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W. H. AUDEN'S SOCIOLOGICAL CONCERN:
INFLUENCES OF MARX, FREUD, AND
LAWRENCE IN HIS EARLY POETRY

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The name of Wystan Hugh Auden is certainly a significant one in contemporary poetry. An heir to the tradition of Eliot and Pound, he has conceived a style uniquely his own and established himself as a major poet in his own right. Although certain critics may question his ultimate importance in English literature, they must agree that he has had considerable influence as a man of letters during the last three decades. The volume of work Auden has written in that time is large and inconsistent in quality. For this reason, definitive critical evaluation of his value will probably be some time in coming.

In spite of the disparity of opinion regarding Auden, critics find general agreement on the idea that his work reveals the spirit of the times. Auden grew up in a changing world with certain unique problems. His writing reflects the spirit of the time, symbolized by the industrial revolution and the first global war of modern times. Beginning his poetic career in the days of worldwide economic depression, he and many other writers were profoundly influenced by the social problems that resulted. In their work they revealed these problems. There seemed to many at this time to be no

way out of the depression except through the establishment of Marxist or Fascist systems. It was this dilemma and its consequent sociological implications that provided the primary inspiration for Auden's early work.

Auden's first poetry is perhaps the best revelation of his social concerns. It represents the initial steps in the lengthy dialectic which affects him no less than many other contemporary writers. This involves the gradual shift from overt Marxian doctrine to an orthodox Christianity. As such the early work is certainly a first step to any effective study of the poet, and may eventually be regarded as some of his most important work from a literary standpoint. For immediate purposes of consideration, his early poetry may be said to comprise the 1930 collection. This consists of thirty poems and three prose-verse dramatic works, Paid on Both Sides, The Orators, and The Dance of Death. Auden's principal thoughts at the first stages of his literary career are outlined in these works.

Restricting consideration to the 1930 collection largely eliminates a major problem in the study of Auden's poetry. In his later work he is seen as a more prolific writer and treats a variety of themes and does not lend himself to the study of a single topic. His first works are generally centered around the theme of social conflict which so obsessed him at the time. They provide a definitive cross-section of his ideas. Most significant, perhaps, is the appearance here of an Auden

philosophy, a concept which is seen to be not only a product of the times but also of the great thinkers with whom he had been acquainted either personally or through their writings. Much evidence in the 1930's points to such outside influences on his work, and foremost among these are the theories of Karl Marx as well as those of Sigmund Freud and D. H. Lawrence. From these three writers Auden has constructed a synthesis of his own.

The overall result of this synthesis is a sociological concern which is largely peculiar to Auden and which becomes a dominant theme in the early poetry. Auden reveals in the first poems and plays a theory of social sickness. Living as he did in an age when all values seemed to be breaking up and the world seemed headed for a social revolution of some type, he feared instinctively that society had become sick. The rising tides of Fascism and Nazism convinced him that a new and terrible social order would arise out of the ruins of the old economic system which the Great Depression had killed.

In his poetry he attempts to explore the reasons for this sickness of society. Since nations are made up of individuals, the root of the problem must of necessity be in the sickness of the individual. The illness of an entire civilization, then, can be cured only through the cure of the individuals who compose it. The problem is one of extending the microcosm to the macrocosm, and what Auden really wants is to make a new order. Insistence on this idea often

gives his poems an appearance of propaganda, which his detractors say weakens the work.

With the basic theme of social sickness, Auden uses ideas from Marx, Freud, and Lawrence to build his own philosophy. In that area of his thought which is of a more cosmic nature, he shows definite overtones of Marxism. This is especially evident in his treatment of society as a whole. He has a definite concern with the problem of class conflict and at times reflects the socialistic doctrine of historical inevitability. When he narrows his view to the individuals who comprise the society, he is more conscious of the Freudian and Lawrencian theories. Here Lawrence's ideas about individual sense of guilt and the necessity for moral reformation are of great significance. Freud, of necessity closely related to Lawrence because of his psychological preoccupations, is in the background of Auden's theme of the subconscious. The idea of the death wish as a primary cause of the sickness of the middle class is recurrent in Auden and is essentially Freudian.

It may well be that the Marxist influence is the greatest one in the 1930 collection. Many of the works here deal specifically with the problem of class conflict and the social ills which engender it. Marx felt that history moved toward an inevitable goal--the classless society. In his concept the historical flux was in waves. First came the wave of aristocratic domination. This perpetuated a more or

less tyrannical society until the rise of the middle class, which brought a new order. The wave of middle class or bourgeois dominance was the second. Marx predicted that at some time in the future the wave of proletariat revolution would come. This period would complete the age old leveling process and bring about the classless society.

There were many in the days which followed World War I who applied this theory, and saw in the economic disorder signs of its fulfillment. Capitalizing on the idea, the regimes of Hitler and Mussolini rose quickly. Auden shows traces of this concept in his own work. Indeed, one of his basic assumptions is the "death of the old order".¹ The Great Depression brought the end of this order, and Auden felt he saw a definite social revolution as the only result thereof. The situation in Italy and Germany seemed to suggest the direction this revolution might take.

Marx felt that the middle class was doomed, and to many in the period of the depression this seemed to be the case. The economic ruin in England gave Auden further cause for this belief, and he became susceptible to Marxist thinking. In his early poems he explores the problem, implying that the old social customs must go to make way for a new order. He sees a type of Marxism as the best way of achieving

¹Randall Jarrell, "Changes of Attitude and Rhetoric in Auden's Poetry," Southern Review, VII (1941), 326-49.

this order.

It is in the problem of achieving a social reformation that Auden turns to the theories of Freud. In contrast to Marx, who felt that society shapes men, Freud felt that men shape society. The latter idea is more integral to Auden's ideology. It is directly in the background of Auden's belief that mass sickness is basically a result of individual sickness. Jarrell feels that Auden saw the Fascist revolts at the time as a manifestation of this idea. "Our fundamental activity is a guilty revolt against a guilty authority, . . . a revolt by the neurotic and diseased . . . against a neurotic and diseased culture."²

This leads to another of the important themes Auden takes from Freud, that of the sense of guilt. He feels that this is at the root of all the disease and illness he describes in his poetry.³ This guilt is ubiquitous in Auden's mind since in his Freudian belief the mind is reduced to an essentially animal level and that man is ruled by the hypocrisy of his sick mind.⁴ It is the cure of these ills that Auden is seeking to find in his poetry, and to find it

²Randall Jarrell, "Freud to Paul: Stages of Auden's Ideology," Partisan Review, XII (1945), 437.

³Monroe K. Spears, The Poetry of W. H. Auden: The Disenchanted Island. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), 10.

⁴Jarrell, "Freud to Paul," p. 442.

he inevitably returns to Marx.

A more subtle influence on his work is that of D. H. Lawrence. He, too, lends to Auden the theme of guilt. Like Freud, he placed great value on the subconscious as a ruling force over external situations. In Auden the subconscious is more ordered than in Lawrence; but the idea emerges in the belief that physical illness is invariably symptomatic of an inner illness.⁵ Another of Lawrence's views which appears from time to time in Auden's poetry is the idea of sexuality. Lawrence felt that the feeling of guilt should be removed from sex as it served only to harm the relationship. He contended also that guilt feelings connected with sex were definitely injurious and for this reason was a violent critic of Victorian morality. His ideology is closely related in some ways to Freudianism, and it is often difficult to distinguish one influence from the other. However, in numerous places in the 1930 collection there are direct allusions to Lawrence. In one of the odes in The Orators he mentions him by name. In Paid on Both Sides he alludes to some of Lawrence's characters.

What Auden has done is to fuse the ideas of Lawrence and Freud into his own concept of man within himself. In Lawrence the subconscious is allowed full sway and should be subjected to little control. Freud possessed a less anarchistic view, contending that the lower levels of consciousness

⁵Spears, The Poetry of W. H. Auden, p. 8.

should be understood and sublimated. Auden has taken Lawrence's idea that the consciousness is sick and that cerebral or reasoning power has been misused. He is also influenced by the view that the subconscious is really the healthy part of the mind. However, he does not pursue this concept to its conclusions. He accepts in some degree the Freudian belief that the subconscious sickness is responsible for an individual's "neuroses". The idea of the "animal" in man is prevalent in Auden. He agrees with both Freud and Lawrence in the need for a moral and psychological reformation.⁶

The triple influence of Marx, Freud, and Lawrence in Auden's poetry derives from his background--both educational and environmental. The second of these two factors has already been alluded to, and is seen in the historical situation of the world into which Auden was born. On a smaller scale, his family and personal life had an undoubted effect on him. His education, however, is more important. He is supposed to have read widely, in poetry of diverse literatures and periods while at Oxford. He evidently knew the well-known poets of modern times. However, he also was familiar with Old English poetry,⁷ and the bleakness and archaic verse of these poems fit in rather well with his own work. This is

⁶Ibid., p. 38.

⁷Donald Stauffer, "Which Side Am I Supposed to Be On?: The Search for Beliefs in Auden's Poetry," Virginia Quarterly Review, XXII (1946), 571-72.

especially true in his attempts to depict the desolation of English society.

Auden's knowledge extends also to the philosophers and religious writers. He later wrote poems about a variety of these thinkers of many different periods. Montaigne, Voltaire, and Freud in philosophy as well as Pascal and Luther in religion are among these.⁸

Of far more significance here is his direct experience with social upheavals around him. The postwar economic troubles were acute in his native Yorkshire. Unemployment was widespread throughout the mining area during the time before he went to Oxford.⁹ After Oxford he went to Germany, where a group of literary figures gathered at Berlin. Life here was carefree, and much time was spent in the cabarets and theaters. Auden also absorbed some writings of the German psychologists, such as Groddeck and Freud.¹⁰ There, too, he began to contemplate the possible effect of the depression. Hitler had not yet become an important figure but Mussolini's Fascism was already an established fact in Italy and Auden saw a possible trend in the making.

Although other factors in his background could probably be cited, Auden's education at Oxford and his stay in Germany are perhaps the most important ones in relation to his poetry.

⁸Ibid., p. 572.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Spears, The Poetry of W. H. Auden, p. 4.

From the two can be gained a philosophical as well as sociological outlook. Numerous literary influences could be named in addition to Marx, Freud, and Lawrence. It is these three, however, that have the greatest bearing on Auden's concern with social sickness. In regard to this specific theme, these three are most in evidence. For this reason, any discussion on the motif of social sickness in Auden's early poetry must take into consideration the three figures of Marx, Freud, and Lawrence.

CHAPTER II

THE MARXIAN INFLUENCE

It is not difficult to understand Auden's attraction to the ideas of Karl Marx. This was a common attachment at the time, and it has been said that in the late 1920's and early 1930's poets and leftists were one and the same. They were disturbed by the international scene and felt that Christianity and capitalism were not giving satisfactory answers to the sociological problems which beset the world. These literary men saw that modern civilization, especially through science, capitalism, and democracy, had broken up. Against a background such as this, they began to cry for an ideal world. The institution which they felt could best achieve this ideal was the Marxist classless state.¹¹

Auden himself was not a true Marxist, for he did not believe that society shapes man's morals. However, the general tenets of Marxism proved attractive to him in the early years of his poetic life. He was drawn to the ideology primarily because of its exclusively intellectual discipline. Moreover, the entire Marxist concept seemed to be free from any religious or mystical considerations.¹² This, too, un-

¹¹Stauffer, "Which Side Am I Supposed to Be On?", p. 574.

¹²Richard Hoggart, Auden: An Introductory Essay (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1957.

doubtedly appealed to him, for he was in sympathy with the idea that religion could not really solve the problems of contemporary life.

With the ascendancy of Marxism in English literary life, a significant conflict arose. Auden and his colleagues saw a definite need for changes in society. Since they were fundamentally individualists, however, they tended to place personal considerations above the social considerations. The system of Marx reverses this idea, and they were forced to modify their own views. "In Marxism", says Beach, "they met with a social philosophy which attributed the system of moral values approved in any given culture to material (economic) causes connected with the prevailing system of production."¹³ Since the poets felt that the Marxist state was the best answer to the deterioration of the twentieth century world, they molded their own views to fit the philosophy.¹⁴

The way in which Auden met the challenge of the philosophical conflict has a great deal of bearing on his ultimate ideology. In effect, what happens is that his own interpretation of the Marxist theory is somewhat different from that of his associates, some of whom went further than he in embracing the concept. Auden's stand is somewhat ambiguous. It is clear from his poetry that he believes the individual as well as the society to be sick. However, he never shows

¹³Joseph Warren Beach, The Making of the Auden Canon (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1957), pp. 22-23.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 23.

exactly to what extent the personal derives from the social or the social from the personal.¹⁵

Spears has professed astonishment at the fact that Auden's work has been related so much to political theory. He feels that in Poems and The Orators the political implications are obscure at best.¹⁶ However obscure these implications may be, there is no doubt that they exist. One should consider especially the times involved and the reformatory tone of some of the poems. Marxist doctrine reaches the surface most notably in The Dance of Death.

It is in such instances that the Marxian influence on Auden's theme of social sickness is most readily apparent. The idea as well as the theories behind it actually pervade the entire 1930 collection. It has already been mentioned that Auden feels that all society suffers from a tangible illness. This illness is directly perceptible in the situation of postwar Europe and the world. He contends that the world has deteriorated greatly and that a real need for a reformation exists.

Granted the existence of a social sickness and the need for its cure, one arrives at the central focus of Auden's poetry: the call for social reform. The present system, especially in the economic area, must be abandoned and a new one established. He feels that this can be done through a

¹⁵Ibid., p. 24.

¹⁶Spears, The Poetry of W. H. Auden, p. 16.

mass reformation of individual minds. Only if each man concentrates on removing the fundamental causes of world decline will any improvement be made. Admittedly there are problems in this interpretation of Auden, but it seems to be satisfactory in general.

In examining the ways in which Auden addresses himself to the question of social sickness, it is most revealing to examine the 1930 collection itself. The Marxian idea of revolution is encountered for the first time in Poem I. Although it is not conceived on a scale of society as a whole, it nevertheless introduces the motif of social reform. The basic theme is of the person actually engaged in the revolutionary struggle.

Another poem, "Doom is dark . . .", is somewhat more explicit, although still rather vague. Known variously as "The Wanderer" and "Something is Bound to Happen" it is considered to be one of Auden's outstanding poems from a literary point of view. It is written in the Old English style that he employs from time to time throughout his work, and it is this style that lends the poem much of its value. Through the medieval verse patterns and images, a sense of barrenness and waste is felt. This fits in with Auden's idea that the modern world is becoming a waste land.

The central figure of the poem is the Wanderer, an entity that Spears relates to the "middle-class intellectual". Such a man must have understood the realities of the political

situation and moved to an alien way of life.¹⁷ By extension the Wanderer may be an Auden figure, seeing the world as doomed by a social disorder and trying to escape it.

Poem IV further delineates the sociological illness by relating it to a person, whom Spears calls the "prosperous capitalist".

Watch any day his nonchalant pauses, see
His dextrous handling of a wrap as he
Steps into cars, the beggar's envy.

'There is a free one', many say, but err.
He is not that returning conqueror
Nor ever the poles' circumnavigator.

But poised between shocking falls on razor-edge
Has taught himself this balancing subterfuge.
Of the accosting profile, the erect carriage.

These three stanzas reveal one aspect of how society, in Auden's opinion, has become sick. The man he is portraying here is a universal figure of the times, and serves to illustrate the emptiness and artificiality which may be said to have brought on the world's economic ruin. If society is to be cured, he implies, it will have to be through the individual efforts of such men as this one.

Poem IX is one that is often selected for anthologies. Although somewhat obscure, it is rather suggestive of the changed social conditions of the world. Once again is the implication that the changes constitute a sickness of society

¹⁷Ibid., p. 41.

as a whole. One way this is achieved is through the colloquial style of the poem. The first stanza, in particular, is written in an absurdly modern, almost trite form. The overall tone of the poem, however, is more or less pathetic, and this pathos is sharpened by the refrain: "Here am I, here are you:/ But what does it mean? What are we going to do?" Everything in the poem is said principally by implication, and the refrain seems to imply the sense of frustration brought on by the conditions of the postwar period. The question at the beginning of the first stanza, "It wasn't always like this?", may support such an idea.

Randall Jarrell's interpretation of the poem brings out and shows more directly the Marxian influence. He contends that one of Auden's basic assumptions is the "death of the old order".¹⁸ Indeed, this assumption is almost a necessary prerequisite to Auden's philosophy at the time. There are suggestions of it throughout the poem, notably in the second and last stanzas. What the poet seems to be analyzing is the manner in which the new order of society has destroyed people's roots in the old order. They are faced with the fact of change but do not know how to meet it, says the refrain. In this recurring couplet he implies that the situation exists and that all recognize it. He also suggests the need for reform but in this poem does not advance any way to carry out a reformation.

¹⁸Jarrell, "Changes of Attitude and Rhetoric in Auden's Poetry", pp. 326-49.

A more graphic description of the effects of the social malaise is to be found in Poem XI, later called "The Watershed". It specifically pictures the consequences of the old order's collapse, particularly the desolation which struck many parts of England during the Depression. Lines 2-7 set the tone of the poem:

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. A ramshackle engine
At Cashwell raises water; . . .

It is here that he shows the influence of Eliot, who sometimes used similar imagery in his "waste land" poetry. In both cases the images may be read on a universal as well as a literal level.

The second part of the poem is less concrete but still related to the Marxist theory. After reviewing the situation as he sees it, the poet says, "Go home, now stranger, . . ./ This land, cut off, will not communicate." He suggests that the old order is sick and worthless, and that the "stranger" may profit in the new order. This part of the poem, then, seems to be concerned with those who attempt to rise in the new society. This brings in the idea of the "vertical" as opposed to the "horizontal" man. To Auden the vertical man is the man of action while the horizontal man is essentially dead.¹⁹ Here the stranger is the vertical man and those with

¹⁹Babette Deutsch, Poetry in Our Time (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1952), p. 379.

whom he is trying to "communicate" are the horizontal men. The theme is still one of the sickness and death of the old economic system.

Direct allusions to Marxism are evident in Poem XII, later called "Let History be My Judge". Here Auden refers to the socialistic measures which were deemed necessary to combat the Depression.

We made all possible preparations,
Drew up a list of firms,
Constantly revised our calculations
And allotted the farms,

Issued all the orders expedient
In this kind of case;
Most, as was expected, were obedient,
Though there were murmurs, of course;
Chiefly against our exercising
Our old right to abuse.

These lines reflect Auden's reaction to the hardships of his day. The situation brought on by the Depression caused him to lean toward Marxist thinking because the doctrine held hope for the improvement of social disorders. In this poem Auden also seems to approach the Marxian emphasis on the social rather than the individual. Under such a concept, says Beach, "the program of social change comes first, and the moral improvement of the individual follows as effect follows cause."²⁰

The principal concern of the poem is the effect of the

²⁰Beach, The Making of the Auden Canon, p. 22.

new thinking on people at large. They are skeptical, says the poet, and somewhat unwilling to give up the old order even for an improved one. The sixth stanza carries this suggestion. Implicit is the recurrent theme of sickness and death--of a way of life. Following this death is an inherent inability to accept it. This, Auden seems to be saying, is a major obstacle in the way of reform. For if the social order is to be cured of its illness it must be the individual people within it who act. The individuals cannot act if they do not accept the fact of their sickness.

Poem XVI, "It was Easter as I walked in the public gardens . . .", is a long one and deals with a description of the individual's struggle in the modern world. The theme is one of illness and death, direct images of which are found throughout the poem. A sick world, says the poet, is a manifestation of sick individuals who inhabit it. Auden generally conceives of an external wound as an indication of an internal illness.²¹ The old world is seen as sick and man is reaping the benefits of the sickness. In the course of the poem, he reviews England's social sickness as revealed in everyday life, using the typical examples one might observe during an afternoon walk. At the end he says that the solution is death--"Death of the old gang". As in Marx's concept of history, one system must die in order to be replaced by a new and improved one.

²¹M. Louis Rosenthal, The Modern Poets: A Critical Introduction. (New York: Oxford University Press), 1960, p. 187.

die out to make way for the classless state. This idea of death before rebirth is implied in the last line quoted above, and fits in with Auden's sociological concepts. In most of his early poems he realizes that the world is changing and that the old social customs must go before the new ones can take hold. He thus becomes a reformer calling for a new order, and in the process is seen to be a Marxist of sorts.

Another poem related to the theme is "Look there! . . ." (Poem XXIII). The speaker here is Spears' "doomed bourgeois", the victim of a social illness which will soon change his life. Auden does not here bring in the relationship of mass illness to individual illness. He also makes no direct call for improvement of the situation. The poem is significant mainly for its relation to Auden's ideological scheme. According to Beach, the images all suggest the ideological struggle in which the poet was engaged. The line about the "glaciers calving" seems to have reference to the social revolution.²⁴

"Consider" (No. XXIX) is significant both for its style and for the ideas it reveals. The theme is essentially the same one embracing social sickness and its consequences but the imagery is closer to Eliot's "waste land" style. The poem describes a cross-section of the English nation as it is affected by the new social changes. Throughout the poem the imagery of landscape is evident, and the details of this bear an integral relation to the overall theme. Spears sees the

²⁴Beach, The Making of the Auden Canon, p. 282.

all-encompassing description of this type as "moralized landscape--"paysage moralisé. The term is derived from the German poet Rilke, who felt that human life could be interpreted in terms of landscape.²⁵

In the line referring to "polar peril" the landscape imagery may be carried even further than the usual "waste land" interpretation, according to Cleanth Brooks. He sees the poem as metaphorically representative of the advent of a new ice age.²⁶ This interpretation is not incompatible with Auden's thinking. He actually felt that the Great Depression had made a figurative waste land of England, and this was undoubtedly responsible for his reformatory, sometimes pro-Marxist ideas. In any case, the poem sounds the note of reform by showing the effects of the "new ice age" on all classes of people. This new ice age is actually the social malady which concerned Auden.

Much of the poem is taken up with direct address, again suggesting that social disorder is in the final analysis an individual matter. The last part, especially, implies that the "Financier" (mentioned directly) will probably not be able to help improve society. The conclusion seems to be that he is really a doomed bourgeois, like all of the middle class.

The final inclusion in the collection, Poem XXX, is one that is usually ranked among Auden's best. It is also known

²⁵Monroe K. Spears, "The Dominant Symbols of Auden's Poetry", Sewanee Review, LIX (1951), 392-425.

²⁶Cleanth Brooks, Modern Poetry and the Tradition (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1939), p. 126.

under the title "Petition". Somewhat different from the others, it seems to display a more overt religious concern and has been interpreted as a prayer to remove people from the ills of society.²⁷ In this sense, the "Sir" who is addressed at the start of the poem may be read as God. If it is God then it is a Marxist-type one. This is evident in the theme of social revolution and reform. The unique characteristic of the poem is that the poet invokes a divine power to assist the new order to emerge from the old. "Petition" does not specifically carry the theme of death. Day-Lewis, however, sees the theme in the phrase "will his negative inversion".²⁸

Paid on Both Sides, the first of the dramatic pieces under consideration, was written in 1928. It has a great deal of the Old English flavor which characterizes much of Auden's work, and has some of the "moralized landscape" concept. Spears says that the subtitle, "A Charade", suggests "that the piece is not to be read as a play, that it will have hidden meanings, and that it is intended to be entertaining . . . there is no dramatic illusion, and the reader's interest is not in characters or plot but what each of these represents." He goes on to say that it is like a "guessing game", with ideas as the principal concern.²⁹

We learn in the course of the "play" that it is set

²⁷Rosenthal, The Modern Poets, p. 194.

²⁸Cecil Day-Lewis, A Hope For Poetry. (New York: Random House, 1935), p. 214.

²⁹Spears, The Poetry of W. H. Auden, pp. 15-16.

around Christmas time. Furthermore, it soon becomes clear that a feud is in progress, in the best tradition of the old Norse sagas. The setting seems to be medieval, but the characters have modern names. The suggestion here is that whatever Auden is saying should be applied to the contemporary world. Thus the poet implies that the feud between the Nowers and the Shaws will necessarily bear some relation to his overall sociological concern.

The connection between Paid on Both Sides and Auden's general ideology at the time he wrote it is somewhat difficult to establish. The work itself is more obscure than the poems or the other two dramatic pieces. Nevertheless, interpretations may be advanced which serve to demonstrate that the play does fit in with the Auden concept of social sickness as well as his Marxist tendencies of thinking. In any event, the work does show undeniable traces of the problems which confronted the world at the time and Auden's ideas in regard to them.

The first element to be considered in advancing any sociological interpretation of this piece is the style. The technique which the poet uses here is similar to that employed in much of his early poetry. The style itself is difficult to characterize but its most distinctive attribute is probably the use of ellipsis--the omission of some of the words. This, combined with an almost Germanic scrambling of syntax, helps to set the tone. It seems to suggest a bareness, a sterility. Spears sees the style as giving the "impression

of being stripped down to bedrock as the situation is stripped down to the permanent, unchanging human predicament".³⁰ The atmosphere conveyed by such a technique provides an effective background for Auden's speculations on the nature of the contemporary world.

Since this is an early work, Auden's thought is not fully developed and what he means is not always clear. However, certain passages seem to carry suggestions of the Auden concern. Some of these were later taken out of the context of the play and printed separately in the Collected Poetry. In one, "The Spring unsettles sleeping partnerships . . .", we see echoes of the central motif of the play, which is closely related to the concept of social sickness which would later develop. Throughout the work the dominant subject is a denunciation of war. At this stage of his philosophical development, Auden must have thought war one of the principal manifestations of mass illness. This idea and the prevailing sense of doom in his early poetry suggest that he may have feared armed conflict as the ultimate result of the economic changes taking place around him.³¹

In "The Spring unsettles . . ." the war theme is definitely there, as are echoes of the Depression.

War is declared there, here a treaty signed;

³⁰Ibid., p. 16.

³¹Ibid., p. 17.

Here a scrum breaks up like a bomb, there troops
 Deploy like birds. But proudest into traps
 Have fallen. These gears which ran in oil for week
 By week, needing no look, now will not work;
 Those manors mortgaged twice to pay for love
 Go to another.

The imagery of war and economic trouble is fairly clear in this passage, and the implication is that it is probably a failure of the entire human condition. We see that even in 1928 he was concerned about what he felt to be sickness on a cosmic scale. He does not yet overtly treat the question of its connection to individual disease of the mind. Nevertheless there are implications that the concern is with him even at this time.

A further treatment of the idea that war is an inherent weakness of man and thus a sickness on a social level is seen in the fragment, "Always the following wind of history . . ." Here he seems to favor the idea that social sickness is a universal, that it cannot be confined to time or place.

Our fathers shouted once. They taught us war,
 To scamper after darlings, to climb hills,
 To emigrate from weakness, find ourselves
 The easy conquerors of empty bays:

Such a concept of the hereditary nature of the human condition was later modified. As seen in the Poems above, he seems to have arrived at the idea that the situation in the 1920's was unique. It probably represented a real breakdown in the values of society.

Perhaps Auden approaches this belief of a unique situation in the excerpt later titled, "To throw away the key and

walk away . . .". In this passage he reveals the Marxian influence more clearly. According to Spears it should be interpreted in a political context. Auden's idea is that society must change, the present system must be disavowed to permit hope for a better one. As in the "Always the following . . ." fragment, the basic image of the proposed change is that of migration. Spears elaborates on this imagery as well as the Marxian implications of the passage:

The basic metaphor of migration, changing one country for another, means giving allegiance to the Marxist society of the future. The poem argues that once the key has been thrown away--the essential commitment made--instead of leaving the old society abruptly and completely, it is better to follow carefully the frontier between the old and new societies.³²

If this interpretation is correct, then it appears that Auden has begun to espouse the theory that a Marxist society is perhaps the best hope for curing of the social ills.

Paid on Both Sides, then, is significant mainly for what it shows about the very earliest stages of Auden's thinking. In this respect it is somewhat obscure because it does not really carry his fully mature views on the sociological problem. Although he is more concerned with the more obvious ills of the human condition, he still gives evidence that he is thinking about the Marxist solution. Thus the theme of social sickness is very much in evidence here and the influence of Marx is perceptible also. Both of

³²Ibid., p. 17.

these elements are better clarified in the poems and other dramatic works.

In 1932 Auden produced The Orators, a long work in both verse and prose. It consists of three parts: "The Initiates", "The Journal of an Airman", and "Six Odes". Of these, the odes are probably the most significant in a study of Auden's beliefs at the time. The themes here are in most cases similar to those in the Poems. However, the poet modifies these themes by bringing in new elements. Overall, however, it is still the social concern which is most important.

Perhaps the best known of the odes is number V, later titled "Which Side Am I Supposed to Be On?" This changed title is significant, since the reader is not certain whether to accept the wording of the poem at face value or to read it as a tongue-in-cheek satire. Written in the form of a military commander's speech before battle, it charges the listeners to fight against the enemies of God.

There's Wrath who has learnt every trick of guerilla
warfare,
The shaming dead, the night raid, the feinted retreat;
Envy their brilliant pamphleteer, to lying
As husband true,
Expert Impersonator and linguist, proud of his power
To hoodwink sentries.

Gluttony living alone, austerer than us,
Big simple greed, Acedia famed with them all
For her stamina, keeping the outposts, and somewhere
Lust

With his sapper's skill
Muttering to his fuses in a tunnel 'Could I here meet
with love,
I would hug him to death'.

The enemies portrayed here are seen to be the classical

Deadly Sins. It is with this enumeration of the enemy that Beach begins his discussion of the poem as satire.³³ It all ties in with an Auden theme seen throughout The Orators. This is the theme of the Enemy, which is conceived as anything which destroys tradition and custom.³⁴

Beach contends that everything in the poem is to be read in reverse. He notes that the "enemy" of the poem turns out to be the party of reform and progress, which in most of the other poems Auden had set up as the ideal. This fact signifies an apparent paradox which necessitates some explanation. The effect of condemning his own faction in this way is seen to be one of definite irony.³⁵ Auden evidently believed that the reformers of the left had the best answer to the upheavals of society brought on by the breakdown of the established order. What the poet seems to be doing in this ode, then, is satirizing those who favor the status quo.

This ode may well have the most ideological significance of any part of The Orators. Indeed, Beach devotes a great deal of space to it in his study, giving it a place of major importance in the "Auden canon". He agrees that the poem is ironic, and further elaborates the idea by saying that Auden has perhaps written a parody on himself in the poem.³⁶ More-

³³Beach, The Making of the Auden Canon, pp. 84-86.

³⁴Hoggart, Auden: An Introductory Essay, p. 117.

³⁵Beach, The Making of the Auden Canon, pp. 86-89.

³⁶Ibid., p. 89.

over, he feels that much of the inherent irony is in the implied contrast of "we" and "they". The "we" seems to be the very bourgeois society that he usually condemns. "They" become what should be regarded as Auden's group itself, that is, all those who seek a new social order. It is this kind of devastating satire that gives the poem its effect.³⁷

Another of these odes, later called "The Exiles" has echoes of the same theme, which Spears calls the motif of the "ambivalent schoolmaster". Such a man is totally unlike the prototype of his genre, he appears to be calling for the overthrow of his own institution.³⁸ This may be another satiric representation of those Marxist-oriented reformers (with whom Auden was to some degree associated then) who were seeking a program to redeem the society which they believed had gone sick.

There are two other poems in The Orators which are of limited significance with regard to the theme under consideration. The last ode ("Not, Father, further do prolong . . .") is a satirically rendered prayer. It continues the imagery of "we" and "they" in the same ironic manner. Intimations of the illness of the masses may be implicit in the fifth stanza:

³⁷Ibid., pp. 89-91.

³⁸Spears, The Poetry of W. H. Auden, pp. 53-54.

Weaker we are, and strict within
 Your organized blockade,
 And from our desperate shore the last
 Few pallid youngsters fade.

Spears places this poem in the context of the others and sees in it a dramatic representation of the "doomed bourgeois", a stock figure in Marxian interpretations of the 1920's. The epilogue is also important within the context. It has traces of the themes of social sickness and its cure in the form of a large-scale reformation.³⁹

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

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

Much of The Orators is in prose and cannot really be included in a study of poetry. However, an examination of some of the poems scattered throughout may prove valuable. Many of the same thoughts recurrent throughout the early poetry are apparent in "The Initiates" and "The Journal of an Airman". The latter is most significant in relation to the Marxian influence. The most direct evidence here is in the motif of the Enemy, against whom the airman is fighting. As in most of the early work, this enemy represents the tradi-

³⁹Ibid., p. 57.

tional society which is in a process of revolution. The figure of the airman ties in with the idea since he is seen to be a symbol of the "forces of release and liberation".⁴⁰ He is able to dissociate himself from the sordid conditions around him and move into a better world.

Taken in the context of Auden's thought at the time, this metaphor of the airman seems to fit in rather well with the Marxist element. He is set up as the idealist who combats the capitalist establishment. His thoughts on this point are best seen in one of the poems, "Beethameer, Beethameer . . .". Here the poet is attacking two newspaper editors well-known at the time. To him they represent the worst in the society as it exists. He says that they live by exploitation, implying that such a life is a primary weakness of civilization and one that is largely responsible for its present state of decline. It is men such as this that collectively become the "enemy" in Auden's work.⁴¹

The final work in the 1930 collection is The Dance of Death. This is a short verse play which brings in directly the theme of social sickness which so obsessed Auden at the time. Indeed, it is almost directly concerned with the Marxian system as he envisioned it. A suggestion of this idea is given in the first lines, when the announcer says:

⁴⁰Hoggart, Auden: An Introductory Essay, p. 28.

⁴¹Spears, The Poetry of W. H. Auden, p. 52.

"We present to you this evening a picture of the decline of a class, of how its members dream of a new life, but secretly desire the old, for there is death inside them." This sets the atmosphere of the piece rather succinctly, and further connections with the socialistic theme are seen in the audience as representative of the proletariat as well as the appearance of Karl Marx himself at the end. The atmosphere created thereby places the work near the level of overt propaganda.

Written in an almost colloquial style reminiscent of jazz talk and popular songs, the play deals with a group of people who are in a state of decline. They are the "capitalists", those who are governed by bourgeois morality and whose deterioration necessitates a Marxist-oriented reformation. At the opening they are all at the beach hearing a discourse on the benefits of swimming and sunbathing. The implication seems to be that their middle class way of life has brought about their present decadence. This situation can be cured, the speaker says, by building "a clean new town". This is, he implies, a Marxian state.

The truth of the implication is seen later on. The Audience, to which Auden gives an integral part in the play, joins in a dialogue with the Chorus and Manager. As previously mentioned, the Audience is clearly meant to signify the working class. In a nursery-rhyme type of passage they chant:

One, two, three, four
 The last war was a bosses' war.
 Five, six, seven, eight
 Rise and make a workers' state.
 Nine, ten, eleven, twelve
 Seize the factories and run them yourself.

A few lines later the chorus adds its own chant:

You are responsible,
 You are impossible,
 Out you go.
 We will liquidate,
 The capitalist state
 Overthrow.

These lines amount to an overt expression of the Marxian historical doctrine. The bourgeois people presented at the first seem to have been accused implicitly of contributing by their own weaknesses to the downfall of the civilization. This sickness of society has reached such proportions, the audience seems to be saying, that revolution is called.

Indeed, revolution is the primary note that is sounded throughout the rest of the play. The Dancer now plays a significant part in the action through pantomime. He is taken to represent different segments of the capitalist order in turn. When the Dancer goes into an epileptic fit and begins to die the reference seems rather definitely to be to the death of that order.⁴² The recitations of the announcer and chorus then take on a doctrinaire appearance, giving a brief history of the rise of the middle class civilization. They bring in directly the theme of social decay.

They invited them into a squalid town
 They put them in factories and did them down
 They ruined each other for they didn't know how
 They were making the conditions that are killing them now.

⁴²Beach, The Making of the Auden Canon, p. 152.

The suggestion here is the same one that runs throughout Auden's early poetry. Collective sickness results from widespread sickness of individuals and can become an ailment of a nation, a civilization, or the entire world.

The Dance of Death is a good piece on which to conclude a discussion of the influence of Karl Marx on Auden's beliefs. It is here that the references to Marxian ideology are most in evidence. Here also the relations of this ideology to the poet's sociological concern are most readily apparent. Auden, although not a Marxist in precise terminology, nevertheless draws from the doctrine certain basic ideas. The principal debt here is seen to be in the realm of the end desired--that is, the classless state. He felt, apparently, that such a state might provide the best solution to the problems of a world racked by depression. Thus his real concern is with a call to social reform, since he recognized in the contemporary order an inherent sickness.

Thus the 1930 collection has the most definitely socio-political ideas in any of Auden's poetry. Later he became progressively religious, rejecting the dialectic materialism of the 1930's. At the time he was writing his early work, however, the situation of the world was different. There was good evidence for the idea that the economic system which had governed Europe for the last few centuries was not suited to the postwar world. In Auden's view, the Depression was a sign of the old order dying, a sign that some kind of revolution might be forthcoming. The only way to avoid such a

disaster, he implies, would be in a vast reformation involving all individuals. This reformation, as seen in his early poetry, would presumably bring about a socialist state under a modified Marxist system.

CHAPTER III

THE FREUDIAN INFLUENCE

The second great influence on the development of Auden's sociological beliefs was the psychologist Sigmund Freud. In shifting emphasis from Marx to Freud one must consider Auden's interpretation of contemporary history from a personal rather than social point of view. The central focus thus becomes the individual and how he shapes society. The theme of social sickness is still much in evidence in Auden's use of Freudian ideas, but this sickness is seen from a different point of view. Auden differed with Marx in that he felt that the individual molds society. This is where Freudian psychology becomes important in the early poetry, for there is a great deal of suggestion that the problems of the 1920's were the result of widespread psychological disorders in individuals.

Freudian psychology at the time was relatively new, and it was popularized and taught by many who did not really understand it. This fact has led to numerous misconceptions about its theories which have persisted even down to the present day. Auden, however, had certainly read a great deal of Freud. Indeed, the Freudian influence on his work represents only part of the wide variety of psychological thought which he appears to have assimilated. Outstanding among the

others are Groddeck and Homer Lane. Hoggart, though, finds general agreement in his insistence that Freud's influence probably exceeded that of any of the other noted psychologists.

A complete discussion of Freud's psychology would be too complex for the layman. However, a general discussion of some of its main points can be meaningful without being overly technical. Many of Freud's theories are open to varying interpretations, but certain of the specific concepts are not difficult to grasp. Perhaps the most significant of the Freudian theories, one that is universally known and which recurs throughout Auden's early poetry, is the dominance of the subconscious mind. According to Freud the conscious mind is not its primary element and is thus relegated to the status of behavior. The lower levels of consciousness, he says, are the driving force behind all our actions and the activity inspired by the conscious mind is merely "behavior".

Freud's entire psychology is centered around this basic idea. Moreover, he contends that the subconscious mind which rules our activities is itself ruled by various desires, as well as what he calls complexes. Principal among these is the sex motive, but closely allied to this is the guilt complex which pervades the mind and provides a further influence on our behavior. Both of these elements are prominent in Auden's thinking, as is the destructive desire more popularly called the "death wish".

Auden does not apply the Freudian concepts directly. His application thereof is more what Hoggart calls pseudo-

Freudianism. That is, he is concerned with the individual mind not exclusively for its own sake but as a means of interpreting universal social-political problems in psychological terms. Scarfe sees justification for such a viewpoint, saying that in effect the Marxian and Freudian concepts are complementary. That is, Marx believed that society is the controlling factor in shaping the individual while Freud contended that the individual shapes society. Auden seems to have realized this idea and consequently stands between the two extremes.⁴³

In using such pseudo-Freudian psychology, he is attempting to arrive at the real basis for the state of the world in which he found himself. Applied on this scale, his view is that the "neuroses" of individuals are symptoms of subconscious diseases and that the disorders of society are the necessary projections of these neuroses.⁴⁴ Thus the social sickness which he relates on a cosmic basis in the Marx philosophy traces ultimately to the unknown recesses of the human mind. Auden's ideology may for this reason be called a synthesis of the Marxist and Freudian concepts.

In addition to his application of the basic Freudian idea, Auden uses some of the subsidiary theories in his work. These latter elements appear as recurrent themes in various

⁴³Francis Scarfe, Auden and After: The Liberation of Poetry, 1930-1941. (London: G. Routledge & Sons, Ltd., 1942), pp. 17-20.

⁴⁴Beach, The Making of the Auden Canon, p. 17.

parts of the 1930 collection. A significant one is the motif of the death wish, which has been derived from Freud's theories. This theme is most evident in The Dance of Death but may be seen throughout the collection. Auden sees the death wish as a major sociological disorder, which might have been responsible for the upheavals of his time.

In close relation to this complex is an opposite one--the desire for preservation of oneself as well as one's race. Herein is the theme, prominent in Auden, of Eros--sexual love. Spears sees the conflict of the two forces of Eros and Thanatos (the destructive urge) as a primary motif in the early poetry.⁴⁵ Closely tied up with these forces, as Auden views them, is the guilt complex. Guilt he sees as caused by repression, either internal or external, of the basic drives. This belief Auden derives directly from Freud.⁴⁶ Furthermore, such guilt brings on a revolt against authority, "revolt of the neurotic and diseased against a neurotic and diseased culture."⁴⁷ This, too, becomes a recurrent theme in the early poetry.

It is not difficult to see how these Freudian ideas might fit rather well into Auden's concept of social sickness. If mass illness is a manifestation of individual illness, as he felt at the time, then social disorder may be traced to

⁴⁵Spears, The Poetry of W. H. Auden, p. 124.

⁴⁶Jarrell, "Freud to Paul," p. 444.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 437.

the neuroses of the subconscious which are seen in individuals. The consequence of this belief is that the wars, revolts, and depression of the 1920's may well be general extensions of the Freudian complexes. The repression of erotic love, the destructive instinct, and the "guilty revolt" against authority thus take on cosmic importance even though they are fundamentally individual forces.

In examining the Freudian influence in the 1930 collection, it is helpful to begin with the Poems themselves. Spears sees in these poems a direct treatment of the social sickness in somewhat obscure terms. He contends that a prevalent motif here is a psychological interpretation of the sociological problems of contemporary England. A dominant feeling is that "something is wrong with love"; this feeling apparently is in some measure responsible for the ills of society. He says the first poem is in this pattern, and that it involves the death wish.⁴⁸ If his interpretation is correct, then the poetry already shows traces of Freudianism.

In "Doom is Dark . . ." any traces of this influence are certainly obscure. Nevertheless, the poem has a definite relation to Auden's overall scheme. The motif of the Quest as it appears in the verse is an old one but Auden gives it a new application. In the third part he deals with a "change of heart" of the type seen by Jarrell. The figures of "hostile capture" and "sudden tiger's spring at corner" carry

⁴⁸Spears, The Poetry of W. H. Auden, p. 31.

an implication of a frightening or "traumatic" experience. Immediately thereafter come suggestions of a better day approaching:

From gradual ruin spreading like a stain;
 Converting number from vague to certain,
 Bring joy, bring day of his returning,
 Lucky with day approaching, with leaning dawn.

Viewed with the passage in mind, the poem may illustrate what Jarrell feels to be an essential characteristic of the early poetry. He contends that the world portrayed therein is one of a natural, animal existence which he says is a "dialectical evolution". A change of heart in this system takes on significance as a preliminary to general change.⁴⁹

Using this interpretation, the quest seen in the poem may be part of the overall revolt against repression. In Freudian terms, this signifies an internal disorder. Modified to Auden's viewpoint, the quest becomes part of each individual's struggle for understanding of himself. On a broader plane, it is the universal human condition, having its roots in the neuroses of individuals who make up society. The "change of heart" in such a reading might be the moral reformation that he sought, the cure for the sickness of society. This cure, in keeping with Freud's psychology, must be initiated in the individual person's mind.

"Between attention and attention . . ." is another

⁴⁹Jarrell, "Freud to Paul," p. 437.

poem which may have suggestions of the psychological and social problems which obsessed Auden. It is perhaps significant that it was later titled "Make Up Your Mind". Given the vague and general terms in which the poem is written, there seems to be an indication that the poet is speaking to society. He is, in effect, telling people that indecision is one of their foremost problems.

Between attention and attention
 The first and last decision
 Is moral distraction
 Of earth and air,
 Further and nearer,
 The vague wants
 Of days and nights,
 And personal error;
 And the fatigued face,
 Taking the strain
 Of the horizontal force
 And the vertical thrust,
 Makes random answer
 To the crucial test

In these lines one can distinguish the influence of Auden's psychological studies. In particular, there is evidence of Freudian doctrine in regard to conflicting desires (complexes) within the mind. He does not here advance any idea on what these forces represent, but he seems to say that the anxiety portrayed in the poem is one of the sicknesses of the age. Indeed, it was Auden who gave wide currency to the term, "Age of Anxiety". If interpreted in this light, "Make Up Your Mind" bears definite relation to his application of Freud's psychology as well as to his own concept of the social sickness.

Spears finds elements of Freudianism in Poem IX of the

collection ("It's no use raising a shout . . ."). Here the speaker is concerned with love or, more specifically, his inability to find fulfillment of his desire. It is the second stanza which expresses this view most directly.

A long time ago I told my mother
 I was leaving home to find another;
 I never answered her letter
 But I never found a better.
 Here am I, here are you:
 But what does it mean? What are we going to do?

The implication in this verse is that the speaker has some type of Oedipus complex.⁵⁰ In Freudian terms, this is an illness of the subconscious which ultimately leads to a guilty revolt. The idea of revolt is suggested in the line wherein the speaker explains why he left. That he has come to an impasse in life is seen by the refrain.

In a discussion of this poem on a universal plane, the idea was advanced that the refrain reveals the speaker's frustration in the perplexing situation he faced. The changing social conditions and the apparent end of the economic order in which he had grown up prompted him to ask the question. Viewed in the context of Auden's pseudo-Freudian beliefs, the poem fits more easily into his concept of social sickness. The theme of frustration runs throughout the poem, and the idea of the unresolved Oedipus complex closely approximates Freud's theory. It would appear, then, that the poet is suggesting once again that repressed desires in the human subconscious lead to sick minds. By extension, the

⁵⁰Spears, The Poetry of W. H. Auden, p. 35.

consequent neuroses become universal. Such sicknesses, he says, may play a large part in the wars and depressions which are the external manifestations of a "neurotic culture".

An intimation of the same idea is seen in Poem XVI. This poem, later give the title "1929", reflects the great decay of the social order as the poet knew it. The speaker in the piece appears to be addressing his lover, interpreting the events of the time for her. There is an atmosphere of desolation throughout the poem, possibly revealing the conditions during the depression. All the while, he seems to imply a parallel course of deterioration in his relationship with her.⁵¹ What is not stated here may be that it is decadent lives like theirs which are the ultimate reason for the present social decline.

So, insecure, he loves and love
Is insecure, gives less than he expects.
He knows not if it be seed in time to display
Luxuriantly in a wonderful fructification
Or whether it be but a degenerate remnant
Of something immense in the past but now
Surviving only as the infectiousness of disease
Or in the malicious caricature of drunkenness;
Its end glossed over by the careless but long known
To finer perception of the mad and ill.

In typically Audenesque style, this passage is rather obscure. It does, however, seem to have traces of his pseudo-Freudian psychology. In the first two lines the poet suggests the inherent problem of physical love: perfect adjustment is difficult to achieve and therefore breeds insecurity and

⁵¹Beach, The Making of the Auden Canon, p. 48.

anxiety.

In the rest of the poem, he goes on to relate this almost universal neurosis to the larger disease of society as a whole. Thus Auden is applying the Freudian idea of the predominance of subconscious desires, such as the sex motive. When these desires are not satisfactorily resolved, a sickness of the mind results. The implication is that the frustrations and fears experienced by the people in the poem are reflected on a large scale by the disorder of the entire social body. It is from this situation that the "Age of Anxiety has resulted.

"Consider" brings in the peculiarly Freudian themes of the guilt complex and the death wish. The guilty party here is portrayed as a "financier" by the speaker. It is not fully clear what is causing his guilt feelings, but it seems evident that he is suffering from some type of frustration. This fact is suggested in the last lines of the poem:

Irregular breathing and alternate ascendancies
 After some haunted migratory years
 To disintegrate on an instant in the explosion of mania
 Or lapse forever into a classic fatigue.

The image here is of pursuit. Namely, the person is being pursued by a fear and guilt which the poet implies will either drive him insane or kill him. The heavily Marxist overtones of the poem have already been examined. If the Freudian ideas are added, it becomes clear that the underlying reason for social decadence is in individual neurosis.

Further influences of Freud are seen in the poem's suggestion of the death wish. Indeed, the idea is directly expressed twice in the piece (" . . . made them wish to die" and "The convolutions of your simple wish"). Beach sees the "supreme Antagonist" in line 14 as death itself, and further contends that this figure is part of an elaborate metaphor. This antagonist, representing Death, has planted the death wish in the minds of the people, who become "Seized with immeasurable and neurotic dread." The metaphor here is yet another manifestation of Auden's application of Freudian psychology to the contemporary British situation.⁵²

Some of these recurrent Freudian themes as used by Auden are seen in "Petition". The political implications have already been discussed in relation to the Marxian influence. There is also, however, a great deal of psychological insight. The Freudian idea of mental frustration and repression pervades the poem. It is most evident in such phrases as "intolerable neural itch" and "distortions of ingrown virginity". Again he seems to be suggesting that such aberrations (exactly what they represent is somewhat obscure) cause the social disorders. This interpretation seems to be supported by the mode of address in the poem. He calls upon someone he calls "Sir", probably God, to "send to us power and light". The suggestion is that some type of psychological regeneration may be needed to cure the world's ills.

⁵²Ibid., pp. 44-45.

Freudian influence on the sociological theme may also be found in "Petition" in the second line. Here the vague and indefinite phrase "will his negative inversion" makes more sense if read "the negative inversion of his will."⁵³ The expression thus becomes an implicit reference to the death wish. The neuroses suggested by the rest of the poem probably result from this destructive instinct, the poet may be saying. The idea of God in the poem makes it the closest approach to a religious concern that Auden achieves in the early poetry. He is asking the divine power to give understanding and will power to the afflicted of society.⁵⁴ This is in keeping with Auden's understanding of Freud, who felt that the way to mental stability was by understanding one's subconscious desires and sublimating them. Auden agreed with this concept to some degree, feeling that a social reformation had to begin with the individual and that the prerequisite here was the person's understanding of his problem. This idea is not stated directly in "Petition" but almost certainly lies in the immediate background, for the speaker is asking the death wish, the cause of all the sickness, to be cured.

Paid on Both Sides, too, has a definite psychological theme. The whole piece is actually a statement of the depravity of the human condition. The motif of the feud

⁵³Spears, The Poetry of W. H. Auden, p. 44.

⁵⁴Deutsch, Poetry in Our Time, p. 382.

which is the play's story may thus be seen as a microcosm of all mankind's wars. Taken on a personal level, however, there is real concern with individual psychology. In this regard, the poet is discussing the influence of the sick mind on society as a whole. There is an implication of hereditary sickness; the present generation will die but the feud will be carried on nevertheless. This thought is expressed in the chorus: "His mother and her mother won". Deep in the mind, says Auden, all those traits rule our conscious actions. It is such deep-seated conflicts arising from fear, guilt, and jealousy that bring on wars.

Spears draws an even more explicit Freudian interpretation from the work. In his view "the chief point is the malignant influence of the mothers, who are the chief bearers of the feud and who, from infancy, instill hatred in their sons".⁵⁵ If his interpretation is valid, then the play may be a prime example of the Freudian influence on Auden's early work. The implication would be that these children were taught hatred by their mothers and that this hatred developed into an obsession. Later the subconscious disorder becomes externally manifest in physical violence of the feud. Auden might say that this play is a capsule history of the sickness of the social body.

Support for Spears' view may be found in several passages in the play. There the most recurrent theme is not

⁵⁵Spears, The Poetry of W. H. Auden, p. 18.

specifically the Oedipus complex, but Thanatos, the destructive urge or death wish. This subconscious desire may actually be the sickness which results from the maternal repression and in turn expresses itself in the hatred and killing of the feud. The thought is expressed in a dialogue between Trudy and Walter.

- T. I am sick of this feud. What do we want to go on
killing each other for?
We are all the same. He's trash, yet if I cut my
finger it bleeds like his.
But he's swell, keeps double shifts working all
night by flares. His mother squealed like a pig
when he came crouching out
- W. The best are gone.
Often the man, alone shut, shall consider
The killings in old winters, death of friends
- I will say this not falsely; I have seen
The just and unjust die in the day,
All, willing or not, and some were willing.

As revealed in these lines, the poet is implying that there is a conflict of instincts in the mind, one to humanity and one to self-destruction.⁵⁶ The death wish inevitably wins out, says the play as a whole. Thus Paid on Both Sides shows a great deal of Auden's pseudo-Freudian beliefs which shaped his sociological theories.

Stephen Spender has called The Orators "one of his most vital, but also his most gangish and brutal work."⁵⁷ This is probably a good evaluation, for the work represents

⁵⁶Hoggart, Auden: An Introductory Essay, p. 128.

⁵⁷Stephen Spender, "The Life of Literature, II," Partisan Review, XV, No. 12 (December, 1948), p. 1329.

the most controversial part of the collection. Most of Auden's significant ideas at that stage of his ideology appear here in one form or another. It has received more study than the other prose-verse pieces largely because of its studied obscurity. Such study is often more or less inconclusive since, as Spears puts it, "critics have not usually been willing to commit themselves as to just what they think is going on in The Orators." In spite of its ambiguity, however, the work does bring out a number of Audenesque themes, and in places shows most directly the poet's debt to Freud.

This debt is studied most directly by Hoggart, who in several contexts makes much of the influence of Freud's New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis. He sees the primary Freudian influence in regard to Auden's portrayal of the conflict of desires. Specifically, Auden has much to say about the struggle on the one hand for life and the physical instincts of love and on the other for self-annihilation. In The Orators, the conflict is seen on both sociological and psychological levels. Thus on the more universal plane it might be called the struggle of the public and the private man.⁵⁸ The idea is largely implicit in the structure of the piece itself, for the different parts deal with people in public as well as private situations. The first part, "The Initiates," treats different types of

⁵⁸Deutsch, Poetry in Our Time, p. 379.

orators who are engaged in some type of conflict. The "Journal of an Airman" is more introspective and overtly psychological. The six odes return to the public struggle.

Perhaps the best evidence here is seen in "The Journal of an Airman." The hero of this part is what Jarrell calls a "revolutionary cult-leader." He is attempting to do something worthwhile of a political nature but fails. His underlying difficulty is psychological. That is, he is revolting against authority and trying to justify the revolt while in his own mind he feels that submission to authority is the only answer. It is again the simple clash between the urge toward improvement of life and the urge to self-effacement. In the end, the destructive instinct wins. The Airman states that "God just loves us all, but means to be obeyed." Immediately thereafter he is in an airplane cruising at a high altitude, apparently planning to commit suicide.⁵⁹

On a strictly psychological level, the Airman is Auden's interpretation of a major social and political problem in individual terms. He sees the man as plagued by a real neurosis, a disorder of the mind which leads to his guilty revolt. He is opposed to the authority of the capitalist society but is also repressed by a fear within himself. This fear causes him to regard both forces as an enemy and makes him mentally ill. The idea, also expressed

⁵⁹Jarrell, "Freud to Paul," p. 446.

in one of the odes, is that of fear as a principal source of war.⁶⁰ In advancing this concept, he reasons primarily from the Freudian point of view, with less emphasis on the importance of social and environmental factors as in the Marxian view. Scarfe feels that perhaps he should give more attention in this work to the possibility that the individuals neuroses are caused by unsatisfactory social conditions.⁶¹

The pure Freudian influence is also evident in the "Letter to a Wound." Although in prose, this passage provides an excellent illustration of Auden's application of psychological theory. The piece is actually a satire on the conventional form of the love letter. It is also largely metaphorical in that the speaker is actually addressing the "wound." We know that this wound is physical since he makes reference to visiting a surgeon for treatment. However, it is fairly clear that the injury is symbolic. The speaker loves the wound and in doing so is revealing a true neurosis. He is deceiving himself and expressing a death wish.⁶² In every respect the piece fits in with Auden's scheme of thought. The wound is an external manifestation of an internal ill, caused by a destructive urge. This urge is countered by the expression of an erotic one which obsesses him. The

⁶⁰Beach, The Making of the Auden Canon, p. 87.

⁶¹Scarfe, Auden and After, p. 15.

⁶²Beach, The Making of the Auden Canon, p. 17.

entire atmosphere of parody in the passage suggests that the speaker and his wound represent a corresponding sickness of bourgeois society.⁶³

In regard to the "Six Odes," only two have direct relevance to Freudian psychology. Ode III, "The Exiles," uses the imagery of a mental institution to enhance the poet's intended effect. The general atmosphere is one of abandoned humanity with several types of diseases. It becomes clear that the poem symbolizes "lives in which vital spirit has been withered away by some insidious spiritual malady."⁶⁴

The slight despair
At what we are,
The marginal grief
Is source of life . . .

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

The implication in this last stanza is of the death wish. The speaker suggests that the mental illness suffered by these people is a result of a general despair brought on by the wish for self-effacement. In the best Freudian tradition he is implying that this subconscious desire is at the root of their sickness and that of society.

The other ode which can be viewed in this context is "Which Side Am I Supposed to Be On?" Although the principal concern of the poem is with sociological revolt in general,

⁶³Spears, The Poetry of W. H. Auden, p. 49.

⁶⁴Beach, The Making of the Auden Canon, p. 53.

there is a definite undercurrent of Audenesque psychology. The primary theme in this respect is that of fear and guilt, the idea being that of the collective individual guilt in the revolt against authority.⁶⁵ The belief that it is our guilt which brings on wars and our fear which aids the enemy is implicit in the lines:

What have we all been doing to have made from Fear
That laconic war-bitten captain addressing them now?

The poet, in the poem as a whole, seems to say that this fear is a manifestation of the individual's death wish and sense of guilt. War comes when these forces result in physical action.⁶⁶ Again he is interpreting political history in personal psychological terms.

Finally, there remains The Dance of Death, which is not irrelevant in a discussion of the Freudian influence on Auden. Here the concern is specifically with the death wish as it affects individuals and ultimately an entire class. As already seen in relation to Marx, the thought is explicitly stated in the Announcer's opening comments. These lines actually sum up any psychological concepts that may be found in the play, for the primary concern is with social sickness on the universal level. He makes it clear, however, that it is the "members" themselves who are sick and that the death wish is an individual matter. Hoggart relates the thought

⁶⁵Jarrell, "Freud to Paul," p. 442.

⁶⁶Beach, The Making of the Auden Canon, p. 87.

expressed in the opening rewards to a specific passage from Freud which outlines the essential conflict in man between the erotic and destructive instincts.⁶⁷

In assessing Auden's debt to the theories of Freud, it should be remembered that his primary concern in the poetry is sociological. Any use he makes of psychology is merely an attempt to study the problem of social disorder in depth. He was worried by the situation that existed in the world at the time and, like many other writers, sought an explanation of the problem. He drew answers from several different sources. Of these, Freud's ideas were most fundamental because they dealt with the very roots of the trouble. The psychological concern in his early poetry, then, reflects his concern with the illness of society as a whole.

With this basic fact in mind, the Freudian elements in the 1930 collection become more clear. Throughout the poems and plays here he is saying in a variety of ways that the maladies of the social body are primarily only evidences of individual neuroses. In general this concept is in the background of many of the poems, such as "Consider." Many of them show the psychological concern as directly related to the political one.

It is when Auden deals with the underlying causes of these individual neuroses, however, that the Freudian influence is revealed most plainly. The opening lines of The Dance of Death only summarize his concept of the struggle

⁶⁷Hoggart, Auden: An Introductory Essay, p. 128.

between the creative and destructive urges. That the poet believed these two innate desires to be the fundamental ones is seen in the other pieces as well. The greatest concern is with the latter--the death wish. Different manifestations of this are evident in Paid on Both Sides, "Consider," and "The Journal of an Airman." Here we see that the conflict of desires leads to a feeling of guilt, which Freud contends is a leading element in mental sickness. In Auden's ideology the guilt complex, resulting from repression of the basic desires, leads to a revolt against a real or imaginary authority. Thus the Airman revolts against the oppression of the capitalist establishment, the children of the feuding Nowers and Shaws rebel against maternal repression, and the Financier finds himself in a revolt against his own class.

Auden apparently felt that these revolts were symbolic of the growing human conflict which he had seen in his lifetime. It is perhaps significant that he later turned away from the purely psychological interpretation of contemporary history and evolved a more religious view. To him it became not enough to rationalize the social disorders by reference to the subconscious. The question of free will was involved in his earlier philosophy and he later arrived at a theory which allowed for "moral choice."⁶⁸ In the 1930 collection, however, he was still in the earlier stages of ideological

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 152.

development and chose to explain social problems in terms of Freudian psychology.

CHAPTER IV

THE LAWRENCIAN INFLUENCE

During the 1920's, the poetry and philosophy of D. H. Lawrence were of considerable significance both in their own right and in their influence on other writers of the day. Auden was no exception, and traces of Lawrence's ideas appear throughout his early work. His debt to Lawrence reveals itself primarily in psychological concepts. Since many of Freud's ideas were used by Lawrence, their concerns are the same on certain points. But whereas Freud's psychological principles were scientifically oriented, Lawrence's ideology brings in a moralistic dimension. That is, he is interested in the individual mind but is also engaged in the problem of social ethics. His primary concern was with the psychological conflicts of the twentieth century individual in search of a personal morality.

There are several elements in the background of Lawrence's philosophy which may be useful in regard to Auden's poetry. Lawrence grew up in an age when the so-called "Victorian morality" was the prevailing standard. Reason and the intellect were highly respected under the nineteenth century ethical code. Sensual pleasures, on the other hand, were held in comparatively low regard. Lawrence reacted

against this situation and against the entire tradition of the enlightenment. He felt that since the Renaissance man had gradually come to value reason more and more at the expense of intuition and imagination.⁶⁹ He thus proposed a return to intuitive experience in the tradition of Blake, opposing the purely rational doctrines of the modern industrial society.

What Lawrence specifically advocated was a complete reliance on the subconscious. In his belief, the conscious mind, with its logic and reason, is of secondary importance. To him the lower levels of the mind were supreme, and he proposed a return to primitive values where the "dark gods of humanity" dominated. "We can go wrong in our minds," he said, "but what our blood feels and believes and says is true." This concept is a completely emotional one. It has elements of Freudian psychology but Freud believed that the subconscious should be controlled and understood. Lawrence said that it should be received and followed, not questioned rationally.

One of the principal concerns of Lawrence's proposed moral-psychological reformation, and one for which he has been greatly maligned, is with love. Specifically, he deals with the problem of the ethics of physical love. Reacting against Victorian repression, he called for a change in the social status of sex. He saw the procreative urge as a major one in the subconscious mind and, like Freud, felt

⁶⁹Hoggart, Auden: An Introductory Essay, p. 22.

that it should be respected and not repressed. But he was not, as is popularly believed, a true advocate of free love. He was primarily concerned with placing sex on a higher plane of morality, and felt that it should be regarded as the supreme fulfillment of self. Only when one human being is most closely united with another, he believed, can there be a healthy and satisfactory personal relationship.

In a sociological context, this philosophy is a protest against the sickness of contemporary society as such elements of it are shared by Auden. The part with which Auden found himself most in sympathy was the Lawrencian concept of mental illness. As in the Freudian belief, the root of most mental sickness is in some form of repression. Repression, according to Lawrence, inevitably brought on feelings of guilt in regard to its objects. Even when a desire is controlled by the consciousness, however, it is always present in the subconscious in some form or other. This situation results in a mental conflict. In Lawrence the conflict is usually a sexual one between attraction and repulsion.⁷⁰ Auden applies the idea in more general terms but the theme is a recurrent one in his early poetry.

Auden uses the Lawrencian doctrine in a psychological as well as sociological context. He felt that the state of his society necessitated a moral reformation. The political results of this would presumably be the establishment of a

⁷⁰Bullough, The Trend of Modern Poetry, pp. 130-31.

Marxist state; the psychological consequences might entail a cleansing of the individual mind and curing of its neuroses. One of these levels is primarily social and the other is primarily scientific. Without becoming overtly religious Auden introduces a concern for personal morality, patterned after Lawrence, into his ideology. What he proposes is an institution of love which will go far toward curing the sickness of society. He assumes that men want to live together in harmony but are prevented from doing so by feelings of guilt and fear. Auden takes Lawrence's idea that the industrial society and scientific mind are responsible for this situation by causing repression of emotion. Once the inhibiting factors are removed, social relationships can be normal. According to Auden, the key is a kind of love which includes the Freudian type as well as the type evident in social relations. Herein lies the moral concern.⁷¹

The poems themselves reveal many of the ideas which Auden used in advocating a reform of the guilt-ridden society of the 1920's. Suggestions of the Lawrencian influence are first encountered in Poem VIII, also called "Two's Company."

Again in conversations
 Speaking of fear
 And throwing off reserve
 The voice is nearer
 But no dearer
 Than first love
 Than boys' imaginations.

⁷¹Hoggart, Auden, An Introductory Essay, p. 129.

Here there is at least an implication of Auden's idea that repressed emotions are a characteristic of his society. In the background there is an obscure voice, possibly a subconscious desire, which is perceived but not really heard. He may be referring to the subjugation of emotion by the intellect. The atmosphere of the rest of the poem is one of despair.

"Love by ambition . . ." may also be seen to contain Lawrencian ideas. Throughout the poem there is an attempt to define love, with a result that is largely indefinite. The speaker never does say precisely what it is, but rather what it does or does not do.

Love by ambition
Of definition
Suffers partition
And cannot go
From yes to no
For no is not love, no is no . . .

The suggestion here is a thought which is found throughout Lawrence's theories. That is, love cannot be directly apprehended by the intellect or defined on any rational basis. Spears sees the theme of the poem as related to Blake's ideas of free love. The feeling that it should not be controlled by external forces was one which Auden shared with both Blake and Lawrence.⁷²

Poem XIII, "What's in your mind, my dove, my coney . . .," actually sounds somewhat like Lawrence. It is

⁷²Spears, The Poetry of W. H. Auden, p. 43.

actually little more than a conventional love song. However, it does have a definite relation to Auden's concept as a call for more freedom from restraint. The speaker asks the woman what concerns her, implying that she may be thinking in purely materialistic terms. He then tells her:

Open your eyes, my dearest dallier;
 Let hunt with your hands for escaping me;
 Go through the motions of exploring the familiar;
 Stand on the brink of the warm white day.

Here the speaker seems to say that the purely material world he mentions at the first may be replaced by a more sensual world if the instincts are followed. The connection with Lawrence may be further carried out in the third stanza, which appears to be a reference to the passions of physical love which the speaker will experience. The "great big serpent" is an obviously sexual symbol which might have come directly from Lawrence.

"Sentries against inner and outer . . ." is also definitely Lawrencian in both style and theme. The title later given it, "Shut Your Eyes and Open Your Mouth," is significant, for the mouth is the chief image of the poem. It is seen as the most human feature of the body in two different ways. The first part shows it as an instrument of the evils of man, such as deceit, lying, and bribery. At the end it emerges as an instrument of the erotic instinct;⁷³

⁷³Ibid., pp. 143-44.

Yielding at last to a close kiss
It will admit tongue's soft advance,
So longed for, given in abandon,
Given long since, had it but known.

Once the inhibitions are removed, a genuine and healthy relationship is possible. The poet is again using the idea that without repression of the basic drives, much of the sin and treachery mentioned at the first can be avoided. Love, then, may be a way to an improved social order which has become abnormal through the restraints placed on it. This idea is a paramount one in Lawrence, and the emphasis on the physical details of love is very much a part of his style. The Lawrencian influence on Auden here is thus a two-fold one.

"1929," already discussed in connection with Freud, has a direct relation with Lawrence, too. In many ways the influence of the two is parallel here, since the poem deals with the significance of individual illness in regard to social problems. A long poem, it is full of the imagery of decay and death, symbolic of the sickness of an entire people. Throughout the piece there are suggestions that violence or something else rather terrible is imminent. The atmosphere thus far might fit well into the background of either Marx or Freud's influence on the poet. However, direct traces of Lawrencian thought are seen in several passages which relate the contemporary situation to the industrial society which has created new values. It has, the speaker suggests, replaced the natural beauty with a new

concept, what he regards as an abnormal beauty.

Yet sometimes men look and say good
At strict beauty of locomotive, . . .

This may be an allusion to writers such as Spender, who was one of the many poets of the time to see an esthetic appeal in objects of machinery.

But Lawrence, and Auden after him, reacted against this new tradition. The machine was the opposite of Lawrence's ideal, and he felt that it was a product of the enlightenment which obscured the true human values in man.⁷⁴ Throughout "1929" Auden seems to echo the idea that there should be some kind of reform in human ethics. This idea is not so much stated as it is suggested by various images in the poem. Some of these, such as "Frogs exhaling from the pond" and "first baby warm in mother" seem to come directly from Lawrence. The total effect is to protest against the human condition as it exists by drawing a parallel to the decline of society in a similar state in the relationship of two lovers.⁷⁵ The idea is that such tainted relationships may be ultimately responsible for the general social condition.

What the last part of the poem does is to connect all the foregoing picture of the general decadence to the fundamental associations between human beings. Spears

⁷⁴Bullough, The Trend of Modern Poetry, p. 129.

⁷⁵Beach, The Making of the Auden Canon, p. 48.

might call this type of work a "kind of political psychological analysis, showing the relation between the defects of love and those of society."⁷⁶ This seems to be a rather apt evaluation of the poem as evidence of a Lawrencian influence on Auden. In the last division of the piece the poet says:

We know it, we know that love
Needs more than the admiring excitement of union,
More than the abrupt self-confident farewell,
The heel on the finishing blade of grass,
The self-confidence of the falling root,
Needs death, death of the grain, our death,
Death of the old gang; . . .

There are implicit moral overtones in this passage. Auden seems to content that a new vitality should be found in the two lovers' relationship. In mentioning the "old gang" he relates the idea to society as a whole.⁷⁷ This concept is closely related to the Lawrencian doctrine described earlier.

It is also linked to one of Lawrence's primary symbols, that of rebirth. He felt that in the love relationship there should be a real assertion of one's individuality. Such an assertion, however, could be achieved only by realizing the concept of "otherness." This, to him, meant surrendering part of one's self to his partner and going through a small death. Out of the death, however, would come a re-

⁷⁶Spears, The Poetry of W. H. Auden, p. 34.

⁷⁷Beach, The Making of the Auden Canon, p. 48.

birth, and a recognition of otherness and the equality of sexes.⁷⁸ The suggestion in the passage quoted from Auden's "1929" appears to echo this idea in saying that the love association in question needs a kind of death in order to be reborn again. The poet implies that the same theory might be applied to the entire social body to purge it of its present weaknesses.

"This lunar beauty . . ." has less debt to Lawrence's philosophy than to his style. Even so, however, it appears to show echoes of the theme of repressed love, although without relating the theme to a sociological context. The poem's style is somewhat Lawrencian in that it describes a certain natural beauty in terms of love imagery. In this case it is the "lunar beauty" of the night which is given a vaguely erotic cast.

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

There is an intimation here that the "ghost," or probably the human spirit, was not intended to suppress the love instinct. Until the mind's inhibitions are removed, the poet says, a real fulfillment of love which the subconscious

⁷⁸Bullough, The Trend of Modern Poetry, p. 131.

desires cannot exist. Although the problem is not treated on a social plane it is nevertheless reminiscent of a concern found throughout Lawrence's work as well as the early poetry of Auden.

Spears sees the next poem in the collection, "Before this loved one . . . ," in somewhat more general terms. He notes its "incantatory" quality in describing what might be a capsule history of mankind. Man, the speaker says, has been occupied with the task of seeking food, clothing, and shelter and crossing frontiers throughout his existence. The general outlook of the poem, says Spears, is psychological-political. Its value, however, lies in the ambiguity; one is never certain of precisely on which level it is to be read. The metaphor of the "new love" is never clearly connected either to a person or a social order. Thus the conclusion seems to be "that love and politics are intimately related."⁷⁹ If his interpretation is correct, the poem is definitely related to Lawrence's sociological doctrine.

"Get there if you can . . ." again shows Lawrencian background in style as well as social concern. At the opening the description of England in the depression is an Audenesque version of the Lawrence short stories that deal with industrial ruin in the mining country. The poem, however, makes an abrupt transition to a moralistic atmosphere. Now that the speaker has set the scene by showing

⁷⁹Spears, The Poetry of W. H. Auden, pp. 42-43.

what the industrial order has done to the nation, he proceeds to explain why this order came about in the first place. He says that such philosophies as those of Pascal, Newman, Plato, and others have distracted man from what should be the real concerns in life. Since the society has taken on the beliefs of such thinkers, it has become a slave to the new bourgeois morality.⁸⁰

It is in reaction to this situation that the poet says:

Lawrence, Blake, and Homer Lane, once healers in our
English land;
These are dead as iron for ever; these can never hold our
hand.

The philosophies of such men as Lawrence, he says, might bring life back to society. Although much of the poem can be read in Marxist terms, there is also much evidence of Freudian and Lawrencian ideas. Spears feels that the total effect of the poem is a call for action in the moral-psychological area.⁸¹ Indeed, there seems to be much support for this reading, since the last part of the poem is phrased largely as commands that one might expect from a preacher. Auden is drawing from Lawrence directly here while giving the poem an oratorical quality that is in his own style.

In "Who Will endure . . ." there are parallels to certain Lawrencian themes as well as what appears to be a direct allusion to one of his characters. It also has

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 37.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 38.

images of a dreary landscape which presumably represent the state of society. The atmosphere is less connected to a psychological state than in "Get there if you can . . .", but it ends on a note of moral suggestion.

For no one goes
 Further than railhead or the ends of piers,
 Will neither go nor send his son
 Further through foothills than the rotting stack
 Where gaitered gamekeeper with dog and sun
 Will shout 'Turn back.'

Beach sees this passage as revealing Auden's opposition to the morality of the day, a morality which involved obedience to established codes. The lines here state cynically that no one goes beyond the limits of these codes and implies that the faculty of imagination has been lost.⁸²

Such a theme ties in with Lawrence's theory that the age of reason and enlightenment has given man a scientific mind which rejects the more healthy world of imagination and emotion. These natural instincts of the subconscious, Lawrence would say, have been denied and subjugated. Auden seems to follow this view, and there may be real irony in his naming of the "gamekeeper" shouting "Turn back," in the last lines of the poem. In Lawrence's Lady Chatterley's Lover, the gamekeeper Mellors is an authorial spokesman for the natural and instinctive life. He is set against the character of Lady Chatterley, who is representative of the

⁸²Beach, The Making of the Auden Canon, p. 283.

emotional repression that is characteristic of the times. The reference to a gamekeeper in the poem thus may be significant. If Auden is alluding to the Lawrence character here, he is making an ironic comment on the morality of the day. People have become so entranced by the Victorian morality that they have forgotten how to lead an imaginative and unrepressed life.

"Under boughs between our tentative endearments . . ." may be interpreted with regard to the same theme. The general outlook of the poem seems to be more sociological than the last one, as the speaker makes guarded references to "revolution" and "industries." The first two stanzas suggest the possibility of some type of upheaval in the near future. Most of the imagery indicates that it may be a political change. The speaker, however, moves on to a more individual concern. He observes that

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 mind's constant sniffing,
Their blood's dulled shuffling.

Taken in the context of the other Lawrencian poems, it appears that Auden is making yet another comment on the stifling effect of the contemporary social order. The poet is saying, perhaps, that "knowledge" has dulled the human capacity for the intuitive life. This is a major reason, he says, why society is sick.

Even "Consider," which has already been shown to reveal Marxist and Freudian themes, has traces of Lawrence. The entire poem, it will be remembered, is concerned with the general despair which Auden felt about the social condition. Here again is an attack on the academic community, which with its modern philosophy has caused the decadence that the poet sees around him.

The same is up for you and for the others,
 Who, thinking, pace in slippers on the lawns
 Of College Quad or Cathedral Close,
 Who are born nurses, who live in shorts
 Sleeping with people and playing fives.

It should be remembered in reading this passage that the speaker is addressing the "Financier," symbol of the industrial establishment. He is linked by the poet to the "others," the scholars who interpret the morality and ethics of the times. These scholars are held in rather low regard by the speaker.⁸³

If interpreted in relation to the Lawrencian doctrine, the passage above may be read as an attack on the personal morality of the day. In connecting the philosophies with the Financier, the poet implies that the contemporary values are largely materialistic. The reference to "Sleeping with people and playing fives" may well be a suggestion that the capacity for satisfactory love associations has deteriorated. If this interpretation is valid, Auden is showing a very

⁸³Ibid., p. 45.

real debt to Lawrence. The poem here seems to be concerned with the loss of personal morality as a social sickness. The idea of changing the mercenary quality of the Financier's values may be related to the Lawrencian moral concern. Auden's interest in moral and psychological regeneration may thus be read into this poem also.

The final poem in the collection, "Petition," provides one of the most concise examples of the triple influence on Auden's early poetry. The connections with Marx and Freud have been well established. The moral-psychological implications in the poem show the Lawrencian and Freudian elements to be closely related. The debt to Freud is primarily in the idea of curing society through the cure of the mental aberrations referred to. The pseudo-religious motif relates more directly to Lawrence. Where they both would agree is in the effect of artificial repressions on the subconscious. Both saw these mental disorders as the true causes of more universal weaknesses. Given these similarities in outlook and lacking more direct evidence, it may be said that the influence of Lawrence here is generally confined to the moral tone of the poem.

Paid on Both Sides reveals numerous instances of a Lawrencian influence. One of the first passages in the play, "Can speak of trouble . . .," is written in a style which is decidedly similar to some of Lawrence's poems. The reference to "eyes, ears, tongue, nostrils" shows a preoccupation with physical details. These parts are

especially relevant as instruments of the sensory faculties, a concern which is dominant in Lawrence. The emphasis on such details is seen throughout the passage, and at the end the poet connects the individual concern to a larger one.

Your sudden hand
 Shall humble great
 Pride, break it, wear down to stumps old systems
 which await
 The last transgression of the sea.

Beach contends that there is a religious concern here, that the chorus is addressing some type of divinity.⁸⁴ If read in this light, the passage might be interpreted as a prayer for the cure of excessive pride which Auden feels is a principal characteristic of the industrial order. Like Lawrence, he calls for action against the old systems.

In another passage from the play, which has not been included in later collections, Auden deals again with the problem of suppression of desires. The passage in question is a speech by a character called the "Man-Woman." It is fairly clear that this character is a symbolic figure of some type, although the poet does not say precisely what it represents. The best explanation is that it is supposed to apply to either sex without regard to their distinguishing characteristics. This would naturally give the expression a more universal quality than if the character were either a man or woman.⁸⁵ If read with this idea in mind, the excerpt

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 33.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 147.

might be a discourse on the social problems involved in repression of the subconscious:

Your mother told you that's what flowers did,
 And thought you lived since you were bored, not
 dead,
 And could not stop. So I was cold to make
 No difference, but you were quickly meek
 Altered for safety. I then tried to demand
 Proud habits, protestations called you mind
 To show you it was extra, but instead
 You overworked yourself, misunderstood,
 Adored me for the chance
 Now I shall go. No, you, if you come,
 Will not enjoy yourself . . .

The thought expressed here is rather obscure, but the implication is that the person spoken to is a victim of repressed desires who is unable to take pleasure in love. Again Auden is borrowing from the Lawrencian concept and implicitly attacking the Victorian standards of morality. The terms in which the Man-Woman speaks make it clear that it is against the situation represented by the hearer. When viewed in the context of Lawrence's beliefs and Auden's applications thereof, this passage may well be another expression of the need for a moral reformation. Such a reformation, the speaker might say, would remove artificial restrictions imposed by reason from the society and allow for more freedom of healthy emotional experience.

Three of the odes in The Orators show evidence of the doctrines expounded by Lawrence. "January 1, 1931," is a review of the year which has just ended. The poet is lamenting here what he considers to be the further decline

of the English social order during that time. He specifically mentions Lawrence, who died on March 2, 1930, and who he considered to be a major spokesman for the proposed moral reformation. This allusion is important in regard to Auden's sociological concern. With Lawrence dead and the social situation rapidly deteriorating, Auden's progressive circle had to find a new vitality. This ode is an attempt to render the spirit of the social and moral reformers of the time.⁸⁶

The ode "To John Warner" is definitely in the Lawrencian tradition. It is addressed to a newborn baby which the poet sets up as a potential savior of England. This fact is evident from the first when he connects the young child to the mythical figure of "John Bull." He then proceeds to a description of all the problems of the contemporary world which need solution. Implicit in the background is the need for a stronger morality. This he hopes the Great Reformer for whom he is calling will accomplish.

The gauche and lonely he will introduce of course
 To the smaller group, the right field of force;
 The few shall be taught who want to understand,
 Most of the rest shall love upon the land;
 Living in one place with a satisfied face
 All of the women and most of the men
 Shall work with their hands and not think again.

Beach contends that the child spoken to in the poem "represents the life force itself." He is the exponent of all the

⁸⁶Ibid., pp. 36-37.

healthy instincts that Lawrence could have praised.⁸⁷ If this is the case, the young John Warner is Auden's personification of the moral and psychological reformation that he proposes. The reformation is intended to cure the various ills of society but, as the poem implies, can be achieved only through a "change of heart" in the individual mind.

The final ode, "Not, Father, further do prolong . . .," is a highly moralistic piece. It is fairly obvious that he is addressing a deity, and he is doing so in more direct terms than in "Petition." Although it is not directly related to any specific ideas of Lawrence, it nevertheless may have a connection with the tradition he gave to Auden. When the speaker in this poem calls for the higher power to end the "desert-long retreat" and other troubles, he is calling for a type of moral reform. The relation to Lawrence is possible if the ode is placed in the context of the other odes, which lead up to this final expression of an almost religious concern.

Throughout the collection, then, there is abundant evidence that Auden knew and used the works of D. H. Lawrence. Both shared an intense interest in the future of humanity as well as a strong dissatisfaction with things as they were. They were in sympathy with the idea that the social order was in a state of decline. The decline appeared to have been brought on by the failure of the economic system,

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 94.

and the depression was cited as evidence of this fact. In seeking an explanation for the apparent inability of society to cope with the problem, Lawrence and his followers pointed to defects in human relationships. Although men wanted to live in peace together, they could not because of guilt feelings caused by repression. This belief, stated scientifically by Freud, was adopted by Auden.

Traces of the Lawrencian philosophy may be seen in numerous places in the 1930 collection. The poems therein reveal Auden's different methods of applying the doctrine. He may, as in "What's in your mind . . ." or "Sentries against inner and outer," borrow from Lawrence's style as well as his thought. In doing so he shows much attention to physical details as well as the direct love imagery. The poems where his influence is used in this manner prove to be rather effective in dealing with the idea of repressed instincts.

Other poems reveal a debt to Lawrence on a more general level. Here one finds a central point of Auden's sociological concept. He followed Lawrence in the belief that reason and logic had replaced emotion and intuition in the collective mind. Having studied Freud, he felt there was a psychological explanation for this condition. He then combines the Freudian and Lawrencian theories and calls for a removal of the restraints which prevent men from following their subconscious instincts. Auden uses poems such as "1929" to voice a concern for the general sickness

of society and call for a more healthy morality, a morality which places physical relations on a higher plane than the Victorian standard has hope of cure. To accomplish such a goal, he suggests in the same poem, each individual must initiate the reformation within himself.

What Auden proposes above all, and he is definitely sympathetic to Lawrence in doing so, is a return to a more imaginative life for everyone. Such a return, he implies, involves an escape from the bourgeois values imposed by an industrial society. As in "1929," he feels that less reliance on the philosophies of the enlightenment will bring a more sound society. This society would appreciate the beauties of the natural order above the beauties of the machine. For these reasons, Auden in his early poetry reveals a desire for social reformation. He is not alone in his wish but follows a large tradition of English writers. Auden, like Lawrence and the others, wrote the kind of poetry he did because he shared a general anxiety in regard to the world situation as it seemed then.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In evaluating the early poetry of W. H. Auden, one cannot escape the conclusion that social problems are his primary concern. Although the same might be said of many recent poets, there are few who approach the issues of his time in exactly the same way that he does. Indeed, he appears to be among the small number of writers whose sociological concept encompasses three different spheres of thought: the political, the psychological, and the moral. What is significant is that he synthesizes these fields of ideas in such a way as to construct an ideology primarily his own.

Since no writer can be completely original, there are always definite influences which shape his philosophy. In Auden's case, the influences are principally historical and philosophical. The historical background of his work involves the world situation during the post-World War I period. The philosophical background includes other writings with which he was acquainted and whose ideas he applied to political circumstances. He was concerned with possible solutions to the problems as well as the fundamental causes of the problems themselves. This dual interest in the state

of society is undoubtedly the chief inspiration for his early poetry.

In translating this interest into poetry, Auden assimilated diverse ideas from numerous writers. He was rather well-read in many fields of learning, and echoes of many historians, sociologists, and psychologists are demonstrable in his work. In his first poetry, however, three major influences are discernible above any of the others. Critics have shown significant elements of the ideas of Marx, Freud, and Lawrence throughout his 1930 and 1933 collections. Although the theories of these three men are associated with three different disciplines, Auden has combined their beliefs as they relate to his primary interest: the sociological concern.

He was able to apply these diverse concepts because he sympathized with their opinion that there were certain underlying reasons for the growing social ferment. He felt, as they did, that neither orthodox Christian doctrine nor capitalism were sufficient to cope with twentieth century problems. In a later evaluation of his early ideological struggle, Auden himself describes partially why he was drawn to their beliefs.

The various 'kerygmas', . . . of Lawrence, of Freud, of Marx, to which, along with most middle-class intellectuals of my generation, I paid attention between twenty and thirty, had one thing in common. They were all Christian heresies; that is to say, one cannot imagine their coming into existence except in a civilization which claimed

to be based, religiously, on the belief that the word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and that, in consequence, matter, the natural order, is real and redeemable, not a shadowy appearance or the cause of evil, and historical time is real and significant, not meaningless or an endless series of cycles.

They arose, as I suspect most heresies do, as a doctrinal protest against what one might call a heresy of behavior, I mean not simply someone whose conduct or thinking on secular matters is inconsistent with his faith, but someone who is quite honestly unaware that there is any inconsistency and defends his actions as a Christian . . .

The doctrinal heretic perceives, usually more or less correctly, what doctrine is implied by the particular actions of which he more or less justly disapproves, and in protest propounds a doctrine equally one-sided in the opposite direction.⁸⁸

The ideas of Marx, Freud, and Lawrence thus had a natural appeal for someone who was searching for a new perspective on contemporary social values.

The Marxian influence is probably the most immediately evident of the three. Auden's poetry represents an attempt to evaluate the spirit of the time and as such is strongly influenced by recent political events. When he began writing, the realities of the Great Depression were causing many of the thinking people to consider seriously the possibility of a social revolution. Many of these saw the economic collapse as adequate evidence of the Marxian doctrine of historical inevitability, of the eventual triumph of the working class. There was at that time a significant group which advocated the establishment of a classless socialist state.

⁸⁸Quoted in Spears, The Poetry of W. H. Auden, p. 174.

Support for the idea that Marxism is a direct influence on the early work is found throughout the collection. One need only consider The Dance of Death to see how close Auden comes to pure propaganda. Much of this work appears to be a direct call for action to abolish the prevailing political system and set up a new one modeled on the Marxian concept. Other works in the group reveal a growing concern with the idea that social change was necessary, that the present society was sick. It is this last interest that connects his ideology with those of Freud and Lawrence.

Although Auden believed in a definite necessity for a reformation to cure the social order of its basic weaknesses, he could not subscribe whole-heartedly to Marxist doctrine. Marx placed great emphasis on the effect of social environment on the individual. Auden's view modifies this idea to a great extent. He granted the fact that a political revolution would go far toward solving the problem of social sickness. However, he also realized that society is made up of individuals. Thus he placed greater emphasis on the theory that a general illness of an entire people was merely symptomatic of a collective individual malady. In such a view, his proposed reformation must include the personal problems of each man. Any change for the better in the overall system of society, then, must necessarily begin within the individual.

The departure from Marx on this point connects rather well with Auden's applications of Freudian psychology to his

own concept. Freud's view of the subconscious mind as the dominating element in man's behavior proved to be, for Auden, a satisfactory explanation of the world's contemporary disorders. He took Freud's idea that human activities are ruled to a great degree by subconscious desires and applied it directly to his Marxist views on political reform. In the early poetry, the resulting concept appears in the idea that social disorders are primarily general manifestations of a universal destructive urge, or "death wish", that is present in the collective unconscious. Besides this instinct, Freud, and Auden in his work, attributes a great deal of mental illness to repressions of the basic drives, such as the sex motive. Guilt feelings arising from such repression may be, Auden suggests, a primary cause of mass instability which reveals itself in wars and depression.

In such works as "The Journal of an Airman", Auden demonstrates a Freudian interpretation of the problems which beset England in his day. The trouble with society, he says here, is that it is torn by a destructive urge and a conflicting desire for self-preservation. In addition, the modern man is seen as filled with repressed desires. Such ideas have definitely Freudian overtones. Thus his interests in the political and psychological are seen to be closely related in his own concept.

The psychological explanation of conditions in the world was also accepted by Lawrence. He, like Freud, believed that individual neuroses had a great deal of effect

on the entire social body. Lawrence disagreed with Freud, however, on a major point. He felt that the real sickness of the time was not a disease of the subconscious, but an unhealthy state of the consciousness. He thus went a step further than Freud in searching for an ultimate cause of mass illness. The guilty element, he said, was not so much the repressed subconscious desires themselves but the abuse of conscious intellectual power which repressed them. This concept allowed Auden to make still another modification in his ideology and introduce a moral concern into his work. He believed in the dominance of the individual in molding society, but probably considered the Freudian concept as allowing for little free will.

The influence of Lawrence in Auden's early poetry is plainly evident in the call for a moral-psychological reformation. They evidently agreed that nineteenth century ethical values lay at the root of the trouble. Reason and intellect, they said, had imposed restraints on the individual imagination and inhibited a true fulfillment of emotional and physical desires. Such restrictions, said Lawrence, had caused disharmony in human relationships and were adversely affecting the social order. Auden's debt to this line of thought is readily apparent in such works as "January 1, 1931".

The inescapable conclusion, then, is that Auden has fused three different philosophies in arriving at one of his own. His own ideology which he formulated at an early

stage of his literary career combines ideas from three of the most eloquent spokesmen for these philosophies. The resulting concept is a perceptive one, and offers explanations of the overriding problem as well as possible methods for its solution. In each case, he never accepts all tenets of one theory, but modifies the idea to fit his own conception. The ultimate product of his critical evaluation of the great thinkers of his day is a sociological philosophy which is distinctly his own.

Critics may debate the real greatness of Auden's poetry or the durability of his literary reputation, but they cannot deny his significance as a spokesman for his time. The literature of any period essentially reflects the thought of that period. W. H. Auden is important in that he reveals one of the principal currents of thought in the late 1920's and early 1930's. Consequently, a study of his 1930 collection will be of value to the student of the history and philosophy as well as the literature of the period. In effect, he stands as an important symbol of the period's sociological concern, speaking for all the followers of Marx, Freud, and Lawrence as the principal advocates of social reform.

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