And the Word was made Flesh: Anthropomorphism in the Poetry

of W.H. Auden

by

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements

for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the subject

ENGLISH

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

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JANUARY 2016

To my Wife

'Peg' – Jeong Ae-Ran

For my Parents

Julia Imelda Murray &

Bartholomew Hurley

– who worked or went to work so we could go to school.

My Gratitude To:

Séan P. O'Connell, Douglas Community School, Cork, Ireland.

Howard Hussey, Philadelphia, PA, USA.

Stanford Bazilian M.D., Philadelphia School of Psycho-Analysis.

Professor **Ivan Rabinowitz,** University of South Africa.

_____ **Jubail, Saudi Arabia** _____

2008-2015

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Declaration: **And the Word was made Flesh: Anthropomorphism in the Poetry of W.H. Auden**

I declare that the above dissertation is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Mr M. HURLEY _____   _____ January 2016

Summary

And the Word Was Made Flesh: Anthropomorphism in the poetry of WH Auden examines the reasons for the neglect of Auden's prolific deployment of anthropomorphism by examining the poetry's critical reception with a view to understanding what larger purpose, what 'strategy of discourse' (Ricoeur 2003, *The Rule of Metaphor*: 5-9), Auden may have had in mind when he revived a trope traditionally regarded as retrograde.

Anxious not to be mistaken for a Modern, yet unable to find a social rhetoric to suit his purposes, Auden elected upon a new style of poetry which questioned the very foundations of language by placing anthropomorphism, the ascription of agency and sentience to voiceless entities, at its centre. The study explores anthropomorphism from historical and theoretical perspectives in an attempt to explain the reasons for its demise, at least, within the academy.

This study emphasises the importance Auden placed on the everyday activity of reading, the principal focus for the poet's 'cultural theory' (Boly 1991 and 2004: 138). Auden, 'eager to create a tradition of its own' (Emig 2000: 1), abjuring propaganda, hoped to educate the reader to resist the different ideologies which were vying for ascendency during the 1930s. This study will demonstrate that anthropomorphism, with its capacity to suggest alternative words to 're-describe reality' (Ricoeur 2003: 5), played a pivotal role in Auden's project for cultural renewal.

This study demonstrates that the lasting benefit of Auden's use of anthropomorphism is to have recognised with prescience what critics now recognise as a 'revolutionary and potently counter-cultural tactic of cultural appropriation' (Paxson 1994: 173), a trope that 'engenders within its semiotic structure a hidden critique of Western culture' (Paxson: 50). Evidence from recent linguistic theory is marshalled in support of the trope's rehabilitation.

This study examines a selection of Auden's four hundred published poems, and it also offers a provisional taxonomy to initiate the complex process of classifying instances of personification and its co-ordinate tropes in poetry.

Biographical Note

(Wystan Hugh) Auden was born in the city of York in the north of England in 1907. He attended Christ Church College, Oxford University from 1925 to 1928. Admitted to read Natural Sciences, he graduated in English Literature with a pass degree. His first book of Poetry entitled *Poems* was privately published in 1928, and released to the general public in 1930 while his last, *Thank You Fog*, appeared posthumously in 1974.

In all, twenty books of poetry by Auden were published. He compiled twenty-two anthologies. Auden's prose writings consist of four volumes of reviews, essays, prefaces and introductions comprising over 2800 printed pages, the great majority of which appeared in publications of record.

Auden variously worked as a teacher, editor, anthologist, reviewer, and travel writer. In the 1930s in Great Britain, Auden became an active spokesman for left wing opinion and for what came to be known as the Auden Generation. Auden visited Iceland in 1936, China in 1938 and Spain in 1939. In 1945, he briefly worked for the US Army (Strategic Bombing Survey) in Germany.

He moved to the United States in 1939 and became an American citizen in 1946. He was briefly married in 1935 to Erika Mann, the sister of the novelist Thomas Mann, in order to help her to escape from Germany. He otherwise lived life as a confirmed bachelor.

In his later life, he divided his time between Ischia, near Naples, and New York City. He was elected with a significant majority to the Chair of Poetry at Oxford University in 1956 where he remained until 1961. He died in Austria, where he is buried, in 1973.

Preface

According to Brian L. Moore's 2008 study, *Ecology and Literature, Ecocentric Personification from Antiquity to the Twenty-first Centu*ry, 'Few concepts in literary studies are less fashionable than personification, which is, by almost all accounts, an archaic, even discredited figure of speech'. Moore asserts that 'A contemporary who seeks less to dismiss [rather] than affirm the trope – who essentially argues *for* the validity of personification as a means of argument and artistic expression – may be for some comparable to a physician propounding the merits of leeching or a contemporary scientist arguing for a Ptolemaic view of the universe' (Moore 2008: 1).

Arguing in favour of anthropomorphism,[1] the ascription of agency or sentience to inanimate objects, represents the least of the problems facing anyone who seeks to play a part in the rehabilitation of a trope, still widely regarded as déclassé, within a body of poetry where its performative role has been either completely ignored, or grandly dismissed as 'degenerate' (see Jarrell 1951-2, 2005: 47-63), Auden's 'device of decadence' (Jarrell: 52).

Given the compromised state of this field of study, modest aims can serve to strengthen the case for a reappraisal of a literary device that has been as popular among poets as it has been unpopular within the academy. One aim of this study will be to present relevant and constructive evidence from the compendious literary-critical history of anthropomorphism to supply a context to understand and classify Auden's personification of voiceless entities. Another aim will be to present suitable examples from Auden's four-hundred published poems to begin the process of identifying 'paradigmatic deployments' (Paxson 1994: 2) of the trope.

In keeping with the requirement that a dissertation prove its thesis, this study will demonstrate that Auden's use of anthropomorphism was part of a concerted effort to influence the reading public to assume a more proactive role in their discrimination of the various ideologies that vied for their attentions during the 1930s. This study will do this by affirming the

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[1] From Ancient Greek and Late Latin: '*ánthrōpos*, man, human being or body; *poein*, to make or turn; *morphḗ*, form'. http://www.memidex.com/anthropomorphic#etymology

efficacy of a literary device that possesses the unusual capacities to *inter alia* re-describe reality and to critique culture. This can be achieved by demonstrating how competing conceptions of 'truth' can be weighed and measured in the public domain by exposing their discursive stratagems. The only definitive position that can be proved with regard to a body of poetry which engenders subjective participation (on the part of the reader) is to attempt to trace what brought such conditions about, how such 'fragmentary poetics' came into being.

The absence of a consensus regarding the rhetorical component of the poet's work, particularly grave given the current status of an as yet unreconstructed anthropomorphism, represents the prelude to renewed appreciation of a literary device, anthropomorphism, which gives expression to sentiments such as can be found in lines excerpted from Auden's elegy for William Butler Yeats, Poem XXXIX, written in February, 1939, shortly after the poet's passing.

He disappeared in the dead of winter;

The brooks were frozen, the air-ports almost deserted,

And snow disfigured the public statues;

The mercury sank in the mouth of the dying day,

O all the instruments agree The day of his death was a dark cold day.

Far from his illness The wolves ran on through the evergreen forests,

The peasant river was untempted by the fashionable quays;

By mourning tongues The death of the poet was kept from his poems (1986: 241-3).[2]

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[2] All poems are excerpted from *WH Auden*, *The English Auden*, Faber and Faber, 1986, London, Edited by Edward Mendelson. Many poems display numerals for titles. The page number is best followed as Roman numerals were frequently duplicated by the poet.

Here, an alliterative euphemism, 'disappeared in the dead of winter', announces the demise of a poet whose reputation precedes him, captured within a simple personal pronoun, the 'He' of the poem. The estate of his weakened corpse is assisted by a sympathetic winter's morning where the physical elements assist the author of the poem to take the temperature of a dark, cold day.

'Frozen', 'deserted' and 'disfigured', though ostensibly innocuous references to 'brooks', 'airports', and 'public statues', are *made* poignant for their ability to double as oblique though unmistakeable allusions to the dying poet's physical state. English grammar is thus conscripted and carefully arraigned to align the local regional infrastructure with the funereal foreground as, Breughel-like, life goes on elsewhere.

Having deployed inanimate objects which are frozen, deserted and disfigured, and which refer obliquely to the body of the dying poet, Auden compounds their allusion by introducing 'mercury', a more direct reference to the process of dying as the poet's temperature and that of the dark, cold day are suggestively and invitingly juxtaposed.

Though not strictly anthropomorphic, the brooks and the snow and the airports are imbued with meaning and play their part, agentless objects in the depopulated landscape which are conscripted to create a moralised landscape, a *paysage moralisé*. While not strictly anthropomorphic, their presence raises an important issue for the poem, for this study, and for literary criticism if creative poetry is to remain within its purview.

Though they are physical objects that, by definition, lack sentience, they are 'proximal' words that are imbued with sentience and a sense of foreboding, and so can inaugurate a discussion as to what qualifies as an anthropomorphism. To employ Alan Lawson's rubric, anthropomorphisms 'function rhetorically… they function to persuade; they are strategic, polemical, and tendentious' (*The Anxious Proximities,* Rifkin and Ryan 2004: 1218).

Is their presence to be ignored? Are such examples to be rejected as un-anthropomorphic on the limited basis that they lack agency? Is agency therefore the *sine qua*

non of anthropomorphism? Referring to anthropomorphism, James Paxson explains that 'contemporary theory has not yet been able to settle on a universal, working definition of the figure' (Paxson 1994: 35). This study will expand the use of the term to include what might be called 'proximal anthropomorphisms' as these often constitute the most interesting of Auden's deployments. In a word, they are 'performative'.

> But the best story poems may be analysed, I believe, as metaphors without expressed tenors, as symbols which speak for themselves (Wimsatt 1954: 47 in Rifkin and Ryan).

To reject them or to ignore them is to pass over a thorny problem that really needs to be addressed, if not resolved. They may lack agency or sentience but they are, in this case, replete with meaning and do contribute as voiceless entities to the timbre of the poem. They are the linguistic mourners that Auden summons in a sympathetic prelude to death. This study will argue that literary criticism must make the effort to accommodate connotative language even if the examples mentioned, 'brooks', 'airports', public statues', fail to qualify as bona fide anthropomorphisms. This plea may gain greater acceptance where the history of the trope and the functions of metaphor are examined in greater detail.

This anomaly can be briefly articulated by looking at the line 'a dark, cold day'. These four words, strictly speaking, representing an article, two adjectives and a noun, could never hope to find acceptance as anthropomorphic, yet they contribute in a remote but distinct fashion to the climate or the mood that Auden is attempting to create, thereby highlighting the difficulties of arriving at a clear definition. Isolating one or perhaps two elements that are distinctive and peculiar to the trope may hasten agreement as to a universal working definition. Though not tendentious or polemical, their presence is strategic. The words function rhetorically as one minor part of the poem and so ought not to be ignored. They ought to merit provisional inclusion or, at the very least, special recognition within a taxonomy.

> Let the definition of a figure, therefore, be a form of speech artfully varied from common usage… *Ergo figura sit arte aliqua novata forma dicendi* (Corbett 1965, *Classical Rhetoric*: 143, Quintilian, *Institutes of Oratory*: IX.i.II).

James Paxson refers to such elements as 'perceptual prosopopoeia' (Paxson: 106-113), a term he uses to describe agentless objects or entities which, though inert, do exert an influence as they invite the reader to project upon them.[3] The example he uses, which will be examined in greater detail, is that of clouds which are agentless floating bodies that exert an influence (much like a Rorschach Test) on the perceptual abilities of readers. He cites a number of Shakespeare plays in support of his contention that they merit attention even if their status remains unregulated as slightly aberrant meta-tropes.

Irrespective of status, such elements are part of a scene that often contain(s) anthropomorphisms and so might be considered for their supporting role(s). They are part of the allegorical furniture of the poem, images that are deployed to augment a scene. They are situated as the fitting backdrop in and around which the action of the poem, such as it is, is dramatised. Their selection took preference over any number of other images or references or events that Auden might have elected to deploy such as, in January of 1939, General Franco's conquest of Barcelona (January 26th, two days before the death of Yeats) or the death of thirty-thousand people in Concepcion, Chile due to an earthquake, on January 25 (1939).

Quintilian's *Institutes of Rhetoric* refers to '*hypotyposis*'[4] which means a representation of things so fully expressed in words that it seems to be seen rather than heard'… "Imagine that you behold," as Cicero says, "These things, which you have not seen with your eyes, you may represent to yourselves in your minds." '(Quintilian, Book 9, Ch. 2: 40).

Auden's inclusion of such speculative though inert bodies at the beginning of his elegy draws in the reader, directing her thoughts to rather sympathetic infrastructure and civic objects on a day when someone disappeared. Had Auden stated that 'It was a dark and stormy night', a very different reaction might be elicited, and a very different mood established. 'A dark, cold day' is innocuous to the reader only because it is congruous.

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[3] See Thing Theory, a concern with 'materiality', 'how objects mediate social relationships – ultimately, how inanimate objects can be read as having a form of agency of their own' [Sev Fowles, Course Description, Columbia University]. http://www.cddc.vt.edu/accs/syllabi/thingtheory.pdf

[4] 'When we read a book, it is as if we are with a person' (Auden). 'The person in question is a momentary hypostasis, a response that instigates a further departure' (Boly 1991: 35).

The metaphorical foreground thus softened, conditions are made right for the belated, surprise appearance of two semi-radical anthropomorphisms, surreptitiously infusing magic as a stoic 'peasant river' keeps to its routine, while a huddle of poems are detained by the sound of hush, as 'The death of the poet was kept from his poems'. Here, the anthropomorphic peasant river is untempted while poems are endowed with sentience and agency, further expanding the definitional range of anthropomorphism to include negative action words, and nouns that are endowed with the capacity to hear. These examples can be said to be paradigmatic in that they are archetypal deployments. They recur. They represent some of the stock ways in which the trope can be used.

To present Auden here at his most measured and self-assured is, of course, to deliver the polished end-product before providing an account of the poet's long struggle to find his own style, and to gain mastery in his use of a literary device which he first deployed in the late 1920s, when he used it in an experimental fashion to help inaugurate a new literary aesthetic, what eventually came to be known as 'the Auden Effect' (Smith 2004: 3), or 'the Audenesque' (Bergonzi 1975, Essay, *Auden and the Audenesque*: 70).

'Fragmentary poetics', which demanded the participation of the reader to bear witness to Auden's demolition of poetic traditions, and repeated sallies into the domains of received wisdom, to challenge the foundational authority of words (and authors), mark just two of the staging posts Auden had to traverse *en route* to that aesthetic style or voice.

This study will seek to help to begin the process of rehabilitation whereby Auden's particular use of anthropomorphism can reveal the dynamism and the range of a literary device which he attempted to revive and give employment to, one which connects the near present with the works of Virgil, Ovid, Shakespeare, and notable others. To expose that dynamism and range, it may help to remember the poet's own observation that 'one of the constant problems of the poet is how to express abstract ideas in concrete terms' (Auden 1939, 2002, *Prose*, *Rilke in English*, Vol.II:25).

The value of anthropomorphism can be observed where, by connecting abstract thought to humankind's immediate and everyday physical and environmental surroundings, abstract thought and ideology and everything else must pass through that crucible of the *vox populi*, that is, they must survive and pass muster among the idiomatic and figurative expressions that ordinary people ordinarily use and understand. This is not to claim for anthropomorphism the status of a master trope but it is to underscore the importance of the physical underpinnings of language as a means of constraining and disciplining abstract thought.

This is where new ideas are measured, anchored, frequently constrained, and sometimes outright rejected, by a *lingua franca* that is intelligible to all. 'The words of a dead man are modified in the guts of the living' (Auden 1939, *Elegy for WB Yeats* 1986: 242), Auden declared, regarding poetry's interactive relationship to the reading public. Language changes and it is changed by the people who use it, as the excerpt from Auden's elegy makes plain, where semi-radical anthropomorphisms audition before the reading public, as they seek permanent membership of the language. Anthropomorphism is a handmaiden of such change, as this study will attempt to show.

Citing the concluding views of George Lakoff and Mark Turner's 1989 study, *A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor*, Moore affirms that personifications are 'metaphors through which we understand other things as people', how 'personification is a natural means for humans to understand the world around them', because people 'can best understand other things in their own terms. Personification permits us to use knowledge about ourselves to maximal effect, to use insights about ourselves to help us to comprehend such things as forces of nature, common events, abstract concepts, and inanimate objects' (Moore 2008: 41).

This study will attempt to show that anthropomorphism retains the potential to reassert itself as an integral part of language, literature, and beyond. Finally, it is curious to note that one of the best descriptions of the power of anthropomorphism can be found, inadvertently, in the *Preface* to the second edition of *the Lyrical Ballads* (1817). Recalling his conversations with Wordsworth, Coleridge elevates what he calls the 'the two cardinal points of poetry' which he

describes as 'the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colours of imagination' (Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, Chapter XIV).[5]

Anthropomorphism possesses the power to excite and it is often used in a novel and imaginative fashion. Ascribing sentience to Yeats's poems is a novel and exciting gambit, suggesting that poems possess or can take on a life of their own. 'News of his death was kept from his poems'. To say that Yeats is survived by his poems is to rely on the reader to develop this idea. The concept of poems outliving their maker is a novel variation of a stock theme.

James J. Paxson explains that 'Anthropomorphism…is a complex coordinate trope of personification' (Paxson 1994: 46). Anthropomorphism and *prosopopoeia* are synonyms, Greek and Latin terms for personification, and have traditionally fallen within the domain of Rhetoric. By a 'trope' is meant language that is used in a figurative or non-literal sense. 'A trope (Greek *tropein*, to turn) involves a deviation from the ordinary and principal signification of a word' (Corbett 1965, *Classical Rhetoric*: 143).

Citing Quintilian, Brian Vickers further explains that 'By a trope is meant the artistic alteration of a word or phrase from its proper meaning to another' (Vickers 1998: 443). A fitting definition, for the purposes of this dissertation, would be the '… alteration of a word or phrase from its *established* meaning'.[6] With regard to 'Auden's transgression of the linguistic rules', Rainer Emig argues that 'The reluctance to use the proper term is the very foundation of poetry' (Emig 2000, *Towards a Postmodern Poetics*: 20). In other words, poets and their poems possess the power to generate and shape meaning in the minds of readers by replacing one word with another. In doing so, they lay siege to the foundations of language.

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[5] The terms *Biographia Literaria* and *Lyrical Ballads* are anthropomorphic. The term *The Pathetic Fallacy*, a pejorative which the English art critic John Ruskin coined in 1856 to describe anthropomorphism, is also anthropomorphic (Ruskin 1856, *Modern Painters*: 60-61).

[6] '*Ergo figura sit arte aliqua novata forma dicendi*… A form of speech artfully varied from common usage'. (Quintilian: Institutes of Oratory: IX,i,II in Corbett: 143).

Vickers explains that 'All the tropes, then, work by a form of substitution based on resemblance and difference, with the listener or reader being expected to make the mental operations necessary to relate one term for another within the same class' (Vickers 1998: 444). This interactive role, so prescribed for the reader, has significance for this study. Anthropomorphism may be regarded as a most democratic and inclusive literary device for the recognition it pays the reader whose role in collaborating to create the meaning of an image, as Vickers suggests, is crucial.[7]

Vickers's mention of resemblance and difference invokes the work of Jacques Derrida whose concept of *difference* asserts that 'the structure of signification is the structure of difference'… how 'Signs refer to something else – an idea or an object – from which they differ… Because the presence of a thing or of an idea depends on something other than itself, it too is a sign' and because 'no presence or substance of an object or an idea is complete in itself… Each presence requires supplementation by something else to which it refers or relates and from which it differs' (Rifkin and Ryan 2004, *Introductory Deconstruction*: 259).

Whether one accepts this, or whether one agrees with Derrida or not, anthropomorphism by definition involves the use of a word in place of another word. Even if the intention is to replace or eradicate the source domain, that domain is obliquely honoured (more honoured in the breach) by virtue of being called into question as the focus of attention. In other words, 'the metaphoric that transgresses the categorical order also begets it' (Ricoeur 2003: 26). The king is dead. Long live the king.[8]

Alan Lawson's essay, *The Anxious Proximities* (Rifkin and Ryan 2004: 1218), offers the following background clarification. 'What is a trope?' –

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[7] The term 'egregious demagogue', for example, used to refer to an 'exemplary' or 'illustrious' 'leader' of the people whereas today the term denotes its polar opposite, that of a reprehensible or deliberate 'misleader' of public opinion (etymonline.com).

[8] 'The parricidal imagery of…the weaker son, condemning and killing the weaker father, reaches the inherent paradox of the denial of history implied in modernity' (de Man 1970, *Literary History and Literary Modernity*: 7). https://www.jstor.org/stable/20023950?seq=7#page_scan_tab_contents

For some time I have been troubled by the unreflective looseness with which so many of us use the word "trope" when we might mean "*topos*". In rhetoric, a trope is one of the figures of speech, metonymy, or say, zeugma. In Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, a *topos* is one of the "topics" of invention, that is, one of the suitable subjects for the orator. They are what is speakable.

On one hand, it might be easy enough to explain how tropes work discursively – and synchronically – in any given textual moment. On the other hand, we might be able to explain how *topoi* work in narrative (and perhaps more broadly among culture). Whatever these things are, they hover uneasily between rhetoric and narrative. I think we prefer to call them tropes (and treat them as rhetorical figures) because they function rhetorically, that is, they *turn* a history, a narrative; they function to persuade; they are strategic, polemical, and tendentious' (Lawson in Rifkin and Ryan 2004: 1218).

Lawson's emphasis on 'function' is important as he suggests that classification should be driven by what words do, by their performative aspect and not by theoretical imperatives that, as this study will demonstrate, have only succeeded in keeping anthropomorphism on the periphery. Whether strategic, polemical, or tendentious, 'they function to persuade', they audition. If words audition beyond their established meaning, that role must be considered, even if only to be set aside.

Vickers's lengthy treatise, *In Defence of Rhetoric,* observes that, 'in two recent compilations from our most ancient universities [,] rhetoric is nowhere given enough treatment, either as a cultural phenomenon or as a discipline affecting all forms of literary composition' (Vickers 1998 and 2002: 435). Within his own five-hundred and eight-page study, Vickers makes five passing references to *prosopopoeia*.

This is less an indication of neglect than it is a telling indicator of the need to rehabilitate and accommodate the 'delicate and powerful virtue of the trope' (Paxson 1994: 8). 'My complaint is that some moderns have not tried to understand rhetoric, either as a historic reality or as a complex but coherent system of communication' (Vickers 1998: 470).

In the absence of any commonly agreed formulation (Paxson 1994: 35), this study will define anthropomorphism as the human tendency to ascribe (or to deny) sentience and/or agency to entities in the external world. 'Brevity is the soul of wit' (*Hamlet*: II.ii.90).

And this our life, exempt from public haunt,

Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,

Sermons in stones, and good in everything.   (*As You Like It*: II.i.15-18)

In contrast to Shakespeare's broad anthropomorphic vision, Lord Kames (Henry Home) and, later, John Ruskin, took a dull view of anthropomorphism, one which had implications for the status of anthropomorphism. Moore relates how 'Kames devotes thirty-three pages to personification in his *Elements of Criticism* (1762). His examples of personification (many of them from Shakespeare) show that the figure is used properly in two ways, to 'gratify passion' (55) and as a 'figure for descriptive poetry' (62)', but rejects Shakespeare's conception, in *Anthony and Cleopatra*, of winds being lovesick, as 'too far-stretched, having no resemblance to any natural action' (Moore 2008: 34).

Moore further explains that 'Kames thus anticipates, by almost a hundred years, John Ruskin's famous concept of the pathetic fallacy. ... Commenting on a few lines from Alton Locke – 'they rowed her in across the rolling foam – the cruel, crawling foam' – Ruskin writes, 'The foam is not cruel, neither does it crawl. The state of mind which attributes to it these characters of a living creature is one in which the reason is unhinged by grief' (Moore 2008: 34, Ruskin 1856, *Modern Painters*, Vol. 3: 60-61).[9] Ruskin's term gained currency despite the over-reductive and highly selective examples cited. Finding weak examples of anthropomorphism to discredit an otherwise distinguished lineage proved detrimental to the status of the trope.

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[9] 'It is perhaps somewhat disconcerting to learn that our usage of the term [Modern] goes back to the late fifth century of our era and that there is nothing modern about our concept of modernity' (Paul de Man 1970, *Literary History and Literary Modernity*, JSTOR).
https://www.jstor.org/stable/20023950?seq=2#page_scan_tab_contents

Brian Moore's study provides the reader with a litany of examples to bear witness to the historic devaluation of anthropomorphism and 'the identity it held from late antiquity to the late twentieth century' (Moore 2008: 1).[10] In his defence of anthropomorphism, he traces more recent efforts to reinstate the trope as a literary device worthy of serious scholarly attention.

James Paxson's 1994 study, *The Poetics of Personification*, observes that 'poststructuralist thinkers' have 're-evaluated, along with allegory, the highly complex nature of personification in literary discourse'(Paxson: 1), a rehabilitation which this study will show is far from complete.

The lack of consensus within Auden Studies regarding the poet's earliest published work, hereafter referred to as Stage One, is due to the fact that the early poems tend to be avoided or dismissed as 'innovative', poems which are considered 'interesting and fertile', while 'others … go over the top and prove counterproductive and dangerous' (Emig 2000: 8).

Rainer Emig explains that 'this pattern is often employed as a polite way of disguising the conviction that the early Auden wrote interesting and controversial, if flawed, poems and plays' (Emig 2000: 8). This is a conviction observed but not shared by Emig who tries to show that 'Auden in fact paves the way for a poetics of postmodernism' (Emig 2000: 3).

Readers familiar with the Auden oeuvre will know that Auden used anthropomorphism prolifically throughout the three commonly recognised phases of his career, the English or early Auden (1928-1939), the American or middle Auden (1939-1956), and the late or mature Auden (1956-1974), but Stage One is where the poet deployed the trope with a very specific purpose.

While the available material which addresses anthropomorphism in a constructive manner is extremely limited, modern rhetorical theory is very clear regarding the need not

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[10] Citing Stewart Guthrie, Moore relates that 'Thinkers as varied as Vico, Comte, Ruskin, and de Man…held that those who use the trope and its kindred anthropomorphism do so out of a state of confusion'.

simply to document and account for instances of trope deployment, but also, in order to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past, to account for the author's larger aims.

Paul Ricoeur calls this imperative an author's 'strategy of discourse' (Ricoeur 2003: 5-9). A poet's strategy of discourse refers to any over-arching purpose the author may have had in mind when deploying metaphor, what the poet was trying to achieve more broadly, and beyond the immediate need to convey an image. What larger purpose did the author have in mind?

Ricoeur explains that 'metaphor presents itself as a strategy of discourse that, while preserving and developing the creative power of language, preserves and develops the heuristic power wielded by fiction' (Ricoeur 2003: 5). Ricoeur qualifies this statement regarding the use of metaphor as an agent of linguistic change where he explains that 'metaphor is the rhetorical process by which discourse unleashes the power that certain fictions have to redescribe reality' (Ricoeur 2003: 5). James Paxson argues that identifying such 'a strategy of discourse' ought to take precedence over any effort to record instances of anthropomorphism. To fail to do so:

> would entail treating every recorded mention of the trope personification, however brief or matter of fact, from the era of Aristotle's rhetoric and forward through the history of Western grammatical and rhetorical theory. But such a compendious historical survey would not really serve to elucidate the true nature of personification; it might on the contrary, support the theoretical camps that devalue the trope.

> This is because we would be faced with a mountain of summary, formulaic, aphoristic utterances about prosopopoeia and its relatives. The uniformity and sheer mass of these utterances would devalue the ostensibly delicate and powerful virtue of the trope (Paxson 1994: 8).

To observe Paxson's directive faithfully would be to avoid compiling and presenting a mountain of summary, formulaic, aphoristic utterances, culled from the poetry of Auden, for to do so would be to fall prey to what Paxson refers to as 'an obsession with the pathology of the

compendium' (Paxson 1994: 8). The aim is to privilege the author's larger purpose, if any, over mere accountancy. A central aim of this study will be to identify what larger purpose Auden had in mind when he deployed anthropomorphism in his poetry.

This study will argue that misguided critical consensus among literary critics and theorists (Chapter Three – Anthropomorphism & Theory) needlessly condemned anthropomorphism to several centuries of literary penury. The failure of Auden studies to reach consensus regarding the poet's earliest published work (Chapter Two – Auden's Critical Reception) as mentioned, has meant that that body of work remains largely ignored or misunderstood.

A preliminary chapter (Chapter One – Auden's 'Strategy of Discourse') is presented in an attempt to apply the available relevant theory to the anthropomorphic content in the poet's work to show how deployment of the trope has significance politically, culturally and linguistically. A number of poems are examined to put flesh on the bones of the various theories that are mentioned, while a later chapter (Chapter Five – Taxonomy, Poetry and Poetics) examines the poetry in greater detail.

John Boly's study, *Reading Auden: The Returns of Caliban,* the only study to have identified a central organising principle in Auden's early work, is examined in depth (Chapter Four – Auden's 'lack of a social rhetoric') to make greater sense of the claim that Auden's poetry was performing a cultural duty. Rainer Emig's work augments that of John Boly.

After the preliminary chapter, which discusses the main issues addressed in this dissertation, selective surveys of anthropomorphism and Auden's poetry are followed by an examination of some of the poems which played a part in Auden's 'strategy of discourse' (Ricoeur 2003: 5-9).

The study will attempt to situate the poetry of Stage One, Auden's earliest published work, as representing more than an experimental phase in the young poet's development, a view that is as wrong as it has been destructive. Rainer Emig refers to this mis-categorisation of

Auden as 'the uncritical routine…the common integration of Auden into a pattern that is as well trodden as it is generally useless' (Emig 2000: 8).

Emig explains that, 'pointing at the abundance of studies that show Auden's writings as landmarks in history or the development of Auden's personality – and also sadly enough, by the limited insights that these approaches have procured… Such attempts at integrating Auden's works into pre-existent patterns (of history or personality) generally try to override the obscurities and difficulties exposed by them instead of accepting them as crucial' (Emig: 4).

As this study will show, anthropomorphism remains an area of study that is still much derided, though it is also one that has begun to attract more scholarly interest. James Paxson relates that 'The rigorously formal and aesthetic appraisal of tropes and figures is coterminous only with the rise in modern literary criticism' (Paxson 1994: 9).

While the great majority of published scholarly references to the trope are negative, more recent attention to anthropomorphism tends to be exploratory and, therefore, tentative. The absence of a *vade mecum* or a *locus classicus*, combined with the absence of a rigorous taxonomy with which to classify findings or instances of anthropomorphism, hinder efforts to understand the performative and interactive role of the trope in literature and in language.

This dearth places pressure on those few authors who have attempted to situate anthropomorphism within modern literary theory, and while a number of prominent critics (Paul de Man, J. Hillis Miller) have made bold claims for anthropomorphism, nominally rehabilitating the trope, this elevation, while welcome, has not been accompanied by clear expositions and definitive explanations. Such claims have also attracted a degree of criticism.

For example, Brian Vickers's study *In Defence of Rhetoric* broadly criticises de Man on the subject of 'anthropomorphism', the status of which, he argues, de Man tries to 'elevate', saying that his two essays on the subject 'are typical of de Man in limiting their interest in rhetoric to one stage, *elocutio*, then to one category within it, namely a specific trope, which then becomes the basis for a vastly elaborated theory' (Vickers 2002: 454).

James Paxson, while remaining sceptical of 'a favourite move in current literary theory' where 'many theoretical discussions conclude by adopting a particular trope as the key to all tropes, as the figure of all figural invention', nonetheless does 'appreciate personification as one of several tropes that are uniquely and deceptively powerful in the creation of literature', and how it is 'a prime poetic mark of theoretical self-awareness and maturity, a signal not of the failure of the literary imagination, but of its success and fulfilment' (Paxson 1994: 174).[11]

It seems no accident that the one critical essay which does address Auden's use of anthropomorphism, Randall Jarrell's five part lecture series (delivered in 1951-2 and published in 2005), roundly condemns it, perhaps influenced by the critical fashion of several centuries which rendered it prudent to condemn anthropomorphism as unworthy of serious scholarly attention. Jarrell's condemnation compounded Ruskin's denouncement:

> The rhythms of this new language, compared to those of the old, are mechanical and unorthodox or heavily perfunctory – Auden has never written so much in a sort of sloppily hypnotic accentual verse. But the rhetoric! … One of Auden's most exploited rhetorical formulas is an inversion of the Orator's Favourite: a surprisingly abstract word is put into a concrete context – In general, unexpectedly abstract, critical, "unpoetic" words, taken from relatively abstract, technical, "unpoetic" universes of discourse, are substituted for their expected and concrete sisters.

> The consistent use of this device is one of the things that have made people attack Auden's poetry as relaxed or essayistic or abstract … Here are some examples …The beauty's set cosmopolitan smile, love's fascinating biased hand, the baroque frontiers, the surrealist police, the shining neutral summer, the tree's clandestine tide, the small uncritical islands; and the indigenous figure on horseback (Jarrell: 48).

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[11] 'De Man…has variously proclaimed allegory, prosopopoeia, and irony to be the primary tropes of literary discourse. J. Hillis Miller similarly idolizes personification. Roman Jakobson has promoted metaphor and metonymy as the proto-tropes out of which all other tropes arise. Foucault…has proclaimed catachresis as the fundamental and constituent trope of *all* human language'(Paxson).

The reader has seen in my earlier quotations many examples of Auden's use of this method; there exist enough for several generations of critics. Let me rob them of only one, a certain sort of spatial metaphor that Auden uses for people, he found it in Rilke originally… Freud is a climate, a weather. The provinces of Yeats's body revolted, the squares of his mind were empty, / Silence invaded the suburbs, / The current of his feeling failed (Jarrell: 55).

Excerpts from Virgil, Shakespeare, and Adolf Hitler are included in the introduction to Chapter One, while testimonies from the Bible, from Ovid and from Vico augment a distinguished lineage. How such a distinguished manifest of creative talent could find regular employment for the trope while traditional scholarship found it deficient is one of the conundrums this study will attempt to address.

Only two critical works, one by a grammarian, Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005), the other by a Medievalist, James Paxson (1961-2011),[12] neither of whom makes mention of Auden, supply a theoretical framework which encompasses anthropomorphism sufficiently for an informed and plausible narrative to be created to situate the poetry, particularly that of Stage One.

What is remarkable is that a major poet such as Auden, whose work is replete with anthropomorphism, should have received the little attention it has, particularly as the poet's work has been instrumental in forcing theory to expand its terms of reference, the central theme of Rainer Emig's study, *W.H. Auden: Towards a Postmodern Poetics* (2000).

That relatively little has been written about Auden's use of language (see Herman-Colburn 2004, *Bibliographic essay and review of Auden studies*: 241), specifically his use of anthropomorphism, makes the task more challenging. 'Not as much has been written about Auden as about some other twentieth-century poets, in part because Auden sometimes falls between the cracks – neither fully English nor American, modernist not postmodernist' (Herman Colburn: 240).

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[12] http://www.english.ufl.edu/in_memoriam/index.html

Most of what has been written and generally known about Auden's poetry focuses on his later, more public poems. His earliest published poetry is pivotal as this was the period when he deployed anthropomorphism with the most frequency and ferocity:

The street music seemed gracious now to one   (Anthropomorphisms in bold)

For weeks up in the desert. **Woken by water**

Running away in the dark, he often had

Reproached the night for a companion

Dreamed of already…   (Auden, 1928 from Poem VIII: 25)

Reading or referring to several accounts of the history of Rhetoric (Paxson, Moore, Lauer, Vickers, Ricoeur), it soon becomes clear that the most frequently cited reason for the demise of Rhetoric as a serious discipline was the decision to shift from what had been its central focus. James Paxson describes that shift:

> In the Middle Ages it failed to hold as its primary interest the discovery, invention, and implication of topics and arguments; rather it pursued the taxonomic obsession best suited to the *compilatio*… (Paxson 1994: 9).

This study contends that Auden used the trope to inaugurate a new literary aesthetic. Consequently, the poems Auden wrote in the 1920s and 1930s constitute the principal focus of discussion. Poems from the other stages are also examined for their anthropomorphic content, but the Middle and Late Auden did not use anthropomorphism to disrupt poetic tradition as the early poetry tried to do. It can well be argued that Auden's use of anthropomorphism, across the three stages, returned poetry to a poetry of things, or *Dinge* [13] as Rilke referred to them (see Auden 1939, *Prose* Vol. II: 25), where its relation to the physical world finds ample expression.

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[13] See Thing Theory, http://www.cddc.vt.edu/accs/syllabi/thingtheory.pdf

Postmodern quips that the absence of a clue or a code to the early poems is itself a clue (see Mendelson 1981:10) offer little to the aspirant interpreter. Hiding Auden's more challenging poems behind a postmodern retrofit does little justice to the poetry. While Auden's work certainly did anticipate postmodernism, critical agreement regarding the early work remains in short supply while anthropomorphism in Auden's poetry, with the single exception of Randall Jarrell's essay, has been almost completely ignored.

The final section of Poem XXXIX is presented here as an example of an Auden poem which displays a plethora of anthropomorphisms. The poem is examined in greater detail in the chapter on poetry. Many of these instances resemble ordinary speech since Auden leant heavily on established anthropomorphisms, or 'standardised tropes' (Ricoeur 2003: 72).[14]

From Poem XXXIX (Auden: 241-243)   (Anthropomorphisms in bold)

...In **the nightmare of the dark**,

All the dogs of Europe bark,

And **the living nations** wait,

Each sequestered in its hate;

Intellectual disgrace

Stares from every human face,

And **the seas of pity** lie

Locked and frozen in each eye...

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[14] 'People know them through regular use, like one's mother tongue, without ever being able to say when or how one learned them'(Ricoeur 2003: 72).

...With **the farming of a vers**e

Make a vineyard of the curse

Sing of human unsuccess

In **a rapture of distress**;

In **the deserts of the heart**

Let **the healing fountains** start,

In **the prison of his days**

Teach the free man how to praise.   February 1939.

The line 'In the nightmare of the dark' is a telling instance of anthropomorphism but one that can resume the discussion as to what qualifies as an anthropomorphism. To attribute 'a nightmare', that is, an event requiring sentience, to an entity such as 'the dark' is a particularly illuminating example of anthropomorphism since 'the dark' is an abstract and inanimate entity which is ordinarily incapable of dreaming. The attribution or ascription of sentient agency is thus definitional. Nevertheless, it is only fair to reject such a reading as Auden's deployment of such ambiguous words stokes controversy.

It can even be argued that a simple coupling like 'the white house' is anthropomorphic, as the word 'white' is a man-made construct which is used to describe an entity in the external world of objects, but this study will avoid such polemics except where they impinge on discussions of the relationship of established anthropomorphisms to new, more creative deployments.

To ascribe agency to such inanimate objects is a definition of anthropomorphism, whether or not the arrangement of words is regarded as a commonplace in English Standard

usage or not. It may also help to recall the words of Goethe where he reminds the reader that 'man never realises how anthropomorphic he is' (Molloy, *Marking Territories* 2001: 3).

The following excerpts are presented to display something of the range of anthropomorphic deployments in the English language, representing the rich literary pedigree referred to throughout this study:

What makes the corn crops glad – Virgil (70-19 BC), (*The Georgics*, Book 1).

And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries – Shakespeare (1564-1616), (*XXIX*).

The poison of foreign races was eating into the body of our people – Hitler (1889-1945), (Volume 1, Chapter 1, '*In the Home of My Parents', Mein Kampf*).

Here, where Virgil asks the reader what it is that makes the corn crops glad, he readily assumes or reports that they are glad and bypasses the reader's rational capacities with a question which, while perfectly reasonable on one level, tends to grate with those who would regard such usage as an imaginative abuse of the language.

Likewise, Shakespeare packs two anthropomorphisms into a single sentence as he presents a normative scenario, a troubled man with a conception of a higher power who finds that heaven is deaf to his appeals, appeals which lack footwear, which lack traction so far as heaven is concerned. In terms his of language, such imaginative conceptions do not always sit well with the guardians of language who take issue with such personifications.

Hitler, meanwhile, in one fell swoop, explicitly denigrates foreign races, which he personifies with poison, while implicitly asserting the purity of the unspoken German race, to suggest that the anthropomorphic body was being consumed by poison emanating from what he also implicitly presents as an external threat to an unspoken body-politic.

In all three cases, standard words and standard sense units are appropriated to deliver a definite message which; taken all together, generate new meanings. This is what Paul Ricoeur

refers to where he says that 'metaphor presents itself as a strategy of discourse that, while preserving and developing the creative power of language, preserves and develops the heuristic power wielded by fiction' … 'to re-describe reality' (Ricoeur 2003: 5).

Finally, as to the existence of such a strategy of discourse elsewhere in literature, Stanley Fish provides the following example. 'I would like to suggest something about *Paradise Lost* that is not new except for the literalness with which the point will be made: (1) the poem's centre of reference is its reader who is also its subject; (2) Milton's purpose is to educate the reader to an awareness of his position and responsibilities as a fallen man, and to a sense of the distance which separates him from the innocence once his; (3) Milton's method is to re-create in the mind of the reader (which is finally, the poem's scene) the drama of the Fall, to make him fall again exactly as Adam did and with Adam's troubled clarity, that is to say, 'not deceived'. [15]

In a limited sense few would deny the truth of my first two statements; Milton's concern with the ethical imperatives of political and social behaviour would hardly allow him to write an epic that did not attempt to give his audience a basis for moral action; but I do not think the third has been accepted in the way that I intend it' (Fish 1967: 195 in Rifkin and Ryan).

Fish's exposition of what he sees as the motive force for Milton's epic represents an implicit critique of English Literature since the publication of *Paradise Lost* (1667), and goes some distance in explaining the task which Auden, lord of all he surveyed, faced when confronted with the need to steer his culture in a new direction and 'give his audience a basis for moral action' (Fish: 195).

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[15] 'And it is from a reader's active participation in this textual play that the social function of literary art is derived' (Boly 1991: 47).

Chapter One –Auden's 'strategy of discourse'

In keeping with Paul Ricoeur's suggestion (*The Rule of Metaphor*) that trope deployments, to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past, be contextualised within 'a strategy of discourse'(Ricoeur 2003: 5-9), within some larger narrative frame where they can be analysed *en masse* as having a larger context or a semantic basis for their deployment, the following extended quotation from John Boly's 1991 study, '*Reading Auden*, *The Returns of Caliban*', identifies one such strategy which serves as a prelude to much of the discussion which follows:

> He is rightly known as one of the first poets to break with the dismayed isolationism of the high modernists and willingly to concern himself with contemporary events: the fall of the Weimar Republic, the rise of German fascism, the civil war in Spain, the outbreak of the Second World War, the terror of the nuclear era, the cynical travesties of the Cold War. But his concern with reading is perhaps less irrelevant to these affairs than at first appears.
>
> What can a poem hope to accomplish? If it simply equips a reader with a counter- truth, little has been achieved. The ordinary person is inundated with authoritative messages, from newscasts, papers, well-meaning colleagues, persuasive strangers. To put the comparatively frail powers of poetry in direct competition with these more strident forces is to play a losing game.
>
> But if poetry has a different cultural role, if its task is to promote awareness of how truths are formed, and how, in the process of their formation they provoke the resistance of a [sic] historical medium, then the poet might perform a cultural duty after all (Boly 1991, *Reading Auden, The Returns of Caliban* 1991: x- xi).

The point of excerpting this lengthy quotation is to reinforce the assertion that Auden used anthropomorphism to perform a 'cultural duty', such as that referred to by John Boly. His

identification of a strategy of discourse, though he makes no reference to anthropomorphism, is significant for two reasons.

Firstly, he presents a plausible explanation for a body of poetry which other critics still find largely unintelligible. The majority of critics who encountered Auden's earliest published work, when it first appeared, made little sense of it except where they found agreement in dismissing it as lacking literary merit, serving 'no single intelligible purpose' (Sparrow in Haffenden 1983: 7).

Writing at the time the poetry first appeared (1930), John Bayley recommended that Auden's 'poetry is read for what it is, and not for what his critics – misled by the poet's ambiguous attitude – have supposed it is attempting to be' (Bayley, '*The Romantic Survival'*, Constable 1957: 156, in Hendon: 24). The problem with citing Auden is that he often assumes positions he does not believe in, once referring to himself in a BBC radio interview as basically 'a comic poet', a description very few people would agree with.

Citing Charles Osborne, John Haffenden recalls that 'Despite the almost celebrated Auden obscurity, it was immediately acclaimed by his mainly young readers, who seemed to be able to penetrate to its meaning without difficulty' (Haffenden 1983: 8).

Secondly, Boly implicitly identifies those poems of Auden's which best advertise and embody his weighty observations regarding what Auden intended to achieve, namely those he wrote in the late 1920s and early 1930s, when there was 'a feeling that something must happen in England to shake up the social order'(Lehmann in Haffenden: 1983: 6). Boly's central assertion is that Auden was in the business of re-educating the ordinary reader actively to discriminate as a way to sort through the competing ideological claims of the day.

A measure of the extent to which the practice of ordinary reading has been overlooked by critics can be seen if one considers Auden's observation that readers are concerned with 'the relation of a poet's life to what he writes and its relation to other lives'. It is a point worth pondering, how habit has it that the emphasis is placed where it is, and not on the impact of

writers or their writing on their audience. Auden says that such bias typically sees 'one relation where there are really two' (Auden 1942, *Poetry and Total War*, 2002, *Prose*, Vol. II: 152).

In terms of poetry's suitability as 'a fitting vehicle for intellectual illumination' (Porter 2004: 134), Boly cites Mikhail Bakhtin's observation that poetry faces 'the task of cultural, national and political centralisation of the verbal-ideological world in the higher official socio-ideological levels'(Boly 1991: 27). In other words, poetry has a role if poets can recognise it.

This study traces the influence of a seemingly obsolete device (see Moore 2008: 1-3), anthropomorphism, at a time when Adolf Hitler was making full use of anthropomorphism by, for example, exclaiming that 'I am nothing but a magnet constantly moving across the German nation and extracting the steel from this (sic) people' (Adolf Hitler, in Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* 1951: 360-1).

Auden elsewhere remarks how the very same people were referred to by Hitler as having 'the rabbit's ears of the masses' (Auden 1996, *Prose*, Vol. I: 465), a description that is anthropomorphic, as it is an example of de-personification. 'De-personification' refers to the diminution of a person by abstracting them using synecdoche as Hitler does by reducing people to ears, and, while ears constitute a human body part, the effect is to diminish their humanity. James Paxson speaks of the 'numbing reminder of how verbal figuration can turn to poison when it is put in the service of misdirected patriotism' (Paxson 1994: 51).

The 1930s has been characterised as an era of 'bewildered mediocrity, triviality and fudge' (Smith 2004: 5), 'a low dishonest decade' (Auden poem: *September 1, 1939*) during which Auden and his generation confronted the possibility of what he described as 'a metaphysical failure' (Auden 2002, *Prose*, Vol. II, *Mimesis and Allegory*: 79) which he likened to 'the breakdown of classical civilisation' (79):

> Societies come to grief if and when they are confronted by problems for which their technique or their metaphysics or both are inadequate, and every technical advance requires a parallel advance in metaphysics (*Prose*, Vol. II, *Mimesis and Allegory*: 78).

Anthropomorphism was one instrument Auden used throughout the 1930s as *part* of an ambitious attempt to inaugurate a new literary aesthetic, one that the poet hoped would change, not just English poetry, but English society. That aesthetic laid claim to being new because 'the dominant feature of Auden's poems is their refusal (or inability) to integrate themselves into established literary patterns' (Grigson in Emig 2000: 1), a stand which had to do with the fact that 'a significant part of the literature of the 1930s is determined to engage with the actualities of its time' (Emig 2000: 1).

Auden conducted his assault on the existing literary orthodoxy on two main fronts. He used anthropomorphism to disrupt traditional notions and expectations of poetry by deploying it to subvert the familiar. Auden challenged established notions of what poetry should look like. The following poem is entitled *Poem I*, written in June 1927, signals the advent of his new style. It serves as an example of the poet's reluctance to communicate in traditional forms:

Poem I   (Anthropomorphisms in bold)

Bones wrenched, weak whimper, lids wrinkled, first dazzle known,

World-wonder hardened as bigness, **years brought knowledge**, you:

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

The soul is tetanus; gun-barrel burnishing

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

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

Infuriate the fire with bellows, blink till sleep

And two-faced dream – 'I want' voiced treble as once

Crudely through flowers till dunghill cockcrow, crack at east.

Eyes unwashed jewels, the glass floor slipping, feel, know Day,

Life stripped to girders, monochrome. **Deceit of instinct**,

Features, figure, form irrelevant, dismissed

Ought passes through points fair plotted and you conform,

Seen yes or no, too just for **weeping** [sic] **argument**.   (Auden 1927, 1986: 21)

On a second front, Auden used anthropomorphism as part of a critique of the everyday practice of reading where the meanings of the text, as John Boly asserts, typically silence the reader into compliance. It might even be reasonably claimed that the appearance of his early poetry anticipated reader-response theory as his poems implicitly critique reading habits such that, as the analysis of poems in this study will show, readers of his poems are often left with nowhere else to go.

By denying the reader's expectations, or easy entrance into the poetry, the reader is left with two choices: either abandon the work, or attempt to understand why a young poet should risk his fledgling reputation on a style of poetry that forces the reader back into a discussion regarding the fundamentals of poetry.

Readers naturally baulk at the suggestion that they as ordinary readers are being dictated to or repressed when reading. This is a natural response but one which is quite mistaken. In any written or verbal communication that claims to offer definitive opinions, as long as the reader's own views are not given voice, the text can be said to be repressing them.

'Lots of people are willing to admit that they don't understand painting or music, but very few indeed who have been to school and learned to read advertisements will admit that they don't understand English' (Boly 1991: 51, Auden *Prose* Vol. IV: 465). The suggestion is that readers are being repressed but it is a necessary, unavoidable repression. John Boly explains:

'If a message must be conveyed, its recipient is obliged to *get it right*, to abjure all illicit and merely subjective deviances in favour of an ascetic confinement to the sender's original intentions' (Boly 1991: 50), which is precisely the kind of communication Auden seeks to avoid insofar as his own intentions as an author and poet is to bring into awareness the entitlement of the reader to any kind and any number of responses he wishes. This is a crucial point.

John Boly is basically arguing that Auden's reader, in an effort to help defend herself against any message that insists upon its holy writ, learns to outwit the dominant voice of the text, or at the very least, to discriminate regarding its contents, by an act of, ultimately, civil disobedience in defiance of the message the writer wishes to communicate.

Taking the example of Wordsworth's *The Solitary Reaper*, he argues that 'Whereas Romanticism presents a completed image of the reader, an already constructed part that needs only to be accepted … that the passer-by succumb to the wanderer's lyrical spell by assenting to the demands of an imposed effigy … [Boly's term for a docile or inattentive reader], Auden opens a gap, a fact [an act?] of resistance…This shift, from image to resistance, alters the essential task of interpretation' (Boly: 86-87). By 'image' here, Boly means cooperation.

Boly argues that 'The stakes are very high. Not only the authority of the romantic voice but the privilege of the ideologies it has espoused are at risk' (87). In other words, the assumed entitlements of romantic conceptions of the world, mediated for readers by its self-styled interpreters, the Romantic poets, are challenged and implicitly critiqued by a new style of poetry which cannot take for granted that its vantage point is the definitive one. Where Wordsworth directs his audience to 'Behold her single in a field, yon solitary highland lass', Auden poses a question, 'his sentinel's challenge' (87) – 'Who stands?, the crux left of the watershed'.

Boly explains that 'The reply' to this question 'is portentously cryptic… Is the crux *to* the left of the watershed or *all that is left* of it? While the speaker of the poem attempts to 'give proof of his synoptic authority: the power to grasp an entire world… the newcomer [the reader] balks [sic], unable to see exactly what is said [unable to see the object the voice is referring to],

if only because of the parallax, the fact that another person always stands on a very different spot'(87).

This concern with parallax arguably represents the most innovative feature of Auden's poetic style; what distinguishes his poetry from what came before brings into question the reliability of the narrator.

Auden is seeking to empower the franchise. In Auden's poetry, the reader, like Lear's fool, can no longer be shut up, at least not for very long. Just as the Fool is tasked with speaking the unspeakable (telling Lear he retains the one title he was born with) the reader is informed that the perspective of the poet, that of the presiding voice, is not one that he can readily share. The notion of a dominant, often overbearing and preachy; discourse re-enters poetry and while Auden falls short of allowing the *dramatis personae* to critique the author, as Sterne does, the advent of the reader signals a sea change in the affairs of English poetry.

Auden's cultural duty begins to be discharged where his poetry encourages subjective responses and where he enfranchises the reader to read critically. Propaganda omits, selects, persuades at the expense of the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Boly argues that 'The cultural contribution of the poet is to deliver language from its convenient repression, even into truth' (Boly 1991: 56).

Contrast can be made between traditional newspapers with their editorials and their limited readers' letters columns and more recent, more progressive newspapers that welcome both citizen journalists and below the line responses to articles and blogs. The results are not always pretty but to open up the views of a single writer to public scrutiny and approbation can, if managed properly, enrich the process by amplifying the range of perspectives. This is essentially, what Auden's early work was doing.

Problematizing his own material, refusing to adopt an authorial voice, reneging on the author's traditional role as a detached observer, 'by making it unpoetic and clinical' (Emig 2000:

16), Auden used anthropomorphism, with its inherent capacity to subvert, to force the previously silent and compliant reader to collaborate in the poem.

This was the poet's attempt to displace traditional habits of reading – where the rather authoritarian text attempts to enforce its writ – with a thoroughly democratic exchange between reader and author. The 'ordinary reader' is beckoned to play a role in developing the imagery of the poem, consistent with Brian Vickers's observation regarding 'the listener or reader being expected to make the mental operations necessary to relate one term for another' (Vickers 1998: 444). John Boly refers to the careful reader as 'the auditor [who] performs the tasks of resistance and response' (Boly: 77). The reader's response is crucial in Auden where the words and images presented do not conform to known conventions of reading or of poetry. Auden's first published poem does stretch the reader's capacities:

Though body stir to sweat, or, squat as idol, brood, (Anthropomorphisms in bold)

Infuriate the fire with bellows, blink till sleep

And **two-faced dream** – 'I want' voiced treble as once

Crudely through flowers till dunghill cockcrow, crack at East.

Auden here offers familiar images or notions in unfamiliar settings. How can a fire be infuriated? the reader asks. Can a dream have two faces? the reader wonders. Subjective responses to anthropomorphised images seem to be encouraged, as meaning, or any deliberate message, seems to be avoided. The remaining lines of the poem offer little context.

Quite apart from the success or failure of *Poem I* to actually say anything that can be readily understood, what it and poems just like it did was to herald change. Auden was announcing himself, but instead of following protocol and looking like and behaving like a debutante, Auden preferred to deck himself out in an outrageous costume, in an aspect of his own making, one guaranteed to infuriate the literary establishment, with figures like Leavis,

who had initially supported the promising young poet, left scratching their heads in bewilderment.

Poem I does certainly contain a number of anthropomorphisms, but to try to decipher them here, or classify them narrowly, would be to miss a larger point. In seeking to arrest the attention of readers with a style of poetry that confounded almost everybody, Auden's poems implicitly drew the reader's attentions to the business of writing, to the activity of a poet writing poetry for a reading public, thus fulfilling a 'cultural duty'.

As part of that attempt to win their attentions and to shift the conversation away from traditional poetic forms, and trying to move it to a new abode, Auden used the trope to further his central aim which was to use language in a way that, *inter alia*, exposed how arbitrary signifieds are (Rainer Emig's contention), and, crucially, how a reorganisation of the way poetry is written and consumed might spearhead and inaugurate a conversation among the literary establishment and ordinary readers to consider their status as passive consumers, or 'docile readers' as Boly calls them, of poetry. Readers had never seen anything like it.

Though quite unable to pin down precisely what was Auden was doing, William 'Empson recognised Auden's insight into the problem of attempting ''to change radically a working system'', the poet being an agent of change and a part of the system'. Empson observed that 'It has the sort of completeness that makes a work seem to define the attitude of a generation' (Hendon 2000: 62).

Where John Boly speaks of Auden performing 'a cultural duty', Auden begins to perform that civic duty by beginning the slow process of persuading the reader not to accept this opinion or that, 'an easily forgotten truth', instead inviting and occasionally taunting the reader to participate in the development of the imagery of the poem. Auden's unorthodox syntax invites unintended responses. Boly refers to a 'good reading' where 'the good recipient's tasks are to detect an informing intention; to purge any elements that distract from that intention's will; and to be naturally effected, to play a carefully prepared part'(Boly: 77).

When all goes well and the recipient behaves according to plan, the result is a "good reading", approved by the majority or at least by their appointed representatives, because its findings are conspicuously at ease with dominant prejudices (Boly: 77).

Boly's general point is that Auden's unorthodox syntax discourages good readings, or at least, discourages readings that are only good, how the whole point of departing conventional writing is to engender non-conventional readings. Auden does not demand obedience from his readers. Boly's opening sentence states that 'Auden wrote poetry to help people become more aware of what happens when they read' (Boly: ix).

Writing a few years after Auden died, in 1973, Roland Barthes observed that 'Classic criticism never paid any attention to the reader; for it, the writer is the only person in literature… it is necessary to overthrow the myth: the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author' (Barthes 1977, *Image Music Text*: 148).

Auden's poetry deployed the unfashionable trope as an instrument that could play a part in reforming or at least re-shaping ' England, this country of ours where nobody is well' (Auden, *The Orators*, in Mendelson 1981: 62, Deane 2004: 27). This, it might be reasonably inferred, represented Auden's 'parallel advance in metaphysics'(*Prose*, Vol. II, *Mimesis & Allegory*: 78), his 'strategy of discourse' (Ricoeur 2003: 5-9).

In *Mimesis and Allegory*, the poet traces the breakdown and the crisis to a failure on the part of the educated class, 'the philosophers', to mediate between the man in the street and the larger forces and pressures which people felt or were confronted by, a failure as he described it 'to relate this abstract concept ('civilisation') to the concrete phenomenal world' (Auden 2002, *Prose*, Vol. II, *Mimesis and Allegory*: 79).

By telling contrast, Auden's measured admiration for Richard Wagner (1813-1883) centred on the composer's capacity to address the suffering (`*Amfortas'*) of the man in the street (83), perhaps an expression of solidarity with the individual and an expression of hope

for the maintenance of the symbolic contract between writers and artists, and the general public.

In an essay on Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926) written during the previous year (1939), Auden had expounded on this idea more fully, recalling how, as mentioned earlier, 'one of the constant problems of the poet is how to express abstract ideas in concrete terms' (25). Auden explained that 'the Elizabethans solved it for their generation by an anthropomorphic identification' (Auden 2002, *Prose*, *Rilke in English*, Vol. II: 25).

The main value of this observation is to show that Auden who 'possessed a synoptic intelligence', was very aware of the mechanics of language, and was 'able to visualise the system of codes which shaped a work' (Boly 2004: 137). The point to make here is that Auden did not just happen upon anthropomorphism. His work as an anthologist (twenty-two volumes, see Davenport-Hines 2004: 18) and his four volumes of prose writings reveal a man intimately aware of the history and the literary techniques of English Literature. 'He took poetry up to the great quartermaster's store of inherited forms' (Porter 2004: 128).

Regarding the implementation of Auden's strategy of discourse, this is not to suggest that every trope deployment had such deep intent nor is it to claim that his poems always had particular targets in mind, particular values or attitudes he wanted to tamper with, though that is sometimes the case. This is a critical point. Auden's work, and critical theory which can be applied to his work, represent separate streams, and while they frequently intersect, neither theory nor poetry are coterminous.

Auden was not so much intent upon making a particular point as he was in trying to advertise a particular practice. Arrest their expectations, detain their attention, and remand readers to their own experience, seems to have been Auden's method. Winning their attention was the easier part. Convincing readers to become active citizens by exposing the indeterminacy of language, by actively encouraging them to partake in the shaping and reform of culture, a much larger enterprise, would prove more trying.

It is, however, to suggest that Auden, 'a great reviver of past disciplines within modern times' (Porter 2004: 128), in fact, revived 'an archaic, even discredited figure of speech' (Moore 2008: 1) amidst 'a disintegrating social and economic system ripe for fascism'(Smith 2004: 3). As a tool to expose, in this case, the exploitation of labour, anthropomorphism is used here to align the reader's sympathy with nature and the 'We' of the poem, who are depicted as being unfairly put upon by a nameless 'they':

From Poem XL (Auden: 243)   (Anthropomorphisms in bold)

…And we realise **the woods are deaf and the sky,**

Nurses no one, and we are awake and **these**

Like farmers **have purpose and knowledge**,

And towards us **their hate is directed**.

We are the barren pastures to which they bring

The resentment of outcasts; on us they work

Out their despair; **they wear our weeping**

As **the disgraceful badge of their exile**.   (April, 1939)

The looming 'international crisis' (Auden 2001, *Prose*, *Rilke in English*, Vol. II: 26) appears to have concentrated the mind of the young poet who, confronted with the messages of the different ideologies vying for political ascendency (mainly Communism, and National Socialism), eventually came to the conclusion that the best way a poet might serve the common good, the best way to perform a cultural duty, was to play a part in helping the reading public to become more aware of the mechanics and the grammar of truth formation.

This would mean eventually abandoning his Vatic isolation and embracing a Civil poetry[16] (see Mendelson 1981: xvi) which spoke to present problems and the common good. This essentially describes the struggle within the poetry of Stage One. By Stage Two (1939-56), Auden had become a very public poet.

The 1930s was a time when 'it was indeed widely assumed that artists and writers *should* "ransom" themselves, sacrificing their aloofness in service to the common good' (Deane 2004, *Auden's England*: 34). Writing in 1942, in a prose piece entitled *Poetry and Total War*, Auden addressed the sense of immanent crisis, explaining that:

> If artists during the last ten years turned themselves into journalists and committeemen
> for the Spanish or Chinese cause, it was because, however inefficient they may be, they
> saw that the fate of every individual was involved in these causes at a time when
> politicians, the public, the efficient men of action, were still indifferent (Auden 1942,
> *Prose*, Vol. II, *Poetry and Total War*: 152).

In a bravura attempt to reform a pre-war society in need and in crisis, the young poet set out to reform its language which, denying 'reverence to contemporary standards' (Emig 2000, *Toward a Postmodern Poetics*: 1), he first attempted to subvert. Auden's project, on the evidence, may help justify or at least augment the claim that Auden 'returned to poetry its ancient privilege as a major component of world literature' (Porter 2004: 135), though Peter Porter may not have had Auden's experiments with rhetorical devices, his deployments of anthropomorphism in mind, when he made that claim.

In the Introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to WH Auden* (2004), editor Stan Smith records how suspicious the poet himself was regarding any attempt to manipulate, to employ 'propaganda ... which practices enchantment as a way of securing domination over others' (Auden in Smith 2004: 3).

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[16] Faced with choosing a poet 'who can save the city from disaster', Mendelson cites Aristophanes' *The Frogs* where Dionysus, 'Descending into the underworld...presides over a contest between the shades of Aeschylus and Euripides, and weighs in his scales the art of civil responsibility against the art of inner vision...chooses Aeschylus' (xvi).

It is interesting to note that according to Smith 'it was Yeats Auden blamed for what a letter to Stephen Spender called in 1964 … 'my own devil of unauthenticity … false emotions, inflated rhetoric, empty sonorities' (Smith 2004: 2), partly explaining why Auden excised, deleted and redacted much of his earlier published work, and why perhaps he wanted to take himself and English poetry in a new direction.

Auden does not so much seek to persuade the reader to a particular course of action but he does deploy the trope with such regularity, often to the point of profligacy (see Jarrell 2005: 47-63), that the effect was singular; as to install the harbingers or the suggestions of change in the language of a society in need of renewal. Peter Porter's essay on *Auden's language and style* describes Auden's habit of editing some of his already published poetry as 'the removal of detonators' (Porter 2004: 132).

Auden's retroactive editing, for which he received intense criticism (*The Making of the Auden Canon*, Joseph Warren Beach, 1957), appears to have been motivated by the disgust he felt when he found himself taking sides. Patrick Deane reports that 'Auden's most frequent explanation for his departure from England (in 1939) is that he could no longer tolerate the demands placed on him as 'Court poet to the Left' '(Deane 2004: 36).

Humphrey Carpenter goes further where he relates how Auden 'spoke at a dinner to raise funds for Spanish refugees' and how 'the speech's success provoked a bout of self-contempt which caused the poet to later write that "I felt just covered in dirt afterwards" ' (Carpenter 1981: 256). Auden concluded that it was better to allow people to make up their own minds regarding National Socialism, Communism and so on, and not to follow the likes of Wyndham Lewis who vigorously argued that '[S]ides have to be taken' (Deane 2004: 35). Auden had arrived at a different conclusion:

It is, I believe, no accident that as the international crisis becomes more and more acute, the poet to whom writers are becoming increasingly drawn should be one who felt that it was pride and presumption to interfere with the lives of others (Auden 2001, *Prose*, *Rilke in English*, Vol. II: 26).

A serious rebuke from George Orwell to Auden's poem *Spain* may also have influenced the latter's sense of enforced neutrality. Orwell described the poem as 'a kind of thumbnail sketch of a day in the life of a good party man', and criticised it for giving 'callow approval to the politically necessary murder' (Smith 2004: 6).

It should be pointed out that while Orwell's rebuke may have forced Auden to assume a stance of ideological neutrality in principle, later poems are full of examples where the poet is clearly taking sides though, certainly, of a less partisan nature. Poem XLI, entitled *September 1, 1939* (Auden 1939, Stanza 8: 246) is one example:

…All I have is a voice   (Anthropomorphisms in bold)

To undo **the folded lie**,

The romantic lie in the brain

Of the sensual man in the street

And **the lie of Authority**

Whose buildings grope the sky:

There is no such thing as the State

And no one exists alone;

Hunger allows no choice

To the citizen or the police;

We must love one another or die…   (1939)

Here Auden, denying the dominion of the state, petitions the reader who is implicitly endowed with reason, to join his solitary voice in undoing a lie he describes as romantic which belongs to the sensual man, a man reduced to his libido. Another lie, spoken by a personified

authority whose personified buildings grope the sky as they take liberties with the public space, must also be undone as the failure of the state, a personified Hunger, he seems to be saying, by not providing enough food to eat, denies choice to both citizen and police who are pitched against each other.[17]

Heavily personified, this poem reserves its most radical deployment for the state that physically intimidates the public arena. To grope, to engage physically in an unsolicited fashion, is a powerful abstraction of the state. Auden appears to be anatomising power relations and while the writing is unavoidably moralistic, given the topic, Auden's tone is for the most part salutary, even if cynical regarding broad failures of responsibility. His appeal to the reader to neither grope nor be led by his libido but to love one another represents the culmination of a brief scene where the reader is encouraged to see that citizens and police, and presumably himself alike, are pawns in a very predictable, and so avoidable, dance. This is a useful example of Auden performing a civic function, exposing the predictability of conflict. Partisan perspectives, such as those he witnessed in Spain, must surely have informed such poems.

The point of discussing Auden's decision to turn away from propaganda, his disgust at taking sides, is to explain what led Auden to the realisation that real change could only occur at the level of language and thought, that to persuade readers to a particular course of action was much less of an achievement than one where he could help readers to discriminate in a way that allowed them to rely on their own judgment.

In relying on that judgement, readers were treated to the then radical idea that the words on the page which constitute ordinary communication were, in fact, replaceable, that meaning is a man-made construct and that the reader could envisage a different reality if he recognised that culture was shaped through its deployment of language. If the reader could be tempted or encouraged to collaborate in the reform of language, man might extricate himself from the corner into which he had painted himself.

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[17] http://blog.hrc.utexas.edu/2014/03/04/posters-portray-food-as-evil/

The goal, as John Boly describes it, is to reveal where 'language begins to illuminate and not apply its discursive patterns' (Boly 1991: 49). This goal could be achieved if some way could be found to help readers question the foundations of language itself, and not merely support or oppose those ideological structures which man had erected on them.

In threatening those foundations by alerting or reminding readers of their transient nature, Auden recognised the benefits of alerting his fellow citizens to the arbitrary construct of language while, perhaps, also satisfying a demonic wish to take the entire edifice down. Patrick Deane remarks that 'The truth, though, is that Auden never loses sight of the potential for civil war' (Deane 2004: 32). The distance between any effort to reform language and the suggestion that civil war might be a preferable solution is great indeed, marking the distance between a project that might take many generations to resolve, and the false and probably mistaken notion that somehow civil war might improve matters.

The war that was going on in Spain (1936-1939) was shadowing a struggle Auden was experiencing within himself as he tried to remain aloof from the fray while also wishing it to continue. Auden's psychomachia was in the process of being realised and the brutality of war exposed the real dangers of the word becoming flesh. Words have consequences.

As mentioned above, Auden often struggled to desist from seeking to influence the reader to a particular course of action, perhaps blinded by the fact that he often wrote in a way that suggests that he and he alone was in full possession of the facts, and therefore well situated to make a judgement. A second excerpt from Poem XLI (Auden, *September 1, 1939*, Stanza 2: 245) invokes scholarship and learning to guide readers to adopt sensible positions:

…Accurate **scholarship can**   (Anthropomorphisms in bold)

Unearth the whole offence

From Luther until now

That has driven a culture mad…

I and **the public know**

What all schoolchildren learn,

Those to whom evil is done

Do evil in return…   (1939)

Here, Auden deploys stock and normative anthropomorphisms, 'driven a culture mad', and 'scholarship' which 'can unearth', to underscore what reads like an Old Testament truism, the tendency to seek revenge. Typically, where Auden wishes to focus on the moral or message he wishes to convey, anthropomorphisms tend to be less daring, less radical as he seeks less to focus on language than on content.

For example, in his 1931 prose poem *'Letter to a Wound'* (Mendelson 1986: 71-73) wherein Auden writes a letter to a lesion on his body, the very notion of treating the body or part of one as having an independent existence from the mind or self is quite radical. 'You showed your resentment by a sudden bout of pain' (Mendelson 1986: 72) serves as an example of the kind of challenge Auden was making to commonplace, and some would argue, common-sense conceptions of mind and body. Using a decidedly unfashionable trope to do his bidding added to the novelty though such radical experiments also led to the complaint by Leavis who objected to the 'combination of seriousness and flippancy' (Smith 2004: 96).

Far-fetched as such a challenge might sound, prompting Auden to end the 'Letter' with the admonition 'Better burn this', an admission of just how radical a challenge the letter represented, the question can reasonably be asked whether, for example, Lady Macbeth's endless hand-washing, highlighting the autonomy of the body and the guilt she felt for her part in instigating the murder of Duncan, is really any different? The point to make here is that, far-fetched as Auden's letter may be, it is not without literary precedent. Auden's caution regarding the ascription of independent agency to a body part speaks to the delicate balance he had to try to maintain, his desire to further a transcendental notion of physiological interest while keeping one eye or ear on the public gallery of public opinion.

Auden's use of anthropomorphism also seeks to remind readers that the word for something is not a word that is chiselled in stone, that it is replaceable, how, like Nietzsche's answer to the question 'What is truth', 'truth is a mobile army of metaphors, metonymies [sic], and anthropomorphisms' (de Man 1979, *Allegories of Reading*: 110). The purpose of this approach was to encourage readers to get into the habit of considering alternatives at a time when many people were seeking alternative solutions to the burgeoning problems of the 1930s.

The 'Auden effect' lay in that ability to catch the changing moods of the time in luminous images, magical phrases and breathtaking apercus, expressing sentiments that people were unaware they shared until they read him (Smith 2004: 3).

Many of Auden's trope deployments necessarily involve the naïve, workaday use of personified abstractions simply to meet the immediate demands of his poems. Many such deployments are theoretically unremarkable, but, during the 1930s as Europe slowly experienced economic depression, and political inaction which eventually led to war, Auden developed a penchant for this decidedly outré literary device, as his *Letter to Lord Byron* (Auden, Part V: 197), written in October, 1936, makes clear:

Rumours of War, **the B.B.C. confirming** 'em,

The prospects of the future aren't alluring;

No one believes **Prosperity enduring**…

Here, Auden again deploys normative anthropomorphisms, the BBC doing the confirming as the prospects for the future, the reader is told, are not attractive, while the man in the street, a concrete universal, is shown as not believing that a personified prosperity will last. That such lines can be easily read by the reader without ever being alerted to their status as personified abstractions, again speaks to Auden's habit of deploying tropes of suitable intensity, particularly when his chief priority is to critique something of the economic culture of the 1930s. He is, of course, also furthering the Auden aesthetic by emphasising how institutions such as the BBC do possess agency.

It is important to mention here that the success or at least the efficacy of many of Auden's trope deployments rely to a large extent on the English language being already quite full of them, the capitalised quasi-medieval figure of Prosperity, being one example. For 'prosperity to endure' requires minimal literacy. Auden's coupling of the words `composed flesh', for example, is a novel variation on an established phrase or coupling, that of `decomposed flesh'. Also to be examined is his subtle alteration of 'sweeping argument' that becomes 'weeping argument'. Auden thus builds on the stock or normative library of known anthropomorphic deployments by typically offering variations on existing words.

The measured deployment of stock and normative anthropomorphisms enables more radical and creative anthropomorphisms to co-exist in the poetry, representing the manner in which the status quo can give way to the *avant garde*. It is important to remember that the status quo contains elements that emanated from the *avant-garde*.[18] Chaucer's English and that of a hundred years previous are very different.

Citing Jacques Derrida's 'now classic discussion of metaphor [which] appears in "White Mythology," the deconstructive analysis of the conceptual evolution of metaphorical images through a culture's history', James Paxson explains that 'For Derrida, the metaphor is the expression of an ever-present impulse in human discourse to "vitalise" itself, as well as the natural decay or erosion to which figural utterances are prey when they are used again and again. The natural process of "metaphorization" is the historical sequence the metaphor undergoes: first, it is born; next, it gains currency as a vital figural utterance; finally it is assimilated into everyday language, one that will receive more attention in this chapter.

For now, it is important to acknowledge that Auden's early poetry and particularly his use of anthropomorphism can be located at the first and second stages of the sequence

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[18] It is noteworthy that the old Latinate coupling 'status quo' is not typically written or typed requiring italics, whereas italics are required when writing or typing the term 'avant garde', from the French. This raises the question as to what point words from the avant garde of language enter the mainstream, signalling their adoption as orthodox.

described, but with one important caveat. Auden does not typically audition anthropomorphisms with the specific aim of having them assimilated into everyday language, rather he auditions them to gain acceptance for the practice.

This is neither to argue that Auden, like every other poet, would not have been pleased if all his trope deployments gained currency in the language but as so many of his tropes were grotesques and often outlandish, clearly he was more intent on advertising the practice of displacement[19] than he had hopes for their acceptance in the vernacular. The need to advertise the practice emanated from an assumed strategy of discourse that placed a priority on encouraging the reader to question the foundational authority of language such that the reading public might play a role in improving the manner in which narrative discourse was understood. Specifically, his hopes were to reform the shortcomings of a dominant discourse that, as many of his poems explicitly state, had damaged communities in a variety of ways.

'To breast the final hill' (Auden 1986, V: 24), 'Endless with no dissenting turn' (VII, 25), 'Spring's green preliminary shiver, passed a solitary truck' (VII: 25) 'the stone smile of the country god' (VII: 25), 'walking together in the windless orchard' (IX: 26), 'had scalded to the bone (XII: 28), 'But cheek to cheek, and dear to dear' (XIV: 30) are just some examples of anthropomorphic clusters which Auden nests alongside other perfectly ordinary images, standardised tropes, which inhabit a typical Auden poem of the early stage.

In Poem II, occupying the very centre of his first page of published poetry, Auden presents the one clear line in the poem, 'And difficult images demand an explanation', alerting or perhaps petitioning the reader with the plea that a voice or speaker in the poem is, indeed, aware that the images he is presenting are demanding.

These contradictions introduce time as a variable in the history and development of words, where new words can become established while others flounder, while others still change their meaning entirely. John Boly refers to such words as 'inscripted'. Words possess a

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[19] 'Anthimeria: The substitution of one part of speech for another. I'll unhair they head', *Anthony and Cleopatra*, II.V.64 (Corbett 1965: 156 in Rifkin and Ryan 2004).

history and a time-line but, heirs to the language, ordinary readers understandably make the assumption that the meaning of words is fixed as they learn such meanings before they are old enough to discriminate. If insinuated words can re-describe reality, words and the concepts they support can be unlearned, as new substitutes words gain currency.[20]

The time factor is significant because Auden's poetry attempts to use established words in English to serve as a platform to generate new ones. Stan Smith relates *how The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* (1993) contains forty citations from Auden's work, 'sharing with Yeats (fifty citations) and T.S. Eliot (fifty-seven citations) a talent for turning the memorable phrase' (Smith 2004: 2).

In the process of attempting to pioneer and popularise a new literary aesthetic with anthropomorphism as its centrepiece, Auden recognised that real, lasting change could never result from ideological persuasion alone.

From Poem XXII (Auden: 35)

…Will you turn **a deaf ear**,

To what they said on the shore,

Interrogate their poises

In their **rich houses ….**   (1929)

To refer to a 'house' as 'rich' appears innocuous, a simple adjective describing or modifying a simple noun. The coupling of 'rich' and 'houses' is not a particularly challenging arrangement of words. The locution is scarcely recognisable as anthropomorphic, except

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[20] 'The independence between sound and meaning is believed to be a crucial property of language: across languages, sequences of different sounds are used to express similar concepts (e.g., Russian "ptitsa," Swahili "ndege," and Japanese "tori" all mean "bird"). However, a careful statistical examination of words from nearly two-thirds of the world's languages reveals that unrelated languages very often use (or avoid) the same sounds for specific referents'. http://www.pnas.org/content/early/2016/09/06/1605782113.abstract .

perhaps among grammarians or linguists. Yet, the occupants of the 'rich houses' are effaced, de-personified, and reconfigured to become a house they own or occupy.

The anthropomorphic term 'absentee landlord', which entered the language in the nineteenth-century the result of agrarian activism that highlighted the damage inflicted upon ordinary people by the rentier class, performs a similar function. The absentee landlord is reduced to a type. He is de-personified. One notable land agent (of Huguenot origin) Captain Charles Boycott (1832-1897), lent his name to the collective action of tenants (in Ireland) who protested his land-management practices. 'Rich houses' abstracts people by personifying a house that acts as a synecdoche for its 'apostrophised' occupants. It is also a metonym.

Where people can be personified and reduced to their civilian functions, 'rich houses', 'all hands on deck', 'stronger together', a process of personification occurs. Where body parts are endowed with autonomous (from the mind) agency, 'turn a deaf ear', 'lay down your sleeping head', this represents a different type of paradigmatic deployment and can join the manifest variety under review in this study.

'The Auden effect' (Smith 2004: 3) partly resides in the poet's ability to present stock, normative, radical, and semi-radical anthropomorphic images such that the reader, particularly of the early poems, becomes witness to the remaking of a language:

from Poem XIII

…**Sharers of our day**, though smiling of, but nothing known,

What industries decline, what chances are of revolution,

What **murders flash**

Under **composed flesh ….**   (1929)

from XVII

…Fear, taking me aside, would give advice

'to conquer her, **the visible enemy**,

It is enough to turn away the eyes'.

Yet there's no peace in **this assaulted city**

But **speeches at the corners**, hoping for news,

Outside the watchfires of a stronger enemy ….   (1929)

'A deaf ear', the 'stronger enemy' and the 'assaulted city' of Poem XII and XVII are either stock (reified) or normative (novel but unexceptional) anthropomorphisms as they ascribe human attributes to things, an army, a city and an ear, but, again, so common is the tendency and their incidence in English that Auden is clearly using them to establish a degree of familiarity which serves as a platform for the introduction of more daring, radical or semi-radical deployments.

Even if a reader refuses to accept that 'assaulted city' and 'stronger enemy' (qua 'white house', 'a dark cold day') are in fact anthropomorphic – a not unreasonable, but certainly not a definitive, refusal – the role these pairings play in the poem is to function as enablers for Auden's more daring pairings. Dead metaphors, as they are commonly referred to, enable more vital and creative deployments, while both balance the poems as more radical imposters challenge more conservative elements to reveal a tension between the old and the new.

Once familiar images are rendered, Auden typically (but not always) introduces more adventurous trope deployments. In doing so, he is continuing a trend, his habit, metaphorically speaking, of deploying Trojan horses, more radical or semi radical pairings or arrangements of words, which he smuggles in to challenge or modify existing uses, and, of course, to occasionally audition for permanent status within the language.

In his elegy for Yeats, in the opening sequence to this study, Auden's working method can be observed in greater detail. Having established the habit and obliquely reminded his readers of the extent to which everyday language is suffused with proximal or strategic anthropomorphisms, whether snow disfiguring, airports deserting, squares emptying, provinces invading, and so on, he then deploys a semi-radical anthropomorphism, 'the peasant river was untempted by the fashionable quays', and 'news of his death was kept from his poems', to particular effect, gradually building credibility and lulling the reader into the poem with a mixture of known and previously unknown images.

By defying the expectations of readers, groomed to expect poetry to look and sound a particular way, Auden had the larger aim of provoking a reaction from society while also attempting to supply incremental additions to its language. Even where these additions might ultimately be rejected by the reading public, their audition infused awareness of the practice.

In the last line of *Poem I* (1927), for example, he refers to 'weeping argument', which is derived from the commonplace term 'sweeping argument'. 'Weeping argument' is an anthropomorphism while 'sweeping argument', though thoroughly anthropomorphic, slips under the reader's radar because, typically, the reader reads poetry to focus on whatever the poet is trying to say and is secondarily focused on the language the poet is using. Remaining vigilant to both is crucial. His use of the words seems more of a witticism than any attempt to audition a new anthropomorphism.

Auden certainly has much of Falstaff in him, frequently slapping his thighs as he hums along to the sound of his own jokes and puns. It is difficult to read Auden and not get the sense that he was having a fine old time, ripping up convention, tearing down the edifice, punning here, joking over there, while delivering body blows to several centuries of poetic tradition. In terms of novelty, the presence of Finnegan's Wake and, to a lesser extent, Virginia Woolf's stream of consciousness novels must have been a consideration for him as he sought to create a tradition of his own.

By presenting, deforming and sometimes reforming established words, and by denying readers' expectations regarding how poetry traditionally looks and sounds, Auden implicitly reminded readers that Standard English Usage is not permanent, that it is subject to change. By presenting poems that often made no literal sense to the reader, Auden achieved two things.

Firstly, the lack of 'sense' in the poems draws attention to the activity of reading and the process by which a word can become standardised and part of Standard English usage. While it is dangerous to speculate that Auden blocked access to meaning as a way of drawing the reader's attention to the way language functions, it often seems as if he did. His reference or plea to the reader to entertain his 'difficult images' would seem to confirm as much.

Secondly, by presenting a series of poems that appeared to lack sense, Auden valorised subjective utterance over classic composition, akin to the manner that modern art at that time was also attempting to do. Picasso's one-eyed or three-eyed portraits presented objects, not as they are in reality, but as they are perceived by an individual, in this case, presumably the artist.

The entire last sentence of Poem I (Auden: 21) reads as follows:

Features, figure, form irrelevant, dismissed

Ought passes through points fair plotted and you conform,

Seen yes or no, too just for weeping argument.

Even where a reader thinks he can make sense of these lines, developing the imagery to create a plausible narrative, the reader's primary attention is forced to focus on the language of the poem and on the poet's larger aims, if any, in constructing it, and others like it. Auden's alternative or derivative phrasing both underscores how familiar the words 'sweeping argument' are in common English usage while also offering or assigning the reader a role in deciphering a variation of an established coupling.

This semi-radical pairing of 'weeping argument' also presents the reader with a new image which, with time, might become part of the compendium of stock English phrases, though the practice of exposing how established couplings, such as 'sweeping argument', actually are in Standard English usage appears to have been his primary aim, at least in this poem. Derrida refers to this process of interminable renewal, as *usure* (Paxson 1994: 168), described earlier, which Paxson describes as the exhausting of the metaphor's original potency.

Paxson explains that all figural language undergoes *usure*, but the very initial existence of such language entails the engagement of a cognitive process Derrida labels *rélevér*. Related to Hegel's term *aufheben*, *rélevér* is, according to James Paxson, 'the impulse of a language to revitalise itself, to uplift itself to a pristine significational [sic] condition' (Paxson 1994: 168).

Auden appears to inculcate an awareness of how semi-formed or incomplete, how provisional and `improvable', all language can be, how it is that humans use language to say things but also how fluency masks the simple fact that words are invariably deployed in a habitual way, in collocations, habits of speech that are so engrained and automatic that native readers tend to forget the debt that is owed to fluency.

Emig's extended treatment of this issue, though it gets slightly ahead of this chapter's scope, is worth excerpting, both for restating some of the assertions made in this study thus far, and also for framing the argument such that the theoretical platform for Auden's strategy of discourse can be identified and examined:

> But unlike Eliot's extended images which derive from an unspeakable centre of meaning, or Pound's layers of translation which illustrate the search for the correct expression and thus a distrust of language, Auden's verbal acrobatics are not the expression of a struggle against language, but rather an assault on the concept of a firm reality underneath it. His early poems attack the belief in referents with that unlimited ammunition of language, signifiers.

In the poem 'No Change of Place' … the second stanza starts with the lines 'Metals run/burnished or rusty in the sun' From town to town' … 'Metals' are, of course, rails; the *mot juste* is there, the signified is easily identifiable and not at all a difficult abstraction or a transcendental concept, but related to a concrete referent.

The reluctance to use the proper term is the very foundation of poetry, but that explains Auden's transgression of the linguistic rules as little as blaming it on his intellectual ingeniousness which sometimes verges on flippancy. The much more serious *motif* underlying his excesses of his vocabulary (which in his later poetry leads to a menacing of the Oxford English Dictionary) has been described … as a stress on the autonomy of language and its potential as a tool rather than a link between concepts and reality.

One can be more precise and claim that Auden's early poems put their entire trust in signifiers. They exercise an important shift in language in modernity; the concept of the sign eventually ceases to function as the binary concept of the sign (the signifier/signified dichotomy as developed by Saussure). As an outcome of modernity, but also relativising many of its main assumptions, the signifier eventually becomes privileged over the signified. The signal achieves predominance, while concepts related to it are increasingly questioned and often abandoned. Jacques Derrida is the theorist whose work describes this shift most fully (Emig: 19-20).

Citing Derrida's essay '*Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences*', Emig explains that this 'often misunderstood term' …'The concept of center and presence' … 'refers to the transformations and creations of the material – themselves organised – out of which concepts are formed: language, in short'. Emig continues:

One of these transformations is, of course, the poetic function of language. When traditional views of poetry speak about poems creating a world of their own, we find in them the problem in a pre-theoretical nutshell. When this alternative world seriously questions the existence of a 'real' world or problematises its relations to it, we are faced with a poetics that privileges the signifier, questions the givenness of signifieds, and

denies the simplistic belief in a link with objective referents. Derrida formulates this as an 'event' in the history of the concept of structure: The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification indefinitely (Emig: 20).

Emig adds that 'This shift of emphasis on signification is one of the benchmarks of the concept of postmodernity', adding that 'Referents are indeed regarded with suspicion in Auden's early writings. Reality is at best a vague notion; often it completely gives way to surreal flux. This explains the constant vacillation between the abstract and the concrete, and the resulting difficulties of pinning down the meaning of his compound signifiers whose individual parts seem so easy to grasp at first sight' (Emig: 20).

Emig does not address Auden's use of anthropomorphism but were he to attempt to designate a linguistic exemplar 'that questions the existence of a 'real world', by definition the trope's essential activity of replacing signs with unexpected or radical replacements would seem to qualify it as a literary device of choice to accomplish the act of undermining trust in the foundational authority of language by 'privileging the signifier', while also 'questioning the givenness of signifieds' by breaking the 'link with objective referents'.

Emig further examines the 'distrust in reality' in 'Auden's early works' by identifying the role of 'the question', 'Who stands, the crux left of the watershed', ' Under boughs, between our tentative endearments, how should we hear', 'Will you turn a deaf ear' (poems examined later), which he says 'shift the poems at once into the realm of the intellect', so creating 'an explicitly anti-sensual, anti-Romantic, and clinical imagination' (Emig: 21).

Sounding very much like John Boly, Emig adds that 'Reality is constantly shown to be the playing-field of the mind, and this dominance of the intellect is as arrogant as it is painful in its solipsistic isolation. Even pseudo-naturalistic descriptions, such as the derelict mines in '*The Watershed*', are depicted as mental landscapes, not so much those of a meditation, but of ruthless analysis. Intellect swallows all experience and transforms it into words, into signifiers. Any other grasp of reality is impossible' (Emig: 21).

Finding himself, his generation, and his community, reeling in a post-Romantic and now dilapidated landscape, one that was 'mis-shaped' ultimately by the community's trust in authority, the presiding voice of the poems traces the fallout to a defect or a mal-practice in the use of language. The community suffered a wholesale betrayal and if the words for things were the means by which the community found itself in such poor shape, language, Auden seems to be implying, is the locus where the entire project might still be saved, by *inter alia* replacing some of those words and ideas with new ones.

The predominance of intellect in the poems, with their focus on words and their trustworthiness, is the unavoidable tool shop where the damage might be undone, where paradise might yet be regained. At the very least, intellect was a way that the community might come to terms with being cast out of Eden, with Auden's presiding voice, acting as a one person Greek chorus or conscience, to stage-manage the chaos.

While many of Auden's anthropomorphisms have gained currency in English ('a low dishonest decade', 'memorable speech', to mention two), it becomes clear that where he deploys un-aesthetic or outlandish anthropomorphisms, that clearly have little chance of ever joining the pantheon of recognised words in English, it must be assumed that their deployment is down to a misjudgement on the part of the poet, or else they are serving an altogether different function. This divide polarised critics when the early poetry first appeared.

For example, the following lines from Poem XXVI (*The Creatures*), written in 1936, contain multiple anthropomorphisms and a style which probably owes more to the era of Bunyan (1628-1688) and Milton (1608-1674) than to the twentieth-century, but it seems safe to say that Auden never anticipated that the public should suddenly start trading in moral aphorisms, the likes of which the following lines (Auden: 158) advertise:

They are our past and our future: the poles between which **our desire**

    unceasingly **is discharged**.   (Anthropomorphisms in bold)

A desire in which **love and hatred** so perfectly **oppose themselves** that

we cannot voluntarily move; but await **the extraordinary compulsion of the deluge and the earthquake,**

Their affections and indifferences have been a guide to all reformers and tyrants.

Far more probable, at least in this instance, is the likelihood that Auden is focused less on language and more on dissecting and atomising power. Just as Auden is said to have been able to 'instantly visualise the system of codes which shaped a work' (Boly 2004: 137), the reader of an Auden poem must try to see where the poet is placing his emphasis, whether on language and novelty, or on content, or, very occasionally, both. Rainer Emig observes that:

> Although the basic images in Auden's early poems seem fairly easy to comprehend, the texts prove remarkably evasive when it comes to questions of meaning (Emig 2000: 9).

The only conclusion that can be drawn, if Emig's observation is accepted as accurate, is that either Auden has lost control of his materials, or the evasions of the text are tactical and serve Auden's larger purpose in drawing the reader's attention to, *inter alia*, the processes of *usure* and *rélevér.*

To capture this event in linguistic terms, Paul Ricoeur, though not addressing Auden's work, explains that 'the metaphoric that transgresses the categorical order also begets it' (Ricoeur 2003: 26). This is precisely what Ricoeur has in mind where he speaks of 'redescribing reality' (Ricoeur: 5). The earlier coupling, 'weeping argument', represents the transgression while the new suggested meaning(s) beget(s) a new reality, a new meaning.

This is the *sine qua non*, the essential condition of anthropomorphism.

Lakoff and Johnson argue that 'The metaphoric innovations of poets are shown … to consist not in the totally new creation of metaphoric thought but in the marshalling of already existing forms of metaphoric thought to form new extensions and combinations of old metaphoric mappings' (Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, Afterword 2003, 1980: 266).

In Auden's poetry, where 'sweeping argument' becomes 'weeping argument', this process of 'a marshalling of already existing forms of metaphoric thought' can be witnessed 'to form new extensions and combinations of old metaphoric mappings'.

Auden's revival of anthropomorphism represents the return of a long banished literary and linguistic device capable of exposing the foundations of language to scrutiny. By abstracting power though not supplying local or identifiable detail, as he does in Poem XXVI (*The Creatures*: 158), for example, Auden's personified abstractions, affection and indifference, who the poem says 'have been a guide to all reformers and tyrants', function as impersonal cautionary sentinels that warn the reader about the way power operates.

This is but one example of how he helped readers to understand the stratagems of truth-telling, and how to identify 'when we are being deceived by others' (Auden 1996, *Prose*, Vol. I: xxxiii), which he described as 'the primary task of the teacher of English', a pronouncement he made after returning from Spain in 1937. John Boly makes the point that:

> Auden knew that to hold power over someone is not to impose a specific (and easily forgotten) truth, but to induce that person to construct reality in a predictable way. For Auden, modern society is composed of technologies and bureaucracies that, though invented by human beings, are no longer controlled by them. Anywhere one turns, including (especially) the depths of the innermost self, a presiding voice, vestige of the romantic *genius loci*, stands guard as the agent of these social forces.

> Language offers a particularly effective means of repression because it gives these interests the capacity to enter an individual and, in effect, to become that person's own voice...Reading Auden, then, is partly a matter of outwitting a dominant voice (in effect,

outwitting oneself as the conjurer of that voice) by patiently tracing its repressive stratagems (Boly 1991: x).[21]

This excerpt gives prominence to the power of ventriloquism, where a young poet with unusual abilities might seek to attempt to reform his society by attempting to reform the habit of reading which 'designates the entire shaping process through which a too fluent world is forged into solid truth' (Boly 1991: ix). Auden dramatizes something of this process in *The Shield of Achilles*, in poetry that could pass for prose, how:

> Out of the air a voice without a face
>
> Proved by statistics that some cause was just
>
> In tones as dry and level as the place:
>
> No one was cheered and nothing was discussed;
>
> Column by column in a cloud of dust
>
> They marched away enduring a belief
>
> Whose logic brought them, somewhere else, to grief.   (in Boly1991: 125)

By relocating a discussion of power to Ancient Greece and by offering a cautionary tale regarding the fatal outcome of unchecked ideology, Auden encourages the reader to draw the simple moral, exposing with minimal outlay how the voice of a poet can enter the individual reader's mind. This is a very simplistic description of a complex ongoing process but to deny the power of ventriloquism is to suggest that fables, aphorisms and morality plays have no impact

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[21] 'The industry needs to control the story by controlling the lexicon through creative, positive words that tell a vivid story and lock out the language of critics', alludes to the 'seductive coercion' John Boly highlights (Boly: x). (Excerpt from *Counterpunch* Magazine, 2015).

on the manner in which truths are forged. This would be very wrong though, as always, their impact on the individual reader and on the larger reading public is immeasurable.

John Boly's assertions affirm the manner in which a poet might be effective as an agent who could manipulate language and reading, and not merely concern him or herself with trying to persuade readers to a particular course of action, 'an easily forgotten truth', as Boly calls it. Much more influential is it, to attempt to influence the manner in which readers construct or deconstruct reality. In classic psychoanalytic theory, *ego* replacing *id*, the intellect is the location where problems are first identified, well before any emotional shift can occur.

Reforming society, by attempting to influence it at the level of language and not simply at the level of truths, appealed to Auden. Partisan perspectives shocked him. He was shocked by what he saw in Barcelona during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) where the faction he supported committed atrocities. 'Both nationalists and Republicans were behaving with remarkable cruelty to those of opposing sympathies who happened to be on the wrong side of the battle line' (Carpenter 1981: 214).

Auden's efforts to inaugurate a new aesthetic were ultimately adjudged somewhat premature, largely because critics struggled to comprehend them; but Auden's warnings regarding the power of ventriloquism are true today as they were in the 1930s. Quite how ready the already agitated English or British public were to embrace what might appear to be rather Epicurean options, while staring down the barrel of a gun, cannot be measured with any accuracy, yet the poet's prescient identification of the trope's potential impact on society's superstructure certainly defied historic 'attempts to institutionalise rhetoric' (Ricoeur 2003: 11).

Auden resurrected a trope 'condemned' by Plato (Ricoeur 2003: 11), and deemed dangerous by Aristotle who identified it as possessing the power to move the mob.[22] While

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[22] 'A reading of Aristotle tells us that we must begin cautiously. First of all, a simple examination of the table of contents of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* tells us that we have received the theory of figures of speech from a discipline that is not merely defunct but amputated as well… This sense of irredeemable loss increases all the more if we remember that the broad Aristotelian programme itself represented the rationalisation (if not reduction) of a discipline that in Syracuse, its birthplace, endeavoured to regulate all facets of public speech' (Ricoeur 1977: 9).

Aristotle's judgement may or may not have been sound, in terms of defending Ancient Athenian society and its privileges, English society during the 1930s was in need of a cure. In the absence of clear political leadership, public opinion had to be marshalled to move society toward choices that might avert immanent disaster. Auden's principles seem to have advocated that he remain aloof but the didactic schoolmaster in him preferred to speak out.

Recognising that 'philosophy cannot break the ties between discourse and power', Paul Ricoeur argues that, to Aristotle 'the possibility remained open, to delimit the legitimate uses of forceful speech, to draw the line between use and abuse…' (Ricoeur 2003: 11), providing one explanation why rhetoric in general, and anthropomorphism in particular, disappeared from public view.

'Attempts to institutionalise rhetoric' (Ricoeur 2003: 11) since the time of Aristotle, while intended to prevent the mob from carrying the day through force of numbers, nonetheless stripped rhetoric of one of its most important weapons, one which could threaten the designs of elites. Where such an elite failed to perform its duties adequately, a fair description of political leadership in England in the 1930s, Auden was trying to rehabilitate rhetoric such that it could regain its historic role to serve the will of the people.

Delimiting the legitimate uses of forceful speech had simply resulted in the disappearance from view of the *vox populi*, the common will intent on pursuing the common good. As a co-ordinate trope of Rhetoric, Auden would use the trope to try to move the reading public from what he saw as passive obeisance to activism, or at least greater awareness, by exposing the lack of fixity in the very same language that represented the means by which ideas are formed, communicated and, finally, absorbed by the public. This is something of a simplified overstatement but it broadly reflects Auden's larger aims.

It is interesting to read James Paxson's comments (below) regarding the importance of anthropomorphism not just to history but also to the present, his realisation that personifications can move masses of people to support a particular course of action. Certain

populations are, according to Alan Sinfield, 'probal to thinking' (Sinfield, *Cultural Materialism,* Rifkin and Ryan 1998: 745).

Writing in 1994 from the USA and just after the first Gulf War (the second Gulf War to residents of the Gulf as the 1982-1988 War is considered 'the first'), James Paxson, in the preface to his study, *The Poetics of Personification*, observes that:

> Although I argue in my book that we have moved past a historical era when personification literature was powerful and esteemed, I have looked suspiciously and curiously at governmental rhetoric of late; no one could miss the significance of President George W. Bush's charge against the One Evil Man, Saddam Hussein, who personified all the miseries of the 1990 Persian Gulf War and all the ills of contemporary Iraq (Paxson 1994: xi).

Paxson recognises and emphasises the exceptional nature of anthropomorphism, citing *inter alia* Paul de Man's bold claim for the trope:

> But 'anthropomorphism' is not just a trope but an identification on the level of substance. It takes one entity for another and thus implies the constitution of specific entities prior to their confusion, the taking of something for something else than can then be assumed to be *given*. Anthropomorphism freezes the infinite chain of tropological [sic] transformations and propositions into one single assertion or essence which, as such, excludes all others (de Man 1979: 33).

It was 'the constitution of specific entities', the 'given', that Auden sought to re-constitute by heightening awareness regarding how such constitutions are there to be amended if the reader is sufficiently motivated and aware to alter them, or support their alteration. According to Auden, 'The primary function of poetry':

> as of all the arts, is to make us more aware of ourselves and the world around us. I do not know if such increased awareness makes us more moral or more efficient. I hope not. I think it makes us more human, and I am quite certain it makes us more difficult to

deceive, which is why, perhaps, all totalitarian theories of the State, from Plato downwards, have deeply mistrusted the arts. They notice and say too much, and the neighbours start talking (WH Auden 1938, *Prose*, Vol. I, 1996, *Nonsense Poetry*: 470).

Regarding Auden's trope of choice, anthropomorphism, the Neapolitan and late-Renaissance scholar Giambattista Vico (1668-1744) observed that 'It is noteworthy that in all languages the greater part of the expressions relating to inanimate things are formed by metaphors from the human body and its parts and from human senses and passions' (Vico, *New Science*, para. 405: O'Neill 2004, *Five Bodies*, 2004: 11).

Vico's postulate, *Verum ipsum factum* (Croce 1913: 5)*, how *truth too is invented,* has relevance for this study for what it, and his book *The New Science*, can say or suggest regarding the formation of truth.[23] Vico's aphorism suggests that truth is verified through creation or invention and not, as Descartes asserted, through observation. If indeed poets are endowed with such creative agency, one of the questions this study will pose is whether poets or poetry can make anything happen.

By examining and exposing the trope's capacities to impact culture by the relatively simple tactic of suggesting alternative words for things, Auden was able to reveal the unique capacity (among tropes) of anthropomorphism to impact the ideological superstructure by thus challenging the artificial constructs that constitute language.

Auden's suggested replacement words expose the ornamental nature of language, 'the reduction of metaphor to a mere ornament' (Ricoeur 2003: 51), by refusing to acknowledge the permanence, the fixedness of language. He achieves this by presenting words, by dismantling words and then, by reconstructing them, somewhat in the manner James Joyce (1882-1941) did in *Finnegan's Wake*, by exposing the debt standard dictionary words owe to other words, to other eras, and to other languages.

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[23] Citing Vico, Croce explains that 'Again, he says that "the aim of poetry is to give life to the lifeless," since its most sublime task is to give life and sensation to insensible objects… He says that poetry has as its special subject-matter "the impossible made credible": for instance, it is impossible that body should be mind, and yet it was believed that the thundering of the sky was Jupiter' (Croce 1913: Ch.4, 54).

Auden constantly reminding the reader that 'that which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet' (Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, II.i.43-44). Auden reminds the reader how language is regarded by succeeding generations as fixed, and so reified. Juliet, exposing the arbitrariness of words, asks 'What's Montague? It is nor hand nor foot, Nor arm nor face, nor any other part Belonging to a man' (40-41).

The deployment of words which might be termed 'imposters' or 'pretenders'; new metaphors and tropes that impersonate or loosely approximate or adumbrate existing ones, challenges the established order with the aim of reminding the reader of Francis Bacon's statement that 'words are but the images of matter' (Francis Bacon 1893, *The Advancement of Learning:* 39).

As a linguistic event, Ricoeur cites the work of Pierre Fontanier who James Paxson describes as the 'last rhetorician in Europe' (Paxson 1994: 9):

What Fontanier says about newly invented metaphors confirms the close relationship between the trope and the living event of actual speech… all usage tends to become habitual, and metaphor tends to resemble catachresis [24] ... However, it appears in a more and more fixed and standardised fashion, and, in a sense, can be said to be 'part of the foundations of language' – that is, it begins to act like a literal meaning… This point leads us to set up an internal distinction with regard to figure, parallel to that between figure and catachresis; this is a distinction between initial use and the eventual usage that can become 'forced in present-day speech' (Ricoeur 2003: 71-2).

Auden's anthropomorphisms attempt to span the distance between established uses and new ones. Ricoeur, again citing Fontanier, observes that 'To give colour, to astonish and surprise through new an unexpected combinations, to breathe force and energy into discourse – so many impulses express themselves only in the figure tropes, which must be called "writer's tropes" since they are "the special creation of poets" ' (Ricoeur 2003: 73).

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[24] Strained or paradoxical use of words either in error, as 'blatant' to mean 'flagrant', or deliberately as in a mixed metaphor: 'blind mouths'.

This is what Ricoeur is referring to where, earlier, he states that 'metaphor presents itself as a strategy of discourse that, while preserving and developing the creative power of language, preserves and develops the heuristic power wielded by fiction'(Ricoeur 2003: 5).

A brief biographical detail from Auden's own family life reveals the subtle, often imperceptible shifts in the social and cultural perspective of a society. In 1899, when Auden's mother, Constance Rosalie Bicknell, had consented to marry Auden's father, George Augustus Auden, a medical doctor, she was advised against the union on social grounds, on the basis of class distinction:

'Marry him if you must, but no one will call on you' (Carpenter 1981: 2) warned one of her aunts, presumably mindful that 'The status of doctors in Edwardian society was ambiguous to say the least' (4).

Biographer Humphrey Carpenter relates how 'In the York street directory, Dr Auden, like other medical men, was not listed under *Private Residents* , but under *Commercial* – which amounted to saying that doctors were little better than tradesmen' (4). The inference here is that Auden's father had suffered to be de-personified due to his occupation, a subjective grouping or typecasting which threatened his social and reproductive prospects, thereby negatively defining him according to the social contract, as it was understood in late nineteenth-century England. Such an admission seems remarkable by today's standards. The story highlights how fickle and how ephemeral a commodity is truth, or what passes for truth.

Or, as Salman Rushdie says, speaking of stereotypes, in a 1984 essay entitled *Outside the Whale,* that they 'are easier to shrug off if yours is not the culture being stereotyped; or, at the very least, if your culture has the power to counterpunch against the stereotype' (Rushdie, *Granta* Magazine, 1984). T.S. Eliot describes something of the process of being subject to such a formulation, in his poem *The Love-song of J. Alfred Prufrock*:

And I have known the eyes already, known them all—

The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,

And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,

When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,

Then how should I begin…   ('*Prufrock*': lines 55-59)

To deny the influence of what Rushdie and Eliot are referring to, as somehow unworthy of serious attention, is to deny the relationship of activism to change. Alexis de Tocqueville made the observation in *Democracy in America* that the determining factor in Post-Colonial America in avoiding the kinds of revolution experienced in Europe in the eighteenth century was the tendency among Americans to promote the capable from within the so-called lower classes.

On page one of that work, Tocqueville observes that 'The value attached to the privileges of birth decreased in the exact proportion in which new paths were struck out to advancement' (Tocqueville 1851: 4). He adds that:

> the divisions which once severed mankind are lowered, property is divided,[25] power is held in common, the light of intelligence spreads, and the capacities of all classes are equally cultivated; the State becomes democratic, and the empire of democracy is slowly and peaceably introduced into the institutions and the manners of the nation.

Personification or de-personification occurs where cultural entities of any description are subjected to any special treatment that highlights their caste, their perceived or actual attributes at the expense of their individual selves. To explain, in abstract terms, the implications of the dilemma the young Constance Rosalie Bicknell faced, the following excerpt can help situate her choice:

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[25] It is curious also to consider that, beginning in the USA in the 1990s, it was the very effort to 'divide property' among the citizenry, making them stakeholders in society, that saw a massive reduction in the need for substantial housing deposits for would be home owners. This, combined with the deregulation of the derivatives market, which allowed mortgage debt to be credit-rated and sold on, contributed to the housing bubble and the collapse of the financial markets in 2008.

Along with abstractions, animals, and objects that can be translated into a personifier, we find suppressed in the domain of the personified all categories of Otherness; infants and children, women, the aged, the feeble-minded, insane or inform, and members of ethnic, religious, occupational, or racial minorities (Paxson 1994: 50).

Implicit in the concept of the personifier are capacities not only of human physiology, sentience, intelligence, and language in general, but also maleness, adulthood (but not old age), bourgeois, financial and social standing, (including standard bourgeois level education), membership in the white race – in short, all the properties that constitute the valorized facets of the ideological superstructure of the complete "society" depicted in the Western personification apologue of the modern Christian era (Paxson: 50).

Evidently, Edwardian England had a very limited view of who exactly qualified as a *bona fide* member of the middle and upper classes and while George Augustus Auden was educated, white and of good financial standing, he was nonetheless deemed to be beyond the pale so far as high society was concerned. Though Anglican, the matter of religion had been somewhat resolved in previous centuries.

Whether Auden consciously deployed the unfashionable trope as part of his larger reformist project cannot be known or stated with any certainty, but as personification theorist James Paxson insists, 'whether consciously or unconsciously executed', the trope may be regarded as a serious actor, a 'revolutionary' and 'counter-cultural' 'tactic'(Paxson 1994: 173) in the struggle to appropriate culture.

In his detailed study of Auden's efforts to reform the everyday practice of reading, John Boly speaks of the poet's realisation that perhaps the poet's most useful function in the modern world might be to expose the discursive stratagems of the written and the spoken word, an issue Auden addressed in prose:

The propagandist, whether moral or political, complains that the writer should use his powers over words to persuade people to a particular action, instead of fiddling while

Rome burns. But poetry is not concerned with telling people what to do, but with extending our knowledge of good and evil, perhaps making the necessity for action more urgent and its nature more clear, but only leading us to the point where it is possible for us to make a rational and a moral choice (WH Auden 1935, Introduction to *The Poet's Tongue*, *Prose*, Vol. I, 1996: 108).

Boly's observation regarding the role of the poet in shaping culture has enormous implications not only for poets and poetry but also for society, if poets were to assume the role of helping readers to learn to read with discrimination, to assume the role of what Boly calls an 'auditor'; 'as a meticulous and not very reassuring reviewer, a contentious respondent, the difficult person, someone who hears a bit too well' (Boly 1991: 2).

In a section of an essay published in 1967 entitled *The Defects of our Hearers*, about reader-response in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Stanley Fish observes that 'The deep distrust, even fear, of verbal manipulation in the seventeenth-century is a recognition of the fact that there is no adequate defence against eloquence at the moment of impact. Fish explains that 'The appeal of rhetoric was traditionally associated with the weakness of the fallen intellect – the defect [sic] of our hearers, its fine phrases flatter the desires of the cupidinous self and perpetuate the disorder which has reigned in the soul since the Fall. In other words, you can analyse the process of deception only after it is successful' (Fish 1967 in Rifkin and Ryan: 197).

Much of Auden's early poetry is an analysis of industrial decline that required a high level of cooperation on the part of the community and, according to Auden, a high level of deception by industrialists and the political and intellectual classes.

Boly's study, (*Reading Auden, The Returns of Caliban*) suggests that 'the main task for poetry is to maintain the possibility of an auditor's alternative reading, as a non-compliant, dissenting respondent'. Boly's point is that the reader should not be dictated to by the authoritarian text, a text that never listens. The reader, he asserts, should answer back. In a somewhat similar vein, writing in 1939, Auden suggests that:

teachers will realise that their first job now is to take part in political action, for as long as society is [as] unequal as it is, the whole idea of democratic education is a sham. Unless all of the members of a community are educated to the point where they can make a rational choice, democracy is a sham.

The combination of social inequality with democratic forms of government means either mob rule or democratic rule by those who know best to handle and inflame the mob. The primary demand of all educationalists must be for equality of educational opportunity; otherwise, the first law of democracy – that environment should master heredity -is violated (WH Auden 1996, written in 1939, Vol. I, *Democracy's Challenge to the Challenge of Dictators*: 466).

The need to present the larger picture, to present anthropomorphism against the larger backdrop of Auden's reformist project of reshaping, or at least, influencing culture by attempting to collaboratively re-educate readers is, necessarily, to avoid the mistakes of the past which consigned trope deployments in particular and the discipline of rhetoric, more generally, to the condition of 'futility' (Ricoeur 2003: 9-10).

Janice Lauer's 2004 study of *Invention in Rhetoric* accedes to the view expressed in T*oward a Modern Theory of Rhetoric* which suggests that 'The strength and worth of rhetoric tends to become a superficial and marginal concern when it is separated from systematic methods of inquiry' (Lauer 2004: 1).

This imperative, to contextualise the appearance of tropes in poetry or language is the implicit position of Richard McKeon, Janice Lauer, Paul Ricoeur and James Paxson whose separate works have traced the demise of rhetoric and the study of rhetorical tropes to identify what James Paxson refers to as 'the degenerate legacy of classical logic and rhetoric in the Middle Ages and after' (Paxson 1994: 8). James Paxson relates that:

The history of rhetoric as it has been written since the Renaissance is ... in part the distressing record of the obtuseness of writers who failed to study the classics and to

apply rhetoric to literature, and in part the monotonous enumeration of doctrines, or preferably sentences, repeated from Cicero of commentators on Cicero (McKeon in Paxson 1994: 9).

It is against this backdrop, that of re-examining some of the fundamental assumptions of the practice of reading, that this study will examine the roles that anthropomorphism plays, with its unique capacities to 'critique' culture (Paxson 1994: 50) and 'to re-describe reality' (Ricoeur 2003, *The Rule of Metaphor*: 5), within the poetry of WH Auden.

This study will examine Auden's attempts to break with Modernism, in keeping with a trend whereby 'a significant part of the literature of the 1930s is determined to engage with the actualities of its time' (Emig 2000: 1) and where writers like Auden pave 'the way for a poetics of postmodernism' (sic) (Emig: 3).

Auden did not simply break with Modernism for the sake of breaking with it. He broke with Modernism because he felt that it had ceased to address the needs of the people, had failed to observe or maintain the symbolic contract, the relationship between poets and people that Edward Mendelson describes as:

the common frame of reference and expectation that joins a poet with a finite audience, and joins both with the subject of his poems (Mendelson 1981: xviii).

The challenges for this study will be to show the relevance of what Auden was doing to larger societal concerns, to connect the writing of poetry to the fate of civilised norms. It is quite reasonable for people to dismiss the activity of poetry as peripheral to such larger concerns but those familiar with Auden's prose writings will affirm his insistence that the connection is real, that poetry can remain relevant if proponents of the art, and readers, are helped to become (or to remain) sufficiently aware of the importance of the unfashionable art, poetry, to civilised life.

A book review Auden wrote in January 1942 somewhat captures the nexus between art and life, while also answering the honest doubts readers may have about poetry, particularly during a time of war:

> To be spending the day of America's entry into the war in criticising a literary critic may seem preposterous, but, perhaps, it is more relevant than appears at first sight. To be living in the greatest revolutionary epoch since the Reformation means, firstly, that all our activities, political, economic, religious and cultural are involved, and, secondly, that the external conflict of classes and nations and political systems is paralleled by an equally intense internal conflict in every individual.

> We are perhaps less conscious of this than we should be; we are all too ready to accuse others of being fascists, Reds, Bourgeois, or what-have-you, but all too reluctant to admit the sinister presence of a Fifth Column within our own personal mind and heart. Yet, unless we realise that a collective political victory over Germany and Japan, and a personal victory over ourselves are mutually interdependent aspects of the same problem, our chances of winning either battle are small (Auden 1942, *Prose*, Vol. II, *La Trahison d'un Clerc*: 148).

Auden's rather Jungian injunction, that each individual withdraw his shadow, to remove the mote from his own eye, is an affirmation that irrespective of laws and rules, cultures and religious imperatives, the business of civilisation really comes down to the good faith people can display regarding the views of those whom they are ideologically or otherwise opposed to.

This assumes a knowledge or at least an awareness of history, of human character, and of the need to behave decently, to behave in a way that exhibits self-respect by, ultimately, exhibiting respect for others, to extend to them the same benefits that they enjoy, benefits which are the gift of previous generations. Auden is appealing to the individual to overcome his baser instincts. 'In the prison of his days, teach the free man how to praise' (Auden 1939: 243). Auden's appeal is also an implicit appeal for poetry, how, for it to remain relevant as the place one goes to discuss important, topical issues, the reader is crucial.

Auden reminds the reader that the personal (in a way one that cannot be measured) is the political, that however much people might rail against the idea, systems are the fruit of individuals. Moreover, while the opposite is also true, Auden is appealing to the individual by reminding him of the real basis for the social contract. Or, as Shakespeare managed to say, in fewer words:

For there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.

To me it is a prison.   (*Hamle*t: II.ii.212)

Chapter Two – Critical Reception

In the early 1930s, 'eager to create a tradition of its own' (Emig 2000: 1), Auden ambitiously envisaged the reform of English language and culture by attempting to introduce a new literary aesthetic which, risking his burgeoning reputation as a fledgling poet, he hoped he could foist upon the literary scene and the reading public, as Auden Estates executor Edward Mendelson explains:

> Before he set out on his international wanderings Auden had tried to make all England his arena and audience, the place he could alter with his poems (Mendelson 1981: 334).

It is important to draw a distinction here between England as 'the place that Auden could alter with his poems', and any impact his work might have on English poetry. Today, it is very difficult to conceive of poetry ever being in any position to change the socio-political and cultural direction of a country, but this is exactly what Auden imagined he might be able to do.

Auden's new style appeared to break with literary tradition by refusing 'the inherited forms' of modernism (Porter 2004: 128) or 'to accept the great models of its time' (Emig 2000: 1). The trouble was that 'his ideas' were 'at best difficult to grasp' (Emig: 2). Auden's poems looked and sounded nothing like the poetry of his literary forbears.

Before examining that new style, and the problems critics had in coming to terms with his new aesthetic, it is worth pausing to ask, precisely, what was it about the poetry that came before that Auden deemed inadequate or unsuitable as a suitable vehicle for poetry? Where Rainer Emig asserts (earlier) that 'Auden's poetry denied reverence to contemporary standards such as free-verse, and refuses to accept the great models of its time, Yeats and Eliot', he explains that 'instead it prefers decidedly unfashionable poetic ancestors, such as Hoffman and Kipling, and forms as dusty as Icelandic sagas and Anglo-Saxon verse' (Emig: 1).

Emig comments on the proliferation of 1930s publications which used the word 'new', 'New Signatures, New Country … New Verse and New Writing', suggesting that the 'New' of these anthologies and periodicals always means 'more than mere artistic innovation – as it does

in the various modernist avant garde movements', how the 'New' always 'includes a political stand, usually a left-wing position that occasionally drifts toward doctrinaire Marxism'. Emig observes that 'Unlike Eliot's absurd royalism, Yeats's esoteric flirting with right-wing ideologies, and Pound's outspoken, yet equally ineffectual support for Mussolini that derives from an imagined lineage connecting Italian fascism with ancient Chinese emperors, a significant part of the literature of the 1930s', as mentioned earlier, 'is determined to engage with the actualities of its time' (Emig: 1).

Emig adds that, furthermore, the new poetry 'tries to respond to them actively, often by appropriating styles of propaganda', describing a situation where poetry either failed to address topical concerns or else became too involved and too adept at promoting this ideology or that. 'This commitment to the political and economic landscape of their time has proved fatal for many writers of the Thirties, and this includes Auden' because, Emig summarises, even today Auden is recalled as ' the foremost poet of the Thirties', how 'Auden's poems depict the industrial decline in England's North; Auden's poems take sides in the political conflicts of the time', descriptions that Emig describes as 'some of today's standard responses to his works' (Emig: 2).

'Equally common', Emig adds, 'is the problem that, even for those who appreciate his poems today, it is difficult to justify their taste' because 'Auden's indisputable technical brilliance very often presents itself in mere witticisms; his descriptions usually defy firm classifications; his ideas are at best difficult to grasp, if not contradictory or encoded in private references… The political convictions of his poetry, if unambiguous, appear dated and boring, if not worrying and opaque' (Emig: 2). Emig, in softening the ground for a reappraisal of the early work, observes that:

> Moreover, compared to the revolutionary stylistic achievements of the modernism of
> Eliot and Pound [and the late Yeats], Auden's poetry seems a mere hiccup, if not a step
> backwards to traditions already overcome. Unlike Eliot and Pound's writings, Auden's
> poems have therefore not been firmly placed into the canon of either modernist or

'post-war' English literature. His innovatory phase, common agreement has it, was the 1930s, its violent end the Second World War. Yet while no-one can be blamed when even revolutionary novelty eventually becomes dated, and integration into the established canon – though also a question of chance and fashion – does not spare the most anti-establishment work of art, in the case of Auden's poetry this inclusion has been only possible through a wilful neglect of many of its features (Emig: 2).

Emig adds that 'A second look at the main judgements concerning his works (i.e. that they were descriptive of their times and politically motivated) shows that they regard the texts as mere reflections of their context, a sort of transfer of the times in which they were written. A similar, though more subtle approach, which follows the same dubious premise, is the analysis of Auden's poems in psychoanalytic terms.[26] Its results are taken as hints of the psychic disposition of Auden, of the period he wrote in, or both. This is especially problematic as Auden's writings were themselves thoroughly informed by Freudian ideas and other forms of psychoanalysis, which were not always interpreted in orthodox ways and often features as travesty rather than serious exposition' (Emig: 2).[27]

Therefore, Auden deemed the inherited forms of modernism as inadequate to the task of engaging with topical issues of the kind he later addressed in his poetry, causing him to look elsewhere. Emig's complaints are valid complaints and suggest that there is still a distance to go before the common responses to the early poetry are overcome, the task he sets himself and which he describes as requiring an effort 'to take the basic ambiguities of Auden's poems seriously for an assessment of their importance as a contribution to the artistic and cultural debates of the twentieth century' (Emig: 3).

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[26] A distinction must also be drawn between psychoanalytic writing, as claimed by Emig, and writing which supplies psychoanalysis with interesting material to consider. Auden's psychoanalytic writing provides little by way of clarification though it does provide a suitable arena for psychoanalytic readings.

[27] '…we were interested in Marx the same way we were interested in Freud, as a technique of unmasking middle-class ideologies…'(Auden in Boly: 44).

Emig does not mention the benefits of the modernist project, at least in terms of stylistic innovations, to Auden's poetry. Auden did benefit from their efforts even if he could not adopt their poetic forms which, like the Romantic poets, remained detached, perhaps with the exception of certain sections of the Wasteland (the hollow men) which, curiously enough, resemble Auden's solitary characters who appear to suffer from dissociation.

Seamus Heaney observes that 'In the late Twenties and early Thirties, he caught native English poetry by the scruff of the neck, pushed its nose sharply into modernity, made it judder and frolic from the shock over the course of a decade, and then allowed it to resume a more amiable relation with its comfortably domestic inheritance... The new poem turned the reader into an accomplice, unaccountably bound to the poem's presiding voice' (Heaney).[28]

Edward Mendelson's book, *Early Auden*, weighing in on the anxieties of influence and introducing a genuine sense of the psychoanalytic,[29] refers to 'This battle, for a new poetry to supplant the old as one of many skirmishes in Auden's adolescent war against his family and his class', adding that, 'like most such revolts, it was selective; there were parental traits he was convinced must be decisively renounced, others decisively retained' (Mendelson 1981: 28).

Mendelson recounts that 'Auden first read Eliot in the spring of 1926, when he had just turned nineteen.' Reading it with Tom Driberg, he 'read it at first with incredulous hilarity, read it, again and again, with growing awe', how 'Eliot served as a great liberator' as 'Auden learned' that 'Poetry... could be comic and grotesque' and that 'the extravagance of his [Auden's] personality was, for the first time, free to disport in his verse. Using Eliot's exotic vocabulary as his model, Auden brought into his poems the sciences and psychology he learned in his father's library, while discarding the traditional poetic diction and poetic subjects favoured by his mother. Within two or three months, by the early summer of 1926, the transformation was complete. For almost a year he wrote almost exclusively in Eliot's driest and most satiric manner, constantly alert to the contemporary and grotesque' (Mendelson 1981: 29).

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[28] Seamus Heaney 1987, LRB. http://www.lrb.co.uk/v09/n11/seamus-heaney/sounding-auden

[29] It seems much more productive and more authentic to attempt to trace Auden's development as a poet by tracing the real struggles of his own life which inform his evolving style(s), as Mendelson does, rather than to seek clues in the poetry to, somehow, furnish proofs regarding the poet's persona.

Observing that 'Most of the poems Auden wrote during his first ears at Oxford describe variations on a single theme: life is a constant state of isolation and stagnated desire' such that 'In 1928, when Auden was twenty-one and had rejected the coherent pastoral metaphors of Hardy and Thomas [Edward] for the fragmented symbolic portents of Eliot, he was still recollecting in tranquillity the same calm after the sexual storm'. Mendelson observes that 'As Auden wrote these poems of an unchanging and unchangeable world, a new element entered. In the summer of 1927, he introduced a frontier into his landscape' (Mendelson: 30-31).

By June of that year (1927), Mendelson recounts that Auden 'at the urging of Sacheverell Sitwell … sent some poems to T.S. Eliot at Faber & Gwyer' (Mendelson: 32). By September, Auden 'had begun to write in his own voice' with the writing of *The Watershed*, a poem, excerpted by Mendelson, which is considered to be a key marker in the development of his own style. Anthropomorphisms abound, highlighted in bold.

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 the wood,

An industry already comatose,

Yet sparsely living.   (Mendelson: 32-33).

Here, Auden begins with a question, a feature of the early poems, which engages the reader's intellect by inviting her to consider a scene of industrial decline. Though engaging the reader, the question posed is far from clear as commas and subordinate clauses cloud what precisely is being asked. The grass is rough and the road is wet, the reader is told. The grass and the road lack agency but are modified by nature and the weather. An unidentified 'him' stands

above washing floors made passive as an unidentified force has dismantled them, the hidden hand of neglect that the reader is implicitly invited to consider.[30]

'Snatches' or glimpses of a personified tramline can be seen 'running to the wood', as a radical anthropomorphism renders 'industry already comatose, yet sparsely living'. That industry is presented as comatose and not dead suggests a degree of hope remains as 'the patient' might yet be revived, presumably an appeal to the reader to exert his influence by joining the debate.

By the early nineteen-thirties, in terms of his critical reception, so great had been the onslaught of mostly negative reviews that certain critics had read enough to be able to begin to classify his early poetry in an effort to defend it. Michael Robert's response to such reviews began with the assertion that:

> The poet is under no obligation to provide his own or any generation with a metaphysical system or a prophetic message. Sometimes, however, he provides the material out of which systems and messages are made. He expresses the sensibility of a generation and, by making experience communicable, makes it tolerable. He makes it possible to think what could only be felt before. In poetry of this kind, narrative interest and logical development, however valuable they may be as adornments, are no more necessary than they are in a dictionary.

> When a good poem does contain an intelligible message it differs radically from prose propaganda and from its own prose translation, for it shows not only that an attempt to change a certain situation is a necessary part of the scheme of things, but also that the situation is itself a part of that scheme.

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[30] 'The same rate of structural change that favours global prosperity, that benefits many nations and regions, and that many other nations and regions can at least cope with, now brutally exceeds the adaptive limits of individuals, families and communities' (Luttwak, LRB, 1994). http://www.lrb.co.uk/v16/n07/edward-luttwak/why-fascism-is-the-wave-of-the-future

In praising Mr. Auden's 'Poems' and his new volume of prose and verse, ' The Orators', critics have made premature attempts to extract specific and familiar messages which would enable them to apply convenient labels, platonist [sic], communist, or anarchist.[31] But the most important thing about Mr. Auden is not his message, but his manner of writing: indeed it still remains to be seen whether he will be able to organise the material with which his technique enables him to deal. Meanwhile his work, taken line by line, is unquestionably good:

Next the defective lovers. **Systems run to a standstill**,

or like those **ship-cranes** along Clydebank, **which have**

done nothing all this year.   (Roberts in Haffenden 1983: 107-108).

Roberts does not highlight the anthropomorphic content of this excerpt but what arguably makes these images effective, or 'unquestionably good', is that the poet has animated 'Systems' and 'ship cranes', one general and one specific entity, which, positively and negatively charged, 'run' or 'do nothing'. Why Roberts elected to choose this excerpt where two elements of industrial decline are likened to 'defective lovers' is not clear but it can be assumed reasonably, given what is already known about why Auden personifies objects, that by relating external goings on, by relating the socio-economic to the personal, the corporeal, the reader's sympathies or interests are engaged.

Michael Roberts's review (1932) frames the problems critics faced by stressing the need for a poetry that is necessarily different from that which came before, while also creating a little breathing room for a new style of poetry by withholding judgement regarding its achievements, and by identifying the premium that ought to be placed on the manner of writing, a style like no

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[31] Roberts does not use the terms psychoanalytic or psychoanalyst but the discipline falls under the same hyponym of 'convenient labels'. While Auden's poetry, as said, may provide grist for the psychoanalytic mill, Auden frequently cites Freud but usually only to renounce him (see Mendelson 1981: 40-41, 50-54) or to modify his rubrics: 'As in his other psychoanalytic borrowings, he altered the Freudian model in putting it to use' (219). 'The trouble with Freud, wrote Auden in his 1929 journal, is that he accepts conventional morality as if it were the only one' (Mendelson 1981: 41).

other. Roberts encapsulates Emig's central arguments (the need to avoid tired labels, etc.), concluding with the observation that the poetry 'is of general interest because it seems as relevant to the contemporary situation as that of Shaw and D.H. Lawrence once appeared to be' (Roberts: 110).

In the short period of only six years Auden appears to discover a unique position for his writings after his contact with modernism, especially Eliot's *The Wasteland*. Yet the period also sees his struggle against Eliot as a limiting model and eventually its final abandonment and – I would argue- supersession. Compared to the radicalism of the Orators, Auden's subsequent poetry may at first glance appear to retreat to safer poetic ground. Yet a closer look at the poems written during the remaining years before the Second World War reveals that they, too, are bound with problematic positionings, of voices, political convictions, and historic evaluations (Emig: 6).

Such problematic positionings and historic evaluations presented their own challenges to critics as they did for literary theorists, given the undifferentiated state of literary theory at that time. Poem XVII, excerpted here and later discussed in detail, is not atypical of the kind of poetry contained in his first published work, *Poems (1930)*.

From Poem XVII (Auden: 32)   (Anthropomorphisms in bold)

The strings' excitement, **the applauding drum**

Are but the initiating ceremony that out of cloud

and out of **ancestral face** may come

And never hear their **subaltern mockery**,

Graffiti writers, moss grown with whimsies

Loquacious when the watercourse is dry

It is your face I see and **morning's praise** of you

is **ghost's approval** of the choice

Filtered through roots of **the effacing grass**

Fear, taking me aside would give advice

To conquer her, **the visible enemy**,

it is enough to turn away the eyes   (1929)

This poem is probably as difficult to analyse or to make sense of as any written by the poet during the period. Its relative inaccessibility will serve well to test critical observations that seek to explore what Auden was attempting to achieve in his radical departure.

It is interesting to note that the poem opens with two striking images, two anthropomorphisms, The strings' excitement and the applauding drum, two musical references which, being novel, tax the reader's capacity to understand them or formulate them. How this orchestral manoeuvre, consisting of strings and drums, represents 'an initiating ceremony' is initially unclear, as the images emerge literally out of the blue, as the speaker seems to be suggesting that an over-active gestalt can find his loved one's face among the clouds. The speaker of the poem appears to mix some personal emotion with an external landscape that shrouds rather than clarifies.

What does seem clear is that the animated sounds the instruments make appear to block out the sound and signs of protest or mockery that the speaker observes get louder when liquids are in short supply. The speaker appears to address the extent to which passions can override public events in terms of their importance, as if to suggest that if there were more love, or more liquid, there might be less discontent. While this scenario seems plausible, the reader has to wonder why Auden would go to such lengths to say so little. The reader is led to wonder what ulterior purpose the poet may have in mind by deploying such imagery.

The speaker confirms the identity of a loved one, 'It is your face I see', and quickly delivers three more projections that are anthropomorphic, 'morning's praise', 'ghost's approval', and 'effacing grass', which he refers to confidently, as if they were known entities with established identities.[32]

The final stanza introduces what might be a stock favourite of medieval morality plays, the character Fear, who appears capitalised to offer advice to the speaker regarding what may be a quandary, whether to confront a 'visible enemy', or not. 'Fear' appears as 'Folly' or 'Mischief' might in allegorical dramas (*The Castle of Perseverance, Mankind, Everyman*) which deny readers identifiable, local settings to dispel place and time such that, presumably, the reader can focus on the moral of the story.

Who this enemy is, or what the speaker's quandary is, the reader can only speculate, and, it must be said, the reader *is* left to speculate because, denied all solace in terms of a discernible movement within the poem, bombarded with linguistic contortions which appear to want to impersonate stock imagery, in the dark room of the poem, the only recourse is to rely on his or her own experience, or memories, to make sense of imagery that is at once highly subjective, but also curiously wedded to an external landscape.

Either the poem has to be dismissed as unworthy of serious attention or it may be recognised at some point as part of a larger effort. A degree of frustration and a concomitant resistance accrues as the reader skirmishes after meaning.

Rainer Emig, speaking of the verse-play *The Orators* (1932), claims that it is 'as puzzling as it is fascinating' (Emig 2000: 5). 'The text's concern …[is] the relation of language to subjectivity and the establishment of authority in language, which – in the shape of rhetoric – encapsulates the problematic link between self and others'. Regarding the experiment which, he says, 'Auden himself regarded as a noble failure' (5, 6), Emig identifies it as an example of writing which heralded the poet's new aesthetic.

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[32] The line may reference John Donne's 'My face in thyne Eye, thyne in myne appears, And true playne harts doe in the faces rest'.

In The Orators, which is basically a school romp in which divergent, non-conformist views are expressed in an arena where authority is broadly challenged, Emig identifies, 'the conflicts between poetics, psychology, and politics that are at the forefront of Auden's early writings'(4). Furthermore, Emig explains, 'What becomes evident in the early poems is a tendency to link private and personal concerns with larger impersonal issues. At the same time[,] the texts refuse to present a coherent self embodied [sic] in a single speaker' (5).

Poem XVII (The strings' excitement, the applauding drum), not addressed by Emig, embodies such general claims, the mixing of the personal and the impersonal, the absence of any clear indication of who is speaking or who is being addressed, all the while peppering the vistas he does present with subversive trope deployments such as the 'ghost's approval', 'subaltern mockery', drums that applaud and strings that excite, or are excited.

That some of these images or couplings may not qualify as anthropomorphisms is unimportant. What is important is the totality. Anthropomorphism is never to be considered an end in itself. Their dubious status as recognisable tropes might even serve as a virtue since part of Auden's project is, or so it seems, to threaten language with menacing phrases of uncertain origin. Speaking of the early poems, Emig observes:

Nor do they commit themselves to firm and identifiable settings, much less to transcendental symbolic certainties. The effect is unsettling and often unconvincing. None the less, these first poetic exercises already hint at a farewell both to a simple realism… and modernist attempts to employ symbols in order to transcend contemporary reality in the direction of a vague 'human condition' (Emig 2000: 12).

Emig asserts that 'the apparent self-destruction of *The Orators*', because of its departure from poetic conventions, 'paves the way for an aesthetic that breaks out of the solipsistic artistic closure [sic] of many modernist texts… opens up possibilities for political writings that are non-authoritarian, because it incorporates its own dangers of manipulation and as a consequence highlights choice and resistance' (Emig 2000: 6).

If Auden 'opens up possibilities for political writings that are non-authoritarian' (6), as Emig claims, the reader is not only placed in the frame, among fragmentary poetics which rely on her presence or intervention for their interpretation, to co-create some semblance of meaning, something more is asked of her. The refusal or inability of the presiding voice to spell out any coherent message demands of the reader that, she not only enter the fray, she must also adjudicate with some degree of autonomy and authority.

Why precisely the wilful refusal to communicate in conventional forms might somehow serve as 'an antidote to solipsism' cannot be addressed here, but what is important is that Auden signalled the need to break with Modernism, as Emig's statement suggests. While Auden may have acknowledged the nobility of failure, a modicum of success can be gleaned insofar as here was a young poet who had just introduced a new literary mould, albeit one which brought with it new problems of intelligibility.

Failing, like others before him, broadly to discern any central organising principle with which to understand or begin to deconstruct the early work, Emig falls back on the default excuse for such poems where he argues that 'Like the daring metaphors in Eliot's poems, they gain their particular value by the impossibility of scrutinizing them fully, a claim which echoes Edward Mendelson's assertion that 'the absence of a clue is itself a clue' (Mendelson 1981: 10).

There is certainly some truth to these observations but the voice of Leavis is a useful counterweight to postmodern *laissez-aller*. To convince Leavis that there is more here than meets the eye or the ear, further evidence will have to be amassed.

Emig asserts that 'even the deliberate obscurities observed above have a specific poetic function' (Emig 2000: 14). Such critical excuses can be dangerous excuses because they usurp the need for readers to delve deeper into the poems to find a central organising principle within it, while they also forward the postmodern canard that a lack of clarity in art is something members of the public must accept as part of art's mission statement, its artistic license.

To allow Auden's early work to be subsumed under the rubric of postmodernism is to benefit unfairly from hindsight and to avoid an independent exploration as to what the poet was doing or trying to do. While Auden certainly did contribute to postmodernism, the early work should be studied and judged on its own merits and not benefit from a postmodern retrofit such as that offered by Emig when he enlists the help of Francois Lyotard to place Auden within the narrative frame of postmodernism:

> What is postmodernism? The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself, that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable (Lyotard in Emig 2000: 17).

Emig recognises that 'It is precisely this naturalising of language that Auden's early poems refuse. By making it unpoetic and clinical, they actually problematise the status of their material' (16). This seems far more useful than his claim that obscurity for the sake of obscurity has any real merit. Still, anthropomorphism is the ideal candidate to test the arbitrariness of signs (and signifieds) as its life's blood relies on their mutability. The point that can be taken from this discussion for now is that Auden disrupts language in order to draw the reader's attention to it. Paratactical[33] anthropomorphism is the literary device he uses to do this.

What emerges from a brief analysis of Poem XVII is a clear recognition that Auden's poetry is not a continuation of Modernism, that his experiments with form were informed by the need to challenge the writ of Modern poets and poetry, neither of which are recognised for assigning an active role to the ordinary reader. What is clear is that Auden was using the English language in new, deliberate, and quite radical ways to force the moment to a crisis.

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[33] 'The more intimate tasks of poetic repression, however, are conducted through the license of parataxis. To attain certain effects, poets are permitted syntactic forms that are more elaborate than standard constructions. Unrelated clauses may be juxtaposed without explanation, and verbs either misplaced or withheld'(Boly 1991: 166).

In *Auden's England*, Patrick Deane observes that:

It is a measure of Auden's ambiguous relationship with England that his thirties poems repeatedly assert the imminent and welcome demise of the imperial power while simultaneously making bravura use of a language inseparable from the country's imperial, class-bound history. In linguistic terms, 'we' and 'they' are both on the same side in what might be read as either a model for inclusiveness or a recipe for civil war and artistic defeat (Deane 2004: 32)

Auden used anthropomorphism as part of his new aesthetic to induce the reader to envisage a different world. The first step to ushering in that brave new world which might help avert the cataclysms of the late 1930s and 1940s, and perhaps take the old edifice down, was to attempt to popularise a style of poetry that challenged and questioned the established order of English literature and of English society by addressing topical issues and concerns but in such a manner that nobody quite knew what to make of it all.

To understand why Auden's prolific use of anthropomorphism, that 'trite device representative of a past period' (Josephine Miles, in Moore 2008: 1) has received so little attention and why 'the subject cries out for rigorous taxonomy' (Paxson 1994: 3), it may serve well to revisit Auden's critical reception and to address the difficulties critics have faced in coming to terms with the poet's diverse output.

Writing in 1965, a few years before Auden's death (1907-1973), a full thirty-five years after the poet's work first appeared, John G. Blair observed that 'the major failing of criticism has resulted' from 'a refusal to look at the art of his poetry as distinguished from the ideas it implies' (Hendon 2000: 179).

Readers familiar with Auden's early critical reception, faithfully recorded in John Haffenden's *The Critical Heritage,* containing verbatim poetry reviews and commentaries on Auden from the early 1930s onwards, will recognise in Blair's admonition a broad critical failure

to focus on the poetry, a point made and explained some years before (1957) by John Bayley when he observed that:

> attacks on Auden are invariably based on his irresponsibility, his unfounded pretensions to intellectual power and weight, and his enjoyment of the private joke or absurdity for its own sake, etc., and all these strictures lose their force if his poetry is read for what it is, and not for what his critics – misled by the poet's ambiguous attitude – have supposed it is attempting to be (Bayley, *The Romantic Survival*, Constable 1957: 156, in Hendon 2000: 24).

Hendon explains that Bayley 'describes Auden's acute self-consciousness in relation to the way that his poetry is being read and received'. Hendon argues that Bayley's approach 'does indeed fly in the face of much of Auden criticism to date, but has the virtue of looking beyond the simple fact of Auden's politics [or perceived personality] into a world where those politics assume more than the transient importance of fashion' (Hendon: 51).

In perhaps veiled defence of Auden, a 1970 review by John Bayley argues that 'Auden's early poetry often employed portentousness as an engaging device of rhetoric and artificiality, but never seriousness'. Bayley supplies an apt description of such early work where he explains that the poem 'Consider this, and in our time' (*Poems 1930*) was a superb bit of rhetoric that used several devices Auden has since discarded – for example, a threateningly ellipsed and telegraphic syntax dotted with anacolutha[34] – to create the mood that was commonplace in intellectual circles at the time but was never so successfully caught in poetic language' (Bayley, *Halcyon Structures*, *The Listener* 1970 in Haffenden: 457).

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[34] An anacoluthon (/ænəkəˈluːθɒn/ ("not following")) is an unexpected discontinuity in the expression of ideas within a sentence, leading to a form of words in which there is logical incoherence of thought. Anacolutha are often sentences interrupted midway, where there is a change in the syntactical structure of the sentence and of intended meaning following the interruption (Wikipedia.com, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/anacoluthon).

John Bayley's practice of using his reviews to excerpt and highlight the technical virtues of Auden's poetry, implicitly avoiding the then critical tendency to scorn the poet, was an implicit rebuke to those who did, while perhaps also leading his fellow critics by example.

These various statements support the view that most critics could not understand Auden's poetry. In the 1930s, to be fair, critics did not have the technical language or the conceptual frameworks to describe this new style of poetry. The following is a brief excerpt from Auden's most prominent critic on the eastern side of the Atlantic Ocean, F.R. Leavis:

Many passages in [Auden's poems (1930)] are baffling, if not intelligible, because they lack that measure of normality which makes communication between one individual and another possible.

For mental idiosyncrasies, if they are extravagantly indulged, isolate a writer as completely as if he spoke in an unknown tongue. Thus in the first of his poems Mr Auden invites us, as far as we understand him, to discover, amid the horrors and humiliations of a war stricken world, 'the neutralising peace' of indifference.

But the manner of his invitation is often so peculiar to himself and so eccentric in its terminology that, instead of communicating an experience of value to us, it merely sets our mind a problem in allusions to solve (F.R. Leavis 1932, unsigned in *The Listener*, Haffenden 1983: 100-101).

Scrutiny, edited by Leavis, according to Paul Hendon, 'was, of course, negative toward almost all contemporary poetry, with the partial exception of Yeats, Eliot, and Ronald Bottral, but the case against Auden was pressed with special vigor, and with motives at least in part transparently extraliterary [sic]' (Hendon 2000, 60). Another review, from Patric (sic) Dickinson, relates that:

Purely as a work of art it seems utterly remote from living experience; quite emotionless; full of carefully written words and carefully contrived ideas, but all *in vacuo* – and it is

difficult not to conceive that this vacuum has been created by the poet's life (Patric Dickinson, *Horizon*, 1949 in Hendon 2000: 22).

What is interesting about the reviews of Leavis and Dickinson and others is that while they certainly highlighted some of the problems presented by reading Auden's poetry, 'extravagant indulgence' and 'contrivance', their reaction to the poem's impenetrability was to dismiss them *en masse* and not recognise that, arguably, the very reform to English poetry that Leavis had called for, had already commenced. Leavis had declared that 'English culture was in crisis, and asserted the social responsibilities of writers and critics' (Deane 2004: 35).

A poetry whose task, to adopt John Boly's terms of reference, is 'to intimidate the reader' (Boly: x) might have demanded of Leavis and others that 'to trace the intricate patterns of discipline and disruption that Auden saw as essential to the process of reading, it is necessary to spend much longer with a text than would otherwise be the case'. Boly adds that 'For some reason, it is rarely noted that a poem might take weeks, months, or even longer to compose, and yet not fit into a tidy summary' (Boly 1991: xi).

Had Leavis and others been in possession of the means to register this sea change in the affairs of English literature, or had they recognised the intrinsic tyranny of any text which outlawed all other meanings beyond those intended by the author, the outcome might have been different. Yet, such prescience among critics would have seen them anticipate reader-response theory, a feat that would also have, ironically, diluted the claim that Auden's poetry did in fact signal a sea change in the affairs of English poetry. But, to paraphrase Auden's remark about Yeats's poetry, 'your gift survived it all', mad England had hurt Auden into poetry and England has her weather still ('mad Ireland had hurt you into poetry, Now Ireland has her madness and her weather still'(Auden, *Elegy for Yeats*: 241).

Sifting through the various reviews of the day, Paul Hendon observes that 'Dickinson's remarks contain all the assumptions, misrecognitions, prejudices and historical mispredictions [sic] that run through criticism of Auden's poetry' (Hendon 2000: 22).

Monroe K. Spears, author of *The Disenchanted Island* (1963), 'one of the first comprehensive overviews of the poet's work' (Hendon: 178), 'announced a new era in Auden criticism, noting that the landscape had been too severely dominated by the sceptical opinions of critics such as Leavis and Jarrell' (Spears 1964, *Critical Essays of WH Auden* in Hendon: 178). Speaking of Auden, Spears lamented a situation where 'Minor critics speak of him with condescension and refer knowingly to his inverted development' (Hendon 2000: 178).

That, according to Mendelson, 'the poems central subject is their own failure to be part of any larger interpretive frame' (Mendelson 1981, *Early Auden*: 10) certainly did not help matters. Edward Mendelson does not add the word 'deliberate' where he employs the word 'failure', but he makes it very clear in ensuing paragraphs that Auden:

> absorbed the modernist notion of a catastrophic break in literary tradition; he accepted the break as irreparable; and he set out to find a new poetic language, nonsymbolic [sic]and noncommunicative [sic], that would give voice to the new conditions (Mendelson 1981: 11).

Mendelson's observation regarding the 'noncommunicative' aspect of the 'new poetic language' is important because it establishes the principle of a deliberate problematizing of his own material to suit particular ends, while also establishing one of the key precepts of postmodern poetry, Lyotard's assertion that 'the postmodern puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms' (Lyotard 1984 in Emig 2000: 17).

Of Auden's earliest published poetry, Rainer Emig observes that 'Auden's poems deny their material wholeness' (Emig 2000: 16). Emig states that it is precisely this 'naturalising of language that Auden's early poems refuse'. In other words, Auden's poetry departed from literal meaning during a period of experimentation where the medium was manipulated to obscure the message.

Mendelson observes Auden's early adherence to the Vatic in contrast to the Civil Tradition of poetry. Mendelson charts Auden's progress from the Vatic, resembling or characteristic of a prophet or prophecy where the poet 'sings for himself alone' (xv), to the Civil tradition, from a private to a more public poetry as the times, the turbulent thirties, demanded it. Auden's earliest published poetry certainly does read, as Leavis observed, like a man 'singing 'for himself alone' (Mendelson 1981: xv), but the poems can also be read for their method.

Referring to the general bafflement of critics and theorists alike, such widespread 'criticisms', according to Paul Hendon, 'were coping strategies for a poetry that challenged the very world that the critic inhabited' (Hendon 2000: 60). Hendon's view is by no means a mainstream perspective but it appears to explain the nature and scope of much of the animosity directed toward Auden who felt a general disdain for literary critics:

> I don't read them, and often I don't know what they say about me. You see, most critics write on the basis of reading, not from any experience of writing. I've no use for such criticism (Haffenden 1983, 1).

Hendon's description, 'The world the critic inhabited' also alludes to the literary theory and the critical apparatus and infrastructure available to critics at the time. John Boly's essay, *Auden and Modern Theory,* reminds readers that 'New Criticism... dominated literary studies in America for most of the poet's lifetime' (Boly 2004: 137), and while it valorised close reading and abjured musing on the biographical intentions of the poet, it lacked the theoretical framework that might have helped situate Auden's new style.

Ad hominem attacks by critics may also have been a rebellious and perhaps reflexive response to the narrow prescripts of New Criticism's 'intentional' and 'biographical fallacies' (Boly 2004, 141), New Critical precepts insisting critics ought 'to criticise the work itself' (Brooks, *Formalisms*, in Rifkin & Ryan 2004: 24). Where Cleanth Brooks wrote that 'speculation on the mental processes of the author takes the critic away from the work into biography and psychology' (23), he might have had many of Auden's critics in mind.

Stan Smith makes the point that Auden 'learnt to interpret the world differently through a new literary style' and that 'It has taken the emergence of postmodern approaches to literature to revalorise the yokings and jokings of Auden's poetry' (Smith 2004: 99), a view shared by Emig (see Emig 2000: 3).

When the poetry first appeared, in 1930, William Empson and a few others, while unable to articulate precisely what it was about Auden's work that spoke to them, nonetheless recognised 'the tones of a new, completely individual voice and the presence of some highly compressed message which was trying to force its way into expression' (ER Dodds, in Hendon 2000: 62, Carpenter 1981: 83).

William Empson shared the enthusiasm of Dodds, explaining that 'One reason the scheme is so impressive is that it puts psycho-analysis and surrealism and all that, all the irrationalist tendencies which are so essential a part of the machinery of present-day thought into their proper place' (Hendon: 62).

Paul Hendon recognises that 'some of his early critics noted that Auden's voice contained something essentially novel that spoke of the economic, political and spiritual problems of the time in heretofore unexpressed ways' (Hendon 2000: 38). Likewise, Babette Deutsch, falling short of explaining exactly what Auden was doing or what he hoped to achieve, made the remark that:

> His poems are scarcely intelligible until one has read them in their entirety. Not only is nearly every poem an inseparable entity, but, furthermore, most of the pieces are supported by the body of the work. The whole here is greater than the sum of its parts. (Deutsch, CE: 40).

Deutsch, by way of a rather weak appeal to Auden's restricted audience, suggests that:

> It is an ironic commentary on popular education that one of its results has been to make it impossible for the poet to communicate except to a narrowly limited circle. Where

everyone has the minimum of information, everyone pretends to be educated, but only the fewest attain more than a shallow learning…

The result is that the poet, knowing more of the past than his fellows, more sensitive than they to the present to which that past is tributary, and speaking out of that richer awareness, can be intelligible to the merest handful of people (Deutsch: 43).

Mendelson argues that readers 'who hunt out clues in the mythical landscapes of the writings of Auden's friends, largely miss the point of the early work, although they are responding to a quality that pervades it' (Mendelson 1981: 10). Mendelson also argues that:

the poems suggest that they are fragments of a larger whole but do not provide enough data to identify that whole. The reader is made to feel that some vital clue is lacking which, if one had it, could make sense of everything …The poems' central subject is their own failure to be part of any larger interpretive frame.

Their metaphors refer to their own state of division and estrangement. As soon as one stops looking for the key to a set of symbols, and recognises that the poems focus on the self enclosing [sic] patterns that bar their way to a subject in the world outside, their notorious obscurity begins to vanish (Mendelson 1981: 10).

Mendelson concedes that 'this argument may sound like a paraphrase of late twentieth century theories of poetic language as reflexive and self-referential', but proceeds to cite Auden's journal in defence of the idea that 'we are reaching the point where symbols are becoming obsolete in poetry'(11), to attempt to explain the new style. This claim is a very grand one as it suggests that Auden was gauging the ability of the literate public to interpret poetry, implying that the power of symbols could give way to a more ruminative style of reading. Symbols are entities that possess power in excess of what is articulated. Auden here appears to be overreaching and appears to want to shoehorn a new style of poetry as somehow more suitable to the age.

While Mendelson quite rightly observes 'qualities that pervade the work', his insistence that no central paradigm or organizing principle is discernible in the work, while a fair enough reading of the chaos, is not a wholly accurate description of the poetry. Mendelson effectively calls off the hunt, the search for a paradigm with which readers could come to terms with what the body of poetry was attempting to do. John Boly's study on Auden appeared a full ten years after Mendelson's commentary.

To announce that 'The poems were taken as fragments of an activist allegory whose key, though hidden, really did exist' (Mendelson 1981: 13) without then explaining or suggesting what that key was, effectively stymied further critical inquiry.

Mendelson observes that 'the absence of a clue is the clue itself' and that 'their notorious obscurity begins to vanish … as soon as one stops looking for the key to a set of symbols' (Mendelson: 10). At one level, this is true but to fall short of stating the purpose of such a strategy can only have added to the lack of on-going interest in the work. Mendelson observes that 'critics have been misled by the poems' early reception', though he does also recognise 'the excitement produced by the first misreadings' (Mendelson: 15). Mendelson variously adds that:

> his first adult poetry, the work of a young man of twenty, was overwhelmingly concerned with his own emotional isolation, rather than with truths he could share with his audience (Mendelson 1981: xiv).

> The elusiveness of his first poems brought consequences he never intended, effects that eventually helped persuade him to revise his modernist projects (Mendelson 1981: 13).

Failure to recognise a central organising principle in the work had the predictable effect of reaffirming the view that the early poetry was experimental and could be dismissed as the flawed work of a young poet learning his craft, as Yeats once described it, a 'routine' which Rainer Emig laments as 'uncritical' (Emig 2000: 8).

Clive James, in a 1973 *Times Literary Supplement* (unsigned) review, observed that 'In all of English poetry it is difficult to think of any other poet who turned out permanent work so early – and whose work seemed so tense [sic] with the obligation to be permanent. In his distinguished essay on Auden [not identified], John Bayley penetratingly pointed out that it was not in Auden's creative stance ever to admit to being young' (James 1973, in Haffenden 1983: *A testament to self-control*: 477).

James adds that 'What has not yet sufficiently been noticed is that it was not in the nature of Auden's talent to win sympathy by fumbling towards an effect – to claim the privileges of the not yet weathered, or traffic in the pathos of an art in search of its object. Instant accomplishment denied him a creative adolescence' (James in Haffenden: 477)

The importance of such excerpts and such views to the study of Auden today is that the great majority of criticism about Auden's work is interesting not so much for what it says about Auden's work, but for what it says about the problems literary criticism faced then and since. Before critics could come to terms with what the poet was attempting, the poet moved on, leaving England, leaving his critics, and leaving behind a body of poetry that continues to baffle readers, poetry which challenges and still requires elucidation.

To deem the work 'postmodern' or 'experimental', while it exhibits those features, merely confirms much of the criticism and prejudice traditionally directed toward some modern and some postmodern poetry, that its obscurity is its central feature, that it need not communicate directly, thereby precluding the need to investigate further. Leavis makes reference to this where he observes that 'Mr Auden seems apt to set down too readily what comes, on the tacit plea that modern poetry has vindicated the right to demand hard work from the reader' (Hendon 2000: 63). Leavis here alludes to the recognition that modern poetry had begun to depart from a poetry of strict authorial intentions and, had he pursued this line of inquiry, he might have discovered vistas into Auden's new aesthetic that might have earnestly begun to uncover what the young poet was trying to do.

Mendelson also considers Auden biographer Humphrey Carpenter's suggestion that 'as late as 1937 Auden perhaps still believed it would be possible to realise, in England, the kind of society presaged by his vision of Agape [selfless love], but that by 1938 he did not' (Smith 2004: 37), emphasising that Auden's emigration was not pre-planned, that he left when it seemed nobody could quite fully understand him or understand his larger purpose, or what he was attempting to achieve.

Mendelson argues that 'The intensely isolated and reflexive character of Auden's earliest poems has been obscured by the more public character of his later work', adding that 'it was obscured because the critical climate was not yet receptive to it' (Mendelson 1981: 21).

Auden's later work, more public, more international, and much easier to read, created the false impression that the poet had finally straightened himself out when in fact he had simply moved on, abandoned England and his hopes for a bloodless revolution. Critics who focus on the poetry tend to examine the better-known and somewhat less challenging poems of the middle period.

Mendelson suggests that 'wholeness' was Auden's larger aim. 'Wholeness', citing Auden, 'is beyond language, yet language is the inevitably futile means by which we try to recover it'. He observes that 'In his earliest poems his language tries to cross an emptiness to a unity that cannot be found. The poems report from a condition of absence, speak to no one, and have no place to go' (Mendelson 1981: 26).

Rainer Emig is more constructive in his assessment of Auden's style. His study 'proposes to take the basic ambiguities of Auden's poems seriously for an assessment of their importance as a contribution to the artistic and cultural debates of the twentieth century' (Emig 2000: 3). Citing Geoffrey Grigson, Emig highlights 'one of the most frequent images used by Auden... the image of the frontier, the line between the known and the feared, the past and the future, and the conscious and everything beyond control', identifying that Auden lives very much 'in this frightening border territory'(Emig 2000: 3).

Emig explains that 'this territory reflects back on the complex cultural and political issues of his time and offers the chance as well as [the] challenge of looking ahead into an artistic no-man's land'. Emig further claims that 'the particularly new poetic territory exposed by Auden's writing is that which leads out of modernism into something uncharted, into a region where the only orientation is provided by images and borders, folds and ruptures' (3).

Having identified the borderlands Auden occupies in his poetry, Emig explains how 'By an application of formalist, structuralist and post-structuralist concepts and a concentration on some dominant topics, namely the problem of meaning, text and history, identity and community, authority and certainty', his study 'strives to elucidate the complexity of Auden's works' (Emig 2000: 5).

Emig broadly describes Auden's 'rarely discussed' plays, ' as 'attempts to escape from literary and cultural traditions through the introduction of the then fashionable theories of Marxism and Freudianism and the avant garde techniques of Surrealism and Dada', the results of which 'has led many critics to dismiss them as failures'. Emig explains that 'important postmodern concepts *avant la lettre*, such as deconstruction and dialogism, are prefigured in these experiments' (5).

Emig further mentions 'the intrusion of concerns about history into Auden's writings', as well as the poet's 'seemingly objective concern with everyday objects' (7). Emig concludes his survey by saying that he wants 'to demonstrate that there is a structural and theoretical challenge and paradoxical coherence, at least of problems, in Auden's writing. This leads from the farewell to transcendental symbolism via the struggle between writing and reality to a playful armistice'. He explains that, speaking to contemporary theory, 'Especially in the light of many current philosophical and political problems, his poems provide interesting insights and points of departure' (Emig 2000: 8).

The inability of critics to place Auden's early writing with a recognised conceptual frame was largely due to the undifferentiated state of literary-criticism when Auden's work first appeared. The situation since then has changed but Emig's essay in *The Cambridge Companion*

to WH Auden observes that 'In the period since Auden's death [1973], critical trends have put less emphasis on [such] text based theories and favoured the greater historical and social orientation of post-Marxism, cultural poetics, reader response, critical discourse theory and multiculturalism'(Emig 2004: 137).[35]

The simplest explanation for the difficult and protracted critical reception is that Auden's new aesthetic, while it certainly was experimental, simply could not be domesticated or by the literary theories available to critics, giving justification to Stan Smith's observation that 'the increasing professionalism of literary criticism in the American academy found in Auden a ready candidate for exegesis in scholarly dissertation and monograph' (Smith 2004: 7).

By way of retrospective summary (1973), Clive James locates the difficulty some critics faced where he observed that 'As always with Auden, ethics and technique were bound up together. Barely out of his teens, he was already trying to discipline, rather than exploit, the artistic equivalent of a Midas touch. It is for this reason that the 'Scrutiny' group's [Leavis & company] later limiting judgments and dismissals of Auden were wrong-headed as well as insensitive: they were branding as permanently undergraduate the one major modern gift [sic] which had never been content with its own cleverness for a moment. They missed the drama of Auden's career in the 1930s and 1940s, never realising that the early obscurity and the later bookishness were both ways of distancing, rather than striving after, effect' (James: 478).

> The moral struggle in Auden was fought out between what was possible to his gift and what he thought allowable to it: the moralists, looking for struggles of a different kind, saw in his work nothing but its declarative self-assurance. The more he worked for ironic poise, the more they detected incorrigible playfulness. Subsequent critical systems, had they been applied, would not have fared much better (James 1973: 478 in Haffenden).

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[35] The *de facto* repeal of New Critical strictures, 'the intentional and biographical fallacies', may have inadvertently hindered the close reading of Auden texts as critics no longer felt inhibited in examining *inter alia* the relationship of texts to their authors' intentions. 'New Criticism's long ascendancy, disdain for history, hostility to other theories and patriarchal self-righteousness persisted through the mid-century decades…'(Boly 2004: 142).

Later that same year (1939) Auden left England and, in an essay on Yeats, the poet reasserted the conviction that 'the great struggle of our time to create a juster [sic] social order' (Auden, *Prose* Vol. II: 4), but whether he still believed that this could be enacted in England cannot be known though Patrick Deane finds in Humphrey Carpenter the suggestion that 'Auden perhaps still believed it would be possible' (Deane 2004: 37).

Edward Mendelson also makes the point that 'the elusiveness of the early poems brought consequences he never intended, effects that eventually helped persuade him to revise his modernist projects' (Mendelson 1981: 13). While this explanation may be correct it remains that those early 'modernist projects' cannot be dismissed simply because the middle work is more accessible, a fair description of what did happen.

One notable exception to the general tendency to be distracted (or 'misled', Bayley) from the study of the poetry was the American poet critic Randall Jarrell (1914-1965) who observed that 'There is a protean complication to his work; and since the world has this complication, too, Auden's poetry is unusually suited for mirroring or representing it' (Jarrell 1951-2, Lecture Four, 2005: 74).

Unfortunately, while 'Jarrell was one of the first critics to provide an extensive overview of Auden and his work' (Hendon 2000: 39), and to engage with it in other than negative terms, a situation not unconnected to his apparent ability to understand the poetry and to articulate at length upon what he saw as its strengths and weaknesses, he elected to roundly criticise Auden's prolific use of rhetorical devices, particularly Auden's use of anthropomorphism.

During the spring of 1952, before an invited audience at Princeton, Randall Jarrell delivered six lectures on the poetry, prose and career of WH Auden … at once a passionate appreciation, a witty attack from an informed opponent, an important document of a major poet's reception, and a key to another poet's career (Stephen Burt (ed.) 2005, *Randall Jarrell on W.H. Auden*, 1951-2, 2005: 1).

In the third lecture of that series, Jarrell addresses the subject of Auden's use of rhetoric by asserting that 'In the middle poems, most of all in the late poems, there has grown up a system of rhetorical devices so elaborate that Auden might list it under Assets, just as a firm lists its patents' (Jarrell 1951-2, 2005, Lecture 3: 47).

Jarrell proceeds to 'name and analyse some of these devices, and illustrate them at length, since I want the reader to appreciate the weight and range of their use' (Jarrell 1951-2, Lecture 3, 2005: 46). Jarrell does so and in the remaining sixteen pages of the lecture, proceeds to attack the northern English poet for his 'effect by Incongruity' (48), his 'juxtaposition of disparate coordinates' (49), his 'mechanically worked out conceits' (51), 'his device of decadence' (51), his 'bureaucratization of perspective by incongruity' (54), his 'spatial metaphors' (55), his 'degeneration into abstraction' (58), and his 'unbelievable little rhetorical engines' (60) (Jarrell 1951-52, 2005, Lecture 3: 46-60).

Jarrell, highlighting some of Auden's more radical anthropomorphisms and personified abstractions which he says 'are written in this appallingly abstract and mechanical rhetoric', offers the following example (Jarrell, Lecture 3, 2005: 58) which he singles out for opprobrium:

That syllogistic nightmare must reject

The disobedient phallus for the sword,

The lovers of themselves collect,

And **Eros is politically adored**:

New Machiavellis flying through the air

Express **a metaphysical despair**,

Murder their last voluptuous sensation,

All passion in **one passionate negation**.

Here, an animated nightmare ('the nightmare of the dark' was seen earlier) is entreated to reject the personified, adjectivised phallus in preference for the sword, an appeal that is not altogether clear except to observe that libido (internal, private emotion) ought to be channelled into action (an external, collective one). 'The lovers' of previous poems reappear to personalise what is a discussion of the need for sublimation of desires such that 'Eros' will be adored in the public sphere, a situation the speaker of the poem sees, presumably, as a good thing.

Auden is here addressing basic Freudian theory to enact the need for civilisation to manage libido for some civic good though why 'the sword' should be seen as preferable to 'the disobedient phallus is not clear. If by sword the poet wished to signify discipline, it may work.

Reduced to a phenotype, it is little wonder that 'New Machiavellis flying through the air/ Express a metaphysical despair' should have caught Randall Jarrell's attention. Auden's efforts to rhyme this sequence of images seems to have compromised their meaning, how 'Murder' might be described as an emotion is difficult to square except that it rhymes with the 'one passionate negation', which twins love with the death instinct, common to Freud.

Why as clever and studied a poet as Auden elected to engage such a pedestrian rhyming scheme as seen in this poem (and not ultimately redact its publication) can lead the critic and reader to reject these lines, as Jarrell and others did, as examples of frivolity. A more productive response might not only be to cast the poem as outlandish and extravagant in order to win the attentions of readers but also, to give the poet his due, to present so serious a theme in such an unsuitable setting underscores that sense of helplessness that is probably inevitable where any effort is made to marshal the libido.

While it is difficult not to see the ridiculous side to some of these deployments, it must be said that Jarrell's focus was exclusively directed against Auden's employment of rhetorical devices. It seems never to have occurred to the poet-critic that anything else may have been in play, such as, for example, Auden's use of the bully pulpit to encourage his readers to submit voluntarily to a programme of re-education, one that might see them begin to think in a more critical way regarding the living reincarnations of Machiavelli or Eros.

The Second World War, which Jarrell did not play any part in, was over by the time he delivered his six-lecture series, and his audience at Princeton University could not have known very much of the sense of crisis which had paralysed England in the 1930s and which gave rise to a style of poetry, sometimes flawed, which Auden deployed in an effort to reform the reading habits of the general public. This is not to excuse Auden's excesses but it might somewhat explain them by offering a context with which to comprehend them.

Quite apart from the fact that Jarrell himself was, according to an acquaintance, Adam Gopnik, 'an almost pathologically rhetorical poet' (Gopnik 2005, Foreword, *Randall Jarrell on WH Auden*: xi), or that his attack on Auden is adjudged to have been 'asserted more than argued', Gopnik surmises that Jarrell 'accepted as plain faith the primacy of romantic poetry – of a poetry of plain feeling and apprehended immediate experience – at a time when he was unable to write it' (xii).

The impact of Jarrell's lecture series can somewhat be measured by the lack of attention subsequently paid on both sides of the Atlantic to the rhetorical component of Auden's poetry. Orotund condemnation of the already beleaguered discipline of Rhetoric, it can be reasonably assumed, found ready reception among an invited audience and a literary academy that knew no such figure or classification as a [R]hetorical poet. Who among the audience would have found any real support in defending an out-of-fashion literary device, anthropomorphism, which received the lion's share of Jarrell's condemnation?

The diminished status of Rhetoric, 'an erratic and futile discipline' (Ricoeur 2003: 9) which had 'lost its power' (Lauer 2004: 85), and the outlaw status of anthropomorphism, 'the pathetic fallacy' (Ruskin 1856, *Modern Painters*: 60-61), can only have helped confirm its compromised status and further condemn the trope to literary and intellectual penury.

Referring to Auden's work, Paul Hendon points out that 'The influence of Jarrell's criticism has been wide ranging, and has dictated many of the subsequent readings of the poet' (Hendon 2000: 44). A review of the literature suggests that the damage Jarrell's lectures did was indeed significant as many critics adopted Jarrell's terms of reference, his tripartite division

of Auden's stages. The lectures came at a time when critics had had a full twenty years to come to terms with the poetry. It might have been a good opportunity to forestall the critics who, like Blair twelve years later, saw in the work's reception something of a critical vacuum. Jarrell's condemnatory tone can only have stymied interest in what remains highly '[R]hetorical' poetry, in the classic sense of that word.

More recently, Emig has made the general point that despite long-standing recognition that 'the dominant feature of (his) poems' being 'their refusal (or inability) to integrate themselves into established literary patterns', critics have tended to ignore this, as *New Verse* editor Geoffrey Grigson's opening sentence testifies (Emig: 1). 'Auden is a monster'.

> Auden does not fit. Auden is no gentleman. Auden does not write, or exist, by any of the codes, by the Bloomsbury rules, by the Hampstead rules, by the Oxford, the Cambridge, or the Russell Square rules (Grigson, *New Verse* in Emig 2000: 1).[36]

Emig claims that the literary establishment had long known that Auden's poetry was not poetry that sat easily with poetic traditions. Specifically, Emig rails 'at the abundance of studies that show Auden's writings as landmarks in history or the development of Auden's personality – and also, sadly enough, by the limited insights that these approaches have procured' (Emig 2000: 4). Emig explains that:

> Such attempts at integrating Auden's works into pre-existent patterns (of history or personality) generally try to override the obscurities and difficulties exposed by them instead of accepting them as crucial (Emig 2000: 2).

Though living authorities on Auden can hardly be held responsible for the direction or the emphases editors and publishing houses deem suitable in their efforts to document and record Auden's legacy, of the eighteen essays about Auden which constitute the most recent attempt to collectively evaluate that legacy, *The Cambridge Companion to WH Auden* (2004),

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[36] 'Despite the timbre of his approach, Grigson celebrates Auden's non-conformist stance, identifying 'the image of the frontier, the line between the known and the feared, the past and the future, and the conscious and everything beyond control … Auden lives very much in this frightening border territory' (Emig 2000: 3).

sixteen address aspects of Auden's life and personality within their historical or geographical contexts, an indication that Emig's estimate remains broadly accurate.

And while Auden the man can hardly be blamed for such decisions any more than can the tastes of the reading and the literary public who presumably drive such output, Auden's multiple roles as university lecturer, anthology-editor, travel writer, political spokesman, documentary maker, book-reviewer, librettist and general man about town, make such a selection inevitable. – 'He scarcely made matters easy for them' (Mendelson 1981: 15).

John Boly is one of the few critics (along with Rainer Emig, Edward Mendelson and John Fuller) to tackle the art of Auden's work. John Boly explains that the origins of what he calls Auden's cultural theory:

> belong to an intellectual tradition that includes Kant's categories of the understanding, Marx's superstructure, Heidegger's *dasein*, Gramsci's hegemony, Saussure and Levi Strauss's *langue*, Foucault's *episteme*, Raymond Williams's dominant discourse and Fredric Jameson's political unconscious (Boly 1991: 138).

As for Jarrell's wholesale denouncement, his charge sheet against Auden, it is well to bear in mind by way of telling contrast that 'The four main features of Auden's poetic style:', what separated the poet from his contemporaries and what distinguished him from his literary forbears were, according to Bernard Bergonzi, 'his copious use of the definite article, unusual adjectives and adjectival phrases, surprising similes, and personified abstractions'(Bergonzi 1975, *Auden and the Audenesque*, *Encounter*: 70). All four are rhetorical gambits. The following excerpt advertises something of the features Bergonzi highlighted:

> From XXIV (Auden: 40)   (Anthropomorphisms in bold)
>
> The **falling leaves know** it, the children,
>
> At play on the **fuming alkali-tip**

Or by the [flooded football ground], know it –

This is the **dragon's day**, the devourer's:

[Orders are given] to the enemy for a time

With [underground proliferation] of mould,

With [constant whisper] and the [casual question],

To **haunt the poisoned** in his **shunned house**,

To destroy the **efflorescence of the flesh**,

The intricate **play of the mind**, to enforce

Conformity with the **orthodox bone**,

With **organised fear**, the **articulated skeleton**.   October 1929

Here, with thirteen definite articles in thirteen lines, Bergonzi might also have mentioned Auden's omission of articles as well as their inclusion. Just as interesting is the complete absence of indefinite articles, which are typically used to specify the local and the particular. In addition, the passage contains ten radical or semi-radical anthropomorphisms intermixed with four [bracketed] stock and normative, or 'standardised tropes' (Ricoeur 2003: 72), which balance the onslaught of radical imagery in the poem.

In terms of a paradigmatic deployment, Auden here favours the use of adjectives and the possessive / genitive 'of' to animate; skeletons which are articulated , fear which is organised, bones which are orthodox, flesh which is efflorescent, house which is haunted and poisoned, question which is casual, whisper which is constant, football-ground which is flooded, alkali-tip (mining) which is fuming, and, to open the salvo, a normative reference to leaves which are falling. The leaves are falling as if to prepare the metaphorical ground for nouns that have ended their syntactical lives with negative appendages in the form of adjectives, which not

only modify them but also define them. The absence of verbs seems to seal their autumnal fate as beyond saving. The children are playing amidst a scene of decay.

From XVI (Auden: 142)   (Anthropomorphisms in bold)

For [private reasons] I must have the truth, remember

These years have seen [a boom in sorrow];

The **presses of idleness issued more despair**

    And it was honoured,

Gross Hunger took on more hands every month,

Erecting here and everywhere **his** vast

    Unnecessary workshops;

Europe [grew anxious] about her health,

[Combines tottered], **credits froze**,

And **businesses shivered** in **a banker's winter**

    While we were kissing.   (1933)

In contrast to the previous poem, here Auden animates nouns that are modified and defined by verbs; businesses have shivered, credits have been frozen, combines have tottered, as a personified Europe grew anxious about her health. A personified Gross Hunger added numbers to its ranks each month while erecting unnecessary workshops. Likewise, the animated 'presses of idleness issued more despair'; reminding the reader that industry and the state are actors and drivers of unemployment and hunger just as they are drivers of prosperity. Workers are reduced to a phenotype, hands taken on in the service of need. By describing the

increase in sorrow as a 'boom' and by depicting Hunger as a recruiting agent, Auden is using the language of bureaucracy and perhaps statistics to critique the downside of industrial decline.

Here, five radical or semi-radical anthropomorphisms are embedded among three standard examples to expose the reliance of the discipline of economics (anthropomorphically known as 'the dismal science') on metaphor. Auden expands the range of expression while also expanding the objects of his attention from previously personal concerns to a new focus on the economic decline of England during the 1920s and 1930s.

The lines 'Europe grew anxious about her health' occupies the frontier between Standard English usage and a more radical deployment to unify two sets of images which conspire to describe the economic downturn in a poem where there are no individuals. People are reduced to 'hands' while the machinery of industry, the boom in sorrow and the presses of idleness are the only witnesses to an England, within a Europe, that is feminized.

From Letter to Lord Byron (Auden: 184)

The **mountain snob** is **a Wordsworthian fruit**;

He tears his clothes and doesn't shave his chin,

He wears a very pretty little boot,

He chooses the **least comfortable inn**,

A [mountain railway] **is a deadly sin**;

His strength, of course, is as the strength of ten men,

He calls all those who live in cities **wen-men**.

This excerpt from *Letter to Lord Byron* does little justice to the range of ideas discussed within it but does show something of Bergonzi's surprising similes, the 'Wordsworthian fruit' and 'the least comfortable inn'. The latter is not surprising as a simile but as an idea, it does surprise

that someone would seek discomfort. Though clearly the reference to an uncomfortable inn, or to an easy chair, is a standard part of the language, Auden relies on such normative images to platform his more outrageous deployments.

This gambit is not dissimilar to the role of the fool and other peripheral characters in Shakespeare's plays, how it is often the person who lacks status, fools, messengers and perhaps gravediggers, who deliver home truths, exposing the tyranny of establishment power structures that fail to self-govern in an effective manner.

'A mountain railway' that is 'a deadly sin' absents the speaker to couple a railway with sin, which, if it does qualify as a simile, certainly surprises the reader, as Bergonzi suggests. The final line shows the snob personifying city folks in a manner that seems pejorative.

Such examples underscore the points Bergonzi makes in reducing the elements of Auden's style to four but they also expose the damage Jarrell did in rejecting Auden's use of the literary device. In other words, the one prominent critic who appeared to have the appreciation and the critical apparatus to comprehend, articulate and disseminate what Auden was broadly trying to achieve, could not permit a poetry that the literary landscape had no room for.

Jarrell, despite his line item vetoes of Auden's rhetoric, did recognise in Auden's poetry elements which earlier, and some later, critics entirely failed to appreciate:

He is not only extremely intelligent but also – and this is a much rarer thing – extremely intelligent *in* his poetry, he manages to put an astonishing amount of intelligence, acute insight, into effective use in his poems. Ideas, theories, dialectic are material for him as they have been material for few other poets, he uses abstractions, sets of ideas, astonishingly naturally and well – too well and too naturally, sometimes, for they keep him from writing about more recalcitrant things.

He has an extraordinary wideness of range, of subject matter, of information pointing to the world, he could say with some truth 'Why I can write about any of it – have written about most of it'. No other living poet gives so much the feeling of having the whole

range of things, facts and ideas and events, the actual objective world, more or less at his disposal (Jarrell 2005: 70).

Louise Bogan, in a review of '*The Collected Poetry'* that appeared in 1945, supplied a useful comparison between the poetry of Auden and that of Eliot where she asks 'What is the particular thread that runs through this collection, the clue to Auden's importance and power? :

In what way is his great gift different from Eliot's, and in what way is it of importance to Auden's contemporaries? Auden shares with Eliot a sense of his time. He is, however, much more exuberant, restless, sanguine, and unself-conscious than the older poet... And he is a natural dramatist in a degree surpassing Eliot. Eliot can dramatize his lyrics but cannot project real dramatic action with force. Auden dramatizes everything he touches. He is wonderfully effective with that most dramatic of lyric forms, the ballad. At the same time, his purely lyric endowment is so deep and so natural that many of his songs sound as though they had been worked up at a moment's notice as improvisations.

He can sing about as many things as the Elizabethans, and with the same disregard for the demands of the high literary line and the 'refined' literary tone. Eliot's importance is based on the fact that he had the sensitiveness and the melancholy foreboding to sense the general tragedy of his period when that tragedy had not impressed other observers. Auden, nearly twenty years his junior, stands farther from the shadows of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; he is more able, therefore, to deal with particulars. He is conscious of his physical surroundings down to the last contraption of 'light alloys and glass;' conscious of his spiritual scene down to the last sob of modern self-pity, down to modern brutality's last threat. He has smashed the 'tabu against tenderness' as someone has said, he is not afraid or ashamed to laugh or weep (Bogan 1945, *The New Yorker* in Haffenden: 357-8).

To augment and somewhat Bogan's tribute to Auden, John Haffenden, reviewing more broadly the critical reception of the poet, observes that 'In sum, while favourable critics thrilled

to the new poet's classicism, his detached clinicality of manner, and the introduction into verse of contemporary, possibly sinister or subversive, symbols and subjects – disintegrating industrialism, climbing, exploring, spying, plotting – others saw the elements of arbitrariness in his work as aspects of an artistic vision lacking in definition and coherence'(John Haffenden 1983, Introduction, *The Critical Heritage*: 4).

Before looking at that 'extraordinary wideness of range', as Jarrell referred to it (above), and Auden's search for ideological salvation, Rainer Emig list of 'Stylistic Indicators' augments that of Bernard Bergonzi while, hopefully, serving as an anti-dote to Jarrell's diminution of the poet's use of rhetoric.

Auden's Stylistic Identifiers

'What becomes evident in these early poems is a tendency to link private and personal concerns with larger impersonal issues' (a). 'At the same time[,] the texts refuse to present a coherent self embodied [sic] self in a single speaker' (b). 'Nor do they commit themselves to firm and identifiable settings, much less to transcendental certainties' (c). 'The effect is unsettling and often unconvincing' (Emig 2000: 12).

About these first three features, Emig remarks that 'these first poetic exercises already hint at a farewell both to a simple realism (no matter whether it is a psychological or social one) and modernist attempts to employ symbols'. Emig observes that the setting of many of the poems (d) 'oscillates between the realistic and the symbolic' (12).

Emig identifies much of the imagery as 'anthropomorphic again' (e) but does not dwell on their overall impact. Likewise, while he identifies that 'the images are illustrations of the effect of the poem on the reader' (f) and how (g) 'the refusal of communication, indeed, becomes even more pertinent when also linked with the text itself' (13), he does not explore reader-response or reader participation.

Emig identifies how pervasive, in the poems, is 'the loss of contact between self and reality' (h) and how 'it is clear that the Romantic communion of nature and man has ceased to

function'. He identifies 'the concept of the border which becomes so prominent in Auden's early poetry' (i), which he says is ' the dividing line between generations, political convictions, and countries', and how it is also ' the barrier between the poem's message and the reader'.

Emig also more broadly identifies 'the close relation between landscape and observer, state of mind and reality', one that 'will reappear again and again in the analysis of Auden's early poems, alongside the doomed hero that moves along borderlines' (13).

Emig identifies Auden's use of the definite article (j), observing where 'the absence of articles (Auden is always radical with them)...lends an archaic appearance to them, as if the stanza dealt with eternal truths' (14). Observing Auden's 'colourless images which constantly verge on abstractions' as 'illustrating the division between intellect and reality' (k). Emig says that it is 'a division which seems to produce most of the conflicts in the early poems' (14).

In terms of deliberate ambiguity and obscurity (l), Emig observes that 'one always senses possible explanations for terms, but is left defeated when it actually comes to pinning them down', adding that 'it is not even very helpful to be told' their meaning as 'All it tells the reader is that much of the obscurity ...derives from its massive use of private references and schoolboy codes' (14). Emig identifies 'the problematic use of the conjunction 'of ' '(m), which 'tends to combine terms that have no logical meaning' (he cites 'bombs of conspiracy') and which are 'used to dramatize abstractions' while 'it can also compress an entire narrative into an image' (15). Emig cites the example 'wooden shape'.

Crucially, at least for Emig's thesis, 'The significance of the obscure images derives from the absence of identifiable signifieds' (n) which 'can create ambiguity' [in the sense that a poem can generate variable readings]. Emig also identifies 'the missing context of signifiers' as a cause of obscure images' (o). Regarding such deliberate or at least manipulated or willed obscurity, Emig insists that neither of the last mentioned strategies 'produces meaningless texts', how 'the absence of a definable meaning can also be interpreted as a calculated strategy which fulfils a function of its own' (15).

Having set out his list of stylistic identifiers[37], Emig arrives at his central contention, that 'Auden's poetic technique thereby puts into practice what Ferdinand de Saussure formulates theoretically as the arbitrariness of the sign'. Emig explains that Saussure (1857-1913) 'is eager to point out that the link between that which signifies, the signifier or signal, and that which it signifies, the signified (which he sees as a mental image), is governed by convention and not by a natural relation' (Emig 2000: 16).

'Shifting agnosticisms' (source unknown) is the slightly dismissive phrase sometimes associated with career-long searches for ideological salvation, and while that description in Auden's case quite rightly exposes a series of loose allegiances to ideological systems, National Socialism, Marxism, Christianity, Psychoanalysis and others, none of which arguably amount to a solid commitment, such promiscuity is, according to Nicholas Jenkins 'prototypically modern' (Jenkins 2004, *Auden in America*: 39). According to Jenkins:

> The classical route map for a great poet's career was linear and ascendant. Following the Virgilian example, it began with pastoral apprenticeship (*The Eclogues*), continued with works about subjects of great significance (*The Georgics*) and ended with the loftiest achievements, a national epic (*The Aeneid*) (Jenkins 2004: 39).

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[37] Emig adds another stylistic identifier where he explains that 'It is precisely this naturalising of language that Auden's early poems refuse. By making it unpoetic and clinical, they actually problematise the status of their material' (p). 'By producing obscurity and ambiguity, they question the notion that poetic language might have a substance… Auden's poems deny their material wholeness' which Emig is careful to point out 'does not mean that they devalue language' (Emig 2004: 16).

Emig, in a later essay, adds a further stylistic feature (q) or recurring motif to his list where he recognises Auden's description of the need, specifically in poetry, to permit 'the aura of suggestion' (Auden, *The Poet's Tongue*: in Emig 2004) 'that surrounds the words of a poem in a way that anticipates deconstruction's *différance*, or continuous deferral of signifieds (meanings) into chains of signifiers (words)' (Emig 2004: 141).

The Virgilian example is apropos to Auden's career, though Jenkins's classical comparison, quite reasonably, may be making a virtue of necessity in that the three phases of his career do consist of an apprenticeship, a series of explorations (of the dominant ideologies of the twentieth Century), and finally the writing of longer poems of a less ephemeral nature.[38] Auden described himself as wishing to become 'a minor Atlantic Goethe' (Smith 2004: 10).

Citing a 1941 review Auden wrote for *The New Republic,* Emig claims that 'in Auden's later poems a thorough reassessment of his earlier concerns takes place', one that 'takes the form of three inquiries that Auden himself named… The first concerns the self's relation to its past, with Freud as a starting-point. The second examines the self's relation to the present (with Marx at the basis of its inquiry). The third one eventually investigates the relation of self and future or transcendental goals' (Emig 2000: 7).These terms seem a little over-reductive and while they may be true, they are stages that literary critics have, by and large, not explored.[39]

It is important to maintain a perspective and to bear in mind that, as Peter Porter reports, 'Faber and Faber and Random House sold scarcely a thousand or so copies of most of Auden's collections during the thirties' (Porter 2004: 123).[40]

Auden had become a prominent spokesman for his generation largely on the strength of his personality, for abandoning England on the eve of World-War-Two (discussed in the House of Commons at that time), for his associations with the 'Soviet defector' Kim Philby (who contacted him before fleeing to Moscow), and, more broadly, on the basis of his political

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[38] 'Jarrell's… idea of a three-step development, from personal, to social, and then back to personal (religious) concerns, has furnished a framework that both Auden's defenders and detractors have been obliged to accept' Boly 1991: 40). 'His career divides into periods almost as easily, and doubtless as misleadingly, as Shakespeare's or Beethoven's' (Kermode 2008, LRB) http://www.lrb.co.uk/v30/n03/frank-kermode/with-slip-and-slapdash.

[39] Speaking of *The English Auden*, Barbara Everett observes that 'In the two previous collected editions of 1945 and 1950, Auden had arranged his verse in the alphabetical order of first-line initials; but for the 1966 volume Auden arranged his poems in more or less chronological sequence, making breaks, moreover, at what he called 'each new chapter of my life' – 1932, 1938, 1947 and 1957 (where he terminated)' (Barbara Everett 1981, LRB). http://www.lrb.co.uk/v03/n21/barbara-everett/auden-askew

[40] '…publishers' records show that Walter Greenwood's Depression novel *Love on the Dole* sold 46,290 copies between 1933 and 1940 (Hobsbaum 2009, LRB). http://www.lrb.co.uk/v31/n15/eric-hobsbawm/c-for-crisis

involvements, and not on the strength of poetry which, while known to be subversive and occasionally Marxist in tone, went largely unread or misunderstood.

Auden's value had always centred on the fact that his life was more interesting to most readers than his work, and while this is not to say that people did not read his work, readers soaked up details of Auden's life. To slightly abuse a comment made by Raymond Winkler in *Scrutiny*, 'It isn't altogether surprising to find that some of the bones contain more nutriment [sic] than the soup' (Winkler 1941 in Haffenden: 325). Auden's life provided good copy.

More useful are comments like those made by Mendelson who explains the point of traversing such personal and political territory. Charting Auden's progress, Mendelson observes that 'Auden made the difficult journey from a private poetry to a public one, from apparent formal disorder to manifest artifice, and from lonely severity to a community of meaning' (Mendelson 1981: xiv). Randal Jarrell likewise comments on the stages of Auden's development:

Auden's poems, the stages of his poetry, look extraordinarily different, but as the reader gets to know them well enough, thinks about them hard enough, it seems to him [sic] that he can see how and why they changed as they did – can see, even, what was constant underneath all the changes (Jarrell 1951-2, Lecture 1, 2005: 22).

Jarrell observed that 'The world of Auden's early poems –if one presents it as simply as possible in a diagram – is made up of three overlapping processes or fields':

These processes are essentially similar, so much so that almost anything in one has its analogue in the other two. The small central primary process is that of ontogeny, of individual growth, of moral development, the largest and most removed process is that of evolutionary development, of phylogeny:

This ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, as you would suppose, but so does what comes in between [:] the historical process (and its contemporary aspect, the "economic situation") which ranks between the other two, so far as size and importance are concerned. Each of these processes is made to recapitulate the other with astonishing faithfulness (Jarrell, 1951-2, 2005: 25).

Jarrell is suggesting that Auden's relationship to himself and his relationship to the world beyond him had parallels, how the young poet's object relations traversed the stages of his poetry unchanged. The net value of such an observation is to suggest that somehow Auden had an empirical sense of the world about him, that his personal isolation found expression in the depleted community of which he was a part. He, or the presiding voice of the poems, was driven half-mad because the community, whether industrial, commercial or historic, had suffered from neglect or abuse. Essentially, the point that can be taken from Jarrell's observation is that the personal was the political.

As Jarrell suggests, the movement from stage to stage can be traced once the reader has become familiar with the poems but perhaps the biggest obstacle, then and now, to attaining such an overview is Stage One of the poetry which contains poems which continue to be regarded by many, as they were when they first appeared; as 'oblique', (Dudley Fitts), 'unintelligible' (FR Leavis), or 'obscure' (Louis MacNeice) (in Hendon 2000: 68).

The purpose of this chapter, reviewing Auden's critical reception, has been to make the case for a need to reappraise the early work, given the difficulties critics have encountered, then and since, to account for it in meaningful ways.

The next chapter, Anthropomorphism and Theory, examines how 'the pathetic fallacy' (Ruskin, *Modern Painters 1856:* 60-61), 'personifications that we stigmatize as tedious and unreal' (Moore 2008: 1), has come to be regarded by some as 'the master trope of poetic discourse' (Paul de Man 1979, *Resistance*: 48, in Paxson 1994: 1) and 'the fundamental trope of narrative' (Hillis Miller, *Narrative*: 79, in Paxson: 166). This exposition will also explain what is

meant by the claim that anthropomorphism 'engenders, in its semiotic structure, a hidden critique of the structure of Western culture' (Paxson 1994: 50).

At the beginning of this study, the work of Brian Vickers was cited to expose the lack of attention paid to Rhetoric. Despite the lack of 'adequate treatment' (435) mentioned at the outset, Vickers sounds a promissory note where he observes that, though:

> it is evident that for many practitioners of traditional classical philology [,] literary criticism has begun to exist as a respectable category, but not rhetoric ... a proper history of rhetoric... will consider the parallel presence of rhetoric in major literary forms, such as poetry, history, the sermon, the letter, the novel, and the other arts, for these are all ways in which rhetoric has influenced the thought-habits and modes of expression in a society (Vickers 1998 and 2002: 436).

While Literary anthologies are unlikely to begin classifying Auden's work under the category of Rhetoric, his use of rhetoric can earn for literary criticism a greater degree of respect, of the kind Brian Vickers is referring to, if his poetry is acknowledged and credited for what it actually contains. With regard to language, the rhetoric on display in the following excerpt[41] from David Bromwich offers a degree of support to the hope that rhetoric (particularly anthropomorphism) can again become 'a respectable category' (Vickers).

> The projection of the generous instincts of self-sacrifice from the individual to a collective object is a psychological jump that contributes a new and unnecessary evil to the life of society – unnecessary because it goes beyond the minimum necessary evils of regulation, coercion and punishment. The allure of the gregarious satisfaction – as if a team by a victory did more than a person through love – makes a promise only fantasy can deliver, against which reason is helpless and conscience cannot find itself.

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[41] David Bromwich 2008, LRB. http://www.lrb.co.uk/v30/n20/david-bromwich/self-deceptions-of-empire

Chapter Three – Anthropomorphism & Theory

In tracing the fortunes of the trope, James Paxson calls anthropomorphism 'an expressive form that is now entirely abandoned by the literary voices of cultural ascendency', commenting that 'It is intriguing that personification and its coordinate tropes, at one time so securely connected to the absolute center of society (the English monarch) are now a favorite poetic mode of voices on the absolute periphery, the margins of modern Western society' (Paxson 1994: 173).

This shift may be due to the fact that, in past centuries, monarchs often struggled for legitimacy (Spencer's highly anthropomorphic *Faerie Queene* was written in Ireland to buttress the position there of the young, single monarch, Queen Elizabeth I) whereas today, as Paxson details (see Paxson 1994:172-173), minorities of different persuasions struggle to appropriate recognition by finding their own voice.[42] Auden, recognising that political leadership in England during the late 1920s and 1930s was struggling to fulfil its remit, used anthropomorphism to help readers find their own voice by showing them how they could subtly modify textual language to suit their needs and so to reflect their own predilections.

To comprehend the influence anthropomorphism can exert not just upon the sensibilities of readers of poetry but also upon everyday language and thought, connected as the latter are to action and thought and ultimately to the historic process, an investigation into what James Paxson refers to as 'the ostensibly delicate and powerful virtue of the trope' (Paxson 1994: 8) reveals why critics such as J. Hillis Miller, Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida and

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[42] Much more likely, the shift is due to the fact that since absolute monarchies evolved to become largely figureheads in constitutional monarchies, they no longer struggle to gain acceptance by the populous as they cease to rule directly. Their role is largely ceremonial. Since power has been devolved, parliamentary parties are the ones who seek broad consensus, so whereas a young Edmund Spencer presumably sought to hold on to his lands in Ireland (and buttress his own position) by writing *The Faerie Queen*, his modern equivalent probably works in the PR office of one of the major political parties, or perhaps for a national newspaper. Executive style presidents, party leaders and prime ministers are typically the ones who 'struggle for legitimacy' today.

such figures as Plato, Aristotle, Vico, Ruskin and Nietzsche have expounded at length upon 'Homer's common practice of giving metaphorical life to lifeless things' (Aristotle in Paxson 1994: 12, O'Neill 2004: 11). Vico, though largely against anthropomorphism, observed that:

> It is noteworthy that in all languages the greater part of the expressions relating to inanimate things are formed by metaphor from the human body and its parts and from the human senses and passions.

> Thus, head for top or beginning; the brow and shoulders of a hill; the eyes of needles and of potatoes; mouth for any opening; the lip of a cup or pitcher; the teeth of a rake, a saw, a comb; a beard of wheat; the tongue of a shoe; the gorge of a river; a neck of land; an arm of the sea; the hands of a clock; heart for center; the belly of a sail; foot for end or bottom; the flesh of fruits; a vein of rock or mineral; the blood of grapes for wine; the bowels of the earth (Vico, *New Science*, in O'Neill 2004, *Five Bodies*: 11).

If 'the historical fountainhead of Western literary personification' can be found in 'the personified abstractions seen on Achilles shield in the Iliad' (Paxson 1994, 2), then the theoretical fountain-head of Western literary personification may well be found in the words of Friedrich Nietzsche who postulated that truth itself is a construct, a fabrication; embodied in Vico's aphorism *verum ipsum factum*, that *'*truth too is invented' (Vico, *New Science*):

> The question of questions: What is truth; Truth is a mobile army of tropes, metonymies [sic] and anthropomorphisms – Friedrich Nietzsche, *Anthropomorphism and Trope in the Lyric* (1873).

Nietzsche speculates how 'after long and repeated use, a people consider them [truths] solid, canonical, and unavoidable. Truths are illusions whose illusionary [sic] nature has been forgotten, metaphors that have been used up and have lost their imprint and now operate as mere metal, and no longer coins' (de Man 1979, *Allegories of Reading*: 110).

In his attempt to inaugurate a new aesthetic, Auden sought to challenge such 'solid, canonical and unavoidable' truths by exposing them and also, to use Nietzsche's metaphor, to

coin a few of his own. Auden's oft-quoted description of the 1930s as a 'low dishonest decade' is one such example of, in this case, an anthropomorphic projection that is part of the canon of stock phrases. 'Nature abhors a vacuum' is another, coined by the person who probably did most damage to the trope, John Ruskin.

Stan Smith states that 'Auden is one of the few modern poets whose words inhabit the popular memory' (Smith 2004: 1) reporting that '*The Concise Oxford Dictionary* (1993) contains forty citations from Auden's work' (Smith 2004: 2), taking as an example the line 'lay your sleeping head'.

In his essay *Rhetoric of Tropes (Nietzsche)* Paul de Man explains that 'The degradation of metaphor into literal meaning is not condemned because it is the forgetting of a truth but much rather because it forgets the untruth, the lie that the metaphor was in the first place' (de Man 1979: 111). Paul de Man, while not addressing Vico or the Viconian viewpoint, expounds on his postulate where he observes, in *The Will to Power,* that:

> the idea of individuation of the human subject as a privileged viewpoint, is a mere
> metaphor by means of which man protects himself from his insignificance by forcing his
> own interpretation of the world upon the entire universe, substituting a human
> centered set of meanings that is reassuring to his vanity for a set of meanings that
> reduces him to being a mere transitory accident in the cosmic order (de Man 1979: 111).

Nietzsche's dictum, his assertion that truth is man-made and not divinely or otherwise inspired, is relevant to this study insofar as anthropomorphism in literature and in language can be shown to play a part in the formation of truth. In other words, the trope can serve to shape culture where, unique among literary devices, it possesses the capacity to 'redscribe reality' (Ricoeur 2003: 24).

The claims of Vico, Nietzsche and Ricoeur regarding metaphor's role in the formation of truth are strictly speaking at odds with much of the thinking of the last two millennia where Cartesian Duality has held sway; empiricism, positivism and objectivism claiming to have

identified and located how and by what truth is formed. Metaphor does not feature in these systems of explanation.

What George Lakoff and Mark Johnson call *'The Commonsense Theory of Language and Truth',* they are referring and criticising 'the traditional theory of metaphor' that has 'persisted for twenty-five hundred years' which they say 'has fostered a number of empirically false beliefs about metaphor that have become so deeply entrenched that they have been taken as necessary truths' (Lakoff & Johnson 1999: 120). Their study offers a corrective to this practice, and they offer an alternative approach that reinstates metaphorical thinking as central to the formation of truth.

While the reasoning behind their arguments goes beyond the scope of this study, their findings do support the contention that metaphor can indeed shape truth and reality. Lakoff and Johnson do not seek to overturn all inherited philosophic systems of thought, but they do make the important point that 'Much of Western philosophy has turned the common sense folk theory [which rejects metaphor] into an objectivist theory' (Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh* 1999: 120), explaining that:

> what makes sense for basic level concepts has been turned into a theory that is supposed to be true for all thought and language. It is a theory that has held sway for over two millennia, and its dominance has for all that time hidden from view one of the most powerful influences over our daily lives – conventional metaphorical thought (120).

Despite literary-classical testimony which might have spoken to anthropomorphism's distinguished pedigree, from the *Epic of Gilgamesh* to *the Old Testament*, ideological expediency won the day, the term stuck, and the trope remained déclassé for over a hundred years. Charles Darwin's (1809-1882) 'observations of animals in *The Descent of Man'*, for example, were 'criticized for their anecdotal quality and anthropomorphism' (Paul White 2009, *Darwin's Emotions*: 823, *The History of Science Society*).

An 1881 paper by the Duke of Argyll, by way of example, refers to the practice of 'assuming the existence of relations among things which do not exist at all' (Argyll: 38-43). This sentiment is only significant in that it is an example of minor criticism that echoes Bacon's empiricist writ, one that should never have been applied to the language and imagery of creative poetry.

Five years previously, James Edmunds, writing on Kant's *Ethics*, asserted that 'anthropomorphism is of the very essence of all rational representation' (Edmunds 417, *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (October, 1876): 416-431). Eco-critical scholar Brian Moore argues that:

> Personification in literature was finally done in not by Ruskin's pejorative term [The pathetic fallacy] but by Realism in fiction and the Symbolist Movement in poetry, both of which arose in the nineteenth century as responses to romantic idealism (Moore 2008: 35).

'Realism', Moore explains, 'emanated from Positivism which rejected metaphysics and espoused empiricism' (35). In other words, Moore is suggesting that anthropomorphism appeared to contravene the dominant positivist or 'Comtean' bromide, and suffered by default. Bryan Moore cites a number of mid to late twentieth century sources as evidence of an historic tendency both to eschew and to denigrate anthropomorphism, what James Paxson refers to as 'the theoretical camps that devalue the trope' (Paxson 1994: 8). Moore excerpts an example:

> The ancients anthropomorphised freely, but the closer we get to our own era, the less it is used; we may claim that by and large, anthropomorphism is out (Joseph Agassi writing in 1973, Moore 2008: 1).

Bryan Moore further explains that 'For Paul de Man and other poststructuralists, the figure is, like rhetoric in general, far removed from the identity it held from late antiquity to the late twentieth century' (Moore 2008: 1). Considerable distance exists between the trope, as it

has been deployed in literature since antiquity, and academic understanding and acceptance of it, since about the middle of the nineteenth century when it fell from favour.

The viability of the term 'anthropomorphism' appears to have become enmeshed in larger societal and academic concerns for the purity of language and for the clarity of expression, concerns which assumed moral and political implications without due distinction or regard for the fact that literal and metaphorical language, the latter to include figurative and idiomatic expression, were quite different activities with quite independent ontologies, separate domains, and discrete traditions.

Academicians who were concerned with precision, with unambiguous and empirical (indisputable) proofs simply could not permit a trope that so fundamentally relied upon the reader for interpretation. The problem was that there expulsion of the trope brought the trope into needless disrepute as creative writing demands interpretation.

This squares with Lakoff and Johnson's assertion that 'what makes sense for basic level concepts has been turned into a theory that is supposed to be true for all thought and language' (Lakoff and Johnson 1999, *Philosophy in the Flesh*: 120).

Critics are frequently at cross-purposes where they refer to anthropomorphism. Where Ovid talks of knowing why the corn crops are glad; to submit such expressive language to an empirical paradigm or positivist bromide which might somehow render it illogical, unscientific or, as a misuse or abuse of language is to exemplify how well-intentioned efforts and concerns and public platforms erected to improve a language can render that restricted language sterile, and their conclusions often ridiculous.

Though it is nowhere officially recorded, the likelihood is that many objections to anthropomorphism originated with or were inspired by the publication in 1620 of Francis Bacon's (1561 – 1626) *Novum Organon*, written as something of a corrective to Aristotle, 'who corrupted natural philosophy by his logic' (Bacon 1620: LXIII), whose work was entitled simply *Organon*. In it, Bacon sets out in succinct aphoristic fashion to realign men's thinking by

pointing out how erroneous man's perceptions can be when attempting to interpret reality. Such failures he calls *The Idols of the Tribe, idola tribus*, perhaps also explaining why he is regarded as 'the father of empiricism'. Aphorism XLI states that:

> The Idols of the Tribe have their foundation in human nature itself, and in the tribe or race of men. For it is a false assertion that the sense of man is the measure of things. On the contrary, all perceptions as well of the sense as of the mind are according to the measure of the individual and not according to the measure of the universe. And the human understanding is like a false mirror, which, receiving rays irregularly distorts and discolors [sic] the nature of things by mingling its own nature with it (Bacon 1620, *Idols of the Tribe:* Aphorism XLI).

Hence, the proscription of anthropomorphism appears to coincide with a general post-Enlightenment tendency to purge anything considered unscientific from academic use, or perhaps, if Eliot's conception of a 'dissociation of sensibility' (Mendelson 1981: xvii) has any basis in reality, the diminution of anthropomorphism may be a casualty of that purge. [43]

Elsewhere, the trope's fortunes remained tied to the steadily declining fortunes of the mother discipline of Rhetoric; dismissed immediately after the French Revolution by Condorcet (1743-1794) and the Estates General as an instrument of oppression and considered inimical to a Republican education based on reason alone, it was finally removed from the schools' curriculum with the Separation of State and Church in 1905.

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[43] 'The poets of the seventeenth century, the successors of the dramatists of the sixteenth, possessed a mechanism of sensibility which could devour any kind of experience. They are simple, artificial, difficult, or fantastic, as their predecessors were; no less nor more than Dante... In the seventeenth century a dissociation of sensibility set in, from which we have never recovered; and this dissociation, as is natural, was aggravated by the influence of the two most powerful poets of the century, Milton and Dryden. Each of these men performed certain poetic functions so magnificently well that the magnitude of the effect concealed the absence of others. The language went on and in some respects improved; … But while the language became more refined, the feeling became more crude.'

'The second effect of the influence of Milton and Dryden followed from the first, and was therefore slow in manifestation. The sentimental age began early in the eighteenth century, and continued. The poets revolted against the ratiocinative, the descriptive; they thought and felt by fits, unbalanced; they reflected…' (Eliot 1921, *The Metaphysical Poets*). http://personal.centenary.edu/~dhavird/TSEMetaPoets.html

Mid-twentieth century definitions of anthropomorphism maintained the embargo. Publications of record such as the *Dictionary of the History of Ideas* (1973; the year of Auden's death) deemed anthropomorphic assumptions 'not likely to be true' (Agassi in Moore 2008: 1).

Claire Molloy's 2001 essay *Marking Territories* observes that 'anthropomorphism often emerges in discursive struggles to preserve ontological security and the taxonomic privilege of the category "human" '(Molloy, 2001: 1). 'Denied intellectual respectability in many quarters, Western culture has determined and constructed the limits of a discourse of anthropomorphism', she adds. Citing PJ Asquith's 1997 study *Why anthropomorphism is not a Metaphor*, Molloy relates that 'the limits of the discourse depend upon culturally prescribed definitions of humanness and resultant taxonomic systems' (Molloy: 5).

The significance of this point, with its emphasis on the words 'culturally prescribed', is that the decision to elevate or denigrate voiceless entities, to prescribe or indeed to proscribe, is a decision made that is based on cultural priorities and not on so-called objective rational truth. In other words, ideologically driven cultural preferences are local and contingent, and not necessarily universal or necessarily true.

Extensive studies by Janice Lauer (2004) and Richard McKeon (1952) trace the demise of Rhetoric to the removal of *Inventio*, one of Aristotle's five *topoi*, from its purview during the Renaissance, a decision which condemned the discipline to what Paxson, earlier, calls 'an obsession with the pathology of the compendium' (Paxson 1994: 8). Rhetorical education focused on five particular canons, which Paxson lists as: *inventio* (invention), *dispositio* (arrangement), *elocutio* (style), *memoria* (memory), and *actio* (delivery). The removal of invention as a topos would reduce their number to four.

Paul Ricoeur explains that Rhetoric became 'an erratic and futile discipline' and eventually 'died when the penchant for classifying figures of speech completely supplanted the philosophical sensibility that animated the vast empire of Rhetoric, held its parts together, and tied the whole to the organon and to first philosophy' [sic] (Ricoeur 2003, *The Rule of Metaphor*:

9). Ricoeur adds that 'before becoming futile, rhetoric was dangerous. That is why Plato condemned it' (Ricoeur: 10).

For Plato, 'Rhetoric is to justice, the political virtue par excellence, what sophistry is to legislation; and these are, for the soul, what cooking in relation to medicine and cosmetics in relation to the body –that is, arts of illusion and deception' (Plato, *Gorgias*, in Ricoeur 2003: 10).

Ricoeur also presents a contrary view of the trope, from Aristotle who stated that 'It is the one thing that cannot be learned from others; and it is also a sign of genius (*euphuias*), since a good metaphor (literally: to metaphorise well, *eu metapherein*) implies an intuitive perception of the similarity (*to homoion theorein*) in dissimilars' (Aristotle, in Ricoeur 2003: 25).

While the trope functions as a somewhat unusual metaphor in poetry where, for example, *The Book of Job* (38-39) records that 'the morning stars sang together', where Mercutio, wearing a mask or 'prosop', 'speaks of dreams which are the children of an idle brain, begot of nothing but vain fantasy, which is as thin of substance as the air, and more inconstant than the wind'(*Romeo & Juliet*, I. iv: 96-100) , or where, in *The Daffodils*, Wordsworth 'wandered lonely as a cloud'. Paxson warns the reader that, in reviewing examples of the trope, 'anthropomorphism might at first seem mechanical' (Paxson 1994: 46).

Just as the trope possesses the capacity to endow inanimate or voiceless entities with attributes deemed human, as seen in previous examples, it also possesses the capacity nominally to withdraw human attributes from *inter alia* individuals and groups, thereby effectively dehumanising, and so objectifying them as inert and/or passive objects.

In stark contrast to its enforced exile and decline since the middle of the nineteenth-century, perhaps 'nature abhorring a vacuum' (Ruskin, *Modern Painters: 61-64*), anthropomorphism has relatively recently been declared 'the master trope of poetic discourse' (Paul de Man 1979, *Resistance*: 48 in Paxson 1994: 1), and heralded as 'the fundamental trope of narrative' (Hillis Miller, *Narrative*: 79 in Paxson 1994: 166).

Auden's project for cultural renewal relied on readers abilities to recognise, even if only intuitively, the substance of Nietzsche's argument, how the canon of established words in English was subject to revision, how languages evolve by the slow accumulation or dereliction of words. If ordinary readers might learn, occasionally, to reject the writ of authority, they would have begun the process of empowerment that Auden's project envisioned, and demanded if it were to succeed.

It is significant that Auden's project for cultural renewal (1927-1939) happened when it did, at a time when control of the printing presses had been relaxed by church and state and at a time when mass literacy had become commonplace. Conditions were ripe for ordinary readers to make this pro-activist leap, particularly given the ephemeral political climate of the 1930s where activism had become the norm and where public opinion was being courted by a variety of ideological factions. Seeing beyond their narrow appeal, Auden predicted that:

> If we are going to break down, it seems then, that, our failure will be largely a metaphysical failure (*Mimesis and Allegory*, 1940, *Prose*, Vol. II: 78-79).

Auden likened the breakdown in human relations that occurred in the 1930's to 'the breakdown of Classical Civilisation' that he rather abstractly describes as 'a failure to relate the abstract concept to the concrete phenomenal world'. Auden extends the parallel to a post-Christian society where he explains that 'The man in the Athenian Street lost faith in the gods, but the philosophers were unable to replace that faith by anything he could understand from his own experience, so that he easily stepped into nihilistic conclusion'(79). Auden observes, in an essay on Rilke, and building upon the Metaphysical survey he conducted in *Mimesis and Allegory*, that:

> while Shakespeare, for example, thought of the non-human world in terms of the human, Rilke thinks of the human in terms of the non-human (Auden, *Prose*, *Rilke in English*, Vol. II: 25).

Auden explains that though Rilke's 'method is the direct opposite of the Elizabethan's', that is, 'anthropomorphic identification', 'but like them, and unlike the Metaphysicals, he thinks in physical rather than intellectual symbols', the inference being that physical symbols were something the man in the London or Berlin street 'could understand from his own experience'. Auden's observations strike to the heart of the matter:

One of the constant problems of the poet is how to present abstract ideas in concrete terms. The Elizabethans solved it for their generation by an anthropomorphic identification:

That fell sergeant strait in his arrest

The Metaphysicals for theirs by an intellectual ingenuity of wit:

For in your beauty's orient deep

Those flowers, as in their causes, sleep. (Auden, *Prose*, *Rilke in English*, Vol. II: 25).

Auden here makes a mistake as the line he sought, perhaps recalled from memory, reads thus: Had I but time – as this fell sergeant, Death, is strict in his arrest – O, I could tell you – But let it be Horatio, I am dead (Hamlet, V.ii.252-254).   (Auden, *Prose*, *Rilke in English*, Vol. II: 25).

[Def. 'Fell', Adj., 'able or disposed to inflict pain or suffering']

The mistake is significant in that Auden's line omits the allegorical figure of Death which is a personified abstraction and the only reason he, presumably, cites this example. Another mistake can be found in Auden's second citation as the excerpt in question is actually from a poem entitled 'A Song: When June is past, the fading rose' written by Thomas Carew (1595-1639) who was a Cavalier Poet and a favourite of Charles I, and not a Metaphysical poet as Auden states. His insertion of a comma after flowers and his use of 'those' instead of 'these', again suggesting that he was working from memory, do not detract from his essential point, namely that different literary epochs called forth different responses to express abstract ideas.

The omissions recall Prospero's line 'I, thus neglecting worldly ends, all dedicated to closeness and the bettering of my mind… made such a sinner of his memory' after which he asks Miranda – 'Dost thou hear?', whereupon she says – 'Your tale, sir, would cure deafness' (*The Tempest,* I. 2.89-101).

These (memory as sinner, and tale as cure) are possibly better examples of anthropomorphism than those offered in the review as they exemplify allegorical (*prosopopoeia*, masking) and non-allegorical anthropomorphisms (*prosographia*, without a mask), representing Erasmus's two types of personification trope.

'With the exception of Blake', Auden adds that:

the poets of the succeeding two centuries found no fitting solution: in consequence they are weakest whenever they attempt to deal with abstractions. They are content to state the latter abstractly, with the result that their poetry too often degenerates into preaching (Auden 2002, Rilke in English, Vol. II: 25).

Though Auden's comments are more of a tribute to Rilke's contribution to poetry's efforts to remain topical and relevant and connected to larger events than they are an attack upon either the Romantics or the Moderns, Auden implicitly acknowledges that 'the symbolic contract' (Mendelson 1981: xviii) had broken down. Auden's remarks also obliquely recognise his own use of the trope.

It is very difficult to believe that Auden could write what amounts to a recognition of the literary debt owed to anthropomorphism, or 'anthropomorphic identification', as he calls it, and not recognise that here he appears to be implicitly justifying his own prolific use of the trope over the course of his career, while also placing anthropomorphism as the central device which could be relied upon to make poetry relevant and accessible again to the man in the London street or on the Clapham omnibus.

The breakdown, Auden is suggesting, and why poetry lost its connection to ordinary people and events, happened because the poetic methods, the choice of imagery employed by

poets, did not resonate with ordinary people. Citing Cicero's advice to orators, Brian Vickers relates that metaphor may be employed 'more frequently because it is of the commonest occurrence in the language of townspeople and rustic alike', explaining that 'The rustics, for example, say that the vines are bejewelled… the fields thirsty, the crops happy, the grain luxuriant' (Cicero, *Orator*, 24. 81 in Vickers 1998: 299).

Eliot's *Love song of J. Alfred Prufrock* is interesting for its deployment of powerful anthropomorphisms where, for example, 'the fog rubs its back upon the window panes'. The poem's conscription of everyday scenarios, an operating theatre, a cafe, a beach, and a street suggest that the poem's imagery spoke to the man in the street. This may explain its enduring popularity.

While Auden certainly did not articulate anthropomorphism as 'a revolutionary and potently counter-cultural' 'tactic' (Paxson 1994: 173), that engendered 'in its semiotic structure a hidden critique of Western culture'(Paxson 1994: 50), the heavily self-circumscribed New Criticism being in the ascendant throughout his lifetime, Auden's remarks on anthropomorphisms reveal someone with more than a passing interest in its utility.

'For poetry makes nothing happen' (*Elegy to Yeats*) is among Auden's best known lines, frequently cited to assert art's futility in entering or shaping the historic process. The importance of the struggle to avert the War might remain academic except that Auden, upon feeling morally obliged to abandon his hitherto vatic isolation (see Mendelson 1981: xxiii) in search of the underlying causes of the 'metaphysical failure' (Auden, *Prose*, Vol II: 79), appears to have identified in the deployment of the trope a means of salvation, the possibility of averting disaster and *in extremis* saving civilisation by attempting to reform language.

Such a putative reformation, a renewal of 'the symbolic contract', could not of course be enacted overnight, nor instigated by any one individual. If anthropomorphism was the literary device that could play a central role in reshaping the reading public's attitudes toward the information presented to them, Auden would need to convince them. At the heart of Auden's cultural theory, according to John Boly, is the conception that:

Language is a particularly effective means of repression, because it gives… technologies and bureaucracies…though invented by human beings, are no longer controlled by them … because it gives these interests the capacity to enter an individual and, in effect, to become that person's own voice (Boly 1991: x).

By offering an opportune site for the anatomy and disruption of repressive disciplines, poetry might contribute to the open society Auden never stopped hoping would one day be built (xi).

The preceding paragraphs describe how the voice of the master becomes the voice of the people. Beyond its appearance in literature, anthropomorphism also features in everyday language. 'An idea came to me', 'fortune favours the brave', 'tragedy struck at midnight', 'truth speaks to power', 'the economy nosedived', are all examples of anthropomorphism.

Despite several centuries of activism by those who object to the use of anthropomorphism in language, objections based on all manner of grounds, the trope has persisted. Arguably, the practice of borrowing symbols from the external environment and deploying them as metaphors is a clear indication that language and those who use it remain rooted to the physical earth.

The following examples, some of which have already been referred to, reveal something of how formidable and how pervasive use of the trope continues to be:

I am nothing but a magnet constantly moving across the German nation and extracting **the steel from this people** (Adolf Hitler in Arendt: 360-1).

The Jew is **the gangrenous appendix** in **the body of mankind** SS physician, Fritz Klein, speaking in 1940 (Paxson, 1994: 51: Fisk 98).

They planted **the cancerous tumour** of Zionism in the Islamic Ummah (*Press TV*, 01/02/ 2012)

The Taliban have **metastasized** into various **offshoot** factions (Barak Obama, *CNN*: 09.08.13).

The Zionist regime has been **a wound on the body of the Islamic world** for years and should be removed (Hassan Rouhani, The Daily *Telegraph (UK)*: 25.09.2013).

The ship's captain told investigators that the company provides armed escorts to merchant vessels travelling in **pirate-infested waters** in the Indian Ocean (The *Guardian (UK)*: 23/10/2013).

Makkah Police **rounded up** 500 African **illegals** (*Arab News*, November 12, 2013: 1).

As Qatada poured tea into small glass tumblers, he began reeling off images to better communicate the depth of his loathing for Isis. He likes speaking in metaphors. The group, he said, was "like a bad smell" that has polluted the radical Islamic environment. No, they were better described as a "cancerous growth" within the jihadi movement – or, he continued, like the diseased branch of a fig tree that needs to be pruned before it kills the entire organism (*The Guardian* (UK), June 10, 2015).

Beyond its use as a literary device, anthropomorphism possesses the capacity to humanise and sometimes to dehumanise entities considered outside the realm of the human, entities deemed beyond the pale by those authorities with the power and the means to include them or to exclude them.

The employment or abuse of tropes by a dominant discourse or by a minority population within a state can directly influence, not just the treatment of others, but also their survival, so powerful is the trope's capacity to persuade; to appropriate symbols and objects in the external world and use them to effect as markers (recognisable objects, artefacts) with which to convince whole or part populations to a particular course of action.[44] It is also the means by which a poet can, unelected, legislate aspects of his or her society by making, or at least by suggesting, subtle or not so subtle alterations to language.

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[44] 'Narcissists are not identified in a vacuum; the person you label a narcissist is usually someone who's close to you, or a member of a tribe that you have been culturally encouraged or professionally incentivized to dislike' (Gia Tolentino, *The New Yorker*, August 21, 2016 http://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/what-happens-when-we-decide-everyone-else-is-a-narcissist, accessed 17/08/2016).

Anthropomorphism, so described and so understood, can arguably be deemed one of the unacknowledged legislators (or legislative tools) of the world. Raymond Gibbs's Introduction to *The Cambridge History of Metaphor and Thought* states unequivocally that 'Metaphor is not simply an ornamental aspect of language, but a fundamental scheme by which people conceptualise the world and their own activities' (Gibbs 2008: 3), broadly echoing the findings of Lakoff and Turner (and others), cited earlier.

Throughout his adult life, Auden expended great effort examining Fascism, Totalitarianism, National Socialism, Marxism, Psychoanalysis and religion, top-down ideologies that vied for ascendency during the 1930s and after. He concluded that the impending war and the social unrest of the 1930s had far deeper and far older causes.

England, however, was in need of an immediate solution. Though Auden left England in 1939 at the outbreak of the war, part of his legacy is to have located the manner and the means by which further breakdown might be averted by popularising a literary and linguistic device which was being deployed with chilling effect in Germany where Hitler was using the trope to harness the will of the German people.

Auden seems to have intuitively recognised the trope's special facility to elevate or to denigrate entities in the external world. Recognising the power of anthropomorphism to enter the historic process and effect change by shaping the dominant discourse of a society and actually making such changes represents the challenge Auden and his society faced as storm clouds gathered over Europe as the 1930s proceeded.

Why he chose to write and present poetry that defied traditional norms puzzled critics and the reading public alike but, with the benefits of hindsight, modern linguistic theory can supply a plausible answer. Yeshayahu Shen's essay on *Metaphor and Poetic Figures* catalogues the various means by which 'figurative expressions tend… to become conventionalized' (Shen 2008: 296), a pivotal issue so far as Auden's use of anthropomorphism is concerned.

Shen argues that while 'It is commonly assumed by literary critics… that the stylistic properties of poetic language, particularly figurative expressions, deliberately pervert or flout regular cognitive principles, so as to achieve the effects unique to poetic discourse – the creation of such effects being the goal of all poetic discourse… How can we account for the fact that these expressions succeed in communicating in spite of their novelty?' (295).

Shen's answer to this question is that 'poetic figures conform to certain cognitive principles that allow their ideas to be communicated' which she illustrates with reference to 'three types of figurative language, namely, simile, zeugma, and synaesthetic[45] metaphors which are governed by what is called *The Directionality Principle,* which states that 'The metaphorical source domain tends to represent a conceptually more accessible (i.e. more concrete or more salient) concept than the image' (295).

In other words, novel or disruptive or radical as a new image may be, it can be accommodated within a source domain from which ordinary readers can map to comprehend the new image as it auditions for acceptance, as it seeks to be naturalised.

The relatively simple idea that a type of metaphor, accessible and comprehensible to all, can have such a resounding and a far-reaching impact on language is quite extraordinary, one which leads to an overwhelming question, whether poetry can make anything happen?

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[45] 'Synaesthetic… (e.g. sweet silence) entail the mapping of two concrete terms, belonging to two different sensory domains'.

Chapter Four – Auden's 'lack of a social rhetoric' [46]

Can poetry make anything happen?

Towards the end of a 2004 essay entitled Auden's *English: Language and Style*, part of an overdue retrospective (see George Bahlke, *Collected Essays*: 1991) on WH Auden from Cambridge University Press where nineteen prominent critics of the poet's work tackle the various strands of his legacy, the Australian poet-critic Peter Porter wrote that 'Above all, he has returned to poetry its ancient privilege as a major component of world literature'. Porter concludes a not uncritical survey with the assertion that 'nobody in the past hundred years has shown better how English [poetry] can be a fitting vehicle for intellectual illumination' (Porter 2004: 135).

The 'above all' of Porter's assertion is interesting because relevance seems to be its *sine qua non*, the belief that poetry should be at the centre of things. It implies that poetry needs to be and to remain relevant, something poetry has not always managed to do, or to be. It is perhaps no accident that the reason Auden, putatively, returned poetry to relevance was that the period when his work first gained prominence, the 1930s, was a period when a whole way of life was under threat, the last time that writers and artists became actively involved in the struggle to save Western civilisation.

'That writers had a social function was an orthodox notion in England during the 1930s, according to Patrick Deane (Deane 2004, Auden's England: 34) who cites the influential essay '*Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture*' (1930) where FR Leavis, the doyen of the literary establishment at that time, 'began the decade by declaring that English culture was in crisis, and asserted the social responsibilities of writers and critics' (Deane 2004: 35).

Deane relates how, at the '*Second International Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture*' in Madrid in 1937 (the first in 1935), the gathering issued an appeal which was later reprinted in T*he Left Review* , 'to writers of the world, to all those who believe deeply and

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[46] Auden's 'difficulty in finding a language for social criticism' (Mendelson 1981: 131).

sincerely in their human mission, in the power of the written word to take up their stand without delay against the menace which hangs over culture and humanity' (Deane 2004: 35).

Auden, in his own way, responded to this call. Whether it was wise to get involved in politics puzzled the young man. Whether a poet could influence the political sphere, or whether poetry or art provide a suitable venue for the discussion of important societal issues, were questions that all artists and writers of the period faced. Auden became popular for:

his ability to catch the changing moods of the time… expressing sentiments that people were unaware they shared until they read him…sentiments often decidedly political, indicting a disintegrating social and economic system ripe for fascism (Smith 2004: 3).

This question Auden faced was one he posited in his 1939 elegy for WB Yeats:

For poetry makes nothing happen: It survives

In the valley of its saying where executives

Would never want to tamper; it flows on south

From ranches of isolation and the busy griefs,

Raw towns that we believe and die in…   (Auden: 242)

Peter Porter's assertion, *ars poetica in medias res*, is an important one as it reaffirms the importance of what Edward Mendelson refers to as 'the symbolic contract' (Mendelson 1981: xviii). A breakdown in that contract was 'among the historical crises faced, and in part invented, by modernism' according to Mendelson. Referring to critical resistance to Auden's early efforts to find a way of re-connecting with the reading public, he observes that:

Critics who looked to poetry for an escape into the ideal took offence at Auden's deliberately unpoetic language of description, his frequent refusal to sing…but his particularizing language was his homage to the actual, his refusal to generalize …His

language allowed him to be didactic, and he hoped his didacticism would finally allow him to cross the barrier between poet and audience (Mendelson 1981: 209).

The problem with writing didactic poetry for Auden was that it coincided with his self-admitted weakness for demagoguery. Mendelson also observes that:

Too often he hectored his readers or despaired over their intransigence. But he was also learning to offer parables – didactic poems that refused to limit his readers' power of choice by telling them how to use it. Through knowledge he hoped to enlarge freedom (Mendelson 1981: 209).

By writing poetry about War, Communism, the Church, Art and others such, Auden was creating for poetry a forum that had been off limits. Edward Mendelson writes that Auden 'began to recognise that the literary manner he inherited from his modernist predecessors had rendered practical social issues invisible by assimilating all experience into a private introspective order' (Mendelson 1981: 131).

Lamenting the absence of such a dialogue, 'his lack of a social rhetoric' (Mendelson 1981: 131), Mendelson identifies Auden's 'difficulty in finding a language for social criticism... Everywhere, one hears voices speaking only about personal issues, and so criticism of society has become impossible' adds Mendelson. Citing a January 1933 Auden review in *The Criterion*, Mendelson records the poet as saying that:

Whoever possesses the instruments of knowledge, the press, the wireless, and the Ministry of Education, is the dictator of the country; and, my friends, it becomes increasingly difficult to overthrow a bad one because imitating our voice, he makes us believe that he does not exist (Mendelson 1981: 131).

The suggestion here is that having identified the self-imposed limits which poetry had concerned, some would argue encumbered itself with, Auden set out to enlarge the range and the scope of socio-political expression, and, lacking a language that might allow him to

comment on what he regarded as topical issues, began to think in terms of a new aesthetic. Mendelson concludes that:

> Auden's complaint regarding the limits of the language available to him should be read as a poet's complaint as well as a citizen's. Politics and sociology offered adequate rhetoric for the arguments he wanted to make, what he needed was a way of incorporating this rhetoric into a memorable language for poetry (Mendelson 1981: 131).

Mendelson observes that 'As Auden sought a poetic language of choice and community…Berthold Brecht was tackling the same problem', how 'He had already recognised what Auden now began to understand: that to turn away from the closed intensity of modernism required more than an enlargement in vocabulary and style such as Auden had begun in 1930. It required a thorough change in the artist's relation to his audience'. Mendelson adds that Auden realised that:

> Instead of composing his unique experience into idiosyncratic structures, or transmitting the forms of his vision to an audience of the aesthetically initiated, an artist must convey knowledge that is not exclusively his own, and that he and others can put to use. He must become a teacher both of theory and practice (Mendelson 1981: 132).

Therefore, Auden was not so much finding his own voice as he was searching for a medium that best suited the issues he wanted to address. Auden's task, his concern that the word be made flesh (*Et Verbum caro factum est,* the unity of word and flesh, substance and imagination) that poetry might have something important to say, or might make something happen, was assisted by what is commonly recognised as a lack of political leadership in the 1930s. Writers and artists attempted, or were co-opted, to fill the political vacuum.

The political paralysis of the 1930s was due to the failure of any party to win a majority in parliament, particularly after Oswald Mosley left the Labour government in January 1931. Ramsey MacDonald subsequently resigned and formed a National Government (sic), a coalition

but Popular Front governments in France and Spain, the death of George V in January 1936, and the ongoing uncertainty as to Germany's expansionist aims, ensured political stasis as nobody was quite sure what to expect. The relevance of political uncertainty to Auden and his generation was that the public had become unsettled by the competing ideologies vying for attention, and so, naturally enough, looked beyond politicians for political guidance.

Auden fretted at the prospect of the task of finding such a new language or idiolect. Citing the poet, Mendelson relates that, as late as May 1933, Auden:

charges [sic] that his literary language is so corrupted by its limited reference that teaching it to the young cannot serve to make them critical. Better for an English class to study advertising, 'part of the environment [to] which literature is a reaction', than literature itself (Mendelson 1981:133).

'Perpetually confronted with the problem of what to do with the time between the few hours when he is visited by his muse', and therefore 'resentful of any prose he wrote for implying a poetic impotence' (Sharpe 2004: 112), 'after 1932 Auden began contributing prose to literary periodicals' (Davenport-Hines 2004: 18).

Despite an ambiguous attitude toward his better paying job as a reviewer and essayist, the 1930s saw Auden forced to confront topical issues and articulate or occupy positions that he otherwise might not have done. He even modified his attitude to prose, observing how 'Since the word was made flesh, it is impossible to imagine God as speaking in anything but the most sober prose' (Sharpe, 2004, 122).[47]

Auden's prose supplies insights to his thinking about poetry for the role it might play in the reformation of culture. 'Sometimes he embedded clandestinely self-revelatory reports on his current intellectual passions or volatile emotions in apparently neutral pieces of writing', observes Richard Davenport-Hines. 'He was an omnivorous reader whose reviews and essays often foreshadowed ideas he was later to develop in poems' (Davenport-Hines 2004: 14-15).

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[47] http://www.newadvent.org/bible/joh001.htm#vrs14

For example, speaking of an essay on 'Writing', which Auden 'prepared for a children's encyclopaedia early in 1932', Edward Mendelson observes that 'critics have ignored this remarkable essay', and marvels that 'Auden used this unpromising setting to publish a manifesto of his private ideology' in which he 'made clear not only that his sole subject at the time was dissociation from a longed-for unity, but also that he regarded *Sehnsucht* and division as the ultimate subject of all written language' (Mendelson 1981: 14).

Arthur Kirsch explains that 'In one of his introductions to his five-volume *Poets of the English Language* in 1950, he wrote that ' the dualism inaugurated by Luther, Machiavelli and Descartes has brought us to the end of our tether and we know that either we must discover a unity which can repair the fissures that separate the individual from society, feeling from intellect, and conscience from both, or we shall surely die by spiritual and physical annihilation' (Kirsch 2003, *The Sea and the Mirror*: xiv-xv).

Patrick Deane's essay *Auden's England* records that 'As early as 1932 Auden had envisaged a role for the writer in building the good society' (Deane 2004: 53). Auden began to develop a language that would permit him to comment on topical issues while avoiding his tendency to browbeat.

The symbolic contract, for poetry to remain relevant, is something which needs to be renewed for each generation, and, poetry runs the risk of becoming marginal or inward where it fails to engage citizens or adherents in a meaningful way. In a 1939 essay on WB Yeats, Auden explained the form such an engagement might take. 'A great poet':

> to deserve such an epithet… is commonly required to convince us of three things: firstly a gift of a very high order for memorable language, secondly a profound understanding of the age in which he lives, and thirdly a working knowledge of and a sympathetic attitude towards the most progressive thought of his time (Auden 1939, *Partisan Review*: 3 and *Prose*, Vol. II: 4).

Auden's emphasis on a great poet's 'sympathetic attitude toward the most progressive thought of his time', which he identifies as 'the great struggle of our time to create a juster [sic] social order' (Auden 1939: 4) was delivered in a 1939 essay, just a few short months after his poem for Yeats, as perhaps something of an antidote to those who took a little too literally his earlier declaration of art's futility.

Auden regarded Yeats's refusal to support the Irish Nationalists in the 1916 rebellion as something of a weakness (Auden 1939, *Prose*, Vol. II: 4) and his (Auden's) declaration that poetry made nothing happen was a ventriloquized Yeatsian maxim as much as it may have been intended as his own opinion regarding art's utility.

> The deceased had the feudal mentality. He was prepared to admire the poor just as long as they remained poor and deferential, accepting without protest the burden of maintaining a little athenian [sic] band of literary landowners, who without their toil could not exist for five minutes (1939, *The Public v. the Late William Butler Yeats* 2002, *Prose*, Vol. II: 4).

Often cited as an article of faith, his 'belief' that 'while literature could expose and critique a society's leading paradigms, it did not directly re-enter history as an effective agent' (Boly 2004, Essay: 139, Mendelson 1981: 393), Auden's actions suggest that it was not a view he held fervently as his own response to the socio-political problems can hardly be described as defeatist.

Auden frequently reminds the reader that 'all art is ventriloquism' (Smith 2004: 9) but the clamour for absolutes frequently saw his opinions aligned with his 'beliefs', or at least, with his utterances, in public and in verse. Until he departed for America with Christopher Isherwood in 1939, his actions suggested he very much believed that poetry could make something happen. Auden spent a decade trying to make something happen. He had spent most of the 1930s trying to reform 'this country of ours, where nobody is well' (Deane *2004*: *27*). On this issue, Stan Smith has this to say:

Auden's apparently tough-minded attitude toward the bad faith of art is focused in a much cited and decidedly rhetorical axiom of 'In Memory of WB Yeats': poetry makes nothing happen. This somewhat dubious claim has become a truism of debates about the social function of art. But Auden's poetry, modified in the guts of innumerable successors, has certainly made happen innumerable later poems… (Smith 2004: 4).

Smith here is referring to the influence Auden has had on other poets. Why Auden seems to have been blinded regarding his (own) influence on his successors may have had to do with the difficult critical reception his poetry received, but again the tendency to assume Auden believed in his own maxim forces the reader into speculation.

Patrick Deane points out that Auden's essay on Yeats, later in the same year, was an attempt to rectify the impression that Auden did not believe poetry could make anything happen, adding that 'Evidently not satisfied…' that Auden's 'demurrer' in the poem, '…a way of happening, a mouth…was sufficiently clear', Auden addressed the issue a few months later in an essay entitled *The Public vs. The Late Mr William Butler Yeats*.

On the first page of his long essay, Auden makes the general point that 'Our fathers imagined that poetry existed in some private garden of its own, totally unrelated to the workaday world, and to be judged by pure aesthetic standards alone. We know that now to be an illusion' (Auden 1939, *Prose* Vol. II: 3). This statement would seem to be a clear attempt to distance himself from an opinion that he had become associated with. Deane cites the essay, how 'we are tempted to judge contemporary poets because we really do have problems which we really want solved, so that we are inclined to expect everyone… to give us what we want, and to blame indiscriminately when they do not' (Deane 2004: 37).

Deane also makes the point that 'Such effect as a text has, then, is linked to the way in which readers experience it, rather than to anything it might "say" '(Deane 2004: 36). This aspect of the problem is only of interest insofar as it casts light on Auden's realisation that it simply was not enough to say something, how the manner of its reception was also important.

Auden's essay on Yeats is a repudiation of opinions contained in his elegy for the Irish poet, which readers had taken to be his own private view.

In any event, the point of questioning the axiom is not to resolve the matter definitively but to challenge the manner in which the axiom manqué has transmuted into an article of faith. The relative ease with which Auden's axiom has been adopted is perhaps a measure of the attitude many people still hold toward poetry, that somehow poetry should concern itself with other matters.

If Auden recognised that he needed a new social rhetoric to address topical issues, to show his 'sympathetic attitude to the most progressive thought of the day' (Auden, *Partisan Review*: 3), he still lacked the poetic form that might allow him to address contemporary events and issues. Edward Mendelson presents the problem as follows:

> When Auden set out to write in a different tradition, his goal was a poetry that reflected the formal and linguistic lessons of modernism yet could still serve the public good. The art he wished to create was intent less on autonomy and stasis than on enlightenment and action (Mendelson 1981: 205).

This said, Peter Porter asserts that 'Auden gave no credence to the idea that form must be governed historically or should spring mysteriously from contemporary necessities... He was sceptical that ''the age demanded'' any style just because it was the age' (Porter 2004: 129). Porter also asserts that Auden's reference to a 'low dishonest decade' (from *September 1, 1939*) was 'the most politicised since the Napoleonic era, and he seemed to his audience at the time ''a political poet'' '(129). Porter's claim is a very grand one and cannot be gauged here.

The question remained, as to which literary form Auden might adopt. Moreover, insofar as he could find a literary form to serve both his needs and the common good, it remained uncertain that people, primarily critics, would recognise that new form. If poets and readers of poetry were successfully to reaffirm 'the symbolic contract', then perhaps, as important would be the critics' role in mediating their own unspoken contract with the poet or the artist.

In reviewing the literature on Auden, a longstanding problem in presenting Auden to the public, at least for Auden studies, has been a preference toward peripheral aspects of the poet's life, as explained by the critic Bernard Bergonzi:

Auden's death in 1975 [1973] evoked some backward glances at his early career but no fresh appraisals. The emphasis has, in short, been thematic and generalised, or biographical or historical... not much has been said about the fact that Auden's influence has been as much stylistic as thematic (Bergonzi 1975: 65-74).

Writing in 1979, Paul de Man addressed this problem at length in an essay on Nietzsche (*Genesis and Genealogy*) which opens with the observation that 'In literary studies, structures of meaning are frequently described in historical rather than in semiological or rhetorical terms' (de Man 1979, *Allegories of Reading*: 79).

His essay addresses a phenomenon which appears to have hampered efforts to classify the arrival of work which, though recognisably new, did not meet the expectations of critics who 'seem to shy away from the analysis of semantic structures and feel more at home with problems of psychology or historiography' (de Man 1979: 79). Auden also commented on this tendency:

Literary criticisms [sic] tend to isolate literature as the relation of one writer to another from the rest of the historical process: their treatment of the effect of the form of a society on art has, as far as I know, only scratched the surface of this profoundly interesting problem (Auden, *Prose*, Vol. I: 67).

The point of raising these issues is, again, not to test their plausibility or to find definitive explanations for them, but to reveal the instability of efforts to classify Auden's work, and also to entertain the possibility of reclassifying Auden's poetry in the light of its neglected features.

His canon has been provokingly inconstant, flouting any notion of art's fixity; he subjected his poems to authorial revision or derision, even to complete suppression.

Any critical summary of his career, therefore, risks offering a sedatively reasoned account of something which was in many aspects unshapely [sic] and unreasonable (Tony Sharpe 2007, *WH Auden*: xiii).

To this, Bergonzi adds that 'Auden's legacy from the thirties was not only his own dazzling and mannered poetry, but an instantly recognisable idiom, the Audenesque, which began with a few imitators early in the decade but within ten years was common throughout the English speaking world' (Bergonzi, *Encounter*: 65-74).

In surveying the literature since Blair and Bergonzi issued their warnings, the pattern they refer to has persisted. 'By this I mean', echoes the critic Rainer Emig in 2000:

the (un)critical routine...the common integration of Auden into a pattern that is as well trodden as it is generally useless: the young poet attempts certain artistic innovations, some of which are interesting and fertile, others of which go over the top and prove counterproductive and dangerous. In his middle age the poet calms down and accepts the complexity of existence, while in his later years he philosophises about the meaning of life and the approach of death (Emig 2000: 8).

If Bergonzi identifies the structural failures of Auden criticism, Rainer Emig supplies the detail where he asserts that 'integration into the established canon...has only been made possible through a wilful neglect of many of its features' (Emig 2000: 2).

With few exceptions, notably those raised by Emig and Boly, the great majority of full-length studies of Auden's poetry ignore what Bergonzi refers to as 'the stylistic'. Invariably, studies of Auden's poetry become enmeshed in the ideas the works imply with the result that 'the art of the poetry' as Blair referred to it (Hendon 2000: 179) largely remained and, to some extent, still remains neglected.

John Fuller's 1978 extended study, *A Commentary,* is a notable exception to this tendency. Fuller's work serves as an antidote to the trend in that he abjures what he calls 'the circumstantial background...there was, after all, enough work to be done in puzzling over

details of interpretation and in tracing for the first time the sources of some of his most celebrated poems' (Fuller 1978, W.H. Auden, *A Commentary*: vii).

In examining Bergonzi's manifest of stylistic identifiers (use of the definite article, unusual adjectives and adjectival phrases, surprising similes, and personified abstractions), what is interesting is that all four features are rhetorical devices or rhetorical gambits. Therefore, if a case can be made for the need for a reappraisal of Auden's work, the question remains, to what authority should readers look to reconsider his literary output.

John R. Boly's critique, *Reading Auden: The Returns of Caliban* (1991) renders largely superfluous the traditional analysis of *any* Auden poem of Stage One. Boly demonstrates convincingly how those who dismiss the content of the poetry as 'unintelligible' are not incorrect in their responses, that there is something else going on. So-called unintelligibility, according to Boly, was part of Auden's method.

Boly's study silences the standard belief that Auden's poetry of the first stage is *simply* obscure, and therefore flawed, and experimental. Stage One *is* experimental and, by and large, it *is* obscure, and as traditional poetry goes, it *is* flawed but, the reader discovers, there are good reasons, or at least good explanations, for the apparent obscurity.

Auden does not present the reader with unintelligible poetry because he disregards the reader, nor because he wants to abolish the reader. The reader for Auden is pivotal, as Boly asserts. The reader is the co-author, or at least a potential co-author, if he answers the summons to embrace the chaos and engage with the drama of the poem on its own terms as a fluid, incomplete arena where something cathartic can occur. The poem therefore assumes a value beyond the limited intentions of the author.

The reader, as co-author, interprets the presented images and words on the page and, depending on which 'interpretive community' (Fish 1976, *Interpretive Communities*: 271-221) she belongs to, augments them. This is what is meant by its performative aspect, as a

collaborative effort on the part(s) of writer and reader. Referring to his thesis, John Boly explains that:

> This book argues that WH Auden wrote his poetry to help people to become more aware of what happens when they read. In itself that is an innocent enough, maybe even banal claim. But if patiently pursued, it leads into perilous territory, the uncharted marches, badlands, deserts waiting calmly beyond the horizon of Auden's verse (Boly 1991: ix).

> it is natural to assume that reading is a practical affair, a matter of figuring out what must have been an author's original intention. But for Auden that is not it at all. He saw reading as an activity that takes place in a cultural arena, where murderously opposed interests compete for status and power. Contrary to widespread belief, reading is not the referee of this mayhem but its chief prize and goal.

> The rivals of the arena try to seize control of reading, to claim its activity of meaning making as their own. Auden knew that to hold power over someone is not to impose a specific (and easily forgotten) truth, but to induce that person to construct reality in a predictable way (Boly 1991: ix).

The reader as 'docile, obedient effigy' is Boly's main concern. The reader, according to Boly, typically accepts the particular role the poet or the poem assigns. Auden, he explains, certainly does not dismiss this traditional 'docile' role, as it 'provides the basis not just for ordinary communication but for the whole elaborate apparatus of a culture's understanding and truth'… 'But to read for content…is not only unhelpful but obstructive' (Boly 1991: 2).

Instead, he sees that 'the main task for poetry is to maintain the possibility of an auditor's alternative reading, as a noncompliant, dissenting respondent'. To empower such an auditor, or at the very least to alert the reader to the nature of the activity of reading, Auden denies easy access to the content of the poem. Denied access to the poem's content, the

reader is faced with a choice: abandon the work or make the effort to understand, not what the work presents, but what it represents (Boly 1991: 2). Most crucially, Boly observes that:

> For Auden, modern society is composed of technologies and bureaucracies that, though invented by human beings, are no longer controlled by them. Anywhere one turns, including (especially) the depths of the innermost self, a presiding voice, vestige of the romantic *genius loci*, stands guard as the agent of these social forces (Boly 1991: x).

'Language', Boly continues:

> is a particularly effective means of repression, because it gives these primary interests (technologies and bureaucracies) the capacity to enter an individual and, in effect, to become that person's own voice (x).

Boly here refers to the manner in which the presiding voice of the superego is likewise breached by the seduction of an authorial voice that has hijacked discourse such that people remain unaware that they are not exercising free will *per se,* but are functioning as automatons in the service of vested interests he identifies.

The notion assumes a degree of comedy if the reader encounters, for example, some of the managerial buzzwords that are used by those who are charged with introducing new managerial initiatives, or those who are keen to impart their credentials as insiders. This is not to suggest that such repetition is always conducted unconsciously or with insidious intent, as people quite naturally repeat new words or terms they hear or read. The point *is* that the human tendency to repeat what they hear *is* quite natural, even if people resist or baulk at the suggestion that they too are susceptible.

However, what does not seem natural is the human tendency to imagine that the origin of the repeated message rests with the speaker himself, and not in fact with the person or entity who originated the idea or opinion. This amounts, perhaps, to a charge of intellectual dishonesty or perhaps carelessness on the part of the party who repeats messages unthinkingly. The charge of a degree of dishonesty can be made not because people are not aware the

information came from elsewhere but that people, perhaps, want to take credit for imparting the information they repeat.[48]

When language, used to de-personify others, is repeated by the hearer, the consequences can be dramatic, where comedy can give way to tragedy if voiceless or under-represented entities are or become stereotyped. Where Auden occasionally over-extends his use of the trope, the consequences can lead to farce, for example his deployment of the anthropomorphic 'morning's praise', and 'a disobedient dream'. Jarrell referred to such couplings as 'Another of Auden's usual formulas' which he argues 'might be called the juxtaposition of disparate coordinates' (Jarrell 1951-2, Lecture 3, 2005: 49).

Like the dog on the gramophone label, the listener obeys 'his master's voice' not just by listening to it, or barking when he hears it, but also by faithfully reproducing it. In reproducing it, he appropriates it, and owns it, and when he deploys it, the story goes, forgets that it is not his own voice. Where tragedy turns to tragicomedy, he also forgets that in reproducing his master's voice, he also invariably reproduces his master's ideology.

Language, with its inherent ideological baggage, is internalised throughout a person's life. In other words, the reader contracts the ideological priorities of a voice not her own but which becomes her own. Boly observes that 'as an anatomy of this seductive coercion'

> the voice of an Auden poem is typically a negative force. Its task is to intimidate the reader into compliance with its limits and to manage the text so that its inscriptions remain unobtrusive, marginal, as *insignificant* as possible.

> Reading Auden, then, is partly a matter of outwitting a dominant voice (in effect, outwitting oneself as the conjuror of that voice) by patiently tracing its repressive stratagems.

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[48] '…fashionable management-consultant verbiage, those catchy, suggestive yet profoundly shallow slogans coined by the authors of the latest business-book bestsellers, who proclaim them expensively and with evangelical insistence on the corporate lecture circuit, with the result that they are then repeated with great solemnity to audiences of deferential, bewildered employees in corporate briefings, 'workshops' and 'retreats' (Luttwak LRB 1994). http://www.lrb.co.uk/v16/n07/edward-luttwak/why-fascism-is-the-wave-of-the-future

Auden's forsaken landscapes, with their dilapidated ruins and derelict machinery, furnish images for the disruptive potential of the text. For that disruption emerges not only from the detritus of contemporary usage but from the wreckage of industries once in demand and now abandoned (Boly 1991: 6).

In other words, the damage endured as a result of the industrial exploitation of the countryside finds apt expression in a disjointed poetic voice that embodies that fallout. That voice encounters abandoned mines, derelict warehouses and factories, unused tram and train-lines while lamenting the total absence of the departed people who 'populate' the poem, what used to be a thriving community.

Auden's poetic voices are often the voices of people who appear to have internalised the industrial decay and resulting social disintegration, and so where they are incoherent and damaged and unable to supply the reader with coherent ideas or any clear progression of imagery, as is often the case, they give voice to the general torpor. Language acts in sympathy with the hollowed landscapes he presents. His language dramatically embodies decay.

The critical importance of encouraging the reader to assume responsibility for the text, by becoming its co-author, is that for democracy to function, individual readers, or at least a substantial number of them, have to be relied upon actively to discriminate between the truth and that which is not. This last statement cannot be proved but it is hoped that the reader will accept it in good faith as self-evident.

One further aspect of the poetry, not yet remarked upon, is the sense that Auden's verse, however clever and constructed to will the reader to dissent, may in fact also signal an exorcism of sorts. It would be wrong to assume that Auden was in control to the degree that definitive summaries and pronouncements often inadvertently imply.

They show not the performance of an accomplished voice but the trial efforts of what may later become one… These poems do not, as in the narratives of an intention-based criticism, show a youthful ''Auden'' testing his talents in an effort to find the authentic

voice. Rather they eavesdrop on the disciplinarian's workshop. Through their deliberately off-register arrangements, they gain access to a scene of production, the tactician's stithy [sic, smithy] where disciplines are forged into meaning and truths (Boly 1991: 139).

Auden, speaking in the third person, concedes that the work of a young writer is sometimes 'a therapeutic act', how:

> finding himself obsessed by certain ways of feeling and thinking of which his instinct tells him he must be rid before he can discover his authentic interests and sympathies, and the only way by which he can be rid of them is by surrendering to them (Auden 1932, *Prose*, Essay entitled *Writing* Vol. I 1996: 18).[49]

The indignation and the stupefaction felt by the reader, the huge resistance this poem and others like it provoke, is the wellspring, the source from which the reader can later fashion more productive responses to the poem. A high degree of frustration is not simply to be tolerated; it is to be actively encouraged as a necessary step to look beyond content and to look beyond finding easy access to the poem.[50]

The reader may recognise that, in seeking a new social rhetoric, 'Complexity of form is sophistication of content' (Wimsatt 1954: 48), that Auden's need to address topical problems must have been a key driver in selecting the literary form he did. Anthropomorphism was among his key detonators.

Huge, perhaps even violent frustration is the necessary precursor, once the reader has learned how to read Auden, to crafting a particular role for the reader of the poem. Poem XVIII (Part Five) is a good place to start in that it exemplifies Auden at his most intractable:

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[49] Seamus Heaney remarks that Stan 'Smith maintains that early Auden, for example, is both afflicted and inspired by his perception that he is the product rather than the producer of several world-shaping discourses' (Seamus Heaney 1987, LRB). http://www.lrb.co.uk/v09/n11/seamus-heaney/sounding-auden

[50] Auden was a voracious reader of detective stories (Auden 1948: *Prose* Vol. II: 263) which he identified as occupying a distinct position within the literary canon, valorising their structure (their use of peripeteia) which he likens to Greek tragedy in terms of the role each assigns for the reader, quite different from other forms of imaginative literature which do not invoke the reader's participation to the same degree.

XVIII (Auden: 147-148)

One absence closes other lives to him

Like Sunday; his **self pity falls like rain**

And keeps the pasty household all indoors;

Up in **the pokey nursery of the brain**

The **thoughts grow tired** of story and charade

And start **to pinch each other**; with inertion [sic]

His head aches; **petted senses** at his side

Exasperate him with **their dumb devotion**.   (May 1934)

Poem XVIII, written in May of 1934, opens with a sentence that defies easy access or assimilation, immediately placing the reader on the back foot. If the reader had survived reading parts one to three, none of which supply anything resembling a story-line or a set of cogent images, the reader has little alternative but to permit this opening line, allow it to pass without making much sense of it, and hope that the ensuing lines might illuminate the rather vague scenario the speaker of the poem has presented the reader with, that of 'one absence closing other lives to him/ Like Sunday', a non-descript sentence whose meaning is not clear. Bewilderment is a not an unreasonable response. Under the umbrella of the Auden Weltanschauung, bewilderment, or something resembling it, is often the preferred response.

The absence of a comma at the end of the first line suggests to the reader that the simile 'like Sunday' (unless the speaker is actually referring to the events of a previous Sunday where 'like' is used as an example) is meant to clarify the mysterious absence which induces self-pity which is anthropomorphised and 'falls like rain', presumably a reference to involuntary tears and sadness. Auden, or the mouthpiece of the poem, ('the implied author' or 'the

author's second self', Chatman, *The Structure of Narrative Transmission*: 99) invokes the presence of the object by announcing his or her absence. The object is apostrophised.

The speaker's self-pity, readers are told, keeps 'the pasty household indoors', an image which suggests that by indoors is meant a sense of being or remaining bottled up, physically and emotionally, an inference confirmed in the next line where, finally, 'the pokey nursery of the brain' indicates that the scenario of the poem is a mental and an emotional one, and not an actual physical setting, although it may be both. It may be that the speaker has borrowed concrete images from the external world to serve as objective correlatives in the sense that T.S. Eliot referred to them in his essay *Tradition and the Individual Talent.*[51]

Though Eliot has been superseded as a literary critic, his terms of reference so far as personification theory is concerned have not, and so the significance of the term he coined, and his suggestions regarding 'the dissociation of sensibility', that pathos was exiled or circumscribed at a particular point in literary history, do provide working terms with which to investigate the appropriation and the manipulation of material objects in poetry.

With a clearer sense that the poem is perhaps metaphysical, that emotions are deployed as *dramatis personae*, the speaker develops the theme by anthropomorphising thoughts, 'The thoughts grow tired of story and charade, And start to pinch each other'. This may be an expression of boredom that follows on from the absence referred to in the opening line, but it is far from clear. '[w]ith inertion' is a non-standard variable of the word inert, to mean stasis or torpor, used here to describe the speaker's inability to think or to function. A paralysis that merits a new addition to the English language is indeed a disability like no other. Language does not possess the capacity to express his sadness and so a newly coined word 'inertion' thereby consummates or beweeps the speaker's sorry state.

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[51] In a 1921 essay, entitled *Hamlet and His Problems,* Eliot asserted that 'The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an "objective correlative"; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked' (Eliot 1921, *The Sacred Wood*: Para. 7).

The speaker's 'head aches', as the poet deconstructs 'headaches', while a new addition to the metaphysical tradition, the 'petted senses' of the speaker, 'exasperate' him due to what the speaker deems 'their dumb devotion', a recurring sentiment in Auden's poetry which he uses to stress the autonomy of the mind and body, indicating a split in the organism which seems more than just a division of labour. The mind and body cannot agree.

Quite apart from the task of deciphering the content of the poem, discovering tropes, or identifying recurrent themes, the reader is confronted with a display of emotion that, initially, at least, he must tune in to, in order to determine what is being said. Once the reader understands that the resident population of the poem is in fact internal to the speaker, the task is assisted. Unhelpful similes, insofar as they confuse more than they clarify, and covert or oblique references, 'like Friday', unsettle the reader as they dispense with traditional and identifiable settings. Their removal or disavowal, though initially unsettling, is also freeing in that it banishes what Boly might call traditional force-feeding of the reader with the familiar.

Literary tradition and poetic conventions are only present insofar as they are being flouted, Auden's convention of the anti-convention which indicates a voice which is cut off from tradition, one which has lost its bearings. Disjointed language is apt expression for the speaker's emotional struggle. Form is made to mimic content. Form and content are unified but it is a unity that lacks any pleasing aesthetic, even as it heralds a new style of poetry. The flouted conventions in Auden's poem resonate with Schoenberg's discordant harmonies. They replace euphony with cacophony.

The poem nonetheless mixes the traditions of (a very sober) courtly love with a Donnean or Marvellian wit which plumbs absence to conjure up the apostrophised loved one but in a style which, again, valorises subjective utterance over formal expression. The singular merit of this approach is to deny the reader easy access to the poem and so to tax the reader's own emotions by insisting that the lack of familiar settings invites the reader's own subjective responses to furnish or augment as spare a setting as can be found in poetry. The absence of

stage props in the poem beckons the reader to supply them. To use Jarrell's metaphor, Auden renews a patent he has registered in earlier poems of this stage.

'As Auden's genius loci demonstrates', Boly explains, 'the discipline essential to successful communication (as repression, domination) must ensure that 'the effigy' ', Boly's word for the static, passive reader, 'remains intact', so that the resistance of an auditor', Auden's word for an active resistant reader, 'never emerges. Yet the resistance is always there'. 'How is it', Boly asks, 'that the very efforts to entrance and captivate a reader also releases the refractory responses of an auditor?' (Boly 1991: 93).

There can only be one answer. Auden provides the reader with enough to engage him but never enough detail that would see the reader's own responses banished, or locked out of the poem. By denying the reader identifiable settings, and by valorising broken syntax, such denials trigger the reader's own responses by forcing her to furnish the missing detail. By providing the reader with a few bars of the melody and a limited supply of lyrics, the reader is made, to extend the musical analogy, the co-composer of his love-song, one in which he seems more intent on serenading and nursing his own emotions, than anything else. Boly further suggests how:

Indeed, perhaps the most evident feature of an Auden poem is its singularly monologic[52] quality. In what becomes a recurrent drama, an unchallenged voice holds sway over an abandoned (emptied, silenced, repressed) landscape. This voice's oppressive enforcement of a meaning closes off the reaches of the past and thus excludes the possibility of any dissident overture emerging from lapsed or bygone discourses. It carefully intimidates and silences any contemporary rivals. If an auditor looks harder or listens more attentively to one of Auden's landscapes, it proves to be neither as abandoned nor as unresponsive as it first appears. The scenes are preoccupied, littered

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[52] Boly's use of 'monologic' here would appear to contradict the suggestion that the reader has an active role to play in the poem as potential co-author. Boly appears to be suggesting that no other voice exists *within* the poem to contradict the speaker. The absence of another voice within the poem perhaps creates space for the reader's voice.

rather than haunted, strewn with a variety of material remnants. Even complete

emptiness and unrelieved silence are not empty or silent but figures of inscription…. (5)

Boly does not directly address how inscripted words, words which carry their history

within them, function in such elliptical settings. One possibility is that words and their histories

exert an unusual influence upon the reader when faced with whole sentences that, ostensibly,

make no sense. In other words, the appearance in the poem of inscripted words, whose very

lack of connectedness to normative syntax and sentence structure, sees them assume a much

more powerful function, typically denied them by traditional poetry and language which

ordinarily limits their meaning to a clearly defined identity and address.

The opening line of part five, 'One absence closes other lives to him, like Sunday', were

it readily intelligible and easy to explain, the moment of reading it might pass without incident.

That it does not make sense, and not because it relies on part four for context, ordinary words

and constructions like 'absence' and 'closes other lives' become invigorated to the reader who

is unable to place them within a continuum of subject-verb-object, and so, denied any stable

connection, their possibilities multiply. Boly explains the word 'inscription' (Boly 1991: 4) thus:

The canons of rhetoric, ancient as they are venerable, strive to imbue language with a

combination of certainty and authority so that words might offer scant resistance to the

will of a presiding voice. This confident assurance is of course a complete hoax. If words

were indeed untainted in their meaning, purified of any intrusive or distracting accents,

they would not be certain, only incomprehensible. The ciphers of a language, having in

most cases outlasted several epochs and traversed numerous historical situations, arrive

at the threshold of an utterance in a quite contaminated state. They are radically impure,

unfaithful, even promiscuous, or, to put this in a nonmoralistic way, they are inscribed.[53]

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[53] 'To Auden, words are inscribed, which means they retain the varied accents and nuances they have
accumulated during the course of their wanderings through history. Each cultural moment naturally has its
enforced designations for a word. Yet, its inscriptions remain. To the thoughtful writer and patient reader, this
neglected memory, language's recollection of itself, offers continuous resistance to that most subtle violence, a
tyrannically conceived normality or truth' (Boly 1991: x)

An inscripted word that appears in an ordinary setting goes typically unremarked as the reader easily domesticates its meaning. For example, the phrase 'absence makes the heart grow fonder' is broadly intelligible to a young adult native reader who can domesticate its allegorical complexity with relative ease. Tied to a known context, this aphorism assembles a number of sense-units that conspire to produce meaning. The power of in scripted words is seen where they appear on the page but lack any familiar moorings. Their lack of connection renders them much more potent than if they are seen to quietly and serenely play their part in a normative sentence.

Boly uses inscripted to mean that words carry with them a history quite independent of that apparent when they appear on the page within a known sentence or context. He seems to suggest that they possess a valence that typically goes unseen. Shorn from a familiar context, he suggests that they evoke an independent response beyond that intended by their user. Where words have an onomatopoeic trace, their impact is more noticeable but he insists that most words possess a history and the power to evoke involuntary responses.

The suggestion here is that normative sentences, which clearly signal and communicate a fixed and unambiguous meaning, deny all other possible meanings. If this is accepted, then the suggestion is that, normative sentences that clearly *deny* signals and *fail* to communicate, embrace, enable, or engender all other possible meanings. Therefore, the power of the inscripted word is (often) only seen where it fails (or is not allowed) to play a part in a community of meaning. Denied that role, it unleashes its hitherto unseen power by implicitly inviting readers to respond to it in any way they can. So, the line 'One absence closes other lives to him, like Sunday', residing outside any shared community of meaning, becomes whatever the reader can make of it.

To round off this narrative, the single sentence under review might conjure up the scenario of a prison or that of a religious homily, or may invoke among readers a notion of death. The point is that, even where such readings prove unfounded, or where they lack any resonance with other readers, the potency of these undomesticated words increases with their

status as maverick or orphaned entities within the poem. Auden's fragmentary poetics opens up a world of conscious and unconscious possibilities.

Regarding readers' unconscious cognitive responses to language, the following example can open up vistas regarding the complexities involved when one person talks or interfaces with another. Lakoff and Johnson, in their 1999 study, *Philosophy in the Flesh,* do not address poetry directly but do offer a list of 'unconscious' activities,[54] which they are keen to stress, are unconscious but 'not in the Freudian sense of being repressed'(Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 10).

Anthropomorphism's subversive power to uncouple accepted pairings, its suggested replacement of one word for another, or one concept for another, enables the ordinary reader to imagine a different, presumably better, world.

Auden's cultural theory appears to be dictated, naturally enough, by the circumstances of the age he found himself born into but, unusually, it is one that is derived from a practice. 'One of the consistent concerns of his criticism', Boly explains, 'is to resist if not to overcome the cultural aftermath of Romanticism and its many descendants' (Boly 2004: 138-139).

'Auden's respect for the power of environment and culture', he explains, 'led him to trace Romanticism's material source to the ironic consequences of the Industrial Revolution' (Boly 2004: 139-140). Auden's landscapes, as the chapter on Poetry will show, are post Romantic landscapes.

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[54] 'Accessing memories relevant to what is being said, Comprehending a stream of sound as being language, dividing it into distinctive phonetic features and segments, identifying phonemes, and grouping into morphemes, Assigning a structure to the sentence in accord with the vast number of grammatical constructions, Picking out words and giving them meanings appropriate to context, Making semantic and pragmatic sense of the sentences as a whole, Framing what is said in terms of what is relevant to the discussion, Performing inferences relevant to what is being discussed, Constructing mental images where relevant and inspecting them, Filling in gaps in the discourse, Anticipating where the conversation is going, and, Planning what to say in response'(Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 10).

'Romanticism', Boly posits, 'attempted to make this situation tolerable to an ambivalent middle class', to people of 'independent income' 'whose lives' citing Mendelson, 'felt neither the economic pressure of the wage earner nor the responsibility of the landlord' (Mendelson 1981: 365). Boly further explains that while this middle class were:

> alarmed by squalor, disease and child labour, they had no wish to give up their rentier's [sic] profits and leisurely life style' and, needing 'a paradigm to reconstruct the social scene in a way that distracted them from their angst but otherwise left things unchanged. Romanticism despite occasional revolutionary aspirations achieved this by sending its new hero, the artistic genius, into the relatively unexplored field of his 'private world' (see Mendelson 1981: 366, Boly 2004: 140).

The private world of artistic genius 'diverted attention from actual living and working conditions' as the middle classes became 'beguiled instead with the labyrinth of its one-sided version of human identity'. Auden's efforts to return poetry to topical concerns to comment on the here and now, and to abjure the there and then, was an effort to make poetry meaningful again, and to remind poetry that it has a role to play.

The choice between escape and reality presents the reader with another false binary, just as objectivism and subjectivity are not two sides of the same coin. Lakoff and Johnson make the point that 'The Romantic tradition, by embracing subjectivism, reinforced':

> the dichotomy between truth and reason, on the one hand, and art and imagination, on the other. By giving up on objectivity, the Romantics played into the hands of the myth of objectivism, whose power has continued to increase ever since. The Romantics did, however, create a domain for themselves, where subjectivism continues to hold sway. It is an impoverished domain compared to that of objectivism.
>
> In terms of real power in our society – in science, law, government, business, and the media – the myth of objectivism reigns supreme. Subjectivism has carved out a domain for itself in art and perhaps in religion (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 192).

Perhaps recognising what is an unfair division of labour, Auden's poetry entered the realm of imagination but instead of an appeal to rationality where he might continue a tradition of poetry that sounded rational and prose-like, he embraced subjective utterance. The great irony of Auden's early poetry is that he only caught people's attentions and fired their imaginations by an inaccessibility that denied readers' reasonable expectations.

He did this, partially to arrest the expectations of critics, but also by trying to forge in the smithy of his own language and culture, an uncreated or dormant conscience that he sought to awaken by dismantling objectivist pretensions regarding language as a fixed, reified system of signs that could not be adulterated with new words, new anthropomorphisms, new imposters and pretenders to the crown that is Standard English usage, he challenged the myth of objectivity.

By embracing subjective utterance and by abandoning authorial detachment, the traditional poetic voice of the poet speaking to his readers, Auden was a long way off from offering pat solutions to the dilemmas of the era. First, he had to win the attentions of the public in as dramatic a fashion as possible.

Reading Lakoff and Johnson's offer to synthesise and to mediate between competing objectivist and subjectivist myths, it is difficult not to identify Auden's strategy in attempting to undermine a complete edifice in need of repair. In their book, *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson resolve the conundrum by offering what they call *The Third Choice: An Experimentalist Synthesis*, which denies that subjectivity and objectivity are our only choices' (192). This broadly summarises Auden's dilemma.

John Boly's conceptions of Auden's work are an indispensable aid to understand not just the new aesthetic the poet tried to foist upon English society but also to Auden's work where he subverts the language in an attempt to reform it. Anthropomorphism's role within that aesthetic as subverter, confuser, suggester, disrupter and replacer in chief will be addressed in the next chapter which features Auden's poems.

Chapter Five

[a] Taxonomy   [b] Poems   [c] Poetics

Introduction

Edward Mendelson's observation that Auden had absorbed the modernist notion of 'a catastrophic break in literary tradition', a break he accepted 'as irreparable', and which led him to search for 'a new poetic language to give voice to the new conditions' (Mendelson 1981: 11), leads the reader to ask what that new language might look like or sound like?

The critical reception of Auden's poetry revealed a high degree of confusion. Critics railed against the new style which, despite its shortcomings, its problems with intelligibility, and what was perceived as a deliberate obscurantist style, its novelty and its willingness to address contemporary issues saw it win the attentions of the intelligentsia who, while not exactly embracing it, dealt with it.

Auden's political profile and his ability to articulate many of the problems facing his society, not from a politician's but often from a spiritual and sometimes transcendental viewpoint, kept his name in the public domain as he tried to encourage his fellow citizens to see the deeper issues facing a fast-changing England, and a larger Western civilisation, in crisis.

At the heart of his new aesthetic, was rhetoric. Auden was trying to revive the ancient art, not for its own sake, not out of nostalgia for previous epochs when 'things were better', but because he identified it as a vehicle that could have an impact, and make something happen. While nobody was inclined, then or since, to classify Auden as a rhetorical poet, the rhetorical devices that he deployed with consistency, often to the point of profligacy, ensured that he became a *de facto* rhetorician.

At the heart of his rhetoric, was anthropomorphism. This device disrupted traditional notions of what a sentence should look like, while also ushering in the possibility of change, a

move which may not have sold very many books of poetry at the time, but one which gave him a public platform, and the critics enough time to try to sort out what was going on.

The survey of Auden's poetry revealed something of the manner in which he deployed his secret weapon, an idea that would have appealed to his Lear-like persona, out wandering the heath in search of a way out of his existential dilemma as he dramatised his isolation and his angst by pegging normative syntax as the gold standard in his imaginary world. Auden's poetry, particularly the early work, is too severe to qualify as a *bildungsroman.* It is much more than that, but without the gloss that such a term implies. Auden's poetry held up a very unflattering mirror to the spiritual emptiness that had come to characterise life in England during the period. Too proud and stubborn to sound defeat, he or his persona eventually went on the offensive. He looked outward at the world.

By attempting to describe a dissociated sensibility while his own sensibility, and that of his society, remained disassociated, he placed the average person in the narrative frame. He acted as a guide through the underworld for anyone brave enough to go with him, and by doing so, he made something happen, the results of which can never be measured. History, the body, the landscape, the community with its post-industrial and rural decimation, were his themes, not to mention the heart, the unconsummated love, the constant cravings which skirted around the perimeters of his poems, never quite able to reveal themselves.

Above all, he designated language and one of its concomitants, clarity of expression, as the ultimate barometers of mental, spiritual, physical, and emotional wellbeing, reminding readers that a problem can be solved if a name can be put on it, and if a way can be found to fix the broken gas pipes, and the old car which needs attention, and the broken bicycles with their rusty mudguards, then good. Failure to articulate pressing problems, in Auden's imaginative world, amounted to a breakdown in fluency, characterised by his lonely figures who wander in search of solutions to problems they have difficulty in articulating.

Auden's new language was the same old language but, to misquote George Bernard Shaw[55] (1856-1950), he showed his readers how to use it. Or, at least, how to read it.

Critics have made a number of useful observations regarding different aspects of that new language, or *aesthetic* as it has been referred to throughout this study. The following observations help to begin the conversation. First, Emig offers the following estimate regarding Auden's perceived obscurantism:

> Yet even the deliberate obscurities observed... have a specific poetic function, and so do the original metaphors used in the poems. ... Like the daring metaphors in Eliot's poems, they gain their particular value by the impossibility of scrutinising them fully … In Auden's poems, they are often created by the problematic use of the conjunction 'of'. It tends to combine terms that have no logical relation. Sometimes it suggests a connection that is much more complex than the economical 'of' can express... It is used to dramatise abstractions, but it can also compress a complete narrative into an image (Emig 2000: 14-15).

In his essay, *Auden in America*, Nicholas Jenkins makes the point that 'classicism's failings have become modernity's virtues' (Jenkins 2004: 39), and while his comments address the poet's 'ideological reversals', it is also an accurate comment on Auden's use, or misuse, of language. Auden's 'failure' (or refusal) to write poetry in the classic sense of that term, a style of poetry that readers and critics could readily recognise and relate to, was a deliberate act of sabotage such that the ensuing 'virtue' of Auden's early work lies precisely with such failure.

The absence of logical relations, which Emig refers to, are not so much virtues in themselves but, taken as a whole, are virtues in what they represent, a new style of poetry that severs the connection with the past, a poetic tradition which may have produced notable successes, but which clearly had not served the population very well, given the dire straits society found itself in, as the 1930s dragged on.

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[55] In response to being reminded that England had imposed its language on Ireland, Shaw remarked that 'You gave us your language, and we showed you how to use it' (Source unknown).

The following excerpt can serve as an example of the type of conundrum the poet presented the reader with:

From XVIII (Auden: 32)

Calling **of** each other by name

Smiling, taking a willing arm

Has the companionship **of** a game

These brief lines, shorn from context, read like a greeting card or a diary entry, or a ditty that might be set to music, and while the reader's initial reaction may be to dismiss it, the reader has learned that 'Ambiguity is at the heart of any Auden poem' (Porter 2004: 132), that however the reader might choose to react, the cardinal error would be to read the lines literally.

Quite apart from Auden's unusual use of the genitive case, Emig recognises the symbolic power of metaphor to bypass the cognitive functions of the reader in his efforts to interpret the text. The presence of metaphor in Auden's poems serves less to 'compress' any message but to invite possibility. Possible reactions or readings of the text multiply where the poetry refuses to look and sound like poetry. Modernity's failings ensured the success of postmodernism, to use Jenkins's rubric.

Auden's use (Auden 1936, Poem XXXIV: 163) of zeugma, 'a figure of speech in which a word is made to govern two other elements in such a way that a different sense relationship is obtained in each case' (Shen 2008: 300), compounds the possibilities:[56]

…He was my North, my South, my East and West,

My working week and my Sunday rest.

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[56] 'Instead of restricting the semantic range to a single entry, a poem calculatedly sets off "the aura of suggestion round every word through which… it becomes ultimately a sign for the sum of all possible meanings' (Auden in Mendelson 1981: 327 and Boly 1991: 25-26).

Secondly, Randall Jarrell makes the observation that Auden's use of anthropomorphism in his early work was less about making a particular point, or series of points, and more about advertising a particular practice, namely, his habit of producing poems, unlike any that had been seen before, which bore a distinct style and signature.

Auden's earliest work, taken as a whole has far more effect than any selection of the best poems from it – readers will usually think of this as a fault, but there is a good and unusual reason for it. *Poems* … have implicit in them a picture of the world , a description and valuing of our existence, that are different in a number of ways from any we are accustomed to in earlier works of art – and even the mediocre poems usually supply us with essential elements of the pictures or with essential principles for organizing them. The world of the poems is consistently different from the world of everyday reality (Jarrell 1951-2, 2005, Lecture I: 23).

Here, Jarrell is commenting on the topicality and the relevance of Auden's poetry to the here and now, suggesting that the meaning of the poems is of less importance than the phenomenon of poetry that strives, not always successfully, to describe existence that bears some relation to the lives of the ordinary person or reader, even if the poems do not appear closely to resemble the reader's every-day reality.

For example, where Auden's mouthpiece (staying with Poem XXXIV) exclaims that 'The stars are not wanted now; put out every one, / Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun', he is referencing everyday motifs which are easily accessible to the reader, but in a way that is not meant to be read literally. Auden is accessing the stock library of metaphors most literate people have at their disposal. Jarrell's prescient observation, 'the valuing of our existence', serves as a road map for much of the poetry that was written after Auden established what Bergonzi earlier referred to as 'the Audenesque' (Bergonzi 1975, Essay: 70).

Assuming the critical reader accepts Jarrell's proposition, his observations at once relieve the poet of responsibility of saying anything at all, while also offering a free pass to those poems which contribute little to what became known as the 'Auden effect' (Smith 2004:

3). Though issuing Auden and his poems with what appears to be a suspended sentence for crimes against poetry, Jarrell recognises that the over-riding and cardinal virtue of the style is that the poems 'have implicit in them a picture of the world, a description and valuing of our existence, that are different in a number of ways from any we are accustomed to in earlier works of art' (Jarrell 1951-52, 2005: 23). Novelty of expression is valorised, while the attendant failures are to be understood as an implicit critique of past practices or traditions.

Thirdly, Stan Smith, addressing the difficulties some critics have (had) in taking what he refers to as 'the poststructuralist turn', speaks of Terry Eagleton's conversion from one who 'pronounced excommunication in the columns of *The Tablet* in 1976', indicting 'an overbred irresponsibility which threatens to dwindle the substance of a poem to empty technical acrobatics' and 'historically obsolescent postures' (Smith 2004: 98-99, Haffenden 1983: 52) to a recognition, some years later, that 'the playfulness and multiple ironies of the later poet can be read not as a defeatist political withdrawal, but as an instance of the 'carnivalesque' spirit subverting the solemnities of bourgeois authority with the iconoclasm of humour and the body' (Smith 2004: 99).

Taking the postmodern turn refers in part to an acceptance that *avant-garde* poetry could never again demand obedience from the reader, disciplining the reader to conform to its intended meanings. Poetry ceased to be a monument to fixed ideas where known phrases might rub shoulders in tacit agreement. Poetry would now more resemble life itself, complicated, ambiguous, and difficult.

Finally, it should be said that while Auden's poetry was novel, its arrival was belated as the complicated, ambiguous and difficult world out there had already moved on, had turned the corner long before. It was Poetry that had to catch up. This was the metaphysical advance or breakthrough Auden referred to in his earlier critique of a civilisation in crisis. As Eliot suggested and perhaps foretold, 'poets in our civilization, as it exists at present, must be difficult'[57] (Eliot 1921, *The Metaphysical Poets*).

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[57] http://personal.centenary.edu/~dhavird/TSEMetaPoets.html

Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning (Eliot 1921).

The point to make here is that most traditional notions of poetry have to be jettisoned when approaching some of Auden's poems, particularly as the more arcane poems are those where Auden deploys anthropomorphism with greater regularity and intensity. The following examples of anthropomorphism are, at first, normative, but are then followed by more radical deployments, each of which requires a figural and not literal reading. Both are from Poem XXXII:

Night covers up the rigid land   (Anthropomorphisms in bold)

And ocean's quaking moor,

And shadows with a tolerant hand

The ugly and the poor…

O hurry to **the fêted spot**

Of your deliberate fall;

For now **my dream of you cannot**

Refer to you at all.   (Auden 1936, Poem XXXII: 162)

In terms of tone and rhythm, these excerpts read like an advertising jingle totally unsuited to the substance contained within it. This mismatch is unsettling to the reader. The animated night shrouds the land, normatively personified as rigid, while reaching down to the ocean's quaking moor, the sea-bed. The night is further animated as it shadows, with a tolerant hand, the ugly and the poor. The only thing than can be said about these lines is that the poet's mismatch of form and content matches the ridiculous with the sublime. Readers, quite

naturally, reach for meaning and it is very difficult to accept that there may not be any. Does taking the postmodern turn entail giving the author a completely free hand?

John Fuller's *A Commentary* can add little except to say that this is 'The first of two songs dedicated to Benjamin Britten (who Auden collaborated with) in which the poet 'laments an unreciprocated love in terms of the solipsistic isolation of dreams'. Fuller adds that 'Auden has returned to his Housman manner of ten years earlier, and had obviously been rereading the early poems he wrote in German', how 'It would appear, in addition, that Auden translated parts [of a sonnet] back into English' (Fuller 1998: 170).

Probably the only point to make here is that Auden had never quite cured himself of his penchant for vatic poetry, such that a part of him refused to insist that poetry has a method, one that is always discernible and pleasant to the reader. The reader naturally registers relief at hearing or reading that the lines in question are a personal remembrance of a non-event, an unrequited love, one that pays homage to a style of poetry reminiscent of another poet.

Unburdened of the responsibility further when she hears that the lines in question are a translation from the German, what can emerge is a not too flattering critique of the reader's ordinary reasonable expectations of poetry. The danger, of course, is to treat every Auden poem as a kind of oracle, which would be a mistake.

Writing in 2004, Stan Smith makes the point, how, 'In recent years Auden has attracted wide critical attention for the hermeneutic indeterminacy, ludic iconoclasm and polymorphously deconstructive nature of writings, in the words of a late poet, "modern only in this – our lack of decorum" '(Smith 204: 99).

This all amounts to a plea (perhaps unnecessary) to the reader to attempt to put aside traditional expectations regarding what to expect from poetry. As the introductory excerpts imply, the reader of the poem is the co-author of the poem. Auden's aesthetic of the anti-aesthetic is finally, belatedly, in the process of being inaugurated.

Poem XIII (*Under Boughs*) is an example of the kind of poem Auden wrote in which he challenges the reader and the literary establishment with what reads like a rough draft, or a poor translation from another language, the work of a half sober cross-word clue setter going through a personal crisis, a veritable stream of half-conscious musings on a subject the author had yet to make up his mind. Humour aside, the intention is to frustrate. The reader's expectations are thwarted. 'Events', the reader is told, are 'not actual'.

This revelation, while it may come as a relief for its bald message, that of confirming the unreality of the landscape, is so obviously deliberate that the reader, denied identifiable settings, normative syntax, any clear story line, or familiar phrasing, is thrown back on her own resources and forced, perhaps encouraged, to contemplate such questions as: What actually constitutes a poem? What constitutes a sentence? What forms govern poetry? What conventions determine whether a line or phrase has meaning or not? The poetry accesses the reader's memory and implicitly challenges traditional assumptions regarding language.

Because Auden's poetry constitutes two basic types, the later more accessible than the earlier, where clarity of expression is valorised (or not), this chapter is divided into three parts, the first part (a) will outline a putative taxonomy, the second (b) will examine a sample of Auden's poetry with the aim of further identifying anthropomorphic tropes, while the third (c) will review one of Auden's most intractable poems which was previewed in an earlier chapter.

Poem XIII (Auden: 29), with its wide variety of anthropomorphism, will be referenced to set out the precise terms of a provisional taxonomy. Where taxonomies become an end in themselves, very little is achieved beyond the compilation of voluminous lists. In fact, the predominance of taxonomies at the expense of substantive analysis can, asw as earlier suggested, take the place of inquiry. The inclusion of a rudimentary taxonomy in this study is purely functional, to serve as a repository for the range of Auden's trope deployments. The creation of taxonomy also functions as an aid to discipline.

From XIII   (Anthropomorphisms in bold)

Under boughs between our **tentative endearments**, how should we hear

But with **flushing pleasure**, drums distant over **difficult country**

Events not actual,

in **time's unlenient will**

which we shall not avoid, though at **a stations chance delay**

Lines branch to peace, iron up valleys to **a hidden village**

for we have friends to catch

and none leave coach

Sharers of our day, though smiling of, but nothing known,

What industries decline, what chances are of revolution,

What **murders flash**

Under **composed flesh**

Knowledge no need to us whose wrists enjoy **the chafing leash**

Can plunder high **nests, who** sheer off from old like gull from granite,

From their **minds constant sniffling**,

their bloods dull shuffling   **(**March 1929)

Taxonomy [a]

The subject cries out for rigorous taxonomy – James Paxson (3).

Paxson, in laying the groundwork for the formulation of such taxonomy of personification and its coordinate tropes, warns against 'assuming the tactic of literary history as it has been conceived through much of the twentieth century' (Paxson 1994: 10). He explains that while:

> tropes and figures as discrete formal entities can be likened to texts…the temptation to see them as precursors or successors in a lengthy chronological chain is always present.

> …We would fall prey to the impulse to seeing the history of a given trope as a genetic order in which earlier, literary implementations or theoretical conceptions of the trope evolve into richer, more complex and mature later versions –versions made possible by the more highly evolved temperaments of creative men and women in chronologically later periods (10).

The lesson to draw from such caveats is to resist seeing both trope developments as necessarily organic. Auden may have had a strategy of discourse, a plan, in mind but there is no evidence to suggest that his trope deployments progressed in a linear or in a chronological fashion, quite apart from the fact that his later anthropomorphisms are more readable, because less daring than the early ones, his poetry became less radical.

James Paxson does not use the term 'strategy of discourse' but he does refer to personifications used 'as a component of narrative discourse' (Paxson 1994:3), which suggests an effort should be made to locate anthropomorphic deployment within a larger narrative. Why is this trope, or why are these tropes, being deployed in the manner they are, the reader wonders? Moreover, how is that larger context to account for their incidence or their appearance?

Where Paxson observes, as mentioned in the Introduction, that 'the rigorously formal and aesthetic appraisal of tropes is coterminous only with the rise of modern literary criticism' (Paxson 1994: 9), he implicitly evokes the efforts of literary critics to investigate the use of language in literature as the result of having greatly improved theoretical tools to conduct that research. He explains that 'The conception of rhetoric as a mountain of data that involves the sheer naming and identification of all conceivable tropes, schemes, figures and topics of invention'(Paxson 1994: 8-9) as degenerate and to be avoided.

Since a large number of Auden's trope deployments are naïve, the use of anthropomorphism to simply garnish a line or burnish an image, this chapter will examine a sample of Auden's poetry, subject it to close reading and where possible identify 'paradigmatic employments' (Paxson 1994: 2).

To this end, the following rudimentary taxonomy provides a broad container for the classification of personification tropes.

Metaphors are 'defined in terms of their deviation… in relation to ordinary usage' (Ricoeur 2003: 19), and are rated by such deviation from their 'lexically codified usage' (Ricoeur: 2). Because 'metaphor does not produce a new order except by creating rifts in the old order' (Ricoeur 2003: 24), the following categories can broadly accommodate the primary criterion, that of familiar and unfamiliar trope deployments.

Auden admixes **stock**, **normative**, **semi-radical,** and **radical** anthropomorphisms in his poetry. He uses them to bring into question how both familiar and unfamiliar deployments are legitimized in everyday language usage.

The term **Stock** will be used to denote trope deployments which are known and recognised as part of Standard English usage. Oliver Goldsmith's poem, *The Deserted Village* is an example of a stock, in this case, literary image whereas the 'hidden village' (Poem XIII, *Under Boughs*) of the poem is normative in that it is an anthropomorphism but has no status as a

known or recognised pairing which has been inducted into the language. However, the term 'deserted village' has or does.

A **stock** deployment of two (or more) parts of speech will refer to an accepted anthropomorphic image (none appear in Poem XIII, though 'initiating ceremony' comes close) such as 'a low dishonest decade' (Poem XLI, *September 1, 1939*, Auden: 245) or 'memorable speech' (Mendelson 1999: 17), examples of (Auden's) words that were once radical or semi-radical anthropomorphisms but which have gained currency or a reasonably high degree of recognition in everyday speech to become stock images.

Stock pairings possess an element of surprise but have been inducted into language and so do not require much thought or much effort to comprehend them, at least not for readers who are familiar with English. As word images, they tend *not* to require interpretation, but are recognised, because of their familiarity. They are 'standardised tropes' which have been inducted into the language and which typically pass unnoticed. As Paul Ricoeur explains, readers 'know them through regular use, like one's mother tongue, without ever being able to say when or how one learned them'(Ricoeur 2003: 72).

The term **Normative** will be used to denote trope deployments which are novel but which fall outside Standard English usage. The description 'difficult country' (Poem XIII, *Under Boughs,* line 2, Auden: 29) is an example of normative usage. Whether a trope deployment is stock or normative may be a matter of interpretation, but the main divide is between tropes that are already part of the English lexicon and those which are not (yet).

A **normative** deployment will refer to a pairing of two parts of speech that does not surprise and which requires little thought or effort to be comprehended. The 'agitation of the sea' is normative but the appended 'lunatic' ('agitation of the sea') (Poem XVII *The strings' excitement*, Line 21, Auden: 32) would seem to render it semi-radical.

Normative pairings do not possess an element of surprise (except perhaps to a novice reader or non-native speaker), require minimal effort to assimilate into sentences, and may sometimes include inducted tropes or variations on inducted tropes.

The distinction between stock and normative is that stock tropes are recognisable as already being part of the language, that is, inducted or standardised tropes, whereas normative trope deployments are unremarkable, have not been inducted into Standard English, qualify as personifications, but cannot be termed either radical or semi radical because they are neither.

The term **semi-Radical** will be used to denote trope deployments that are novel, which fall outside Standard English language usage, and which possess only a weak relation to any literal meaning. 'Minds constant sniffling' (Poem XIII, Under Boughs, Line 15, Auden: 29) is an example of this usage as 'mind' is an obvious synecdoche for a person.

A **semi radical** deployment will refer to the pairing of two parts of speech that do require a degree of thought, that is, assimilation, and which do contain an element of surprise as together the words may appear somewhat incongruous. The coupling of 'applauding drum' (Poem XVII *The strings' excitement,* line 1: 32) falls somewhere between normative and semi-radical because while the image is easy to comprehend, especially coming hot on the heels of 'the strings' excitement', the absence of an agent, a drummer, renders it a little taxing. In other words, its novelty draws attention to its construction.

A semi-radical pairing of two or more parts of speech will contain an element of surprise and so will require considerable thought on the part of the reader. It requires effort to assimilate it into a sentence but falls short of being wholly radical due to a higher degree of intelligibility.

Finally, the term **Radical** will be used to denote trope deployments that are novel, which fall outside Standard English usage but which possess little or no relation to literal meaning. 'Bloods dull shuffling' (Poem XIII *Under Boughs*, Auden: 29) is an example because no easily apparent connection exists between blood, dull, and shuffling.

A **radical** deployment will refer to the pairing of two parts of speech which are, by normative English usage standards, incongruous, contain an element of surprise, are typically anthropomorphic, and which do tax the reader, often excessively, as the literal meaning of radical pairings can often get lost. A 'disobedient dream' (Poem XVII *The strings' excitement*, Line 20, Auden: 32) is probably the most radical pairing in Poem XVII followed by 'the morning's praise' (Line 7: 32). 'Tears that salt' (Line 20), sodium chloride appearing here as a verb, also qualifies.[58]

A radical pairing will contain a large element of surprise. It does force the reader to pause and is often extremely taxing for its novelty, a novelty that frequently prevails at the expense of real clarity of poetic content. Radical trope deployments are intrinsically subversive. That is their function. Resistance to them is not merely to be expected, it is required and actively encouraged 'to help people to become more aware of what happens when they read… it leads into perilous territory, the uncharted marches, badlands, deserts[59] waiting calmly beyond the horizon of Auden's verse' (Boly 1991: ix).

From 'Pascal', Poem IV, (Auden 1939, stanza eight: 451)

Yet like a lucky orphan he had been discovered   (Anthropomorphisms in bold)

And instantly **adopted by a Gift**;

And she became the sensible protector

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[58] Jarrell, speaking of the poet's use of the phrase 'beside the undiscriminating sea', used this example when he 'wished to show the method degenerating into abstraction' (Jarrell 1951-2, 2005: 48). It seems not to have occurred to Jarrell that the poet he so admired may have been trying, and yes, often failing, to achieve something larger and greater than the vanity project; the exhausting of the anthropomorphic patent, he accused him of pursuing.

[59] Proximal anthropomorphisms have been excluded from the rudimentary taxonomy presented in this chapter as, strictly speaking, they do not qualify as bone fide personifications but must merit further mention for their impact on poems which contain anthropomorphisms because they do influence the fabric of the poems and the development of the imagery. Proximal anthropomorphisms are, to use James Paxson's term, 'perceptual prosopopoeia' (Paxson: 106-113) assume greater significance where, for example, 'Clouds' are recognised as 'the traditional metaphor in medieval and Renaissance allegory for allegorical writing itself' (112).

Who found a passage through **the caves of accusation**,

And even in **the canyon of distress** was able

To use **the echo of his weakness** as a proof

That **joy was probable**, and **took the place**

Of **the poor lust and hunger he had never known**.   (in Mendelson 1999: 11).

The sentiments expressed in this poem, whose ostensible subject is the French philosopher and aphorist, Pascal, seem overwhelmed by the desire of the poet to show-case a technique Jarrell faulted him for using. Written after his elegy for Yeats, and after his poems about Freud, A.E. Housman, Edward Lear, Rimbaud, and Voltaire, there lingers the sense, however unjustified, that having done a competent job with these literary figures, he would now 'do' Pascal. This may be a failing. (This may also be to assume incorrectly). Unlike the figures mentioned, Auden's poems for Pascal and Nietzsche are relegated to the rear of the collected works as perhaps an indication that they do not quite succeed.

Though coming after seven stanzas of similar length, in which Auden attempts to contain the life and achievements of Pascal within a narrative frame, an awareness persists that the use of radical metaphor, in this eight stanza, is somewhat forced. The reader is hardly prepared for the onslaught as previous anthropomorphisms cannot be said to advertise the trope's efficacy. 'Moon-struck jeering neighbours', 'the first stab of his talent', 'prayer bled to death in its abyssal spaces, Mocked by the silence of their unbelief' and, later, 'the ruined chateau of his faith' lend credence to Jarrell's complaints.

As Desmond MacCarthy once said of the poet 'his own muse all too often frequently fails to swerve from the abyss in time. The chariot of his verse is again and again dashed to pieces by cutting too fine the corner of nonsense' (MacCarthy 1945, *The Sunday Times* in Haffenden 1983: 335-336).

Where previously Auden had been awake to the need gradually to familiarise the reader to subtle increases in his use of daring metaphor, stanza eight tends to bludgeon the reader's reasonable expectations. 'A lucky orphan adopted by a gift, who becomes his sensible protector, and who found a passage through the caves of accusation, and even in a canyon of distress was able to use the echo of his weakness as a proof that joy was probable' must surely rate very poorly compared to previous forays into the realm of personification.

It is important to show Auden failing, and, here, failing badly in his method as fallibility underscores the collaborative nature of reading this kind of experimental poetry. Where the reader finds herself unable or unwilling to suspend disbelief, something positive can happen. The outer limits of a method are exposed as a patent becomes exhausted (or, in this case, fails to register as a valid patent), or, to adapt Nietzsche's metaphor, coins which were once freshly minted become outworn as they lose their currency and their potency (see Nietzsche 1873: 262-265).

Poetry [b]

About a hundred years ago, in 1817, Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) observed about reading imaginative literature that the activity involved 'the willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, that constitutes poetic faith' (Coleridge 1817, *Biographia Literaria*, *Lyrical Ballads*, Ch. XIV), an acceptance of what later became known to post-structuralism as the ludic component to reading which involves a certain playfulness. Readers of Auden's early poetry need to undergo a not dissimilar leap of imagination when presented with poems which, initially at least, make no sense at all.

> To read for content… However useful for everyday purposes, this familiar sense of reading is not only unhelpful but obstructive when applied to poetry, or for that matter any form of imaginative literature (Boly 1991: 2).

This assertion requires some elaboration as it is central to any understanding of the role of the reader in the world of Auden's fragmentary poetics. Boly explains that:

To read for content is also to accept, even if unconsciously, a specific contract. One agrees to honor certain associations, exclude or repress others, credit proper authorities, observe required practices. One agrees, in other words, to accept a role, a prescribed identity which like any imposition entails a restriction of rights. The reader who adheres to a regimen of basic competence thus becomes an effigy, a fixed image, motionless, docile, at best a commemoration (though perhaps an intricately wrought one) of a formerly vital and surprising life (2).

Crucially, Boly explains, 'this dire entombment provides the basis not just for ordinary communication but for the entire elaborate apparatus of a culture's understanding and truth. So, there must be no thought of abolishing the effigy, no anarchic dream of pure liberation' (2).

What Boly says about the reader (the effigy) in Auden is certainly true for all writing but the point of applying a well-hidden but self-evident truth to the reader of an Auden poem is that Auden, according to Boly, gives his reader another task that he says is one of an auditor. 'To put the matter in brief, the main task for poetry is to maintain the possibility of an auditor's alternative reading as a non-compliant respondent' (2).

Finally, in response to the charge that 'this distinction' is 'anything more than a refinement', Boly cites Auden's essay *Balaam and His Ass* to confirm that Auden did see 'the difference between a routine competence and an imaginative response as leading to the heart of what distinguishes us as human beings' (3). In it, Auden states that 'The communication of mere objective fact only requires monologue and for monologue a language is not necessary, only a code. But subjective communication demands dialogue and dialogue demands a real language' (Auden in Boly: 3). [60]

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[60] 'The distinction between the communicative and the ludic is essential to an understanding of how literary art might serve a social purpose… In its communicative role, language must be induced to conceal its conflicting inscriptions, which are subjugated to a presiding voice so that the utterance may achieve a semantic end. But in its ludic aspect, a wholly different activity emerges. The normal concern of language, the preoccupation with a successfully achieved meaning or effect, is suspended…Thus the ludic function covertly turns absolutes into contingencies and certitudes into anxious decisions. But as Auden knew, the culture of late capitalism has little tolerance for such impractical activity. A genteel and almost imperceptible dogmatism pervades discursive practice in the form of a belief that *only* the communicative has any value' (Boly 1991: 49).

The willing suspension or deliberate flouting of poetic forms and standards, the abandonment of traditional expectations regarding what a poem should look like or sound like, is demanded of the reader who enters the badlands of an Auden poem.

Poem XVII (Auden: 32)   (Anthropomorphisms in bold)

The strings' excitement, **the applauding drum**

Are but the initiating ceremony that out of cloud

and out of ancestral face may come

And never hear their **subaltern mockery**,

Graffiti writers, moss grown with whimsies

Loquacious when the watercourse is dry

It is your face I see and **morning's praise** of you

is **ghost's approval** of the choice

Filtered through roots of **the effacing grass**

Fear, taking me aside would give advice

'To conquer her, **the visible enemy**,

it is enough to turn away the eyes'

Yet there's no peace **in this assaulted city**

but **speeches** at the corners, **hope for news**

Outside the watchfires of **a stronger army**

And all the emotions to expression come

Recovering the **archaic imagery**

This longing for assurance takes the form

Of a hawk's vertical stooping from the sky

Their tears salt for **a disobedient dream**

the **lunatic agitation of the sea**

Why this despair with hardened eyeballs cries

A golden age, a silver …..rather this

Massive and taciturn years…the Age of Ice.   April 1929

Poem XVII, referenced briefly earlier, continues a pattern that readers of these poems can begin to recognise. Elliptical imagery accompanied by ostensibly half-finished sentences offer fragments that might be dismissed out of hand as flawed, as blatantly unsuccessful and unpoetic, except that the reader is also aware, becomes aware, or is made aware that Auden is doing something else, something quite deliberate.

While the two opening stanzas look and sound like poetry, two forms of poetic tradition thereby duly observed, the content of the poem threatens the whole enterprise as the reader is, at least initially, denied access to the meaning of the poem. The lines '**The strings' excitement**, **the applauding drum /** Are but the initiating ceremony that out of cloud / and out of ancestral face may come', supply two semi-radical anthropomorphisms, which the reader is told in a tone that sounds definitive, are the prelude to an initiating ceremony that will emerge 'out of [a] cloud' and out of [an] 'ancestral face'.

Musical instruments supply the musical prelude to a ceremony, which will emerge from a cloud, as will a face that bears the resemblance of an ancestor, the voice seems to be saying. It is not clear who the presiding voice is. The reader is made to work very hard in this opening sentence, and while its tone may be definitive, its message, if there is one, is vague.

The reader may well hear the Lear-like grandeur in the tone as he assembles his family and entourage to announce that something important is about to be imparted. The old king announces 'Mean time we shall express our darker purpose…tis our fast intent to shake all cares and business from our age' (*King Lear*, I.I.18-21). But, to introduce Shakespeare is to dignify verse which cannot yet be said to make a reasonable claim on our attentions as a clear message or direction or purpose is denied. There is something of the grand manner in the voice but the reader is kept at arm's length with vagueness.

 Proceeding in expectation, the next stanza, it is hoped, may deliver an image, message, or explanation that may help the reader make sense of the opening lines. The next lines 'And never hear their **subaltern mockery** / Graffiti writers, moss grown with whimsies / Loquacious when the watercourse is dry', compound the confusion of the opening stanza by again, at least initially, denying any clear or discernible message to the reader. Subaltern mockery is normative but it stands alone as an idea within a sentence whose meaning is not clear.

A subculture, which delivers its unofficial message, its graffiti, the reader is told, does not impact on the more formal ceremony found in the opening stanza. The ceremonial and ancestral entities of the opening stanza are unaware; do not hear, 'and never hear', that an

alternative view, a satirical view from below or from the periphery, exists. A tension exists or is created where two points of view, one that is in opposition, the other that does not hear, are juxtaposed. The official or formal voice of the opening stanza, supported by an orchestra and by ceremony and heredity, is unaware of this alternative view; that held by people considered inferior in rank, the subalterns. Suddenly, a very different poem begins to emerge.

Why the graffiti writers are 'moss grown with whimsies' is open to interpretation but the description is delivered as if it had a recognised meaning in English, which it does not. The image suggests that the graffiti writers are seasoned (moss-grown) commentators who entertain themselves with clever whimsical comments which they direct at the dominant discourse, 'the ruling class' of the opening stanza who 'never hear' the mockery intended for them and directed at them. The poem continues to make demands on the reader, recruits the reader to interpret the poem, to work for the message, such as it is.

Poem XVII, (*The string's excitement*) is one of Auden's earliest, least accessible and most anthropomorphic poems. Almost every instance of anthropomorphism in this poem is radical or semi radical. Where normative or stock anthropomorphisms are deployed, they function as a kind of lexical anchor for the more adventurous deployments in that they expose the range of expression by offering the reader a recognisable baseline from which meaning can be measured and sense made.

The pairing of 'initiating ceremony', 'ancestral face', 'assaulted city', 'subaltern mockery' and 'hardened eyeballs'; the relatively normative images of the poem, standing alongside more radical pairings, a few of which have been mentioned, has the effect of balancing the imagery of the poem such that the reader is not, as has been seen previously, completely overwhelmed by audacious anthropomorphisms and metaphors. The reader can measure the degree of radicalisation when presented with pairings that are more familiar.

As seen previously, this dovetailing of radical and normative imagery is a mainstay of Auden's early poetry, representing the means by which he strove to change the language by furthering, though not always successfully or aesthetically, its anthropomorphic range.

The dearth of such normative lexical anchors may be a useful measure of how fragile the speaker feels, the distance he feels from normality. Radical and semi-radical anthropomorphisms expose that distance. The lack of clarity may be a measure of the speaker's frame of mind, or it is just bad poetry. The reader is left to decide.

Written only a month after Poem XIII, (*Under Boughs)*, which heads this chapter as an example of Auden at his most intractable, Poem XVII (*The string's excitement*) demonstrates that while the poet persists with his new style, he does make a few more concessions to the reader than previously allowed. The poem is slightly more accessible, slightly more readable and slightly less oblique, since it appears that a hitherto internal conflict appears to have become externalised.

Auden here appears to have moved on from feeling isolated insofar as he has escaped his internal conflicts long enough to make observations regarding a class-conflict involving two strands of society where one comments on the other but is not heard by the other. This failure of communication appears to serve as a proxy for the miscommunication which hampers his own relationship with his loved one, the absent other.

The 'clues' in this poem are marginally less cryptic, the poetry more like prose, the prose more readable, the parts of speech less incoherent, indicating perhaps a resolution of some sort, or a movement to a more stable condition. The anthropomorphisms of a dozen or so years later remain radical but they are more integrated in terms of meaning, unlike those which appear here.

Poem XVII begins with slightly more accessible syntax. '**The strings' excitement**, **the applauding drum** / Are but the initiating ceremony that out of cloud / and out of ancestral face may come / And never hear their **subaltern mockery**, / Graffiti writers, moss grown with whimsies / Loquacious when the watercourse is dry'. Sentences are more readable yet where they gain in terms of normative syntax, they struggle in terms of overt meaning.

This opening line or construction runs for forty words and, meaning aside for a moment, the use of the word 'Are' at the beginning of the second sentence, completely absent from previous poems, connects the strings and drums which are described as 'the initiating ceremony', suggesting a stronger connection as nouns and adjectives and verbs and other parts of speech collude to form, at least, recognisable sentences. This prose-like declaration continues into a fourth line where the word 'And', also previously absent, at least as a conjunction, extends the speaker's sentence by another eighteen words to conclude the opening scene of the poem.

In terms of meaning and content, the images and words fail to say things that the reader can readily comprehend, but the tone is self-assured and the general flow easy, as are the meanings of discrete images. These communicate a less strained, less isolated, less disjointed scene though one which requires closer examination if something solid is to be made of it, or found in it. This signals a progression, at least in terms of form.

If clear syntax acts as a barometer of stability or normality, the poem continues to privilege subjective utterance of a still disjointed nature over readable 'prose-verse'. Whether such semi-improved clarity represents a progression remains to be seen. This relief may be temporary. A larger sampling of obvious, progressive clarity on the part of the poems must be registered in order to discern a pattern, a consistent movement from isolation to engagement, as critics claim. The reader must keep one eye on other poems of the period.

Whereas in Poem XIII (*Under Boughs)*, the speaker was the sole 'occupant' of the landscape, Poem XVII introduces a character, albeit absent, for whom the speaker apparently feels some emotion, and though the person is apostrophized,[61] the speaker is nonetheless alone. The speaker is alone but not as lonely or as isolated as in *Under Boughs*.

Poem XVII (*The strings' excitement*) fuses two sets of images: the feelings of the speaker for an absent loved one, and a sense that events of some importance are happening or about to happen elsewhere. The resonance and the interplay of two such disparate narratives generate

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[61] 'the fiction of an apostrophe to an absent, deceased or voiceless entity' (Paxson 1994: 69).

for the reader a questionable dividend born of their confusion, a sense that the overall effect produced by the poem is greater than the sum of its parts. At first, less seems gained by their confusion than their agglomeration but, as seen, closer reading does unearth possible meanings.

The first narrative, represented by the first two stanzas, consists of a collection of words that loosely suggest the enactment of a very public rite of passage, 'The strings' excitement, the applauding drum / Are but the initiating ceremony that out of cloud / and out of ancestral face may come'. This ceremony is conducted out of earshot of the other group. 'And never hear their **subaltern mockery**, /Graffiti writers, moss grown with whimsies / Loquacious when the watercourse is dry', depicts a second public activity which provides a commentary on the ceremony of the opening lines.

The mockery of the rather grand ceremony is followed by a private reference to the apostrophe of the poem, 'It is your face I see and **morning's praise** of you / is **ghost's approval** of the choice / Filtered through roots of **the effacing grass'.** This personal element gives way to the lines '**Fear, taking me aside** would give advice /To conquer her, **the visible enemy**, it is enough to turn away the eyes / Yet there's no peace **in this assaulted city /** but **speeches** at the corners, **hope for news** / Outside the watchfires of **a stronger army',** where public concerns re-emerge, exposing a range of activities which compete within the poem.

This is achieved as the reader is taxed with trying to match the content of two narratives. Are they related, the reader wonders? The narratives are deeply personal on the one hand, and highly public on the other. Their position, as successive stanzas which introduce the poem, invites comparison by exercising the reader's natural tendency to find some basis for connecting them, but so inexact or inconclusive are the links between the competing narratives of the public ceremony and the subaltern mockery, followed by the emergence of the apostrophe's face, that the response is unavoidably subjective as neither narrative reveals sufficient meaning to ensure any level of certainty.

Still, their interplay is achieved at the expense of everything else, simplicity and clarity being the main casualties. This said, the reader is reminded that simplicity and clarity are willing

hostages in Auden's assault on poetic traditions. While the term zeugma is typically applied to discrete words, Auden's intertwined narratives perform a not dis-similar function except that here, two whole narratives are governed by figures of speech by virtue of the fact that the reader can never be sure to which is being referred. [62]

This 'not knowing' results in increased mental activity on the part of the reader who is caught up in a process of having constantly to cross reference and juxtapose the contents of the poem in search of meaning. The temptation to refer to such figures of speech as 'orphaned', or as words which have 'no fixed abode', is contagious, or perhaps infectious, as these twin narratives have ambiguous source domains. Being ambiguous, they are difficult to locate, yet flexible enough to deploy in parallel.

Auden appears to want to portray the relationship of a subculture to a dominant discourse, apparently deaf to that subculture, with his own relationship to someone who is unable or perhaps unwilling to listen to him. This tenuous link centres on the word 'face' which connects 'ancestral face', the last line of the first stanza, with the opening line of the third stanza, where the speaker declares 'It is your face I see'. Two faces, separated by the subaltern commentary of the second stanza, are paired to denominate which party the speaker identifies with, and which one he likens to his loved one.

This is confirmed by a later stanza which contains the lines 'And all the emotions to expression come / Recovering the **archaic imagery** / This longing for assurance takes the form' and which seems to be a commentary on the poem itself, observing that emotion finds expression,

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[62] Frank Kermode identifies that '*Zahl und Gesicht [Figure and Face]*, a work by the exiled Austrian philosopher Rudolf Kassner, was among the books [Auden] described as having 'so essentially conditioned [a writer's, i.e., his] vision of life that he cannot imagine who he was before he read them'. http://www.lrb.co.uk/v30/n03/frank-kermode/with-slip-and-slapdash Kassner (1873-1959), a friend of Rilke, 'developed a style suited to the articulation of this physiognomy: the frequent use of zeugma; he brings together things that appear to be contradictory on the surface in order to show not immediately evident interconnections between them. The seemingly contradictory phenomena combine to give a total image of the whole. One distinct advantage of this method is its usefulness in avoiding of the tendency to reify… His works have no linear development and do not yield swiftly to rational analysis'. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudolf_Kassner https://archive.org/details/essayskassner00kassuoft (in German).

that an effort is made to recovery imagery that the lines describe as archaic, and that a certain assurance can be found in the familiar.

Suddenly, the incongruously ornate '**morning's praise** of you' and the '**ghost's approval** of the choice' can be seen for what they are, excessively ornate compliments which are paid to a party which does not listen, which is identified with ancestry, a social marker, and perhaps with the trappings of power and State, the power to command drums and strings. The reader has to wonder whether such compliments are not deliberately tarnished by their association with attributes that the speaker deigns undesirable. The mind and body want different things.

Such unwarranted praise, the speaker seems to be suggesting, is 'Filtered through roots of **the effacing grass**', presumably a reference to the way such pomp is brought to heel and down to earth, filtered in the sense of being reduced to what it actually is. What does seem odd is that the speaker, though possessed of the face and beguiled by it, seems highly critical and antagonistic toward the absentee. Is his status, as the aggrieved party who the apostrophe does not communicate with, to be compared with that of the subalterns who critique the ceremonial drum beating of the opening lines, as the reader is left to surmise.

This interpretation is plausible, as if to suggest that personal relationships, those of the presiding voice and the absentee, are in fact no different or little different to the fanfare of the political class who go on banging the drum at the expense of those outside or beyond their sphere of influence. The same might be said of the subalterns.

The poem qualifies not as a rounded narrative but as an incomplete treatise on the affection or other feelings that an individual may feel for an absent loved one. This may not be a deficiency but it is a feature. The marital and martial backdrops furnish the landscape(s) and seem to elevate the excitement of the speaker. Clearly, the speaker cannot detach his loved one from the period of time or the images he describes.

Therefore, the speaker of the poem finds, or identifies, a certain resonance and perhaps relief where it appears that the external world also exhibits a failure to communicate. The poem appears to be suggesting that the personal and the political are not unconnected.

The personal breakdown or failure to establish meaningful contact, the angst of the speaker, is reflected in the political reality where two classes fail to communicate with each other. This, after all, is England in the early twentieth-century. The speaker of the poem identifies with the subalterns, the voices on the periphery, while the absent object of his affections or attentions is associated with the public, martial, dominant class who 'never hear', and who are satirized by the subalterns who languish, unheard, on the back benches.

That the poet decided not to write two separate poems, to cater to these two narratives, suggests that he saw some benefit in the way each serenades or interplays with the other. The hope may have been that the poem might reveal the way an individual functions in the private and the public spheres, how perhaps they influence each other.

On the other hand, more likely, given what is known of Auden's efforts to re-educate the reader, he may be testing the reader's ability to do two things at the same time. He does not proffer two competing voices but two narratives that may be in competition; however, this remains far from clear. The besieged party does not get to speak or to respond. As usual, though, the reader or critic is reduced to 'maybe', 'should' and 'might'.

In a chapter of his book entitled *The Border and the Group,* speaking of 'his literary method', Edward Mendelson confirms that 'his first poems':

had called attention to their fragmentary quality – they started and stopped in the middle of things, and refused to give any hint of the contexts in which they might be read. Whenever Auden put together a poem of more than a hundred lines, he would combine existing fragments into a sequence rather than devise a large form at the outset (Mendelson 1981: 146).

This semi-arbitrary twinning of narrative fragments would seem to confirm that Auden's priorities lay with experimental forms rather than with a concern with meaning. Concerns with meaning, of course, remained a longer-term goal but hijacking it, at least in the early work, became a necessity as his first priority was violently to arrest the attentions of the reading public. Mendelson adds that while 'All this improvisation from isolated fragments *could* be considered suitable to a poetry whose aim was to express fragmentation itself… as early as 1929 Auden was objecting to his own style'(Mendelson: 147).

What Mendelson does not say is that by 1929, Auden had somewhat achieved his goal by creating a no-man's land which lasted for almost a decade, one which created a necessary hiatus (perhaps through critical exhaustion) from modernism that presaged the emergence of his later style. Flawed poetry and the prolonged critical attention that surrounded it created a necessary distance between the receding past and a new poetry that promised to address issues in the here and now. Yet, to use Auden's device of decadence, promise had yet to deliver.

However, as this poem testifies, he refused to prioritise meaning, for to do so would certainly have resulted in the appearance that Auden's poetry represented a continuation of sorts, when clearly, continuity of tradition was the very last thing he was pursuing. A poetic tradition in free-fall was much more of a bounty, even where readers struggled to work out what precisely Auden was trying to say. Auden's work did not have a literal meaning. It had a singular message, it seems, and that message was that the time had come for something new and it had something to do with inclusiveness. Poetry's subjects were fast becoming citizens.

Written just before the Great Depression, a few short years before the advent of the Second World War, 'Strings', 'drums', 'speeches', 'armies' and 'instruments', the 'assaulted city', 'the watchfires', the 'visible enemy' and talk of conquering the enemy, conjure up a martial backdrop, though an awareness of the historic events of the period may erroneously or serendipitously invite such assumptions.

The background narrative cannot obscure the face the speaker is ever focused on. The noise the instruments make is a prelude to the speaker's concern for whomever it is he is

addressing. That love, or love's face, which wins through or comes through in the most difficult of times or circumstances, seems to be the dominant theme. 'I can't get you out of my mind', the speaker seems to be saying.

There appears to be an erotic or sensual component, a build-up in tension, as drums beat and strings are sounded, an unmentioned intercourse that might lead to progeny, an ancestral face, but the inference is far from clear.

The strings' excitement, **the applauding drum**

Are but the initiating ceremony that out of cloud

and out of ancestral face may come

Yet, such general impressions cannot alone distinguish what appears to be a very ordinary poem that seems to labour over its own productions, again making the reader work very hard for very little. Words may be inscribed but what resonance emerges from exposure to their inscriptions, the reader asks? Is poetry, like music, to be appreciated in a visceral way, or is the reader required to submit to an inchoate text?

The deliberate omission of material, the elevation of a fragmentary economic style, casts Auden as the Robbe-Grillet of poetry, a Young Turk less concerned with tradition than with saying something new, or at least, saying something in a new way.

As beauty pageants go, Auden's new style is certainly novel, but it is also a grotesque for the assault and the demands it makes or places on the language and on the reader, the audience. While concerns with meaning come in a consolatory last place, this was the unavoidable entrance-fee Auden and his mostly younger readers appeared willing to pay to resolve the '*Crise de vers'*. His new aesthetic captured the imaginations of the young, entrancing them with the promise of change. Citing Mallarmé (1842-1898), Mendelson observes how 'the liberation of language results not in shared truths but in a new ordering of private vision within the self' (Mendelson 1981: xviii).

While such a claim is a reasonable part-summary of the motivating force that drove the new aesthetic, Leavis's insistence that Auden had 'not taken enough trouble to make his private counters effective currency' (Henson 2000: 63) also seems a reasonable criticism of the early work as Auden's convention of the anti-convention, his new aesthetic, was bereft of those aesthetic qualities that his audience might reasonably expect from poetry. The anxiety of influence may have been too heavy a burden for Auden to produce anything resembling what had gone before him. For now, his poetry would valorise novelty of expression over what traditionally would have been regarded as substance.[63]

Speaking of Auden's strained relationship with meaning, the poet Cecil Day-Lewis observed that 'His first book, *Poems*, is full of psychological examples and inferences. It ought, by rights, to have been nothing more than an illustrated case-book. Yet, no one can read it without feeling again and again, however baffled he may be for a meaning, the impact of poetry'(Hendon 2000: 67). Emig cites Justin Replogle:

> The pattern of Auden's ideas, though often talked about, has never been very clear. His earliest poetry was vigorous, energetic, and on the surface at least[,] original, untraditional, and obscure. Readers could sense vast energies pouring forth without quite knowing what the commotion was about. Yet at first the energy itself seemed meaningful. To a young generation at odds with society, energy suggests rebellion (Emig 2000: 9).

Emig adds that the passage displays a puzzling array of terms for 'meaning', and how:

> There are underlying structures, there are ideas, and there is a pattern created out of them, Replogle also mentions a discrepancy in lucidity between the different layers. The basic features of Auden's poems seem easily perceptible. His ideas, however, remain

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[63] 'If history is not to become sheer regression and paralysis, it relies on modernity for its duration and renewal; but modernity cannot assert itself without being at once swallowed up and reintegrated into a regressive historical process. …The more radical the rejection of anything that came before, the greater the dependence on the past' (de Man 1970, *Literary History and Literary Modernity: 8, 17*). *https://www.jstor.org/stable/20023950?seq=8#page_scan_tab_contents*

obscure, and a pattern or [of] meaning can hardly be constructed out of them. Rather, the texts create an 'energy', which, however, remains unspecific and hardly signals permanence (Emig 2000: 9).

Emig adds that 'A passage like Replogle's tells us that a more organised approach to the problem of meaning is required' (9). Before examining Emig's 'more organised approach', the remainder of the poem can be examined.

'Effacing grass', grass that is personified with agency, manages to 'filter through' or conjure up the visage of the apostrophe (the absent addressee). In other words, the thing least like a face, 'effacing grass', can conspire to bring the person or entity's face to his mind. No external event can shroud the face of the speaker's beloved, the poem seems to be implying.

Effacement brings recognition presumably because of some strength of feeling or concern. The speaker of the poem endows grass with agency, intimating his sense of solitude, how, in the absence of meaningful communication with the world of people, he appropriates objects to do his bidding. This tendency speaks to the very heart of anthropomorphic activity, the appropriation of objects in the physical world that are endowed with human agency, in this case, their appropriation to convey a sense of the solitude and isolation of the speaker, and also, a sense that, however distorted that relationship may appear, a communion with the landscape prevails.

Beyond an intimation of his isolated state, the anthropomorphised imagery may serve another purpose. By appropriating the objective world: the 'grass', 'clouds', 'drums', 'strings', 'dream', 'morning', 'mockery', and the 'sea', the speaker may be trying to insist that he is making 'objective' observations. To ventriloquize through objects, besides temporarily disowning or projecting one's own voice, looking for signs in external nature to confirm the reality of his inner state, the spectre of objects speaking truths or conveying emotions brings complication.

Either the speaker cannot own his own feelings and so recruits the objective world, through which he can hope to convey them, or, the speaker's intellectual pride insists that he and he *alone*, is in possession of the facts. Demanding that the reader 'Hear not my steps, which way they walk, for fear the very stones prate my whereabout [sic]…Words to the heat of deeds too cold breath gives' (*Macbeth*: II.I.58-61).[64] The point of citing Shakespeare here is to remind readers that the style of poetry Auden was experimenting with has literary precedence, but also to reinforce the notion that inanimate objects, voiceless entities are appropriated for reasons. Objects cannot speak or prate. The poet who makes them speak is doing something deliberate.

Employing inanimate and un-sentient objects as sounding boards, in place of people; correspondents whose own emotions or responses might only confuse the speaker, seems a reliable way of plumbing and exposing emotion. The psychoanalytic object-oriented question, for example, is a simple technique therapists use to gauge a patient's emotional state, particularly if the analysand (sic) is unable or unwilling 'to tell all' or cooperate. By directing her attentions to a carefully chosen (not value-laden) external entity or object, the patient involuntary discloses something of their internal architecture. This technique would of course need to be repeated for any sampling to have real meaning or use.

The words 'out of cloud may come' repeat this sense that 'the darnedest thing' reminds the speaker of the face of his loved one. Though absent, she (perhaps) suffuses his day. Auden seems to be probing how the mind works and how particular psychic contents find their way to consciousness, but the inference is vague.

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[64] Here, stones are personified to echo the sense of fear the speaker feels. The solidity and certainty of the stones confirm the danger of his 'whereabout' being discovered. Stones are objects which are appropriated to convey, what the speaker seems sure is, an objective truth. By telling comparison, Lodowick in *Edward III* declares that 'And changing passion, like inconstant clouds' (*Edward III* (Act II, Sc. I: 3), as if to confirm the appropriation of the external world to convey emotion but also to endow it with, at least, the air of certainty.

The inclusion of clouds as an object of interest in literature echoes the play by Aristophanes that, according to James Paxson, is of interest because 'perceptual prosopopoeia has become a narrative theme in fantastic or uncanny Western Literature. The *locus classicus* is Aristophanes' *The Clouds*, in which Socrates enlightens Strepsiades about the fact that there really are no gods in heaven, only the Clouds who [sic] do all divine things [he] thought the clouds did' (Paxson: 108). Paxson also mentions the 'whimsical cloud-game between Hamlet and Polonius (III.iii.380-85) which he says has become the second *locus classicus* of dramatized perceptual prosopopoeia… (109). Likewise, he mentions a similar conversation between *Anthony and Cleopatra* (IV.xiv.2-7) which he says 'takes a more serious tone' (110).

The point of referring to these is, if needs be, to strengthen belief in Auden's method, to cite literary precedent, and to expose how subtle and complicated innocuous imagery can sometimes be.

The declaration, 'the Age of Ice', may suggest an unrequited love or an unconsummated love, or celibacy, as it may refer to the Phoney War that preceded the eventual outbreak of war in 1939. Who 'the greater enemy' is, the reader is not told.

The lines 'It is your face I see and **morning's praise** of you / is **ghost's approval** of the choice/ Filtered through roots of **the effacing grass'**, again, at least initially, make no obvious sense. The face associated with the non-listening party of the first stanza is likened to the object of his attentions. It reappears to receive 'the morning's praise', one of the examples Jarrell referred to as degenerate.

To receive praise from the morning does sound slightly ridiculous but it is ridicule that may have a purpose. It may be a classical allusion. 'Morning's praise' does seem gratuitous, however; the face who receives it basks in what amounts to an unearned compliment, to the extent that the light of the morning is directed at everyone, perhaps improving their visage. This is not unlike a sentiment Auden expresses in a later poem, how 'the sun shone/As it had to' (Auden, *Musée des Beaux Arts*: 237).

Perhaps it is a reference also to beauty that is embellished by light and perhaps the reason why the speaker is so infatuated with it. 'Morning's praise' is, perhaps, no praise at all. The notion of unearned or ceremonial approval is repeated with the line a 'ghost's approval', which suggests approval from something that either does not exist or only exists as a spectre. Such praise is faint and, given the speaker's scarcely concealed antagonism toward the absentee, he may be using mellifluous imagery not to flatter but to diminish.

The speaker's ambivalent feelings toward the apostrophe may find expression where, in the morning of their relationship, she (presumably) looked that much more beautiful, a beauty that has diminished due to the unexplained angst that now separates them.

The anthropomorphic 'effacing grass' may be a word play on 'ef-face' but why something like grass might 'remove completely from recognition or memory', or 'withdraw' the face of the object of his epithalamium, cannot be measured with accuracy. The image or spectre, of a face unworthy of praise and approval which emerges from the roots of grass, suggests that the face he ponders has the power to break through innocuous imagery to gain his attention.

By accusing Auden of degeneracy for employing anthropomorphisms like 'morning's praise' or 'a disobedient dream', Jarrell perhaps confused Auden with the speaker of the poem, as if to mistake Shakespeare of being Iago or Melancholy Jacques. This heightens awareness regarding the traditional limits of the poetic narrative tradition in that readers do often assume that the voice of the poem is the voice of the poet.

For example, Milton in *Paradise Lost* clearly signals when Lucifer is about to speak, and so the reader can sit back in the comfort of a prescribed identity as the Morning Star delivers his oration.[65] Auden offers no such comfort and, if a poet as intelligent as Jarrell might read

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[65] Milton was not above manipulating his own audience when it came to his own ideological persuasions. Satan, while identified with man's fallen nature, also represented the fallen monarch Charles I, and though Milton was a Republican, giving Charles some of the best lines in English Literature suggests that Blake may have been correct when he suggested that 'The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God, and at liberty

Auden quite so literally, what it points to is the limited repertoire of dramatic poetry in English, the lack of a tradition where readers of poetry might step beyond the pedestrian limits Auden's forbears marshalled. 'Auden was acutely aware of this limitation. At times he envied the greater discursive freedom permitted to novelists and dramatists' (Boly: 26).

This cannot be said of the advent of Fear, who takes him aside and advises the speaker to conquer 'the visible enemy', as Fear has a prescribed identity, well grounded in poetic tradition. The personification, that is, the externalisation of an emotion, Fear, would seem to confirm that the outdoor scene is, in fact, an interior dialogue, complete with clouds. The scene is being described by the presiding voice of the poem as it inundates the reader with twin narratives, anonymously voiced which bifurcate his attention regarding an absent person the speaker associates with a dominant class. A metaphysical conflict whose descriptor is part of the scene, the speaker longs to assume the visage, the safe emotional distance of Hardy's hawk that hovers over a scene of latent antagonism from which the conventional narrator is sovereignly absent.

When Wordsworth marvels at Westminster Bridge, we implicitly assume (that is if the reader thinks about it at all) that it is the poet who is speaking. There is no strain on ventriloquism. Auden apparently wanted to change this and so refuses to introduce the *dramatis personae* of the poems, forcing the reader to try to identify who is speaking, an inadvertent way of beckoning her into the poem. Denying the reader easy access, in terms of a clear message, the poem implicitly demands an enlargement of poetic forms to accommodate his new direction for poetry, one that embraced ambiguity to increase the possibility of variable readings.

He also empowered the subjective voices both of the poet and the reader of the poem while simultaneously challenging the authority of any authority (sic) to hold readers hostage to its truisms, its controlled eristic, its effort to domesticate the reader with clearly labelled

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when of Devils & Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it' (William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. 1793).

expressions (regarding who is speaking at any moment) which move along within clearly established literary traditions.

In terms of the anthropomorphic canon, the radical anthropomorphisms of this poem have not thus far entered the English language and are only cited critically.

The next stanza begins with the line, '**Fear, taking me aside** would give advice / 'To conquer her, **the visible enemy** / it is enough to turn away the eyes', which sees the entrance of a classic anthropomorphic figure who takes him aside and suggests that he conquer her, 'the visible enemy', either Fear itself or that which threatens or inveigles the speaker. Trying to make sense of it all is probably to miss the point. In fact, where the poem refuses access to meaning in any traditional sense, what usually ensues is a sub-textual treatise on the hermeneutics of poetry as the poet blocks the access roads to common sense readings.

This, of course, is a far too charitable reading of the chaos. That Auden was attempting to derail poetic tradition altogether is more likely, visiting blunt trauma on a poetic tradition that readers, with the benefit of hindsight and exposure to his later poetic successes, can acknowledge he succeeded in doing.

Three such stanzas are sufficient for the reader to abandon the hunt for a progressive storyline and to accept that the poem is drawing attention to its own construction. The poet is evidently experimenting with form and, perhaps most importantly, the overtly subjective utterances with their scant, spare accoutrement are invitations to the reader to form her own subjective responses, while also insinuating and insisting upon a sub-textual dialogue regarding poetic function.

One other possibility exists to answer the question 'why read a poem that treats its readers so badly? Why continue to suffer an experience that is unpleasant?' Though speaking of Milton, Stanley Fish explains that 'The answer is simply that from the seventeenth-century Puritan and indeed for any Christian in what might be called the Augustinian tradition, the kind

of discomfort I have been describing would be paradoxically a source of comfort and the unpleasantness a source of pleasure'(Fish 1967: 212 in Rifkin and Ryan).

In other words, people who read the book when it first appeared, perhaps irrespective of their faith, might have found relief in witnessing his new style, not necessarily for its ostensible message, such as it is, but relief in witnessing an accurate depiction of their own alienation.

Though much less agitated than Poem XIII (*Under Boughs*), this poem again makes no pretence regarding what is being depicted. The reader is allowed glimpses of a mind that oscillates between a number of concerns. The poem is an awkward meditation on seemingly young love in a difficult climate, delivered in a terse, almost Elizabethan prose, a very self-assured style and tone.

As to whether the poem permits 'an auditor's alternative reading', what can be said is that the incompleteness or the lack of resolution of narratives or dialogues engenders or encourages reader participation. The mixture of normative and radical deployments of anthropomorphism certainly engages the reader in examining why the poet should couple incongruous parts of speech. It also brings into focus why normative pairings are considered normative.

Stock and normative couplings such as 'initiating ceremony', 'subaltern mockery', 'visible enemy', 'graffiti-writers', 'stronger army', 'assaulted city', 'archaic imagery' and 'hardened eyeballs' all provide ballast to an equal number of daring anthropomorphisms, 'strings' excitement', 'morning's praise', 'ghost's approval', 'effacing grass', 'a disobedient dream', 'the lunatic agitation of the sea', and 'massive and taciturn years'.

The point is to recognise that language, Standard English usage, is unavoidably subjective and, being subjective, is subject, (some would argue, ought to be subject) to revision and change and improvement. The once mighty Latin language is now considered dead. Lexically codified usage, –Ricoeur's phrase – is probably a more accurate term to use as it

dispenses with time as a variable. Standard English usage is only standard for a single generation, if even that. 'Lexically codified usage' refers to the dictionary meaning of the day and not a changing standard of what passes for accepted use.

Communicating such sentiments or concepts in poetry would suggest a high degree of intellectual illumination. 'Poetic novels such as *Finnegan's Wake* are riddled with inscriptive play' (Boly: 27). 'Girls that are jung and easily freudened' is the oft-quoted example of this practice. 'A way a lone a last a loved a long the / riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation back to Howth Castle and Environs', the closing words of the Wake, advertise Joyce's method (Joyce).[66]

Auden pairs a somewhat conventional personification 'applauding drums' alongside the unorthodox 'string's excitement', using two different forms of the genitive (the Latin possessive) case, to convey the applauding of the drums and the excitement of the strings. Auden here abandons his use of the word 'of' for which Emig criticises him.

'Applauding' is a present participle which is used here as an adjective or modifier to describe and to animate drums, while 'string's excitement' couples two proper nouns, one abstract and semi-descriptive, the other concrete. The subversion of syntax brings into question 'the legality' of accepted and acceptable syntactical usage. Why can a gerund not qualify a *proper* noun? Why can't an atypical noun modify another noun? Is Auden analysing syntax, lexically codified usage? Auden's anthropomorphisms attempt to extend the domain or at least initiate a dialogue regarding their use in language.

The rules of grammar are brought into question. The reader may become suspect of their foundational authority, their reified status and question their legitimacy, their accepted usage. Normative language usage sits uneasily aside fantastic couplings. The opening line balances the normative 'applauding drum' with the more radical 'excitement' of 'strings, while normative couplings like 'subaltern mockery' and 'graffiti-writers' are quickly balanced by

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[66] http://www.wakeinprogress.com/2010/02/first-line.html

'morning's praise', 'ghost's approval', and 'effacing grass', establishing a pattern which supplies familiar imagery interspersed with new and more radical couplings.

Auden, aware that habits of speech ultimately determine action, suggests speculative, often promiscuous alternatives like 'the lunatic agitation of the sea' and 'disobedient dream', in an effort to extend the anthropomorphic domain. He achieves this extension enlarging the range of subject matter and by positing often, outlandish anthropomorphisms that threaten the existing order because they expose the lack of foundational authority that stock and normative tropes typically enjoy.

'Subaltern mockery', for example, is a normative anthropomorphism, one the reader can interpret without difficulty, but by denying that reader a context with which to connect 'subaltern mockery' with a narrative or storyline that can be discerned without difficulty, the trope joins many other free-standing tropes within the poem which do not contribute in a coherent fashion to a lucid narrative. Such normative tropes are stand-alone entities which have been endowed with sentience but which cannot contribute to a coherent whole.

Their more radical cousins possess even less foundational authority. Being new arrivals, pretenders or imposters that petition the reader for acceptance into the language, they too appear in the poem without any coherent context and contribute only in the most dubious way to a coherent narrative. Where an effort is made to extract meaning from the contribution of either normative or radical anthropomorphisms, the net effect is vague at best. This vagueness suggests that coherence, a valuing of their contribution to the poem, was never a priority.

A deliberate flouting of that 'traditional sense', the signature of Auden's early work, can only be reasonably comprehended not in terms of its local significance, the deployment of this image or that in contributing to a poem, but instead within a larger context that observes the impact of the poet's assault on language. Deliberately to sever or severely truncate the very traditions which are the lifeblood of poetry, is at once to honour them and destroy them.

The only logical basis which might justify the decision to attempt to destroy poetic traditions in a slow and systematic fashion is that such traditions are or had come to be regarded as having served their purpose, or had served it in a way that was seen as detrimental either to poetry or to the population which poetry is supposed to serve. Auden's early poetry is an implicit statement, an indictment of a lapsed 'symbolic contract' (Mendelson 1981: xviii).

While it would be a decade before Auden began to produce poems that can be said to be aesthetically pleasing, the early work represents a kind of house clearing. Auden had responded to Leavis's claim that 'English culture was in crisis' (Deane 2004: 35) but Leavis seemed unable or unwilling to accept that a complete overhaul of existing poetic forms was required. Therefore, Auden's assault appears less concerned with the impact of local effects than it does with the grand vision of total renewal.

For example, by presenting the reader with the line 'to breast the final hill' (EA, V: 24), the reader is left with little alternative but to question why 'breast', used here as a verb, cannot be inducted into the language (across five continents). Auden is stretching the limits of language. Unlike Jarrell's over-literal reading of the deployment of such images, a broader understanding of such usage can see that Auden is arguing, less that 'breast' be adopted as a verb and inducted into the pantheon of established terms in English, but more for the practice itself, highlighting the slow process of change. Breast does not have universal currency.[67]

Auden has no obvious message (no 'easily forgotten truth') but the method of the poem is to engender in the reader, as John Boly contends, an awareness of how truths are formed by exposing its 'discursive patterns' (Boly 1991: 49) or 'discursive stratagems'. All other access points are blocked. One subtext here is that by a relentless challenge to the foundations of language; by presenting poetry that looks and sounds like poetry but which defies and refuses other conventional forms, Auden shows that not only are words arbitrary, but their combinations and what we regard as normal are also arbitrary and subject to revision and change. This is, in essence, Emig's thesis.

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[67] In parts of the Middle-East, food servers will not utter the word 'breast' but will instead ask the customer if she wants 'a leg or a chest of chicken.

If Auden's plan was to renew culture through language, the question needs to be asked, does he or did he first need to subvert it and, if so, is the assault on the citadel of language the necessary precursor to rebuilding the assaulted or destroyed city? Alternatively, does Auden simply prefer ruins, abandoned mineshafts and railway lines that run nowhere?

Auden thereby admits the reader to the debating chamber of the poem to involve him or her in a conversation where an interested reader might begin to enter into a dialogue with the presiding voice of the poem. The lines 'It is your face I see and **morning's praise** of you / is **ghost's approval** of the choice' are so vague, or general, that the 'you' the speaker addresses assumes the role of an everyman or everywoman, thereby inviting the reader to project into, or identify with, the terse scene as it is presented.

The lack of a definitive setting likewise invites the reader to participate in a morning scene where a lonely or isolated individual petitions his absent lover or friend, thereby opening up the poem to as many interpretations as there are readers, with similar memories. The poem lacks real affection and so is really more like a lover's complaint in what reads like a cross between an Elizabethan drama (or Webster) and an abandoned post-Communist gulag.

Moreover, while many of Auden's anthropomorphisms are outlandish, they are genuine protestations of love or affection or attention, even if awkward, difficult, or sometimes lacking aesthetic qualities. They are anti idealistic, stubborn in their insistence on controlling the foreground of the poem that has been depopulated.

Auden's decision to offer the sparsest settings, timeless, and shorn of any identifying era or address for his metaphysical landscapes, has the inevitable impact of promoting a catchall inclusiveness for readers. The lack of identifiable settings, the moonscape imagery, and the lack of any discernible plot or obvious development, are Beckettian or Kafkaesque in their aspect, a recurring gambit throughout the poems where, it seems, by providing fewer identifiable props, sometimes more can be encompassed.

The lines 'Filtered through roots of **the effacing grass.** / **Fear, taking me aside** would give advice / To conquer her, **the visible enemy**, it is enough to turn away the eyes' are Donnean or Marvellian in their complexity, again stripped of identifiable habitat or other discriminating features. But, instead of wit, Auden gives us Fear. It may well be the case that it is Fear itself or herself that needs conquering, to suggest that, like J. Alfred Prufrock, the presiding voice of the poem cannot muster the courage to confront whatever or whomever seems to cause him the degree of angst he is experiencing.

Yet there is no peace '**in this assaulted city /** but **speeches** at the corners, **hope for news** / Outside the watchfires of **a stronger army',** are lines which forward the notion that the assaulted city is a metaphysical construct. While some concession is made to a democratic commune where speeches are made on corners, the lines taper off with descriptions of what read like pre-industrial warfare, or perhaps union activity, as watch-fires and armies assemble somewhere in the distance. It is interesting to notice that while Auden may have been referring here to the General Strike (1926), he deliberately avoids incriminating details.

Instead of fleeing into the countryside and into nature, Auden's voices have taken refuge among the detritus that more than adequately serves to reflect his mental state. There, his emotions are afforded the chance to express their inchoate state by allowing him the chance to recover their 'archaic imagery', so denying the reader that 'measure of normality which makes communication between one individual and another possible' (F.R. Leavis in Haffenden 1983: 100-101).

Anthropomorphism in Poem XVII (Auden 1986: 32)

> …It is your face I see, and morning's praise
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> Of you is ghost's approval of the choice,
>
> Filtered through roots of the effacing grass.

Even to speak of the need for 'justification' of particular imagery invites a whole other set of problems, problematic in that the reader sets out to read a poem but often has to critique his own assumptions regarding how poetry should behave. Extremely annoying as this may sometimes be, it is also an inseparable part of the charm of Auden's poetry, and why the claim that he refashioned poetry as 'a fitting vehicle for intellectual illumination' (Porter 2004: 135) finds some justification.

The coupling 'withdrawing grass', or 'inconspicuous grass', a literal translation, is an anthropomorphism which, if it does have a purpose, it is not apparent unless Auden is invoking Whitman and Lorca's conceptual motif of green ('*verde*') leaves of grass to represent the common people. Such evidence is very circumstantial and flimsy.

This might work, however, as it is conceivable that one face might emerge out of the many. There is a strong sense on reading poems such as this one that viewers of art are frequently placed in a similar position particularly when faced with non-figurative art. De-constructive and self-referential art may be recognised, in the fullness of time, as a necessary interlude, or hiatus, to major breaks in tradition, whether in the plastic arts, or in poetry.

'Fear, taking me aside, to give advice, conquer the enemy' - is a personified abstraction, an allegorical depiction of Fear. Fear is personified to offer the poet general advice on how to proceed. This suggests the components of the poem may indeed be split off parts of the speaker, characters in their own right. If this is the case, the entire poem might be read as a psychomachia where unwanted or disavowed elements of the speaker's personality are projected into the poem, representing an inner conflict that the speaker externalizes through objects.

'Assaulted city', like 'difficult country' of Poem XIII, works as a normative, descriptive term which offers the reader a clear and strong image, an anchor with which to ground the poem. But, whereas English usage supports the phrase 'the city was assaulted', to present the phrase 'assaulted city' is to imply something else. The city is personified by absent agents. The denial of historical details or local references, with which to situate the assault he refers to, implicitly

invite universal comparisons, but they also enable the poet's twin narratives to co-exist as the unspecified city may also refer to the apostrophe, about whom he has mixed feelings.[68] The poet may be referring to his muse. Auden may, of course, be referring to all the absent parties who have influenced the scene but who have since deserted it.

'To conquer her, the visible enemy, is enough to turn away the eyes', suggests the lack of autonomy the organs enjoy, that the mind has dominion over the body's functions. What the speaker means by 'to conquer her' may refer to seduction, but 'conquer' is hardly the way of the gentleman. Perhaps the speaker is struggling to disavow his attraction to a loved one so that 'conquer' is used in the sense of wanting to conquer his attraction. The sense of antagonism is palpable but the reader must wonder what kind of courtship the speaker has in mind that he might associate the absentee with a class of people he describes in such unflattering terms. Perhaps the speaker is addressing the resentment he feels toward desire itself, the apostrophe being the mere proxy for that emotion.

'And all the emotions to expression come' subverts normative imagery and syntax – emotions come to be expressed – and is an idiom which, if reversed, becomes something else, something unidiomatic and difficult, so exposing the familiar in an unfamiliar way. Again, the priority seems to lie with the speaker's (or perhaps the poet's) need to present actions which lack agents rather than the need to impart information. The lines may also be a comment on the poem or the role of the reader, faced with the task of recovering the poem's 'archaic imagery', except that the imagery is not particularly archaic. It is chaotic but it is controlled chaos.

A 'disobedient dream' is probably the most radical pairing in Poem XVII, followed by 'the morning's praise'. 'Tears' that 'salt'; sodium chloride appearing as a verb, also qualifies as radical. A 'disobedient dream' is one which does not follow the commands or advice of the dreamer, and

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[68] The reference may be an allusion to the poem 'When the Assault was intended to the City' (1642) by John Milton, in which the city in question is likened to a muse who needs defending. 'Lift not thy spear against the Muse's bower'.

so suggests a conflict between how the dreamer envisages the progress of his devotion to the addressee of the poem, and the distance and estrangement this gives expression to.

The speaker appears to discover the limits of the control he can exert over the relationship he has with the absentee, insofar as his dream, how he envisages the progress of their relationship, is thwarted. To assume that it is the dream that disobeys, that does the disobeying, may be incorrect. The dream may be thwarted by circumstances beyond the speaker's control. The lack of agency apparent in the coupling 'disobedient dream' invites speculation regarding who or what precisely causes the dream to remain unfulfilled or thwarted. The longer the reader considers potential meanings, the more possibilities multiply.

To return to Brian Vickers's definition of a trope, for a moment, his assertion that 'All the tropes, then, work by a form of substitution based on resemblance and difference, with the listener or reader being expected to make the mental operations necessary to relate one term for another within the same class' (Vickers 1998: 444), it is clear that Poem XVII cannot properly exist without the reader's input. So far as an early Auden poem is concerned, the poem never quite sees the light of day until the reader arrives to interpret it.

Where Vickers refers here to 'class', W.K. Wimsatt's essay (*The Structure of the Concrete Universal*) may help elaborate upon those 'mental operations' where it (he) explains that 'Even the simplest form of metaphor or simile … presents us with a special and creative, in fact a concrete, kind of abstraction different from that of science. For behind a metaphor lies a resemblance between two classes, and hence a more general third class. This class is unnamed and most likely remains unnamed and is apprehended only through the metaphor. It is a new conception for which there is no other expression. Keats discovering Homer is like a traveller in the realms of gold, like an astronomer who discovers a planet, like Cortez gazing at the Pacific' (Wimsatt 1954: 46 in Rifkin and Ryan).

It is the reader who generates this third class and it seems very likely that science's historical antipathy toward anthropomorphism emanates from a dislike of such an interpretive role for the reader, as clear scientific writing quite naturally prides itself on empirical proofs,

avoiding ambiguity, avoiding any interpretive role which might undermine the authority of the author who is presenting his findings.

The radical nature of these anthropomorphisms provides a clue to their function or purpose as their non-conformist status suggests that something quite deliberate is being said, the poet is staking out a position. Their contribution as outlandish *dramatis personae* is seen in their Vatic refusal, vagabond and non-conformist, to submit themselves to the Civil standards of a community of meaning. If they cannot or refuse to partake in that community, this suggests that they represent something of an intra-psychic meta-conflict that finds expression, if not resolution, where it appropriates highly subjective utterance in an imaginary or contrived landscape to render the problem external.

The imperative which drives a progression from isolation to engagement is consistent with the need for poets and poetry to react to the social, political, and economic circumstances of the day, the need to re-tool, to answer the demands of the civil emergency society was facing by immersing himself in the detritus industry and poor governance had visited upon the landscape, causing every living thing in it to evacuate. The poet has returned to the scene of the crime and before he can deconstruct the causes for the damage, he must reorient himself and attempt to resolve his inner conflicts.

Each radical pairing represents a disparate impulse under the proscenium arch of the poem. The speaker is conflicted and disturbed and the language reflects this. As a style of poetry that progresses from deliberately half-articulated inner conflicts to a point, in later stages, where language finds cogent expression, the early poetry represents a movement from isolation to semi-coherence.

Auden's early work can only be measured in terms of what came after it, not because early promise is necessarily an indication of mastery, but because later mastery does reflect well on the early work.

If one reads these images literally, Jarrell is correct to reject them, though their sheer number (he cites nineteen examples of what he regarded as the worst) might have prompted him to seek a connotative rather than a stubbornly literal reading. It is important to note that Jarrell's rejection of Auden's 'Effect by Incongruity' (Jarrell 1951-2, Lecture 3, 2005: 48), his rejection of 'the juxtaposition of disparate coordinates' (49) is correct only as far as he understood the basis for their deployment. Jarrell seems never to have countenanced that Auden might have had an ulterior motive, a strategy of discourse.

Contrary to Jarrell's basic assumption, that Auden was using anthropomorphism literally, that the poet took phrases such as ' the lunatic agitation of the sea' seriously, it is much more likely that the deployment of his 'disobedient dream' represented an effort to disrupt tradition rather than actually trying to augment the anthropomorphic range which his trope deployments certainly did extend. The anthropomorphic auditions are doomed to fail because that seems to be their function in this series of poems.

Auden's new aesthetic, whichever way it is looked at, did signal a sea-change in English poetry. That his sea change involved withdrawing most of the water, and destroying most of the ports, and flooding the badlands, was the price paid to wash away the old order.

Auden's aesthetic involves the immolation of past strictures, his refusal to honour the grandees, the established authorities, but, instead of crawling into a hole and lamenting his outcast state, Auden makes a virtue, or at least finds a use, for what appears to be his psychopathology.

 'And all the emotions to expression come / recovering the archaic imagery / This longing for assurance takes the form/ Of a hawk's vertical stooping from the sky', is perhaps the most interesting section of the poem as it appears to be a direct comment on the poem's construction.

A reference to Thomas Hardy's 'hawk's vision, his way of looking at life from a very great height' (Mendelson 1981: 33), something Auden acknowledged had been a formative influence on his own style, addresses the creative quandary of trying to describe an emotional

connection while remaining above it, yet in remaining above it, remain emotionally detached from it.

The poem inverts the phrase 'emotions find expression' to direct the reader's attention to a rediscovery of how words and emotions are assembled, their need for archaic imagery to satisfy their longing for assurance, the assurance of syntax that is normative and comforting. By contrast, imagery that is not archaic would, presumably, not lead to the same level of comfort.

The poem seems to equate established or archaic imagery with emotional (and perhaps political) contentment. If the speaker is not content, or if his generation is facing conditions that do not promote well-being or emotional security, then 'new imagery' will be needed to articulate the changed circumstances.

'And all the emotions to expression come / recovering the archaic imagery / This longing for assurance takes the form/ Of a hawk's vertical stooping from the sky'. The poem casts language as an emotional (and perhaps political) marker of sorts.

Though hardly novel by today's standards, a poem that comments on its own construction, or on some of the creative problems faced by the artist, must certainly have appeared unusual in its day. Here, Auden is pointing to the nature of forms, how recognizable shapes provide reassurance or at least familiarity and perhaps voicing criticism of the manner in which 'archaic imagery' can keep readers sedated.

Hardy's hawk's vision, the capacity to stand above systems and describe their contours from a height to render some advantage, also raises the issue of personal and artistic sincerity. The emotional distance required to understand something is the same distance that keeps people, or our emotions, at arm's length from the heart of the matter, the scene of emotional challenge or conflict. Here the speaker is trying to understand and 'overcome' that conflict.

This leads to the question as to whether it is ever possible to both articulate something, yet remain emotionally engaged with it. By deploying the anthropomorphic hawk, the quandary is provided with a narrative frame to, at least, posit the artistic dilemma. It speaks to the heart

of Auden's decision to attempt to inaugurate a new style of poetry in that the presiding voice of the poem is also part of the scene he is trying to describe, like Escher's hand drawing itself.

This brings to mind Samuel Johnson's remark, 'where there's leisure for fiction there can be little grief' (Johnson 1783, *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets*: 218–220), raising the issue of the emotional distance required to render emotion with sincerity but also with objectivity. The hawk's too distant position invariably keeps him at an emotional distance. Distance may be necessary to get an overview of his strained relationship, but with detachment comes a diminished emotional engagement. In place of a therapist, upon whom the friendless exile of the poems might project his dilemma, Auden's persona(s) project upon inanimate objects which, assuming his voice, become contorted, assume strange shapes as he weaves in and out of sanity.

While such questioning may be a commentary on the fact that emotional detachment, by definition, deprives the protagonist of clarity with regard to his strained relationship to the absentee, the observation has further value in that it is a reasonable critique of the activity of reading insofar as the presiding voice of the poem is so enmeshed in emotion that he is unable to render the scene with anything resembling accuracy or clarity. To be caught up with emotion is to struggle to describe it. The stanza seems to challenge the sang-froid of the traditional omniscient narrator.

Emig asserts that 'though trying to break out of their textuality by a direct appeal to the external entity [reality?] of the reader, the poems end up trapped in their own imagery and therefore also in language' (Emig 2000: 23). If the poems are indeed trapped, part of the very conundrum they seek to solve, perhaps the solution lies not in resolving the paradox but in simply accepting the truths such entrapment advertise, how mimesis and catharsis are two emotions that it seems impossible, at least from an artistic point of view, to portray as the capacity to feel and the impulse to describe are mutually antagonistic.

Emig suggests that 'Writing is that which stresses the non-immediacy of language. It cannot establish a direct link with the world of things, because it is itself part of that world. In

its failure to establish a stable connection between thought and reality, language reminds the human being of the isolation and alienation that are the price of consciousness'(Emig 2000: 18).

Though Emig does not address Auden's use of anthropomorphism directly, it seems reasonable to suggest that one way to 'establish a direct link with the world of things' was to deploy the trope 'to earth' the intellect. The ascription of agency to inanimate objects palpably underscores our humanity by formalizing, albeit via an unfashionable literary device, a relationship between the isolated mind or intellect, and the world of things.

It seems perfectly reasonable to challenge poetry such as this. Whether the poem has a meaning or a value or not, the reader cannot be faulted for asking, what is of such great import that Auden could not have written his message in readable prose? Perhaps, however, to read for content or to measure Auden's work by any traditional yardstick is to miss the point.

Auden's early poetry is primarily dramatic, as opposed to overly narrative or descriptive. What description he supplies is fragmentary, and the reader has no option but to co-opt the fragments into whatever scene can be conjured up. Effectively, the reader is invited to inhabit a landscape of her own making, a co-operative venture with the minimal materials the poem supplies.[69]

Auden's early poetry is mimetic of a pre-war sensibility, and while it co-opts the reader as a participant or co-author of the poem, who develops her own imagery from the supplied fragments, such chaos may have spoken to the psychological uncertainties and the political confusion that characterise the 1930s.

Stan Smith's study of Auden mentions 'the discovery of a discourse that could explain a disintegrating world' (Smith 1997: 23). Auden explained that 'It is no doubt psychologically

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[69] 'This sense of the askew, of inhabiting a moment that gains definition only from the degree to which it lacks the absolute, pervades Auden's verse from first to last. This is why it is a poetry of fragments and splinters, always changing styles and doxologies. We recognise the Audenesque by the way things don't fit: epithets together ('tolerant, enchanted', 'warm and lucky') or objects with their figures of speech ('the winter holds them like the Opera') or style with substance (camp with Christian, Horatian with Ischian, medieval alliterative verse with lost souls in a New York bar, haikus with home truths)' (Everett 1981 LRB) http://www.lrb.co.uk/v03/n21/barbara-everett/auden-askew

significant that my sacred world was autistic, that is to say, I had no wish to share it with others nor could I have done so' (Mendelson 1981: xiv). To this statement, can be added Edward Mendelson's observation, cited earlier, that 'his first adult poetry, the work of a young man of twenty, was overwhelmingly concerned with his own emotional isolation, rather than with truths he could share with his audience' (Mendelson 1981: xiv).

Edward Mendelson further explains how 'During the first twelve years of his career….Auden made the difficult passage from a private poetry to a public one, from apparent formal disorder to manifest artifice, and from lonely severity to a community of meaning' (Mendelson 1981: xiv). Reading through Stage One of Auden's poetry, it is possible to discern the trend Mendelson refers to, as Auden perhaps overcame his subjective entrapment, became less autistic, and more civically engaged.

A lack of authorial detachment, a flouting of literary tradition and its protocols, an infusion of topical neurosis or psychosis, a self-referential obliquity, and the introduction of a hermeneutical and phenomenological subtext, so assigning a role for the benighted reader, represent that contribution.

What is extraordinary about Auden's early work is that it received the critical attention it did, in the sense that such poems were ever reviewed in poetry journals at all. And while he went on to establish himself as a foremost poet, in a sense giving greater credibility to the earlier work, his project for cultural renewal was audacious, to say the very least.

Instead of searching for clues to determine what Auden might have meant or speculating in the most sympathetic manner to discover Auden's unspoken ambitions for cultural renewal, a sterner approach would be to credit Auden for introducing to poetry something novel, to perhaps credit him with a style of poetry that spoke to present problems and not to an unrepresented or unarticulated past.

But it must also be to ultimately dismiss Auden's ambitions as having been pitched not just above the heads of ordinary readers of poetry, but also over the heads of the literary

intelligentsia whose attacks on Auden's person, or persona, were borne of the frustration his new aesthetic of the anti-aesthetic provoked. This is not to forgive the *ad hominem* attacks on him in place of a proper critique, but it is to explain them.

Leavis and Jarrell were partly right to criticise Auden's early work but it seems that they attacked it for all the wrong reasons, their critiques saying more about their own expectations for poetry than anything useful that might have helped readers appreciate the work. Leavis had declared 'that English culture was in crisis, and asserted the social responsibilities of writers and critics' (Deane 2004: 35) but was unable to recognise the arrival of a partial solution, and while that solution invoked the immolation of the old order, surely a necessary precursor to rebuilding a rhetoric that might serve the common good, the professor and others failed to recognise it.

The relative success of the early poetry did sweep away the old edifice but readers would have to wait almost a decade before Auden again produced a style of poetry that represented a new aesthetic, one that actually displayed aesthetic qualities, a poetry that looked and sounded like poetry but which was not disembodied and which did not place excessive demands on the reader.

The early work represents the swidden; the bushfire of its time, required to clear the land to make way for a new poetry. Upsetting the old guard was inevitable, but what does not seem inevitable was Auden's refusal to explain to anyone what in fact he was doing.

That he eventually followed up on the bushfire with a poetry that more closely resembled his literary forbears, though it is not mistaken for a bland continuation of modernism, is credit to him for it suggests that, just as 'mad Ireland had hurt you into poetry'(Auden, *Elegy for Yeats*: 241), referring to Yeats, mad England had hurt Auden into replacing existing poetic traditions with something different.

To hijack Robert Bridges's remark about Keats, how his poetry sometimes 'displayed its poetry rather than its meaning', Auden's poetry made a virtue of such a display, precisely to allow meaning, with a little bit of help from the reader, to take care of itself (Bayley 1982, LRB).

Poem III (Auden: 22)   (Anthropomorphisms in bold)

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 the wood

An industry already **comatose,**

Yet sparsely living …

Through **long abandoned levels** nosed his way

And in his final valley went to ground.

Go home now stranger, proud of your young stock

Stranger turn back again frustrated and vexed

This land, cut off, will not communicate…   August 1927

Generally considered a pivotal poem in the Auden *oeuvre*, the title '*The Watershed'* signals the end and the beginning of something, a change of heart perhaps. Recognised as the point where Auden's poetry began to move from self-imposed isolation and subjective imprisonment to greater contact with the objective world, the poem appears to meet traditional expectations of what poetry should look and feel like.

However, instead of moving toward engagement, *The Watershed* in fact signals the beginning of a period where Auden backed away from engagement, and as the previous poem demonstrates, Auden, or the presiding voice of the poem, is still a far distance from a living community. The poems that were written after *The Watershed* see Auden go deeper into his isolation, as the final line of the poem foretells. The watershed of the poem, as Edward Mendelson explains, 'proves to be both a crossroads and … a dilemma', 'the stranger can neither communicate with the past nor decide on a plausible future' (Mendelson 1981: 34-35).

While the tone of the poem is emphatic and hopeful, insofar as the speaker is, finally, less focused on his own isolation and emotions as he looks outward at the ruined and abandoned landscape, it nonetheless ends with the abrupt reminder that 'This land, cut off, will not communicate…', establishing a pattern which persists for several years after it was written. *The Watershed* of the title marks a border or limit to engagement and not a breakthrough. About these lines, Seamus Heaney says that 'I am now content that Auden should practise such resistance to the reader's expectations. I take pleasure in its opacity and am ready to accept its obscurity – even if it is wilful – as a guarantee of the poet's implacable testimony to the gulf which separates art from life' (Heaney).[70]

Where previously, *ennui* and *anomie*, and a generally disembodied self, clouded the semi-coherent metaphysical landscape, *The Watershed* looks outward at what finally appear to be real objects, and though the land will not communicate, this in itself signals a degree of progress as, at least, a central concern is identified, even if it remains unresolved. Therefore, while the poem may not represent a breakthrough, it represents an articulation of the problem or dilemma, that of a refusal to communicate, which the presiding voice ascribes to the land.

It ought to be borne in mind that while the presiding voice attributes a refusal to communicate *to* the land, the refusal may in fact refer to his own inability to communicate, harking back to his own hitherto dissociated state. Auden appears to have finally escaped what

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[70] Seamus Heaney 1987, LRB. http://www.lrb.co.uk/v09/n11/seamus-heaney/sounding-auden

he elsewhere describes as 'the cell of himself' where each individual 'is almost convinced of his freedom' (Auden 1939, 1986, XXXIX *Elegy for Yeats:* 242, line 26).

The poem represents not a resolution, but a diagnosis that may be the first step forward toward finding resolution. *The Watershed* inaugurates the advent of 'the Audenesque'(Bergonzi 1975, Essay: 70), as Mendelson asserts, so displaying some of the stock ingredients of Stage One, a number of elements within the poem recur or are elaborated upon in later poems.

A speaker describes a state of industrial or infrastructural disarray and its concomitant spiritual decay while exhorting everyman to action in language which is frugal and preachy, assuming a tone that oscillates between the didactic and the frankly dismayed. *The Watershed* is something of a guide to later poems that elaborate or explicate its salient features.

The poem also casts a long shadow back upon previous poems of the series that deny a handle to readers and critics as Auden, Lear-like, gets lost on the heath in a metaphysical storm of his own creation but one that, he would doubtless argue, was representative of his generation. It is not WH Auden who is caught in the cross-winds but a modern incarnation of Everyman.

The Watershed is significant for one other reason. Auden's stated love of industrial and mining equipment implies some form of communication that is advantageous, yet, in this poem which inaugurates the series, the poem declares that the land is cut off and will not communicate.[71] Is childhood or adolescence finally over, the reader wonders? Here is Auden, speaking of that childhood:

Besides words, I was interested almost exclusively in mines and their machinery ... From the age of thirteen I had a series of passionate love-affairs with pictures of, to me, particularly attractive water turbines, winding engines, roller-crushers, etc., and I was never so emotionally happy as when I was underground (Hendon 2000: 35).

While no full and plausible explanation can here be proffered to account for the two expressions, the one poetic, the other autobiographical, it is important, at least, to register the connection. Perhaps Auden assumed that industrial detritus would not mean the same thing to his readers as it evidently meant to him.

Those beautiful machines that never talked

But let the small boy worship them and learn   (Carpenter 1981: 13)

Humphrey Carpenter reminds the reader how important machinery was to the poet who makes reference to his attachment to them as 'part of his imaginative world' (13). Carpenter also clarifies the source for much of the content of Auden's first published work where he explains that 'A large number of the poems in the book, perhaps the majority, dealt, under a layer of symbolism, with the emotional plight of the individual, expressed largely according to Layard's ideas;[72] but this would scarcely have been apparent to someone who did not know Auden's private interests' (Carpenter 1981: 113).

In terms of its anthropomorphic content, 'an industry comatose' and a 'land' that 'will not communicate' are the powerful engines of the piece. These are two of the clearest images of the poem and, arguably, its central theme as they reinforce each other.

Referring to T.S. Eliot's essay from *The Sacred Wood* (Eliot 1921: 7), it seems extraordinary that Auden claimed that 'I have never understood exactly what the objective correlative is' (Carpenter 1981: 114). It may well have been the case, given the poet's relationship to objects; his love of mining equipment, and so on, that *every* object in his visual field was an objective correlative, (the fish being the last one to discover water).

Carpenter's biography of Auden details how 'I spent a great many of my waking hours in the construction and elaboration of a private sacred world, the basic elements of which were a

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[72] John Layard, a faith healer Auden had met in Berlin in 1927, was a follower and practitioner of the psychological theories of Homer Lane whose 'teachings bore a certain resemblance to those of Freud', and who believed that 'all instinctive behaviour is not just biologically 'good' but morally desirable too…' (Carpenter 1981: 86-87).

landscape, northern and limestone, and an industry, lead mining'. 'In his imagination', according to Carpenter, 'he was the "sole autocrat" of this dream country' (Carpenter 1981: 14).

The only assistance such biographical detail can contribute toward the task of interpreting the early work is to establish the existence of a firm connection to a post-industrial landscape with which the young poet could readily identify. While it is natural to assume that Auden's isolation found expression in the detritus, the evidence also suggests that he was right at home there.

It is more likely, given Auden's vast knowledge of literature, that he was escaping into a ruined landscape in defiance of the Romantic poets' flight into nature. However, instead of escaping the problems of the city as they did, he was determined to keep his readers with him among the ruins, at least long enough to give some thought to the critical impasse they faced.

Whereas the Romantic poets had anaesthetised themselves with laudanum and escapist forays, whether to Xanadu, Dorset, or a depopulated Westminster Bridge, Auden preferred the gritty realities of a post-apocalyptic landscape to confront the reality of a 1930s England. [73]

A sleeping industry, knocked senseless and devoid of people, stands as a reminder of what was, the connection between the people and the means of production. 'Yet sparsely living' the poet suggests, referring to the now inanimate industry. 'Long abandoned levels' and 'dismantled washing floors', though not anthropomorphic, further expose and underscore the connection, since lost, between people and things, a normative connection descriptive of an abandoned mine or factory. Auden's post-Romantic landscape looms heavily.

'Long abandoned levels nosed their way' animates the levels which, though abandoned by people, retain a human element as they still 'make their way' to the final valley where they run to ground as a beleaguered animal might to a final resting place, the 'final valley' of the scene.

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[73] 'Fleeing the discursive arena, it set out for the steep and exhilarating splendors of the isolated individual… But Auden did not follow the path of this romantic departure. By turning from the discursive arena, romantic poetry and its long line of inheritors did more than ensure the ascendency of the novel for the next few centuries. It also made a contract: in return for a reduction of discursive range, it acquired a greater freedom' (Boly 1991: 121).

'Snatches of tramline running to the wood' combines the animation of the inanimate tramline with the decrepit image of disused tracks running on empty. 'The chafing grass', a recurring image in the early poetry, is animated with irritation, nature embittered by something.

Thematically, the poem is significant because, compared with Poems XIII (*Under Boughs*) and XVII (*The strings' excitement*), the speaker has finally adopted a theme other than that of the psychotic interplay of mind and landscape. While mind and landscape here predominate, the speaker has something to say about the abandonment, infusing an element of real regret for the decline of industry and the departure of the people who worked there. With such clarity of expression usually comes, it seems, greater mental stability on the part of the speaker, as if language operates in the poems as a barometer of mental health.

Auden, or the speaker of the poem, appears to have escaped his psychomachia and is now focused on his external surroundings, though whether they are actually external or actually real is open to debate as they are animated in a way that suggests that he has already internalised them, or perhaps, committed them to memory.

The speaker has moved his focus from his own inner concerns to a concern for the landscape and for others, a small step forward from solitary subjective self-reference to a sense of community, or at least a critique of what was a community. The end point for such a journey would be where the speaker will render himself invisible, his own needs and feelings absent from the narrative. An example might be Auden's much later series of portraits of Freud and Yeats, signifying a maturity, the ability not to infuse one's own concerns into the picture but to stand back, or above, and look and write objectively about the object, the other.

However, it is more likely that Auden learned to bring his passion to bear upon such landscapes, which, for all intents and purposes, represent the *prima facie* physical exterior, the outside objective world, but, his treatment of them is so infused with feeling and care that he may in fact have internalised them to the point that they have ceased to be objective 'objects' in the external world. They appear to be extensions of self.

Seen earlier, John Boly takes up the question of writing objectively where he examines Poem III (*The Watershed*) for the role parallax plays in it:

The speaker's picturesque "snatches of tramline" concedes a broken line of sight, the result of an intervening screen, and thus unwittingly knocks out a main prop of visionary poetics: its unmediated linkage between perception and reference (1991: 87).

'The unmediated linkage between perception and reference' Boly mentions here, refers to the fact that the narrator who typically retains control of the narrative by giving the reader his (the author's) perspective, surrenders this right or privilege when the reader of *The Watershed* finds himself physically unable to share the perspective of the writer. An objective perspective is thereby denied the reader, thereby liberating her from the tyranny, the repressions of the text. It is a deliberate act of self-sabotage as Auden exposes the dichotomy of any shared perspective. Boly continues:

'Irked', because the reader cannot share the author's objective view of the scene, 'the genius loci tries to salvage matters by resorting to a stronger personification, "running to a wood", as a means of diverting attention to the mysteriously animating energies within the scene below. But in the process of avoiding one rift [between speaker and author], he chances upon another, for the auditor [the reader] detects disruptive accents within his personification' (87-88), the reader finds the phrase "running to a wood" ambiguous, distracting.

The point to make here is that *The Watershed* is the first poem where abdication of control by the narrator is witnessed. By denying the reader the same access as that enjoyed by the author, the abandoned reader is left to his own devices, left to his own unique perspective and so is liberated. The text no longer demands obedience to its writ and as progress can only ever happen as the result of someone breaking the rules or by improving upon them, the reader's sociological imagination is triggered.

With freedom comes responsibility. Auden's readers, were they gatekeepers at Belsen, might well have questioned the received wisdom of placing absolute trust in the written orders they received.

The point of highlighting this is not to assent to the likelihood of Auden's readers ever being given charge of gas chambers, but to accept that by supplying such a sophisticated narrative exposition regarding the relationship of individuals to written information, the practice might eventually become a commonplace. Questioning authority might become a mainstay. Such a practice might contribute to 'critical thinking', might eventually become part of national or international schools' curricula, and might eventually uplift man and free him from his baser tendencies which, typically, amount to privileging one's own perspective at the expense of others.

That Auden attempted to carve out such a role for poetry is remarkable.

While seasoned literary critics may take such innovation in their stride, it ought to be remembered that informed dissent, aimed at a dominant discourse, is the lifeblood of all political systems.

That Auden managed to carve out this role for poetry is remarkable (sic) but then Milton achieved something similar in the seventeenth-century as Stanley Fish's earlier examination of *Paradise Lost* made clear. Fear of 'verbal manipulation' (Fish: 197) did not begin with Aristotle and will not end with Auden.

Auden's machinery and mining equipment thereby represents a transcendental arena where he re-enacts existential dramas that he believes in, to which he invites us as readers to participate. Given what is known of his early childhood relationship to mining equipment and machines, it appears that these physical objects in the environment have been paid such a high degree of attention by Auden that they represent some kind of personal investment. They may also represent a divestment of self, such that they have ceased to be what they are in reality, inanimate objects, and have become extensions of self.

This is a difficult point to make as it relies on the reader having encountered the notion of 'cathecting' (to inject with libidinal energy) whereby individuals form often intense relationships to objects, whether it be babies and their blankets or daring adults to their fetishes. These are termed transitional objects as they typically represent progress from one stage to another.

While he ostensibly cares about the exterior landscape which is the main subject of the poems, his attachment to the objects in it and his animation of them, his ascription of agency to them does suggest an attachment which goes beyond simply caring for them and expressing apparent regret for the damage that has been visited upon them.

This point assumes importance given Auden's later writings on landscape, particularly his later poem *In Praise of Limestone* in which he identifies limestone as a suitable metaphor, inconstant, impervious and malleable for the human organism, 'the theme of which is that rock creates the only human landscape'(Mendelson 1999, *Later Auden*: 290).

If it form [sic] the one landscape that we, the inconstant ones,

Are constantly homesick for, this is chiefly

Because it dissolves in water.   (Mendelson 1999, *Later Auden*: 292).

It seems reasonable to surmise that while stock and normative anthropomorphisms indicate a measured sense of caring and affection for the objects in the landscape, semi-radical and radical anthropomorphisms are often so outlandish and so unpoetic that the reader can find in them a level of concern that goes well beyond a reasonable level of caring.

This suggests that the speaker of the poem is attached to them in a way that these animated objects have ceased to be what they are, the detritus of abandonment, and have become objects which have begun to assume a high degree of importance and which radically serve the unresolved pathology of the presiding voice of the poem. On a simple level, the individual of the poem may feel abandoned and perhaps decrepit.

Such landscapes represent existential sites where, perhaps, unwanted or formerly disowned parts of the self are deposited, sites which then supply an externalised metaphysical playground in which the presiding voice navigates his dissociated self. The language employed to describe his subjective relationship to the exterior provides the reader with a guide to the speaker's dilemma, his inability to escape the self, his difficulty in communicating.

Clarity of language thus acts as a wavering measurement of the speaker's emotional health. Radical and semi-radical anthropomorphisms typically appear when the speaker is in crisis, where new phrases and often fantastic couplings are deployed in an effort, often desperate, to extend the language to encompass emotions which existing language cannot service or satisfy. Of course, the language of mental health did not exist to the extent that it does today. Auden's poems contain vivid descriptions of mental estrangement. What does come through is the sense that the writer of the poem feels strong enough to describe such feelings, breaking 'the tabu against tenderness' (Bogan in Haffenden: 357-8) and, creatively, felt motivated enough to bring them to the attention of readers.

Their unsuitability, radical metaphors, as fitting candidates who audition for a place in the larger community of words and stock phrases, is a measure of the emotional health of the presiding voice, a measure of the extent to which the presiding voice is ready or capable of taking his place among the community, which is to say, not at all.

Auden manages, in the portrait poems mentioned, to make accurate statements or observations about his subjects (Yeats and Freud, and others), but the depth of feeling he possesses for his subjects infuses his objective renderings with highly subjective nuance that often defies description or obvious explanation. His later portraits are impersonal but rendered in a highly personal way. That is to say, these portraits are objective. Where the language of the poem ceases to read in an objective way, it seems safe to conclude that they are or they function as 'subjective correlatives'.

Careful to avoid biographical information that might explain away the poet's motivation to write poetry, Humphrey Carpenter makes mention of two things which may help clarify this

issue. Carpenter says that 'He was himself, indeed, remarkably un-neurotic in manner. Largely because he was in the habit of assuming that things would turn out as he wanted them to – which, as a result, they usually did.

Moreover, as he himself once suggested, a neurosis may not be so much the cause of intellectual and artistic achievement as the means by which it is achieved. 'The so-called traumatic experience', he wrote, is not an accident, but the opportunity for which the child has been patiently waiting…'(Carpenter 1981: 12).[74]

> A word like pyrites, he said, was for me not simply an indicative sign; it was the Proper Name of a Sacred Being (Carpenter: 14).

Impressive though Auden's observation is, it is only to be expected from someone who would set about depicting mental health through the medium of poetry. Regarding his stated love for machinery, Carpenter observes that 'However genuinely technical and scientific his interest in mines may appear to be, it was actually (as he later realised) a romantic and quite unpractical love affair which had nothing to do with real mining…'

> The machinery, the tunnels, the geological info... attracted him because of their names and because they were symbols of something else, though he could not say of what. It was, in fact, an obsession which marked him out for something very far removed from engineering. I doubt, he said, 'if a person with both these passions, for the word and for the symbol, could become anything but a poet' (Carpenter 1981: 14-15).

Of course, the language of mental health did not exist then, to the extent that it does today. Auden's poems contain vivid descriptions of mental estrangement. What does come through is the sense that the writer of the poem feels strong enough to describe such feelings,

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[74] '…in his poetry Auden managed to correlate surface and depth as he could almost never in life; he wrote a poetry in which the 'unluck' of his life became the 'luck' of his verse. And by virtue of this capacity it achieved, perhaps, that normative quality which is the opposite of neurosis. It is Auden's sense of failure which is the true success of his poetry'(Everett 1981, LRB). http://www.lrb.co.uk/v03/n21/barbara-everett/auden-askew

breaking 'the tabu against tenderness' (Bogan in Haffenden: 357-8) and, creatively, felt motivated enough to bring them to the attention of readers.

Their unsuitability, radical metaphors, as fitting candidates who audition for a place in the larger community of words and stock phrases, is a measure of the emotional health of the presiding voice, a measure of the extent to which the presiding voice is ready or capable of taking his place among the community, which is to say, not at all.

Auden manages, in the portrait poems mentioned, to make accurate statements or observations about his subjects (Yeats and Freud, and others), but the depth of feeling he possesses for his subjects infuses his objective renderings with highly subjective nuance that often defies explanation. This is perhaps the gift of the poet and cannot be explained.

Perhaps all good poetry or good writing about the so-called objective world displays this element of personal investment, revealing something of the sensibility of the writer. Where the language of the poem ceases to read in an objective way, it seems reasonable to suggest that they are, they function as 'subjective correlatives'.

The 'barometric pressure', so to speak, that the mental health of the presiding voice places on language, may represent more than a rendering of the emotional state of a post-industrial refugee who laments all that has happened, and who cannot align his emotions sufficiently to string cogent sentences together. The struggle with language and meaning, more plausibly, might well (also) represent the creative struggle the young poet was enmeshed in, as he faced the dilemma of needing to break with poetic tradition.

Unable to banish or escape language, he deforms it. Unable to find his own style, he truncates it. Unable to announce a new aesthetic that actually exhibits aesthetic qualities, he monopolises the attentions of the literary class, yet disdainfully refuses to throw them a proverbial bone that might help them in their task of deciphering his new style of poetry.

Poem XIII, *Hearing of harvest rotting in the valleys,* written in May of 1933, and 'later titled *Paysage Moralisé'* (Mendelson 1981: 154), represents one of the few direct indicators the

poet provided regarding the status of his landscapes. His chosen term for a 'moralized landscape' (Paxson 1994: 43, 169), implies a human component.

The poem is unremarkable in terms of its anthropomorphisms but the pattern of endowing mountains, cities, valleys, islands, love and water, the dawn and hunger, with human attributes is repeated. The preponderance of such imagery reminds the reader of the human connection to the land and sea, to emotions or states of being, and so furthers his project of personifying landscape.

More engaged than most of the poems previous to 1933, Poem XIII, while it does present a dilemma, that of unhappy people stuck in cities as they dream of a better life elsewhere, it lacks the intra-psychic angst of previous poems which may lead the reader to focus less on the speaker's state of mind and more on the objects in the landscape that are being rendered. Auden is moving out into the world.

The portrait is broadly constructive and hopeful even as it pauses to consider the suffering of people. It appears here as a simple testament to the development of the poet's style, to show that the presiding voice is beginning to move away from private concerns, as he appears to discover a world beyond the self. John Fuller's commentary dissects that world.

<div align="center">

Poem XIII (Auden: 135-6)   (Anthropomorphisms in bold)

</div>

Hearing of **harvests rotting** in the valleys,

Seeing at end of street **the barren mountains**,

Round corners coming suddenly on water,

Knowing them shipwrecked who were launched for islands,

We honour founders of **these starving cities**,

Whose honour is **the image of our sorrow**.

Which cannot see its likeness in their sorrow

That brought them **desperate in the brink of valleys**;

Dreaming of evening walks through **learned cities**,

They reined their violent horses on the mountains

Those **fields like ships to castaways on islands**,

Visions of green to them that craved for water.

They built by rivers and at **night the water**

Running past windows **comforted their sorrow**;

Each in his little bed conceived of islands

Where **every day was dancing** in the valleys

And all the green trees blossomed on the mountains

Where **love was innocent**, **being far** from cities.

But **dawn came back** and they were still in cities;

No marvellous creature rose up from the water;

There was still gold and silver in the mountains

But hunger was a more immediate sorrow,

Although to **moping villagers** in valleys

Some waving pilgrims were describing islands ...

"The gods," they promised, "visit us from islands,

Are stalking, head-up, lovely, through our cities;

Now is the time to leave **your wretched valleys**

And sail with them across the lime-green water,

Sitting at their white sides, forget your sorrow,

The shadow cast across your lives **by mountains**."

So many, doubtful, perished in the mountains,

Climbing up crags to get a view of islands,

So many, fearful, **took with them their sorrow**

Which stayed them when they reached **unhappy cities**,

So many, careless, dived and drowned in water,

So many, wretched, would not leave their valleys.

It is our sorrow. Shall it melt? Ah, water

Would gush, flush, green these mountains and these valleys,

And we rebuild our cities, not dream of islands.   (Auden, May, 1933)

'Barren mountains', 'wretched valleys', 'starving', 'learned' and 'unhappy cities', 'running water', 'dawn returning', 'castaway fields', 'mountains' 'casting shadows', are all stock and normative anthropomorphisms, established tropes which suggest a degree of harmony not previously seen in a single poem of the early stage. That the poem appears to make a more cogent argument in terms of its lament for a better life, that people dream of and deserve a better existence, may suggest that the mental confusion, a feature of previous poems, is often accompanied by radical couplings.

This landscape does communicate and while there is no solution offered for the plight of the city dwellers, the problem is framed in a relatively normative way. The poem is, or appears to be, about something other than itself. Self-reference has given way to the world.

Fuller describes the poem, 'Auden's second published sestina', as an ingenious exercise in the suggestiveness of multiply defined symbols', explaining that the poem was written in response to William Empson who 'had complained [in *Seven Types of Ambiguity*] that the capacity to conceive such a large form as the sestina had been lost since the time of Sydney'. Seeing that 'Auden's sestina shares two of its six key words with Sydney' [mountains and valleys], Fuller asserts that the poem 'therefore looks like a conscious effort to rebut Empson'. Fuller adds that 'the complex exploration of the concepts embodied in the key words is allegorical rather than emotional' (Fuller 1981: 154-155).

Despite Fuller's insistence on the poem being more 'allegorical than emotional', his further treatment of the poem, which he defines as an example of *paysage moralis*é, focuses on Auden's negative conception of these landscapes, 'the valleys are wretched places that the wretched refuse to leave, where the harvests rot and where villagers mope', how these 'may be places of projected civilisation and of nostalgic dreams though both these kinds of dream are almost certainly illusory. Mountains also feature in these false dreams, but more commonly are barren, unmined or places of failure, haunting as regrets, where originating impulses have been forgotten' (155-156).

Fuller adds that 'In the civilising journey of human history we might expect such negatives for they characterise the restlessness of man and his uncertain aims, just as the contrary urges of solitariness (islands) and gregariousness (cities) convey the social paradox of human existence. Fuller acknowledges the poet's debt to Rilke and to Ovid.

Fuller's observations are valuable for revealing that Auden was fighting a battle on another front, a literary-critical front where his classical allusions to Sydney and (also mentioned) Heidegger represent an updating of man's existence in light of the situation modern man, as depicted by Auden, had found himself. Auden's negative cloak is a gritty, realist response to the hope found in Sydney. Auden's Forest of Arden is a dismal place where Touchstone is absent, allowing a very bleak and Melancholy Jacques to hold court.

That Auden places the reader in such abject conditions, affirms his belief that for poetry to remain relevant, lost Arcadias and unattainable Utopias were its unavoidable subject matter.

XXXI   (Auden: 48)   (Anthropomorphisms in bold)

Get there if you can and see the land you were once proud to own

Though **the roads have almost vanished** and **the expresses never run.**

Smokeless chimneys, **damaged bridges**, **rotting wharves** and **choked canals**

Tramlines buckled, **smashed trucks** lying on their side across the rails

Written in April 1930, almost three years after *The Watershed*, Poem XXXI (*Get there if you can*) extends the theme of industrial decline while obliquely furthering the anthropomorphic project. While it can be read as a comparatively 'straight' account of north-eastern English landscape, the innovative style of the poems which precede it tell a different story, suggesting that even a 'straight', anthropomorphic-free, landscape or scene 'should not' be mistaken for a realistic rendering of the external world. The poem and its anthropomorphic imagery can only be measured in relation to the poems that surround it, largely depopulated metaphysical landscapes.

The significance of this poem is evident where it marks a return to normative syntax at the very moment when Auden, having quite exhausted the theme of neglect and decay, and having certainly tested the patience of readers and critics, realizes (or chooses now to remind us) that there are causes or greater forces at work to explain that decline. Escaping the self, the landscape has, it seems, finally communicated to him by moving his attention away from his mind and feeling, freeing him to express concerns for something other than himself. This suggests some kind of psychological shift.

Though quite impossible to prove, the likelihood that the depiction of this putative psychological shift is rendered in real time is negligible. It is far more likely that Auden dramatizes the poems to re-enact a process of inner development that he had already transcended by the time he wrote the poem. It is more likely that he is recreating the difficulties he faced in overcoming real isolation.

The idea that poetry was for Auden a cathartic or therapeutic activity in the Jungian sense is highly unlikely given what is known of his tendency to first identify the various codes embedded in a poem before pronouncing upon it, though the typical lack of resolution would support a contrary argument, that he was living through the angst he portrays.

The Watershed marks the frontier between Auden's Juvenilia and first finding his own voice. Poem XXXI is the first poem of the period to mention 'real' people (see Mendelson: 117-21). This is the standard view but it is one that reads a little too easily as the series of poems it belongs to represents absolute mayhem. Breathing through an existential straw, the solitary occupant of the poems wanders aimlessly from pillar to post on life-support. Tired legs trudge through metaphysical mud as the solipsistic lament for happier, more productive days takes its toll on the poem's co-opted protagonist, the benighted reader who too struggles for breath and hope of resolution in sympathy with a situation that refuses to yield.

It is as if Auden or the speaker of the poems came to the edge of the abyss, the watershed, and said yes, but no thank you. Not yet. *The Watershed* is significant but it represents a retreat or an entrenchment.

Presumably, his readiness, or the necessity, for survival's sake, to look up at the larger picture, to the source or cause of the industrial decline and the disenchanted population he depicts, had to do with some sense of 'peace' or resolution he attained by airing the neurosis of his generation. As seen, Auden dramatises his illness as opposed to describing it with traditional authorial detachment.

As poem XXXI is extremely long, a number of short excerpts will be examined:

<div align="center">XXXI   (Auden: 48)   (Anthropomorphisms in bold)</div>

Get there if you can and see the land you were once proud to own

Though **the roads have almost vanished** and **the expresses never run.**

Smokeless chimneys, **damaged bridges**, **rotting wharves** and **choked canals**

Tramlines buckled, **smashed trucks** lying on their side across the rails

Power stations locked, **deserted**, since they drew the boiler fires,

Pylons fallen or **subsiding, trailing** dead high tension wires

Head gears gaunt on **grass grown pitbanks**, **seams abandoned** years ago… (April 1930)

This excerpt, replete with verbs and action words, is devoid of people. 'Damaged', 'choked', 'buckled', 'smashed', 'locked', 'deserted', and 'abandoned' are all human behaviours or actions which have visited a now empty and abandoned countryside. The vanished workers are the apostrophe of the poem. By omitting them from the poem, Auden introduces them to it, making them conspicuous by their absence. This is a recurring gambit.

Their 'reappearance' or figural summoning is effective in that the poem is not invoking particular individuals with individual names at an individual location or hour. Rather, it is conjuring up the spectre, the broad contours of a departed workforce to comment on their migration from the landscape. By generalising this workforce, by denying them actual names, in

an effort to emphasise their group identity, he manages to consider the implications and the tragedy of their collective departure from the land in an impersonal fashion. Auden was no little Englander. Readers in Kenya or Chile might recognise the scene. Local detail would surely only have detracted from its broad appeal.

The poem thereby elicits a high degree of sympathy for every displaced industrial worker, something that might never have been achieved had the poem attempted to champion, for example, the displacement of a select group of miners, or textile or print workers, at a particular location.

While this tactic of personified or personifying absence, the figural summoning of sentient apostrophes to the poem by absenting them (or by adumbrating their former presence) is a powerful literary gambit whereby the systemic faults of, in this case, a now defunct industrial eco-system are exposed with the precision of an actuary, the practice also calls for a broadening of the definition of anthropomorphism.

The depersonalisation of an absent population, typically a bad thing, here assumes a positive aspect. The depersonalisation of the departed industrial population assumes a positive mien because the general tragedy of outward migration elicits broader sympathy. A local event thereby assumes national, even international proportions, and significance. The lack of telling detail banishes time and space, leaving behind the facts as they are presented and as they are understood and marshalled by the poet.

The lack of individual names or place-names, the generalising and nationalising of the outward migration, would certainly have assisted the reader in recalling the outward migrations of previous centuries where Land Enclosure Acts and the imposition of fixed tithes saw large rural populations depart the countryside for the city. Between 1604 and 1914, over 5,200 individual Enclosure Acts (originally 'Inclosure' Acts) were put into place in the United Kingdom, enclosing or privatising 6.8 million acres of formerly common land.

In terms of anthropomorphic theory, this 'paradigmatic employment' (Paxson 1994: 2) shows that while depersonalisation is typically a negative event, this generalising of a population can also be used to positive effect. James Paxson, referring to what he calls 'conceptual slippage', warns that 'Even the most basic assumptions of taxonomic trope relationship…avoid simple formulation' (Paxson 1994: 50).

Such aberrations or surprising applications for anthropomorphism, depersonalising to achieve positive outcomes, might need to be encompassed within any revised taxonomy that might 'best dramatize the formal codes which constitute the trope and that in turn advertise the limits of tropological formalization' (Paxson 1994: 2). This versatility of application makes anthropomorphism all the more potent.

Where Auden connects the people absented by the poem to their former occupational or industrial activities, he humanizes such activity by exposing their anthropocentric connections since things cannot be choked, buckled, smashed, locked, deserted or abandoned, except by people. The poem exposes the interdependence of people and machines as the poem anthropomorphizes the absented people's anthropocentric activities.

The first physical images of 'the land you were once proud to own' are curious as the first is idiomatic, the idea of roads 'vanishing'. Though clearly anthropomorphic, it is a use of the trope that does not stretch credulity, being a fairly common idiom, thereby slyly licensing what is to follow, the slightly more novel 'expresses which never run'. This too draws on the registry of stock anthropomorphic idioms as it is not unusual for people to say that the roads or the buses 'do not run', in the same way that a person might say 'an idea came to me'.

Gentner and Bowdle explain that 'Novel metaphors are processed as comparisons, in which the target concept is structurally aligned with the literal base concept'. With regard to the reader's or the public's acceptance of their novelty, they explain that 'metaphors can give rise to new categories [i.e. they can become reified] but only over time, as they become conventionalized' (Gentner and Bowdle 2008: 116).

The next line, 'Smokeless chimneys, damaged bridges, rotting wharves and choked canals', contains four images of things which bear a human imprint and which grow increasingly biotic as 'smokeless' graduates to 'damaged' which becomes 'rotting', until finally 'choked' at the end of the sentence.

Having familiarized the reader with the apostrophe, and after deploying stock or unremarkable anthropomorphic imagery toward the beginning of the poem, Auden delivers the line 'smashed trucks lying on their side across the rails' which unusually evokes a degree of sympathy for the trucks which are smashed and which lie on their sides, vulnerable to any traffic on the rails. Conjuring up the departed population who used to inhabit such abandoned industrial complexes, Auden animates the scene as the trucks prostrated on the railway lines give the impression of an injured or an abandoned and helpless animal.

A truck lying on its side is again not a radical use of the trope but a variation of it, a normative or stock image. The degree of sympathy provoked is perhaps a measure of how radical the trope is, so perhaps it is a semi-radical deployment. In other words, a well-made deployment may arouse sympathy to the extent that it is both novel and effective. Its efficacy and novelty are likely connected to the reader's awareness and understanding of language.

The remaining lines of the excerpt, 'Power stations locked, deserted, since they drew the boiler fires, /Pylons fallen or subsiding, trailing dead high tension wires, /Head gears gaunt on grass grown pit-banks, seams abandoned years ago', reinforce the absence of the former workforce as the industrial detritus is 'locked', 'deserted', 'fallen' or 'subsiding', 'trailing', and finally 'abandoned' by their apostrophes.

…Where the Sunday lads came talking of motorcycle and girl.

Smoking motorcycle in chains until their heads are in a whirl,

Far from there we spent the money, thinking we could well afford

While they quietly undersold us with their cheaper trade abroad

At the theatre playing tennis, driving motor cars we had,

In our continental villas, mixing drinks for a cad.

These were boon companions who devised legends for our tombs

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

As if revisiting the scene before the advent of decline, Auden populates the landscape with happy carefree, perhaps foolish images of a population who never expected and never prepared for a metaphorical rainy day.

Auden, as if initially depopulating the scene to prepare the reader for what is to follow, lists the culprits 'whose compelling logic' seduced the population, as he sees it, into servitude:

…Newman, Ciddy, Plato, Fronny, Pascal, Bowdler, Baudelaire,

Doctor Frommer, Mrs Allom, Freud, the Baron, and Flaubert.

Lured with their **compelling logic**, **charmed with beauty of their verse**,

With their loaded sideboards whispered 'Better join us, life is worse'…

These lines are interesting for the power that the speaker sees things as possessing, logic that can lure, and verse that can charm. Auden here allegorises logic and verse as if characters in an apologue. They are not merely endowed with human attributes in any decorative sense; rather, they possess or are seen to possess a proactive agency to the degree that they can assume an independent power, to compel and charm. Auden appears to be indicting certain forms of intellect as leading people astray with their powers of verbal persuasion. These are examples of allegorical representation:

Taught us at the annual camps arranged by the big business men

Sunbathe pretty til your twenty. You will be our servant then…

Auden's depiction of the early lives of all those bright young things is one that retains its appeal, or its accuracy, today. Likewise, the very real anti-intellectualism found in British society. Auden's poem serves as a warning. He suggests that the system is often rigged and that intellectuals are partly responsible. The role of individual agency is never addressed.

Auden's *trahison des clercs* continues:

…Lawrence Blake and Homer Lane, once healers in our land;

They are **dead as iron** forever, these can never hold our hand.

Lawrence was brought down by *smut-hounds*, Blake went dotty as he sang,

Homer Lane was killed in action by the Twickenham Baptist gang.

Have things gone too far already? Are we done for? Must we wait

Hearing **doom's approaching footsteps** regular down miles of straight…

The metre of the poem does not suit the gravity of what is being expressed. The piece reads as if it could be set to music, not a serious dirge but something with a few 'hey nonny no's', sung perhaps by Lear's Fool. The rhyme is pedestrian and carefree, almost like an advertising jingle, while the rhythm seems to bounce along with the absurdity born of resignation, perhaps a cover for the sense of despair that the abandoned scene rightly deserves.

Though the poem tapers off into a polemic, Wordsworth's *Upon Westminster Bridge* cast its long shadow over this poem, and the de-populated London that Wordsworth details is contrasted with the scene Auden presents. Both poems are emptied of their people, though Auden packs in a distinguished audience towards the end of his. Wordsworth did not see the slums and, if he did, they did not make it into his poetry or into the popular imagination. By contrast *Germinal* did, as did *The Road to Wigan Pier* but neither work, gritty realist pieces, caught the imagination of the public.

Auden's diction reads here almost like prose, and beyond the fustian preachy tone, it is a suitable vehicle for a plethora of throwaway lines that yet contribute to an air of helplessness; exit the experimental nature of the earlier poetry. In its place, Auden posits a workaday style as his poetry moves from the symptomatic to the causal, from the narcissistic to the objective world.

To contrast the following lines (Auden 1930, Poem XXXI: 48, Lines 37-38) with (Auden 1929, Poem XVII: 32, lines 13-15) and any two lines from Poem I (Auden 1927, Poem I: 21, lines 4-5), and a clear progression emerges:

> Lawrence was brought down by *smut-hounds*, Blake went dotty as he sang, Homer Lane
> was killed in action by the Twickenham Baptist gang :   (1930)

> Yet there's no peace **in this assaulted city /** but **speeches** at the corners, **hope for news**
> **/** Outside the watchfires of **a stronger army.**   (1929)

> The **soul is tetanus**; gun-barrel burnishing

> In summer grass, **mind lies** to tarnish, untouched, undoing.   (1927)

Any randomly chosen sample would produce similar results. It is an unmistakable movement from existential angst coupled with disconnected, or at least highly subjective, sense imagery which lacks a coherent outward focus, to the presentation of slightly more cogent images but which still lack solid grammatical (read emotional) connections, and which do not cohere as an overall sense unit, to a poetry which looks like poetry, sounds like poetry but, a poetry so eager to declare itself free of neurosis that it reads like prose. This perhaps more fully explains Auden's earlier remark about God speaking in prose.

To answer the question, posed earlier, as to why Auden could not have stated his beliefs in readable prose, in light of his dramatic re-enactment of the perilous journey toward mental

health, it seems plausible to equate prose with clarity of expression and mental health (Ariel[75]) whereas poetry's main advantage in depicting such emotional development is its capacity to dramatize. Cognitive therapies that articulate problems in terms of rational arguments lack that visceral element which poetry and drama can activate. Recognising a problem in a rational way and becoming emotionally reconciled to that problem are quite separate activities.

Auden has moved from self-dramatizing his neurotic mouthpiece to preaching about what it was that made the oracle ill. An astute reader who never saw Auden's later poetry could, without too much effort, visualize the type of poetry the later Auden wrote by examining this sequence. *En masse*, his oeuvre possesses a compelling logic.

Moving away from a poetry of fragmented syntax, of chaotic imagery laying siege to endless apparent non-sequiturs, the exteriorized fixations of a damaged psyche (Prospero), this poem signals a change in that a new-found focus and a solid direction is suggested, such that the poem is one that might appear in a schools' anthology, given the accessible storyline and easy progression of images that bear some relation to each another.

Landscape that had previously represented the torment of isolation has begun to yield cogent imagery and a history worth ruminating over. The external world has not changed significantly but the approach of the presiding voice has, such that the reader can read this poem and remain unaware of the poet or the language, insofar as it says what it says in an uncomplicated way. The poem thus signals a breakthrough of sorts. The poet is becoming invisible, whereas earlier, his personas were unable to get out of the way, or their own way.

Auden's proto-Marxism is perhaps becoming visible here where, clearly, he identifies industrial decline as a contributing factor to the neurotic state of his protagonist, the forlorn

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[75] 'On the one hand, we want a poem to be a beautiful object, a verbal Garden of Eden which, by its formal perfection, keeps alive in us the hope that there exists a state of joy without evil or suffering which it can and should be our destiny to attain. At the same time, we look to a poem for some kind of illumination about our present wandering condition, since, without insight and self-knowledge of the world, we must err blindly with little chance of realising our hope. We expect a poem to tell us some home truth…neither pretty nor pleasant. One might say that, in every poet, there dwells an Ariel, who sings and a Prospero who comprehends' (Auden 1963, *Forewords and Afterwords* 1989: 385).

figure who occupies most of his early-published poems. Auden's poetry achieves a much higher degree of clarity, as he appears to identify whom to hold responsible not just for the industrial decay he surveys but also, possibly, for his state of mind and the real source of his own woes. Auden shows his protagonist as moving from an intra-psychic state to an inter-psychic state.

If clarity of expression is a reliable indicator of the mental health of the borderline personality who haunts the early poetry, then radical and semi-radical anthropomorphisms, which represent the presiding voice's demands to expand the range of existing expression to accommodate his isolated state, taper off as that individual manages to resolve his outcast state, replacing dissociation with a focus, a mission now to identify the external origins of his neurotic symptoms.

Ruskin's comment about poet's who use anthropomorphism as being those 'whose reason is unhinged by grief' (Ruskin 1856, *Modern Painters*: 60-61), may in fact possess a degree of accidental wisdom, though Ruskin seemed more intent upon delegitimizing the trope than evaluating it.

Whereas most of the previous poems contain elliptical imagery which defies the reader's best efforts to process them, a random pastiche loosely held together by a forlorn figure stalking an unspecified borderland without purpose or direction, Poem XXXI (Auden: 48-49), *Get there if you can,* presents a clear narrative and focus.

The dislocation of previous poems gives way to a reasonably clear critique of industrial decay. Instead of phrases like 'under boughs' or 'tentative endearments', the opening line of Poem XXXI, 'Get there if you can', directs the reader to examine a landscape about which the presiding voice has things to say. The imperative voice signals urgency.

This poem adds value to previous inchoate imagery insofar as it is reasonable to surmise that the lone figure of the earlier poems is suffering from the systemic effects of an industrial decay that has traumatized the community. Clarity of expression is the result, where instead of feeling trapped and isolated in a 'land' which 'will not communicate', the syntax of the presiding

voice improves such that he (presumably) can speak in clearer sentences as he comments directly on (some of) the causes of the decay.

Across the early poems, as mentioned, the appearance of anthropomorphisms, particularly those of a radical and semi-radical variety, appears to coincide with the emotional or mental state of the speaker, insofar as such states are possible to register or discern. The more sure-footed and traceable the narrative, the more lucid the sentences, the more coherent the communion among the parts of speech, the less the reader is made aware, or encouraged to remain aware, of the underlying language, the more normative the anthropomorphisms become. Radical tropes that lack aesthetic value appear to signal distress. The inability to rely on existing words to articulate, signals their isolated state.

This suggests that anthropomorphism's challenge to language tends to coincide with a search for meaning, their radical pairings signal that the English language, as it is configured, cannot accommodate the mental or emotional state of the forlorn speaker. He must re-create language to find expression for his angst. His isolation is expressed to the extent that he is trapped within the confines of available expression. Breaking free of his emotional and mental constraints can only be achieved by the creation (or enlargement) of a new rhetoric, a new language and a new conceptual framework.

Earlier radical pairings such as 'the morning's praise', 'a disobedient dream' and 'tentative endearments' thereby assume the status of psychological markers, significant contours on a map depicting mental health. Ancestral faces, clouds, dreams, drums and strings begin to give way to more stolid imagery, lucid verse supported by parts of speech which cohere, and which are not deployed for effect but actually seem to represent the things the presiding voice wants to address, and which he wants the largely ignored reader, to contemplate.

If the reader compares the opening stanza of Poem XIII (Auden: 135) 'Hearing of **harvests rotting** in the valleys, / Seeing at end of street **the barren mountains**, /Round corners coming suddenly on water, /Knowing them shipwrecked who were launched for islands, /We honour founders of **these starving cities**', with the opening stanza of Poem XXXI (Auden: 48), 'Get there if you can and see the

land you were once proud to own / Though the roads have almost vanished and the expresses never run /Smokeless chimneys, damaged bridges, rotting wharves and choked canals /Tramlines buckled, **smashed trucks** lying on their side across the rails', while both poems lament abandoned landscapes, rural and industrial, the militancy of the second excerpt stands in stark contrast to the passivity of the first example .

The greater urgency of the second example, where the seeing and knowing, the non-action verbs of the first example give way to getting, vanishing and running, and where things are damaged, smashed and lying, suggests some kind of further movement away from the psyche and out into the world, from the intra-psychic to the inter-psychic. While the shift to the inter-psychic involves the speaker and either an absent addressee or a forlorn landscape, the movement is a significant shift out of and away from the self, as previously seen.

There is a line towards the end of poem XXXI (Auden: 49) which may summarise the speaker's own attitude toward the heavy ponderous deliberations of the earlier poems where he says, 'Shut up talking, charming in the best suits to be had in town, Lecturing on navigation as the ship goes down'. Though the speaker is hardly critiquing himself, or offering himself advice, the line expresses a rather avuncular view of the intense ruminations of previous poems where, unable to get a grip on life, the line suggests that there is work to be done, that there is not much point in navel-gazing as the ship is beginning to sink. It represents a call to action.

Unlike previous poems where the reader was ignored and frustrated by being denied everything except a sureness of tone, the reader is petitioned at the outset with an appeal to 'Get there if you can' and witness the destruction of the countryside, his participation is now welcomed. This improvement confirms the suggestion that the early poems cannot be examined *in vacuo*, that each poem, with its semi-recurrent motifs and its recognisably similar tones and rhythms, contributes something to a larger portrait of individual isolation and the general dismay characteristic of the solitary voice. This was Jarrell's point.

This linguistic re-enactment of the journey from mental incapacity to wellness, or, at least to the ability to present sentences that are intelligible, is too precise and too consistent

across the poems for it to be deemed accidental. The movement from isolated, solipsistic, self-referencing, existential angst, represented by language that displays the basic inability to cohere, is replaced by the vocative case, by more militant language, by imperatives, and a more direct appeal to the reader to become involved.

Auden was well aware of Freudian and Psychoanalytic theory, but his understanding of the difference between psychotic and neurotic states, the difference between the self-harming or self-loathing tendencies of the individual who is experiencing mental anguish, and the relief which comes with moving the conflict out of the psyche and into the world, is impressive. The psychological movement reflects the transition from the tentative anal phase, where everything is transactional and subject to scrutiny, to the phallic phase where goals are set, where actions are spontaneous, and where life appears more connected and hopeful.

John Fuller calls the poem (Poem XXXI, *Get there if you can: 48*) a 'high-spirited harangue of the bourgeois 'dead' ' which he says 'is a poem of resolve: it involves a challenge to start living' (Fuller 1981: 69). Based on 'Tennyson's Locksley Hall Sixty Years After', he explains that Auden provides a list of 'public and private enemies'… 'the Romantics, the pessimists, the authoritarians'.

Fuller adds that 'The poem threatens revolution, and holds out the alternative of psychological regeneration for the bourgeoisie in some of the plainest terms to be found in the early poems, while retaining a hectic invigorating diction that makes the poem exciting, bold, prophetic and assured' (Fuller: 70-71). This confirms some of the earlier findings.

To compare Poem XI (Auden: 27) written in 1929, with Poem VII (Auden: 120), written three years later, the mood could not be more different. (This three-year gap is insignificant in itself as the change in mood, or tone, or health, is not a function of normal or real time. The gap refers to the shift in emphasis where one poem displays particular characteristics on a very different time-line, referring to the emotional progress of the presiding voices in the poems).

XI

Again in conversations   (Anthropomorphisms in bold)

Speaking of fear

And **throwing off reserve**

The voice is nearer

But no clearer

Thank first love

Than boys' imaginations.   (1929)

VII

The sun shines down on the ships at sea,

It shines on you and it shines on me

Whatever we are or are going to be.

To-morrow if **everything goes to plan**,

To-morrow morning you'll be a man:

Let wishes be horses as fast as they can…   (1932)

Poem XI speaks of fear, reserve, and a voice that remains unclear whereas Poem VII
expresses sentiments that might be witnessed where two teenagers, the presiding voice having
conjured up a hopeful friend, converse about the future.

One suspects, however, that he relied less on theoretic postulates[76] and more on the experiences of his own dissociated youth and his preoccupation with industrial machines to depict the psychological transition from autism to autonomy, though not perhaps individuation. That would come later. Maturity would coincide with understated clarity of expression.

The muddled message and the muddled syntax are gone and in their place, the poems find a new energy, a new target or object or set of objects to interrogate for their role in society's perceived decline. The poem (*Get there if you can*, Poem XXXI: 48) provides a brief meta-history of the forces which forced prominent individuals, (D.H.) Lawrence, (William) Blake, and Homer Lane (a faith-healer) who, one assumes, are regarded as objects of admiration, by another group of individuals, representing another part of the intellectual tradition which, the poem seems to argue, are complicit in their downfall.

Poem XXXI lists (identified by Mendelson throughout *Early Auden*) (John Henry) Newman, Ciddy (Auden's Latin teacher), Plato, Fronny (the title of a lost play Auden wrote), Pascal, Bowdler (who published an expurgated edition of Shakespeare circa 1818), Baudelaire, Doctor Frommer (a Berlin acquaintance), Mrs Alliom (religious convert and mother of an undergraduate friend), Freud, the Baron, and Flaubert, whose 'compelling logic' charmed the reading public with ideas, the poem seems to suggest, that did little for the common good. The next line 'When we asked the way to Heaven, these directed us ahead / To the padded room, the clinic and the hangman's little shed' implies an intellectual treason on their part.

The poem charges these individual writers, who were 'our boon companions who devised the legends for our tombs / These who have betrayed us nicely while we took them to our rooms', with being part of the superstructure that can 'knock the critic down who dares', a critic who might draw attention to speak up publicly against industrialists who 'quietly undersold us with their cheaper goods abroad.'

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[76] Auden's prose writings on Psychoanalysis are not so impressive, however, particularly his understanding of the key term 'transference.' The Freud Memorial Lecture he gave at The Philadelphia Association (now School) of Psychoanalysis, March 12, 1971, amounts to little more than a re-statement of object-relations theory, but here (above) he does manage to present the dilemma of a tortured individual finding resolution in a manner that is clinically adept. Auden elsewhere declared that 'we are lived by powers we pretend to understand' (Carpenter 1981: 88).

While the poem's polemic is largely free from anthropomorphism, the late appearance of 'Hope and Fear' who 'are neck and neck' suggests that a price may yet be paid for what the poem infers is the deliberate undermining of society, as unspecified anthropomorphised 'Terrors drawing closer and closer' foretell 'the crash/ Meaning that the mob has realised something's up, and start to smash.'

Language, it seemed, no longer needed to be subverted as the disease, it seems, has a history and a cause that Auden or his proxy now sets out to investigate. In other words, the afflicted patient reaches the point where he realises that his illness and his symptoms are the result of forces beyond his control.

Ruminating over his condition as he wanders the heath, he finally gives way to the realisation that his geographical and emotional dislocation are symptoms not of some original sin, nor of some doomed personality disorder, or of heredity, but are the result of larger impersonal economic and intellectual forces which he identifies as having brought the country and individuals like him to the brink. My country made me, Auden's proxy seems to be inferring.

Earlier in this study, questions were asked as to what end game the poet may have had in mind by presenting unintelligible scenarios that were neither external nor internal. It is now clear, in retrospect, that such befuddled landscapes were a prelude to portraying the protagonist's movement from internal conflict to a degree of external relief. With the lifting of his personal burden, new energies and new diction emerge to frame new subject matter. Edward Mendelson sees the shifts in style as the poet's efforts 'to rouse himself to find something new' (Mendelson 1999, *Later Auden*: xix).

Mendelson asserts that 'Each new [geographical] move coincided with fundamental changes in his work and outlook, and brought him to the landscape he thought most suitable to the kind of poetry he wanted to write' (xviii). Purely in terms of causality, this reads a little too tidily as (surely) Auden could not have known 'the kind of poetry he wanted to write' until he got there. Mendelson's point still holds, so far as a changing style is concerned.

Much more useful is Mendelson's treatment of what he calls the 'problems of form and content' where he advances the view that 'Traditional forms and regular metres were among the means by which he evoked an order that existed prior to any personal intervention: physical laws, bodily instincts, social conventions, beliefs and habits inherited from a family or culture' (Mendelson, 1999, *Later Auden*: xiv).

This assertion supports the view that culture, 'beliefs and habits', can have a distorting influence on style, that language becomes untraditional (and more audacious) when a speaker is no longer able to identify with that culture. Poetic tradition thus becomes a barometer for the successful transmission of ideas except that where ones ideas, 'beliefs and habits' differ from one's own immediate culture, 'family and forbears', a new style and a new language is required. Thus, the overthrow of tradition is not just preferable, it is essential if 'progress' is ever to be achieved. Of course, Auden's new style looked like a throwback and a corruption of poetic forms. It was in fact something of a healthy and bloodless succession.

To stand still, to reproduce one's culture and the views of one's family, is to invite revolution whereas a healthy change in direction might prevent one from ever occurring; Auden seems to be saying. In other words, whereas Leavis called for change, when change arrived, he did not like the look of it because it overturned what he cherished, what he and his generation identified with. The distance between generations can be measured by the poetic styles they adopted or admired, and so, more radical styles are, ironically, counter-revolutionary whereas repetitive, conservative styles endanger the Empire for failing to attract the imaginations of the younger generation, (a tenet of Phillip Rieff's book, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*: *Uses for Faith after Freud,* 1966).

Mendelson suggests that 'Irregular metres, newly invented or modified forms, prose poetry, and forms and metres that had not yet been naturalized into English verse – all these were used in his work to evoke voluntary, unpredictable acts, newly found accommodations between, on the one hand, the world of nature and the instinctive body and, on the other, the world of history and the individual face' (xiv).

The second part of Mendelson's last sentence might have also included a reference to the fact that – ['Irregular metres, newly invented or modified forms, prose poetry, and forms and metres' *that had not yet been naturalized* 'into English verse – all these were used in his work to] – and fashion a style of poetry that rejected 'beliefs and habits inherited from a family or culture', because the only way to create a brave new world, new beliefs and new habits, was to reject that old order. New words or combinations of words were needed.

In other words, Mendelson does not appear to see the relationship of style to the social order, or if he does, prefers instead to connect style with history and the individual.

Cooperation with the old order would have sounded the death knell for 'the symbolic contract', which, to repeat, is 'the common frame of reference and expectation that joins a poet with a finite audience, and joins both with the subject of his poems' (Mendelson 1981: xviii). Auden's stated disdain for critics ('I don't read them' Haffenden: 1) and many from the intellectual classes (Poem XVII, *Get there if you can: 48*), saw him fashion a style of poetry that sought to speak directly to the man in the street.

The revival of anthropomorphism as a device that could mediate between reader and writer represents the principal means by which the contract was renewed, at least in the short term. Once swept away, a new, more pleasing aesthetic could again restore order to poetry.[77]

Speaking of Auden's love of mining equipment and machinery, Mendelson recounts how 'Among the equipment he needed for his imaginary mines was a device, used for washing the ore, which was available in two different designs':

One type I found more sacred or 'beautiful', but the other type was, I knew from my reading, more efficient. At that point I realized that it was my moral duty to sacrifice my aesthetic preference to reality or truth (Mendelson 1981, *Early Auden*: xiii).

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[77] 'So if a poet is committed to exposing and disrupting the disciplines used by a range of voices, sooner or later a pilgrimage must be made to the New Jerusalem, the site of actual power' (Boly 1991: 122).

While it is difficult not to be a little cynical regarding this type of commentary, the nurturing of a myth at an age when Auden had yet to commit to poetry, the choice described does adequately characterise the challenge he faced. [78]

The next two poems under review are likewise connected. They are taken from the English period, 1931-1936. The first, Poem XXXIV (*Stop all the clocks*), written in April 1936, is among Auden's most popular poems. Just as *The Watershed* posited concerns that were later explicated at length, Poem XXXIV relates to bereavement and to a lesser extent to the mechanics of artistic creation which Auden elaborates upon in the second of these two poems, Poem XXXIX, (*In Memory of WB Yeats*). Auden wrote his elegy for Yeats as he left for New York in 1939, so marking the end of his English period.

Poems XXXIV (*Stop all the clocks*) and XXXIX (*Elegy to Yeats*) are both addressed to individuals who have died, one famous, the other not. The language employed by Auden to treat death and to treat the artistic process is anthropomorphic.

XXXIV (Auden: 163)   (Anthropomorphisms in bold)

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephones,

Prevent the dog from barking with **a juicy bone**,

Silence the pianos and with **muffled drum**

Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come

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[78] '…a technique the literary theorist Michael André Bernstein has called 'backshadowing': a device of conventional narrative whereby significant moments, leading to a climax or a large recognition, are inserted with teleological pointers at early stages of the plot.' http://www.lrb.co.uk/v34/n13/david-bromwich/diary
 Speaking generally of *Early Auden*, Barbara Everett observes that 'The effect of this self-defining, expressive if tacit pattern [of ascribing motive] is to give enormous importance to [x or y event] is to introvert that event into the poet's will and consciousness' (Everett 1981 LRB). http://www.lrb.co.uk/v03/n21/barbara-everett/auden-askew

Let aeroplanes circle, **moaning overhead**,

Scribbling in the sky the message he is dead,

Put crepe bows round the white necks of **the public doves**

Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves.

He was my north, my south, my east, my west,

My working week and my Sunday rest,

My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song,

I thought that love would last forever, I was wrong.

The stars are not wanted now, put out every one,

Pick up the moon and dismantle the sun,

Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood,

For nothing now can ever come to any good.   (April 1936)

Auden here exposes the relations the mind has or can have with the world of recognizable everyday objects. Some of these objects are workaday images, telephones, clocks, barking dogs, muffled drums, and pianos, all of which must be 'removed' from the scene to make way for the coffin of his loved one. It is a solemn removal. The selection of these images is noteworthy in that Auden (again) introduces elements only to remove them, so placing a gentle emphasis on transience.

Many images in this poem ascribe superhuman agency to humans who are invoked to pick up, dismantle, and pack away the unwanted moon and stars and ocean. The poem displays an attitude to human capability that is associated with John Keats whose 'negative capability' is credited with seeing humanity as infinitely creative, while also valorising anti-rational sentiments.[79]

The admixing of the death of a loved one and the process of artistic creation raises the issue of artistic sincerity, mentioned previously. The charge of insincerity cannot easily be directed at this poem as Auden makes a very public celebration of the passing of the apostrophe whose loss is expressed through the currency of everyday objects. The point to make is that when dealing with death in poetry, the charge of insincerity is easily levelled and so the author must tread warily particularly if language and unusual artistic effects are employed to mourn the passing of a loved one.

The popularity of the poem among the public may be because the poem, though a dirge, is the very opposite of funereal. Time must however stand still and the phone-lines must be cut, 'Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephones', as something important has happened. (Lady Havisham had the clocks in her house stopped at a quarter to nine, when she learned that Compeyson had jilted her). In the second line, the entrance of a dog in possession of a juicy bone announces not frivolity, but a new attitude toward death. Life goes on.

And **the expensive delicate ship that must have seen**

Something amazing, a boy fall from the sky,

Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.

(From Poem XXX, 1938, Museé des Beaux Arts: 237)

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[79] 'Negative Capability_, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.' Letter XXIV, December 22, 1817. http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/35698/pg35698.txt

Ordinary, frivolous images like animals and musical instruments, life in general, need not signal a lack of respect for the recently departed. Reminiscent of an Irish wake, where mourners are welcomed to celebrate the life of the departed, the poem appropriates neutral objects that are infused with loss not because they are symbolic of death but simply because they are proximal to the event. Most of the objects in this poem are oxymoronic in that their essential neutrality as everyday objects is contradicted by the overwhelming news of death.

An airplane scribbling a message in the sky, and public doves adorned with crepe bows, furthers the poem's insistence that gun carriages, mausoleums, and the paraphernalia typically associated with death are superfluous signifiers in this very modern lament for a departed loved-one.

The phone lines and clocks can be stopped, and an effort can be made to 'Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone', but such activity cannot affect the new reality. Further imperatives, to 'Silence the pianos and with muffled drum / Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come', render death as an interruption to everyday life. A cartoon scenario where 'aeroplanes circle, moaning overhead, /Scribbling in the sky', imparts the message that the apostrophe is dead, compounding this sense of joyful loss.

The traffic cannot be stopped but the plea, 'Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves', is made to show respect for the departed. Having moved the scene out to the street, the poem declares that 'He was my north, my south, my east, my west, / My working week and my Sunday rest, / My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song, / I thought that love would last forever, I was wrong'. Again, neutral referents are appropriated and are infused with feeling and while not one of them is anthropomorphic, all together they become animated by association, by their strategic proximity.

Auden slowly moves the poem from the local and the familiar to more metaphysical concerns before, in the final stanza, identifying himself, as someone who appropriates such objects to write poetry. Moving outdoors in the second stanza, having cleared away the

household objects from view, Auden moralises the landscape by demanding that it too reflect the loss of his loved one. He demands that inanimate objects display sentience.

The final stanza, moving further away from the domestic scene, resumes the demand that the world stand still as 'The stars are not wanted now, put out every one, / Pick up the moon and dismantle the sun, / Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood, / For nothing now can ever come to any good', as the physical environment has finally lost all its uses for the speaker of the poem.

The final stanza, moving further away from the domestic scene, resumes the demand that the world stand still. Auden, effortlessly sidestepping the science and the philosophical debates regarding perception, explicates how human relations and sometimes human events can filter a person's perspective, as he previously attempted with the term 'effacing grass'. Though this implication is gently presented, it is a central theme of so much of Auden's early poetry, the interplay of the human mind, with its troubles and its complexity, and the external environment. The individual has often two visual fields, that generated by the mind and that perceived in the outside world. This interplay is fundamental to existence.

Auden is reminding us that the mind filters the objects we see. Gertrude Stein's 'A rose is a rose is a rose' is a reminder that things are what they are and not what we suppose them to be. Auden reminds us, as Pascal (1623-1662) does in *Pensées*, that '*Lustravit lampade terras* [80] 1[63]—The weather and my mood have little connection. I have my foggy and my fine days within me; my prosperity or misfortune has little to do with the matter' (Pascal, 1665, *Pensées*: 1958: #107) with the difference that Auden's internal weather makes its way into the landscape in much the same way as Eliot's 'Streets that follow like a tedious argument /Of insidious intent' (T.S. Eliot, 1920, *Prufrock*: 8-9).[81]

The speaker's gentle insistence that the loss of the bereaved be acknowledged publicly represents a subjective demand on an objective world. His grief cannot be contained and must spill out onto the streets. Love is not the private affair one typically imagines it to be, the poem

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[80] 'He lit a lamp for the world' http://en.eprevodilac.com/prevodilac-engleski-latinski
[81] T.S. Eliot. *The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock*, 1920. http://www.bartleby.com/198/1.html

appears to be saying. Loss drives him back into the public domain. Though back in the public domain, the speaker is again returned to the world of objects, objective correlatives of his loss, but correlatives which are imbued with personal feeling.

These objects are Auden's 'subjective correlatives'. Impersonal objects assume a very personal mien. Love and loss are represented as the psychotic drivers of emotion insofar as the external world of objects is, contrary to reason and decorum, pressed to co-operate in marking the occasion, the death of his loved one.

This is perhaps as close as readers can ever get to unravel the mystery of, on the one hand, Auden's unusual 'umbilical' relationship to '*dinge*', to things, but also, how it is he manages to imbue inanimate and voiceless entities, in this or any other poem, with such import. If the progress of the mental health of the presiding voice throughout the Auden *oeuvre* is any guide, from inchoate, tongue-tied friendless exile to the (later) very public, avuncular figure who chronicles the lives of the great and the good, then only one position seems plausible.

By demonstrating what such a personal journey might look like, what the stages of such introspection or 'outrospection' might look like and perhaps feel like, Auden valorises verbal fluency as (to borrow a phrase from John Boly) 'the chief prize and goal.' 'Things' are no more than the playing blocks that nature provides the individual with to achieve this goal. Landscape, in his case, is the arena where such things, with our individual input, can find expression.

To return to the poem, the third stanza moves further away from the local and the familiar, from the outside and the particular to the more distant abstract concepts of space and time and communication. The speaker has lost his compass, his routines and his habits of speech seem altered forever. Love, or loss, is clearly the engine that drives the speaker but Auden is not a love poet nor ever overly sentimental about love, and so he presents the loss in pragmatic terms.

The poem amounts to a requiem for the common man and for everyday objects, objects that receive a similar treatment in the poem *The Unknown Citizen* in which a motorcar, a

frigidaire, and an instalment savings plan are the remnants, the only physical remains of the anonymous apostrophe of the title. Though not anthropomorphic, such objects are animated by association, as seen elsewhere.

The final stanza, as the soul makes its way from the house to the street, to the working week and out into the ether, sees the speaker reveal the reliance the speaker owes to the natural elements and while he does not anthropomorphize them directly by displaying them as active agents in the scene (as he did in his elegy for Yeats), the reader is left with no doubt that these are the materials which the speaker appropriates to communicate with, or think about, his loved one.

The stars, the moon, the sun, the ocean and the wood have lost their uses,

'For nothing now can ever come to any good'.

Poem XXXIX, written almost three years later, marks the continuum of this commitment to moralized landscape. As it is quite a long poem, a series of short excerpts are examined.

Again among Auden's better known and more readable poems, such as his elegy to Yeats, written in several different meters, vacillates between the local, the familiar and the abstract as the body of the poet becomes the canvas upon which the city is written.

Poem XXXIX (Auden: 241-43)   (Anthropomorphisms in bold)

He disappeared in **the dead of winter**

The brooks were frozen, **the airports almost deserted**…

Auden, as mentioned, conflates the body of the poet with the landscape to create a *paysage Moralisé*, a moralised landscape through which the poet expresses sentiments regarding another poet whom Auden greatly admired (but who also irritated him greatly).[82]

Stanza three persists with the moralized landscape of the first and second stanzas to describe the afternoon of the poet's death. 'The provinces of his body revolted', 'the squares of his mind were empty', 'silence invaded the suburbs', 'the current of his feeling failed', 'he became his admirers'. By now, the landscape and the design of the poem is no longer the object of scrutiny or uncertainty as the architecture of the poem and the gambits at work have been clearly established. Auden has a free hand to present imagery which is less familiar, more daring, and as he does so, the poem is all the more seductive.

> …But for him it was his last afternoon as himself,
>
> **An afternoon of nurses and rumours**;
>
> **The provinces of his body revolted**,
>
> **The squares of his mind were empty**,
>
> **Silence invaded the suburbs**,
>
> **The current of his feeling failed**; he became his admirers...

Auden conditions his readers to accept slight amendments to the reading contract by provincializing the body. This is quickly followed by two further stock anthropomorphisms, 'the brooks were frozen, / the airports almost deserted', two ergative verbs (agentless, transitive) which ostensibly describe local streams and regional infrastructure but which can also be used to obliquely describe the rigor mortis of a body, the frozen corpse of the deceased.

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[82] 'I am incapable of saying a word about W.B. Yeats because, through no fault of his, he has become a symbol of my own devil of inauthenticity, of everything that I must try to eliminate from my own poetry, false emotions, inflated rhetoric, empty sonorities'(Mendelson 1981: 206).

The further sympathy of nature is suggested where 'public statues' are 'disfigured' by 'snow', the figurative disfiguration (sic) of famous people who have been calcified in stone but who today must succumb to the mighty and powerful physical elements, snow temporarily occluding the sculptor's work. The weathering effects of time, and the physical environment, on the reputations of public people is also subtly forwarded as an assessment of the apostrophe's contribution or worth is about to begin.

The first of several funereal refrains, reminiscent of a wake or a Greek chorus, is next introduced, 'O all the instruments agree / The day of his death was a dark cold day'. 'The instruments', at once a reference to the barometer (or the thermometer), also refer to complicit nature which, in an act of inferred sympathy with the passing of the apostrophe, they empty, desert, disfigure, freeze, sink and disappear.

Careful not to overstep the mark, and careful not to violate the contract thus far, or allow any awareness of language (on the art of the reader) to intrude on the depiction of what is a solemn event, the anthropomorphised funereal chorus maintain a sober and solemn demeanour where they understate the loss with a simple confirmation of the scene as it has been rendered, 'The day of his death was a dark cold day'. A stock anthropomorphism, a 'dark, cold day', is so common in English usage that it, and tropes like it, typically fly well under the reader's radar, something Auden has used to particular effect in this poem as he softens the conceptual ground for what is to follow.

'By mourning tongues', appearing late in the first movement of the poem, focuses the reader's attention on the poet's choice of language. This element of surprise is characteristic of the poet's trope deployments. It comes very close to unbalancing the poem but its incidence is singular and so the moment passes.

Returning to the death bed, 'But for him it was his last afternoon as himself', the dual identity of a poet and a person is echoed in 'an afternoon of nurses and rumours' as the appearance of the word 'of' is used to animate nurses and rumours, a terse description of the

poet's last day during which 'The provinces of his body revolted, /The squares of his mind were empty, /Silence invaded the suburbs' while 'The current of his feeling failed'.

This third stanza summarises what has transpired and what has been described, echoing and completing the stock anthropomorphic images of the opening stanza, images that have already been presented to and accepted by the reader who is by now inclined to approve of the poem and permit a degree of poetic license.

Stanzas four and five begin to appraise the apostrophe whose impact is 'scattered among a hundred cities', he is now, 'given over to unfamiliar affections', leading a different kind of existence where he must 'find his happiness in another kind of wood/ And be punished under a foreign code of conscience', the presumption that different rules predominate in the afterlife. His poems will now also be subject to revision by people who will modify his words to suit their own needs.

Here Auden uses the word 'of', 'another kind of wood', as a conjunction (and as a genitive) to temper the anthropomorphic assault previously visited on the poem, and to pause on the likelihood that the apostrophe or his soul must now seek solace in new ways, perhaps a sympathetic nod in the direction of Yeats's belief in metempsychosis, the belief that after death the soul begins a new cycle of existence in another human body.

The terms 'And wholly given over to **unfamiliar affections'** and 'punished under **a foreign code of conscience**' are semi-anthropomorphic, (as is 'To find his happiness in another kind of wood'). Likewise, '**the words of a dead man/ are modified in the guts** of the living' is anthropomorphic, so animating words, the wood, affections, and conscience. These 'less direct anthropomorphisms' use conjunctions and while they lack the punch of 'a disobedient dream' or a 'morning's praise', seen earlier, their impact is to focus on the fate of the bereaved whose life and death and deliverance is quietly knitted to objects.

The next stanza remains focused on the fate of the departed, how the brokers will continue to roar, as the poor will retain their familiar suffering, as individuals remain convinced

of their freedom. 'Suffering' and 'freedom' are animated as companions or familiars as 'A few thousand will think of this day/ As one thinks of a day when one did something slightly unusual'. Before the metre of the poem shifts for the first of three movements, the chorus reminds the reader that the instruments all 'agree, the day of his death was a dark, cold day'.

The middle section of the poem, the shortest, a ten line, sonnet-like eulogy that could 'stand by' itself as a separate poem, continues with a broad recapitulation of previous stanzas. (It was written after the first and last sections). The lines 'You were silly like us: your gift survived it all, / The parish of rich women, physical decay, / Yourself' animate the poet's gift and the parish of rich women, a reference to County Sligo in the west of Ireland where Yeats held court with Lady Gregory and other grandees. 'The parish of rich women' is a particularly Irish synecdoche, similar to the 'rich houses' seen earlier, a metonymy that animates.

That the apostrophe's gift survived animations like 'physical decay', and the attentions of 'rich women', furthers the close connection between the poet and his physical and natural surroundings. The point of anthropomorphising rich women, who are already human, is to animate their influence upon his gift, which is to say that, to animate an entity already animate (women) is to highlight their abstract influence and not their individual selves. This anthropomorphising of humans to abstract and isolate a particular function is an interesting addition.

The appearance of the line 'Mad Ireland hurt you into poetry', assumes that the poem has achieved sufficient credibility that it can now embark on more daring metaphors, previously inhibited until the poet could get the poem, with all the solemnity an elegy requires, to a sufficiently advanced state where a radical deployment would not detract from the overall effect.

The remainder of the middle section traverses territory already colonised by the earlier stanzas as, recently animated poetry 'survives in the valley of its making' (or 'saying', in some editions), where previously featured executives 'would never want to tamper; / it flows south From

ranches of isolation and the busy griefs, /Raw towns that we believe in and die in, the gift of poetry / it survives, / A way of happening, a mouth'.

Again, the test for such anthropomorphic imagery is whether it contributes effectively to the overall meaning of the poem, or not. 'Ranches of isolation' as a standalone anthropomorphic deployment sits near the very edge of acceptance, yet, in terms of the colonised and animated landscapes of the poem, such an image as a ranch of isolation poses little threat to the overall effect. A 'canyon of distress', seen in Auden's poem for Pascal, if it appeared in this poem, might pose some difficulty as it is a little too radical, particularly in a requiem.

The final section of the poem, eight four line stanzas assume a gentle rhyming scheme, wherein the animated earth is commanded to 'receive an honoured guest; William Yeats is laid to rest'. The personified 'Let the Irish vessel lie' is duly 'Emptied of its poetry'. The personified figure of 'Time', that is 'intolerant/ Of the brave and innocent, / And indifferent in a week/ To a beautiful physique' is recruited to assist the elegy.

An unidentified entity, most likely 'Time', which 'Worships language and forgives/ Everyone by whom it lives' is invoked where it 'Pardons cowardice, conceit/ Lays its honours at their feet'. 'Time that with this strange excuse/ Pardoned Kipling and his views, / And will pardon Paul Claudel, / Pardons him for writing well'. In other words, Time pardons the tares and vagaries that often plague those with exceptional ability, even where they are deemed cowards as Yeats was by his great love, Maud Gonne (1865-1953), for his refusal to back the Irish nationalist cause in the second decade of the twentieth-century.

'In the nightmare of the dark, / All the dogs of Europe bark, / And the living nations wait, / Each sequestered in its hate' again sees 'the dark' and 'Europe' animated as 'living nations' wait', and are sequestered. 'Intellectual disgrace' is personified as it 'stares from every human face' while 'seas of pity lie/ Locked and frozen in each eye', references to the cultural decline in the 1920s and 1930s when Europeans began to line up behind different ideological factions.

The third last stanza signals the conclusion of the poem with a drum beat 'Follow, poet, follow right/ To the bottom of the night, / With your unconstraining voice, / Still persuade us to rejoice'. Here, the night is rendered figuratively, given a voice and asked to persuade people to rejoice, to celebrate, a sentiment that persists right to the final line of the eight-and-final stanza which asks that the 'free man' be taught (or learn) to 'praise'.

The penultimate stanza returns to the mind-as-landscape *topos*, the dominant theme of the poem, the moralised landscape that now focuses on the subject of poetry. 'With the farming of a verse / make a vineyard of the curse / In the deserts of the heart/ Let the healing fountains start / In the prison of his days/ Teach the free man how to praise'.

The individual freedom of the poem's fifth stanza gives way 'to the prison of his days'. The individual must be encouraged to learn how to praise. 'Sing of human unsuccess / In a rapture of distress' again brings a reality to bear on man's imperfection, but it suggests that failure or imperfection must also be celebrated, that there is a certain rapture to distress and struggle, the idea that humans are wonderful failures in their striving.

A personified 'Ireland now / has her madness and her weather still', two anthropomorphic deployments which are two sub-contractions of the first instance, the appearance of zeugma. Moving from an animated Ireland to a personified poetry is a minor feat as the poem declares, in its most memorable line, 'For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives In the valley of its saying where executives / Would never want to tamper'. (Elsewhere, 'tamper' appears as 'venture'.)

In terms of anthropomorphic imagery, the poem is a well-balanced elegy for the recently departed as the figurative language it employs never intrudes on the solemnity of the occasion. This should be an unremarkable observation except that readers of the earlier poetry will be aware that sobriety of tone and normative syntax, so evident in this poem, are often wholly absent from many of the poems that went before it.

The poem returns Auden to the land of the living where, having survived and abjured the badlands where a mind isolated and troubled by economic, intellectual and political decline,

found refuge in language and disused equipment, normative syntax and orderly sentence structure reassert themselves to reinforce the conviction that language provides the means by which rationality can overcome problems, whether they be private or public.

Poetics [c]

XIII   (Anthropomorphisms in bold)

Under boughs between our **tentative endearments**, how should we hear

But with **flushing pleasure**, drums distant over **difficult country**

Events not actual,

in **time's unlenient will …**

Auden's poem XIII, *Under Boughs,* reproduced at the head of this chapter, has been kept until the end of this poetry review because it is the least accessible and probably the most anthropomorphic of all of Auden's poems. It stands in direct contrast to Auden's Elegy for W.B. Yeats in that it represents the presiding voice of the poems at its (his) most vulnerable.

Poem XIII opens vistas onto Auden's work and because of the absence of any progression or any ordinarily discernible structure within it, the anthropomorphic content is all the more interesting for the role it plays within the new aesthetic. Paola Marchetti observes that:

Auden consistently projected his bi-polar vision, working through a complex series of opposites, on to his landscapes. His early approach to topographical imagery, shaped by a Romantic sense of the contradiction between reason and feeling, was gradually transformed into a postmodern acceptance of duality as a 'unity in tension of different modes of being…' (200).

...If duality is the key to Auden's poetry, the multiple perspectives offered by the image of parallel and coexisting geological strata, or of overlaid layers of paint in a painting, are the key to understanding his landscapes.

His early works explore the struggle between the body, constrained by natural and inescapable laws of cyclical repetition, and a mind which resists and seeks freedom from necessity. The image of the journey is the search for the right place, the Just City, where true existential freedom may be realised.

This place initially had political connotations, but is transformed in the 1940s and 1950s into a spiritual locus beyond time and space, At Augustine's 'City of God'. In his later poetry, a balance is reached and the body considered as a human landscape (Marchetti 2004: 201).

Marchetti, in her final sentence, confirms the assertion that what began as a struggle between the body and the mind achieves balance where the body is finally conceived of and presented as a human landscape. That this moralised landscape is presented in cogent sentences that barely trouble the reader's capacities to understand them, confirms the suggestion, made at the beginning of this study, that Auden's Elegy for Yeats, and poems like it, represent the finished product, the terminus or resting place where the land finally communicates.

The movement from estranged solitary figure on an unforgiving landscape, to one where the speaker of the poem is at one with the landscape, charts Auden's journey from unavoidable unintelligibility to measured syntax, from poetry that denies aesthetic pleasure to the reader, to a poetry that is sophisticated and pleasing to the ear.

Fully to appreciate poems like Auden's Elegy for Yeats and the journey Marchetti describes, it can help to return briefly to the very beginning to measure the distance covered as the poetic style evolves, often imperceptible to Readers of the early work are rewarded and gratified for their patience, their stubborn refusal to simply give up on the early poems.

Confronted with Poem XIII, *Under Boughs*, a reader might, not unreasonably, ask the question, what can this poem possibly be about?

Poem XIII looks like a poem, with four stanzas of four, seven-foot lines of approximately equal length, two longer lines followed by two shorter, three-foot half rhymed couplets. Sentences duly make their way from left to right. Parts of speech, while they appear to comply with syntactical norms, can be seen to struggle to generate coherence on any level.

Nouns and verbs, as the reader might expect, are typically qualified or modified by adjectives and adverbs, while prepositions, conjunctions, and the occasional pronoun play supporting roles. It is English and it is poetry but, beyond that, it is difficult to make any claims for it. How are 'events not actual', the reader, again not unreasonably, wonders. What are 'tentative endearments'? Why has the author placed 'distant' after 'drums'?

Mostly, that hallowed trinity of subject-verb-object is observed, but where observed, appears to lead nowhere, at least nowhere easily recognisable. It is English, but it is not English that yields any easy dividend. Thus locked out from the poem, nose pressed to the window, the reader, feeding on scraps, is implicitly invited to speculate as to form, content, structure, purpose, intention, and meaning. The reader is somewhat co-opted into the poem, but the price of admission is curiously to remain locked out.

The subtext to such a reading might be found in John Boly's assertions regarding the deliberate tensions the poet sets up to force the reader to set about making sense of the concatenation of images which appear to have no causal link or relation.

'Under boughs', 'tentative endearments', 'flushing pleasure', and 'time's unlenient will' are novel semi-radical or radical pairings but the novelty supplied is at the expense of clarity. What is 'flushing pleasure', the reader wonders? Such pairings appear to detract from the reader's efforts to gain control of the poem. 'Drums distant' and 'difficult country' are slightly more solid, less oblique images, but doubts emerge or exist as to what is being denoted or connoted.

The reader, quite naturally, reads or re-reads the poem to discover an organizing principle, a recurring motif, a familiar or recognisable allusion or referent, or perhaps a story line, as she seeks to adjust to the style of the poet and the particularities of the poem.

Syntax appears strained. Ideas struggle to be born, to come to full term. They run out of breath. Truncated, they fall short of meaning, and appear to wander off aimlessly. There seems no discernible development or continuity. The reader or listener strains to gain a foothold in the landscape. Is it a landscape or a mindscape? Are events actual in the sense of happening in space in time, or are they imaginary? This is a question Paola Marchetti begins to answer:

> They are all real and symbolic loci in which a personal psychomachia unfolds. The land through which the spy travels is the Ur-Mutter, the primal mother, an impersonal nature with its unchanging laws of birth, generation and death that absorb the history of the individual into the history of the species.

> Death is defeated only by the powerful resistance of the life force – Eros, Dame Kind, Love, or evolution figuratively anthropomorphised as the goddess….The land to be explored is the protagonist's own body, as differentiated from that of both Mother and Nature (Marchetti 2004: 202).

Even for poetry, where a certain degree of close reading and effort are required and expected, the reader's reasonable expectations are hindered. Nonetheless, the reader is alerted to the fact that his or her expectations are frustrated, that the landscape, if it is one, is not welcoming. This, of itself, is a message. Any reader, even vaguely aware of post-modern precepts, will attempt to discern a method to Auden's radical departure from conventional form. A reader familiar with Auden or with literary criticism might identify the barren landscape as an extended wasteland, or perhaps a poet using the medium to muddy the message.

The poem or poet appears intent upon denying access to its cryptic or encrypted meaning but to argue as much is to presume the poet has or had a particular meaning in mind. Were it not for the fact that the poem, the reader is told, is supposed to be a sample of a new

style of poetry, it is reasonable to assume that he or she would simply jettison it and move on to something else.

Though the poem is divided into four stanzas, their separation is largely unjustified as each bleeds casually into the next with neither rhyme nor reason to explain the division. This lack of connection, to stock imagery or normative sentence structure, suggests that either the poem is not serious, that the poet is simply experimenting, Auden perhaps being 'joco-serious', or that its author *is* saying something but in a very roundabout way.

Alternatively, it could be bad poetry, leading the reader to question the age or the competence or the reputation of the poet. Such responses cannot be dismissed as the reader is made prisoner to a forced subjectivity. If words are in-scripted with meaning, then perhaps the exercise is akin to listening to atonal music, the type of experiment Schoenberg conducted.

Between 1927 and 1931, Auden created the parameters of his imaginative landscape: dark woods, abandoned mines, locked gates and chained-up orchards, remote valleys, limestone hills and mountains, silted harbours, fortified farms and besieged cities. The most pervasive image is that of places of passage [sic], transit and division: frontiers, passes and watersheds (Marchetti 2004: 201).

In Poem XIII (*Under boughs*), verbs appear at a premium. 'Under boughs between our **tentative endearments**, how should we hear/ But with **flushing pleasure** drums distant over **difficult country**, / Events not actual in **time's unlenient will**?' The opening twenty-six words share a single verb, the verb to hear, but despite the premium placed on it, it does not support or cohere with the other twenty-five words. The extent of this disconnect signals a deliberate strategy, the promotion of a type of stop/start 'telegraphese'.

The next stanza, consisting of thirty-two words and three verbs, includes a negative imperative 'Which we shall not avoid' and two verbs, 'lines branch to peace', and 'iron up' valleys to a hidden village, noun-verbs whose main contribution as verbs is to slow the pace or motion of what are presumably trains, or possibly buses. The rhyming couplets serve no obvious poetic

function, 'For we have friends to catch / And none leave coach', inverting the traditional expression 'to catch a coach, or bus, or train' with 'we have friends to catch', which is not a known arrangement of words in Standard English usage.

The same pattern continues in the third stanza. 'Sharers of our day, thought smiling of, but nothing known, / What industries decline, what chances are of revolution', sees the present passive, present simple, and the verb to be, connect industries with decline and revolution, again, for no obvious reason. The rhyming couplet 'What murders flash / Under composed flesh', casts little light on the stanza except, again, to connect references to industry with decline, chance with revolution, and murder with flash.

Personal identities, whomever and sometimes whatever it is the poet is addressing, or talking about, are hidden, denied personal pronouns as abstract nouns bump into one another without direction or reason. 'Knowledge no need to us whose wrists enjoy the chafing leash, / Can plunder high nests; who sheer off from old like gull from granite' furthers the terse style but without furthering the reader's understanding. The indifference and anti-intellectualism of the proletariat is alluded to but the reference to plundering high nests is another of Auden's subjective referents that offer(s) no help to the task of deciphering the poem. Perhaps those who do not need knowledge are being portrayed as old seagulls living in the moment as they take off and land on the cliff-face. 'Preposterous' doesn't begin to describe the speculative forays Auden's images encourage.

This interpretation, though speculative, is as reasonable an interpretation as any other when faced with sentences that are not coherent. Still, the reader is reminded, there is a point to being made to work, and work very hard, to achieve at least some understanding of what the poem is trying to convey. Arrogance does not begin to describe the confidence Auden displays here in imagining that grown-ups would want to spend more than a minute looking through such poetry in search of elusive clues.

While this assessment may be true for the twenty-first century, it is not true for the late 1920s and early 1930s when portmanteau words, unusual conjugations, and impossible

declensions had rarely been seen before. Auden's poetry is experimental and though it may fail to move the reader today, in its day, it was novel and outrageous, and it did catch the attentions of the reading public.

The absence, however, of a semantic anchor, or a chain of causality that can be differentiated clearly, unambiguously, or unequivocally, weighs down the reader's reasonable expectations.

What is not in doubt, perhaps the only thing, is the self-assured tone of the speaker who talks to the reader, it seems, through the poem, if indeed that is what is happening, and if so, talks as if nothing untoward is in the offing. The narrative frame, such as it is, hardly contains or disciplines the contents of the poem and the speaker remains anonymous, the message; such as it is, anomalous, in the sense of jarring reasonable expectations.

The poem ostensibly reads like a poor translation from another language whose translator or copyist did not quite manage to capture its essence. It does not resemble a draft as there is no clear sense as to what is being expressed or where an editor might begin to prune, or to augment, or develop the text or the ideas it contains.[83] This is a harsh judgement but experimental poetry cannot lose sight of the gold standard for it owes a debt to tradition, however rebellious it might think itself.

All the reader can reasonably claim with certainty is that, if the writer is at all concerned with the reader's understanding of the poem (a dangerous presumption as the opposite may be true), the writer denies the reader access to its meaning (or access is simply denied). If its status as poetry can indeed be confirmed, the only reliable response is that the poem appears to be drawing attention to the manner of its own construction.

The reader is left with could and should and might, while the tone and the structure and the general appearance of the poem asks question after question, syntactical, rhetorical,

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[83] '… a prosaic iteration of incoherencies' (Dudley Fitts: 4).

grammatical, semantic, without making any apparent effort or concession to meet that reader's reasonable expectations.

The reader is tempted into posturing and speculation. The particularities of meaning; the imagery, the diction, the rhythm, the style, and so on, have no meaningful meaning (sic), at least not one readily discernible. They are not important for what they say but seem to be important for what they, clusters of words loosely assembled, represent.

The particulars are assembled to make the more general point, perhaps, that the poem and others like it are part of something new. The reader struggles to place the poem within a literary tradition. The poem uses the vocative case. The tone is almost grand. There are no identifiable people in this 'difficult country'. The reader, if familiar with the forms of literature, may find in the poem a kind of dramatized interior monologue, one that is vaguely interactive, vaguely rustic, vaguely populated, vaguely modern, and vaguely communicative.

The style of the poem seems stunted, elliptical, incomplete, and experimental as it telegraphs the vague details of a landscape that seems more metaphysical than *actual*, leading the reader to surmise, perhaps, that the poet is either not in control of his materials or else he is striving to create an impressionistic collage which prefers or privileges subjective utterance to shared meaning.

Seamus Heaney cites Christopher Isherwood's observations of Auden, how 'He was very lazy. He hated polishing and making corrections. If I didn't like a poem, he threw it away and wrote another. If I liked one line, he would keep it and work it into a new poem. In this way whole poems were constructed which were simply anthologies of my favourite lines, entirely regardless of grammar or sense. This is the simple explanation of much of Auden's celebrated obscurity'(Heaney 1987, LRB). A more nuanced explanation can augment the reality.

Despite adopting the outward physical form of poetry, it seems to be poetry only in name, a demi-prose impersonation whose contents read as if an interior monologue set in a landscape. While landscapes, being landscapes, are typically found in the external world, the

poem's failure to communicate suggests that the interior monologue, or whatever it is, is being dramatized in an external landscape. The poem is neither abstract nor physical, any more than it can claim to be metaphysical. Marchetti observes that:

> Many of Auden's poems are posited on such metaphorical journeys through symbolic landscapes. Others deploy landscape allegorically to explore the relation of the mind and body to their habitat, viewed in psychological, historical, anthropological and social terms.

> On occasion, Auden reverses the traditional device, in which the natural world is anthropomorphised. Instead he 'naturalises' the human body, viewing it as a natural landscape. He uses allegory and symbolism as the poetic counterpart of the basic duality he perceived in human nature between Logos and Eros, allegory being a more active and rational approach to the world (via analogy); symbolism a more passive, visionary expression of a primary world of perception (Marchetti, 2004: 200).

Events, even if *not actual*, are not narrated or reported upon in any traditional sense, but are dramatised. There is a mind and there is a landscape but the traffic between the two is hard to fathom, clarity being neither here nor there. Still, the reader observes, it is clear that the drama is unclear. It may be 'unclear' but the reader is reminded that to accuse the author of a lack of clarity is to fail to observe 'the ancient distinction between mimesis and diegesis, or in modern terms between showing and telling'(Chatman 2004: 97).

The interior monologue, if it is one, supplies only intermittent clues as to the remainder of the text, that portion of the text where, either the speaker cannot communicate, or which cannot be fully communicated because the available words may mean more than they reveal. The opposite might also be true, that the words the text does make available are, or represent, a type of shorthand, the legend to which is not available, at least not to the befuddled reader.

If a symbol is a sign that reveals less than it represents, then the parts of speech in Poem XIII, falling short of literal meaning, are symbols that, perhaps, can be read for what they

represent. Auden's parts of speech appear to function as perhaps deliberately failed synecdoche or failed metonymies. The lines 'Who feebling, still have time to wonder at the well-shaped heads / Conforming every day more closely to the best in albums; / Fathers in sons may track / Their voices' trick', maintain the consistency of style as agentless, nameless, feeble and conforming entities who trick and track with no apparent purpose beyond the presentation of a predicament which the reader is left to ponder.

The next stanza, the sixth, and the first to offer a connection, albeit a very loose one, refers to 'their ancestral curse' which 'jumbled perhaps and put away, / Baffled for years, at least in one repeats its potent pattern'. Here, Auden is retailing the psychological premise that families are cursed in that they, or some of them at least, are doomed to repeat a particular pattern of behaviour. The ensuing rhyming couplet, 'And blows fall more than once, / Although he wince' again offers little beyond the suggestion that such repetitive behaviour comes with real consequences.

Why Auden would deform the present simple, third person 'he wince' is puzzling, unless of course it is modified to dovetail with the 'once' of the previous line. The deformation of 'wince' is too obvious to be ignored, however. If past practice is anything to go by, language becomes stolid and vague when the aim is to communicate torpor or uncertainty.

The single sentence that emerges from the stanza intact is that their ancestral curse repeats its potent pattern, an alliterative and rational concept that is embedded in extraneous language that occludes it, as if to suggest that, language is both the means by which people can become conscious of their Lamarckian endowment, but also its chief obstacle. This represents something of a breakthrough, if Auden's deployment of language at any given time represents a barometric reading of the speaker's state of evolution.

The next stanza continues a pattern, this time reading like a string of cryptic crossword clues, as, 'Who was to moorland market town retired for work or love, / May creep to sumps, pile up against the door, crouching in cases, / This anger falling / Opens, empties that filling'. What began as a nice rhythmic sentence, 'Who was to market moor land town retired for work or love', a sentence

with pleasing cadence, quickly gives way to truncated, nonsensical verbiage as angry verbs fall and open and fill the empties.

This section of the poem is important as two very different styles of language are placed in the same sentence. The first part of this equation signals normality or security while the second signals uncertainty, while also dispelling any suggestion that the poem as a whole lacks literary merit. The reference to the moorland market town may signal a goal, or end point, or an ideal, one that is quickly frustrated by the intervention of the present.

If in fact the monologue is externalised, then the landscape, such as it is, is an anthropomorphic projection of inner contents, or inner discontents. If the monologue is 'interiorised', then the mind, such as it is, is an inverted anthropomorphism. The interchange between the two represents something of a heavily encoded internal dialogue, externalised. The contents of the poet's mind appear to be walking across a landscape.

'Let each one share our pity, hard to withhold and hard to bear, / None knows of the next day if it be less or more, the sorrow; / Escaping cannot try; / Must wait though it destroy'. Here, the presiding voice, assuming the tone of a Polonius or a royal retainer, or perhaps a Pardoner, attempts to tidy up a very untidy scene with talk of pity being hard to bear, of sorrow, of escape and destruction in what reads like a parody, a mixture of Bunyan and Shakespeare at their most morose, tying up a few loose ends, delivering the hard-boiled moral to members of the audience in case they were not paying attention.

Anthropomorphisms abound. The writer supplies a wide array of trope deployments, from the 'difficult country' of the beginning, one of the few stock images the reader can appropriate to orientate the poem, to the unexplained 'time's unlenient will' which immediately dilutes and deflates what appeared to possess the promise of a clear message. 'Events not actual' compounds the obliquity.

It may in fact be superfluous to speak of occasional anthropomorphisms like 'difficult country' or 'times unlenient will' as the strong likelihood exists that the entire poem, and many

like it throughout Stage One, are anthropomorphic projections, that every last line of the early poems represents 'an ascription of human attributes to inanimate entities'.

'Difficult country' is one of the few noun/adjective couplings that might make sense, though the reader then realises that to append 'difficult' to 'country' is to append a subjective, that is, a human term to a neutral noun, an act of speech which is un-empirical and which runs contrary to reason. But then, the reader recalls, perhaps, that this is poetic language and not literal language, and so acknowledges the connotative license afforded to poetry.

Poetic license aside, the poet's assertion of the right to denominate 'country' as 'difficult' makes the case for, at least in this poem, the supremacy of subjective utterance in clear defiance of, call them, empirical norms. The speaker is making, or is forced to make, a concession to the objective world, perhaps announcing quite self-consciously that objects assume the identity the perceiver confers upon that object world. If anything, the poem suggests that it is trying to detach, (or otherwise render inaccessible) the observed, the contents of the poem, from the observer of the poem.

What may also come to mind is that the speaker is perhaps unable to detach the two, the physical and the mental, that he is displaying neurotic symptoms that have more in common with the psychopathology of a person under ontological threat.

By appending 'flushing' to 'pleasure', meaning is not created nor imagery advanced as the reader struggles to understand the coupling of a descriptive adjective 'flushing' with an abstract noun 'pleasure'. The adjective 'flushing' may in fact be a gerund or a truncated verb ending (Present continuous/progressive), but either way all that the reader can find, in common with 'difficult country', is the anthropomorphic coupling of a perhaps subjective modifier, 'flushing', to a neutral abstract noun, 'pleasure'. How pleasure can be flushing, presents the reader with a challenge.

As there is no objective, dictionary or English Usage answer to this question, all that can be surmised is the appending of a subjective modifier to an abstract noun, which again underscores the supremacy, at least in this poem, of subjective utterance.

'Drums distant', an inversion of 'distant drums', is less severe, being more recognisable or clichéd but also introducing the quandary of *who it is* that hears these distant drums, exposing the anthropocentrism of the drums, their reliance 'on being heard' to be heard. Bishop Berkeley's anti-materialism suggests itself, but, to cite a philosophical doctrine to justify unintelligible lines of poetry seems a stretch. The poem does not seem worthy of such grandiloquent speculation, but perhaps the contemporary reader's natural resistance to such linguistic tinkering is misguided.

Likewise, 'time' is burdened with 'unlenient will', a not altogether clear image, anthropomorphized like the 'village' which is 'hidden', again presenting things as only possessing meaning when humanized or anthropocentrised. To refer to 'a village' as 'hidden', though not an anthropomorphism, is quasi-anthropomorphic in that the hearer of this coupling will effortlessly make the mental leap required to grasp that the village is not hidden in reality, that it is only hidden to the speaker.

Such mental activity is relied upon all the time as hearers interpret language, but where most every reference to an objective entity is subjectively rendered, the reader is alerted that there is something else going on. That something else is a prolonged insight into a mind where things have ceased to be what they are, and are replaced by a meta-grammar that reflects the state of mind of the speaker, an exercise that has the concomitant effect of opening up linguistic discourse to minute analysis.

The 'minds constant sniffling' and the 'bloods dull shuffling', again cross the anthropomorphic divide, coupling subjective attributes to minds and bloods which, to further complicate matters, are denied apostrophes, and thereby possession or connection to their modifiers, 'dull shuffling' and 'constant sniffling'. How blood can shuffle, or how the mind can sniffle, is left to the benighted reader to interpret, but as the subjective pattern has already

been firmly established, the reader will see such images as character witnesses for a style of poetry which the poet is trying to prosecute.

The high incidence of anthropomorphism in the poem has one overriding function, to reinforce the general impression the poem creates, that the imagery is compromised by being neither mental nor physical, because most of the external objects in the poem are imbued with subjective qualifiers, rendering them and the poem generally as 'in-objective', or incorrigibly subjective in the way they are rendered.

The visual objects in the external world, because they are invariably chaperoned by subjective modifiers, appear to have been internalised. The external landscape has ceased to be an external landscape. It has become a site for the appropriation of objects which the poet anthropomorphises to convey the essentially neurotic state of the solitary occupant in that landscape. As the voice of the poem seems to be unable to differentiate between his mind and the objects that fill it, the ontological barrier has been extended well into the external world, a land that refuses to communicate.

Though Auden does not make the case explicitly, something important can be said where any individual's relationship to the external world is imbued with a degree of real sympathy for it, even if that sympathy is borne of a pathological connection or personality disorder. It might even be argued that human beings have traditionally not had enough sympathy for the physical environment. To cast a troubled isolate as one condemned to be at one with his physical environment, is to cast the problem very differently, if indeed the fate of the speaker is tied to the fortunes of the landscape where he finds himself a witness.

Auden was not writing eco-poetry when he wrote '*Under Boughs'* but as a general statement regarding the relationship of the individual to a post-industrial landscape, the connection that the poem, and others like it, establishes between mental health and the environment does raise deeper questions. It is not too far-fetched to suggest that estrangement from the physical environment is a measure of the extent to which humans have rendered themselves immune to, and insulated from, the effects of that physical environment.

Perhaps the only logical response a person can have to the desolation of the countryside is one of internal dislocation. Dissociation may signal the individual's inability, a literal and visceral inability, to associate with the new external reality.[84]

For this scenario to be plausible, the speaker of the poem or perhaps the author of the poem would have to have a peculiarly enhanced relationship to his surroundings, which, as a job description of a twentieth-century poet, sounds about right. In pursuing and researching the plausibility of this line of inquiry, Brian Moore's study 'affirms poetry's power to give voice to that which is voiceless, to draw attention to an injustice, and even to persuade readers attitudinally, and sometimes, to action'(Moore 2008: 194).

The speaker, and by extension the reader, is caught up in an existential dilemma of some sort, metaphysically challenged as he or she traverses an anthropomorphic and occasionally anthropocentric limbo. Alternatively, perhaps, it represents a psychomachia of the kind Paola Marchetti suggests.

Marchetti asserts that 'Auden's early imagery still carries Romantic echoes' (202). Perhaps Auden is placing himself in one of the doomed landscapes of the doomed genius-hero. Such a posture implicitly references the damage the Romantics did to the working classes who, in his poems, are only present where they have abandoned the landscape. The poems thus invoke history.

The history they invoke does not require a full treatment, which might catalogue the movement from medieval serfdom to the fixing of rents. To situate a doomed hero in a post-industrial landscape is sufficient to invoke that long struggle. Boly's suggestion that Romantic poetry and the novels of that era were written at the expense of the working class is an approach that seems credible though Auden falls short of indicting Wordsworth or Coleridge.

Marchetti also mentions *The Orators*, a work from the same period about which she says 'On an allegorical plane, it depicts the sickness of the society which produced it, England in

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[84] http://www.urbandesignmentalhealth.com/journal1-beautifulplacesandwellbeing.html

the 1930s. It is therefore an anthropological and social study of a sick body politic that transmits disease through such institutions as its public schools' (Marchetti 2004: 203). Marchetti's essay surveys the different phases of Auden's poetry and, throughout, landscape is the one constant.

Marchetti refers to 'the 1930s poems, Bucolics' which 'sees the history of the individual reproducing the history of the species, ontogeny recapitulating phylogeny'. He speaks of the poet's partial abandonment of his 'scientific gaze' 'for a more humane and intuitive perspective'. He refers to 'major theme of the late poetry' as 'the cohabitation of Eros and Logos, body and consciousness, and the implicit acceptance of human dualism' where 'The body is revalued as the house of the spirit, which expresses its wish to shape and order the world through architecture' (210).

He also refers to the significance the poet attaches to the house. 'If the body is our primary home, the house, celebrated in *Thanksgiving for a Habitat*, as a private not public building, becomes our second body', and how 'by using the metaphor of a river's descent from the mountains to the sea'… 'The lands the river runs through are phases of a civilisation but have also become a symbolic landscape leading to death' (211).

The point of all these references is to show that Auden's poetry addressed the tangible artefacts life presented. The body, houses, landscape and rivers are the subjects of his poetry, entities within arm's length of everybody, which he tried to show had meaning beyond the prima facie, that they possess symbolic importance.

Instead of opting for documentary realism, or investigative journalism or the novel, or for some other medium through which he might more directly address what he saw as lacking or wrong with his society, the domestic blowback from possessing and managing an empire perhaps, Auden appears to have opted to disrupt the medium, in this case poetry, with the side-effects of industrialisation, after people left the countryside for the city.

In an essay entitled *Auden and Ecology*, sub-headed *'Radical Anthropocentrism'* (Emig 2004: 212-218), Rainer Emig makes the point that:

Auden's aversion to Romantic idealism, especially the Shelleyan mingling of spiritual sublimation and political radicalism, is well documented. His nature images also reject Romantic models. For the Romantics, nature provided an imaginary framework enabling the self to overcome alienation.

'Nature' bridged the gap between childhood and adulthood as a quasi-religious power enabling the self to enter a higher plane than that of a mundane reality where actual, physical nature was increasingly sacrificed to the Industrial Revolution. In Auden, images of nature are always man-made constructs (Emig 2004: 212).

Perhaps providing a clue to what drove Auden to address nature in his landscapes, Emig cites an essay on Robert Frost in which Auden stated bluntly that:

Man is naturally anthropocentric and interested in his kind and in things and animals only insofar as they contribute to his life and sustain him; he does not interest himself in things to the exclusion of people till his relations with the latter have become difficult or have broken down (Emig 2004: 212).

To return to the poem, 'time's unlenient will' extends the act of unfamiliar coupling to three, the first 'Time' is personified, the second 'unlenient' posits lenience only to negate it but qualifies or modifies 'will' to suggest Time's severity or impatience or dominion. 'Will', appearing officially as a noun, also shadows or auditions as an auxiliary verb, the net effect of which is to unsettle the reader by denying fluency and by creating a deliberately uncomfortable syntactic cluster.

'Events not actual' underscores the official status of the poem as not being a traditional rendering of a landscape, or of not being a landscape at all, certainly not one that can be escaped to or from. The lines serve as a stark reminder that the whole journey is perhaps metaphorical, part allegory.

This denial of actuality amounts perhaps to a confession by Auden or the narrator that he or the situation he describes is indeed neurotic, but it is not intended as a confession; rather it seeks to establish the undisclosed dilemma the poet, and by extension the audience, witness.

…times unlenient will…..

which we shall not avoid, though at a stations chance delay

Lines branch to peace, iron up valleys to a hidden village

for we have friends to catch

and none leave coach

This second stanza extends the patents Auden registered in the first, adding very little new but further variations of the unfamiliar reinforce the chaos and the uncertainties and the dilemma.

Auden posits time's dominion, but brings this general statement down to earth by contrasting it with the 'chance delay' at what appears to be a railway station where he appears to have time to regard the station platform route maps whose particulars he denies the reader, for to do so would be to break the illusion that this journey was anything other than a symbolic one. Incomplete maps are a feature of this period of Auden's writing, the absence of which underscores the dilemma he faces.

The absence of a clear route map also points to the novelty of the artistic and cultural renovation to which Auden has committed. Absent or incomplete maps testify to the neglect visited upon culture by his vatic predecessors. Auden had no Virgil to lead him through the underground.

The reference to 'Railway lines which branch to peace' is not immediately clear, while 'iron up' is presumably a reference to train engines (irons) as they pull themselves up to generalized places beyond. The image, a new phrasal verb, implies a search perhaps for resolution.

Villages which are 'hidden' reinforce the solipsism central to the poem though the poet's obvious awareness that such villages do actually exist, even if he cannot actually see them, may imply that though he cannot find 'peace' or resolution, he is aware that it is reachable, that all hope is not lost, that 'peace' or resolution may sometimes be found, but not always where they may be expected to be found, that 'chance' delays can bring good tide. Peace may not be a destination today but it is a destination as it is connected to the metaphorical train grid. Peace is an abstracted goal.

Auden admixes the phrases 'trains to catch' and 'friends to meet' perhaps to expose the blurring of individual sense perception that is a common feature of agitated people or commuters. 'None leave coach' seems to be a pun on the Northern English habit of often dropping the definite article while also generalizing the noun 'coach'.

Nameless people, the 'none' who leave the coach, remind the reader that the journey is a solitary search and not a real location. Auden's anonymous fellow travellers are figments of his and the reader's imagination. Auden again flouts normative grammar where he uses 'iron up', a 'phrasal noun', something which does not officially exist in the English language, as a verb, as he refuses to supply other supporting verbs which might allow the reader to settle in or become oriented in his landscape.

Taken all together, thus far in the poem, the language reflects the deeply and deliberately confused, un-centered, un-stable nature of the speaker who, despite the incongruities and lack of balance allowed, seems otherwise perfectly comfortable in terms of its tone and mood. Auden seems to be heavily and contentedly identified with his landscapes. The smoothness of the underlying tone amounts to saying that the situation as it has been described is the reality the speaker faces, or the reality as his senses experience and report it.

…Sharers of our day, though smiling of, but nothing known,

What **industries decline**, what chances are of revolution,

What **murders flash**

Under **composed flesh**

Knowledge no need to us whose wrists enjoy **the chafing leash**

Can plunder high nests, who sheer off from old like gull from granite,

From **their minds constant sniffling**,

their bloods dull shuffling

Taken together, these 'stanzas', whose organizing principle is far from clear, blend local and abstract terms to remark on the lack of awareness or interest, the 'nothing known' the speaker's fellow travellers appear to have or lack regarding the industrial decline and the possibility of revolution, the result, perhaps, of such decline.

'Sharers of our day' may highlight the oddity that people perceive the same visual field with such differing perspectives. The sharer's lack of knowledge or interest in industrial decline and the prospect of the revolution insinuate an awareness of such concerns upon the mind of the speaker. 'Sharer' is an uncommon usage, the unfamiliar again made somewhat familiar.

The absence of any shared vision or shared knowledge of the problems faced seems to announce itself by inference. Knowledge, Auden asserts, has no appeal to those who enjoy or who seem to relish the relative captivity of labour, 'the chafing leash' of the poem. The lines may also refer to the anti-intellectualism of large segments of British society.

Auden, or the speaker, seems to suspect that murder is never far from the surface of people who seem otherwise composed. 'Decomposed flesh' is straight from the language of coroner's reports, but Auden rewinds to a time when flesh is still composed. The smiling faces of the people who share our day conceal a multitude of latent potentials, he seems to be suggesting.

Yet, the speaker makes little effort to conceal his disdain for his fellow travellers, 'their minds' sniffling', and 'their dull bloods shuffling'. Their personalities he reduces to the level of

bodily functions that he conveys with metonymy, minds and bloods which he refuses to apostrophize.

If faceless, voiceless people lack personality or the inclination to express opinions and can be reduced to the base level of bodily functions, the nearby industrial decline seems like a destination that is apropos. The absence of the genitive case, the apostrophes of 'minds' and 'bloods', seems to support the idea that instead of reading the snivelling or snivelling of the mind or the dull shuffling of the blood, mind and blood have been personified. Minds sniffle or snivel while dull bloods shuffle. Promiscuous parts of speech add to the confusion.

'Can plunder high nests, who [not which] sheer off from old like gull from granite' seems to balance the pathetic abstract with the frivolous concrete and remind the reader that the simplicity of rustic life prevails. To what end, the reader is left to wonder.

John Fuller's commentary on Poem XIII amounts to a single page in which he corroborates the notion, generally descriptive of the poem, that 'happiness might be found by taking a branch line at a railway station into mountainous country', which Fuller adds 'Auden later stated to be the ideal way of entering his dream Eden' (Fuller 1998: 73).

Fuller is referring to the speaker's quest to return to an idealised existence. The day trip on the train through the country of the poem is the allegorical representation of that search. The train and branch network is the poem's working metaphor for the complexity of choices individuals are faced with in terms of their own development as one unit or among many.

Fuller adds that 'Stanzas 3 and 4 generalize the reasons for the timidity: we have no way of understanding our contemporaries because we are content with our own self- absorbed mental life' (Fuller 1998: 73-74). Here, Fuller identifies the difficulty of real communication, though the description 'content' might be replaced with the word 'pre-occupied' as the speaker is seeking contentment.

Fuller points out that to understand the lines, 'the images of bird's nesting and the dog straining at the lead', and the phrase 'sheer off like gull from granite', the reader has to refer to

lines 10-12 and 15 in another poem 'Out of sight, assuredly not out of mind'... a poem of June 1927'. According to Fuller, 'the images were the acceptable memories of recreation with a holiday visitor [sic] to the family home are contrasted with the intimate memories that would be possible if the mind were able to 'build a house' for itself '(Fuller 1998: 93-74).

Fuller adds that 'In the present poem the constraining presence of the "old" is more forcefully underlined and is developed in Stanza 5 and 6 into the familiar Jungian "ancestral curse": we inherit all the weaknesses of our forebears just as we inherit their desires' (Fuller 1998: 73-74).

The concept is of an ancestral curse is more 'Sophoclean' than Jungian. It may also refer to the much older Catholic conception of an unspecified 'original sin' (the Auden family was Anglican) or older Buddhist conception of Karma, whereby unresolved complexes are reproduced through generations, how along with our genetic inheritance, humans inherit psychological complexes. Though impossible to quantify, the concurrence of major religions and the dramatic re-enactments of plays such as Oedipus Rex, or even Macbeth, suggest that, whether these beliefs are true or false, some people do have faith in them.

Despite the lack of evidence, archetypes and archetypal complexes are a reality. Often, in seeking to avoid our psychological inheritance, individuals compound the original problem or complex by the very effort to avoid it, as can be seen in Greek tragedy where, for example, King Laius tries to avoid the oracle's prediction by giving the infant Oedipus to a shepherd with the instruction to kill him. This action inadvertently contributes to the fulfilment of the prophesy, the suggestion being that psychological complexes, or curses, can be delayed but not deterred.

Edward Mendelson uses the same phrase 'They sheer off from old like gull from granite', to juxtapose the hopes of the young, who 'think themselves free from their elder's burdens' (Mendelson 1981: 5). Fuller adds that 'These inherited characteristics may not show themselves for years, like a carried disease: Auden's brilliant metaphor is of finding that you can do a jigsaw puzzle that has been put away because no one could finish it' (Fuller 1998: 74). Fuller's point is that the quest for a return to an idealised Eden (harmony, individuation) is hindered by the

awareness that to enter such a state requires that the individual's personality cleanse itself by dealing with the burdens people inherit from their ancestors.

It is more likely that the poem is 'about' something quite different. It advertises a practice, reports on an extended scenario, opens vistas to the reader that are part of metaphorical and metaphysical landscapes where amidst fleeting images and fleeting thoughts and fleeting impressions, the reader is talked through the existential angst of his generation by being offered glimpses of the angst that emerges on an afternoon visit in the English countryside.

The notion of individuation (the emotional maturation of personality), so central to the conception and execution of the poem, is not a process that is readily understood today, much less in 1929. Yet here is Auden and his interpreters, assuming a high degree of specialised knowledge on the part of the reader regarding the psyche's inner processes, all furtively hidden behind the cloud of unknowing of his new writing style. This seems retroactive and flawed.

Auden was certainly precocious and certainly up to the task of presenting the unpresentable, of recognising the problem of spiritual illness and the dilemma the individual was faced with in trying to navigate his way back to communal health, but to infer that the twenty-two-year-old had a complete understanding of the issues and problems he addresses, or a solution for them, is unlikely and unnecessary. Merely to present the problem as he does was sufficient and a significant achievement, even if today such portrayals are *passé*.

Emig asserts that 'Time is the agent of the intellectual imagination. It distances event and perception, as in the early poem, 'Under boughs between our tentative endearments', which couples a limited and unromantic sensuality with unsettling images of 'drums distant over difficult country':

The events it alludes to as a threat to erotic fulfilment are labelled 'events not actual, in time's unlenient will'. This apparently confusing explanation fits perfectly and, indeed, only makes sense as further elaboration of the inextricable link of time and intellect –

which now becomes all-powerful as to dominate reality completely. It is even hostile toward the individual itself. The suffering that this all-powerful intellect causes the self is therefore self-inflicted (Emig 2000: 22).

Emig is alluding to the loss of innocence suffered through consciousness, the eating of the apple that saw man banished from Eden. His comments underscore the belief that a dominant intellect is a domineering intellect insofar as the priorities of cognition are different from the priorities of the heart, that social organ which, it can be assumed, is more likely to be the handmaiden to community and to healing.

Auden's apparent self-indulgence, his linguistic excesses, his use of anthropomorphism to inaugurate a discussion regarding the fundamentals of poetry, or sometimes to signal a call for the expansion of language to cater to the psychological needs of his doomed heroes, are part of a deliberate pattern to catch and retain the interests of his readers, and to simultaneously truncate the existing literary tradition, replacing it with his own aesthetic.

That aesthetic seems unremarkable today for the reason that it has become orthodox, or part of orthodoxy, where poetry need no longer conform to the type of poetry found in Palgrave ('*Golden Treasury*') or any of the older volumes which used to represent poetry. Poetry today which addresses topical issues, which dispenses with an authorial omniscient voice, or which makes the reader work hard by employing any of the postmodern apparatus to communicate, has come to be expected. These gains and many others, while they cannot be credited solely to Auden, they are achievements that the poet was among the first to champion.

Subjective utterance, as has been seen, is valorised. Poetic artifice may be a liability in, for example, Ezra Pound, but if artifice is the price of admission to a dramatized debate focused on the anatomy of the English language, then surely the benefits of such an exchange must be recognised as outweighing peripheral deficiencies.

Just as Stephen Burt exposed the lacuna in Jarrell's approach to Auden's rhetorical poetry, the charges against Auden's poetry must be weighed alongside what those failings were

handmaiden to, and, as this dissertation has attempted to show, the Auden oeuvre cannot be exhausted very easily. Jarrell, in one of his later lectures, had this to say about Auden's work:

> Auden became a master at *moving his audience as he wished it to be moved*, became a true and magical rhetorician… a man who could speak to and for that whole audience *as it conceived itself*, about the "real" problems, the "real" realities, of its world – *as it conceived them* (Jarrell 1951-2: Lecture 4, 2005: 66).

Jarrell's emphases are telling. He is suggesting that Auden was ahead of his audience but, knowing what was important to them, or what concerned them, gave them what they wanted in a way that they could understand.

The tendency to judge Auden by today's standards sees his contribution inevitably diminished as the ground he helped break vanishes in the distance as his innovations become commonplace, but if the testimony of Jarrell and Empson have any foundation, Auden is credited with speaking truth to a community about things that matter.

The evils of propaganda and of ideology and the need for poets to warn people of their pernicious influence, the dangers the intellectual classes can pose to social cohesion, what used to be Marxist prerogatives, are now global concerns. The need to reconnect with things, with the physical environment, how industrialism can atomise communities and individuals, are also today mainstream issues. Auden's concern for the mental health of the individual is among his main themes, one he addressed while also struggling with his desire to interrupt a literary tradition that absconded to the countryside, leaving behind their copy of the symbolic contract.

Auden absconded to the countryside also, but what he did there has relevance not just for the issues he addressed, or for the manner in which he addressed them, but for his refusal to supply definitive answers. Instead, as this study has tried to show, he tried to co-opt the reader as his assistant in the darkroom of the poem where nebulous imagery and a Spartan, if occasionally grandiloquent, style allowed the reader to bring his or her own experience and history and emotions to bear upon important, very often, transcendental subjects.

Emig asserts that the 'significance of the obscure images derives from the absence of stable signifieds'. He adds that the 'lack of clear signifieds can be caused by overlapping signifiers to create ambiguity. Another cause of obscure images can be the missing context of signifiers'. Defending this strategy, Emig adds that such an approach 'automatically produces meaningless texts' (Emig 2000:15). Emig appears to relent from this position, and in a gesture John Boly's reading theory might approve of, responds to his own critique:

> The absence of a definable meaning can also be interpreted as a calculated strategy which fulfils a function of its own in Auden's early poems. Auden's poetic technique thereby puts into practice what Ferdinand de Saussure formulates theoretically as the arbitrariness of the sign (Emig 2000: 15).

The absence of stable signs and signifieds is a distinction that might well trip over itself where Auden's poetry is concerned. The word 'arbitrariness', quite heavily 'inscripted' as John Boly might say, betrays the assumption that meanings are not subject to arbitration, whereas Auden's whole point and his motivation for changing the literary aesthetic was to prove that words and their meanings, the things they refer to, can always be negotiated.

Auden presents the dilemma of the individual who seeks to return to an idealised existence but who struggles with attaining that return. The indeterminate meaning of words, a perceived over-dominance of the intellect, the burdens of inheritance, and the struggle to establish shared meanings mark some of the contours of the speaker's, and by extension the reader's, dilemma. The work is often a reminder to the individual to return to first principles.

At the beginning of this study, Auden's essay *Mimesis and Allegory* was cited to frame the central problem he believed Western civilisation was facing in the 1930s, but to confine the problem to a single decade is to misread the warning. Auden's central assertion regarding the danger of 'a metaphysical failure', which he identified as ' one of the causes for the breakdown of classical civilisation', was cited to frame the problem faced by his generation, a dilemma he explained in terms of 'a failure to relate the abstract concept to the concrete phenomenal world' (Auden 2002, *Prose*, Vol. II, *Mimesis and Allegory*: 79).

In his essay, written shortly after the beginning of the Second World War, Auden explained that when 'the man in the Athenian street lost faith in the gods…the philosophers were unable to replace that faith by anything he could understand from his own experience, so that he easily stepped into nihilistic conclusion' (79). Picking up where Classical civilisation had failed, Auden traces the efforts of 'the Christian Church…to relate the universal to the particular, the spiritual to the material', which 'made the technical advance of civilisation possible'.

The Modern poets, though more attuned to topical issues than the Romantic poets, generally preferred symbolism, mythology, and free verse to any aesthetic that might have valorised mankind's connection to 'the concrete phenomenal world' (Auden: 79). Faced with the Modernist inheritance he reasoned he needed to overthrow, or displace, Auden sought to establish an aesthetic which could 'relate the abstract concept to the concrete phenomenal world' (Auden 2002, *Prose*, Vol. II, *Mimesis and Allegory*: 79) as the best means of renewing the symbolic contract. Anthropomorphism was central to his new style, not just because it possesses the inherent capacity to disrupt, but because it reconnected the man in the London street with something 'he could understand from his own experience'.

That is what anthropomorphism represents: imaginative imagery that is accessible to the ordinary reader. That its more creative deployments relied heavily on the co-operation of the reader, in a democratic age, made it all the more attractive. With regard to the nature of that aesthetic, Auden further identifies 'allegory and symbolism' as the two powerful engines of representation available to the artist, who 'will tend to give allegorical interpretation of figures which are really symbolic' (85), perhaps explaining why Auden's solitary figure is a symbol of his generation but who readers might read allegorically.

He also makes the observation that 'Every artist tries to give an objective picture of the world, but since he is himself a part of it, such objectivity can never be complete' (83), thereby explaining Auden's decision to dispense with the omniscient narrator, casting the presiding voice of the poems as someone who is unable to clearly articulate the existential storm he finds himself caught up in.

Auden observes that 'while one does not have to accept the beliefs expressed in a work of art in order to appreciate it, they cannot be ignored and that sometimes they seem so silly as to arouse aesthetic dislike'. This general observation (not made with reference to his own work) amounts to an appeal to those who do not like, or who cannot countenance, less orthodox poetry, to try to read the work symbolically.

Mendelson, reviewing Auden's changing style, in which 'each new stage' began 'with a vehement renunciation of past errors' (Mendelson 1999, *Later Auden*: xix), acknowledges that 'An aesthetically tolerant reader…is made uncomfortable by the moral intelligence of the poems, by their transformation from a beautiful picture into an unflattering mirror' (xxii).

Some may argue that reading poetry should not demand of the reader that she command knowledge of, or at least be conversant with, what Boly called 'the conquest of perplexing idiolects' (Boly 2004, *Auden and modern theory*: 137). Poetry that makes such demands will invariably lose the common reader, demanding instead in her place, an uncommonly well-informed scholar.

Auden claimed that 'There must always be two kinds of art, escape art…and parable art' (Mendelson 1999: xvii). Auden argues that often readers 'attempt to find in art a bolster or substitute for a faith in which people no longer believe' (86). Art, and poetry in particular, Auden suggests, has unwittingly replaced faith as the place where people go to for comfort, or for certainties, or at least for answers to perplexing questions.

The reference to *John* 1:14 in the title of this dissertation, 'and the word was made flesh',[85] encapsulates what has become a secular dilemma, the need for our current problems, personal and political, to find meaningful representation, even if faith or art cannot supply us with the comforting solutions or the guidance we say we would like.

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[85] For Auden 'the Word being made Flesh… means that reason and imagination are one. But does not poetry, as such, live from there being a gulf between them?' (Auden 1962, *Christianity and Art*, *Prose* 2010, Vol IV: 777).

Conclusion

This study has examined and explained some of the reasons why Auden's earliest published poetry did not receive the attention it merited when the work first appeared. The popularity of Auden's later work eclipsed the early work such that the latter has only slowly begun to be examined and understood. From the perspective of literary theory, the early poetry is a far more fertile source than the later, more accessible, poetry because it prefigured many of the themes and concepts literary theory occupies itself with today, but also because critics at that time lacked the verbal apparatus to deconstruct and articulate what Auden was doing or attempting to do.

Auden's early poetry is unusual in that it offers the reader and perhaps the critic a salutary lesson in how to read and how to discriminate when presented with information. How something as simple or ordinary as reading could in fact be as complicated and subtle and important as Auden attempted to show is a reminder of the extent to which trust, particularly trust in authority, in authorial voices, is such an important factor in everyday life.

Auden's work is also interesting for moving poetry away from symbolic representation by appropriating the physical world to communicate with the reader. His model, by his own account, was that he 'should like to write but can't… the thoughts of a wise man in the speech of the common people', a sentiment he appropriated from Lady Gregory who had borrowed it from Aristotle (see Mendelson 1981: 179-80). Though something of an intellectual poet, Auden's imagery speaks to the common reader in a much more immediate way than do symbolic representations, though this may have much to do with the *anima mundi,* if such a thing exists*,* of the late twentieth century as anything else. By so doing, Auden made Poetry relevant again.

As one tool or instrument, Auden's weapon of choice with which to assist the reader to question the reified status of objects in the external world, Auden's use of anthropomorphism played an important role by simply offering or suggesting alternatives. Auden exposed the potential dangers of Rhetoric by encouraging readers to imagine other possibilities.

Anthropomorphism is a subversive trope, but it is only a real threat where it is misused to dehumanise people or where authority insists on subduing people to its writ. It is well that society can learn something of the manner in which such manipulation is instigated.

What is most noticeable about an Auden poem, as distinct from his literary forbears, is that the poem often relies on the reader to translate some of his more radical images. Auden's radical anthropomorphisms, departing and deviating from the norm and from lexically codified usage, saddle the reader with a clear role and a clear responsibility to develop or at least consider his suggestions, his alternative words for things.

Auden returned poetry to the present, to topical issues, to the concerns of the ordinary man in the street and in so doing; he tried to renew 'the symbolic contract' between reader and writer. It is interesting that the writings of John Boly and Paola Marchetti and to an extent Rainer Emig all lead Auden back to a discussion of Romanticism, and how that movement seems increasingly responsible for doing a disservice to the working man and woman by escaping into idealism. [86]

When one reads an Auden poem, disbelief is not the thing that needs to be suspended as the reader can do well, also, to suspend cognition, to allow the poems to work on the reader in much the same way as music works on the listener. The weakness of this approach, like much of modern art, is that it is often difficult to appreciate fully the aesthetic principles the work is forwarding or promoting.

In his discussion of Rilke's use of anthropomorphism, Auden concludes his remarks with what appears to be a whimper, the suggestion that:

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[86] In Lecture Three of *The Enchafèd Flood,* Auden observes that 'In earlier ages it was the business of the artist to record the great acts and thoughts of others. The contribution of the poet, that is, was his gift for language. The characteristic of the Romantic period is that the artist, the maker himself, becomes the epic hero, the daring thinker, whose deeds he has to record…Small wonder then if their capacity for experience was burned out quite early…'(Auden 1949, 2008, *Prose* Vol III: 89-90). Frank Kermode observes that 'The most interesting [of the lectures] is the third, condemning the figure of the romantic artist-hero, requiring the renunciation of his 'Promethean pride' and replacing him with 'the less exciting figure of the builder, who renews the ruined walls of the city' (Kermode 2008, LRB). http://www.lrb.co.uk/v30/n03/frank-kermode/with-slip-and-slapdash

It is, I believe, no accident that as the international crisis becomes more and more acute, the poet to whom writers are becoming increasingly drawn should be one who felt it pride and presumption to interfere with the lives of others; one who occupied himself consistently and exclusively with his own inner life (Auden 2002, *Prose* Vol. II: 26).

Auden, of course, did not follow Rilke's suggestion except perhaps in his later years where he modelled his work on Horace, where he praised limestone and thanked the fog. Auden concludes his essay (*The New Republic*, 6 September, 1939) by citing Rilke.

Art cannot be helpful through our trying to keep and specially [sic] concerning ourselves with the distresses of others, but insofar as we bear our own distresses more passionately, give now and then a perhaps clearer meaning to endurance, and develop for ourselves the means of expressing the suffering within us and its conquest more precisely and more clearly than is possible to those who have to apply their powers to something else (Auden 1939 essay, *New Republic*, 2002 *Prose* Vol. II: 26).

Auden's democratic principles often run contrary to the rather patrician image often crafted for him. Auden is known for driving an ambulance in Spain during the Civil War but less well-known, less celebrated for his driving a taxi during the General Strike (1926).[87] In any event, Auden conceived of a world where the ordinary reader could become, if sufficiently inclined, its unacknowledged legislator.

As some of the varied examples mentioned in this study should testify, anthropomorphic deployments assume many guises. While this study has attempted to examine and display as wide a variety as possible, it is important to remember that Auden's revival of the trope, while it certainly has practical applications, is most significant because it advertises a particular practice, one that can be built upon.

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[87] Speaking of Humphrey Carpenter's *A Biography*, Barbara Everett touches on this issue where she observes that 'There are some splendid stories in his first two hundred pages particularly, whose charm derives in part from their being presented as biographer's facts, from their cool randomness of occurrence: but it is again hard to believe that the 'facts' have not already been transmuted by letter and anecdote' (Everett 1981, LRB) http://www.lrb.co.uk/v03/n21/barbara-everett/auden-askew

While extending and advertising the range of paradigmatic deployments certainly has high 'aerial' value, to communicate how pervasive the practice is, promiscuously and often 'imperceptibly' embedding itself in every other adjective, displaying and revealing existing or potential applications, linguistic interest in such acrobatics, if poetry is to make anything happen, must yield to pragmatism. The key value must surely be that, upon being alerted to the manner in which the trope can be used to manipulate language and thought, as an advocate manipulates the legal code, the reader is henceforth armed and forewarned of the process by which he can be manipulated.

In terms of his contribution, the value of his prescient identification of the trope's valence and efficacy and applicability in language, only recently recognised by theorists, is that he won attention for a literary device that clearly matters, one which increases understanding of the manner in which a society's superstructure can impose its dominant discourse, by implementing its hierarchical value system.

Regarding the prematurity of Auden's aesthetic, his efforts to reform his society by reforming its language, Edward Mendelson observes that 'In the atmosphere that later developed around existentialism and around structural theories of language and culture... Auden's earliest work would have seemed comfortably at home' (Mendelson 1981: 21). A much more useful yardstick might be to consider the impact Auden's poetry actually had on the readers who went to him to help them to understand the world. This is one metric that cannot be measured but it is, arguably, the most important one.

Auden's later poetry, poems such as *In Praise of Limestone, Amor Loci,* and *Nones,* develop the poet's conception that objects in the external world are essentially extensions of the self, how the world the reader sees is one she has internalised, how it sometimes is that humans tend to project on the environment concerns which mirror their innermost feelings.

In this respect, Auden's solitary pursuit, his relentless exploration of the world out there, is very much a personal project, a perhaps solipsistic expression of the loneliness of an

individual who began his life and ended it with the sense, quite impossible to prove, that individuals try to recreate the world in their own image.

This study began with a quote from Brian Moore in which he asserted that anyone arguing '*for* the validity of personification may for some be comparable to … a contemporary scientist arguing for a Ptolemaic view of the universe' (Moore 2008: 1), an anachronistic theme also adopted by John Boly to explain the manner of Auden's impact on poetry. Bakhtin maintains (according to Boly) that 'Poetry is well equipped for the task of cultural, national and political centralization … because it assumes the existence of a higher, primordial, more complete or otherwise superior discourse' (Boly 1991: 27):

> The language of the poetic genre is a unitary and singular Ptolemaic world outside of which nothing else exists and nothing else is needed. The concept of many worlds of language, all equal in their ability to conceptualize and to be expressive, is originally denied to poetic style (Bakhtin in Boly).

Boly insists that 'Auden was aware of the monologic tyranny of poetic genres… But unlike Bakhtin, retained an acute sense of more elusive textual interiors, the realm of an utterance's topography that remain[s] open to a poetic dialogism. Bakhtin makes a reasonable mistake, given his scholarly preoccupation with the novel, in overlooking the dialogic potential of poetry' (Boly: 28).

Auden refused the temptations of didacticism and monasticism inherent in poetry, and while he did indulge himself with monologues and harangues, these he tried to deploy in the service of the public good. In doing so, he began a conversation with the reader as correspondent.

> Any heaven we think it decent to enter,
>
> Must be Ptolemaic with ourselves at the center.[88]

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[88] 'Auden took up the same metaphor, though in a comic spirit'(Boly 1991: 28).

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