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## SOME REMARKS ON THE AUDENESQUE SELF VIEWED AS A PRODUCT OF THE INTER-WAR ENGLISH DOMESTICITY

### Abstract

The paper focuses on the formation and predicament of the Audenesque self as a reflection of the inter-war English domesticity emerging from the discourse of the 1930s, especially from the poetry of the Pylon school: W.H. Auden, Cecil Day-Lewis, Louis MacNeice and Stephen Spender. Eventually disillusioned with history, with the new 'pyloned' technological landscape, modern mass civilisation and high elitist culture, Auden's generation of poets and writers sought their identity attempting to narrate their selfhood 'in the low and dishonest decade'.<sup>1</sup> Witnessing the paradoxical times of Freud's psychoanalysis, the apocalypse and sterility of modernism, radical political, social, economic and moral changes, the Audenesque wobbling self strove to 'set its lands in order' and grasp its identity between life and art, domesticity and otherness.<sup>2</sup>

The self has always been a problem, since it 'was born as a problem', Zygmunt Bauman observes from the postmodernist viewpoint.<sup>3</sup> The self's baffling nature results apparently from its intrinsically complex subject matter: human psychology, morality and identity can never be concluded dossiers upon which one might set the seal. Since it constitutes 'a person's essential being that distinguishes them from others', the self pertains to a unique field of study and as 'the object of introspection or of reflexive action', it is comprehensible only within some specific frames.<sup>4</sup>

According to Charles Taylor, a contemporary interpreter of the self, these 'inescapable frameworks' rest on the concept of a good and on the bounds of a com-

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<sup>1</sup> A quote from W.H. Auden's poem 'September I, 1939.'

<sup>2</sup> A phrase borrowed from T. S. Eliot's Eliot, *The Waste Land*, part V 'What the Thunder Said'.

<sup>3</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, 'From Pilgrim to Tourist – or a Short History of Identity,' [in:] *Questions of Cultural Identity*, London: Sage Publications, 1997. P. 18.

<sup>4</sup> *The New Oxford Dictionary of English*, Judy Pearsall, ed., London: Clarendon Press, 1999. P. 3685.

munity, which both constitute the two adjacent dimensions, each necessitating some kind of articulation.<sup>5</sup> Those frameworks, Taylor asserts, 'provide the background, explicit or implicit, for our moral judgements, intuitions and reactions; to articulate a framework is to explicate what makes sense of our moral responses'.<sup>6</sup> Articulation and frameworks seem to act as the coagulators of identity – they are catalysts responsible for the self's firm and solid condition and this is their abstruse nature that incorporates the formidability of selfhood. Should they wane, identity wobbles and dilutes. 'We achieve selfhood in a space of concerns ... among other selves', Taylor stipulates, hence only in reference to the good and to the Other, may the self, a being of a requisite depth and intricacy, be approached.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, exclusively by means of strong evaluations and qualitative distinctions can 'the who of identity' get underscored.<sup>8</sup> The frameworks secure the self from groundlessness and teleological chaos and, as Bauman corroborates Taylor's stance, they make the self anchored to the 'island of meaningfulness'.<sup>9</sup> Without those firm anchoring points, 'human beings cannot face Chaos and face it as Chaos, they cannot stand up straight and confront the Abyss'.<sup>10</sup> Correspondingly, had it not been for the recognition of God, the epitome of Taylor's concept of a cardinal 'hypergood', 'not confronting the Abyss' and 'not facing the Unfaceable' would have proved hardly feasible a task.<sup>11</sup>

Both Taylor and Bauman accentuate, therefore, the exigency of coercing human selves to be moral, the powers in charge being community and ethics. Self-identity, nevertheless, does not appear to be a ready-made concoction of the two formants. It is rather a perpetual formation-in-process, an entity-to-be. As Bauman attests, 'moral selves do not "discover" their ethical foundations but ... build them up while they build themselves'.<sup>12</sup> Owing to the inexorable temporalisation of human existence, 'the issue of our condition', Taylor concedes, 'can never be exhausted for us by what we *are* because we ... are changing and *becoming*'; thus, what a self is, has to be understood as what it has become.<sup>13</sup>

Calvin O. Schrag, the author of *The Self after Postmodernity*, perceives human identity in like manner: 'the story of the self is a developing story, a story subject to a creative advance'.<sup>14</sup> In its dynamics, the self appears then as an assemblage of

<sup>5</sup> Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1989. P. 26.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. P. 50.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. P. 51.

<sup>8</sup> 'Strong evaluations and qualitative distinctions' are key terms in Taylor's discourse of the self, whereas 'the who of identity' pertains to Schrag's idiolect.

<sup>9</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Theory, Culture, and Society*, London: Sage Publications, 1994. P. 4.

<sup>10</sup> He recalls here the words of Cornelius Castoriadis, as quoted in *ibid.* P. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Bauman, *Theory, Culture, and Society*. P. 5.

<sup>12</sup> Bauman, *ibid.* P. 9.

<sup>13</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*. Pp. 46–47.

<sup>14</sup> *The Self after Postmodernity*, New Haven: Yale UP, 1997. P. 37.

forces, an agent as well as a receiver of action. It expands and diversifies by itself, while getting transformed simultaneously by history and time, and the new understandings of the frameworks they inflict. As an energetic constituent, the self requires a flexible mediator, so that articulation must evolve as well, lest it should be a discontinued requisite.

Another conclusion emerging from the analyses of Bauman's, Taylor's and Schrag's is the conviction that the crucial frames cannot be grasped mimetically, on an *ad hoc* basis. As it has been already indicated, sovereignty of the good, as the password to identity, binds up the selfhood inextricably with articulation.<sup>15</sup> Obviously, all man's creation, material and intangible, accrued throughout the centuries, does bespeak human self, yet its most direct presence is to be encountered in the language. An arbitrary code of meanings though it is, the language provides rather explicit rendering of the self, permitting its pursuit and determination of the good, along with fixing and maintaining a relationship with the Other. 'The issue of ... identity is worked out only through a language of interpretation', reads one of Taylor's postulates, the complementation of which one may find in Bauman's work.<sup>16</sup>

Discourse is the realm proper of the moral self, and thanks to language, Bauman claims, 'it is possible now, nay inevitable, to face the moral issues point blank ... as they emerge from the life experience ... and confront moral selves in all their irreparable ambivalence'.<sup>17</sup> What is more, the liaison between the discourse, or generally between the narrative and the selfhood, turns out to be a quintessential symbiosis, for neither of the parties can exist on its own.

Moreover, viewed holistically as all verbal or non-verbal instances of epiphanic arts, the narrative signifies the medium of articulation through which the self gets grasped. 'Self-understanding necessarily has temporal depth and incorporates narrative', Taylor grants; the narrative, which finds expression 'not only in linguistic descriptions but also in other acts – liturgy, ritual, its music and in display of visual symbols'.<sup>18</sup> A mode of manifestation and revelation, the narrative conditions epiphany, so that it brings the self 'into the presence of something which is otherwise inaccessible, and which is of the highest moral or spiritual significance'.<sup>19</sup>

Simultaneously, the narrative constitutes the self's artefact and its maintenance rests on the selfhood entirely. This tenet meets again its ample corroboration in Schrag's deliberations on the self. The self makes inescapably 'the *narrating* self', he says, that is 'the self as *homo narrans*'.<sup>20</sup> Hence, its formation is achieved through the discourse, as the most immediate mode of man's narrating, and is likened to the

<sup>15</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*. P. 34.

<sup>16</sup> Taylor, *ibid.* P. 34.

<sup>17</sup> Bauman, *Theory, Culture, and Society*. P. 31.

<sup>18</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*. P. 419.

<sup>19</sup> Taylor, *ibid.* P. 419.

<sup>20</sup> Schrag, *The Self after Postmodernity*. P. 39.

‘development of characters within the plot of a story.’<sup>21</sup> The self, as ‘the who of discourse’, dwells therefore in a coherent narrative, which, notwithstanding its bent for ambivalence, insures the ‘unity and species of self-identity’.<sup>22</sup> The touchstones that delineate its habitat rely on the society of other selves and the axiom of a hypergood, which both compel the ceaselessly becoming nature of the self.<sup>23</sup>

Little wonder that the representation of the self has been an exceptionally frequently rehearsed topic in literature and philosophy, and that the problem of self-identity has occupied the centre of many a controversial writing. While evolving incessantly, the contemporary, postmodern self is apparently presented with the advantage of an overall view of its diachronic and synchronic development. It proves even more so, for, as Taylor emphasises it, ‘language, [as the means of the self’s expression], and artistic creation rise at times to obsession in our century’.<sup>24</sup> Very close and in many facets homogenous to the late postmodern identity treated in Bauman’s, Taylor’s and Schrag’s analyses is the Audenesque self, the ‘who’ of a distinctive discourse created by a generation of British writers in the 1930s. Mirrored in the literary produce of its day, the very term ‘Audenesque’ functions today as an instantly recognizable idiom, and, as Bernard Bergonzi argues, it appears already in 1933, heading Gavin Ewart’s poem in *New Verse*.<sup>25</sup> Adopted subsequently by Graham Green into his film review, ‘the Audenesque’ receives its formal acknowledgement in *The Oxford English Dictionary Supplement* in 1940.<sup>26</sup> Serving as both, an adjective and a noun, the watchword denotes ‘group consciousness’ of the Auden generation and the ‘collective style of the times’.<sup>27</sup>

The Audenesque identity exemplifies the case of reinforcing and polyphonising the voice of the self; its message, generically conveyed, has been a co-articulation of the group orientation to the lapsed good and to the Other. Against that common formative experience, Wystan Hugh Auden’s ‘centrality appears unmistakable’.<sup>28</sup> A touchstone of the period, Auden’s very personal, idiosyncratic style has become the collective idiom and a salient factor affecting the generational self, whereas his name has come to betoken the whole age group of writers. It is Auden and his Pylon

<sup>21</sup> Schrag, *ibid.* P. 39.

<sup>22</sup> Schrag, *ibid.* P. 33.

<sup>23</sup> Those yardsticks of the self have found their explicit rendering in Schrag’s disquisition, which comprises four autonomous parts: ‘the self in discourse’, ‘the self in action,’ ‘the self in community,’ and ‘the self in transcendence.’

<sup>24</sup> *Sources of the Self*. P. 198.

<sup>25</sup> Bernard Bergonzi, *Reading the Thirties* (London: Macmillan Press, 1978), p. 40. As Bergonzi grants, the title of the poem was ‘Audenesque for an Initiation,’ and it appeared in *New Verse*, in December 1933.

<sup>26</sup> Bergonzi, *ibid.* P. 40.

<sup>27</sup> Bergonzi, *ibid.* P. 3. ‘The Auden Generation’ is a term coined by Samuel Hynes and a title of his book: *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s* (London: The Bodley Head, 1964).

<sup>28</sup> Bergonzi, *ibid.* P. 8.

School peer poets: chiefly Cecil Day-Lewis, Louis MacNeice and Stephen Spender, who verbalise the hopes and concerns of their sensibility. The Pylon School, as a group of inter-war poets, receives its symbolic name after Spender's momentous poem 'The Pylons' (1933). The major prose writers of the time, Christopher Isherwood, Graham Greene and Edward Upward are also related to that literary coterie.

Resting on the aesthetics of the time, the temporal and spatial status of the generation seems explicit: the thirties provide the Audenesque with history, Britain with its setting, Oxbridge with its milieu, and the modernist art with its immediate literary antecedents. The Auden group is a war generation and though the Audenesque voice breaks in the inter-war period, the poets' consciousness bears the brunt of both the First and the Second World War, as well as the civil bloodshed in Spain and the Chinese combat. Virtually all those wars have found their reverberation in the poetry of the thirties, with Auden's poems in the lead; suffice it to mention 'Spain', 'Journey to the War' or the renowned 'September 1, 1939'.<sup>29</sup>

The generic identity has grown 'in time of war' and matured in its shadow, hence history betokens one of the Audenesque 'ill-starred words'.<sup>30</sup> The other watchwords, Bergonzi adds, 'are "Love" and "Europe"', though "History" is peculiarly obtrusive and influential.<sup>31</sup> Auden himself capitalises the word in order to differentiate it from the lower-case 'history'. As Edward Mendelson explicates, in the Audenesque idiolect *history* denotes 'the set of personal and collective acts done in the past that shape the present', whereas *History* stands for the 'determined and purposive force that will bring mankind to its ultimate fulfilment'<sup>32</sup>, 'We all have to live with- and in- our times: we are all atoms of History,' states Richard Hughes, another voice of the Thirties Group.<sup>33</sup> Though the peculiar preoccupation with history has immanently saturated the Audenesque narrative, the Second World War and the forties annihilate the poets' belief in History and in the ultimate fulfilment of mankind.

Yet it is History which, as one of the chiselling masters of the Audenesque, had provoked Auden's poem 'Spain 1937', often considered as the apogee expression of the collective self.<sup>34</sup> History constitutes also the most ominous of Yeats' Gyres adopted into the Audenesque consciousness and produces many a portentous ref-

<sup>29</sup> 'Spain 1937' is inspired by the 1936 Spanish civil war between the nationalists, that is fascists, and republicans, that is socialists and communists. 'Journey to the War,' a volume of prose and verse written by Auden in collaboration with Ch. Isherwood, and dedicated to E. M. Forster, deals, in turn, with the Sino-Japanese war, 1939.

<sup>30</sup> In 'Time of War' is a sonnet sequence of W. H. Auden's; 'Shadow of War' is a poem by Stephen Spender. 'History is but one / of Auden's ill-starred words,' writes Karl Shapiro in his *Essay on Rhyme*, (London, 1947), as quoted in Bergonzi. P. 47.

<sup>31</sup> *Reading the Thirties*. P. 47.

<sup>32</sup> Edward Mendelson, *Early Auden* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999; 1st ed. 1991), p. 304.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Valentine Cunningham's *British Writers of the Thirties*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989). P. 12.

<sup>34</sup> Especially notorious and celebrated is the conclusion of 'Spain': 'History to the defeated / [m]ay say Alas, but cannot help or pardon,' which Auden later 'comes to abhor,' since it 'equates goodness with success,' as Bergonzi grants (*Reading the Thirties*. P. 47).

erence. We live in a 'debased century', Yeats proclaims, dating the unbroken age in 1450, when the Gyres of his historical cycles were presumably in balance.<sup>35</sup> To Yeats, the twenties and the thirties prearrange 'a scene of universal anarchy and chaos', which is going to culminate in a 'blaze of violence and confusion' at the end of the millennium.<sup>36</sup> The period appears, thus, to be symptomatic of a death-pang of the old historical cycle. 'Willy-nilly, History's spittle lards the writing' of every period, Valentine Cunningham claims, yet the literature of the thirties seems to have undergone a peculiar historical 'mastication,' which appears both compelled and manifested by the politics of the time.<sup>37</sup>

Much awaited, the period raised both expectations and fear. 'Everybody [is] ready for the '30s,' 'What Will the "Thirties" Bring?' reads one of the 1930 New Year magazines.<sup>38</sup> 'The low and dishonest [war] decade,' gives rise to the main springs of the contemporary totalitarianism, to fascism and communism, with Marx, Darwin and Nietzsche as their grandfathers and substantial intellectual sources.<sup>39</sup> The momentous impact of Freudism cannot be gainsaid, either, since Freud has completed 'the devaluation of human discourse by making private life merely the location for the clash of mechanistic and irrational forces.'<sup>40</sup> The Freudian insight seems to pervade the Audenesque consciousness and although in his *Letter to Lord Byron* Auden states that 'Freud's not quite O.K.,' he is the first imaginative writer in English who, as Mendelson claims, '[takes] seriously the Freudian speculative mythology of mind'.<sup>41</sup> What is more, the fact that Augustus Auden, Wystan's father and an accomplished doctor, has been one of the English pioneers of Freudism in the field of medicine, is also a matter of significance. Nonetheless, plied and misused by false 'barking orators', the new ideas prevalent in the thirties have spawned pernicious doctrines, and it had not been even a hunch of their founding fathers that they would have promoted philistinism.<sup>42</sup> 'It is, [nevertheless,] vulgar Marxism, vulgarised Darwin and Freud, which percolate into the cultural brew'.<sup>43</sup>

In addition, the era of Nazism, communism and in-depth psychoanalysis coincided with grave social mutations. The two cardinal pillars of selfhood, the concept

<sup>35</sup> Mendelson, *Early Auden*. Pp. 180 and xvii.

<sup>36</sup> Mendelson, *ibid.* P. xvii.

<sup>37</sup> Valentine Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989). P. 13.

<sup>38</sup> *Answers*, (January 4, 1930), quoted in *ibid.*, p. 13. Though the period is widely known as 'the '30s,' Auden, for instance, rejects this labelling as a sheer attempt at an artificial periodisation of literature and as an act of pigeonholing the writers.

<sup>39</sup> The phrase 'the low and dishonest decade' comes from Auden's poem 'September I, 1939.'

<sup>40</sup> *The Cambridge Cultural History of Britain*, Boris Ford, ed., vol. 8: 'Early Twentieth Century Britain,' (London: Cambridge UP, 1985). P. 36.

<sup>41</sup> *Early Auden*, p. 52. *Ibid.* 36. All the poems by Auden mentioned in this thesis can be found in W.H. Auden. *Collected Poems*, E. Mendelson, ed., (London: Faber and Faber, 1976.)

<sup>42</sup> In the poem 'In Memory of W. B. Yeats,' 1938, Auden writes: 'In the middle of the dark / [a]ll the dogs of Europe bark.'

<sup>43</sup> *The Cambridge Cultural History of Britain*. P. 36.

of the good and the interaction within a community, got dramatically impaired, the former having been twisted by politics, the latter by the middle-class bourgeoisie. The Establishment of the time, the capitalist and pro-fascist Philistia acted as an abolitionist of the good and constituted the Audenesque Enemy, of whom Auden directly speaks in *The Orators*: '[the Enemy], bully of Britain, / [w]ith your face as fat as a farmer's bum . . . / [a]re you sure you're our Saviour? We're certain you smell ...'<sup>44</sup>

Furthermore, the fundamental good-bad dichotomy was questioned by post-Nietzschean ideologies, utter relativity and emancipated morality being proclaimed. Nietzsche had offered the most direct challenge, since, as Taylor contends, that 'way to the harmony of yea-saying passes through the repudiation of the ethic of benevolence'.<sup>45</sup> 'God is dead', so there is no hypergood, proclaimed after Nietzsche the modernist mass culture.<sup>46</sup>

Not only did the public pulp and communal standards devour the notion of deity, but also they abolished the realm of individual thinking. 'Private faces in public places / [a]re wiser and nicer / [t]han public faces in private places,' contends Auden, studying the English domestic landscape.<sup>47</sup> The process of stereotyping or 'levelling' employed popular culture and demotic arts and produced a 'narrow-minded fiscal timidity diluted with a dash of social welfare'.<sup>48</sup> A new technology, symbolised by the 'pyloned' landscape and synthetic industries, called for an escapist lifestyle, consumer durables and, as Louis MacNeice labels it, 'gadgets approximating to the fickle norms'.<sup>49</sup> In response to the technological mode, the new society of 'incoherent, empty [faces,] manufactured 'ticketed gewgaws', 'insipid colour, [and] patches of emotion'.<sup>50</sup>

One might venture to say that, to a considerable extent, it is the thirties which contributed to the cradling of the millenarist turn's 'permissive' age, and which permanently unsettled the modern status quo. The rapid industrial boom and moral abatement of the period emerge as an unheard-of 'shocking disease'.<sup>51</sup> As Bergonzi asserts, the Auden group 'is the first literary generation in England to have to face mass civilisation directly, though with a sensibility formed by a traditional minority culture'.<sup>52</sup> That encounter, or that frontier, according to Bergonzi, denotes 'a major determinant of the literature of the time'.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Book II, 'Journal of an Airman: Of the Enemy Gambits,' W. H. Auden: *Collected Poems*. P. 86–87.

<sup>45</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*. P. 430.

<sup>46</sup> F.H. Nietzsche announces it first in *The Gay Science* (*Die Frohliche Wissenschaft*), 1882, and later on in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (*Also Sprach Zarathustra*.)

<sup>47</sup> These words are the motto of Auden's 'English Study,' *The Orators*, 1932, dedicated to Stephen Spender.

<sup>48</sup> *The Cambridge Cultural History* ... vol. 8. P. 28.

<sup>49</sup> MacNeice, *ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>50</sup> This is the phrase from Auden's 'Epilogue' of *The Orators*, 1932.

<sup>51</sup> A phrase from W. H. Auden's poem 'O Where Are You Going?'

<sup>52</sup> *Reading the Thirties*. P. 142.

<sup>53</sup> Bergonzi, *ibid.* P. 142.



Moreover, what made the decade so blatant and murky was its paradoxical nature. The burgeoning technology and the derelict mines, the mass entertainment and the high elitist culture, the economic crisis and the middle-class affluence, a quest for novelty, a neo-Futurist salute to technology and a recourse to tradition, grand ideologies and spying scandals, they all coexisted in the thirties, interwoven as the warp and weft of the period. Suffice it to mention the aeroplane, the locomotive, Wurlitzer music, the movies, the radio, and pseudo-jazz dance halls against the scenery of Midland waste-dumps and dilapidated mines, the New Year exhibitions and the Wall Street crash of 1929.

A paradox inheres also within the social constitution of the Audenesque identity. Preoccupied with the middle-class neurosis, the Pylon narrative is itself a product of bourgeois intellectuals, who behold a dubious position of a critical observer and a class participant at the same time. The Audenesque self, as Cunningham attests, emerges unavoidably from 'its fearful, generic bourgeois *we*,' and all attempts to join either the upper or the working class prove in the long run null and void.<sup>54</sup> The Oxbridge scholarly milieu had brought forth but disappointment; the labour class had proved to be, as Cunningham puts it, 'a matter of cinema-mindlessness and canal-side cuddling, so emptily banal, that it could not possibly attract an intellectual'.<sup>55</sup> Entrapped within the mediocre social bounds, the Audenesque poets made initially an effort to 'turn themselves into [socialist] faux-proletarians, to sink their worrying self into the engrossing social mass'.<sup>56</sup> Yet, it could not last and they were back to 'the old isolative status of the more or less bourgeoisie writer'.<sup>57</sup> As Stephen Spender accounts for that imbroglio of his generation, this class-consciousness struggle, 'while existing eternally, [was primarily] taking place within the mind of the poet himself, who [irrevocably] remained a bourgeois'.<sup>58</sup>

The overall self-contradictory ambience of the thirties seems to entail the core of the problematics concerning the Audenesque identity. The thriving paradox sets up the 'inevitably shaky foundations of the 30's structure', obscuring the two preliminary contexts of the self: the sense of a good and of a community. As Taylor argues, there can be no solid selfhood without a coherent and transparent moral space, or without irrevocably anchored frameworks.<sup>59</sup>

Not only does the Auden generation inherit the high-modernist desert of moral inertia and desolation but also it is bequeathed with the twenties' Cocktail Age and with the cult of 'affairs'. T.S. Eliot's *Waste Land*, one of the most representative works of the peak modernism and a momentous ur-text of the Pylon School, encapsulates the imagery of the Audenesque reality. In the 'world of mechanical met-

<sup>54</sup> Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties*. P. 263.

<sup>55</sup> Cunningham, *ibid.* P. 232.

<sup>56</sup> Cunningham, *ibid.* P. 148.

<sup>57</sup> Cunningham, *ibid.* P. 150.

<sup>58</sup> New Verse, 1931, quoted in *ibid.* P. 263.

<sup>59</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*. P. 20.



amorphosis', 'heaps of broken images' and desiccated values are to be impregnated with the ersatz ephemeral fashions, darting social movements and roaring Muzak.<sup>60</sup> The inherited modernist 'huge gaping hole' and 'man's enormous hunger' of the good needed desperately to be filled - 'with the writing of poetry, with sex, ultimately with affection and love'.<sup>61</sup> It is owing to the lack of the cardinal pillars of selfhood, the explicit presence of the good and of the Other, that the gaping emptiness hurts.

Little wonder, then, that the thirties' self cried out for some makeshift completion, perpetuating an insatiable search for friendship, intimacy or sexual attraction. The Pylon generation had, according to Cunningham, its own 'private corner in communising solidarity'.<sup>62</sup> Auden and Isherwood's long-standing sexual liaison, kept up intermittently from their preparatory school, 'is only characteristic of the period: they set up their own "Homintern", the perverse variant on the Comintern'.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, as Cunningham views it, the Auden group appears as the war-crippled 'aesthetic homosexuals', whose immature psyche had been lopsided with an absence of the recruited father and with a syndrome of pain, savagery and violence.<sup>64</sup> Hence may have stemmed, Cunningham suggests, the homoerotic affections of the writers, and their 'shared myth of sexual adventuring', seen as 'a kind of honourable even if honorary version of the War they had missed'.<sup>65</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the all-embracing conflicts of modernity render the Audenesque identity wobbling and insecure. Uneasy yet 'willing to be oneself', the self experiences the Eliotian dissociation of sensibility, witnessing the distortion of reason, which has broken the ancient betrothal to morality. It is after the metaphysical poets onwards that, according to Eliot, reason, disengaged from the good, has come forth in an artistic narrative as a schism between intellect and emotions.<sup>66</sup> Remaining under the 'avuncular' impact of the great modernist writers: Eliot, Pound, Yeats and Hardy, and influenced by the French Symbolists, the Auden group, turned back, then, in pursuit of the lost inward harmony. The metaphysical but also the Old English poets, as well as Gerard Manley Hopkins, had been recognized as the masters of the union between intellect and emotion.

Indirectly, the rapture inside the human selfhood translates into the Freudian division of a human subject into the id and superego, the bodily instincts and the mind, the two repulsive poles of the ego, struggling incessantly for the domination. Equipped with the insight of the Freudian split consciousness, the Audenesque

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<sup>60</sup> 'The World of Mechanical Metamorphosis' is the title of Stephen Spender's essay from the collection *The Struggle of the Modern* (London: University Paperbacks, 1963). 'Heaps of broken images' mark Eliot's post-war vision of the reality in *The Waste Land*, pt. 1. 'The Burial of the Dead,' l. 22.

<sup>61</sup> Gabriel Josipovici, *The Mirror of Criticism: Selected Reviews 1977-1982*, (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1983). P. 115.

<sup>62</sup> Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties*. P. 148.

<sup>63</sup> Cunningham, *ibid.* P. 148.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* Pp. 54-55.

<sup>65</sup> Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties*. P. 55.

<sup>66</sup> T.S. Eliot, *The Metaphysical Poets*, 1921.

‘who’ got even more unsettled, owing to the ‘wrestling bout between the ego and self’.<sup>67</sup> That profound dichotomy signifies, according to Auden, ‘the third great disappointment’ in the survey of history: ‘the first was Classical civilisation, the second, the Middle Ages, and the third, in our epoch, is the dualism between mind and body, isolation of the self in an indifferent universe’.<sup>68</sup>

In the idiolect of the period, ‘man’s being’, ‘is [also seen as] a copulative relation between a subject ego and a predicative self,’ conforming well to the prevalent mode of a dichotomous partition.<sup>69</sup> The divided moral landscape of the thirties reminded eventually that of a desert, ‘neatly planned’ and clinically pure, yet permitting no orientation to the good and no light of the benevolent reason.<sup>70</sup>

Furthermore, the overall predicament of the Audenesque consciousness seems to be lying in the post-Enlightenment rationality. Since the Romantic era, the rational thinking has no longer fully complied with the Kantian formula of ‘man’s self-incurred emergence from immaturity’.<sup>71</sup> This transformation has been radically put forth by the modern civilisation, which, having enormously widened the horizons of thought, has ‘released [man] from the duty of maturity, so that ‘the faculty of reason [ceased to be] its own light’.<sup>72</sup> The reason, monstrous and disengaged from the good, has overwhelmed the prior noonday of the European democracy; brought wars and bred ‘accepters’ with an underdeveloped human heart.<sup>73</sup>

The basis of a community and the warrant for difference, which conditions love, the Other has, thus, been crippled to an ‘Empiric Economic Man,’ a ‘Threadbare Man / [b]egot on Hire-Purchase by Insurance’.<sup>74</sup> Little wonder, then, that among the evident plurality of frequently contradictory trends, D.H. Lawrence stands out as one more of the Audenesque doyens. His neo-Romantic belief in the necessity of a reunion with Nature points to the primordial, tellurian realm as to the reservoir of the unspoilt goodness and beauty and of the concord between man’s heart and mind.

<sup>67</sup> Herbert Greenberg, *Quest for the Necessary: W. H. Auden and the Dilemma of Divided Consciousness*, Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1968. P. 110.

<sup>68</sup> Quoted in Monroe K. Spears’s *The Poetry of W. H. Auden: The Disenchanted Island*, London: Oxford UP, 1968. P. 132.

<sup>69</sup> These are the words of Auden, as quoted in Greenberg’s *Quest for the Necessary*, p. 6.

<sup>70</sup> In his poem ‘This Excellent Machine,’ John Lehmann, a minor poet of the period, speaks of ‘neatly-planned urban pits; *Poetry of the Thirties*, R. Skepton, ed., London: Penguin Books, 1964. P. 262.

<sup>71</sup> Georg Picht, ‘What is Enlightened Thinking?’ *What Is Enlightenment*, James Schmidt, ed., (Berkeley: California UP, 1996). P. 368.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* P. 378.

<sup>73</sup> Louis MacNeice in his *Autumn Journal*, 1939, writes about ‘accepters, born and bred to harness,’ (London: Faber and Faber, 1953), pt. 3. P. 47.

<sup>74</sup> These are Auden’s words, recalled in Richard Hoggart’s *W. H. Auden*, (London: Longmans, Green, 1957), p. 12. ‘Awareness of difference – love’, says Auden’s airman in *The Orators*, 1932, (book II, ‘*Journal of an Airman*’).

A reconstruction of the inescapable frameworks and a re-attainment of the genuine quality of selfhood had constituted the supreme task of the Audenesque predecessors, indicating already one fundamental preliminary: the Audenesque inchoate self must first 'set its lands in order.'<sup>75</sup> 'To set in order – that's a task / [b]oth Eros and Apollo ask; / [f]or Art and Life agree in this, / [t]hat each intends a synthesis', declares Auden in his *New Year Letter*, 1940.<sup>76</sup>

What appeared as the sole remedy against the Pylon displaced moral space and the divided consciousness was articulation, yet it equally demanded restoration. Since the language had been wrecked, the Audenesque identity became engrossed foremost in the action of 'restoring, remembering, recovering and returning'.<sup>77</sup> Moreover, Auden and his peers 'train[ed] [themselves] in a topography of the actual', so as to handle the fragmentary, discontinuous English landscape.<sup>78</sup> 'England to me is my own tongue,' declares the voice of the Audenesque, a tongue of a 'limbo culture' and barking orators, though.<sup>79</sup>

How, then, could the poets map the arid terrain of the domestic disarray? First of all, it seems that in order to take stock of their position, they needed to get an overall look from an unimpaired perspective.<sup>80</sup> The figures of a hawk and of a helmeted airman appeared, therefore, as natural emblems of the Audenesque code. The uplifted, 'commandingly lofty' and, as Cunningham observes, convincingly precise' position, 'cut straight through the mess and blur of the chaotic post-war crisis'.<sup>81</sup> Owing to that vision, the Pylon poets could 'measure sufficiencies as well as deficiencies;' they could judge the politics, character, and topography 'at a glance'.<sup>82</sup> From '10, 000 feet', Auden says, 'the earth appears to the human eye as it appears to the eye of the camera; that is to say, all history is reduced to nature'.<sup>83</sup> 'The pan-optic sweep' allows, moreover, an incisive depth of the analysis, so that the Audenesque narrator knows: he knows, 'because airmen and hawkmen are in the position to know'.<sup>84</sup> Thus, the [Audenesque] longing for assurance took the form /

<sup>75</sup> The desperate need for moral order and clarity is a matter of paramount importance in modernity. In *The Waste Land* T. S. Eliot writes: 'I sat upon the shore / Fishing with the arid plane behind me / Shall I at least set my lands in order? / London Bridge is falling down, falling down, falling down.' (part V, 'What the Thunder Said').

<sup>76</sup> Quoted in Cunningham's *British Writers of the Thirties*. P. 61.

<sup>77</sup> Mendelson, *Early Auden*. P. 91.

<sup>78</sup> Bergonzi, *Reading the Thirties*. P. 59.

<sup>79</sup> Auden, *New Year Letter*, 1940, pt. 3. 'Limbo Culture' is another poem by Auden, dated 1957. Both the poems, as well as all the other further recalled poems of Auden's, are anthologised in the volume W. H. Auden: *Collected Poems*, E. Mendelson, ed., (London: Faber and Faber, 1991).

<sup>80</sup> The exigency to 'take stock of one's position' is a key concept in John Buchan's shocker *Thirty-Nine Steps*, (London: Penguin Books, 1991), e.g. P. 66.

<sup>81</sup> *British Writers ...*, P. 102.

<sup>82</sup> Cunningham, *ibid.* P. 102.

<sup>83</sup> 'Hic et Ille,' *Encounter*, VI, April 1956, p. 36, quoted in Greenberg's *Quest ...*, P. 73.

<sup>84</sup> Greenberg, *ibid.* P. 74.

[o]f a hawk's vertical stooping from the sky,' as Auden attests himself.<sup>85</sup> The hawk is a traditional symbol and the airman a modern one, but, according to Bergonzi, 'both are, in different ways, masters of the world they survey'.<sup>86</sup>

This topographical imagery produced 'rather curious "lonely maps"' of camera-eye images, in which landscapes, lists, surveys and catalogues recurred.<sup>87</sup> What is more, the Audenesque 'maps and languages and names / [h]ave meaning and their proper claims,' Auden asserts; for there are 'two atlases': one identifying the inner world of self, the other the world of public affairs in which the self works and acts.<sup>88</sup> As a result, the private and the public get mixed in a typically Audenesque manner. The paradoxical impact of both the metaphysical poets and the English music hall manifested itself, in turn, in the 'emphasis on irony, in the development of simultaneous meanings, in the deliberate counterpointing of the colloquial and the formal,' in the oddest concatenations of things and in the use of wit as well as of parable and allegory'.<sup>89</sup>

Perceived from the airman's eye-view, the thirties were focused also by means of a frequently used deictic. 'The aerial position', as Cunningham concedes, was 'natural and ideal for that recognizably totalitarian strain of giving orders, hectoring, advising, being schoolmasterly'.<sup>90</sup> The stylistic tendency to strings of nominal phrases and an abundant use of definite articles, with a slight touch of Hopkinsian inscape and Anglo-Saxon kennings, built up the rudiments of the Audenesque idiom. As Cunningham highlights it, the period's widespread deictic and the imperative mood pronounced 'undoubtedly an effort to assert authority, knowledge, command of experience, the capacity to master typologies, ... such as between-the-wars British authors seem exorbitantly to have craved'.<sup>91</sup>

An epitome of that fashion of the thirties is perhaps 'Poem XXIX' of 1930, in which Auden instructs: 'consider, look, pass on, admire, join,' so that one 'is told precisely what to see, where to go, what to do with oneself'.<sup>92</sup> This 'stylistic eccentricity serves the argument for [the decade's] textual inwardness'.<sup>93</sup> This is as well the medium of coming to grips with the shattered reality, the tool of articulating the self's predicament, and the *signumtemporis* of the decade. This is the medium of the Audenesque narrative, in which the frameworks of identity are to be restored and the collective *Selbstverständnis* achieved. 'My history, my love [and my self] / [i]s but a choice of speech,' contends Auden's persona, articulating the creed of the Pylon generation.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>85</sup> He does so in the poem 'Family Ghosts,' 1929.

<sup>86</sup> Bergonzi, *Reading the Thirties*, P. 64.

<sup>87</sup> Bergonzi, *ibid.* P. 68.

<sup>88</sup> Quoted in Greenberg's *Quest for the Necessary ...*, P. 107.

<sup>89</sup> Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties*, p. 79.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.* P.193.

<sup>91</sup> *British Writers of the Thirties*. P. 10.

<sup>92</sup> Quoted in *ibid.* P. 193.

<sup>93</sup> Cunningham, *ibid.* P.10.

<sup>94</sup> These are the words of Trinculo in Auden's *The Sea and the Mirror: A Commentary on Shakespeare's The Tempest*, ch. 2, p. 28, (London; Faber and Faber, 1945).

The airman's broad vista and the fully-fledged narrative stand, nonetheless, in need of one more, extralinguistic preliminary. They necessitate movement and a radical change of perspective. The Audenesque poetic narrator is not merely a 'passive, recording and not thinking camera-eye' of Isherwood's diaries.<sup>95</sup> Refusing to be a 'holder of one position, wrong for years,' it is a self in action.<sup>96</sup>

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,

promulgates a voice of the Auden generation.<sup>97</sup> What appears a sole remedy for the suspended, insecure and depersonalised identity of the thirties is decentralisation - moving away from the dismal English chasm. 'The marginal grief / [i]s source of life,' Auden asserts in his meaningfully titled poem, 'The Exiles'.<sup>98</sup> Moreover, that marginal direction of a voyage, as Rainer Emig argues, has in the English reality 'a status of a life-source' and hence of 'an origin of poetry,' that is of a new language.<sup>99</sup>

Hence, one may infer that, all-embracing though it seems, the hawk and the airman's perspective eventually proves to be insufficient. The sky-oriented motion of the Audenesque observer seems to require a centrifugal, horizontal extension, the focus of the uplifted perspective standing in need of a radical distantiation. Shifting apart from the English centre appears, therefore, as a must for the Audenesque narrator – the narrator who is doomed to exile. As Emig points out, it is at the outset of the poem 'The Wanderer' that Auden explicitly 'declares exile a necessary condition' of the Pylon identity, for he urges: '[man] should leave his house, / [n]o cloud-soft hand can hold him, restraint by women'.<sup>100</sup> An outcast of the history, a voyager and a pilgrim at the same time, the Audenesque wanderer 'in one aspect [represents] still the middle class intellectual, doomed by his political awareness to leave his intellectual and spiritual home, and endure hardship and isolation'.<sup>101</sup> Yet, as Auden remarks himself, the compelling banishment, 'instead of a necessary evil becomes the symbol of man's true condition'.<sup>102</sup> That journey of the Audenesque inchoate self shall be a search for identity, a path towards self-formation through language-restitution, and a matter of being and becoming. That peregrination remains for the Pylon generation the one and only way to develop a firm, framed identity.<sup>103</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Christopher Isherwood, *The Berlin Novels: Goodbye to Berlin* (London: Vintage, 1999). P. 243.

<sup>96</sup> Auden, 'Venus Will Now Say a Few Words,' November 1929.

<sup>97</sup> Auden, 'Venus Will Now Say a Few Words,' November 1929.

<sup>98</sup> October 1930.

<sup>99</sup> Rainer Emig, W. H. Auden: *Towards a Postmodern Poetics*, (Houndmills: Macmillan Press, 2000). P. 119.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. P. 18.

<sup>101</sup> This is the opinion of Monroe K. Spears, as quoted by Emig in *ibid.* P. 119.

<sup>102</sup> Quoted by Emig in *ibid.* P. 120.

<sup>103</sup> Auden, 'Poem XXIII,' 1930.

'If we really want to live, we'd better start at once to try,' pleads the Audenesque persona; 'If we don't, it doesn't matter, but we'd better start to die'.<sup>104</sup> Therefore, the Audenesque 'who' of discourse cannot escape the lot of a self in quest of its genuine selfhood.

Wary of the necessity of movement, the Audenesque airman turns a wanderer, and stands on the verge of departure, away from the domestic technological and moral wasteland. His geographical voyage to the margins of Europe is going to entail both a spiritual quest, 'out of [theatricality, masks, and] roles,' back 'into the self, and an existential search for the good, firm Otherness, which preconditions attaining 'an inner validation' in the throes of identity building. Approaching the British frontier, the Audenesque narrator faces two realms: the European sick centre and the auspicious unconfined periphery. Germany, Spain, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, France, Portugal, Switzerland, Iceland, Egypt, Hong Kong, China and The United States are some of the landmarks of the Audenesque quest for identity and for the Other, reflecting the political and ethical predicament of the Pylon poets. A change of perspective and focus helped the Auden generation view their domesticity from a distance and see both England of the day and themselves in a clearer way, as documented in their works of the late thirties and the following decades. Yet, paradoxically, the quest and geographical distantiation 'increased the sense of enclosure'.<sup>105</sup> The corollary of the journeys was often, unfortunately, the realisation of the 'ubiquity of human horror', and of 'the cold controlled ferocity of the human species', as Auden and MacNeice write in the joint *Letters from Iceland*, a sad but essential finding.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Auden, 'Poem XXIII,' 1930.

<sup>105</sup> Richard Davenport-Hines, Auden, London: Minerva 1995. P. 148.

<sup>106</sup> Auden, L. MacNeice, London: Random House, 1969. Pp. 7, 10.

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