

## INTRODUCTION

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AUDEN wrote his prose so that he would be able to write his poems, and the benefits of writing prose were both financial and intellectual. In a letter written from Italy in 1955, he explained: “The winter months are those in which I earn enough dollars to allow me to live here in the summer and devote myself to the unprofitable occupation of writing poetry.” During his winters in New York, punctuated by lecture tours and visiting professorships in American college towns, he wrote the commissioned essays and reviews that paid for his summers in Ischia. No matter what the nominal subject of those essays might be, he used them as exercises in which he explored whatever moral, intellectual, literary, or prosodic issues concerned him most in the poems he was writing or planning. During the late 1940s and early 1950s he wrote a sequence of poems largely about history, “*Horae Canonicae*”, and another sequence largely about nature, “*Bucolics*”. He developed the structure of ideas that holds them together by writing essays and reviews on the theme indicated by the title of one of them: “Nature, History and Poetry”.

Auden enjoyed deflating romantic images of inspired poets driven only by their genius. He made a point of praising the bourgeois virtues—directly in his essays, indirectly in poems such as “Under Sirius”, “Cattivo Tempo”, “Sext”, and “Mountains”. He also made a point of practicing those virtues. After agreeing to write an introduction or essay or review, he typically finished the job weeks or months ahead of his deadline. For an anthology of English poetry and a collection of Elizabethan verse and music he used original texts rather than later reprints, and was impatient with collaborators who were less responsible and punctual than he was. As a public lecturer he gave value for money with his lucid and substantial talks. During the early 1950s he finally outgrew his intermittent temptation to pose before academic audiences as a severe philosopher, and his prose style achieved the urbane, inclusive ease that it maintained for the rest of his career.

Before this, during Auden’s first years in America from 1939 to around 1947, his work and thought had focused on lonely inward crises and existential choices of the kind he wrote about in his longer poems from “New Year Letter” in 1940 through *The Age of Anxiety* in 1944–46. In the later 1940s he began to seek a less narrow and intense approach to experience, and explored ways of thinking that were more social and collective, and more aware of the common world of the body. In the early 1940s he had found the structure of his thought in the work of Søren Kierkegaard. In 1955, while still acknowledging his debt to Kierkegaard, he pointed toward “what seems to be

his great limitation, a limitation which characterizes Protestantism generally. A planetary visitor could read through the whole of his voluminous works without discovering that human beings are not ghosts but have bodies of flesh and blood.”

Auden first visited Italy in 1948. For the next ten years he settled into a routine of summers in a rented house in Ischia and winters in an apartment in New York. He countered the urgent and severe Protestantism of his thought in the earlier 1940s with what he half-seriously called a “counter-Reformationary” Catholicism. His poem “In Praise of Limestone,” written in 1948, was an emphatic hymn of praise to the human body and the Mediterranean landscapes in which it was most at home. During the next few years he wrote sympathetically about the differences between Italian and northern European societies and cultures, especially about the lucid fatalism of Giovanni Verga’s fiction and the operas based on Verga’s stories. Also in 1948 he resumed his earlier practice of collaboration with other writers and artists by inviting Chester Kallman to join him in writing the libretto for Igor Stravinsky’s opera *The Rake’s Progress*.

In the summer of 1948 he was invited by the University of Virginia to deliver the 1949 Page-Barbour Lectures, an endowed annual series that required the lecturer to publish his lectures as a book. (T. S. Eliot’s Page-Barbour lectures for 1933 were published as *After Strange Gods*.)<sup>\*</sup> Auden chose for his subject the romantic and nineteenth-century image of the sea, and the contrary image of isolation, the desert, illustrated by examples from Wordsworth to Rimbaud. He titled the series (and the resulting book) *The Enchafèd Flood: The Romantic Iconography of the Sea*, after a fragment from *Othello*: “I never did like molestation view / On the enchafèd flood.” The underlying theme of his lectures was the myth of the heroic artist as a solitary voyager in the realm of consciousness, a potentially redemptive figure who finds new territories of experience that he reveals to an audience too timidly bourgeois to make such explorations for themselves. Auden had repeatedly been tempted by this myth in earlier years; his lectures served as a final exorcism of it.

*The Enchafèd Flood* is a backward-looking book, both in its implicit renunciations and in its explicit themes. Auden’s survey of literary images of the

<sup>\*</sup> The first lecture series that Auden gave in America seems to have been the Turnbull Lectures in poetry at Johns Hopkins in January 1940. When Harvard invited him to lecture in December 1948, he may or may not have been told that the faculty intended to decide after ward whether to offer him the Charles Eliot Norton Chair in Poetry for 1950–51, a series of six lectures intended for publication as a book. He gave his talk on *Don Quixote*, “The Ironic Hero”, perhaps the most probing and sympathetic reading of the book ever written in English (a published version appears in *Prose II*), but he began by joking that, like everyone else in the room, he had never finished reading it. The contents of the lecture proved the joke to be untrue, but Harry Levin and others took offense, and Thornton Wilder was chosen instead. Auden was eventually offered the Norton chair in the 1960s but declined; he told friends that he had nothing to say.

sea and the desert arranges in systematic form the imagery of “The Sea and the Mirror”, the long poem he wrote in 1942–44. All the sentences in the book are new, but the content restates much that Auden had written in essays and reviews earlier in the 1940s, notably his Kierkegaardian account of aesthetic, ethical, and religious authority and his readings of Don Quixote as a religious hero and of Melville’s Ishmael as an explorer of possibility. The last pages of the book turn away from all that: “We live in a new age,” he wrote, and his phrase refers both to public culture and to his private interests. This new age is one in which

the necessity of dogma is once more recognised, not as the contradiction of reason and feeling but as their ground and foundation, in which the heroic image is not the nomad wanderer through the desert or over the ocean, but the less exciting figure of the builder, who renews the ruined walls of the city. . . . We are less likely to be tempted by solitude into Promethean pride: we are far more likely to become cowards in the face of the tyrant who would compel us to lie in the service of the False City. It is not madness we need to flee but prostitution.

These new temptations became a recurring theme. Later in 1949 he contrasted the situation of nineteenth-century poets and that of his contemporaries: “The former were either admired or left alone; the latter are suspect, and the campaign to control them by bribes or threats is likely to intensify.” He now began to write systematically about the ways in which poetry allowed itself to be tempted by these bribes and threats and the ways in which it might learn to resist them.

At the center of his thinking was his idea of history, a word he began using in 1949 in a special idiosyncratic sense. History, as he described it, was the realm of unique, voluntary, irreversible events that occur in linear time. Nature, in contrast, was the realm of recurring, involuntary, reversible events that occur in cyclical time. Human experience occurs in both these realms. Sexual desire is historical to the degree that it focuses on a unique person to the exclusion of all others, and natural to the degree that the instincts that drive it could equally be satisfied by almost anyone else.

The moral point of the distinction between nature and history was that public life, especially in a world increasingly dominated by the machine, tends to treat human beings in statistical and generalizing ways, as if they were predictable elements of the realm of nature. The impersonal power of government or the machine operates in the realm of nature, not history, and the reason that modern governments distrust the arts is that the arts are products of personal, historical choices. A work of art, no matter how much it owes to an anonymous cultural climate or literary tradition, bears witness to the historical realm of individual choices.

In 1951, when Auden was helping to prepare *The Rake’s Progress* for its pre-

mière, he applied these ideas in a series of essays on music. Music was the purest expression of “irreversible historicity” and of all that historicity implies about freedom and self-determination. “Every high C accurately struck utterly demolishes the theory that we are the irresponsible puppets of fate or chance.” Auden’s interest in music had always been inseparable from his curiosity about historical changes in theme and style. He and Kallman had adopted an eighteenth-century style for the libretto of *The Rake’s Progress*; in 1952 they wrote another libretto in an even more archaic Tudor style, *Delia, or A Masque of Night* (which Stravinsky declined to set, having been introduced to the twelve-tone scale whose enthusiasts had declared it the style of the future). In 1953 Auden began collaborating with an early-music group, the New York Pro Musica, founded by Noah Greenberg, and at some of their concerts read the Tudor verses that the group then sang. These concerts issued in an anthology of words and music, *An Elizabethan Song Book*, with an introduction by Auden and Kallman and Greenberg’s musical transcriptions.

For Auden, in many essays and reviews from the early 1950s, the great prophet of individual history was Sigmund Freud. Freud’s greatness, Auden wrote, did not depend on the validity or cohesiveness of his theories—whose revolutionary significance Freud himself often failed to understand. “In fact, if every one of his theories should turn out to be false, Freud would still tower up as the genius who perceived that psychological events are not natural events but historical and that, therefore, psychology as distinct from neurology, must be based on the pre-suppositions and methodology, not of the biologist but of the historian.”

Another name for individual historicity was the human face, the visible sign of uniqueness that was never exactly the same from one moment to the next, but was always a sign for the same individual person. In 1950 Auden wrote a poem, “Numbers and Faces”, about the madness of those who prefer the statistical, anonymous world of numbers to the personal world of faces. The title and much of the content derived from a book written in 1919 by the Austrian thinker Rudolf Kassner, *Zahl und Gesicht*, which became central to Auden’s thinking around 1950, although he seems to have encountered the book a few years earlier. (As a phrase, Kassner’s title means quantity and quality; as separate words, *die Zahl* means number and *das Gesicht* means face or physiognomy.) As Kassner’s “face” corresponded to Auden’s “history”, so Kassner’s “number” corresponded to Auden’s “nature”.

Kassner used the term “Physiognomik” for his whole intellectual and moral enterprise, in which he contrasted, on one hand, unique individuality, finite human flesh, truth as something to be witnessed or exemplified, and, on the other, collective identity, indifferent fate, and truth as something impersonal that can be taught like a method. For Kassner this was the contrast between the Christian and classical worldviews, and Auden’s poem “The Shield of

Achilles” in 1952 portrayed a modern world of statistical impersonality shaped by the same worldview that shaped the fated cruelties of the *Iliad*.

Faces and persons are characterized by their uniqueness as themselves; they are not sets of more or less widely distributed qualities such as beauty, strength, intelligence, or wit. Only a person has a physiognomy; a set of qualities has none. The classical gods have qualities such as shrewdness or strength; the Christian God has a face. The distinction between persons and qualities is a theme that pervades Auden’s poems in the early 1950s, and he spelled out the distinction in a review of George Santayana, who, he suggested, sometimes lost sight of the difference:

The natural human, or at least masculine, tendency, both in love and friendship, is to be attracted by qualities rather than persons. We like people not for what they are in themselves but because they are beautiful or rich or amusing, so if they lose their looks or their money or their wit, we lose our interest. . . .

Plato, if I understand him rightly, took our romantic interest in qualities as his starting point and sought to show, by analysis, that on the temporal level it was self-defeating; if qualities, not persons, are what we want, then the proper place to look for them is in Heaven, among the Universals.

This is perhaps a generous reading of Socrates’ report in the *Symposium* of what Diotima had told him about love; Auden privately referred to Plato as “a man of genius who’s always wrong”—a view that emerged more visibly in Auden’s later work.

To the degree that the modern artist resists the faceless impersonality of the machine, he is right to do so, but if his resistance is merely nostalgic, he may embrace the error that he hopes to escape. Auden borrowed from Henry Adams’s *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres* the distinction between the Dynamo and the Virgin, between the natural world of involuntary recurrent events and the historical world of voluntary unique events; but, Auden wrote, for Adams himself, and for many who shared Adams’s nostalgia, the Virgin was not the source and protector of individual lives but another name for the anonymous and impersonal nature-goddess. As Auden wrote in his poem “Nocturne” around 1951, this goddess was not the unique historical Mary but the cyclical lunar Venus, “Whose majesty is but the mask / That hides a faceless dynamo.” And in a paragraph published in 1962 but probably first written in the early 1950s:

Henry Adams thought that Venus and the Virgin of Chartres were the same persons. Actually, Venus is the Dynamo in disguise, a symbol for an impersonal natural force, and Adams’ nostalgic preference for Chartres

to Chicago was nothing but aestheticism; he thought the disguise was prettier than the reality, but it was the Dynamo he worshiped, not the Virgin.

Starting from the idea of historical uniqueness, Auden developed an elaborate vocabulary for different kinds of social order and for the analogous kinds of formal order that give shape to poems. Unique persons create different kinds of social order from those generated by impersonal forces. Historical individuals, Auden wrote, join into communities united by their shared voluntary love of something; a community is historical because it has no bureaucratic impersonal structure. Communities tend to create societies that can carry out their purposes; societies are natural, not historical, because they have a bureaucratic structure in which individual members have roles distinct from their unique personalities. A group of music-lovers is a community but its love accomplishes nothing; a string quartet is a society that puts into effect the community's love.

A crowd, unlike a society or community, is a mere plurality of things that happen to be together. "The subject matter of poetry", Auden wrote in 1949, "is a crowd of past historic occasions of feeling", some portion of which the poet hopes to convert into a community; but the poem in which that community is embodied is a society, something that the poet must assume will remain unchanged and eternal once it is written. Crowds of feelings are not especially dangerous; but in the real world the extreme version of the crowd was the Public, that faceless purposeless mass that anyone can join when one is no one in particular.

The Public has always existed, but one effect of the mass media is to make it easier than ever to be faceless and impersonal. The culture of celebrity is one result of the growth of the Public: "the public instinctively worships not great men of action or thought but actors, individuals who by profession are not themselves." The moral consequences are all too clear: "The public, therefore, can be persuaded to do or believe anything by those who know how to manage it. It will subscribe thousands of dollars to a cancer research fund or massacre Jews with equal readiness, not because it wants to do either, but because it has no alternative game to suggest."

Auden had included sweeping historical summaries in his poems and prose from the start of his career, and since 1946 he had borrowed the Swiss-American historian Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy's outline of the past thousand years as a series of revolutions against local and sectarian authority. In 1949 he wrote the introductions to a five-volume anthology, *Poets of the English Language*, which he was editing for the Viking Portable Library in collaboration with an American professor, Norman Holmes Pearson. The introductions took the form of a history of English poetry that was also a compressed his-

tory of the revolutionary changes in literary, psychological, and political presuppositions over five centuries. Auden's four-part poem "Memorial for the City", written around the same time, retold much of this history in allusive verse. Also around this time, Auden began writing the sequence "Horae Canonicae", in which the events of a single Good Friday echo the historical events from birth to death, from the rise to the fall of a civilization, and from the Creation to the Apocalypse.

In 1951 Auden published *Nones*, one of the mostly quinquennial volumes of verse in which he collected his recent shorter poems. The book took its title from the central poem in "Horae Canonicae" (he had at this point finished only two of the seven poems in the sequence). Auden tended to organize his collections of shorter poems and volumes of longer poems with numerological precision, and the exact center of *Nones* was the historical survey in "Memorial for the City".

Historical intelligence, in Auden's criticism and reviews, was analogous to moral intelligence. His review of Isaiah Berlin's *The Hedgehog and the Fox*, a book built on the distinction between those whose historical understanding is based on a unified vision and those who perceive multiple purposes and ends, proposed a deeper, more morally unsettling distinction between two kinds of contemporary intellect. Borrowing from *Alice in Wonderland*—Auden wrote repeatedly about the moral seriousness of Lewis Carroll's fantasies—he distinguished between tough-minded Alices, who have nerves and courage but are tempted to imagine themselves the Queen of Heaven, and the weak-minded Mabels, increasingly common in intellectual life, who adopt "a grotesquely tough, grotesquely 'realist' attitude" as a mask over their weakness and terror.

Auden's exasperation at Albert Camus's well-meant confusions in *The Stranger* (in a review titled "Fog in the Mediterranean") was prompted largely by Camus' idea of history in which the only significant events occurred in France and revolutionary changes elsewhere were ignored. His pleasure in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* arose largely from its historical imagination. "If a feigned history is to seem real," Auden said in a broadcast about Tolkien's trilogy, "it must be shown as the joint product of individual character and circumstances, neither, that is, as the operation of a few great men nor as the inevitable result of the play of impersonal forces. The present must have an intelligible relation to the past, neither inevitable nor arbitrary, and the future must appear open; that is, characters in this history may make guesses about what will happen which will turn out to be correct, but, in general, the outcome of their actions will be different from what they either hope or fear." Auden especially praised Tolkien's invention of the many plausible and varied languages and verse-forms that were essential to his invented history. Tolkien, in effect, had written an imaginary version of Auden's



historical accounts of English metre in his *Poets of the English Language* and his lengthy, detailed, and politely devastating review of the historical account in *Rhythm and Tempo*, by the musicologist Curt Sachs.

Some of the most vexing literary questions that Auden was obliged to confront during the 1940s and 1950s were raised by the case of Ezra Pound. In 1946, after Pound was charged with high treason for his broadcasts from Italy during the Second World War, Auden's American publisher, Bennett Cerf at Random House, announced that Pound's work would be dropped from an anthology of American poetry. Auden severed relations with Random House until Cerf reversed this policy: "Begin by banning his poems not because you object to them but because you object to him, and you will end, as the Nazis did, by slaughtering his wife and children." Auden's view had nothing to do with his opinion of Pound's poems; "I do not care for them myself particularly," he told Cerf. He again acted against his literary opinions in 1948 when he defended the award of the first Bollingen Prize to Pound's *Cantos* by a committee of which he himself had been a member. (He seems to have preferred William Carlos Williams for the prize, but finally voted with the majority for Pound.) In the next few years Auden found occasions to praise Pound, not for his poems, but for the knowledge of literary history through which he introduced English poetry to styles and techniques that had not been available to it before: "it might be said of his translation of *The Seafarer* that its effect was to make the spondee respectable in English verse".

Auden focused on revolutionary changes whenever he wrote about large-scale history, but he refused the temptation to think of himself and his art as revolutionary, or to think of his own era as a unique moment of crisis when the moral and aesthetic concerns of calmer eras must be suspended or abandoned. "Revolutionary changes in sensibility or style are rare", he wrote at the start of *The Enchafèd Flood*; he cited only the twelfth-century conception of "amor", the sixteenth-century abandonment of allegory as a common literary genre, and the eighteenth-century rise of Romanticism. Elsewhere, he emphasized that the current artistic climate was invented by an earlier generation of revolutionaries, not by himself and his contemporaries, about whom he made an elaborate show of modesty. He listed the birth years of great modernists from W. B. Yeats (1865) to T. S. Eliot (1888), the youngest of them almost twenty years older than himself, and observed:

These are the figures whom we still think of as the creators and masters of the "modern style": none of them seems old-fashioned. . . . It is clear, then, that so far as the arts are concerned we are not . . . living at the beginning of a new era but in the middle of one. Poets of my generation and of the next, therefore, are in the position, whether we like it or not, of being colonisers rather than explorers. It would be as wrong-headed for us to attempt to make a radical break with the style of our immedi-



ate predecessors as it was right for them so to break with their Victorian elders.

A coloniser is a less romantic and less heroic figure than an explorer, but his task is necessary and perhaps it is easier.

This restates the argument at the end of *The Enchafèd Flood* about the contemporary hero as no longer the romantic nomad but the builder who renews the city walls. Auden's prose leaves mostly unsaid the claim he made in many of his poems: that, for better or worse, the builder and colonizer is more densely engaged in moral complexities and emotional depths than the nomadic explorer, that his work is less spectacular but more profound. He makes no claim that the builder-poet is more virtuous or pure than the lonely explorer; instead, he acknowledges that the builder is more deeply implicated in social and political guilt. The builder who "renews the ruined walls of the city" in *The Enchafèd Flood* is the citizen-poet of "Vespers" (part of the "Horae Canonicae" sequence) who admits complicity in the injustice that sustains any civilization, even the mildest: "For without a cement of blood (it must be human, it must be innocent) no secular wall will safely stand."

Auden wrote the history of his own career, his development as a colonizer and builder, largely in indirect terms, by clarifying his differences with his great poetic predecessors, first Yeats, then Eliot. Both poets embodied temptations that Auden had overcome only after years of struggle. Yeats was the model for political and oratorical poetry, such as "Spain" and "September 1, 1939", that Auden was now ashamed to have written. In the early 1940s he wrote that Yeats's poetry was "lacking in seriousness, which, of course, has nothing to do with solemnity": Yeats's passionate engagement with recurring moments of strong feeling, and his temptation to treat art as a religious ritual, protected him from any serious risk of failure. Auden made no claim to have risked that kind of failure by writing poems that were concerned as much with the truths of history as with the timeless order of poetry, but he knew that he had written greater poems than Yeats's by having done so.

T. S. Eliot offered the subtler temptation to withdraw into the lonely vision of a superior intellect, and Auden had half-yielded to that temptation while reacting against those offered by Yeats. He overcame this temptation by the late 1940s, and during the next few years he found occasions to point out, with the greatest possible courtesy, Eliot's imaginative failings. As an editor at Faber & Faber, Eliot had accepted Auden's first book for publication when Auden was twenty-three, and throughout the 1930s Auden spoke and wrote about Eliot with reverent gratitude. When Auden returned to the Anglican Communion in 1940, he identified his religious views as being close to Eliot's, and echoed Eliot's "Ash-Wednesday" and "Burnt Norton" in the poetry he wrote after his conversion.

Auden soon realized that the focus of his religion was the worldly com-

mandment to love one's neighbor as oneself—something very different from Eliot's unworldly, idealizing religion of a still point and a rose-garden never entered. By writing "In Praise of Limestone" in 1948 he made clear to himself the differences between his own religious emphasis on the sacred importance of the body and Eliot's revulsion from the body's sordidness. When Eliot's *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* was published a few months later, Auden reviewed it for the *New Yorker*, where he treated the book partly as a deliberate joke against liberal pieties—a polite way of dismissing most of Eliot's arguments—and partly as a pharisaic misreading of history in which Eliot credited a privileged social class with the transmission of culture that had in fact been transmitted by the Church. "The value of Mr Eliot's book is not the conclusions he reaches, most of which are debatable, but the questions he raises."

In 1951, reviewing Eliot's *Poetry and Drama*, Auden questioned Eliot's competence as a prosodist and hinted at a lack of imagination in his use of Broadway and West End conventions in his poetic drama. Auden spelled out the moral and theological implications of this lack when he reviewed Eliot's *Complete Poems and Plays* two years later. He again pointed to this lack in Eliot's plays and offered a slightly disingenuous apology for it:

If in *The Family Reunion* and *The Cocktail Party*, one hears an occasional discordant snobbish note, I believe that this is not a matter of sensibility but of technique. While concentrating upon the problem of how to write dramatic verse which shall not be "Little Theatre" and arty, Mr Eliot has postponed the problem of dramatic convention, i.e. he has simply taken on unchanged the conventions of English "High" Comedy that have existed from Congreve down to Noel Coward, under which the decor and the main characters are aristocratic. So long as the dramatic subject is one of the various worldly self-affirmations, like love between the sexes, and the moral values implied are social, the convention is perfectly satisfactory; wealth and good-breeding are quite adequate symbols for gifts and virtues. But when the theme becomes one of spiritual election, of the radical gulf between the Christian faith and *all* worldly values, the symbolism breaks down. I am absolutely certain that Mr Eliot did not intend us to think [in *The Family Reunion*] that Harry is called and not John because John is stupid, or [in *The Cocktail Party*] that Celia is called and not Lavinia because she is of a higher social class, but that is exactly what the comedy convention he is using is bound to suggest.

A few months later, in a review of Eliot's *Selected Essays*, Auden dismissed Eliot's "efforts to be the Matthew Arnold of our time, to diagnose and prescribe for the ills of modern civilization, his defense of dogmatic and organized Christianity against Liberal Protestantism and the Higher Thought". Eliot was not at fault, he suggested, for his failure to influence anyone who did not already

share his views: the fault lay in the difficulty of the problems involved. The complexity of the questions “demands an investigation on a scale larger than that of the occasional essay which is all Mr Eliot has had the time, and, probably, the ambition to write.” In Eliot’s essays on liberal humanism, “I cannot help feeling that . . . Mr Eliot is flogging a horse which not only is dead but was never alive” and that Eliot avoids more-difficult problems because “such a job would take a long time and Mr Eliot has other and, for lovers of poetry, better things to do.” Later the same year, Auden returned to Eliot’s imaginative failings in a parenthetical remark on the difficulty of writing nature poetry: “A writer today may believe, if he is a Christian like T. S. Eliot or Graham Greene, that the temporal world is an analogue of the eternal . . . but it is very difficult for him to imagine what he believes, to portray, for instance a temporal relationship like marriage as anything but sordid and corrupting.”\*

Auden’s theology was more social than solitary, and its social vision was more concerned with equality than with hierarchy. In 1950 he wrote a systematic theological statement in the form of a lecture for a conference at the Yale Divinity School which he later published in the learned Anglican journal *Theology* as “The Things Which Are Caesar’s.” It closed with these remarks on “the besetting temptations for the Christian layman in relation to the evils of the historical order”:

Laziness acknowledges the relation of the present to the past but ignores its relation to the future; impatience acknowledges its relation to the future but ignores its relation to the past; neither the lazy nor the impatient man, that is, accepts the present instant in its full reality and so cannot love his neighbour completely.

In our age it is impatience, perhaps, which is the more characteristic temptation, partly because the historical situation is rather desperate, but mainly because for us the problem of faith is not of lapsing into a childish magical conception of God but of despair, of believing that God has abandoned us. “Trust in God and take short views”, wrote Sydney Smith. In mid-Victorian England this may have had too Whiggish a ring to be sound advice, but as a motto for the laity in 1950 I cannot imagine a better one nor a more terrifying.

During these years Auden worked increasingly at the social tasks of literature: editing anthologies, judging competitions, introducing younger or forgotten writers. He continued to edit the Yale Series of Younger Poets, a job

\* Auden was not the only actor in the Oedipal drama implied in his remarks on Eliot. Eliot’s dustjacket blurbs for the Faber editions of Auden’s books took away as much as they gave. In Eliot’s letter to Auden on 3 February 1948, suggesting that Faber should now publish a volume of Auden’s collected poems, he added: “Any season in which there was no new book of poems by you would be a good season for us.” Auden’s reply included a page on which he had pasted that sentence from Eliot’s letter with the comment: “Oh Tom! What a *naughty* freudian error!”

he had begun in 1946. At first his work on the series had been desultory and not entirely successful. The series was intended partly to provide young poets with a starting point for a career, but the first poet whom Auden chose for the series had died some years earlier. His next two choices were poets whose work tended toward rhapsodic nonsense; conceivably he chose them out of a sense of obligation to find poets entirely unlike himself. (Both were associated with a San Francisco-based group of poets who called themselves Activists; the name referred to the nervous energy of their style and had no political significance.)

In 1949 the head of the Yale University Press hinted repeatedly that Auden might prefer to resign from the series, but Auden ignored the hints and became more assertive and confident in his editorship. Having accepted the least bad of the two or three manuscripts that survived the Press's preliminary screening in 1948, he now rejected all the manuscripts submitted in 1949. Starting in 1950, he chose poets who had learned much of their craft by reading and imitating Auden himself, but who proved to have enough individuality to diverge from his style in their later work. Auden's three earliest choices were largely forgotten; of his eight later choices, seven (one died young) went on to distinguished, productive careers. Auden's introductions to each book focused on the details of the young poet's work in the context of his own current concerns. In 1950 he prefaced Adrienne Cecile Rich's poems with reflections on revolutionary changes in literature. In 1951 his foreword to W. S. Merwin's poems considered the ways in which poems combine unique and recurring experiences. In 1952 he introduced Edgar Bogardus's poems with thoughts on whether the writing of poetry can be taught (a theme developed in detail a few years later in his fantasy of a "training school for poets"). In 1953 he prefaced Daniel G. Hoffman's poems with thoughts about nature and the machine. In 1955 (he again made no selection in 1954) he prefaced John Ashbery's poems with questions about the difficulty of translating a private mythology into publicly available verse.

In 1951 he began a dozen years of collaboration with Jacques Barzun and Lionel Trilling as editors of two subscription book clubs, first The Readers' Subscription, later The Mid-Century Book Society. The editors jointly chose the titles that would be offered to subscribers and divided among themselves the task of writing brief reviews of their selections for a monthly newsletter. After first refusing, Auden let himself be persuaded by Barzun, whose company he enjoyed and whose learning and enthusiasm he admired. With Trilling he was always cordial, but he seems to have been put off by Trilling's humorlessness, and he said privately that Trilling did not like literature. Auden's reviews for The Readers' Subscription newsletter *The Griffin* covered social and political subjects that other magazines might not have assigned to a poet, and gave him a chance to write about previously published books that continued to interest him. The Readers' Subscription was conceived and

managed by a former student of Barzun and Trilling at Columbia, Gilman Kraft, who had already begun a predatory career in publishing and whose sharp practices led to the editors' joint angry resignation in 1959; Auden was clear-sighted enough to foresee the crisis when Barzun and Trilling refused to hear anything against someone who had studied at their feet.

In his early forties (he was born in 1907) Auden had the status of an elder statesman, invited to speak at solemn conferences and symposia. He seems to have shored up his courage at such events by adopting a style intended to dispel suspicions that poets were frivolous by nature. The lectures he wrote for *The Enchaféd Flood* in 1949 were compressed, allusive, and partly written in the philosophical shorthand of postwar secular existentialism. Auden had long since tried to avoid obscurity in his poems, but he was still pursuing it in his academic prose. During a visit to Mount Holyoke for a two-lecture series in 1950 he wrote to Kallman: "The first lecture was last night and the most severe I have ever given—a cross between Whitehead and Heidegger—but my Dickens-Firbank one will be gentler." All his later lectures were gentler than his severe one at Mount Holyoke, partly because he felt increasingly comfortable in his role of public sage while he taught himself to speak moral truths in a diffident, sometimes comic manner that achieved authority by refusing to claim it.

Auden's severe lecture at Mount Holyoke reused some of the densely philosophical *pensées* he had written in 1949 as reflections on poetry for a tribute to Saint-John Perse. Their layout and manner echoed those of Paul Valéry's notebooks (for which Auden wrote an introduction in 1955), which in turn echoed the *pensées* of Pascal. Because Auden's 1949 essay said nothing about Saint-John Perse, it was omitted from the tribute, but he expanded it into a new version, retaining the title "Nature, History and Poetry", and gave it to his friend Fr. William J. Lynch, the editor of *Thought*, a quarterly devoted largely to Roman Catholic theological studies, published by Fordham University, a Jesuit institution. The essay appeared in *Thought* in 1950, followed at two-year intervals by two further essays, "Notes on the Comic" and "Balaam and the Ass: The Master-Servant Relationship in Literature", each less severe than the last. A few traces of Auden's academic manner survived in "Notes on the Comic" but it was absent from "Balaam and the Ass", which included material from Auden's "gentler" lecture on Dickens and Firbank in 1950.

"Notes on the Comic" and "Balaam and the Ass" are serious manifestos against high seriousness. Each finds in low characters and comic situations expressions of the greatest moral truths. "Notes on the Comic", after considering inside-out umbrellas, sexual jokes, banality, Spoonerisms, puns, parody, flying, satire, *Twelfth Night*, *Charley's Aunt*, and *Der Rosenkavalier*, ends with a section headed "Falstaff, or the Comic Presentation of the State of Grace". It concludes: "In his own way, Falstaff is, like Don Quixote, the Knight

of the Doleful Countenance, the Suffering Servant who sacrifices his life for the sake of others.” “Balaam and the Ass” pointedly ignores the economic and political relation of the master-servant relation in real life, and considers instead its literary expressions as instances of mutual love and voluntary commitment. The essay explores a dozen varieties of the master-servant relation from Shakespeare’s plays, Mozart’s operas, *Don Quixote*, and the inner relations among different aspects of a single person, illustrated by a brief comic dialogue about someone whose foot is stepped on in a train. The final section analyses the master-servant relations in *Around the World in Eighty Days* and P. G. Wodehouse’s novels, ending with this comment on an exchange between Bertie Wooster and Jeeves: “So speaks comically—and in what other mode than the comic could it on earth truthfully speak?—the voice of Agapé, of Holy Love.”

In 1939 Auden had renounced the politically engaged role that he had earlier both embraced and rejected—often in the same poem or essay—but his public reputation was still that of a politically minded radical writer rather than that of an ethically and religiously minded liberal one. When Auden wrote for left-leaning magazines in the 1940s and 1950s, he tended to provide a mild disruption of political orthodoxies. In 1950 the editors of *Partisan Review* worried in print over the new interest in religion that they observed among their intellectual contemporaries; Auden was one of about thirty writers who responded to the editors’ invitation to comment, and his remarks focused on the editors’ coarse misunderstanding of religion itself. A few months later, reviewing a biography of Oscar Wilde for *Partisan Review*, he dismissed the anarchist author’s account of Wilde as a political thinker and social victim:

Nothing is clearer in the history of the three trials than his unconscious desire that the truth should come out. This desire was not caused by guilt in the conventional sense but by the wish to be loved as he really was. One suspects that his secret day-dream was of a verdict of guilty being brought in whereupon Judge, Jury and public would rise to their feet, crown him with flowers and say: “We ought, of course, to send you to gaol, Mr Wilde, but we all love you so much that in this case we are delighted to make an exception.”

The review ends by praising *The Importance of Being Earnest* in much the same terms Auden used when praising Falstaff and Jeeves as examples of holy love: “Wilde, like anyone who has been exposed to the culture of Christendom, knew, however unconsciously, that pleasure and happiness are distinct, and that happiness does not depend upon power but upon love”. The subtitle of the review, “St Oscar, the Homintern Martyr”, was meant to annoy Auden’s acquaintances who thought of homosexuality in terms of its outcast social status rather than as a variety of love with the same kinds of temptations and re-

wards as any other. (The Homintern, an echo of the Comintern, was the term used among Auden's circle to refer to homosexual chauvinists.)

In the farther-left weekly pages of the *Nation*, around the same time, Auden praised Tocqueville as a "counter-revolutionary", one who defends the just causes of a revolution better than the revolutionaries themselves can do:

De Tocqueville stands out as one of the noblest examples of an attitude which may be called the Counter-Revolution. This must not be confused with Reaction, which refuses to recognize the just element in the Revolution and wishes to regard it as a simple rebellion. The Counter-Revolutionary has no wish to return to the condition which preceded the outbreak of revolution; he wishes rather to save the revolution from failure through the inevitable over-emphasis and over-simplification of the revolutionary party.

This states in political terms the argument that Auden made elsewhere about revolutionaries and colonizers in the arts. Auden concluded his review of Tocqueville with a variation on the theme of nature and history:

The central issue of the world revolution at present in progress is the right of every human body to the food, light, housing, medical attention, and so forth necessary for health. . . . The body knows nothing of freedom, only of necessities, and these are the same for all bodies. Hence the tendency of the revolutionary party in concentrating on this one goal to deny all liberty and all minority rights. In so far as we are bodies, we are or ought to be revolutionaries; in so far, however, as we are also souls and minds, we are or ought to be counter-revolutionaries . . .

Auden endorsed the counter-revolutionary position in a long essay on Sydney Smith (apparently an early version of his introduction to a selection from Smith that finally appeared in 1956) in which he defined Smith's politics in these terms:

Sydney Smith is a perfect expression of the Whig mentality, of that English form of Liberalism which has always perplexed and sometimes enraged Continental observers both on the political Right and on the political Left. European liberalism, which has normally been anti-clerical, republican, and materialist, finds it bewildering that social reform in England should owe so much to religion—that the British Labour Party, for example, should be so closely associated with the Evangelical movement, and the increasing concern with juvenile delinquency and other cultural problems of urbanisation with Anglo-Catholicism . . .

In "The Things Which Are Caesar's" Auden had cited Sydney Smith's advice, "Trust in God and take short views", as a motto against impatience and laziness in relation to history. He made the same point in his essay on Smith in



terms of social justice: "Both his character which accepted the duty of the moment and then tried to get the most fun out of it, and his practical experience of the problems of the poor, made him an ideal person for attacking injustice."

One common form of laziness and impatience in twentieth-century literary culture was contempt for the bourgeois. Auden's defense of Smith's Whiggism was one version of his defense of the bourgeois, as in a review of Dostoyevsky's travel diaries:

Poor Bourgeois! No other social class has ever caught it so hot in literature. To begin with, nearly all writers have come from it . . . It is only natural that writers should attack most violently the faults of which they have first-hand experience from childhood on. And then, to look at, the bourgeois is, it must be admitted, an unattractive object. He is a windbag, he worries about the future and what his neighbors are saying, he doesn't know how to wear clothes, he is either too fat or too thin. Even his virtues of industry and prudence are dull. . . .

But when he is considered morally, the bourgeois has some questions to put to his critics. . . . If Dostoevsky could return to earth and visit such countries as England or the United States, he would not like us any better than before, but he would have to admit that it has been in precisely those countries where the bourgeoisie were strongest that they have been able to impose limitations and discipline themselves, while those countries with an aristocratic ruling class resisted all reform until it was too late. In a time of rapid historical change, the very vagueness and fluidity of the bourgeois, his lack of a clearly defined notion of his class to which he must be loyal, is an advantage both practically and morally.

Auden refused partisan, ethnic, and ideological loyalties in the morals and politics that he derived from his sense of historical uniqueness and the universality of the body. He knew that he had been helped toward his adult understanding of these matters by the bourgeois values that he had rebelled against as an adolescent.

One step toward this mature understanding had been Auden's renunciation, during his first years in America, of the political loyalties that he had ambivalently adopted in the 1930s. Soon after he arrived in New York he began to praise Henry James as an heroic example of an artist who never wavered in his service to his art, and whose elaborate style was the moral instrument through which James examined the finest details of nuance and scruple. Then, around 1948, Auden learned from the newly published *Notebooks of Henry James* that this style was not the instrument with which James had organized the subtleties of his fiction but the means by which he thought and wrote about everything. James had not limited his aestheticism to his art, where it belonged, but extended it into his life. As Auden told his secretary

and scholarly assistant Alan Ansen: “the *Notebooks* show that he was writing like that all the time. And I find that a very suspect attitude for an artist.”

James now became one of Auden’s illustrations of the ways in which writers can evade responsibilities by not noticing that they exist. He wrote in a review of Keats’s letters:

Dedicated artists are liable to suffer from two complaints, a humorless over-earnest attitude toward art, and a lack of ordinary social responsibility, a feeling that what they are doing is so important that it is the duty of others to support them. Reading Rilke’s letters or the Journal of Henry James, for example, there are times when their tone of hushed reverence before the artistic mystery becomes insufferable and one would like to give them a good shaking; similarly, the incessant harping on money in the correspondence of Baudelaire or Wagner provokes in the most sympathetic admirer the reaction of a sound bourgeois—“Why doesn’t he go and look for a job?”

From both of these defects Keats is completely and refreshingly free. . . .

In 1946, in an introduction to a reprint of James’s *The American Scene*, Auden had written at length about the differences between American and European writers. He resumed this theme in 1949 when the Jewish immigrant writer Anzia Yezierska pestered him into writing an introduction to her memoir *Red Ribbon on a White Horse*. Yezierska’s career had included a sudden rise to fame, a disastrous summons to Hollywood, and an episode when she perhaps had been John Dewey’s lover; she now hoped Auden would write a lyrical celebration of her genius, and was loudly horrified to read his sober analysis of the temptations faced by writers and immigrants in America. (Auden placated her by agreeing to wholesale cuts, which are restored in this edition.)

In later essays he used *Oliver Twist* and *Huckleberry Finn* as exemplars of the moral and emotional differences between Europeans and Americans. Europeans, he wrote, believe in some form of unchanging natural law that can be codified and explained by professionals, whereas Americans find it hard “to believe that there is anything in human nature that will not change” and so refuse to grant authority to any professional clerisy. *Huckleberry Finn*’s decision to take Jim into safety “is a pure act of moral improvisation”, based on no general law and providing him with no template for future actions; Americans tend never to rely on general principles in art or morals. Auden had noted in his introduction to *The American Scene* that American writers tended to be utterly unlike each other in ways that the writers of any European country were not; now he understood this variety in terms of America’s moral improvisation, its refusal of precedent and professionalism.

In 1953 T. S. Eliot commissioned Auden to compile a *Faber Book of Modern*

*American Verse*. “What a way to make enemies”, Auden wrote in a letter to Norman Holmes Pearson, although his choices seem to have been evenhanded enough to satisfy everyone except Laura Riding, who for years had refused permission to reprint anything she had written. Auden’s selection of eighty-one poets began with Edwin Arlington Robinson and Edgar Lee Masters (both born in 1869) and ended with Robert Horan (one of his early selections for the Yale Series of Younger Poets) and Anthony Hecht, both born in 1922; Auden excluded anyone younger than thirty at the time he began compiling the book. The poetic styles represented in the book ranged from the formal elegance of Yvor Winters through the comic doggerel of Ogden Nash to the laconic rhapsodies of Robert Duncan; the only noteworthy style that was absent was the unreadable sub-Poundian avant-garde that emerged in the 1920s. Auden gave nine or more pages to Robert Frost, Vachel Lindsay, Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, Ezra Pound, Marianne Moore, and Allen Tate; his generosity to Stevens, Pound, and Tate was perhaps more diplomatic than committed, but he genuinely admired the others.

His introduction praised American poetry for its openness and curiosity (qualities exemplified by his own selection) despite individual poets’ tendency toward a narrowness of tone:

There is much in Tennyson that Longfellow would never have dared to write, for the peculiar American mixture of Puritan conscience and democratic licence can foster in some cases a genteel horror of the coarse for which no Englishman has felt the need. On the other hand Longfellow had a curiosity about the whole of European literature compared with which Tennyson, concerned only with the poetry of his own land and the classical authors on whom he was educated, seems provincial.

After *The Enchafèd Flood* Auden wrote lengthy essays and series of connected essays, but he did not publish another separate book of prose until *The Dyer’s Hand* in 1962. Much of that book was made up of material from Auden’s lectures during his five-year term as Professor of Poetry at Oxford that began in 1956; much of the rest was rewritten from essays, lectures, and *pensées* written in the late 1940s and early 1950s, not all of which had been published at the time. Auden had been planning for some years to put together a book based on this material. An editorial note in the Fordham University quarterly *Thought* reported in 1952 that Auden was working on “a commentary on many things called *Thinks*”. Perhaps around 1954 he wrote out a list of nine titles of essays that might be included in such a book, some already published, some delivered as lectures, some perhaps never written. The first item was “Hic et Ille”, a title that did not appear in print until 1956, but which was probably his original title for a set of notes and aphorisms published only in a French translation in 1952 under the title “De Droite et de Gauche”. Other items on the list matched more or less closely the titles of published

works: “Nature, History and Poetry”, “Notes on the Comic”, and “Notes on Opera”. Others corresponded to lectures that Auden gave on his annual speaking tours starting in 1950: “Dingley Dell and the Fleet” and “The Hero” (titled in the lecture hall “The Hero in Modern Poetry”). Two others, “Pothooks and Hangers” and “The Word and the Tribe”, seem to have used (or were intended to use) extracts and notes from his reviews and *pensées* (“pothooks and hangers” refers to the ill-formed letters of a scrawled handwriting; Eliot had paraphrased Mallarmé on the “language of the tribe”).

Another title on the list was “The Dyer’s Hand” (a phrase from Shakespeare’s sonnet 111). Auden used this title for a series of three broadcast lectures in 1955 that brought together many recurring themes from the past half-dozen years. The first of these lectures modified his earlier contrast of nature and history by juxtaposing two ideal, imaginary figures, the Poet and the Historian, who exist in uneasy tension in almost all real poets of the past nineteen hundred years. The contrast between them summarizes the moral and literary dilemmas that Auden had been exploring throughout his recent work.

The Poet, he explained, is that aspect of every real poet which celebrates power, beauty, cleverness, wisdom, and all other gifts of fate. He is interested in visible deeds, not invisible choices, because the characters in his poems can never be anything other than what they are. He charms his audience into forgetting themselves in their fascination with the timeless, imaginary world evoked by his poems. He is fascinated by the magical properties of numbers. The Historian, in contrast, is interested in the way in which his characters become themselves when they could have become something else; he does not distinguish between the gifted and the ungifted but between “those who are faithful to the True Voice, however difficult its commands or promises, and so become what they ought to become; and those who, through indifference or through believing the Lying Voices, which may be more plausible than the True, are unfaithful and fail to fulfil their proper destiny.” His audience believes his stories not because they become unaware of anything else but “because they recognise in what they hear something which they know to be true about themselves.” The Historian is indifferent to all numbers except One, the only number that to him is real.

These imaginary figures collaborated in the making of almost all of Auden’s poems, but one or the other took charge of each individual poem. The Poet seems to have written “Precious Five”, which ends by acknowledging “that singular command / I do not understand / *Bless what there is for being*”; in the same year, 1950, the Historian seems to have written “The Chimeras”, which ends in a different kind of acknowledgement about the historical failure of those who voluntarily shed their personal selves: “It is good that they are but not that they are thus.” In his essays and lectures throughout the 1950s Auden tended to adopt the voice of either the Poet or the Historian, the first

when he wanted to emphasize art's indifference to politics and morals, the second when he wanted to emphasize art's ability to clarify moral dilemmas without pretending to solve them.

Auden gathered the shorter poems he had written from 1951 through 1954 in *The Shield of Achilles*, which appeared in 1955. The book opens with the sequence of seven "Bucolics"; then a group of shorter poems, many of them variations on the theme of personal speech and its relation to impersonal performance and personal choice; then the full sequence of "Horae Canonicae" including the two poems already printed in *Nones*. Almost all the poems Auden wrote in 1955 were meditations on history: "Makers of History", "The Old Man's Road", "The Epigoni", and "Homage to Clio". The last of these (which gave its name to Auden's next collection of poems, published in 1960), was a lightly disguised hymn to the Virgin as the source and defender of historical uniqueness, and the poem deliberately combined Protestant and Roman Catholic theology.

Auden's published prose expressed personal commitments and alluded to personal feelings, but was seldom autobiographical in any explicit way. Auden was especially reticent in his prose in the 1940s, although at times he hid personal secrets where an attentive and sympathetic reader might find them. In 1948, for example, he wrote a poem titled "A Household" (first published in *Nones* in 1951), about a successful businessman and his harridan mother and crybaby son, with no hint of any deeper meaning. Perhaps a few months later, he began his *New Yorker* review of Eliot's *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* with the conceit that "Like most important writers, Mr T. S. Eliot is not a single figure but a household". That household, he continued, had three permanent residents: the archdeacon, a violent passionate grandmother, and a boy who plays practical jokes. Without this oblique clue that the real subject of Auden's "A Household" was another, unnamed poet, similarly imagined as a household of three persons from three generations, the poem's autobiographical code could never have been deciphered.

Then, in the early 1950s, Auden began writing about his past in a less indirect way, but also in a way that treated his experiences as generic to his class rather than unique to himself. A review-essay in 1952, "Our Italy," begins with reminiscences of his contemporaries' attitudes toward different European cultures. Three years later, his review of Leslie Fiedler's *An End to Innocence*, "Authority in America", explored the motives and nuances of his and his friends' politics in the 1930s.

In 1955 Auden wrote his first extended autobiographical prose since 1940 as a contribution to *Modern Canterbury Pilgrims*, a book of twenty-three essays by converts to the Anglican Communion. It opened by stating the connection between Christianity and individual history: "The Christian doctrine of a personal God implies that the relation of every human being to Him is

unique and historical, so that any individual who discusses the Faith is compelled to begin with autobiography.” The essay weaves together a personal interpretation of Christian doctrines and a history of Auden’s changing attitudes toward them. After losing his childhood faith based on magical rituals, he went through a period of indifference, until, in his thirties, he discovered an adult faith that combined Protestant doctrines of man as “a spirit, a conscious person endowed with free will,” who has “a unique ‘existential’ relation to God” and Catholic doctrines that “stress the physical reality of the flesh into which the Word was made.” The closing paragraph sidesteps the problem of choosing between these two sets of doctrines: “Into the question of why I should have returned to Canterbury instead of proceeding to Rome, I have no wish to go in print. The scandal of Christian disunity is too serious.” The unwritten answer to this question seems to have had something to do with his understanding of Anglicanism as a unique combination of Catholicism and Protestantism, his memory of the Anglo-Catholicism of his childhood, and his continuing sense that the most dangerous temptations of his age were the temptations to accept authority.

Around the same time, Auden wrote a seriously comic counterpart to this essay in the form of a questionnaire—to which he supplied his own answers—on the nature of one’s private image of Eden; he published it in the magazine of the prep school he had attended in his teens. The title of the questionnaire was a fragment from the *Purgatorio*: “*Qui è l’uom’ felice*” (“here man is happy”); its double subtitle was “Everyman in His Eden: A Psychological Parlour-Game for a Wet Sunday Afternoon”. The questionnaire asked, “In your Eden what is its . . .”, followed by a list of twenty-six items, including landscape, climate, methods of lighting and heating, forms of public entertainment, and much else. Auden’s answers resembled the account he gave of his private Eden in “Vespers”; to his final question, “Any feature, important to you, not covered by your answers to the preceding questions”, his answer was “*Censored.*”

In August 1955, not long after writing these two pieces, he received a letter from Enid Starkie, whose biography of Rimbaud he had reviewed in 1939 but whom he seems never to have met, asking whether he would agree to be nominated for the chair of Professor of Poetry at Oxford, the only professorship chosen by an election in which all Oxford M.A.’s were eligible to vote. The winner would be obliged to give three lectures during each of the five years of his term. Auden at first refused. His American citizenship, he said, would prevent his election either on statutory or political grounds; and he could not afford to give up his winters writing for money in New York in order to be in Oxford during all three academic terms. Starkie persisted, and in November Auden finally agreed to be nominated for the election scheduled for February 1956, which he won by a small margin. His mixed feelings about

his victory, and about his inaugural lecture scheduled for June 1956, prompted him to find new ways of speaking to an audience, and new ways of both hiding and revealing.

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