁰⁹ In other words, even love cannot help get rid of war. The power of love is ineffective in WWII. Death is the destiny of most people in this war. Anthony Hecht commented on “September 1, 1939”:

Nevertheless, like many poetry readers of my generation, I continue to be enormously grateful for this poem. No one else took it upon him- or herself to address directly and unequivocally the massive crisis that was inevitably to become the Second World War..... Auden addressed the crisis at its inception, regarded it with historical perspective that in no way diluted the force and horror of its importance; made the crisis psychological, personal and universal, and did so in passages that are nothing less than memorable¹¹⁰

“Memorial for the City”

This is the image introduced by Auden about the Americans during the first day of the war. Actually, the situation is not very different in the upcoming days. WWII lasted for five years and many massacres happened during the war. A lot of people have been killed. Auden writes his poems about the war after his close watching of its events. As mentioned earlier, he has worked as a reporter in

¹⁰⁸ “September 1, 1939” , line 57.

¹⁰⁹ Edward Mendelson, p. 472.

¹¹⁰ Anthony Hecht *The Hidden Law: The poet of W.H. Auden*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 152.

Germany during the war. This visit to Germany was in 1945 nearly at the end of the fighting. This visit inspired him to write a poem in which he describes the scenes of his camera. The title of this poem is “Memorial for the City” through which Auden wants to assert that war brings pain and disasters. No one is a gainer in this war, not even the winner, because both conflicting sides have death penalties and much devastation. When the speaker opens his camera to document the events, he sees a great war just like the Trojan one.

In “Memorial for the City” Auden compares WWII to the Trojan War. He gives the Great War the same characteristics of the Trojan one. These two wars are alike in many ways. The first similarity is that the main indirect cause of them both is the behaviour of gods. In the Trojan War the jealousy of Goddess Eris, the goddess of discord, is the origin of the later behaviour of Paris. This goddess is selfish and wants to be the best. Concerning WWII, the “gods”(the political leaders) are the ones who burn it. Those leaders are the politicians whose violent actions and selfishness led to the war. On every occasion Auden refers to those political men as “gods”. He refers to Hitler in “1st September 1939” as a psychopathic god. The direct cause of the fighting in both wars is lust, the lust for sex of Paris and the zest of power of the political people. The similarity is that the number of soldiers in both wars is huge. Also, there are two clashing sides, each one is supported by many allies. In addition, in both wars many people died and a lot of destruction took place.

The speaker in “Memorial for the City” opens his camera to see an image that expresses Homer’s world. The world is full of fighting, suffering and ruins. This scene is accompanied with a crow which generally believed to be a symbol of ruination. It is a bird which lives in a destroyed place that is void of people. The crow is an evidence that Germany is completely wrecked in time of war. It is not a

suitable place to live anymore. Auden again accuses the leaders to be a reason of this grief. When he says “Gods behave, men die”. He means German dead soldiers fight just to satisfy Hitler’s arrogance and tyranny. Also, he mourns the facts that people that Auden is one of them, are living in Homer’s ugly world, not in a peaceful one. He says, “The eyes of the crow and the camera open/ On to Homer’s world, not ours.”¹¹¹

Through his poetry, Auden gives his readers a full image about WWII. He draws a detailed picture describing the behaviour of the dictator, people’s pain and the horrible consequences of this war. He documented the first day and the last days of the fighting. The war ended but it is normal to wonder if people lived a peaceful life after the war. According to history and Auden, the answer is simply “no”. Auden sheds light on the period after the war. In that period there were two powers which ruled the world; USA and many European countries versus USSR (Union Soviet Socialist Republics). There was a cold war between these two poles. This occasion inspired Auden to write his masterpiece “The Shield of Achilles”. He composed it in 1952 when the Western democracies led by America and the communist countries led by the USSR were engaged in a dangerous cold war.

“The Shield of Achilles”

In the “The Shield of Achilles”, Auden describes Homer’s world. This world is a little different from WWII. From the title the readers expect that the topic is related to Achilles, the hero of Homer’s *The Iliad*.¹¹² The first is a warrior who participated in the Trojan War. He fought for the Achaeans the Greeks against Troy. He is the son of the god Peleus and the goddess Thetis. Her mother was

¹¹¹ “Memorial for the City”, lines 1-2.

¹¹² Homer. *The Iliad*. Robert Fitzgerald. tra. (New York: Anchor Press, 1974).

scared after her son joined the war so she asked Hephaestos to make him an armour to protect him. In *The Iliad*, the shield of Achilles consists of many circle layers. Hephaestos draws the Earth, the sky, a sea, the sun and the moon. Also, there are two beautiful cities that are full of people. One of the cities is besieged by a feuding army and the shield shows an ambush and a battle. This is the real armour:

His first job was a shield, a broad one, thick,
well-fashioned everywhere. A shining rim
he gave it, triple-ply, and hung from this
a silver shoulder strap. Five welded layers
composed the body of the shield. The maker
used all his arts adorning this expanse.
He pictured on it earth, heaven, and sea,
Unwearied sun, moon waxing, all the stars
That heaven bears for garland:¹¹³

But Auden gives it other characteristics. According to the poem, Thetis asks Hephaestos to create a shield for Achilles but unluckily it is not similar to what she expects. At first, she sees no vines or olive trees but a place without life. The earth is brown which symbolizes infertility. She also looks at the sky and sees it grey rather than blue. Here the colour grey indicates to the state of being neutral. The speaker might be referring it to the Cold War in the 1950s. The two conflicting sides' stances are grey. No actions are made by them yet. Auden introduces this idea when he says, "His hands had put instead/An artificial wilderness/And a sky like lead."¹¹⁴ The speaker at the beginning of the poem shows that Hephaestos replaces all the pictures of the real shield with new ones. Another indication of the Cold War is that there are millions of soldiers stood in uniforms and boots ready for any orders to attack. This portrays the case of the two clashing poles as they are

¹¹³ Homer. *The Iliad*. Robert Fitzgerald. tra. (New York: Anchor Press, 1974), p. 450.

¹¹⁴"The Shield of Achilles", lines 6-8.

being in conflict and all scenarios are probable. War may break out at any moment so that they keep their armies in a state of readiness. Auden said:

Yet, congregated on its blankness, stood
An unintelligible multitude,
A million eyes, a million boots in line,
Without expression, waiting for a sign.¹¹⁵

In “The Shield of Achilles”, Thetis looks at the armour three times. Every time she looks, she is surprised at what is drawn on the shield. She sees something completely different from what she expects. First, she sees images of wilderness and war. Secondly, she comes to find images of punishment and injustice. Third, she notices pictures of unsafety and irrationality. These three times are possibly an illusion of WWI, WWII and the Cold War. Each war has its characteristics. In other words, the drawn images on the shield in the poem mirror the modern world.

John Haffended comments:

The shield of Achilles in Homer has emblazoned upon it the triumphs of the future. Auden, looking into the shield sees the horrors of the modern state. But such a pattern, perfect though it is, seems to be too simple for the Auden of today.¹¹⁶

By reading “The Shield of Achilles” deeply, readers cannot ignore a very important idea. There is a contrast between what Hephaestos delivers and what Thetis desires. Here Auden wants to give a message about the role of an artist. Hephaestos is now in the position of an artist who mirrors reality in his work. He stays honest for himself and for others. He never deceives others by giving charming fake images. Hephaestos is a reflection of Auden who tries to be honest in his writings. Lucy Collin and Stephen Matterson talk about Auden’s honesty:

¹¹⁵ “The Shield of Achilles”, lines 12- 15

¹¹⁶ W.H. Auden. *The Critical Heritage*. John, Haffennenden. ed. (London: Hechi, Taylor of Francise Library, 2004), p.394

It would be easy (and lucrative) for Hephaestos to please Thetis by giving her the images that she wants, but to do so would be irresponsibility to his art; it would be “dishonest” to use. The job of the poet is to tell the truth about our world, to free us from self-enchantment and deception “as Hephaestos has done in making the shield.”¹¹⁷

Auden is known to be loyal to himself as well as to others. Most critics denote that most of Auden’s writing mirrors reality. He tells truth in his poetry and tries to be neutral. His poetry is a reflection of the modern world. John Haffenden says:

His intellectual view of the contemporary world is nevertheless, I think, vitiated by fashion and mass feeling, and his morality a morality of emergency, derived from that view; on the other hand his imaginative picture of the world always strikes me by its profound truth.¹¹⁸

3. The Negative Effects of War

Auden is a modern poet who lived in the modern world so it is natural for him to show the features of this world in his poetry. As it is mentioned before, Auden is keen on politics and war. Those two themes occupy a huge part in his writing. Besides, Auden talks about the modern society and the social life during that period. It is important to bear in mind that a modern human being has different criteria. People became materialistic since they lived in the age of machine and inventions. As a result, the priorities have changed. A modern person became a slave of war, money and government. During war time people are submissive to their authorities mainly because they want to live peacefully in a disordered period. They try not to go against the government’s will just to avoid problems. Readers

¹¹⁷ Lucy Collin, p.46

¹¹⁸ W. H. Auden. *The Critical Heritage*, p.267

may justify this behaviour of people to be conformist. They prefer to be obscure since they endure war time.

“The Unknown Citizen”

This appears in Auden’s poem “The Unknown Citizen”. The title shows that the poem is about an anonymous person whose identity is hidden. The speaker of this poem talks about a citizen that is identified with numbers and letters. This person is honoured by the government through building a marble monument for him. It is obvious from the beginning of the poem that the state is in total control. The state structures its individuals to serve the government. Throughout the whole poem there is a tone of mockery of the status of citizen concerning the standards needed to satisfy the state. Also, there is irony with the fact that the government never appreciates the people for their special achievements but a citizen can be respected based on how much they are obedient. The first lines of “The Unknown Citizen” introduce an anonymous person who is known through statistics and is given no clear identity. He is recognised by numbers so no one knows his name or shape. This person is a saint for his government but the surprise is why he is called as such. He is sacred for following blindly without complaint. He agrees with on everything said or told by the government. Roger S. Platizsky argues that:

In essence, the sarcastic speaker seemingly praises but, of course, actually mocks the kind of citizen who blindly relinquishes his individuality to the ‘Greater Community’ and the kind of society that insists and depends on such sacrifices from its modern-day Saint, a saint who does not seek higher truth but merely exists to perpetuate the status quo.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Roger S. Platizky. “Auden’s The Unknown Citizen” *The Explicator* V.50, No.1, Fall 1991, p.48.

The citizen here has two choices either to be a saint or a devil. He can be a saint if he is a conformist or a devil if he goes against the will of the government. In the case of the unknown citizen, he chooses to be a saint just to please the government. Also, the speaker in the poem makes fun of the state of being in a modern world with an old-fashioned attitude. The authority must behave in a different way. The modern world needs new methods and new system but instead they choose bureaucracy which is unsuitable in the age of technology and invention. Auden explores this idea when he says:

He was found by the Bureau of Statistics to be
One against whom there was no official complaint,
And all the reports on his conduct agree
That, in the modern sense of an old-fashioned word,
he was a saint,
For in everything he did he served the Greater Community.¹²⁰

The speaker continues describing the characteristics of the good civilian in a sarcastic way. The CV of this citizen can be celebrated since he serves the “Greater Community” in a loyal way without questioning anything. To call America “Greater Community” is an irony. In the eye of the government America is the top. It is honourable for people to serve this country. The authorities work hard to publicise the term and these ideas about the nation. It is a kind of brainwashing and the individuals are completely convinced by this so-called fact. This is the case of the anonymous person who buys a newspaper every day to read the propaganda dished out by the bias press of the government. This person has no negative reaction of the adverts of the newspaper. He is programmed to accept everything given by the authority. Auden says, “The press are convinced that he bought a

¹²⁰ "The Unknown Citizen", lines 1- 6

paper every day / And that his reactions to advertisements were normal in every way.”¹²¹

In the view of the men in power, the government meets all the needs of the individuals to have a comfortable life. There are no reasons for them to nag or protest against the country's policy. This means people should be satisfied with the services presented like health insurance and technological devices (gramophone, a radio, a car and a Frigidaire). It is believed that all these things that are known to be necessary are enough for them to be thankful to their rulers and submissive to their will. Auden ridicules the idea of considering the technological devices like gramophone and others as sources of happiness for people. Also, they are thought to fill the needs of modern human beings. The government forgets an essential duty to offer which is a peaceful atmosphere for the people to live in away from war. This is really shameful for a government like this which thinks that all citizens are satisfied with the many services mentioned earlier. People need peace above all. This peace cannot be reached with WWII at its peak. In this case, the citizens have no choice save giving up and living the way the government wants. People are internally unstable and they end up complaining. This is the best solution for their status. The unknown citizen that Auden talks about has the same destiny like these people since he is convinced that he has his rights so he accepts everything done by the state. This person is loyal to the extent that he goes to join the war.

The speaker in “The Unknown Citizen” tells that the soldier has fought in many battles for his country. Also, he is married and has five children. What is really sarcastic about that is the number of his children. This number is ideal according to the rules of his country during that period. Even in this issue the rules are taken into consideration by the unknown citizen. All these stories show the

¹²¹ “The Unknown Citizen”, lines 5-16

complete control by the government which has a specific propaganda that people are fed up with. Edward Mendelson comments on this topic; “In March 1939, probably soon after his speech, Auden wrote “The Unknown Citizen” , a poem that appears to be a neat uncomplicated satire on the corporate state in which freedom and happiness are equated with conformity.”¹²² These lines suggest that conformity is the key of happiness for the unknown citizen and other people. Being submissive is a necessity in order to have a stable life.

The principles of this propaganda depend on how much submissive individuals can be. In return, the government gives them the best quality of being unique. Therefore, conformity is needed to be a super citizen in the eye of the authority. After all this speech, the readers may think that those citizens are foolish and they do not think logically. The fact is probably different since people have two options during war. The first one is to think about the real world consciously and moralise the politicians for being a part in WWII, and this choice will cause disorder to the country. On the other hand, they have another choice to live unconsciously and convince themselves with a good current life without clash with the state. Most modern people preferred the second option. This comes from their belief that the hilarious events of war are enough for them so that they are unable to endure other bad circumstances. This pushes them to deceive themselves to be happy and stable.

Auden says:

Does life only offer two alternatives: You shall be happy, healthy, attractive, a good mixer, a good lover and parent, but on condition that you are not overcurious about life. On the other hand, you shall be attentive and sensitive , conscious of what is happening around you, but in that case you must cease to expect to be happy or successful in love, or at home in any company. There are two worlds and you cannot belong to them both.¹²³

¹²² Edward Mendelson, p. 435.

¹²³ Quoted in Anthony Hecht’s *The Hidden Law, The poet of W.H. Auden* ,p.211.

Auden denotes to the idea of being conformist and trying to live normally away from the war in other poems. Modern people are careless and they want nothing to corrupt their normal life. For instance, in “1st September 1939” the speaker mentions how the Americans continue their lives normally with the first day of the war. They intentionally ignore the agony of others because they are not ready to spoil the sequence of their daily lives. There is no place to give a hand to whom endure the war. The Americans during the war enjoy parties at bars, drinking and dancing apart from the pain of other people. The poem mentions:

Faces along the bar
Cling to their average day:
The lights must never go out,
The music must always play,¹²⁴

The same that asserts people indifference to others troubles is repeated in “The Shield of Achilles” with three men who are sentenced to death. Those men are in a state of war and get no help from anyone. The crowds watch the men silently without thinking of supporting them or sympathising with them. Selfishness here is a key term. People prefer to stay away to keep their lifestyle fine. For them, nothing deserves to be cared for so they never try to help the three men. Auden clarifies this idea when he says:

The mass and majesty of this world, all
That carries weight and always weights the same,
Lay in the hands of others; they were small
And could not hope for help and no help came:
What could not hope for help and no help came:
Was all worst could wish; they lost their pride
And died as men before their bodies died.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ “1st September 1939”, lines 45-48

¹²⁵ “The Shield of Achilles”, lines 31-37

This reveals that people in the modern world are apathetic. Apathy is one of the characteristics of the modern human being. In the scene of the three men, the speaker blames the audience and the men in power who just see the men taken to their destiny with no reaction from the spectators. Although the men can be innocent but they get no help. This causes humiliation to the men to be treated this way so that they are heartedly hurt and helpless. They feel that they are metaphorically dead before their literal death. This is grievous for human beings not to share others their suffering. Humanity is deteriorated in the modern world that is full of war, fighting and death. This is an indication that war affects the American people and the whole world.

With the scene of the three men on their way to be punished, there is another scene of men and women who enjoy playing games. They have fun and self – indulgence apart from what the three men experience. Those men and women are portrayed to dance in the air without a dancing stage. This symbolises that those people pretend to be happy or they are unconscious of what comes around. They live in fantasy so all their actions of playing and dancing are just an illusion. In reality, they are miserable and this is the reason why they neglect others' pain and act as normal people. It is bitter to live in a place that is full of worries. They are in a chaotic situation as if they are in a long nightmare. They are lost in the world of war so that they try to deceive themselves of being well but they are not. They swing between fantasy and reality. This idea is expressed by Auden when he says:

She looked over his shoulder
For athletes at their games,
Men and women in dance
Moving their sweet limbs
Quick, quick, to music,
But there on the shining shield
His hands had set no dancing-floor

But a weed-choked field.¹²⁶

Suffering can be seen in another occasion in “The Unknown Citizen”. Many services are offered to the people by their government, and one of which is work. However, one thing is not provided that is peace. These individuals need safety. The reader may wonder if they are relaxed and comfortable with their life. This is the exact situation of the unknown citizen that Auden talks about. This man has fought in the war for his country. He also has the best features of the good civilian who never complains or rebel against the authorities. This leads to the complete satisfaction of the deeds of this citizen by the government. The marble monument is a kind of reward to this noble person in the eye of men in power. After all, it is logical to ask a vital question if this person is happy with this kind of life. The speaker ends up with this question with an implicating answer. There is a tone of absurdity to acquire about such an issue: “Was he free? Was he happy? The questions absurd:/ Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard.”¹²⁷ The speaker mocks the silly minds that believe that this person is happy.

“In Memory of W. B .Yeats”

Through his observation, Auden explores all the previous effects of war on people. He most importantly notices that modern people are indifferent to great incidents around them. As discussed in chapter one, individuals do not care about the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the fall of Icarus that Auden talks about in his poem “Musee` Des Beaux Arts”. Here again Auden sheds light on the same idea in a different place and time. During war, most modern human beings lose their interest in great actions. They express no feelings towards such phenomenon. They

¹²⁶ “The Shield of Achilles”, lines 46-53.

¹²⁷ “The Unknown Citizen”, lines 34-35.

also show indifference towards literary figures and literature. This is just like what happened with the death of W.B. Yeats. The great poet died silently and no one pays attention to this news. He is very famous for his talent of writing good poetry and drama in that period. Unfortunately, this incident never makes noise and passes on the ears of people normally. This man has not been appreciated and his long successful career is useless. This general atmosphere pushes Auden to write a poem commenting on this incident which is "In Memory of W. B .Yeats". He composed it with a tone of blaming to those who, in his opinion, never give any reaction about the death of this special person. Auden discusses the death of this great man in the "dead winter" when the brooks were frozen and snow made it difficult to figure out the public statues. As Yeats lays ill and dying, the world and specifically Ireland goes on normally. Even nature is represented as going on its course indifferent and unaffected. Auden says, "Far from his illness/The wolves ran on through the evergreen forests,"¹²⁸

Life of people and nature as well continues without any little stop to think about this dark day that witnesses the departure of this genius person. This is really sorrowful since the ignorance of this great event (the death of Yeats) causes pain to Auden as a normal person and as a poet. Auden fears that he will have the same end as his fellow. He is probably scared to be neglected after his death just like Yeats now. Auden is not comfortable with this expected end. Aidan Waseley argues:

His elegy for Yeats, whose death 'on a dark cold day' coincided with Auden's American arrival, depicts a world bleakly indifferent to the earthly departure of most celebrated of poets, not to mention the debarking of an ambitious younger one in snowy New York.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ "In Memory of W.B.Yeats", lines 7-8.

¹²⁹ Aidan Waseley, p.2.

Through “In Memory of W. B. Yeats”, Auden mourns the status of poetry in the modern world in America and Ireland. In his opinion, poetry and poets are marginalized. Verse does not have an effective role in people’s life. This makes Auden sad so he criticises the interests of people. They are not engaged in poetry and this hurts him since “Poetry makes nothing happen”. Unlike media, poetry was ineffective. John Lowney talks about the role of the media during the thirties:

The 1930s saw the proliferation of new mass media such as the radio, sound film and photo journalism, which accelerated the development of mass consumer culture even as the impact of mass unemployment homelessness and hunger was palpable.¹³⁰

In the modern world the radio and other means of the media had big effect on people. People got the news and affected by what was introduced in newspapers and on radios. Their big interest came from sound films and pictures unlike poetry that had minor role in making them interested. This is what caused pain for Auden.

It is known that literature immortalises writers and poets. For example, Auden’s poems should immortalise him but this does not work in the modern world. Poetry is ineffective and people are careless about literary figures and literature. This is what causes pain for Auden and other poets. He remarks on the failure of poetry to change things. This is a cry of despair and powerlessness. Aiden Waseley says, “Auden’s requiem for Yeats and for his earlier idealistic self sounds its famous cry

¹³⁰ John Lowney. *History, Memory and the Literary Left Modern American Poetry, 1935-1968*. (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2006), p.7

of poetry's impotence in the world of politics, war and injustice.”¹³¹

Auden once lamented the futility of his poetry to solve problems or change things for better. He struggled in his poetry for Jews who suffered from racism in Germany. He criticised Hitler and his dictatorial policy against them. In contrast, this struggle did not save Jews from being slaughtered. In this case, Auden's poetry had no role to help people. This was the state of poetry in the modern world. Nobody cared about poetry and poets in times of war. He mentioned: “Nothing I wrote saved a single Jew from being gassed... It is perfectly all Right to be an *engage`* writer as long as you don't think you're changing things.”¹³² This shows that poetry is unfunctional in the modern life.

By reading Auden's poetry, one can discover many issues. There is always a hidden meaning. Therefore, the one must read deeply in order to understand the messages Auden wants to convey. There are top ideas given by Auden indirectly. One of these ideas is hypocrisy, the hypocrisy of America as a democratic country. The term is shown in many poems. For example, in his poem “The Unknown Citizen” there is an implication of this notion. The high control of the government clarifies the duplicity of the American authorities. They think themselves democratic which means that their system is based on freedom. In contrast, democracy does not mean to oppress the citizens and work officially to make them follow the government's strategies blindly just like what American authority does. Unfortunately, the rule of most countries, especially those involved in war, is dictatorial. Democracy is missed in such countries. They pretend to spread equality and justice but they have a double standard policy. Robert Hutchins, the president

¹³¹ Aidan Waseley p. 2

¹³² Quoted in Alan Levy's *W. H. Auden in the Age of Anxiety*. (New York: The Press Permanent, 1983), p.35

of the University of Chicago, discusses the notion of democracy in his lectures:

He believes that the Western democracies do not understand what democracy is or why is valuable, and are therefore in danger of being deprived of it. Hutchins continues his questioning. “What is the basis of these principles of law, equality and justice?”¹³³

Here, Hutchins inquires if there is equality which is one of the pillars of democracy. His tone is full of doubt. This means democracy is a lie under which countries behave secretly and offend people. Governments pretend to be democratic but do the opposite.

To conclude, this chapter summarises how modern life is portrayed in Auden’s poetry that he wrote during his living in America. He depicts politics and war since he witnessed WWII and kept up with its events. His poetry tells a lot of things starting with the bad conditions of people because of politicians as well as war circumstances. Auden keeps blaming men in power especially the leaders and claims that they are responsible for the suffering of the people. Also, this poetry shows that modern human beings live in the age of anxiety (twentieth century) where no one is happy. Moreover, this chapter sheds light on the psychological side of the population of America in the war and how selfishness is a key mark of those modern people. Additionally, it shows that democracy was a lie.

¹³³ Alan Jacobs. *The Year of our Lord 1943, Christian Humanism in an Age of Crisis*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 20018), p.15

Conclusion

In conclusion, this dissertation examines the image of modern life in many aspects; social, political and religious. This is shown through two main phases; the English and the American phases. It is important to differentiate between the English Auden and the American one. In his early stages of writing poetry in England, Auden derived most of his ideas from many contemporary modern poets. He read Eliot and was influenced by his poetry. As a result, Auden's early poems depict England as a waste land just like Eliot's vision in *The Waste Land*.

Auden's early poems are characterised by traditional forms. His early poems are somehow ambiguous. In his first collection, there is often a hidden meaning so readers must think profoundly to understand the meaning. Auden's early poetry is debatable since each reader can read it in a different way. John Haffenden mentions something about the vagueness of Auden's early poetry. He says, "Mr Auden's first book of poems has already won him a reputation; yet it is a safe to say that no reader put the book down with a comfortable sense of having understood."¹³⁴ Haffenden notices that Auden's early poems are vague as a reader and a writer. Auden probably intends to give his poetry a sense of vagueness. During that period, he suffered from social and political restrictions, so he was unable to express things freely.

Most of the characters that Auden uses in his early poems have no clear identity. Those characters have a kind of inner conflict and they try to escape their past that was full of painful memories. This is a reflection of people's lives in 1920s in the post-war period when people tried to forget the bad events of WWI. It was said

¹³⁴ W. H. Auden .*The Critical Heritage*, p. 121.

“The protagonists of Auden’s early poetry cannot escape their past: they are determined by it whether they resist or acquiesce.”¹³⁵ Here the writer discusses the inability of people to forget their past-the past of war. They have inner conflict of living in the present but cannot escape their past. For example, in “Who Stands the Crux Left of the Watershed”, the persona is a stranger who stands alone in a chaotic situation. The stranger is not given a name or a shape. It is difficult for the reader to get the meaning of the poem directly because there are many ambiguous things.

Auden’s American poetry is clearer. He uses a direct style to talk about incidents. He also uses free verse more often than in his English poetry. It seems that his life in America is more comfortable, so he can express himself clearly and freely. Auden discusses many themes through his poetry. He addresses social, religious, and political issues. One of the themes he talks about is love. First, the fruitless love in England. Auden portrays England as a waste land where nobody is happy. Auden once said “What do you think about England, this country of ours where nobody is well?”¹³⁶ There is another image of love that Auden’s poetry introduces which is the homosexual love. Homosexuality has spread in England in the beginning of the twentieth century because of separating boys and girls at school, so boys started to have sex with each other. Freud’s theory of psychoanalysis played a role in changing the way of thinking about sex. This led people to think openly about sexual issues more than before. Auden was one of those who were influenced by Freud’s ideas. In his early age, Auden read Freud so he started to neglect religion and think in a different way. Charles Osborne mentioned in his book:

¹³⁵ Michael O’ Nelle & Gareth Reeves, p. 10.

¹³⁶ Tony Sharpe, p. 35.

It was in 1922 Waystan's fifteen years, his attention was turned away from religion as major interest, and towards poetry. He had already begun to read Freud, who has turned many of younger's mind away from imagined God to real man, but he was now given a sudden and seemingly arbitrary push into the arms of poetry.¹³⁷

Obsorne shows the effect of Freud on Auden. This was the case of most people in that period. Spreading psychoanalysis of Freud led People to think in a different way. Also, they started to change their way of thinking and stopped following Christian teaching blindly.

From Auden's poetry, readers notice that homosexuality was forbidden at first from 1920s to 1930s as it was a sin in Christianity and illegal according to the law of England. In contrast, after a decade it was easier to talk about such relation especially in America. People in the 1940s started to free themselves from social restrictions. This conclusion depends on the two relations of Auden. His first relation with Isherwood was under cover. Auden did not dare to announce it although this relation lasted for eight years. On the other hand, his relation with Kallman was not that private. After two years, Auden announced their relation as marriage. This indicates that life in England was stricter than in America. Many of his love poems like "This Lunar Beauty" and "Lay your Sleeping Head my Lady" show that homosexual love was not accepted and their love will end sooner or later. Homosexual lovers were afraid of being discovered. They felt that they taste love with fear. They suffered because such relations were not acceptable in the modern world. They could be punished or disdained especially in Britain. This means that England in that period was unsuitable place to live because there were many social, religious and political strangles. People felt unrest to have notions

¹³⁷ Charles Obsorne, p.20.

that are new or different. This is the message that Auden wanted to give through his poetry.

The poetry of Auden features the dominance of the theme of war and politics. This is not strange since he was born in the first decade of the twentieth century. This century was full of wars and conflicts, and there were a lot of fighting sides. After seven years of his birth, WWI started and lasted for four years and when he became an adult, the Spanish Civil War took place in the thirties that lasted for four years. Later on, WWII broke out. After that, there was a Cold War among great powers. In Auden's opinion this was the century of anxiety. In this sense, he was an observer of wars, rather than a participant. This led him to feel that he is responsible in his poetry to warn people about the disastrous effects of these wars.

Auden's responsibility is shown when he criticises politicians for being the major cause of all this fighting. Their lust of power and terrorism led to many conflicts among big countries. At the same time, Auden blames some people to obey these oppressive men in power. For him, tyrants are accountable for all the hurt that people had out of wars. Auden's function is to notify the danger about the brutal actions of those politicians especially Hitler and Mussolini. Auden's reaction against Fascism and Nazism came from his recognition of the danger of these two powerful systems so that he wrote about them.

In his poetry, Auden presents the post-war period. He shows people's indifference towards great actions after that horrible war. Concerning the Spanish Civil War, Auden wrote a poem entitled "Spain". In this poem, the speaker talks about many stages in history. He starts with that "past" that was full of achievements. Then he moves to the present where the citizens are degrading day by day. Next the speaker moves to a better "tomorrow" which may have a bright

future. In the last two stanzas, the speaker talks about “today”. Today is filled with death, guilt, gloom, terror, loneliness. Unfortunately, there is neither consolation for the loss of the war nor friendship or hope. Here in “Spain” Auden summarises the period of thirties when countries are either in a state of war or in their way to have war. The speaker uses “the scraping concert” as an indication to the ruins of war.

The same applies to WWII. Auden wrote about WWII in details because he experienced it as a reporter. He talked about war events, the conflicted countries and the situation of people during and after war. As for the Americans, they were careless about what was happening, unlike other people. During war time, people were frightened because of the bad news that they were hearing from the radio. There was a kind of propaganda introduced through the media either on the radio or in the newspaper. Each side has an influential figure to support, so people tended to believe those famous characters. Politicians used the media to legalise inhuman actions. In this case, media had a major effect on people unlike poetry.

It was painful for Auden that the media had more effective impact on people than poetry. He lamented the state of poetry of being marginalised. He wrote poetry for a purpose. His aim was to awaken people to see clearly, so he gave some pieces of advice that help to solve their problems. He sometimes sympathised with them and shared their daily worries. In this sense, humanity is a key term. In contrast, he had nothing in return since poetry meant nothing for modern people, and poets had no significant role in the modern society. Auden expresses this idea in his poem “In Memory of W. B. Yeats” when he says “Poetry makes nothing happen”. By this line Auden felt sorry for the situation of poetry that cannot change things for better.

To sum up, Auden's poetry reflects modern life in many aspects. Through his poems, readers know modern way of thinking. His poetry talks about social, religious and political life of the modern people. His poetry gives a full image about modern life in all of its aspects. Everett Barbara once said:

In his verse, Auden can argue, reflect, joke, gossip, sing, analyze, lecture hector, and simply talk, he can sound, at will, like a psychologist on a political platform, like a theologian at a party, or like a geologist in love he can give dignity and authority to nonsensical theories, and make newspaper headlines sound both true and melodious.¹³⁸

In other words, Auden's poetry discusses many issues. The readers can see modern world through this poetry. They can learn a lesson from a wise poet. They also have a clear image about politics. This poetry is various that can teach people about love and entertain them at the same time. People get benefit of reading Auden's poems. They also sympathise with modern human beings for suffering a lot because of wars. They lived hard times that lacked peace. In brief, the image of modern life in Auden's poetry is gloomy and depressing.

¹³⁸ Everett Barbara. *Auden*. (Edinburgh: Oliver Boyd, 1964). P. 22.

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