
HUMANITARIAN CONCERNS OF W.H. AUDEN

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Auden was a visionary poet. he studies human conditions with all its various facets in order to ameliorate them. the human situation as Audon viewed it was nothing short of disastrous he saw death-wish settling upon thousands of faces. People had lost touch with warm and fluidity of love which marks human beings distinct from other creations of all almighty. Audon`s time was markedly the time of frenzy, it was a time when war-mongers were making hay and the whole earth seemed to be gripped with the madness and vacillation of an unsteady storm-tossed vessel. It was a sick world, a demented world ,a world out of joint , a world where purblind men (reference Hitler and Mussolini)enacted hell in their midst and achieved a thwarted purposing. It was a world which seemed like a vast mental asylum. The concentration camps of Nazis showed how totally man had descended into the hells of bestiality and cruelty. Humanity and basic human values seemed to break to pieces and the ship of humanity all but dashed itself against the rocks of cruelty in the primordial seas of bestiality.

In such an atmosphere such a sensitive poet as Auden could not help getting stirred to the very roots of his being. He took upon himself the task of bridging the gulf that lay between the visioned future and the diseased present of mankind. Auden gave shape to the idea of a perfect man who could weep because another wept; a man capable of love which encompasses the whole of humanity. For such a change Auden felt that it was imperative to remove the sickness and the various ailment of society, physical or economical, social or psychological. Auden felt that Art has to be geared to the needs of time and for this very conviction he became a champion of social justice and began to emphasize the need for a revolution to bring about the necessary changes in the structure of society.

He had great sympathy for the lonely, the lost and the unhappy and so in his early phase he employed his knowledge of psychology for diagnosing their ailments and suggesting a cure. Later when he read Marx and Engels he began to suggest Marxism as a possible cure. But when Marxism began to seem inadequate he went back to `love` and became its ardent advocate, as he found it to have a great healing effect. This ultimately led him to adopt Christianity which based as it is on love, promised to be the panacea for all ills and evils.

Auden was a poet of hope. He believed that the present madness will not last; it is bound to give way to sanity. The reality of the universe was, according to Auden, not its actuality at any moment, but its possibility in every moment. Time, therefore, and space too, are not absolute; they are relative. Behind this relativity of time and space is the metaphysics that if our perception cohere at a point, we may get a vision of a unified world. So what in poetry of Auden, appears to be disintegrated presupposes integrated essence.

Deep below our violences,

Quite still, lie our 'First Dad'.....

("Bucolics")

Of course, there are degrees of unity, that an ordered society, for example, has more unity than a confused mob, as in "The Shield of Achilles", and then an organized body or a machine has more unity than in society- that is to say that there is more point in conceiving them as single thing, because there is more relation between the constituent parts. But in the end these unities receive their existence from thoughts and appearance, like colors and all other phenomena, which for all that are called real, Auden was dead against all superficial unities, imposed or ordered to certain purpose or design. Disintegration in that case is better than integration which has no substance. Auden was aware of two pitfalls- of disintegration and of hegemony. If he was against Hitler, he was equally against Marx. He had a vision of a genuine unity, wherein an individual is left to express his or her self. This expression will, Auden felt, be in harmony with the expression of other equally free and happy souls. In fact, the whole organic world is one genus, though species - animals and human being differ in degree. All kinds of distortion, therefore, arise from external modifications. Miss Gee could not be herself, and therefore got cancer. IN "THE WATERS", Auden writes:

POETS, ORACLE AND WIT

LIKE UNSUCCESSFUL ANGLERS BY

THE PONDS OF APPERCEPTION SIT

BAITING WITH WRONG REQUEST

THE VICTORS OF THEIR INTEREST.

It is our interests that betray us to corruption of essential human nature or else there is no reason for us to live dishonest lives.

After elaborating about the ills and evils present in the society Auden delves into the causes of this disintegration. As a student at OXFORD Auden gained knowledge of modern psychology and came to the conclusion that sickness was a symptom of an impure heart. Auden already well-versed in the theories of GRODDECK and FREUD, became a believer in the psychomatic theory of diseases during his stay in BERLIN. According to JUSTIN RAPLOGLE:

*BEFORE 1933 , AUDEN FASHIONED HIS ANALYSIS
OF SOCIETY FROM INFORMATION HE GOT MOSTLY
FROM FREUD ,LAWRENCE AND AVARIETY OF
PYSCHOLOGICAL WRITERS . SOCIETY WAS SICK HE
BELIEVED BECAUSE INDIVIDUAL REPRESSED
THEIR INSTINCTIVE, SPOTANEOUS IMPULSES
WITH THEIR INSTINCTS FREED, INDIVIDUALS
WOULD BECOME HEALTHY AND SOCEITY CURED.*

Auden developed a feeling that the root cause of all diseases and sins is the sense of guilt. The sense of guilt has first to be removed if a sickness has to be cured as according to him , the physical sickness is only a symptom of the sickness of the soul. Auden believed when people are ill, they are wicked; a sore throat means that the sufferer has been lying ; cacer means refusal to make use of creative power; rheumatism means obstinacy, refusal to bend a knee, deafness and short sight are attempts to shutout the exterior world; epilepsy is an attempt to become an angel and fly. The great attraction for Auden of this kind of diagnosis was that in interpreting disease as morally symbolic it made possible a new mode of rendering moral abstraction concrete and vivid.

Auden felt that the root cause of all diseases in the sense of guilt. The physical sickness is only a symptom of the sickness of soul. Suppression and repression of natural desires had a bad effect on man's mind as well as his body. Auden thus reach this conclusion that man must revolt against those acts and institutions which hampered the free and natural growth of his personality. Natural instincts and society inhibitions play a vital role in a person `s upbringing.

Auden's poetry is full of references to the lost ,lonely , self imprisoned, time-obsessed souls. They are displaced persons of the heart whose emotional springs have dried up and who are living in the narrow cell of their own ego. They are like those sinners whom Dante has placed in the first circle of his hell , souls who were excessive lovers of themselves. Auden writes about them; the cause of misery and sorrow of the people is self-love. People are engaged merely in self gratification. Such person in society cannot be cope with the problems facing them and They devise means and ways of escaping reality. Auden believed that in our society the head has become divorced from the heart and man has subjected himself to the will, which comes from the devil. Auden was in agreement with Blake that will is always evil; and he says that will means the faculty by which we try to change ourselves according to pattern prescribed by the reason , by moral codes and by religious organizations. T he lost and injured individuals today live in mechanized societies and societies

themselves are affected with communal neurosis and they fashion large scale forms of escape from fear and cowardice.

Auden feels very unhappy at people's taking recourse to hatred when hatred seems more paying. He wishes to remind people that the gains of hatred are only short lived. People must conquer hatred to be able to love and live. In his well known poem 'September 1,1939', Auden writes:

'We must love one another or die.'

Auden deals extensively about the nature of human existence, why people are incapable of loving one another. The crisis begins in the depths of our consciousness. The things which we dread as the external enemies come from the depths of our own consciousness. Auden also discovered through Freud that the external wars are really based upon the psychological condition of men and they represent the revenge of the conscious which has been repressed by the advance in civilization. "Those to whom evil is done / Do evil in return."

Auden probes into various reasons responsible for the wide-spread degeneration in society. selfish love is one of the reasons as also the suppression of natural instincts. Inertia, indeciveness and sloth both mental and physical distort human personality and result in psychological aberrations. Lack of individuality and authenticity are also among the causes of human misery. Crowd mentality prevails and individuals have no mind of their own.

Auden was keenly conscious of the human situation, its misery and despairs and felt much disturbed by the challenging social and economic problems around him. He was pre-occupied with exploring ways and means of pulling man out of his terrible situation. He prescribed remedies for the ills afflicting society. He felt that man had to make a choice between change and death.

If he did not want to die, he must change himself as so his surroundings. For a time Marxism seemed to answer but the poetry of his religious phase makes it clear that Auden found in the philosophy of Kierkegaard a solution to the problem's of man suffering which neither psychology nor Marxism could give him. He was deeply impressed by Keirkgard's faith in the belief that to be relieved of suffering in sense of voluntarily to accept suffering in other. Kierkegaard's belief that despair and hopelessness make one truly Christian, drew him to Christianity. Auden was convinced that Kierkegaard's teachings were most relevant to our time, for he strongly felt that one cannot live without some sort of faith which alone protects a man against uncertainty and doubt.

Kierkegaard begins with man's immediate experience as a subject, that is a being, whose existence is at stake.

Existentialism is an attempt to begin the search for a common truth by being honest about the subjectivity. The impress of extentialism, especially of Kierkegaard is all too visible in his work. In the sea and the mirror, Auden gives Prospero Kierkegaard insight into the aesthetic and the moral. In

Auden's word : "Agape requires that we love our enemies , do good to those who hate us, and forgive all those who injure us and this command is unconditional." If Prospero refused to accept Agape, it was not incongruous with the character in the work. Its emergence into the realm of Agape would have given the character a Kierkegaardian vindication as referred by Auden. His awareness was evocative in the lines:

*I never suspected the way of truth
Was a way of silence where affectionate chat
Is but a robber's ambush and even good music
In shocking taste .
For the time being's reflects the
Kierkegaardian spirit much in the same
Manner as it did in the same
Manner as it in "the sea and the mirror"*

The following lines are conspicuously existentialist in tone.

.....we despair.....

*We are AFRAID
OF PAIN BUT MORE AFRAID OF SILENCE;
For no night mare of hostile objects would
Be as terrible as the void.*

How life could be made bearable and acceptable was Auden's lifelong concern. His answer now was that man concedes his sinful nature, he becomes full of humanity which replace his pride for being the noblest of God's creations. He can also live in greater harmony with their surroundings .

It may be added as a word of caution that is very tempting to be led into the belief that Auden was a poet of dark shadows because he has dealt with the sickness and abnormality of the human existence so much. But he deals with this sickness in order to heal it. Because he knew the Paradise beyond this inferno. Because he knew that behind this veil of misery lies the beauty and the bliss.

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