

W. H. AUDEN AND THE NEUROTIC DREAD

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The poetry of W. H. Auden is predominantly concerned with the problems of modern man in society. The life of which he writes breeds neuroses, fragmentation, disorientation, and perversion. His world harbors collective man, war, hate, and anxiety. In Auden's poetry, neurotics comprise today's society. The poet, however, is not chiefly interested in society itself, but in the individuals who constitute the group. He delineates the modern condition by concentrating almost entirely upon the failures and weaknesses of the individual. Although contemporary society may exhibit a sort of communal neurosis, it is still, to Auden, the man himself who has originated the modern disease.¹ The culture is indeed a disordered one, and the individual suffers. In his book W. H. Auden, Francis Scarfe says, "The individual is baffled, torn between various indecisions, powerless to stem the great destructive forces in society today which do so much to nullify the efforts and internal life of the individual."² Nevertheless, man has created these destructive forces, and, in seeking a

¹Richard Hoggart, Auden: An Introductory Essay (London: Chatto & Windus, 1951), p. 127.

²Francis Scarfe, W. H. Auden (Monaco: The Lyrebird Press, 1949), p. 19.

synthesis and cure for modern life, Auden unmercifully points his finger at the individual: "Auden looks with pity and terror upon a world that is harsh and cruel, that has been made so by human wills perverted, and that is destined to collapse unless there is individual and mass moral regeneration."³ Although Auden depicts modern society, he primarily characterizes the individual human element which has ultimately caused the diseased, neurotic condition.

Critics and scholars have fairly well analyzed Auden's approach to the failures which have produced the social malaise. They have similarly explicated the various approaches through which the poet attempts to understand and combat these failures. In an article on Auden, Justin Replogle states that the poet has analyzed the cultural decline from a healthy past to a neurotic present by way of Freudian psychology, Marxism, and Kierkegaardian Christianity.⁴ But, whatever his approach to the problem, Auden at all times recognizes its special symptoms and effects. Hoggart states, "The agents of the psychological and neurotic disease are malaise, cowardice, inability to 'cope,' inertia, longing for death, frustration, ingrown will, reason without emotion, and self-regard. The enemy is all the

³Rica Brenner, Poets of Our Time (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1941), p. 246.

⁴Justin Replogle, "Social Philosophy in Auden's Early Poetry," Criticism, II (Fall, 1960), 351.

fear and negation which helps to dry and deaden."⁵ Auden takes special interest in these unhappy and displaced persons and attacks the negative life through which the disease gains momentum. He attempts both to chastise and encourage the individuals whose qualities seem no longer important in the world, to offer a cure for the sense of futility against the march of events and the sense of loss of the familiar and the necessary.⁶ Love itself seems ineffectual and tainted in a world in which negation influences all phases of existence. The persons in Auden's poetry are neurotics, and he attacks all types.⁷

In attempting to get at the heart of this disease, Auden delves into the original causes. M. L. Rosenthal believes that Auden finds the primary cause in man's "terrible new responsibility for himself, now that the time of unconscious evolution, biological and social has ended."⁸ This "new responsibility" is apparently a task for which man is poorly equipped and which, he feels, will lead only to failure. He faces a terrifying freedom, responsibility, and necessary choice by which he must redeem the present time.

⁵Hoggart, p. 117.

⁶Scarfe, p. 19.

⁷Francis Scarfe, Auden and After (London: George Routledge and Sons Ltd., 1947), p. 15.

⁸M. L. Rosenthal, The Modern Poets (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 195.

Each man confronts this choice. Scarfe asserts in W. H. Auden: "Whatever their original determinism all men are 'volunteers' inasmuch as they must choose; no man has the right to master another, in 'choosing' no man can choose without reference to all others."⁹

To establish a cure for the neurotic generation, Auden again looks toward the individual. Since he is responsible for the condition, only he--man alone--can elevate society and culture above the fragmented present. Rica Brenner states that Auden insists upon a positive attitude of action, of the revival of old personal virtues, for in each lie the possibility and responsibilities of betterment. The world which Auden finds ideal is the one which would permit the individual the greatest freedom and opportunity for development.¹⁰ Since man has freedom of will, problems and solutions alike must arise from what each makes of this freedom. Although man in the modern world feels inadequate to the responsibilities of adult choice, he must, in order to gain salvation, confront this choice, accept the human position, and trust in God. To Auden the subversion of the heart to the intellect has been a perversion of human will: "Auden emphatically assures us that one way of combatting evil is to substitute for the ordre logique the ordre du

⁹Scarfe, W. H. Auden, p. 46.

¹⁰Brenner, p. 275.

coeur."¹¹ Modern man must return to a less complicated mode of living. To find unity and wholeness, he needs to achieve a simplicity, honesty, and love which can combat the existing ills in society. Replogle analyzes Auden's answer in an article appearing in Criticism: "To achieve wholeness he must avoid unsatisfactory patterns of behavior. Although he cannot attain the simplicity of animals, he can develop his own native instinctive potentialities, find his own proper place in nature, and release the primitive forces producing healthy love."¹² The solution lies, not in restructuring society, but in a healthy effort by each of society's members.

In general, then, scholars have analyzed the modern disease, some of its special symptoms and cures, found in Auden's poetry. However, critics have not, as yet, sufficiently recognized and delineated what seems to be, in consideration of the bulk of Auden's poetry, the primary evidence of widespread neurosis in Twentieth Century life--the neurotic dread. This dread is a product of the problem discussed above, a particular manifestation of neuroticism; yet it arises from its own particular sources, and has its own special cures. It is perhaps the most promi-

¹¹Ruth Lechlitrer, "The Odyssey of Auden," Poetry, LXVI (July, 1945), p. 210.

¹²Replogle, p. 356.

nent neurosis to be found in Auden's view of modern man.

The neurotic dread, which haunts so much of Auden's poetry, takes many forms. It is in general that anxiety which plagues the individual at all times, but which is usually nameless, unreasonable, and seemingly unconquerable. Although modern man seldom confronts it consciously, this dread constantly surrounds him, perverting his daily actions, hopes, and contemplations. It is at once the "supreme Antagonist" of "Consider" and the foreboding witnesses of "The Witnesses." The dread perverts the love of the dreamer in [Dear, though the night is gone] and causes him to dream of his lover's faithlessness.¹³ The angst may appear as the "Terrible Presences" of "Crisis" or, in "Not All the Candidates Pass," the "sleepless presences," which "endear / Our peace to us with a perpetual threat" (p. 85). Auden has been preoccupied enough with this neurotic dread to name the very age in which he lives "The Age of Anxiety."

Although the persons in Auden's poetry cannot confront, understand, and overcome this crippling neurosis, the reader can, by studying Auden's poetry, come to grips with the forms, causes, and cures which Auden offers in his delineation of the modern age. In the poet's viewpoint,

¹³W. H. Auden, The Collected Poetry of W. H. Auden (New York: Random House, 1945), p. 201. Unless otherwise indicated, all references to Auden's poetry will be from this volume and will be indicated by page numbers only in the text.

the neurotic dread takes two major forms, each of which has several causes, symptoms, and possible solutions. The first and probably the most important form is the unreasonable dread of failure, the sense of inevitable doom and loss which affects the individual's every action, feeling, and thought. He dreads the failure of free choice, yet insists upon his right to choose failure. At once he feels terror both at the loss of his identity and at the discovery that his identity is inadequate. Thus he attempts isolation, surrounds himself with an overwhelming ego, refuses to know and accept himself, or hides in the strength of "Collective Man" (p. 58). He becomes incapable of a healthy love because he either surrenders with the probability that it will fail or tries to use love to supplement and abet his inadequate ego. Since he harbors a neurotic sense of guilt for past failures, he dreads that he is unworthy of achieving future successes. Finally he condemns the achievements themselves as probable failures because he dreads that, once attained, they cannot fulfill his expectations. His dread, in its most significant form, is a crippling anxiety that his every action, desire, and feeling will result in inevitable failure.

The neurotic dread, in its second major manifestation, is a particularly modern fear of time. In several Auden poems, one notices his concern with time. Such works as "For the Time Being," "The New Year Letter," "The Wit-

nesses," [Stop all the clocks], "Kairos and Logos," and "Another Time" evidence the poet's constant recognition of time and man's fear of it. The individual agonizes over the temporality of human existence. Although he can confront yesterday and can look to the future, he can never quite grasp the "now." He dreads the ticking clock, yet is always mindful of its presence. Auden's characters refuse, because of their dread, to recognize today and accept the human condition. The anxiety arises especially from the gnawing fear of death, which the ticking clock inevitably brings to mind. The poet chastises, "'O let not Time deceive you / You cannot conquer Time" (p. 197), but his characters avoid it, ignore it, and most especially dread it. To Auden, man has failed, thus far, to redeem the time being. Thus he lives and must live in his present state of terrors at the perpetual passing of minutes, days, and years.

Auden recognizes, analyzes, and offers solutions for the neurotic dread. Yet he sometimes becomes impatient with its petty, selfish manifestations. In Auden and After, Francis Scarfe comments: "He developed a strong attack on neurotics of all kinds as though they were the enemies of society."¹⁴ Auden's impatience leads him to a rather peculiar method of portraying these neuroses. Rather than treating this modern anxiety seriously, Auden more fre-

¹⁴Scarfe, Auden and After, p. 15.

quently satirizes the contemporary individual. Scarfe says, "The pseudo-psychology, by which disease is represented purely as defense-mechanism and selfishness, leads Auden very often to treat suffering cruelly as though it were a joke."¹⁵ Humour often prevails even in the most serious anxiety-ridden situations. The comedy well suits the neurotic dread about which he writes. For, in joking about the disease, Auden displays a humour which takes on characteristics of neurosis. The comic effects are not always very funny; they seem usually to be similar to that nervous giggle which may accompany anxiety or fear.

Justin Replogle finds the humorous aspects of Auden particularly suited to his subject matter: "The appropriate style is the mock heroic, the comically grand, the style of a man who knows that deeds are both heroic and foolish, that man is both sincere and a fake, and that to show this best is not to say so straight out in a serious manner, but to make the style itself reflect it."¹⁶ In short, the poetic humour seems to be merely another symptom of neuroticism. The poet, after all, is a poet of the culture about which he writes, and that he should write of this neurotic dread in a style suggestive of a neurotic humour further

¹⁵Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁶Justin Replogle, "Auden's Homage to Thalia," Bucknell Review, XI (March, 1963), 105.

emphasizes the character of contemporary life. The laugh is a neurotic one, a recognition that this overwhelming dread is really rather silly. As a member of this culture, Auden satirizes himself when he satirizes and spoofs his fellow citizens. It is highly appropriate that the neurotic dread should be portrayed in a satirical, joking style through which the poet recognizes his own role in the neurotic drama. The dread must be laughed at in order that some of the gnawing anxiety may be relieved. Taken too seriously the anxiety could easily become a neurotic dread of the dread itself.

W. H. Auden has in short made it his task to characterize Twentieth-Century life. By way of a frequently satirical and humorous style, the poet presents a serious problem which plagues modern society--a neurotic dread of failure and time. This anxiety takes many forms, arises from many sources, and has several possible cures. The reader, to gain a full understanding of this widespread neurosis, can find it valuable to analyze Auden's poetry from 1930 to 1955. By carefully studying many specific poems, with special emphasis on the two major forms of the dread and the neurotic humour which frequently accompanies it, he may gain an understanding of Twentieth-Century man and of the poetic works of W. H. Auden.

CHAPTER II

FAILURE AND THE NEUROTIC DREAD

One of the most frequent subjects in W. H. Auden's poetry is the sense of failure which surrounds the entire life of modern man. Free will, responsibility, guilt, love and inadequacy are all agents of this failure; each, at various times, contributes to man's defeat. Communally man may eye contemporary failure by looking at the wars in which the participants themselves must ask, "Which side am I supposed to be on?" (p. 120). He can take the poet's view of "September 1, 1939" and watch "the clever hopes expire / Of a low dishonest decade" (p. 57). Or the contemporary individual can regard Spain, as Auden did in 1937, and say, "But today the struggle" (p. 182). In "New Year Letter," Auden observes:

Who, thinking of the last ten years,
Does not hear howling in his ears
The Asiatic cry of pain
The shots of executing Spain
See stumbling through his outraged mind
The Abyssinian, blistered, blind,
The dazed uncomprehending stare
Of the Danubian despair,
The Jew wrecked in the German cell,
Flat Poland frozen into hell,
The silent dumps of unemployed
Whose areté has been destroyed. (pp. 272-273)

One can read any of a great number of Auden's poems which reveal the great failures of the Twentieth Century; but each error is inextricably bound to the failure of the in-

dividual as he copes inadequately with the responsibilities which confront him.

This sense of failure which occupies so much of Auden's poetry cannot, upon analysis, be separated from the neurotic dread. The dread and the failure interact so that they are at once both cause and effect, effect and cause. The failures have been so frequent that the dread haunts the individual with each new task. The dread has become so prominent that he cannot, because of it, succeed. In "Spring 1940," Auden writes of the terrible consequences to which the neurotic anxiety has ultimately led and the role which failure plays in these consequences:

O not even war can frighten us enough,
That last attempt to eliminate the Strange
By uniting us all in a terror
Of something known, even that's a failure

Which cannot stop us taking our walks alone,
Scared by the unknown unconditional dark,
Down the avenues of our longing. (p. 94)

The relationship between the dread and the failure, is, in this poem, not sufficiently clear. But it is evident that Auden has placed them together as parts of the same condition. Modern man has preferred the known terror of war to the neurotic fear of the "Strange"; he has acted, Auden intimates, out of an unknown terror and many defeats. Not even war succeeds, and Auden indicates that there are more failures to come. Still "scared by the . . . unconditional dark," surrounded by that ominous dread, man continues. He

will again and again fall short of success:

For however they dream they are scattered,
 Our bones cannot help reassembling themselves
 Into the philosophic city where dwells
 The knowledge they cannot get out of.
 (pp. 94-95)

Perhaps the "knowledge they cannot get out of" is the knowledge that failure inevitably thwarts every endeavour. Possibly the "Strange" and the "unconditional dark" are both the unknown doom which man feels must result from any action. At any rate, in W. H. Auden's poetry, the most prominent, recurring form of the neurotic dread is a gnawing anxiety that failure and defeat are the only rewards which man receives for his struggles in the Twentieth Century.

Free will, choice, and responsibility form probably the most anxiety-ridden area of modern life. To Auden the citizen of contemporary society feels a responsibility which he cannot shirk, an obligation to recognize his limited free will and to act by virtue of this freedom. In several poems, Auden indicates that this responsibility, and particularly the possibility of failing to meet this responsibility, is one of the most frequent causes of the neurotic dread. Aware of his free will and determined to exercise it, man lives an anxious nightmare that, whatever he chooses, he will fail. Auden effectively expresses the dread of free choice in one of Rosetta's speeches in The Age of Anxiety:

What fear of freedom then
 Causes our clasping hands
 To make in miniature

That earth anew, and now
 By choice instead of chance
 To suffer from the same
 Attraction and untruth
 Suspicion and respect?¹⁷

Rosetta has indicated that some dread of freedom has caused man to choose his own suffering. But, even though he fears freedom, man acts compulsively, almost eager to will his own doom since he earnestly feels an obligation. Part of the obligation lies in what he thinks is finding and fulfilling his own identity. He has to choose and act freely in order to find self-hood, but he dreads inadequacy. If he does not act, he has no identity; if he does, he will probably fail. Thus, defeat looms in every direction, and the future is, at best, a fearful prospect.

When, even in an atmosphere of absolute dread, exercising free will becomes a compulsive necessity for man, then failure, as it does in the above quote from The Age of Anxiety, frequently appears intentional, and the dread seems to be an awareness that he dooms himself. Auden, in his poem "In Time of War," describes war, for example, as an intentional terror:

Those accidental terrors, Famine, Flood
 Were never trained to diagnose or heal
 Nightmares that are intentional and real.

Nor lust nor gravity can preach an aim

¹⁷W. H. Auden, The Age of Anxiety (New York: Random House, 1946), pp. 74-75.

To minds disordered by a lucid dread
 Of seeking peace by going off one's head.
 (p. 25)

Twentieth-Century man, in many instances, completely justifies his dread by choosing his certain doom. If man wills his defeat, "it must be so," but Auden, of course, questions the rightness of this perverted exercise of human freedom.

He asks:

If we are right to choose our suffering
 And be tormented by an Either-Or,
 The right to fail that is worth dying for.
 (p. 26)

The "right to fail" is an unfortunate manifestation of free will or the use to which modern man has put it, and it frequently causes the neurotic dread. While man naturally fears failure, he nevertheless demands his right to accomplish it in whatever way he chooses. In "The Labyrinth," Auden further delineates the erring will which often justifies modern anxiety. Seeing that he is lost, man seeks his salvation in metaphysics, mathematics, and aesthetics; but Auden writes, "Man creates his own condition" (p. 10), and suggests that the will plays the most important role in this creation:

My problem is how not to will;
 They move most quickly who stand still;
 I'm only lost until I see
 I'm lost because I want to be. (pp. 10-11)

The condition is, then, one which man has manufactured for himself and which he perpetuates through his mistaken will. The dread of not succeeding forces him to continue on the

same ego-driven journey, the quest that, ironically enough, leads repeatedly to failures and defeats.

Again, in "Something is Bound to Happen," Auden portrays the feeling of doom which is coupled with the compulsive drive to act in spite of it:

Doom is dark and deeper than any sea-dingle.
 Upon what man it fall
 In spring, day-wishing flowers appearing,
 Avalanche sliding, white snow from rock-face,
 That he should leave his house,
 No cloud-soft hand can hold him, restraint by women.
(p. 34)

A catastrophe seems inevitable, even fated; but despite all attempts to restrain him, the hero willfully seeks the disaster which awaits him. Auden only pleads, "Save him from hostile capture, / From sudden tiger's spring at corner."

The neurotic dread takes an additional form in another of Auden's poems, but results from the same cause. In "Hell" the angst is a hell of man's own creation. The first stanza of this poem points out the truly neurotic character of the anxiety:

Hell is neither here nor there
 Hell is not anywhere
 Hell is hard to bear. (p. 51)

This hell is "neither here nor there"; it exists only in man's mind. But, although intangible, it is a very real illness which receives its nourishment from the individual will. Auden writes, in the same poem, "Only the challenge to our will . . . / Sustains our effort to be ill" (p. 52).

In Poem XXI from his sonnet sequence "In Time of

War," Auden clearly names free will as one cause of the modern dread. Freedom is "hostile," making "Loss" and "Anxiety" pervade the life of man (p. 330). Again, in "1929," Auden finds that everything, even nature, seems to man to make "choice seem a necessary error" (p. 63). The compulsion to will remains bound to unsuccess, and man writhes in fear of his "necessary error." The poet, in a similar mood, asks in "Crisis" a rhetorical question, "Where do They come from?" (p. 169). He later identifies "They" as "Terrible Presences," another form of the dread. Answering his own question, Auden replies that "we conjured them here," that terror has been answered with terror. Our will demands and gets the doom it dreads; man repeatedly justifies his anxiety. The reader finds another example in Poem XXV from "Songs and Other Musical Pieces." In this lyric, the hero receives, from various symbolic forms of anxiety, many questions and warnings about the journey he is making. One of the most effective stanzas clearly expresses the mood of terror:

'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.'
(p. 223)

The neurotic images haunt the rider on his journey, but, compelled by his will to act, he travels on.

The most predominant reason for this desire to assert free will seems, in Auden's poetry, to lie in contem-

porary man's search for identity. The theory behind this assertion resembles the existential belief that man is what he does. He must find his identity through willful action, even if the action means destruction. The neurotic dread at times is reminiscent of the Kierkegaardian angst. Although he feels "fear and trembling," the individual must act; he has to take the leap of faith. However, in Auden's writing, the leap is not necessarily one of faith, but is frequently action in spite of disbelief. The fear and trembling produce in the neurotic only the feeling that he will inevitably fail. Yet, to fulfill his ego, to assert a questionable identity, Auden's hero willfully dooms himself. Ironically, however, Auden indicates that these exercises of limited free will lead often only to a masking of identity. The individual, in searching for fulfillment, many times refuses to accept and recognize his true condition. There exists a dual fear that he will fail to find himself and that the self he finds will be an intrinsic failure. To Auden this failure is indeed inevitable, for, in attempting to create an indestructible self, man has become too egoistic to succeed. He chooses without reference to others; his free will seems to exclude all but himself. Auden characterizes this condition in "New Year Letter" when he sets the stage "up in the Ego's atmosphere" (p. 307). There, free will functions not "to choose the actions that this world requires." Rather the egoist acts,

to lead alone

An attic life all on her own,
 Unhindered, unrebuked, unwatched,
 Self-known, self-praising, self-attached.
(p. 307)

Thus, since man lives not alone, but in society, any choice made without consideration of the other man is certainly bound for failure.

"The Riddle" also describes this ego-centered condition. The poet writes that "we love ourselves alone" (p. 150). He believes that, if we could be rid of all the terrors and could see our condition clearly, we would discover that, in truth, we think only of ourselves. "The Third Temptation," from the sonnet sequence "The Quest," again reveals man's state. The hero, having carefully regarded both present and past, decides that success lies in acting selfishly, without concern for another. Yet, his success turns to dread when he sees the self he has created:

And bowed to fate and was successful so
 That soon he was the king of all the creatures:
 Yet, shaking in an autumn nightmare, saw,

Approaching down a ruined corridor,
 A figure with his own distorted features
 That wept, and grew enormous, and cried Woe.
(p. 255)

The hero acted freely, but even in his temporary success, he dreads the failure of the identity he worked so hard to achieve. Here, the anxiety is completely reasonable, for the modern egoist has made himself a distorted figure.

The "Commentary" from "In Time of War" indicates that man has sought his salvation in self: "Self was the

one city, / The all where each must find his comfort and his pain" (p. 340). But, as in "The Riddle," the refuge in self merely adds to the anxiety and destruction of life.

Another manifestation of the neurotic dread in relation to identity appears in "The Average." The erring will in this case results from parental mistakes. The hero's parents pressure their child with "fond ambition," making their "shy and country-loving child afraid / No sensible career was good enough" (p. 257). His dread is that he will not be able to fulfill their expectations; thus, he sets out on a quest for which he is ill-prepared. The journey results in further anxiety:

The silence roared displeasure: looking down,
He saw the shadow of an Average Man
Attempting the Exceptional, and ran. (p. 257)

Having refused to accept his "average" state, this man cannot succeed; he has fearfully attempted the impossible and has, of course, found only defeat. In trying to find himself, he has merely lost his true identity.

One of Auden's most famous poems, "September 1, 1939," presents a nearly opposite view of modern dread and individual identity. In this poem, rather than seeking to be exceptional, the characters take an equally destructive, defeating course. They attempt to hide in the "strength of Collective Man" (p. 58). The dread that they are individually inadequate to meet the problems confronting them causes an endeavour to obscure all individuality:

Faces along the bar
 Cling to their average day:
 The lights must never go out,
 The music must always play,
 All the conventions conspire
 To make this fort assume
 The furniture of home;
 Lest we should see where we are,
 Lost in a haunted wood,
 Children afraid of the night
 Who have never been happy or good.
 (p. 58)

Surrounding themselves with conventions, clinging to "their average day," these people refuse to recognize and remedy their dreadful condition. But the poet wonders "who can live for long / In an euphoric dream." No attempt heretofore made by modern man can, in Auden's view, remedy the neurotic concern for identity. The completely selfish quest, the attempt of the average to be exceptional, and the fearful submersion of the individual in Collective Man all lead to further anxiety and failure. In "New Year Letter," Auden clearly states his belief that man cannot find a solution if he does not acknowledge and accept what his true character and position are:

Meanwhile at least the layman knows
 That none are lost so soon as those
 Who overlock their crooked nose,
 That they grow small who imitate
 The mannerisms of the great,
 Afraid to be themselves, or ask
 What acts are proper to their task,
 And that a tiny piece of fear
 Is lethal in man's atmosphere. (p. 288)

In the above passage, Auden fully recognizes that the fear, in this case the fear of being and accepting oneself, is

the "lethal" poison which has caused man's failure.

This anxiety about identity perhaps most frequently appears in Auden's poetry in the form of attempted isolation, often symbolized by a journey to an island.¹⁸ Because neither the egocentric will nor the strength of Collective Man has cured the individual of his neurotic dread, he searches for physical isolation. In "Journey to Iceland," the poet effectively presents this futile endeavour:

And the traveller hopes: 'Let me be far from any
Physician'; and the ports have names for the sea,
The citiless, the corroding, the sorrow;
And North means to all: 'Reject.' (p. 7)

In this poem the journey to Iceland seems to symbolize rejection and isolation, through which man again tries with "his limited hope" to rid himself of the anxiety and failure. However, the heroes find, much to their dismay, that even this journey is hopeless. The island refuge does not help them forget that they still must endure themselves; there is no escape:

For Europe is absent: this is an island and
therefore
A refuge, where the fast affections of its dead
may be bought
By those whose dreams accuse them of being
Spitefully alive, and the pale

From too much passion of kissing feel pure in
its deserts.
Can they? For the world is, and the present,
and the lie. (p. 8)

¹⁸Monroe Spears, The Poetry of W. H. Auden (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 124.

From this journey into isolation, the modern citizen gains only another form of dread--that of being alone. He asks, "'O who is against me? / Why am I always alone?'" (p. 8). Instead of finding a cure for his sickness, he has unfortunately only transferred the dread.

The lyric "Atlantis" presents an even more extreme endeavour to find salvation in isolation. In a rather light mood, Auden writes of a journey to an island which does not, except poetically, exist. After the trials and the seeming impossibilities of the quest have been overcome, the traveler collapses just as Atlantis is in sight:

Having actually got
 To the last col, you collapse
 With all Atlantis shining
 Below you yet you cannot
 Descend, you should still be proud
 Even to have been allowed
 Just to peep at Atlantis
 In a poetic vision: (p. 22)

The isolation which man seeks is, like Atlantis itself, only a poetic dream. The hero is dismayed because of his failure: "All the little household gods / Have started crying"; but the poet merely soothes, "but say / Good-bye now, and put to sea." The vision of separation is an empty, hopeless one. Men may dream of islands, as they do in "Paysage Moralise," where "love was innocent, being far from cities" (p. 47); however, they may only dream. For typically, the characters in the poem must awaken: "But dawn came back and they were still in cities" (p. 48). Thus,

neither the selfish will, nor Collective Man, nor physical isolation can soothe the anxiety-ridden man, the being haunted by a fear of failing to discover an adequate self.

Perhaps the most prominent symptom of the neurotic dread of failure--failure to choose rightly and to find an adequate identity--is, in Auden's poetry, the inability to love. The dread becomes mingled with guilt resulting from failure to a point at which man feels himself unworthy of love and incapable of giving or receiving it. Auden's characters are, for the most part, too guilt-ridden, egoistic, or fearful to achieve a fulfilling relationship with anyone. They live in constant dread that love, like all else, will fail.

In The Age of Anxiety, the reader finds an effective description of the guilt which plagues modern man and makes him fear that he is unworthy both to succeed and to fulfill his needs:

All that exists
Matters to man; he minds what happens
And feels he is at fault, a fallen soul
With power to place, to explain every
What in his world but why he is neither
God nor good, this guilt the insoluble
Final fact, infusing his private
Nexus of needs, his noted aims with
Incomprehensible comprehensive dread
At not being what he knows that before
This world was he was willed to become.¹⁹

In the same poem, the character Malin feels a guilty sense

¹⁹Auden, The Age of Anxiety, p. 24.

of unworthiness that causes him to reject friendship:

My deeds forbid me
To linger longer. I'll leave my friend,
Be sorry by myself.²⁰

Each of the characters in The Age of Anxiety possesses that "incomprehensible comprehensive dread," which is nurtured by an individual guilt. They cannot receive love or satisfy a lover because they cannot rid themselves of their failures. Even friendship has no place in an age in which dread, fed by guilt, dominates each life.

In "Spain 1937," Auden identifies the predominant feeling of the age: "Today the inevitable increase in the chances of death; / The conscious acceptance of guilt" (p. 184). The acceptance of guilt usually results in the rejection of love. When fear and conscience negatively prevail, love cannot endure healthily. In many of his lyrics, W. H. Auden both sadly and satirically delineates the neurotic fear and guilt which enfeeble modern love. Poem IV from "Songs and Other Musical Pieces" portrays a man who is haunted by a dream of his lover's unfaithfulness: "Dear, though the night is gone, / Its dream still haunts today" (p. 201). In his waking hours, the lover accuses himself not his sweetheart, of failure:

O but what worm of guilt
Or what malignant doubt
Am I the victim of,

²⁰Ibid., p. 90.

That you then, unabashed,
 Did what I never wished,
 Confessed another love;
 And I, submissive, felt
 Unwanted and went out? (p. 201)

The hero is "submissive" because he dreads his own inadequacy; that "worm of guilt" will not allow him to enjoy a fulfilling relationship which is free from anxiety. Again, in "The Lesson," a lover's three dreams terrify him as he fears that they occurred only to rebuke him and show his unworthiness of the love he seeks. Upon reflection, he transforms dread to guilt, deciding that each dream "tried to teach / My will to have you that it cannot be" (p. 117). Auden directly describes this same anxiety in "Heavy Date" when he says, "Every young man fears that / He is not worth loving" (p. 108). Auden recognizes that this guilt and dread of inadequacy are justified. In "Canzone," he writes that one must acknowledge "how much must be forgotten out of love, / How much must be forgiven, even love" (p. 163). The main problem lies, however, in the fact that man in Auden's time can neither forget nor forgive in order to love well. He cannot forget deeds he so much regrets or forgive himself for being less than he feels he ought to be.

Thus, love becomes, like all other areas of modern life, a thing to be dreaded because man feels that it too must surely fail. Again, expecting failure and demanding so much that failure is inescapable, the lover effectively

wills his own defeat. "Canzone" expresses both the dread and the excessive demands that precipitate love's fall:

Dear flesh, dear mind, dear spirit, O dear love,
 In the depths of myself blind monsters know
 Your presence and are angry, dreading Love
 That asks its images for more than love. (p. 163)

The character in "Too Dear, Too Vague" also fulfills the doom he imagines: "Designs his own unhappiness / Foretells his own death and is faithless" (p. 79). Because he dreads failure, he insures it through faithlessness. The certainty that faithlessness will defeat love is preferable to the gnawing anxiety that love might fail. Rather than fulfillment, he offers negation; but love cannot endure negation: Love "cannot go? From yes to no" (p. 78).

Aware of the anxiety, guilt, and defeat, Auden is skeptical of love in the Twentieth Century. In "In Sickness and in Health," he images love's domain as a "land of condors, sick cattle, and dead flies" (p. 30). The poet suggests that modern man is too eager to say, "I love," without realizing that "figures of destruction unawares / Jump out on Love's imagination" (p. 30). Before love can succeed, man must understand the tremendous trials to be endured: the dread, the guilt, the defeat. When he analyzes the sickness indicated by the poem's title, the poet warns:

O let none say I love until aware
 What huge resources it will take to nurse
 One ruining speck, one tiny hair
 That casts a shadow through the universe. (p. 30)

The same poem reveals the selfishness and stupidity which disease other-involvement. Although, in the part of the lyric which concerns the health suggested by the title, Auden presents an affirmation of love as the partial solution to the modern disease, he seems at times to doubt even the possibility of a healthy relationship in this age of anxiety. He laments:

Beloved, we are always in the wrong
 Handling so clumsily our stupid lives,
 Suffering too little or too long,
 Too careful even in our selfish loves.
(p. 31)

The same gloomy anxiety pervades many other Auden lyrics, such as "Venus Will Now Say a Few Words." In this poem, the Love Goddess taunts that the lovers' fate is to "suffer the loss they were afraid of, yes, / Holders of one position, wrong for years" (p. 110).

The relationship between failure and the neurotic dread should, at this point, be clear to the reader. The dread manifests itself in numerous forms. The failure of choice, identity, society, and love, coupled with the guilt which strengthens it, is both the dread's cause and its effect. Auden characterizes men and women who shrink even from success for fear that success itself will fail to fulfill their desires. They fear that the good will not, after all, be good enough. As Auden states in "New Year Letter," man is "doomed to fail if he succeeds" (p. 282). Even in Auden's long poem "For the Time Being," the story of the

Nativity of Christ, a modern Joseph and Mary fear the actual arrival of the greatest Good. They do not quite know how to cope with the idea of eternal goodness:

Safe in Egypt we shall sigh
 For lost insecurity;
 Only when his terrors come
 Does our flesh feel quite at home.
 (p. 464)

Because terror and anxiety are, paradoxically, the only feelings with which modern man can feel secure, he must reject the fantastic goodness received from Christ's birth. The Chorus in "For the Time Being" characterizes this dread of goodness:

Alone, alone, about a dreadful wood,
 Of conscious evil runs a lost mankind,
 Dreading to find its Father lest it find
 The Goodness it has dreaded is not good.
 (p. 411)

The dread then results in rejection. In the final part of "For the Time Being," the Narrator describes the way in which man rejects God's gift:

We look round for something, no matter what, to
 inhibit
 Our self-reflection, and the obvious thing for that
 purpose
 Would be some great suffering. So, once we have
 met the Son,
 We are tempted ever after to pray to the Father;
 'Lead us into temptation and evil for our sake.'
 (p. 466)

There exists a double fear--that man is too tainted with guilt to deserve the miracle and that the miracle itself will be unsuccessful. The guilt leads us to "inhibit our self-reflection." The certainty of failure seems to be

preferred to uncertainty of a good we never expected; failure is at least familiar. The Narrator soothes, though, that temptation and evil will come,

That we do not expect, and certainly with a force
More dreadful than we can imagine. (p. 466)

accustomed to the anxiety, quite secure in his feeling of futility, modern man dares not hope that he has actually been blessed by Eternal Goodness. As long as the neurotic dread prevails, as long as man wills his own failure, not even God can offer salvation. Auden writes, "God's Will will be done, that, in spite of her prayers, / God will cheat no one, not even the world of its triumph" (p. 466).

CHAPTER III

TIME AND THE NEUROTIC DREAD

In his book The Poetry of W. H. Auden, Monroe Spears states that, in Auden's viewpoint, "the basic human problem is man's anxiety in time."²¹ Coexisting with the neurotic dread of failure, a terrifying preoccupation with the clock on the wall haunts the heroes in Auden's poetry. Like other modern writers, Auden characterizes the contemporary individual as a time-obsessed man who fears and hates the passing of the hour. Henry James, for example, writes in The Ambassadors, "People can be in general pretty well trusted, of course--with the clock of their freedom ticking as loud as it seems to do here--to keep an eye on the fleeting hour."²² Similarly Eliot's hero in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" watches the clock and allows his obsession with time, which is never now, to defeat his intentions.²³ Auden, who often writes in the tradition of James and Eliot, presents time as the "supreme Antagonist" of modern humanity. His characters dread the ravages of the minute, the temporality of human existence and human

²¹Spears, p. 178.

²²Henry James, The Ambassadors (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1902), p. 149.

²³T. S. Eliot, T. S. Eliot: Collected Poems (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, 1963), p. 4.

love. Such poems as "Kairos and Logos," "Consider," "The Cultural Presupposition," "1929," "For the Time Being," and The Age of Anxiety describe the dreadful, time-kept condition of the Twentieth Century. Auden portrays men who yearn for or blame the past, dread the future, and anxiously refuse to recognize and accept "the now." Richard Hoggart discusses this condition in his book Auden: An Introductory Essay: "Rendered purposeless by a constant trickle of fears eroding the will, he becomes a hater of life, one who tries always to evade issues, to say 'Not Now.'"²⁴ Time is, in Auden's age, a doomster, a destroyer. Dreading death, the temporality of love, the goodness of Eternal order, and the present condition, man listens for the terrible ticking clock which he fears will destroy his every hope and endeavour.

The poem "Consider" implies the neurotic dread of time experienced by Auden's generation. In "Consider," time, suggested by the supreme Antagonist,²⁵ reminds the people constantly of "life's limiting defect," by bringing death. Here time as the bearer of death, is the malignant "polar peril, a prodigious alarm, / Scattering the people, as torn up paper" (p. 28). The time which brings death and

²⁴Hoggart, An Introductory Essay, p. 121.

²⁵Joseph Warren Beach, The Making of the Auden Canon (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1957), p. 45.

disunity causes people, in Auden's words, to be "seized with immeasurable neurotic dread" (p. 28).

The characters in The Age of Anxiety, a poetic eclogue which rather comprehensively reveals the condition of modern life, are all conscious of time and the angst it creates in contemporary man. Malin, for example, refers to the "incessant Now of / the Traveller through time."²⁶ The traveler, because of the "incessant Now," is "menaced by madness." When Rosetta says, "Time flies," Quant retorts, "No, Time returns, a continuous Now / As the clock counts."²⁷ Later, Rosetta fully acknowledges the modern dread of time:

Uncle and aunt and alien cousin,
Mute or maddening through the Maze of Time,
Seek its center, desiring like us
The Quiet Kingdom.²⁸

The "Quiet Kingdom" is not, however, to be found as long as its seekers remain "mute or maddening" in this "Maze of Time." The personages of The Age of Anxiety do not find their kingdom, for, even in the end, they must remember the "clock we are bound to obey."²⁹

Like Auden's characters in The Age of Anxiety, the

²⁶Auden, The Age of Anxiety, p. 23.

²⁷Ibid., p. 44.

²⁸Ibid., p. 56.

²⁹Ibid., p. 134.

central figures in "For the Time Being" live in dread and awe of time. The mood of the entire piece is set in the first two lines, in which an ominous darkness accompanies the "clock on the mantelpiece" (p. 407). Even after God sends Christ to provide an eternal order, the Narrator reveals that man still dreads time; he feels, for example, "an unpleasant whiff of apprehension at the thought / Of Lent and Good Friday which cannot, after all, now / Be very far off" (p. 465). The individual, who too much dreads the good to accept it, still has "the Time Being to redeem / From insignificance," and still must seek God "in the Kingdom of Anxiety" (p. 466). Stone Jameson, in his chapter "W. H. Auden: The Poet of Angst" from The Writer's Situation, discusses the anxiety over time which occurs in "For the Time Being": He finds "the revolt of the rational man, the man of good will, against the hideous risks of accepting the paradox that at one point historic time is broken into by the timeless."³⁰ For modern man the "timeless" does not really exist; he cannot believe in an order which transcends the clock.

When Auden characterizes the Twentieth Century in "New Year Letter," he describes with particular effectiveness the neurotic dread of its time-kept men and women.

³⁰Stone Jameson, "W. H. Auden: The Poet of Angst," The Writer's Situation (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1950), p. 91.

In this poem, Auden continues the delineation of the neurotic anxiety over time which adds the "one unnecessary grief" (p. 292). Lying "time-conscious for eternity," we "add intolerable fear" to the suffering which, without this time-consciousness, we could endure:

Time is the life with which we live
 At least three quarters of our time,
 The purgatorial hill we climb
 Where any skyline we attain
 Reveals a higher ridge again. (p. 293)

It becomes obvious that time, referred to in such images as "the purgatorial hill we climb," is an object of hate and fear to Auden's contemporaries.

In "Our Bias," W. H. Auden presents a satirical view of man's unreasonable concern. He writes that, although the hour-glass "whispers to the lion's paw" and the "clock-towers tell the gardens day and night" (p. 118), the lion and the rose are not shaken by time. In other words, nature, unlike man, feels no anxiety that the hour is fleeting and the days are short. Whereas they, the lion and the rose, "care only for success," man prefers "some going round / To going straight to where we are" (p. 118). To Auden our watchfulness of the passing minute is an evasion of our position, a refusal to accept "where we are" and comprehend "now." Our dread of time is sometimes a dread of recognizing and understanding the human condition. We seem to prefer this anxiety to the awareness of where we are, the perception which would allow us, like nature,

to succeed.

Auden again relates the futility of clock-watching in his poem "But I Can't." The person to whom the lyric is addressed evidently attempts to find answers to questions about future and decay by observing time. However, the "I" of the poem warns, "Time will say nothing but I told you so, / Time only knows the price we have to pay" (p. 135). Time answers nothing; in fact the poet suggests that there are no answers when he says, "There are not fortunes to be told, although . . . / If I could tell you I would let you know" (p. 136).

"Kairos and Logos" describes the coming of the time-less Christ into a world ruled by time. The first line of the poem, "Around them boomed the rhetoric of time" (p. 11), indicates the general condition of the people about whom Auden writes. The poet describes the "military order" that transfers "its obsession onto time" and lives in fear of "another kind of Death / To which the time-obsessed are all condemned" (p. 12). The Twentieth-Century men of Auden's poetry are all condemned to the dread of "another kind of Death." The death he fears is the living death of a time-kept world. He cannot truly live because he constantly fears the passing of life.

The dread of the present, of now, is one of the most prevalent symptoms of the general anxiety over time. Having already seen the pervading atmosphere of failure and

unhappiness in the age in which Auden writes, one can understand why the individual so completely dreads to accept today. To recognize the present would be to acknowledge the poverty of man's existence. Instead, the individual anxiously watches the clock, regretting the passage of yesterday and fearfully yearning for the tomorrow. If he were to live the hours as they come, he would be forced to confront himself. But, like J. Alfred Prufrock, Auden's hero also evades "now" with "in a minute there is time."³¹ Auden points out this condition in "Another Time":

So many try to say Not Now,
 So many have forgotten how.
 To say I am, and would be
 Lost, if they could, in history.
(p. 41)

Modern man says "Not Now" because he dreads himself--his failures and his inadequacies. Auden, however, pointedly challenges the individual, "It is today in which we live . . . / Another Time has other lives to live" (pp. 41-42). The time-obsessed anxiety is, in the "Not Now" form, another instance of the neurotic dread of failure. It is an evasion of man's real condition. Man is afraid to take his eye off the clock, afraid that, if he really sees today, he will see the unsuccessful, guilt-ridden life the present offers. In "What's the Matter," Auden metaphorically summarizes the problem of "Not Now." When he says, "Our pul-

³¹Eliot, p. 4.

ses count but do not judge the hour" (p. 144), Auden implies that we are perpetually counting time--always aware of it--but that we never "judge the hour" or admit that we live today. We do not acknowledge that this hour is the important one, the only hour we can really live.

Auden's poem "Spain 1937" presents the most complete and effective characterization of the people who dread today. It also adequately explains why this anxiety exists. Several times throughout the lyric, the poet writes, "today the struggle." The present time is the time which cannot be faced. History can be regretted or blamed; tomorrow may bring hope. But, today only offers unhappiness:

Today the inevitable increase in the chances of
death;
The conscious acceptance of guilt in the fact of
murder;
Today the expending of powers
On the flat ephemeral pamphlet and the boring
meeting.

Today the makeshift consolations; the shared
cigarette;
The cards in the candle-lit barn and the scraping
concert,
The masculine jokes; today the
Fumbled and unsatisfactory embrace before hurting.
(pp. 184-185)

In "Spain" the dread takes the form of "The private nocturnal terror," which causes life to cry, "O no . . . / Not today, not to you" (p. 183). Because today is the struggle which is haunted by this "nocturnal terror," man is tempted

to concern himself with blame for yesterday:

Yesterday the abolition of faeries and giants,
 Yesterday the theological feuds in the taverns
 Yesterday the belief in the absolute value of Greek;
 The fall of the curtain upon the death of a hero;
 Yesterday the prayer to the sunset
 And the adoration of madmen. (p. 182)

Since it is so much easier to be obsessed with the failures of yesterday than to try to cure the problems of today, man happily points the finger of blame away from himself to the past. Or, just as frequently, he avoids the present by regarding the future, which is, however, just a "perhaps":

Tomorrow, perhaps, the future:

.

Tomorrow the rediscovery of romantic love;
 The photographing of ravens; all the fun under
 Liberty's masterful shadow;
 Tomorrow the hour of the pageant-master and the
 musician.

Tomorrow, for the young, . . .
 The walks by the lake, the winter of perfect
 communion. (p. 184)

Safely able to chastise the past and to look hopefully to tomorrow, the individual manages to escape today. His terror tells him that today brings only "the struggle," and he cannot confront his task.

In the form of obsession with time the neurotic dread again renders the modern individual incapable of love. This anxiety strongly resembles the dread of love's failure, in that time's destructiveness makes it seem impossible for love to prevail forever. The loudly ticking clock disturbs

the lover's embrace, terrifying man with the probability that time will destroy love as it destroys life. One of the most effective and beautiful characterizations of the modern angst that time will conquer love appears in Auden's first lyric in "Songs and Other Musical Pieces." The "I" of [As I walked out one evening] hears a lover sing, "Love has no ending" (p. 197). The poet listens to the beautiful vows of the assured lover; but then the pervading anxiety, which plagues even the most ardent sweetheart, intrudes:

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

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

In headaches and in worry
 Vaguely life leaks away,
 And Time will have his fancy
 Tomorrow or today. (pp. 197-198)

For the creature who dreads the whirring clocks, love cannot be free from fear. Only nature remains undisturbed; in the last line of the poem, Auden writes, "And the deep river ran on" (p. 199). The poet seems to question the validity of the dread which cripples even love; for nature peacefully ignores the chiming of the hour. He challenges man to acknowledge his self-made terror: "O look, look in the mirror, / O look at your distress" (p. 198). Unfortunately, however, modern man cannot accept and remedy his condition. Thus,

the poet cynically, almost fatefully, says, "You shall love your crooked neighbor / With your crooked heart" (p. 198). There is neither healthy love nor lasting happiness in this age of fearful time-consciousness.

In Poem XI, Auden portrays a lover who attempts at least one night of peaceful fulfillment, although eminently aware and dreadful of time. He recognizes that time and "fevers burn away / Individual beauty," and that "the grave / Proves the child ephemeral" (p. 208). However, he asks that one night be spared from time's ravages:

Every farthing of the cost,
All the dreaded cards foretell,
Shall be paid, but from this night
Not a whisper, not a thought
Not a kiss nor look be lost. (p. 209)

The lover has promised to pay time's cost later, but he seeks a temporary reprieve from the obligation. Poem XIII similarly describes the inevitable defeat of love by time. Auden writes soberly that time will always bring the hour of "weeping and striking," that "my vows break / Before his look" (p. 213). One can see clearly that the dread of time, like the dread of failure, has produced men and women who cannot love freely and wholly. They cannot escape their terrible anxiety that, subjected to the ruthlessness of time, love cannot, and, therefore, will not endure.

Perhaps the most frequent and obvious time-obsession in Auden's poetry concerns the Twentieth-Century fear of death. Time's passing carries man inevitably to his end:

with the passage of the seasons, man anxiously perceives the waning of his life. Twentieth-Century man, bereft of faith in God and eternal life, jealously guards every minute, hour, and day which bring him always closer to the final, dreadful failure--the failure of life itself. His active, perverted will often manifests itself in a futile attempt to become immortal. As the reader has seen many times in Auden's poetry, the individual cannot accept his real human position. He refuses to acknowledge the irrefutable fact that, as a human, he must eventually die. Yet, at the same time, he cannot escape the neurotic dread that death is his ultimate fate.

In Poem XXVI of "Songs and Other Musical Pieces," Auden reveals that no one, no matter what his occupation or retreat, successfully evades death's reign of terror. Farmer, fisherman, traveler, lover, dreamer, and drunkard all have their refuges. The farmer and fisherman seek "native shore and local hill," the traveler journeys from city to mountain, the lover finds the lover's bed, and the dreamer and drunkard discover a world of fantasy. Each endeavours to hide from his human fate. Yet, death, the hobgoblin of modern man, finds and terrorizes each one. To the farmer and fisherman drifts "Death's soft answer" (p. 224). The traveler eventually hears "Death's coercive rumour." "Death's enticing echo" disturbs the lover's peace; and "death's reply / From whelping fear" (p. 225)

awakens the dreamer and drunkard. Death taunts with the maddening refrain, "Not to be born is the best for man" (p. 224).

Poem XXVII similarly characterizes the apprehensive awareness of death, imaged as "the pit of terror," which robs both love and life (p. 226). In "All Over Again," Auden describes the relentless hovering of death over each new life: "Not from this life, not from this life is any / To keep" (p. 83). All are plagued by death, for each "new ghost learns from many / Learns from old timers what death is, where." Man must reluctantly see death, and he trembles because "a new begetting" is "an unforgiving morning," "unforgiving" because life cannot pardon death's victory.

Humanity reasons that nature should be envied because it is oblivious to death. In "The Cultural Presupposition," Auden reveals nature's fortunate escape from knowledge of mortality. The rabbit is happy since he does not know that the hunter is near; the leaf is lucky because it cannot predict its fall (p. 46). Man, however, endowed with consciousness, is incapable of avoiding the knowledge that his life is doomed to temporality. The poet questions,

But what shall man do, who can whistle tunes by
heart,
Knows to the bar when death shall cut him short
like the city of the shearwater,
What can he do but defend himself from his knowl-
edge? (p. 46)

Auden's generation, in an endeavour to rid itself of the anxiety over death, seeks refuge in books, terraces, playing-fields, lovers and music. All attempt to deafen themselves to "the thud of their falling bodies" (p. 47). Time, however, inevitably brings the end. The poet of "1929" observes the passing of the seasons with an alarming memory: "So I remember all of those whose death / Is necessary condition of the season's setting forth" (p. 63). The above quotation offers a summary of the predominant reason for man's anxiety over time. The ticking clock, the falling leaves, the budding flower all bring death closer; death is the "necessary condition" of time's journey.

The witnesses in Auden's poem "The Witnesses" reveal themselves to the haunted young hero: "We are the clock . . . / The two" (p. 186). They represent the unrelieved anxiety man feels, the angst that the clock or time will bring life's final blow. The witnesses taunt and warn the neurotic, "We are watching you" (p. 186). They tell him to continue "expansive dreams," to keep on living. However, at the same time, they threaten, "But do not imagine We do not know, / Or that what you hide with such care won't show" (p. 187). Death, decay, and time appear to the neurotic in terrifying images, such as, in "The Witnesses," "the hooded women," "the hump-backed surgeons," and "the Scissor Man" (p. 188). None finds refuge from "the wit-

nesses"; the reminders of time and death, direct the hero to "wind the clock" and "remember the Two" (p. 188).

The warning is, however, unneeded. The men of Auden's age scarcely require any heeding to remember time. The neurotic dread of the present condition and the future fatality is, after all, always lurking somewhere in man's consciousness. To live serenely with "now" or with the certainty of death is to accept the human position. Auden's age, however, is an age in which the individual dreads this confrontation with his position. All forms of the neurotic dread evidence a fear of facing honestly and directly the failures of the modern age. A faithlessness in eternity and a pessimism about man's present life make time the terrorizing monster that has lost all characteristics of healing or hope.

CHAPTER IV

HUMOUR AND THE NEUROTIC DREAD

In analyzing Auden's poetry, the reader has recognized that it characterizes a modern people who are haunted by dread. The dread of time and failure is a neurosis in its unreasoning, gnawing, comprehensive dominance. The age of anxiety is not a pleasant one, and Auden relentlessly describes all of its failures and crimes. However, at the same time, the poet is able to view the rather terrible situation with a lightness and humour which relieve some of the burdensome seriousness intrinsic to the subject. Indeed, to portray a generation whose life is filled with angst is a sober task; but Auden, frequently the comic, refuses to become too heavily weighted by the "fear and trembling" about which he writes. Instead he often satirizes the individuals who are taunted by the "supreme Antagonist," the witnesses, or the nightmare. Through his use of humour and satire, Auden justly accuses modern man of taking himself too seriously. He says, with friendly irony, that this overwhelming dread has become a bit ridiculous. Justin Replogle indicates that Auden's satirical attack is a heritage from Kierkegaard: "In Concluding Unscientific Postscript Kierkegaard said that from one vantage point the vast discrepancy between this world and the Ideal made man appear a pathetic, tragic, lost creature, but looked at

from another angle he appeared comic in his foolish imperfections."³² Auden seems to agree with Kierkegaard that the modern despair has certain comic aspects.

At times the poet even cruelly laughs at man's disease, but more often he considers himself one who shares in the mock-heroic. In one of his completely serious poems, "September 1, 1939," Auden writes about the despair-ridden citizens of his decade and admits that he is "composed like them," that he is "beleaguered by the same / Negation and despair" (p. 59). Replogle says that Auden does not write "as a man apart, but as one who shares in the bewilderment."³³ Thus, when he satirizes his modern fellows, the joke is equally on him, a definite participant in Twentieth-Century life.

Auden's use of comedy is particularly appropriate to the neuroticism he describes. The humour usually resembles the nervous giggle which lightens fear rather than the spontaneous outburst which follows a good joke. Since man could hardly endure an unrelieved anxiety, the poet seems to feel that humour is a temporary pain-killer, a pill which will not heal but which will, for a brief time, reduce the intensity of the symptoms. In one of the forms it takes in Auden's poetry, the humour itself is neurotic. As a ner-

³²Replogle, "Auden's Homage to Thalia," p. 103.

³³Ibid., p. 102.

vous uncomfortable joking, it appears to be an integral part of the neurotic dread. The comedy is neurotic because it arises from an unreasonable nervousness. More often compulsive than sincere, the laughter is itself a product of the neurotic dread.

Whether Auden is being the critical satirist who derides man's foolishness or the observer who reveals the neurotic humour of anxious people, his comedy is well-suited to the Twentieth Century. Replogle believes that Auden's style is both sincere and appropriate: "Today Auden has wedded his natural delight in buffoonery and comic invention to beliefs about man and art that make his comedy not only appropriate but perhaps the only possible way to communicate a large share of his beliefs."³⁴

One can easily perceive the suitability of Auden's comedy and satire to the modern anxiety about life, love, and death if he understands Auden's belief that the contemporary condition is absurd. In their more extreme forms the dread and guilt become completely unreasonable, even ridiculous. In "The Labyrinth," for example, Auden analyzes man's feeling of confusion and disorientation. The confusion presents a serious problem to modern man, but Auden utilizes levity and satire to portray the maze-like situation:

³⁴Ibid., p. 105.

Anthropos apteros for days
Walked whistling round and round the Maze,
Relying happily upon
His temperament for getting on.

The hundredth time he sighted, though,
A bush he left an hour ago,
He halted where four alleys crossed,
And recognised that he was lost. (p. 9)

The mood is light; the style, humourous. The relevance of this approach becomes apparent in the last stanza of the poem, in which Auden cites the absurdity of man's self-created labyrinth:

Anthropos apteros, perplexed
To know which turning to take next,
Looked up and wished he were the bird
To whom such doubts must seem absurd.
 (p. 11)

As Auden does often in his poetry, he criticizes man's position by suggesting that nature remains aloof to the problems which plague man. The bird is utterly undisturbed by the doubts and absurdities of mankind.

"Atlantis," a poem in which Auden depicts attempted isolation from anxiety and dread, again reveals the ridiculous extremes to which the current generation will go in order to relieve itself of fear and failure. The journey to Atlantis is a journey to an island which has no tangible existence. Yet, man, searching for some answer to his problems, will attempt even the absurd. With light satire, Auden sketches the endeavour to escape life's dilemma:

Being set on the idea
 Of getting to Atlantis,
 You have discovered of course

Only the Ship of Fools is
 Making the voyage this year,
 As gales of abnormal force
 Are predicted, and that you
 Must therefore be ready to
 Behave absurdly enough
 To pass for one of The Boys,
 At least appearing to love
 Hard liquor, horseplay and noise.
(p. 20)

The poet acknowledges the humour of the quest, but he is not cruelly satirical. As one who participates in contemporary society, Auden can sympathize with those who seek salvation in "a poetic vision." Thus, in the last stanza of the lyric, he offers support and encouragement, asking that God provide "for all you must do / His invisible guidance" (p. 22).

The poem "In Sickness and in Health" points out the absurdity of life itself. In one of the stanzas, Auden writes, "All chance, all love, all logic, you and I, / Exist by grace of the Absurd" (p. 32). If life, love, and logic are themselves absurd, then all of the anxiety and guilt must similarly have ridiculous aspects. In the sonnet sequence "The Quest," for example, "The Adventurers" depicts people whose search through the "Negative Way" results from unreasonable ideals. Their quest is trying, but Auden finds them still "praising the Absurd with their last breath" (p. 261). "Pleasure Island" describes a place which is free from both anxiety and hope because its inhabitants perceive that both are silly. Death is not dreaded since

the people recognize life's insignificance:

. . . the ocean
Stares right past us as though
No one here was worth drowning.³⁵

On Pleasure Island there is no weeping. The citizens find that an "occasional tear" which one might add "would be rather silly." Auden seems to believe that, because life is not really as significant as modern man would make it, the neurotic anxiety that results from taking oneself too seriously is an appropriate object of satire. Thus, he often treats the individual's neurosis with levity and humour. However, as in "Cattivo Tempo," the poet sympathizes with his contemporaries by acknowledging that the fun could "turn ugly, / The jokes hurt."³⁶ Auden's satire is, therefore, usually benevolent; his humour, friendly.

In his poem "Under Which Lyre," Auden satirizes the Apollo-like citizens of the Twentieth Century who worship collective behaviour and administrative detail. It has previously been cited that Auden distrusts man's attempt to find salvation in "the strength of Collective Man." In this poem, he reveals his allegiance to Hermes, the individualist who refuses to exist as a mere part of a group.

³⁵W. H. Auden, Nones (New York: Random House, 1939), p. 28.

³⁶Ibid., p. 57.

an underlying seriousness in the satire. If one remembers such poems as "New Year Letter," he must realize that Auden at times views the same situation with complete earnestness. The poet feels that the Apollo-like subversion of the heart to the intellect is one of the basic causes for the failures and problems of modern life. He questions in "New Year Letter," "O when will men show common sense / And throw away intelligence" (p. 280). He seriously believes that at least a partial solution lies in recovering the "deep unsnobbish instinct which / Alone can make relation rich" (p. 280).

In "The Fall of Rome," Auden again satirizes the plight of the modern generation. The position of the average man is not really very funny, but Auden attacks it humourously:

an unimportant clerk
Writes I DO NOT LIKE MY WORK
On a pink official form.⁴¹

In the above passage, the poet has treated lightly the same despair over identity which is tragically viewed in "The Third Temptation" and "The Average."

The lyric which Auden dedicates to a fellow poet, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," similarly satirizes the modern feelings about death. In it he spoofs the pathetic fallacy that nature is as concerned with human suffering as man is.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 32.

Twice throughout the poem, Auden writes ironically, "The day of his death was a dark cold day" (p. 49). Man's dread of mortality has caused him to become rather silly in his recognition of it. In another dedicatory poem, "Many Happy Returns," Auden inverts an old cliché in order to satirize man's fear of failure. He recalls an "Ancient proverb;--Nothing / Fails like a success" (p. 70). To the young birthday celebrant Auden advises, "Travel for enjoyment, / Follow your own nose" (p. 72).

Although Auden is usually the friendly critic when he delineates the modern neuroses, he is at times cruelly satirical in his attacks. Perhaps the most extreme example of such harshness is Poem XII from "Songs and Other Musical Pieces," in which the poet presents Miss Edith Gee, a spinster whose fears about love, sex, and identity cause her to wear "her clothes buttoned up to her neck" (p. 211). Miss Gee dies of cancer, which the doctor believes is "some outlet / For [her] foiled creative fire" (p. 212). The poet, who seems disgusted at the repressed desires which result in death, wastes no sympathy in describing her end:

They laid her on the table,
 The students began to laugh;
 And Mr. Rose the surgeon
 He cut Miss Gee in half

 They took her off the table,
 They wheeled away Miss Gee
 Down to another department
 Where they study Anatomy.

They hung her from the ceiling,
 Yes, they hung up Miss Gee;
 And a couple of Oxford Groupers
 Carefully dissected her knee.
 (p. 213)

Modern dread has produced some rather horrible results, and Auden sometimes grows impatient with the unreasonable fears and guilts of his contemporaries. But, whether his approach is kind or caustic, Auden quite often endeavours to lighten the burdensome problems of the Twentieth Century by pointing out the frequent absurdities of which it is guilty.

In one of its forms, Auden's humour seems to be, not satirical, but merely a characteristic of the neurotic. Many times the reader may discover that the humour itself is neurotic since it often results from the dread, or is simply an outward manifestation of the neurosis. The comedy is nervous rather than funny, serving as an outlet for the anxieties of the modern citizen.

In "The Witnesses," the reader finds an excellent example of the comedy which, in its pathetic nervousness, seems to be an outlet for anxiety. One has already read that, in this poem, the hero is haunted by the witnesses, which symbolize time and doom. He dreads the foreboding watchfulness of "the Two." The overall mood is ominous; however, in at least one passage the dread takes the form of a sick, neurotic joking. The fear of doom is released through the comedy in the following passage:

We're afraid in that case you'll have a fall;

 Something is going to fall like rain,
 And it won't be flowers. (p. 187)

In a somewhat less gruesome mood, Auden again portrays the general anxiety over time in his lyric "But I Can't." The humour in this poem contains at least a bit more levity:

Suppose the lions all get up and go,
 And all the brooks and soldiers run away;
 Will Time say nothing but I told you so?
 If I could tell you I would let you know.
 (p. 136)

The tone of "Danse Macabre" evidences a similar, but perhaps more sinister, levity through which the poet reveals the dread of the Devil, death, and failure. The use of colloquial, sometimes trite, language, coupled with a rather monotonous rhythm, contributes to the comic attitude:

For the Devil has broken parole and arisen,
 He has dynamited his way out of prison,
 Out of the well where his Papa throws
 The rebel angel, the outcast rose.

 O were he to triumph, dear heart, you know
 To what depths of shame he would drag you low;
 He would steal you away from me, yes, my dear,
 He would steal you and cut off your beautiful
 hair. (p. 60)

Such unpoetic phrases as "broken parole" and "dynamited his way," accompanied by the awkward sentence structure of such lines as "To what depths of shame he would drag you low," prevent the poem from being completely serious.

Poem XVIII from "Songs and Other Musical Pieces" discloses the neurotic dread of death; but, unlike the som-

berness of "Consider," the mood of [Now the leaves are falling fast] is capricious:

Now the leaves are falling fast,
Nurse's flowers will not last;
Nurses to the graves are gone,
And the prams go rolling on. (p. 217)

One may question the taste of "the prams go rolling on," but he will recognize that death is treated with more lightness than seriousness.

The dread of failure and inadequacy in love receives a similarly whimsical treatment in many of Auden's lyrics. The fear that time will defeat even the most ardent love occurs, as has been shown, many times in Auden's work. In his comic moods the poet writes jokingly about this anxiety. In Poem XVI of "Songs and Other Musical Pieces," for example, Auden turns this dominating fear into a light-hearted ruefulness:

My second thoughts condemn
And wonder how I dare
To look you in the eye.
What right have I to swear
Even at one a.m.
To love you till I die? (p. 216)

The lover recognizes the silliness of vowing undying love, for, like his contemporaries he is acutely aware that time is destructive. He jests rather than mourns, however, and asks pointedly,

But who on earth can think
With heavy heart or light
Of what will come of this? (p. 216)

The same tone pervades a small part of Poem I, [As I walked

out one evening]. In this lyric, the poet writes humourously, "Time watches from the shadow / And coughs when you would kiss" (p. 197). The anxiety is still evident, but Auden chooses to use a certain amount of comedy in revealing it.

In "Leap Before You Look," Auden reverses an old cliché in order to give levity to a typically modern situation in which love holds a precarious position. In this poem he directly acknowledges the rather neurotic humour which results from some of life's unpleasantness:

The worried efforts of the busy heap,
The dirt, the imprecision, and the beer
Produce a few smart wisecracks every year;
Laugh if you can, but you will have to leap.
(p. 124)

The lovers of this poem seem to enjoy a security in their mutual affection. The poet, however, whimsically warns, "Although I love you, you will have to leap; / Our dream of safety has to disappear" (p. 124). The leap is reminiscent of Kierkegaard's fearful "leap of faith," but again the lightness which Auden utilizes to characterize modern anxiety serves to relieve the atmosphere of tension.

The girl who listens to her lover's vows in "The Willow-Wren and the Stare" fears that her sweetheart is insincere. Vague figures taunt her with doubts: "What does he want? said the willow-wren; / Much too much, said the

stare."⁴² Yet, in spite of the generally anxious mood, the man is able to sustain a sense of humour, even when he reveals his own feeling of inadequacy:

'Forgive these loves who dwell in me,
 These brats of greed and dear,
 The honking bottom-pinching clown,
 The snivelling sonneteer.'⁴³

Auden again treats humourously the modern dread which accompanies love in one of his later poems, "The Proof." In it the poet familiarly questions, "What promises, what discipline, / If any, will Love keep?"⁴⁴ That question pervades the entire poem, but, in describing the various obstacles which love might face, the poet comically writes:

'When stinking Chaos lifts the latch,
 And Grotte backward spins,
 And Helen's nose becomes a beak,
 And cats and dogs grow chins
 And daisies claw and pebbles shriek,
 And Form and Color part,
 What swarming hatreds then will hatch
 Out of Love's riven heart.'⁴⁵

Although the "I" of the poem perceives the likelihood of love's failure, he refuses to take his own fears too seriously. Instead, such droll lines as "And Helen's nose be-

⁴²W. H. Auden, The Shield of Achilles (New York: Random House, 1951), p. 41.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 43.

⁴⁵Ibid.

comes a break" point out the ridiculous extremes to which the anxiousness of modern man may lead.

In "The Truest Poetry Is the Most Feigning," Auden capriciously suggests that, since lovers are usually so fearful that affection is not strong enough or ardent enough to endure, the poet must exaggerate and "make a rare old proper hullabaloo" in order to convince his sweetheart or the readers of his devotion. The following passage offers an example of the poem's levity:

Suppose your Beatrice be, as usual, late,
 And you would tell us how it feels to wait,
 You're free to think, what may be even true,
 You're so in love that one hour seems like two,
 But write--As I sat waiting for her call,
Each second longer darker seemed than all
 (Something like this but more elaborate still)
Those raining centuries it took to fill
That quarry whence Endymion's love was torn;
 From such ingenious fibs are poems born.⁴⁶

One of Auden's most delightful qualities is his ability to sustain a satirical or humorous tone while delineating a completely serious, even dreadful, condition. He is eminently aware of Twentieth-Century anxiety, failure, guilt, and confusion. Yet, at the same time, he displays a skillful artistry in discovering methods by which these overwhelming problems may be somewhat lifted. Modern man becomes so frequently weighted down by his burdens that he is completely incapable of finding any solution. Auden

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 44.

seems to advise man to recognize some of the inherent absurdity in his self-centered dreads. In this way, he might be able to perceive clearly enough to seek a reasonable cure. Auden's comedy is not always very funny; his humour is often as neurotic as the dread about which he writes. But his manner of buffoonery is a refreshing, effective approach to the neurotic dread which possesses Twentieth-Century man.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: THE CURE

In his poetic works, W. H. Auden comprehensively presents the problems which confront Twentieth-Century man. Throughout his poetry, he characterizes modern anxiety and fear which arise from the failures and confusion of contemporary life. Over and over again Auden's reader may cite passages in which the poet describes an obsessive dread--a neurotic dread of failure, time, death, love, and inadequacy. Although he writes with frequent satire or comedy, Auden perceives the seriousness of the human condition; he intends not merely to criticize but to help. Auden is seldom the cool spectator who only analyzes. Instead, as one who feels a deep involvement in the condition, he seeks to find some method of alleviating or curing the contemporary disease. Thus, Auden's reader is not often left to despair. The poet clearly defines the methods through which he feels modern man can seek salvation.

Basically Auden offers three major ways in which the modern citizen can combat the neurotic dread. His solutions, in general, are acceptance, timelessness, and love. In delineating the nature of the contemporary problem, Auden has often implied that these qualities might serve to lighten the dreadful burden. The reader, however, does not need to rely on implication; for, eager to relieve the anxiety

which plagues both himself and his contemporaries, the poet directly describes the manner in which a cure may be effected.

One has seen that perhaps the most prevalent symptom of the neurotic dread is man's fearful refusal to accept his true position. Because of his many failures, man cannot acknowledge his present condition. He evades the now, the certainty of death, and the fact of his guilt. Auden feels that these evasions are the lethal poisons that rob man of any chance for salvation. Man is not, and can never be, God. Thus, the sooner he recognizes his natural frailties and inadequacies, the more quickly he may rid himself of his neuroses. In "Please Make Yourself at Home," Auden indicates that success lies, not only in accepting one's human condition, but in acknowledging one's position as an "Average man." Auden advises his reader to forget his dreams of fame, or greatness:

Not as that dream Napoleon, rumour's dread and centre,
 Before whose riding all the crowds divide,
 Who dedicates a column and withdraws,
 Not as that general favourite and breezy visitor
 To whom the weather and the ruins mean so much,
 Nor as any of those who always will be welcome,
 As luck or history or fun,
 Do not enter like that: all these depart. (p. 82)

Such renown only offers temporary fulfillment. The happiness Auden describes comes from filling a small, seemingly insignificant position. The task which provides fulfillment is that of giving comfort and love to the "one who needs

you, / that terrified / Imaginative child" (p. 82). To become a healthy individual one must know "that only / The meek inherit the earth" and that to soothe perhaps just one person's weeping is his life's vocation.

"For the Time Being" further delineates the acceptance which will help to heal man's neurosis. Joseph asks for one "important and elegant proof" that God's love has really given man the miracle of Christ. Gabriel describes the road to salvation when he answers, "No, you must believe; / Be silent, and sit still" (p. 424). This solution strongly resembles a line in "The Labyrinth," "My problem is how not to will" (p. 11). Faith that knows no need of elegant proof" and an acceptance of one's condition--"Be silent, and sit still"--comprise part of the cure which Auden offers. Finally, the acceptance is also the recognition of God's love and His will. In "For the Time Being," Gabriel tells Mary that Eve fell because she was "in love with her own will, / Denied the will of Love" (p. 419). Gabriel states that salvation lies in affirming God's love: "What her negation wounded, may / Your affirmation heal today" (p. 419). Mary may save herself and mankind by "choosing to / Conceive the Child who chooses you" (p. 420). All that is required to remedy man's condition is a submissive acknowledgement of one's position, which includes the acceptance of God's miracle of love.

In "Kairos and Logos," Auden again relates the ne-

cessity of love in the process of relieving the Twentieth-Century malaise. He describes the people who have hated and feared time and death; he characterizes the men who have completely rejected the world. But, in this poem, the only ones who seem to reach salvation are the people who faithfully accept eternal love and eternal time which Christ's coming has offered:

So, sown in little clumps about the world,
The fair, the faithful and the uncondemned
Broke out spontaneously all over time,
Setting against the random facts of death
A ground and possibility of order,
Against defeat the certainty of love.

And never, like its own, condemned the world
Or hated time, but sang until their death:
'O Thou who lovest, set its love in order.'
(p. 12)

Against defeat, Auden sets the "certainty of love." Love is perhaps the most important aspect of the three-fold remedy found in Auden's poetry. In the above passage, the reader also sees that, to Auden, the fear of time is destructive. To rid oneself of dread, the individual can neither condemn the world nor hate time. He must become aware both of eternal time and eternal love before he can cure his obsessive neurosis.

In "New Year Letter," Auden most completely and clearly outlines the three methods by which his contemporaries can effect a cure for their neurotic dread. This poem directly analyzes the causes, symptoms, and results of the modern sickness; and it also depicts the specific

remedies. For example, in one passage in "New Year Letter," Auden states the necessity of accepting and acknowledging our guilt. He writes that "true democracy begins / With free confession of our sins" (p. 314), and later pleads, "Disturb our negligence and chill, / Convict our pride of its offence" (p. 315). We have to recognize our guilts and failures before we can sincerely accept our human condition.

In the same poem Auden similarly describes the need of timelessness, which the modern creature has been unable to feel. He implies the need by asking a question, the answer to which would bring partial salvation: "but how / To be the patriots of the Now?" (p. 300). To be aware of today, of this particular minute, would be a form of timelessness since the ability to live each moment as it comes would be to forget the clock--the past and the future. Were the individual to fill each "now," he could not really be conscious of time at all.

Another form of timelessness which alleviates the modern dread is the recognition of eternity. In "New Year Letter," Auden writes:

Our best protection is that we
 In fact live in eternity.
 The sleepless counter of our breaths
 That chronicles the births and deaths
 Of pious hopes, the short careers
 Of dashing promising ideas,
 Each congress of the Greater Fears,
 The emigration of beliefs,
 The voyages of hopes and griefs,

Has no direct experience
 Of discontinuous events,
 And all our intuitions mock
 The formal logic of the clock. (p. 278)

To escape the "formal logic of the clock" and to comprehend that we, in fact, "live in eternity" comprise one of the major cures of the pervading Twentieth-Century anxiety.

Finally, in "New Year Letter," Auden portrays the absolute necessity of love in this age. He believes that, in subverting the heart to the intellect, modern man has created his own dilemma. He suggests that men "throw away intelligence" and govern themselves by an "ordre du coeur" (p. 280). In the final passage of "New Year Letter," the poet cites love as the ultimate cure for the Twentieth-Century disease:

We fall down in the dance, we make
 The old ridiculous mistake,
 But always there are such as you
 Forgiving, helping what we do.
 O every day in sleep and labour
 Our life and death are with our neighbour,
 And love illuminates again
 The city and the lion's den,
 The world's great rage, the travel of young men.
 (p. 316)

The people who forgive, and help, and love are the ones to whom modern man may look for salvation. Love is that final element which "illuminates" the awful darkness of the Twentieth Century.

The darkness is the neurotic dread itself. That fear of time and failure cripples modern man until he is incapable of potent action or feeling. Only love--which

cannot exist unless man accepts his true position and discovers a timelessness that knows no fear of the clock--can, to W. H. Auden, provide the complete annihilation of this terrible anxiety.

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