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Topophilia and Escapism: W.H. Auden's Interwar Poetics of Place (1927-1938)

Topofilie a útěkářství: poetika místa v meziválečném díle (1927-1938) W.H. Audena

Disertační práce

vedoucí práce – prof. PhDr. Bohuslav Mánek, CSc.

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Prohlašuji, že jsem disertační práci napsal samostatně s využitím pouze uvedených a řádně citovaných pramenů a literatury a že práce nebyla využita v rámci jiného vysokoškolského studia či k získání jiného nebo stejného titulu.

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Abstract

This work focuses on Wystan Hugh Auden's (1907-1973) early poetry (1927–1938) and analyzes its engagement with places, landscapes and local cultures. The scope is limited to the interwar years, when Auden started to write poetry, entered the literary stage and formed his ethical stances, poetics and a personal voice within one of the most socially arduous and aesthetically innovative periods of recent history. This turns his 1920s and 1930s work into a fertile ground for research, which is evidenced by the large body of extant criticism scrutinizing the technical aspects of Auden's interwar poetry as well as its reflection of the poet's affinity with Marxism and the politically conscious intelligentsia of his generation.

While sharing the same historical focus, this dissertation diverges from existing scholarship and traces the character of Auden's imaginative dynamic, which renders an inscription of the physical world into art. Auden was highly emotionally and intellectually responsive to particular places, environmental types, human spatial experience and their embedment in arts. This work examines his engagement with Alston Moor in the Northern Pennines, Iceland and England. In his prose, the former two are constructed as sacred places and asylums for his imaginative and physical escapism. The latter two are presented as islands whose insularity forms a border and protects their specific local cultures. All three locations are fashioned as hierarchically superior places bestowed with a unique and distinctive landscape which attracts his topophilic sentiments. Together they form the major constituents of Auden's personal mythical geography. Using relevant secondary sources, this dissertation provides a detailed textual analysis of Auden's engagement with these locations in interwar poetry with the intention to determine the nature of his imagination and poetics of place as well as the impact on their character of the poet's responsiveness to the 1920s and 1930s social and aesthetic milieu. Hence, this dissertation seeks to enhance the ability to perceive one of the most accomplished authors of the last century in terms of his relation to contexts that are broader than merely political ones.

Such integral attributes of Auden's work are examined in light of knowledge offered by humanistic geography and recent theorizing about landscape. Conflating phenomenology and geography, its exponents (Yi-Fu Tuan, Edward Relph, D.W. Meinig, Anne Buttimer, etc.) concentrate on the forces informing the sense of place, patterns of human spatial awareness and experience, and their inscription in different art forms. Tuan and other humanist geographers provide a set concepts applied to the present reading of Auden's poetry, namely place-making, existential insidedness and outsidedness, topophilia, escapism and mythical geographies. This theoretical underpinning is complemented with observations on landscape and its representation in the visual arts and topographical poetry of recent literary critics, critics of culture and anthropologists of landscape such as Paul Shepard, David Lowenthal, John Wilson Foster, Raymond Williams, Jerome McGann, Dennis Cosgrove, Lothar Fietz, J. Hillis Miller, Eric Hirsch, Roland Barthes, W.J.T. Mitchell.

Keywords: Wystan Hugh Auden, English interwar poetry, poetics of place, literary topography, sacred place, landscape, Iceland, Alston Moor, England, topophilia, escapism.

Abstrakt v českém jazyce

Tato disertační práce se zabývá ranou poezií (1927-1938) britského básníka Wystana H. Audena (1907-1973) a zaměřuje se na poetiku místa. Časově se soustředí na první a zároveň nejdynamičtější fázi jeho básnické tvorby. V tomto období Auden započal velmi uvědomělé, disciplinované a už tehdy mimořádně ctižádostivé hledání svého osobitého básnického hlasu. Silný a proměnlivý myšlenkový náboj Audenovy poezie let třicátých nesly oslnivá dikce a vytříbený styl spájející ryze současné prvky s tradičními. Kombinace těchto obsahových a formálních aspektů představovala hybnou sílu, jež začínajícího básníka vynesla do samého středu meziválečné literární scény. Tyto faktory zároveň poutají největší pozornost literárních kritiků, kteří kladou hlavní důraz na technické stránky Audenovy rané poezie a zajímají se o míru i povahu jejího odrazu básníkova zájmu o freudovskou psychologii a o jeho politickou angažovanost. Tato disertační práce sdílí zájem o tuto fázi Audenovy tvorby, ale přesouvá svou pozornost na literární topografii. Vychází z výjimečné vnímavosti, kterou básník již od dětství projevoval ke struktuře materiálního světa, krajině, krajinným typům, ale i jejich literárnímu zobrazení a vazbám, které mezi nimi a lidským subjektem vznikají. Věnuje se třem místům, pro Audena představujícím zdroje celoživotní intelektuální a citové, tzv. topofilické odezvy – Alston Moor v Northern Pennines, Island a Anglie. První dvě básník považoval za svá osobní posvátná místa, druhá dvě za státy, jejichž ostrovní ráz přispíval k zachování místní krajinné osobitosti a kulturní identity. Všechny tři pak představovaly základní prvky jeho osobní mytické geografie. Práce se věnuje způsobu jejich pojetí v poezii a kritické próze, tedy k principům reprezentace, ideologizace a transformace míst a krajin do uměleckého díla. Primárním cílem je determinovat povahu a míru vlivu, který na jejich zobrazení mělo Audenovo básnické vyzrávání na pozadí společensky velmi napjaté a umělecky kreativní meziválečné atmosféry. Jeho poetika místa se formovala v průsečíku edwardovské tradice tzv. místní a přírodní poezie a angloamerického modernismu, jehož představitelé různým způsobem reagovali na romantickou a klasicistní estetiku. Zároveň se vzhledem k politické situaci mezi dvěma válkami Audenova estetika utvářela uvnitř období oživující tradiční otázky umělecké tvorby, jako například vztah umělce k publiku, napětí mezi básníkem jako privátní a veřejnou osobou, či angažovanost díla ve společenském dění. Analýza tedy poskytuje možnost vnímat Audena a jeho imaginaci v kontextech širších než jen politických. Ke zpracování zvolené problematiky je primárně využita metodologie humanistické geografie (*humanistic geography*), jejíž představitelé (Yi-Fu Tuan, Edward Relph, D.W. Meinig, Anne Buttimer a další) těží z propojení geografie a fenomenologie. Staví do centra svého zájmu „pojetí místa“ (*sense of place*), tedy významy a citové vazby, které si člověk k v zásadě neutrálním místům subjektivně utváří a které do nich „vkládá“ na základě různých druhů prožívání a pod tlakem osobních i nadosobních faktorů (intence, cíle, existenční potřeby, kulturní stereotypy, politický diskurs, apod.). Tato práce využívá řadu propozic a konceptů, např. „topofilie“ (*topophilia*), „útěkářství“ (*escapism*), existenční vztah k místům (*existential insidedness* a *outsidedness*), „tvorba míst“ (*place-making*) a „mytické geografie“ (*mythical geographies*). Vzhledem k povaze literárních analýz je tato metodologie rozšířena doprovodným teoretickým rámcem. Ten využívá poznatky nedávných a současných literárních a jiných kritiků a teoretiků o krajině (*landscape*) a jejím zobrazování v malířství a v topografické poezii (*topographical poetry*). Mezi odborníky, jejichž studie jsou v této práci využity, patří např. Paul Shepard, David Lowenthal, John Wilson Foster, Raymond Williams, Jerome McGann, Dennis Cosgrove, Lothar Fietz, J. Hillis Miller, Eric Hirsch, Roland Barthes, W.J.T. Mitchell a další.

Klíčová slova: Wystan Hugh Auden, meziválečná anglická poezie, poetika místa, literární topografie, posvátné místo, krajina, Island, Alston Moor, Anglie, topofilie, útěkářství.

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Thus the theory of description matters most.
It is the theory of the word for those

For whom the word is the making of the world,
The buzzing world and lisping firmament.

It is a world of words to the end of it,
In which nothing solid is its solid self.

— Wallace Stevens
"Description without Place"

Introduction

> Lucky the poets of old; for half their work was done for them:
> all would applaud when they named places or heroes or gods.
> Proper names are *an-sich* poetic, but now there is hardly
> one that a poet will dare pen without adding a gloss.
> – Wystan Hugh Auden[1]

In October 1957, Wystan Hugh Auden (1907–1973) purchased a small nondescript summer house in Kirchstetten, a village located some twenty miles west of Vienna. This was his first and last time possessing a place. Yet, since childhood Auden's imagination had been virtually possessed by places and landscapes. A lifelong possession was a large Ordnance Survey map of Alston Moor, an area of an undulating limestone landscape in the Northern Pennines unfolding through Cumberland to the south of the Roman Wall.[2] The map hung in Auden's shack on Fire Island, later on the wall of the Kirchstetten house, where it was found at his death with numerous books on the mining and geology of Alston Moor. These were subjects that enraptured Auden in childhood when he was already fascinated with rocks, the earth and its texture and curves to such an extent that he intended to pursue a career in the natural sciences long before realizing his poetic vocation. Alston, its adjoining area of former lead-mines, and Iceland embodied his idea of Eden and represented the major constituents of a personal mythical geography. Auden's relation to these is a concrete manifestation of his general and refined *topophilic* responsiveness to the physical world. The epigraph above, his biography and countless comments on different places, landscapes, environmental types and their significance reveal his spatial awareness clearly: "when I go to Europe from the States, the great relief is *escaping* from non-humanised, non-mythologised nature and getting back to a landscape where every acre is hallowed."[3]

Much of the critical commentary on the poet notices Auden's spatial awareness. In November 1937, Geoffrey Grigson published the "Auden Double Number" of *New Verse* containing a major public acknowledgement of Auden's work on the occasion of his thirtieth birthday. Besides Grigson, who famously called him a "Monster" who "does not fit," other interwar writers and coterie friends attempted to characterize Auden's poetry and observed his exceptional sensibility toward landscape.[4] Contemporary critics like Reiner Emig still open

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[1] Wystan Hugh Auden, "Shorts II," *Collected Poems*, ed. Edward Mendelson, 1st trade ed. (New York: Random House, 1976) 642. **All future page references to this edition will be included in parentheses in the text as (*CP* 642)**.

[2] For Auden's fascination with maps see Richard Davenport-Hines, *Auden* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1995) 19, 35; Anthony Sharpe, "Paysage Moralisé: Auden and Maps," *Lancaster University EPrints*, Lancaster University, 2007 <http://eprints.lancs.ac.uk/791/1/ Maps_in_WHA.pdf>, 5 February 2013.

[3] Wystan Hugh Auden, "Authority in America," *The Complete Works of W.H. Auden*, Vol. III*: Prose 1949-1955*, ed. Edward Mendelson (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008) 525, emphasis added.

[4] Geoffrey Grigson, "Auden as a Monster," *New Verse* 26-27 (1937): 13, *Modernist Magazines*, n.d. <http://www.modernist magazines.com/media/pdf/275.pdf>, 14 September 2012. Among the contributors noticing Auden's attraction to landscapes were Herbert Read and Christopher Isherwood.

their studies with attesting to Auden's fondness for specific places, regions, climates and the importance of this dimension in his work. Most of them, however, only brush against such issues and proceed to assess Auden's original style, personal idiom and, above all, his ethical concerns and entanglement in interwar politics.

This study is essentially an outcome of an endeavour to enlarge our understanding of W.H. Auden's work through a rigorous focus on his treatment in criticism and interwar poetry of topographical details, landscapes and his sacred places, the presence of which forms an integral component of his oeuvre, yet one that remains largely critically neglected. The present dissertation reads Auden's texts primarily in light of theoretical knowledge offered by the exponents of humanistic geography concentrating on the study of human spatial awareness and experience, its inscription in different art forms and on a topophilic and escapist relation to the physical environment. It is my hope that this approach and the investigation into such salient aspects of Auden's work may yield novel insights into his imaginative dynamic transcribing the physical world into text. In the 1920s and 1930s, Auden underwent the most tumultuous ethical development of his life and his poetics of place was fashioned inside one of the most socially intense and artistically innovative moments of recent history. It is my strong belief that a detailed analysis of the construction of Auden's texts and their appropriation of specific places in the context of such forces has the potential to expand our understanding of Auden because it enhances the ability to perceive one of the most accomplished and recognized authors of the last century in social and aesthetic contexts rather than merely political ones.

I. Auden Criticism

Throughout his life, Auden expressed disdain for scholarly research and academia. Yet, his voice, dramatic ethical growth, homosexuality, relation to Christianity as well as integral position in both American and British literary traditions have coalesced to turn his work into a subject of critical attention as attractive today as it was in the 1930s.

Auden's first critics were his contemporaries and fellow artists – Stephen Spender, Naomi Mitchison, Michael Roberts and Louis MacNeice – as well as established authorities like William Empson. They subjected his early work and thought to the test of both encouraging and deriding commentary immediately after the appearance of his first book of poetry *Poems* (1930). The editor John Haffenden (1983) provides an extensive source of such authentic responses, namely reviews and commentaries, to all Auden's collections. Starting with F.R. Leavis' severe repudiation of *Poems* and *The Orators* (1932) on grounds of their cryptic character, Haffenden charts the generally avuncular and appreciative responses to the

subsequent collaborate drama and books of poetry by critics praising Auden as the harbinger of a new style. The anthology proceeds through Philip Larkin's famous "What's Become of Wystan?", responding to the general disenchantment of English readers and critics including himself with Auden and his poetry written after the emigration to the USA in 1939. The anthology concludes with Frank Kermode's 1972 assessment of Auden's "Epistle to a Godson" and Seamus Heaney's 1976 critique of Auden's *Collected Poems.* Haffenden's project is unique and invaluable in that it allows the contemporary researcher to observe how criticism helped to cement Auden in a central position among other outstanding poets of the last century and to follow the curve of his reception from the first appearance on the literary stage to the very last months of his life.

Jerome McGann has recently observed that much of twentieth-century poetry is consciously language- rather than content-orientated.[5] Auden partakes in this aesthetic orientation. Since the 1930s critics have been attracted by the challenge of defining the features of his personal voice and technical qualities of his verse displaying a gamut of established forms and accommodating crisp diction. Monroe K. Spears (1963) and Barbara Everett (1964) authored two of the first comprehensive book-length studies that attend to Auden's unique voice "delighting," as Everett phrases it, "in the potentialities that language" offers to a modern poet conscious of developing the formal aspects of their poetry in the context of tradition.[6] Justin Replogle (1969) dedicates a substantial part of his analysis to what has become known as the 'Audenesque' idiom and most critics since then have paid at least partial attention to Auden's language, style, tone and voice. Other more recent critics, such as Peter Porter (2004) and Ian Sansom (2004), have focused on Auden's language, style and idiom primarily with the intention of mapping the influence of these aspects not only on the 1930s generation, but also the 1950s and later poets as diverse as Philip Larkin, George MacBeth and Allen Ginsberg. Unfortunately, neither of these two critics devotes more than a little attention to Auden's technical influence on a younger generation of American poets. This paucity has recently been corrected by Piotr K. Gwiazda (2007) and Aidan Wasley (2011), who map the extent and quality of Auden's influence on the post-World War II American poetry scene, namely Joseph Brodsky, John Ashbery, James Merrill and Adrienne Rich. These are two recent studies signalling the general relocation of the previous critical tendency to focus primarily on the poet's interwar years. Another representative of this trend is Rainer Emig (2000), who reads Auden in terms of his work's transition from having a

[5] Jerome McGann, *The Point Is To Change It:Poetry and Criticism in the Continuing Present* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2007) xi.
[6] Barbara Everett, *Auden* (London: Oliver and Boyd Ltd., 1964) 2.

serious, socially committed interwar tone into the post-1940s light and comic voice of a postmodern artist grappling with the absence of certainties.

While of some concern to most critics, analyses of Auden's language, style and other technical aspects of his work do not present the full weight of extant criticism. Since Francis Scarfe in his pioneer study (1942) called Auden's poetry "a clearing-house for modern psychology and social doctrine,"[7] scholars have centred upon the poet's ethical views and gauged the impact on his poetry of his personal engagement with modern psychology as well as political and theological systems of thought; many trace the contours of his 'Freud-Marx-Kierkegaard' ideological trajectory. In his prose Auden often explains the reasons for approaching such discourses in his search for an effective cure for the interwar malaise, or as he called it, "the failures of civilisation,"[8] through a change of the individual or environment. In regard to the former, critics in general assess Auden's 1920s appropriation of Sigmund Freud's psychology and Homer Lane and John Layard's doctrine of the psycho-somatic nature of a bodily illnesses caused by the repressive mind. For the latter, inspired by Auden's interest in Marxism, a class-related dialecticism interpreting history as a power struggle, critics have explored the political dimensions of his verse and envisioning of collective changes. Nadia Herman Colburn has suggested that, of all the phases of Auden's creative career, there is an obvious tendency in criticism to focus on the interwar years.[9] This has aesthetic but mainly ethical reasons. In this period Auden was not only anxious to find his own style and voice, which makes the period critically attractive. He also went through the most dynamic phase of his ideological development. An insightful critique of the stage and Auden's engagement with politics is provided by Lucy McDiarmid (1984), who reads Auden, T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats for different versions of a response to the general temptation of the intelligentsia to 'save civilization' and for their dilemma over socially engaged art. Out of all available studies of this type, however, Valentine Cunningham's (1988) detailed analysis of the multifaceted forms and themes of 1930s writing is crucial, as Auden's work is discussed in comparison to other writers of the decade. Cunningham provides a valuable account of the political, social and aesthetic context of Auden's poetics and subject matter. He maps the complexity of the relation between Auden's generation and the High Modernists, the forms of their response to the interwar modernity, mass culture, the Spanish Civil War and other crucial aspects of the 1930s world.

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[7] Francis Scarfe, *Auden and After: The Liberation of Poetry 1930-1941* (London: G. Routledge & Sons, 1942) 11.

[8] Wystan Hugh Auden, "Psychology and Art To-day," *The Complete Works of W.H. Auden*, Vol. I*: Prose and Travel Books in Prose and Verse, 1926–1938*, ed. Edward Mendelson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) 103.

[9] Nadia Herman Colburn, "Bibliographic Essay and Review of Auden Studies," *The Cambridge Companion to W.H. Auden*, ed. Stan Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 242–43.

A scholar of interest in this respect is Justin Replogle (1969), who challenges the commonly accepted interpretation of Auden's 'pattern of ideas' and, by drawing attention to the vagueness of his interwar poetry, argues that Auden and his work should only be interpreted in terms of the Hegelian dialectical struggle between two opposite forces whose identity is systematically obfuscated or undefined. Replogle's proposition is that its nebulousness makes Auden's poetry especially susceptible to attempts to forcefully foist Marxism and Freudianism upon it. Perhaps due to Auden's frequent retractions, even within days, of his own previous spontaneous and assertive affirmations, assessors eager to determine Auden's entanglement in, say, Marxism resort to either overemphasizing or diluting his commitment to it.

Replogle's unwillingness to read the poet in Marxist terms already signals recent trends in Auden criticism. Indeed, since the 1930s, scholars have not only increased in number but, availing themselves of new critical approaches and interpretative possibilities, they have gradually shifted perspectives and focus, thereby providing an exceptional variety of commentary on Auden's writing. The most distinctive common denominator in the work of the most recent and contemporary critics is that they have largely abandoned the afore mentioned debates and tendencies to dwell upon the Marxist and Freudian aspects of Auden's oeuvre. The scope of context deemed relevant has been broadened, and previously ignored connections between Auden's life and poetry examined. For example, Marsha Bryant (1997) provides a rare assessment of Auden's books of reportage in the context of the 1930s culture and the popularity of film documentary. The latter was a fresh medium offering new ways of organizing reality which, as it will be seen, Auden explored for its potential to engage with topographical detail. Auden's post-English poetry has also been read with an emphasis on the poet's return to the Anglo-Catholic fold and fascination with Søren Kierkegaard's religious existentialism. Gareth Reeves (2004) and Arthur C. Kirsch (2005) have examined the role of religion in the work that Auden wrote after his reconversion in 1940, but they also propose its impact on the interwar poetry when he was claiming a withdrawal from religiousness. Richard R. Bozorth (2001) and Piotr K. Gwiazda (2007) have focused on the long-avoided role of Auden's homosexuality as a source of anxiety, but also as a creative impulse for his work.

Overarching all recent criticism, however, are three studies indispensable for any contemporary critic attempting to explore the complex terrain of Auden's poetry and thought. Edward Mendelson, the executor of Auden's literary estate and a major authority in Auden studies, published *Early Auden* (1981) and *Later Auden* (1999) offering a thorough and insightful assessment of poetry, its formal aspects as well as the trajectory of Auden's thought

in both the English and American phases. John Fuller's *W.H. Auden: A Commentary* (1998) still remains an unrivalled and insurmountable exegesis of Auden's poems in a variety of contexts – literary, ideological, historical and theological. Finally, like other recent scholars engendering critical monographs and collective companions under the auspices of the world's leading universities, Edward Mendelson is taking the opportunity to contribute to Auden studies on the occasion of the recent centenary of the poet's birth. Although incomplete at the time of writing this dissertation, the first results of Mendelson's assiduous, meticulous and mammoth endeavour to organize, edit and publish Auden's complete oeuvre – prose, drama and poetry – in eight volumes is already assisting contemporary critics in their diverse efforts to assess his thought and writings.[10]

In June 1927, Wystan Hugh Auden, an unknown Oxford undergraduate, submitted his juvenilia to Faber and Gwyer but the editor T.S. Eliot replied with a negative judgment three months later.[11] However, thirty years later, in June 1956, Auden re-entered his *Alma mater* in order to deliver a lecture on the occasion of his installation to the chair of Professor of Poetry. Aged fifty, the man at the lectern was now an experienced, established poet with a distinctive, self-assured voice of international renown and influence. Notwithstanding this experience, Auden titled the inaugural speech "Making, Knowing and Judging"[12] and revealed to the distinguished audience an anxiety about his new duty to *profess* poetry – to disseminate a critical *judgement* of the work of others. Yet, while primarily a poet – a *maker,* Auden himself was also a critic of great *knowledge*, erudition and formidable judgement already in the 1930s. The learnedness of hundreds of his essays and reviews, 1940s lectures on Shakespeare and other writers, as well as the Oxford speeches, show that Auden's was indeed a 'dyer's hand' 'stained' with a sustained interest in subjecting other writers to meticulous, often excoriating, assessment and scrutiny.[13] The new professor held discourse on two aspects – ethical and aesthetic – that were crucial for his assessment of other poets' work:

> […] the questions which interest me most when reading a poem are two. The first is technical: 'Here is a verbal contraption. How does it work?' The second is, in the broadest sense, moral: 'What kind of a guy inhabits this poem? What is his

[10] At the time of working on this dissertation, Edward Mendelson has published two volumes of Auden's drama and libretti (1928–1973) and four volumes of his prose (1928–1962). Two volumes of poetry remain to be published, which will complete the series *The Complete Works of W.H. Auden* by Faber and Faber (UK) and Princeton University Press (US). Preceding this are not only Auden's more than twenty books of poetry and editions of collected poems (1945, 1966, 1968), but also posthumous *Collected Poems* (1976) and *The English Auden: Poems, Essays and Dramatic Writings, 1927–1939* (1977) prepared by Mendelson.

[11] Edward Mendelson, Preface, *The English Auden: Poems, Essays and Dramatic Writings, 1927–1939*, by Wystan Hugh Auden, ed. Edward Mendelson (1977; London: Faber and Faber, 1988) xiii.

[12] Wystan Hugh Auden, "Making, Knowing and Judging," *The Complete Works of W.H. Auden*, Vol. IV*: Prose, 1956–1962*, ed. Edward Mendelson (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010) 477–97.

[13] *The Dyer's Hand* (1962) is the title of Auden's book of prose and Oxford lectures written and delivered between early 1950s and 1962 (reprinted in Auden, *Complete Works IV* 447–826).

> notion of the good life or *the good place*? His notion of the Evil One? What does he conceal from the reader? What does he conceal even from himself?'[14]

As shown, the character of the twentieth-century criticism of Auden's work largely parallels this emphasis on the moral and technical aspects of the critical act. Scholars have not only fruitfully examined Auden's style and language. Approaching Auden as a 'poet of ideas', they have also scrutinized his work for signs of engagement with psychology, and political and religious discourses.

Essential as such issues are, in comparison with the large amount of critical attention devoted to Auden's affinity with abstract systems of thought, only a little scrutiny has been accorded to the last part of his definition of the critical act. Only a few attempts have been made to assess Auden's responsiveness to the physical world, his notion of the 'good place', and his engagement in poetry and prose with specific places, landscapes and local cultures. David R. Weimer was perhaps the first to notice this aspect of Auden's work, namely his engagement with the city, in one chapter of his *The City as Metaphor* (1966) assessing other twentieth-century poets' treatment of this environmental type. Edward Mendelson (1981, 1999) also makes some reference to spatial imagery in his exceptional analysis of Auden's interwar work and ethical growth, and where appropriate, his observations are heeded to in the present study. In their respective articles, Patrick Deane (2004) focuses on the ambivalence of Auden's image of England, and Craig Hamilton (2005) re-examines Auden as 'a poet of the city' by assessing Auden's allusions to the urban space in a single 1949 poem 'Memorial for the City'. Lastly, Paola Marchetti (2004) concentrates on the figurative, allegorical and iconographic dimensions of Auden's generic landscapes of the interwar period. These critics provide useful knowledge of Auden's engagement with places and landscapes. However, its scope is either limited by the space that scholarly articles and chapters offer, or by their attention to Auden's engagement with only a particular environmental type, or by the fact that his topography is examined on the margin of a different central theme.

II. Auden and Place

The absence of a substantial assessment of Auden's literary topography may imply the irrelevance of the topic. Yet, the above mentioned studies, Auden's biography and writing show that a strong attribute of his sensibility was a profound engagement with the physical environment and with art responding to it. Auden knew that among his maternal ancestors and relations through marriage was the landscape painter John Constable. The poet also wrote

[14] Auden, "Making, Knowing and Judging," *Complete Works IV* 490, emphasis added.

several ekphrastic poems responding to the oil landscapes of Pieter Brueghel the Elder and Giovanni Bellini.[15] There are also numerous references and commentaries in his work upon the visual imagination of Salvator Rosa, Nicolas Poussin, Titian and Daumier. Moreover, while the maternal lineage provided Auden with a distinguished origin, his father Dr George Augustus Auden (1872–1957), who held a first-class Cambridge degree in the natural sciences and published in *Nature* on geology, had ignited and nurtured his son's exceptional sensitivity to the earth, landscapes and minerals in an early childhood.

Auden's prose and biography show that he had an acute sense of particular places and environmental types, as well as experiencing and perceiving them. His attraction to the English landscape of the Pennines remained throughout his life even when rivalled by frequent travels. In the interwar period he lived in Berlin, repeatedly explored Germany, stayed in Iceland, visited Czechoslovakia, Romania, Portugal, Spain, China and roamed through the USA. In later years, he added New York, Ischia and Austria to his boundless itinerary and list of residences. In general, Auden in his writing reverences local diversity as well as topographical and cultural specificity of different places. Simultaneously, he scorns the functionalist planning and technological progress of the twentieth-century modernity as factors that depersonalize places, erase their identity and contribute to topographical and cultural homogenization. More importantly, it will be shown that Auden found space in his poetry and prose for discussing the emulation of landscapes in 'verbal contraptions'. He wrote travel reportage, was fond of literary topography, read and translated travel literature. Also, and expressed unstinting encomia of a group of local, topographical and nature poets. Auden praised their engagement with the physical world and ability to combine a sharp eye for a significant detail, sensibility and verbal skills for the sake of rendering particular places as unique, even sacred.

Above all, however, Auden conjured and weaved into his writing a geography of unique and numinous places for which he claimed to have strong topophilic sentiments. Paola Marchetti suggests that the poet's attention to landscape has been critically neglected in consequence of the suggestion by Humphrey Carpenter, Brian Howard and Lincoln Kirstein that Auden had neither a visual sense nor interest in the visual arts.[16] Oversimplified as this

[15] Auden's mother Constance Rosalie Bicknell (1869–1941) had numerous distinguished ancestors and relatives. John Constable married Maria Elizabeth Bicknell (1788–1828) despite her father's Charles Bicknell's (1751–1828) disagreement caused by Constable's undistinguished origin. Besides, the maternal line of Auden's family includes aristocratic and royal predecessors. Auden's grandfather Rev. Richard Henry Bicknell (1823–1869) married Selina Acton Birch (1833–1880), whose ancestors were several baronets like Sir John Rous, and Earls such as Earl of Stradbroke. A detailed family genealogy titled "Family Ghosts" has been compiled at Stanford University under the supervision of Nicholas Jenkins, who has traced Auden's relation to literary and distinguished personages of English history (Nicholas Jenkins, *W.H. Auden – Family Ghosts*, Stanford University, 2008–2013 <http://www.stanford.edu/group/auden/cgi-bin/auden/>, 5 December 2012).

[16] Paola Marchetti, "Auden's Landscapes," *The Cambridge Companion to W.H. Auden*, ed. Stan Smith 200.

reason seems in view of other possible causes, such as Auden's status of a modern polyglot poet of international provenance and residence, Marchetti's essay and the present study derive from a contrary conviction. This dissertation shows that Auden's writing reveals his fine and discriminating sensibility towards the texture and visual contours of the physical world as well as the visual arts. His 'poetic universe' is replete with references to places and landscapes ranging from generic types to concrete locales. While Marchetti analyzes the former as one of the signature features of Auden's early poetry, the critical act in the present study is forced upon the latter. It focuses on a selection of locatable places that had a special emotional and intellectual significance for Auden, namely Alston Moor and Iceland, which he repeatedly described in terms of sacrosanct places, and England, which he praised as a location of an unmatched and specific insular culture. To use the poet's own words in the definition of the critical act cited above, Auden's writings are 'inhabited by a guy' who repeatedly reveals a notion of the 'good place' and who is imaginatively rooted and fixedly attracted to the same set of 'holy' and unique locations as well as to the texture of the physical world in general. Auden undoubtedly represents what George Steiner has called a modern 'unhoused'[17] writer incessantly peregrinating the world. Yet, this dissertation illustrates that because Alston Moor, Iceland and England remained the lodestones of Auden's thought, topophilic sentiments and writing, there is a contrasting tendency in his life and work that is worth exploring.

This study brings such aspects to prominence as categories for interpreting Auden's work. It follows a major tendency of Auden criticism and limits its scope to poetry written between 1927 and 1938. The fact that in this period Auden wrote his earliest mature poems while developing his ethical and aesthetic stances, as well as personal voice provides fertile ground for research. This dissertation diverges from extant criticism, however, by centring upon Auden's responsiveness to topographical detail, his sense of place and notion of the 'good place'. It sets out to assess his frequent but scholarly underestimated colloquy with the physical world and the manner in which concrete landscapes, topographical details and, especially, personal sacred places are transformed into prose and poetry. This study traces the character and contours of Auden's imaginative dynamic rendering the inscription of the physical world into art and the formation of his imagined geography. The focus on such constant cynosures places this dissertation with the recent scholarly tendency outlined above to enlarge the context deemed relevant for a critical assessment of Auden's work. It approaches Auden's spatial awareness and poetics of place as aspects which if analyzed have

[17] Qtd. in Malcolm Bradbury, "The Cities of Modernism," *Modernism*, eds. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (1976; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1981) 101.

the potential to conduce to a greater comprehension of his genius and imaginative workshop. One step in this journey is to seek a clearer definition of Auden's relationship to the local and topographical poets he so admired as well as Auden's connection to his own politically conscious generation and the High Modernists reappraising established modes of representation. Hence, while attending to Auden's general politics where necessary, the focus on the engagement with the world of places and its transformation into art in the aesthetic and social context framed by the wars makes this primarily a study of his interwar *politics of place, description and representation*. In this respect, I am greatly indebted to Professor Edward Mendelson for providing me with important encouragement in the preparatory stages of the research when its course was taking shape.

III. Outline of Chapters

This study has two parts. Chapter One opens the first one and introduces the theoretical underpinning for subsequent analyses. It centres upon a selection of propositions made by humanist geographers, whose application of an existential-phenomenological perspective to geography represents a fresh form of theorizing about human experience, perception and 'writing' of the physical environment. Their focus on experiential subjectivity together with a cluster of interrelated concepts – place, sense of place, topophilia, escapism and mythical geographies – renders humanistic geography a productive approach essential for Chapter Two, which concludes the first part of this study. It examines the extra-poetical aspects of Auden's engagement with the physical environment. Special emphasis is placed on his spatial sensitivity and topophilia discussed in the context of his private mythical geography of sacred places and predilection for topographical poets. On such bases, the second part of this dissertation proceeds to the assessment of Auden's poetical topography. Chapter Three opens with an analysis of representative samples of English topographical poetry and gauges its capacity to engage with concrete places and landscapes. Chapters Four, Five and Six offer a close textual analysis of Auden's engagement in his interwar verse with Alston Moor, England and Iceland, respectively. The issue is examined in light of relevant secondary sources, and the theory of spatial experience, topographical poetry and Auden's prose analyzed in Chapters One to Three.

Approached from a strictly geographical point of view, *place* means 'location in space' and 'intersection of spatial gradients'. Yet, since antiquity, it has proved to be a highly complex category subjected to several reconceptualizations. In this study, place is reduced neither to a mere locality nor to an Archytian *a priori* condition of existence nor an

Aristotelian precedent container.[18] In **Chapter One** and further it is approached as a variable expression and product of human spatial experience.[19] Humanist geographers – Edward Relph, Yi-Fu Tuan, Anne Buttimer, D.W. Meinig, etc. – alter the epistemology of traditional geography. While scientific geography concentrates on the veritable aspects of the physical environment, representatives of humanistic geography ground their research in phenomenology and existential phenomenology to conceive of place as a cultural category and multifaceted construct emerging from the human encounter with space. In their work, the idea of place conflates a location, its physiognomic features and, inseparably, meanings imputed to it through different forms of experience. As a phenomenologist of architecture influenced by Martin Heidegger, Christian Norberg-Schulz equates place-making with 'gathering' and 'revealing' in a physical object of recondite meanings latently contained in an environment.[20] Rather than *revealing*, place is hereafter viewed as resulting from a process in which individual or collective subjects *vest* an essentially neutral environment with diverse anthropomorphic meanings, thereby constructing places in space materially as well as ideally (i.e. with ideas) without altering their physical properties or forming visible boundaries. While border is inherent to places, it is argued that ideal stratification of homogeneous space often entails the 'construction' of imaginary divisions. These differentiate hierarchically organized zones frequently imbued with dialectical values, such as the sacred and profane or home and periphery, actuality and potentiality (e.g. Eliade, 1957; Tuan, 1974, 1977, 2009; Hirsch, 1995; Shepard, 1991).

Humanist geographers view the size and the experiential distance of a subject from a location as crucial determinants in spatial apprehension. Chapter One argues that the quality and quantity of sense of place depend on the existential relation of a subject to a given locality as much as their intentions and goals. The same location is experienced differently by a long-term resident, a tourist arriving for a sojourn and a person deriving their sense from mediated means or mere imagination. It also emphasizes that while commonly associated with a conscious response, a sense of place is often unarticulated, especially when the complex and profound experience of an intimately known locality is considered. Visited or imagined places

[18] Edward S. Casey reminds us that Archytas of Tarentum (as reported by Simplicius) thought of place as an *a priori* condition for existence: "to be (at all) is to be in (some) place" (*The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* [Berkley: University of California Press, 1997] 4). Casey also attends to Aristotle's *Physikē akroasis* (*Hearkening to Nature*) and *Physics* in which the latter includes 'where something is' among the essential metaphysical categories, thereby viewing place as a precedent vessel necessary for existence (50–71).

[19] Cf. Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (1976; London: Pion Limited, 1980) 4; David Lowenthal, "Geography, Experience, and Imagination: Towards a Geographical Epistemology," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 51.3 (September 1961): 246-48, *JSTOR* <http://www.jstor.org/stable/256 1658>, 11 April 2012.

[20] Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a phenomenology of architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1980) 18.

tend to be sensed more consciously but the brevity or lack of a direct exposure to them makes such awareness parochial, selective, focused on the visual aspects and so prone to warping.

David Lowenthal has claimed that "Every image and idea about the world is compounded […] of personal experience, learning, imagination, and memory."[21] It will be shown that this is crucial for an approach to Auden. Although corporeality forces each individual to experience the world in an indelibly authentic way and, in consequence, endow it with idiosyncratic values, Chapter One acknowledges the importance ascribed by humanist geographers to supra-personal factors, which makes sense of place a melange of concurring individual and collective views, especially when its size precludes intimate experience. In its formation direct and authentic elements fuse with inter-subjective discourses, such as cultural apperceptions, knowledge, stereotypes and worldviews.[22] In this connection it is argued that sense of place concerns balancing between concreteness and type, as each topographically distinctive locality is likely to be perceived as a particular geographical unit, but also within culturally fixed generic categories – a town, nature, etc. – and accreted associations with such environmental types.

In preparation for further chapters, Chapter One also attends to selected aspects of spatial experience such as the uniqueness, 'identity of' and 'identification with' place, as well as topophilic sentiments for it and escapism. Traditionally signifying a supernatural force guarding a location, *genius loci* is now commonly associated with unique physiognomic features, atmosphere and authentic experience of places.[23] Although the pressures of homogenization are not a novel phenomenon, a major aspect of recent theorizing about place and an impulse for it has been a sense of rapid weakening of local specificity. Edward Relph (1976), David Harvey (1990) and Christian Norberg-Schulz (1980) have examined the impact of increasing intercultural exchange and standardized planning on the erasure of local authenticity, which Relph terms 'placelessness'. Yet, when place is viewed as a conflation of physical features and meanings reflecting its functions and human intentions, it may be 'constructed' as unique and sacred at an ideal level regardless of its topographical distinctiveness. Such values emerge from topophilic sentiments for places such as home or distant places imagined as able to fulfil a desire for a satisfactory environment.[24]

As noted, in his inaugural lecture Auden used the phrase 'good life' in connection with 'good place', yet this was not for the first time. Throughout his career, he viewed them as

[21] Lowenthal, "Geography" 260.
[22] Lowenthal, "Geography" 242, 251; Relph, *Place and Placelessness* 82–92.
[23] Cf. Lawrence Durrell, "Landscape and Character," 1960, *The Lawrence Durrell Travel Reader*, ed. Clint Willis (New York: Carroll and Graf Publishers, 2004) 3-14; Norberg-Schulz 18.
[24] Relph, *Place and Placelessness* 44-62; Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1974) 99–100, 220.

inseparable mutual complements implying an ideal place allowing existence spared from wants and desires. In the essay "The Good Life" (1935), he defined man as "an organism with certain desires existing in an environment which fails to satisfy them fully. His theories about the universe are attempts, whether religious, scientific, philosophical, or political, to explain or *overcome this tension*."[25] Chapter One shows that Yi-Fu Tuan (1998) and Paul Shepard (1991) approach man from a similar perspective as a desiring animal congenitally predisposed to negotiate between environmental actuality and potentiality. Anthropomorphic meanings ascribed to essentially neutral environments are concomitants of incessant attempts to escape the *status quo* of the 'here' and 'now' in search for a good place – an ordered, protective and life-sustaining lifespace satiating basic physiological, psychological and spiritual needs, needs of safety, stability, belongingness, identification and esteem as defined, for example, by Abraham Maslow (1943). For Tuan and Shepard, migration, travelling, material and ideal constructs, idealizations and topophilic sentiments for particular locations and environmental types, as well as pre-lapsarian and utopian visions, are different expressions of the same endeavour to cope with the shortcomings of actuality. Besides physical departures, individual and collective *mythical geographies* consisting of locations enchanted with superlative values can be read as ideal 'carapaces' issuing from attempts to escape the shortcomings and vagaries of the actual environment. Home (and homeland) is the prime constituent of such constructions. Idealized as a hub of the world, it attracts topophilic sentiments and forms a benchmark for assessing the periphery. In addition, the fuzzy, limited and vicarious knowledge of remote locations in personal *terrae incognitae* outside the intimately known home zone makes them equally prone to mythologizing. Such places represent the second major source of 'material' for the 'construction' of personal and collective geographies as well as objects of topophilic infatuation and destinations for temporary, permanent, physical and imaginative escapism.

It is these 'topophilic' and 'escapist' aspects of the human encounter with home and the surrounding periphery that form the basis for the analysis of Auden's construction of his own mythical geography. Outside his lifespace, he knew Iceland and the limestone landscape of Alston Moor primarily as a visitor bringing into them the sediment of mediated knowledge, preconceptions and childhood imagination nurtured by the father and his books on geology and mining. England, on the other hand, was his homeland and existential zone, but, as noted, its size prescribes knowledge also largely dependant on public discourses or on intimate experience of its part. All three are concrete topographical details that Auden imbued with

[25] Auden, "The Good Life," *Complete Works I* 109, emphasis added.

specific values and used as major building blocks of his mythical geography of sacred and unique places. Hence, drawing upon the propositions of Chapter One, this study proceeds to the discussion of the extra-poetical aspects of Auden's engagement with the physical world. **Chapter Two** has two objectives. Firstly, it delineates Auden's understanding of the term topophilia and relates it to his proclaimed reasons for maintaining awe for particular English poets. Secondly, the contours of his private mythical geography and topophilic sentiments are defined with an emphasis on what Auden claimed to be his perennial, unique and numinous *loci amoenī* – sacred locations differentiated from the inferior surrounding profaneness. Auden's view of the North is presented, especially the region of the Northern Pennines, Alston Moor and Iceland. These places are treasured for their distinctive topography and potential to embody his private idea of Eden, 'islands of bliss' and imaginative asylums from the quotidian life. Auden's view of England is also considered in the context of his preference for cultural diversity and aversion to placelessness, homogenization, international exchange and the depersonalization of places.

In an attempt to assess the character of Auden's poetic treatment of these places, **Chapter Three**, which opens the second part of the dissertation, provides a brief analysis of topographical, landscape and prospect poetry. It starts with the discussion of Sir John Denham's *Cooper's Hill* and Dr Samuel Johnson's definition of locodescriptive verse. Then the concepts of landscape and perspective are discussed in light of certain propositions of David Lowenthal (1961, 1991), John Wilson Foster (1975-1976), Raymond Williams (1973, 1980), Jerome McGann (1983), Dennis Cosgrove (1985), Lothar Fietz (1995), J. Hillis Miller (1995), Eric Hirsch (1995), Roland Barthes (1997), W.J.T. Mitchell (1994, 2003), Aaron Santesso (2006) and other scholars. Their theories about landscape, its (re)presentation and the poets' engagement with the physical world are approached as vital for establishing some of the major generic features of topographical poetry with respect to the manner and character of its appropriation of a local detail in art.

Chapters Four, **Five** and **Six** concentrate on Auden's poetry written between 1927 and 1938. During this time he wrote more than one hundred poems published in three volumes titled *Poems* (1928, 1930, 1933), *Look Stranger!* (1936), *Another Time* (1940). Several others remained unpublished, uncollected until later decades or they were incorporated into plays, prose writing (e.g. *The Orators*, 1932) and books of travel reportage (e.g. *Letters from Iceland*, 1937 and *Journey to a War*, 1939). More than prose or drama, it is these poems that earned Auden the agnomen 'monster' and a rank among the leading voices of an ascending generation of poets yearning to join the High Modernists on the interwar literary stage. In

January 1939, however, T.S. Eliot left *The Criterion* and Auden, to the consternation of many, left England. As Patrick Deane phrases it, the fact that Auden went to exile in the context of the impending European war meant that his departure "took on the character of betrayal in the public mind."[26] As Auden later admitted, this year marked a "new chapter of [his] life."[27] It was a moment of radical reconsiderations of his youthful and boisterous ethical views, concept of poetry and role among interwar writers. Famously, Auden launched his post-English phase by denouncing poetry for its inability to change the world in his panegyric for W.B. Yeats and by summing up the 1930s as "a low dishonest decade."[28]

The scope of this dissertation is limited to the interwar period because Auden shaped his poetics of place in the context of a very innovative and radical reappraisal of established literary patterns and sensibility taking place on the background of perhaps the most socially, politically and economically arduous moments of the twentieth century. In his 1956 inaugural lecture "Making, Knowing and Judging", Auden spoke on novice poets, the "would-be" makers and the process of their growth. The proposition is that the mastery of poetry *making* should result from developing an inner "Censor" – a self-critiquing agency assisting in fashioning a personal style. Every apprentice poet should nurture such self-*judgement* through gaining *knowledge* of seasoned masters through imitating them.[29] Auden found patterns for his classical argument in recollections of his own beginnings. Embarking on a poetic career in 1922, he set out to train the inner Censor, saturated himself with the work of established poets and knew then as in 1956 that to write is to engage in an acute critical assessment of one's own work or, as T.S. Eliot phrased it in 1923, in a conscious "labour of sifting, combining, constructing, expunging, correcting, testing."[30] Before the novice poet can give birth to his Censor, Auden claimed in front of his Oxford audience, "he has to pretend to be somebody else; he has to get a literary transference upon some poet in particular."[31] Here as elsewhere, Auden borrows the Freudian psychoanalytical concept implying a person's direction of their emotions towards a particular object.

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[26] Patrick Deane, "Auden's England," *The Cambridge Companion to W.H. Auden*, ed. Stan Smith 25.

[27] When preparing *Collected Shorter Poems* (1966) Auden abandoned the alphabetical order of the 1945 edition. The poems were arranged chronologically and divided into four sections, each representing a new phase of his life. In all but one case these were place-related: moving to New York (1939), the first stay in Ischia (1948), acquiring a house in Kirchstetten in (1958). The first decisive moment was 1933 when Auden experienced the 'Vision of Agape'. Symptomatic of his hostility to criticism, the decision to arrange the 1945 edition alphabetically was guided by the intention to prevent attempts to map his development (Auden, "Foreword," *CP* 15-16).

[28] Wystan Hugh Auden, *The English Auden: Poems, Essays and Dramatic Writings, 1927-1939*, ed. Edward Mendelson (1977; London: Faber and Faber, 1988) 241-42, 245. **All future page references to this edition will be included in parentheses in the text as (*EA* 241–42, 245)**.

[29] Auden, "Making, Knowing and Judging," *Complete Works IV* 478–84.

[30] T.S. Eliot, "The Function of Criticism," 1923, *Selected Essays* (1932; London: Faber and Faber, 1969) 30.

[31] Auden, "Making, Knowing and Judging," *Complete Works IV* 481.

Aged fifteen in 1922, Auden realized his poetic vocation and commenced his own precocious search for a suitable style, inner Censor and models to learn from and imitate. In one of his very last poems titled "Thanksgiving", he recounted the character of his very first literary transference: "When I started to verse, / I presently sat at the feet of / *Hardy* and *Thomas* and *Frost*" (*CP* 671, emphasis original). Auden had recalled in his inaugural lecture and several earlier essays how Thomas Hardy had been his 'poetic father', whose literary "world and sensibility were close enough to [his]" own. Hence, Auden assumed that by learning from Hardy's images of the early twentieth-century provincial England, he "was being led towards, not away from [him]self."[32] In Edward Thomas, he discovered a nature poet and prose writer interlacing description with reflection – a style inherited from Richard Jefferies whose laudatory biography Thomas had written. It will be shown why Auden admired Robert Frost's engagement with the natural world and his focus on an everyday rather than visionary and ecstatic experience. Later accompanied with John Betjeman, Hardy and Thomas remained in the centre of Auden's literary pantheon throughout his life primarily for what he claimed was their endearing responsiveness to places and landscapes. Among Auden's juvenilia from the pre-1927 period are "To a Toadstool", "Woods in Rain", "November at Weybourne", "Rookhope", "The English House", "Skyrehole Mill", "Richard Jefferies" and "Tea Time in November". The titles, style and subject matter are clear manifestations of Auden's first literary transference upon the Edwardian and Georgian poets and their continuation of English nature, local, topographical and landscape poetry.[33]

The earliest poem considered in Chapter Four is "Who stands, the crux left of the watershed" (June 1927), which remains the earliest poem preserved in his canon and the first poem displaying what has become recognized as the trenchant 'Audenesque' idiom. By this time, Auden had outgrown his taste in the Edwardians and Georgians: he deemed it "tardy" and "raw provincial" (*CP* 98). While Auden maintained an admiration of their work throughout his whole life, as poetic models they now seemed anachronistic and inappropriate. In the same year, Auden and C. Day-Lewis wrote that the intellectuals of their generation were bequeathed "no universalized system – political, religious or metaphysical."[34] Indeed, Auden's 1920s ethical views and poetics crystallized while the early twentieth-century radical dissolution of trust in liberalism and positivist epistemology as well as reappraisal of

[32] Auden, "Making, Knowing and Judging," *Complete Works IV* 481.
[33] The only edition of Auden's juvenilia is Wystan Hugh Auden, *Juvenilia : Poems 1922–1928 / W.H. Auden*, ed. Katherine Bucknell (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).
[34] Cecil Day-Lewis and Wystan Hugh Auden, "Preface to *Oxford Poetry 1927*," *Complete Works I* 5. In 1935, Auden added that a new historical epoch was just beginning (99).

established aesthetic models and concepts of time and space were still in the air.[35] Auden decided to become a poet in March 1922. Unbeknownst to him at the time, this was the *Annus Mirabilis* of Anglo-American Modernism, when in January Joyce's *Ulysses* and in October Eliot's *The Waste Land* epitomized the diverse but profound shift in aesthetic sensibility marked by technical and thematic innovation as well as diverse challenges to established forms of artistic expression, the relation of art to life and of artists to the public. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane characterize Modernism not as a style but as a self-conscious "search for a style."[36] It was a quest for a new regenerative power, a means of "controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy," as T.S. Eliot put it in his famous review of *Ulysses.*[37] It was a search "overturn[ing]," as Peter Childs aptly notes, "existing modes and subjects of representation […] by pushing them towards the abstract or the introspective."[38] The Modernist search involved a syncretism of previously opposed categories, synaesthesia of different forms,[39] as well as diverse attitudes to the past and the present, which encourages Bradbury and McFarlane to take 'bifurcation' and 'Janus-faced' quality as accurate descriptors of the multiple forms of Modernism. They define it as a celebration and condemnation of interwar modernity and technological progress, as "an extraordinary compound of the futuristic and the nihilistic, the revolutionary and the conservative, the naturalistic and the symbolistic, the romantic and the classical." [40] Numerous critics draw attention to the endeavour of High Modernists to reject, embrace, alter, but also reconcile the last pair. Edward P. Comentale discusses Anglo-American Modernism not as a violation of the Romantic and Classical impulses in the new aesthetic but as their diverse fusion and appropriation.[41] Ford Maddox Ford's "On Impressionism" (1913), T.E. Hulme's "Classicism and Romanticism" (1914), T.S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919) and other essays of the era display a vast spectrum of critical and aesthetic views. There is the Classicist, anti-Romantic and anti-Impressionist stance of T.S. Eliot, who insists on craftsmanship and discipline shaping the creative impulse, the suppression of emotion and spontaneity, along with a poet's duty to be an impersonal catalyst amalgamating disparate phenomena and objectifying subjective

[35] James McFarlane, "The Mind of Modernism," *Modernism*, eds. Bradbury and McFarlane 79-80.
[36] Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, "The Name and Nature of Modernism," *Modernism*, eds. Bradbury and McFarlane 29.
[37] T.S. Eliot, "Ulysses, Order, and Myth," *Dial* 75 (1923): 483, *University of Virginia*, n.d. <http://people.virginia.edu/~jdk3t/eliotulysses.htm>, 5 October 2011.
[38] Peter Childs, *Modernism*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 2008) 4.
[39] Martin Hilský, *Modernisté: Eliot, Joyce, Woolfová, Lawrence*, vyd. 1. (Praha: Torst, 1995) 62, 177–78.
[40] Bradbury and McFarlane, "The Name and Nature of Modernism" 44–49.
[41] For the assessment of the relation of Modernist authors to the Classicist and Romantic aesthetics see Martin Hilský (1995) and Edward P. Comentale, *Modernism, Cultural Production, and the British Avant-Garde* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

impressions and experience.[42] On the other side of the scale, there is Ford arguing for the vital presence in art of a personal vision, self-expression and display of an uninhibited subjective experience of a fleeting moment as true sources of artistic production: "all art must be the expression of an ego, and that if Impressionism is to do anything, it must, as the phrase is, go the whole hog. […] The Impressionist gives you his own views."[43]

Auden savoured this complex, creative and aesthetically self-conscious atmosphere in the late 1920s and the experience encouraged him to make a second move and transference. While at Oxford (1925–1928), he started to yearn to become a contemporary poet with a modern voice relevant to the aesthetic and social context of the interwar period. In his professorial lecture he recalled his undergraduate days when young apprentice poets including himself realized that they were "a new generation" and "somebody shout[ed] the word 'modern'." He remembered their discovery of "New Iconoclastic Poets," mainly "Mr T.S. Eliot, O.M., as 'a drunken helot'."[44] Auden here seizes upon the image of a drunken slave used both by Arthur Waugh in his assessment of Eliot's novel voice in 1916 and by Ezra Pound a few months later when defending Eliot against Waugh's charges. For Waugh, intent on warning readers about its deleterious potential, the new poetry was "the very stronghold of literary rebellion, if not of anarchy."[45] For Auden, poised to undergo his second literary transference, a welcome "riot [was] on."[46] Eliot especially had uttered to his generation, as Auden recalled in the mid 1930s, "the still unspoken word." Appropriately for the present claim concerning Auden's discriminating sensitivity to places and landscapes, he expressed the consequences of the new discovery through a spatial image revealing his late 1920s willingness to forsake "The clock at Grantchester, the English rook" for "gasworks and dried tubers" (*CP* 98). In this compound of concrete and generic, man-made and natural, traditional and modern elements, Auden replaces the rural English with lifeless and industrial imagery reminiscent of *The Waste Land* and the Pylon poets of his own generation.

Enchanted as Auden and his peers were by the innovativeness of the High Modernists, they also became bitterly critical of the avante-garde artists for their display of excessive

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[42] T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the individual Talent, Part I," *The Egoist* September 1919: 54–55, *The Modernist Journals Project*, Brown University and The University of Tulsa, n.d. <http://dl.lib.brown.edu/mjp/journals.html>, 25 November 2012; "Tradition and the Individual Talent, Parts II & III," *The Egoist* December 1919: 72–73, *The Modernist Journals Project*, Brown University and The University of Tulsa, n.d. <http://dl.lib.brown.edu/mjp/journals.html>, 25 November 2012.

[43] Ford Maddox Ford, "On Impressionism," 1913, *Poetry and Drama, Vol. 2.*, ed. Harold Monro (London: Poetry Bookshop, 1914) 166–67, *Internet Archive*, n.d. <http://ia700300.us.archive.org/26/items/poetrydrama02monruoft/poetrydrama02monruoft.pdf>, 6 October 2012.

[44] Auden, "Making, Knowing and Judging," *Complete Works IV* 482.

[45] Ezra Pound, "Drunken Helots and Mr. Eliot," *The Egoist* June 1917: 72-74, *The Modernist Journals Project*, Brown University and The University of Tulsa. n.d. <http://dl.lib.brown.edu/mjp/journals.html>, 15 November 2012; Arthur Waugh, "The New Poetry," *Quarterly Review* October 1916: 226, *University of Saskatchewan*, n.d. <http://www.usask.ca/english/prufrock/recept1.htm>, 15 November 2012.

[46] Auden, "Making, Knowing and Judging," *Complete Works IV* 482.

aestheticism, escapism and ivory-towerism. Despite George Orwell's disenchantment with Auden and his coterie, both writers united in a critique shared across their generation of the 'old gang' for their disengagement from social matters and inattention to actuality. Orwell's *Inside the Whale* (1940) offers a succinct authentic observation expressive of this disquiet:

> Our eyes are directed to Rome, to Byzantium, to Montparnasse, to Mexico, to the Etruscans, to the Subconscious, to the Solar plexus – to everywhere except the places where things are actually happening. When one looks back at the twenties, nothing is queerer than the way in which every important event in Europe escaped the notice of the English intelligentsia.[47]

For Graham Hough the Modernist lyric and artist withdraw from the public domain and from the position of the spokesman of a culture.[48] It will be shown that Auden frowned at escapism and formalism, 'significant form' and the concept of art as an autonomous but ordered alternative to the contingent, slovenly and formless life. Also, contrasting with Eliot's romantic view of a poet as a superior being possessing ability to amalgamate disparate experience is Auden's claim that the best poetry is written in milieus in which there is close contact between artists and their audience. At the same time, in his 1930s prose Auden repeatedly suggests that what distinguishes poets from the average passive man is an intellectual curiosity and active conscious interest in correcting the *status quo* of the actual environment.[49] What caused notable distress to Auden and his peers was not only the tension of the interwar economic and political situation. They were also disturbed by what seemed irresponsible isolationism of the High Modernists (and the masses) from it. The arrival of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, for example, educed a need to take sides, which highlighted the difference between the younger and older generations regarding their readiness to be socially engaged. To Auden, this presented a problem which Lucy McDiarmid describes as a conflict faced by interwar intellectuals in questions related to the capacity of art to expedite social change, a conflict "between a civic urge to become *engagé* and an artistic need to remain disengaged."[50] The period, in other words, reopened the debate concerning the relation of an artist and his work to the public.

It is this combination of the tense interwar public situation and revolutionary aesthetic developments that formed the context in which Auden's resolution to become a poet took place and which accompanied his endeavour to nurture an inner Censor and modern poetic voice. Auden negotiated between admiration and scorn for the Georgians and High Modernists, between a backward nostalgic gaze towards distant places or times and

[47] George Orwell, *Such, Such Were the Joys* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1953) 174.
[48] Graham Hough, "The Modernist Lyric," *Modernism*, eds. Bradbury and McFarlane 313–15.
[49] E.g. Auden, "To Unravel Unhappiness" and "Introduction to *The Poet's Tongue*," *Complete Works I* 77, 106.
[50] Lucy McDiarmid, *Saving Civilization: Yeats, Eliot, and Auden between the Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) XI.

confrontation of the world of actuality, between the poet as a private individual and public figure. Chapters Four, Five and Six concentrate on Auden's poetry and provide a detailed analysis of selected poems with a particular regard to their engagement with Alston Moor, England and Iceland, respectively. It is shown that Auden's approach to such topographical details and constituents of his mythical geography is inseparable from his negotiations among suitable literary precedents, a poet's civil and artistic roles, isolationism, escapism and engagement in public matters. The overall goal is to assess the manner and extent to which Auden's awareness of these issues and impulses imprints itself on his poetics and sense of place displayed in poetry.

Chapter Four attends to the treatment of Alston Moor – the prime constituent of Auden's mythical geography – in poems written between 1927 and 1930. The chapter starts with a detailed analysis of "Who stands, the crux left of the watershed". This topographical and prospect poem is shown to be anchored in a clearly defined spatial-temporal nexus. It is interpreted in context of others containing generic and concrete spatial imagery. An insight is sought not only into the aesthetic and ethical aspects of Auden's earliest phase when he was still seeking a personal voice and training his inner critic, but also into the earliest manifestation of his modern appropriation of the traditional topographical poetry genre. By exploring Auden's engagement with his sacred place, the chapter establishes basic attributes of his verse poetics of place. For the sake of subsequent chapters, an emphasis is also placed on his approach to the natural and the humanized landscape, escapism and topophilia.

Chapter Five surveys the image of England in Auden's topographical and landscape poems published either in *Look Stranger!* (1936) or separately between 1930 and 1938. This was the only period when Auden, having returned from Berlin (1928–1929), stayed in his homeland for a long time while also writing poetry. His transformation from what he called a private 'rentier' existence financed by parents to a public figure coincided with the parlous social, political and economic interwar situation. In consequence, Auden's 1930s poetry reveals a new preoccupation with the relation of private and public realms. The homecoming and his awareness of an escalating public crisis encouraged in Auden a marked change in the type of poetic landscapes he chose as well as his treatment of them. The chapter offers a reading of Auden's 1930s poems centring upon England in context of his prose (as discussed in Chapter Two), in which he constructs himself as an Englishman and exploits the island topos to fashion England as a self-enclosed geographical entity whose separation functions as a border protecting distinctive cultural and physiognomic identity. The analysis gauges the consequences, on Auden's engagement with England, of his style, which now becomes

pronouncedly more personal, especially with regards to his self-admitted belief in England's uniqueness and his proclaimed belongingness to it. On the whole, the chapter outlines both new and previously established aspects of his earlier poetics of place.

Like several of his peers, in the 1930s Auden published travel reportage. *Journey to a War* (1939), co-written with Christopher Isherwood, describes their journey to China, travels through it and observations of the Sino-Japanese War. **Chapter Six** examines *Letters from Iceland* (1937) – a travel book in verse and prose based on Auden's visit of the island in the summer of 1936, latterly in company of Louis MacNeice, who co-wrote it. Auden went to Iceland almost immediately after his experience in interwar film documentary (early 1936) with the Film Units of the General Post Office. Inspired by his new knowledge, Auden now praised the new genre for its capacity to show a vast amount of visual detail of physical and social reality. At the same time he began criticizing abstract artists for their inattentiveness to such issues, and so for failing to be what he claimed every artist should be: 'reporting journalists' delivering 'plenty of news' about the actual world. The chapter concentrates on Auden's verse letters. Creating a travel book combining text and photographs gave Auden an opportunity to utilize his film documentary experience, to focus on great amounts of local detail and so to write Iceland as a topographically and culturally unique place, which is an attitude displayed in his prose. Also, the choice of an epistolary form provided Auden a format suitable for promoting personal topophilic sentiments and laudatory praises of Iceland's insular sacredness. As a whole, the Chapter gauges the extent to which Auden took these opportunities. The analysis of Auden's treatment of the same subject in the prose and verse parts of *Letters from Iceland* in many respects offers ground for making more general conclusions about his 1930s poetics of place. It summarizes Auden's views on the capacity of poetry to engage with topographical detail, enchant specific locations and promote mythical geographies and topophilic sentiments. In the concluding chapter, the knowledge gained in Chapters One to Six is placed in the broader context of Auden's aesthetic and ethical views and preferences.

Wystan Hugh Auden wrote about his own criticism in terms of mere breadwinning and he held others' critical work in the same low esteem, especially when assessing artists he treasured. For example, he belittled critics for counting references to a bicycle in a work of John Betjeman.[51] Auden was a Professor of Poetry but wrote about academia in a scornful

[51] Wystan Hugh Auden, "Introduction to John Betjeman's *Slick but not Streamlined*," *The Complete Works of W.H. Auden*, Vol. II*: Prose, 1939–1948*, ed. Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 2002) 303–07. Auden's remark also calls to

tone, as when admitting that "Nor are those Ph.D's my kith, / Who dig the symbol and the *myth*" (*CP* 639, emphasis added). The present study does not set out to enumerate the number of Auden's references to bicycles, particular places, villages and landscapes, but it does attend to his spatial myths. It brings under scrutiny the architecture and material used for constructing his poetic universe as one version of the intermediate imaginative worlds all humans conjure between themselves and the neutral physical environment. It is unlikely that Auden would approve of any scholarly endeavour to analyze his politics of representation and treatment of sacred places for the sake of expanding the knowledge of his work and imagination. Yet, the issue is approached with the due respect that he claimed numinous places deserved.

mind T.S. Eliot's 1923 remark on the number of appearances of giraffes in the English novel T.S. Eliot, "The Function of Criticism" 33.

1. Place, Topophilia, Escapism and Mythical Geographies

This chapter provides the theoretical framework for the discussion of Auden's engagement with places and the physical environment in further sections. Firstly, in order to explicate the point of view that humanist geographers assume to the analysis of spatial experience, their methodology is placed in the context of philosophy, social sciences, humanities and recent theorizing about place. Secondly, the chapter attends to selected aspects of human spatial awareness necessary for further analyses. Special attention is paid to the transformation of space into place, the impact of distance and size of a location on the apprehension of space, search for an ideal environment, topophilia and escapism as ways of interpreting culture and basic patterns of human behaviour. Thirdly, the chapter interprets the dichotomy of nature and culture as an illustrative example of the basic patterns of environmental experience.

1.1. The Renascence of Place

In everyday discourse 'space' and 'place' are synonymous household terms. Yet, philosophical history shows that since antiquity they have been endowed with many shades of contrasting meanings. In an effort to define space and place as distinct categories, philosophers and scholars from different fields of inquiry have engendered an accretion of conceptualizations testifying to their recalcitrant nature, semantic instability and importance. Edward S. Casey's thorough grasp of the field allows him to provide an incisive exploration of the multiple historical shifts in their perception.[52] While admitting that there has been a discernable tendency to associate space and place with the notions of universality and particularity, respectively, his overall cogitation pertains to quantitative rather than qualitative aspects of their evolution. His overall argument is that following antiquity, especially the thought of Aristotle and Archytas, place gradually ceded to a philosophical and scientific inquiry into space and time. Such supremacy, he claims, coincided with the spread of Christianity, "a religion with universalist aspirations." Yet, as he adds, it was mainly the consequence of an inclination of early modern and modern western philosophers and scientists towards universalism, abstraction and generalization rather than particularism, regionalism and spatial diversity: "universalism is most starkly evident in the search for ideas, usually labelled 'essences,' that obtain *everywhere* and for which a particular *somewhere*, a given place, is presumably irrelevant."[53] Casey argues that this tendency reached its pinnacle

[52] Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1997). The shifts in conceptualizations are also evident from the changing meaning of the term geography. A detailed and critical assessment of Casey's ideas and aims is available in Stephen Hardy, "Placiality: The Renewal of the Significance of Place in Modern Cultural Theory," *Brno Studies in English* 26 (2000): 85-100.

[53] Casey, Preface: Disappearing Places, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* XII, emphasis original.

in the seventeenth-century physics and Enlightenment philosophy, especially in the works of Newton and Descartes, who modelled the concept of space as an absolute and *a priori*, hence superior, entity. In the course of the last century, both concepts underwent new reconceptualizations under the pressure of post-positivist views, a process that may be viewed, in Thomas Brockelman's phrasing, as a symptom of a rising resistance to the overall abstract character of modernity.[54] As for space, twentieth-century thinkers in general reject to approach it as an *a priori* 'container' within whose bowels social life unfolds. Marxist critics, such as David Harvey, Henri Lefebvre and Edward Soja, for example, argue for the connection between capitalism and spatiality and for space constructionism. From a different perspective, Martin Heidegger has claimed that space becomes 'visible' only in consequence of man's being and acting in the world.[55]

A similar reassessment can be detected in approaches to place. In his examination of the historical dominance of the 'spatial discourse', Casey does not propose a complete effacement of the rival concept. Besides demonstrating that place never completely ceased to elicit attention, not even from 'universalist' thinkers, in the last parts of his study he identifies a twentieth-century recrudescence of interest in this dormant concept caused by new developments in philosophical and social domains. Philosophically, the renascence is related to the above view of environment and social life as intermeshed and mutually constitutive, of which Marxist criticism is but one manifestation. As shown below, the most common contemporary understanding of place is that it is an ontological category arising in consequence of human interaction with space. Casey proposes that this stream issues from later, post-*Critique of Pure Reason*, I. Kant and traces its course as it permeates through the phenomenological and existentialist approaches of E. Husserl, M. Heidegger, G. Bachelard and M. Merleau-Ponty, but also through the work of G. Deleuze and other recent critics departing from the paradigms of positivism and from the overly abstraction of empirical science and systems of thought. From this perspective, the resurgence of a focus on place is a "position from which the critique of modernity is to be mounted."[56] Socially, the end of the 'placial' hiatus has also been brought about by a growing critical awareness of the homogenization and curbing of local identity of the physical environment. Casey aligns himself with a recent tendency to reproach technology – and its capacity to cater for unrestricted international communication, exchange and mobility – for making a significant

[54] Thomas Brockelman, "Lost in Place? On the Virtues and Vices of Edward Casey's Anti-Modernism," *Humanitas* 16.1 (2003): 36, *National Humanities Institute*, n.d. <http://www.nhinet.org/brockelman16-1.pdf>, 25 August 2012.
[55] Martin Heidegger, "Art and Space," 1969, *The Heidegger Reader*, trans. Jerome Veith, ed. Günter Figal (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009) 305-09.
[56] Roger Friedland, "Space, Place, and Modernity: The Geographical Moment," *Contemporary Sociology* 21.1 (January 1992): 15, *JSTOR* <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2074695>, 11 May 2012.

contribution to the time-space compression.[57] The awareness of such a 'shrinkage' of the world and of an increasing spatial uniformity resulting in the erasure of local places and communities has been in the air for some decades – roughly those decades that have seen scholars from different disciplines respond to the condition by centring upon place rather than space and the particular rather than the universal.

While attendant to a large portion of philosophical history, Casey's account is selective rather than eclectic. It must be. Especially with regards to a recent scholarly fascination with place, the unnerving inundation regurgitating from the camps of philosophy and other spheres of humanities and social sciences renders attempts at an all-encompassing treatment of the issue impossible. From their diverse perspectives, anthropologists, cultural historians, psychologists and others have availed themselves of place as a critical concept for the sake of exploring spatial behaviour and so for enlarging man's knowledge of himself. This is the case of Professor Yi-Fu Tuan, a contemporary Chinese-American geographer, whose thought provides the main theoretical underpinning of the present thesis. Spanning the last forty years, his scholarly efforts have been to explore spatial experience and attitudes to the physical environment. The range of his propositions has provided scholars in the social sciences and humanities with thoughts to be applied and expanded in their own research. Tuan's emphasis on the subjectivity of spatial experience and the variety of factors that influence perception turn his work into a suitable and practical methodological tool for the present inquiry too. In order to characterize the vein of his ideas, and for the sake of embedding his method within a philosophical context, a brief detour into twentieth-century geography and philosophy is presented before outlining those aspects of Tuan's work utilized in the present research.

1.2. Geography, Humanist Geography and Phenomenology

The fact that the main vocation of geography is the study of the physical environment has caused that it too has been affected by the whirlpool of post-positivist approaches to space in the second half of the last century. Traditional geography is an earth science ingrained in the post-Cartesian dichotomy between the human subject and object. Physical geographers gather verifiable data in order to classify and de*scribe* [-graphy] the properties of *earth*'s (geo-) surface as if from an outside 'objective' point of view.[58] Yet, future historians of the science will have to account for the recent emergence of several subfields sheltered under the

[57] For a detailed account see David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1990); Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (1976).

[58] Michael R. Curry argues that theorizing about space can be done on several levels reflecting the scale topo- choro- geography (place as a unique locality, region, earth). He also shows, however, that while originally diverse, with an increasing knowledge of the earth, the word topography started to be used synonymously with geography ("Discursive Displacement and the Seminal Ambiguity of Space and Place," *The Handbook of New Media: Social Shaping and Consequences of ICT*, eds. Leah A. Lievrouw, and Sonia Livingstone (London: Sage Publications, 2002) 502-517.

umbrella term ‘human geography’. While lacking a *positive* unifying concern, representatives of its different streams share an oppositional posture to the epistemology of ‘scientific’ geography. Human geographers with constructivist inclinations reject, as Michael R. Curry puts it, “the ontological priority of absolute space” because they approach space and place as “human inventions.” Others accept space as an entity existing ‘prior to’ yet ‘inseparable from’ human experience and existence.[59] All, however, unite in the critique of traditional geography for its positivist attitude to space as a single, knowable and objective entity, and for its negligence of subjective spatial experience. Benefiting from the insights of other disciplines, human geographers bridge the gap between geography as a natural science on the one hand and social sciences and humanities on the other. They analyze spatial awareness and so expand the former by importing into it a type of focus usually associated with the latter. As shown below, critical attention to processes in which space is experienced is among the prime reasons for the renaissance of an interest in place, because when approached as a conflation of locality and value, it becomes a useful critical concept for scholars in humanities.

Yi-Fu Tuan is one of the founders and the major exponent of the most productive branch of human geography bearing the appellation ‘humanistic’. Humanist geographers, such as Edward Relph, Donald Meinig, Anne Buttimer, James Duncan and others, problematize the complexity of human awareness of different types of biophysical environments, the meanings and values ascribed to them through various modes of knowing and the forces influencing their formation. The expansion of a geographical inquiry in this particular direction since the 1970s parallels, as John N. Entrikin, an early critic of humanistic geography, noted, a general “growth of humanist perspectives in other human sciences.”[60] Analogous to the above, more than with the natural-science base of traditional geography, humanist geographers ally themselves with the humanities and social sciences because they find a common denominator in their endeavour to increase man’s self-knowledge. While the humanities, Tuan asserts, aims to achieve the goal by studying expressions of human creativity, humanistic geography aims to achieve “an understanding of *the human world* by studying people’s relations with nature, their geographical behaviour as well as their feelings and ideas in regard to space and place.”[61]

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[59] Curry 503, 513.

[60] John Nicholas Entrikin, “Contemporary Humanism in Geography,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 66.4 (December 1976): 615, *JSTOR* <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2569260>, 3 May 2012. Besides several extensive articles, Entrikin is the author of a doctoral dissertation titled “Science and Humanism in Geography”, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1975, inquiring into the advantages and limitations of appropriating philosophical thought in geography.

[61] Yi-Fu Tuan, “Humanistic Geography,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 66.2 (June 1976): 266, *JSTOR* <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2562469>, 3 May 2012, emphasis added.

Humanist geographers establish useful connections between philosophy and the spatial experience they study. This is not only evident from a general willingness to find support for their research in twentieth-century philosophy, but also from Tuan's explicit assertion that besides geography, anthropology, psychology, history and arts, humanist geographers should have sufficient "training in systematic thought, or philosophy."[62] In particular, they draw nourishment from phenomenology and existentialism, which has several reasons and implications characterizing their research.

Tuan interprets the phenomenological approach as that which "suspends, in so far as this is possible, the presuppositions and method of official science in order to describe the world as the world of intentionality and meaning."[63] This signals a dissenting view of traditional geography and taps into two essential phenomenological concepts – the lifeworld and intentionality. In his abnegation of positivist sciences, Edmund Husserl collapsed the rift between the human being and the physical world, and he found a worthy concern in their correlation. Humanist geographers also emphasize the relation of the human subject to space and view *Lebenswelt* as a useful concept emerging from their inseparable conflation. They embrace phenomenology because its overall critique of modern science for inadvertence to the lifeworld assists them in casting a grave doubt on the methods used and data gathered by traditional geographers. Tuan's is not only a post-Kantian conviction that space and time are fundamental and "necessary feature[s] of experience," which makes the study of spatial behaviour a worthy object of scholarly attention.[64] He also shares with Husserl the claim that consciousness is an intentional and active constituent of external reality. What he calls the 'human world' consists of people, environment and "mental worlds" emerging between them on the basis of different forms of experience.[65] Hence, rather than what space is, he explores the manner in which it gives itself to man and how it acquires meanings in different existential situations. A belief transpires from Tuan's work that an inquiry into the construction of such 'mental worlds' may transcend the limitations of physical geography because it has the potential to expand man's knowledge of his being in the world – of himself.

Tuan's use of the word 'suspend' in the quotation above recalls Husserl's method of 'phenomenological reduction'. Yet, his interpretation of the term somewhat differs. Tuan's studies display no aspiration to explore the pre-conceptual, universal and transcendental essences emerging after an object and the existential world of variables and particulars are

[62] Tuan, "Humanistic Geography" 266.
[63] Yi-Fu Tuan, "Geography, Phenomenology, And the Study of Human Nature," *The Canadian Geographer* 15.3 (September 1971): 181, *Blackwell Publishing*, 28 June 2008 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1541-0064.1971.tb00156.x>, 26 July 2012.
[64] Entrikin, "Contemporary Humanism" 624, 620.
[65] Tuan, *Topophilia* 13.

bracketed. He does not aim to study the structure of consciousness purified of "the contingencies of existence."[66] On the contrary, his overall ratiocination is that man and environment are in an inextricable relation and that experience always entails being in the world which cannot be transcended.[67] The purpose of humanities, he wrote, is "to display and order the immense complexities of human life" through describing experience understood as *directed* towards the world: "The prefix *ex* in experience stresses its outward-directed nature: *ex*perience presupposes the *ex*istence of an *ex*ternal reality. To describe experience, then, is […] is to describe man-in-the-world."[68]

Clearly, Tuan perceives man as interminably embedded in the world because always in a *situ*ation. Hence, in his writing, the world is neither a 'bracketable' nor clinically detached object viewed by an external observer but a lived world and an inherent context of existence. Revealing an attribute of their common ground, Anne Buttimer claims that geographers "should be cultivating a perspective which sees man as part of nature, not dominant over it, nor submissive to it, but as intrinsically part of the biosphere," and that all manifestations of human existence should be studied in relation to the "common terrestrial home."[69] In this respect, Tuan, Buttimer, Edward Relph and other exponents of humanistic geography are indebted to Martin Heidegger's concept *Dasein* – man's specific being-in-the-world, which entails being 'bound up' to the world and the inability to suspend it.[70] Yet, *Dasein* is not simply being 'in location' but a unique form of being concerned with being, which includes relations with other humans and objects as well as intentions and actions directed towards achieving them. Tuan clearly domesticates Heidegger's conviction that while essentially neutral, spatial constituents acquire meanings according to their capacity to assist in the achievement of goals – one's future *situ*ation.[71] This has been aptly characterized by John N. Entrikin: "Objects, and thus the environment surrounding an individual, have meaning only in terms of these goals. Objects become aids or obstacles after the choice of goals is made."[72] This attitude does not only back Tuan's analysis below of the geographical and historical mutability of meanings imputed to different environmental types. It also explains the semantic

[66] Entrikin, "Contemporary Humanism" 618. For an essence to be universal and pre-conceptual is to be prior to language, outside history and changeability. For Husserl, as Quentin Lauer is reported to have asserted, "essence is truly an eternal essence, precisely because it is completely independent of existence" (qtd. in Entrikin, "Contemporary Humanism" 619).
[67] Tuan makes frequent forays into etymology. Like Heidegger, he appeals to the interconnection of man and the world in the word 'world': *wer* – man (Yi–Fu Tuan, *Space and Place* [1977; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003] 34).
[68] Yi-Fu Tuan, "Reflections on Humanistic Geography," *Journal of Architectural Education* 30.1 (September 1976): 3, *JSTOR* <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1424389>, 2 May 2012, emphasis original.
[69] Edward Relph, Yi-Fu Tuan and Anne Buttimer, "Humanism, Phenomenology, and Geography," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 67.1 (March 1977): 181, *JSTOR* <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2562264>, 24 May 2012.
[70] Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008) 53-54.
[71] Tuan, *Space and Place* 118. The mere fact that humans have learned to define distance by means of temporal phrases (it is a two-hour walk) and vice versa (a stone's throw) evidences their interconnection (129-30).
[72] Entrikin, "Contemporary Humanism" 622.

shifts that central geographical notions have undergone in the work of existentialist philosophers and humanist geographers, where they acquire "existential meanings."[73] For instance, Tuan views distance – a crucial concept for the present work – as meaningless unless viewed in relation to the idea of goal.[74]

The above paragraphs reveal the extent to which humanist geographers have absorbed the ideas of Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and other thinkers in the existential fold, who developed and also reacted to Husserl's transcendental aspirations. "To move from Husserl to Heidegger," Terry Eagleton proposes, "is to move from the terrain of pure intellect to a philosophy which meditates on what it feels like to be alive."[75] Like Heidegger, Tuan does not ask "What are the essential structures of knowledge of the world?" but 'What are the essential structures of human being in the world?' and "What is it to be a person?"[76] In Tuan's work, 'to suspend' and 'to go back to things themselves' is to occupy a middle ground between Husserl and traditional geography. It is to concentrate on the lifeworld – on the physical world as experienced. This is not only to avoid the abstract scientific presuppositions detaching man from space, but also the transcendental reduction. Throughout his career Tuan has remained fully focused on this 'middle ground' and has sought manifestations of man's primordial awareness of space and environment. Although not intended as such, Merleau-Ponty's description of existential phenomenology aptly characterizes Tuan's own approach:

> To return to things themselves is to return to that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always *speaks*, and in relation to which every scientific schematization is an abstract and derivative sign-language, as is geography in relation to the country-side in which we have learnt beforehand what a forest, a prairie or a river is.[77]

In order to explore spatial experience, humanist geographers attend to a variety of materials ranging from everyday practice, ethnographical and anthropological studies of spatial behaviour, cosmological systems and other forms of discourse. At the same time, Tuan realizes that when profound, spatial experience tends to be subconscious and hardly ever articulated because its complex and subtle character resists verbal objectification. Hence, like Martin Heidegger and Gaston Bachelard before him, Tuan approaches art and literature in the hope of finding in it pre-scientific articulations of spatial experience.[78] In his understanding, art "gives objectified form and visibility to feeling so that what is powerful but inchoate can

[73] Entrikin, "Contemporary Humanism" 616.
[74] Tuan, *Space and Place* 12, 136. The same distance separating a tired person from their home or, on the other hand, from a climatic disaster appears as an obstacle or aid, respectively, in achieving goals and satisfying existential needs.
[75] Eagleton 54.
[76] Entrikin "Contemporary Humanism" 617, 623.
[77] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Preface, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 1945, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 2002) IX-X.
[78] Tuan, *Space and Place* 7, 202.

lead a semipublic life. [In art] what was formless and vacillating is now framed and still."[79] However, Chapter Three, attending to topographical poetry, as well as the subsequent sections analyzing Auden's poetry show that in his reliance on literature to be a source of authentic spatial experience, Tuan partly fails because he underestimates the pressure exerted by literary forms, stylistic conventions and period aesthetics on individual writers and their expression.

Tuan's voice is that of a pioneer defining and defending the aims and methods of a new approach to the physical environment. In order to provide a comprehensive base for a new discipline, he does not only attend to data from various sources, but, as illustrated below, he also takes into account the fact that spatial experience and attitudes to environment are the consequence of a penumbra of forces: "A person is a biological organism, a social being, and a unique individual; [environmental] perception, attitude, and value reflect all three levels of being."[80] While underestimating the aesthetic forces, Tuan is conscious of the role of age, gender, existential situation, class and public discourses on one's sense of place. Moreover, he shows how attitudes to the same environmental types vary both diachronically and synchronically. In consequence, he notes that the data humanist geographers gather form merely "a long gallery of individual portraits with no hint as to how they might be related." This compels him to ask if it is "possible to stay close to experience in the study of place and yet retain the philosophical ideal of systematic knowledge."[81] Realizing that systematization implies abstraction, which humanist geographers in general approach as one of the demerits of traditional geography, his answer in the same essay is cautious, yet affirmative. In fact, Tuan's oeuvre is an implicit confirmation of the intention to systematize collected data. In this respect, his endeavour recalls Structuralism. Tuan studies individual paroles of spatial experience in large geographical and historical contexts in order to demarcate the underlying principles and processes involved in the human response to the physical environment. In consequence, he refrains from the scholarly reductionism of, say, Marxist critics, who examine literary representation of space with valuable results, yet from a narrower point of view. Hence, a selection of Tuan's 'essences' is outlined below in order to provide a set of critical tools usable for the fulfilment of the present task in further chapters.

[79] Tuan, "Place: An Experiential Perspective," *Geographical Review* 65.2 (April 1975): 161, *JSTOR* <http://www.jstor.org/stable/213970>, 11 May 2012.
[80] Tuan, *Topophilia* 245.
[81] Tuan, "Place: An Experiential Perspective" 151.

1.3. Space into Place

For the purpose of the following analyses, the following sections of this chapter attend to a selection of three themes and problems analyzed by Tuan and other humanist geographers. These are: the transformation of space to place, the impact of an increasing size and distance of a location from the experiencing subject on modes of their apprehension and formation of mythical geographies, and the historical changes in topophilic sentiments for different environmental types, namely nature and the humanized space, in relation to Tuan's recent view of culture as 'escapism'. While the weight of the chapter rests on Tuan's work, it is discussed in the context of other critics and their observations.

In Tuan's view, space is an unlimited, continuous and undifferentiated expanse: "space, not place, tantalized Americans when the frontiers were open and resources appeared limitless. Space is abstract. It lacks content; it is broad, open, and empty, inviting the imagination to fill it with substance and illusion; it is possibility and beckoning future."[82] The sea horizon or other open vistas have the capacity to arouse admiration, provide conditions for solitude, self-reflection, sublime experience and the flight of imagination. The same vast and open prospect, as well as the caprices of the biophysical environment, however, may reveal the vulnerability and weakness of the human being and so appear as a hostile and life-threatening chaos.[83] Instead of 'beckoning future', space can be perceived in opposite terms. It can, then, be viewed as an *a priori* physical category that humans instil with qualities reflecting existential situations and goals. 'Place' is hereafter approached as the prime outcome of such a response to space.

For humanist geographers, place-making is inseparable from man's care for his basic existential physical, psychological and social needs (as defined, for instance, by Abraham H. Maslow)[84] in the face of a limitless space and unorganized biophysical environment. Thus conceived, place is essentially a cultural category and the opposite of space: not a movement, hope and future but "the past and the present, stability and achievement."[85] It is a locality 'erected' within the seamless spatial continuum but its constructing must not be understood solely in the literal and material sense, which is where humanist geographers go beyond existentialist philosophers. For example, the title "Building Dwelling Thinking" of Martin Heidegger's famous essay foreshadows his exploration in his text of the relation between these phenomena. Building is an essential feature of dwelling: not an action directed towards

[82] Tuan, "Place: An Experiential Perspective" 165.
[83] Tuan, *Space and Place* 6, 54.
[84] A useful pyramidal model of human needs is available in Abraham H. Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," 1943, *Motivation and Personality* (1954; New York: Harper & Row, 1979) 35–59.
[85] Tuan, "Place: An Experiential Perspective" 165.

it but already an expression of it because to build is to be able to feel at home in the world and to dwell. Humans construct tangible objects in space functioning as shelters or aids in the sustenance of physical and spiritual wellbeing. In the title of the essay, 'dwelling' is wedged between 'building' and 'thinking'. Yet, only a little attention is paid in the text to the latter, except the intimation that thinking too is an essential aspect of our being in the world.[86] A strong aspect of Tuan's thought is that to dwell is also to sustain existence through constructing *ideally* (i.e. with ideas). Besides material shaping of the environment, man employs the capacity to use "abstract language of signs" for conjuring, as already mentioned, 'mental worlds' between himself and the external world. Houses, myths, legends and taxonomies may all be viewed as diverse forms of a protective sheathing erected against space, environmental forces and their unpredictability. Like houses, conceptual worlds are "cocoons […] woven in order to feel at home in nature."[87] Man 'constructs' them in response to a desire for a systematic habitat inside the wealth of surrounding spatial phenomena. To be liveable, space must be organized so that it satisfies human physical and psychological needs and social relations.[88]

The imposition of order on the seamless spatial continuum through ideal constructing is multiform. Yet, stratification, bounding and the ascription of values to it are what Tuan considers to be the most basic principles involved in the transformation of space into places and the most common aspects of spatial experience overstepping regional and historical diversity. Historically, he recognizes two basic approaches to space. The first is that of man's view of himself as *homo microcosmus*, an analogical image of the cosmos with the earth being "the human body writ large," which implies the 'pathetic-fallacy' view of the world as filled with human attributes. In the second model, presupposing the seating of consciousness in the individual, man differentiates between self and not-self and perceives himself as the centre surrounded by spatial otherness: "man wants to order his experiences of the world; not surprisingly, the world so ordered revolves around him."[89] Anthropomorphism in the first model, and egocentrism and ethnocentrism (as individual and collective forms of anthropocentrism) in the second one, are what Tuan claims to be the most universal traits of human experience of space in which "man is the measure."[90]

Generally, in the process of organizing the wealth of external phenomena, humans select some and consign others into oblivion. The differentiation of four cardinal points within

[86] Martin Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," 1954, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter, 1st Perennial Classics ed. (1971; New York: Perennial Classics, 2001) 141-59.
[87] Tuan, *Topophilia* 13.
[88] Tuan, *Space and Place* 199, 34.
[89] Tuan, *Space and Place* 88-89, 93.
[90] Tuan, *Space and Place* 44-45.

an infinite number of directions or the recognition of 'here' and 'there', 'inside' and 'outside', 'vertical' and 'horizontal', 'front' and 'back' recall the commonplaceness in western and other cultures of segmenting of space into a reduced number of anthropocentric units organized into antinomic pairs.[91] To create such a grid of directions and points is to inscribe into the homogeneous spatial continuum a "pattern of significant places"[92] – heterogeneous zones bounded from others not perforce by a tangible border but, as the word 'significant' implies, by the instilment into them of different meanings. To associate the East and the other cardinal points with contrasting values, to consider home as the sacred centre surrounded by a profane periphery, to approach the back and front as the past and the future, and to construe the sky and underground as heaven and the nefarious underworld is to demarcate in neutral space zones of different values assisting in orientation and in the attainment of material and spiritual wellbeing.

For Tuan, to stratify space and environment physically and ideally into locations imputed with diverse meanings is to create place. From such a perspective, place ceases to be a container existing *per se*. It becomes the result of man's standing *vis-à-vis* the world. It is an interface of space and man because the former "is transformed into place as it acquires definition and meaning" from the latter.[93] While a tangible boundary may lack, the ideal one is always present because as a cultural category, place is primarily constructed by the *values* ascribed to a location. Hence, 'palimpsest' offers itself as a descriptive metaphor for the idea of 'place'. Because its emergence relies primarily on immaterial inscribing, place is a locality capable of comprising several signifieds ascribed to it by individuals and collectivities in different historical moments and in diverse existential relations to it.

1.4. Sense of Place: Experience, Size and Distance

Michael R. Curry claims that place emerges from a long-term and intimate contact of inhabitants with their domicile, and he intimates that it is a unit smaller than a region.[94] Tuan considers physical presence and profound experience as important for place-making but he does not turn them into absolute conditions. For him, the armchair, house and neighbourhood are places, yet a holiday destination, mountain range and nation state too. Although the latter are locations visited briefly, encountered through a string of words on a map or, in the case of the whole state, known only through a part, they are 'experienced' and imbued with meanings whose articulated intensity, in fact, often exceeds that ascribed to a domicile. The gains of

[91] Tuan, *Space and Place* 38-41; Tuan, *Topophilia* 15–16.
[92] Tuan, *Space and Place* 136.
[93] Tuan, *Space and Place* 136. This is also a view of Roger Friedland, for whom place is "the fusion of space and experience, a space filled with meaning" for "without subjects, there can be no theory of place" (Friedland 14).
[94] Curry 504.

such an embracive conceptualization are more significant than losses. It allows Tuan to examine the impact on the meanings ascribed to a location of the above factors – the size of a place and the experiential closeness or distance of the perceiving subject from it. An important part of his research is the analysis of the relation between different existential situations, modes of knowing space, and their impact on the quality and quantity of sense of place. These factors are vital for the discussion of places as ideal constructs and of personal and collective mythical geographies, including those fashioned by W.H. Auden.

Tuan distinguishes different types of spatial experience. The fact that humanist geographers make it the focal point of their concerns prompted Edward Relph to assume that instead of 'humanistic', the branch should be called 'experiential geography'.[95] Tuan understands experience as a broad "term comprising various modes in which man knows the world" and he knows that the sense of place a person develops is a highly complex and multifaceted medley of feeling and thought.[96] Also, his work testifies to Roger Friedland's claim that "Captured universalistically, from 'nowhere', place is stripped of its meanings and reduced to location."[97] For Tuan, the 'somewhere' are existential positions assumed by a person to places, which they encounter in ways ranging from the direct sensory experience – smell, touch, hearing, taste and sight – to the more active but indirect modes, which is the case of mediated and conceptual knowledge or imagination.

The form of experience is what determines the intensity and type of feelings and thoughts forming one's sense of place. At one extreme, profound familiarity requires a long-term and direct bodily presence in a location whose size, while increasing in proportion to spatial ability, remains relatively modest as is the case of home or neighbourhood. Locals are immersed in their habitat through everyday practices and their sense of place is based on an extensive multi-sensory experience snowballing into a complex tumult of feelings and ideas:

> Sense of place is rarely acquired in passing. To know a place well requires long residence and deep involvement. It is possible to appreciate the visual qualities of a place with one short visit, but not how it smells on a frosty morning, how city sounds reverberate across narrow streets to expire over the broad square, or how the pavement burns through gym-shoe soles and melts bicycle tires in August.[98]

This is a position that Edward Relph in his seminal *Place and Placelessness* calls 'existential insidedness' and defines it as a situation "in which a place is experienced without deliberate and selfconscious reflection yet is full of significances."[99] Tuan shares Relph's view that an extensive multi-sensory contact of an existential insider with a location usually makes its

[95] Relph, Tuan and Buttimer, "Humanism, Phenomenology and Geography" 178.
[96] Tuan, "Place: An Experiential Perspective" 151; Tuan, *Space and Place* 10.
[97] Friedland 14-15.
[98] Tuan, "Place: An Experiential Perspective" 164.
[99] Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* 55.

sense complex, profound, but also silent and subconscious.[100] Yet, he expands Relph's claim and asserts that even such experience is frequently enriched with reflection, which is to suggest that the existential insider fuses inchoate feelings and conscious thought, at least in the act of recollection, in which the memory of personal experiences are often fused with the awareness of collective local history.[101] Also, one's sense of their lifespace benefits from distance and outsidedness, which make its contours more clearly and consciously defined: "long residence enables us to know a place intimately, yet its image may lack sharpness unless we can also see it from the outside and *reflect* upon our experience."[102]

At the opposite extreme from the direct, intimate and frequently subconscious experience are mediated and indirect modes of knowing. When the size of a location precludes intimate contact with the whole, when a tourist arrives in a place for a sojourn, or when a person's mind extrapolates beyond the intimately known lifespace into regions of which they have no direct experience whatsoever, sight, mediated knowledge and imagination become the major forms of spatial experience and factors forming one's sense of place. The absence of an existential dependence on a locality and the lack of an extensive 'immersion' in it tend to result in a more conscious, but also more parochial sense of place, which is prone to 'warping' under the pressure of desires, cultural stereotypes, printed material and imagination.[103]

While the direct-intimate and indirect-mediated modes of knowing can be seen as polar opposites, Tuan demarcates them for methodological rather than practical purposes. As illustrated on the example of an existential insider, most spatial experience takes place in the interstitial zones of a seamless experiential continuum, where such contrasting means of engaging with the world are combined. What follows is a more detailed account of human experience of places like *home*, *nation state* and *remote areas*. This is crucial for a later discussion of Auden's sense of England – his home, and of his attitude to Alston Moor and Iceland – distant places that he knew as an existential outsider, hence primarily through mediated means and imagination.

1.4.1. Home: An Intimate and Sacred Centre

A profound sense of place acquired through a direct experience of one's lifespace accrues through humble everyday events over time. When born "the infant is *worldless* to the extent

[100] It is in this connection that Tuan believes that artists have a better capacity to objectify and give shape to experience and feelings (Tuan, "Place: An Experiential Perspective" 152, 161).
[101] "To know a place is also to know the past: one's own past preserved in schoolhouse, corner drugstore, swimming pool, and first home; the city's past enshrined in its architectural landmarks" (Tuan, "Place: An Experiential Perspective" 164).
[102] Tuan, *Space and Place* 18, emphasis added.
[103] Tuan, *Space and Place* 8, 16-18.

that he cannot distinguish between self and environment."[104] As their spatial ability increases, the horizon is expanded from the mother, the first intimately known place of nurture and safety, to the house, neighbourhood and beyond.[105] Analogously, the idea of distance emerges as spatial relations between the self and objects or between one object and another become established.[106] As the environs become familiar, they are gradually transformed from nebulous to stratified and meaningful space. Naturally, this applies to adults too when they settle in a new neighbourhood, which appears as an undifferentiated smooth space until 'broken up' into segments instilled with meanings and 'borders' differentiating one place from another and making them 'visible'. "A neighbourhood," Tuan notes, "is at first a confusion of images to the new resident; it is blurred space 'out there.' Learning to know the neighborhood requires the identification of significant localities."[107] When a locality starts to be familiar, different objects and landmarks become meaningful and can serve for orientation, which contributes to self-confidence, control over the existential situation and contentment. It is only in such an environment filled with values, Christian Norberg-Schulz asserts, that man feels at home.[108]

Home allows dwelling on earth. It represents a positive context for human existence and, for humanist geographers, a prime example of affective space because it caters for basic human needs. To build or gain home, however vague the term appears, is to create a material or ideal border between an enclosed place and an open Otherness, which can accentuate "the difference in emotional temperature between 'inside' and 'outside'." Familiarity, often fortified with the awareness of ancestral history inscribed into such an intimate personal 'navel', makes home a predictable "haven of stability,"[109] which breeds sense of security and safety. Tuan finds rural people especially susceptible to it: "rootedness in the soil and the growth of pious feeling toward it seem natural to sedentary *agricultural* peoples."[110] With experience, the capacity to protect is corroborated to provide 'shelter' from the volatile external forces. For Tuan, the 'inside' places are pauses in movement, points of rest, security and life invigoration. The more hostile and wayward is the space without, the more revealed human is vulnerability and the stronger feelings accumulate towards the life-sustaining quality of the 'inside'.[111] Gaston Bachelard also notices that a house in winter feels more homely because the external harshness enhances the difference in what Tuan calls 'emotional

[104] Tuan, *Topophilia* 54.
[105] Tuan, *Space and Place* 138.
[106] Tuan, *Space and Place* 23-30.
[107] Tuan, *Space and Place* 17-18.
[108] Norberg-Schulz 23.
[109] Tuan, *Space and Place* 107, 138.
[110] Tuan, *Space and Place* 156, emphasis added.
[111] Tuan, *Space and Place* 182, 137; Tuan, "Place: An experiential Perspective" 163.

temperature'.[112] Home thus conceived is a place *par excellence* as it is a locality teeming with signification, "a focus of value, of nurture and support."[113] Following the mother as the first place, the house and neighbourhood are all prime sources of physical and psychological comfort where "biological needs, such as those for food, water, rest, and procreation, are satisfied," and where "our fundamental needs are heeded and cared for without fuss."[114] It is these aspects that are exploited in commercial practice of estate agencies offering 'homes' rather than 'houses'.[115] To be evicted from home or to lose it "is to be stripped of a sheathing, which in its familiarity protects the human being from the bewilderments of the outside world," which can be felt as unwelcome or devastating. It is among the most common human responses to be disquieted about attacks on permanence and stability of home territory. The disturbance and change of established experiential and structural patterns may result in nostalgia or eagerness to defend such a protective carapace from the encroachment of outsiders damaging its integrity.[116]

For these reasons, place is inseparable from the notion of singularity and superlativeness, which are attributes that do not solely emerge from its unmatched physical properties. In line with the claims above that man stratifies space anthropocentrically and arranges its elements into dichotomic pairs, profound experience turns home into the centre of one's lifespace. It is a point attracting intense affections surrounded by areas extending away in "concentric zones (more or less defined) of decreasing value" towards more nebulous and emotionally 'colder' areas.[117] It transpires from Tuan's work that demarcating such a hub encircled by a periphery imbued with gradually attenuated values is among the most common forms of ordering space in social organization, cosmologies, art and everyday life. Such centres tend to be approached and mythologized as unique, privileged, caring and protective.[118] As an interdisciplinary critical concept, identity has an obvious appeal to humanist geographers too because for them to transform nebulous space into place is to register its unmatched attributes: "A city, such as San Francisco is recognized by its unique setting, topography, skyline, odors, and street names."[119] The proper name is the most conspicuous mark of topographical specificity and, as J. Hillis Miller notes, a manifestation of

[112] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 1958, trans. Maria Jolas (1964; Boston: Beacon Press, 1994) 40-41.
[113] Tuan, *Space and Place* 29. This view coincides with Norberg-Schulz's assertion that architecture is a resource of 'existential support' (Norberg-Schulz 5).
[114] Tuan, *Space and Place* 4, 137.
[115] 'Home' is a location experienced and associated with a life-sustaining potential and so a sentimentalized marketable commodity. 'House', on the other hand, is a mere building (Relph, *Place and Placelessness* 83).
[116] Tuan, *Topophilia* 99, 214.
[117] Tuan, *Topophilia* 27-30.
[118] Tuan, *Topophilia* 16-20. For a more detailed account see, Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 1949, trans. Willard R. Task (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959) 12-17.
[119] Tuan, *Space and Place* 18.

a process in which a unique place is carved into space by the act of naming, which differentiates it from others.[120] Norberg-Schulz claims that the character of a place, its *genius loci*, emerges from the totality of unmatched physical properties – texture, colour, etc. – and the organization of local elements.[121] It transpires from Tuan's observations about home that he expands these views and approaches uniqueness as a formation also existing purely at the ideal and affective level. In the process of signifying, man bestows identity upon place regardless of its material features. Familiarity, protectiveness, stability and other aspects of existential contentment discussed above turn a house boasting of an original architectural design as well as an indifferent tenement block into privileged and unique centres.

Home "territory and the sacred place within it," Paul Shepard remarks, "orient the individual to topography, position him in the land and in the cosmos, an environmental gestalt of figure and ground."[122] As a predictable place of order, stability, protectiveness and uniqueness, the intimately known centre is an area imbued with superlative visceral feelings and embraced by the surrounding zones of concentrically extenuating significance.[123] In this connection, Mircea Eliade and Yi-Fu Tuan speak of 'centre' and 'periphery' in terms of 'sacredness' and 'profaneness,' respectively. Both critics are conscious of the prime religious and spiritual connotations of the dualistic pair 'sacred/profane' and Eliade differentiates between a nonreligious and religious person in terms of experiencing space as a homogeneous profaneness and heterogeneous entity of profane and sacred zones, respectively. Neither Tuan nor Eliade, however, limits their thoughts to the realm of a religious experience. Eliade admits that even nonreligious people carve space up into sacred and profane zones:

> experience of profane space still includes values that to some extent recall the nonhomogeneity peculiar to the religious experience of space. There are, for example, privileged places, qualitatively different from all others–a man's birthplace, or the scenes of his first love, or certain places in the first foreign city he visited in youth. Even for the most frankly nonreligious man, all these places still retain an exceptional, a unique quality; they are the 'holy places' of his private universe, as if it were in such spots that he received the revelation of a reality *other* than that in which he participates through his ordinary daily life.[124]

Similarly, in Tuan's view, the adjective 'sacred' does not only imply a site of hierophany but a privileged and unique centre, whether this be connected to higher spheres of being, like a medieval cathedral, or an environment of prime existential importance in the most non-

[120] J. Hillis Miller, *Topographies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995) 4.
[121] Norberg-Schulz 5-6, 14.
[122] Paul Shepard, *Man in the Landscape: A Historic View of the Esthetics of Nature* (1991; Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2002) 37.
[123] Tuan, "Place: An Experiential Perspective" 152.
[124] Mircea Eliade *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, 1957, trans. by Willard R. Trask, (1959; Orlando, FL: Harcourt Inc., 1987) 24, emphasis original.

religious sense of the word.[125] The sacredness emerges from being experienced and sensed as single and unmatched by anything in the surrounding periphery. Home and hometown, like the walled medieval city, are mythologized and 'consecrated' because associated with the potential to sustain life, wellbeing, a means of togetherness and a cocoon of protectiveness from external unpredictability.

Clearly, people live in affective space. They learn to associate a tumult of values with the surrounding environment and their quality reflects the extent to which it contributes to the satisfaction of human needs, concerns, goals and intentions. This results in the accretion of emotional ties between people and places. Familiarity, rootedness, the ascription of superlative and unmatched properties to a location are all characteristic concomitants of a process in which place becomes a means of individual and communal identification. Norberg-Schulz claims that to say 'I am a New Yorker' is a more common answer to a question 'who are you?' than replying 'I am an architect.'[126] Members of a social group, be it a family or a larger unit, as well as inhabitants of the same locality, share among themselves spatial situatedness and a host of values ascribed to their common lifespace. As Norberg-Schulz puts it, place "unites a group of human beings, it is something which gives them a common identity and hence a basis for a fellowship or society."[127] Place and its attributes of uniqueness, for example, can play a substantial role in the satisfaction of basic human needs of dignity, self-esteem, personal and collective identity, as well as togetherness, that man as a *homo socius* has. The idea of place as a privileged centre surrounded by a periphery is related to self-identification because it commonly emerges against the 'other' areas and communities existing 'outside'. People often "promote a conscious sense of self and of the things associated with self, including home and locality," and that "awareness of other settlements and rivalry with them significantly enhance the feeling of uniqueness and of identity."[128]

A term that is crucial for the study of such aspects of spatial experience and for the discussion of Auden's emotional ties with places in the following chapters is 'topophilia'. Defined by Tuan as "the affective bond between people and place or setting," it is a positive sentiment most commonly coupled with one's habitat in consequence of contentment with its capacity to provide 'homeness' – conditions for physical and spiritual wellbeing.[129] Yet,

[125] Tuan, *Space and Place* 150.
[126] Norberg-Schulz 21.
[127] Christian Norberg-Schulz, "The Concept of Dwelling: On the Way to Figurative Architecture," 1985, qtd. in Stefania Michelucci, *Space and Place in the Works of D.H. Lawrence,* trans. Jill Franks (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers, 2002) 116.
[128] Tuan, *Space and Place* 166-67. For a thorough treatment of the 'identity of' and 'identification with' a place, see Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* 44–63.
[129] Tuan, *Topophilia* 4; Tuan, *Space and Place* 139, 159.

Tuan's broad conceptualization of place discussed above is matched with an equally liberal view of topophilia, which he does not constrict to an extensive and direct experience:

> topophilia takes many forms and varies greatly in emotional range and intensity. It is a start to describe what they are: fleeting visual pleasure; the sensual delight of physical contact; the fondness for place because it is familiar, because it is home and incarnates the past, because it evokes pride of ownership or of creation; joy in things because of animal health and vitality.[130]

Whatever their form and extent, topophilic sentiments arise out of positive feelings about any 'good place' imagined to satisfy fundamental physical and psychological needs. It is a warm affection for places that function as aids for the achievement of wellbeing, goals and desires: "images of topophilia are derived from the surrounding reality. People pay attention to those aspects of the environment that command awe, or promise support and fulfilment in the context of their lives' purposes."[131] It has been argued that place is rest, stability and pause, which all imply motionlessness. Topophilia emerges from an overall satisfaction with the local *status quo* and one of its manifestations is a grudge against changes.

1.4.2. Imagining the Nation State

So far, the discussion has revolved around small places forming the closest environmental context of human life. As noted, spatial awareness of a habitat accumulates gradually over a long period of time on the basis of direct and undramatic quotidian experience. Yet, while known intimately and intensely, such centres and existential situations are scarce when compared to people's encounters with the vast peripheral zones lying outside their lifespace.[132] It has been suggested that gaining spatial knowledge is related to spatial ability. At the same time, when spatial relations are established, large and distant locations become objects of focus and reflection although an intimate sensory experience of them is partial or lacking completely.[133] Large places and personal *terrae incognitae*, however, entail a change of apprehension. The larger or the more distant a place, the less visible and accessible it is and the more pronounced the transition becomes from a direct personal perceptual experience to knowledge gained through symbolic and conceptual modes. Because variously mediated, the sense of such places may be more conscious and easily articulated but it lacks the complexity and profundity typical of engagements with small and intimately known localities. Existential outsiders – the visitor taking photographs of a holiday destination and, in a similar way, a

[130] Tuan, *Topophilia* 247.
[131] Tuan, *Topophilia* 120.
[132] Tuan, *Space and Place* 88.
[133] In support of his claims that man's attention often extrapolates beyond the directly known, Tuan quotes A. Irving Hallowell: "perhaps the most striking feature of man's spatialization of his world is the fact that it never appears to be exclusively limited to the pragmatic level of action and perceptual experience" (A.I. Hallowell, *Culture and Environment*, qtd. in Tuan, *Space and Place* 87).

person learning about a place through images and texts – attend to visual and mediated data signalling distance and outsidedness. In the extreme, when even such data are unavailable, imagination plays a crucial role in spatial apprehension. In his analysis of human interaction with large, distant, directly unknown places, Tuan concentrates on the impact of projection and public discourse on the formation of the sense of place and topophilic sentiments. Imagination, aesthetic and cultural stereotypes, as well as political rhetoric, are factors making spatial awareness susceptible to warping, delusion and construction of mythical geographies.

The city, region and the nation state are large places known through a direct perceptual experience combined with, and increasingly more dominated by, indirect, conceptual and abstract apprehension. A large city is "often known at two levels," Tuan claims, "one of high abstraction and another of specific experience. At one extreme the city is a symbol or an image (captured in a postcard or a slogan), to which one can orient oneself; at the other, it is the intimately experienced neighborhood." On the one hand, large places are made meaningful and 'visible' by symbols emblematizing them and reducing their topological heterogeneity to a set of images representing the whole. On the level of lived experience, they are known through a visible and profoundly experienced segment.[134] In the case of the nation state, the change is even more pronounced. The shift in attention from home to homeland entails a transition from direct to vicarious knowledge gained through the ingestion of communal and public meanings.[135] Consequently, in regards to topophilia, the inception of the nation state caused its 'relocation' because "the sentiment that once tied people to their village, city, or region had to be transferred to the larger political unit. The nation-state, rather than any of its parts, was to achieve maximum visibility."[136]

Geographical features are often exploited in education, ceremonies and other public channels for reinforcing collective memory and national identity. A nation has been described by Benedict Anderson as an 'imagined' community of a large group of heterogeneous individuals unbeknown to each other but forming a seemingly homogeneous community artificially constructed through the elevation of commonalities.[137] By analogy, the size and morphological variety of geographical forms making up a state territory defy homogeneity and personal knowledge. Besides, the state is not always a self-contained insular physiographic unit bounded by a visually perceptible boundary and the undisturbed continuity of landscape over the borderlines contradicts its singleness. Yet, the idea of geographical

[134] Tuan, *Topophilia* 223-24.
[135] Tuan, *Space and Place* 175-77; Tuan, *Topophilia* 100.
[136] Tuan, *Space and Place* 177.
[137] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (1983; London: Verso, 2006) 6.

uniqueness is an essential part of the nationalist rhetoric of 'imagined' and 'mythical geographies'. For Anthony Easthope, national unity is not a given but "an effect, first of all, of the process of collective identification with a common object which is accompanied by identification of individuals with each other. […] a sense of national identity comes about when a set of signifiers are endowed by fantasy with meaning."[138] Besides the flag and anthem, ethnocentric history and geography are such 'common objects endowed with meaning' that the citizens of a state share and which can be embedded in national narratives and mythologies for the promotion of self-awareness, collective identification and national identity.[139] Selected geographical features and visual landmarks are used for instilling and maintaining the myth of a unique community of people and, in consequence, for constructing local uniqueness as an 'ideal' border differentiating the 'inside' from the external otherness.

The idea of a privileged and unmatched existential 'here' discussed above is also exploited on the national level for the promotion of a collective superiority, loyalty, homeness and topophilic sentiments for the state.[140] As in the case of a small and intimately known place, the sustenance of the state is based on ethnocentrism, a collective form of egocentrism, and "a bulwark against forces of cultural homogenization."[141] Tuan makes a foray into the history of cartography in order to illustrate a common historical tendency to organize space with the homeland in the privileged centre surrounded by inferior circumambient space. The ancient maps of Hecateus of Miletus, the medieval 'T-O' *orbis terrarum* images and maps created by British cartographers during the period of sea explorations show the known world with Ancient Greece, Jerusalem and Britain, respectively, in the position of a central navel of the world.[142] The surrounding space is represented in ways defying isomorphism, which manifests the common strategy "to exaggerate the size of one's home ground at the expense of the territory of neighbors."[143]

Besides the size and centrality, the ideas of border are often exploited in the process of differentiation of a state territory from peripheral Otherness. Historically, geographical insularity has frequently been exploited for such ends, and Britain is a case in point. As the following chapter shows, Auden emphasized this very aspect of his homeland as crucial for

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[138] Antony Easthope, *Englishness and National Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999) 22.
[139] Tuan, "Place: An Experiential Perspective" 160.
[140] Tuan realizes that such factors constitutive of national identity are not only ramified by central authorities. He proposes that they are also indoctrinated through other forms of discourse such as art and architecture emphasizing the "rivalry or conflict with other places [and] visual prominence" (*Space and Place* 175-78).
[141] Tuan, *Topophilia* 31.
[142] Tuan, *Topophilia* 39-43. Medieval European 'T-O' maps are emblematic circular 'O' shaped maps with the sea and ocean located in the circumambient area. The land is located within the 'O' and divided by horizontal and vertical lines intersecting in the very centre and forming a 'T'.
[143] Tuan, *Topophilia* 34. Tuan shows that even in modern times, communities of various sizes often use superlatives in the act of creating the illusion of superiority, as when Taunton is presented as "the largest city for its size" (32).

its specific identity and superiority to homogenized Europe. Demarcating a visible boundary suffused with the potential to protect the 'inside' from external, especially Continental influences, the cliffs of Dover are familiar emblems of such protectiveness and self-contained character. "Insularity," David Lowenthal asserts, "differentiates Britain from all other European nations save Iceland and Ireland. Atavistic loyalties are insularly voiced."[144] He supplies numerous examples to corroborate the role of insularity in the construction of English national identity. John of Gaunt's exalted speech in *Richard II* represents a literary version of local patriotism emphasizing insularity, superiority and sacredness:

> This other Eden, demi-paradise,
> This fortress built by Nature for herself
> Against infection and the hand of war,
> This happy breed of men, this little world,
> This precious stone set in the silver sea,
> Which serves it in the office of a wall,
> Or as a moat defensive to a house,
> Against the envy of less happier lands,
> This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England [...].[145]

When a visible boundary is lacking, or in addition to it, the geographical character of inland territory is exploited for the same purposes because, as Lowenthal has it, "Whatever feels distinctive becomes a jealously *un*shared possession."[146] The parvenu character of a local landscape, public architecture and monuments play a crucial role in promoting the singularity of the state.[147] Concrete structures, such as the silhouette of Hradčany, are unmistakable and characteristic landmarks built, or selected from the vast aggregate of heterogeneous parts, and used as instruments for the formation and maintenance of national identity. They make the unique 'self' of a nation tangible and 'visible'.[148] Besides spatial coordinates, however, citizens share a national history and heritage offering a rich reservoir of material for the promotion and invention of self-esteem, national uniqueness, identity and emotional attachment to the *terra patria*, as well as for appeals to undisturbed continuity and homogeneity of the nation. Yet, unlike geographical features, the past lacks materiality and it must be transcribed into 'visible' objects publicly lionized and used for the nurturing of topophilic sentiments. For example, western antiquarianism does not only transpire from the maintenance of museums and restoration projects, but also from the erection of monuments

[144] David Lowenthal, "British National Identity and the English Landscape," *Rural History* 2.2 (1991): 214, *Cambridge Journals*, 22 January 2009 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0956793300002764>, 1 July 2012.
[145] William Shakespeare, *Richard II* II, i, 42-50, *The Complete Works*, gen. eds. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005) 347.
[146] Lowenthal, "British National Identity" 207, emphasis original.
[147] Tuan, *Space and Place* 164.
[148] Tuan, *Space and Place* 176.

with durable materials in veneration of the past.[149] It is logical why such landmarks making the national 'self' and uniqueness 'visible' and distinctive become attractive targets of attempts at an identicide.[150]

Besides insularity and concrete architectural landmarks, generic images are among the most prominent means for constructing a country as magnificent and homogeneous through the obfuscation of less seemly and heterogeneous properties. As for Britain, Lowenthal proposes, "The patchwork of meadow and pasture, the hedgerows and copses, the immaculate villages nestling among small tilled fields" are aspects so deeply ingrained in imagining Britain that it has become a naturalized and "hallowed visual cliché" promoting an image of a fertile, peaceful and secure place. Lowenthal argues that the tendency to reverence such images springs from the fact that the English environmental ideal is a rural landscape littered with human artefacts because the English "identify with this landscape as both admirable and ancestral." Untamed wilderness, he concludes in a phrase recalling Capability Brown's credo, seems repugnant: "It is an English creed that all land requires human supervision. Far from knowing best, nature needs vigilant guidance."[151] It is shown later that Auden's understanding of the term 'topophilia' manifests this particular national stereotype and fondness.

Naturally, local uniqueness is not only promoted by state authorities and writers. It is also an important part of commercial practice and individual travelling. In their enticing study of the relation between landscape and tourism, Claudia Bell and John Lyall argue that in order to commodify authentic experience "in the global competition for tourists," travel industry uses selections of visually appealing landscape images in order to individuate a location, offer desired Otherness and "titillate a tourist's appetite."[152] Indeed, visual apprehension becomes dominant when an existential insider assumes the position of a tourist – an outsider. The judgements of a transient lacking familiarity are more easily articulated because they derive mainly from the aesthetic qualities of the locality. When topophilic sentiments for such a location emerge, it is primarily because "the outsider judges by appearance, by some formal canon of beauty," which is doubly recorded in the word 'sightseeing'.[153] Indeed, while the lustre and 'visibility' of a home territory is largely cherished by local inhabitants, it can also be promoted by visitors,[154] writers, poets and documentarists limited to the 'surface'.

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[149] Tuan, *Topophilia* 99.
[150] For a detailed examination of the term 'identicide', see Brian S. Osborne, "Landscapes, Memory, Monuments, and Commemoration: Putting Identity in its Place," *The Metropolis Project*, n.d. <www.canada.metropolis.net/events/ethnocultural/publications/putinden.pdf>, 7 July 2012.
[151] Lowenthal, "British National Identity" 213, 215, 218.
[152] Claudia Bell and John Lyall, *The Accelerated Sublime: Landscape, Tourism, and Identity* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2002) 15-16.
[153] Tuan, *Topophilia* 64.
[154] Tuan, *Space and Place* 172.

1.4.3. Experiencing *Terrae Incognitae*

Human apprehension of and relation to places such as the nation state exemplifies the extent to which social, political and entrepreneurial forces combine with a direct sensory experience and override it. With an increasing experiential distance of the human subject from a location, the existential insider successively assumes the position of a native, visitor and finally a person engaging with places never directly experienced. In the past, maps of the world contained blackened areas designating *terrae incognitae*. Today, geographers and cartographers register no unknown regions on the surface of the earth. Yet, while the boundaries of the known world have been gradually expanded, for the humanist geographer assigning importance to the difference between a direct sensory and vicarious knowledge, such areas still exist in the zones surrounding one's lifespace and, in fact, outnumber it. How is the sense of places known indirectly and through imagination formed? Under what circumstances are topophilic sentiments for distant locations ignited? 'Escapism' and 'mythical geographies' are critical terms that offer means to answering such questions.

The above discussion of the experience of home and homeland shows the manner and extent to which humans derive support for their existence from their lifespace and, in the process, mythologize it by investing it with superlative and anthropomorphic meanings. In this connection, Paul Shepard, an American professor of environmentalism, proposes the following pattern of spatial behaviour and experience: "Men have always sought order and comfort in their environment." When thrown into the sunlight, even the earthworm

> squeezes underground as quickly as possible, where we may suppose it is more comfortable. Not at all sharing St. John's metaphysics, it flees from light as from the devil. Given a choice […], an animal *moves to* or *builds* what amounts to a combination satisfying for him. To man paradise is the desired ultimate unity of these conditions, but the daily business of living deflects the searcher and routs him out. Environments change. The quest continues as long as life.[155]

Human 'building' and 'moving' are more dependant on a rational choice than the instinctive response of an annelid. Yet, the fact that people *build* and construct places physically and ideally manifests a tendency to strive for the good place and shield allowing them to dwell and to satisfy biological and psychological needs. Human mythologization of the existential centre is a concomitant of a desire for the good life in a good place spared from deficiences. In their judgements of lifespaces, the insiders are concerned with more than aesthetic and 'picturesque' qualities attracting the eye of the visitor, travel agent and the viewfinder of their cameras. For the local farmer, the main criterion is the satisfaction of existential needs. To return home is to arrive in a magnetic hub centripetally attracting topophilic sentiments. To be

[155] Shepard 38, 28, emphasis added.

ousted out of it can be decimating. As a survival strategy, Tuan claims, local residents "shunt unpleasant reality out of mind."[156] The possible aesthetic faults and imperfections of the existential heartland are tolerated or obliterated because it is treasured for the capacity to provide wellbeing – order, stability, security, comfort and invigoration. While essentially neutral, in experience the intimate place is imbued with anthropomorphic values and mythologized as caring, protective, unique and emotionally 'warmest', even sacred. In this situation, it is set over against the inferior circumambient realms of baffling, chaotic and, in the past, demoniacal qualities.

What happens, however, with the perception of the nebulous periphery when the privileged and protective 'centre' becomes mundane and unbearably complex, when its stability and predictability feel suffocating, when it turns into an obstacle to goals and when it contrasts with the insiders' notions of the good place providing wellbeing? In their own ways, Yi-Fu Tuan and Paul Shepard suggest that there may occur a change in 'reading' the privileged lifespace and inferior periphery to the point of the reversal of their values: "familiarity breeds affection," Tuan intimates, "when it does not breed contempt."[157]

Besides 'building', Paul Shepard in his definition above of human response to the actual environment alludes to 'fleeing to', 'moving to', 'searching' and 'quest for' a good place offering wellbeing. Reminiscent of such claims, Tuan dedicated one of his most recent studies *Escapism* (1998) entirely to this type of a response to the actual and imperfect environment. In his effort to postulate 'escapism' as an inherent attribute of culture, Tuan combats the derogatory connotations of the term and its general negative implication of a human inability to face facts. To envision a location spared from the flaws and shortages of 'what actually is' is to imagine a good place and life as 'they should be', of which paradise, as Shepard intimates, is the ultimate embodiment. People do not only submit and adapt to actual environmental conditions. Unlike other animal species, which Tuan claims would not survive unless perceiving the world realistically as it is, humans frequently 'shut their eyes' to the *status quo* and indulge in daydreaming, escaping and wishful thinking in a quest for a better or ideal environment. Tuan's overall cogitation is that rather than weakness, the congenital indisposition to accept actuality, as well as the ability to fancy a situation and place superior to the actual, are in fact among the most natural behavioural patterns and survival strategies proper to man. People 'shut eyes' to facts, yet, at the same time, they 'see' what is not there, define a goal and strive for its achievement. Hence, Tuan views 'escapism' – an ability to

[156] Tuan, *Space and Place* 126–28; Tuan, *Topophilia* 65.
[157] Tuan, *Topophilia* 99.

envision a better state elsewhere, in the future or the past – as one of the essential constituents of culture: "Seeing what is not there lies at the foundation of all human culture."[158]

In this connection Tuan distinguishes two basic forms of a response to the unsatisfactory conditions of the actual environment: escaping the *status quo* of the 'here' and 'now' through the procurement of changes *in situ*, and through physical, imaginative, permanent or temporary departures from the actual situation in search of a better place elsewhere. To build a shelter and to make a clearing for a field in order to gain protection and a cornucopia of supplies are examples of the former. To emigrate, go on a holiday or imagine a 'good-place' alternative for the actual lifespace outside or far from it exemplify physical escapism and a human tendency to construct idealized mythical geographies of distant places.

Tuan calls the area circumscribing and outstretching away from the lifespace 'mythical space'. It is so because he understands 'myth' as an anthropomorphic construct arising from the need to explain and systematize the external world in the absence of precise knowledge: "the way people act depends on their comprehension of reality, and that comprehension, since it can never be complete, is necessarily imbued with myths."[159] It follows that the 'deeper' a location is in the circumambient mythical space surrounding the existential centre, the less direct experience of it man has and the more likely it is that its knowledge is fragmentary, fuzzier and distorted by mediated data and imagination. Ancient and medieval narratives render remote areas beyond the intimate centre as both alluring and menacing, as inhabited by mysterious and life-threatening creatures.[160] Even at present, however, the perception of distant places is prone to warping, whose character, positive or negative, is related to one's view of their intimate lifespace. When the existential 'here' is felt to be restrictive or limiting, the idealizing power of projection makes the mythical space qualify as a location of the good place. It is this moment when topophilic sentiments are centrifugally redirected away from the centre towards an imagined environmental ideal in the distance. If 'goal' may be defined as one's *situ*ation in the future, then imagination and the vicarious knowledge of a far place entice reading into it the capacity to reach such a state. Even sedentary people abandon the centre, physically or through imagination, and 'move' to a place they believe "amounts to a combination satisfying for [them]," be it a temporary holiday resort, a permanent exile or an imaginary escape from the existential 'here'. This type of an interaction with a location in the periphery is a sample evidence of the above claim that places can indeed be viewed as palimpsests because one location may simultaneously be perceived as centripetally attractive

[158] Tuan, *Escapism* (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press, 1998) 5-6.
[159] Tuan, *Space and Place* 86, 98.
[160] John K. Wright, "Terrae Incognitae: The Place of the Imagination in Geography," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 37.1 (March 1947): 1–2, *JSTOR* <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2561211>, 10 May 2012.

by a tourist and as centrifugally repulsive by the insider yearning for a better place elsewhere. In both cases the desire for a superior good place is at work and mythical geographies emerge.

Before embarking further, a remark should again be made about time. Spatial distance affects topophilic sentiments and it frequently elicits idealization, which is also the case of the homesick insider far from home. But the passage of time too creates distance, albeit in a temporal sense, and it makes man equally susceptible to the glorification of the distant 'not now.' It has been suggested that time is anchored in tangible objects and that the sense of the past affects the sense of place because the awareness of a stable and glorious past may contribute to the formation of identification with home territory. Yet, it is possible to reverse Tuan's claim and argue that sense of place affects sense of the past, which is at an equal risk of idealization when the present environment frustrates goals and the achievement of contentment. When "people perceive that changes are occurring too rapidly, spinning out of control, nostalgia for an idyllic past waxes strong," and they tend to evoke "an idealized and stable past."[161] The relics of ancestral achievements are used by the present generation for fashioning myths of superior historical moments and for projecting onto the predecessors idealized images of themselves. However, in this process, as in the case of obfuscating the faults and unseemly aspects of home territory, humans too obliterate the injustices and acts of cruelty that lie in the foundations of such monuments.[162]

No longer viewed as a physical ailment, 'nostalgia' still implies discrepancy between the present and the past. Aaron Santesso has recently defined it as a "mode of idealization responding first and foremost to the concerns of the present."[163] In the face of their actual dissatisfactory conditions, humans often 'remember' the past as more stable, superior and simpler. The extreme of such constructions is the pre-lapsarian purity in the Garden of Eden walling in a realm of innocence and an ahistoric state unburdened by the contingencies of historical time: "the constant references to a Golden age in the past are exhortations to restore harmony to the present in accordance with an idealized past."[164] Yet, as Shepard has it, while "to man paradise is the desired ultimate unity of [existential] conditions," man's interminable state of becoming renders such places unattainable and the "quest continues as long as life."[165]

As historical examples of migration, self-exile and architecture show, the quest for the good place does continue. What remains is the physical and ideal constructing of the centre and the search, outside the existential zone, for an environmental ideal imagined as abounding

[161] Tuan, *Space and Place* 195, 188.
[162] Lowenthal, "British National Identity" 217–18.
[163] Aaron, Santesso, *Careful Longing: The Poetics and Problems of Nostalgia* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2006) 13. Santesso views nostalgia as a literary trope and examines the change in the objects of a nostalgic rhetoric.
[164] Tuan, *Space and Place* 190.
[165] Shepard 28.

in resources, as spared from the bigotry and overt complexity, and as promising "support and fulfilment in the context of [people's] lives' purposes."[166] The location and type of the environmental ideal individually and collectively vary. Yet, historically, certain generic types prevail over others and Tuan draws specific attention to the forest, seashore, island and valley. Besides, even extremely austere and visually unappealing sites have attracted topophilic sentiments. The bleak northern regions and ascetic places, such as the desert or a cave, have all been approached as superior alternatives for those who have "shun[ned] the soft environment" of their lifespace. Like Shepard, Tuan in this connection too recalls St. Jerome: "a town is a prison, the desert loneliness a paradise."[167] Biographies of English writers offer several cases of an infatuation with austere environments: George Orwell and C.S. Lewis can serve as examples but, most importantly for the present discussion, W.H. Auden too.

1.5. Topophilia, Escapism and the Culture of Nature

These instances of environmental ideals are natural types. In the western approach to space, but not exclusively there, nature is commonly perceived as a dualistic antipode to the city – the epitome of the civilized and humanized space.[168] Together they represent one of the most basic ways of space stratification into antimonic pairs, however artificial this presently seems. As already noted, the search for the good place, "for a point of equilibrium that is not of this world," may entail the reversal of the time-honoured meanings associated with the 'core' and 'margin'.[169] Human attitudes to the city and nature manifest such a process as both have assumed the position of an environmental ideal in different historical moments. Values associated with these environmental types are numerous and heterogeneous, and human judgments of them depend on the activation of some and obfuscation of others. Also, as existentialists would argue, the city and nature are sensed in ways reflecting their capacity to function as aids or obstacles to human goals and purposes. Because W.H. Auden's approach to space is profoundly engaged in this spatial index of polarity and its conceptualization, at least a brief excursion into the issue seems appropriate while still pursuing the importance of the experiential 'insidededness' and 'outsidedness', escapism as well as topophilic sentiments.

Martin Heidegger's conviction that to dwell is to build, cultivate and construct suggests that out of all environments, the urban space displays man's being in the world the most explicitly. Visually, the city is indeed the most artificial, constructed and, in Tuan's terminology, 'carpentered' space. Stone, metal and glass are shaped to build structures

[166] Tuan, *Topophilia* 120.
[167] Tuan, *Topophilia* 51-52.
[168] Tuan draws attention to several African and New Guinean tribes who structure the world equally (Tuan, *Escapism* 18-20).
[169] Tuan, *Topophilia* 248.

assisting in the sustenance of individual and communal life. They provide material for the erection of distinctive monuments and public edifices pronouncing abstract ideas, myths of power and glory. While obfuscating its heterogeneity and less seemly attributes, such symbols stand for the whole and form a hallmark enforcing the uniqueness and identity of a particular city or state.[170] By analogy, the city as an environmental type can be viewed as a robust 'monument' to man's biological uniqueness and achievements, both tangible and intellectual, and as a symbol standing "for what a civilization can achieve."[171] When the term 'place' is defined as a location physically and ideally constructed, the city is a place *par excellence* and the most natural habitat of man.

The city has been imagined as a privileged centre and an environmental ideal, which does not only transpire from its etymology, but also from its religious, political, economic and social importance. 'Civil' and 'civilized,' as attributes of refinement and superiority, are related to urbanity because they share a common root in the *cívitás*, from which the words 'citizen' and 'city' derive. "As artefact the city reflects human purpose," claims Tuan, because it materializes human excellence and it has an obvious potential to provide conditions for the stability of man's existence, wellbeing, socialization and communal togetherness, symbolized by the agora.[172] It provides protection from the unpredictable caprices of natural forces and, in consequence, it "liberates its citizens from the need for incessant toil to maintain their bodies and from the feeling of impotence before nature's vagaries."[173] The layout of a traditional city often reflected its central function and communal role. As Tuan and Mircea Eliade show, imagining the mythical Atlantis in terms of a centre surrounded by alternate concentric areas of water and land is not unique. Several real cities, medieval and modern, follow the pattern in which the central edifice of power and importance is surrounded with concentric zones and infrastructure radiating towards the periphery. Eliade notes that in a religious sense the city manifests the powerful symbolism of the sacred centre. Its visual dominant – a cathedral vaulting towards heaven – forms the vertical *axis mundi* connecting the earth to the heaven and underground. In consequence, it can become a site of hierophany surrounded by profane areas.[174] It is a terrestrial enactment and an image of the *Civitas Dei*: "the city transcends the uncertainties of life; it reflects the precision, the order, and the predictability of the heaven." The city is the site proper for human existence because it is

[170] Tuan, *Topophilia* 203, 247.
[171] Tuan, *Topophilia* 193.
[172] Tuan, *Topophilia* 247-48.
[173] Tuan, *Topophilia* 110, 151.
[174] Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* 36-42, 58-62. Washington DC with the Capitol encircled by fanning streets is a concrete example of a modern city designed to make the centre prominent.

there that man can gain a privileged "share in the pageantry of a far larger world."[175] Neither the religious aura nor protective walls are to be found in the design of modern urban agglomerations. Yet, their role of nodes centralizing production and allowing its exchange has survived and so has the capacity to satisfy communal, civil and pecuniary needs.[176]

That the city has been imagined as an environmental ideal is to claim neither universality nor univocality. On the contrary, the criticism that urban space has deserved in different moments of history, but especially since the advent of modernity, is an obvious evidence of the opposite. This is all the more visible when the natural space, its anti-image, is considered and its transformation from a demonic and uncouth into a sacred and deified environment is examined. Raymond Williams has demurred at the singular form of the word 'nature' because of its numerous and unstable meanings. For him, it is one of the most complex concepts defying lexicographic definition:

> The idea of nature contains, though often unnoticed, an extraordinary amount of human history. Like some other fundamental ideas which express mankind's vision of itself and its place in the world, 'nature' has a nominal continuity, over many centuries, but can be seen, in analysis, to be both complicated and changing, as other ideas and experiences change.[177]

The semantic field of the word 'nature' has quantitatively and qualitatively evolved. Tuan's reading is that it has been constricted from the 'all and everything' in pre-Socratic antiquity to the medieval "sublunary regions of mutability." Since then, nature has lost further ground as well as its ancient and medieval 'vertical' dimension. At present, nature suggests the "layer of the earth's surface and the air above it that have been unaffected, or minimally affected, by humans,"[178] hence it is semantically close to the concepts of wilderness and countryside bearing no or little sign of man's 'carpentering'. Also, historically, nature is a qualitatively ambivalent concept attracting contrasting interpretations. While Adam and Eve were expelled from the safety of the walled garden into the unenviable demonic land of thistles and thorns, at present, untamed nature is commonly approached for the "less austere qualities of charm and picturesqueness," and for its therapeutic reinvigorating potential.[179]

Pre-modern examples exist of the capacity of nature to assume the status of a privileged environment.[180] Yet, the most important for the following analyses is the 'deification' of

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[175] Tuan, *Topophilia* 152.
[176] Tuan, *Topophilia* 151-59. See also Tuan, "Place: An Experiential Perspective" 157.
[177] Raymond Williams, "Ideas of Nature," *Culture and Materialism: Selected Essays* (1980; London: Verso, 2005) 67.
[178] Tuan, *Escapism* 20.
[179] Tuan, *Topophilia* 130–33.
[180] The rise of cities in Alexandrine Greece produced "a strong reaction against urban sophistication and a longing for rusticity." The pastoral poems of Theocritus "are redolent of the peace of the countryside." In the Augustan age, Horace retiring to Tivoli or Virgil in his bucolic poems depicting an ideal life of contentment mixed with sadness in a rural landscape are occasions of striving for the country and of the praise of its simplicity against the complexities and ostentation of the city (Tuan, *Topophilia* 106-07).

nature and its ratification as an environmental ideal in a process that started in the eighteenth and culminated in the nineteenth century, but whose residue is still discernable at present. Alexander Wilson suggests that the topophilic sentiment for nature "flourishes best in cultures with highly developed technologies" because "nature is the one place we can both indulge our dreams of mastery over the earth and seek some kind of contact with the origins of life – an experience we don't usually allow urban settings to provide."[181] Similarly, Tuan views the causes of the eighteenth-century infatuation with nature in an attempt to escape and find a compensation for a "certain level of artifice and complexity"[182] associated with the urban environment since the onset of modernity.

In the course of the eighteenth century, Tuan proposes, the public opinion was led to "stress the merits of the countryside and of nature at the expense of the city. Images are reversed so that the wilderness stands for order and freedom whereas the central city is chaotic, a jungle ruled by social outcasts," a nest of corruption and sterility.[183] Nature took over from Christianity the role of a creative force and, as Sir Kenneth Clark proposed, the status of divinity to be worshiped.[184] Besides order and freedom, the western man gradually imbued nature with the status of a maternal environment and sanctuary of purity, essentiality, origin and unchangeability contrasting with the constructedness, complexity and mutability of the urban space. The western man projected onto it the capacity to reinvigorate the body and soul, hence attributes previously associated with the city, its cathedral and citizens rather than with the country and villagers (*villa*ins) seen as brutish and uncouth rustics. The sensual plunge into the sights and textures of the countryside, fresh air and lush vegetation "was invested with connotations of health, wholesomeness, and security."[185] Nature became the source of morals and both picturesque and, later, sublime experience. It is this moment when the natural environment in the periphery of the urban space came to be significantly reconceptualized in consequence of the growth of the cities, improvement of infrastructure, transition from the Classicist to the Romantic aesthetic preferring ruggedness to regularity,[186] and of several other cultural and social forces. Propelled by these factors, nature gained the

[181] Alexander Wilson, "The View from the Road," *The Culture of Nature: North American Landscape from Disney to the Exxon Valdez*, 3rd ed. (1991; Toronto: Between the Lines, 1998) 25.
[182] Tuan, *Topophilia* 103.
[183] Tuan, *Topophilia* 236, 248.
[184] Kenneth Clark, *Civilization* (1969; London: BBC Books and John Murray, 1991) 269.
[185] Nicholas Green, "Looking at Landscape," *The Anthropology of Landscape: Perspectives on Place and Space*, eds. Eric Hirsch and Michael O'Hanlon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 37. Green's essay has comparative merits for the present argument. He claims that the appreciation of nature in nineteenth-century France emerged and was proliferated from Paris. He deals with the issues of health, escape from the complexity of urban environment to simplicity and wholeness.
[186] W.J.T. Mitchell recalls the serpentine line from the title page of William Hogarth's *The Analysis of Beauty* to show the importance of this curve for eighteenth-century aesthetic and emphasis on curiosity and variety ("The Serpent in the Wilderness: Space, Place and Landscape in the Eighteenth Century," *Acts of Narrative*, eds. Carol Jacobs and Henry Sussman [Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003] 149-53).

potential to be positively mythologized and consecrated, to attract topophilia and to serve as a means of escape to seekers of solitude, morality, simplicity and mystical experience.

The ambivalence and historical mutability of meanings ascribed to the natural space reflect, as an existentialist philosopher might suggest, the existential and social situation of the perceiving subject and their aims. But whose perspectives and goals caused that nature received the status of an environmental ideal and that it became an object of topophilic sentiments? Or rather, whose *articulated* perspectives, goals, sentiments and sense of place are involved? In 1974, one year after *The Country and the City* was published, Tuan offered an answer redolent of Raymond Williams' overall position in his seminal study. Running an equal risk of oversimplification, Tuan proposed that topophilic sentiments for nature had been promoted primarily through the verbal and pictorial syntax of urban dwellers, hence, in respect to nature, by people in the position of existential outsiders: "attitudes toward wilderness and the countryside, insofar as they are verbalized and known, are sophisticated responses to environment that have their origins in the city."[187]

Ebenezer Howard's twentieth-century plans for 'garden cities', merging the merits of the natural and urban environment, did not find much practical use but suburbs can be approached as such 'middle landscapes' emerging partially in consequence of an urban lust for nature, where human 'carpentering' may seem, but only seem, less conspicuous than in the city.[188] As the more affluent classes in the eighteenth century found their way to the 'profane' *sub*urban periphery outside city centres, the derogatory connotations of the prefix *sub-* were gradually erased and "the place for paupers and obnoxious trades" received "greater prestige than the decaying city core."[189] Newly built country estates satiated quests for temporary retreats, privacy, a less formal lifestyle and rural idyll. Today, advertising a healthy lifestyle is still inseparable from 'green' images and, while no longer the privilege of higher classes, a sojourn in the country is often imagined as an asylum offering privacy, health, reinvigoration and contact with the earth. To plan a weekend stay in a cottage is still to look forward to an escape from mainly the quotidian urban space.

This is where the distinction between the perspective of the existential insider and outsider becomes crucial. Tuan echoes Raymond Williams when he suggests that the topophilic sentiments and mythologization of nature in the eighteenth century were and still are mainly the repercussions of attempts made by city dwellers to find a 'golden' refuge from the 'brazen' urban lifespace backing their existential security:

[187] Tuan, *Topophilia* 248.
[188] Tuan, *Escapism* 24.
[189] Tuan, *Topophilia* 248.

> [t]he sentiment is romantic in the sense that it is far removed from any real understanding of nature. It is also suffused with melancholy: the literati retire for a time to the country and live in indolent ease with much thought for the vanity of office but no thought of how they are to be fed. At the back of the romantic appreciation of nature is the privilege and wealth of the city.[190]

A less romantic sense of wilderness and countryside is among rural people – the existential insiders. As Williams notes, "once we begin to speak of men mixing their labour with the earth, we are in a whole world of new relations between man and nature."[191] It is in this respect that Tuan, otherwise displaying a greater critical independence, fashions himself as a Marxist critic. For him, the farmer is an existential insider in nature and is thus deeply attached to the land through a rigorous physical contact. "Nature," he asserts, "is known through the need to gain a living. […] The farmer's topophilia is compounded of this physical intimacy [and] material dependence."[192] Martin Heidegger once used the image of a forest clearing in support of his claim that man carves places in an undifferentiated space and so makes it visible.[193] In Tuan's view, a field and protective shelter do not reveal space as much as they bespeak the formidability of natural forces compelling man to take a proper care of such life-sustaining structures.[194] Hence, the self-esteem and topophilic sentiments of existential insiders emerge from a long-term ability to cope with natural vagaries. Yet, as Tuan proposes, while their affection is present and profound, it is seldom articulated. The deification of nature seeps through the discourse of existential outsiders possessing power to make excursions into the natural environment, appreciate its visual attributes and articulate their experience in verbal and visual forms. In consequence, Tuan claims, "what we have is a vast, largely sentimental, literature on the farming life written by people with uncallused hands" who little realize the hardship of existing in uncaring and indifferent nature.[195]

Mythologized perceptions of nature have prompted recent critics to expose the reasons and flaws of their accretion. Claudia Bell and John Lyall, for example, disclose the processes of commodifying a natural landscape as a version of paradise. Much has changed since the eighteenth-century travel guides offered 'stations' and viewpoints allowing travellers to appreciate a rural life and landscape from distance, which already suggests detachedness. Yet, the elevation of the picturesque, pure and idyllic aspects of nature still characterizes the travel-brochure rhetoric. "Turquoise lagoons, glistening sand, and lush vegetation [are]

[190] Tuan, *Topophilia* 103.
[191] Raymond Williams, "Ideas of Nature" 76.
[192] Tuan, *Topophilia* 96-97.
[193] Heidegger, "Art and Space" 306.
[194] Tuan, *Escapism* 10.
[195] Tuan, *Topophilia* 97–98.

rarified as paradise, and commodified as hideaways."[196] The harshness of nature and its less seemly aspects are obfuscated in such mythical geographies in order to offer attractive destinations for escapades from the urban life.

It transpires from the above that nature can be viewed as an antipode and antidote to the carpentered urban space. Yet, when ideal constructing is taken into account, this dialectical opposition disappears. In general, houses and other constructions reveal man's primary and inexorable attempt to escape from raw nature and its vagaries to culture. When the pressure of the carpentered environment accumulates, however, the desire to escape arises again. Nature offers itself as a means of shunning the quotidian life. Yet, its perception as a refuge and panacea relies on culturally biased values and idealizations. Hence, to escape to the seemingly 'non-carpentered' natural space, Tuan argues, is merely to escape to its cultural image. "What we wish to escape to is not 'nature' but an alluring conception of it, and this conception is necessarily a product of a people's experience and history – their culture. Paradoxical as it may sound, 'escape to nature' is a cultural undertaking, a covered-up attempt to 'escape from nature.'"[197] It will be shown that these very processes – the deification, worship and mythologizing of nature – provided Auden with one of his central and life-long concerns.

This chapter has attended to selected aspects of spatial experience and place-making proposed, primarily, by humanist geographers. It shows that places can be approached as both material and ideal constructs issuing from man's desire for an existence in a meaningful, ordered and good place. In this process, concrete locations and environmental types, while essentially neutral, are invested with idealized values. These conflate to form mythical geographies constructed between man and the world. The rest of the present work explores W.H. Auden's sense of different places, his version of a mythical geography, his perception of home and distant places, and their treatment in prose and poetry.

[196] Bell and Lyall 15.
[197] Tuan, *Escapism* 19.

2. Topophilia and W.H. Auden's Mythical Geography of Sacred and Unique Places

Without Art, we should have no notion of the sacred.
–Wystan Hugh Auden[198]

Auden's 1956 inaugural speech "Making, Knowing and Judging" can be viewed as his small-scale 'biographia literaria'. He describes the creative process involved in poetry writing and different stages of a poet's development from an imitator to an independent voice. To state his concept of poetry, Auden borrows from S.T. Coleridge's distinction between Primary and Secondary imagination. The former, he claims, must be concerned purely with objects and events personally recognized as sacred, yet not sacred in a strictly religious sense. It is "from the sacred encounters of his imagination," Auden explains, "that a poet's impulse to write a poem rises." The proposition is that poetry is made in response to such an ecstatic experience eliciting a desire to "express that awe in a rite of worship" of such objects. For the poet, the rite of praise is verbal and his poem "pays homage by naming,"[199] which can only happen when the character of the sacred object is 'pronounced' clearly and aptly in order for its uniqueness and specificity to be duly voiced. To illustrate his claim, Auden compares a sacred object with a proper name: "a word like *pyrites*, for example, was for me [in childhood], not simply an indicative sign; it was the Proper Name of a Sacred Being, so that when I heard an aunt to pronounce it *pirrits*, I was shocked." Besides, Auden concludes that the apotheosis that sacred objects deserve is only possible on the basis of a personal experience: "since Proper Names in the grammatical sense refer to unique objects, we cannot judge their aptness without personal acquaintance with what they name."[200] Auden's 1950s poetics clearly consisted in a productive interplay of a profound 'visionary' encounter and its delicate rational transformation into a poem – "a verbal contraption"[201] – through professional craftsmanship. In order to be able to communicate the unique character of a numinous object, the poet should not only be responsive to their experience, but also to poetic precedents, from which the rite of verbal praising can be learned.

The previous chapter shows that under certain circumstances locations in the centre and periphery of an existential lifespace have the potential to become privileged, unique and, in broader than a religious sense, even sacred objects enticing topophilic sentiments whether this be on the basis of a direct experience, public discourse or imagination. For Auden, landscapes qualified as numinous and supremely significant objects more than anything else. "Many of

[198] Auden, "Making, Knowing and Judging," *Complete Works IV* 498.
[199] Auden, "Making, Knowing and Judging," *Complete Works IV* 497, 495.
[200] Auden, "Making, Knowing and Judging," *Complete Works IV* 479.
[201] Auden, "Making, Knowing and Judging," *Complete Works IV* 490.

us have sacred landscapes which probably all have much in common, but there will almost certainly be details which are peculiar to each," Auden told his audience at Oxford and so implied the extent of his own responsiveness to space and readiness to ascribe such exquisite qualities to an essentially neutral environment.[202] This chapter has two objectives. Firstly, it charts the nature of Auden's reasons for treasuring poets highly responsive to topographical details, nurturing topophilic sentiments for particular landscapes and writing poetry expressive of their uniqueness and sacredness. Secondly, it defines the roots and character of his own topophilic sentiments for places and landscapes that he viewed as distinct, unique and sacred objects, and that he placed at the hierarchical apex of his personal mythical geography.

2.1. Practiced Topophiles – W.H. Auden, Topophilia and Topophilic Poets

During the 1940s, hence a decade before announcing his view of poetry at Oxford University, Auden already extolled writers whose spatial sensibility, combined with the mastery of poetry writing, he believed, allowed them to pay homage to a chosen locality by transforming their experience into 'a verbal contraption' and so apotheosizing it as a sacred object. Auden's assessment of such poets is related to his drawing of a connection between them and topophilia. He employed the term 'topophilia' in 1947 and then again in 1949 and 1959. Auden's definition of the concept and his views concerning the locations capable of attracting topophilic sentiments are more restrictive than those of Yi-Fu Tuan, who draws attention to such emotional bonds between man and any type of environment. In an attempt to define the sentiment, Auden somewhat struggles and, typically of his style, begins by negation:

> Topophilia differs from the farmer's love of his home soil and the litterateur's fussy regional patriotism in that it is not possessive or limited to any one locality. […] On the other hand it has little in common with nature love. Wild or unhumanised nature holds no charms for the average topophil because it is lacking in history.[203]

Auden clearly dismisses the part of Tuan's views concerning the possessive and patriotic affection for the existential centre and homeland as well as for unspoilt wilderness. In his definition, attention is paid to the inseparability of the temporal and historical dimension from space. For Auden, topophilia emerges from the subject's exposure to a historicized landscape bearing signs of human dwelling in the world.

Auden emphasizes, however, that while the presence of objects revealing human existence is indispensable, their quality, architectural distinctiveness and public recognition are irrelevant, which is a view he shares with Tuan. To the topophile, "a branch railroad is as

[202] Auden, "Making, Knowing and Judging," *Complete Works IV* 494.
[203] Auden, "Introduction to *Slick but Not Streamlined*, by John Betjeman," *Complete Works II* 304. Auden's spelling of 'topophile' and 'topophil' was not consistent.

valuable as a Roman wall" and "a neo-Tudor teashop as interesting as a Gothic cathedral."[204] That topophilic sentiments can be generated with respect to such an indiscriminate list of humanized places points at another aspect of Auden's definition of topophilia and its practitioners, the topophiles. He draws attention to the importance of a direct experience and purely subjective choice of a location regardless of its public historical value, cultural importance and size: "though he may often […] know a lot about architecture, the genuine topophile can always be distinguished from an educated tourist or an art historian by the uniquely personal character of his predilections."[205] For Auden, like for humanist geographers, topophilia is a *personal devotion* to a place subjectively experienced as a "loved and intimately known locality"[206] which can be topographically, architecturally and historically indistinctive, unattractive to and unnoticed by the public, academia, or the above-mentioned litterateurs.

Yet, unlike Tuan, who conceives of spatial apprehension as a melange of individual experience and impersonal discourses, Auden promotes the possibility of distinguishing a purely personal emotional encounter with a locality from sentiments and meanings derived from an ideological bias and pressure of patriotic, political, academic or cultural discourses. Related to such insistence on a personal encounter is Auden's claim that topophilic sentiments can only be formed at low speed. Allowing a physical exposure to a place, it creates conditions for noticing a "significant detail."[207] "Topophilia," Auden explains in a phrase expressive of his general distrust of modern technology, "cannot survive at velocities greater than that of a somewhat rusty bicycle."[208] This evokes an attitude commonly shared by humanist geographers and anthropologists of space, who differentiate between a shallow sense of place derived from the 'fast' photographic trends of modern tourism and slow, more 'earthy' contact with a locality.[209]

Three years after his inaugural lecture, Auden wrote that "the practiced topophile can find objects of *worship* in a district he is visiting for the first time."[210] Although a connection is maintained between topophilia and a direct unhasty experience, Auden, like Tuan, obviously does not restrict its emergence to existential insiders and to a long-term inhabitation, which is manifest from his own topophilic sentiments discussed below. Auden's diction – the use the word 'worship' – does not only recall the numinous status that Tuan and

[204] Auden, "Introduction to *Slick but Not Streamlined*, by John Betjeman," *Complete Works II* 304.
[205] Auden, "John Betjeman's Poetic Universe," *Complete Works IV* 219.
[206] Auden, "Thomas Hardy: An Aspect of his Poetry," BBC, 16 September 1949, *Complete Works III* 679.
[207] Auden, "Thomas Hardy: An Aspect of his Poetry," *Complete Works III* 679.
[208] Auden, "Introduction to *Slick but Not Streamlined*, by John Betjeman," *Complete Works II* 305.
[209] See for example John Gray, "Open Spaces and Dwelling places," *The Anthropology of Space and Place*, eds. Setha M. Low and Denise Lawrence-Zúniga (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003) 224-44.
[210] Auden, "John Betjeman's Poetic Universe," *Complete Works IV* 219, emphasis added.

Eliade claim spatial objects acquire. It also echoes Auden's own inaugural speech because it points at the apotheistic reverence that a topophile maintains for particular sacred places. In adolescence, hence a long time before postulating his 1950s view of poetry, Auden already admired and explicitly praised particular poets whose verbal skills, topophilic infatuation and encounters with personal sacred places allowed them to write poetry 'naming' aptly, and so panegyrizing their numinous status. Indeed, the above quotations defining topophilia and topophiles come from an introduction, a review and a radio talk, in which Auden discusses the work of two English poets. In fact, in all his prose exceeding five thousand pages, he used the words 'topophilia' and 'topophil(e)' in these texts only, and only in relation to these writers. They were Thomas Hardy, Auden's 'poetic father', and John Betjeman, his Oxford friend. Auden did not treasure them because their topophilic sentiments for Dorset, East Anglia or North London matched his own fondness of the same areas but because of the manner in which they engaged with such places in verse. The connection Auden makes between Hardy, Betjeman, their poetry, topophilia and sacred places sheds light not only on his praise of such poets, but also on his general admiration for poetry revealing topophilic sentiments and treating concrete localities as unique and sacred 'proper names'.

In 1947, although an experienced reviewer and author of forewords, Auden felt ill at ease when writing an introduction for *Slick but not Streamlined*, a collection of poems by John Betjeman, exposing both the poet and his work to the judgment of American readers for the very first time. Auden's discomfort arose from his anticipation of a negative reception caused by a possible failure of American readers to appreciate the type of experience Betjeman's poems carried and which, Auden claimed, was rare in America because lacking a historicized landscape – the trigger of topophilia. Thus, instead of recounting Betjeman's life or leading the reader into particular poems, Auden set out to forestall such a situation by offering "a few general remarks about topophilia," whose presence "may be in order here since, so far as I know, it rarely attacks professional poets in this country [USA]."[211] He felt the need to emphasize that Betjeman's approach to the English landscape was a specimen of pure, politically unbiased topophilia and not an expression of patriotic regionalism.

The introduction was republished in *Town and Country* as "The Practiced Topophile" in July of the same year. This latter title reveals just what Betjeman meant to Auden. Besides defining topophilia in the terms quoted above and in addition to his insistence that Betjeman was an example of a topophile, in this essay Auden expresses his "violently jealous"[212] but also reverential attitude to his Oxford friend. That Auden's fondness was unrelenting is

[211] Auden, "Introduction to *Slick but Not Streamlined*, by John Betjeman," *Complete Works II* 304.
[212] Auden, "Introduction to *Slick but Not Streamlined*, by John Betjeman," *Complete Works II* 303.

visible from a review of Betjeman's *Collected Poems* prepared in 1959 for the first issue of *The Mid-Century* under the title "John Betjeman's Poetic Universe". There, Auden describes the reasons for the admiration that he felt already in the mid-1920s when together at Oxford, and that was still the same in the 1950s. In 1958, Betjeman invited Auden to meet at Marylebone Station and described it as "the only railway terminus in London where you can hear birds singing."[213] A substantial aspect of Auden's reverence for Betjeman is, in fact, implied in this very quotation. Auden did not only perceive in Betjeman a rare ability to notice a significant local detail and specificity, but also a potential to transform such properties into verbal images of no ambiguity but a great visual clarity and impact. Auden claims that such a fusion of an image, feeling, idea and experience of a place, be it a terminus station or a historical monument, can only be achieved by a poet afflicted with topophilia – by a poet bestowed with a loving and insightful eye, a poet gifted to verbally worship, praise and pronounce the uniqueness of their sacred object, a poet naming aptly because capable of distilling the moment of spatial experience into a clear and impressive visual image expressive of local uniqueness – a poet who can hear the birds singing at the railway station. This ability to verbally transform an indistinctive into a unique place was a quality that Auden felt was missing in post-war poetry, especially of American provenance.

Perhaps propelled by an effort to sound impartial, in the essay on Betjeman's poetic universe Auden counterbalances his personal fondness with diagnosing a symptom of his friend's weakness. In Auden's view, Betjeman fails when attempting satire because he does not dislike objects sufficiently enough to be able to criticize them so:

> Mr Betjeman's universe is made up of a number of sacred objects […], to which he is passionately devoted. Upon this universe, a number of profane objects […] keep imposing themselves from the present outside world. Naturally, he dislikes these intrusions upon devotions, but he does not hate them. […] Hatred, like love, can only be felt for what is, to the hater, a sacred object and therefore demands the same concentration of attention as a sacred object which is loved. Mr Betjeman fails as a satirist because since they are to him merely profane, the objects of his satire do not fascinate him sufficiently.[214]

Hence, for Auden, Betjeman was the most genuine and best when expressing love of a place, when concentrating his attention to it and when apotheosizing its sacred character; not when focusing on defiling intrusions into it: "When he is writing about one of his loved sacred objects, suburban Surrey, for example, his eye for detail is unerring."[215]

The other poet occupying Auden's literary pantheon on the merits of a comparable capacity of topophilic sentiments, worship and 'unerring' sensibility for a local detail was

[213] Auden, "John Betjeman's Poetic Universe," *Complete Works IV* 217.
[214] Auden, "John Betjeman's Poetic Universe," *Complete Works IV* 217.
[215] Auden, "John Betjeman's Poetic Universe," *Complete Works IV* 217.

Thomas Hardy: "HARDY whose Dorset gave much joy / To one unsocial English boy" (*CP* 163, capitals original) wrote Auden in 1940, the year marking the centenary of Hardy's birth. Auden discovered his endearing qualities at the age of sixteen and, as he admitted in 1940, "for more than a year [he] read no one else."[216] This was within a few months of Auden's decisive and revelatory self-discovery. Prompted by Robert Medley during their walk in March 1922, Auden realized his vocation:

> indecision broke off with a clean-cut end
> One afternoon in March at half-past three
> When walking in a ploughed field with a friend ;
> Kicking a little stone he turned to me
> And said, 'Tell me, do you write poetry?'[217]

Auden recalls a negative answer and, at the same time, a moment of revelation: "I never had, and said so, but I knew / That very moment what I wished to do" (*LFI* 333). Hardy represented the earliest significant literary influence on Auden because he provided a major support to the first wobbly steps of this 'newborn' poet seeking inspiration from such established masters in the process of developing his own inner Censor and personal voice.

"Transference," Auden wrote in Berlin in 1929, is "the re-creation of the original attitude of dependence towards parents" (*EA* 299). That he saw Hardy as his "poetic father" is suggested in the title and explained in the body of an essay "A Literary Transference" (1940). There, Auden sets out to characterize the origins of his devoted relation to the late 'parent'.[218] So profound and complex was Hardy's influence on Auden, not only in adolescence, when he was "in love with him,"[219] but throughout the whole life, that a long chapter would be necessary to fully assess its form and reasons. Yet, for the purposes of the present thesis attention is restricted to those aspects concerning topophilia. Written in 1940 when Auden's prose shows repeated attempts to retrospectively assess his interwar years, the essay shows that the joy and respect Auden maintained for Hardy came from the appreciation of his attachment to and "reverence for the enduring earth," and from the "Devotion to place and *pietas.*"[220] In 1949, Auden stated his views more concretely: "Not all, perhaps even few, of the great poets have been topophiles. Dante was; Shakespeare, I think, was not. But topophilia is one of the most characteristic and endearing qualities of Hardy's poetry."[221] Almost duplicating his assessment of Betjeman, Auden esteemed Hardy's devotedness to a locality,

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[216] Auden, "A Literary Transference," *Complete Works II* 43-44.
[217] Wystan Hugh Auden, *Letters from Iceland* (1937; *Complete Works I* 173-382) 332. **All future page references to this edition will be included in parentheses in the text as (*LFI* 332)**.
[218] Auden, "A Literary Transference," *Complete Works II* 48.
[219] Auden, "A Literary Transference," *Complete Works II* 42.
[220] Auden, "A Literary Transference," *Complete Works II* 44; Auden, "Thomas Hardy: An Aspect of his Poetry," *Complete Works III* 679, emphasis original.
[221] Auden, "Thomas Hardy: An Aspect of his Poetry," *Complete Works III* 679.

his power of observation and an acute but unobtrusive visual imagination. Hardy, Auden claims, "does not indulge in description for description's sake – his sense of the significant detail, the row of raindrops on the gatebar, the coppery sea flinging its lazy flounce at the quay, the wagonette in the rain at the crossroads, etc. is unerring."[222] In Auden's view, Hardy had the same ability as Betjeman to notice and transform into a verbal image a publicly inappreciable but personally 'significant detail' expressive of local specificity and subjective experience. This could only be achieved by a 'practiced topophile' busy trying to convey a sense of a unique place and, at the same time, by a poet conjuring up his own mythical geography of numinous landscapes. A symbolic gesture of treasuring Hardy's topophilic devotion to his sacred places in writing is the fact that Auden concluded his Oxford inaugural lecture promoting poetry as a praise of a numinous object with Hardy's poem.

In the late 1960s, Auden wrote that "a poet's hope [is] to be, / Like some valley cheese, / Local, but prized elsewhere" (*CP* 639). His respect for Hardy emerged from reading him as a regional poet because committed to a sacred, "loved and intimately known locality."[223] It was the amount of a personal experience, which he claimed was important for the encounter of a sacred object, that appealed to Auden and convinced him of Hardy's genuine engagement with a provincial life and space from the perspective of an existential insider. In 1940, he recalled that when searching a precedent to follow in the early 1920s, he "might easily have become attached, […], to one or other of the Georgians and learned little, for they were Londoners observing it from the outside."[224] But Hardy qualified more than anyone else because, for Auden, he embodied a poet whose regionalism had been fortified with a direct knowledge of his sacred places.

As noted, as late as 1973, Auden summarized that when he "started to verse, / [he] presently sat at the feet of / *Hardy* and *Thomas* and *Frost*" (*CP* 671, emphasis original). Although Betjeman could not be included within such a triad on the grounds of being Auden's contemporary, an important aspect of Auden's life-long reverence for him was a belief in his equally 'unbiased' regionalism and dedication to suburban regions of Cornwall, East Anglia and North London on the basis of his own childhood experience. Looking back on the undergraduate days at Oxford, in 1959 Auden remarked on Betjeman's exceptional self-knowledge and maturity, which included an early ability to define his own literary precursors and style.[225] To illustrate the claim Auden quotes Betjeman's 1940 "essay on 'Topographical Verse'," and claims that what Betjeman says in it was already known to him

[222] Auden, "Thomas Hardy: An Aspect of his Poetry," *Complete Works III* 679.
[223] Auden, "Thomas Hardy: An Aspect of his Poetry," *Complete Works III* 679.
[224] Auden, "A Literary Transference," *Complete Works II* 45.
[225] Auden, "John Betjeman's Poetic Universe," *Complete Works IV* 216–19.

in the undergraduate days.[226] In this preface Betjeman spells out his literary pantheon occupied by Thomson, Dyer, Shenstone, Cowper and other English poets, whose poetry has "topographical atmosphere." He also mentions his fondness for contemporary "topographical descriptions in verse published locally at Plymouth, Barnstaple, Ipswich or Northampton, Mullingar, Cork, Dublin, Galway."[227] Besides topophilia and acute sense for detail, Auden's apotheosis of Hardy and Betjeman was partly caused by the satisfaction he derived from their prolongation into the twentieth century of the long trajectory of local, topographical verse, while attending little to what he called "'Modern poetry', the ancestors of which were the English metaphysicals and the French *Symbolistes*."[228]

2.2. W.H. Auden's Emotional Compass and Mythical Geography

A long time before Auden discovered the sacred worlds of Betjeman and Hardy, he compiled and treasured a particularized private 'list' of numinous places and landscapes. As noted in the previous chapter, various cosmological and secular schemata convince Yi-Fu Tuan that the stratification of space into cardinal directions imbued with different values is among the most common forms of a human response to the homogeneous and neutral spatial continuum.[229] Auden manifests this claim fully because an important part of his acute spatial awareness is a clearly articulated set of associations with the cardinal points and the North-South and East-West axes. In his 1947 article "I like It Cold", he claims: "my feelings have been oriented by the compass as far back as I can remember" and he goes on to define the South, North and, to a lesser extent, the remaining points, as foci of concrete and contrasting values and emotions.[230] For Auden, the South represents heat, light, drought, agricultural plains, trees, rotarian crowds, Greek literature, houses with large open windows, publicity, the life of ignoble ease, waste of time and moral decay. The North, on the other hand, means cold, wind, precipices, glaciers, caves, heroic conquests of dangerous obstacles, Norse mythology, whales as well as houses with protective thick walls and small windows providing privacy.[231] This summary reveals the extent to which the South and North stood against each other in Auden's imagination not only in the geographical sense, but also in terms of ethical significance. Throughout his life, the North towered superciliously over the South as a privileged spatial segment imbued with morally and aesthetically superior values. In "The Sacred Cold" (1958) Auden uses the first-person plural in order to speak on behalf of an

[226] In fact, this is Betjeman's preface to his *Old Lights for New Chancels* (1940). Auden used an extract from it and placed it after his own introduction to *Slick but not Streamlined.*
[227] Qtd. in Auden, "John Betjeman's Poetic Universe," *Complete Works IV* 216.
[228] Auden, "John Betjeman's Poetic Universe," *Complete Works IV* 216-17, emphasis original.
[229] Tuan, *Topophilia* 15-29.
[230] Auden, "I like It Cold," *Complete Works II* 335.
[231] Auden, "I like It Cold," *Complete Works II* 335.

imagined community for whose members "the Polar Regions are numinous places which our imaginations worship with religious awe so that any scrap of information fascinates us."[232] Auden felt so strongly about the North that he found in its climate two sacred locations embodying his idea of the 'dream home' and *Eutopia*, the 'Good Place': the Northern Pennines and Iceland. This chapter outlines the character, origin and reasons for Auden's readiness to imbue these locations with such superlative values.

2.2.1. The Sacred Limestone

"North, north, north" are the opening words of Auden's 1935 poem "Night Mail" – his contribution to a film of the same name made in 1936 by the Film Units of the General Post Office about the postal train between Euston and Glasgow. The repetition of 'North' in the first line may be taken as a symbolic gesture of Auden's consistent, abundant and life-long encomiastic attitude to Northern England. In his childhood, Auden recalled in 1947, "the North of England was the Never-Never Land of my dreams. […] to this day Crewe Junction marks the wildly exciting *frontier* where the alien South ends and the North, my world, begins."[233] Auden uses the word 'frontier' and, alluding to J.M. Barrie's fantasy setting Neverland, signals that there was for him in the North a perennial superior private world differentiated by an ideal border from the alien South. In its centre were the Northern Pennines, a region of limestone landscape stretching from Hadrian's Wall to the River Tees. In all his writing, Auden, so pedantic about naming aptly, used the word 'love' in connection with only one location and its geology: that of Alston Moor in the Northern Pennines.[234]

When Auden states his affinity to the area, he recalls Tuan's claim that humans do not only stratify space ideally, but also exaggerate and imagine the properties of the object of their topophilic sentiment in superlative terms. In his description of the Northern Pennines, Auden can indeed sound prodigal and hyperbolic, even possessive. For example, in "England: Six Unexpected Days" (1954), he devises a questionnaire asking a prospective tourist to England about their "conception of Eden, [their] Innocent Place where no contradiction has yet arisen between the demands of Pleasure and the demands of Duty." He provides an illustrative answer and claims that in his case it is the landscape of "the Pennines, that chain of limestone hills which runs due North up the centre of England from Derbyshire to

[232] Auden, "The Sacred Cold," *Complete Works IV* 173.
[233] Auden, "I like It Cold," *Complete Works II* 335, emphasis added. Crewe Junction is located to the south of Manchester and is known as 'the gate' for the Northwest of England.
[234] See for example his *New Year Letter* (1940, *Collected Poems* 182).

Northumberland."[235] Trying to explain his reasons for such an attitude, Auden is seized between two contrasting compulsions:

> On the one hand I want all *worthy* people to agree with me about their beauty; on the other, I have a feeling of personal possession which makes me jealously afraid of *unworthy* or *unappreciative* intruders. It is not an area for those who like their landscape cozy. To qualify, one must have a proper moral sense about the points of the compass; North must seem the "good direction, […] South the way to ignoble ease and decadence.[236]

Clearly, Auden echoes "I Like It Cold" in terms of the moral significance of the cardinal points and the superiority of the North. The group of attributes and values ascribed to the Pennines are those Tuan believes humans maintain with regard to locations that become sacred, homely and surrounded by an inferior periphery. Auden turns the region, whose heart is incidentally formed by the Eden Valley and the River Eden, into such a superior centre encircled by profane space. Moreover, the dialectical pairs 'worthy/unworthy' and 'appreciative/unappreciative' bespeak his possessive willingness to segment space and divide people according to their sense of the locality. In Auden's interpretation, the Northern Pennines are not only the 'Backbone of England', as they are commonly referred to.[237] They also form the linchpin of his private and privileged sacred world that should be protected against unworthy 'sacrilegious' intruders and tourists.[238]

Auden's positioning of his *locus amoenus* and "Mutterland"[239] in the Northern Pennines, as well as his grudge against the South, may seem to ensue from the more general predilections and dislikes of his generation. His fondness of the industrial sites around Birmingham and the disused lead-mining areas of the Pennines echo the penchant of the Pylon School poets for industrial imagery as much as the subject of George Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) and several other 1930s works. An analysis of such an attraction would draw the present discussion to the social concerns: the focus of middle-class interwar intellectuals "on the troubled and decaying industries of the north" and, as Peter Davidson suggests, to the problematic of their distrust towards the preference of the previous generations of the French Riviera and the European South.[240] Yet, if Auden's adult recollections can be trusted, his was a fondness predating such a tendency because rooted in

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[235] Auden, "England: Six Unexpected Days," *Complete Works III* 431.
[236] Auden, "England: Six Unexpected Days," *Complete Works III* 431, emphasis added.
[237] See for example William Arthur Poucher, *The Backbone of England. A Photographic and Descriptive Guide to the Pennine Range from Derbyshire to Durham* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2008).
[238] The same posture of defence with respect to the public who enter one's ideal landscape informs the end of Auden's "Lakes" (1953), the fourth part of *Bucolics*, where he alludes to Wordsworth and says: "Liking one's Nature, as lake-lovers do, benign / Goes with a wish for savage dogs and man traps" (*CP* 431).
[239] In 1948, Auden is reported to have written a letter to Elizabeth Mayer claiming that the Pennines were his 'Mutterland' (Alan Myers, "Auden in the North," *The Myers Project,* 2004 <http://www.sclews.me.uk/myers.html>, 2 September 2012).
[240] Peter Davidson, *The Idea of the North* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2005) 83-84. See also Paul Fussell, *Abroad: British Literary Traveling between the Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

childhood. “From the age of four to thirteen [1911-1920],” notes Auden in his unfinished pensée *The Prolific and the Devourer* during the summer 1939, “I had a series of passionate love affairs with pictures of, to me, particularly attractive water-turbines, winding-engines, roller crushers, etc. and I was never so emotionally happy as when I was underground.”[241] Auden often decried an early interest in imaginative literature. Yet, his own imagination was fully at work because with such objects he constructed a private sacred world: “Until my sixteenth year I read no poetry. Brought up in a family which was more scientific than literary, I had been the sole autocratic inhabitant of a dream country of lead mines, narrow-gauge tramways, and overshot waterwheels” taken from the Pennines.[242]

Auden’s topophilic sentiment for the area and its landscape was first and foremost based on mediated means and it was attracted by one particular local place. His childhood fascination with the Pennines was triggered and nurtured by his father Dr George Augustus Auden. He earned a first-class Cambridge degree in natural sciences and published several articles in the field in the prestigious journal *Nature*. Although Dr Auden also trained in medicine and became Professor of Public Health at Birmingham University, his keen interest in geology and mining remained. Most importantly, it was transposed onto his sons John Bicknell Auden (1903–1991) and Wystan. A few weeks after his arrival in New York in 1939, Wystan Hugh Auden recalled the following childhood experience:

> Perhaps I always knew what they were saying:
> Even the early messengers who walked
> Into my life from books where they were staying,
> Those beautiful machines that never talked
> But let the small boy *worship* them and learn
> All their long names whose hardness made him proud;
> Love was the word they never said aloud. (*CP* 203, emphasis added)

Dr Auden did not only supply his sons with plentiful ‘non-literary’ texts on medicine and psychology, but also with an extensive library with illustrated books on geology, mining and its machinery rather than prose fiction or poetry. In 1956, Auden specified that his private world was based on childhood reading of “*Underground Life* [1869], *Machinery for Metalliferous Mines* [1894], *Lead and Zinc Ores of Northumberland and Alston Moor* [1923].” These and other titles gave him the opportunity to “gain knowledge of [his] sacred objects.”[243] In his lecture “Fantasy and Reality in Poetry” read to the members of the Freud Society in 1971, Auden recalled using this knowledge for “constructing a private secondary

[241] Auden, *The Prolific and the Devourer*, *Complete Works II* 415.
[242] Auden, “A Literary Transference,” *Complete Works II* 42.
[243] Auden, “Making, Knowing and Judging,” *Complete Works IV* 479.

sacred world," whose basic elements were the limestone landscape of the Pennines and its disused mining machinery.[244]

Only later – in a period immediately after the Great War – was Auden's knowledge of his sacred world enriched with a direct encounter. In 1908, one year after his birth, Auden's parents moved from York to Birmingham. When Dr Auden enlisted in the Royal Army Medical Corps in 1914, his wife brought the sons to Bradwell in Derbyshire. This was about four miles to the southeast of Edale in Peak District, which, in the 1930s, became the starting point of the Pennine Way – a national trail cutting through Yorkshire Dales, Hadrian's Wall, Northumberland and ending in Kirk Yetholm on the Scottish Border. It was there, close to the beginning of the 'Backbone of England', that the adolescent Auden enriched his mediated knowledge and topophilic sentiments with a direct experience of the local landscape, which he was to reverence through the rest of his life. Auden's biographer Richard Davenport-Hines informs about his 1940s correspondence with Dr Auden, in which the father recalls organizing numerous exploratory trips for his sons Wystan and John through the Pennines and its lead-mining villages.[245] The father's attraction to the region is evidenced by the fact that soon after returning from the front, he acquired a cottage 'Far Wescoe' near Threlkeld, some thirty miles to the west of Alston Moor. Following the death of his wife in 1941, the cottage became Dr Auden's major resting place. Wystan Hugh Auden frequently returned there on a visit even when living in the USA and Ischia, and his 'homecoming' has a concrete reason. The limestone sediments and disused mines hidden under Alston Moor's undulating landscape, which visited for the first time in 1919 during the family trips, was the exclusive centre of his mythical geography of sacred places.[246]

Dr Auden kindled and nurtured in Wystan Hugh Auden such a fascination with mines, limestone and geology that when he came to Oxford in 1925, it was with the intention to pursue a career in mining and engineering. However, Auden set off in an opposite direction from his father and brother John, who had a childhood desire to be a poet but abandoned his wish and became a dedicated and successful land surveyor.[247] Wystan forsook his early plans too. Soon after arriving at Oxford, he switched from natural sciences to literature. Gradually, he grew into a poet of a stature and recognition comparable with his brother's in geology. However, his early interest in the earth, landscape and minerals remained and so did his

[244] Wystan Hugh Auden, "Fantasy and Reality in Poetry," *In solitude, for company: W.H. Auden after 1940: Unpublished Prose, and Criticism*, eds. Katherine Bucknell and Nicholas Jenkins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 186.
[245] Richard Davenport-Hines, *Auden* (London: Heinemann, 1995) 21.
[246] Auden, "Fantasy and Reality in Poetry" 191.
[247] John Auden studied geology at Cambridge and then spent ten years as a land surveyor in the Himalayas. He learnt to fly and, after 1939, made reconnaissance flights over Indian unmapped territories (Davenport-Hines 12-13).

devotion and topophilic predilection for Alston Moor. As noted, an Ordnance map of the sacred region hung in his shack on Fire Island and then in the Austrian house in Kirchstetten.

During Auden's childhood, the carpentered landscape of Alston Moor was already littered with disused mines and dilapidated machinery evidencing the demise of the Victorian lead-mining industry. It was the incarnation of a publicly unattractive, humanized and historicized landscape which, as a type, he later purported to possess the capacity to elicit topophilic sentiments. Indeed, for the humanist geographer, Auden's exalting tone manifests a strong emotional bond between an individual and place as well as their propensity to treat locations, regardless of architectural distinctiveness or public importance, in superlative terms as superior, privileged and sacred. Yet, besides the humanized character, it was the desertedness of the landscape that played a substantial role in the accretion of Auden's topophilic sentiment and his sanctification of the region. In his Freud Society lecture, Auden recalls that his sacred limestone world was humanized but uninhabited: "of this constructed world I was the only human inhabitant. Although I equipped my mines with the most elaborate machinery, I never imagined any miners. Indeed when I visited real mining areas, I preferred abandoned mines to working ones."[248] In autobiographical parts of his prose, Auden often attends to his early lackadaisical attitude to the world of people. In 1939, he recollected that as a child he "was interested almost exclusively in mines and their machinery" and that "an interest in people did not begin until adolescence."[249] One year later, he tried to expose the rationale behind such a clear-cut preference and recalled that his life of an unhappy and unpopular introvert pupil in the shadow of the successful extroverts made him seek a better environment elsewhere. He claimed that such a person, "unable to imagine a society in which he would feel at home, […] turns away from the human to the non-human: homesick he will seek, not his mother, but mountains or autumn woods."[250] More than thirty years later, he was still prepared to claim in "Thanksgiving" (1973) that "When pre-pubescent [he] felt / that moorlands and woodlands were sacred: / people seemed rather profane" (*CP* 671). Humanized but austere and desolate, the limestone region of the Northern Pennines provided Auden with a version of an unpeopled landscape, and so with a sacred asylum for his physical and imaginative escapades from the profane communal life and humanity. To Auden, the Pennine slopes and valleys embodied his idea of Eden. His use above of the word 'worship' in relation to this landscape implies reverence and devotion that such a sacred place deserves.

[248] Auden, "Fantasy and Reality in Poetry" 187.
[249] Auden, *The Prolific and the Devourer*, *Complete Works II* 414.
[250] Auden, "A Literary Transference," *Complete Works II* 43.

Indeed, the encomiastic tone is evident in a 1939 poem, where he claims that when he was "hunt[ing] the Good Place, / Abandoned leadmines let themselves be caught" (*CP* 203).

2.2.2. Iceland as an Island with a Halo

Alston Moor was not the only 'island' of sacredness that attracted Auden's topophilic devotion and that qualified for a position on his list of numinous and unique places surrounded by profane regions. It had to share such a privileged status with another location and island proper – Iceland. Its landscape and culture too held a powerful sway over his imagination already in childhood and adolescence and, as numerous essays and reviews reveal, it also remained his life-long sacred lodestone. Three decades after his first stay in Iceland in 1936, Auden returned for a brief visit in 1964. He described the experience thus:

> For me personally, it was a joy to discover that, despite everything which has happened to Iceland and myself since my first visit, the feelings it aroused were the same. In my childhood dreams Iceland was *holy ground*; when at the age of twenty-nine, I saw it for the first time, the reality verified my dream; at fifty-seven it was holy ground still.[251]

The reasons for such a perception of Iceland as a holy ground and the forces informing its status of a *locus amoenus* only partly overlap with those concerning Alston Moor. Auden's topophilic sentiments for the island too emerged early in his life primarily on the basis of imagination and vicarious knowledge. It was only later that such forms of apprehension were complemented with a direct and sensuous experience during his two trips (1936 and 1964). More than anyone else, two men were responsible for sparking off Auden's infatuation. Triggered in childhood by his father's passion for the island, its sagas and Norse myths, it was fuelled in the 1920s by J.R.R. Tolkien's Oxford lectures and poetry readings. In correspondence with Auden's above-mentioned differentiation between the cold northern and warm southern regions and their literature, it was the father who set in motion the poet's literary preferences. "Some of the most vivid recollections of my childhood," Auden wrote in 1936, "are hearing him read to me Icelandic folktales and sagas, and I know more about Northern mythology than Greek" (*LFI* 336). Dr Auden was so fascinated with the place that he even traced his family name back to Icelandic origins, and so undoubtedly assisted in Auden's own imagining of the island as his ancestral home ground. In *Letter to Lord Byron* the poet relies on this information and remarks: "My name occurs in several of the sagas, / Is common over Iceland still" (*LFI* 327). The fact that the first edition of *Letters from Iceland*

[251] Auden, "Foreword," *Letters from Iceland*, 2nd ed., 1967, *Complete Works I* 801, emphasis added. In 1963, Auden's partner Chester Kallman broke their common annual pattern, maintained since the late 1940s, consisting in spending the summers in Europe, first in Ischia, later in Austria, and winters in New York. Kallman decided to leave New York permanently and winter in Greece without Auden. As Richard Davenport-Hines informs, Auden's trip to Iceland in April 1964 was instigated by a desire to escape the misery of loneliness in the USA before reuniting with Kallman in Kirschtetten in May of the same year (314).

(1937), whose inseparable part this long poem forms, was dedicated to Dr Auden seems a due expression of the son's gratitude. Besides, J.R.R. Tolkien had at least a twofold influence on Auden in the 1920s. With his 1920s Oxford readings of Old English poetry, Tolkien whetted Auden's budding northerly literary appetites and inspired the novice poet to use alliterative stress and images derived from Old English literature in numerous 1930s poems. A tribute to him was paid in 1954. Auden wrote two laudatory reviews of his Middle-earth novels and defended in them the importance of fantasy literature.[252] Also, in 1969 he cooperated with Paul Taylor and Peter Salus on a translation of *The Elder Edda*, a collection of Icelandic poems and prose, dedicated to the Oxford Professor.

Yet, the values that Auden associated with Iceland, and which informed his topophilic sentiments for it, also closely reflect his awareness of a traditional western conceptualization of an island as an environmental type and literary topos. Yi-Fu Tuan reminds us that islands and valleys are among the most typical forms of imaging the environmental ideal. Historically, valleys and basins have attracted agricultural and sedentary life. Their fertile soil, access to fresh water and protective concavity have the potential to satisfy basic existential needs, which has contributed to imagining them as life-nurturing wombs, shelters and places of contact with the Mother Earth. Contrary to this, the "tenacious hold" that islands have had on human imagination, Tuan claims, rests not in their existential importance and role in "man's evolutionary past," but in "the imaginative realm."[253] The island, like the seashore, too provides safety and protection from the surrounding unpredictable forces, tempests and surf. Yet, because for most western people it is located in the mythical zone outside their quotidian lifespace, it has frequently instigated associations with the ideas of a distant adventure and, most frequently, with purity. Besides Christianity, Tuan presents other cosmogonic myths purporting to associate the appearance of life with landmass emerging amidst a primordial water chaos. Also, he recounts the historical perception of the island in Elysian terms from the medieval legends, in which seafaring heroes search and discover "insular paradises of blissful ease and abundance," through the original European perception of the New World as "isles of innocence," all the way to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Nowadays, islands are still commonly marketed and perceived in paradisaic terms for their capacity to offer a relief from the chaos and disorder, albeit of civilizational rather than watery character. As already noted, the tourist industry thrives on promoting the idea of uniqueness, authenticity and Otherness. In this type of discourse, an insular place commonly acquires an unmatched aura of original and unspoilt purity lost elsewhere. It becomes a refuge for seekers of temporary escapism

[252] These were J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Fellowship of the Rings* and *The Two Towers.*
[253] Tuan, *Topophilia* 118.

from the quotidian existence and lifespace. In general, the island, Tuan notes, "symbolizes a state of prelapsarian innocence and bliss, quarantined from the ills of the continent."[254] Undoubtedly, the major factor of such imagining emerges from the protective physical detachedness and the clear-cut visible borderline separating the self-enclosed island from the surrounding sea space and other territories. Remoteness and insularity serve as barriers against the peripheral world extending beyond the sea horizon. Island as an environmental type gains its idealized perception from solitariness, isolation (island – *isola*) and from its ubiety in the mythical zone approached as superior by existential outsiders.

The island and its historical perception received plentiful attention from Auden both in his prose and verse. Besides frequently employing insular images in 1930s poems discussed below in Chapters Five and Six, and in poetry written in later periods, Auden the critic addressed the literary image of the island explicitly in "The Sea and the Desert" – the first of his three Page-Barbour Lectures delivered at the University of Virginia in March 1949 and published the following year under the title *The Enchafèd Flood: Or the Romantic Iconography of the Sea*.[255] Their overall design is to assess the nature of the shift from the Classical to the Romantic aesthetic. In the first lecture Auden displays the importance he was willing to ascribe to the embedment of spatial images in literary texts. To accomplish his mission, he examines a contrasting treatment of the island and sea by authors representing the two aesthetic milieus.

For Classical authors, Auden argues, "the sea or the great waters, that is, are the symbol for the primordial undifferentiated flux, the substance which became created nature only by having form imposed upon or wedded to it."[256] Like Tuan, Auden draws attention to ancient narratives and reminds his readers that The Book of Genesis and the Greek myth of Eros fashion the sea as a chaotic "state of barbaric vagueness and disorder out of which civilisation has emerged and into which, unless saved by the effort of gods and men, it is always liable to relapse."[257] To support his claim that in the Classical imagination to be at sea is contrary to the natural state of mankind, Auden makes a passing reference to the opening lines of "A Grave" by his favourite Marianne Moore: "As to the sea, the classical authors would have agreed with Marianne Moore. 'It is human nature to stand in the middle of a thing; But you cannot stand in the middle of this.'"[258] Consequently, echoing the above claims concerning the city as the

[254] Tuan, *Topophilia* 118.
[255] The other two lectures are "The Stone and the Shell", referring to another antithetical cluster, and "Ishmael-Don Quixote".
[256] Wystan Hugh Auden, *The Enchafèd Flood: Or the Romantic Iconography of the Sea* (1950; New York: Random House, 1967) 6.
[257] Auden, *Enchafèd Flood* 6.
[258] Auden, *Enchafèd Flood* 7. Auden praised Marianne Moore generously. See "Marianne Moore, Bless Her!" and "A Marianne Moore Reader" (*Complete Works IV* 226–29, 392-94).

most natural human habitat, Auden adds: "When society is normal, the image is the City or the Garden. That is where people want and ought to be."[259]

Yet, when such places of stability constructed and controlled by man become unsatisfactory and when they fail to cater for human needs, Auden continues, the ship must be embarked and the sea endured in order to arrive at a superior place. His conclusion is that in Classical and medieval texts, such as the Anglo-Saxon poems, a voyage across the sea implies "a necessary evil, a crossing of that which separates or estranges" man from a less sinister environment and which promises the arrival at a Good Place or home.[260] Hence, Auden asserts, traversing the sea in pre-eighteenth century literature is frequently an involuntary act. It allows the subject to suffer and undergo purgatorial cleansing. In order to illustrate his claim that Shakespeare forms a bridge between the Classical and Romantic sensibility, Auden draws attention to his diverse treatment of the sea in early and late plays, which, he believes, are symptomatic of the process. No longer purely negative and destructive, the crossing of the sea in *The Tempest* "is a pain which must be accepted as cure, the death that leads to rebirth, in order that the abiding city may be built. Deliberately to seek the exile is still folly."[261]

As shown, Yi-Fu Tuan noticed that environmental types imagined as dialectically opposed (e.g. 'nature/culture') can undergo the reversal of their values. The 'still' in the above assessment of the *Tempest* signals Auden's cogitation that in the work of Romantic writers the sea and the city exchanged qualities. The former came to embody a place of freedom and a symbol of the "true condition of man," the lonely seeker.[262] In an unduly simplified manner, Auden adds that the latter becomes a site of social restrictions to escape from in search of freedom offered by the sea. "Man marks the earth with ruin – his control / Stops with the shore," quotes Auden from Lord Byron's *Childe Harold Pilgrimage* in support of his claim that the sea is uninhabited and unpossessed, not carpentered by constructing, not expressive of changes and human history, and so free and unrestricted by human law.[263] It is the antipode to the humanized landscape bearing relics of human existence. Auden claims that like the desert, the sea in the Romantic imagination is a welcome form of natural wilderness allowing

[259] Auden, *Enchafèd Flood* 7.
[260] Auden, *Enchafèd Flood* 7.
[261] Auden, *Enchafèd Flood* 11. That Auden chose *The Tempest* is not at all surprising. It is evident from his lecture "The Tempest", delivered at the New School for Social Research on 7 May 1947, that Auden approached Shakespeare's late play with a great respect as a mythopoeic work inspiring literary responses and adaptations (Wystan Hugh Auden, *Lectures on Shakespeare*, ed. and reconstr. by Arthur Kirsch [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002] 296–307). Indeed, when making such claims, *The Tempest* had already become the main inspiration for Auden's long poem "The Sea and the Mirror" written between 1942 and 1944.
[262] Auden, *Enchafèd Flood* 12.
[263] Auden, *Enchafèd Flood* 15.

solitariness, relief from communal existence and purification through the purgation of sins or a contact with higher forces allowing the attainment of superior being.[264]

In his taxonomy, Auden positions the sea and the desert antithetically against the "happy island" and "oasis or rose garden," respectively. Like the city, these are "enclosed place[s] of safety," and like the sea and the desert, they offer "a solitary or private place from which the general public are excluded."[265] The combination of seclusion and exclusion of the public recalls Auden's unkindness above to tourists entering the Northern Pennines. More importantly, however, it encourages him to claim that in the Classical imagination, the island is associated with a cluster of meanings, mainly those of innocence and desireless being. Protected by the sea from the inhabited and humanized continental landmass, the island is a sanctuary of existence still unburdened by civilization and so by a conflict between private and public interests. The island-garden offers a place for escapes into a location

> [w]here the writ of the law does not run. The primary idea with which the garden-island image is associated is, therefore, neither justice [as in the city] nor chastity [as in the desert and the sea] but innocence; it is the earthly paradise where there is no conflict between natural desire and moral duty.[266]

Auden concludes that while symbolizing the same idea of an original purity, Romantic authors commonly associate such a "happy Prelapsarian Place" with a mirage and illusion. It is charged with hopeless nostalgia and therefore used rarely because the only place that exists is "the Trivial Unhappy Unjust City, the desert of the average from which the only escape is to the wild, lonely, but still vital sea."[267]

Auden distinguished Eden and "a prelapsarian Arcadia" from New Jerusalem and "post-judgement-day Utopia" in terms of the past and the future, the origin and the goal, respectively. In the former, the conflict between private interests of an individual and their public obligations "has not arisen yet," while in the latter it "has at last been solved."[268] As noted, in 1954, he asked for people's conception of Eden, their innocent place 'Good Place' spared from this contradiction "between the demands of Pleasure and the demands of Duty."[269] In fact, the lack of such a conflict is echoed in the previous paragraph with respect to the island *topos*. In his prose, Auden treats Iceland as the sacred and innocent place in consequence of his association with it qualities remarkably redolent of those typifying the Classical perception of the *topos*. Iceland's insularity and remoteness quarantine its original, Arcadian purity and innocence. The island is presented as a purer alternative and asylum to

[264] Auden, *Enchafèd Flood* 17.
[265] Auden, *Enchafèd Flood* 20.
[266] Auden, *Enchafèd Flood* 20.
[267] Auden, *Enchafèd Flood* 25.
[268] Auden, "Qui èl'uom' felice, or Everyman in his Eden," *Complete Works III* 569.
[269] Auden, "England: Six Unexpected Days," *Complete Works III* 431.

those escaping from the civilizational clutter, crowdedness, restrictiveness and profaneness of Europe or from other antithetically positioned inhabited regions.

To Auden, Iceland's insularity offered desired privacy. As already claimed, he despised the southern climate because its heat and large windows attracted 'rotarian crowds' and instigated publicity. It is well known among Auden scholars that, fascinated with mines and caves, the poet preferred the privacy of dark rooms and the weight of several duvets in sleep. He reverenced the North because its bleak weather and austere inhospitable landscape provided an environment for the one half of his character relishing in solitariness:

> […] if […] your temperament, like mine, is of the kind that prefers your own company or the company of one other to the company of several; if, when you go for a walk, you prefer the countryside to be uninhabited, except for yourself and your companion […] then you are probably, like me, a cold weather man.[270]

Auden 'the cold weather man' reverenced Iceland's insularity and its austere northerly landscape for their capacity to provide such conditions. "The fact is, I'm in Iceland all alone," wrote Auden in an exalting tone shortly after his first arrival there and added that "home is miles away, and miles away / No matter who, and I am quite alone" (*LFI* 180). Besides being physically removed from his homeland and interwar Europe, he also enjoyed the communicative barrier caused by his inability to speak with the local inhabitants: "here I've found no tutor / No sleeping lexicon to make me cuter" (*LFI* 180).[271]

Almost twenty years after Auden spent Christmas in Berlin in 1928, he recalled the coldest experience of his life. The month's allowance spent, friends to borrow from out of town, he "passed the days with [his] feet upon the very inadequate tiled stove, reading *War and Peace* for the first time, cold, hungry and very happy." This memory is contrasted with that of the scorching summer of 1944 spent in New York City: "I had money, friends, an electric fan, a shower, a refrigerator. I lay in stupor wishing I were dead."[272] While this citation further illustrates Auden's predilection for the cold northern climate and aloneness, it also displays his preference of simplicity and austerity, as well as contempt for technological progress and material lavishness. As mentioned, in his prose Auden presents the Northern Pennines as a privileged centre in need of protection from 'sacrilegious' intruders. To the reactionary side of his personality, Iceland's insularity protected the island from the intrusion of excessive modernity affecting European countries and diminishing the borders separating

[270] Auden, "I Like It Cold," *Complete Works II* 335. Paul Beekman Taylor speaks about Auden's 'chronic sensitivity to his own isolation and exile' and Auden's love of old English poems like *The Wanderer* which are centred on the idea of exile and aloneness ("Auden's Icelandic Myth of Exile," *Journal of Modern Literature* 24.2 [Winter 2000-2001]: 213, *JSTOR* <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3831908>, 5 July 2012).

[271] This is Auden's very early mention of his view of language as a communicative barrier isolating an individual from other people and animals, which is one of the recurring themes of his later poetry.

[272] Auden, "I Like It Cold," *Complete Works II* 334.

them. His brief observation that Iceland is a country with "handsome scenery / But little agricultural machinery" (*LFI* 208) is but one example of reading into its landscape preserved natural simplicity, idealized rural life and traditional local culture lost elsewhere. This is one of the essential attributes of his conservative idea of Eden, where there should be, "Horses and horse-drawn vehicles" but no "automobiles or airplanes" or other modern inventions catering for an international exchange and homogenization.[273]

For Auden, Iceland embodied a welcome 'purer' and more stable alternative to Europe, whose changing geographical and cultural landscapes were causing great distress to him. The poet perceived such processes as detrimental to the local *genii loci* of individual countries. Being one of the first poems drafted after his arrival in Iceland, Part I of *Letter to Lord Byron* formulates the concern thus:

> Go down by chara' to the Sussex Downs,
> Watch the manoeuvres of the week-end hikers
> Massed on parade with Kodaks and Leicas.
>
> These movements signify our old-age rule
> Of insularity has lost its powers;
> The cult of salads and the swimming pool
> Comes from climate sunnier than ours,
> And lands which never heard of licensed hours.
> The south of England before very long
> Will look no different from the Continong. (*LFI* 210)

Perhaps intensified by his initial enthusiasm tinting the perception of Iceland on arrival, Auden does not only implicitly contrast Iceland with the South of England presented, in a bitter satirical tone, as an example of the 'decadent' south. Taking the advantage of being distant from home, thus 'looking' at it from the 'outside', he also portrays Sussex as a place beginning to be affected by technological modernity, international exchange and dynamism reminiscent of his above-mentioned view of New York. By doing so, Auden clearly touches upon one of the major causes of his long-term disquiet – the undergoing transformation of western national cultures into homogenized and placeless international wholes.

Auden's 1930s prose already reveals a personal relish in cultural diversity alongside a strong grudge against an internationalized landscape. In 1936, he lamented that "the days of national culture are over" (*LFI* 340). Indeed, in the above lines, the cuisine and forms of leisure in England are read as early signs of such a malignant influx into a traditional insular and national culture of foreign influences from the 'Continong'. Contrary to this, his adult

[273] Auden, "Reading," *Complete Works IV* 460. This quotation forms a part of Auden's definition of Eden in which he includes several other aspects such as architecture, economic activities, religion, language, etc. In a simplified form his answers were first published in "Qui èl'uom' felice" in 1955. They were extended in "Reading" written at the end of the 1950s or early 1960s for the *Dyer's Hand* (1962).

fondness for Iceland was still largely based on a proclaimed belief in a perpetuating pre-modern and national character protected by physical remoteness. Revisiting Iceland in 1964, almost thirty years after his first trip, Auden could still claim that it is a country where "modernity does not seem to have changed the character of the inhabitants." Quite typically for his style, such views are expanded to social issues: the Icelanders "are still the only really classless society [he has] ever encountered."[274] This hierarchical superposition is echoed in a poem of the same date called "Iceland Revisited": "Fortunate island, / Where all men are equal, / But not vulgar – not yet" (*CP* 547).

Hence, besides the myths and poetry, which haunted Auden's childhood imagination and to which he was introduced by Dr Auden and J.R.R. Tolkien, a crucial factor informing his topophilic sentiment for this sacred place was reading into the island a multiform uniqueness and *genius loci*. In his imagination, Auden turned Iceland's insularity and remoteness into a reliable border – the rudimantary attribute of the idea of place – protecting the inside from external international influences and placelessness. Throughout his life, these geographical features formed a barrier preserving local pre-modern simplicity, stillness, specific customs, lifestyle, literature and an austere landscape bestowed "with the most magical light of anywhere on earth."[275] Auden's infatuation with Iceland was so profound that he regarded it as his potential home and asylum, where he could lead a simple idyllic life. "Should circumstances ever drive me, like Ovid, into exile," he claimed, "I shall retire […] to Isafjőrthur, a little fishing town in Northwest Iceland at the bottom of a grim fjord where the sun is not seen for five months in the year. There, […] I shall eat, fish, play the phonograph and die in the greatest contentment."[276] Auden wrote these idyllic lines in December 1947, just a few months before embarking upon the first of his extensive stays in Europe. During this journey, Auden found a new home. It was also in a seaside fishing town and also on the northwest coast of an island, yet a different one: in Forio, Ischia, located in the abhorred South abounding in sunshine and rotarian crowds. In all his life, Auden visited Iceland twice: in 1936 and 1964. Yet, he never turned it into a home. It stayed outside his existential centre, hence in the mythical periphery prone to idealizing, where it remained to emit the most magical light on Earth as a halo of local sacredness.

[274] Auden, "Foreword," *Letters from Iceland*, 2nd ed., 1967, *Complete Works I* 801.
[275] Auden, "Foreword," *Letters from Iceland*, 2nd ed., 1967, *Complete Works I* 801.
[276] Auden, "I Like It Cold," *Complete Works II* 336. Auden's spelling of Isafjőrthur is not consistent (also Isafjőrdur).

2.2.3. "England, my England – you have been my tutrix"

Unlike Iceland, England was Auden's homeland and existential zone. Although not hallowed, it also received apotheosis. Auden read it as unique and superior, which, as shown, is a common sense of place held by existential insiders *vis-à-vis* their home ground.

As noted above, Auden wrote of the archetype of a voyage across the sea in terms of a necessary evil, a crossing which *separates* and *estranges*, and as a temporary state that must be endured in order to arrive at a better place. In Southampton on 19 January 1939, Auden embarked the *Chaplain* and sailed across the Atlantic towards his exile in the USA. He undertook a journey separating him from Britain, his homeland, where he was born and where he spent his childhood, adolescence and most of his adult life prior to emigration.[277] The departure did not only announce Auden's estrangement from the 1930s poets and his interwar aesthetic. It also signalled a pattern characteristic of his itinerant, 'unhoused' life after 1939. He spent the majority of the following thirty-four years cyclically peregrinating between New York and several places in Europe, especially Ischia and Austria – his summer retreats.

Yet, the transatlantic journey did not estrange Auden from his home island completely. His post-English life does not only abound in frequent physical returns, especially to the family cottage in Threlkeld and, later, to Oxford as a Professor of Poetry, but also in an unflagging intellectual and affective engagement with his homeland throughout the American, Italian and Austrian phases. Auden's prose was written by an omnivorous reader attracted to and reflecting upon an impressively broad palette of world-wide issues and fields – psychology, anthropology, politics, economy, medicine and, of course, literature. Yet, amidst the totality of his post-1939 output exceeding five thousand pages, there is an unprecedented number of essays on a variety of social, cultural and political issues concerning England, its culture and landscape. They are interspersed with lectures, reviews and published radio talks on Shakespeare, Tennyson, Browning and other writers, which evidences his unquenchable focus on English culture, geography, etc. It is clear that besides the internationalist airs of Auden the world traveller, it is possible to discern a contrasting aspect in his post-English phase. Instead of estranging, the settlement in America made Auden's awareness of England crystallized and his sense of place more affective than in earlier years. This manifests Tuan's claim about the power of distance to elicit an intense and more conscious response to homeland.

[277] In 1928, Auden graduated from Oxford. Offered by the parents to spend a year abroad, Berlin seemed to him an alternative to Paris, which he associated with the previous generation. He stayed in Berlin until May or June 1929. Yet, the reasons for choosing this city were more complex than Auden states because they were also related to his sexual orientation and associating with Germany "forbidden pleasures" (Auden, "England and Europe," *Complete Works IV* 442).

After more than twenty years of a 'nomadic' existence and living in the USA, Italy and Austria, Auden still identified himself as an Englishman. In 1962, for instance, he wrote: "Sixteen years ago, I became an American citizen, and my permanent home is New York; I also own a small house near Vienna where I spend my summers." Yet, he adds, "I remain, despite all this, a true Englishman."[278] Similar proclamations of national belongingness can be found already in his interwar poetry:

> England, my England – you have been my tutrix –
> The Mater, on occasions, of the free,
> Or, if you'd rather, Dura Virum Nutrix,
> Whatever happens I am born of Thee ;
> And Englishmen, all foreigners agree,
> Taking them by and large, and as a nation,
> All suffer from an Oedipus fixation. (*LFI* 355)

England is fashioned as 'Mater' from whose entrails Auden emerged and to which he interminably belongs. These lines were written in 1936, hence a few months after leaving his teaching occupation. Perhaps under the influence of this experience, the word 'tutrix' is used to ascribe to England the status of a formative environment and tutoress shaping him and all her other 'pupils'. The unbreakable fixation – 'Whatever happens I am born of Thee' – is emphasized by the phrase 'the Stern Nurse of Men' that Auden appears to have borrowed from the "Dura Virum Nutrix" motto of Sedbergh School, Cumbria, located some twenty miles south-west of Alston and about the same distance to the south-east of the family cottage in Threlkeld. Also, the allusion to the Oedipus complex assists Auden in presenting England as a common mother to all 'children of Albion' who emerge from her, belong to her, and so share a collective origin. Auden visibly generalizes his relation to England to a national stereotype. He overlooks all possible hybridity and approaches the English as constituents of a large unified collectivity. Its members find in England a means for identification and so for the formation of a community.

Besides proclaiming his national identification, Auden frequently wrote of England's insularity and, as in the case of Iceland, took it for a guarantor of a specific national and cultural identity. In his prose, Auden repeatedly manifests Tuan's claims about the ethnocentric experience of large places by existential insiders in terms of reductionism, selectiveness and a tendency to imagine homelands as superior and privileged centers. In the 1960s, he still showed a grossly oversimplified construction of England as one cultural unit distinct from the surrounding space. In 1962, two years after Charles de Gaulle's veto of Britain's application for the membership in the European Economic Community, Auden

[278] Auden, "Are the English Europeans? *The Island and the Continent*," *Complete Works IV* 429.

distinguished between travelling abroad and overseas in essays "Are the English Europeans?: *The Island and the Continent*" and "England and Europe". Their proposition is that when the English traverse oceans to get to the USA, Canada and India, they go merely "overseas". To visit the Dominions is not to travel at all as one encounters people "speaking English, eating English food, wearing English clothes and playing English games." The purpose of travel, Auden adds, is the opposite: to be in a place where one can shed off cultural identity and language as its major index: "one of the greatest joys of travel [is] to be in a place where no one speaks English and where, in consequence, I am an anonymous individual with no social status and therefore free to associate freely with anyone."[279] To go across the English Channel (or to Iceland), then, is to "go abroad": "for the English, Europe is a different world from England."[280] In both essays, Auden constructs Europe as a different entity on the basis of its specific historical and religious development. Also, he provides an itemized list of sixteen images conjured up in his mind by the word 'Europe' but not by 'England'. He wrote the essay "Are the English Europeans?: *The Island and the Continent*" for a German audience one year after the erection of the Berlin Wall symbolizing the division between the East and West. Yet, he makes no distinction between individual European countries because Europe with its unified furniture, cuisine, etc. presents itself to him as one inferior homogeneous Otherness and "cultural unit".[281] Auden's gross obliteration and erasure of boundaries between European states is based on cultural not political phenomena. It originates from his anxious conviction that the identities of European states have been eradicated by excessive internationalism and omnipresent working of modern technologies. "England may join the Common Market," Auden claims, "but that will not make her part of Europe" because "Europe no longer exists." He reads the peninsula as a placeless cosmopolitan crucible blighted by a world-wide sameness and besmeared by a global culture: "The automobile, the aeroplane, television, Espresso bars, etc. are creating a way of life which is the same from San Francisco to Vienna. […] I find the age ill-bred and horribly noisy."[282]

Although such references to the homogeneity of Europe come from the period of intense debates about the European common market, Auden's critical awareness of the transformation of western nations into an internationalized whole is diagnosable already in his interwar writing. As noted, in 1936 he lamented that "the days of national culture are over"

[279] Auden, "Are the English Europeans?: *The Island and the Continent*," *Complete Works IV* 435.
[280] Auden, "Are the English Europeans?: *The Island and the Continent*," *Complete Works IV* 429.
[281] Auden, "Are the English Europeans?: *The Island and the Continent*," *Complete Works IV* 432.
[282] The only dissimilatory phenomenon that Auden finds in Continental Europe is a linguistic variety. Making use of his own knowledge of German, he noted: "Let us praise *den lieben Gott*, and thank Him for the Tower of Babel." Its presence guarantees that two men speaking different languages will be able to engage in "a genuine dialogue" instead of "addressing [their] mirror images" ("Are the English Europeans?: *The Island and the Continent*," *Complete Works IV* 435-36).

(*LFI* 340). Although he set England off from the Continental homogeneity absorbing world-culture, such an embittered lamentation of the expunction of cultural identities concerned his references to England too. It transpires, for example, from the afore mentioned *Letter to Lord Byron*, where the invasion into England of international and Continental mores is satirically criticized. The crowds of hikers head for the Sussex Downs, to indulge in cosmopolitan novelties and idleness associated with the South and the Mediterranean. Auden is disenchanted with the influx into England of phenomena from "lands which never heard of licensed hours", one of the distinguishing hallmarks of Englishness. For him, this signifies that "our old-age rule / Of insularity has lost its powers." He bitterly concludes that the island is at risk of being deprived of its insular specificity and identity. If the process continues, the unique Mutterland "Will look no different from the Continong" (*LFI* 210).

Auden's aversion against concomitants of interwar modernity reveals his temptation to nostalgically idealize the past. Indeed, in the two essays of 1962 distinguishing England from Europe, he does not claim to state objective facts. Self-depreciatively confessing to being a middle-class anachronism at odds with the present, Auden warns that his reading of Europe and England is a mere impression of "an English middle-class old fogey" and of an "intellectual snob."[283] Analogously, his satirical portrayal of the English interwar culture reveals a reactionary backward gaze away from the present towards a culturally purer, more stable and idealized England of the early years of the twentieth century. In the late 1930s and early 1940s, Auden 'remembered' his Edwardian and Georgian childhood in obvious middle-class terms: "There were family prayers before breakfast, bicycle-rides to collect fossils or rub church-brasses, reading aloud in the evenings. We kept pretty much to ourselves."[284] These 'memories' come from his unfinished *The Prolific and the Devourer* (1939) but the same 'recollections' appeared in a slightly expanded form in his afore mentioned paean essay on Thomas Hardy (1940). While insisting on the unbiased character of Hardy's (and Betjeman's) regionalism and topophilic sensibility, Auden's fondness also emerged from his ability to identify with the type of England and experience that Hardy had described. Auden recalls that at school he felt 'gauche and frightened' to condone to the taste of London students looking for poetic models because this would have forced him into "pretending a life which had no contact with [his] own experience." Hardy, on the other hand, offered a literary universe and experience that Auden found appealing because he knew it personally. This was the provincial England of the early twentieth century and the middle-class experience of it:

[283] Auden, "Are the English Europeans?: *The Island and the Continent*," *Complete Works IV* 429, 436.
[284] Auden, *The Prolific and the Devourer*, *Complete Works II* 414.

> The properties of Hardy's world were the properties of my own childhood: it was unsophisticated and provincial, and it was the England of the professional classes, clergymen, doctors, lawyers, and architects. A world still largely Victorian, in which one went to church twice on Sundays and had daily family prayers before breakfast, […], rode in pony traps or on bicycles to rub brasses or collect fossils, and relied for amusement on family resources, reading aloud, gardening, walks, piano duets, and dumb crambo; above all a world which had nothing to do with London, the stage or French literature.[285]

This is Auden's nostalgic 'recollection' of his existence on a middle-class class 'island' allowing a comfortable, self-enclosed, secure and mainly stable life in the provinces of a real island separated from the Continent and spared from cosmopolitan influences.

For biographical reasons, Auden makes less reference to this dimension of Betjeman's work. Yet, it is obvious from his introduction for *Slick but Not Streamlined* that the retrospective look of his friend titillated his taste too. At the time of writing it, Auden could not have judged Betjeman's 1960s television documentaries. Yet, Betjeman's disenchantment in them with modern planning and his admiration for the past is what Auden presents as praiseworthy in his own assessment. Betjeman's devotion to Victorian architecture and the sense of nostalgia in his eulogies of early twentieth-century suburban life stimulated Auden's appreciation of the poet, who, he felt, was "so at home with the provincial gaslit towns, the seaside lodgings, the bicycle, the harmonium" – the components of the idealized world, in which Auden grew up and with whose portrayal he could identify.[286] As noted, when dissatisfied with the actual 'here' and 'now', people tend to idealize distant places and times. As discussed, Auden praised Hardy's and Betjeman's topophilic attention to detail. Yet, his fondness for them also issued from being able to appreciate their poetic worlds constructed with Edwardian provincial material. In other words, Auden valued Hardy's and Betjeman's sanctification of a spatial-temporal node reminding him of childhood experience. It is this nostalgic retrospection that stands behind his mythologization of England as a unique and superior place, and behind his grudge against unifying processes leading to placelessness.

Auden's attitude to Alston Moor, Iceland and England clearly echoes the major propositions that humanist geographers make about basic patterns of spatial experience. Auden's topophilic sentiments for the former two and his encomiastic writing of them manifests Yi-Fu Tuan's view of a typical approach of existential outsiders to places in the mythical periphery outside their imperfect existential lifespace. Although not in the polar region, Auden fashions the Pennines and Iceland as privileged northern places magnetically attracting the needle of his emotional compass. The time span of the above references ranges

[285] Auden, "A Literary Transference," *Complete Works II* 44-45.
[286] Auden, "Introduction to *Slick but Not Streamlined*, by John Betjeman," *Complete Works II* 304.

from the late 1930s to 1960s, which shows that both places retained their sacred status of an embodiment of Eden. The humanized character of Alston Moor landscape and the pre-modern natural purity of Iceland turned their landscapes into basic constituents of his mythical geography and into means for physical and imaginative escapism from his quotidian existential zones. England, Auden's Mutterland, received a treatment closely reminiscent of Tuan's observation concerning the ethnocentric attitude of existential insiders to their homeland. Auden emphasizes his belongingness to England and constructs himself as a proud Englishman praising local English poets and culture. He dwells on England's insular status as a guarantor of uniqueness and, at the same time, he frowns at processes and technology impinging upon his existential hub.

As noted, in 1956, Auden claimed that poets should apotheosize a sacred object. Yet, an overwhelming majority of texts quoted above come from prose. The analysis of all three places does not only show that Auden candidly reveals his topophilic sentiments and the architecture of his personal mythical geography. It also shows that he expressed a consistent general fondness for local physiognomic and cultural uniqueness and that he was willing to praise particular places as unique. The following chapters gauge the extent to which Auden's poetry parallels such claims, promotes personal myths, underwrites his grudge against placelessness and reveals indebtedness to topophilic poets by pronouncing the uniqueness and sacredness of his numinous places.

3. Topographical Poetry, Landscape and Place

In their endeavour to extend the epistemology of traditional physical geography, humanist geographers analyze the physical environment as experienced and perceived by the human being. As argued in Chapter One, to do so, they approach literature as an abounding source of primordial and pre-scientific spatial awareness.[287] However, insightful as, for example, Yi-Fu Tuan's views are, in the assessment of such data, this and other critics of the same fold pay little attention to the pressure that literary tradition, generic specificity and aesthetic conventions of particular historical milieus exert on individual artists and their work. Language, writing and place meet in the word 'topography', whose original meaning was the "description in words of a given place."[288] Hence, before the discussion of W.H. Auden's verse treatment of Alston Moor, Iceland and England, the critical act is forced to the issue of topographical poetry as one of the most obvious literary forms engaging with the physical world. The question examined here is: to what extent do poems, generally subsumed under the label 'topographical', delineate local uniqueness and subjective spatial experience?

It is a commonplace practice of literary critics discussing topographical poetry to refer to *The Lives of the English Poets*, in which Dr Samuel Johnson credits Sir John Denham with the status of the forefather of topographical poetry in Britain. After demurring the poet's inclination to gambling, Johnson does praise *Cooper's Hill* (1642) as a foundation-text:

> 'Cooper's Hill' is the work that confers upon him the rank and dignity of an original author. He seems to have been, at least among us, the author of a species of composition that may be denominated *local poetry*, of which the fundamental subject is some particular landschape, to be poetically described.[289]

Contemporary scholars still recall Johnson's definition in support of their claims that an accurate description of a geographical detail is the most germane to the genre. For John Wilson Foster, for example, the topographical method "honors the uniqueness of topographical features (exhibiting, in other words, a sense of locality)."[290] This is in line with the tendency discussed in Chapter One to associate the idea of 'place' with the attributes of uniqueness, concreteness and border dividing it, albeit only ideally, from other locations.

Yet, such views overlook the fact that 'poetry of place' neither univocally registers an urge to display a sense of a particular location, nor does it honour local specificity through an accurate or exaggerated and mythologized depiction of its autonomy. To claim this is to

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[287] Tuan, *Topophilia* 49.
[288] Miller 3.
[289] Samuel Johnson, *Johnson's Lives of the Poets, vol. I*, 1789, ed. Alexander Napier (London: George Bell & Sons, 1890) 84-85, *Internet Archive*, n.d. <http://www.archive.org/details/johnsonslivespo02napigoog>, 22 December 2012.
[290] John Wilson Foster, "The Measure of Paradise: Topography in Eighteenth-Century Poetry," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 9.2 (Winter, 1975-1976): 244, *JSTOR* < http://www.jstor.org/stable/2737599>, 13 April 2012.

neglect the latter part of Johnson's definition of the genre, in which he adds that the description of a 'particular landschape' is complemented with "the addition of such embellishments as may be supplied by *historical retrospections* or *incidental meditation*."[291] At least since Denham's inscription into the Thames Valley of a Tory view of British history, this latter part of Johnson's observation has been vital and inseparable from much topographical poetry. More frequently than not, poetic descriptions of concrete places have served various further functions, whose complexity defies an easy characterization. J. Hillis Miller notes that the term 'topography' experienced a sideway slippage when it was extended from its original verbal to visual 'writing of places', in which symbols appeared alongside words to designate a concrete location. By analogy, Miller argues, places in poetry have been used as prosopopoias for abstract and imageless ideas, in the context of parables and allegories, and as means for exploring broader supra-regional and -temporal horizons.[292]

In the latter part of his definition, Dr Johnson intimates that places provide poets with a 'springboard' for intellectual brooding. In this connection M.R. Curry reminds us that 'topography' in its original oral form involved creating 'narratives'.[293] Taken in the modern broad sense, to describe a location *is* to create a 'narrative' because of the inscription into local physical features of abstract ideas informed by and carrying an ideology (i.e. a set of intellectual beliefs) transparently or in a disguised form. This brought Lothar Fietz to the conclusion that because places are so ideologized, more than an objective description "'Poetry of place' implies 'Politics of place.'"[294] In other words, from a contemporary post-positivist perspective, to describe and respond to a place in a topographical poem is to write it anew and to contribute to an extant body of local topographies. Joseph H. Miller aptly summarized this position when he wrote that "landscape 'as such' is never given, only one or another of the ways to map it,"[295] where 'mapping' can by no means be restricted to cartography. As for topographical poetry, this 'mapping' can be examined for different forms of 'politics of displacement' of local specificity. In view of Auden's poetics of place analyzed below, two aspects exemplifying such a tension between individuality and universality, concreteness and *genus*, deserve attention before proceeding further: the transformation of a place into a placeless environmental type and reading into landscapes of time and history.

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[291] Johnson, *Johnson's Lives of the Poets* 85.
[292] Miller 3, 139.
[293] Curry 503-04.
[294] Lothar Fietz, "Topos/Locus/Place: The Rhetoric, Poetics and Politics of Place, 1500–1800," *Poetry in the British Isles: Non-Metropolitan Perspectives*, eds. Hans-Werner Ludwig and Lothar Fietz (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1995) 17.
[295] Miller 6. Miller argues that writing a place is in fact an example of a performative act because every author adds to the existing body of verbal acts and so causes a shift in imagining particular places.

3.1. From Place to Placelesness

The Greek word *topos* does not only stand for a 'place', but also for repetitive rhetorical formulae.[296] Viewing *topoi* as "established points of reference or aspects," which the rhetor observes and uses in the development of an argument, Lothar Feitz illustrates how the descriptions of topographical details in works from different periods are governed by stylizations reflecting established cultural paradigms, stereotypes and clichés. In his analysis of the politics of place representation from Renaissance until the end of the eighteenth century, he echoes some views held by humanist geographers, namely the capacity of both elements of dichotomic pairs to slide from their signification to that of the other part, as well as the power of nationalist politics and other discourses to shape the writing of a location. In his opinion, the Renaissance conceptualization of the universe as "ordered and structured by the unifying principles of hierarchy and correspondence" imprints itself on poetry, in which specific places lose their historicity and uniqueness. They are aligned with ahistorical utopian and mythical locations at the hierarchical apex of human imagination.[297] Fietz interprets William Shakespeare's and William Dunbar's respective rendering of England and London in *Richard II* and "To the City of London" in terms of "Eden, demi-paradise" and "Troy Novaunt" as sample expressions of a conventionalized encomiastic rhetoric of patriotism and nationalism. Manifesting Renaissance emphasis on resemblance, the idea of self-esteem and superiority of a unique nation and city is not promoted through their unmatched historical and geographical specificity. On the contrary, it is constructed by means of an analogy with mythical and heroic places. In consequence, their uniqueness is nullified and *genii loci* subjected to unifying principles, which Fietz understands as "a highly political procedure aiming at the stabilization of political hierarchy."[298]

Praises of the metropolis continued in the aftermath of the Restoration.[299] At the same time, however, in the course of the eighteenth century a new object for poetic encomia emerged. As shown in Chapter One, nature gradually assumed the deified position of the city at the top of the imagined hierarchy of environmental types. Realizing the graduality of such a process, Fietz approaches Jonathan Swift's "Description of a City Shower" (1710) as an example of the initial stages of such a transition. To use Swift's poem as an illustration of an early critique of the urban environment is not to propose the allegiance of the Tory satirist with Romanticism. Yet, while different in tone, the urban satire is also motivated by the

[296] For a brief account of the meaning of 'topos' see Daniela Hodrová, et al., *Poetika míst* (Praha: H&H, 1997) 8.
[297] Fietz 15-17.
[298] Fietz 19-22. Fietz claims that London was compared with Troy because of a misunderstanding of the word 'Trinovantes' (a British tribe which settled in Essex during the Roman invasion) by Renaissance historiographers who promoted the idea of 'Trinovantes' as the descendants of Trojans that founded London (29).
[299] E.g. William Fenne in "Londinium: or, The Renowned City of London, 1669" (qtd. in Fietz 23).

dissatisfaction with the city and its community. As its title implies, this poem alludes to the pastoral mood of Virgil's country shower in Book I of *Georgics.*[300] Yet, as Fietz notes, Swift defamiliarizes Virgil's image through a satirical inversion. He lets the shower cleanse the city by washing away its debris and suffocating smell produced by local urban inhabitants.[301] The Thames, which receives the dirt, is no longer beautified by London, the "diadem embattled wide / With hundred turrets," as Edmund Spenser had described it in *Faerie Queene.*[302] It is begrimed by a civilizational clutter flushed off from Smithfield, St. Pulchre, Holborn Bridge and other characteristic constituents of London's unique cityscape. Yet, Swift does not draw attention to such topographical details in order to delineate local specificity. He casts an equally simplified, but *inverted* and demythologized, image of Dunbar's 'Troy Novaunt' and Spenser's 'diadem'. Swift's London is a concrete specimen of the urban environment in general. The city as a type, however, is no longer a positive humanized space and a paramount signifier of man's potential. It embodies his decline and moral degradation.

When the central position of the city was challenged by the Romantics, and when its privileged position was assumed by nature, a replacement of local uniqueness with universalism in the treatment of concrete geographical realities in topographical poems prevailed. The book of nature offered a source of eternal, unchanging principles and common sense 'naturalness' extracted from the course of history. William Wordsworth's "Valediction to the River Duddon" is an illustrative case in point. Wordsworth pays tribute to the constancy and stability of the stream. Its Form, which "remains," and Function, which "never dies," are contrasted with man's existence, which "must vanish."[303] Similar attention to universal properties is diagnosable in Wordsworth's other poems. In his study "Wordsworth and the Ideology of Romantic Poems" Jerome McGann analyzes "The Ruined Cottage" and "Tintern Abbey" to illustrate what he claims is a widespread feature of Romantic poetry: the tendency

> [...] to develop different sorts of artistic means with which to occlude and disguise their own involvement in a certain nexus of historical relations. This act of evasion, as it were, operates most powerfully whenever the poem is most deeply immersed in its cognitive (i.e. its ideological) materials and commitments.[304]

McGann shows that while describing a series of events embedded in a concrete spatial-temporal nexus, Wordsworth does not use the story of Robert and Margaret for the discussion of social and economic problems of the time and place – the decapitation of cottage industry.

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[300] ll. 431-538.
[301] Fietz 25.
[302] Edmund Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, Book IV, Canto XI (qtd. in Fietz 22).
[303] William Wordsworth, "Valediction to the River Duddon," *The New Oxford Book of English Verse*, ed. Helen Gardner (London: Book Club Associates, 1972) 517.
[304] Jerome McGann, "Wordsworth and the ideology of Romantic Poems," *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation*, (1983; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985) 82.

He evades immersion in such issues and leads the reader "further and further from a clear sense of the historical origins and circumstantial causes" of their tragedy.[305] Wordsworth transcends the situation and distils from the events an eternal truth. In the story of Margaret and Robert, Wordsworth exploits the *rerum natura* of human existence: ephemerality and inconsequentiality juxtaposed with the permanence and "ceaseless governance" of nature. Margaret's overgrown cottage becomes a mere emblem revealing the "pathetic incompetence of individual, cultural, and institutional efforts to give stability to human affairs."[306]

"Tintern Abbey" can be read within the same politics of representation. The geographical and historical specificity of the long title "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye During a Tour, July 13, 1798" has encouraged critics, like David S. Miall, to locate the dark sycamore and other locales of the poem.[307] Yet, in recent criticism, there is also an obvious tendency to focus on the vagueness of Wordsworth's landscape. Dennis Taylor starts his essay "Wordsworth's Abbey Ruins", in which he analyzes the importance of the abbey for the poem, with what he calls a "perennial question" in Wordsworth criticism: "where is the abbey in 'Tintern Abbey'?" He argues that it is mainly implicitly present and, despite the fact that it occupies a prominent title position, he answers the question in a manner suggesting that this particular location is immaterial to the poem: "Presumably the poem might have been subtitled 'A few miles above Chichester Common' or 'Above Birnum Woods' if these had been the nearby places."[308]

In his own analysis, McGann eloquently argues that not only in "The Ruined Cottage" but in this poem too, Wordsworth transcends the spatial-temporal nexus, thereby suppressing the importance of local details. His initial attention to the cottage life, hermit's cave and homeless vagrants already suggests the transformation of a real into a generic landscape constructed with the use of stock pastoral and picturesque *topoi*.[309] But the poet defies geographical specificity in yet another way. He turns the local landscape into a placeless dialectical environmental type. McGann calls the prospect a "landscape of contradiction" because he reads the cottage dwellers and vagrants as representatives of diverse social conditions.[310] However, he shows that such elements of the local social reality are evaded,

[305] McGann, "Wordsworth and the ideology" 83.
[306] McGann, "Wordsworth and the ideology" 83.
[307] David S. Miall, "Locating Wordsworth: 'Tintern Abbey' and the Community with Nature," *University of Alberta*, 12 September 2000 <http://www.ualberta.ca/~dmiall/tinternl.htm>, 24 July 2012.
[308] Dennis Taylor, "Wordsworth's Abbey Ruins," *William Wordsworth*, Bloom's Modern Critical Views, ed. Harold Bloom, updated ed. (New York: Chelsea House, 2007) 207.
[309] For the discussion of the imprint on the poem of Wordsworth's early predilection for the picturesque see David S. Miall, "Locating Wordsworth: 'Tintern Abbey' and the Community with Nature". For a comparison of the picturesque images, see Magnasco Alessandro's (1667-1749) *Landscape with Gypsies and Washerwomen*, William Shayer's (1787-1879) *Gypsy Encampment in the New Forest* or images of gypsies and bandits in Salvator Rosa's (1615-1673) paintings.
[310] McGann, "Wordsworth and the ideology" 86.

displaced out of the poem and supplanted with an image of harmony and permanence found in nature and the mind. Wordsworth withdraws from the external variety of landscape particulars subject to change and decay. Famously, their worth appears in "tranquil restoration" – an act of memory, through which the "life of things," their essence, emerges from beyond the external "beauteous forms."[311] This transforms the poem from 'a picture of a concrete landscape' to what Wordsworth calls "the picture of the mind"[312] – the invisible 'mindscape'. McGann reminds us of the analogy of the poem with the end of the "Ruined Cottage". What remains as permanent in the external landscape are the "steep woods and lofty cliffs"[313] around the ruined walls of the Abbey forming "a visible emblem of everything that is transitory."[314] Wordsworth returns to the initial image of nature as if to suggest the cyclicality, permanence and inherent stability of its processes, which "A worshipper on Nature"[315] may observe and find soothing. Hence, for McGann, Wordsworth performs a shibboleth associated with much Romantic poetry: the tendency to evade history and culture. The poet 'looks' inwardly away from social facts because neither the domestic enclosure problematic nor the European context of the Napoleonic wars is voiced. Instead, Wordsworth describes the search for solitude in nature and brooding through the "mansion" of the mind, which "has triumphed over its times."[316] Simultaneously, he escapes the local landscape and internalizes it. In this process its importance, variety and local uniqueness are obfuscated and reduced to a placeless forum allowing the poet to focus on the dialectic of man and nature.

To dwell on those features that a concrete locality shares with the surrounding space is to synthesize different places and subdue the border that separates them. Also, to think of a place in terms of types and categories – a town, nature, etc. – "establishes," as Paul Shepard proposes, "a rubric of stereotyping and carves the universe into duplicable sets of units."[317] This suggests that such a treatment of topographical detail in poetry can be interpreted within Classical aesthetics. Places, like people, have proper names as the most conspicuous hallmarks of their identity and specificity. Yet, as summarized by M.H. Abrams in *The Mirror and the Lamp,* among the basic principles of mimetic representation in the eighteenth century was a revival of an Aristotelian focus on a selection of historically and geographically

[311] William Wordsworth "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye During a Tour, July 13, 1798," *Lyrical Ballads,* by William Wordsworth and Samuel T. Coleridge, 1798, eds. R.L. Brett and A.R. Jones (London: Routledge and Taylor & Francis Group, 2005) 111–12.
[312] Wordsworth, "Tintern Abbey" 112.
[313] Wordsworth, "Tintern Abbey" 115.
[314] McGann, "Wordsworth and the ideology" 88.
[315] Wordsworth, "Tintern Abbey" 115.
[316] McGann, "Wordsworth and the ideology" 88-91.
[317] Shepard 41-42.

unchanging attributes and Forms superior to the physical world subject to change.[318] Famously, Samuel Johnson found Shakespeare's merit in his ability to transcend individualization and capture the general and eternal properties of man. In support of his assessment, Abrams cites briefly from Chapter Ten of Johnson's *Rasselas*. Because of its absolutely crucial role in Auden's poetics of place, a longer version of Imlac's lecturing of the Prince than that offered by Abrams seems apposite:

> The business of a poet […] is to examine, not the individual, but the species; to remark general properties and large appearances: he does not number the streaks of the tulip, or describe the different shades in the verdure of the forest. He is to exhibit in his portraits of nature such prominent and striking features, as recal the original to every mind; and must neglect the minuter discriminations, which one may have remarked, and another have neglected, for those characteristicks which are alike obvious to vigilance and carelessness.

While vigilant to all local and historical variety of modes of life, a poet should divest himself of his period and place in order to

> consider right and wrong in their abstracted and invariable state; he must disregard present laws and opinions, and rise to general and transcendental truths, which will always be the same. […] He must write as the interpreter of nature, and the legislator of mankind, and consider himself as presiding over the thoughts and manners of future generations; as a being superiour to time and place.[319]

Swift's translation of London into a generic type manifesting a decay of the modern civilization may be read as a display of these aspects of the eighteenth-century aesthetics. Swift does present himself as a superior legislator standing 'outside' the common trend and expressing irritation over it. Wordsworth too pays little attention to the topographical details and those features that would underline the uniqueness of the river Duddon, Wye valley and their landscape. He transcends them in order to dwell on generalities and immaterial abstractions. This subdues the importance of a regional specificity and creates in the poems a literary evocation of what Edward Relph has called a sense of 'placelessness'. Contrary as such an approach to places may appear to the general notions of poetry bearing the appellation 'topographical', it is among its common attributes.

3.2. Landscape, the Linear Perspective and Distance

There are other ways in which poets engaging with topographical detail withdraw from spatial specificity, especially when the idea of landscape is considered. To Dr Samuel Johnson, Sir John Denham qualified as the forefather of locodescriptive poetry more than earlier authors who had written about particular locales as, for example, Benjamin Jonson in "To Penshurst"

[318] Meyer Howard Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (1953; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971) 35-39.
[319] Samuel Johnson, *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia* (1759; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) 28-29.

(c.1616). What differentiates *Cooper's Hill* from such country house poems is the range of geographical details referred to. Denham's poem offers a massive prospect view of Windsor, The Thames and Runnymede from a vantage point at the top of a hill near Egham in Surrey. Indeed, as shown above, Johnson characterizes locodescriptive poetry as that in which a particular *landscape* is poetically described. Denham seems to have applied to poetry the principles of prospect and perspective geometry discovered by Renaissance scholars. He created a precedent imitated and revised in the following decades, and so assisted in fashioning the major form that topographical poetry has taken since the eighteenth century – the landscape and prospect poetry, of which John Dyer's "Grongar Hill" (1726) and Thomas Gray's "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College" (1747) still represent prime examples. This format provides further ways of eclipsing a local detail. To support and clarify the claim, references below are made to the concept of landscape and to landscape painting.[320]

The history of the idea of landscape provides an example of how the advancement of scientific knowledge can precipitate changes in the perception, representation and appropriation of space. Originally, the Dutch word 'Landschap' denoted an inland region and small administrative unit, hence an area viewed as if from an aerial point of view.[321] Since Renaissance, however, it has acquired a more 'terrestrial' and horizontal meaning. Landscape became associated with a prospect of a stretch of inland scenery viewed by the 'eye' of the perceiving subject seated in an elevated vantage point. A recognized cultural geographer Denis Cosgrove has dedicated his academic pursuits to the analysis of landscape and its representation. He claims that the idea of landscape is firmly embedded in the European visual tradition thriving on the linear perspective as its "most enduring convention of space representation."[322] Described during the fifteenth-century by Leon Battista Alberti in *Della Pittura*, the linear perspective played a vital role in revolutionizing space apprehension and representation. In general, such advances in geometry supplied land survey, military planning and map-making with tools for gaining a more precise command over space. Through the eighteenth century, this knowledge was gradually absorbed by landscape architects realizing the role of perspective and the position of the perceiving subject in the experience of space.[323] Country houses too, as those designed in the eighteenth century by Henry Benjamin Latrobe

[320] The history of art shows that painting and poetry have frequently been compared for the sake of delineating the features of the other form. M.H. Abrams, for example, points out that in the eighteenth century the features of the latter were derived from a comparison with the former under the rubric of the Horatian idea of *ut pictura poesis* (50-51).

[321] Tuan, *Topophilia* 133.

[322] Denis Cosgrove, "Prospect, Perspective and the Evolution of the Landscape Idea," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, New Series* 10.1 (1985): 47, *JSTOR* <http://www.jstor.org/stable/622249>, 13 April 2012.

[323] Mainly in the course of the eighteenth century, the principles of geometry and land survey influenced the design of prescribed paths along which the 'man in the landscape' moved, and in different viewpoints – 'stations' – was isolated from or exposed to vistas according to a preconceived plan. This resulted in a surprise, contrast and variety – some of the essential principles of landscape experience for William Gilpin, Uvedale Price and the Picturesque as an aesthetic category.

under the rubric of the Greek Revival, were built in locations allowing the appreciation of open vistas, thereby enhancing the social power that their owners possessed.[324]

As for painting, Denis Cosgrove surmises that in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the linear perspective was accepted as "the guarantor of pictorial realism" and as a technique providing "certainty in spatial conception, organization and representation." Painters could now create an illusory depth and distance by decreasing the size and clarity of spatial objects arranged along lines converging towards a focal point in the background. This resulted in the emergence of more realistic, *il vero* semblances of a three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface. The perspective offered artists a means for capturing the singularity of a chosen landscape and its specific physiognomic features. The fact that it derived from geometry, convinced Renaissance scholars, including Leonardo, of possessing a tool for gaining an objective knowledge of the inherent properties of space.[325]

Yet, such trust in geometry as the guarantor of an accurate representation is no longer tenable in the post-representational age when 'landscape' is synonymous with a 'point of view' and 'constructedness'. In fact, typically of the anthropocentric bias of Renaissance humanism, the linear perspective also accentuated the role of the perceiving human subject: "at the centre of renaissance space, the space reproduced by perspective, was the human individual, the measure of his world and its temporal creator and controller."[326] Indeed, for contemporary critics and theoreticians including humanist geographers, the idea of landscape arises out of a subjective human encounter with space. As D.W. Meinig argues, different people exposed to the same prospect "will not – cannot – see the same landscape." While observing identical spatial constituents, these "take on meaning only through association; they must be fitted together according to some coherent body of ideas. […] any landscape is composed not only of what lies before our eyes but what lies within our heads."[327] Because of their inseparability from subjective 'seeing' (pro*spect*), landscape and its representation have attracted the attention of scholars throughout the twentieth century (e.g. Erwin Panofsky, Carl Sauer, Kenneth Clark). The most recent decades in particular have witnessed a lively debate among social anthropologists, literary critics, art historians and other researchers in and outside geography. They recognize and variously scrutinize the potential that landscape as a critical concept offers to the humanities. Overarching the variety of their approaches,

[324] Henry Benjamin Latrobe (1764-1820) was an English architect who built two country houses in the Greek Revival style - Hammerwood Park (1792) and Ashdown House (1794). Both exploit the linear perspective, clusters of trees and other landscape features to create the picturesque effect.
[325] Cosgrove 49–52.
[326] Cosgrove 51.
[327] D.W. Meinig, "The Beholding Eye: Ten Versions of the Same Scene," *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*, ed. D.W. Meinig (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979) 33, *Colorado State University*, n.d. <http://student.agsci.colostate.edu /horton/Ten_views.htm>, 18 July 2012.

however, is an emphasis on landscape constructedness. Simon Schama, for example, has proposed that "it is our shaping perception that makes the difference between raw matter and landscape."[328] Similarly, W.J.T. Mitchell claims that "Landscape is a natural scene mediated by culture,"[329] which is also J. Hillis Miller's view, for whom

> landscape is not a pre-existing thing in itself. It is made into landscape, that is, into a humanly meaningful space, by the living that takes place within it. This transforms it both materially, as by names, or spiritually, as by the ascription of some collective value to this or that spot. […] Landscape exists as landscape only when it has been made human in an activity of inhabitation.[330]

In view of the discussion in Chapter One of different existential relations to places, it is possible to argue with Miller that 'living', 'inhabitation' and 'collective' are not prerequisites for making space 'humanly meaningful'. What cuts through all these views, however, is a shared emphasis on the transformation that a location undergoes in the process of becoming a landscape. Echoing Yi-Fu Tuan's opinions on place-making, landscape is not only defined by its spatial coordinates and physiognomy, but also by the values in*scribe*d into it which are determined by the way of 'looking'. Hence, landscape is also constructed ideally or, as Miller phrases it, 'spiritually' in consequence of a human interaction with space.

It is for these very reasons that contemporary critics liken landscape to a text that is 'read' and 'written' from different perspectives.[331] Yet, such 'points of view' should not be understood merely in the sense of the subject's physical position, but mainly as stances taken by individuals and groups *vis-à-vis* a given scene under the pressure of cultural, social and other paradigms. Approached as such, the very idea of landscape, let alone its representation, is already a construct. The concept represents *a* world-view ratified and naturalized in art or other discourses. W.J.T. Mitchell sums up this proposition when positing 'landscape' as a

> [...] physical and multisensory medium [...] in which cultural meanings and values are encoded, whether they are put there by the physical transformation of a place in landscape gardening and architecture, or found in a place formed, as we say, by nature. […] Landscape is already an artifice in the moment of its beholding, long before it becomes the subject of pictorial representation.[332]

This turns landscape into an image of a specific structuring and symbolizing of the world.[333] Because it is only *a* 'way of seeing' and writing, Denis Cosgrove proposes that the idea of

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[328] Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, 1st Vintage ed. (New York: Vintage, 1995) 9-10.
[329] W.J.T. Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape," *Landscape and Power*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell, 2nd edition (1994; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002) 5.
[330] Miller 21.
[331] E.g. Stephen Daniels and Denis Cosgrove, Introduction: Iconography and Landscape, *The Iconography of Landscape*, eds. Stephen Daniels and Denis Cosgrove (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 1-10; Trevor J. Barnes and James S. Duncan, Introduction: Writing Worlds, *Writing Worlds: Discourse, Text, and Metaphor in the Representation of Landscape* (1992; New York: Routledge, 2001) 1-17.
[332] Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape" 14.
[333] Daniels and Cosgrove 1.

landscape should be approached as a "visual ideology."[334] Hence, rather than creating mirror *il vero* semblances of the physical environment, landscape paintings and poetry write it anew. Canvases with accurate depictions of an external detail do exist. Yet, like the idea of landscape itself, paintings tend to be artifices deriving from and adding to generic period paradigms. A landscape in oil, like Wordsworth's initial lines of "Tintern Abbey", is an assemblage of selected details and authored illusion conjured through a selection, obfuscation and arrangement of physical details. Cosgrove illustrates his observation above that the Renaissance man became the 'controller and creator' of his world when he claims that the landscape painter has a supreme power over space and the spectator. The artist "establishes the arrangement or composition" and determines "the point of view to be taken by the observer."[335] Such a control is of a piece with that of the spectator. Brueghel's landscapes, Jacopo de Barbari's map of Venice or Vaclav Hollar's etching of London force spectators into a view but, at the same time, empower them by gaining an otherwise inaccessible prospect.

3.3. Landscape, Prospect and Time

The approach to landscape and its representation in terms of an artifice, carrier of ideology and manifestation of power encourages critics to a specific type of criticism. Thus conceived, landscape representation serves as a litmus paper for gauging the presence of an ideology in an artwork, especially of the bourgeois values. In view of W.H. Auden's background, upbringing and education, the examination of these aspects would certainly qualify too. While inseparable from such issues, however, the purpose of the present study is not to assess his middle-class ethos but the manner and extent to which aesthetic and ethical forces correct or reinforce his prose engagement with topographical detail in poetry. To complete the preparation for such an inquiry, it is necessary to extend the propositions above concerning landscape artificiality and the evasion of local details. Attention is paid to the ideas of perspective and prospect as essential components of landscape experience because most of the poems analyzed below fall within the category of landscape and prospect poetry.

Tuan notices that the idea of landscape emerged with modernity when the traditional view of space and time were radically reconceptualized. The medieval world, organized along the vertical axis of sky-earth-underworld, was gradually transformed into the modern non-rotary, horizontal and broad spatial model. He takes landscape and its representation in a visual form as a sample manifestation of such a shift because of the dominance of distance

[334] Cosgrove 47, 45.
[335] Cosgrove 48, 54.

and breadth over height.[336] Coinciding with this process in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were changes in an approach to time consisting in a gradual ceding of the cyclical to the linear model.[337] Time acquired depth. It started to be viewed in historical, irreversible and progressive terms rather than as a repetitive and cyclical entity. While in western cultures history and progress gained respect, "among nonliterate peoples," as Tuan has it, "not only the means but the desire to think historically is lacking because the ideal is not development but equilibrium, a state of unvarying harmony."[338] Indeed, unlike maps, a perspective view and movement through space are directional. They imply time, history and future.[339] Landscape paintings often evoke the atmosphere of stillness through the illusion of a static 'eye' viewing a scene at a particular spatial-temporal nexus. Yet, directional time is incorporated into them through several conventions, such as a *memento mori*, picturesque ruin or movement as that of a ship driven by billowing sails in Brueghel's *The Fall of Icarus*.

Raymond Williams asserts that an important aspect of landscape is distance: "The very idea of landscape implies separation and observation."[340] The mere fact that landscape is always in front of and away from the observer makes the latter interact with the 'not here'.[341] A prospect is a panoramic view from an elevated vantage point, which accentuates distance, visual perception and contemplation over a direct physical contact. In his analysis of the Eiffel Tower, Roland Barthes notes that to an observer at its top, Paris "offers itself to him as an object virtually *prepared*, exposed to the intelligence, but which he must himself construct by a final activity of the mind."[342] The approach to landscape imagery in poetry can be said to be marked with the same type of dynamism. The poetic voice often remains 'physically' anchored in an elevated vantage point. Yet, while its view and observing 'eye' are limited by the horizon, intellectually the poetic voice can abandon the location and 'wander away' by gaining an extrospective or introspective 'sight' of what lies beyond the landscape *visibilia*. Sir John Denham realized the limitations of corporeality already in the seventeenth century when he let the voice in *Cooper's Hill* utter that it feels "More boundless in [its] Fancy than [its] eie."[343] It is the fancy that takes the speaker of the Caroline royalist to remote places and times. The view does offer itself to the observer as an object in need of construction by 'a final activity of the mind', as Barthes phrased it. Like Dunbar, Denham makes a connection

[336] Tuan, *Topophilia* 247.
[337] Tuan, *Topophilia* 129-30, 148.
[338] Tuan, *Space and Place* 189.
[339] Tuan, *Space and Place* 122–23.
[340] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (1973; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975) 120.
[341] See also Jiří Sádlo, "Krajina jako interpretovaný text," Vesmír 77 (February 1998): 97.
[342] Roland Barthes, "The Eiffel Tower," *The Eiffel Tower and Other Mythologies*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkley: University of California Press, 1997) 9-10, emphasis original.
[343] John Denham, *The Poetical Works of Sir John Denham*, ed. Theodore Howard Banks (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1928) 65.

between England and myth through seating the poetic eye on Egham Hill and alluding to Parnassus. He also admits the constructedness of places through the instilment into locations of arbitrary meanings when he claims that Parnassus and Egham Hill are made by poets not *vice versa*. More importantly, however, concrete locales such as Windsor, The Thames and Runnymede are selected to form an aggregate used to celebrate the glory and stability of the English national history. Denham chooses the locales – all in the direction of London as the seat of power – in order to praise Charles I, the empire builders and Magna Carta. Such historical 'monuments' and processes allow him to eulogize "the realm [of England] and its changing fortunes through history,"[344] and so to 'see' the present in the context of the past.

Therefore, in poetry, landscape features may be means for pondering on a distant past and for expressing and falsifying intangible time in spatial images,[345] which is the very opposite of Wordsworth's ahistoricism. It is Barthes' as much as Tuan's conviction that a landscape view stimulates temporal and retrospective contemplations.[346] To view a particular landscape is to encounter an area whose relief bears past inscriptions of at least natural and, more often than not, human activity.

As for poetic landscapes embedding preoccupations with the past, they are often marked with a nostalgic gaze. A succinct summary of the historical changes in meaning and reception of nostalgia is offered by Aaron Santesso and Vita Fortunati.[347] Their thesis is that in both its original sense of a medical perturbation (*nostos* – return, *algos* – pain) defined by Johannes Hofer in 1688, and in its relocation and ensconcing in the realm of feeling in the period of Romanticism, nostalgia thrives on a fissure – distance – between the present and the past. As a response to actuality, it arises out of the sense of unsatisfactory and inadequate conditions and from a simultaneous projection onto the distant past of purer states. Naturally, 'recollecting' the past does not only suggest conservative escapism from present facts. It also implies the 'construction' of an idealized version of the past, which involves seeing in it, as Tuan phrases it, "what is not there."[348]

Eighteenth-century topographical and landscape poetry is replete with examples of nostalgic gazing from the brazen world of actuality into the golden past associated with a superior life lost through industrialization, enclosure acts and other social factors. Perhaps the most patent example is the idyllic, elegiac and pastoral atmosphere of a pre-industrial village

[344] Foster 236-37.
[345] Miller 138.
[346] Barthes 11.
[347] Aaron Santesso 11-26; Vita Fortunati, "Memory, Desire and Utopia: A New Perspective on the Notion of Critical Utopia," *Time Refigured: Myths, Foundations Texts & Imagined Communities*, eds. Martin Procházka and Ondřej Pilný (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2005) 39-50.
[348] Tuan, *Escapism* 6.

life in Auburn constructed by Oliver Goldsmith in *Deserted Village* (1770). Yet, the 'nostalgic trope', as Santesso calls it in his study, is not restricted to the period. In the twentieth century, Georgian and Edwardian poets were still attracted by the idea of a lost rural England and superior past; even Philip Larkin faced the post-war suburban modernity with a similar disdain.

As noted, the extreme form of imagining a superior past is the envisagement of pre-lapsarian timelessness: "The absolute opposite to historical and geographical places subject to hierarchical placement is the 'not-place' referred to as *u-topia* which – due to the fact that in English *u-topia* is a homophone of *eu-topia* – is understood to be a 'good' and 'ideal' place in comparison with the real places of this world."[349] In the eighteenth century the major model of such a timeless good place was nature. The above glimpse of "Tintern Abbey" shows to what extent Romantic poets interpreted nature as a realm of stability and permanence, and as the original motherly womb from whose entrails, unfortunately, man has departed.

A focus on mnemonic inscriptions is not the only means of highlighting the presence of time in landscape. The idea of 'prospect' has both spatial and temporal meanings. It is not only a view of a large and expansive area, distance and horizon. It also denotes *prospective* future. In her study, Vita Fortunati reassesses the derogatory connotations of nostalgia as an inconsequential and reactionary response to the fissure between the actual imperfect present and the lost idealized past. She argues that nostalgic *retro*spection and memory are productive because they enable man to envision a superior model to strive for in the *pro*spective future. The word 'prospect' suggests an expectation, hope and vision of a potential *situ*ation. *Pro*spect denotes 'looking' forward, which like the *retro*spective nostalgic gaze, entails 'turning away' from the present. For Yi-Fu Tuan, this is to gaze at the less stratified mythical and idealized space filled with hope. For Eric Hirsch, a contemporary social anthropologist, the idea of landscape entails the structuring of space into the polar opposites of foreground actuality and background potentiality, which implies idealization of the distant background.[350] A ship disappearing on the horizon and a winding road are stock images suggesting both direction and movement away from the actual spatial and existential position of the observer to the future and a potential good place elsewhere.

Erwin Panofsky introduced the term *Paysage moralisé* in his 1936 article on Piero di Cosimo's landscapes.[351] He supplied a term aptly characterizing landscape painting, but also a

[349] Fietz 17.
[350] Eric Hirsch, "Landscape: Between Space and Place," *The Anthropology of Landscape: Perspectives on Space and Place*, eds. Eric Hirsch and Michael O'Hanlon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) 3.
[351] Patricia Emison, "The *Paysage Moralisé*," *Artibus at Historiae* 16.31 (1995): 125, *JSTOR* <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1483501>, 7 December 2012.

substantial body of topographical poetry. The heterogeneity of poems containing references to concrete places generated in the course of British literary history defies univocal and totalizing statements.[352] Fragmentary and inexhaustive as the present probe into sample poems and tendencies is, it charts the character of a strong but complex stream in this genre. Poets anchor their works in concrete locales and, frequently, in a clear historical context. Yet, they often do so in order to acquire a tangible image, forum and grounds for discoursing upon issues of an immaterial social, political, historical and ethical nature. Their scale and character are usually restricted neither to a specific locale nor moment. There is an obvious tendency to approach particular places as specimen of environmental types and to use them for discoursing upon, for example, the dialectic between the raw natural and humanized carpentered environment. Also, topographical poets have exploited landscape constituents, as well as the idea of distance and prospect, for providing comments on the difference between the imperfect actuality of "here" and "now", and superior and mythologized distant times and lands of content imagined as either lost or not yet gained. The 'visual ideology' of landscape and prospect, in other words, caters for a politics of displacement of local particulars.

All these are forms in which the dichotomies of the concrete and the universal, the particular and the abstract, are revived because topographical poets often displace the idea of specificity and uniqueness, ideal or physiognomic of a given place captured in a particular historical moment. They do not 'enumerate' the streaks of the 'tulip'. On the contrary, they let the fancy dwell on broader problems, decrease the local flavour of a locality and pay little tribute to the *genius loci*. Inevitably, particular places and landscapes are transformed into *topoi* – stable, repeated and generic images, as well as figures and rhetorical devices used for discoursing upon intangible placeless and timeless issues concerning humanity and its potential. This attitude to topographical details allows a comparison with Aristotle's differentiation between poets and historians. The former should not relate concrete, actual events and "what has happened, but what *may* happen." Poetry "is more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the *universal*, history the particular." Aristotle concludes that although poets do attach proper names to "the agents," this happens in an arbitrary way because they start with the universals and do not write "about particular individuals."[353] The use of topographical detail bearing a proper name as a means for

[352] No attention, for example, has been paid to eighteenth-century poets who, as J.W. Foster informs, made excessive use of survey principles to provide detailed descriptions of landscapes and topographical detail. He argues that such writers were grossly rejected by romantic poets emphasizing the subjective 'I' and criticizing excessive indebtedness to scientific methods. Foster also claims, however, that even such poets could dispose of meditation and figurativeness only to the degree of subduing it under the literariness of description (253-255).

[353] Aristotle, *The Poetics of Aristotle*, ed. and trans. S.H. Butcher, 2nd revised edition (London: MacMillan and Co., 1898) 35, 37, *Library Genesis* <http://gen.lib.rus.ec/>, 15 December 2012, emphasis added.

discoursing upon universal and potential issues may be understood as ceding to such aspects of the Classical aesthetic. More than from historians, the treatment of topographical detail in poetry distinguishes poets from geographers, ‘topographers’ and cartographers.

The following chapters chart W.H. Auden’s engagement with particular topographical detail in his landscape poetry. The discussion aims to assess if Auden the poet reinforces his topophilia and mythical geography displayed in prose or, failing that, the extent and manner to which his inner Censor corrects the treatment of his sacred and unique places by heeding to the above generic features of topographical poetry and to other aesthetic and ethical forces of the 1920s and 1930s.

4. Alston Moor in W.H. Auden's Poetry (1927–1930)

> All the striving of life is a striving to transcend duality, and establish unity or freedom. The Will, the Unconscious, is this desire to be free. Our wants are our conception of what dualities exist, i.e., of what the obstacles are to our will. We are not free to will not to be free.
>
> –Wystan Hugh Auden[354]

In July 1936, Auden asked this rhetorical question: "For who is ever quite without his landscape?" (*EA* 204). As shown, above all places in England, Auden felt greatly emotionally attached to the Northern Pennines. He repeatedly and effusively presented Alston Moor as a region that had seized his imagination in childhood and exerted a grip over his sentiments for the whole life to such an extent that it became his numinous *locus amoenus*. Also, while formulating a concept of poetry as a praise of a sacred object only in the 1950s, from the very beginning of his poetic career, Auden maintained an explicit respect for topophilic poets who he claimed had the ability to notice a significant local detail, atmosphere and *genius loci* of a concrete place as well as verbal capacity to present its sacredness in poetry. Alston Moor was Auden's own holy land and an embodiment of Eden.

This chapter presents a close textual analysis of selected poems from Auden's first collection *Poems* (1930, 1933). The nub of the argument is that despite the professed salient perennial reverence for the Pennine landscape and topophilic poets, no such attitudes are palpable in this early poetry. The analyses show that, while attentive to the region, the poems house a sense of place controlled by a contrasting imaginative force. In what follows, it is argued that Auden obfuscates local specificity of Alston Moor and displaces out of the 1920s poems his eulogistic tone, private myth as well as his abiding deference to the sensibility of local poets. Auden's poetic voice is not that of an enthralled subject expressing positive topophilic sentiments, constructing Alston Moor as unique and superior, and paying homage to its sacredness.

As a whole the chapter forms a basis for the discussion of Auden's engagement with places, local details and the physical environment in the remaining parts of the present study. Hence, the poems are discussed in a broader context of those aspects of Auden's thought that interlace his oeuvre in an unchanged or, on the contrary, highly metamorphosed form.

4.1. The Prospect of a Border

In August 1927, while taking a summer leave from Oxford in his parents' house in Harborne, Birmingham, Auden wrote a poem "Who stands, the crux left of the watershed", later titled "Watershed", which appeared in Stephen Spender's 1928 private edition of Auden's poetry and in both editions of the *Poems*. It serves as a suitable starting point for the present analysis

[354] Auden, *The Prolific and the Devourer*, *Complete Works II* 411.

not only because it is the earliest poem announcing Auden's stylistic maturity and spared from his later rejections, but also because it contains images of a concrete English landscape, whose treatment already signals the poet's more general approach to topographical detail.

From the very first line of the poem Auden is very particular about landscape features. He establishes an elevated vantage point by positioning the speaker on a "wet road between the chafing grass" (*EA* 22). The road forms a watershed and borderline. It offers a prospect view of the valley below littered with "dismantled washing-floors", "Snatches of tramline running to the wood", "flooded workings" and "a damaged shaft" (*EA* 22). Obviously, Auden avails himself of the basic attributes of landscape and prospect poetry. Yet, as the rest of the poem shows, he also subverts and updates traditional patterns through the choice of the objects in the landscape below the feet of the observer. The valley ruins are neither those of a picturesque abbey nor symbols of a national pride. They are remnants of Britain's industrial glory. This is a landscape filled with disused and dilapidated engines and lead-mining machinery redolent of Auden's early sacred imaginative world. Indeed, the poetic universe of this poem derives from a concrete place. The "ramshackle engine" which "raises water" is "At Cashwell" (*EA* 22) – a former lead-mine located about five miles south-east of Alston, the very centre of Auden's holy land and 'Good Place'.

Auden does not only attend to a recognizable and locatable topographical detail, but also to a concrete moment of local history. From the vantage point, the speaker can descry local miners eagerly trying to revive the former functionality and fruitfulness of the lead mine. Throughout his whole life, Auden was fascinated with the idea of 'lead' as a material for lining coffins and, at the same time, for rhyming with 'dead'.[355] Indeed, instead of yielding ore, the seedy grounds of the lead mines are presently used merely for interring the figures' late predecessors who "lie under the poor soil" (*EA* 22). Similarly, although the present miners "Cleaned out a damaged shaft by hand" in an effort to reinvigorate the local industry, their striving was ineffective: "clutching / The winch, the gale would tear them from; one died / During a storm, the fells impassable, / Not at his village" (*EA* 22). Following his predecessors, the miner resting in a coffin is carried underground to the Valley of Death: "in wooden shape / Through long abandoned levels [of the mines] nosed his way / And in his final valley went to ground" (*EA* 22). As noted earlier, Auden, his brother and their father paid several visits to the region in 1919 from the newly acquired family cottage in near-by Threlkeld. Interestingly, John Fuller informs that in this poem Auden draws upon a real local event of 1919, when a miner died in a close-by village of Nenthead and was carried back to

[355] See, for example, Auden, "Fantasy and Reality in Poetry" 187, and the poem "In Praise of Limestone" (*CP* 414-15).

his home in Allenheads through mining levels due to bad weather – the storm mentioned in the poem.[356] Obviously, this poem is clearly embedded in a particular spatial-temporal nexus, in a concrete moment and place, in Auden's experience of his beloved sacred world.

However, "Who stands" also performs the shibboleth that Jerome McGann associates with Romantic poems and which Lothar Fietz discerns in eighteenth-century topographical poetry in general. After such a close-up attention to time and place, Auden departs from the local detail and dwells on the area in terms of a universalized image of a generic dialectical environment.

The humanized character of the Alston Moor landscape meets Auden's afore mentioned requirement for sites capable of attracting topophilic poets and sentiments. It is filled with material remnants of human dwelling. The dilapidated and unseemly machines, tramlines and damaged shafts in the limestone landscape are those that Auden in his prose presents as triggering his own topophilia. As noted, he also claimed that for the topophile unhumanized nature "holds no charms because it is lacking in history."[357] Yet, in this poem the humanized core is girdled by grass and woods in the periphery, which does attract his attention and even charms him. In fact, Auden approaches it with reverence, imperceptible in prose, for the very sake of the absence in nature of human inscriptions and history. Such a bifurcal focus on the natural and man-made space is a common feature of his work with landscape not only in this but, as it will be seen below, in several other poems written in the 1920s and later. Reminiscent of the relational focus of humanist geographers, characteristic of Auden's treatment of both environmental types is his concentration on man's relation to them.

The 'inner' man-made centre is pervaded with discontent and desire to procure changes and turn potentiality into actuality. The miners at Cashwell strive to repair a dysfunctional machine in order to secure better existential conditions. This is a situation reiterated in several poems in the late 1920s. One month later in September 1927, for example, Auden wrote "The crowing of the cock", which has obvious parallels with "Who stands". In this short lyric Auden constructs a vague and unlocatable landscape where "The chosen [hermits] in a cave" suffer the "dizzy calm" before the storm. In this "scorching season" (*EA* 23), they pray for an improvement. In January 1928, Auden's imagination returned to Alston Moor. He wrote a poem "Control of the passes was, he saw, the key", in which he subverts traditional ideas of a pastoral English landscape by planting a spy figure in the midst of the hills. "He, the trained

[356] Fuller, *W.H. Auden: A Commentary* (1998; London: Faber and Faber, 2007) 9.
[357] Auden, "Introduction to *Slick but Not Streamlined*, by John Betjeman," *Complete Works II* 304.

spy" enters the natural world – a valley in the Greenhearth area[358] – and, finding "a fine site for a dam / And easy power" (*EA* 25), wants to build it there. These poems reflect Tuan's afore-mentioned conviction that man "is an animal who is congenitally indisposed to accept reality as it is" and so eager to escape the actual state by means of transforming it into a better place. In these and several other poems from the period, Auden constructs the landscape as inhabited by human figures dissatisfied with their actual life and environment and as unwilling to accept such faults, which breeds their eagerness to procure a change.[359] The portrayal of the landscape and man's existence in it in such terms also fully echoes Auden's own claims that man lives by wishful thinking and by a relentless effort to solve the shortages of the actual life in order to install and realize the 'Good Life'. This, however, transforms the sacred Alston Moor into a landscape of desire, dissatisfaction and escapism.

Contrary to prose, in Auden's early poems, the humanized part of Alston Moor does not form a superior centre. In fact, he fashions its antipode – the surrounding untamed periphery – as a realm of an unmatched satisfaction and superior desireless life. This applies to other early poems too. The figure in "It was Easter as I walked in the public gardens" (April 1929) hears "the frogs exhaling from the pond" and perceives unrestricted freedom in the "traffic of magnificent cloud / Moving without anxiety on open sky" (*EA* 37). Similarly, while still in Berlin one month later, he wrote of a homesick foreigner, possibly himself, in "Coming out of me living is always thinking". Leaning on a harbour parapet, the speaker enviously watches

> a colony of duck below
> Sit preen, and doze on buttresses
> Or upright paddle on flickering stream,
>
> Casually fishing at a passing straw.
> Those find sun's luxury enough,
> Shadow know not of homesick foreigner
> Nor restlessness of intercepted growth. (*EA* 37–38)

The ducks' contentment and absence of anxiety emerge from the orderly principles working in nature and governing its constituents. In "Who stands" too, the humanized centre filled with desire, unhappiness and death is surrounded by the woods and thriving trees whose "sap unbaffled rises, being Spring" (*EA* 22). In these poems, nature is a peripheral environment abounding in energy and teeming life, whose vitality is maintained through a regular seasonal renewal. In this period, Auden often alluded to such moments of reinvigoration. In October

[358] In his early poetry, Auden makes frequent references to Greenearth Side/Fork or Greenhearth. The Greenearth mine was at Low Green, above the Cow Green reservoir in Upper Teesdale, which about seven miles to the south of Alston and Nenthead. The second possibility is that the word refers to Greenside mine, close to Kenswick, which is about a mile to the south of Threlkeld, the location of the family cottage (Alan Myers, "Auden in the North," *The Myers Project* <http://www.sclews.me.uk/myers.html>, 2 September 2012.

[359] Tuan, *Escapism* 5-6.

1929, for example, he wrote that "the dawn of common day is a reminder of birth / Is as the first day was when truth divided / Light from the original and incoherent darkness" (*EA* 41). "The crowing of the cock" poem has obvious parallels with "Who stands" in this respect too. It opens at the moment of dawn, which, like the Spring in the above poem, and the East in several cosmologies, also signals a fresh beginning, potential and growth: "The Crowing of the cock, / Though it may scare the dead," shall also "summon up / The pointed crocus top" (*EA* 23). In nature, there is not only contentment and freedom, but also hope, light and life.

All the above images of the natural space underline the antinomic character of the humanized landscape and existence peculiar to man. Contrasting with the thriving plants and content animal life, void of anxiety and restlessness, is the dissatisfaction and longing pervading human existence in the state of becoming, whose traces and remnants the ruined carpentered landscape bears. Unlike the unbaffled sap, magnificent clouds moving without anxiety and ducks dozing on buttresses for which the sun's luxury *is* 'enough', the figures inhabit concrete and generic humanized landscapes hosting a universal desire to overcome the shortages and unsatisfactory conditions of the actual life which *is not* 'enough'. The parapet against which the speaker of "Coming out of me living" leans is not only a product of an effort to construct a harbour – a humanized environment sheltering man from the vagaries of nature. It is also a border separating the restless human figure from the content, preen ducks dozing below and from the sea, which Auden claimed was a prime example of an uninhabitable space. The thriving woods surrounding the mining village of Cashwell in "Who stands" emphasize the same discontent and desire in the humanized clearing within. The parapet and woods are liminal points signalling man's irredeemable parting from nature, from the 'Good Place' of being. They are marks accentuating the post-lapsarian condition of man. Such dialectical landscapes present a rudimentary element connecting Alston Moor with other concrete places and generic spatial images that Auden imported into his interwar poetry.

Auden abstracts from topographical detail towards placeless dialectical landscapes. By embedding in them such a tension, he immerses himself in a long, not only western tradition of conceptualizing nature and culture as *topoi* of dichotomic values described in Chapter One. The reasons for the portrayal of the former as a 'Good Place' possessing power to sustain energy and life are outlined in Auden's prose from the interwar and later periods. In 1949, for example, he wrote of natural events as "recurrent" because governed by Natural time, in which such events occur "according to laws" and which is "reversible and cyclical."[360] As shown, Auden's 1920s poems already contain frequent references to the 'ritual' taking place

[360] Auden, "Nature, History and Poetry," *Complete Works III* 161.

in nature on a cyclical basis. It reinvigorates life and maintains its dynamic: the Spring and morning allow the sap to rise and crocus to grow. In an attempt to characterize the implications of Sigmund Freud, Auden stated that for this psychologist "A Golden Age […] (and anthropological research tends to confirm this), is an historical fact."[361] Auden came to criticize Freud during the 1930s. Yet, in the 1920s poems, he wrote nature as an environment embodying such praiseworthy characteristics. Also, despite the fact that in adolescence Auden refuted Christianity, by constructing nature as a space of content and repetitive occurrence, he approximates notions of pre-lapsarianism. The natural space in Auden's early poems appears as a primordial non-historical realm governed by reinvigorating power and hope. This is redolent of, for example, Mircea Eliade's connection between a cyclical sacred time, regular renewal and reactualization of the original state of purity *in illo tempore*.[362] Auden takes nature for an environmental ideal and sets it against the inferior, carpentered world of man. Here, he recalls Martin Heidegger approaching a clearing in the midst of woods in terms of a space freed from nature by man in his dwelling.[363] The human figures in "Who stands" and other poems dwell in the humanized landscape freed from the prime natural environment forming its surrounding. There, they care about their existence and hope to improve it.

Clearly, Auden reverses the values associated in his prose with the natural and humanized environments. Yet, despite its physical closeness, nature in his poems has no potential to become man's existential habitat satiating his desires. There is in the landscapes a steady presence of an insurmountable void and border between them. The insistence on such an irredeemable separation is a fundamental ingredient of Auden's landscape construction used for voicing critical views of Romantic poets and for expressing a grudge against an aspect of interwar modernity discussed in the following chapter. Therefore, a brief recourse into Auden's opinions on man's relation to nature seems apposite before proceeding to further analyses. Due to the fact that he did not publish essays and reviews on a regular basis until 1932, the diary kept in Berlin during his stay in 1929 is an invaluable index of his intellectual views held at the time of writing the presently discussed poems.

"The progress of man seems to be in a direction away from nature" (*EA* 298), Auden affirms lucidly in the diary and reinforces the claim with an explanation in the same entry:

> The development of consciousness may be compared with the breaking away of the child from the Oedipus relation. Just as one must be weaned from one's mother, one must be weaned from the Earth Mother […]. Along the growing self-consciousness of man during the last 150 years […] has developed Wordsworthian

[361] Auden, "Psychology and Art To-day," *Complete Works I* 102, round brackets original.
[362] Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* 68-115.
[363] Heidegger, "Art and Space" 307.

> nature-worship, the nostalgia for the womb of Nature which cannot be re-entered by a consciousness increasingly independent but afraid. (*EA* 298)

Auden alludes to Wordsworth's admission of being "A worshipper of Nature"[364] in the last lines of "Tintern Abbey" and shows that he too is willing to locate a superior primordial womb of cyclicality and unity in the natural space. Yet, unlike his literary predecessors nostalgically gazing at nature and different stages of the past for a more organic state of human existence, he affirms that like an individual at birth, man in general cannot but be separated from it. Auden saw the dissociation of man from nature as a crucial attribute of the specific *condition humaine*: "Man is a product of the refined disintegration of nature by time" (*EA* 298). The miners at Cashwell are trapped in the humanized centre and so separated from the surrounding natural space which they cannot enter. In a similar fashion, the trained spy in Greenhearth in "Control of the passes" is unable to enter the natural world and the hermits in "The crowing of the cock" must stay inside their caves.

Besides spatial features, in this diary entry attention is paid to the temporal axis in order to argue that man must learn to accept the consequences of the division and 'expulsion'. Instead of striving for the reunion with the once inhabited matrix of nature, man should avoid nostalgia and move forward and away from it. Such a directional, 'away-from-nature' essence of the human existence adumbrates Auden's later and frequent preoccupation with two different conceptualizations of time. In his definition of topophilia cited earlier, for example, he dwells on the historical dimension of the humanized environment comprising remnants of historical events. In 1949, he claimed that man's specificity consists in existing within a historical time made up of such events, each of which is "unique or once only," and is "responsible for the occurrence of subsequent historical events, not by causing them necessarily to occur but by providing them with a motive for choosing to occur." Hence, unlike other organisms, Auden concludes, man lives within the historical time of *change* and *progress*, which "historical events create by their occurrence" and which is thus "irreversible and moves in a unilinear direction."[365] The parapet in "Coming out of me living", the ramshackle engines and washing floors in Alston Moor, and similar constituents of other humanized landscapes, are mementoes of such a directional existence. Their historical indistinctiveness reminds the hilltop observer and reader not of local uniqueness but of an unrelenting common desire of the post-lapsarian man to construct a satisfactory habitat. The relics bespeak a general effort to turn potentiality and vision of the 'Good Life' into actuality.

[364] Wordsworth, "Tintern Abbey" 160.
[365] Auden, "Nature, History and Poetry," *Complete Works III* 161.

Besides Auden's Berlin diary, early cues of his belief in man's progressive historical existence and irretrievable dissociation from nature are also in his very first full-length essay "Writing" (1932) analyzing human communication.[366] Recalling the claim from the diary, Auden associates the loss of unity and wholeness with the emergence of self-consciousness: "At some time or other in human history, when and how is not known exactly, man became self-conscious; he began to feel, I am I, and You are Not-I." The consequence of such a rapturous moment, Auden purports, was the loss of man's previous status of a part within a whole because at this point man began to be irredeemably "shut inside [himself] and apart from each other. There is no whole but the self."[367] The isolation and loss of unity render all that surrounds man a separated object and Otherness – a 'Not-I'. Auden writes about the split under the influence of a Classical notion revived during Romanticism that the original language was emotional, natural and spontaneous.[368] He does it in order to propose the existence of a point in history when a direct communal language capable of conveying feelings underwent a transformation into an emotionally and communicatively impoverished symbolic language. In consequence, Auden concludes, people cannot but try to "bridge over the gulf" that separates them from others and the external world. Such a reading of language seems a clear echo of what Richard Sheppard considers to be a crucial aspect of Anglo-American Modernism – the view of language as "opaque" and "de-potentiated".[369]

Related to the dialectical opposition in the 1920s landscapes of the natural and humanized space, as well as to Auden's life-long insistence on the inevitable progress of man away from nature, is his claim that "Deprived of a mother to love him / Descartes divorced / Mind from Matter" (*CP* 639). Edward Mendelson notices that Auden in the interwar years analyzed the "personal and social costs of duality," such as the "separation of instinct and intellect."[370] Indeed, the term "duality" and its derivations are very frequent in Auden's prose of the time. They are most commonly used in relation to the Cartesian division between the body and the mind. In exactly the same way as he imagined the human being in terms of a creature dissociated from communal wholeness and nature, he perceived another aspect of the lost motherly womb of unity in the split between the mind and the body. In the Berlin diary, Auden notes that "Mind has been evolved from body, i.e. from the Not-Self" (*EA* 298).

Auden viewed them as mutually dependent but each in need of a different development. He associated the body with sameness because it is what man shares with other individuals,

[366] Contrary to the propositions that Auden makes in this essay about the opaqueness of language is its argumentative clarity caused by the fact that he wrote it as a chapter for *An Outline for Boys and Girls and Their Parents* (ed. Naomi Mitchison).
[367] Auden, "Writing," *Complete Works I* 13.
[368] See, for example, Martin Procházka and Zdeněk Hrbata, *Romantismus a romantismy* (Praha: Karolinum, 2005) 22-28.
[369] Richard Sheppard, "The Crisis of Language," *Modernism*, eds. Bradbury and McFarlane 323, 329.
[370] Edward Mendelson, Introduction, *The Complete Works of W.H. Auden*, vol. I. xiii.

natural organisms and nature. In "The Noble Savage", his 1938 assessment of Dr Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture*, Auden claims that "the physical differences between these three peoples [North-West American Indians, Pueblo Mexicans, Dolu Islanders] as between any human beings are very *slight*. Man finished his biological development long ago."[371] Like Yi-Fu Tuan, for whom "The body is clearly nature" and cultural practices are means of disguising its desires,[372] the interwar Auden repeatedly claimed that the natural tendency of the human body is towards togetherness and "communistic" (i.e. of community) existence, which he found in the unity prevailing in nature. Contrary to this is his view of the mind as naturally polymorphic, thus unique and individual. As he put it in the Berlin diary, the reason is that the natural development of the mind is "one more and more of differentiation, individualistic, away from nature" towards culture. The mind, he adds, is "non-communistic" (*EA* 298–99), which turns it into a barrier sealing man off from community with other men and from nature as the original habitat. The mind, in other words, makes each individual inherently lonely.

The postulation of the human being as engaged in the process of individuation, as banished from merging with nature, and as inseparably entwined into the humanized landscape bearing signs of his dwelling on earth, all feed Auden's life-long critique of what he called 'Wordsworthian nature-worship' and the "heresy" (*EA* 297) of different forms of Unitarianism attempting to overcome the body-and-mind duality. In his Berlin diary, Auden suggests that "The Pagans tried to convert mind into body, and went mad or just apathetic. We attempt to turn body into mind and become diseased" (*EA* 297). As shown later, the 1930s Auden interpreted such efforts as deplorable myths construed in avoidance of the actual dualistic existence that must be faced despite its imperfection. Similarly, convinced of the naturalness of man's development towards individuation and independence of the mind, Auden the teacher became an explicit critic of tendencies in education and politics to ignore and suppress human individuality. He saw such processes as leading to the transformation of individuals into anonymous mechanistic parts of a manipulatable crowd.

The ideas of an irreconcilable dualistic existence resonate through Auden's landscapes in the above poems and in other early works. The natural and humanized landscapes stand in a great contrast to each other because used for discoursing upon the inescapable dualities of a community and individual, the whole and the part, and the body and the mind, respectively. Although written some years before the prose, the poetry already promotes Auden's 1930s

[371] Auden, "The Noble Savage" *Complete Works I* 472, emphasis added. Yi-Fu Tuan in his anthropology-based analyses suggests that human bodily differences are minor and negligible when compared to the 'inner' variations (*Topophilia* 46).
[372] Tuan, Preface, *Escapism* xiii.

emphasis on the irredeemable division and inability to reach unity, oneness with nature or with another human being due to the rationalizing consciousness and language. In "Again in conversation" (1929), for example, the voice of the lover is physically

> nearer
> But no clearer
> Than first love
> Than boys' imaginations. (*EA* 27)

The consequences of such a bodily closeness but communicative partition caused by the rationalization of experience is that every new lover and "every news / Means pairing off in twos and twos / Another I, another You" (*EA* 27). "It was Easter as I walked in the public gardens" is also telling in this respect. Auden's choice of a 'public garden' is apt because it can be viewed as an intermediate environment conflating nature and the humanized landscape and, at the same time, as a place where an individual meets other men. Yet, although the frogs in the garden and the clouds above it are free of anxiety, and although the Christian festival is a returning ritual celebrating the rise from the dead at the onset of Spring, the lovers must stay alone. Like the animals, they are also driven by vernal energy. Nevertheless, they remain separated and 'locked' inside themselves. Spring and Easter are a

> Season when lovers find
> An altering speech for altering things,
> An emphasis on new names, on the arm
> A fresh hand with fresh power. (*EA* 37)

The bodies, the 'Not-selves', are close to each other and to nature. Yet, the rationalizing mind keeps the lovers apart. Auden here draws a parallel between writers and lovers, both of which use language in the hope of approaching others. Yet, instead of removing distance, language and communication maintain the gap between one human being and the object of their desire. All that surrounds man and his consciousness remains an unapproachable otherness, a 'Not-I'. Unlike in nature, where cyclicality is an inherent property and sign of order, the use of the words 'altering', 'fresh' and 'new' suggests unwelcome repetitiveness, stagnation and unassailability of unity in the life of man.[373] Auden underlines this state with a poignant image of a "solitary" male "weeping on a bench, / Hanging his head down, with his mouth distorted / Helpless and ugly as an embryo chicken" (*EA* 37). Although the figure is in nature and next to other people in the public garden, and although he is compared to the prenatal embryo, he flounders in loneliness and sorrow.

[373] Auden's late 1920s poems offer numerous examples of unattainability of unity in experience due to the consciousness and language spoiling the experience of wholeness (e.g. "No trenchant parting this" [*EA* 21] or "Love by ambition" [*EA* 30]).

Besides love, as an ineffective means of erasing one's separation from others, Auden at this time was already sceptical about other types of exalting moments of experiencing wholeness because of their transitoriness. In "Coming out of me living" (1929), he claims that

> sometimes man look and say good
> At strict beauty of locomotive,
> Completeness of gesture or unclouded eye;
> In me absolute unity of evening
> And field and distance was in me for peace,
> Was over me in feeling without forgetting
> Those ducks' indifference, that friends' hysteria,
> Without wishing and with forgiving […]. (*EA* 37–38)

Edward Mendelson takes these images as examples of Auden's display of a "romantic unity in the perceiving mind" and of "Wordsworthian moments."[374] Auden's above reference to the completeness of the 'unclouded' vision does suggest a flirtation with the notions of wholeness and revelatory experience spared from rationalizing. Yet, Mendelson also shows that at the end of the poem, Auden admits the irreducible presence of human consciousness that forms a border dividing man from unity. For Mendelson, Auden implies that "The mind may look through its windows to the world outside, but it must leave those windows shut."[375] The lines above suggest that such 'windows' may in fact be opened but only transitorily. Although there are exalting moments of unity, Auden concludes the poem, man must face "being no child now nor bird" (*EA* 39) because irrevocably entrapped in the 'I/Not-I' dualistic existence.

Beside the opaqueness of Auden's late 1920s poetry, which the poet himself admitted,[376] the critics often notice a feature that any reader of the early poems searching a coherent ethical paradigm must patiently learn to tolerate: his intellectual instability. It takes the form of excruciatingly frequent shifts in views and contradictory claims made, not without an exception, within weeks and even days. In October 1929, for example, Auden wrote a poem "Which of you waking early and watching daybreak". It contains another image of a landscape at dawn celebrated as a moment of a new beginning reminiscent of the poems above. Auden presents man as fully connected to nature and its nourishment:

> daily under the disguise of immediate day-dream
> Or nightly in direct vision the man is nourished,
> Fed through the essential artery of memory
> Out of the earth the mother of all life. (*EA* 41)

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[374] Edward Mendelson, *Early Auden* (1981; London: Faber and Faber, 1999) 72.
[375] Mendelson, *Early Auden* 72.
[376] Mendelson shows that Naomi Mitchison, the reviewer of Auden's *Poems*, wrote a letter to the poet complaining of obscurity. Auden replied with an explanation of the last stanzas of "The crowing of the cock" as "a symptotic movement towards emotional satisfaction" (Textual Notes, *The English Auden: Poems, Essays and Dramatic Writings, 1927-1939*, by Wystan Hugh Auden, ed. Edward Mendelson [1977; London: Faber and Faber, 1988] 418), which John Fuller (11) marks as Mendelson's misreading of 'asymptotic'. Mendelson corrected his mistake in *Early Auden* 36.

He who tries to disrupt the arterial connection and inflow of nourishment, Auden asserts, will suffer and "become cipher / With codified conduct and a vacant vessel for heart. / Yes, she is always with him and will sustain him" (*EA* 41). Auden imports into the poem Northern English landscape of fells and imitates the Romantics in suggesting that when in nature, man can fuse the body and the mind:

> Often he knows it – caught in a storm on fells
> And sheltering with horses behind a dripping wall,
> Or in prolonged interview with another's eyes
> And full length contact he will forget himself
> As passion coming to its climax loses identity
> And consciousness, is one with all flesh. (*EA* 41)

Auden himself soon loudly repudiated such a deviation from his more general resigned attitude to man's capacity to reach the state of unity and reconciliation with nature. Edward Mendelson informs that Auden tried to remove the poem from the 1930 edition of *Poems* prior to publication and that, failing to do so, he described it as "pompous trash".[377] It was finally removed from the 1933 edition. It is of great significance that its position was taken by "Doom is dark and deeper than any sea dingle" (1930). Here, the fells and natural images remain as residues of the earlier poem. Yet, they become sites of a longing for the humanized landscape. The figure is in the midst of fells and "pot-holed becks" but, reminiscent of Anglo-Saxon elegies, he "dreams of home" and of "Kissing of wife under single sheet" (*EA* 55).

4.2. The Landscape of Entrapment

The view of man as unable to escape his dualistic existence by means of regaining unity and organic oneness explains why the 1920s Auden was already critical of backward nostalgia. Yet, besides sneering at Unitarianism and the worship of nature, he was also equally distrustful of man's capacity to progress along the historical time in the direction of freedom and the independent 'self'. This attitude points at another attribute of his treatment of Alston Moor in early poetry: its use for the construction of landscapes of interception, entrapment and suffocating cyclicality of human existence in general, which contrasts with the proclaimed value of local sacredness and uniqueness.

It was not until the following decade that Auden started to fully elaborate his claims that the mind tends towards individuation and that consciousness is a tool of progress, change and freedom. As already noted, in 1938 he wrote that man's biological development was complete. Yet, more than ever before and after, this was also a moment when he repeatedly claimed that man is the only organism capable of progressing further and the only species

[377] Mendelson, "Textual Notes," *The English Auden* 418.

able to "continue his evolution" with the use of "conscious intelligence."[378] Stated in November 1938, this belief obviously exerted a powerful grip over Auden's thought in the year or so before his emigration because it came to the surface again two months later. In January 1939, pondering on what would succeed exhausted Liberal Democracy, Auden imagined Social Democracy and Fascism as two possible replacements. He interpreted both as ideologies based on a belief that "Man is the only animal who has been *able* to continue evolution after biological development is finished. He is the only animal *capable* of using his intelligence and making choices; the only animal whose society can develop from one form into another."[379] Through the 1930s, Auden came to claim that the mind, consciousness, intelligence and the rational choice were not inhibiting faculties but welcome and indispensable tools for making progress. As already shown, man in his view was the creator of unique historical events responsible for the occurrence of subsequent ones. As the word 'capable' and 'able' in the above citations imply, through the decade Auden started to posit man as an effective maker of history and environment because bestowed with a privileged freedom to choose, respond to ideas and act:

> [...] it is legitimate to see ideas as the prime agents of human historical change, for were it not for his capacity to think, man's evolution would be complete like that of animals. An idea has two purposes, to justify our satisfactions, and to find a way to remove our wants. [...] In its aspect as a means to remove wants, it demands a change in our actions and so becomes an agent of change. In so far as it is true, i.e. it achieves its conscious intention, the causal relation between idea and historical change is obvious [...].[380]

The words 'wants' and 'satisfactions', as well as the possibility to satisfy the former by actions resulting from ideas, align with Auden's argument in the afore mentioned essay "The Good Life" from 1935. There, he claims that man lives by a conscious desire to remove the tension between the present 'Evil Life' and his idea of the 'Good Life' and 'Place' through turning potentiality into actuality. However, the following chapter shows that the 1930s Auden did not unanimously promote the workability of such proclamations.

As regards his 1920s poems, such claims are defied without exception. The humanized landscapes are inhabited by eager figures desiring to act their will in order to remove the shortages of actuality. Yet, the dilapidated environment which they work and implore stands a silent witness to their calls and futile attempts to attain the vision of an imagined better life. All efforts to escape the actual *status quo* are crushed. What remains is sorrow, frustration and death. In contrast with the hope and new beginning brought to the natural landscape by the

[378] Auden, "Morality in an Age of Change," *Complete Works I* 478.
[379] Auden, "Democracy's Reply to the Challenge of Dictators," *Complete Works I* 463, emphasis added.
[380] Auden, *The Prolific and the Devourer*, *Complete Works II* 441.

vernal season awaking its elements back to life, the Cashwell miners in "Who stands" are unable to resurrect the fecundity of the local mine. Unfulfilled remain their conscious choice and desire to both bring the actual existence forward and closer to their idea of the 'Good Life'. Instead of turning the dysfunctional landscape into a 'Good Place' sustaining existence, one of them dies and returns to the womb of nature symbolized by the abandoned mine levels through which he is carried. On a larger scale, the Alston Moor landscape bears material relics of a past human struggle for improvement. Like the miner, the machines and other man-made structures will also remain stagnant until dissolved in nature. The workings are flooded and the vegetation of the surrounding woods has already devoured the tramline, which can no longer stand for human achievement, movement, dynamic and change.

Similarly, the daybreak in "Crowing of the cock" does not only "Call on the fire to strike" for action. It also announces stasis and death. The crocus top summoned up by the dawn is described as "smelling of the mould" and "Breath[ing] of the underworld" (*EA* 23), which is reminiscent of the images of decay and 'dried tubers' that Auden found appealing in T.S. Eliot's imagination. The hermits in their cave pray and direct their gaze towards the heavens. Yet, while the dawn brings a new beginning to the natural world, it also crashes their hopes. In the morning, they find "Blocked conduits in spate, / Delectable horizon" (*EA* 23). In "Control of the passes" the trained spy finds a good natural site in the Pennine Greenhearth for a human construction yielding an electric power – an improvement to the life of man. Yet, the spy is unable to act and materialize his plans because the unidentified "They" ignore his calls and kill him. In the poems from this period, Auden multiplies the image of a landscape inhabited or entered by figures eager to manifest their will in order to turn the actual habitat into a satisfactory one. Yet, they have no potential to escape its present state by improving it.

The presence of an unquenchable desire and profaneness connects the villages of Alston Moor to other places and landscapes in Auden's early verse. An interesting example of such a panoptic vision disregarding notions of local specificity and superiority is "Which of you waking early" (1929) introduced above as an example of Auden's occasional relapse to unitary ideas. What this 'pompous trash' poem shares with others is a statement of a general lack of man's potential to consciously reach desired goals by making choices that would allow him to 'write' his own history as a series of causes and consequences:

> Seeking a heaven on earth he chases his shadow,
> Loses his capital and his nerve in pursuing
> What yachtsmen, explorers, climbers and buggers are after,
> Till exhaustion come and *homeless he cry for support*
> In a hot room with the sagging melody of jazz
> And the waters of the womb or a blue heaven close over him.
>
> (*EA* 42, emphasis added)

The spatial sweep of this poem is immense and all-encompassing. Man at sea, on land and in the mountains achieves none of his ambitions and plans to find "heaven of earth" (*EA* 42). Such an enterprise is compared to a futile chase of a shadow, an idea and vision. What remains for the exhausted and homeless is a desperate terrestrial 'cry for support' from the potential outside while staying inside his hot room, his habitat and actual existential situation, and listening to sagging melodies. Again, like the miner, the 'he' will overcome his desire only at death when the waters of the womb of nature regain him for the bowels of the Earth.

Such desperate calls for support, however, find no encouraging response. On the contrary, the figures inhabiting Auden's 1920s landscapes, including those of Alston Moor, must stay within the dilapidation of their actual environment because unable to make effective steps. Their future does not hinge on their personal will, thus on manifestations of individual choices. It is subject to powerful forces outside their control. The attempts and efforts made by the Cashwell miners and hermits praying in caves are inconsequential. While committed to improving their habitats, the figures are navigated, their desires tamed and consequently thwarted by storms, winds and the undefined "They" (*EA* 25) as Auden ambiguously remarks in "Control of the passes". His use in the Berlin diary of the passive in the claim that "Mind has been evolved from body," and the assertion that "man is a product of the refined disintegration of nature by time" (*EA* 298), declass man to the status of a mere unfruitful object in the landscape and an inane product of its forces. These limit the freedom, eagerness and personal choice of an individual to take an active part in turning ideas into action.

"Ancestral curse, jumbled perhaps and put away, / Baffled for years, at last in one repeats its potent pattern" (*EA* 29), wrote Auden resignedly in March 1929. Edward Mendelson notices that Auden in his poems from the period often deals with 'Family Ghosts' and their ancestral curse preventing individuals from determining the course of their existence.[381] Due to the opaqueness and complexity of Auden's early poetry, critics attempting to identify the nature of such forces find themselves at odds and at risk of unbiased speculations. Most commonly, the vagueness of the dialectical struggle between an individual and impersonal external forces allows them to read the poems in unduly exaggerated Marxist or Freudian terms.[382] Whatever their identity – ancestral, class-related, natural – the forces are fatal for preventing man from displaying what Auden claimed was proper to the human being: the independent self. As shown, due to his consciousness of the surrounding otherness, man cannot regain unity. At the same time, because barred by the forces from a fruitful

[381] E.g. Mendelson, *Early Auden* 5. "Family Ghosts" is the title of a poem beginning "The strings' excitement, the applauding drum" (*EA* 32) from April 1929.
[382] See Justin Replogle, *Auden's Poetry*, 1st ed. (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1969) 3–30.

manifestation of will and eagerness to act, he cannot grow independent, make progress and move forward. Hence, unlike the frogs accepting cyclicality, man lacks control over his life and environment, as well as power to change them. This enhances the ubiquity in the 1920s landscapes of stagnation, dilapidation and man's "restlessness of intercepted growth" (*EA* 38).

The fact that Auden saw mankind as stranded between the state of organic unity and independence brought into his poetry images of man searching but unable to find a 'resting place' of satisfaction. Perhaps due to his undergraduate fondness for the Old English literature and elegies, Auden placed in his late 1920s poems human figures lacking belongingness and undergoing a crisis that must be endured in consequence of their expulsion from a motherly womb. For example, when his bohemian stay in Berlin came to a close in the early summer of 1929, Auden visited his parents staying in the 'Far Wescoe' cottage in Threlkeld. While there, in August he wrote "Order to stewards and the study of time" and set it in a recognizable English landscape of the region. The poem is interlaced with a tension between disconnection and connection, independence and dependence, departure and return. It opens with an image of a man sitting on a train, watching the "slackening of wire" (*EA* 39) along the track and going home. Auden conflates the destinations of the homecoming traveller – the rural setting of the northern parts of the Lake District and the cottage located close to Alston Moor. He uses them as figures of the 'womb' of nature and family, respectively, from which mankind and he emerged and into which he is now returning:

> Being alone, the frightened soul
> Returns to this life of sheep and hay
> No longer his : he every hour
> Moves further from this and must move,
> As child is weaned from his mother and leaves home
> But taking the first steps falters, is vexed,
> Happy only to find home, a place
> Where no tax is levied for being late. (*EA* 39)

This poem is informed by the same frame of mind as the Berlin diary quoted above in connection with Auden's insistence on weaning and overcoming the Oedipus bond. The same modal verb 'must' is reused in an identical context of weaning and the same analogy is drawn between nature and mother.

This time, however, the weight is not on the 'departure from' but on the 'return to' the family cottage and motherly womb of nature represented by sheep and hay. Auden exemplifies his general ability to create a functional interplay of the thematic and formal features of verse. The voice claims the inevitability of separation, which is echoed by the

caesura in the third line of the quotation between 'his' and 'he'.[383] At the same time, the diaeresis ends the enjambment evoking the idea of continuity of 'his' life amidst the sheep and hay, which cannot be abandoned. Exhausted by the separative process, he returns to the womb of 'home'. Although 'slackening', the 'wire' of the first stanza viewed from the train along the route to the family cottage becomes a strong and unbreakable umbilical, which problematizes the growth of the individual towards independence and selfhood. However, due to the flow of time signalled by the temporal references on both sides of the caesura and in the title line, the perception of the same place is different. The traveller becomes an exile because, like the homeless yachtsmen and explorers above, the rural life cannot be re-entered as it is "No longer his" (*EA* 39). This is one of Auden's figures unable to move either way because trapped in the stalemate situation between unity and independence. The final stanzas underwrite man's lifeless existential 'hibernation' and stagnation caused by his inability to move backward to unity and forward to independence. The figure returns from the woods, feels homeless and enters "winter, winter for earth and us" (*EA* 40).

The consequences are that despite making efforts, man in Auden's 1920s landscapes cannot overcome the tensions between the actual and imagined life because unable to advance his incomplete and insufficient evolution. In September 1929, one month after the above 'homecoming' poem, Auden expressed the position aptly: "to be held for friend / By an undeveloped mind" reduces human life to "No income, no bounty, / No promised country" (*EA* 35–36). The most explicit explanation for Auden's frequent construction of landscapes of stagnation and dilapidation, and for the cul-de-sac *condition humaine*, is in the final stanza of "The Strings' excitement, the applauding drum" written five months earlier (April 1929):

> While this despair with hardened eyeballs cries
> 'A Golden Age, A Silver … rather this,
> Massive and taciturn years, the Age of Ice.' (*EA* 32, ellipsis original)

The regressing epochal sequence suggests that while man cries for the re-creation of the Golden Age and the 'Good Life', he must accept the present entrapment within the glaciated age, which 'cools down' all such aspirations. Besides echoing Auden's interest in geology and the climate of the north, the 'frozenness' of the image forebodes the above-quoted line "winter, winter for earth and us" written four months later. It implies the irremovable existential rigidness, immobility and inability to navigate one's life away from its present state. Controlled by much more powerful agents, man must be taciturn and remain an inhabitant of the actual 'here' and 'now' of the humanized landscape, whose material

[383] Besides the themes and atmosphere of Anglo-Saxon poetry, Auden developed fondness for its prosody. His occasional use of caesura is very likely the consequence of this rather than classical influence.

dilapidation echoes his existential and evolutionary stasis. As noted, in "Under boughs between our tentative endearments" (1929), Auden used the idea of an "ancestral curse" which "repeats its potent pattern" (*EA* 29) and forces every individual into a cyclical stasis frustrating their progress. They can thus neither "withhold", Auden continues, nor bear easily the despair which springs from the uncontrollability of their life. Hence, he concludes, the "Sharers of our own day" – the modern man *in general* – has only one option in life. He must

> share our pity, hard to withhold and hard to bear.
> None knows of the next day if it be less or more, the sorrow :
> Escaping cannot try ;
> Must wait though it destroy. (*EA* 29)

4.3. The Cry for Support and Cure

Justin Replogle has observed Auden's incessant clinical fascination (perhaps derived from his father's medical occupation) with human health and sickness.[384] Indeed, the figures in Auden's landscapes are 'ill' and discontent. Lacking their own capacity to overcome and escape a stalemate existential situation, they make desperate outward "cry for support" (*EA* 42). They gaze at the space surrounding their homes and dilapidated lifespace and beg for mercy from the forces thwarting their actions and projects. Auden often wrote about his own step in adolescence towards personal independence: the repudiation of the High Anglican faith and upbringing supervised by his religiously devout mother. It is also a commonplace fact of his biography that following the departure from Europe in 1939, he soon rediscovered Christianity. Yet, even during the 1920s and 1930s, he occasionally reverted to the prayer rhetoric and analyzed its pragmatic potential.

In the sonnet "Sir, no man's enemy, forgiving all" (October 1929) written in the context of the Wall Street Crash, the anxious voice adopts a synoptic focus on humanity in general. It addresses an almighty power and begs for mercy not on himself but, using the plural 'we', on all mankind. With itchy desires but exhausted and incapable of advancing forward by himself, the voice cries:

> be prodigal :
> Send to us power and light, a sovereign touch
> Curing the intolerable neural itch,
> The exhaustion of weaning, […]. (*EA* 36)

The speaker is tired of weaning repetitively frustrated by impersonal forces and the unidentified ancestral curse. Interestingly, one month later, Auden wrote "Since you are going to begin to-day", which can be interpreted as a direct response to this sonnet apostrophe. It is a poem that offers a very early glimpse of Auden's 1930s fascination with a public rhetoric

[384] Replogle 8, 23-29.

and the power of oration (displayed primarily in *The Orators* [1932]). It takes the form of a monologue, which gives the responding voice an unlimited power to orate in a self-assured style belittling man and implying his powerlessness. Recalling the futile climbers of "Which of you waking early and watching daybreak", it asserts that "You" can

> climb with bare knees the volcanic hill,
> Acquire that flick of wrist and after strain
> Relax in your darling's arms like a stone
> [...]
> But joy is mine not yours […]. (*EA* 44)

In its treatment of the human being, the unidentifiable speaker is comparable with the ambiguous "They" of "Control of the passes". It degrades human striving for a bodily excellence as much as attempts for emotional counselling. In 1945, Auden added to the poem the title "Venus Will Now Say a Few Words", which tempts the reader to narrow the original vagueness of the deriding voice to the retarding power of an erotic desire. However, without the cue in the title, the poem hardly indicates such an original intention. The force could also be history or evolution. This is a type of interpretation of which Auden was well conscious. In 1956, for instance, he wrote that Venus is "a symbol for an impersonal natural force."[385]

Regardless of its identity, the speaker is an unlimited 'puppeteer' trifling with man, deriding his inconsequential efforts and turning him into a passive object:

> I shifted ranges, lived epochs handicapped
> By climate, wars, or what the young men kept,
> Modified theories on the types of dross,
> Altered desire and history of dress. (*EA* 45)

The omnipotence is signalled by the proclaimed capacity to control empires, whole cultures and its narratives, which also shows the massive scale of Auden's historical sweep. Like the powerful and advanced Romans, who "had a language in their day / And ordered roads with it, but it had to die" (*EA* 45), the contemporary man is adamantly informed that he cannot but fail to procure a conscious change. Auden makes a connection between landscape and culture. He claims that human language lacks any performative potential to alter the environment. It is impotent, *dross*y and feeble. He alludes to toponymy and lets the voice assert: "Your culture can but leave – forgot as sure / As place-name origins in favourite shire" (*EA* 45). Regardless of the advance of their civilization, humans cannot do things with words and make lasting marks on the landscape by the act of naming its segment with a proper name. This is another example of man's hollow efforts and his inevitable subjection to larger impersonal schemes. In "Who stands", the natural space surrounding the Cashwell mines devours a formerly functional tramline and floods the man-made workings. In "Venus Will Now Say a Few

[385] Auden, "The Virgin & The Dynamo," *Complete Works IV* 498.

Words", the humanized landscape filled with "Equipment rusting in unweeded lanes" (*EA* 45) reappears. Like Cashwell, this landscape becomes a repository of dilapidating machines. Their disintegration is governed by nature revealing the futility of a former and present human struggle for the 'Good Life'. He who tries to rebel, the voice warns imperviously, "will be tipped, / Found weeping, signed for, made no answer, topped" (*EA* 45).

The voices, responding to man's desperate calls with indifference and derogation, leave him in the midst of the relics of his efforts alone and unassisted. In "Having abdicated with comparative ease" written in January 1930, hence one month after the poem above, Auden returned to a recognizable topographical detail. Here, he exploits the idea of a liminal territory for stating man's helplessness and ineffectiveness of his steps. The landscape and the human figure in it are again controlled by a discouraging and authoritarian voice looking at a map of a border area between England and Wales and proclaiming:

> Here is the first- and the second-class roads,
> Crossed swords for battles, and gothic letters
> For places of archaeological interest.
> The car will take you as far as the gorge,
> Further than that we fear is impossible.
> At Bigsweir look out for the Kelpie. (*EA* 46)

Bigsweir is in the Wye Valley dividing Gloucestershire in England from Monmouthshire in Wales, which, as the following chapter shows, is a region that came to attract Auden repeatedly in the 1930s. Like several other poems above, this one elaborates the idea of incompletion. The border territory is a point, a 'parapet', where the addressee *is taken*, hence assisted, but left at the mercy of the powerful mythical Kelpie haunting rivers. Hence, the human figure in the landscape cannot overcome the border and must stay within the historicized world despite his efforts to escape from it. Unlike the local and publicly uninteresting rusting machines in Cashwell, the crossed swords and gothic letters mark sites of public importance. Yet, like the dilapidated machines, less than monuments of human achievements and glory, these cartographic symbols designate relics reminding the reader of the saddening stasis, inconsequentiality and incapacity of man to be an effective wilful agent of change and history.

The overall plaintive tone of the 1920s poems does not issue from man's inability to re-enter the state of unity. It emerges from Auden's conviction about the invincibility of the crushing power of the unidentified 'ancestral curse' – genes, family, nature, etc. This force limits the freedom and choice of an individual, thereby depriving the whole species of the possibility to make a conscious progress and change. What Auden repeatedly resigned to at this stage, was a statement of stoic acceptance of such a position. He described it as the

existence of a 'Truly Strong Man' – man strong enough to bear the stasis and resignation on ideals. As noted, because 'Escaping cannot try' (*EA* 29), man should accept the actual 'Evil Life'. This, Auden often proposed, required endurance instead of eager heroism:

> Heroes are buried who
> Did not believe in death
> And bravery is now
> Not in the dying breath
> But resisting the temptations
> To skyline operations. (*EA* 28)

Instead of bravery and heroism, man should be content with occasional moments of contentment, albeit transitory. "The happiness, for instance, of my friend Kurt Groote, / Absence of fear in Gerhart Meyer / From the sea, the truly strong man" (*EA* 37).[386] One year before T.E. Lawrence's death in 1935, Auden wrote of his life as an "allegory of the transformation of the Truly Weak Man into the Truly Strong Man." In his view, the Truly Weak Man tries to take to "blind action without consideration of meaning or ends." The Truly Strong Man, on the other hand, "lounges about in bars and does nothing." [387] His merit comes from the willingness and strength to stoically endure the stasis, actuality and temptation to act. In November 1929, Auden summed up the belief clearly: "Its no use raising a shout. / No, Honey, you can cut that right out" (*EA* 42). As shown in the following chapter, this ingredient of Auden's early landscapes is what underwent radical changes in the 1930s.

4.4. The Reversal of Values

From Auden's childhood until his death, the Northern Pennines remained in his peripheral mythical space, which Yi-Fu Tuan claims is prone to idealizing by existential outsiders. Chapter Two shows that as a visitor and reader, Auden developed an early topophilic sentiment for Alston Moor and that he remained to praise it in prose in superlative and encomiastic terms for its unique and numinous landscape. In his criticism, the region forms the prime constituent of his private mythical geography as well as a physical and imaginative asylum from the profane chaos of the surrounding human world. Yet, as seen in the present chapter, the 1920s poems do not endorse such proclamations. They contradict them.

As noted, the perception of a spatial segment as unparalleled and numinous necessitates an imaginary border separating it from the surrounding profane and inferior Otherness. Yet, while there is no reason to doubt the childhood origin of Auden's private myth, the existence

[386] Kurt Groote and Gerhart Meyer were Auden's German friends (Mendelson, *Early Auden* 119). Meyer, as the line implies, was a sailor who Auden met on Easter Sunday in 1929 (Fuller 61).
[387] Auden, "T.E. Lawrence," *Complete Works I* 61–62. Edward Mendelson claims that the 'Truly Weak Man' is Auden's gloss on Christopher Isherwood's 'North-West Passage' (*Early Auden* 135-36), which Peter Davidson interprets as "perverse action, […] otiose heroics" and "pointless exertion" (Davidson 95).

of such a border in the poetry of the late 1920s is systematically and consistently suppressed. Auden's early landscapes diverge towards two opposing extremes. On the one hand, he employs topographical details drawn from Alston Moor and, to some extent, from other regions. On the other hand, he refrains from concreteness and resorts to constructing vague and unlocatable 'type' landscapes of caves, public gardens, valleys and horizons. Yet, their comparative analysis shows that Auden reconciles the particulars and the universals, the concrete and the generic, through an imagination bleaching out the border embracing and highlighting local uniqueness and sacredness. The poems do not pronounce the 'proper nameness' and topographical specificity of Alston Moor nor do they laud the sacredness of its landscape. Both attributes are passed over in silence, nullified and displaced out of the poems.

Numerous critics have noticed the presence of border in Auden's early landscapes.[388] In the 1920s, Alston Moor attracted Auden's attention and some of his poems from the time are clearly embedded in a concrete spatial-temporal nexus. Yet, the idea of a border is present only as a boundary differentiating between placeless environmental types. Local images are classicized and transformed into physically and ideally indistinctive generic landscapes. Particular places are used as illustrative but substitutable manifestations of much broader issues, in both geographical and historical sense. Like other concrete and vague landscapes in his 1920s poetry, Auden constructs Alston Moor in a manner allowing him to discourse upon traditional dichotomic oppositions and human directional existence. The dominant dialectic is that of nature and culture, of raw and carpentered space. Yet, the poems were not written by a poet eager to differentiate between these environmental types as such. Rather, manifesting a tendency in topographical poetry to exploit tangible landscape components for grappling with abstract issues, Auden focuses on this binary opposition in order to contrast two modes of time and existence. The observer standing on the wet road above the Cashwell valley in "Who stands" (1927) is in an elevated position offering a panoramic prospect of a dilapidated village surrounded by woods. The latter provides a means for imagining a mythical and primordial cyclical state of wholeness, organic unity, stability, prosperity and order. Yet, Auden's reading of nature is not marked with a retrospective nostalgic gaze towards a superior moment of existential unity. He needs it merely as a background for a focus on the humanized landscape in the centre and for demarcating the *sui generis* character of human existence. The humanized core of the Alston Moor landscape becomes a site illustrative of man's irrefutable expulsion and weaning from the communal womb of unity prevalent in natural periphery. Man lives close to nature but his irrevocable submission to the directional historical time is

[388] E.g. Replogle 24; Marchetti 200–11; Reiner Emig, *W.H. Auden: Towards a Postmodern Poetics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000) 3.

monumentalized in the dilapidating objects littering the carpentered centre. Even the observer atop the watershed is surrounded by and physically close to nature. Yet, he is a "stranger" who does not belong to it and so remains merely standing on the manmade road – an archetypal image of movement and progress.

Auden depersonalizes Alston Moor and dwells upon the dichotomy of the humanized and natural space. Their respective treatment, however, bespeaks a reversal of attitudes displayed in prose, which involves the desecration of the former. Despite his proclaimed disdain for Romantic poets and unhumanized nature, Auden fashions it as the superior 'Good Place'. It becomes a sanctuary of a pre-dualistic organic existence, purity and contentment nourished by regular reinvigoration. Its portrayal clearly echoes his definition of the innocent and 'Good Place' as that "where no contradiction has yet arisen between the demands of Pleasure and the demands of Duty."[389] The humanized centre, however, is constructed in opposite terms. Auden claimed that in childhood he found in the Pennines and its abandoned mines both the material for the construction of his private world filled with numinous objects, and a sacred refuge allowing imaginative escapes from the profane human world. This chapter shows, however, that in the 1920s poetry, Alston Moor is a landscape of crisis, decay and suffering; a landscape inhabited by man filling it with a tension and desire to escape from its present suffocating state; a landscape occupied by figures dissatisfied with their environment and envisioning, as Tuan phrased it, "what is not there."[390] Instead of being a means for imaginative escapes into a superior, secondary world of potentiality, Alston Moor assists Auden in grappling with the human condition in the primary fallen world of actual existence. Hence, analogous to obfuscating local uniqueness, by peopling his sacred world and by opening it to the chaos, contingence and human yearning, Auden suppresses the ideal border dividing the numinous 'inside' from the profane 'outside'. In consequence, its humanized landscape is desecrated and deprived of its status of a hierarchically privileged asylum. In fact, the portrayal of the humanized parts of Alston Moor does not resemble Auden's later definition of the happy 'island' or 'oasis', but that of the 'desert' interpreted as

> [...] wilderness which lies *outside* the fertile place or city. As such, it is the place where nobody desires by nature to be to be. [...] the desert may not be barren by nature but as the consequence of a historical catastrophe. The once-fertile city has become, [...], the wasteland. In this case it is the opportunity for the stranger hero [...] [to] become the rebuilder of the city.[391]

The comatose industry, disused and rusting machinery in Cashwell, blocked conduits and other images contribute to an overall sense of dereliction and dysfunction. The environment is

[389] Auden, "England: Six Unexpected Days," *Complete Works III* 431.
[390] Tuan, *Escapism* 6.
[391] Auden, *Enchafèd Flood* 13-15, emphasis original.

exhausted, paralysed and in the state of stasis contrasting with its former fruitfulness. The humanized landscape in "Who stands" and other poems is indeed a 'once-fertile', productive and animated place but also one that is presently depleted and barren. Unlike the natural world, where moisture invigorates life because it allows the sap to rise and grass to grow, the man-made "washing-floors" in the Cashwell lead-mine are dismantled and disused. Like in the desert, there is no water as a life-preserving element and as a substance necessary for separating ore. Its absence makes the sustenance of the local miners' lives impossible. Where water is present, as in the flooded workings of Cashwell or in the form of a flood in "The crowing of the cock", it is a natural element causing stagnation and human inability to live.

Consequently, Auden's 1920s humanized landscapes are generally pervaded with dissatisfaction breeding the wish to 'escape' their present state in which 'no one desires by nature to be.' Out of the two forms of escapism that Tuan describes as common to man's response to the faults of the actual place, Auden in this period portrays figures eager to materialize a change *in situ*. They try to revive and 'cure' the disquieting chaos and disorder, or they make an effort to build a power-generating construction. Yet, unlike the stranger entering deserts with a potential to reinstate the former fruitfulness of the city, the "stranger" (*EA* 22) that appears in the second stanza of "Who stands" is discouraged from entering the local wasteland. In this respect, the poem can be read as an early predecessor of, for example, Auden's famous ekphrastic poem "Musée des Beaux Arts" (1938), where the insight of old masters into the nature of human suffering is admired: "how well they understood, / Its human position; how it takes place / While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along" (*EA* 237). Unlike the fisherman and ploughman in Brueghel's *The Fall of Icarus*, the stranger in Cashwell pays heed to the suffering of the miners but, as a specimen of a 'Truly Strong Man', he is equally detached. Avoiding otiose heroics, he passively observes how the miners drown their hopes and die.

Contrasting with such signs of inaction are the active and eager miners, the spy in Greenhearth and the hermits praying in caves. In line with Paul Shepard's and Yi-Fu Tuan's claim above that man lives by a constant search for a good place, and in reflection of Auden's own view of human existence as marked by a quest for the 'Good Life', Alston Moor is turned into a landscape of actuality filled with a desire for the attainment of a better state. The human figures strive for materializing their vision of what 'is not there' and they act to transform the dilapidated environment into a functional cultured space engendering satisfactory existence. All, however, fail to procure changes. They neither construct a fertile human habitat nor restore its former prosperity. The fate of the miners in the valley and the

derelict mementoes of previous efforts to advance divulge existential paralysis caused by man's general submission to indifferent and impersonal forces. They drag the whole species through history, frustrate human will, pull man off the track towards an envisioned life and suck him back to the cyclical existence. In 1956, Auden wrote that "The historical world is a fallen world" but added that it is redeemable: "The unfreedom and disorder of the past can be reconciled in the future."[392] The 1920s Auden, however, relegates such visions far beyond the horizon of potentiality. The irrevocable dereliction of the humanized landscape and the futility of man's effort bespeak their untenability. Due to such an ever-present dereliction, dissatisfaction, sorrow, unwanted cyclicality and death, Auden's 1920s humanized landscape, including that of his sacred world, resemble the desert-like 'Evil Place' from which man desires to escape but in which he is trapped. The result is that besides defying the uniqueness of Alston Moor, Auden also 'desanctifies' his holy land. He floods it with suffocating profane chaos and human stagnation, and turns it into a landscape of entrapment.

In his excellent analysis of "It was Easter as I walked in the public gardens", Rainer Emig notices Auden's use of the word 'man' without an article, which makes him conclude that it is an allegory of suffering.[393] In "Who stands" (1927), Auden positions the stranger in an elevated place and in "Having abdicated with comparative ease" (1930) he lets the speaker look at a map offering an equally large region. Similarly, in "Which of you waking early" (1929) and "Since you are going to begin to-day" (1929, later titled "Venus Will Now Say a Few Words"), Auden opens massive geographical and historical prospects, and speaks on behalf of the whole mankind. This is also the case of "Order to stewards and the study of time" (1929) and "Sir, no man's enemy, forgiving all" (1929) explicitly using the plural 'we' and 'us'. This intimates an overall tendency, analyzed in the following chapter, to focus on a concrete spatial-temporal nexus, but also to abstract from it and transcend an interest in the particular lives, cultures and locations with proper names. Auden does it because he maintains a panoptic focus on the *condition humaine* and mankind as a whole, irrespective of local variations. In the 1920s, he entrusted the sacred landscape with the capacity to illustrate the general disenchanting impasse of human existence characterized by suffering, fatigue incurred by the "intercepted growth" (*EA* 38), and by man's generic inability to manifest his will that would lead to the construction of a protective home and 'Good Place'. Consequently, rather than treating Alston Moor as a unique, specific and sacred proper name, the 1920s Auden approaches it as a 'pronoun' that can be used to refer to the profaneness of man's post-lapsarian dwelling on earth. By demythologizing and depersonalizing the limestone area,

[392] Auden "The Virgin & The Dynamo," *Complete Works IV* 503.
[393] Emig 90.

however, Auden defies the basic patterns of spatial experience of a mythical space described by Yi-Fu Tuan and, more importantly, he negates the reverential approach to it displayed in his own prose as well as its supreme position in his mythical geography.

"If [art] moralizes, it must counsel a stoic resignation, for the world he knows is well content with itself and will not change," wrote Auden later in his life and in fact retrospectively characterized his 1920s ethos.[394] Intellectually, this period was only the beginning of a long journey that he would undertake during the following decades. Yet, in terms of the treatment of concrete geographical locations, including his sacred places, he already planted the seed of a poetics that, in some respects, underwent little or no change. Yet, Auden's 1930s drastic shift in ethical views, which entailed a refusal of a passive acceptance of actuality, called for substantial changes in the construction of landscapes too. As his psychological preoccupations with individuals and intercepted evolution gave way to a focus on their commitment to public issues and actuality, Auden rearranged his landscapes substantially. The following chapter charts the character of such constants and variables through a focus on Auden's treatment of England – his existential lifespace.

[394] Auden, "A Literary Transference," *Complete Works II* 43.

5. England in W.H. Auden's Poetry (1930–1938)

> When we are confronted with an emotional difficulty or danger, there are three things we can do. We can pretend that we are not there […], we can pretend that it isn't there, […] or we can look at it carefully and try to understand it, understand the mechanism of the trap.
>
> [The garden island is] an illusion caused by black magic to tempt the hero to abandon his quest, and which, when the spell is broken, is seen to be really the desert of barren rock.
>
> –Wystan Hugh Auden[395]

The present chapter brings into focus Auden's poetry written between his homecoming from Berlin in 1929 and 1938. These are the only years when Auden was a practicing poet and, at the same time, stayed in England as a long-term resident and existential insider. The analysis traces the contours of Auden's engagement with his homeland in poetry from the period. It shows that when examined in light of changes in Auden's ethical stances, the poems reveal further discrepancies between his verse and prose and new aspects of his poetics of place.

5.1. Leaving the Ivory Tower of a 'Rentier' Life

In July 1929, a few weeks before the October events signalled the world-wide economic crisis, Auden returned home from his one-year stay in Berlin. The arrival marked the end of what he later called a 'rentier' life – a private, carefree existence supported by generous parents allowing its beneficiaries to take no interest in public issues.[396] The moment also marks the beginning of a ten-year period that proved to be the most intellectually and aesthetically intense of his entire life. At its beginning, there was an unknown, financially dependant 'rentier' and unpublished poet yearning for public recognition. At its end in 1938, there was its mirror reflection – a mature and respected artist yearning for dissociation from his public image and entanglement in the interwar literary scene. In between these margins, on the backdrop of the economic crisis and surge of European nationalism, there was Auden in the role of an increasingly more recognized poet, enthusiastic teacher, piercing and prolific critic, collaborate playwright and reporting traveller.

Auden the poet announced his presence on the literary stage with *Poems* published in September 1930 under the auspices of T.S. Eliot. Despite its initial failure to be positively received, this and the following volumes, as well as collaborate plays, installed Auden in the centre of an emerging generation. His growing reputation was also due to Michael Roberts' anthologies *New Signatures* (1932) and *New Country* (1933), Geoffrey Grigson's *New Verse* and his own prose. Typically of his generation, Auden published it mostly in left-wing periodicals *Daily Herald* and *New Statesman*, but also in renowned journals: F.R. Leavis' *Scrutiny* and T.S. Eliot's *The Criterion*. Auden began with reviews. However, these are at the

[395] Auden, "Poetry, Poets, and Taste," *Complete Works I* 163-64, emphasis original; Auden, *Enchafèd Flood* 21.
[396] 'Rentier' is Auden's own description of his existence prior to 1929 when fully dependant on the generosity of his parents and their allowance (*The Prolific and the Devourer*, *Complete Works II* 417).

cusp between reviews and essays. The personal tone and intellectual vigour of the maturing inner Censor already presage Auden's self-assured comments on literature, anthropology, education, politics and religion displayed in the slightly belated essays appearing after 1932.[397]

Together with the volumes of poetry, these platforms allowed Auden's distinctive voice to be heard, thereby playing a substantial role in eliciting the attention of critics who ascribed to the poet the status of a vanguard of an emerging generation of left-wing intellectuals. A myth was fashioned mistaking Auden 'the main influence on' for Auden 'the leader of' a group of individual artists labelled 'MacSpaunday' (coined by Roy Campbell), 'Audenites', 'The Pylon School' and the 'Auden Circle'.[398] Towards the close of the decade, Auden did not only grow indignant about this reception but, as it is evident from his 1939 writing, he also became bitterly critical of his own view of poetry as an effective social force. As already noted, at the onset of the Second World War and to the dismay of many, Auden left his homeland. In the early months of 1939, he set off for New York in the hope of rooting himself out of such contexts and his former views.

In April 1930, five months before the publication of *Poems*, Auden had made yet another decisive step. The lack of psychological freedom lamented in the 1920s poetry was abruptly replaced with financial independence in February 1930. Auden's parents' allowance came to an end, which terminated his ability to savour the liberal and progressive atmosphere of Berlin. Almost immediately, the returnee 'rentier' embarked on a pedagogical career and so started to follow his father's commitment to the public service. After a short-term period of private tutoring in London (September 1929 – early 1930), in April 1930 Auden succeeded his friend C.D. Lewis in Larchfield School (later Academy) in Helensburgh, Dunbartonshire, to the north-west of Glasgow, where he worked until the early months of 1932. Dissatisfied with the institution, he left and, in the autumn of the same year, began teaching in Downs School, Colwall, Herefordshire, where he stayed for three years until 1935.[399] This was a moment when the socialist tilt of John Grierson's Film Units financed by the General Post Office appealed to Auden. He joined the organization specializing in documentary films and stayed there for several months (September 1935 – March 1936). In the summer of 1936,

[397] Tony Sharpe notices Auden's scornful view of his prose, yet for any Auden critic it is an invaluable source of insight into his thought ("Auden's Prose," *The Cambridge Companion to W.H. Auden*, ed. Stan Smith 110-11).

[398] Stephen Spender himself defied the notion of a unified group and movement: "The thirties are often described as a literary movement, and Auden is supposed to have been its leader. […] Movements have meetings, issue manifestoes, have aims in common. The thirties poets never held a single meeting, they issued no manifestoes […]. Each of them wrote a different kind of poetry from the others without his feeling that, in doing so, he was letting down the side. As I have mentioned elsewhere, the first time that Auden, Day Lewis and Spender were all three in a room was in Venice, after the war, in 1948" (*The Thirties and After – Poetry, Politics, People (1933-75)* [London: Fontana, 1978] 18-19).

[399] Edward Mendelson informs that Auden left Larchfield because he found it increasingly uncongenial (Introduction, *The English Auden: Poems, Essays and Dramatic Writings, 1927-1939*, by Wystan Hugh Auden, ed. Edward Mendelson [1977; London: Faber and Faber, 1988] xvii). Auden returned to Colwall for one more term in 1937.

Look Stranger! was published but Auden had already embarked on a series of journeys abroad. He turned his experiences into travel books, whose writing and preparation occupied him for most of the remaining time prior to going into exile in the early weeks of 1939.

No longer an indifferent hedonistic 'rentier' isolated from public issues, Auden came to face the same new problem in all the professional pursuits. As a poet, critic, teacher and documentarist he became preoccupied with the relation of the private and public realms and the role of an individual in public issues. Like other members of his generation profiling themselves against High Modernists, he felt compelled to adopt a stand on the engagement of an individual in current social, economic and political matters. Yet, he distinguished between two roles. Auden the teacher and citizen was fully convinced that a conscious awareness and commitment to the contemporary social reality were major facets of the civil responsibility of every individual. For Auden the poet, however, this presented a dilemma: neither propagandist poetry nor ivory-towerism, which many of his generation critically associated with the High Modernists, was an easily acceptable choice. He tried both. Both, however, made him bitter and led to the expulsion of several poems from his canon and to substantial revisions of others. Auden's attempts to come to terms with these two roles and to reconcile the public with the private in poetry were accompanied with phases of eagerness and doubt over their miscibility. This tension had a major impact on his 1930s treatment of places and landscapes and as such, it is accounted for in what follows.

Most of the poetry written in the period under focus was collected in *Look Stranger!* (1936) comprising thirty-one poems. The volume is finely executed not only because it contains some of the most memorable lyrics that Auden wrote in the decade. It also reveals his fully developed sense of symmetry and harmony between its thematic and formal features. The poems are 'circumscribed' by a verse "Prologue" and "Epilogue" endowing, as Tony Sharpe notices, the second and penultimate poems, respectively, with a special importance because they are both concerned with the summer.[400] However, this temporal leitmotif is also paralleled by unprecedented attention throughout the volume to two spatial features. The "Prologue" (beginning "O, Love the interest itself in thoughtless Heaven", May 1932) provides an adumbration:

> Here too on our little reef display your power,
> This fortress perched on the edge of the Atlantic scarp,
> The mole between all Europe and the exile-crowded sea. (*EA* 118)

[400] Tony Sharpe, *W.H. Auden* (London: Routledge, 2007) 50-51. The poem is "Out on the lawn I lie in bed" (1933) set in June and discussed later in this chapter. This is an example of Auden's general sense of a symmetrical structure, whose glimpse is already in *Poems*, where the 'mini-cycle' later titled "1929" occupies the very central position (no. 16) in all three editions of the volume.

These lines bespeak two changes. Firstly, Auden's transformation from a coterie artist into a public figure was accompanied with a substantial expansion of the spatial horizon of his poetry from a private sacred world of Alston Moor to images of various other public places in England, Wales, Scotland, the Isle of Wight and Skye, used, occasionally, within a single poem. Secondly, for the first time in his prose Auden referred to his homeland as "a small European island" in 1937.[401] In the "Prologue", the words 'reef', 'mole', most certainly used in the sense of a massive breakwater barrier, and 'fortress', a structure of an equal yet terrestrial function, reveal Auden's heightened attention in the 1930s poetry to the idea of England's insularity and its separation from without. The fact that in this introductory poem Auden dwells on such notions is significant because to read his pre-1939 poetry chronologically is to encounter an unprecedented increase in the whole of *Look Stranger!* of a preoccupation with England and, generally, with the idea of insularity as a guarantor of local uniqueness and protectiveness emerging from the physical remoteness of islands from other places. Auden's 1930s fascination with this type of place is evident already from the covers of both the English and American editions. Auden abhorred the English title, which the publisher derived from the famous poem beginning "Look, stranger, at this island now" and foisted it on the volume in the poet's absence. John Fuller informs that, learning too late about the title, Auden disparagingly asserted in a letter to Frederic Prokosch that it "sounded like a vegetarian lady novelist."[402] Nevertheless, his wish for the American edition of 1937 was that it be called *On This Island*, which draws the same attention to the idea of insularity.

As shown in Chapter Two, Auden profiled himself as a 'true Englishman' proud of his homeland. Typically of existential insiders mythologizing their motherland in superlative terms, he emphasized its insular position and derived from it reasons for discoursing upon England's privileged and unique local culture, landscape and immiscible heritage contrasting with Europe imagined as a homogeneous unit devoid of diversity. Moreover, as shown, in the 1930s, Auden expressed aversion against the increasing influx of 'global culture' and interwar modernity into England damaging its traditional self-contained identity. In a satirical tone revealing a reactionary bias and patriotism, he lamented the pervading presence in his homeland of cosmopolitanism diminishing the distinctiveness of Englishness and, at the same time, he gazed nostalgically at his middle-class life in the idealized provincial England of the Edwardian and Georgian eras.

[401] Auden, "Pope," *Complete Works I* 144.
[402] It is a letter written on 16 March 1937 (Fuller 145). In Britain and the USA, the volume was published by Faber and Faber on 22 October 1936 and by Random House on 2 February 1937, respectively.

In what follows, this chapter analyzes Auden's treatment of England and the manner in which he takes to task the idea of Englishness and insularity. With the propositions of the previous chapters in view, it seeks to fathom the consequences on such cultural and spatial aspects of the poetry of Auden's return to his existential lifespace, his long-term residence there and his transformation in this period from a coterie artist and private individual focused on the psychological impasse of an individual into a public poet, teacher and critic concerned about social affairs and capable of addressing large bodies of people. Firstly, the chapter assesses how these changes combine and interfere with his construction of England in prose as a locally superior and insular 'fortress' protecting its hierarchically privileged status. Secondly, it examines the extent to which Auden's poems bespeak his national belongingness, pride and middle-class predilection for the secluded provincial life that he found so appealing and that he admired about Hardy and Betjeman. Lastly, it explores the impact of Auden's new ethical stances, especially the relation between a private individual and the public, onto his approach to the idea of insularity, distance and the island *topos*, about whose Classical and Romantic perception he was well informed.

5.2. The Voice from the Island

It was when away from England that Auden realized the disappearance of his childhood world. In the liberal and progressive atmosphere of the Weimar Republic, he came to recognize that he had lived in a safe ivory tower constructed around him by his class. Berlin

> […] opened my eyes to the precarious condition of culture in our century. Even the oldest readers of this essay cannot imagine how secure the English middle class still felt in the twenties. Despite the Great War, we could not believe that anything really serious had happened. For example, I never read a newspaper until I went to Berlin. In Berlin, however, I understood for the first time that something irrevocable had happened, that the foundations had been shaken, and that during my lifetime the world would never again be the same secure place it had been in my early childhood.[403]

In Germany, Auden and his friends indulged in private bohemianism. Yet, Berlin was also a place where he was exposed to the first signs of a public crisis announcing the oncoming catastrophe and beginning to shake the foundations of his class and established patterns. When back in Britain, Auden soon realized that his class and England's insularity were no protective shields from the European situation. Writing retrospectively from New York in 1940, Auden noted that "Whatever its character, the provincial England of 1907, when I was born, was Tennysonian in outlook; whatever its outlook the England of 1925 when I went up

[403] Auden, "Are the English Europeans?: *The Island and the Continent*," *Complete Works IV* 431.

to Oxford was," alluding to T.S. Eliot, "The Waste Land in character."[404] Besides his plaintive awareness of England's increasingly cosmopolitan character, Auden's 1930s writing is full of references to the new distraught condition of the no-longer-Tennysonian 'Mater':

> With all thy faults, of course we love thee still ;
> We'd better for we have to live with you,
> From Rhondda Valley or from Bredon Hill,
> From Rotherhithe, or Regent Street, of Kew
> We look you up and down and whistle 'Phew!
> Mother looks odd to-day dressed up in peers,
> Slums, aspidistras, shooting-sticks, and queers.' (*LFI* 355)

The fact that the interwar 'Mother' England suffered from a malaise did not make Auden turn away from it. Not yet. On the contrary, in the 1930s he was prepared to face it and approach both the working-classes – the 'slums' – as well as the middle-classes – the 'aspidistras' – with piercing commentaries. The speaker in Book I of *The Orators* from 1931 asks: "What do you think about England, this country of ours where nobody is well?" (*EA* 62). Auden's poems, especially those written before 1938, reveal his attempts to formulate an answer.

While in *Look Stanger!* Auden incessantly addresses English insularity, the poems in this volume as well as the question raised in *The Orators* signal that England is not an isolated and safe island but a site struck with symptoms of a general contemporary disease. In fact, the verse "Prologue", introduced above for its reference to the mole, reef and fortress, is a case in point too. Written while Auden was teaching in Helensburgh, it shows the expansion of a horizon through attention to several specific locations in England, Scotland and Wales. Lancashire "furnaces gasping in the impossible air, / The flotsam at which Dumbarton gapes and hungers" resemble the "wind-loved Rowley,"[405] upon which "no hammer shakes / The cluster of mounds like a midget golf course, graves / Of some who created these intelligible marvels" (*EA* 119). In this poem, Auden does not voice matters peculiar to Lancashire, Dumbarton, Chester and Rowley. He collapses the local uniqueness of chosen seaside counties and towns by dwelling on their underlying dysfunctional status indicative of the general crisis. Together, they even resemble the comatose Cashwell valley, the landscape of blocked conduits and other landscapes in his 1920s poems. Auden may have expanded his geographical horizon from Alston Moor to other places in Britain, but his synthetic appeal to sameness remains unchanged.

In the above-quoted apostrophic line "Here *too* on our little reef display your power" (*EA* 118, emphasis added) from the "Prologue", there is already a signal of Auden's 1930s

[404] Auden, "A Literary Transference," *Complete Works II* 46.
[405] Rowley Regis is near Birmingham in the "Black Country", once one of the most industrialized areas of England famous for coal mines, iron foundries and other types of industry.

view of England and places in it as inseparably connected to broader supra-national problems. Although the 'reef', 'mole' and 'fortress' are obvious allusions to insularity, in this and other poems from the decade England *too* is a place fully and patently affected by the general dilapidation and exhaustion of western culture. Like Alston Moor in the 1920s, Britain as a whole in the 1930s poetry resembles the desert, to whose description Auden added: "the desert is a dried-up place, i.e., the place where life has ended, the Omega of temporal existence." It recalls the desert in that it is also an *exhausted* image "of modern civilization in which innocence and the individual are alike destroyed."[406] Auden approaches Britain as affected by the decay of Western capitalist civilization whose principles, as shown below, dehumanize individuals by turning them into mechanical and acceptant automatons.

In his examination of Auden's image of England in his interwar poetry, Patrick Deane claims that the poet was attracted to England's dereliction.[407] Indeed, he was. Yet, the care and interest he displays are not carried by the voice of a patriotic Englishman specifically concerned about a particular culture or proud of his homeland's uniqueness. Rather, Auden adopts the position of a cosmopolitan humanist seeing England as undistinguishable from an overall situation between the wars. Auden's diagnosis above of the link between individual counties, England and the surrounding interwar world matches his occasional earlier use of the plural generic 'we'. It appears in the above line from the "Prologue" and in the poem beginning "The chimneys are smoking" written one month earlier in April 1932. There, Auden wrote about lovers and "all these people around us" that

> We ride a turning globe, we stand on a star ;
> It has thrust us up together ; it is stronger than we.
> In it our separate sorrows are single hope." (*EA* 118)

Auden's use of plural pronouns intimates global concerns. While present in a 1930s poem, this is a clear early manifestation of what Justin Quinn, charting Auden's later engagement with local cultures, has referred to as Auden's "internationalized" and "universal self", and which John Fuller has called a "generalized symbolic form."[408] Auden may have considered himself the citizen of one insular *polis*, yet, like Diogenes of Sinope, he presents himself as 'a citizen of the world' (*kosmopolitês*) concerned about all the people standing on the same dilapidated 'star'. Auden the poet disguises his national belongingness and preoccupies himself with the whole *cosmos* and humanity in general. The allusion above to a 'turning globe' upon whose surface people with separate sorrows are 'thrust […] up together' and united in a 'single hope' undermines all local variety and subdues attention to it. Auden is

[406] Auden, *Enchafèd Flood* 19, 25.
[407] Patrick Deane 26.
[408] Justin Quinn, "On Audenstrasse," unpublished essay; Fuller 485.

immersed in global concerns and, like the star, he thrusts all mankind into one large crucible. Despite economic, political, cultural and other varieties of local cultures, common to basic principles of cosmopolitanism is an emphasis on the cultivation of a single community.[409] Auden's professed allegiance to Englishness does not preclude his moral commitments to man in general and to the whole human community. This is an attribute of several other poems from this period in which the proclaimed national identity is eclipsed and the insular specificity of England deconstructed.

In 1936, Auden started to travel extensively through the whole world – to Iceland, Spain, China and America. Consequently, England had to compete for his attention with other places. Yet, he made frequent imaginative returns to the homeland. The frontier-poem "Dover", written in August 1937 while staying there with Isherwood and working on *On the Frontier*, is a case in point. Auden approaches Dover for its ambivalent function. He dwells on its border status to show that besides separating the existential 'inside' from the 'outside', the town also connects the island to the Continent. Strategically, he begins by fashioning Dover as a sheltered and secure place accessible only through "Steeps roads, a tunnel through the downs" and the opening between the lighthouses. "Like twin stone dogs opposed on a gentlemen's gate," they guard "forever the made *privacy* of this bay" (*EA* 222, emphasis added). They protect the town, and the whole country it symbolizes, from external intrusions. They also mark the limits of the sea, Auden's constant image of disorder and unpredictable chaos, surrounding the warm and safe existential centre within the 'gate'. Echoing his observations about English specificity embedded in prose, Auden constructs these as shields protecting a unique local culture and its language: "Within these breakwaters English is spoken ; without / Is the immense improbable atlas.". Besides, there are "Georgian houses" and pubs, "The Lion, the Rose or the Crown" (*EA* 222-23). Their names clearly allude to Englishness through national heraldry and a toponymic tradition of the English culture.

Moreover, Auden emphasizes the safe-haven status of England when in the fourth and fifth stanzas Dover becomes a point of departure for migrants. Their eyes, "fixed on the sea" (*EA* 222), discern in the water a temporary suffering that must be endured before the adventure and financial gain awaiting in the world outside may be attained. The prospect and horizon perceived in such terms recall what Yi-Fu Tuan and Edward Hirsch refer to as a mythical zone and the background of potentiality, respectively. Yet, failing to find a 'Good Place' elsewhere, the migrants return home with their eyes "filled with tears of the beaten."

[409] Pauline Kleingeld and Eric Brown, "Cosmopolitanism," *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2011 ed. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2011/entries/cosmopolitanism/>, 14 June 2012.

They thank “the historical cliffs” within whose protective embrace it is possible to sit in gardens “under the yew, at children’s play” where “everything is explained” (*EA* 222).

Auden also creates the atmosphere of undisturbed sameness and tranquillity. Dover is accustomed to and unstirred by the private “unusual moments; / The vows, the tears, the slight emotional signals” of men and women bidding farewell to each other. It has always seen such “unremarkable gestures” (*EA* 222). The routine and placidness are also present in the local taverns bearing the heraldic appellations. There, English soldiers swarm in their new untainted uniforms “As fresh and silly as girls from a high-class academy” because “All they are killing is time” (*EA* 223). Even they live idle and enclosed lives of reciprocal dependence but also self-interest:

> The soldier guards the traveller who pays for the soldier ;
> Each one prays in the dusk for himself, and neither
> Controls the years.

Such a routine tranquillity and pastoral image above of figures in the shade of a tree completes Auden’s construction of England as the safe-haven of stability, home and Mother protecting and nurturing the ‘wounded’ travellers and English citizens.

For a first-time reader aware of the fact that Auden wrote this poem in 1937, these initial images are likely to seem naive and outrageous when seen on the background of the disquieting European situation. Yet, this placidness is intentional. Amidst the above images testifying to the presence of a unique culture, insular protectiveness and peace, Auden disperses counter elements foreshadowing the contrasting atmosphere of the latter stanzas. In the second line of the poem, he draws attention to “A ruined pharos [which] overlooks the bay” and, in the first line of the following quintain, he refers to “the dominant Norman castle” (*EA* 222). Hence, the lighthouses protecting England like dogs are complemented by a pharos, one of the two Roman lighthouses built in Dubris – Dover. Together with the medieval Norman castle, this image effectively deflates England’s insular status and isolationism from Europe. Both are memories and ‘inscriptions’ of massive historical and supra-national events, which Auden uses to bring to the surface the fact that Britain *is* a product of foreign forces and invasions and that its insularity, cultural and geographical, *is* a false and enfeebling myth. Moreover, at the beginning of the poem, he says of Dover: “The sea-front is almost elegant ; all this show / Has, somewhere inland, a vague and dirty root: / Nothing is made here” (*EA* 222). The elegant façade hides the artificiality of the town. The scene is a ‘show’ whose grandeur is not the result of a local production but of ‘dirty’, presumably colonial roots further evidencing England’s interconnectedness with the world beyond the shore.

The allusion to the Roman invasion and Norman Conquest prepares the ground for the eighth stanza exploring the risk of contemporary invasions and spread of Nazism. The idling and self-absorbed Englishmen on Dover beaches and in pubs vividly contrast with the eager and active miners in the Cashwell valley, and with other figures in the 1920s poetry trying to protect and improve their existence. The speaker notices that above their heads, "expensive and lovely as a rich child's toy, / The aeroplanes fly in the new European air" (*EA* 223). The innocence of the words 'lovely' and 'toy' is ironic and intentionally naive. This poem was written five months after Auden returned from the Spanish Civil War and four months after the bombers of Nazi Germany's *Luftwaffe* razed Guernica as an early test of the blitzkrieg tactics. Hence, the adjective 'new' in connection with the European sky has negative connotations. It announces novel forms of warfare and invasion tactics involved in redrawing of the Continental map. When in Spain, Auden was not directly involved in fighting, nor was his experience of the War the same catalyst as for, for instance, George Orwell.[410] But it was sufficiently strong to make his conviction of the potential consequences of passive acceptance of the spread of Nazism crystallized. More than by the horrors of the front, Auden was disturbed by the isolationist indifference of the local bourgeoisie to the tragedy taking place in other parts of Spain. In his authentic prose piece "Impressions of Valencia" (1937), he portrays them engaged in eating, drinking in cafés and driving fast cars. Auden claims that "This is the blood-thirsty and unshaven Anarchy of the bourgeois cartoon, the end of civilization from which Hitler has sworn to deliver Europe."[411] Hence, when he signed the famous *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War* manifesto, it was with an explanation of motives for siding with the democratically elected Republican Government of Spain. His main reason was not the support of socialism but anxiety about the threat that Fascism was posing to artists and to the freedom of individuals.[412]

The same apprehensions about the loss of freedom hover over "Dover". The speaker does not only notice the listlessness of the port to the 'unusual moments' and private dramas in the lives of individuals who meet and separate there. Like Auden, irritated by the inattention of the Spanish people to the tragedy unfolding in other parts of their country, the voice in "Dover" is disturbed by the Englishmen on its beaches. Their equally indolent attitude to the planes that signal the public drama on the Continent puts them and the whole nation at great risk. Auden's poem warns of the danger to which existential insiders expose themselves when anthropocentrically mythologizing their homeland in terms of safety and

[410] George Orwell, "Why I Write," 1946, *Such, Such Were the Joys* 3–11.
[411] Auden, "Impressions of Valencia," *Complete Works I* 384.
[412] Auden, "[from Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War]," *Complete Works I* 388.

stability. He refuses to accept the white cliffs and England's insularity as guarantors of a self-contained existence unaffected by the chaos raging through the surrounding European periphery. As the vicinity of the planes suggests, Dover, like Valencia, is a safe-haven in neither a literal nor figurative sense. In Europe, the existence is already threatened by the planes which are no toys. From this perspective, the allusion to the Romans and Normans becomes a reminder of the vulnerability, vincibility and conquerability of the English cliffs, and of the potential consequences of self-absorbed ivory-towerism of the local people.

Yet, the "bronzing bathers" (*EA* 223), travellers and even soldiers take no heed of such a premonition. Their idleness and self-absorption, echoed by the town equally immersed in the "interests of its regular life" (*EA* 222), bespeak irresponsible detachedness from the situation across the Channel. Auden introduces the image of the Moon and turns it into an all-seeing yet detached and, most importantly, indifferent witness of human history. Yet, it controls the tides. Like them, the past when England was conquered may repeat itself unless action is taken. Tim Young has noticed that in this poem, Auden "bring[s] the personal and the public together."[413] Indeed, attention to escapism into private hedonism and fantasies of a safe home in the face of a threatening situation in the public periphery is what forms the spine of this poem. The refusal of the figures to acknowledge the interconnection of the private and the public, and of home and periphery, is what Auden points at in his denigrating portrayal of the English. Like the glossy house fronts in the old town undisturbed by the emotions of migrants, they also maintain a glossy 'façade' and remain unstirred. It is this very response to actuality that is new to Auden's 1930s landscapes and that distinguishes them from his earlier work. It is so because passivity, isolationism and ivory-towerism became the major targets of Auden the 'universal humanist', who effusively and repeatedly presented such attitudes as immoral, socially irresponsible and foreign to man's proper being in the world.

Auden's prose provides plentiful clues and knowledge of motives informing his sustained 1930s eagerness to construct landscapes of passivity, idleness and self-absorption. A brief digression into the criticism will suffice to explicate its major causes. His tone in prose is that of a middle-class intellectual stricken with *crise de conscience*. Auden's 1930s reading of the contemporary 'man-environment' relationship draws from Marxist understanding of history and social organization. He perceives the roots of the self-absorbed detachment from public problems in modernity, namely in the social and economic models established by the bourgeoisie. In 1955, Auden tried to convince readers that the interwar interest of his generation in Marx and Freud was that they supplied tools for unmasking

[413] Tim Youngs, "Auden's Travel Writings," *The Cambridge Companion to W.H. Auden*, ed. Stan Smith 68.

middle-class ideologies and for making the bourgeoisie, including themselves, better rather than for destroying it.[414] The gravamen of his 1930s prose is that a conscious engagement of an individual in the construction of their social milieu was decimated through the emergence of large collectivities and mass production. Their size and organization deprived man of the basic attributes of human life: individuality, critical consciousness, creativity, communal belongingness and will to participate in shaping their habitats, which shows in "Dover". In this connection, he often used the term 'average man' and defined him as a being "perfectly at home in the life and standards of his class."[415] This very attitude is what made Auden claim in 1939 that "The commonest ivory tower is that of the average man, the state of passivity towards experience."[416] Its main symptoms were complacency and surrender to the *status quo* of the environment. Clearly, Auden lost all respect and admiration for the Truly Strong Men.

Auden drew nourishment for such concerns about the anti-humanistic social processes turning individuals into average men from the juxtaposition of modern and pre-industrial collectivities. In 1932, he defined existence in essentially organistic terms: a part is "different from every other thing, but without meaning except in its connection with other things. The whole cannot exist without the part, nor the part without the whole; and each whole is more than just the sum of its parts, it is a new thing."[417] Similarly, he believed that each individual should be a part of a whole that is more than the summation of its members. Hence, in 1934 he defined 'community' as a group based on a homogeneous framework of ideas with which individuals can identify.[418] Auden found this possible in small pre-industrial structures binding individuals to others by a common interest, thereby gratifying their need to belong.[419] The size and organization of modern collectivities, however, prevented Auden from ascribing to them the status of a community. Such structures cause "the annihilation of personality and the dissolution of community into crowds."[420] Historically, he perceived the locus of a communal fragmentation in the eighteenth century when an earlier economic system of small regional units disappeared: "The industrial revolution broke up the agricultural communities, with their local conservative cultures, and divided the growing population into two classes,"[421] sects, the

[414] Auden, "Authority in America," *Complete Works III* 524.
[415] Auden, "The Average Man," *Complete Works I* 159.
[416] Auden, *The Prolific and the Devourer, Complete Works II* 413.
[417] Auden, "Writing," *Complete Works I* 13.
[418] Auden, "The Group Movement and the Middle Classes," *Complete Works I* 53-54.
[419] Auden, "Writing," *Complete Works 1* 18, 24. In 1950, the reconverted Auden added that a community is a group of rational beings associated on the basis of a common love (*Enchafèd Flood* 30). That the differentiation between community and society was of a permanent concern for Auden and that his views on their characteristic features underwent little changes through later periods is evident from his "The Virgin and the Dynamo" (1956, *Complete Works IV* 497–505).
[420] Auden, *Enchafèd Flood* 31.
[421] Auden, "Psychology and Art To-day," *Complete Works I* 100; Wystan Hugh Auden and John Garrett, "Introduction to *The Poet's Tongue*," *Complete Works I* 107.

rich and the poor.[422] In the Victorian era, "the atomisation of society into solitary individuals, which is one of the effects of laissez-faire capitalism, first began to be felt actively."[423] Like Benedict Anderson, Auden saw modern societies as imagined communities because consisting of crowds of atomised parts whose integrity is maintained through the exertion of power and coercion – strategies compensating for, as he called it in 1935, the 'fiction' of uniting individual heterogeneous wills.[424] As for Anderson, Auden saw the major problem in internal stratification, heterogeneity and hierarchical organization, which contradicted his notion of a community.

The passivity and self-absorption displayed in "Dover" and in the poems discussed below are among the major consequences of mass production and the dissolution of communities. The emergence of supra-regional collectivities expunged a common ground and interpersonal bonds, which increased the sense of unbelongingness: "the problem for the modern poet, as for *everyone else* to-day, is how to find or form a genuine community, in which each has his valued place and can feel at home."[425] Also, Auden saw advances in knowledge and means of production as prime causes of the lack of a sharable identity. For him, its absence isolates and 'distances' individuals from each other within the crowd of other average men. Redolent of Marx's notion of *alienation* is Auden's argument that, unlike a pre-industrial worker overseeing the whole process of production, the modern man performs a function within a narrow specialized niche. This deprives him of dignity and grasp of what he does. It estranges him from other solitaries, which encourages self-absorption and the feeling of inability to influence collective issues. It causes disinterest in the organization of the large structure: "All we can do is to become specialists. […] No one can afford to stop and ask what is the bearing of his work on the rest of the world, its ultimate value."[426] To reinforce his claim, Auden alluded to Melville's *Moby Dick*. The *Pequod* crew reminded him of the contemporary situation:

> If a community […] dissolves, the societies, which remain […] must, left to themselves, grow more and more *mechanical*. And such real individuals as are left must become Ishmales, 'isolatoes, not acknowledging the common continent of men, but each isolatoe living in a separate continent of his own.'[427]

Auden does not quote Melville to confirm man's inherent alienation from other people. On the contrary, his 1930s prose reveals that he points at the unnaturalness of the present

[422] Auden, "Writing," *Complete Works I* 24.
[423] Auden, "Nonsense Poetry," *Complete Works I* 467.
[424] Auden, "The Good Life," *Complete Works I* 118. In October 1938, Auden claimed that the only genuine community in the present society is the family: "The breakdown of the old village or small-town community left the family as the only real social bond" ("Introduction to *The Oxford Book of Light* Verse," *Complete Works I* 435).
[425] Auden, "Introduction to *The Oxford Book of Light* Verse," *Complete Works I* 432, 436, emphasis added.
[426] Auden, "Private Pleasure," *Complete Works I* 25.
[427] Auden, *Enchafèd Flood* 34, emphasis added.

condition. In 1933, he proposed that every man desires dignity and company: everyone wants "to be liked and to like other people; to feel valuable, both in their own eyes and in the eyes of others; […] above all, not to feel lonely and isolated."[428] Yet, man, who "has always been a social animal living in communities,"[429] has been ousted into the position of an 'isolatoe'.

Auden's use of the word 'mechanical' in the quotation above is of great importance. Although he never quoted the term, he seems to have shared with Marx the belief in *reification*, the act of turning an individual into a depersonalised object. Georg Lukacs summarizes the dehumanizing process of planned manufacture as hostile to consciousness and will: "the human qualities and idiosyncrasies of the worker appear increasingly as *mere sources of error*." Man "is a mechanical part incorporated into a mechanical system. […] As labour is progressively rationalised and mechanised his lack of will is reinforced by the way in which his activity becomes less and less active."[430] In 1938, Auden cynically articulated similar views when claiming that modern children admire gangsters more than factory workers because "they sense that being a gangster makes more demands on the personality than being a factory operative and is therefore, for the individual, morally better."[431] Also, he stressed that self-esteem, dignity and creativity are not achievable in mass production. For individuals to repetitively attend to a mere fragment of the production process is to be turned into "instruments of their particular function," which defies such notions and limits active participation of their consciousness.[432] Auden expanded Marxist views into the social sphere and claimed that critical awareness and self-consciousness of an individual are undesirable factors in the organization of large structures whose organization entails their suppression and transformation of individuals into depersonalised mechanistic automatons employing the body but neglecting the mind, man's prime faculty.[433]

To live in a group that is too large for an individual to actively change its principles, to be its mechanical part, not to belong, to be an isolatoe among other individuals and to live in a social group discouraging active participation of its members in its construction are factors informing Auden's display of idleness and self-absorption in "Dover" and other poems discussed below. The beaches and pubs are filled with average men and women who express no conscious interest in the large public issues, future of their large imagined 'community' of Englishmen. While sunbathing on the Dover beaches, drinking in pubs and flirting with girls,

[428] Auden, "A Poet Tells Us How to Be Masters of the Machine," *Complete Works I* 36; "Morality in an Age of Change," *Complete Works I* 483.
[429] Auden, "Morality in an Age of Change," *Complete Works I* 479.
[430] Georg Lukacs, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971) 89, emphasis original.
[431] Auden, "Morality in an Age of Change," *Complete Works I* 482.
[432] Auden, *Enchafèd Flood* 28-29.
[433] Auden, "A Poet Tells Us How to Be Masters of the Machine," *Complete Works I* 36.

these isolatoes heed to the needs of the body while neglecting their civil obligations and role in the formation of a community.

5.3. Somewhere the Good Place and Time

When young, Auden inherited from his father and J.R.R. Tolkien keenness on Norse mythology. Throughout his life he wrote positively about classic myths. His 1930s poetry, however, is highly critical of contemporary mythologizing. Like Tuan, Auden perceived 'myth' as a human construct emerging from the desire to explain surrounding phenomena with imagination compensating for the lack of precise empirical knowledge. Reviewing W.B. Yeats' *Mythologies* in 1959, he wrote that "All myth-making is 'anthropocentric' in that it is based upon the notion of personal responsibility, which cannot be arrived at through observation of the outer world but only through introspection."[434] Therefore, like Benedict Anderson, who claims that imagined communities cannot be distinguished "by their falsity/genuineness,"[435] Auden concludes that because imagined and based on introspection, a myth cannot be judged by being "true or false". Instead, one should ask "if it is alive, moribund or dead," if it is believable. In the same review he distinguishes two types of myths: those accounting for natural and recurrent events and those pertaining to legendary human history providing "an account of human actions in the past which produced revolutionary cultural changes."[436] While willing to praise all such attributes in relation to ancient myths, Auden's 1930s insistence on a sober commitment to the *actual* situation in the *existential centre* brought into his landscapes eagerness to criticize current mythologizing of the *past* and *distant places* outside one's lifespace precisely for its fictionality, delusiveness and heroization bespeaking escapism from social irresponsibility of those who indulged in it.

As seen in the previous chapter, Alston Moor and other 1920s places were inhabited by figures braving the disquieting actual environment and trying, albeit unsuccessfully, to sooth their discontent by acting upon the place and their life. However, as the interwar European situation worsened and, in parallel, as Auden grew more alert to the general public crisis, his landscapes changed. The townscape of Dover is filled with figures showing little or no signs of willingness to act and procure changes leading to overcoming the *status quo* of the imperfect 'here' and 'now'. As a topographical detail, Dover is enmeshed into the Continental past and present, which contrasts with the idleness and ivory-towerism of the 'average men'. In the "Prologue" (1932), the response to the degenerate English landscape of gasping furnaces is already that "In bar, in netted chicken-farm, in lighthouse," hence symbolically

[434] Auden, "The Private Life of a Public Man," *Complete Works IV* 221.
[435] Anderson 6.
[436] Auden, "The Private Life of a Public Man" *Complete Works IV* 221.

everywhere – in the urban, rural and sea space – "The ladies and gentlemen apart, too much alone" stand statically "on these impoverished acres." They make a mere ineffective "hopeless sigh" when "watching these islands" (*EA* 119) in their contemporary dilapidation. Such a complacent behaviour is no longer accompanied with Auden's praise of 'Truly Strong Men' and proclamations of stoic endurance. On the contrary, in the 1930s, passivity started to be deplored and bitterly, even ironically, criticised. What the "Prologue", "Dover" and other 1930s poems analyzed below share with Auden's early work is landscapes brimming with 'separate sorrows' and 'single hopes' for better existential conditions. Yet, instead of making an effort to actively procure changes, the 1930s figures merely sigh and indulge in ineffective myth-making, self-delusion and pretence.

An example of such attitude is that Auden frequently resorted to landscape imagery when exposing the falsity and danger of a tendency to enchant and idealize history and nature. Physical or imaginative escapism into such mythologized times and locations of a 'Good Place' and 'Good Life' were deemed immoral, vain and, most importantly, socially irresponsible evasions of the disquieting actual conditions 'here' and 'now'. As an alternative to action, the figures in the "Prologue" construct the myth of a superior past and revolutionary changes realized by their predecessors. In the fifth stanza, Auden speaks to the English people and points at 'our' dream to relieve the present discontent by means of heroizing ancestors and by uniting them "into a splendid empire." Yet, presented as untenable is such reverence for late predecessors "Under whose fertilizing flood the Lancashire moss / Sprouted up chimneys, and Glamorgan hid a life / Grim as a tidal rock-pool's in its glove-shaped valleys" (*EA* 119). The pervasive current dilapidation of their achievements mouldering and merely "gasping for the impossible air" recalls the state of the humanized landscapes of the 1920s. In the "Prologue", the decay convinces the observer that such fancies and dreams are "already retreating into her [England's] maternal shadow" (*EA* 119) and that man cannot but quiescently face the debris of past aspirations. Unlike Newton in love with the country, who "in his garden watching / The apple falling towards England, became aware / Between himself and her of an eternal tie" (*EA* 119), the present inhabitants are not gravitated to the country at its present state. On the contrary, to them the 'here' and 'now' emit no centripetal attraction nor does the English 'Mater' attract topophilic sentiments from its 'children'.

For Auden, to mythologize history is to reveal inability to face the present. Resuming an earlier use of the generic plural 'We' in 1933, he explains that nothing but the present unhappiness tints our perception of the past as superior. On hearing of rotting harvests, "We honour founders of these starving cities, / Whose honour is the image of our sorrow" (*EA*

135). The glory ascribed to the past generations is a mythologized inversion of the present discontent and suffering. These lines come from "Hearing of harvests rotting in the valleys" titled "Paysage Moralisé" in 1945. This is Auden's most frequently anthologized and critically attractive poem perhaps because, as Edward Mendelson notices, Auden achieves in it "a masterful symbolic play of psychology and history" and "offers a summary account of civilization in terms of action and desire."[437] Auden speaks on behalf of mankind and draws a placeless generic landscape of valleys, mountains, islands and cities to point out the fact that a sorrow makes man susceptible to idealizing the ancestors without noticing the "likeness in their sorrow" (*EA* 135). He shows that former 'colonizers' lauded by the present generation also felt grief and discontent that brought them "desperate to the brink of valleys; / Dreaming of evening walks through learned cities" (*EA* 135). Yet, aware of their actual condition, while "Each in his little bed," they merely imagined a 'Good Place' in terms of an island:

> Where every day was dancing in the valleys,
> And all the year trees blossomed on the mountains,
> Where love was innocent, being far from the cities. (*EA* 135)

This is in line with Auden's afore mentioned understanding of the traditional perception of the island *topos* as a place of innocence and joyful existence. Here, such imagining becomes an ineffective dreaming of an unreachable Arcadian existence. The word 'still' is reiterated presumably to accentuate the stagnation in the life of the honourable ancestors. When "dawn came back and they were still in cities," their dream remained: "There was still gold and silver in the mountains." Evading actuality because absorbed in myth-making, even the ancestors found themselves in a more sorrowful and discomforting environment where "hunger was a more immediate sorrow" (*EA* 136). To underline their likeness to the modern man, Auden claims that the ancestors too had "pilgrims", the equivalents of public orators supplying moral encouragement during the interwar crisis. The pilgrims were also "describing islands", lands of plenty and promising the arrival of insular gods. Yet, those tempted to escapism could not but perish "in the mountains / Climbing up crags to get a view of islands" (*EA* 136). This is indeed a *paysage moralisé* clarifying that a 'Good Place' is unattainable and that any attempt to reach it leads either to annihilation or a greater sorrow when 'waking up' from the dream. Instead of facing the 'now', to idealize ancestors, to turn them into heroized legends and 'splendid empires', is to fictionalize history through a nostalgic and naive myth-making.

The final stanza of "Paysage Moralisé" is generally interpreted as a glimpse of Auden's growing optimism about social changes.[438] The image of flood appears in the final tercet:

[437] Mendelson, *Early Auden* 155.
[438] See, for example, Sharpe, *W.H. Auden* 51.

It is the sorrow ; shall it melt? Ah, water
Would gush, flush, green these mountains and these valleys
And we rebuild our cities, not dream of islands. (*EA* 136)

When water is viewed as a regenerative feminine element,[439] the biblical image of a deluged landscape invites to be interpreted as an allusion to an opportunity to rebuild the derelict humanized world. Yet, in the context of other poems from this period, such reading is difficult to accept. The response to the question raised is a sigh 'Ah', which is followed by the modal verb 'would' used, in general, for the description of an *imagined* event. Moreover, there is an implied 'would' between 'we' and 'rebuild' suggesting that an apocalyptic deluge allowing a clean start is welcome but merely hypothetical, hence not reliably productive of changes. The sorrow remains and the glorification of ancestors helps not because their dreams about the future were as ineffective as those of the present generation about the past. Instead, Auden seems to propose that suffering cannot be completely removed and, as Mendelson notices, that man should face it, learn from it and so "make a vineyard of the curse," as Auden put it in his famous 1939 panegyric for W.B. Yeats.[440]

The idea of unreachability of the good island also appears in "I have a handsome profile" written in September 1932, published in *New Verse* in January 1933 but excluded from *Look Stranger!*. Here, however, Auden's focus is more contemporary and class-conscious. A clearly bourgeois speaker blaming his class for its share in the interwar crisis tries to relieve his sorrow and assuage conscience. He wants to give money to the poor and work in a factory – symptoms of what Valentine Cunnigham extensively describes as the *crise-de-conscience* urge of left-wing interwar intellectuals to 'go over' to the working classes.[441] He attends the church, goes to a brothel and takes drugs. Importantly, however, he also plans to "book a berth on a liner" and sail to sea where he hopes to "settle down on an island / Where the natives shall set me free" and where he will be able to "leave a world that has had its day" (*EA* 124). Yet, all such escapist attempts are counterbalanced in even stanzas by a mocking and discouraging voice redolent of the 1920s. With regards to the speaker's longing for an untainted island, the voice deconstructs its quarantined innocence and suggests that the natives "are dying" because "They've sampled your sort before" and they are "in no mood for more / Who come from a world that has had its day" (*EA* 124). Finally, the voice offers a daunting advice to "Go down with your world that has had its day" (*EA* 125).

Both themes – the myth of a superior natural environment and escapism into it from the discomforting 'Evil Place' that has had its day – are echoed towards the end of the

[439] Tuan, *Topophilia* 23-24.
[440] Mendelson, *Early Auden* 156.
[441] Valentine Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) 211–40.

"Prologue", where they are explicitly derided. Auden mentions school children at Chester who "look to Moel Fammau to decide / On picnics by the clearness or withdrawal of her treeless crown" (*EA* 119). He returns to the 1920s 'nature/culture' dialectic and locates relevant stanzas in an area between England and Wales. Chester on the River Dee, Cheshire, is used as a viewpoint of a Welsh mountain Moel Fammau in the Clwydian Range. Hence, the prospect is of a border territory dividing the cultured urban Chester 'here' from the Celtic and natural 'there' in the periphery. In the 1920s poem "Having abdicated with comparative ease" discussed in Chapter Four, this region was ruled by the mythical Kelpie. Now, the natural setting is mythologized by children. They live in the Roman-based city, a place with a long human history, but relish in the prospect of the mountain and its natural space across the border. The children hope for a picnic and sojourn in its pastoral setting. Yet, Auden frustrates their desire to abandon the humanized landscape. His choice for the picnic spot of Moel Fammau – the 'Mother Mountain' – seems apposite in the context of the poem. It is turned it into a spatial myth: a place enchanted and idealized as a pure womb beyond the intimately known urban space of profane chaos. Auden's intended irony is, however, that the picnic will in fact take place in no rural idyll but in the acculturated "clearness" of the treeless crown – in the shade of The Jubilee Tower built on the summit of Moel Fammau in 1810 as a memorial for the Golden Jubilee of George III. Yet, the tower was never completed. At Auden's time, it was already a derelict 'intelligible dangerous marvel' of history evidencing the subjugation of Wales to England and a remnant of futile attempts to 'immortalize' and glorify the past.

Related to the exposure of naivety in the "Prologue" is Auden's comment, made two years later (1934), characterizing the English middle classes as prone to believing in Rousseau and in the goodness of nature and children.[442] In the 1930s poems, nature lost its earlier figurative dimension and use as a prosopopeia of a cyclical time. Auden started to approach it as an environment in the mythical periphery outside man's proper habitat and existential centre – the urban and communal space, to which he felt everybody should be committed. He maintained earlier scepticism about man's tendency to take refuge in nature but turned it from the symbol of a pre-lapsarian unity into a spatial escapist destination approached by urban and civically irresponsible individuals – existential outsiders.

The 1930s Auden referred to the 'nature/city' dialectic when focusing on the interwar popularity of hiking and staying in wilderness. For example, he wrote very critically about the concept of scouting in a review of Lord Baden Powell's *Lessons from the Varsity of Life* (March 1934). At this time, Auden was a teacher and his pedagogical bias made him agree

[442] Auden, "The Group Movement and the Middle Classes," *Complete Works I* 49.

with the founder of the scout movement about the excessive detrimental emphasis in modern education on "word knowledge, theories, mental experience." This was, he believed, destroying the "capacity for physical experience," which, in Baden Powell's opinion too, was eradicating independence, character and resourcefulness. Auden quotes Baden Powell's argument that scouting will take children

> [...] to nature and backwoodsmanship, by taking the men back as nearly as possible to the primitive, to learn tracking, eye for the country, observation by night as well as by day, to learn to stalk and to hide, to improvise shelter, and to feed and fend for themselves.[443]

Clearly, Auden can see the merits of Baden Powell's agenda in that it allows children to acquire a direct physical experience of an environment rather than an abstract and theoretical knowledge – his own pedagogical methods aimed for the same. But Auden strongly disagrees with what he reads as a naive ambition to correct contemporary ills and revive people's goodness by means of taking children back to the primitive roots and life in nature. Auden turns the word 'primitive' against Baden Powell, whose programme, he says,

> [...] is fatally primitive. To say that the Backwoods life is natural and City life artificial is nonsense. The only possible meaning of 'artificial' in this connection is 'un-habitual.' Camping is really a highly artificial training for a better town life, and, valuable as it is, town life demands much more. The closer people live together, the more complex and civilized life becomes, the more one individual affects another and the more knowledge he needs about himself. It is here, to my mind, that scouting fails.[444]

Clearly, consistent with his own early views of man's being in the world, Auden sees nature as an environmental type that is artificial to man because it presents the periphery of his natural habitat in the urban communal space. In December 1937, *The Listener* published Auden's review of F. Haydn Dimmock's *Bare Knee Days* called "The Good Scout", in which the author is praised for a relentless commitment to his work. At the same time, however, Auden is irritated by the descriptions of scout journeys to Poland and Hungary, in which Dimmock pays attention to "the warmth of their welcome" while ignoring the presence of social injustice. He uses the same arsenal as in the review of Baden Powell to expose the artificiality of escapades to nature and its mythologizing as a superior and corrective environment. He asks: "Why should camp life be *real* as opposed to *artificial* town life?"[445] Immediately he supplies an answer revealing a radical shift from his 1920s sceptical views of almighty natural forces and the impotence of the individual, conscious human will:

> Most of us have to live in towns and need to be taught how. All civilised life is artificial; i.e. it is life which is not ruled by the forces of nature, but by one's free

[443] Auden, "Life's Old Boy," *Complete Works I* 63.
[444] Auden, "Life's Old Boy," *Complete Works I* 63.
[445] Auden, "A Good Scout," *Complete Works I* 424, emphasis original.

> will, and no one can use that properly who has not acquired self-knowledge and the habit of reason.[446]

Clearly, for Auden the panacea for the contemporary ills is neither in individual nor collective 'picnics' and scout escapades to nature. Scouting for him is a mere example of a futile Platonic idealism: "it falls back on the academic method of ideals."[447] Auden does acknowledge the contribution that teaching practical skills makes to nurturing self-knowledge. He demands, however, that this be focused on the urban life and practised in town – the real habitat of man. It is in this milieu that individuals should learn about themselves, display their will, civil obligations and commitments.

As the discussion below shows, besides the "Prologue", several other poems from this period attending to England and its landscape communicate the same distrust of nature-seeking. None, however, outmatch Auden's attention to the issue in *Letter to Lord Byron* (1936-1937). Auden addresses Byron in the hope of finding an ally willing to appreciate his own grudge against Wordsworth, 'Wordsworthian nature worship' and man's post-Romantic glorification of it. The adoption of satire in this letter gave Auden an effective tool for unmasking what, in his view, was an essential aspect of interwar modernity and social immorality of mainly working classes escaping from their habitat in 'the poor industrial soil'. It is in the hope that the clarity of Auden's striking, succinct and self-explanatory denigration of mass interwar escapism to nature justifies the extent of the following citation:

> I'm so glad to find I've your authority
> For finding Wordsworth a most bleak old bore,
> Though I'm afraid we're in a sad minority
> For every year his followers get more,
> Their number must have doubled since the war.
> They come in train-loads to the Lakes, and swarms
> Of pupil-teacher study him in *Storm's*.
>
> [...]
> And new plants flower from that old potato [Wordsworth].
> They thrive best in a poor industrial soil,
> Are hardier crossed with Rousseaus or a Plato ;
> Their cultivation is an easy toil.
> William, to change the metaphor, struck oil ;
> His well seems inexhaustible, a gusher
> That saves old England from the fate of Russia.
>
> The mountain-snob is a Wordsworthian fruit ;
> He tears his clothes and doesn't shave his chin,
> He wears a very pretty little boot,
> He chooses the least comfortable inn ;
> A mountain railway is a deadly sin ;

[446] Auden, "A Good Scout," *Complete Works I* 425.
[447] Auden, "Life's Old Boy," *Complete Works I* 63.

His strength, of course, is as the strength of ten men,
He calls all those who live in cities wen-men.

I'm not a spoil sport, I would never wish
    To interfere with anybody's pleasures ;
By all means climb, or hunt, or even fish,
    All human hearts have ugly little treasures ;
    But think it time to take repressive measures
When someone says, adopting the 'I know' line,
The Good Life is confined above the snow-line. (*LFI* 250-51)

Auden sagaciously refuses the possibility of reaching the 'Good Life' and 'Good Place' in nature and in the heights of the mountains. Isolation from other people and townspace is simply not a permissible and effective solution to unhappiness. He relocates the artificiality associated above with the urban environment and life to man's adoption of an asylum amidst the trees, meadows and mountain peaks. Here, as in the "Prologue", Auden insists on the exposure of the falsity of the rural myth and self-imposed rusticity. Wordsworth is seen as the forefather, as an old but still 'sprouting potato' that yields interwar men whose spurious and deliberately torn clothes, unshaven faces and ascetic self-excruciation disturb Auden. He interprets such expressions in terms of naive mythologization and escapism of the urban folk. Like the children in Chester, they look up to the non-carpentered environment with awe and consciously subject themselves to the allure of primitivism in the 'genuine' natural space. Nowhere else in Auden's poetry is his anti-Wordsworthianism and critique of interwar modernity more explicit. It is worth noting that at around the time of writing *Letter to Lord Byron*, Auden assessed Alexander Pope's poetry and admitted that in general "No form will express everything, as each is particularly good at expressing something. Forms are chosen by poets because the most important part of what they have to say seems to go better with that form than any other."[448] Auden's letter to Lord Byron reveals his indebtedness to Classicist authors. His commitment to the city, as man's habitat proper, and to the intellectual urban witticism, displayed more effectively in satirical than serious modes, are its essential signs.

The mainspring of Auden's disdain for the romanticized view of nature held by the English masses is occasionally disclosed in his comparisons of the European and American imagination. In the introduction to *Poets of the English Tongue*, co-written with Norman Holmes Pearson, Auden claims that for the nineteenth-century American poets, nature is what man has to struggle with because it is "recalcitrant and violent." The European Romantic poetry, on the other hand, renders nature as "humanized, mythologized and usually friendly." Auden and Holmes Pearson purport that this emerges from the fact that it was written by

[448] Auden, "Pope," *Complete Works I* 149.

existential outsiders who did not existentially depend on it, and for whom nature was a temporary refuge from the urban lifespace:

> The European Romantics may praise the charms of wild desert landscape, but they know that for them it is never more than a few hours' walk from a comfortable inn: they may celebrate the joys of solitude but they know that anytime they choose they can go back to the family roof or to town [knowing that] the club and the salons […] will still be going on exactly as they left them.[449]

What Auden disliked about nature was not the environment as such but its idealized and romanticized perception constructed by visitors. For example, he treasured Robert Frost's engagement with nature. Unlike Wordsworth, contemplating in it a sudden revelatory and mystical experience, Frost to Auden appeared as an 'existential insider' whose direct experience allowed him to adopt a sober, genuine and realistic perspective to it. Auden praised him for writing about man working the natural world surrounding him and so slowly learning about himself and the environment on the basis of everyday experience.[450] As shown, Auden's respect for Hardy and his engagement with provincial England was based on the same premise – the experiential view of an insider. In other words, for Auden, the interwar idealization of nature issued from a seed planted by the English Romantics who evaded and escaped from, as Jerome McGann proposed, the social problems of the time.

Although equally simplified, Auden's derogatory remarks about the English interwar view of a local countryside can be interpreted within Tuan's claim that the postulation of nature as a superior alternative to the humanized space is an artificial cultural construct issuing from the urban 'workshops'. What 'all human hearts' in the citation above from *Letter to Lord Byron* share with the men, women and children in the "Prologue" is that their individual 'ugly little treasures' and 'separate sorrows' unite in a single hope of finding spatially and historically distant 'Good Places' compensating for their actual communal environment. Yet, unlike Tuan, who sees escapism to an idealized image of nature and the tension between reality and fantasy as inherent and productive aspects of man's response to actuality, Auden approaches them as civically irresponsible, enfeebling and deplorable myths.

5.4. Hilltop Prospects of an Alluvial Plain

The 1930s landscapes of escapism, evasion and self-absorption involved other aspects of the interwar reality. In 1939, Auden remembered his transformation, nine years earlier, from a 'rentier' into a financially self-reliant teacher in Scotland with these words: "For the first time in my life I became aware of money, the technique of advertisement, and the gullibility of the

[449] Wystan Hugh Auden and Norman Holmes Pearson, Introduction, *Poets of the English Tongue: Romantic Poets from Blake to Poe*, eds. Wystan Hugh Auden and Norman Holmes Pearson (New York: The Viking Press, 1950) xxii–xxiii.
[450] Auden, "[Robert Frost]," *Complete Works I* 137–41.

public."[451] In February 1932, a few months before his departure from Helensburgh, Auden wrote "The third week in December frost came at last", in which he attends to topographical details drawn from the local landscape while lamenting the gullibility and submission of the modern citizen to coercion and large political discourses in consequence of being deprived of individual, independent critical consciousness and will to act upon their environment.[452]

As the 1930s European situation worsened, Auden started to sharpen his comments on the control of social structures and political discourses over the freedom of individuals. Like other interwar artists, he knew and reviewed the work of early twentieth-century anthropologists, namely Bronisław Malinowski and W.H.R. Rivers. In his assessment of Dr Ruth Benedict's comparative *Patterns of Culture* (November 1938), Auden hails anthropology for proving that established cultural patterns have an immense power "to mould the personal characters of individuals" because when born they are raised to fit the existing social structure.[453] "A given cultural pattern," Auden asserted one month later, "develops those traits of character and modes of behaviour which it values, and suppresses those which it does not."[454] He translated such general observations into a contemporary social context. Being a teacher for most of the decade, he repeatedly asserted that people were dehumanized and turned into isolatoes in the process of being raised and educated to comply with the social models maintained by the ruling middle class and its economic interests. In his view, this 'fitting into' the modern mass collectivities and industry entailed, on the one hand, the suppression of individuality and critical consciousness and, on the other hand, the nurture of passive acceptance of the established system by the isolated average men in the crowd.[455]

Although Auden in the 1930s wavered between scepticism and optimism with regards to the potential of individuals to change the environment, his prose unvaryingly presents coercion and manipulation as the greatest threats to their critical consciousness in all social models including Liberal Democracy. Simultaneously, he was alarmed by the tendency of individuals to heedlessly submit to politicians and to relocate their civil responsibility into the hands of such 'saviours'.[456] Hence, he expressed an explicit exasperation with signs of escapism into a private world as well as large political and religious discourses. Auden

[451] Auden, *The Prolific and the Devourer*, *Complete Works II* 417.
[452] This poem is Part I of "A Happy New Year" that Auden wrote but removed from the poem's second part published separately as "Now from my window-sill I watch the night" (*EA* 115–16).
[453] Auden, "The Noble Savage," *Complete Works I* 472.
[454] Auden, "Morality in an Age of Change," *Complete Works I* 479.
[455] This issue permeates through several texts in the period. In 1935, Auden wrote that any large-scale society "will favour those forces and persons who favour its organisation, wealth, and power, and oppose those which oppose it, without considering too closely their individual moral value" ("The Good Life," *Complete Works I* 116).
[456] Auden's understanding of the word 'politician' was very broad. It was anyone "who wants to organize the lives of others," such as "a civil servant, a bishop, a schoolmaster, or a member of a political party" (*The Prolific and the Devourer*, *Complete Works II* 416).

perceived and relentlessly promoted the nurture of an independent critical awareness as the prime prevention against forces dissipating humaneness and transforming people into "behavorist automatons".[457] "The third week in December" is as much a probe into the possibility of isolating oneself from the humanized world as to the lack of critical consciousness and public gullibility that he associated with the English people.

The "I" of the poem, presumably Auden himself, walks out of the cultured world and its social organization symbolized by the established educational practices used at school, "where boys were puzzled by exams." He climbs the hills north of Helensburgh, where Auden was teaching. In the first stanzas, he reaches an elevated point from which the prospect of "Luminous all Glen Fruin" can be seen to the West, and to the East "Boats on a bay like toys on floor" in Loch Lomond. The speaker does not only relish in the vista, but also in the solitude and quiet that the natural spot offers: "As I walked by myself in the sun; / […] // No strange sound laid my echo on the road" and "sky was silent as an unstruck bell" (*EA* 444).

Such an initial idealizing diction, romantic images and escapism to nature are vividly non-Audenesque and they must be read with cautiousness. Although rarely, Auden invariably adopted this tone when mocking such rhetoric or when carefully planning a foreshadower of a radical turn in the second half of the poem. Here, the latter applies. The moment of the first-person speaker's exposure to the womb of nature in the rural Scottish landscape, which "on every quarter touched [him] still" (*EA* 444), does not become a memorable 'spot of time' in which the mind "is nourished and invisibly repaired," as Wordsworth famously put it in Book XII of his *Prelude*. While physically immersed in the natural idyll, mentally, the speaker soon forsakes the reclusiveness and peaceful asylum of the motherly womb. Auden is unerring in his insistence on man's inseparability from the humanized world. The speaker remains attentive to civil matters: "suddenly the unnoticed wire above / […] / Which south into *alluvial* England ran" started to "invisibly move." Although it made unintelligible vibrations, "A voice spoke straightaway and was heard / Within the labyrinth of the inner ear" (*EA* 444, emphasis added). The 'inner ear' is Auden's version of Denham's introspective focus: while the eye is limited, the fancy is not. It can roam. The cable is the very opposite of the 'slackening wire' in "Order to stewards" (1929) discussed in chapter Three. There, it was used as an umbilical cord metaphorically standing for an insufficient weaning of the returnee traveller from the womb of nature and home. Here, however, it plucks the speaker out of the 'island' of solitude found in the natural landscape and it 'ties' him back to culture, which can

[457] Auden, "A Review of *The Evolution of Sex,* by Dr Gregorio Marañón, and *The Biological Tragedy of Women*, by Anton Nemilov," *Complete Works I* 31.

be abandoned only temporarily, and to England, which his eye cannot see but his fancy sets out to explore.

Besides his distrust of seeking refuge in the natural environment, Auden in this poem attends to another contemporary *hamartia*. He addresses mass escapism of the 'average men' to impersonal and large public narratives, and to their indulgence in fashionable pastimes in response to anxiety and inability to exercise one's own critical consciousness. The cord speaks exaltedly about England lying to the south of the vantage point. It makes the "I" of the poem focus on its fertile potential. Auden's above use of 'alluvial' – a geological term suggesting fertility, growth and a source of wealth from the ore or gold sediments it may contain – is exploited by the cord itself: "I show you a cooled soil, fertile for grain, / A land of rivers, a maternal plain. // 'Look down, look down at your promised land'" (*EA* 445).

England is hallowed as it becomes a version of The Promised Land. Yet, as in "Dover", Auden constructs such a hierarchical status as well as the idyllic and fertile introductory atmosphere in order to deconstruct them in the rest of the poem. He turns the alluvial plain into a morally exhausted wasteland. In suggestion of man's relation to nature, with his *back* "to a little fir wood," the speaker heeds to the voice and 'looks down' towards England. The prospect, however, defies all notions of a promised and fertile land. Auden's military diction transforms the 'maternal plain' into a stage of mindless social preposterousness and delusion:

> from East and West I saw
> Converging quickly on that moor
> The English in all sorts and sizes come
> Like an army recruited there
> From lake and bush and stone and air
> By the unbearable excitement of a drum. (*EA* 445)

Auden furnishes the landscape with elements that create an atmosphere starkly contrasting with that in the introductory stanzas. There is noise and various signs of interwar modernity: golf courses, movement and speed, music bands, loud crowds of boys and girls in bathing dresses, performers and a motorcyclist claiming that "'Sporty and speedy is the British style ; Tempo. Tempo'" (*EA* 445-46). Noticing such crowds of average men and features of the 1930s fashion and mass culture, the speaker presents them in a surreal collage:

> The equipment was curious they had found to wear.
> Silk stockings, cigar boxes, covers of sumps,
> Newspapers, ham-frills, and bicycle-pumps. (*EA* 446)

Amidst such a floodplain gaiety and entertainment, which John Fuller calls a "Langlandesque field of folk,"[458] Auden diagnoses symptoms of excessive profaneness underlain with anxiety:

> So much stammering over easy words,

[458] Fuller 180.

So much laughter spasmodic and queer,
So much speech that resembled a bird's,
So much drawling concealing a fear,
So much effort to sound sincere,
So much talk which was aimed at the floor
Was never heard in one place before. (*EA* 446)

Under such an external cloak of gaiety, the silent hill-top speaker clearly discerns the figures' internal fear, neurosis, sorrow and stasis, highlighted with the anaphoric 'so much'.

Auden wrote this poem in February 1932 at around the time of working on *The Orators*, which is a detailed probe into oratory skills and the power of rhetoric. Indeed, the anxious figures in the valley gather in such a 'vanity fair' not only to be entertained but to be addressed by Ramsay MacDonald and Stanley Baldwin of the National Government, by Winston Churchill and other makers of national and international interwar politics that Auden brings into the landscape. Importantly, he also mentions Oswald Mosley, thereby drawing attention to the growing popularity of radical nationalism suggesting insularity and isolationism. All of them come and stand in front of the crowds eagerly awaiting relief from such public comforters and modern prophets.[459] However, despite their promising speeches, at the end of the poem the falling snow brings back to the plain previous stillness as it drives off all the excitement, noise, talk, anxious folk and politicians. The indulgence in entertainment and reliance on politics allow merely a temporary and futile eclipse of the shortages of the actual life. They bring only an ineffective means of escapism from anxiety. The entertainment and public rally come to an end. Like the speaker, all must return home because neither their idle hedonism nor public orators deliver an effective relief of their 'separate sorrows' and a 'single hope'.

The first-person speaker thus enters the natural space alone in search of solitude. Yet, the fact that he contemplates in it such a surreal gathering of the masses and public politics in the venue below, turn him into an exemplar of Auden's 1930s idea of a modern individual who should not evade personal civic responsibility for his habitat proper – the city. Wherever they are, people remain citizens, which precludes their gaining a distance from the humanized landscape and civil life. Auden concludes the poem with a statement that the mind should "moralise", if only meagrely, "Upon these blurring images / Of the dingy difficult life of our generation" (*EA* 451). In *The Enchafèd Flood*, Auden quoted Melville's Ahab: "stand close to me, Starbuck; let me look into a human eye; it is better than to gaze into sea or sky; better than to gaze upon God."[460] "The third week in December" contains a similar explicit statement

[459] Fuller claims that all Auden's allusions to historical figures concern various events in the 1931 political world (180-82).
[460] Auden, *Enchafèd Flood* 17.

urging to face the world of fact and 'the dingy difficult life of our generation' instead of the world of potentiality conjured up by the political 'gods' at the lectern. Within the vibrations of the wire breaking the initial tranquillity, the hill-top speaker discerns a command not to look "at sky through the forelegs of mares." The call is an imperative bid to "Look down, look down at your promised land" (*EA* 444-45), which he heeds fully. This image concludes Auden's probe into the danger of 'the gullibility of the public' and into the ineffectiveness of attempts to replace a conscious commitment of an individual to the social milieu with adherence to large manipulative narratives. As the following section shows, this is a concern seeping through several 1930s landscapes in which Auden subjugates the idea of 'insularity' for addressing the irresponsibility of isolationism as well as submission to public discourses.

5.5. Islands of Contentment

As observed, in his interwar poetry Auden makes a frequent use of the all-embracive and generalizing plural 'We'. "The third week in December", however, is an example of an increased presence in the 1930s poems of the first person singular. This is an index of Auden's growing effort to grapple with the engagement of a private individual in public issues. Not only attempts to idealize the ancestral history and nature, but other forms of isolationism from the disquieting 'here' and 'now' started to disturb Auden undergoing the transformation from a 'rentier' to a socially conscious individual convinced that to face actuality is a central moral obligation of every sensible individual. He himself was a teacher writing extensively, especially in the first half of the decade, about the social responsibility of pedagogues for the future of England. As glimpsed in his review of Baden Powell, teachers should refrain from training abstractions and theories and focus instead on developing practical skills and individual characters capable of forming their own judgement and of manifesting their free will. Besides critiquing collective forms of escapism into fashion and politics, Auden became agitated by the detachment of individuals from the imperfect "world that has had its day" (*EA* 123). He believed this was the result of wrong educational principles suppressing individuality, of the inactive middle class clinging to their privileged *status quo*, and of a general desire of the 'average' man to assuage dissatisfaction by indulging in, as he wrote to Lord Byron, 'ugly little pleasures'. Importantly, while critiquing such compensatory myths, Auden's poems from the period show his own temptation and subsequent self-reproach for ivory-towerism, for which he found a suitable image: the island and its insularity.

In the autumn of 1932, Auden started the second stage of his pedagogical career. He moved to the Downs School in Colwall, Herefordshire, where he taught English, French, gymnastics and other subjects until 1935. Once again, he chose a hilly region and town close

to a national border. John Fuller's afore mentioned remark that the valley scene in "The third week in December" is 'Langlandesque' finds application here too. Colwall is close to the border between England and Wales. It is encircled by the towns and villages of West Malvern, Great Malvern, Malvern Wells and Little Malvern in the Malvern Hills. Besides, as in Scotland, here too Auden followed the steps of the medieval allegorist and, in the late summer of 1933, positioned his speaker in the poem "Here on the cropped grass of the narrow ridge I stand" in the Malvern Hills.[461] In 1929, he wrote of a "hawk's vertical stooping from the sky" (*EA* 32). Edward Mendelson notices that the early 1930s Auden abandoned elevated positions and descended down to the ground level.[462] Yet, while the Colwall speaker is not in the air in the same way as the airman in *The Orators*, he is still in the hills 'outside' and above the landscape in the prospect below, which empowers him to explore equally large horizons.

"Here on the cropped grass", like "The third week in December", reveals an approach to topographical detail shared by several traditional prospect poems. Auden repeats his earlier strategy a lets the speaker climb a hill-top ridge near his workplace in Colwall. This offers a prospect allowing his fancy to roam through distant places beyond the *visibilia*, which again obfuscates the local importance of the vantage point and the immediate surrounding landscape below. The speaker can 'see' "England below me" where "Eastward across the Midland plains / An Express is leaving for a sailors' country" (*EA* 141). In the other direction

> Westward is Wales
> Where on clear evenings the retired and rich
> From the french windows of their sheltered mansions
> See the Sugarloaf standing, an upright sentinel
> Over Abergavenny. (*EA* 141)[463]

The speaker is also an equally solitary private figure standing "Aloof as an admiral on the old rocks" and viewing large public worlds on both English and Welsh sides of the prospect. Although standing on a *ridge*, the 'naval' simile implies that the vantage point is both a ridge and a captain's 'b*ridge*' providing the 'admiral' speaker with an unlimited power of observation and oratory command over the vista and its construction. The relatedness of the word 'admiral' to sailing and the above use of the phrase 'sailors' country' foreshadow the theme of the poem: England's physical detachedness from Europe and the ethical insularity of the English from international public issues explored later in "Dover". The authoritative position of the speaker and the idea of isolation are very significant. Like his Scottish

[461] When the poem was published in *New Oxford Outlook* in November 1933, the title was "The Malverns".
[462] Mendelson, *Early Auden* 121, 138-39.
[463] Out of all available towns, by choosing Abergavenny, Auden shows his early interest in geology. It is known for a pre-Roman blacksmith and iron-ore-smelting activity. A.D. Mills argues that Abergavenny means 'Mouth of the River Gafenni'. Gafenni means 'the smith' ("Abergavenny," *A Dictionary of British Place-Names* [Oxford: Oxford University Press], 2003) 2.

antecedent in “The third week in December”, he does not ascend the hill in order to escape the existential zone. Auden makes him look back upon it. His expansive view, aloneness and interest in the surrounding world contrast with the retired and rich living in the cocoons of their ‘sheltered mansions’ whose ‘french windows’ limit the view just to the ‘Sugarloaf’ – the name of a mountain above Abergavenny implying sweetness and bliss.

Auden sets out to grapple with the risks of a tendency displayed by individuals, including himself, to evade their civil duties. He takes to task isolationism in private contentment, material comfort and aloofness, as well as, again, the dissolution of a personal responsibility for one’s life and public matters. In the second stanza, Auden introduces an aspect of his private history, a personal ‘spot of time’:

> When I last stood here I was not alone ; happy
> Each thought the other, thinking of a crime,
> And England to our meditations seemed
> The perfect setting […]. (*EA* 142)

The past is remembered in terms of togetherness and private love breeding happiness that made the large public world seem flawless and irrelevant. At this stage of the poem, the speaker idealizes the past in a way redolent of the “Prologue” and “Paysage Moralisé”. Yet, contrary to a tendency characterizing several traditional prospect poems, he is not enticed into a nostalgic gaze for long. The ‘but’, common in Auden’s early poetry as a marker of a transition from thesis to antithesis, comes here too: “But now it [England] has no innocence at all; / It is the *isolation* and the fear, / The mood itself” (*EA* 142, emphasis added). The ‘but’ creates a contrast between the past and the present because from now on, the speaker does not allow his fancy to roam through memories to the irrevocable past of a comfortable middle-class ‘rentier’ life. Now, alone in the same place and devoid of personal happiness, he cannot but feel guilty or step out of isolation in the ‘sheltered mansion’ of private love. The speaker turns his eyes outward from private issues to the public actuality surrounding him: “These years have seen a boom in sorrow” (*EA* 142). The idleness of the leisurely rich “issued more despair” and, Auden continues to build up a terse atmosphere, “Gross Hunger took on more hands every month / Erecting here and everywhere his vast / Unnecessary workshops” (*EA* 142). The adverbial phrase ‘here and everywhere’ is telling. In the quotation above, Auden says that England is ‘the isolation’ but he resumes his work on the erasure of England’s insularity. The speaker confesses to the guilt of his own withdrawnness and sees the country enmeshed into the European crisis on the background:

> Europe grew anxious about her health,
> Combines tottered, credits froze,
> And business shivered in a banker’s winter

While we were kissing. (*EA* 142)

From this point of 'awakening' to the Europe of exhausted capitalism in the aftermath of 'a banker's winter', an allusion to the Wall-Street landslide, escapism to idleness and egocentric contentment becomes the target of a harsh litany in the remaining stanzas. The speaker becomes intent to speak on behalf of the anonymous clerks, guides, children, people in the shops and trams, all mentioned in the poem. Besides the men isolated in their 'sheltered mansions', he notices other manifestations of irresponsible self-absorption, isolationism and blindness to the public fact. In the fifth stanza he returns from brooding to the landscape below the vantage point and notices that in "lanterned gardens sloping to the river / […] saxophones are moaning for a comforter" (*EA* 142). "The high thin rare continuous worship / Of the self-absorbed" (*EA* 142) rises from public venues, theatres and cathedrals. All these are disturbing signs of indulgent hedonism, self-centredness and escapist reliance on religious and political comforters expected to deliver relief – an echo of "The third week in December".

In this connection, Auden takes the opportunity to allude to the origin of the word 'nave' as a central part of clerical architecture through another sea- and sailing-related metaphor. There are "cathedrals, / Luxury liners laden with s*oul*s, / Holding to the east their hulls of st*o*ne" (*EA* 142, emphasis added). They are imagined as lifeless containers and opulent vessels of 'stone'. Auden picks up from it the moaning 'oh' and connects it through assonance with the 'souls' of the worshippers inside such insulating hulls 'carrying' them eastward. From the vantage point, England is in the East as if in a suggestion that the religious 'ships' are bound for its profane chaos. Yet, being from stone and unable to move, they deliver no divine light and hope of rebirth, which is the traditional association with the cardinal point. With such a naval metaphor, it is possible to place in the altar a priest as the 'admiral' and navigator of a religious vessel and as an ineffective 'comforter' and soother of 'separate sorrows' and moaning.

In the remaining stanzas, while physically in the same location, Auden exploits the local landscape. In the manner of older topographical poets all the way to Sir John Denham, he lets his speaker exploit its material features for 'embarking' upon a mammoth imaginative journey through history. He reaches a period "before the Cambrian alignment"[464] and ancient Greece: "the civilization of the delicate olive" (*EA* 143). Besides moments of "brocaded glory" as well as "intercalary ages of disorder," Auden attends to a permanent historical reliance on unhelpful "seers" (*EA* 143). Again, he is eager to stress the ever-present failure of large public narratives and the general futility of tendencies to relocate personal responsibility onto public

[464] Again, Auden displays his knowledge of geology. The word Cambria – Latin for 'Wales' – supplied Adam Sedgwick with the name for one of the geological periods of the Palaeozoic era when Wales was formed.

comforters. These are the main points of his critique because perceived as patterns leading to an individual and collective self-destruction:

> And all the customs your society has chosen
> Harden themselves into the unbreakable
> Habits of death. (*EA* 144)

Following the speaker's imaginative journeys from the local detail into history and distant places, the last lines express the need to be actively involved in the public 'here' and 'now'. Ironically, after the critique of escapism to religion, Auden brings the speaker back from his contemplations to the physical world by the "Priory clock" (*EA* 143). It announces the historical time and inseparability from it. The chimes make the speaker realize that a return from ineffective brooding to his "situation" – the actual life of a school teacher – is inevitable. There, he can 'atone' for his early self-absorbed isolationism by serving the public and by taking an interest in the lives of others. This creates a contrast with the figures in the landscape below occupying enclosed mansions and gardens. The speaker remembers the words of Wilfred Owen and Katherine Mansfield and reminds himself of the need to act:

> 'The poetry is in the pity', Wilfred said,
> And Kathy in her journal, 'To be rooted in life,
> That's what I want.'
> These moods give no permission to be idle,
> For men are changed by what they do. (*EA* 144)

In this poem, like in "Tintern Abbey", the same place approached in different times elicits two contrasting autobiographical responses. Unlike Wordsworth, however, here, like in "The third week in December", Auden takes the hill above Colwall for no private refuge from contemporary social matters. On the contrary, the height reveals their urgency and the need to be civically responsible. The discontent arises in consequence of the speaker's own ethical shift. It consists in stepping out of the asylum of private contentment in the direction of the disquieting world outside. The "I" is appalled by individual and collective escapism into class privileges, cathedrals and public healers limiting their responsibility for the public 'landscape'.

Despite his criticism, Auden found refuge in private contentment too. However, when he did, it immediately bred waves of self-reproach. In June 1933, a few weeks before "Here on the cropped grass", he wrote another topographical poem attending to the interconnectedness of private and public realms and of the concrete and universal. This aligns with Edward Mendelson's claim in his detailed analysis of the poem that Auden attempts to reconcile opposites.[465] The poem begins "Out on the lawn I lie in bed" and it is dedicated to

[465] Mendelson, *Early Auden* 167-69.

Geoffrey Hoyland, Auden's headmaster in the Downs School. The dedication is very important as the poem is clearly autobiographical and rooted in concrete historical and spatial coordinates. It opens with an image of a figure resting upon a local school lawn.[466] Auden foreshadows the theme right in the first two lines. The couplet "Out on the lawn I lie in bed, / Vega conspicuous overhead" erases the boundary between the bedroom, the realm of privacy, and the outside, where an individual joins the public because sharing the same view of the brightest "conspicuous" (*EA* 136) star in the constellation of Lyra. Such a conjugation and reconciliation of the inside and outside reveals Auden's plan to eclipse the particular with the discussion of unwillingness to accept his own and others' isolationism in personal happiness.

As critics in general agree, this poem was inspired by Auden's mystical experience described in 1964 as the 'Vision of Agape' – the dissolution of the self leading to the unselfish love of another human being. While sitting in the Downs School garden with colleagues, Auden remembered: "I felt myself invaded by a power which, […], was irresistible and certainly not mine. For the first time in my life I knew exactly – because, thanks to the power, I was doing it – what it means to love one's neighbor as oneself."[467]

In April 1933, two months before "Out on the lawn I lie in bed", Auden wrote a personal dream allegory beginning "The month was April, the year / Nineteen hundred and thirty-three" (*EA* 130).[468] The speaker recalls a dream in which he, as a seagull, could see a ship called *Wystan Auden Esquire* sailing "To the Islands of Milk and Honey / Where there's neither death nor old age," the poor have money, bread grows on trees and "roasted pigs run about / Crying 'Eat me, if you please'" (*EA* 133). In *Enchafèd Flood*, he says that the image of a ship tends to be used as "a metaphor for society in danger from within or without."[469] In his own dream allegory, it does work as a vehicle transferring figures from the actual to the 'Good Place'. Yet, the island is never reached and the speaker wakes up to actuality.

In "Out on the lawn I lie in bed", however, the speaker finds himself on a utopian and privileged 'garden island' – on the grounds of the school lawn walled off from the outside profaneness. Auden constructs it as a secluded and sacred spot of a privileged and content existence free from desire, as a 'Good Place': "Lucky, this point in time and space / Is chosen as my working place" (*EA* 136). It is a site where he can sit with colleagues in an equal ring

[466] This is a reminiscence of one of Auden's plentiful idiosyncrasies. Covered with an umbrella, he slept on the lawn through the summer in all weather (Sharpe, *W.H. Auden* 25).
[467] Wystan Hugh Auden, Introduction, *The Protestant Mystics*, ed. Anne Fremantle (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1964) 26.
[468] The poem remained unpublished until it appeared in *New Statesman* in February 1977 (Fuller 183). For Fuller, this poem exemplifies Auden's persistent "psychological allegorising" (107).
[469] Auden, *Enchafèd Flood* 7.

(which Mendelson interprets as a symbol of unbroken time[470]) "on each calm evening, / Enchanted as the flowers" (*EA* 136). The speaker hopes that the company will remember it as a place where

> The lion griefs loped from the shade
> And on our knees their muzzles laid,
> And Death put down his book. (*EA* 137)

Yet, this utopian atmosphere of a safe cocoon is soon rejected. The speaker feels guilty of inhabiting a secluded privileged 'island' surrounded by the raging world in the periphery. The rest of the poem is haunted by self-reproach suggesting, once again, the inconsequential, egoistic and transitory nature of escapism. The speaker gazes and his feet "Point to the rising moon" (*EA* 136) in the usual elevated position of Auden's speakers. The star is a thread connecting and, as Mendelson has it, reconciling the garden with the world outside:

> She climbs the European sky ;
> Churches and power stations lie
> Alike among earth's fixtures :
> Into the galleries she peers,
> And blankly as an orphan stares
> Upon the marvellous pictures. (*EA* 137)

Noticing this, the speaker is allured to musing on the difference between man and nature. The Moon looks down but it does not respond to the world of fact. It cannot. Being amoral, it has the inexpressive and petrified gaze of an orphan who "notice[s] nothing" and must remain self-absorbed, "To gravity attentive" (*EA* 137). Man is the opposite. As in "The third week in December", natural elements make the speaker realize his irremovable immersion in the humanized landscape. Looking up to the Moon, he realizes the impossibility of adopting her ethical detachedness without remorse because the earthly position binds him to the current problems afflicting the world outside the walled garden and insular England. We may choose not to "care to know, / Where Poland draws her Eastern bow, / What violence is done." We may inhabit privileged 'islands' – "The creepered wall [that] stands up to hide / the gathering multitudes outside" (*EA* 137). We may ignore the hungry glances while we "feel secure" and, unlike Ahab, "Look up" to the sky and Moon, but not without guilt. To find an asylum in private contentment is to "with a sigh endure / The tyrannies of love" (*EA* 137). Echoing the dreamer awakened from his utopian dream, the speaker on the walled lawn in Colwall 'wakes up' and, heeding to the facts, becomes agitated by the immorality of his own enclosed and privileged existence.

[470] Mendelson, *Early Auden* 168.

In “The third week in December” (1932), “Here on the cropped grass” (1933) and “Out on the lawn I lie in bed” (1933), Auden’s style becomes more personal. In these poems, more than ever before, private experiences anchored in particular places and moments serve as points of departure for the exploration of issues concerning the public realm. A crowning epitome of this tendency to use “I” and, at the same time, to depersonalize an autobiographical experience of a concrete place came in August 1935. Then, Auden wrote a birthday poem beginning “August for the people and their favourite islands” and dedicated it to Christopher Isherwood. This is the penultimate poem in *Look Stranger!*, which Tony Sharpe believes has a supreme symbolic importance for the whole collection. In the context of the present thesis, however, the poem is more important for being a succinct recapitulation of Auden’s 1930s ethical views. It oscillates between autobiographical details and a general social commentary. Individual stanzas are anchored in specific spatial-temporal nodes framed by the mid-1920s and 1935 and expressive of different stages of Auden’s evolving views on the relation between an individual and the public. It is also a self-portrait juxtaposing Auden’s current with recently abandoned beliefs, hence a format he would later use several times: in *Letter to Lord Byron* (1936-1937), “In Memory of W.B. Yeats” (1939), “September I, 1939” (1939) and other poems. Besides outlining interwar intellectual positions in a condensed form, “August for the people and their favourite islands” is approached here for its potential to encapsulate Auden’s approach at the time to places and landscapes, both concrete and generic, namely England and the island *topos* of a geographical and ethical insularity.

Auden begins with a landscape description used for making a disparaging commentary on an interwar indulgence of the English in mass travelling and nature worship, thereby returning to the theme of man’s belongingness to the city. Like cathedrals imagined as vessels laden with worshippers, Auden envisions steamers approaching “The effusive welcome of the pier” (*EA* 155) and hints at the interwar fashion of beach sunbathing. The ships take “The sallow faces of the city” – the unhealthy-looking urban populace – to their favourite islands, where they can be “laid bare / Beside the undiscriminating sea” (*EA* 155), and where they hope to find a retreat from everydayness.[471] Clearly, the voyage across the sea must be endured by the ‘ill’ who are escaping from the actuality of their lives in the hope of reinvigorating their ‘sallow faces of the city’ on a therapeutic island of bliss. They are portrayed as languid figures who, “Lulled by the light,” live “their dreams of freedom” (*EA*

[471] Auden, who abhorred the South, clearly uses the seaside sunbathing for a critique of mainly the middle-class hedonism in the interwar period. Yet, this is not only the case of “August for the people”. It appears in *Letter to Lord Byron*, “Dover” and several other poems from the decade. In 1937, fifteen million British people are reported to have gone to the beach. For Tuan, this is a useful litmus paper for gauging the rising leisure of the middle and lower-middle classes gaining acceleration from the Victorian to the post-war periods (*Topophilia* 116-17).

155). Auden piles up other images of people who go hiking to the moors, engage in various past-times and show the latest fashion fads as they "Play leap-frog, enter cafés, wear / The tigerish blazer and the dove-like shoe" (*EA* 155).

Tony Sharpe ascribes an emblematic dimension to this contrasting clothing and assumes that, because written in 1935, the poem hints at the aggressive 'tigerish' German expansionism juxtaposed with the politics of Appeasement symbolized by dove.[472] While this image indicates Auden's reading into the local culture and place of a connection with the European situation, the initial lines as a whole also allude to the irresponsible hedonism of the British 'average men'. Controlling "The complicated apparatus of amusement" (*EA* 155), they evade the drama taking place on the Continent. As in several earlier poems, Auden clearly takes such a myth of insular protectiveness and collective escapism to task for their social impracticality and irresponsibility. The island is a dream destination for many an Englishman and Auden turns it into an image of their ivory-towerism. Only later does the reader learn that the steamers are sailing from England to the Isle of Wight. While only relatively 'southern', Auden's approach to the idea of South in this poem provides an early glimpse of his future explicit disgust for such climates and cultures, which, as shown in Chapter Two, he associated with decadence and abhorrent idleness.

While criticizing such unfruitfulness, Auden does it with a sense of dyer's-hand guilt. In the following stanzas, "the defeated and disfigured" crowds "marching by" (*EA* 156) and heading for the Isle of Wight in pursuit of pleasure are complemented with a counter image of a small company – Christopher Isherwood and himself. Auden provides a retrospective exposure of their own former 'rentier-youth' escapism to the comforts of the ivory tower offered by their class. He remembers occasions when, "Nine year ago," they were together "upon that southern island / Where the wild Tennyson became a fossil" (*EA* 156). The allusion to Tennyson reveals that the place in focus is also the Isle of Wight, where the two adolescents spent their holiday in 1926.[473] With guilt springing from his awareness of bourgeois privileges, Auden remembers common inconsequential summer talks about books. They could afford these pastimes, Auden explains, because behind them were "The stuccoed suburb and expensive school" – hints at the middle-class background allowing such comforts. The life within their "turf" (*EA* 156) also allowed them to conjure up a secluded private imaginary world of spies in glasses and "the old felt hat" (*EA* 156).[474] In the next stanza,

[472] Sharpe, *W.H. Auden* 15.
[473] Replogle 17.
[474] Replogle argues that their private world shared features with the famous imaginary world of Mortmere fashioned by the slightly older Christopher Isherwood and Edward Upward when at school. However, there is a discrepancy among various critics as to where it was invented. Replogle claims that it was at Gresham School, Holt (16), but the fact that Isherwood did

Auden refocuses from their class insularity onto an equally blameworthy youthful reliance on the power of love: "Five summers pass and now we watch / The Baltic from a balcony : the word is love" (*EA* 156). This second spatial-temporal nexus is the Rügen Island, Germany. Auden and Isherwood went there in the summer of 1931 to visit Stephen Spender.[475] In this poem it becomes the island of love and Auden remembers how they trusted its healing power: "Surely one fearless kiss would cure / The million fevers" (*EA* 156). Love, private pleasure and hedonism seemed effective antidotes to the problems of the time. Auden adds that, should there be "a dragon who had closed the works / While the starved city fed it with the Jews," love "would tame it with his trainer's look" (*EA* 156).

This autobiographical 'chronicle' poem reaches a point where Auden retracts his earlier and others' "every flabby fancy" because the present permits no such privileges, naivety and fantasy: "Louder to-day the wireless roars / Its warnings and its lies" (*EA* 156). Now, in 1935, it is no longer feasible to take refuge on the 'island' of class privileges, love and in a private imaginary world. It is not viable "Among the well-shaped cosily to flit" and desire "The beautiful loneliness of the banks" (*EA* 156–57). When the surrounding profane sea of public affairs is wild, to cling on to the peaceful banks of personal insularity is immoral. Clearly, there is a parallel between this poem and "Here on the cropped grass" in terms of approaching the same places in two different moments.[476] Here, the insular properties of the Isle of Wight and the Rügen Island are also used as images of 'Good Places' offering contentment. Besides, they too are presently rejected and viewed with guilt. The 'Good Life' and 'Place', it seems, can only be temporarily achieved through escapes from the 'outside' world of public fact to self-deluding myths, secluded existence and hedonism, which Auden explored abundantly during the following months in poems multiplying spatial images of insularity.[477]

"In this hour of crisis and dismay," announced towards the end of "August for the people", Auden cries out for Isherwood's help. He asks a rhetorical question: "What better than your strict and adult pen / Can warn us from the colours and the consolations" of the seemingly comfortable lives of isolationism and complacency? What else can "reveal / The

not attend it suggests that he mistakes it for St. Edmund's Preparatory School, Hindhead, Surrey, where Auden met Isherwood for the first time. Mendelson reports that the surrealist mythical world was created at Cambridge, where Isherwood and Upward studied (*Early Auden* 120).

[475] Mendelson, *Early Auden* 338.

[476] Auden attempted this 'Tintern-Abbey' format already in "Taller to-day, we remember similar evenings" (March 1928).

[477] In "Casino" (1936), for example, he reuses the idea of a ring but turns it into a profane opposite of perfection as it appears in "Out on the lawn I lie in bed". The central image is a revolving roulette wheel to which the hands of players are attracted and which bespeaks their hedonistic entrapment in a stagnating life. Auden returns to the 'nature/culture' dialectic and alludes to a bird that, "Deep in the greens and moistures of summer, / Sings towards their work." After such a polarity, he concludes the poem with a description of human existence through a painful inversion of the Arcadian imagery contrasting with the happiness and moisture in nature: "here no nymph comes naked to the youngest shepherd, / The fountain is deserted, the laurel will not grow ; / The labyrinth is safe but endless, and broken / Is Ariadne's thread" (*EA* 164).

squalid shadow of academy and garden" (*EA* 157) – the ivory-towerism of intellectuals and the affluent classes ignoring the situation outside the walls of their mansions?[478]

Auden's call for enlightenment from Isherwood is related to his crystallizing view at the time of artists' and intellectuals' role in the afore mentioned large collectivities based on dehumanizing processes. As noted, Auden associated their organization with the transformation of individuals into manipulatable 'behaviourist automatons' deprived of critical consciousness and will to participate in the construction of social milieus. For Auden, the present generations were exposed to coercion more than before because subjected to the misuse of modern technology – an enduring cause of his vexation. In *The Criterion* (January 1933), he aligned technology with power and both of them with invisibility:

> The last hundred years have seen an immense advance not only in knowledge, but also in the technique of spreading and instilling it. [...]. Whoever possesses the instrument of knowledge, the Press, the Wireless, and the Ministry of Education, is the dictator of the country; [...] it becomes increasingly difficult to overthrow a bad one because imitating our voice, he makes us believe that he does not exist.[479]

These aspects of interwar modernity intensified Auden's readiness to praise exemplary intellectuals revealing such mechanism, coercion and dehumanizing process, thereby cultivating alertness in others. In 1934, Auden wrote of E.M. Forster in terms of an exemplary intellectual maintaining "hatred of all tabus and systems which would enforce a proscribed pattern."[480] Similarly, in May 1933, he published a praising review of *Culture and Environment: The Training of Critical Awareness* by F.R. Leavis and Denys Thompson. It seems obvious that he drew from this book inspiration for his views outlined above of the superior former 'face-to-face' communities and modern 'estranged' crowds. He hailed the authors for a publication training critical awareness of the modern "centralised distribution of ideas." For Auden the teacher, their work was "a practical text book for assisting children to defeat propaganda of all kinds by making them aware of which buttons are being pressed."[481] Auden's essays show that as a teacher he too aimed to cultivate his pupils' individuality and opinion. Besides, in 1935, hence at the time of writing "August for the people", Auden claimed that "one of the motives behind poetry is curiosity, the wish to know what we feel and think." Because curious about life, Auden perceived poets as positioned above the acceptant and passive 'average men' but also as socially responsible for assisting the blind

[478] Auden explored the ivory-towerism of academia and its failure to procure social changes in a short poem "Oxford" (December 1937; *EA* 229-30)
[479] Auden, "A Review of *The Evolution of Sex,* by Dr Gregorio Marañón, and *The Biological Tragedy of Women*, by Anton Nemilov," *Complete Works I* 31.
[480] Auden, "Lowes Dickinson," *Complete Works I* 81.
[481] Auden, "A Review of *Culture and Environment*, by F.R. Leavis and Denys Thompson, and Other Books," *Complete Works I* 38.

man in nurturing his self-knowledge for the sake of gaining critical independence and capacity to make the right choices about what direction to take in life.[482]

It is this desire to be enlightened that hovers above the final stanzas of "August for the people". What better than Isherwood's writing, Auden continues his rhetorical questions, can "Make action urgent and its nature clear?" (*EA* 157). Auden no longer begs an external force, nature, history or love in a prayer mode. He addresses another mortal and critically conscious human being. Auden foreshadows his 1939 claim, referred to in the previous chapter, concerning the power of ideas to instigate action and historical change: with no solution of his own, he relies on the ideas and guidance of the slightly older Isherwood and on his ability to elucidate what needs to be done in order to lead the average man out of passivity, escapism, nature worship, private hedonism and reliance on politicians, and to open his eyes to the need to be committed to actuality of the 'here' and 'now'.

5.6. The White Chalk Cliffs of the Turning Globe

This chapter has examined Auden's engagement with England. It ascertains the changes and constants in his treatment of topographical detail, local landscape and culture in poetry written during the 1930s when he 'stepped out' of the cosy 'rentier' life. In "Who stands, the crux left of the watershed" (1927), the observer views Cashwell from a watershed road. Likewise, Auden's 1930s speakers commonly assume elevated border positions. Failing this, they speak from enclosed spaces providing the same amount of solitude and privacy. Yet, unlike the earlier narrow focus on a small private sacred world, the 1930s prospects are much larger. Analogous to his expanding interest in public issues, Auden's speakers 'step out' of Alston Moor and enter Scottish, English and Welsh landscapes offering a broader synoptic 'view' of interwar England, its counties and towns. Yet, unlike in prose, Auden does not make these steps to promote the specificity of his insular 'Mater' nor does he fashion himself as a proud Englishman. His poems do not promote such postures and imagination. Auden obfuscates and displaces them.

Summarizing his admiration for John Betjeman, Auden wrote that his "poetic universe, verbally, architecturally, and ecclesiastically, is so British that when I first began introducing his poems to American friends, I was afraid that they might not be able to make head or tail of them."[483] Auden's 1930s poems show the extent to which his own engagement with England is embedded in a completely different imaginative groove. Auden does not manifest Yi-Fu Tuan's and David Lowenthal's claims that a nation state, its national identity and specificity,

[482] Auden, "Introduction to *The Poet's Tongue*," *Complete Works I* 106-07.
[483] Auden, "John Betjeman's Poetic Universe," *Complete Works IV* 220.

become visible in consequence of the ethnocentric emphasis of the long-term 'insiders' on local uniqueness, centrality, superiority and a selection of discernable landmarks or topographical details. Despite his unabated critique of globalization and in spite of his pedantic reproach of education for disregarding individuality, the 1930s Auden promotes neither the parvenu character of the English landscape nor unique and insular cultural traits. No traces of an ideal border, emerging from a possessive and encomiastic conduct defending such lofty views, are discernable in the poems unless when preparing for their deflation. Auden's voice tends to be socially committed but free-floating and devotedly focused on the dilapidation of his *terra patria* only in the context of global humanistic concerns about the world-wide crisis and exhaustion of western cultures. A new element in the poetry is also the first-person singular voice clearly concerned about the distraught state of the English culture. Such speakers are located in concrete spatial-temporal nodes often deriving from Auden's personal experiences. Yet, such liminal viewpoints opening upon large horizons, or the self-enclosed garden offering the view of the Moon, allow them to expand beyond the vantage points, the local shore, mole, fortress and patriotic concerns. Auden extrapolates beyond the home reef, sees it as inseparably enmeshed in European history and so as equally struck by the interwar crisis affecting all the people riding, as he put it, the turning globe that thrusts people together into one crucible. This type of imagination consequently levels out England's distinctiveness and eclipses the provincial 'Englishness' of Auden's poetic universe with a cosmopolitan timbre.

This is a symptom of his synthetic approach to the English landscape. "Look, stranger, at this island now" (1935) supplied the title for the whole *Look Stranger!*. Under the weight of Auden's attention in the volume to England, the phrase 'this island' is commonly interpreted as a reference to his homeland. Indeed, Auden wrote this fine poem for Marion Grierson's documentary film *Beside the Seaside* about the Isle of Wight – the location of Auden's childhood holiday memories.[484] The speaker stands poised atop "tall ledges" of chalk cliffs "falling to the foam" (*EA* 157-58) and watches ships sailing in the surrounding sea below. Yet, this 'vagueness' can be the subject of much speculation concerning the local reference of the poem. Its supreme visual quality and prospect do not only prefigure the ekphrastic poem "Musée des Beaux Art" (1938) using a generic landscape. It is also strikingly redolent of David Friedrich's famous *Chalk Cliffs on Rügen*. The facts that Auden was well acquainted with visual arts and that he visited Rügen some time before writing the poem provide grounds for doubting the reference of this image to the Isle of Wight and to England. In fact, as in the

[484] Mendelson, *Early Auden* 340; Fuller 152-53.

"Prologue" and elsewhere,[485] it might be more accurately interpreted as a display of Auden's tendency to bring into single poems references to different landscapes from Britain and Europe under the rubric of his sustained panoptic vision, effort to find connections between places, synthesize them and bleach their local distinguishing specificity.

Auden's focus on England as an island is a part of his more general concerns in his 1930s poems about the notion of insularity and ivory-towerism. The last stanza of "Look, stranger, at this island now" contains a fine image of ships imagined as "floating seeds" engaged in "urgent voluntary errands" and heading towards the fertile horizon of potentiality, where the crew may enjoy a thriving and fruitful life. Contrary to such wishful seeking of a 'Good Place' in the periphery is the static voice, heard from atop the chalk cliffs, bidding the stranger – the reader – to pause and look inland towards the landscape 'here'. Edward Mendelson notes that "From the end of 1935 to the end of 1938, whenever [Auden] needed an emblem for *his* separation from responsibility, audience, love, history, […], he invoked the solitary island."[486] Yet, even before this date, Auden found the generic properties of this *topos* useful for scathing not only his own, but also *others'* isolationist withdrawnness from the affairs of the surrounding world of actuality.

In his 1930s poems, Auden is fully focused on the idea of England as an island but the Shakespearean 'silver sea' serves neither 'in the office of a wall' nor a 'moat defensive to a house' and the alluvial plain. Its geographical separation from the peninsula is not taken for a guarantor of differentiation and protection against the global interwar crisis and rising nationalism. Recalling Roman invasion and the Norman Conquest, Auden turns insularity into a self-deluding and self-inflicting myth bespeaking the blindness of the English people to the danger lurking in Europe. Also, in the 1920s, Auden portrayed figures in the landscape as consciously acting to resolve the demerits of their environment *in situ* in the face of indifferent natural forces frustrating their eager efforts. In the 1930s, Auden started to people his landscapes with indifferent, lethargic, passive 'average men' and manipulable crowds evading the world of actuality and oblivious to the interwar situation. Instead of trying to act, they relieve discontent by taking refuge in private 'islands' of middle-class contentment, love, nature, entertainment and in the promises of religious and political comforters.

Auden had divided feelings about the possibility of initiating social changes and he moved sinuously between belief and disbelief in man's capacity to shape his environment. Yet, contrasting with this wavering was a relentless inculcation to readers of a conviction that every individual should be personally accountable for the public realm regardless of their

[485] E.g. "Consider this and in our time" (March 1930).
[486] Mendelson, *Early Auden* 333, emphasis added.

success. Contrasting with the socially irresponsible figures in the 1930s landscapes are Auden's speakers. They too envision alluvial insular plains and flawless islands of milk and honey. They find solitude in isolated positions and take refuge in dreaming, walled gardens, class and mythologized nature. Yet, they wake up, look back upon the existential zone in the valley, brood on and finally re-enter the actual world of desire and sorrow. They are exemplars of a belief that the *condition humaine* implies irrefutable 'rootedness in life' and that escapes from the actual world are only temporary and socially irresponsible.

In 1932, Auden wrote that "since our desire cannot take that route which is straightest, / Let us choose the crooked, so implicating these acres" (*EA* 118). Auden's figures manifest the former because they search easy indecorous 'solutions' satisfying 'every flabby fancy'. As shown, with regards to his homeland, Auden had his own flabby fancy – an idealized memory of a comfortable, secluded, middle-class life in the early twentieth-century provincial England. His poems, however, attempt to guide man along the latter crooked route through the contemporary world of fact by bestirring social accidie and by deflating such futile and civically irresponsible compensatory fantasies. All myths and forms of escapism aggravated his conviction that ivory-towerism, 'insularity' and complacence weakened personal freedom, especially when he noticed the spread of Fascism through Europe. Having suppressed and ousted from his 1920s poetry his own personal myth of Alston Moors allowing private escapism from the world of actuality into the 'island' of bliss, in the 1930s he started to demand the same disenchanted attitude from the whole citizenry. As implied by the epigraph of the present chapter, the island acquired the status of "an illusion caused by black magic to tempt the hero to abandon his quest, and which, when the spell is broken, is seen to be really the desert of barren rock."[487]

[487] Auden, *Enchafèd Flood* 21.

6. Iceland in W.H. Auden's *Letters from Iceland* (1936–1937)

Iceland is not a myth, it is actual and real, a solid portion of the earth's surface.
–Pliny Miles[488]

In November 1935, Auden wrote "Look, stranger, at this island now". As noted, this first line supplied the names for both English and American editions of his second collection of poems. The English title was foisted upon the volume by the publisher while Auden was abroad and 'looking', as a 'stranger', at another 'island': Iceland. After a year in Berlin (1928-1929), this was his second long-term stay away from England, where he had spent most of the last seven years teaching at schools and working for the documentary Film Units of the General Post Office (G.P.O.).[489] Following his resignation from the G.P.O. in March 1936, Auden went to Portugal. Returning in April, he met Michael Yates, a former pupil at the Downs School, with whom he had visited Europe, including Czechoslovakia.[490] Yates was planning a trip to Iceland that summer with a group of boys and a master from Bryanston School. Auden was asked to accompany them and, as Richard Davenport-Hines informs, his "response was swift."[491] The promptness transpires from the discussion of Auden's sacred places in Chapter Two. As an object of his life-long topophilic sentiments, as one of the two locations of a sacred place, Iceland with its landscape, literature and culture had attracted Auden since childhood. To lessen the expenses, he secured an advance for writing a travel book about Iceland from Faber and Faber and left by himself on 16 May to be joined by Louis MacNeice on 8 August and the Bryanston group a week later.[492] Auden returned to England on 10 September, 1936. His visit resulted in *Letters from Iceland* (1937), a travel book that irritated Evelyn Waugh,[493] but which still attracts critical attention and which is examined in this chapter.[494] Although Auden invited MacNeice to co-author it, the authorship of individual

[488] Pliny Miles, *Norðurfari; or, Rambles in Iceland* (New York: Charles B. Norton, 1854) 34-35, *Internet Archive*, n.d. <http://archive.org/details/norurfariorram00milerich>, 26 January 2013.

[489] John Grierson is generally credited with the import of the word 'documentary' to British culture and for organizing the first and largest 1930s documentary productions – the government-sponsored E.M.B. Film Units founded in 1927 and the General Post Office Film Units between 1933 and 1939.

[490] Auden's trip (August – September 1934) resulted in a travel diary "In Search of Dracula" published in the Downs School magazine *The Badger* in 1934. While the party never reached Rumania, the text mentions Karlovy Vary, Praha, Jihlava and Uherské Hradiště, where his camera was stolen (*Complete Works I* 74).

[491] Davenport-Hines 147.

[492] The choice of the publisher was problematic. According to Edward Mendelson, Auden proposed to write the book for Jonathan Cape Publishers. On learning about his intentions, T.S. Eliot secured it for Faber and Faber, Auden's previous publisher. Auden accepted this and replied: "I'm very glad to be back again, scolded but happy" (Textual Notes, *The Complete Works of W.H. Auden, vol. I*, ed. Edward Mendelson 767).

[493] "The legend has grown up," Waugh is reported to have written, "that it is only necessary to send an author abroad to compel him automatically to composition; writers in need of a holiday find that it can always be obtained in exchange for a contract. How burdensome these contracts can become is evident in *Letters from Iceland*" ("Bloomsbury's Farthest North," *Night and Day*, 12 August 1937, qtd. in Cunningham 391).

[494] See Marsha Bryant, *Auden and Documentary in the 1930s* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997); Tim Youngs, "Auden's travel writings" 68-81.

parts is known and a substantial proportion of the text was his contribution as were all the photographs accompanying it.[495]

Letters from Iceland was produced in a decade characteristic of a large number of travel journeys and their accounts. In his attempt to provide a typology of interwar travelling, but cautious of the risk of conjuring up a rickety construct, Valentine Cunningham acknowledges the variety of reasons that the 1930s intellectuals had for their travels and writing. He discusses them in the context of two contrasting poles, which might be termed 'escapist' and 'committed'. The former is "the fine old tradition of purposeless travel for fun and adventure."[496] Cunningham borrows this line from Graham Greene's assessment of Paul Theroux's *The Great Railway Bazaar* (1975) and exemplifies it on Osbert Sitwell's *Escape with Me!* (1939). In such accounts and motives for travelling, Cunningham diagnoses a tendency to escape from the quotidian lifespace in search of superior places: "'30s writing bears witness to an extraordinary craving to achieve escapist interludes, Shangri-La, peaceful parenthesis within the extremely unpeaceful interwar parenthesis."[497] This passing reference to James Hilton's novel *Lost Horizons* (1933), envisioning a harmonious and utopian land enisled from the chaotic and dissatisfactory surroundings, is essential in the context of the present chapter. In Cunningham's view, interwar intellectuals were often motivated to travel by a desire for a therapeutic relief from the actual world. He provides a long list of titles evidencing his claim that writers were magnetically attracted, physically and imaginatively, to islands – the archetype of stillness, separation, blissful existence and a 'Good Place'. Auden's attention to England and his trip to Iceland exemplify such a preoccupation with insularity.[498]

Contrasting with isolationist motives and escapist narratives is the latter 'committed' pole. 1930s journalistic writing and films emerged from an interwar fascination with the documentary. It became a very popular and major form of organizing and representing factuality. As Marsha Bryant convincingly argues in her rare and outstanding study of the genre, it was the decade's prime form of a socially engaged art.[499] Attending to particular regions and exposing the social and economic reality of, especially, the working classes, the documentary served "as a counter-force to the bourgeois propaganda media - the national newspapers, commercial entertainment-films, and public education."[500] The genre attracted

[495] The authorship of individual parts is marked in the Princeton edition used in this dissertation by "W.H.A." and "L.M.".
[496] Cunningham 376.
[497] Cunningham 376.
[498] Cunningham provides a list of writers attracted to the idea of insularity and islands: D.H. Lawrence: "The Man Who Loved Islands" (and his travel account *Sea and Sardinia*, 1923); MacNeice's attention to the Hebrides archipelago; Isherwood's "An Evening at the Bay" and Upward's "The Island" expressing affection for the Isle of Wight, etc. (377-78).
[499] Bryant 98.
[500] Samuel Hynes, *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976) 212–13.

mainly middle-class intellectuals. George Orwell's accounts of Wigan miners, hop pickers in Kent, tramps in London and Paris, as well as his description of Spain during the Spanish Civil War, are examples of such a tendency of left-wing intellectuals to assuage their *crise de conscience* by pointing to the disquieting existential conditions of the lower classes. In "Why I Write" (1946), Orwell states that his "meticulous descriptive quality" allows him to report on both the niceties and shabbiness of the chosen subject for the sake of truthfully informing the public, which he hopes every political art should do to "push the world in a certain direction."[501] Similar eagerness to attend to local facts and social reality of the 'here' and 'now' is discernable in Auden's work. His interest in journalistic reporting and documentary is not only evidenced by his contributions to the G.P.O. projects, for which he wrote poetry and worked as a directional assistant. It is also discernable in his 1930s prose. Auden did not only criticize the aestheticism and 'significant form' of the Bloomsbury intellectuals and authors of abstract art emphasizing form over content. He was also appalled by a general artistic disengagement from social reality. In April 1936, hence only weeks before going to Iceland, Auden scorned Herbert Read's admiration for abstraction because no "artist can be good who is not more than a bit of a reporting journalist. To the journalist the first thing of importance is subject and [...] so in literature I expect plenty of news" about the actual world.[502]

In this connection, twentieth-century authors of documentary travel accounts and journals extended a long tradition of travel writing and its varied discourse subsuming, as J.A. Cuddon asserts, "works of exploration and adventure as well as guides and accounts of sojourns."[503] This summary alludes to the diverse forms that travel writers have adopted since the eighteenth century within the broad continuum opening between seemingly objective, informative, 'journalistic' descriptions of places and, opposite, transcriptions into texts of subjective encounters of places involving an internalization of the external world. Magdalena Ożarska provides a short but succinct summary of this diversity. Referring to Charles L. Batten, she argues that early eighteenth-century travel books were modelled on the Neo-Classical precedent set by Joseph Addison in *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy* (1705) and characteristic of "impersonal and factual depictions." By the latter decades of the century, such "extravert" accounts were challenged by the Romantic aesthetic causing that the external world, hitherto described with a strong emphasis on informative accuracy, constituted "but a

[501] Orwell 5-10.
[502] Auden, "Psychology and Criticism," *Complete Works I* 132.
[503] John Anthony Cuddon, "Travel book," *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 4th ed. (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1998) 937.

springboard to the narrator's exploration of their inner world."[504] This latter form foregrounds a personal bias, hence the issue of a subjective perception and sense of place. This encourages Paul Fussell to claim that travel books are a "sub-species of memoir in which the autobiographical narrative arises from the speaker's encounter with distant or unfamiliar data, and in which the narrative – unlike that in a novel or a romance – claims literal validity by constant reference to actuality."[505] The travel book, then, offers the traveller a broad palette of possibilities in which to write their encounter with the physical world, local cultures, places usually located outside existential zones, and, importantly, with themselves.

Several critics have dismissed *Letters from Iceland* on grounds of its amateurship. To support his claim that it "marks the decadent stage in the course of the between-the-wars travel book," Paul Fussell himself describes the book as "unhappy," "disturbingly discontinuous," suffering from "nervousness," filled with "poems that don't really belong" and where "nothing is rounded off."[506] This chapter approaches *Letters from Iceland* from an opposite perspective. Marsha Bryant illustrates the book's worth by reading it in the context of 1930s documentary techniques and High Modernism. She shows how the *Letters* emerge from a dialogue with these contrasting discourses and so successfully exposes the threads linking the *Letters* to the aesthetic and social contexts of the interwar years.

In what follows, Auden's verse contributions to the *Letters* are also approached as a text which, being far from dismissible and amateurish, can be fruitfully scrutinized. Unlike Bryant, however, this chapter attends to the *Letters* for its invaluable potential to assist in the completion of the present endeavour to assess Auden's poetics of place. Hence, with the travelogue and 1930s escapist and documentary writing in mind, attention is paid to two issues. Firstly, the chapter explores to what extent Auden reveals a surrender to his topophilic sentiments and to the temptation to go to Iceland as to a therapeutic asylum from the European crisis spiralling towards the Second World War. Secondly, as shown in Chapter Two, the sense of Iceland seeping through Auden's criticism embodies some of the basic patterns of the spatial experience of islands and distant places known vicariously or through imagination. Auden ascribed to it the status of an insular refuge of a unique culture, landscape and enchanting mythology. He constructed it as a sacred place with the halo of the most magical light on earth. *Letters from Iceland* uses an epistolary form suitable for promoting a first-person autobiographical perspective and so capable of carrying such a subjective and

[504] Magdalena Ożarska, "Dorothy Wordsworth as Travel Writer: The 1798 *Hamburgh Journal*," *Theatrum historiae* 7 (2010): 179–80. Ożarska refers to Charles L. Batten's study *Pleasurable Instruction: Form and Convention in Eighteenth–Century Travel Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978). For a further assessment of Romantic travel writing see Procházka and Hrbata 76–118.
[505] Fussell 203.
[506] Fussell 219-20.

encomiastic sense of place. This chapter gauges Auden's willingness in the verse letters to write a personal 'memoir' promoting what he called was his private 'icelandophilic' predilection. It seeks to fathom his readiness to reinforce the sense of Iceland placarded in prose praising it as a sacred and superior place. Besides, from a different perspective, the analysis aims to ascertain whether Auden seized upon his G.P.O. experience and the 1930s documentary fashion for the sake of writing a journalistic account delivering 'plenty of news' about the specificity of the physical local landscape, social life and culture, whose insular character still attracts tourists today. In general, the chapter examines the manner and extent to which Auden's direct experience and adoption of the travel-book genre corrected his earlier 'depersonalizing' engagement with a local detail and, at the same time, the contours of his mythical geography.

The *Letters* comprises photographs, prose and verse letters. Therefore, where of merit because conducive to delineating the lineament of Auden's poetic treatment of Iceland, the verse parts are discussed in the context of Auden's prose letters from Iceland. Besides, references are made to *Letter to Lord Byron*, designed as "a central thread" on which to "hang other letters" (*LFI* 280), and to MacNeice's verse contribution to the *Letters*. These contexts assist in uncovering the specificity of Auden's poetic engagement with his 'holy' place.

6.1. W.H. Auden's "Journey to Iceland"

"I worked all this morning and finished a poem on Iceland at last, or rather it's about the voyage out and better, I hope, than William Morris's effort" (*LFI* 267), wrote Auden to Erika Mann in the first of two prose letters that he addressed to her. Auden refers to his earliest Icelandic poem "Journey to Iceland, *A Letter to Christopher Isherwood, Esq.*" and, at the same time, hints at its major theme. It is a meditative 'epistle' on the cliché expectations and sense of place that European travellers commonly have prior to their arrival in Iceland.

The poem makes no explicit reference to Morris, his trips to Iceland (1871 and 1873), nor to his engagement with the Icelandic landscape and culture in "Iceland First Seen". Yet, both Morris and his poem are tacitly present there from the first to last stanza. In "Iceland First Seen", Morris asks: "What came we forth for to see that our hearts are so hot with desire?"[507] Contrary to the contemporary positive view of Iceland as a place of unspoilt natural beauty, fauna and flora, Morris answers the question by presenting the island as a repulsive wilderness, but also as a place brimming with marvellous tales that make the hostile grinding ice, volcanoes and other vagaries worth enduring. Sublime nature and the richness of

[507] William Morris, *Poems by the Way* (London: Reeves and Turner, 1891 ed.) 37-40, *Morris Online Edition*, n.d. <http://morrisedition.lib.uiowa.edu/poemsbyway.html>, 23 May 2012.

local myths reveal Morris's emphasis on insularity. He approaches Iceland as a remote place bestowed with a specific landscape and literature different from Europe.

Similarly, in his letter to Isherwood, Auden dwells upon the idea of Iceland's remoteness, insularity and Otherness promising authentic experience:

> And the traveller hopes: 'Let me be far away from any
> Physician'; And the ports have names for the sea;
> The citiless, the corroding, the sorrow;
> And North means to all: 'Reject!' (*LFI* 185)

The word 'ports' in the second line is of great importance. It is the consequence of Christopher Isherwood's misreading of Auden's original "And the poets have names for the sea."[508] As shown, Auden himself was a poet who 'had names' for the sea and who expressed clearly formulated views of this environmental type. He set the sea dialectically against the life-sustaining historicizable land and approached it as an uninhabitable place of discomfort that must be endured during a voyage, the 'necessary evil', across its vast destructive expanse that 'separates or estranges'.[509] The traveller in "Journey to Iceland" too endures the 'citiless' and 'corroding', hence uninhabitable and life-threatening sea causing 'sorrow' because he hopes to find relief in the remote Iceland from the malaise of homeland, presumably Europe.

Auden's choice of the word 'Physician' foreshadows the main theme of the poem – the possibility of approaching Iceland as a therapeutic asylum for the impaired body and soul, and so as a 'Good Place' geographically separated and culturally distinct from the 'diseased' western world ruled by ineffective soothers. The traveller imagines Iceland as a healthy refuge and Auden makes him draw this conviction from the archetypal purity and pre-lapsarian innocence associated with the island *topos*.[510] The traveller's exclamations 'Let me be far away' and 'Reject!' signal a desire to be isolated from home in a regenerative asylum found in the unmatched, natural and insular Icelandic landscape. In the following stanzas, Auden attends to such stereotypical associations. The sea provides distance preserving Iceland's natural character and primordial stillness: "the great plains are *for ever* where the cold fish is hunted, / And *everywhere*; the light birds flicker and flaunt" (*LFI* 185, emphasis added). The temporal immutability and spatial omnipresence of faunal life in and above the sea are complemented with a description of the local landscape appearing on arrival. In Iceland, the "lover of islands" – the seeker of solitude and refuge in nature – may find "the glitter / Of glaciers" and "the sterile immature mountains intense / In the abnormal day of this

[508] Auden informed Isherwood that he found the misreading an improvement on the poem and decided to replace with it the original word 'poets' (*LFI* 186).
[509] Auden, *Enchafèd Flood* 7. Auden attended to the destructive power of water and uninhabitable quality of the sea in "Who will endure" (1930), "The Fall of Rome" (1947) and other poems.
[510] Auden, *Enchafèd Flood* 20.

world" (*LFI* 185). Iceland is attractive because its glittering glaciers and mountains remain sterile, pure and untarnished by the 'abnormal days' blighting the interwar Continent.

Besides, Auden mentions the local desert, which, like the sea, epitomized his idea of an environmental type unsuitable for man's existence. As noted in Chapter One, the desert has had a strong appeal to the ascetic temperament of people seeking stark environment in order to "escape from not only the corruption but the voluptuous luxury of city life."[511] Traditionally, Auden associated human ensconcing in a desert with an act of self-examination, purification and temporary or "final rejection of the wicked city of this world, a dying to the life of the flesh and an assumption of a life devoted wholly to spiritual contemplation."[512] In "Journey to Iceland", this image is used in exactly the same manner. Being pale "from too much passion of kissing," hence from an excessive bodily contact, lovers escape to Iceland from their comfortable urban existential zones. There, they intend to spiritually recover and "feel pure in its deserts" (*LFI* 185).

Clearly, Auden presents Iceland as an exclusive geographical Otherness in the distant mythical zone prone to idealizing. Its remoteness preserves local stillness and naturalness, to which the figures hope to escape in search of a relieving therapeutic antidote to the blight of their civilized home. Auden's emphasis on the 'therapeutic' and 'sterile' properties of Iceland can be interpreted through Yi-Fu Tuan's summary of the archetypal imagining of an island in terms of a state of original innocence "*quarantined* from the ills of the continent."[513] "Europe is absent," Auden states, and constructs Iceland as a refuge offering an unspoilt and 'immature' landscape that the mature Old Continent, trapped in the 'abnormal day', lacks:

> Then let the good citizen here find natural marvels:
> The horse-shoe ravine, the issues of steam from a cleft
> In the rock, and rocks, and waterfalls brushing the
> Rocks, and among the rocks birds. (*LFI* 185)

As noted, for J. Hillis Miller "landscape 'as such' is never given, only one or another ways to map it."[514] William Morris's poem creates a sublime version of Iceland while Auden's is a rather idyllic and picturesque one. Also, Morris dwells on the evocative historical narratives and, although Auden mentions them too in the fifth and sixth stanzas, he derives Iceland's specificity primarily from its natural features – steam, rocks, ravines and deserts – contrasting with the humanized and historicized European homes of the arriving travellers.

Even Louis MacNeice, Auden's co-traveller, emphasizes the ideas of distance, escape and asylum in connection with Iceland in "Letter to Graham and Anne Shepard". Like Morris,

[511] Tuan, *Topophilia* 51.
[512] Auden, *Enchafèd Flood* 13-14.
[513] Tuan, *Topophilia* 118, emphasis added.
[514] Miller 6.

he ponders on what Iceland can offer to him and why he chose this hostile and northern place rather than the sunny and pleasant climate of "Cyprus and Madeira" (*LFI* 191). Yet, MacNeice criticizes Morris for his enchanting and lofty diction. Instead, he mentions and sympathizes with ascetic Irish hermits who once came to the austere Icelandic desert to "mortify their flesh" (*LFI* 192). Such a purifying undertaking reminiscent of Auden's lovers is compared with the reasons that twentieth-century travellers might have for arriving in Iceland: "we must mortify, / Our blowsy *intellects*" because living in Europe entails "noise, the radio or the city, / Traffic and changing lights, crashing the amber" and because people are always on the move and so "do not remember / The necessity of the silence of the islands" (*LFI* 192, emphasis added). This recalls Valentine Cunningham's claim concerning the fascination of 1930s 'escapist' writers with islands. The rush, movement and dynamism of the civilized existential centre that MacNeice mentions provide him with an "itch / To open the French Window into the rain, / Walk out and never be seen at home again" (*LFI* 192). Like Auden in "Journey to Iceland", MacNeice clings on to the 'nature/culture' dialectic and turns Iceland into a realm of natural, pre-modern tranquillity contrasting with the noise and technological clutter of home.

Yet, he breaks the course of this meditative poem in its very middle and claims that instead of escaping from Europe to anesthetize the mind, he came for an opposite reason. His home is a "complex world" which "exacts / Hard work simplifying." Hence, "to get its focus," anyone eager to understand themselves should "stand outside the crowd and caucus" (*LFI* 194). MacNeice wants to distance himself from the pulverizing western world, its "cruel clock, the bills upon the file," art, fashion, politics: "The excess of books and cushions, the high heels / That walk the street, the news, the newsboys' yells" (*LFI* 194). The aural discomfort and motional dynamism of these images contrast with the depiction of Iceland. There, only in its distant northerly austerity and pre-modern stillness, can he find quiet, solitude and conditions for self-examination. He hopes that its insularity will provide space for such a yearned-for brooding and for peaceful Wordsworthian recollections in tranquillity:

> Here is different rhythm, the juggled balls
> Hang in the air – the pause before the soufflé falls.
> Here we can take a breath, sit back, admire
> Stills from the film of life, the frozen fire;
> Among these rocks can roll upon the tongue
> Morsels of thought, not jostled by the throng. (*LFI* 195)

Like Morris before them, Auden and MacNeice feel the urge to describe and justify reasons that they and people in general might have for coming to Iceland. In doing so, all three poets present the island in terms of Otherness emerging from its insularity and

remoteness. Yet, unlike Morris, Auden and MacNeice derive Iceland's attractiveness from the potential of the local natural landscape to offer an effective antidote to the malaise of interwar Europe. The desire for a 'therapeutic' escape from civilization into the silence and austerity displayed in MacNeice's poem resembles that of "Journey to Iceland". Auden's traveller leaves the infected home behind in order to 'be far from any physician'. His good citizen hopes to find superior 'natural marvels' and the lovers seek emotional purification in the local desert. Writing in 1938, Auden claimed that, bewildered by the complexity, ugliness and power of the world around them, Romantic poets turned away from it "to the contemplation of their own emotions and the creation of imaginary worlds – Wordsworth to Nature, Keats and Mallarmé to a world of pure poetry, Shelley to a future Golden Age, Baudelaire and Hőlderlin to a past."[515] Auden's argument, reminiscent of his earlier attacks on Wordsworth, also recalls Jerome McGann's observation that in their poetry, Romantic poets forged different means of evading an engagement in the reality of the contemporary world. Auden reproaches Wordsworth for 'nature worship', yet, MacNeice and himself locate in Iceland the same type of a refuge.

Paul B. Taylor claims that Auden's life "consisted of a succession of isolations" and that Iceland for him was one of his myths of exile.[516] Indeed, this applies to Auden's sense of the island displayed in his prose, where Isafjőrdur appears as his future exile, and to the first part of "Journey to Iceland".[517] Yet, towards the end of the poem, Auden defies this sense of place. He does not only disrupt MacNeice, whose introspective brooding came to a halt when "Wystan […] butted in again / To say we must go out in the frightful rain" (*LFI* 195). Auden also disrupts the flow of his own poem. In the second half of "Journey to Iceland", he sets off to unveil the fallacy of escapist intentions by deeming futile the romanticized and mythologized sense of the island conjured up by the travellers. He demolishes their hope to find in Iceland a therapeutic Otherness offering health and natural purity. Auden achieves it by means of erasing the 'border' and distance separating Iceland from Europe and by bestirring the accreted sediment of imagining them as embodiments of a superior and inferior, healthy and ill, natural and humanized spaces, respectively. Auden gently foreshadows his aim already in the third stanza. He pre-modifies the noun 'hope' that the lover of islands has with the adjective "limited" (*LFI* 185). Also, later he claims that "this is an island and therefore / Unreal" (*LFI* 185), thereby alluding to a utopian 'no place'. This latter statement nears the middle of the poem, a point where the buoyant wishful thinking, mythologizing

[515] Auden, *Complete Works I* 434.
[516] Paul B. Taylor 215.
[517] Auden, "I Like It Cold," *Complete Works II* 336.

rhetoric and escapist endeavours of his figures are questioned and gradually but assertively dismantled: "Can they?" Auden questions the hope of finding a refuge in Iceland and replies: "For the world *is*, and the *present*, and the *lie*" (*LFI* 185, emphasis added). The cadence of this line revives Auden's earlier insistence on the need to face the world as it *is* here and *now* without *lies* and myths.

Auden starts to dent the halo of the island by debunking the myth of imagining Icelanders as superior 'noble savages' because inhabiting natural environment spared from the moral corruption of the civilized world. He plants indigenous figures into the Icelandic landscape. Yet, although natural, 'sterile' and unspoilt, it forms a background to the life of people facing problems of the same stamp as those of the Europeans who crave for the imagined idyllic rural existence. For two lines, Auden goes on to pile up natural images, "the narrow bridge over the torrent, / And the small farm under the crag" (*LFI* 185), but then he halts and reverses. The bridge and the farm

> Are the natural setting for the jealousies of a province;
> And the weak vow of fidelity is formed by the cairn;
> And within the indigenous figure on horseback
> On the bridle path down by the lake
>
> The blood moves *also* by crooked and furtive inches,
> Asks *all your* questions: 'Where is the homage? When
> Shall justice be done? O who is against me?
> Why am I always alone?' (*LFI* 186, emphasis added)

Innocence and flawlessness evaporate from the landscape. Instead, it is filled with provincial jealousy and hollow promises of fidelity made by the locals in the vicinity of their late ancestors resting in the cairn, which Auden complements with a photograph (*LFI* 188). Also, an explicit reference is made here to the fact that the figure riding the horse is 'indigenous' and yet, their blood 'also' moves in immoral and secretive, 'crooked and furtive' ways.

It is possible to see the strategy in "Journey to Iceland" in the context of Auden's broader 1930s concerns. For example, a similar attitude to the idealization of specific 'uncivilized' communities is expressed in his 1938 review "The Noble Savage" of Dr Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture.* There, he appreciates anthropology for discarding established beliefs regarding Europeans as superior to savage peoples in need of evolution. He praises it for exploding "the fallacy of the Noble Savage, and the fallacy of the Base Savage."[518] Unlike Rousseau and the Romantics mentioned in the review, Auden in "Journey to Iceland" refuses to present the Icelander as "a primitive being unwarped by social pressure" and as a "pristine and good individual" because he inhabits nature. He sympathizes with anthropologists in their

[518] Auden, "The Noble Savage," *Complete Works I* 472.

claim that even "primitive people have extremely complicated and conservative social organizations" displaying different forms of coercion 'correcting' human immorality.[519]

To further demystify the European myth of Iceland's enisled intactness, Auden finds its landscape enveloped by Continental and global mores: flash suits, insanity of the Minister of Commerce, jazz in the huts and cosmopolitan smiles (*LFI* 186). These images of local contamination with the arts and economic reality of the surrounding world escalate Auden's effort to debunk the fallacy of the 'nature/culture' polarity to such an extent that "*no local* features / Are those of the young for whom all wish to care" (*LFI* 186, emphasis added). Auden is clearly reluctant to fashion and romanticize Iceland as an exclusive home to a purer 'young' life preserved on an island bestowed with a natural landscape and 'immature' hills.

Iceland, in other words, should not be a periphery subject to myth-making. Like in "Paysage Moralisé", Auden attributes such an imagining to a tendency of existential outsiders to project onto their sense of distant places in the mythical space the inversion of their dissatisfaction with the actual lifespace: "our time has no *favourite suburb*" and "the promise is only a promise, the fabulous / Country impartially far" (*LFI* 186, emphasis added). He approaches Iceland as a periphery – province and suburb. Yet, he debunks its mythologized perception because the fabulous 'Good Place' is unattainable and 'impartially far'. Instead, Auden proposes a sober sense of a distant place, his sacred Iceland, and advocates to "Present […] the world to the world with its mendicant shadow" (*LFI* 186).

The figures fail to find the 'Good Place' in the northern destination because Auden collapses the border that divides it from the Old Continent. Neither Iceland's natural landscape, nor geographical remoteness from Europe, nor insularity is presented as a sufficient guarantor of local specificity and superior space. The presence of jazz in the huts, the pronoun 'all', the adverb 'also', the fact that Auden lets "Tears fall in *all* the rivers" and that the locals ask "all *your* questions" about law, justice and loneliness (*LFI* 186, emphasis added) complete his work on erasing the border and debunking the myth. Auden strives to pronounce neither the sacredness of Iceland nor its cultural specificity. Such features peter out of the poem because he is less attracted to Iceland than to the manner of its imagining by existential outsiders, hence to issues pertaining to man anywhere and anytime except to the Icelanders. The effort to demystify Iceland does not only explain why Auden's own romanticized perception in this poem remains silent. It also presages the nature of his major concern when writing the travel book: the perception and writing of the physical world in poetry and other art forms.

[519] Auden, "The Noble Savage," *Complete Works I* 472.

6.2. The Landscape with a Glacier

The attention to the natural landscape in the expository stanzas of "Journey to Iceland" is closely reminiscent of the beginning of "Letter to R.H.S. Crossman, Esq.", Auden's next verse contribution to the *Letters*. This latter poem, however, does not re-examine the 'nature/culture' or 'island/continent' dichotomy. While touching upon these issues, it goes off in its own direction. The clue to its course is in the technical elaboration of a landscape presentation in the expository stanza: "A glacier brilliant in the heights of summer" feeds the "putty-coloured river" below, and the whole "countryside [is] collected in a field" (*LFI* 241), where ponies graze and children play. They complete the composition, whose back-, middle- and fore-ground division resembles the prospect of numerous eighteenth- and nineteenth-century landscape paintings, as, say, *Gletscher Landschaft* by an unknown Swiss painter. Also, such an organization and presentation of visual details bears an obvious imprint of filming techniques that Auden learned in the G.P.O. shortly before his trip to Iceland. He opens the poem with a large panorama of a distant glacier, then pans across closer features of the local landscape, the field and river Markafljōt, and completes the view by closing in on "two flags [that] twitter at the entrance gates" (*LFI* 241) close to which the children play. In both "Journey to Iceland" and "Letter to R.H.S. Crossman, Esq.", the ideas of distance and closeness occupy a central position. Yet, while in the former, they serve for deflating the myth of Iceland's uniqueness, purity and Otherness, in the latter they are engaged for different ends. In "Letter to R.H.S. Crossman, Esq.", Auden tests the amount of attention that a poet may dedicate to close-up topographical details and the quotidian local life – whose presence would befit the documentary style of a travel book – and to large panoramic generalizations implying distance and separation of the observing eye from such unique particulars.

The idea of distance is introduced already in the first stanzas depicting casual moments of local existence. There is a wire between the Icelandic children and ponies separating those who "stare and follow, think of questions" from animals that "graze" and "never will grow up to question / The justice of their permanent discipline" (*LFI* 241). Auden reiterates the verb 'to question'. It points at the unequal capacity of ratiocination, hence abstraction, distinguishing man from horses living an acceptant, unquestioning and unmoral existence driven by bodily desires. Auden too raises a *question*. He inquires into the range of focus and type of subject to which he should attend. He decides thus:

> let the camera's eye record it:
> Groups in confabulation on the grass,
> The shuffling couples in their heavy boots,
> The young men leaping, the accordion playing.
> […]

> The service yesterday among the copse of ashes,
> The old men dragging hymns, the woman weeping
> Leaning against her husband as he yawned;
> And two days back the townee from the gasworks
> Riding to Thorsmōrk, highly strung,
>
> Loud-voiced consumed with passion to excel
> His lower-witted red-faced friend. (*LFI* 241-42)

As if in recollection of his 1929 claim that the body is 'communistic' (i.e. of community; see Chapter Four), these lines share an emphasis on human togetherness and attention to physicality. These images are documentary fragments detailing the leaping, shuffling, accordion playing, etc., which a camera can easily record. Yet, Auden presents such moments as merely temporary releases from the usual human wanders "Into our provinces of persecution / Where our regrets accuse" and from which we "keep returning / Back to the common faith from which we've all dissented, / Back to the hands, the feet, the faces" (*LFI* 241). He proposes that, like "the mad" who "will never come back" (*LFI* 241), presumably because they permanently remain in mental deliria, people have ensconced themselves in the realm of brooding and abstraction – in the mental provinces of persecution and regrets – while disregarding the importance of the particular quotidian experience of the immediate 'here'.

Attention is also drawn to the perilous tendency to connect a particular everyday detail to large discourses. The ordinary moments listed above are complemented in the eighth stanza with material derived from a foray into Icelandic legendary history – Gunnar killed at Hlitharendi and Flosi on Three Corner Bridge. Auden no longer focuses on local actuality, to which the camera is limited. The mundane events inspire his fancy to think about crucial legendary ones. But he suggests that both the quotidian present and the glorified past should be perceived as equally important self-contained moments of fleeting experience and not, in the case of the latter, as monumentalizing symbols and legendary narratives. Auden addresses the propensity to transform individual historical events into powerful discourses in the following lines recalling, again, his 1920s belief in bodily sameness:

> Let me find pure *all* that can happen.
> Only the uniqueness is success! For instance,
> Let me perceive the images of history,
> All that I push away with doubt and travel,
> To-day's and yesterday's, alike like bodies. (*LFI* 242, emphasis added)

The past and the quotidian present are the same as human bodies, which justifies Auden's claim that all moments regardless of their historical value are equally important. He suppresses personal fondness for Icelandic myths and demystifies the status of lofty narratives expressive of an idealized past, which recalls "Pasayge Moralisé" and the "Prologue".

Therefore, "Gunnar killed / At Hlitharendi" should be approached with the same amount of soberness and respect as cellophane wraps "torn off / From cigarettes [that] flit through the glass" (*LFI* 242). They should be seen as equal, unique and unrepeatable moments.

Auden's cautious approach to Icelandic heroic stories should be interpreted in the context of his awareness of interwar narratives and radical ideologies. A brief glimpse at the prose memo appended to the Crossman letter will explain Auden's concerns: "Dear Dick, have just been staying in the Njàl country. I gather that the Nazis look on that sort of life as the cradle of all the virtues. The enclosed laws and regulations seem so dotty, I thought they might interest you" (*LFI* 245). Auden mentions the Njàl country – the home of a prominent Icelandic saga – referred to in the poem itself through the allusion to Gunnar, its major hero. He dents the allure of the region and its narratives, however, by associating them with Nazism and nonsensical laws (enclosed, fittingly, to the letter to Richard Howard Stafford Crossman, a 1930s Labour Party politician and legislator). The connection between Nazism, Fascism and Iceland is a recurrent theme in the *Letters*. Auden wrote to Erika Mann, who he married in 1935 to enable her to escape from Germany, about a group of Nazis that he had heard talking on a bus in Iceland about: "Die Schönheit des Islands" and the uncontaminated Aryan type of the Icelanders: "Die Kinder sind so reizend: schöne blonde Haare und blaue Augen. Ein echt Germanischer Typus" (*LFI* 277).[520] For Auden, Nazism was a modern form of an expanding narrative based on dotty laws, principles of hierarchy, the cult of a hero and individual saviours, which was suppressing freedom and exerting coercion. In his view Fascism

> [...] has attacked one by one every tenet of Democracy. […] It says that men are born naturally bad; that the majority, the masses, are incapable of moral choice. Hitler refers in *Mein Kampf* to the 'rabbit hearts' of the masses. There are a few who do know the good, and it is their job to rule society and compel the majority of the masses to be naturally good. Fascists, again, say that there is here and now the perfect form of society which will last forever. The individual can only serve the will of society; he has no rights of his own.[521]

Fascism was among other forms of social organization – the middle-class education and legislation (the 'dotty laws') – that Auden perceived as based on the suppression of humanness and individuality. In fact, in 1934, he wrote about his own school experience in the following terms: "The best reason I have for opposing Fascism is that at school I lived in a Fascist state."[522] For Auden, the educational system and Fascism coalesced in suppressing

[520] In *Letter to Lord Byron* Auden self-mockingly mentions his father's belief in their Nordic origin: "Down under [in Germany] / Where Das Volk order sausages and lagers / I ought to be the prize, the living wonder, / The really pure from any Rassenchander, / In fact I am the great big white barbarian, / The Nordic type, the too too truly Aryan" (*LFI* 327).
[521] Auden, "Democracy's Reply to the Challenge of Dictators," *Complete Works I* 465.
[522] Auden, "The Liberal Fascist [Honour]," *Complete Works I* 59. Auden discusses this issue in detail in "Morality in an Age of Change" (*Complete Works I* 477-86).

egalitarianism and freedom. They instilled hierarchy, slavish obedience and regulations obliterating the individual will that citizens of a Democratic state should always nurture.[523]

The rest of the Crossman letter addresses these very issues. Instead of heeding to particular actual moments for their own sake and instead of trying to grapple with questions raised by their conscious mind from such experience, individuals cling on to leaders – the modern-day equivalents of 'Njal' heroes – and to large ideological structures. In both, people hope to find answers and solutions: "we spend our idle lives looking, / And are so lazy that we quickly find them" (*LFI* 245). Auden implies that the lack of personal responsibility for life encourages the modern man to locate the source of his unhappiness outside himself – in history and law.[524] "Our vulgar error" is

> When we see nothing but the law and order
> The formal interdiction from the garden,
> A legend of a sword, and quite forget
> The rusting apple core we're clutching still.
>
> It's that that makes us really selfish:
> When the whole fault's mechanical,
> A maladjustment in the circling stars
> And Goodness is just an abstract principle
> Which by hypothesis some men must have. (*LFI* 242-45)

Those who blame their unhappiness on the mechanical maladjustment of the environment and on the first human sin in the Garden of Eden disclaim a personal role in shaping their life and social environment. Such 'rabbit hearts' are attracted to elite men who 'must have Goodness' and power to perform heroic deeds and correct the faults.[525]

At the end of the poem, Auden returns to the initial topographical detail. Yet, at the same time, he echoes his overall 'escapism' throughout the poem from the initial camera-style documentary gathering details of a local life in the Markafljōt fields. He reveals his own temptation to connect such particulars to large abstract structures:

> Until indeed the Markafljōt I see
> Wasting these fields, is no glacial flood
> But history, hostile, Time the destroyer
> Everywhere washing our will, winding through Europe. (*LFI* 245)

Markafljōt is not used as a unique physical detail and component of the local landscape. Its features are not 'pronounced' with the accuracy that its singularity deserves in a travel book.

[523] Auden treated the defects of the English educational system in a lengthy 1939 essay "Education" co-written with T.C. Worsley (*Complete Works I* 389-424). It provides a historical overview of education in Britain and proposes that the middle-class control has caused an undue emphasis on mental and abstract skills rather than on the body and individuality.

[524] The same theme of individual irresponsibility is faced in a poem written some weeks after the Crossman letter. The conclusion of "The Detective Story" is that the murderer of our happiness – the victim – is us.

[525] Edward Mendelson draws attention to this issue in his discussion of the biblical allusion "the rusting apple core" and the "interdiction from the garden." He claims that this is an example of Auden's frequent critique in the period of people jettisoning responsibility for their present state (*Early Auden* 312-13).

Like a linking thread, Auden lets the river flow from Iceland to Europe "through Oxford," where Crossman was teaching philosophy, where university "dons of good will, / [were] Stroking their truths away like a headache" (*LFI* 245), and which epitomizes abstraction.

In his analysis of the poem, Edward Mendelson claims that Auden "reports on a unique locality [of Iceland] – its politics, vanities, landscape, literature."[526] Before his departure to Iceland, Auden had criticized abstract art for the lack of journalistic attention to the world of fact. In this poem, the reader is reminded of the importance of the particular, the physical, the body and the fleeting experience, which are always rooted in a concrete time and place of this world. Auden does start with an image of 'the camera's eye' zooming in to provide a close-up view of the local social happening, children, ponies, dancing, happiness and other particulars on the background of mighty glaciers. Throughout the poem, there are references to local literature and history. Yet, as a whole, the poem displays a type of imagination betraying Auden's and Mendelson's claims. After the initial attention to the unique and physical, Auden, like Sir John Denham and authors of topographical poetry in general, gains a broad prospect view. Instead of journalistically documenting the specificity of the local social life and landscape, he uses one of its topographical details – the river Markafljōt – to connect the island to Europe. He abandons restrictive physicality and the indigenous figures for brooding upon immaterial issues concerning the modern man in general, namely the danger of radical ideologies spreading through Europe, including Iceland where Nazis find the locus of the Aryan genus. To use MacNeice's words from his poem above for characterizing Auden's letter to Crossman, the local physical environment inspires him to "roll upon the tongue / Morsels of thought" (*LFI* 195), whose nature exceeds the local shores and glaciers.

6.3. The Travel Book in Verse and the 'Given Subject'

Auden came to Iceland with a commission and commitment to Faber and Faber to write a travel book. Yet, as he informed Erika Mann in the first letter to her, the joy of arrival was impaired by a discomfort springing from the absence of a clear idea about writing it:

> As it is, I've been here a month and haven't the slightest idea how to begin to write the book. Gollancz told me before I left that it couldn't be done, and he's probably right. Still the contracts are signed and my expenses paid, so I suppose it will get done. At present, I am just amusing myself, with occasional twinges of uneasiness, like a small boy who knows he's got an exam to-morrow, for which he has done no work whatsoever. (*LFI* 256)

This is an explicit admission of procrastination and anxiety issuing from Auden's lack of a travel-writing experience. These concerns insinuate themselves into other letters. Both

[526] Mendelson, *Early Auden* 312.

"Journey to Iceland" and "Letter to R.H.S. Crossman, Esq." indicate that while in Iceland, Auden became preoccupied with reading and writing a place. The rejection of idealizing preconceptions in the former and the proclaimed but betrayed critique of 'panoramic' abstractions in the latter are different signs of the same search for a personal stylistic niche and of Auden's engagement in a dialogue with the problems of perception and representation.

Contrary to his claims, however, Auden had done his 'small boy's' homework. It is evident from the extensive list of a recommended reading on Iceland that he had studied prior to arrival and which he attached to "Sheaves from Sagaland", the sixth part of the *Letters*. Auden the poet often used traditional forms, such as the sonnet, villanelle, etc., without the least signs of reluctance. Yet, Auden the travel-book writer felt 'twinges of uneasiness' because, having refused formal and content stereotypes of previous accounts, he found himself in void of an acceptable 'template'. The fact that the *Letters* is an innovative collage of prose, poetry and photographs that depict very unorthodox subjects is a mere glimpse of his desire to syncretize different genres and 'make it new'. As a Modernist writer he was closely attentive to problems springing from the choice of a subject and the myriad ways of its representation:

> I'm bringing the problem.
> Call it as Henry James might have done in a preface
> The Presentation of the Given Subject
> The problem of every writer of travels. (*LFI* 345)

Auden's allusion to Henry James's famous "Preface" to *The Portrait of a Lady* discoursing upon the importance of a subject and the variety of its presentation is very apt and relevant. James announces the replacement of an Aristotelian emphasis on action with a focus on the character and their everyday experiences instead of plotful adventures. To address the question of representation, he uses the metaphor of 'the house of fiction', whose apertures – different literary forms – open like windows on the same subject and, as instruments, allow individual 'consciousness of the artist' to adopt subjective vantage points to it.[527]

Auden, who had chidden Herbert Read and other artists for disregarding the prime importance of the subject, found the description of a local landscape and life as the only 'Given Subject' of a travel book very limiting and a matter of great concern. Also, in February 1936, Auden claimed that "the first, second and third thing […] in any art, is subject" and that "Technique follows from and is governed by subject."[528] Yet, the quotation alluding to Henry James is from "Letter to William Coldstream" – a two-part letter from Iceland revealing that for Auden not only the subject, but also the formal aspects of a travel

[527] Henry James, Author's Preface, *The Portrait of a Lady*, by Henry James (1881; London: CRW Publishing Ltd., 2004) 15-16.
[528] Auden, "Psychology and Criticism," *Complete Works I* 130.

book were more than negligible and subservient aspects of writing. In fact, in this letter such issues are foregrounded, treated explicitly and examined exclusively in the context of aesthetics. The first section is a meta-poetic attempt to demarcate an adequate subject and form for a travel book in verse by juxtaposing poetry with other forms – 'apertures' – and their capacity to engage with a local detail. The second poem is designed as a sample manifestation of such claims.

The first poem is preceded by a short prose paragraph describing an exploratory journey that Auden, MacNeice and Yates made through Iceland:

> Now the three ride from Hraensnef to Reykholt where they stayed two nights. Thence they went to Reykjavik and took ship to Isafjőrdur. Joachim was the vice-consul, a man well spoken of. He found them a motorboat to take them to Melgraseyri in Isafjőrdardjup. The name of the farmer was Olafur. He had six children. Louis fell sick and remained in his bed but Auden and Michael rode to Ormuli where they were very hospitably entertained. (*LFI* 344)

Auden goes on to supply numerous other details and concludes the paragraph with an explanatory postscript for Coldstream: "This Bill is a little donnish experiment in objective narrative" (*LFI* 344). The adjective 'donnish' does not only shun the subject – details of everyday experiences, but also the detached third-person perspective, a common narrative strategy of many a Victorian novel attending to external details and one that Auden associated with previous travel books and was reluctant to accept. Although in the letter to Crossman Auden advocates the focus on quotidian moments, the leaping and dancing, in this letter to Coldstream he calls attention to such details and objective style donnish. Similarly, in his prose letter to Erika Mann, Auden rejects travel books for their repetitive delineation of casual particulars: "The trouble about travel books as a rule, even the most exciting ones, is that the actual events are all extremely like each other – meals – sleeping accommodation – fleas – dangers, etc., and their repetition becomes boring" (*LFI* 280).

The introductory prose paragraph of the Coldstream Letter is intentionally 'donnish' and 'objective'. It is written in such a style because the verse letter that follows it examines its insufficiency and unsuitability for a travel book in poetry. Auden imagines publishers as they belittle the challenge of writing a travel book when they suggest to authors to adhere to the description of external facts:

> For Life and his publisher hand him [the writer] his theme on a plate.
> 'You went to such and such places with so-and-so
> And such and such things occurred.
> Now do what you can.' (*LFI* 48-51)

Auden wrestles with such an approach to the 'Given Subject' and form of presentation from the very beginning of the poem. Besides rejecting the focus on everyday experiential details, he rules out existing 'scientific' accounts of Iceland delineating its physical features:

> Horrebow came here and wrote a chapter on snakes
> The chapter has only one sentence.
> Hooker came here and made a list of the plants. (*LFI* 344)

For Auden, both Sir William Jackson Hooker, a nineteenth-century British botanist, and Niels Horrebow, an eighteenth-century Danish lawyer, who wrote a book of a natural history of Iceland, 'came here' and paid excessive attention to Icelandic flora, fauna and other external, objective and scientific details encountered on their travels.[529]

Because Auden refuses to succumb to such paradigms in his own travel book in verse, he expects a negative reception of the *Letters* by the press and critics chiding MacNeice and himself for inattention to the Icelandic landscape: "'but Landscape,' cries the Literary Supplement / 'You must have Landscape.'" Yet, Auden assertively replies that "Landscape's so dull if you haven't Lawrence's wonderful wooziness" (*LFI* 344). In the 1930s, Auden wrote admiringly about T.E. Lawrence's character and commitment to his pursuits.[530] Yet, his endowment to engage with a landscape subjectively by throwing a charm over it did not provide Auden with a precedent to follow. In the following lines, he explores further possibilities of writing a place but he finds a satisfactory template in none of them. Auden is reluctant to imitate travel books promulgating subjective perceptions biased by religious discourses and aesthetic stereotypes. Reverend Ebenezer Henderson's[531] interpretation of the local landscape through the prism of Christian pathos is given as an example:

> Henderson came here with Bibles
> And looked at the Geysirs and thought
> 'The Lord could stop that if he wanted'. (*LFI* 344)

Also, Auden again recalls William Morris's romanticized preconceptions but he deems the emphasis on Iceland's cultural specificity equally repulsive: "Morris opened his letters from England / And wondered at [local] people's calmness" (*LFI* 345).

With such comments and rejections, Auden reveals his affinity with the Modernist search for new ways of engaging with the physical world as well as an aspect of his own emerging travel-book poetics. Neither the seemingly objective description of the external detail, be it a landscape or people, nor their subjective internalization qualifies as an adequate

[529] This is W.J. Hooker's *Journal of a Tour in Iceland* (1811) and N. Horrebow's *The Natural History of Iceland* translated from Danish into English and published in 1758. Auden hints at the one-sentence chapter 77 titled "Concerning Snakes" in which Horrebow famously claims that there is no need to worry about snakes as there are none in Iceland.
[530] See Auden, "T.E. Lawrence," *Complete Works I* 61-62.
[531] Reverend Ebenezer Henderson came to Iceland on a long-term missionary project and his views of Iceland are found in *Iceland: Or The Journal Of A Residence In That Island, During The Years 1814 And 1815* (1818).

subject and approach to the external world. No landscape, not even the Icelandic hills and glaciers epitomizing Auden's idea of Eden and sacredness, is presented as a suitable topic of his travel book in verse. As discussed, Auden's prime reason for admiring Hardy and Betjeman was their ability to notice a significant detail and, assisted with personal topophilic sentiments, render it in poetry in a way delineating its uniqueness and sacredness. Yet, Auden refuses to focus on the external physiognomic features of his holy land and to enchant them with a subjective topophilic awe that such a beloved numinous landscape deserves.

Moreover, the style of Auden's introductory 'donnish experiment' signals a tongue-in-cheek critique of travel books interlarded with extraordinary adventures presented in a chronological order, thereby creating the illusion of a continuous narrative. For him, adventurism was the major feature of the journey *topos* igniting people's interest in travelogues: "One reason why we enjoy reading travel books is that a journey is one of the archetypal symbols. It is impossible to take a train or an aeroplane without having a fantasy of oneself as a Quest Hero setting off in search of an enchanted princess or the Waters of Life."[532] This is Auden's version of Yi-Fu Tuan's observation of a strong human propensity to enchant distant places beyond one's lifespace and journeys to them. Yet, revealing reluctance to fictionalize his own travel through Iceland, Auden complements his 'donnish' prose experiment with a verse commentary rejecting adventurist and narrative descriptions:

> The substantial facts are as I have stated above [in the 'donnish' prose paragraph]
> No bandits, no comic passport officials
> No hairbreadth escapes, the only test of endurance
> A sixteen mile scramble in gumboots to look at dead whales. (*LFI* 345)

Auden's was an unheroic, unadventurous and unromantic journey: "as you see," he continues, "no crisis, no continuity. / Only heroic cutting could save it" (*LFI* 345). The word 'cutting' does not refer to Auden's traumatic encounter with local whale hunters during the trip he is describing (he met fishermen dismembering whales with large saws, which gave him "an extraordinary vision of the cold controlled ferocity of the human species," *LFI* 288). The 'cutting' alludes to a technique used in filming when raw rushes are edited and arranged to create the illusion of continuity and action. This appeal to artificiality is of great importance for the *Letters* in general because it is a collage of incongruous and seemingly unprocessed material. Yet, this rawness is a highly conscious artifice reflecting Auden's reluctance to write a book providing practical information and continuous narrative of adventure reminiscent of other accounts and preferred by the public.

[532] Auden, "Introduction to *Italian Journey*, by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe," *Complete Works IV* 327.

To further his contemplation of perception and representation, Auden recalls Coldstream's claim that an artist should be "the spy and the gossip" (*LFI* 346).[533] Similarly, when completing his work on the *Letters* in December 1936, Auden claimed that because "The first half of art […] is perceiving. […] The second half of art is telling," an artist is "a mixture of spy and gossip."[534] These skills are also essential for a journalist, who Auden believed should always be partly present in any artist, and who should find out facts and report them to the public. What precedes and follows Auden's line above admitting 'no crisis, no continuity' of his Icelandic experience, are two long lists titled 'Perceiving' and 'Telling'. The headings reflect the respective vocations of the spy and the gossip, which writers should combine. In both parts, Auden supplies a different verse treatment of the same trip to Isafjőrdur described in the introductory 'donnish' and 'objective' prose paragraph. In Henry James's terminology, these versions represent a different 'aperture' and 'windows'.

Auden opens the 'Perceiving' – 'spy' – part with admitting the artificiality of an objective and omniscient perspective: "Let me *pretend* that I'm the impersonal eye of the camera / Sent out by God to shoot on location" (*LFI* 346, emphasis added). He 'pans' across various large-, mid- and small-scale shots, and supplies a fragmentary sheaf of objects encountered during their trip: local individuals, the face of an Icelandic professor, a Gynecologist Angler offering them brandy, men at a whaling station cutting up jaw-bones. As a spy, he describes places, houses, rooms, inconsequential dialogues and various other ordinary activities. Some events, like playing cards in a Salvation Army Hostel, are even mentioned in the introductory prose paragraph. This highlights the interconnection of the prose and 'Telling' sections and the fact that both derive from the same experience processed through a different stylistic aperture. In the 'Telling' section, where Auden adopts the role of a gossip, he mentions other details related to the trip. This time, however, he focuses on private experiences presented in what John Fuller calls "a jumble of personal *gossip*."[535] Besides others, Auden mentions MacNeice reading George Eliot, Yates eating thirty-two cakes in an afternoon, walking to a farm, playing the harmonium, and listening to

> the orchestral background
> the news from Europe interwoven with our behaving
> The pleasant voice of the wireless announcer, like a consultant surgeon
> 'Your case is hopeless. I give you six months.' (*LFI* 350)

In the verse treatment of the same experience, then, Auden avoids the detached informative plainness and chronological structure of the initial prose paragraph. His lists simulate the

[533] Auden himself was very fond of gossip and spy themes. For the former, see his 1937 essay "In Defence of Gossip," *Complete Works I* 425; the latter is a frequent figure of his 1930s verse.
[534] Auden, "Poetry, Poets, and Taste," *Complete Works I* 164.
[535] Fuller 212, emphasis added.

work of a spy and gossip attending to and disclosing private experiences and idiosyncrasies of the three travellers. The accent on a publicly irrelevant material in the former is reminiscent of private travel diaries and it befits the epistolary form that Auden chose for the *Letters*.

At this stage, the reader awaiting Auden's travel-book-in-verse poetics is enticed to a belief that the poet has revealed concrete views on the engagement of poetry with Iceland and places in general. The essence seems to be a scrambled collage of ordinary private experiences but no landscape description, no continuity, adventure, romantic enchantments or practical information for the public. Auden informs Coldstream that readers interested in such traditional travel books on Iceland, as those by Hooker and the like, can "get them all from a public library," while "This letter is for [him]" (*LFI* 345). However, besides the pretended rawness of the *Letters*, this stress on privacy, personal details and disconnection of the private from the pubic realm (criticized, for example, in "Dover") is another illusion. Auden wrote his book for a renowned publishing house, and his allusion above to the public news, broadcast from Europe and 'interweaving' with their private experiences, is also telling. In fact, he toils to compile the 'Perceiving' and 'Telling' lists as versions of the same scene only to test the applicability to poetry of Coldstream's claim that artists should be spies and gossips. In the last stanzas, he reveals that such an approach to Iceland may be suitable for a filmmaker or realistic painter like Coldstream, but not for a poet.

As cited, at the beginning of the 'Perceiving' section, Auden pretends to be the spying eye of an impersonal camera. Throughout the poem, he uses a lot of film-making jargon to introduce individual images and he pans from one to another as if examining celluloid strips. The choice of Coldstream as the addressee of this letter seems apposite. Both men were former colleagues in the G.P.O.[536] There, as Auden recalls, they tried to depart from the excessive aestheticism and formalism of the Bloomsbury circle when they "scrapped Significant Form, and voted for Subject" (*LFI* 345). Auden himself left the Film Units only a few weeks before going to Iceland. The freshness of this experience visibly informs the poem. Its plentiful reference to the film medium assists Auden in setting visual arts against poetry. He examines their generic capacity to render a realistic detail as the subject of a travel account. Auden's opinions on the film medium can be found in his 1936 review of *Documentary Film* by Paul Rotha, a recognized interwar historian of the genre. Writing just a few months before his departure from the G.P.O. and from England to Iceland, Auden shares Rotha's critique of recent trends in documentary filming, and sympathizes with his summary of the problem: "We must abandon the story and report facts, i.e. we must show you people at

[536] In fact, lines 30-43 (*LFI* 345) of the Coldstream letter recall a series of their common experiences in the Units.

their daily work, show you how modern industry is organized, show you what people do for their living." While concurring with such views, Auden also disagrees with Rotha's claim that "The private life is unimportant." He is convinced that the film medium, due to its capacity to convey large amounts of a realistic detail, can portray them well: "on the screen you never see *a* man digging in *a* field, but always Mr Macgregor digging in a ten acre meadow. It goes far beyond the novel in this."[537] Auden proposes that because the greatest merit of the film medium is its generic capacity to be the spy and the gossip, it should not strive for generalities but focus on concrete particulars of an everyday life and report on their distinctive qualities.

These preoccupations are present in the letter to Coldstream, where Auden gauges the capacity of poetry to do the same. The 'Perceiving' and 'Telling' parts of the poem are indeed lists of particular external details drawn from private and public spaces. Yet, Coldstream is informed that this is not what a poet should focus on. He claims that the lists are mere

> externals, and they're not my pigeon
> While the purely subjective feelings,
> The heart-felt exultations and the short despairs
> Require a musician. Bach, say, or Schubert. (*LFI* 350)

Clearly, the replacement of detached, informative and publicly relevant information with gossipy accounts of external and private details is not sufficient for Auden the poet and his verse engagement with Iceland. His lists do mention several real Icelandic locations. Yet, this quotation bespeaks Auden's reluctance to impart poetry to reporting on externals and topographical details for the sake of delineating their particularity, which he claimed was achievable in the film and visual arts.[538] Besides, these lines rule out what Auden imagines to be the opposite pole – pure subjectivity detached from the external world. The allusion to Bach and Schubert may be interpreted in the context of his poem "The Composer" (1938). There, Auden envies musicians and composers for being the only artists spared from having to represent and transform the external world into 'language': "Only your notes are pure contraption, / Only your song is an absolute gift," while "All the others translate." Painters and poets cannot but translate "From Life to Art by painstaking adaptation" (*EA* 239).

Hence, despite his aversion against excessive formalism, Auden suggests that the engagement with the physical world and its adaptation to art is both genre-specific and, in representational arts, inevitably subjective. This claim is reasserted in the last stanza of the Coldstream letter, where two poems are introduced, one by himself and one by MacNeice:

> here is my poem, nevertheless, the fruit of that fortnight
> And one too of Louis's, for comparative reading.

[537] Auden, "A Review of *Documentary Film*, by Paul Rotha," *Complete Works I* 129-30, emphasis original.
[538] Coldstream's paintings bear measure marks left by the author to elevate the realistic nature of his representation of the material world.

The novelist has one way of stating experience,
The film director another
These are our versions – each man to his medium. (*LFI* 350)

Thus ends Auden's contemplative poem discussing the capacity of poetry and other art forms to engage with the experience of Iceland, its sacred landscape and local people. Auden admits that different subjects require specific media and, in consequence, that the conveyance of the singular properties of a particular place – its physiognomic features and local life – is only feasible in some of them. The potential of poetry, however, is defined merely through negation. The poem ends with large-scale rejections of abstract music residing in the realm of pure emotions. Its opposite, the film documentary capable of displaying local uniqueness, is equally unsuitable. Auden is also reluctant to imitate previous travel accounts. He is not willing to mythologize the island and its landscape. Equally, he does not want to deliver a continuous fictional narrative. Except for such negations, however, there is no explicit admission of what this means for poetry. Yet, there is a hint in Auden's inattention to the local detail. As noted, "Letter to William Coldstream, Esq." consists of two parts. The second poem beginning "O who can ever gaze his fill" is what Auden in the first part refers to as the subjective 'fruit of that fortnight' (*LFI* 350) when he was travelling to and around Isafjőrdur. It is here that his travel-book-in-verse poetics of place is displayed in practice rather than theoretically discussed.

6.4. Writing the Landscape of Isafjőrdur

"O who can ever gaze his fill" bears a clear structural resemblance to "Journey to Iceland". To build up his argument, Auden dedicates each stanza to different figures. A farmer and fisherman, travellers, lovers and drunkards perceive the Icelandic landscape in ways reflecting their diverse existential relation to it.

The prime attribute ascribed to the farmer and fisherman of the first stanza is their belongingness to the local sea and hills. Both men look at the surrounding land and water surface and ask:

'O who can ever gaze his fill",
Farmer and Fisherman say,
'On native shore and local hill,
Grudge aching limb or callus on the hand?' (*LFI* 350)

As shown in Chapter One, home is an intimately known place of nourishment, nurture and protectiveness satisfying basic existential needs. Auden has the farmer and fisherman focus on their home ground – a place *par excellence* of topophilic bonds between people and the environment. The question they ask is a rhetorical one. The sentiment for the native land makes neither of them grudge the 'aching limb or callus on the hand' when they 'gaze' at

their catch – the 'fill'. The stains and pain are an inevitable but accepted price paid for remaining in an autochthonous environment, which strengthen their emotional attachment to the life-sustaining home island.

Auden's expository attention to Iceland may suggest that he is setting out to explore the local rural life and to report on the specific problems faced by its people. By reason of his assertion in the previous poem that "O who can ever gaze his fill" is the 'fruit of that fortnight', it is likely that the farmer and fishermen derive from those that Auden mentions encountering during the trip to Isafjőrdur. Hence, departing from the style of the 'donnish objective narrative' in prose and from the 'Perceiving' and 'Telling' sections of the previous poem, this present one is the fourth version of Auden's experience of particular places and people bearing proper names. Adhering to the points and promises made in the first part of the Coldstream letter, he turns this poem neither into a locodescriptive account of unique external details and local landscape, nor into a georgic study of Icelandic farmers, nor into an encomium of Isafjőrdur, presented in his prose as a sacred and potential site of his future exile. Instead, Auden zooms out of the local particulars and employs the personal experience of them in the office of an instigator of brooding on the relation of man to his habitat and on the idea of a sense of place in general. This strategy silences his proclaimed topophilic sentiments for Iceland and voices a critique of a tendency to mythologize places as unique.

In "Journey to Iceland", the island is enchanted by visitors prior to entering this mythical periphery, hence by outsiders with no direct existential bonds to its landscape. In "O who can ever gaze his fill", however, Auden lets the indigenous fisherman and farmer delude themselves with an anthropomorphic myth of their lifespace. As in "Dover", where the English rely on the shielding quality of chalk cliffs, these Icelanders draw comfort and assurance from the construction of their own island as a caring, stable and protective womb. Typically of existential insiders, especially of sedentary rural people which the fisherman and farmer are, such a self-comforting sense of homeland derives from rootedness and long-term familiarity. They approach the natural land- and sea-scape as protectors of a trans-generational dwelling in the same place. Both figures are conscious of the importance of their ancestors and future generations. This encourages them to defer present lives to lineage continuity: "fathers, grandfathers stood upon this land, / And here the pilgrims from our loins shall stand" (*LFI* 350). The assertive 'shall stand' derives from their faith in the capacity of the homeland to protect trans-generational stability and survival – the major triggers of topophilic bonds to it.

As shown in Chapter One, besides houses, cultural practices too can be approached as carapaces forged by individuals and groups in protection against uncontrollable forces influencing their lives. Such immaterial 'shields' may ensue from the realization of the world's indifference and from being in it alone. Yi-Fu Tuan claims that their cause tends to be

> […] the uniqueness of each and every human individual, a uniqueness that makes for a sense of isolation and disconnectedness within the world's chaos even in the midst of familiar others. […] disconnectedness is, albeit rarely, ground for feeling the world's profound indifference – its aloof and essential Otherness.

Cultural practices, seen as aids in overcoming the felt indifference of the world and human separation from it, often consist in the investment of the environment with opposite values – attentiveness, care and connectedness.[539]

The frailty of such anthropomorphic fancies is what Auden explores in this poem. He suggests that to soothe existential disquiet by means of inscribing into places caring and protective qualities is futile, naive and self-deluding. To the above-quoted assertive cry for trans-generational continuity made by the fisherman and farmer, Auden deals an equally peremptory blow:

> So Farmer and fisherman say
> In their fortunate heyday:
> But Death's soft answer drifts across
> Empty catch or harvest loss
> Or an unlucky May. (*LFI* 350-51)

The reliance on the capacity of the local land- and sea-scape to sustain life is undermined by empty nets, bad crops and an 'unlucky May', a hint at a failure to procreate. All are outside threats to the preservation of the present and future generations because safety and continuity are challenged by indifferent nature. Auden has the personified Death – as an inevitable outcome of land, water and body infertility – respond softly but triumphantly to the self-deluding farmer and fisherman:

> *The earth is an empty oyster with nothing inside it*
> *Not to be born is the best for man*
> *The end of toil is a bailiff's order*
> *Throw down the mattock and dance while you can.* (*LFI* 351, italics original)

Both indigenous figures live off, rely on and are emotionally attached to the local soil and water. Yet, Auden says that the earth is inherently 'empty' as if suggesting that people only fill and invest it with an ideal (i.e. of ideas) content. There is no 'pearl' inside the earth oyster that would enrich life and lighten its hardship revealed by the aching limb and callus. It does not respond to human needs and calls. Auden constructs the ancestral home ground and water

[539] Tuan, *Escapism* 81, 91-95.

as so indifferent that the bailiff's order may arrive and evict the farmer and fisherman to the outside Otherness, and, ultimately, to the claws of death.

The encounter of concrete people in the austere landscape of Isafjőrdur allows Auden to be fully focused on the tendency to invest a neutral space with anthropomorphic qualities. Unlike Yi-Fu Tuan, however, who sees it as an inherent attribute of any culture and spatial experience, Auden decries it as a symptom of pathetic fallacy screening facts and so enfeebling man. Like in "Who stands the crux" (1927, see Chapter Four), here too Auden constructs the natural landscape as totally emotionless and indifferent. The poem displays his afore mentioned reluctance to be enticed into what he saw was the European perception of nature as a "humanized, mythologized and usually friendly" entity.[540] The rural landscape guarantees no happiness and idyll. Empty nets and bad crops reveal the harsh reality of existence as well as the shadow of *Et in Arcadia ego.* Clearly, Auden inverts his idealized sense of Isafjőrdur displayed in prose as a site of idyllic future exile where he hopes to live "in the greatest contentment."[541] He does not give way to topophilia and, instead, discloses the fallacy of constructing landscapes as unique, privileged and caring.

Unlike the farmer and fisherman, the travellers of the second stanza are not on the native shore and local hill. Entering a territory outside their existential hub, they are more concerned about loneliness than the indifference of the Icelandic hills. As noted, the feeling of detachedness also arises from the perception of oneself as an object in the surrounding world. Alluding to his own bivouacking experience during the trip to Isafjőrdur, Auden writes:

> 'O life's too short for friends who share',
> Travellers think in their hearts,
> 'The city's common bed, the air,
> The mountain bivouac and the bathing beach,
> Where incidents draw every day from each
> Memorable gesture and witty speech.' (*LFI* 351)

Contrary to the trans-generational concerns of the farmer and fisherman, the travellers are focused on their own lives only. They lament the fleetingness of bodily togetherness when sharing a bed, air, shore and a tent in the mountains. Unlike the georgic callus on the hand of the farmer bespeaking his struggle against a hostile environment, these are moments of bucolic idleness, 'memorable gestures' and, reversely, of forgetting human separateness.

Auden's appeal to togetherness echoes his hope, proclaimed in prose, to live in Isafjőrdur not alone.[542] Yet, even here he lets the travellers find refuge in the idyll only "till malice or circumstance parts / Them from their constant humour" (*LFI* 351). Like the

[540] Auden and Pearson, xxiii.
[541] Auden, "I Like it Cold," *Complete Works II* 336.
[542] Auden, "I Like It Cold," *Complete Works II* 336.

fisherman and farmer longing for a trans-generational cornucopia of supplies, the travellers too desire constancy, albeit only self-centred. However, the only constant element in the landscape is Death. It reappears to announce the ephemerality of experience and inevitability of loneliness: "*A friend is the old old tale of Narcissus / Not to be born is the best for man /* […] / *Change your partner, dance while you can*" (*LFI* 351, italics original). Auden's choice of Narcissus underlines the self-interest and disconnectedness of one human being from others. This is further explored in the following stanza where lovers exchange passion in a bed. They too try to overcome separateness symbolized by the sea and distant prospects it offers: "'O stretch your hands across the sea,'" one of the impassioned lovers cries, "'Stretch them towards your harm and me'" (*LFI* 351). Yet, Auden deems the nest of love "brief" (*LFI* 351). Again, Death announces that "*after the kiss comes the impulse to throttle*." Its advice to the lovers is to "*break the embraces*" and "*dance while* [they] *can*" (*LFI* 351). The travellers and lovers must leave bivouacs, beds and each other. Only memory, like the photographs Auden took in Iceland, can preserve the fleeting 'memorable gesture and witty speech'.

The presence in "O who can ever gaze his fill" of dancing, personified Death and figures from different walks of life invokes the medieval *Danse Macabre*, especially when the fact is considered that Auden wrote a poem of this name in January 1937 while completing his work on *Letters from Iceland*. The figures are not only united by Death reminding them of common fragility. They also share indulgence in fashioning different myths expressive of the same naivety. For Yi-Fu Tuan, death is one of the prime sources of mythologizing because its unknowable essence, implication of nothingness, temporariness and eternal loneliness turn it into an ultimate threat to life.[543] As John Fuller aptly notes, all the figures in Auden's poem develop different forms of utopias, pastoral, social, erotic and spiritual because motivated by "lean years, loneliness, post-coital sadness or the morning-after."[544] Indeed, the awareness of death, threats, loneliness and fragility makes the figures imagine the environment as caring and as capable of providing stable livelihood and togetherness. Those who do not ascribe such qualities to it, like the drunkard of the last stanza, at least envisage "ladders let down out of heaven" (*LFI* 351-52) offering the ascent to a superior place in heaven. Yet, Auden constructs all such myths do deflate them with the image of Death and its deadly dance.

As noted, Auden promised the painter William Coldstream to design "O who can ever gaze his fill" as an illustration of the specific niche, different from visual arts and travel accounts in prose, from which a poet engages with a local landscape, culture, life and travel experience – the usual 'given subjects' of travel books. This poem manifests his explicit

[543] Tuan, *Escapism* 63–66.
[544] Fuller 213.

reluctance to provide an objective and informative account 'spying' on and 'gossiping' about the uniqueness of topographical and social reality. It refrains from subjective enchantments of the landscape and from attempts at a fictional epic narrative satisfying readers thirst for adventure. Having rejected such strategies and templates attempted in his previous three forms of inscribing the experience of the Isafjőrdur area, Auden displays what he saw as a poetics of place suitable for poetry. Its core is a compromise between the external and internal, objective and subjective, engagement with the topographical detail and its experience. The poem obviously derives from Auden's first-person encounter with local external particulars. Yet, despite his grudge against abstract art, Auden does not report on their features. He zooms out of the concrete places, people and their personal experience, and explores immaterial issues pertaining to the human perception and sense of place in general.

6.5. Different Windows in Auden's House of Fiction

Auden's journey to Iceland provided him with a long-awaited opportunity to visit his holy land and Isafjőrdur, and so to escape to its insular asylum from the European crisis. *Letters from Iceland* offered space for contributing to the body of 1930s documentary travel books with a delineation of the uniqueness of Iceland's topographical, cultural and social specificity. Its epistolary format gave Auden a means for promoting topophilic sentiments, and so for delineating the sacredness. While such attributes and sense of Iceland transpire from Auden's prose letters and his overall critical writings, analyzed in Chapter Two, the poetry systematically silences and displaces them.

In 1962, Elizabeth Mayer[545] and Auden translated Goethe's *Italian Journey* for which the latter wrote an introduction summarizing what he believed were the main merits of Goethe the travel writer. In Auden's opinion, Goethe excels other travellers attending to the same 'given subject' – "their encounter with Italy, its landscape, its people, its art" – by displaying a supreme power of observation and accurate journalistic description, especially of the local landscape and its particularity. For Auden, Goethe succeeds because he separates description from subjective emotions and because he surpasses the generic incapacity of verbal arts to "describe a unique object." Auden ascribes the latter to Goethe's painterly skills allowing him to "sketch" and "draw" well with words, which echoes his own belief in the capacity of visual arts to convey a great amount of realistic detail.[546]

[545] Elizabeth Mayer was a German-born American translator and the wife of William Mayer, a Jewish psychiatrist and refugee from Germany. Elizabeth Mayer, who Auden viewed as a substitution for his late mother, was a collaborator of Marianne Moore, who, as noted, was greatly admired by Auden.

[546] Auden, "Introduction to *Italian Journey*, by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe," *Complete Works IV* 324–26.

Auden's prose contributions to the *Letters* reveal willingness to subjugate his writing to conventional styles of travel books and the 1930s documentary production. He makes an effort to approach Iceland as a unique object and 'draw' its specific features in an objective style, while, at the same time, cautious of its achievability. After his return from Iceland, for example, Auden requited Kristian Andreirsson and his wife, Icelanders from Reykjavik, for their "unwearied hospitality" and "delicious pancakes" (*LFI* 335) with writing a requested prose letter assessing their northerly home from the position of a foreigner. In "Letter to Kristian Andreirsson, Esq.", Auden warns the addressee about the validity of his observations caused by the general susceptibility of European travellers to perceive this remote island, its culture and history through tinted and romanticized preconceptions.

Nevertheless, he proceeds and details local character of people, manners, education, culture, literature and landscape. To enhance the impartiality and objectivity of his description, Auden mentions several negative aspects, such as a bad taste in clothes, unpunctuality and drunkenness of the Icelanders (*LFI* 335-43). In other prose letters, he criticizes local cuisine (*LFI* 201), the weather, concrete and corrugated-iron suburban 'architecture' (*LFI* 187-89)[547] and the ferocity and inhospitality of Icelandic whale hunters (*LFI* 288). In others yet, Auden tries to satisfy what he imagined were the general expectations of travel-book readers. He supplies fragments of personal experiences, like stealing a postcard brazenly published in the *Letters* (*LFI* 286, 234). He compiles travel itineraries and provides practical information for tourists on where and how to go, what clothing to wear, food to eat and oddities to be aware of (*LFI* 195–207). He also demystifies Iceland's culture by dwelling upon the burgeoning influence of Europe. He dents the resplendence of Iceland's heroic past and local autonomy. As noted, in his prose letter to Erika Mann, Auden informs that Iceland has already been Nazified, Goering's brother is on a visit there and Nazis approach the island as the source of the pure Aryan type and as "the cradle of the Germanic culture" (*LFI* 265). Unlike his other critical prose discussed in Chapter Two, which embeds subjective, topophilic, romanticized and encomiastic perception of Iceland, the prose letters from Iceland offer a more sober approach. They do not present it as pure and perfect. On the whole, however, they also focus on what is unique, specific and different about the island geographically, socially and culturally. They reveal Auden's willingness to deliver a realistic local detail and practical information expectable from a documentary travel book. Although he occasionally digresses to broader concerns, especially when comparing Iceland with Europe, Auden is centripetally attracted to the given subject of

[547] It is a matter of curiosity that only a few months after Auden's visit, Guðjón Samúelsson was commissioned to design Hallgrímskirkja – the truly magnificent and breathtaking Lutheran parish church in Reykjavik.

a traditional travel book. In consequence, he makes the island stand out as a geographically and culturally discrete insular Otherness, albeit only relatively pure.

However, in "O who can ever gaze his fill" Auden fulfils his promise to illustrate a poet's specific engagement with the island. The poem displays the presence of a contrasting type of imagination and a tendency, discernable in all his other verse letters, to centrifugally depart from the island, remove its insular status and silence topophilic sentiments. In *Letter to Lord Byron*, Auden claims that he "like[s] to give these facts of time and space" (*LFI* 180), which echoes his scorn of abstract artists on grounds of their failure to be 'reporting journalists' bringing plenty of news about the 'here' and 'now'. Also, he informed Erika Mann about his intention to design *Letter to Lord Byron* as a "chatty" poem having "very little to do with Iceland"[548] but forming a central thread snaking through the volume past other letters "to different people *more directly* about Iceland" (*LFI* 280, emphasis added). Yet, despite such proclamations, the verse letters bring very little news about Iceland's local culture, oddities and landscape.

The analysis in this chapter shows that in many respects the challenge of writing a travel book about Iceland did not instigate any correction of Auden's earlier poetics. However, the project brought into the foreground preoccupations heretofore only implicitly present in his poems. Auden compensates his lack of the travel-writing expertise with a great insight into the specificity of different art forms and with a Modernist post-positivist awareness of the subjectivity of perception. He uses the experience of concrete external and experiential details for exploring the variety of human spatial experience. Hence, instead of focusing on places, he concentrates on their perception, reading, writing, and on the transformation of life and world into art, which turns the book into what Marsha Bryant calls a "forum on representation."[549]

In terms of perception, Auden's verse letters manifest a prolongation of his sustained earlier attempt to demythologize the reading of home, mythical space and nature. In his letter to Kristian Andreirsson, Auden quotes Archbishop van Troil, an eighteenth-century visitor in Iceland, to show how fancy twists the perception of particular places:

> 'You must not', he [van Troil] says, 'in this place apply to me the story which Helvetius tells of a clergyman and a fine lady who together observed the spots in the moon, which the former took for church steeples and the latter for a pair of happy lovers. I know that we frequently imagine to have really found what we most think of, or wish for.'(*LFI* 336)

[548] *Letter to Lord Byron* fulfils Auden's intention. It provides comments on England, its culture, the European situation and on literary and personal history.
[549] Bryant 91.

Both the clergyman and the lady subjectively enchant a distant place in ways reflecting their personal desires. On the way to China in January 1938, Auden drafted a poem "The Voyage", which echoes van Troil's remark and anticipates Auden's afore mentioned 1962 claim that the idea of a journey generally involves enchanted perceptions of existential periphery. It focuses on the hopeful expectations of "Juster Life" that travellers have prior to arrival when they "find / In the vaguer touch of the wind and the fickle flash of the sea / Proofs that somewhere there exists, really, the Good Place." Auden deflates such wishful thinking: "No, he discovers nothing" because "The journey is false; the false journey really an illness" (*EA* 231). The illness is the human tendency to project onto places the inversion of frustrations and sorrows. In "O who can ever gaze his fill" and "Journey to Iceland", the fisherman, farmer and travellers arriving in Iceland in order to be cured in a remote place suffer from such a disease. Auden diagnoses its symptoms and assertively deflates romanticized fancies. Iceland does not become a therapeutic asylum. To deprive it of such a status, he deconstructs the dichotomies of 'nature/culture', 'pure/decadent', 'healthy/ill', etc. He infests Iceland with European problems, Nazism and novelties. He lets a local river flow past Oxford, thereby depriving the island of insularity and synthesizing it with the surrounding inferior and homogeneous whole.

The verse letters manifest the self-consciousness of interwar art and authors' scepticism about established modes of representation. The challenge of writing a travel book encouraged Auden to grapple with the issue of writing a place explicitly and more than ever before. He engages in a dialogue with previous accounts of Iceland and film documentary. As Marsha Bryant notes, for example, the prose letter "Sheaves from Sagaland" is not designed to provide insights into 'the country' and 'the natives' – the titles of its subsections. On the contrary, she argues that Auden structures it as a compilation and 'sheaves' of quotations from existing travel books, whose style reveals more about the personal, cultural and class bias of their authors. For example, the emphasis on the naturalness and purity of the Icelandic landscape and people bespeaks the authors' inability to extract themselves from the 'culture/nature', 'superior/inferior' and other culturally derived dichotomic preconceptions.[550] Auden displays equal distrust of subjective writing of places. He informs Lord Byron that he "can't read Jefferies on the Wiltshire Downs" (*LFI* 180) and implies unwillingness to imitate styles mixing documentary with contemplation. He is also reluctant to follow the template of a continuous epic narrative and, in consequence, turns the letters into a discontinuous syncretic collage of prose, verse and images.

[550] Bryant 77.

From Iceland, Auden informed Erika Mann that as a travel book writer, he found himself in void of a suitable stylistic niche. Yet, as seen, he had a clearly defined strategy. "The usual alternative" for writers rejecting the above templates, Auden claims in the second letter to his wife, "is essays on life prompted by something seen, the kind of thing Lawrence and Aldous Huxley do." Despite concluding that he is "neither clever enough nor sensitive enough to manage" (*LFI* 280), Auden's travel-book poetics rests in this very midpoint. It reconciles the opposing extremes of visual arts, capable of conveying unique topography and social reality, and nonrepresentational music, which he saw as altogether detached from the material world. Auden's poems *are* essays on life and art 'prompted by something seen'. He glimpses physical details but withdraws from them to weave into his poems locally unanchored and unspecific confrontations concerning ethics and aesthetics – life and art.

The reason why the travel-book poems are examined with such minute attention is that Auden elaborates in them his own anatomy of poetry. Hence, the analysis of his explicit effort to grapple with perception and the politics of representation does not only shed light on the different sense of Iceland embedded in his prose and poetry. It also clarifies Auden's treatment of Alston Moor and England. Because this chapter points at the poet's broader 1930s views on how poetry can engage with places, cultures, and personal mythical geography, the knowledge gained herein is exploited in the following section for the sake of completing the present endeavour to delineate the contours of Auden's poetics of place in the context of the interwar social and aesthetic milieu.

7. Conclusion

Biography
Is better than Geography,
Geography's about maps,
Biography's about chaps.
-Wystan Hugh Auden[551]

My analyses show disparities in Auden's sense of particular places and the manner of their representation. When scrutinized, Auden's verse and prose treatment of the locations under examination reveals both the protean quality of the author and a bifurcated poetics. Auden's diverse 'mapping' of Alston Moor, England and Iceland arises from his search of a personal poetic voice in the interwar aesthetic milieu and from his affinity with the socially conscious intelligentsia grappling anew with the question of the function of art and the relation of an artist to the public.

The sense of Alston Moor and Iceland embedded in Auden's prose displays his readiness to write them in a manner that expresses the human experience of remote locations as described by Yi-Fu Tuan. Auden viewed topophilia as essential for conducting a verbal rite of praise paying homage to the local *genius loci* and sacred 'proper-name' quality of particular places or landscapes. He proclaimed awe for topophilic English poets capable of channelling their sentiments, an observant eye as well as verbal skills towards the delineation in art of minute local details and atmosphere, thereby pronouncing and praising their unique, 'proper-name', even numinous qualities. Auden the critic displays his own topophilic sensibility that he found so endearing about Thomas Hardy and John Betjeman. The analysis of Auden's prose reveals indebtedness to such authors: he can focus on local features and write Iceland and Alston Moor as unique and sacred places, and present them as embodiments of his idea of Eden.

Unlike Iceland, England was Auden's homeland, which, in general, is susceptible to equally tinted perceptions by existential insiders, who approach it ethnocentrically as the hub of the world and as a hierarchically privileged and unique entity different from other places. Auden the prose writer treats England, like Iceland, with an emphasis on insularity. He takes the shores as a border marking the limits of its self-contained physiognomic and cultural identity. In the treatment of both islands Auden clearly promotes his proclaimed preference of local diversity by setting their distinctive character over against Europe fashioned as a homogenized inferior Otherness. Besides, Iceland's remoteness provides Auden with reasons for constructing it as a sanctuary of pre-modernity and as an idyllic location of his future exile. England's insularity, on the other hand, provides a feeling of belonging and allows him to identify with his motherland. Hence, Auden the critic presents himself as an Englishman

[551] *LFI* 336.

and uninhibitedly emblazons the essential architecture of his mythical geography. He publicly exposes topophilic fondness for all three places, constructs them as unique and, in the case of Alston Moor and Iceland, as sacred.

The lodestone of this study is Auden's interwar poetry. Its politics of place representation stand out clearly when compared with prose and the propositions of humanist geographers. Analysis reveals a contrast: an imaginative dynamic that differs from Auden's own prose and Yi-Fu Tuan's assessment of the basic patterns of experiencing distant places and homelands. Concealment characterizes Auden's poetry, where the sense of place embedded in prose is negated, deconstructed and systematically effaced. Auden the poet neither enunciates the uniqueness of the three places nor does he eulogize his holy lands. He does not only silence his proclaimed topophilic sentiments, rhetoric and awe for local poets. He also disguises the contours of his mythical geography and fondness for local diversity. Despite his grudge against globalizing processes leading to placelessness and sameness, the sense of place embedded in Auden's interwar poetry is unerringly conducted under the rubric of a consistent effort to depersonalize places and displace their local identities.

The village of Cashwell and its non-carpentered surroundings are reduced to an image of the traditional and locally unspecific 'culture/nature' dichotomy, which connects Alston Moor to Auden's other landscapes embedding concrete as well as generic images. Concurrent with the poet's 1930s transformation into a public figure is the expansion of the spatial horizon of his poems. Following patterns characterizing traditional prospect poetry, Auden positions his speakers at elevated vantage points from which to view England and its regions. The height and distance allow him to exploit and invert the traditional perception of the island *topos*. Auden displays a sustained effort to efface the protectiveness of the water border and cliffs. He invariably constructs England as historically interconnected with Europe and as inseparable from its heritage and the interwar condition. The same ardour to level out local singularity through a denial of an insular status concerns the treatment of Iceland. The verse parts of *Letters from Iceland* (1937) collapse the stereotypical 'nature/culture' polarity. Auden deflates the perception of the island in terms of a unique unblemished and pre-modern therapeutic refuge from the Old Continent. He lets a local river meander through Europe and brings into the Icelandic landscape signs of urban life and international modernity. While preparing the "Preface" for the second edition of *Letters from Iceland* (1967), Auden recalled the circumstances of writing the travel book in 1936: "[…] though writing in a 'holiday' spirit, its authors were incessantly conscious of a threatening horizon to their picnic – world-

wide unemployment, Hitler, […] and world-war more inevitable."[552] The analysis of *Letters from Iceland* reveals Auden's awareness of such broader problems, especially with regard to his willingness to dent the allure and charm of local heroic narratives by means of contextualizing them with observations that Iceland is already Nazified and viewed by German tourists as a cradle of the Aryan and Nazi genus.

A strong element of Auden's poetics is also a tendency to universalize experience. "O who can ever gaze his fill" (1936) and other poems using the singular "I" (e.g. "Out on the lawn I lie in bed" [1933], "August for the people and their favourite islands" [1935] and "Dover" [1937]) were clearly inspired by personal encounters with particular places and people. Yet, the analysis shows that Auden transforms such unique moments and details into generalized comments uttered in a Modernist cosmopolitan voice transcending attention to and, in the case of England, commitment to a specific culture and place. In 1956, Edmund Wilson claimed that "one feels that the poet [Auden in the 1950s] is now, as *he was not* in his earlier poems, a completely free-swimming organism."[553] Yet, this dissertation shows that Auden's 1930s obfuscation of national identity, along with his focus on global existential and aesthetic issues, already presage this unanchored, free-floating style.

In his Icelandic poems, Auden abandons the hilltop views of his earlier poetry. Instead, he uses the technique of 'pan' and 'close-up' perspectives learned in G.P.O. Film Units shortly before his arrival in Iceland. Yet, even in the case of islands – places *par excellence* of local specificity – he prolongs the trajectory of traditional prospect poetry. Auden maintains his earlier tendency to abstract from local singularity, gain panoramic views and use a personal experience of local features for diagnosing commonalities. Auden invariably gains distance sufficient for dwelling upon features that allow him to achieve a synthesis of Alston, Iceland and England with the surrounding space. This strategy erases differentiating borders – the most essential attribute of the idea of 'place'. It turns concrete places into indistinctive entities and gives Auden's voice a timbre unmarked with topophilia and national identity.

Auden's depersonalized and syncretic approach to local details can be interpreted as a corollary of a cluster of issues, namely his general predilection for amalgamating disparate elements, fondness for the Classicist aesthetic revived in that part of Anglo–American Modernism reacting to Romanticism, and broad humanistic rather than geographical interests.

Signals of Auden's overall tendency to correlate distinctive phenomena are noticeable in his criticism. As Edward Mendelson points out, the 1930s Auden strove for defining "shared

[552] Auden, *Complete Works I* 801. This statement echoes his admission to Christopher Isherwood in 1936 while in Iceland that he was "too deeply involved in Europe to be able, or even to wish to escape" from preoccupations with it (*LFI* 190).
[553] Edmund Wilson, "W.H. Auden in America," *New Statesman and Nation* 9 June 1956: 658–59, *W.H. Auden*, ed. John Haffenden, *The Critical Heritage Ser.*, gen. ed. B.C. Southman (London: Routledge, 1983) 408, emphasis added.

teleologies" that would join psychology, literature, politics and religion.[554] Auden's afore mentioned eagerness to define a common denominator for Marx's and Freud's teachings, and his equation of the English educational system with Fascism, are but two examples of this conflating dynamic. With regards to his politics of representation and approach to the three places under examination, the amalgamating aspect of Auden's poetics transpires from his description of a process preceding the writing of a poem. In 1932, Auden claimed that poets usually generalize particular experiences. When the poet "hears people talking in his club about the sad story of Mr and Mrs Smith," thus a particular story about a person with a proper name, he thinks:

> 'There now. That's very interesting. *They are just like everybody else*; trying to get round life. It's like those sailors who tried to get to India by the North West passage. On they go, getting further and further into the ice, miles from home. Why, that's a good idea for a poem.' He writes a poem about explorers; he may never mention Mr and Mrs Smith at all. The novelist […] goes from the general to the particular, the poet from the particular to the general.[555]

To go 'from the particular to the general', from a local farmer and fisherman to mankind, or to connect Isafjőrdur and Dover to other locations, is to universalize the experience of a specific external detail by seeing them in a borderless analogy with others.

This tendency to gain height and distance in order to transcend the particular and amalgamate it with the surrounding space reveals the extent to which Auden had absorbed some of the basic elements of the Classicist aesthetic. In 1937, Auden defended Alexander Pope's poetics and, quoting from *The Rape of the Lock*, appreciated his ability to merge the "microscopic image of tea-making" with "the macroscopic image of a flood."[556] Moreover, Auden repeatedly praised Thomas Hardy for his ability to notice and convey *genius loci*. However, there is a contrasting quality of Hardy's work to which Auden's poetics of place shows more obvious and sustained indebtedness even after 1926, when he deemed Hardy an unsuitable literary model; there is one quality that is redolent of Auden's reasons for his fondness for Alexander Pope:

> What I valued most in Hardy, then [in the 1920s], as I still do [in 1940], was his *hawk's vision*, his way of looking at life from a very great height […]. To see the individual life related not only to the local social life of its time, but to the whole of human history, life on the earth, the stars, gives one both humility and self-confidence. For from such a perspective the difference between individual and society is so slight [and] insignificant.[557]

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[554] Mendelson, Introduction, xxii.
[555] Auden, "Writing," *Complete Works I* 20, emphasis added.
[556] Auden, "Pope," *Complete Works I* 152-03, Auden alludes here at Alexander Pope's line "From silver spouts the grateful liquors glide, / While China's earth receives the smoking tide" from Canto III of *The Rape of the Lock.*
[557] Auden, "A Literary Transference," *Complete Works II* 46-47, emphasis added.

This ability to correlate the particular and fleeting with the universal and placeless brought Auden to a very specific understanding of Hardy as a local artist: "Hardy is a regional poet in the best sense, i.e. he is not confined to provincial interests, but sees the most general interests in terms of a loved and intimately known locality."[558] In his own poems, Auden performs the same shibboleth. He lets speakers gain height in landscapes for which he claimed topophilic sentiments and engages with minute details in the prospects below such vantage points. Yet, he also sees in them 'general interests' and systematically treats particular places as manifestations of large macroscopic, supra-regional and supra-temporal issues. At a more general level, this *hawk's-vision* strategy also recalls Samuel Johnson's afore discussed claim in *Rasselas* that a poet should "neglect the minuter discriminations," avoid enumerating "the streaks of the tulip" and, focusing on "abstracted and invariable" problems, he should "rise to general and transcendental truths" worthy of a poet as "a being superiour to time and place."[559] This classicizing Aristotelian strategy is so fundamental for Auden's poetics of place that not even the challenge of writing a travel book about the sacred Iceland corrected it.

Auden's treatment of topographical detail in the post-1940 period is yet to be extensively examined mainly because of his rediscovered Christian faith. Arthur Kirsch claims that Auden embraced Christianity in the 1940s primarily because it "allowed him to relate *the universal* to *the particular*, *the spiritual* to *the material.*"[560] Auden's reconversion and ensconcing in the USA brought new elements into his later poetry. Yet, the 1930s principles were already based on this very relish in conflating the unique and the general, which remained largely unchanged in the 1940s and later. An ample illustration is Auden's approach to the Italian landscape in "In Praise of Limestone" (1948) self-admittedly inspired by his encounter with Florence and its surroundings. Justin Quinn in his recent reading of the poem notes that, although well knowledgeable on the subject of local history and geography, Auden "bleaches that particularity in order to make the limestone landscape more generic, more exchangeable with 'Anywhere you like, somewhere / on broad-chested life-giving Earth.'"[561] As in the 1930s, local singularity is clouded by the force of Auden's intellectual and geographical expansiveness. The landscape is approached as a 'hyphen' between the Catholic South, which Auden abhorred, and the Protestant North, which he loved. In consequence, the polar differences between Italy, England, their cultures and religions, are evened out and the border dividing them erased. This stems from Auden's conscious effort, recounted in 1971:

[558] Auden, "Thomas Hardy: An Aspect of His Poetry," BBC, 16 Sept. 1949, *Complete Works III* 679.
[559] Johnson, *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia* 28-29.
[560] Arthur C. Kirsch, *Auden and Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005) 28, emphasis added.
[561] Quinn, "On Audenstrasse," unpublished essay. Quinn's inserted quotation is from Auden's "Horae Canonicae" (1952).

> […] in 1948, I visited Italy for the first time, and in Florence, wrote a poem In Praise of Limestone. The lead-mines, of course, could not come in, because there aren't any in Florence, but the limestone landscape was important to me as a connecting link between two utterly different cultures [England and Italy].[562]

An illustration of the projection of Auden's synthesizing poetics even onto later poetry is in *About the House* (1965) – a collection of poems, each dedicated to a different room of his Austrian cottage. The private quarters are connected to the public space and past. For John Updike, Auden makes the house abound "in remembrances of human prehistory" and, drawing "significance from every nook," he develops each room "into a cosmic instance."[563]

Another mainspring behind Auden's tendency to obfuscate topographical details and emphasize their likeness rather than disparity is his ability to perceive analogies between landscapes and the human being. Auden admired Rainer Maria Rilke for developing a style spared from pathetic fallacy: "One of the constant problems of the poet is how to express abstract ideas in concrete terms. The Elizabethans solved it for their generation by an anthropomorphic identification." Auden goes on to praise Rilke for finding a new solution. While Shakespeare "thought of the nonhuman world in terms of the human, Rilke thinks of the human in terms of the non-human, of what he calls Things. […] One of Rilke's most characteristic devices is the expression of human life in terms of landscape."[564]

The validity of Auden's interpretation of Rilke in such terms deserves closer attention. Yet, perhaps a residue of an early fascination with mining and desire to become a geologist or mining engineer, Auden approached landscapes and materials in the physical world for imagining the specificity of the human being. An instance of this is his 1971 lecture "Phantasy and Reality in Poetry", in which Auden proposes an analogy between mines and the human body: "looking at the cross-sectional diagrams of mines in my books, I realize that they are like stylised pictures of the internal anatomy of the human body."[565] Above all, however, Auden's poetry partakes in this tendency to see man in terms of landscape. Auden claimed that in the imaginary world constructed in his early childhood for dream escapades from people, there were no miners and that he was its only human inhabitant.[566] Yet, starting with Alston Moor in the 1920s, his poetic landscapes converge in being invariably inhabited or visited by human figures – travellers, miners, fishermen, bathers, and hikers. Particular images, like that of children at play in "Letter to R.H.S. Crossman, Esq.," are structured to foreground man and project him against the expansive fields, alluvial plains and monumental

[562] Auden, "Phantasy and Reality in Poetry" 193.
[563] John Updike, "On Auden's Humanistic Relaxation," *Motive* November 1965: 50–52, *W.H. Auden*, ed. John Haffenden 425.
[564] Auden, "Rilke in English," *Complete Works II* 26.
[565] Auden, "Phantasy and Reality in Poetry" 187. For the lead/coffin/man analogy see "Not in Baedeker" (CP 422).
[566] Auden, "Phantasy and Reality in Poetry" 187.

glaciers in the background. In his poems Auden lets human figures experience the physical world and uses their response to landscapes for mapping basic attributes of man's being in the world. As the analyses show, more than on places, Auden is focused on the human tendency to invest neutral locations with anthropomorphic values. He makes the idealized meanings appear as inversions of the figures' anxieties and frustrations and as reflections of their diverse and futile notions of an ideal place.

The foregrounding of the human figure is redolent of Auden's defence of Neo-Classical poets. He justified their inattention to the description of details in nature and the non-human components of the physical world in general. Alluding to Alexander Pope's "the proper study of mankind is man" in *Essay on Man*, Auden wrote about the Augustans that:

> […] if their descriptions of cows and cottages and birds are vague, it is because their focus of interest is sharp elsewhere, and equal definition over the whole picture would spoil its proportion and obscure its design. They [the descriptions] are conventional, not because the poets thought that 'the waterpudge, the pilewort, the petty chap, and the pooty' were unpoetic in their naked nature and must be suitably dressed, but because they are intended to be conventional, a *backcloth* to the more important human figures.[567]

It is noteworthy that Auden wrote this espousal in February 1937 when finalizing *Letters from Iceland* because to characterize his own poetics in *Letter to Lord Byron*, he made a personal admission reusing the same floral material while also referring to a landscape as a backcloth:

> To me Art's subject is the human clay,
> And landscape but a background to a torso;
> All Cézanne's apples I would give away
> For one small Goya or a Daumier.
> I'll never grant a more than minor beauty
> To pudge or pilewort, petty-chap or pooty. (*LFI* 252)

Befittingly located after "Letter to R.H.S. Crossman, Esq." depicting local figures in the field on the background of glaciers, this citation provides a brief yet apposite synopsis of an unerring aspect of Auden's poetics. Not landscapes, petty-chaps or Cézanne's fruit still-lifes but Goya- and Daumier-like focus on the human clay is Auden's preferred subject in visual arts and the most adequate foreground subject of his own verse, even when challenged with writing a travel book. "O who can ever gaze his fill", travellers imagining Iceland upon their arrival in "Journey to Iceland", or the miners in Cashwell, are but three examples of sustained energy invested by Auden in analyzing the human torso who perceives and responds to the landscape on the background and reveals a facet of being in the world. It is no coincidence that out of Auden's fifty-three photographs in *Letters from Iceland*, not a single one depicts the pristine natural landscape. Some portray scenery littered with human architecture but the

[567] Auden, "Pope," *Complete Works I* 151, emphasis added.

greatest number are images of human figures or, most commonly, close-up details of their faces that reveal little 'Icelandness' and that could be taken anywhere else. Having returned from Iceland, Auden started to write about concrete fictional or historical figures as in "Miss Gee", "James Honeyman", "Rimbaud", "A.E. Housman", "Edward Lear", "In Memory of W.B. Yeats" and "In memory of Ernst Toller" (all from 1937-1939). In his Icelandic letters and earlier poems, however, Auden transforms the experience of concrete fishermen and miners into comments on humanity in general.

As in the case of the universalizing aspects of his poetics, Auden's penchant for using topographical detail for discoursing on man in general projects onto the later poetry. In "Not in Baedeker" (1949), Auden makes several references to the connection between Alston Moor, lead ore formerly found in local mines, and mankind:

> […] Today it would take
> A geologist's look to guess that these hills
> Provided roofs for some great cathedrals
> […]
> And waterproof lining for coffins. (*CP* 423)

In "Amor Loci" (1965), the sacred Pennine landscape allows him "by analogy" to "Imagine a love" that "does not abandon" (*CP* 586). The most patent example, however, is *New Year Letter* (1940). "Whenever I begin to think / About the human creature we / Must nurse to sense and decency," Auden informs Elizabeth Mayer – the addressee of the poem, "An English area comes to mind / I see the nature of my kind / As a locality I love" (*CP* 182). It is clear from later lines of the poem that Auden refers to Alston Moor. In Auden's later poetry the Pennine landscape did become to be praised but not because of its topographical uniqueness. On the contrary, in "In Praise of Limestone" (1948), for instance, Auden presents the soft, inconstant, moderate and malleable properties of limestone as *uniquely* analogous to the nature of *every* human being for one particular reason: to turn the raw limestone into a perfect marble statue requires the same amount of physical nursing as that involved in the immaterial shaping of the imperfect 'human creature' to 'sense and decency'.

Auden's interwar treatment of Alston Moor and Iceland, however, is not marked with such encomiastic rhetoric. Yi-Fu Tuan recently wrote that "a boundary or limit is a characteristic of sacred space."[568] Auden the critic vents his topophilic sentiments in prose and so constructs the two places as surrounded by boundaries differentiating the sacrosanct insides from the surrounding profane periphery. Yet, the poetry is not imparted to the same ends. The

[568] Yi-Fu Tuan, *Religion: From Place to Placelessness* (Chicago: Center for American Places at Columbia College, 2009) 21.

sentiments and romanticized perceptions are silenced and, in consequence, the places are deprived of a numinous status because plagued by profaneness of the inferior 'outside'.

Instead of using Alston Moor for escapes from the world of people, Auden turns it into a forum for the discussion of broader problems of humanity. In his poems, it becomes a landscape of crisis filled with dilapidated relics of man's striving to escape from its actual state, which inverts the putative sacredness and turns the place into a nondescript gasping space of profane suffering. The same suppression of a private myth and desecration of a numinous sanctuary are discernible in the treatment of Iceland. Auden departs from the style of existing romanticized travel accounts and exposes the fallacy of reading and writing the island in superlative terms and as a pre-modern therapeutic asylum. He deflates wishful thinking of his figures escaping to its insular landscape from other spaces as well as the self-deluding anthropomorphic myths of a caring and protective ancestral homeland fashioned by local workers. The challenge of writing a travel book did not prompt Auden to alter his earlier poetics. Rather, it made him think more explicitly about the problem of subjective perceptions and writing of places, which elevated his eagerness to debunk mythical geographies, including his own.

The 'desecrating' attribute of Auden's poetics of place arises from his interwar understanding of poets' public role and emphasis on the social function of poetry. Auden perceived the former as active and curious beings compelled to facing public facts. The latter was a socially engaged discourse that should not proscribe specific political agendas and private myths but inquire into the actual state of life and environment, thereby assisting the general public in making the right existential choices.

Recollecting the decade, Auden wrote in 1939 that: "It is folly to imagine that one can live two lives, a public and a private one. No man can serve two masters. In the struggle between the public life and the private life, the former will always win because it is the former that brings home the bacon."[569] Like other members of his generation who entered the literary stage in the 1920s and 1930s, Auden was explicitly and frequently preoccupied with the relation of a private individual to the public space for more than financial reasons. For example, he invoked the Greek *agora* when noting that while "in Greece private life was to be spoken about in public," the contemporary "private man must suppress his personal views in public."[570] In this connection, throughout his life Auden discriminated between genres according to their suitability for airing private concerns. In 1962, he wrote a letter to the literary critic Monroe K. Spears, who was working on one of the first critical studies of

[569] Auden, *The Prolific and the Devourer*, *Complete Works II* 418.
[570] Auden, "The Poet and the City," *Complete Works IV* 510.

Auden's poetry. Auden informed him that critics should make publicly known their idea of Eden.[571] This comment appeared in an expanded form in *Dyer's Hand* (1962):

> All the judgments, aesthetic or moral, that we pass, however objective we try to make them, are in part a rationalization and in part a *corrective discipline* of our subjective wishes. So long as a man writes poetry or fiction, his dream of Eden is his own business, but the moment he starts writing criticism, honesty demands that he describe it to his readers, so that they may be in the position to judge his judgments.[572]

In his prose, Auden the critic does indeed emblazon and enunciate his mythical geography of sacred places and embodiments of Eden. In fact, this quotation comes from an essay "Reading" outlining them in the greatest of details. But, knowing they were his private idiosyncrasies and products of enchanting imagination, Auden was unwilling to display, share and praise them in poetry. My analysis shows that his notions of the good and sacred places are concealed by the 'corrective discipline' and self-critique of his inner Censor. This seems a patent manifestation of Auden's ingestion of T.S. Eliot's anti-Romantic posture in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919), which emphasizes the surrender of a poet's personal tastes, depersonalization of their voice, "continual self-sacrifice," and "extinction of personality."[573]

The reason for Auden's unwillingness to treat Iceland, Alston Moor and England as unique, and the former two as sacred places, also transpires from a negative attitude to others' private and collective escapist myths. This is a prime corollary of Auden's social commitment characteristic of his generation. Philip Larkin described the 1930s Auden as a poet exceptionally focused on the contemporary situation in all its disquieting variety. In Auden's poetry, the reader will find "the depression, strikes, the hunger marches, […] Spain, and China; and above all we shall encounter […] a sense that things needed a new impetus from somewhere."[574] Unlike other members of his generation embracing Marxism eagerly, Auden was more cautious. While attracted to it too, he did not know what exactly the impetus was. Yet, he was clearly convinced that escapism and myths were practices precluding its finding.

Auden invariably constructs his speakers as exemplars of socially attentive individuals brooding on interwar social problems even when in solitude in nature or in a walled garden. He lets them speak as responsible *citi*zens facing what the general public and, in the view of many in his generation, the High Modernists were evading. Writing to Christopher Isherwood from Iceland, Auden admitted that he was "too deeply involved in Europe to be able, or even

[571] Auden, "To Monroe K. Spears," 19 Feb. 1962, *Complete Works IV* 945-46. Monroe K. Spears' book on Auden was titled *The Poetry of W. H. Auden: The Disenchanted Island* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963).
[572] Auden, "Reading," *Complete Works IV* 459, emphasis added.
[573] Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent, Part I" 55.
[574] Philip Larkin, "What's Become of Wystan?," *Spectator* 15 July 1960:104–05, *W.H. Auden*, ed. John Haffenden 415.

to wish to escape" (*LFI* 190). Auden is, as Craig Hamilton calls him, "a poet of the city"[575] but not because he praises this environmental type. The reason is that Auden approaches the communal existence, of which the city is a prime location, as proper to man. The carpentered space and life in it cannot be avoided. Every individual should face them and strive for their improvement. In consequence, as the analyses reveal, Auden was consistently eager to expose the naivety of spatial and temporal fancies fashioned in response to the dissatisfaction with the condition of the 'here' and 'now'. Individual and collective mythical geographies and physical escapes from the condition of the humanized landscape and lifespace are presented as manifestations of socially irresponsible withdrawals from civil commitments to it. Auden's 1930s poetic voice in general is that of a conscientious *homo socius* realizing that imaginative or physical escapism to the idealized past, nature, its worship, solitude, remote islands and other destinations are mere self-delusions and symptoms of an ivory-tower isolationism from the imperfect 'here' and 'now'. In his poems, the constructedness of such cultural carapaces is exposed and rendered futile. Analogously, Auden unerringly silences his own spatial myths as well as his nostalgic 'remembrances' of Georgian provincial England seeping through prose.

This concealing and desecrating strategy also issues from Auden's view of poetry as a tool providing disenchantment and illumination rather than enchantment and delusion. "Tennyson was a fool to try to write a poetry which would teach the Ideal," states Auden in his reproach of the poet for writing like an exile "from lost Paradise" full of "nostalgia for the Happy Isles."[576] Auden wanted a poem to be a formally perfect "verbal garden of Eden," and so a product of a meticulous craftsmanship rather than a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.[577] Simultaneously, however, he insisted that "we look to a poem for some kind of illumination about our present wandering condition, since, without self-insight and knowledge of the [fallen] world, we must *err blindly* with little chance of realizing our hope."[578]

The 1930s Auden frequently distinguished between escapist and parabolic art. While acknowledging the importance of the former on grounds that "man needs escape as he needs food and deep sleep," he preferred the latter facing the actual fallen world.[579] Auden's very first prose was a preface in *Oxford Poetry 1926* co-written with Charles T. Plumb. As editors, they promise to promote fresh writing of the day and admit that

> […] poetry which does not at least attempt to face the circumstances of its time may supply charming holiday-reading, but vital interest […] it certainly will not.

[575] Craig Hamilton, "The Imagined Cities in W.H. Auden's 'Memorial for the City'," *English Language Notes* 43.2 (December 2005): 170.
[576] Auden, "Introduction to *A Selection from the Poems of Alfred, Lord Tennyson*," *Complete Works II* 210–11. Auden alludes to Tennyson's "Ulysses".
[577] Auden, "Introduction to *A Choice of de la Mare's Verse*," *Complete Works IV* 396.
[578] Auden, "Introduction to *A Choice of de la Mare's Verse*," *Complete Works IV* 396, emphasis added.
[579] Auden, "Psychology and Art To-day," *Complete Works I* 104; see also "Poetry, Poets, and Taste," *Complete Works I* 164.

> […] If it is a natural preference to inhabit a room with casements opening upon Fairyland, one at least of them should open upon the Wasteland.[580]

Auden and Plumb contrast escapist art, dwelling upon 'distant' potentiality, with the focus of socially committed artists on the wasteland of the actual world 'here' and 'now'. Such art *may* provide 'vital interest' because it illuminates about truth and so removes lies and myths. In 1943, Auden cited R.G. Collingwood to state that rather than "Magic", art should be viewed as a "Mirror [whose] proper effect, in fact, is disenchanting."[581] This was essential already for Auden in the 1930s. He frequently insisted on the social power of poetry to illuminate the public. Yet, he did not associate illumination with a dictatorial and programmatic indoctrination of concrete solutions or ideologies, say Marxism with which he is generally associated. Poems, he claimed repeatedly, should only contribute to people's self-knowledge and so lead to a point "where it is possible for [them] to make a rational and moral choice"[582] saving them from 'erring blindly'. Auden claimed that poets should provide readers with an opportunity to make their own connections between a poem and their lives, which he believed was only possible when the parabolic not mythical method was used. As Edward Mendelson informs, the 1930s Auden found the fascination of the High Modernists with myths repulsive because he conceived of them as merely explicative and requiring no participation on the reader's part.[583] Contrary to this, Auden approached even secular parables as "particular stories about particular people and experiences" eliciting active appropriation of the narrative by the reader to their diverse existential situations: parables are stories from "which each according to his immediate and peculiar needs may draw his own conclusions."[584] Auden saw them as moralizing discourses providing readers with enough freedom to increase their self-illumination necessary for making independent steps away from the Evil towards the Good Life and Place.

This dissertation opened with an anecdote about Auden's map of Alston Moor hanging in his shack on Fire Island and on the wall of the Kirchstetten house. It indicates his lifelong attraction to a sacred landscape and willingness to keep in *private* quarters an image of a segment of a *public* space. Yet, this study illustrates that Auden was not indiscriminately disposed to evince the architecture of his private mythical geography. His poetics of place consisted in displacing the uniqueness and sacredness of local places and cultures under the pressure of the poet's general humanistic concerns and views on the social function of poetry.

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[580] Wystan Hugh Auden and Charles T. Plumb, "Preface to *Oxford Poetry 1926*," *Complete Works I* 3.
[581] Auden, "The Poet of the Encirclement," *Complete Works II* 198.
[582] Wystan Hugh Auden and John Garret, "Introduction to *The Poet's Tongue*," *Complete Works I* 108.
[583] Edward Mendelson, "From Myth to Parable," *The Society for the Arts, Religion and Contemporary Culture*, n.d. <http://www.sarcc.org/Auden.htm>, 27 October 2010.
[584] Auden, "Psychology and Art To-Day," *Complete Works I* 103.

This combination encouraged Auden to conceal the contours of his private mythical geography from the public entirely.

This study scrutinizes Auden's sense of place and politics of representation. It diagnoses, examines and rationalizes the presence in his poetics of place and imagination of a clear bifurcation. My analyses approach this disparity as a consequence of Auden's responsiveness to the 1930s social and aesthetic developments, his views on the relationship between an artist and the public, and his readiness to define poetry's capacity to appropriate the physical world and local details against that of other genres and art forms. Auden proclaimed aversion against Ph.D. researchers and, in general, against intruders into his sacred landscape of Alston Moor. His poems display eagerness to conceal from the public the sacred and unique qualities of the places under examination. Nevertheless, this study 'encroaches' upon their territories, exposes Auden's mythical geography and treats it in contexts which should allow us to perceive his work and imagination in broader than political relations.

Resumé

Tato disertační práce se zaměřuje na ranou poezii (1927-1938) britského básníka Wystana H. Audena (1907-1973). Na základě zvoleného teoretického rámce ji zkoumá s důrazem na pojetí a poetiku místa (*sense of place* a *poetics of place*). Hlavním posláním studie je využít potenciál, který analýza těchto ústředních, byť kriticky dosud málo studovaných aspektů Audenovy poezie skýtá pro rozšíření její interpretace, a tím přispět k prohloubení dosavadního poznání díla tohoto významného básníka.

Téma

Tato raná fáze je pro výzkum zvolena z toho důvodu, že v Audenově životě a dlouhé tvůrčí kariéře představuje zdaleka nejdynamičtější a nejsložitější období. Nejen že si Auden na pozadí meziválečné krize, společenského napětí a velmi kreativního klimatu uvědomil svou touhu stát se básníkem. Začal poezii i psát, úspěšně publikovat a zároveň stanul v samém středu tehdy se rodící generace umělců a intelektuálů různě reagujících jak na uměleckou avantgardu, tak i na zneklidňující domácí i mezinárodní politickou situaci směřující k druhé světové válce. Poté, co Auden v roce 1922 učinil rozhodnutí stát se básníkem, započal velmi usilovně hledat vhodné literární vzory, od kterých by se tomuto umění naučil. Později často vzpomínal na své začátky a v této spojitosti psal o tzv. „vnitřním cenzorovi“ (*inner Censor*), kterým označoval vlastní vnitřní schopnost sebekritiky. Po vzoru T.S. Eliota, který tehdy oživil některé z principů klasicistní estetiky, Auden zdůrazňoval, že „vnitřního cenzora“ by si měl každý začínající básník kultivovat tím, že bude vyhledávat a imitovat uznávané básníky, a tím získávat samostatnost a osobitý umělecký styl. Jeho vlastními prvními vzory byli představitelé „edwardovské“ a „georgiánské poezie“, hlavně pak Thomas Hardy a Edward Thomas. Auden si jich nesmírně vážil v prvé řadě pro jejich všímavost a topofilii, neboli zbožnou oddanost a lásku ke konkrétním místům, kterou podle jeho názoru tito básnící oplývali a která jim umožnila jazykově vyjádřit jejich topografickou jedinečnost, specifickou atmosféru a *genia loci*. Audenovy prvotiny z let těsně po roce 1922 vykazují zjevné ovlivnění imaginací a stylem těchto básníků dnes spojovaných s anglickou tradicí přírodní a lokální poezie (tzv. *nature* a *local poetry*).

V roce 1926 si však Auden jako student na Oxfordské univerzitě povšiml tvořivé avantgardní atmosféry a rozhodl se opustit dosavadní orientaci zaměřenou na představitele nostalgické přírodní a „anglické“ poezie, kteří pro něho začali představovat anachronismus. Svou pozornost přesměroval na vrcholné modernisty s úmyslem dosáhnout tak vytyčeného cíle být básníkem osobitým a současným. Tím se však přiklonil k umělcům a intelektuálům negativně reagujícím na předchozí poezii a mnohdy odmítajícím tradiční principy mimetického zobrazení skutečnosti a květnatost postromantického sentimentálního viktoriánského verše. Relativizace vnímání, tradiční objektivistický přístup k zobrazování

vnějšího světa a jeho primárních atributů času a prostoru v dílech H. Bergsona a A. Einsteina, ale také nové poznatky freudovské psychologie a subjektivity vyvolaly v intelektuálských kruzích na počátku dvacátého století snahu o radikální přehodnocení ustavených mimetických postupů. Ty vedly na jedné straně k abstrakci a na druhé straně k důrazu na imprese a subjektivní vnímání materiálního světa.

Audenovo hledání svého osobitého stylu v tomto složitém a kreativním kontextu tak bylo velmi napjaté, komplexní a plné protikladů. Hlavně však bylo výjimečně uvědomělé, disciplinované a už tehdy mimořádně ctižádostivé. To dosvědčuje fakt, že již v roce 1927 ve věku dvaceti let napsal tento tehdy oxfordský student první básně, jejichž analýzu tato práce mimo jiné nabízí a které se v roce 1930 pod názvem *Básně* (*Poems*) rozhodl otisknout T.S. Eliot ve slavném nakladatelství Faber and Faber. Audenův „vnitřní cenzor" byl již natolik vyspělý, že mu dovolil psát poezii, jejíž silný myšlenkový náboj nesly oslnivá dikce a vytříbený styl spájející ryze současné prvky s tradičními, dokonce staroanglickými. Kombinace těchto obsahových a formálních faktorů vyvolala negativní i oslavnou recepci, ale primárně představovala hybnou sílu, která Audena vynesla do samého středu meziválečné literární scény. První veřejné apoteózy se tento básník dočkal v roce 1937, při příležitosti svých třicátých narozenin, kdy Geoffrey Grigson, redaktor časopisu *New Verse*, inicioval vydání „Auden Double Number". Přispěvatelé byli ve valné většině členové nastupující generace umělců, kteří chválili myšlenkovou aktuálnost a nezaměnitelnost formálních aspektů Audenovy poezie a dramatu. To přispělo ke zrodu mýtu stavějícího tohoto básníka do pozice vůdce skupiny dalších levicově smýšlejících a společensky angažovaných umělců a intelektuálů. Stejně jako v Audenově případě se jejich tvorba a ideologické hodnoty profilovaly ve změti uznání a zavržení vrcholných modernistů. Obdiv k novátorství kontrastoval s kritikou politické konzervativnosti, izolacionizmu a nedostatečné společenské angažovanosti ve veřejném a dramatickém meziválečném dění. Tato práce se omezuje na poezii napsanou před rokem 1938. Tehdy se totiž Auden rozešel nejen se svými dosavadními morálními hodnotami a meziválečnou generací, ale také s rodnou vlastí. V lednu 1939 emigroval do Spojených států amerických, kde přijal občanství a navrátil se ke křesťanství, což jsou změny, které Auden považoval za počátek nové kapitoly svého života.

Předkládaná práce se soustředí na toto dramatické meziválečné období a tematicky se zabývá pojetím a poetikou místa. Relevance takových atributů nepramení jen z povahy Audenovy imaginace a umělecké citlivosti k místům, které se tato studie pokouší analyzovat, popsat a z tohoto poznání vyvodit přínosné závěry. Vyplývá i z jeho životopisných údajů. Dlouho před tím, než se Auden vydal na dráhu básníka, projevoval výjimečný zájem o vnější fyzický svět a jeho strukturu, zejména pak o geologii a hornictví, které v roce 1925 přijel studovat do Oxfordu. Tento zájem roznítil a podporoval jeho vzdělaný otec, lékař, ale také absolvent Cambridgeské univerzity v oblasti přírodních věd, sečtělý odborník a nadšený

přispěvatel článků o geologii do časopisu *Nature*. Právě otec a jeho domácí knihovna, zásobená odbornými texty spíše než prozaickou beletrií či poezií, poskytovali mladému Audenovi bohatý zdroj informací o těchto oborech. Již jako chlapec jevil největší zájem o tituly popisující důlní oblast v okolí obce Alston v North Pennines, rozkládající se mezi Hadriánovým valem, městem Penrith a řekou Tees v hrabství Cumberland. Místní zvlněná krajina vřesovišť skrývá bělostně žlutou vrstvu vápence, ložiska olova, bývalé doly a pozůstatky těžební činnosti. Souhrn těchto vlastností mladého Audena fascinoval natolik, že místní krajinu označil za posvátné místo a ztělesnění jeho představy o ráji. O tento hierarchicky nejvyšší statut se Alston Moor v Audenově osobní mýtické geografii dělil s krajinou Islandu. Primární roli zde sehrál nejen jeho otec, který mylně věřil, že rod Audenů pocházel právě z tohoto ostrova, ale i J.R. Tolkien, který Audenovu fantazii a lásku k severským mýtům roznítil během jeho studií v Oxfordu.

K tématu práce přispívá i fakt, že Auden byl vášnivý cestovatel a literární kritik citlivý k literární topografii. Již v meziválečném období před svou emigrací do USA dlouhodobě pobýval v Berlíně a krátkodobě navštívil celou řadu míst včetně tehdejšího Československa, dále Rumunsko, Portugalsko, Španělsko v období občanské války, Island, Čínu a později i italský ostrov Ischia a Rakousko, kde začal trávit letní období. Společně s Elizabeth Mayer(ovou) přeložil Goethovu *Cestu po Itálii* a stejně jako ve svých hodnoceních Thomase Hardyho, Edwarda Thomase či Johna Betjemana v úvodu překladu kladně zhodnotil Goethovu schopnost všimnout si a verbálně vykreslit tamního *genia loci*. Ve své vlastní kritické a cestopisné próze Auden často vyzdvihává topografickou a kulturní specifičnost různých míst a zároveň vyjadřuje rozhořčení nad negativním vlivem funkcionalistické architektury, technického pokroku a mezinárodní mobility na stírání rozmanitosti a pestrosti vedoucí k homogenitě a prostorové stejnorodosti. Jedním z míst, které kromě Islandu a Alston Moor Auden ve své próze ještě v šedesátých letech vykresluje jako specifické, je rodná Anglie. Její osobitou ostrovní kulturu staví do kontrastu s Evropou, vnímanou jako integrovanou do jednoho kulturně bezvýrazného celku. Ve své literárně-kritické próze se kromě opakované oslavy již zmíněných „místních“ topofilických básníků také hojně vyjadřuje k literárnímu přístupu k různým druhům míst, krajin a prostředí. Příkladem mohou být publikované přednášky z roku 1949 (*Enchafèd Flood*, 1950), kde si z různých možných způsobů vyjádření přechodu od klasicistní k romantické estetice vybírá odlišný a protichůdný přístup autorů k zobrazování stejných míst – ostrova a moře.

Výše uvedená složitost a dynamičnost Audenova vývoje a tvorby z let 1927 až 1939 činí toto období kriticky nejpřitažlivějším již od dob jeho života. Formální bravurnost a spojitost Audena s levicovou inteligencí však ve valné míře způsobují, že se tyto atributy staví do absolutního středu kritické pozornosti. Velké množství dosavadního zhodnocení klade důraz na technickou stránku jeho poezie. Primárně ale kritici upínají pozornost na způsob a míru její

ideologické a politické angažovanosti, zejména pak na odraz Audenova zájmu o Freudovu psychoanalýzu a marxismus. Předkládaná studie sdílí zájem o tuto ranou fázi, avšak ve snaze přispět k jejímu hlubšímu poznání, mění úhel pohledu a zabývá se literární topografií. Vychází nejen z Audenovy výjimečné citlivosti ke struktuře materiálního světa a k vazbám vznikajícím mezi člověkem a rozličnými místy i druhy prostředí, ale také z jeho všímavosti k literárnímu zobrazení krajiny jinými autory. Konkrétně se tato práce zabývá Audenovým literárním zobrazením a přístupem ke třem výše uvedeným místům – oblasti Alston Moor, Islandu a Anglie. První dvě představují základní prvky jeho osobní „mytické geografie" (*mythical geography*) posvátných míst, ke kterým byl mimořádně intelektuálně a emocionálně – topofilicky – vázán, ale ve kterých nikdy dlouhodobě nežil a nebyl na nich existenčně závislý. Anglie byla naopak pro Audena vlastí a její ostrovní ráz ho inspiroval k mnohým postřehům o místní specifičnosti a vlastní národní identitě. Svým důrazem na tyto topografické detaily a konkrétní místa tak práce doplňuje stávající výsledky bádání v oblasti Audenova přístupu k místům, které se však svým rozsahem prozatím omezují pouze na články a kapitoly tematicky zaměřené na jednotlivé básně (Craig Hamilton, 2005), interpretaci Audena jako „básníka města" (David R. Weimer, 1966), jeho přístup k Anglii (Patrick Deane, 2004) či alegorizaci krajiny v rané poezii (Paola Marchetti, 2004).

Práce posouvá těžiště zájmu o Audenovu meziválečnou tvorbu pryč od politiky a to směrem k „politice popisu" a poetice místa, tedy k principům reprezentace, ideologizace a transformace konkrétních míst, regionů a krajiny do uměleckého díla. Tím se připojuje k nedávné kritické tendenci rozšířit tradiční úzké kontexty relevantní pro studium Audenovy meziválečné a pozdější poezie, a tak přispět k jejímu hlubšímu poznání. Primárním cílem je determinovat principy jeho básnického přístupu k osobním mýtům a k zobrazování konkrétních topografických detailů. Smyslem tohoto zaměření je prohloubit chápání Audenovy imaginace a role, jakou v tomto procesu sehrál jeho „vnitřní cenzor". Jeho „povaha" se totiž konstituovala v průsečíku edwardovské tradice a angloamerického modernismu, jehož představitelé různě reagovali na romantickou a klasicistní estetiku, a zároveň se utvářela uvnitř politicky a společensky napjaté situace oživující tradiční otázky umělecké tvorby, jako například vztah umělce k publiku, napětí mezi básníkem jako privátní a veřejnou osobou, či angažovanost díla ve společenském dění.

Metodologie

Pro možnost teoreticky uchopit zvolený aspekt Audenova díla se v úvodní fázi výzkumu nabízela celá řada metodologií zabývajících se krajinou, jejím zobrazením v literatuře či tvorbou posvátných míst. Audenův důraz na *pojetí místa* a vztahu člověka k němu však vyžadoval přístup zabývající se právě významy a citovými vazbami, které si člověk na základě různých druhů prožití hmotného světa k místům utváří a definuje. Právě tyto otázky

tvoří ústřední předmět zájmu tzv. „humanistické geografie“ (*humanistic geography*) vyvíjející se od sedmdesátých let minulého století dodnes a propojující geografii s humanitními obory, zejména fenomenologií. Tím se odklání od tradiční deskriptivní geografie a její objektivistické epistemologie usilující o poznání struktury a mechanismů materiálního prostředí. Stoupenci humanistické geografie kladou zásadní důraz na obě složky výrazu „pojetí místa“, které implikují přítomnost jak prostředí, tak i lidského subjektu, který ho prožívá a rozumově i emočně zvnitřňuje. Fyzické prostředí považují za neredukovatelnou složku a kontext lidského bytí, což z jeho prožívání a pojímání činí naprosto základní aspekt existenční zkušenosti. Soustředí se tedy na „meziprostor“, který vzniká mezi člověkem a světem. Ten je konstruován pomocí představ, hodnot a významů, které jedinci a skupiny „vkládají“ do míst či typů prostředí, jako jsou například domov, příroda, město. Zastánci humanistické geografie považují poznání základních principů formování vztahu k místům a výstavby těchto individuálních a kolektivních synchronicky i diachronicky proměnlivých konstrukcí za přispívající k lidskému poznání sebe sama, což sdílí s ostatními humanitními vědami. Podobně jako například Christian Norberg-Schulz představitelé tohoto vědního oboru metodicky vycházejí z Husserlovy a existenciální fenomenologie (např. M. Heidegger a M. Merleau-Ponty), což jim umožňuje soustředit se na subjektivitu prožitku, zvláště pak na to, jak v zásadě neutrální prostředí nabývá na významu, jehož povaha a intenzita odráží lidské intence, cíle a existenční potřeby.

Hlavním představitelem tohoto směru je současný americký profesor Yi-Fu Tuan, jehož několikeré studie zabývající se místem, prostředím, jejich prožitkem a emocionální vazbou k nim tvoří hlavní, byť ne jediný metodologický pilíř této práce. Tuan nabízí vhodnou koncepci pojmu „místo“ a teorii jeho vznikání, které neomezuje na materiální konstruování. Naopak chápe místo jako průsečík materiálních a imateriálních atributů - umístění, vzhledu a významů, které člověk na základě své existenciální situace, cílů a tužeb do míst vtiskává. To Tuanovi a dalším kritikům umožňuje považovat místa za konstrukce primárně ideové, vznikající v procesu ideologizace neutrálního prostředí vnímajícím subjektem na základě jeho situace a tužeb.

Předkládaná práce ukazuje, že tato metodologie je pro interpretaci Audenova díla přínosná, má však i jistá úskalí a nedostatky. Ty jsou zde kompenzovány využitím doprovodného teoretického rámce osvětleného v pojednání předcházející podrobnou textovou analýzou Audenovy poezie. Kromě vlastního přímého výzkumu Tuan a ostatní stoupenci humanistické geografie získávají poznatky o lidském pojímání a prožívání fyzického prostředí z antropologie, psychologie a dalších vědních oborů včetně literatury, kde čerpají zdroje primárních předvědeckých projevů prostorové zkušenosti. Připojují se tak k existenciálním fenomenologům (např. M. Heidegger, M. Merleau-Ponty) a vědcům aplikujícím jejich poznatky do jiných oblastí lidského bádání (např. Norbert-Schulz do fenomenologie

architektury). Nedostatkem humanistické geografie je však teze, že literatura poskytuje spolehlivé záznamy o spontánní a autentické prostorové zkušenosti. Takto romanticky zabarvené chápání literárního textu a umělce svědčí o podcenění tlaku, který na autora vyvíjí nadosobní vlivy jako například dobová estetika, stylizace či žánrová specifičnost. Působení takových faktorů totiž může pojetí místa do jisté míry omezit a předurčit podobu jeho stylizace. Z těchto důvodů je metodologie humanistické geografie využívána společně s poznatky z literární kritiky a kulturních studií. Celá řada kritiků z těchto oborů se totiž zabývá konceptem krajiny, mechanismy jejího ztvárnění v krajinomalbě i v topografické poezii a schopností těchto žánrů zachytit a vykreslit místní specifičnost daného místa. Pro tyto účely jsou zde kromě dobových postřehů dr. Samuela Johnsona využity hlavně práce nedávných a současných odborníků, mezi které patří např. Jerome McGann, Raymond Williams, J. Hillis Miller, W.J.T. Mitchell, Roland Barthes, David Lowenthal, Paul Shepard, Dennis Cosgrove, John Wilson Foster, Aaron Santesso, Eric Hirsch, Lothar Fietz a další.

Struktura práce a hlavní zjištění

Kapitola první představuje teoretický rámec práce a poskytuje východiska pro literární analýzy v následujících kapitolách. Začíná stručným pojednáním o vývoji v přístupu k prostoru a místu, zejména o přechodu od osvícenského univerzalistického důrazu na „prostor“ (*space*) k dnešnímu primárnímu kritickému zaměření na „místo“ (*place*). Tento posun je chápán jako průvodní jev prostupu postpozitivistické filozofie, primárně fenomenologie, do různých vědních oborů a také jako odraz zájmu o vliv funkcionalismu a technického pokroku na vyhlazování lokální architektonické a kulturní rozličnosti. Jedním z oborů, který v tomto procesu vznikl, byla právě humanistická geografie, která je v další části kapitoly zasazena do kontextu fenomenologie a existenciální fenomenologie s cílem načrtnout její základní východiska využitelná v analýzách. Na tato úvodní pojednání navazuje ústřední část kapitoly, která je věnována vybraným poznatkům humanistické geografie týkající se problematiky lidské prostorové zkušenosti, potřebné pro následné analytické části práce. Důraz je kladen na interakci lidského subjektu s prostředím a otázku tvorby míst. Poukazuje na hlavní faktory ovlivňující intenzitu a povahu hodnot, které do v zásadě neutrálního prostředí člověk vetkává. Tím ho segmentuje a ohraničuje v něm heterogenní celky – místa, tedy souhrny polohy, materiálního vzezření a významu –, které jsou většinou binárně a hierarchicky uspořádané (např. domov a zahraničí, sever a jih, příroda a město, apod.).

Vzhledem ke skladbě Audenovy osobní mytické geografie je hlavní důraz kladen na polaritu mezi existenčním „žitým prostorem“ (*Lebenswelt* či *lifespace*) a vzdálenými a rozlehlými místy. Kromě lidských intencí a cílů totiž humanističtí geografové považují velikost místa a vzdálenost lidského subjektu od něj za veličiny zásadně ovlivňující způsob jejich prožívání a tím i intenzitu a povahu antropomorfních významů do nich vkládaných.

Domov je pojímán jako existenční střed, který je člověku dobře znám díky dlouhodobé přímé zkušenosti a ke kterému si tvoří silné citové – topofilické – pouto. Je to zároveň výchozí bod pro jeho hodnocení okolního prostoru, poznávaného a prožívaného buď během dočasného pobytu v roli cestovatele, nebo primárně zprostředkovaně skrze různé druhy diskurzu, četbu, fotografie či dokonce pouze na základě představivosti, což jsou způsoby, jakými Auden „znal" Alston Moor a Island. I velikost místa předurčuje druh jeho prožívání a poznávání lidským subjektem. Rozlehlost regionu či státu zamezuje celistvému poznání pomocí přímé zkušenosti a to včetně místních obyvatel (*existential insiders*), což je případ Audena ve vztahu k Anglii. Taková místa jsou zvnitřňována a pojímána na základě přímého prožitku jeho malé části a prostřednictvím veřejné rétoriky, politické a jiné, vzdělávacího procesu i důrazu na symboly či charakteristickou krajinu, jako je tomu například v případě české národní hymny. Svým důrazem na místní topografickou jedinečnost a kulturní identitu tyto diskurzy kultivují občanskou topofilii a pocit sounáležitosti.

Na základě jiných důvodů a mechanismů dochází v obou případech – u vzdálených regionů i domácí půdy – k tomu, že si jedinci a skupiny vytváří tzv. „mytické" či „domnělé geografie" (*mythical* a *imagined geographies*), o kterých je pojednáno v další části kapitoly. Ukazuje, že mytické geografie sestávají z antropomorfních konstrukcí, ve kterých jsou konkrétní místa či typy prostředí (např. příroda) spojována se superlativními významy a tím hierarchicky nadřazována ostatním. Ve vztahu k domovu mytologizace a „topofílie" (*topophilia*) obecně vychází z víry, že dobře známé místo je schopno člověka ochránit, revitalizovat a uspokojit jeho další základní existenciální potřeby. Protipólem jsou osobní *terrae incognitae*, tedy místa v prostoru vně existenčních center. Ta člověk poznává zprostředkovaně či na základě zkreslující představivosti, což vede k jejich mytologizaci a idealizaci jako kýžených ochraňujících, léčivých a dokonce posvátných útočišť pro imaginární či fyzické „útěkářství" (*escapism*) od všední existence (např. příroda, vysněné místo exilu či letní destinace). Pro Yi-Fu Tuana a Paula Sheparda je tento druh konstruování představ o prostoru a různých druzích prostředí projevem člověku vrozené neochoty přijmout prostředí a existenci v jejich aktuálním stavu. Člověk je pro ně tvor s neutuchající touhou stanout ve středu ideálního místa umožňujícího dokonalou existenci. Toto přesvědčení přimělo Tuana považovat tvorbu mytických geografií, topofilii a útěkářství za základní projevy lidského bytí a prostorové zkušenosti, a tím za koncepty vhodnými pro interpretaci pojmu „kultura". Kultura – domy, mýty, náboženství, atd. – je totiž pro něho variace ochranných štítů materiální či ideové povahy, které člověk konstruuje ve své snaze vtisknout řád a vymanit se nespoutanému, chaotickému a surovému přírodnímu prostředí. Vzhledem k centrálnosti pojmu „útěkářství" pro následné analýzy se poslední část kapitoly věnuje binární opozici příroda *vs*. město. Zaměřuje se na tyto druhy prostředí nejen pro jejich schopnost ilustrovat způsob lidské segmentace homogenního prostoru, ale jako dvojici, která

umožňuje interpretovat dialektické napětí mezi nimi z pohledu vykonstruovanosti, idealizace, topofilie, „útěkářství“ a mytických geografií.

Kapitola druhá z těchto zjištění vychází a aplikuje je nejprve na Audenovo prozaické dílo. Má dva primární cíle. Nejdříve analyzuje a osvětluje pohnutky, které Audena vedly k neutuchající oslavě Thomase Hardyho, Edwarda Thomase a Johna Betjemana. Auden tvrdil, že básník by ve své tvorbě měl velebit posvátný předmět a že báseň je „verbálním oslavným obřadem“ (*verbal rite of praise*) vyjadřujícím jeho jedinečnost a básníkovu úctu k němu. Z jeho prózy explicitně vyplývá, že takovým posvátným předmětem mohla být i krajina a konkrétní místa. Hlavním důvodem pro úctu, kterou k Hardymu a ostatním uchovával celý život, byla právě jejich schopnost všimnout si a v textu vyjádřit jedinečnost a *genia loci* daných míst. Pro Audena tato schopnost vyvěrala nejen z jejich citu pro básnický jazyk, ale primárně z topofilické citlivosti k vlastním posvátným místům. Druhým cílem kapitoly je analyzovat Audenovo chápání topofilie a kořeny i povahu jeho vlastní topofilické spjatosti s konkrétními topografickými celky – Alston Moorem a Islandem, jejichž krajinu považoval za jedinečnou, a které stály na samém vrcholu jeho mytické geografie posvátných míst. Na základě Audenovy interpretace *toposu* ostrova kapitola dále osvětluje jeho vztah k Islandu a k rodné Anglii. Ukazuje, jak se v obou případech jejich ostrovní ráz stal hlavním důvodem pro oslavu tamní krajinné a kulturní specifičnosti, kterou dával do protikladu s homogenní kontinentální Evropou. V případě Anglie je důraz kladen i na Audenovo otevřené prohlašování této země za svou rodnou vlast, *Mutterland*, hrdé přiznání své národní identity a příslušnosti k ní, a to dokonce několik let po přijetí amerického občanství. Jako celek kapitola ukazuje, že povaha Audenova pojetí těchto tří míst v próze přesně zapadá do poznatků humanistické geografie o lidském prožívání, mytologizaci, hierarchizaci rodného kraje a verbálního „svatořečení“ míst vzdálených.

Audenovy básně analyzované v kapitole čtvrté až šesté se dají považovat za topografické. Hlavními druhy tohoto tradičního formátu jsou tzv. „krajinná“ a „scénická poezie“ (*landscape* a *prospect poetry*). Kapitola třetí se z těchto důvodů zabývá pojmem „krajina“ a zamýšlí se nad schopností topografické poezie zachytit místní fyziognomický ráz a krajinnou jedinečnost. Jak bylo uvedeno výše, pro analýzu tohoto problému je využita řada poznatků od předních teoretiků zabývajících se pojmem „krajina“ a jejím zobrazením v uměleckém díle. Závěrem je zjištění, že topografické básně z různých období ve velké míře spojuje tendence básníků potlačovat místní jedinečnost tak, že konkrétní místa redukují buď na geograficky neukotvitelné, univerzální, a tím i zaměnitelné krajinné typy (např. příroda), nebo tak, že využívají konceptu krajiny a výhledu z vyvýšeného bodu (*prospect poems*) k odhlížení směrem ke vzdáleným místům za horizontem či k úvahám o čase, sentimentálně zidealizované minulosti či budoucnosti. To je rys, který odpovídá Tuanovu, Shepardovu a Hirschovu chápání „útěkářství“ jako odhlížení od aktuálního stavu „teď“ a „tady“.

Kapitoly čtvrtá až šestá se již plně zaměřují na Audenovu meziválečnou poezii. Na pozadí kontextu představeném v kapitolách první až třetí a ve světle relevantní sekundární literatury tyto sekce předkládají detailní textovou analýzu básní, které Auden v tomto období napsal a které odkazují na Alston Moor, Island a Anglii. Rozbor se soustředí na způsob, jakým Auden s místy nakládá, jak jeho přístup zrcadlí postoje a propozice humanistických geografů a jaké pojetí těchto základních pilířů své mytické geografie do poezie vepisuje. Důraz je kladen na míru, s jakou Audenovy básně odrážejí jeho proklamovanou topofilickou spjatost s těmito místy a do jaké míry je jeho poezie „verbální oslavou" jejich jedinečnosti, a v případě Alston Mooru a Islandu, posvátnosti. Pozornost je věnována míře a způsobům, jakými Audenovo meziválečné hledání vlastního hlasu a jeho kultivace „vnitřního cenzora" na pozadí bouřlivého estetického kontextu a napjaté společenské situace podtrhují či upravují pojetí těchto míst. Textová analýza básní postupuje převážně chronologicky. Výhoda tohoto přístupu je, že umožňuje vyzdvihnout konstantní a proměnlivé aspekty Audenovy poetiky.

Kapitola čtvrtá se věnuje Audenově přístupu k jeho posvátné oblasti Alston Moor v nejranější poezii z let 1927 až 1930. Začíná detailní analýzou stěžejní básně „Who stands, the crux left of the watershed" (1927), která kromě zřejmého odkazu na tamní vesnici Cashwell reaguje i na tragickou místní událost z roku 1919, kdy Auden oblast navštívil. Přístup k tomuto časoprostorovému uzlu je srovnáván s dalšími básněmi z tohoto období, ve kterých Auden využil jiných konkrétních topografických detailů z tohoto regionu i generické, neumístitelné krajiny. Kapitola pátá se věnuje básnickému zobrazení Anglie v básních z let 1930 až 1938, což je období, kdy se Auden vrátil do své vlasti, začal pracovat jako učitel a filmař. Hlavně však se svou první, ale i dalšími sbírkami vstoupil na britskou meziválečnou literární scénu. Kapitola klade důraz na dopad, který tato transformace ze „soukromé" do „veřejné" osoby měla na jeho poezii a práci s místem. Výchozím zjištěním je, že Auden rozšířil svůj geografický horizont: namísto oblasti Alston Moor, začal psát o různých jiných regionech Anglie a o zemi jako celku, a to v kontextu s Evropou. Kapitola analyzuje důsledky této expanze. Zaměřuje se na to, jak Auden nakládá s jejím ostrovním rázem, který je v próze základním faktorem zabezpečujícím a chránícím místní krajinnou i kulturní specifičnost a zároveň představuje hlavní spouštěcí impuls jeho vlastenecké identifikace. Kapitola šestá se zaměřuje na Audenovy básně vložené do cestopisu *Dopisy z Islandu* (*Letters from Iceland*, 1937), do kterého přispěl i jeho spolucestovatel a přítel Louis MacNeice. Sekce začíná krátkým pojednáním o zájmu meziválečné generace o textovou a filmovou dokumentaristiku a reportáž, tedy nové formy zobrazování společenské skutečnosti a místní jedinečnosti. Upozorňuje na Audenův vlastní počin v této oblasti během práce pro štáb dokumentárního filmu G.P.O. (General Post Office) krátce před odjezdem na Island a na jeho kritické nadšení tímto formátem pro schopnost zachytit množství realistických detailů. To Auden oceňoval primárně při své kritice abstraktního umění a modernistického odklonu od meziválečné reality

směrem ke zidealizovaným představám o dávných dobách. Kapitola ve své úvodní části nabízí i stručnou charakteristiku cestopisu. Poukazuje na jeho velmi rozličné formy umožňující odosobněný „klasicistní“ popis vnější krajinné, kulturní a sociální specifičnosti dané lokality na straně jedné a „romantické“ cestopisy charakteristické subjektivní internalizací vnějšího světa na straně druhé. Kapitola zjišťuje, do jaké míry Auden využil své zkušenosti s dokumentaristikou, osobní návštěvy a pestrosti cestopisného žánru pro vykreslení místní specifičnosti a posvátnosti. Meziválečná oblíbenost dokumentárního stylu v próze a formální rozmanitost cestopisů, zejména Audenova volba dopisové formy, mu totiž poskytly prostor jak pro stvrzení svých subjektivních představ o Islandu jako posvátném místě, tak i pro vyzdvižení jeho ostrovní fyziognomické a kulturní ojedinělosti. To jsou totiž atributy zachycené v jeho próze, která Island vykresluje nejen jako magické a svaté místo, ale i jako specifický a ohraničený celek hierarchicky nadřazený ostatním, zvláště pak homogenizované Evropě.

Analýza poezie v kapitole čtvrté až šesté podává celou řadu dílčích zjištění, ze kterých jsou vyvozeny následující závěry. V nejobecnější rovině na povrch vystupují proteovská povaha Audenova hlasu a zásadní rozpor a napětí mezi jeho pojímáním stejných míst v próze a poezii. Toto systematické rozvětvení jeho imaginace je chápáno jako důsledek působení „vnitřního cenzora“. Ten totiž mezi válkami velmi citlivě reagoval na specifika různých žánrů a uměleckých forem v otázkách estetického a společenského rázu, zejména těch, které se dotýkaly schopnosti prózy a poezie zachytit topografickou konkrétnost a jejich vhodnosti pro exponování osobních mýtů na veřejnosti.

Ve svých esejích Auden bez výjimky ilustruje postoje humanistické geografie co se týče základních vzorců lidské prostorové zkušenosti a pojímání prostředí. Island a Alston Moor byla pro Audena místa vně jeho žitého prostoru a přímé zkušenosti, které v důsledku znal primárně na základě představivosti a četby. Jak první kapitola ukazuje, taková místa tvoří základ individuálních a skupinových mytických geografií, ve kterých jsou tato idealizována a hierarchicky nadřazována ostatním. Do Audenovy prózy se takové zidealizované představy jasně a bez výjimek promítají. S Islandem a oblastí Alston Moor spojuje superlativní hodnoty a významy, čímž je pojímá jako celky s hranicí, která označuje a chrání jejich specifičnost a identitu. Dává průchod topofilickým sentimentům, blahořečí místní charakteristické atributy a vyzdvihuje tím jejich statut posvátných předmětů. Svou domovskou vlast pojímá s důrazem na topografickou a hlavně kulturní unikátnost a jedinečnost, tedy způsobem obecně platným pro místní obyvatele. V jeho případě se tento postoj zakládá na ostrovní odtrženosti Anglie od Evropy, ze které čerpá důvody pro důraz na místní specifičnosti a zároveň zdroj jeho národní identifikace s rodnou vlastí.

Analýza poezie však odhaluje diametrální odklon od pojetí všech třech míst v próze a zároveň negaci propozic humanistické geografie. Tento odlišný přístup je způsoben

estetickými preferencemi autora a jeho důrazem na společenskou roli poezie. Práce ukazuje, že Audenův „vnitřní cenzor“ bez výjimky lpí na potlačení topofilických sentimentů a smazání rysů, které by zdůraznily odlišnost těchto celků od vnějšího prostoru a jejich hierarchickou nadřazenost. To prokazuje přítomnost zcela odlišného druhu imaginace působící na způsob jejich reprezentace. Auden různými způsoby systematicky dekonstruuje odlišnost oblasti Alston Moor, Islandu a Anglie od okolí, nivelizuje je s ním, čímž popírá nejen výjimečnost těchto míst, ale i jejich nejvyšší hierarchický statut ve své mytické geografii. Tím však potlačuje ideovou a materiální hranici, tedy naprosto základní atribut konceptu místa.

Nejvýraznějším projevem takového pojímání je, že Auden umisťuje poetické hlasy básní do vyvýšených kopcovitých bodů a v úvodních verších obvykle věnuje pozornost místní krajině a topografickým detailům. Ty však využívá pouze jako odrazový můstek pro lokálně či časově nespecifická témata dominující zbylým veršům, kde odhlíží od (časo)prostorových uzlů a místních témat. Již od prvních zralých básní z roku 1927 Auden vykazuje neutuchající snahu abstrahovat od fyziognomické specifičnosti tím, že konkrétní topografické detaily a krajinu transformuje do lokálně nespecifických krajinných typů, tedy do univerzálních generických obrazů, a dokonce metafor pro naprosto obecné, místně a ve velké míře dějinně nespecifické abstraktní jevy. Jedním z hlavních rysů Audenova přístupu k Alston Mooru a Islandu je například opakovaná redukce jejich konkrétnosti na krajinné typy „příroda“ *vs.* „polidštěná krajina“ (*humanized landscape*). Tento tradiční dialektický pár mu totiž poskytuje prostor pro úvahy o obecné a lidstvu společné nevymanitelnosti z historického času a bytí, a zároveň pro vybudování kontrastu s nenabytelností životadárné cykličnosti a organicky jednotné existence v přírodě. Během třicátých let Auden téměř bez výjimky inklinoval k této binární opozici se záměrem vyslovit stejně obecnou kritiku meziválečného romantického „útěkářství“ do přírody či osamocenosti. Terčem se mu staly tehdy populární masová turistika i Baden-Powellovo pojetí skautství jako aktivity vedoucí k purifikaci člověka v „morálnějším“ přírodním prostředí.

V jiných básních Auden neabstrahuje od materiálnosti. Důležitost místní specifičnosti však potlačuje tím, že boří ostrovní ráz Islandu a Anglie a syntetizuje je s okolím. Velmi často totiž poukazuje na jejich historickou i současnou provázanost s Evropou (např. normanský zábor Anglie či přítomnost fašismu, jazzu a jiných prvků soudobé kosmopolitní kultury na Islandu). Specifická místa ho nepřitahují svou jedinečností. Ba naopak, zajímají ho jako zdroje synekdochických a konkrétních projevů prostorově i časově obecnějších jevů. Na rozdíl od prózy, kde se Auden profiluje jako Angličan, v poezii využívá hlavně zobecněného „my“ (*we*). Dokonce i v básních, které během třicátých let nabraly více osobní povahy díky zvýšenému užití první osoby jednotného čísla, je Audenův hlas národně neukotvený, kosmopolitní a promlouvající ve jménu celého lidstva.

Odstraňování hranice, která v próze odlišuje Alston Moor a Island od okolí, má však i další důvody a dopady na jejich pojetí v poezii. Tím, že do pilířů své mytické geografie zanáší jevy z profánního prostoru, tato hierarchicky nadřazená centra nivelizuje, znesvěcuje a popírá jejich posvátný statut. Snaha horníků pokoušejících se obnovit nefunkční a rezivějící stroje v údolní vesnici Cashwell v Alston Moor z tohoto místa činí krajinu krize a utrpení, nikoliv posvátnosti. V jednotlivých básních o Islandu Auden obvykle začíná vykreslením místního prostředí a krajiny s důrazem na zeměpisnou autonomii. Vžívá se tak do pocitů přijíždějících cizinců, kteří z geografické oddělenosti ostrova těží představu o schopnosti nalézt v jeho útrobách ideální, přírodní a neposkvrněné léčivé útočiště pro útěk z evropských domovů zmítaných meziválečnou krizí. Auden však tyto kroky podniká proto, aby takové útěky a pojetí místa systematicky bořil. Odhaluje jejich falešnost, čímž demytologizuje a hroutí zromantizované představy o ideálním vzdáleném Islandu. Takový postup je zjevný i v zobrazování přístupu Islanďanů ke své vlasti. Místní rybáři a rolníci se utěšují tím, že je jejich ostrov ochrání a postará se o živobytí, čímž zajistí zachování rodu. Podobně i Angličané zahálející na pláži v Doveru („Dover“, 1937) konstruují svůj rodný ostrov a bílé útesy jako ochranné štíty a krunýře proti nelichotivému vývoji na kontinentu. Auden však tyto představy vykresluje jako naivní, vykonstruované a sebeklamné mýty vyúsťující z nespokojenosti s aktuální existenční situací. Zároveň jsou pro něho projevem neochoty jednotlivců a skupin stát se aktivními tvůrci vlastních životů, dějinných změn a společenské situace. Auden tyto izolacionistické postoje i mýty napadá a boří především proto, že je vnímá jako společensky nezodpovědné projevy „útěkářství“ na ostrovy, do přírody, samoty a jiných forem „věží ze slonoviny“, tedy od nedokonalé aktuálnosti za lepším, v případě Islandu ozdravným prostředím, naplňujícím jejich představy o ideálním místě a existenci. V několika básních v *Dopisech z Islandu* se pak Auden zabývá obecnou schopností poezie zachytit místní topografický detail a krajinnou specifičnost. Analýza těchto metapoetických úvah napomáhá chápat Audenovu poetiku místa a formální zásady, které rozpor mezi poezií a prózou způsobují.

Auden často proklamoval celoživotní respekt k tzv. lokálním a topofilickým básníkům schopným verbálně velebit konkrétní místa a tím vykreslovat jejich jedinečnost. Opakovaně opěvoval místa, krajiny a kultury uchovávající si svou topografickou zvláštnost a místní identitu, a zároveň kritizoval globalizační procesy smazávající tyto rysy. I přesto však Auden ve své poezii naprosto systematicky potlačuje topofilické sentimenty, znesvěcuje posvátnost svých ideálních míst, transformuje krajinu oblasti Alston Moor, Islandu a Anglie do lokálně nespecifických a od okolí neodlišitelných krajinných typů. Soustředí se na ty atributy, které nepřispívají k vyzdvižení místní specifičnosti, ale naopak spájejí různá místa do celku, čímž jsou setřeny rozlišovací hranice a jakékoliv lokální odlišnosti. Celkově Auden odhlíží od konkrétních topografických detailů, čímž prodlužuje dlouhou trajektorii topografické poezie.

Spíše než na krajinu se navíc upíná na ty krajinné prvky, které mu umožňují najít spojnici mezi různými místy, kulturami a historicky neměnnými, univerzálními, sdílenými humanistickými problémy, čímž se v zásadě přibližuje ke klasicistním estetickým ideálům a tradici. Audenova averze vůči individuálním a kolektivním mýtům a subjektivně zidealizovaným představám o místech a krajinách tak vrhá světlo na důvody pro absenci jeho vlastní mytické geografie v poezii. Tam se totiž projevuje „vnitřní cenzor" lpící na potlačení a skrytí subjektivních představ, topofilie, pojetí místa a mytické geografie. Audenova imaginace a meziválečná poetika místa tedy spočívají v zastírání jeho představ, čímž velmi silně inklinují ke klasicistní estetice a k jejímu znovuobjevení v eliotovském důrazu na odosobnění.

J. Hillis Miller napsal: „Krajina není nikdy předem dána. Existuje jen ten či onen způsob jejího mapování," přičemž „mapování" není myšleno v úzkém smyslu kartografickém, nýbrž jako verbální, vizuální či jiná forma „textualizace" vnějšího hmotného světa. Různorodé a protichůdné zobrazování oblasti Alston Moor, Anglie a Islandu charakterizované v této práci nedokládá pouze tuto tezi a nevyhnutelnou subjektivitu v pojímání prostoru. Primárně ilustruje jak Audenovo citlivé vnímání složité meziválečné společenské a estetické situace ovlivnilo jeho vnitřního cenzora a poetiku míst, a tím i jejich zobrazení. Krátce před svou emigrací do USA napsal báseň „The Composer", ve které povyšuje skladatele a hudebníky nad stoupence mimetických forem, jelikož oni jediní nemusí „překládat /…/ život do umění skrze bolestivou adaptaci." Práce se tedy snaží osvětlit principy a poetiku Audenova „překládání" jeho svatých a jedinečných míst do uměleckého díla. Ukázat, jak se do tohoto procesu a vztahu mezi lidským subjektem, umělcem, prostředím, pojetím a poetikou místa vměstnávají formální, estetické a etické preference či zásady v takové míře, že se jejich podoba v Audenově próze a poezii soustavně a diametrálně liší.

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