

(b) Introduction and Appreciation—Critical Summary

Introduction

Petition was first published in the *Poems 1930* and was the last poem in that collection. It was suitably placed at the end of the volume, for it is a transitional poem, a poem which marks the end of Auden's 'Psychological phase' and the beginning of his 'Marxist phase'. The prayer in it is both political and psychological. It should also be mentioned in the very beginning that Auden did not include this fine sonnet in the *Collected Shorter Poems*, 1950. He explained his reasons for omitting it in the preface to the 1966 edition. He writes, "I once expressed a desire for 'New styles of architecture', but I have never liked modern architecture. I prefer old styles, and one must be honest even about one's prejudices. Since the line 'New styles of architecture, a change of heart' suggests far more in the poem's context than being a fan of Gropius or whatever, this explanation seems a little disingenuous." However as it may be, says John Fuller, the poem is "One of the most chronologically diagnostic of Auden's poems. It is typical of Auden's early poetry, both in its matter and manner."

Development of Thought

The poem opens abruptly and ambiguously in the manner both of Hopkins and Rilke. 'Sir' to whom the sonnet is addressed may be either God, the Supreme, or the spirit of Homer Lane or of John Layard, spoken of as Supreme Healers. Instead of praying to this Supreme Being, Auden seems all the time to be instructing Him, and hence some critics suggest that '*Instruction*' would be a more appropriate title for the poem.

The poet begins in the manner of a conventional prayer by praising this 'sir', this Supreme Being. He is the enemy of none and he forgives all. He is the very embodiment of the Christian virtues of love and charity. He forgives all the sins of mankind except one. That sin is the negation of the divine will, resulting from man's pride in his own intellect and powers of reasoning which suppress the instincts and emotions. This is no doubt a heinous sin, but the poet prays to the supreme to be prodigal of his generosity and forgive even this deadly sin.

Next, he prays to this Supreme Being or Supreme Healer to bless them with the power to resist, presumably, 'the negation of the will' and give them knowledge and wisdom enough to avoid the various psychological ills from which they suffer at present. He should bestow upon them some sovereign remedy which, like the magic touch of the Stuart sovereigns of England, will cure their nervous disorders which result from their mother-fixation or excessive desire for motherly protection, the sore-throat caused by lying, and the diseases and maladjustments like cancer and tumours caused by the suppression of sexual desire in virgins. The Supreme Healer should prevent the suppression of emotions and the consequent purely intellectual and distorted response to life. People with such repressed emotions are cowards.

They are unable to face life, and seek escape from it in various ways. Such distorted responses to life must be corrected. Such cowards should be located as with the bright light of a search light. They should be compelled to turn away from their escape world and face life. This change in emotional responses is difficult to bring about, but the poet prays to the Supreme to do it for the good of humanity. It should be noted that the entire passage presupposes a knowledge of the theories of Homer Lane and John Layard, and therefore, creates difficulties for readers unfamiliar with these doctrines. Auden has used the slang word '*spotted*' instead of '*located*' to startle the readers and capture their attention. The Supreme Healer or the Supreme Being is being compared to a watchman with a powerful torch in his hands, with which he is to 'locate' those "in retreat".

In the end, Auden prays to the Supreme to make known to the world all the Healers who might be living at the time in cities or villages, so that their services may be utilised for the cure of a psychologically ill humanity. He should destroy the old and decayed social order, so that in its place may be built up a new social order. He should also bring about 'change of heart' by correcting the responses of the modern man. Thus Auden's prayer is both for a change of the social order and a change of the human heart. This shows that '*Petition*' is a transitional poem marking the end of Auden's "psychological phase" and the beginning of his "Marxist Phase".

Conclusion

Petition is a Rilkean sonnet and as such it does not follow the conventional sonnet divisions into either (a) Octave and Sestet or (b) Three Quatrains and a couplet. On the contrary, it is divided into seven couplets in which assonance rather than rhyme has been used. Despite the use of psychological terminology, the Sonnet is largely free from the usual obscurity of Auden's poetry of the 1930's.

Composed like them.....of dust—the poet also is made of the same common dust as the common people, and also like them craves for Eros or 'to be loved alone'. He is also guilty of self-love.

Beleagured—Tortured, suffering from. Negation and despair—death-wish, rejection of spiritual values, which causes despair.

Show an affirming flame—Give to the world a message of hope, that 'Agape' or universal love can save it from disaster. This is Auden's affirmation of faith in the teaching of Christ.

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'September 1, 1939', was first published in *New Republic*, October, 1939, and its the date of Hitler's invasion of Poland which sent a wave of horror through Europe. Auden did not include it in his *Collected Shorter Poems, 1950*, for he was not satisfied with the line, "We must love one another or die" which concludes the 9th stanza. Explaining his reasons for finally rejecting this fine lyric Auden himself writes.

"Rereading a poem of mine, *Ist September, 1939*, after it had been published, I came to the line "We must love one another or die" and said to myself: That's a damned lie: We must die anyway." So, in the next edition, I altered it to 'We must love one another and die', This didn't seem to do either, so I cut the stanza. Still no good. The whole poem, I realized, was infected with an incurable dishonesty and must be scrapped.

A Topical Piece

The lyric is a topical piece, a political elegy after the manner of Yeats's *Easter, 1916*. It reflects vividly the mood of Europe on the eve of the outbreak of the World War II. For many left-wing poets the 1930's had been a period of uncertainty, in which dreams of the death of the 'old gang' and the revolutionary transformation of society had gradually been changed into the nightmare of a resurgence of right wing power. It had emerged victorious in Spain, and then in 1939 the combined forces of Germany, Japan and Italy must have appeared to many to signal the proof of their worst fears. The poem affords us some evidence of his state of mind as he sat in 'one of the dives/ *On Fifty-second street*' and pondered over the meaning of the latest world disaster with its 'unmentionable odour of death'.

The Contemporary Scene

The short lines of laconic comment, often in colloquial style, but emphatic in rhythm, are very like the later poems of Yeats, and this adds to the impression that Auden is surveying with assurance the recent history of Europe, analysing the causes of the war and asserting what his own attitude to the future will be. He begins by branding the thirties, as a low dishonest decade and his explanation of why Germany has adopted Hitler as its

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 'Psychopathic god' is a blend of Freudian, Marxist and Christian ideas. Auden is not explicit enough and tends to throw curt reference at us with insufficient explication. He mentions 'Luther', presumably as the symbol of the subjection of Church to State Power. He alludes to *What occurred at Linz*, without telling us that this is where Hitler went to an Austrian invasion. These shorthand-notes are not really expanded enough to enable us to agree with his conclusion that.

*These to whom evil is done
 Do evil in return*

This might refer only to the German nation's reactions to Lutherism, or to Hitler's reaction to his schooling, or possibly to the current belief of the Thirties that Nazism was a product of a revengeful *Versailles Treaty* after the First World War. Whatever the value of Auden's ideas, we note that he is still indebted to Freudian psychology for his analysis of Hitler's school-induced psychopathic state, and to social historians for his conception of 'Statism' which has 'driven a culture mad'. As in his earlier poems the maladies of individuals and of state-capitalism are seen as inter-connected.

Maladies of the Modern Age

Auden's views remain Marxist enough to discover similar ladies in the American capitalist system, and his vocabulary still includes the terms 'imperialism' and 'competitive', though it is significant that his lines on 'Collective Man' voice fears rather than left-wing confidence (For Auden an American Sky-scraper symbolises Collective Man rather than collective Capitalists). The New York bar; with its incessant music and electric lights, symbolises man's retreat from his true metaphysical state, which is likened to being,

*Lost in a haunted wood
 Children afraid of the night
 Who have never been happy or good.*

This diagnosis of the human condition, as exhibited in the New York dive, seems to jump rather too eagerly to the general conclusion that a bar-room is symptomatic of the world at large, and in the next stanza Auden restates an old conviction of his that self-love is 'true of the normal heart':

*For the error bred in the bone
 Of each woman and each man
 Craves what it cannot have,
 Not universal love
 But to be loved alone.*

Concept of love

In earlier poems Auden had tried to define the nature of love. Sometimes he seemed to think of *Eros*, of Freudian libido, as a liberating force, though he saw it also acting as destructive self-love when frustrated. Gradually Auden

came to think of true love as *Agape*, the Christian idea of divine love, or love for others. "I don't, think that a study of Auden's poems reveals absolutely clear concepts of love. Self-love. Eros, Agape seem, too much like ready-made concepts imported into poems, rather than conclusions arrived at by the poet after due examination of human behaviour. But it seems safe to say that Auden's initial 'Freudian' exultation in sexual love as a means of freeing the individual from bourgeois chains gave way to a suspicion that this was only self-love in a new guise. And thus in the next stanza he is able to accuse romantic and sexual escapism, as well as political authoritarianism, of being lies. The poem ends in massive despair illuminated by a few sparks of hope."

Ambiguity and Vagueness

"One notes that there is no reference to the role of mass movements or even groups of people. It looks as though 'the Just are composed of isolated individuals who can do little more than exchange messages: One can sympathise with the mood of 'Negation and despair', and most people react favourable, I suppose so he cautions optimism. Opinions will differ as to who the 'just' are, and how helpful their messages will prove without popular support of some kind. Since Auden has already exposed the lies or weaknesses of Luther, Hitler, Germans, Collective Man, Imperialism, commuters, governors, bar-habitués, man-in-street, Authority' State citizens and police, one does rather wonder who is left to compose the just. In earlier poems he had seemingly condemned bourgeois society whole sale, as neurotic and socially sterile, pinning his hopes however, on progressive forces. Now the condemned is even more widespread: it is Man himself (including Auden) who is composed of 'Eros and of dust'. The division into the 'Old gang and those who in Spain', supported the 'Struggle' has disappeared. A possible way out of *this impasse* would be a faith in good people, good causes and good movements, wherever they exist, within or outside any particular system. I cannot see that 'the Just' implies such a faith. At all events the word itself, in its present context, remains vague".

Intendant Caesars—Those who want to be great and powerful like the Caesars of Rome, listen to the call and go away.

Fetched—Attracted, called away.

Older, Colder Voice—the call of the ocean, which has always fascinated the adventurous.

Stanza 4: They were right..... is a limestone landscape

Nor its peace.....once and for all—in this world nothing is settled or fixed. There is no peace or certainty. This is the lesson of history.

A back-ward.....province—The present civilisation, stagnating and backward, is now in ruins.

Connected to.....by a tunnel—the tunnel is the tunnel of time which connects the present with the past.

*Seedy appeal.....*Shabby—looking and unwholesome.

Habit of calling.....Puzzle—for his stark realism which calls a spade a spade

His anti-mythological myth—a myth formed out of the realities of life, and not out of the imaginary doings of gods and goddesses.

Gamins—University students, rowdy and indisciplined.

Colonnade—A path between trees or a gallery. *Rebuke*—Criticise him for.

To resemble.....themselves—because he does not behave like the beasts who always act in the same manner, and so his ways cannot be predicted like those of the beasts.

These modifications of matter.....fountains—the reference is to the various shapes which limestone can easily assume

Make a further point—These limestone shapes stress the truth that.

But when I try to imagine.....limestone landscape—Human nature is weak and inconstant, and so to think of perfection or a life to come is as fantastic and unreal as the various shapes assumed by lime in a limestone landscape. One should accept the reality of life and face it, and not run after empty dreams, the escape provided by religion or romantic love.

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'*In Praise of Limestone*', first appeared in *Horizon*, July 1948, and subsequently in the volume *Nones* (1962). G.S. Fraser (in his essay, '*The Career of W.H. Auden*') has called it 'One of the most beautiful of all his recent poems' and Barbara Everett similarly extols it. As she says in her *Books, Auden*, the triumph of Auden's later style, "lies in the leisurely,

apparently casual, but in fact deliberate, winding movement towards a quiet climax that is half-denied by, but half-resists, the profusion of circumstantial detail that precedes it." Because of the very nature of the style and the leisurely devices, is in full. In an almost languid, conversational manner Auden describes the Geology of an area for which 'we the inconstant ones' are homesick:

Mark these rounded slopes

With their surface fragrance of thyme and beneath

A secret system of caves and conduits: hear these springs

That spurt out everywhere with a chuckle

Each filling a private pool for its fish and Carving

Its own little ravine whose cliffs entertain

The butterfly and the lizard.....

Symbolic Landscape—Interpretation

Into those sober passages Auden injects, however, some disconcerting thoughts. This landscape, described above, is unexpectedly compared to human beings:

What could be more like Mother or a fitter background

For her son, for the nude young male who lounges

Against a rock, displaying his dildo, never doubting

That for all his faults he is loved.....

Auden is really using Nature as a metaphor for Man. 'The convolutions of the landscape' represent the people who 'become a pimp Or deal in fake jewellery or ruin a fine tenor voice', the granite suggests the hard ascetic life from which 'Saints to be/slipped away sighing', and the clays and gravels offer themselves as plains on which armies can drill. In this oblique, original and amusing way, Auden tells us about the nature of man by apparently giving us a geology lesson. Finally, on a personal and religious note, the poem reaches a quiet, but moving climax, by speaking of love and a future existence in terms of such seemingly prosaic things as water rocks.

Four Ways of Responding to Life

According to Justin Raplogle the fine lyric "*In Praise of Limestone*". within its elaborate metaphorical landscape, considers four ways of responding in life. Limestone men live solely for pleasure. Their tribe spreads all the way from unsophisticated, simple living, unspoiled in the natural state, Rousseau dreamed of, to aesthetes in high civilizations graced by "Conspicuous fountains" and "formal vineyards". Unable to imagine anything beyond their control, these attractive limestone types can experience neither Religious despair and joy nor Ethical good and evil. They are Aesthetic men, incapable of becoming either saints or Caesars. Saints live elsewhere, on "granite wastes", while Intendant Caesars prefer "clays and gravels". Saints are obsessed by time, death, chance, and the uncertainties

beyond human control. So they soon flee the limestone softness for a harder land where every austere rock reminds them of human pettiness and limitation. Caesars, like their limestone cousins, cherish earthly existence, but not for its pleasures. They thrive on power, and act to transform the earth, to control it, make it yield. So they seek out malleable builder's soil, gravel and clay. A "really reckless" fourth group prefers the ocean, in whose vast liquidity human aspirations sink without a trace. The sea offers freedom by annihilation and guarantees that no human triumph shall mar its indifference to men's efforts. Those who prefer this freedom, the freedom of life-denial, are so completely uncongenial to Auden that he never mentions them again, even to disapprove.

Under the eye of God all four of these responses to life are wrong and their devotees equally sinful, but with this briefly acknowledged, the poem goes on to evaluate them from the point of view of an ordinary mortal. From this position, the poet admits to a special affection for limestone men and indicates no personal affinity at all for Caesars and Saints. Whatever their considerable shortcomings, limestone men are at least ethically harmless, unlike their cousins, the Caesars. In his fond moments, in fact, the poet imagines the limestone world to be a model of paradise, wistfully longed for by men like himself, happily certain that their wish to be innocent can never be granted.

Incongruous Diction: Its Comic Effects

"*In Praise of Limestone*," is one of Auden's comic masterpieces. It is a complex collection of incongruities, many of them subtle and delicate and unobtrusive in this mildly funny poem. Formal, oratorical syntax and pastoral subject may lead the new reader innocently forward for as much as half a dozen lines before the incongruity becomes apparent. The correct nicety of the subjunctive opening ("If it.....for"), the old-fashioned gentility of "*Mark Cuddy and Hobbinall: all this becomes highly suspect with the unlikely appearance of "spurt" and "Chuckle". In this green and proper verbal landscape springs might decorously "flow", "bubble", or even "laugh", but hardly "spurt", or "Chuckle". Though a species of flowing, "spurt" belongs to a usags world of awkward ejaculations, fingers on nozzles, severed arteries, and "chuckle" (though a kind of laughter), belongs to a usage neighbourhood of non-pastoral heartiness, coarse pleasures, crude delight. From here on, of course, the mild suspicion of purposeful usage dissonance becomes a fact. The genteel form, style, and subject turn mock beneath the course subjects ("displaying his dildo") and Rabelesian style ("a clever line/Or a good lay"). As the poem unfolds, the texture of incongruities becomes particularly complex and skilful. "Whatever their original soberness, jumbled together in "*In Praise of Limestone*" all the unlike usages become mildly absurd, and they are the very verbal stuff of the entire poem. There is a constant, persistent, inveterate leap from level in nearly every line. The result is a*

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The Elegy was written in September 1939 to mourn the death of Sigmund Freud, the noted Psycho-analyst who considerably influenced Auden, and changed the thinking of the entire contemporary world. His theories of sexual repression, "Oedipus Complex", had far-reaching influence. Psychiatrists all over the world to day take into account his teachings.

An "Elegy is a song of mourning. It expresses the grief of the poet over the death of some relative, friend or acquaintance or that of some prominent personality. As a writer of elegies, Auden is entirely unconventional. He has not used the pastoral conventional as did Milton, Shelley and others, nor there is any over-glorification of the dead. Auden's approach is realistic. Thus Freud "wasn't clever at all," he merely taught, "The unhappy present to recite the past". Then follows a realistic appraisal of his teachings, his contribution, and the good that he did.

According to Dennis Davison, "*In Memory of Sigmund Freud*, published in *Kenyan Review* in 1940, is of special interest because of Auden's known use of Freudian ideas. Auden admits that Freud was often 'wrong and at times absurd' but it is more obvious now that this 'important Jew who died in exile' is no longer a mere person but a whole climate of opinion. A central passage describes Freudian therapy as basically simple—the recalling of the past and the recognition of tiny events which have led to present unhappiness:

*He wasn't clever at all: he merely taught
The unhappy Present to recite the Past
Like a poetry lesson till sooner
Or later it faltered at the line where
Long ago the accusations had begun,
And suddenly knew by whom it had been judged.
How rich life had been and how silly,
And was life forgiven and more humble....*

And so we all live, thanks to Freud, in a world he changed simply by looking back with no false regrets.....Auden still sees Freud as a revolutionary force, whose 'technique of unsettlement' has attacked the "ancient cultures of conceit" and caused the collapse of their, "lucrative pattern of frustration". Freud is, therefore, seen as the enemy of the 'Generalised Life'; the 'monolith of State' and the 'co-operation of avengers'. In other words, Auden believes that the influence of Freud on man and society counteracts some of the huge defects in our civilisation. This leads him to describe evil, which is not,

*Deeds that must be punished, but our lack of faith,
our dishonest mood of denial.
The concupiscence of the aggressor.*

It is rather curious that Freudism, usually regarded as atheistic, should encourage a disgnosis of evil in such religious or moral terms—'lack of faith', 'dishonest' and 'concupiscence'. One would think Auden were speaking of Saint Sigmund rather than Dr. Freud.

Optimistically, Auden claims that Freud's pervading influence will help us all. Tired people have felt the change in their bones and are cheered, the anxious child feels calmer now and somehow assured of escape and in particular Freud would have us remember most of all to be enthusiastic over the night, not only for the sense of wonder which it offers but also because it needs our love.'

In general Freud undermined the traditional assumptions of the dominance of free will and reason in man by arguing that we are 'lived' by unknown and uncontrollable forces in the Id, that there is no such thing as psychological freedom, an idea obviously parallel to the Marxist idea of our being determined by the forces of history and economics. That being so, it follows that one should be both more ruthless and less censorious, for those in the wrong are neither blameable nor fundamentally changeable. Again, Freud casts doubts on the objectivity and accuracy of perception, and, of course, on traditional concepts of heroism and selfless goodness, by suggesting the constant presence of unconscious bias and motive. Above all, Freud shocked the older generation by making the sexual drive as all important as Marx made economics.

In particular, Freud's evidence that God was a rationalised projection of the small child's experience of the father was a further blow to religion, his attribution of sexuality to infants, a blow to sentimentality, his argument for a deeply underlying death-wish a blow to confidence. All grist to Auden's mill in the Thirties. His splendid tribute to Freud on his death in 1939 concludes:

*One rational voice is dumb. Over his grave
The household of impulse mourns one deeply loved.
Sad is Eros, builder of cities,
And weeping anarchic Aphrodite.*

The same poem, however, indicates why Freud should later ^{frap} be found to be assimilable to Auden's later liberalism and Christianity. (The positive side to Freud's influence was the vast extension of charity, tolerance, sympathy, understanding and life-enhancement. In spite of the suggestion that religion is the propaganda arm of the Establishment (Of course they called on God) it is evident that a certain near-religious element was latent in the 'English Auden. Freud is approved as a saviour, humbleness is approved, and evil is associated with lack of faith (admittedly as yet with a small 'f').) The obvious approval of breaking the monolith of state, too, points to the future as well as tending to confirm Auden's statement that the attraction of communism was partly based on Marx's remark in passing that the State would eventually wither away under communism. —(Allan Rodway)

According to Stan Smith Auden argues, "that the delectable creatures of the unconscious are exiles who long for the future that lies in our power and that they too would rejoice if allowed to serve enlightenment like him. How we respond to these excluded, the injured who lead the ugly life of the rejected whether we acknowledge them as our own or continue to deny them, will determine whether we can overcome evil or not. For seen in the right way, evil is not "deeds that must be punished", but our lack of faith, our dishonest mood of denial, "the concupiscence of the oppressor."

Technically the poem is uneven, the winding thread of argument is often stretched to near breaking point or gets lost among the over-abstract language (e.g. *our life from whose unruliness. So many plausible young futures with threats or flattery ask obedience...*) On the other hand the deliberately simple tone (e.g. *the tyrant tries to make do with him but doesn't care for him much*) varies in effect from memorable statement to chatty emptiness. Nevertheless Auden is dealing with an important theme and is attempting the difficult feat of celebrating and commenting upon a whole thought system, without becoming pedantically erudite in a poem which is, after all, an elegy.

26. OUR HUNTING FATHERS

(a) Annotations and Explanations

Stanza 1

Told the story—Told the story of the animals, and thus passed on the tradition from one generation to another. It is the tradition communicated through language which governs the reactions and responses of those who listen to it.

Pitted—expressed regret for. *The lack*—the shortcomings, *Set in*—showed by; expressed.

Finished features—faces, as they were at the time.

Intolerant look—ferocious look. [*The quarry*—the animal who is chased and ultimately killed.]

Stanza 8

Rugged Urchin—not any handsome athlete, but a boy in tatters, shabby and awkward. *That vacancy*—the weed-choked field, the contemporary waste land.

A bird flew.....stone—this is symbolic of the cruelty and brutality of the modern age. This is contrasted with the healthy and harmless games of the ancient times.

That girls are.....a third—symbolic of the sex and violence so characteristic of the modern age.

Axioms—some well-known truth.

Him—the rugged urchin, symbolic of the contemporary waste lander.

Of any world.....another wept—the noble world of the past when people were truthful and sympathetic. These qualities are unknown in the modern age.

Stanza 9

Armourer—the maker of armour, the blacksmith. *Hephaestus*—the blacksmith of the gods, symbolic of artists in the past, as well as in the present.

Thatis—the goddess who in Greek mythology was supposed to be the mother of Achilles. Here she stands for the audience.

Who would not live long—who would slay others, but who would himself be slain by someone else. War is destructive, and none can escape falling a victim to it. This is the moral of the lyric and it reflects Auden's faith in Christian theology.

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"*The Shield of Achilles*" is the title poem in the volume. of poems entitled, *The Shield of Achilles*, published in 1955. Thus it is a very late poem in the career of Auden. The lyric is divided into three parts, and each part consists of three stanzas. Thus there are nine stanzas in all. In the first two parts, first stanza is in short lines, incantatory and sing-song, with frequent Homeric echoes; the next two stanzas are in longer lines, invariably Iambic Pentametre. In the third part, there is a slight difference. There is only one stanza—the second stanza—in Iambic Pentametre, the third stanza with which the lyric closes, again being incantatory and sing-song with Homeric echoes.

Use of Mythical Technique

In this lyric Auden has used the mythical technique popularised by T.S. Eliot, to make his comment on the modern condition. The mythical method

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consists in juxtaposing the past and the present, with the past serving as a comment, on the present. The past is contrasted with the present, the similarities between the two are stressed, and in this way some particular experience or situation is universalised. But the differences are also stressed and in this way the decadence and desolation of the contemporary world is symbolized art, image of the human condition. ".....the shield mock-heroic, contrasting the Homeric description to the life the modern artist audience), not the classical city, but the plain of modern life on which multitudes are ordered about by totalitarian rulers (a faceless voice reciting statistics through a loudspeaker). Instead of the "ritual pieties", we have barbed wire enclosing an "arbitrary spot" where there is a travesty of the crucifixion being performed by bureaucrats—while "ordinary decent folk" watch, in which helpless individuals are shamefully deprived of human dignity before death."

Development of Thought

^{Thatis} Thatis, the mother of Achilles, in Greek mythology, looks at the shield hung over the shoulders of her son. The shield of Achilles "was made by Hephaestus, the blacksmith of the gods, and on it the artist had carved beautiful scenes depicting orchards, well-governed cities with marble statues and calm seas with beautiful ship sailing on them. But quite different scenes are carved by the artist on a modern shield. There are scenes depicting the artificial and desolate life of the contemporary waste land. It depicts a vast plain, desolate, bleak and barren, without anything to eat, or a place for rest and shelter. This is the modern waste land, full of crowds, who like dumb-driven cattle are unable to think for themselves, and mechanically carry out the dictates of their leaders and rulers. They are men all hollow within. Their rulers have no personal contacts with them. They speak to them in an impersonal voice, over the radio, prove by statistics that their cause is just, and so persuade them to go to the war in which they are sure to be killed. It is a terrible indictment of dictators of to-day in their 'wooing poses'. The beautiful world of the past has been juxtaposed with the desolate and bleak modern-age, and in this way its hollowness has been commented upon.

In the second part, it is the religious decay and desolation in the modern age that is commented upon. On the Homeric shield, as on the Grecian Urn of Keats, were carved scenes of religious ritual, showing cows decorated with flowers, and wine and food being served in celebration of some ceremony. But on the modern shield are carved big concentration camps where pale prisoners of war are tied to the stake, and brutally shot dead. In the past also there was much cruelty. Christ was crucified, but the crucifixion was necessary for the regeneration and redemption of mankind. It was martyrdom. But the mass-killings in the modern age carry no such significance. They are merely a measure of the spiritual degeneration of the contemporary waste

landers, who helpless and spiritless, allow themselves to be treated and massacred like dumb driven cattle.

In the third part we are told that on the Homeric shield were carved pictures of athletes busy in their games, and men and women dancing rhythmically and sweetly. On the modern shield, on the other hand, there are no dancing floors or playgrounds but only 'weed-choked' fields. There are no sportsman but only 'rugged-urchin' callously throwing stones at birds, or girls being raped, or boys quarrelling among themselves and knifing each other. Life is brutal and beastly, entirely lacking in the sympathy, love and friendship which characterised life in the past. War and violence has always been there, but violence in the past was not soul-less or brutal as it is to-day. In the past there were heroic warriors, like Achilles, fighting for their religion, for their country, or for their beloveds; to day there are only "rugged-urchins, and senseless violence. The contemporary scene terrifies Thais, and the lyric ends as she goes away crying with dismay.

Conclusion

Thus by using the mythical technique Auden has telescoped whole ages of history within the compass of small lyric, and commented upon the spiritual decay and desolation in the modern age. In the words of Justin Rappole, "In *"The Shield of Achilles"* Auden tries something very rare for him, simplicity. The poet remains everywhere sober, but avoids both high elevation and the low conversational sobriety of meditative verse. He still declaims, but now with the dignity of simplicity:

*A crowd of ordinary decent folk
Watched from without and neither moved nor spoke
As three pale figures were led forth and bound.....*

He expresses emotion directly, with simplicity. For this Auden create a song-like style:

*Men and women in a dance
Moving their sweet limbs
Quick, quick, to music....."*