

“The Bleak Philosophy of Northern Ridges”: Examining  
the Early Landscapes of W. H. Auden, 1922–1928.

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy



2018

## **Statement of Originality**

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## **Abstract**

The juvenilia of the poet W. H. Auden has largely been subject to a climate of critical neglect. Despite representing an innovative and influential period of the poet's career in which the nucleic form of the poet's unique ways of addressing notions of landscape and locality might be discerned, there has been little scholarly analysis of these early poems and their place within the poet's literary canon. The same may be said for the poet's landscape works: in a critical field where the modern, cosmopolitan Auden tends to predominate, there has been little recent scholarly consideration of Auden as a 'landscape' poet. This thesis seeks to supplement and develop the critical literatures relevant to the poet's earliest works, arguing that it is only via the analysis of landscape and locality in Auden's earliest poetry that much later landscape works can be fully understood.

Drawing on the work of Auden scholars Katharine Bucknell, John Fuller and Tony Sharpe, alongside key concepts in the study of literary landscapes such as Pierre Nora's *Lieux de Memoire*, this thesis will consider the four dominant themes present in the poet's juvenilia: mortality, northerness, nation and the journey. In doing so, it will trace the development of the poet's own influences, the manner in which they alter and augment to become the trademark Audenesque, and what these focal points mean in terms of contextualising Auden's developing sense of landscape.

The fundamental aim of this study is to make an original and innovative contribution to the scholarship of the poet W. H. Auden, the study of Modernist literatures and further consideration of Auden as a 'landscape poet'. Furthermore, and what is perhaps most applicable about this research, is that it provides a framework for effecting a more comprehensive analysis of any literary text by utilising authorial juvenilia.

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## Introduction

### “When I was a child, I loved a pumping-engine” — Mining Auden’s Juvenilia

[...]Strange are love's mutations:  
Thus, the early poem  
Of the flesh sub rosa  
Has been known to grow  
Now and then into the  
Amor intellectu-  
-alis of Spinoza;  
How we do not know.

Slowly we are learning,  
We at least know this much,  
That we have to unlearn  
Much that we were taught,  
And are growing chary  
Of emphatic dogmas;  
Love like Matter is much  
Odder than we thought.

Love requires an Object,  
But this varies so much,  
Almost, I imagine,  
Anything will do.  
When I was a child, I  
Loved a pumping-engine,  
Thought it every bit as  
Beautiful as you.

“Heavy Date”.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> W. H. Auden, *Collected Poems*, ed. by Edward Mendelson, (New York: Vintage, 1991) p. 257-260

It is fifty years now  
Since the old days when  
It first pumped water here;  
Steam drove it then

Till the workings were stopped  
For the vein pinched out;  
When it lay underground  
Twelve years about.

Then they raised it again  
Had it cleaned a bit  
So it pumps still, though now  
The beck drives it

As it groans at each strike  
Like a heart in trouble,  
It seems to me something  
In toil most noble.

“The Pumping-Engine, Cashwell”.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> W. H. Auden, *Juvenilia: Poems 1922–1928*, ed. by Katharine Bucknell, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003) p. 74-5



## **0.1: Introduction and Structure**

In this introduction I am going to address the core motivations, critical literatures and methodologies that have influenced this investigation of the early landscape poetry of W. H. Auden and contextualise the works central to this thesis and its analyses. First, I am going to examine the modern scholarly study of literary juvenilia and the ways in which the consideration of these early manuscripts have effected a critical reappraisal of the works of several nineteenth-century writers. This is done with the intention of considering the study of juvenilia as able to generate a reading strategy for developing more comprehensive understandings of much later and more practised texts, using works of a less polished and often less ambiguous quality to better understand phraseologies and imagery as they appear in the works of the mature writer. This type of analysis not only forms the basis of this thesis' aim to re-evaluate existing scholarly understandings of W. H. Auden as a landscape poet, but also exemplifies the ways in which unpublished works and juvenilia represent a constructive and informative supplementary resource to literary scholarship that appears currently under-utilised.

With reference to extant scholarship of Auden's earliest poetry and the climate of critical neglect that characterises this period in the works of some of the most prominent Auden scholars, this introduction will go on to examine the benefits of a thematic approach to these early poems as opposed to a more textual, manuscript-based analysis. Building on this, I will then go on to outline the methodology that has informed the critical analyses of this thesis, exploring the concept of a 'sedimentary' analysis and the ways in which the mineral processes of

the lead-mining landscape common to many of these poems also provide a scholarly model for the study and interpretation of Auden's earliest works. Finally, I will outline and summarise the chapters of this thesis based on the four dominant themes evident in these poems, making reference to their key texts and core assertions.

## **0.2 Toward a Theory of Juvenilia**

There is a vacancy in scholarly criticism in terms of the developmental processes of writing that exists largely as a result of the exclusion of literary juvenilia from mainstream scholarship. There are exceptions to the rule: there is emergent a significant body of criticism regarding the earliest works of nineteenth-century writers such as Charlotte Brontë and Jane Austen largely due to the efforts of scholars Christine Alexander and Juliet McMaster and their inception of the Juvenilia Press at the University of New South Wales in 1994. It remains, however, that the study of literary juvenilia is often side-lined in modern academic discourse,<sup>3</sup> with unpublished or early works rarely afforded the critical attention that they might merit.

Although relatively small, the field of juvenilia studies provides some of the most useful analyses of the reasons for the exclusion of these early works from a mainstream scholarly canon. In *The Child Writer: From Austen to Woolf*, Alexander and McMaster posit that the critical devaluation of juvenilia within literary scholarship is perhaps as a result of a tendency to adhere to historic notions of

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<sup>3</sup> Christine Alexander & Juliet McMaster, 'Introduction', in *The Child Writer: From Austen to Woolf*, ed. by Christine Alexander & Juliet McMaster, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) pp.1-9, p. 1

childhood and personhood, citing that “Just as a child could have no rights until his or her status as a “person” was established, so the child as a creator of culture has been subsumed within the child as a mere consumer.”<sup>4</sup> The effects of this critical devaluation of juvenilia are twofold: firstly, an incomplete scholarship of a writer or period in literature is generated, and secondly, as a result of this, more marginal groups of writers are further excluded from a mainstream scholarly canon.

The emergence of scholarly interest in the earliest works of Charlotte Brontë and Jane Austen also provides a useful model for the ways in which re-evaluating juvenilia has had a positive impact on mainstream scholarship of an author or poet and the wider conceptualisation of their works. As Judith E. Pike and Lucy Morrison discuss in the introduction to *Charlotte Brontë from the Beginnings: New Essays from the Juvenilia to the Major Works*, the re-evaluation of Brontë’s juvenilia offers not only an opportunity to gain an insight into the development of Brontë’s intellectual and authorial selves, but also yields a wealth of information that might be used to inform and augment existing understandings of an author’s later works, providing insight that challenges dominant readings and perhaps prompts scholarship to re-address canons in their entirety.<sup>5</sup>

It is this model of juvenilia study that has informed this thesis and the following analysis of the juvenilia of W. H. Auden. The adolescent Auden is a compelling poetic presence that exists in the margins of mainstream Auden

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<sup>4</sup> Alexander & McMaster, ‘Introduction’, p. 1

<sup>5</sup> Judith Pike & Lucy Morrison, ‘Introduction’, in *Charlotte Brontë from the Beginnings: New Essays from the Juvenilia to the Major Works*, ed. by Judith Pike & Lucy Morrison (New York: Routledge, 2017) pp. 1-14, (p. 1-2)

scholarship, possessed of a wide-eyed romanticism that runs parallel to the poet's burgeoning fears of modernity, and the few poems from the 1922–1928 period that make the transition from marginalia to mainstream scholarship regularly appear fragmented, unearthly things. Often mercurial and subject to a jarring naivety of language, these poems yet demonstrate the tacit vision and oscillation between whimsy and scorn that characterises the works of the poet as a mature writer. Combating their current lack of scholarly analysis and exclusion from mainstream Auden scholarship is one of the primary motivations of this thesis.

However, as Natasha Duquette identifies in her history of the *Juvenilia Press* "The New-Formed Leaves of *Juvenilia Press*", there is a considerable issue inherent in the study of literary juvenilia that might be seen to compromise the integrity of its scholarly criticism. Within the field, there is perhaps a tendency to afford an idyllic or overly romanticised backdrop to the juvenilia period of an artist or writer<sup>6</sup> and whilst aiming to contribute to the wider scholarly conceptualisation of the poet as a whole, this re-evaluation of Auden's earliest poetry is not done with the objective of reaffirming sacred status. Instead it is done with the intention of navigating the unexplored country of the poet's literary genesis, shifting focus from the adolescent Auden of popular scholarship — at Gresham's School and at Christ Church College; studying at the knee of J. R. R. Tolkien and H. W. Garrod — to the heroic fascination with the Pennine geographies that formed the basis of the poet's lifelong conceptualisation of landscape.

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<sup>6</sup>Natasha Duquette, 'The New-Formed Leaves of *Juvenilia Press*', *English Studies in Canada* 73 (2011) 201-219, (p. 203)

The works contained in the second edition of Katharine Bucknell's *Juvenilia: Poems 1922–1928* — a volume that has been integral to this thesis and its analyses — represent a critically important period of the poet's creative development. Not only do they facilitate an understanding of the formative period of one of poetic Modernism's most lauded voices, but also in that they permit an insight into some of the more critically disregarded aspects of Auden's poetry; the landscape Auden and the Northern Auden. The vistas of these early poems contain a number of the poet's most inventive and referential conceptualisations of landscape, and in their troubled juxtaposition of natural imagery and the decaying structures of the Pennine lead-mining industry it is possible to discern the nucleic forms of the sense of exile and landscape anxiety that characterise a number of the poet's later works. In this, these poems provide the scholar with a framework for reading later Auden and re-interpreting and decoding the poet's more obtuse and metaphorical verse.

### **0.3: A Model for Reading Auden's Earliest Works**

There are a series of analytical problems that arise from the formal study of Auden's juvenilia: as Duquette identifies, there is a scholarly tendency to romanticise the formative period of the poet's life. There is also the manner in which juvenilia as a form tends toward the emulative, often appearing as carbon-copy of the writer's most dominant sources — it is possible to see this in Auden's early bucolics and the debt of inference owed to poets W. H. Davies, Walter de la Mare and Edward Thomas. Although largely unavoidable in the study of literary juvenilia, this tendency renders any conclusions drawn between works subject to issues of authorship, derivation and authorial integrity. There are also more formal and

structural issues inherent in the analysis of literary juvenilia that render some poetic works from this early period difficult to access; a jarring inadequacy of language characterising these works especially prior to the poet's discovery of Thomas Hardy in 1923<sup>7</sup> to which a great debt of developing linguistic maturity is likely owed.

The study of juvenilia is also restricted by the limitations inherent in the requirement of manuscript access, an obstacle that this thesis and its analyses have largely avoided as a result of Katharine Bucknell's exhaustive *Juvenilia: Poems 1922–1928*. *Juvenilia* not only collates the contents of several small archives and collections of Auden's earliest works, but also contains in its second edition a lesser-known series of poems from an exercise book discovered in 1996 amongst the papers of Tom Wintringham, a former pupil of Gresham's School. Entitled *A Third Garland of Poesy*, the volume consists of several poems in Auden's hand dated from November 1923 to February 1924, including pieces such as "The Menhir" that have been integral to this thesis and its exploration of Auden's early concepts of place and landscape.

There is, however, a less logistical debate relevant to the study of poetic juvenilia that centres on the notions of academic decorum and authorial intent. The controversy surrounding the publication of the juvenilia of Philip Larkin attests to this, as the poet's own feelings on the works now published are made abundantly clear in his own commentary written in the margins of the original manuscripts: "pseudo-Keats babble", reads one. "Unforgettably bad", the next.<sup>8</sup> The issue raised is

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<sup>7</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 254

<sup>8</sup> Nick Tanner, 'Young, Gifted & Hack: is juvenilia a chance to watch great writers finding their voice or a chance to eavesdrop on them before they become famous?' *The Guardian*, (9th January 2007) <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2007/jan/09/juvenilia>> [Accessed 1st March 2018]

that the study of literary juvenilia is, although a valuable resource, seen by some critics to prompt the idea that the reader is “eavesdropping” on the writer in works not intended for publication and via an authorial decision to exempt such texts from a working canon, conclusions drawn from such volumes are perhaps limited in their resonance and applicability.<sup>9</sup>

These limitations in mind, it has been necessary during the course of this thesis to develop a theoretical framework for reading Auden’s juvenilia, and many of the issues raised in the analysis of juvenilia as an academic resource need to be addressed when examining the works integral to this thesis and its exploration of early Auden and its sources.

The first notion that became fundamental to examining these early landscapes is allowing for the limitations of language and expression that prevail in these works and developing a form of analysis that overcame these limitations. This involved shifting focus from a value judgment of these jejune early poems and instead working towards an understanding based on the anatomisation of these texts, exploring the inferences, allusions and intertexts inherent in their composition independent of their cosmetic appeal. This form of metaphysical analysis — reading the unspoken, exploring Auden’s languages of connotation and imitation — in addition to exploring the physical form and patterning of these poems facilitates a much more comprehensive understanding of them as texts. The richer scholarship that this form of analysis generates permits the taking of these poems seriously as a

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<sup>9</sup> Tanner, ‘Young, Gifted & Hack’

scholarly resource, and a much less reductive scholarship of Auden and his works is facilitated both in terms of the juvenilia period and the mainstream criticism of the poet.

The second tenet of the theory is that whilst it remains important to consider the poet's sources and inferences, it is of greater import to consider the poet's divergences from these texts for the purposes of understanding more fully Auden's own developing sense of voice and the key themes within the juvenilia. This is done with the intention of overcoming the often emulative nature of juvenilia and ensuring that the ensuing analysis of these poems not only develops an understanding of the poet's ability to pastiche, but also their own poetic evolution.

Thirdly, although there is likely a significant proportion of the works presented in Bucknell's *Juvenilia* that were not intended by their author for publication, it must be considered that these poems represent a vital resource in combating what is perhaps becoming an insular and reductive scholarship of landscape in Auden, and are imperative in fully understanding the theme in the poet's later works. Although the applicability of the conclusions drawn from a juvenilia study are for some scholars called into question due to the lack of authorial intent for publication, it remains true that the scholarship of the juvenilia of Charlotte Brontë and Jane Austen that has informed the investigative methodology of this thesis makes no mention of any perceived limitations of juvenilia scholarship and its applicability.



#### **0.4: Modernity, Landscape and Anxiety**

The poetry of Auden's 1922–1928 period is characterised by its focus on landscape, a more bucolic mode of expression at the beginning of the decade giving way to a heroically-framed, industrial poetry between 1925 and 1926. Its habitual narrative voice is that of a lone rural traveller, at once fascinated by and distant from the landscape, ostensibly patterned after the wandering narrator of the Old English poem *Er Eardstapa* ("The Wanderer").

As a narrative standpoint, Auden's Wanderer is a strange and melancholy figure, existing in stark contrast to the boyish narrator perhaps imagined when first encountering the poet's juvenilia. The Wanderer of the Anglo-Saxon poem is an aged warrior in exile, far removed from the hearth and home of his youth, seemingly destined to travel aimlessly as he entreats an uncaring almighty and ruminates on the transience of all that he has known. Auden's Wanderer is, although separated from the Saxon Wanderer by a wealth of centuries, similar in his preoccupations: nostalgic for a halcyon past, wary of the inhospitable present, and attempting to find meaning in what is a changing and often isolating landscape. The two figures appear inextricable as Auden attempts to navigate the contradictions of modernity and history, urban and rural and indeed, natural landscapes and Pennine industrialism, and afford these poems a unique sense of melancholy as the poet explores the twentieth century. These anxieties of past and present, place and time characterise a body of work that oscillates between the Georgian, the Modern and the ancient, and

in the study of these somewhat unusual poems, four main thematic concerns emerge from Auden's manifold early interactions with self and landscape.

The first and perhaps most dominant theme within the juvenilia period is the fascination that the young Auden appears to possess not only with death and the anxiety of mortality, but also with mythological narratives of rebirth and living beyond bodily death. The second theme to emerge is perhaps the most critically under-explored in current Auden scholarship; the notion of a northern identity, a retreat from the Modern and a heroic conceptualisation of the industrial landscapes that characterise the high fell country. The poet's laboured relationship with nation and conflict tends to predominate throughout the mid-period of the juvenilia in the form of folk nationalism informed by the works of Edward Thomas. Finally, it is possible to witness a powerful preoccupation emerging with the ideas of transport, motion, and the polarities of ancient and modern, a sense of urban scepticism becoming fully realised as the poet attempts to navigate Modernity.

These four concerns have formed the thematic basis for the ways in which this thesis' research and analysis is structured. Each of the following chapters presents an analysis of the theme as it develops chronologically throughout the poet's landscape works, save for the first and final chapters of the thesis, which identify and explore key elements of the themes for the purposes of better analysing the diversity of the ways the poet addresses specific concerns within the broader themes of mortality and the presentation of space.

## **0.5: Auden Scholarship and the Juvenilia Period**

Whilst the works of W. H. Auden represent some of literary Modernism's most iconic forays into verse — “Funeral Blues”, “Epitaph on a Tyrant”, “September 1st, 1939” — it remains true that in more modern scholarship there is apparent a climate of neglect surrounding one of the century's foremost poets. This is, to some extent, a positive thing for the furtherment of Modernist literary scholarship as moving from a critical landscape where the “Auden Generation” of British university-educated authors and poets predominate to one where the attention is paid to more marginalised groups of Modernist writers generates a much more comprehensive and varied image of the movement. It is, however, inaccurate to assume that the works of W. H. Auden have little left to contribute to the wider discourse of the Modernist movement. In the production of such a large, diverse and pervasive body of works, there are few debates or re-situations of the canon that Auden's poetry and prose cannot contribute to despite the apparent tendency to confine Auden scholarship to discourse relative to the 1939–45 conflict, social modernity or the poet's often conflicted relationship with organised religion.

In addition to this climate of neglect, the extant critical literature surrounding the poet's juvenilia period is scant: aside from Bucknell's *Juvenilia*, there are no published collections of Auden's earliest works available save for the several poems from the mid- to late nineteen-twenties reproduced in *The New Criterion* in June 1994.<sup>10</sup> Although integral to this thesis and its core methodology, it remains that

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<sup>10</sup> Roger Kimball, ‘The Permanent Auden: A Reconsideration of W. H. Auden occasioned by Edward Mendelson's *Early Auden*’, *The New Criterion* (June 1994)

Bucknell's analyses of the poetry of the 1922–1928 period often list only the poet's main stylistic influence — be it Thomas Hardy, W. H. Davies, or *Beowulf* — and rely heavily upon biographical detail and manuscript analysis as a means of interpreting this early, nebulous poetry. The same might be said of the scholarship of John Fuller, however the few explorations of Auden's earliest poetry that do appear in *W. H. Auden: A Commentary* demonstrate a relatively comprehensive analysis of the Pennine regions that inspired them and their influences and intertexts; therefore it is regrettable that Fuller's *Commentary* treats the 1928 publication of *Poems* as Auden's first major body of work. Although many poems from the juvenilia period make it into the volume wholesale or are at least quarried by Auden for their best images and phraseologies, the period 1922–1925 is largely absent from *Poems* and therefore limits Fuller's engagement with one of the poet's most interesting periods. A. S. T. Fisher's 'Auden's Juvenilia' in *Notes and Queries* in 1974 also engages with some of the poet's earlier works from the mid- to late nineteen-twenties, however these relatively in-depth analyses are far from exhaustive in terms of works addressed.

There has been a series of more specific considerations of Auden's juvenilia in terms of the notion of northern landscape and identity within the works of Tony Sharpe; most notably in the chapter 'Auden's Northerliness' in his own *W. H. Auden in Context* and 'No Permission to be Idle: W. H. Auden's Work Ethics' in Bonnie Castello and Rachel Galvin's *Auden at Work*. One of the most useful volumes in accessing and interpreting the esoteric geographies of Auden's high fell country has

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<<https://www.newcriterion.com/issues/1994/6/four-early-poems-of-wh-auden>> [Accessed 13th February 2018]

undoubtedly been *W. H. Auden: Pennine Poet* by Alan Myers and Robert Forsythe, a pamphlet produced by the North Pennines Heritage Trust. Published in 1999, it contains a largely comprehensive list of the poet's north Pennine locations, their ordnance survey references and several in-depth analyses of Auden's engagement with the mining landscapes of the Eden Valley. The volume is primarily concerned with listing and locating Auden's Pennine locations as opposed to providing a literary analysis, however the impact of this research enables a much fuller understanding of the specific geographies of some of the poet's more esoteric locations which has been vital in this thesis' analysis of the poem "Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed".

In terms of understanding one of the most dominant and compelling themes in the juvenilia period, Auden's *Wanderer* and the references to Old English and Norse-Icelandic narratives, Chris Jones' 'Anglo-Saxon Anxieties: W. H. Auden and the Barbaric Poetry of the North' in *Strange Likeness: The Use of English in Twentieth-Century Poetry* provides perhaps the most comprehensive analysis of Auden's allusions and intertexts. Although little mention is made of the juvenilia period specifically, the analysis focuses on several of Auden's shorter poems and their references to the Exeter Book and *Beowulf*, "The Wanderer", "The Seafarer" and the prose homily *The Dream of the Rood*. The early research of Robert Horace Boyer in the late 1960s represents perhaps the best imagery-centric reading of Auden's Anglo-Saxon turn, and whilst lacking the depth of Jones' knowledge of relatively esoteric texts, offers a comparatively in-depth breakdown of Auden's usage of Anglo-Saxon imagery relevant to ideas of exile, folklore and conflict.

## **0.6: The ‘Landscape Auden’**

At its core, this study is concerned with the re-evaluation of the epithets with which we conceptualise W. H. Auden as a poet. There is a wealth of scholarship relevant to the ways that Auden addresses the genesis and contraction of world conflict in the 1930s and 40s, as well as a large critical backdrop exploring the poet’s interactions with the changing natures of nation and Europe’s growing internationalism. The works of the Berlin Auden, the American Auden and the Kirchstetten Auden have become satellite fields to thematic Auden criticism in their own right, and it is a task of little effort to source readings of the poet’s responses to ideas of social control, secularisation and governmental bureaucracy. In short, there appears a canonical focus on the ‘city’ Auden: cosmopolitan, erudite and scathing, the romance of the image of the expatriate bard navigating the increasing centralisation and control of the twentieth century appears to hold sway within the critical landscape.

There exists, however, a slightly muddier Auden. Although a focus on the poet’s modern and cosmopolitan status does appear to possess a certain critical allure for scholarly analysis, there are a number of both verse and prose texts within the poet’s own literary canon that exist in diametrical opposition to the urban and international Auden, and instead provoke a much more local response. Poems such as “Amor Loci”, “Adolescence” and the lauded “In Praise of Limestone” — a topographical poem written about the landscapes of the Mezzogiorno whose literary

bedrock is without doubt the karst landscape of the unforgiving north Pennines —<sup>11</sup> although sometimes international in aspect, fit ill with scholarly Modernism's conceptualisation of the poet and the majority of his work. This often-side-lined body of work prompts discourse not on the urban modern, but on the natural landscape and the rural or provincial Auden and its intrinsic concern with the ideas of locality, local identity and belonging; these poems and their unique landscape anima and geographic-provincial energy perhaps best demonstrative of the poet's recurrent lyrical turn.

The following analysis re-situates the works of W. H. Auden within a landscape context. Examining the poet's early loco-descriptive poetry from the juvenilia period where ideas of geographic identity and folkloric nationhood preponderate those of the urban and the new, this thesis explores the Landscape Auden and its burgeoning concerns with Modernity, with reference to the manner in which these conceits and images evolve into the forms found in the poet's later works.

### **0.7: Metallurgy as Methodology**

These motivations in mind, it remains that Auden's juvenilia period is nebulous and drawing any conclusion from the poet's earliest works is an exercise as much in translation as it is interpretation. Meaning saunters amorphous through entire seasons of work accessible only by those party to a specific geographic

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<sup>11</sup>Eve Sorum, 'Dissolving Landscapes: W. H. Auden's Protean Nostalgia' in *Modernism and Nostalgia: Bodies, Locations, Aesthetics*, ed. by Tammy Clewell, pp. 166-180 (p. 166)

knowledge or well-versed in Auden's own most prominent poetic sources.<sup>12</sup> The sheer depth and variety of reference contained in these early works demonstrates the accuracy of Samuel Hynes' description of Auden as a compulsive borrower,<sup>13</sup> unable to observe without making reference; appropriating phraseologies from a range of sources and reforging them into the burgeoning Audenesque of the nineteen-thirties. This tendency to reference, appropriate and embellish contributes to the often-inaccessible character of Auden's poetry — although it appears almost arcane and rich with intertext and allusion, as Hynes laments, "*Most of us are less well-read than Auden is.*"<sup>14</sup>

In the study of the juvenilia period and its excessive tendency to emulate and allude it becomes evident that the comprehension and analysis of these poems requires a reading framework that goes beyond this thesis' core strategies of close reading, enforcing a scholarly consideration of the juvenilia and overcoming its linguistic limitations. In the interest of ascertaining that the thematic analyses of this thesis are as accurate and applicable as possible to extant critical discourse relevant to the poet and indeed, the study of literary juvenilia, a supplementary reading strategy had to be developed to overcome the poet's dense and allusive linguistic terrain.

The poetry composed during Auden's last years at Gresham's School and first terms at Christ Church College is often deeply flawed, trite schoolboy

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<sup>12</sup> A more detailed analysis of the reasons motivating the creation of this duality of readership can be found in the second chapter of this thesis.

<sup>13</sup> Samuel Hynes, 'Review: 'Quest for the Necessary: *W. H. Auden and the Dilemma of Divided Consciousness* by Herbert Greenberg', *Contemporary Literature* 11 (1970) 98-103 (p.98)

<sup>14</sup> Hynes, 'Review: Quest for the Necessary', p.98



fascination founded upon a bedrock of bucolic phraseology; however, it remains that this poetry is demonstrative still of small, subterranean acts of intrigue and artistry within which it is possible to discern the poet's burgeoning skill. It is in the decryption of this minutiae, this manner of textual processing that meaning often becomes apparent; and Auden's esoteric landscapes become accessible to scholarship. This metaphor in mind, it becomes apparent that the manner in which to combat this ambiguity of meaning lies in one of the 1920s Auden's own poetic fascinations: the industrial processes of lead-mining and ore-washing that characterise the high fell country of Cumbria, Durham and Northumberland. Fascinated by the subterranean landscape since youth and compelled by the decaying sheave-wheels and hushes of the north Pennines, Auden's early poetry often evokes the image of descending or picking through a landscape and its visual, historic and folkloric strata, and it is in this conceit of 'sedimentary' analysis that critical scholarship might find purchase in the juvenilia period.

In essence, the dense karst imagery of these early poems must be mined for their sources literary, folkloric and metaphorical, and the ensuing ore pried from these landscapes subject to an exercise in beneficiation — a process in extractive metallurgy where ore is refined and purified by the removal of metallic impurities and waste minerals. In the beneficiation of these texts using their wider cultural resonances and language of allusion to establish a working understanding of this ambiguous early verse, the interrogation and analysis of these poems is made possible, permitting critical scholarship a more comprehensive understanding of their key themes and concerns. Employing a methodology of mining these poems — reading them metaphysically — and then 'metallurgically' processing the ore — the

information gleaned, examining their most prominent influences and the concerns that they demonstrate — results in a working demystification of Auden’s arcanum. Although there is inherent in the poet’s earliest works a system of reference that is likely only truly assailable to their original author or at least the most dedicated biographers, enough information is revealed by the process to permit analysis enough to facilitate the entrance of these works into the poet’s literary and critical canon.

### **0.8: The Shade of a Pumping-Engine**

There is a line in the 1939 poem “Heavy Date” reproduced at the beginning of this introduction that is perhaps best demonstrative of the power of the juvenilia in undoing the mature poet’s linguistic encipherment. A deeply referential treatise on the manner in which shared love might transform the mundane into the sublime, the piece includes a series of references to the poet’s most prominent literary, scientific and philosophical touchstones during the 1930s period. The piece makes reference to the Kantian concept of *Ding-and-Sich*, the writings of Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza; an earlier stanza recalling Goethe’s sunset speech from *Faust* and the writings of the twentieth-century anthropologists Bronisław Malinowski and W. H. R. Rivers. It is strange, then, when one of the most memorable stanzas of the poem ends with an uncharacteristic and almost childlike bathos: “When I was a child, I / Loved a pumping-engine, / Thought it every bit as / Beautiful as you.” The effect of the juxtaposition is striking; the mundanity of industrial machinery so close in proximity to the level of resonance felt by the poet from the works of Goethe, Spinoza and Kant, and in their opposition the tone of the piece is altered. At face

value, the pumping-engine appears to have little to do with the overblown affection that Auden seems to champion, and the stanza itself appears fractured as a result of its confusing denouement.

The line has been subject to some critical appraisal — Alexander McCall Smith interprets the line as a “sexual joke”<sup>15</sup>; Stan Smith in *The Cambridge Companion to W. H. Auden* sees the line as perhaps naught more than a continuation of the Freudian metaphor of Object that precedes the reference to the pumping-engine in the stanza.<sup>16</sup> The perusal of Bucknell’s *Juvenilia*, however, offers a much more accurate analysis: in 1924, fifteen years prior to the inception of “Heavy Date”, the schoolboy Auden writes of a similar piece of machinery in a poem titled “The Pumping-Engine, Cashwell”, which depicts the restoration of a disused pumping engine from a mine complex on Alston Moor in Cumberland.<sup>17</sup>

Although the derivative, often sentimental language employed by the seventeen-year-old Auden is far removed from the lyricism and intensity of phrase that we would associate with the works of the mature poet, there is a wealth of information available in the earlier poem relevant to the pumping-engine as it appears in “Heavy Date”. The machinery of “The Pumping-Engine, Cashwell” is characterised by an innate nobility, the manner in which it persists in its office dogged throughout half a century admirable to the young Auden, who appears

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<sup>15</sup>Alexander Smith, ‘W. H. Auden can teach us not to be Afraid’, *The New Republic* (September 21st 2013) <<https://newrepublic.com/article/114792/w-h-auden-can-teach-us-not-be-afraid>> [Accessed 2nd February 2018]

<sup>16</sup> Stan Smith, ‘Auden’s light and serio-comic verse’, in *The Cambridge Companion to W. H. Auden*, ed. by Stan Smith, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) pp. 96-110 (p. 106)

<sup>17</sup> Tony Sharpe, ‘Auden’s Northerliness’, in *W. H. Auden in Context*, ed. by Tony Sharpe (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013) pp. 13-24 (p.15)

fascinated by its ability to connect the industrial to the natural; a powerful naive affection tangible in the piece.<sup>18</sup> The manner in which the poem is located is also significant in terms of this developing sense of affection: the piece is not simply designated as taking place on Alston Moor, or in the immediate area such as we would find in other pieces of juvenilia such as “Rookhope (Weardale, Summer 1922)” or “Allendale”, but identified specifically by the handle of *Cashwell*. Cashwell itself is neither a village nor moorland vale, but a small, abandoned mine complex in Culgaith likely known to very few, and in this esotericism the location is established clandestine, part of something arcane and almost sacred.

“The Pumping-Engine, Cashwell” is not an isolated incidence. The landscapes of the juvenilia are rife with mining machinery, shattered adits and disconnected sheave-wheels, each chronicled with a combination of secular ecstasy and the horrified fascination of Auden’s burgeoning apprehension of industrial modernity. The pumping-engine is representative not only of the intensity of childhood affection but of what, for the poet, makes us human: the ability to recapitulate and rebuild, the conjunction of landscape and industry; the marriage of the natural processes of the world and the human ones.

The effect of this new, esoteric knowledge is instantaneous in the interpretation of the later poem. As opposed to seeking to trivialise the Object of his affections, the likeness of the pumping-engine is instead intended as the highest office that the poet might bestow; the romance of an adolescent fascination with the

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<sup>18</sup> A more detailed analysis of this poem and the links between industrialism and nature can be found in the second chapter of this thesis.

decaying industries of the north Pennines now transformed, renewed and transported to the lovers of “Heavy Date”. It is, however, only as a result of the scholarship of the juvenilia period that this analysis might be facilitated, and as an exercise this form of comparison serves to demonstrate the continued relevance of Auden’s earliest works within mainstream Auden scholarship.

### **0.9: Thematology and Thesis Structure**

The first chapter of this thesis ““The Earth took back the Dust she Gave””: Exploring death and narratives of resurrection in W. H. Auden's earliest landscapes’ focuses on Auden’s early relationship with human mortality. This chapter examines the conjunction of traditional modes of dying, the changing societal nature of death and its representation in the aftermath of the 1914–1918 conflict and takes its cue from readings by David Sherman and Sigmund Freud. Examining the idea of ghosts and the suspension of death in these early narratives, this chapter identifies an attempt to preserve and stabilise the decaying industrial landscape of the North Pennine region, and the ways in which for Auden, the spiritual afterlives of mythology appear conflated with the real-world geographies of the north of England. The analysis then goes on to consider the prevalence of the classical katabasis and anabasis resurrection narrative in Auden’s earliest landscapes and what this subversion of mortality indicates relevant to the ways in which the poet positions the man-made structure within the natural landscape as a means of establishing a sense

of permanence. Finally, the chapter explores a section of Auden's earliest and simplest juvenilia poems that focus on the notions of dying young and thwarted youth, and how these poems perhaps represent the key to understanding the poet's 1920s fascination with permanence and the idea of living, in some ways, beyond bodily death.

The second chapter explores the notion perhaps most central to the inception of this thesis and the core ways in which it seeks to re-contextualise the landscape Auden. "“Turn back again, frustrate and vexed / This land, cut off, will not communicate” — Exploring the Hero, Hodge, and the Notion of North' examines representations of north and northerliness within this early poetry, the ways in which it is possible to consider these poems part of a paracosm of the poet's invention and what this means for our conceptualisations of Auden's relationship with the landscape itself. The chapter first explores the notion of esoteric geography and the poet's creation of a two-strand readership for the purposes of the preservation of provincial identity, exploring some of the poet's earliest pastoral landscapes. It then explores the manner in which their iterations of northerliness are subject to augmentation with folkloric and mythological narratives, with reference to Norse-Icelandic saga literature and "Hodge", the ennobled labourer figure of Victorian England.

This chapter then interrogates the decaying Pennine landscape of the poet's youth as a source of anxiety relevant to a loss of provincial identity in the wake of industrial decline. Returning to the notion of heroism and exploring Auden's

northerliness as a “tactic of resistance”<sup>19</sup>, the chapter pursues the burgeoning representations of northerliness in the juvenilia period and the less literary motivations behind Auden’s early reliance upon the heroic, examining the hero as a social figure and the influence of industrial and political action on Auden’s formative period. The notion of identifying and locating some of the poet’s more esoteric landscapes is addressed throughout the chapter as a means of augmenting the framework of extraction and beneficiation that informs this thesis’ methodology.

The third chapter of this thesis examines Auden’s relationship with nation throughout the 1920s and examines the shifting representations of nationality and nationalism using the medium of the flora and fauna of the natural landscape as a reading strategy. “‘Art Thou Richer, Humble Tree / Than Fifty Thousand Oaks or Elms’”: Old English Mythologies, the Bucolic Idyll and the Construction of Nation in Auden’s *Arboreal Juvenilia*’ seeks to contribute to the relatively small degree of “Green Modernism” within the field of Modernist studies of literature and interrogates the manner in which the poet uses the stylistic conjunction of man and tree borrowed from Edward Thomas to explore burgeoning concerns with modernity, industrialisation and urban centralisation. The analysis also explores the poet’s fracturing relationship with nation and the tendency to return to older Welsh and Anglo-Saxon narratives and their conceptualisation of nation and kingdom, as both a response to encroaching modernity and to the events of the 1914–1918 conflict and the ways in which for the poet it appeared to undermine traditional forms of nationalism. This quest for a new, old nationalism, far removed from the conflict of the previous decade then provides this thesis with a framework for reading a number

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<sup>19</sup> Sharpe, ‘Auden’s Northerliness’, p.14

of the poet's more nebulous free verse pieces and interpreting the resonance of the ancient forms of national identity found in poems such as "Lovers Lane" and "The Mill (Hempstead)".

The final chapter of this thesis, "'Under the Hundred Lamps Whose Flare Turns Night to Day': The Journey, Industrial Modernity and Landscape Exile in Early Auden" seeks to move away from analysis of the metaphysical and explore the spatial narratives inherent in the poet's early explorations of landscape and geography. This chapter addresses the ideas of transport and motion through the natural landscape and attempts to go some ways as to filling the scholarly vacancy relevant to the ways in which the poet not only addresses, but accesses and traverses these early esoteric geographies.

Examining the spaces of the railway carriage, railway station and platform the chapter explores the notion of liminality and the ritual mannerisms of the railway journey, and the depictions of greater societal interconnectedness that dominate the poet's early conceptualisations of public transport with reference to the spatial theories of Henri Lefebvre. It will also explore the mythological turn that characterises poems such as "Flowers and Stationmaster" that perhaps acts as a response to the presence of modernity in Auden's northern paracosm. This chapter will also examine the notions of surveillance and moral panic in public transport spaces and the recurrence of the railway carriage mentality in the later juvenilia. Finally, it will analyse the ways in which Auden addresses the tripartite notions of belonging, exile and transience in relation to the idea of roads and the act of walking, and using this, examine the notion of exile and the heroic journey found in Anglo-



Saxon literature such as “The Wanderer” in relation to poems such as “The Walk” and “The Road’s Your Place”.

## **Chapter I:**

### **“The Earth took back the Dust she Gave”: Interrogating Death and Narratives of Resurrection in Auden’s Earliest Landscapes**

Time and fevers burn away  
Individual beauty from  
Thoughtful children, and the grave  
Proves the child ephemeral.

“Lullaby”<sup>1</sup>

#### **1.0: Introduction: Auden’s Many Deathbeds**

In this chapter, I examine the ways in which the poet W. H. Auden approaches the subjects of death and human mortality within the juvenilia period. Using the poems that most overtly address the notion of death and its relationship with the natural landscape, I will develop an understanding of the ways in which the natural world of Auden’s juvenilia period are often overshadowed by the notion of mortality. I will take my cue from the Freudian notion that the literatures of the modernist period are characterised by their attempts to process and understand the notion of death following a period of high human mortality at the beginning of the twentieth century, suggesting that these works are not only more complex than their language or naivety of form would suggest, but are also perhaps representative of the larger early twentieth century societal anxieties of secularisation, loss of identity and national mourning.

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<sup>1</sup> W. H. Auden, *Another Time*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1940) p.43

I first explore the prevalence of poetic narratives that appear to effect a suspension of traditional mortality, and analyse the presence of ghosts and temporal echoes within some of the poet's landscape works. Using pieces that focus on the post-industrial Pennine landscapes of Auden's youth such as "Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed", "Allendale" and "Rookhope, (Weardale, Summer 1922)", I am going to explore how the poet uses the suspension of death as a means of establishing the permanence of declining localities in the face of industrial diminution, as well as how these early narratives might be viewed as a response to several political, philosophical and socio-economic anxieties that dominate the literature of the period. I will also examine pieces such as "Stone Walls I" and "Below Me, Ticknall Lay But in the Light" and examine how for Auden, the notion of a spiritual afterlife often appears conflated with the real-world landscapes of the poet's childhood, and what conclusions we might draw from this relationship.

Using this analysis, I will then go on to examine the ways in which the man-made structures of dwellings, monuments and walls function in relation to the concept of death in Auden's juvenilia and analyse the ways in which the poet attempts to effect some manner of permanence of man within the natural landscape and explore the importance of how classical narratives of katabasis have shaped and informed the poet's early works. Finally, I am going to explore the relationship between some of Auden's earliest pastoral poetry and the notions of premature death and the death of youth, and how these perhaps represent the key to understanding the young Auden's fascination with permanence and the concept of living, in some form, beyond bodily death. In examining the impact of the Great War, the notion of the 'lost generation' of the nineteen-twenties and thirties and Auden's already inventive

attitudes towards death and dying, I am going to effect a reappraisal of the way we might approach Auden's earliest landscape poetry, and how instead of a simple emulation of Auden's most prominent poetic influences they also represent surprisingly complex response to a series of social and spiritual zeitgeists.

### **1.1: A New Attitude Toward Death**

The spectre of death looms large in the literary consciousness: to attempt to analyse this notion in its finite form is to explore a relationship that has both driven and characterised an anxiety of the arts that predates organised study. However, there are periods within the literary continuum that are more significantly characterised by dominant themes of eschatology and mortality. Although there are several, if not many literary periods and movements that this definition might be applied to, a period in which we can observe a particular prevalence of these ideas is that which we commonly delineate *Modernist*, and for the purposes of this introduction and chapter, specifically the period directly following the end of the global conflict in 1918, with specific reference to the writing career of W. H. Auden prior to the publication of *Poems* in 1928.

My examination takes its cue from two explications on the nature of Modernism and death. The first is taken from David Sherman's *In a Strange Room: Modernism's Corpses and Mortal Obligation* (2014), where the author posits that "The preternatural beauty of modernist writing about the dead arose from the uneasy desire to know what it could still mean, in the twentieth century,"<sup>2</sup>. Sherman writes

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<sup>2</sup> David Sherman, *In a Strange Room: Modernism's Corpses and Mortal Obligation*, (New York:

that the primary predilections of the Modernist movement's relationship with the notion of mortality stem from the same widespread cultural anxieties about the changing nature of society that prompt early Auden's textual retreatism into mythological and folkloric narratives. The assertion shares some reasoning with Kenneth Morgan's analyses of the commercial success of Dylan Thomas' works: as a result of their engagement with folkloric Welsh narratives, they provide the reader with a means to combat the creeping cultural anxiety caused by the redundancy of previously significant rural and pastoral Welsh identities in the face of Americanisation and Anglicisation.<sup>3</sup> Verse, here, appears able to effect a form of retreatism, rejecting modernity's new modes of living and dying and instead permitting a return to a bucolic past. Sherman's statement is, perhaps, an applied model of Heidegger's concept of *Entwurzelung* — a widespread socio-emotional deracination — citing the burgeoning secularisation and the denial of a "proper" mode of death largely unchanged since the *ars moriendi*<sup>4</sup> as the primary motivations behind the prevalence of the phenomena.

Whilst arguably reductive in its positioning of the corpse as the core tenet of the Modernist movement's relationship with the spectre of mortality, Sherman's assertion — that Modernist literature's undisguised fascination with death appears as a response to stable Victorian rituals of dying rendered redundant by the increasing modernisation of the labours of birthing and living,<sup>5</sup> as well as by the sheer spectacle of mortality that arose from the First World War — appears particularly true of the

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Oxford University Press, 2014) p.1

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth Morgan, *The Rebirth of a Nation: Wales 1880-1980*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980) p. 269

<sup>4</sup> Alan Friedman, *Fictional Death and the Modernist Enterprise*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 50

<sup>5</sup> Sherman, *In a Strange Room*, p. 2-3

works of W. H. Auden. The second reading that has informed my response to Auden's early explications on death and mortality is from the works of Sigmund Freud, whom alongside his one-time collaborator Otto Rank appears to have had a prominent influence on a series of works from the poet's later literary career.<sup>6</sup> As the introduction to *In a Strange Room* is indeed, almost enthusiastic to mention, Freud writes in 1918 in *Reflections on War and Death*, "we are unable to maintain our former attitude towards death, and we have not yet found a new one".<sup>7</sup> Whilst the statement succinctly demonstrates the confusion of mortality in the Modernist consciousness, the summative remarks of the next paragraph are perhaps more worthy of note in this particular instance: "It is therefore inevitable that we should seek compensation for this loss of life in the world of fiction, in literature," writes Freud. "There alone the condition for reconciling ourselves to death is fulfilled."<sup>8</sup>

Although the notion and indeed, the spectacle of death are explored in numerous forms throughout the poet's publishing career, Auden's juvenilia is of particular interest when we are to explore Freud's notion of literature as part manifestation of and part reconciliation to the sense of confusion that occurred when previous ways of understanding death were undermined. In what forms a particularly nebulous subset of Auden's early poems, the ways in which the poet interacts with the notion of death as both a physical and spiritual entity and engages with the rebirth narratives of Old Norse and early Christian apocrypha are of particular relevance to Freud's assertion that literature was the arena within which the 'new' death was

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<sup>6</sup> John Boly, 'Auden and Freud: The Psychoanalytic Text' in *W. H. Auden in Context*, ed. by Tony Sharpe (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013) pp. 160-170

<sup>7</sup> Sherman, *In a Strange Room*, p. 2-3

<sup>8</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Reflections on War and Death*, trans. by Abraham Brill & Alfred B. Knutter, (Oxford: Acheron Press, 2012) p.14

explored and processed. This, again, is of great relevance to this thesis and its explorations of how ideas of landscape and locality function within these texts when we are to consider the degree to which the northern landscape of these early poems appears representative of a retreat from modernity as a means of addressing the changing social and spiritual structures of the interwar period.

### **1.2: Haptic Ghosts: Heath Wood, *Wuthering Heights* and Katabasis**

The subject matter of the 1927 poem beginning “Who Stands, the crux left of the watershed” is a piece that has already been subject to significant thematic discussion, both by Katherine Bucknell in the pertaining notes to the poem in *Juvenilia: Poems 1922–1928* and indeed, Auden’s most prominent biographers. However, the concern of mortality that looms large within the piece is perhaps overshadowed within the complexity of the created landscape that the poet establishes via the exclusive textual ambiguity of esoteric folk narratives. The piece is a brooding one, again dominated by the structures of the decaying Pennine lead-mining industry that characterise “Allendale” and “The Old Colliery”, and in exploring the piece further we might observe a series of evocations and intertextual allusions that allow us to expand upon this chapter’s analyses of the piece along the lines of Sherman’s position.

The piece begins:

Who stands, the crux left of the watershed,  
On the wet road between the chafing grass  
Below him sees dismantled washing-floors,  
Snatches of tramline running to the wood,

An industry already comatose,  
Yet sparsely living. [...]

“Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed”<sup>9</sup>

The mortality, the decay of the landscape itself is established in overbearing terms — the “dismantled washing-floors” and “Snatches of tramline”<sup>10</sup> of the third and fourth lines, the “industry comatose, yet sparsely living”<sup>11</sup> of the fifth and sixth. Although the metaphor here is unambiguous, it is perhaps important to note that this is similar to the manner in which the 'dying' industrial landscape in the poem “Allendale” is characterised by its action and motion — the constant use of verbs in their present tense — the death of the landscape here is a protracted affair, it too is *dying* rather than merely dead: the “ramshackle engine at Cashwell”<sup>12</sup> still grudgingly performs its office. The poet again appears to have gone to at least some lexical trouble here to affirm that what we are witness to is a scene taken from the process of dying, rather than one of something dead; something that we might observe reiterated when we once again return to the local lore that forms the basis for the mid-section of “Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed”.

The notion of protracted death becomes even more apparent when we consider the two local folkloric narratives that, according to Katharine Bucknell, the piece engages with. One details the abandonment of a coffin during a snowstorm on top of the nearby Crossfell as it travelled the ‘Corpse Road’ from the village of Garrigill to bury the deceased in Kirkland.<sup>13</sup> The second reference is to the death of

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<sup>9</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 218

<sup>10</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 218

<sup>11</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 218

<sup>12</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 218

<sup>13</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 219



Parker Liddell, a miner at the Rampgill Mine<sup>14</sup> during the winter of 1916 in the lines “...one died / During a storm, the fells impassable / Not at his village; in his wooden shape / Through long abandoned levels nosed his way / And in a final valley went to ground”.<sup>15</sup> Having been injured during a rock fall, due to a storm on the fells Liddell had to be borne through the disused adits of an abandoned mine to reach medical assistance at the nearby village of Carrshield, yet died several days later.<sup>16</sup>

Although the landscape of the poem in its entirety is cadaverous and characterised by decay, the “many dead” of the tenth line are still an active and markedly physical presence within the landscape. As they move beneath the earth, they appear similar in aspect to the other very present Modernist dead found in Woolf, Forster, Rilke and Joyce,<sup>17</sup> both spectral and physical: they are presented with little incredulity within their narratives, a natural feature as opposed to an oddity. Regarding the natural landscape, the effect of this is curious: in the dead appearing so tangibly present within the narrative of the setting, Auden establishes a curious sense of the suspension of mortality within the piece. We suspect, perhaps, that the landscape of the ruined mine is itself situated between the polarities of living and dying, and that it is the observer, the reader — the *Stranger* of the nineteenth and twentieth lines — that is the alien in the landscape, rather than the dead. This notion of the narrator being registered as alien to the landscape is unusual for early Auden, and the reasoning behind the subtle juxtaposition only becomes apparent when we pursue the notion in less obvious pieces such as “Elegy (1925)”.

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<sup>14</sup> Alan Myers & Robert Forsythe, *W. H. Auden: Pennine Poet*, (Nenthead: North Pennines Heritage Trust, 1999) p. 51

<sup>15</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 218

<sup>16</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 219

<sup>17</sup> Friedman, *Fictional Death*, p. 148

The final line of “Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed” also contains some indication of the supernatural present within the narrative. The image implied in the final line of the last stanza — “Ears poise before decision, scenting danger”<sup>18</sup> of what Buckell's notation in *Juvenilia* identifies as a 'frightened animal'<sup>19</sup> is perhaps indicative of what is, in English folk eschatology, termed a 'soul-image',<sup>20</sup> an 'echo' shown in symbolic guise of a past crime or occurrence at the location.<sup>21</sup> The phenomenon is found commonly in European folkloric narratives up to the turn of the century<sup>22</sup>. As a textual device, it appears similar in aspect to the notion of metempsychosis found in a number of Old Norse narratives, observable particularly in the Elder Edda of which Auden was so fond and later translated. It is also possible to observe a form of metempsychosis in the figure of Glámr the draugar from *Grettis Saga Ásmundarsonar*,<sup>23</sup> and more generally in the *Völsunga saga* and *Hrómundar saga Gripssonar* — echoes of which might arguably be found in *The Age of Anxiety: A Baroque Eclogue* and the drama *Paid on Both Sides*. In relation to this, there are also a number of connections to be made with some Old English mythological narratives, where the image of the mouse (*mús*) in particular is often found in connection with the notion of death.<sup>24</sup> Rather than the associated notions of pestilence and bodily death that we find in early modern texts, however, the mouse in Medieval texts and indeed, the early English mythologies that Auden often explores

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<sup>18</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 218

<sup>19</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 219

<sup>20</sup> Theo Brown, *The Fate of the Dead: A Study in Folk-Eschatology in the West Country After the Reformation*, (Ipswich: D. S. Brewer, 1979) p. 73

<sup>21</sup> Brown, p.73

<sup>22</sup> Brown, p.73-4

<sup>23</sup> Brown, p.74

<sup>24</sup> Stephen Pollington, *The Elder Gods: The Otherworld of Early England*, (Little Downham: Anglo-Saxon Books, 2011) p. 34

in his later works is more apotropaic, representing a peaceful transition of the spirit either between sleep and waking, or more commonly between the living and the dead<sup>25</sup> (often in the form of the soul exiting the body of the deceased in the form of a mouse).<sup>26</sup>

In consideration of the image's textual proximity to the anecdotal reference to the fate of the Nenthead miner, or perhaps more simply, the “many dead” who lie under the moor, this is perhaps another manner in which we might observe the poet engage with and appear to undermine the notion of mortality within the narrative. In these allusions, the dead are unerringly established as part of the living landscape, the *mús* perhaps even allegory for the dying industrial scene itself. That the animal is, as Bucknell identifies, 'frightened' is less transparent in its meaning, however it may simply be in response to the *Stranger's* intrusion. We must also consider that the animal image here is that of a rabbit or hare; again in European mythologies, a common form of the metempsyche and symbolic of cyclical rebirth.<sup>27</sup>

This suspension of mortality is further illustrated when we consider the ways in which the final lines of “Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed” appear to directly and indirectly interact with other texts. The latter of the two stanzas represents a slight shift in tone from the first, speaking perhaps more directly to the omnipresent *Stranger* — yet it is the manner in which the linguistic choices of the stanza itself appear to echo another text that are perhaps more significant than the subtle change in narrative positioning that occurs.

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<sup>25</sup> Pollington, p. 33

<sup>26</sup> Hope Werness, *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Animal Symbolism in World Art*, (New York: Continuum, 2006) p. 285

<sup>27</sup> Werness, p. 339

[...] They wake no **sleeper; you may hear the wind**  
Arriving, driven from the ignorant sea  
To hurt itself on pane, on bark of elm  
Where sap unbaffled rises, being spring.  
But seldom this. Near you, taller than **grass-**

“Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed”<sup>28</sup>

[...] Listened to the **soft wind breathing through the grass**, and  
wondered how anyone could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the  
**sleepers** in that quiet earth.

*Wuthering Heights*<sup>29</sup>

*Wuthering Heights*, published in 1847, bears some thematic resemblance to “Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed”: the texts share a similarity of setting, a moorland landscape characterised by its desolation, and perhaps more importantly for the purposes of this analysis, a similarity of attitude towards the notion of death and more specifically, the notion of the dead still being present within the landscape itself. In *Wuthering Heights* there are a number of occasions where the dead appear to manifest themselves within the landscape as a physical, visible presence — the young shepherd's account of seeing “Heathcliff, and a woman, yonder, under t'Nab”<sup>30</sup> and the early appearance of the deceased Catherine Earnshaw to Mr. Lockwood, the novel's narrator — however there are occasions where the dead appear represented by more natural phenomena.

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<sup>28</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 218

<sup>29</sup> Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1950) p. 417

<sup>30</sup> Brontë, p. 416

In Bronte's novel, the appearance of the dead is always marked by the presence of wind. When Mr. Earnshaw dies in the first volume, the house is buffeted by “high winds”<sup>31</sup>, when Heathcliff dies, the window is blown open and the “lattice flapping to and fro”.<sup>32</sup> When Heathcliff narrates how he exhumes the body of Catherine Earnshaw some time after she has been interred, the wind appears within the text with such immediacy to the presence that Heathcliff disturbs from the grave to the extent that the dominant narrative reading is to assume that they are one and the same: “There was another sigh, close at my ear. I appeared to feel the warm breath of it displacing the sleet-laden wind.”<sup>33</sup> In relation to Auden and the suspension of mortality, it is also perhaps interesting to note that earlier in the same passage, Heathcliff also uses the presence of the wind as a means of denying Catherine's death — “If she be cold, I'll think it is this north wind that chills me, and if she be motionless, that it is sleep.”<sup>34</sup>

The apparent inextricable nature of the notions of sleep and death here must also be noted. The term 'sleeper' used by Auden and by Bronte as on these two occasions, to refer to the dead — itself thought to be a reference to a biblical verse from Ephesians 5:14, “Awake, O sleeper, rise up from the dead, and Christ will give you light”<sup>35</sup> — again appears to reiterate the notion of death being suspended, that the dead, rather than being dead in a finite sense, are either merely sleeping or awaiting a divine resurrection<sup>36</sup> — this notion is explored further in the analysis of

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<sup>31</sup> Brontë, p. 50

<sup>32</sup> Brontë, p. 414

<sup>33</sup> Brontë, p. 356

<sup>34</sup> Brontë, p. 356

<sup>35</sup> Harriet Britten, *'Mid Heath and Frozen Snow': Death and Dying in the works of the Brontës*, (London: Routledge, 1989) p. 77

<sup>36</sup> Britten, p. 77

another, earlier poem from Auden's juvenilia, "Christ in Hades". The allusion appears to persist; the phrase "*to hurt itself on pane*" echoing several scenes from Bronte's novel, most notably where the image of the deceased Catherine Earnshaw appears at the window of the novel's narrator. The apparition, again, previously thought to be the *wind*<sup>37</sup> — is then injured, "[...] and finding it useless to attempt shaking the creature off, I pulled its wrist on to the broken pane, and rubbed it to and fro 'til the blood ran down and soaked the bedclothes",<sup>38</sup> again, quite similar in aspect to the image that Auden creates in the final lines of "Who Stands, The Crux Left of the Watershed".

The association appears deliberate: in later works, the poet again appears to combine writing about the notion of mortality with the influence of the works of Emily Bronte. It has been suggested by Christopher Innes in the chapter "Auden's Plays and Dramatic Writings: Theatre, Film and Opera" found in *The Cambridge Companion to W. H. Auden* that the moorland setting of the novel *Wuthering Heights* plays a part in the construction of the landscape in the scenes of physical conflict that feature heavily in *Paid on Both Sides*, alongside the scenes from the tenth-century Anglo-Saxon epic poem, *The Battle of Maldon*.<sup>39</sup>

Similarly, in 1944's *The Sea and the Mirror* — a long poem billed as a 'commentary' upon Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, the poet opens the piece with an epigraph comprised of lines from Bronte's 1844 poem, "Plead for Me", although

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<sup>37</sup> Brontë, p. 28

<sup>38</sup> Brontë, p. 29

<sup>39</sup> Christopher Innes, 'Auden's Plays and Dramatic Writings: Theatre, Film and Opera' *The Cambridge Companion to W. H. Auden*, ed. by Stan Smith, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) pp. 82-96 (p. 85)

interrogating the suggestion during the course of the 'commentary' that Bronte's assertion that the creation and source of art is a form of divinely inspired action is, perhaps, incorrect.<sup>40</sup> The nucleic link with the notion of death and mortality here is Auden's textual focus upon the character of Prospero; whose realisation of his own mortality in Act IV of *The Tempest* provides Auden's version with some of its most haunting lines. Previously too engrossed in his magical 'art' to address his own mortality, Auden's Prospero in the section *Prospero to Ariel* finally envisions himself as mortal; “As if I had been on a drunk since I was born / And suddenly now, and for the first time, am cold sober”,<sup>41</sup> envisioning himself as an old man — “An old man just like other old men, with eyes that water easily in the wind, and a head that nods in the sunshine”,<sup>42</sup> becoming “Forgetful, maladroit, a little grubby” — awaiting what he terms death's “stumping question”.<sup>43</sup>

The notion of mortality is not phrased in entirely negative terms throughout *The Sea and the Mirror*. As Antonio — the outsider, afforded an eloquence by what Arthur C. Kirsch notes in the preface to the 2003 Princeton edition of the poem is, perhaps, a sympathetic Auden<sup>44</sup> — taunts Prospero, situated as a counterpoint between adulthood and the “paradisal possibilities of childhood”<sup>45</sup> that the magician is denied —

As I exist so you shall be denied,  
 Forced to remain our melancholy mentor,  
 The grown-up man, the adult in his pride  
 Never have time to curl up at the centre

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<sup>40</sup> Andrew Hass, *Auden's O: The Loss of One's Sovereignty in the Making of Nothing*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013) p. 125

<sup>41</sup> W. H. Auden, *The Sea and the Mirror*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), p. 10

<sup>42</sup> Auden, *The Sea and the Mirror*, p. 11

<sup>43</sup> Auden, *The Sea and the Mirror*, p. 11

<sup>44</sup> Arthur Kirsch, introduction *The Sea and the Mirror* by W. H. Auden, pp. i-xxvi (p. xxii)

<sup>45</sup> Kirsch, *The Sea and the Mirror*, p. xxiii

Time turns on when completely reconciled  
Never become and therefore never enter  
The green occluded pasture as a child.

“The Sea and the Mirror”<sup>46</sup>

It is, here, interesting to note in relation to Freud's positing of literature as a means of processing the notion of mortality that the character of Prospero in *The Sea and the Mirror* was one with which Auden seemed to share some manner of affinity: as Kirsch writes, Auden's Prospero alludes to passages from Kierkegaard and Augustine that Auden himself appeared to particularly value,<sup>47</sup> stating that “the whole of [Prospero's] speech, in its poignancy and wit, suggests Auden's own voice,”<sup>48</sup> and is perhaps emblematic of anxieties that have manifested themselves in the poet's work from the earliest periods. The general textual feeling toward the notion of mortality here, and specifically existing outside or beyond it, is mixed — however it is uncharacteristic of early Auden to provide a value judgement even *sotto voce* on something so decidedly metaphysical in aspect. The connection with the works of Emily Bronte appears to run too deeply to be described as coincidental in connection with “Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed”, appearing almost emblematic of the notion within Auden's later texts.

With this in mind, in relation to Freud's notion that literature represented the

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<sup>46</sup> Auden, *The Sea and the Mirror*, p. 14

<sup>47</sup> Kirsch, *The Sea and the Mirror*, p. xxi

<sup>48</sup> Kirsch, *The Sea and the Mirror*, p. xxii



manner in which the confusion surrounding the loss of life is reconciled, and Sherman's that the ways in which Modernist literatures engage with death as a notion belie greater cultural anxiety, Auden appears somewhat of an atavist: there is an apparent unalloyed denial of its finality. In these associations, the poet appears to have constructed a mid-point between the act of dying and the finality of death, as analogised by the slow decay of the lead-mining industries that dominated the natural landscapes of his early adolescence — a retreat from the notion of death as finite, and the dead themselves as departed, such as the series of allusions to the Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* imply.

However there is, perhaps, more to the suspension of mortality narrative present within Auden's early poetry than that of a simple, juvenile denial of the finality of death, however symbolically presented. In these poems, the notion of death often appears conflated with the notion of a loss of identity, and for Auden, specifically the loss of local and regional identities that occurred as a result of the decay of the heavy industries that characterise the pre-war period in the north of England. The couplet “The men are dead who used to walk these dales / The mines they worked in once are long forgotten”,<sup>49</sup> from “Rookhope (Weardale, Summer 1922)” exemplifies the notion simply, yet again within this narrative we are made party to the presence of the supernatural and the continued presence of the dead within the landscape of the poem. Auden's narrator — perhaps an early incarnation of the intrusive *Stranger* of “Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed” — again echoes the final lines of *Wuthering Heights*, this time in sentiment rather than in direct lexical similarity. Whilst Lockwood — the often-unobservant narrator of

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<sup>49</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p.54

Bronte's final scene — finds it difficult to “imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth”, Auden's narrator relates that “dead men, they say, sleep very soundly”<sup>50</sup> — and much like Lockwood, “*they*” appear to be incorrect in their assumption, as Auden's narrator has himself witnessed the miners' echo within the landscape:

[...] Yet- I have stood by their deserted shafts  
While the rain lashed my face and clutched my knees  
And seemed to hear therein their careless laughs,

“Rookhope (Weardale, Summer 1922)”<sup>51</sup>

The scene, here, is rife with a sense of bucolic idealism — the laughing ghostly figures of Rookhope a far cry from the unquiet dead of “Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed” or the simple, fatalist attitude toward death found its contemporary, “The Miner's Wife” — and appears to suffer from an almost naïve conflation of heroism and industrialism, demonstrating perhaps a shifting attitude towards the notion of death even within the additional context of the industrial setting.

The poems “Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed” and “Rookhope, (Weardale, Summer 1922)” are both emblematic of the way in which for the most part, Auden's *Juvenilia* tends to address an industrial scene by way of the supernatural, or at least pertaining to the notion of mortality, perhaps as we have already identified as a response to the vitiation of previously distinct provincial

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<sup>50</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p.54

<sup>51</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 54

identities and as a means of poetic retreatism into a more archaic and secure social and cultural system. This in itself implies that at least within the context of the juvenilia, for Auden, the notion of landscape is characterised by (and indeed appears inextricable from) its human geography and their associated cultural ephemera; the folk histories, esoteric localities and physical presences that feature with such prominence within the narrative of the two poems that we have already examined in this chapter.

This reading is underpinned by the manner in which the poet has gone to noticeable effort to establish the pieces within their particular geographic context, denoted by the textual prominence afforded to location, a notion that is expanded upon in the following chapter of this thesis. Both pieces are even named with some reference to a specific and relevant viewpoint or location: *Rookhope*, *Cashwell*, or simply the *crux left of the watershed*. In this, there is no mistaking their setting, or the industries that localities that they pertain to. It is perhaps, in itself, a political act: although now defunct, the narratives reaffirm the existence of those locations and their continued existence in the face of industrial decline. In essence: that the dead are undeniably still present.

Expanding upon this, it is also possible to read “Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed” particularly as an allegory for the aftermath of the General Strike of 1926; the “frustrate and vexed” language and ruined industrial landscapes a metaphor, the aftermath of the political suppression of the working-class, industrial voices that the poet seemed frequently to adopt during the late nineteen-twenties. Following the introduction of the Trade Disputes and Trade Unions Act of 1927 by

Sir Douglas Hogg, union responses such as organised solidarity action and mass picketing were designated punishable by up to two years imprisonment, and mandated that trade union members had to contract-in to any political levy, leading to a fall in the annual funding of the Labour Party by over eighteen percent.<sup>52</sup> The reading creates a romantic image, the young Auden, observing the degradation of what he would later term in “New Year Letter” “the locality I love”, perhaps experiencing a first consideration of Communism that we might observe in later poems such as “I Have a Handsome Profile” and “Brothers, Who When the Sirens Roar (A Communist to Others)” from 1932. It is also important to note, however, that the actuality of Auden's poetic worker solidarity has often been called into question by his peers. Stephen Spender in particular denounced the two poems as Auden simply shamming ideologies that he did not personally hold,<sup>53</sup> and as put by Christopher Isherwood, came from a generation that saw strike-breaking as a “tremendous, middle-class lark”<sup>54</sup> — and indeed, at the denouement of Auden’s 1933 play *The Dance of Death*, it is unclear whether the appearance of Karl Marx and Communism are part of the solution or part of the problem.<sup>55</sup>

Whilst the notion does lend a quotable aside to explications of Auden's own political mythos, the poet's politics within the juvenilia are decidedly amorphous, and in most cases likely yet another form of the adoption and appropriation processes that we see in the young poet's interactions with authors such as Walter de la Mare and Thomas Hardy — perhaps more usefully viewed as a textual process rather than a

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<sup>52</sup> Stephen Lee, *Aspects of British Political History 1914-1995*, (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 93-4

<sup>53</sup> David Yezzi, ‘What Auden Believed’, *The New Criterion* (March 2006)  
<<https://www.newcriterion.com/issues/2006/3/what-auden-believed>> [Accessed 13th July 2016]

<sup>54</sup> Samuel Hynes, *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s*, (London: Viking, 1979), p. 80

<sup>55</sup> David Izzo, *W. H. Auden: An Encyclopedia*, (Jefferson: MacFarlane & Company, 2004) p. 63

definite political statement.

However the motif of death within the *Juvenilia* itself is nebulous, and not all of the pieces within Bucknell's anthology that engage with the theme conform to an analytical reading so simple as the politics of early twentieth century regionalism. What persists is the notion of the suspension of mortality and the manner in which a large amount of Auden's early pieces that engage with the notion of death are characterised by what Alan Warren Friedman in *Fictional Death and the Modernist Enterprise* terms “presumptions of posthumous survival and unknown worlds”.<sup>56</sup> This is a fact that Friedman, like Sherman, considers to be one that particularly enriches the character of artistic Modernism — and one that perhaps benefits further analysis within this examination of death in Auden's juvenilia.

There are, however, a number of poems in the juvenilia sequence where the poet depicts a landscape haunted by the omnipresent dead set outside of the context of the declining Pennine lead-mining industry, and perhaps one of the most interesting is the untitled piece beginning “Below me, Ticknall lay but in the light”. The piece itself, dated May 1925, perhaps recalls the sense of the agricultural bucolic found in the poet's earliest juvenilia, and like the early bucolics, clearly demonstrates the influence of the works of Walter de la Mare on Auden's early canon. Although for the most part the influence of de la Mare is charted fastidiously by Bucknell in the notes and addendum to *Juvenilia*, the allusions to the poet's work found in “Below me, Ticknall lay but in the light” appear to have gone undetected, as pronounced as they are. Auden's poem echoes a particular piece of verse by de le

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<sup>56</sup> Friedman, *Fictional Death*, p. 143

Mare, “The Owl” — written several years after the dreamlike nursery-verse of *Songs of Childhood*, the piece was published at a point in the poet's career marked by works of a decidedly darker and more spiritualist turn such as “The Ghost” and “Grim”. The verse of this period appears to have been a particular favourite of Auden's, many pieces featuring in the collection *A Choice of De La Mare's Verse* that Auden himself curated and edited in 1963.

The piece, written sometime in May 1925, begins with the Wanderer of the juvenilia walking above the Derbyshire village of Ticknall in one of Auden's signature early pastoral scenes, characterised by the spectre of modernity present only in the peripheral (“Below me, Ticknall lay but in the light / Which yet remained the roofs looked strange and blurred”). The scene itself is the most atmospherically supernatural within the context of the juvenilia, and the piece evokes several early European pagan ideas in its reference to the figure of the owl. The owl, in early antiquity, is often found linked with the notion of death and specifically the passage between the worlds of the living and the dead in the mythos of the Iron Age Cult of the Head;<sup>57</sup> one of the more well-known tenets of pre-Christian spirituality that was afforded particular vogue in early twentieth-century academic depictions of Iron Age Europe,<sup>58</sup> which again is interesting when we consider the location in which *Ticknall* appears to be set.

At the cry of an owl from the nearby copse, the wandering narrator — returns home only to be struck by the eeriness of the scene. He goes on to imagine the

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<sup>57</sup> Anne Ross, *Pagan Celtic Britain*, (London: Cardinal, 1974) p. 107

<sup>58</sup> Ian Armit, *Headhunting and the Body in Iron Age Europe*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 18

previous inhabitants of the landscape itself, “shagged men, who had / An older name for home than Derbyshire / Or Britain”,<sup>59</sup> whom he fancies that upon hearing the cry of the fern owl would have become afraid, “Feeling the dead peer downward through the trees”. The parallels with the first stanzas of de la Mare’s 1907 poem “The Owl” are potent, both thematically and semantically —

What if to edge of dream,  
When the spirit is come,  
Shriek the hunting owl,  
And summon it home —  
To the fear-stirred heart  
And the ancient dread of man  
When cold root or stone  
Pillowed roofless head?

“The Owl”<sup>60</sup>

The narrative similarities too are obvious: both poems are catalysed by the call of an owl, which in its turn prompts the ancient human geography of the poem — Auden’s “shagged men, who had / an older name for home than Derbyshire / Or Britain” and de la Mare’s subjects from “When root or stone / Pillowed roofless head” — to be struck fearful, “feeling the dead peer downward”, or “the ancient dread of man”.

The “shagged men” and the peering dead of Auden’s piece can be said with a reasonable certainty to be a reference to the funerary interments at the late Bronze Age to Scandinavian barrow cemetery at Heath Wood near Ingleby. Heath Wood, a

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<sup>59</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 94

<sup>60</sup> Walter de la Mare, *The Burning-Glass and Other Poems*, (New York: The Viking Press, 1945), p. 38-39.

hilltop burial nexus and cursus less than two miles north of the village of Ticknall was first excavated in the middle of the nineteenth century and is believed to be connected to the *mycel hæþen here*<sup>61</sup> (the 'Great Heathen Army' of Danish and Norwegian *vikingr* responsible for the harrying of the four remaining Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of England in the late 860s) depicted in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle of 865, that itself forms the aesthetic basis for a number of scenes in the later work *Paid on Both Sides*.<sup>62</sup> From the site itself the titular village of Ticknall is clearly visible on three sides; the unspecified — and yet to a local observer, quite obvious — nature of the setting perhaps yet another of the young poet's exercises in creating a two-strand reading and establishing an esoteric locality. Heath Wood itself is locally believed to be haunted,<sup>63</sup> however there are no references to specific apparitions apparent that may have inspired the image of Auden's "shagged men" save perhaps for an account from the late 1880s where it was reported that a local schoolboy had witnessed a procession of "lumpen, hooded men" in the grounds of nearby stately home Calke Abbey; however the predominance of sources appear to delineate the figures Augustinian monks.<sup>64</sup>

The site also has strong archaeological links to the Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Scandinavian site of nearby Repton,<sup>65</sup> where the shrine to Saint Wigstan (later *Wystan*) of Evesham, the eighth-century Mercian martyr saint for which Auden

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<sup>61</sup> Julian Richards, 'Excavations at the Viking Barrow Cemetery at Heath Wood, Ingleby, Derbyshire', *The Antiquaries Journal* (September 2004) <<http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/635/1/richardsjd1.pdf>> [Accessed 19th December 2017] p. 7

<sup>62</sup> Heather O'Donoghue, 'Owed to Both Sides: W. H. Auden's Double Debt to the Literature of the North' in *Anglo-Saxon Culture and the Modern Imagination* ed. by David Clark & Nicholas Perkins (London: D. S. Brewer, 2010) pp. 51-71, (p. 55)

<sup>63</sup> Mark Henderson, *Folk Tales of the Peak District*, (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2009), p. 69

<sup>64</sup> Henderson, p. 66

<sup>65</sup> Richards, p. 11, 12, 54



himself was named lies beneath the parish church. It is also interesting to note that this early fascination with the Heath Wood burial nexus perhaps also finds its way into a much later piece, the second of the Kirchstetten poems “Thanksgiving for a Habitat”, which opens with the image of a modern funeral described using the epithets of a pagan burial ritual<sup>66</sup> — “Nobody I know would like to be buried / with a silver cocktail shaker / A transistor radio and a strangled daily help”.

With reference to the notion of the suspension of mortality narrative found in Auden’s Pennine ghost poems, it is interesting to note that “Below me, Ticknall lay but in the light” appears to be similarly aesthetically patterned: the transitions from light to darkness and back to light are dominant forces within the poem's imagery. The piece begins with a reference in the first line to the village of Ticknall, caught in “the light / Which yet remained”, yet follows the notion with a series of references to a dark or subterranean imagery — “the edge of the night”, “dark valleys” and “wounded cloud” from the eighth, ninth and tenth lines respectively, and ending abruptly with the “shagged men” of the thirteenth line having “woke sleeping logs to flame”, and “huddled closer to the fire” — again bringing the semantic focus back to notions of warmth and light. This patterning echoes the conventions of several narratives of resurrection from several apocryphal Christian, Norse and classical mythologies, specifically the mytheme of katabasis, or the heroic descent into the underworld. Often tripartite in narrative structure — the plateau, the descent (“katabasis”), and the heroic return (“anabasis”)<sup>67</sup> — representative of triumph over

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<sup>66</sup> Peter Firchow, *W. H. Auden: Contexts for Poetry*, (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002), p. 218

<sup>67</sup> Radcliffe Edmonds, *Myths of the Underworld Journey: Plato, Aristophanes and the “Orphic” Gold Tablets*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 11

fate or more importantly for this chapter, the “possibility of immortality”<sup>68</sup> — the mytheme is found in several specific texts that Auden overtly engages with during his publishing career, specifically the 'Harrowing of Hell' in the Gospel of Nicodemus (“Christ in Hades”, 1923 or 1924), Goethe's *Faust* (“New Year Letter”, 1940) and Virgil's *Aeneid* (“Secondary Epic”, 1959). Although the existence of motif of the “dying-and-rising-god” in world mythologies — motifs A192 and A193 of the Stith Thompson typology Index<sup>69</sup> — has been subject to the criticism of reductionism by later twentieth-century scholarship, the notion of katabasis does appear to reflect one of the broader anxieties of Modernism itself, the displacement of “proper”<sup>70</sup> death. Regarding Auden, this mythological patterning again is suggestive of the suspension of mortality, and indeed, as the trope suggests, the possibility of *immortality*, and a denial of death's finality; perhaps emblematic of the anxieties of eschatology that both Sherman and Freud delineate common to Modernist literature.

Again, in the piece “Below me, Ticknall lay but in the light” we are party to a scene where Auden's dead — once again, co-opted from the sediments of the area's local histories and folkloric traditions — are a powerful presence within the landscape, although in this instance seemingly free of the politics of the decline of industrially-centric regional identity. The suspension of mortality narrative here appears subtler than in either of the two poems previously discussed, yet still evokes a landscape image again supplemented — perhaps dominated — by its human geography. For Auden, certainly within the contexts of the poems that we have

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<sup>68</sup> Bruce Loudon, *Homer's Odyssey and the Near East*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 198

<sup>69</sup> Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk Literature: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folk Tales, Myths, Fables, Medieval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books and Local Legends*, (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1958), p. 106

<sup>70</sup> Friedman, *Fictional Death*, p. 50

examined, the natural landscape exists as a conglomerate force of the aesthetic and the historic, textually characterised by not only the manner in which it appears but also by the manner in which it exists as a result of its heritage in the popular consciousness. The 'landscape', as it were, of the three poems appears to be an exercise in applied phenomenology, an amalgamate of past, present and the seemingly ubiquitous plane of the dead. The notion recalls Jacques Derrida's concept of hauntology in *Spectres of Marx*; a state of temporal and ontological disjunction represented by the figure of the spectre in its conglomerate form of being at once "neither living nor dead, present nor absent".<sup>71</sup> This ghostliness is perhaps best represented in a manner with which we might better understand Auden's landscapes of life and death by Peter Buse and Andrew Scott in *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History* (1999):

Ghosts arrive from the past and appear in the present. However, the ghost cannot be properly said to belong to the past. . . . Does then the 'historical' person who is identified with the ghost properly belong to the present?

*Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History*<sup>72</sup>

This temporal confusion and the conflation of the physical landscape and its dead — or indeed, the landscape death itself — also recalls the manner in which John Whittier-Ferguson in the concluding chapter to *Mortality and Form in Late Modernist Literature* examines the ways in which a series of late Modernist writers, specifically T. S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf, seem to conflate a deathly otherworld

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<sup>71</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, The Work of Mourning and the New International*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 63

<sup>72</sup> Peter Buse & Andrew Scott, 'Introduction: A Future for Haunting' in *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History*, ed. by Peter Buse & Andrew Scott, (London: Macmillan, 1999), pp.1-21, (p. 11)

and the present, physical landscape. Citing Eliot's "Little Gidding" —

There are other places  
Which are also the world's end...  
But this is the nearest, in place and time,  
Now and in England

"Little Gidding" <sup>73</sup>

and Woolf's famed diary entry from January 9<sup>th</sup>, 1941 —

A blank. All frost. Still frost. Burning white. Burning blue.  
The elms red. I did not mean to describe, once more, the downs in  
snow; but it came. And I can't help even now turning to look at  
Ashenham down, red, purple, dove blue grey, with the cross so  
melodramatically against it. What is the phrase I always remember-  
- or forget. Look your last on all things lovely...

Are these the things that are interesting? That recall; that say  
Stop you are so fair? Well, all life is so fair, at my age. I mean,  
without much more of it I suppose to follow. And t'other side of the  
hill there'll be no rosy blue red snow.

*Diary V* <sup>74</sup>

Whittier-Ferguson exacts an analysis that focuses upon the manner in which the notions of death and physical location are somehow coalescent for both writers. This is interesting with regard to Auden's early poetry, particularly the manner in which Whittier-Ferguson views how Woolf fancies herself in near enough proximity to death — "just on t'other side of the hill" — to consider it part of the landscape. The ensuing analysis also pinpoints the manner in which Woolf's narrative appears to hint at the suspension of mortality, however brief, the entry itself suggesting a

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<sup>73</sup> Thomas Eliot, *Four Quartets*, (London: Faber & Faber, 2009), p. 34

<sup>74</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Volume Five, 1936-1941* ed. by Anne Olivier Bell, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1985) p. 351-2

narrative arc “from death to life and back to death again”.<sup>75</sup> This reading is based on Woolf’s lexical transitions of colourless landscapes to one characterised by its vibrancy, from “A blank. All frost. Still frost. Burning white” to “red, purple, dove blue grey” and back again, to “And t’other side of the hill, there’ll be no rosy blue red snow” — as if, as the scholar perhaps fancifully suggests, Eurydice had risen briefly to look upon Ashenham down before returning to the plane of the dead,<sup>76</sup> similar to how Auden’s “Below me, Ticknall lay but in the light” dictates a narrative of katabasis, of light to darkness to light.

For Whittier-Ferguson, this is an exercise in what he terms, borrowing Eliot’s own phraseology, *keeping time* — a prevalence of “holding fast to time and in the sense of making measured arrangements, structures that acknowledge time’s passing”<sup>77</sup> that appears to become of increasing importance to authors and artists during the decade directly after the cessation of world conflict in 1945. Auden’s sedimentary, historically-augmented approach to landscape poetry appears to echo these sentiments, albeit several decades previously, representative for Whittier-Ferguson of a similar anxiety to that which Freud describes in *Reflections on War and Death*. “Mindful of the *longue durée* and the predictable recurrence of catastrophe,” Whittier-Ferguson writes, “also knowing that each crisis nevertheless cries out for its own recognition, exerts its own forceful gravity on those living in one time, in one place”<sup>78</sup> — a sentiment that appears to have characterised the poetic output of Auden himself throughout the 1922–1928 period, exemplified in how in

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<sup>75</sup> John Whittier-Ferguson, *Mortality and Form in Late Modernist Literature*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014) p. 199

<sup>76</sup> Whittier-Ferguson, p. 199

<sup>77</sup> Whittier-Ferguson, p. 199

<sup>78</sup> Whittier-Ferguson, p. 199

reductive terms, landscape within these works appears as a theatre for the dead, and an exercise in establishing some semblance of permanence through a shared history or memory. The post-industrial moorland landscape for Auden represents what the French historian Pierre Nora terms a “*lieu de mémoire*” — a site of memory, a location, object or concept afforded cultural significance as a symbol of memorial heritage due to a conscious public memory (Ground Zero in New York; Tianmen Square) or merely the passage of time (Stonehenge; Hadrian's Wall).<sup>79</sup>

However in the interest of further analysing Auden's early relationships with landscape and locality, it is also necessary that we examine the criticisms levied at Nora's *Les Lieux de Mémoire*. Whilst *prima facie* providing a useful terminology and framework for viewing the landscape-heavy, geographically-centred poetry of the poet's juvenilia, Auden's *lieu de memoire* of the Pennine mining landscape also appears in some fashion to adhere to one of the more rudimentary criticisms of Nora's works. The British Marxist scholar E. J. Hobsbawm in the introduction to the 1983 volume *The Invention of Traditions* interrogates the nature of the *lieu de mémoire* and concludes that whilst there are extant some genuine articles and however useful it may first appear in studies of cultural anthropology, the majority of “sites of memory” are subject to what the scholars term the “invention of traditions”. Hobsbawm concludes that these spurious, modern traditions are invented usually for the purpose of generating consensus within a social group, merely claiming or giving the illusion that they are of legitimate historical precedent, often creating a shared past that its creator has little experience of, if it existed at all.<sup>80</sup> There are, perhaps,

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<sup>79</sup> Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past Volume III: Symbols* trans. by Arthur Goldhammer, ed. by Lawrence Kritzman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998)

<sup>80</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, ‘Inventing Traditions’ in *The Invention of Traditions* ed. by Eric Hobsbawm & Terence Ranger, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987) pp. 1-15, (p. 4-6)

shades of these analyses relevant to Auden's adoption of working-class mortality in the case of the dead of “Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed”,<sup>81</sup> the carter of “The Carter's Funeral”, the miner of “The Miner's Wife”, and even perhaps the decaying structures of “Rookhope (Weardale, Summer 1922)” and “Allendale”. If Auden's biographers are to be believed, the poet lived a life largely wilfully free of the influence of the class awareness of contemporary politics prior to his half-hearted flirtation with communism. In this co-opting of working class mortality, the poet appears to be effecting on a local micro-level what Hobsbawm describes as one of the key functions of the invented tradition — the “deliberate and innovative” engineering of the concept of nation, via the generation of nationalism, the notion of the nation-state, and national symbols and histories.<sup>82</sup> In conveying a knowledge of these mortalities as very minor esoteric events, in elevating them as characterised by the blithe nobility that defines the depiction of the figure of the rural labourer in *Juvenilia*, Auden's narrator legitimises and augments his status as a reliable guide through the North Country without ever having set foot in a mine.

### **1.3: A Quest for Permanence**

Yet Auden's ghosts are not the only manner in which the notions of mortality and landscape appear to interrelate within the context of the juvenilia period; and whilst perhaps less stylistically *Auden* than “Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed” and “Below me, Ticknall lay but in the light”, there are several poems from the period that offer less physical, overt representations of the dead. Instead,

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<sup>81</sup> A more thorough breakdown of the events that likely inspired the genesis of 1927's “Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed” are discussed in the following chapter of this thesis.

<sup>82</sup> Hobsbawm, p. 13

these pieces are characterised by the presence of man-made structures as a means of bridging the interstice between the polarities of the physical, living world and the plane that the dead appear to inhabit in early Auden. This adds another dimension to the frequent suspension of mortality narrative in Auden's early landscape poetry, which is important to consider in our explications of these complex textual relationships with death, mortality and the landscape, and the manner in which the natural landscape (specifically the desolate landscape of Auden's early Pennine poetry) functions as for the poet as a liminal space between the binary of life and death.

The poem “Stone Walls” (1923 or 1924) — hereafter delineated “Stone Walls I” to distinguish it from the February 1925 reworking of the piece that carries the same name, itself hereafter “Stone Walls II” — is characterised by linguistic naivety that belies what is arguably one of early Auden's more complex narratives on mortality and the anxieties of death, and again echoes the mytheme of katabasis that appears in the later poems “Below me, Ticknall lay but in the light” and “Christ in Hades”. The piece is clumsy, with short, alternately rhymed lines reminiscent of the dreamlike nursery verse of Walter de la Mare that we have explored some of the influences of previously, however unlike de la Mare's “Shadow” or “The Listeners” — both characterised by the ways in which they appear “haunted” by the spectre of mortality<sup>83</sup> — Auden's “Stone Walls I” is far removed from poetic subtlety. The piece explores the prevalence of the dry stone field boundaries common to the rural Pennine and Northumbrian geographies that feature heavily as settings in the poet's juvenilia, envisioning the walls' seemingly immutable nature as indicative of their

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<sup>83</sup> Henry Duffin, *Walter de la Mare: A Study of his Poetry*, (London: Sidgwick, 1949) p. 188



otherworldliness, and exploring their presence as a product of both their physical histories and their supernatural office.

The poem itself is interesting with relation to investigations of early Auden in several respects, however the one that contributes the most to this chapter's discourse is the manner in which the walls themselves take the form of a pathway or extended conduit, similar in aspect to the way that the titular pathway of "The Hidden Lane (Near Selbrigg, March 1925)" appears to act as a thoroughfare between the physical world of the narrator and some manner of unspecified otherworld, perhaps of the dead or of the fey. There is, however, an additional element to the "pathway" motif present in "Stone Walls I" as unlike in "The Hidden Lane (Near Selbrigg, March 1925)" specific textual attention is given to the spaces outside the pathway. The titular walls are described as "Sleepily wending / Over the waste fells / Silent, unending",<sup>84</sup> and passing through "strange kingdoms" — this, in addition to the phrase "dream-lost" in the poem's sixteenth line — is evocative of another instance of mythological katabasis, this time the narrative of the death of Baldr in Snorri Sturluson's Prose Edda. The imagery appears patterned after Sturluson's account of the descent of Hermódr the Bold into Helheim, whom on his way into the land of the dead rides on what Sturluson terms the "Hel-way", an "ancient stone path" that travels "over black wastes", "over dark dales and deep", and though "strange kingdoms".<sup>85</sup> The linguistic similarities to Auden's poem are pronounced, and the instance of the phrase "dream-lost" some lines later appears to support this reading: the phrase itself appears likely to be an attempt at the creation of a poetic kenning,

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<sup>84</sup> Auden, W. (2003) *Juvenilia: Poems 1922-1928* Princeton: Princeton University Press p. 49

<sup>85</sup> Brodeur, A. (1916) *The Prose Edda by Snorri Sturluson*, New York: The American-Scandinavian Foundation, p. 109

and directly echoes the phrase that Sturluson uses to describe the god Baldr, who is, by the transcription of the scholar Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur in the 1916 translation of Sturluson's Edda, "lost in Dream".<sup>86</sup>

It must also be noted that the allusions to the Prose Edda are not the only manner in which Auden references the concept of katabasis in "Stone Walls I". The last eight lines of the piece take the form of an extended question, with the narrative voice supposing what should happen should he follow the stone walls to their conclusion, which again appears to coincide with the notion of the walls as representative of something akin to Sturluson's path into Helheim:

What if I follow them  
Upward, afar?  
What if I come to  
Where burns no star?  
Dark hidden places  
Where memories are,  
And cold dead faces  
Despairs do mar?

"Stone Walls"<sup>87</sup>

Again, in the piece "Stone Walls I", we are party to a suspension of mortality and a narrative of resurrection, or living beyond the physicality of death that appears to characterise a larger portion of Auden's early landscape works that might perhaps be *prima facie* apparent. The poem itself, however, represents a subtle shift in the narrative positioning of the poem, delineating it quite distinct from "Who Stands, the

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<sup>86</sup> Brodeur, A. (1916) *The Prose Edda by Snorri Sturluson*, New York: The American-Scandinavian Foundation, p. 107

<sup>87</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 49

Crux Left of the Watershed”, “Rookhope (Weardale, Summer 1922)” and “Below me, Ticknall lay but in the light”. In the first three poems that we have examined during the course of this chapter the narrative voice appears to be *summoning*, using the natural landscape and its histories as a medium to bring into the physical realm a series of ghosts and memories, whereas in the poem most recently discussed, the narrative voice appears to be making an active journey into what appears to be Sturluson's Helheim, or simply a more generic “kingdom of the dead” common to a number of mythologies.

However in the fourth line of the above excerpt, the poet is also making a subtle allusion to the classical Greek mythological figure of Persephone (known in later Roman mythological tradition as Proserpina); perhaps the most well-known mythological narrative of katabasis in the popular imagination. The phrase “where burns no star” appears to be a direct reference — indeed, a direct borrowing — from the works of the American poet and playwright George Sterling, specifically to a piece titled “The House of Orchids” written in 1909, and published two years later in the volume *The House of Orchids and Other Poems* (1911). Sterling's piece, albeit much longer and with a much more developed basis of metaphor than Auden's poem, shares several thematic similarities with “Stone Walls I” as well as some similarities of form, appearing as an address on the fleeting nature of mortality using an extended floral imagery — “Ye seem as flowers exiled / More beautiful because they die so soon”.<sup>88</sup> It also perhaps more notably contains the lines:

If after- life can come to blossoms gone,

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<sup>88</sup> George Sterling, *The House of Orchids and Other Poems*, San Francisco: A. M. Robertson, 1911), p. 32-33

Surely Persephone  
Shall crown her brow with thee,  
In realms **where burns no star** nor sun  
To show the dead what amaranths to seek.

“The House of Orchids”<sup>89</sup>

In the conflation of the goddess Persephone / Proserpina and the image of the amaranth, Sterling's piece recalls the manner in which Book V of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (or perhaps Book IV of *Fasti*), recounts the katabasis and ensuing anabasis of the goddess' narrative, where prior to her descent into the underworld the unsuspecting Proserpina is abducted by the chthonic deity Dīs whilst picking flowers — “Some linger with you, hyacinth, and you, amaranth,”... They pile up roses and nameless flowers; their mistress gathers fragile saffron and white lilies. Her passion for plucking gradually leads her away; no attendant happened to follow her. Her uncle [Dīs] sees her and swiftly abducts what he sees, and bears her back to his realm on black horses.”<sup>90</sup> Auden's piece, although borrowing only the single phrase from “The House of Orchids” appears to offer a rebuke to Sterling's openly Homeric sentiments (“Just as a wind pours some leaves groundward, and others the forest / burgeoning, sprouts at the coming of Springtime, so in the same way / one generation of men grows up as another is fading”).<sup>91</sup> Whilst Sterling largely finds beauty in the mortality of the natural landscape, Auden's piece appears to defy the classical eschatology and finds a suspension of mortality in the man-made structures that mar the natural landscape, even oppressive by way of their permanence: “Each stone

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<sup>89</sup> Sterling, p. 37

<sup>90</sup> Ovid, *Fasti*, ed. & trans. by Anthony Boyle & Roger Woodard (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 109

<sup>91</sup> Homer, *The Iliad*, ed. & trans. by Rodney Merrill, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), p. 120

appears, / As dead hands laid them / In dream-lost years”.<sup>92</sup> The 1925 reworking of the poem, which shares little with the original other than its subject, puts the contention even more succinctly whilst on the subject of walls:

They've no bud-bursting feats in Spring  
To stir up vain hopes in one's head  
In Autumn no unblossoming  
To remind one of the dead.

“Stone Walls II”<sup>93</sup>

The narrative of the original considers using the walls as a pathway, a conduit between the extremities of life and death, as well as delineating the areas external to the walls themselves as alien — “strange kingdoms”; “dark hidden places” — the natural landscape designated distinctly *other*, perhaps itself a more obvious representation of the natural/mortality — man-made/suspended mortality binary.

With reference to Freud's notion that literature is the means by which the broader Modernist period attempts to reconcile the changing nature of death, Auden's early poetry frames what appears to be an almost literal representation of the notion. In “Stone Walls I” it is not the natural landscape that is permissive of the suspension of mortality, it is the man-made structures that characterise the natural landscape that are representative of what might be construed as man's triumph over traditional mortality itself. This is perhaps a reading we might also apply retrospectively to analyses of “Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed” and “Rookhope (Weardale, Summer 1922)”, as well as with some caution to “Below me, Ticknall lay

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<sup>92</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 49

<sup>93</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 81

but in the light” — the poem does have a predominance of natural imagery compared to the other two pieces, however we must still consider the barrows of the probable setting a man-made monument, although free from the materials associated with Auden's more recent structures, the lead-mining industry and the dry-stone walls of the Pennines.

Considering the Heath Wood barrows a man-made structure within the context of Auden's juvenilia, then, perhaps necessitates that we examine another piece of juvenilia from the 1923–1924 period, where it is perhaps accurate to say that the fascination with the dead and the notion of mythological attitudes to suspended mortality seem perhaps strongest in the poet's early works. Another poem from the *A Third Garland of Poesy* exercise book found in the papers of Gresham's School former pupil Tom Wintringham in 1996, “The Menhir” itself is part of a thematic shift in Auden's works that Katherine Bucknell, in the second appendix to *Juvenilia: Poems 1922–1928* outlines as representative of a move into “real landscapes and personal emotions”,<sup>94</sup> and a move into a poetry characterised by its burgeoning cynicism and sense of detachment. The landscape of “The Menhir” does, perhaps, exemplify this subtle shift as it does demonstrate the disappearance of overly sentimental linguistic patterning of the early bucolics and appear much darker and contemplative in its themes and aspect, a pronounced change in position regarding the natural landscape that Bucknell largely attributes to the poet's discovery of the works of Thomas Hardy in the summer of 1923,<sup>95</sup> as detailed in the essay “A Literary Transference”.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 254

<sup>95</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 254

<sup>96</sup> W. H. Auden, ‘A Literary Transference’, *The Southern Review*, 20 (Summer 1940) 78-87 (p. 78-9)

The piece is perhaps more existentially motivated than the poems that we have explored previously in the chapter, less preoccupied with the notion of death in its finite form than “Rookhope” or “Ticknall” and more concerned with the notions of permanence within the natural landscape that we might observe in pieces such as “Stone Walls I” and “Stone Walls II”. The piece is darkly atmospheric, the lone monolith upon indifferent moorland at dusk perhaps the nucleic form of one of Auden's most memorable images from the *Juvenilia* period, the ominous standing stones of “Lover's Lane” from 1926:

...Chokes music. Shadows stoop at me. Strange stones  
Loom up ahead like monstrous tusks before  
Gigantic darkness of a rising storm  
Which will soon set its itching fingers on  
The windpipe of the world.

“Lover's Lane”<sup>97</sup>

Upon examining the particular geographies common to Auden's *Juvenilia* during the 1923–4 period, the menhir itself — a nineteenth-century term for a prehistoric orthostat — is likely to be a reference to a particular standing stone on Hunstanworth Moor in County Durham, situated on a main road between the villages of Townfield and Rookhope, with Bolt's Law Hill (of “New Year Letter” fame) rising behind the monolith. In the piece, the wandering narrator of the *Juvenilia* happens upon the menhir, and after scraping it clean of moss and dirt, proceeds to inscribe the name of an unknown woman upon the standing stone although he

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<sup>97</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 155

appears confused as to why he did so save for a boyish exercise in Romantic deification: “Her name can have but little meaning there / In that wild deserted land”, “Yet some lost traveller there perhaps may feel / He's standing on holy ground”.<sup>98</sup>

The piece itself appears a reworking of Hardy’s poem “The Shadow on the Stone” from the late collection *Moments of Vision and Miscellaneous Verses* first published in 1917, where Hardy's narrator, upon passing the titular monolith he terms the “druid stone” fancies that he feels the ghostly presence of his first wife caught in the shadow of moving branches close to the orthostat. The effect of the stone's presence within the poem, as Brian Green in the volume *Hardy's Lyrics: Pearls of Pity* (1996) demonstrates, is an act in establishing permanence: “The stone is constantly there; it mysteriously possesses inward depth, and its 'druidic' origin establishes a time scale for all that surrounds it”<sup>99</sup> — similar in aspect to how Auden first frames the image of the menhir in terms of its perpetuity, and uses that specific aspect of its nature as a means of affording the unknown woman a manner of transcending mortality in the persistence of the inscription. The function of the menhir within the narrative is similar both to Hardy's “druid stone” and indeed, the stone walls of “Stone Walls I” and “Stone Walls II”, a man-made representation of permanence within the landscape that can, in Auden's case, metaphorically, and in Hardy's case, physically, suspend the notion of mortality. This anxiety is perhaps later stylised as the “gigantic darkness” of “Lover's Lane” that the standing stones appear to act as a bulwark against. The image recalls how Edward Mendelson in 1981's *Early Auden* observes that the figure of the ghost in Auden's *Paid on Both*

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<sup>98</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 263

<sup>99</sup> Brian Green, *Hardy's Lyrics: Pearls of Pity* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996), p. 76



*Sides: A Charade* represents a link to a previous time, being recurrent voices that “bind the energies of the newly born to the will of the forgotten dead”.<sup>100</sup> For Mendelson — and seemingly for Hardy in “The Shadow on the Stone” — the ghost represents a wholly atavistic presence that impedes the healing or mellowing that would come with the passage of time: “Ghosts interrupt lovers, cough when they would kiss.”<sup>101</sup>

Again, like the moorland landscape surrounding the walls of “Stone Walls I”, the landscape surrounding the menhir is lexically designated specifically *other*. The menhir itself is stalwart, described by way of its perpetuity (“it towers still”, “old stone so tall”) and the moorland is portrayed as inhospitable, even dangerous — “a lonely moor”, “that wild deserted land”. Whereas the menhir is established within the narrative as characterised by its constancy, time passes almost ominously swiftly on the surrounding moorland in the second stanza: “I could see for miles; there were none in sight / I cut her name on the stone / It was evening and a failing light”. Bucknell, in the notation pertaining to “The Menhir” in *Juvenilia* describes the setting itself as unearthly, eerie, describing the “ghostly passage of time in an empty landscape”<sup>102</sup> as a marker of Auden's burgeoning 'obsession' with the works of Thomas Hardy, referring perhaps to the spectral inhabitants of landscape poems such as “Wessex Heights, 1896” and “I Found Her Out There” from *Satires of Circumstance*.

The effect of all this is unsubtle, although perhaps not portrayed in as certain

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<sup>100</sup> Edward Mendelson, *Early Auden*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1981) p. 5

<sup>101</sup> Mendelson, *Early Auden*, p. 6

<sup>102</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 263

terms as in “Stone Walls I”: the menhir is representative of a degree of permanence, a structure within the landscape created by human hands that has persisted throughout the ages indefinitely, whereas the surrounding moorland is described as alien, unsafe and perhaps most significantly, still victim to the passage of time. The narrator seeks, by the association of the unknown woman's name with the monolith, to afford the subject the same suspension of mortality that the standing stone itself appears to have possessed — the piece appears plagued by the anxiety of death, and goes on to seek reassurance that in the same fashion as the narrator happened upon the menhir, that the “*lost traveller*” of the final stanza will happen upon the inscribed name. The piece in its entirety, again, seeks to explore the alternatives to the finality of death. This time, however, in place of spectral figures or a heroic katabasis, *bodily* death appears to be acknowledged and the narrator seeks a more achievable manner of permanence: to quote from *The Saga of Burnt Njáll*, another saga that may have inspired the feuds of *Paid on Both Sides*,<sup>103</sup> “fame never dies”.<sup>104</sup>

There are, however, marked differences between “The Menhir” and one final piece from the juvenilia in which the poet makes the textual association of a man-made structure and the notions of mortality and death. Although markedly more vague in its thematic landscape, “The Dying House” from June 1925 (and the ensuing reworking, “Motherhood” from late 1925 or early 1926) again appears to address the notion of permanence found in the man-made structure used textually as a barrier between the subject, narrator and encroaching mortality. The earliest of a series of poems in which the poet focuses on the cynosure of the abandoned mother

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<sup>103</sup> Chris Jones, *Strange Likeness: Old English in Twentieth-Century Poetry*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p.73

<sup>104</sup> George Dasent, *The Story of Burnt Njál, or Life in Iceland at the End of the Tenth Century*, (Edinburgh: Edmondston & Douglas, 1861), p. xxiii

figure, “The Dying House” again features the wandering narrator common to the juvenilia period, however regarding the landscape of the piece there is apparent a subtle shift: perhaps prompted by the societally reprehensible nature of the subject, both “The Dying House” and “Motherhood” take place not upon the open moorland or even the pasture of the early bucolics, but within the landscape of a wood.

Again, we find Auden's wandering narrator in the act of discovery, this time of a derelict dwelling. It is important to note that for explications on Auden's early poetry and the notions of landscape and death that rather than being dead, the dilapidated house of the title is *dying*: the narrative here acknowledges the structure's eventual mortality, rather than the ongoing permanence of the menhir or the dry stone wall however we are still witness to a setting characterised by the manner in which it appears to have evaded a traditional mortality — although thoroughly uninhabitable, it is still only *dying*, rather than dead.

The house was dying when I saw it; gaunt  
And hollow its eyes looked, which once had shone  
So bravely from the wood on winter mornings  
Across the fields; now even moss and leaves  
Were getting ready for the burial.

“The Dying House”<sup>105</sup>

The poet has gone to some textual lengths to portray death of the structure as bodily, the house itself described in anthropomorphic terms — “gaunt and hollow its eyes looked” — that seems perhaps at odds with the more objective manner in which Auden in the latter half of the juvenilia period appears to examine a scene or

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<sup>105</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 96-7

landscape. The image again recalls the setting of Walter de la Mare's "The Listeners", with Auden's Wanderer adopting the role of de la Mare's "Traveller", and like the Traveller, after regarding the scene for a moment, exits the scene in a display of impotence, Auden's "Nought could be done to help it so I left" echoing de la Mare's "'Tell them I came, and no one answered, / That I kept my word,' he said".<sup>106</sup> The piece is characterised by the same manner of folk gothic, the deserted house in the woodland and lone observer, considering the history of the house, and its fate — the image and ensuing narrative is a simple one, so much so that we must perhaps consider its metaphorical implications.

"The Dying House" is perhaps covertly representative not only of the young poet's quest for permanence similar to in "The Menhir", but in the image of the house, may also be considered to unsubtly be making a textual allusion to another zeitgeist of the early Modernist period, a physical representation of the beginnings of the breakdown of traditional familial structures and perhaps even the *heimatlosigkeit* that Heidegger identifies as characterising the era. Similarly, the "dying house" of the poem and the image of the fallen mother present in the narrative may perhaps allude to the strained relationship between Auden and his mother in during the poet's final year at Gresham's and first year as an undergraduate at Oxford.<sup>107</sup> The "death" of the house, here, appears likely symbolic of change — whether personal or societal — however the first and last stanzas of the poem are perhaps the most interesting to consider when examining the interactions between the notion of death and the natural landscapes of Auden's early poetry, and perhaps merit a second, more literal reading.

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<sup>106</sup> Walter de la Mare, *The Listeners and Other Poems*, (Maryland: Wildside Press, 2007) p. 48

<sup>107</sup> Katharine Bucknell, introduction to *Juvenilia: Poems 1922-1928* by W. H. Auden, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003) pp. xix-lxxii, p. xxx-xxxii

The first thing we must consider is that as opposed to the man-made structures in “Stone Walls I” and “The Menhir” that are situated in landscapes that are specifically designated as *other* to the structures, the structure and the landscape of “The Dying House” are entwined, for the first time in the juvenilia, extant on the same plane — even the “moss and leaves / Were getting ready for the burial”. Time passes in the landscape, and the house, although not actually, dead, is described more than once as *dying* — rather than the perpetuity of the standing stone and the stone walls, the house is portrayed with no uncertainty as being affected by the passage of time.

In this secondary examination of the text, we are witness to two notions: the first, most noticeable, is that this is the first poem examined within the chapter where the poet does not actively seek to suspend the notion of mortality. There is no narrative of heroic katabasis, and the “*ghost*” of the third stanza appears fanciful, metaphorical, rather than the physical presence within the narrative we might observe in “Rookhope (Weardale, Summer 1922)” and “Below me, Ticknall lay but in the light” — “The house still seemed an old and kindly one / That shut no door on martin or on ghost”. The second notion that we might observe is perhaps more subtly framed, but no less important in this chapter's examinations of the relationship between death and the landscape in Auden's early poetry: death and the landscape appear conflated, in that the landscape appears to be taking back the dying house — “moss and leaves / Were getting ready for the burial” — in its overgrowth, repossessing the structure. The final three lines of the piece appear to echo this sentiment, as well as introducing another notion for the first time within this chapter:

the acceptance of mortality, rather than an attempt to evade it.

There are worse ways of death to choose from  
Beneath the sky and rain, alone, with birds  
And no grief but a stranger's casual tears.

“The Dying House”<sup>108</sup>

The stanza end recalls a notion from one of Auden's earliest poems to address the subject of dying, the final lines of “Autumn” from 1922 or 1923 seeming to resonate within the piece: “Rich days that teach our foolish mind / To know death's face, that it is kind”,<sup>109</sup> the poet referring to the end of summer and encroachment of autumn as both an inevitable and benevolent process. The process resembles an observation made in *Early Auden*, where Mendelson dissects the poet's nebulous early relationship with death, and sees it often represents an attempt to resolve an uncertainty within the poet's sense of self. “In Auden's earliest adult poems,” he writes, “any successful transformation will occur only through death and submergence in the undifferentiated sea. The new conditions of unity he longs for may be apprehended only by dissolving the fragments of the self.”<sup>110</sup>

This in mind, death in both “Autumn” and “The Dying House” appears as natural as the landscape itself: there is no spectral presence nor mythological triumph over human mortality. The house is a benign presence (“The house still seemed an old and kindly one”), despite the internal narrative of the fallen mother and the dropped boy of the second stanza, and appears to be returning to the landscape

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<sup>108</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 96-7

<sup>109</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 25

<sup>110</sup> Mendelson, *Early Auden*, p. 8

slowly, being obscured by the growing moss and falling leaves, and as the wandering narrator observes, “There are worse ways of death to choose from / Beneath the sky and rain.” The image of the decaying structure and its being slowly absorbed by the woodland landscape appears a more subtle iteration of a notion that appears to characterise a number of Auden's early poems with the subject of death at their crux, in that after dying there appears a “possessive earth”, where the landscape itself appears in some way to admit the dead, obscuring or enveloping their physical form. We might observe this particular patterning in the image of the dying Nenthead miner borne through the abandoned levels of the mine in “Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed”, and again in the second incarnation of the poem “Elegy” from May 1925, where the interment of the dead youth is described in terms that appear to directly refer to a “possessive earth” mythology: “No dog barked in the street below / The churchyard where they dug his grave; / The day wore nothing strange to show / The earth took back the dust she gave”,<sup>111</sup> the personified earth itself “taking”, actively procuring the body of the youth. The second couplet in particular — “the day wore nothing strange to show / The earth took back the dust she gave” appears to demonstrate the irreverent nature of the natural landscape in the face of even intense human emotion, echoing the sentiments that would later form the opening lines of the 1957 poem “The More Loving One”: “Looking up at the stars, I know quite well / That, for all they care, I can go to hell”.<sup>112</sup>

In deconstructing the notion of admittance into the earth further, we appear to find this chapter's analysis at a crossroads: regarding the textual interment of the

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<sup>111</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 90

<sup>112</sup> W. H. Auden, *Collected Poems*, ed. by Edward Mendelson, (New York: Vintage, 1991), p. 445

dead, is Auden as a young poet simply subject to the post-war difficulties in representing or even perhaps *understanding* the image of the lifeless body, the remaining corpse that David Sherman identifies, and so inters them, effecting the “possessive earth” in an act of compositional piety? The reading appears somewhat at odds with the fashion in which throughout the juvenilia period the poet appears to address the notion of death with an almost boyish fascination, the sombre Pennine landscapes populated by a myriad of ghosts and echoes, indeed, creating landscapes that are *characterised* by their dead — in essence, this cautious treatment of the corpse as a physical entity seems out of character for a body of work that engages so freely with the figures of the deceased. The answer perhaps lies in a more literal re-reading of the penultimate couplets of “Elegy” (1925), and in particular the phrase “The earth took back the dust she gave”. Whilst the notion of the “possessive earth” is still evident within the body of the line, it appears tempered by the reflexive nature of the image: the personified earth here is repossessing, rather than merely possessing, textually designated as both the origin and ultimate destination of the corpse within the landscape of the poem and echoes much older notions of bodily death than the Romantic tradition that the young poet appears to be attempting to emulate in “Elegy.”

The phraseology of the line is biblical in origin, “The earth took back the dust she gave” echoing both Ecclesiastes 12:7 “And the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it,” and Psalms 146:3–4, “Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.” Both passages appear to designate death and the admittance of the body into the earth as a “return to



earth” as opposed to a simple interment, and within the context of Auden's juvenilia there are perhaps links to be made with the Harrowing of Hell narrative found in “Christ in Hades” and its appropriation of certain aspects of Christian mythologies for the purpose of effecting a persistence beyond death — for Auden, after all, the earth itself is a living, maternal presence, even if on occasion it pays host to the dead.

#### **1.4: Auden’s Chatterton**

However there is another reading that we may apply to the poet's interred bodies that is again, perhaps vital in the understanding of the manner in which landscape and mortality interact within Auden's earliest works. Once more returning to the phrase “The earth took back the dust she gave” and considering its biblical connotations when coupled with the manner in which the earth, the origin of the body, is designated feminine, the line evokes a number of comparisons with another subset of Auden's works, namely those that centre upon the figure of the Mother. The subterranean mother figure of “In Praise of Limestone”, the “*Mother Earth*” of “Earth's Praises” and perhaps even the notion of the primeval mother, the *Urmutterfurcht* that the poet finds in the abandoned shafts of Rookhope in 1940 in “New Year Letter” are perhaps relevant here, and instead of a biblical reading, we should perhaps consider one closer to the pre-Christian and pagan mythologies that we have already examined as inherent within the figure of Auden's Mothers, whether benign or monstrous. The interred bodies of “Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed”, “Elegy” and “The Dying House” are perhaps an early iteration of this particular tenet of Auden's poetic mythology, and for the analysis of the relationship between death and the natural landscape in Auden's juvenilia, representative of another way in which the poet seeks to undermine the finality of death, this time

rather than creating a katabasis merely hinting at the possibility of cyclical mortality via the form of the natural landscape and its hybrid role as both mother and sexton.

It is upon examining the poem “Elegy” and its predecessor of the same name that it becomes of greater importance to address the broader context of Auden's juvenilia period. It is, perhaps, not unexpected that both pieces that deal explicitly with the notions of memory and commemoration feature the death of a youth, written less than a decade after the cessation of global conflict related to the First World War. “Elegy (1924)” and “Elegy (1925)” are unusual in some respects, representative of a shift in the manner in which the poet addresses the idea of mortality. More akin to “The Menhir”'s quest for permanence, both iterations of the poem “Elegy” forego the unpublished Auden's trademark landscape of ghosts and echoes in favour of addressing a death in terms of the living, and wax considerably more maudlin upon interrogating the notion of remembrance. The poem from 1924 begins:

Why was it that you gave no warning,  
But the night before, magic and candle-flamed,  
Talked, yea and laughed with us? We did not dream  
How drenched with weeds the mere of hours might be  
We sported so in, nor how swift the stream;  
Little guessed that in the splendid morning  
One we loved would lie as cold, and strangely still  
As the black tarn deep-hollowed in the hill.  
Death took you quickly, as though ashamed  
To steal as fair a thing so wantonly.

“Elegy”<sup>113</sup>

In this, we can observe that death in “Elegy (1924)” is not only unexpected,

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<sup>113</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 57-8

but almost offensive in its swiftness, the passage of time described again with language evocative of moving water “We did not dream / How drenched with weeds the mere of hours might be / We sported so in, nor how swift the stream”.<sup>114</sup> It is possible to read the piece in its entirety as an allegory for the “lost generation” of the twenties and thirties, a landscape attempting to reconcile itself to the unexpected loss of almost a million young men: however it is important to note that if this is Auden's own war poetry, it is war poetry that seems quite diplomatically to forego the schoolboy fascination with death and haunting that pieces like “Allendale” and “Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed” are characterised by. Auden's is a landscape a decade on from the war, and makes no attempt to dwell upon the losses of the previous generation despite the narrative being characterised and driven by them. When the grief and indignation of the first stanza has passed, we are party to a narrative that places great emphasis on the passage of time, evoking the changing seasons in references to the “June shower”; “the river, peat-stained in its March spate” of the second stanza, the “bleak October day” of the third. Again, the movement of water in Auden's poetry indicates that time has, indeed, passed since the event: “But time, that drowsy-voiced waterfall, / Will wash the very hardest stone away; / Beauty will come into her own again,” assure the twenty-second and twenty-third lines.

The effect is cathartic, and instead of carnage or grief, we are witness to some — however stilted — manner of healing process. Even the grave, the “black tarn deep-hollowed in the hill” of the seventh line gives way to the sweet-smelling grass of the eleventh. Again, as in “The Dying House”, we see the natural landscape

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<sup>114</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 57

slowly reclaiming its own, obscuring what was there previously, encompassing and repossessing the event until it simply becomes part of the landscape itself. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly for this period of Auden's career, the piece appears decidedly unlike any of Hardy's war poetry, either the earlier meditations on the Boer war found in "The Dead Drummer" ("Drummer Hodge") and "Channel Firing" or the later patriotic verse produced in support of the propaganda bureau during the First World War such as "Men Who March Away" or "We Are Getting to the End". Although decidedly more akin to Hardy's landscape poetry in terms of structure and form, the poem instead takes its cue from a number of pieces written during the previous decade, a reassurance, maybe, to poems such as Vera Brittain's "Perhaps" ("Perhaps some day the sun will shine again / And I shall see that still the skies are blue")<sup>115</sup> and Charlotte Mew's "The Cenotaph" ("Not yet will those measureless fields be green again / Where only yesterday the wild sweet blood of wonderful youth was shed;")<sup>116</sup> Almost a decade on, the young Auden formulates an assured response: time has passed, and the landscape renews itself, obscuring what has gone before. The narrative in itself is a classical katabasis; the descent, the crisis, and eventual ascension.

The poem is, perhaps, an exercise in what Mary Favret in *War at a Distance: Romanticism and the Making of Modern Wartime* terms the powerful desire to periodise in wartime, to designate 'before', 'during' and 'after' — "Channeling war into delineated periods of time with definite beginnings and ends — or, thinking spatially, with obvious insides and outsides — allows and heightens certain

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<sup>115</sup> Vera Brittain, *Because You Died: Poetry and Prose of the First World War and After*, ed. by Mark Bostridge (London: Hachette, 2010), p. 19

<sup>116</sup> Charlotte Mew, *Selected Poems*, ed. by Eavan Boland (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2012), p. 21

responses to war but also keeps it at a remove. Periodizing, in other words, aims — or resists — to close off the ongoing “presentness” or incomplete “present tense” of history.”<sup>117</sup> Unable to write first-hand about the conflict, Auden establishes a landscape in which the conflict is decidedly and unambiguously over, using the languages of regrowth and reconciliation to mask what is, perhaps, a self-awareness in writing poetry outside the realms of personal experience, and with the emotional resonance of a war only six years passed.

It is interesting to note that whilst speaking specifically of war writing, Favret's identification of 'periodising' appears similar in aspect to the manner in which John Whittier-Ferguson in *Mortality and Form in Late Modernist Literature* suggests that the literatures of the late Modernist period are defined by what is termed “keeping time”; seeking to augment an understanding of the recent past and rationalise a changing world via literatures that are characterised by their focus upon chronology and structure. Although the two analyses differ subtly in the motivations that they define, it remains that both Favret and Whittier-Ferguson's frameworks indicate that the marked passage of time in broader Modernist literatures indicates a desire to distance the production of art from the actuality of the past decades. The notion does appear to issue a response to Freud's position that in literature, the twentieth century sought some means of reconciling a new, more complicated human relationship with mortality: rather than doing so by exploring that relationship, however, Whittier-Ferguson and Favret suggest that one manner we might observe of doing so is to periodise, and therefore attempt to isolate the actuality of death in the form of the

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<sup>117</sup> Mary Favret, *War at a Distance: Romanticism and the Making of Modern Wartime*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 30

previous decades. This does appear to be what Auden is attempting in the later stanzas of “Elegy (1924)”; documenting the progression of months and seasons, time-keeping as a means of generating distance between the death itself found in the first stanza and the main body of the poem; the first stanza bleaker and more bodily than the rest with its talk of graves and burials, followed by the rolling Pennine pastoral of the second, third and fourth.

The poem is one of the few pieces from the 1922–8 period that appears to fall victim to the hallmarks that we would associate with literary juvenilia — unlike some slightly later pieces on the nature of memory and grief such as “Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed” and “Lead's the Best”, the allusion is not sensitively made. Instead of utilising the landscape as a theatre for frustration as seen in many of the industrial poems which appear to almost anthropomorphise the landscape in a very human portrayal of loss, the geography itself appears neutered, bucolic in aspect. Its function is more simplistic: to demonstrate the passage of time, the regenerative nature of the natural landscape and to counterpoint the underlying reference to the conflict of the previous decade. Rather than the Stranger giving voice to the landscape, we witness the landscape being used as a literary device, and whilst done with some competency, the relationship is not reciprocal. The landscape, here, is used as a foil. The effect is that the poem seems to lack the confusion of savagery and sincerity that lends a large amount of Auden's early work its charm and allows its reader to overlook what would perhaps be quite memorably unsuccessful language usage and structure — it is, in aspect, distinctly un-Auden. Even the rhyming couplets, noted by Bucknell in *Juvenilia* to be borrowed from the earlier

short poem “March Winds”<sup>118</sup> — appear overly sentimental, overly simplistic — “To watch them round the sheep in from the fell / We shall see men as fine as you still dwell”.<sup>119</sup> The image and stylistic competence appear to echo the nursery-verse patterning of very early poems such as “California” (1922), yet are woefully bereft of its bathetic charm: “Right at the top of the road one sees / A round moon like a Stilton cheese”.<sup>120</sup>

What remains is a piece with small substance, that appears surprisingly devoid of any of the haunting figures that we have grown accustomed to — however like the majority of the juvenilia, the conceit is sensitively made: Auden's England is recovering, the passage of time palliating the previous decade in the same manner that “The Dying House” is overgrown. It is also perhaps worthy of note that the final stanza again appears to echo George Sterling's “Ye seem as flowers exiled / More beautiful because they die so soon” from “The House of Orchids” — “Now they have passed, and none know where they go, / We who are left behind, we only see / This English Spring is lovelier than we / Remembered it”.<sup>121</sup> Herein lies the contradictory nature that we have, perhaps, come to expect from Auden's juvenilia — time has passed and some great wounds are healing, however the notion also evokes a comment upon the fleeting nature of mortality; yet in itself, the association is positive. In terms that appear truly too *bijou* for the poetry of both the twentieth century and the Auden generation itself, we have been taught a lesson in hedonism by the piece, and appreciate the English Spring more because we have known the

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<sup>118</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 59

<sup>119</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 58

<sup>120</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 3

<sup>121</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 58

winter. The maudlin, nationalist heart of the piece is found in the final exchange of the third stanza: “We shall see men as fine as you still dwell / Where wind and rain bring nobleness to all / This land of kings and simple-hearted men,”<sup>122</sup> Auden perhaps echoing the emotive depictions of land and nation in Tennyson’s Arthurian mythologies, a notion explored further in this chapter’s analysis of the poem “Appletreewick”.

It is more accurate to suggest that rather than analogy for losses of the war itself, “Elegy (1924)” is more an analogy for the way that the England of Auden’s adolescence responded to it. It is, perhaps, the beginning of a resolution to Freud’s statement on the manner in which in literature is sought the means of reconciliation with the notion of death in the era of global warfare. “Elegy (1925)” is, by comparison, more akin to both the romantically maudlin Auden present in the majority of the later *Juvenilia* and the dispassionate eye with which Auden as a mature poet addresses the notion of death in the 1938 poem “Funeral Blues”. The piece is perhaps more accurately identified as a re-imagining of the earlier piece as opposed to an early example of the compulsive editing and re-writing processes that Auden’s early publishing career was characterised by,<sup>123</sup> and as A. S. T. Fisher notes in “Auden’s *Juvenilia*”, much more identifiably bears the influence of the poet’s early fascination with the landscapes of Thomas Hardy.<sup>124</sup> The narrative of the piece is predominantly the same as the one found in “Elegy (1924)”, however the later version is subject to some notable structural amendments, and an expansion of the narrative.

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<sup>122</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 58

<sup>123</sup> Joanna Leever, ‘W. H. Auden’s *Poems of 1928*’, *The Electronic British Library Journal* (July 1988) <<http://www.bl.uk/eblj/1988articles/pdf/article15.pdf>> [Accessed 13th August 2016]

<sup>124</sup> Arthur Fisher, ‘Auden’s *Juvenilia*’, *Notes and Queries* 21 (October 1974) 370-73, (p. 371-372)



In “Elegy (1925)”, the death of the youth that drives the narrative is portrayed more as an act of youthful folly as opposed to the earlier poem's uncontextualised and perhaps symbolic representation of mortality: the boy dies falling from a tree in an attempt to investigate a squirrel's drey. It is also important to note that the fashion of death itself has been altered, and instead of a death characterised by its swiftness the opening “Why was it that you gave us no warning” to the earlier poem, we have one that is much more lingering in nature:

Three weeks he lay and watched a rook  
Or lilac hanging in the rain;  
A pair of wrynecks came and took  
The nesting-box outside the pane  
And hatched their brood. The first one cried  
Upon the morning that he died.

“Elegy”<sup>125</sup>

If the metaphor persists into the second poem, Auden's war poetry has taken a significantly more lachrymose turn. Gone is the language of consolation and the unexpected nature of death — instead, death is almost expected, lingering, and the wrynecks of the fourth stanza hatch their brood outside the window with little care for the dying boy inside. This is perhaps indicative of the poet's changing views on the war's mortalities and a more mature divergence from the nationalist sentiments of “This land of kings and simple-hearted men” from the earlier poem.

It is also possible to read the stanza as an expansion of the image, a comment upon the manner in which the notion of youth itself may have been subject to a

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<sup>125</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 90

lingering death in the wake of the First World War: as a number of theorists have identified, a childhood ignorance of death and its associated unpleasantness is, in decades of conflict, replaced by the blithe acceptance of mortality for many young people and fostering the early onset of the mature mentalities and systems of belief.<sup>126</sup> The notion is similar in aspect to how Bucknell's *Juvenilia* notes that A. S. T. Fisher in "Auden's *Juvenilia*" identifies the linkage between the youth's death by a fall and the character of Vernon from one of the poet's favourite nursery books, *Eric, or Little by Little* by F. W. Farrar (1858).<sup>127</sup> Expanding upon Fisher's idea, we find that the similarities between Auden's underlying metaphor and Farrar's *Eric* are even more pronounced when we consider the language of one of the narrator of the novel's more raucous addresses to the reader on the nature of sin:

Kibroth-Hattaavah! Many and many a young Englishman has perished there! Many and many a happy English boy, the jewel of his mother's heart—brave and beautiful and strong—lies buried there. Very pale their shadows rise before us—the shadows of our young brothers who have sinned and suffered. From the sea and the sod, from foreign graves and English churchyards, they start up and throng around us in the paleness of their fall. May every schoolboy who reads this page be warned by the waving of their wasted hands, from that burning marle of passion where they found nothing but shame and ruin, polluted affections, and an early grave.

*Eric, or Little by Little* <sup>128</sup>

Perhaps the most obvious difference between the two poems is that instead of a 'death-and-reconciliation' narrative, where the death and interment of the first stanza is followed by four others where the poet examines the passage of time in the natural landscape, we are subject to an inversion of the form in "Elegy (1925)". This

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<sup>126</sup> James Marten, 'Children and War' in *The Routledge History of Childhood in the Western World*, ed. by Paula Fass, (Oxon: Routledge, 2013) pp. 142-158 (p. 147-148)

<sup>127</sup> Fisher, p. 371-372

<sup>128</sup> Frederic Farrar, *Eric, or Little by Little*, (Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1858), p. 184

time, the body is interred in the fifth stanza, following four where the poet reflects upon the nature of mortality and the circumstances surrounding the death of the youth. Much more like the narrative structure we might observe in “The Dying House”, the body's post-mortem admittance into the landscape is portrayed as an eventual and inevitable consequence of living: “The earth took back the dust she gave;”.<sup>129</sup> Another point of note is that whilst much more stylistically competent, in its revision the narrative of grief and consolation appears to have matured and grown into something much more akin to the ways in which we would see the mature poet address the notion of mortality. Instead of the passage of time in the natural landscape being portrayed as consolatory, the allusion is developed: in the second poem, time passes — but in this iteration it passes irrespective of grief. The natural landscape, previously so full of solace, rolls on regardless: “But bird's wild music cannot bring / The dead into a latter spring”<sup>130</sup> intones the first stanza, echoing the closing remarks of “Elegy (1924)” — “This English Spring is lovelier than we / Remembered it”. The closing address of the poem goes on to make the notion even more transparent, perhaps mocking the earlier version's almost childlike ability to seek comfort in the indifferent flora and fauna of the landscape —

No dog barked in the street below  
 The churchyard where they dug his grave  
 The day wore nothing strange to show  
 The Earth took back the dust she gave  
 And cuckoos, they were calling still

When we had left him in the hill.

“Elegy”<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 90

<sup>130</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 90

<sup>131</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 90

Here, the face of the natural landscape is far more akin to the inhospitable land that we might see act as a backdrop to one of Auden's industrial milieux — rather than offering comfort in a time of grief, in “Elegy (1925)” the backdrop to the scene seems more a case of “This land, cut off / Will not communicate.” The notion of landscape has grown, from offering humanity a sympathetic retreat from grief to something vast and uncaring of human mortality, devoid of the understanding of the earlier poem with the effect of making both iterations of “humanity” — the interred body and the narrator themselves — appear particularly small and of little consequence. This, too, is substantiated when we consider the wrynecks of the fourth stanza and the manner in which they hatch their brood, symbolic of new life, outside the window of the youth as he dies his lingering death. The reference is simple, and well-made: the natural landscape persists, and for Auden, man does not.

### **1.5: Conclusion: The Little Creature Frightened of the Dark**

In the deliberate estrangement of humanity from the landscape found in “Elegy” there is, perhaps, something unusual and therefore of importance in this chapter and its explications on the nature of death in early Auden as it represents another answer to the query identified by David Sherman in the introduction to *In a Strange Room*. If the “preternatural beauty” of modernist writing about death is a result of its “uneasy desire to know what it could still mean, in the twentieth century”, Auden's vast and indifferent landscape, populate only by bird and rain, offers an uneasy answer — as it would appear, it means very little.

This notion of the decline of death is of paramount importance to the exploration of the relationship between landscape and mortality in Auden's earliest works. Aside from the subtle identification of the *stranger* figure of “Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed”, “Elegy (1925)” is the sole poem in Bucknell's collected *Juvenilia* that appears to entirely separate the notions of mortality and the natural landscape, representing them as not only separate, but existing in diametrical opposition. Man in both “Elegy” poems is defined by his mortality and the landscape by its perpetuity; exemplified in the ambivalence with which the months roll on regardless of tragedy, the cyclical nature of life within the natural landscape exemplified in how the nesting wrynecks bring new life into the landscape whilst man withers, separated from the birds and their landscape by the seemingly impassable window. Herein lies the key to understanding the inextricable nature of death and the natural landscape in early Auden: the conjunction of the two is, in essence, an attempt at passing through the window. Man, for Auden, is the “*little creature frightened of the dark*”<sup>132</sup> found in the 1926 poem “Dethroned”, and in the same manner as the natural landscape represents the ability to retreat from encroaching modernity, it also represents the ability to retreat from something similarly inevitable and unknown: human mortality. This positioning also goes some way as to explaining the manner in which the poet seems to link the notions of mythological afterlives or otherworlds with the Pennine landscape such as the links made with the descent of Hermódr the Bold into Helheim. By establishing death as negligible within the natural landscape itself and then drawing human mortality through the pane, the poet is seeking to undermine the notion of death as finite, and although death occurs and some bodies are interred — the boy of “Elegy (1925)”, the

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<sup>132</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 130

Nenthead miner, the “dying house” — they persist in the form of spirits, monuments, spectres and memories, evading death and becoming part of the moorland landscape and its constant katabasis, a continual cycle of death and renewal — “The earth took back the dust she gave”.

Sherman's diagnosis is particularly evident in the case of early Auden: in a body of poetry characterised by its diverse and often thematically nebulous nature, the poetry of mortality represents some of the most well-crafted and innovative images of the poet's career prior to the publication of *Poems* in 1928. The shifting nature of the relationship between death and the natural landscape in Auden's earliest poetry is symptomatic of the anxiety that Freud identifies as vital in the making of post-war literature, and represents what is perhaps best defined as a fear of the spiritual implications of death. The body, for Auden, is represented as secondary in the consideration of death as the great foe: the spirit, the memory is what persists after the body has been admitted into the landscape itself, sometimes even returning whence it came. What is apparent in most poems is a quest for permanence, whether it be in the form of 'marking' the natural landscape, such as in “Stone Walls” or “The Menhir”, or simply the notion that the dead continue to exist in some form within the natural landscape after the act of death has taken place, such as the ghostly figures of “Allendale” or “Below Me, Ticknall Lay But in the Light” or the metempsychosis of “Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed”.

Auden's early poetry offers a direct response to Sherman's suggestion that supposes that the unique character of Modernist writing came out of its uneasy fascination with new and strange aspects of dying, being both some of the most

poetically mature and diversely inspired poems from the Juvenilia period. In terms of prevalence, there is a preoccupation with the notion of living beyond death in the form of a spectres, however rather than the ghosts of individuals, for the poet there appears to be a direct link between the figure of the spectre and the notion of geographic memory. The ghost is representative of the histories of the landscape and its communities, whether those histories be genuine or spurious, ancient or industrial. The notion again echoes one of the core tenets of Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, in that the dead not only continue to wander the moorland landscape after they have died, but also appear to belong there spiritually — as Catherine Earnshaw fancies in the first volume of the novel, “...heaven did not seem to be my home; and I broke my heart with weeping to come back to earth; and the angels were so angry that they flung me out, into the middle of the heath on the top of Wuthering Heights; where I woke sobbing for joy.”<sup>133</sup> Although Auden's own politics regarding the suppression of working-class northern communities in the late twenties and thirties are, perhaps called into question by accounts by both his contemporaries and the poet himself, what remains evident is that the poet was subject to a deep attachment to the romantic patterning of these early landscapes, and as I will expand upon in the following chapter on Auden's northern poetry, esoteric localities and the nebulous provincial identities found in these early works. The presence and movement of these figures — both ghost and Wanderer — through Auden's early landscapes is, however, worth further exploration in the interest of generating a more complete image of how landscape functions within Auden's early poems, and will inform the focus of the final chapter of this thesis on the act of travel and movement through the landscapes of Auden's juvenilia.

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<sup>133</sup> Bronte, p. 97





## **Chapter II:**

### **“This land, cut off, will not communicate”’: Exploring the Hero, Hodge, and the**

#### **Notion of North**

“North was central to Auden's work from the very beginning. His north is a complex structure, made up of obsessions with mining and geology, Icelandic sagas, Old English poetry, personal experience of the north of England and private mythologies about it.”

*The Idea of North.*<sup>1</sup>

“One must have a proper moral sense about the points of a compass; North must seem the 'good' direction, the way towards heroic adventures-”

‘England, Six Unexpected Days’<sup>2</sup>

#### **2.0: Introduction: Identity, Paracosm and Resistance**

In Auden scholarship, it still remains unusual that we consider the mature Auden a 'northern' poet despite the prevalence of works produced during the poet's publishing career that are situated directly within the Pennine landscape. Although there has been some small scholarly consideration of the poet's early northernness and the geographic resonance of poems such as “New Year Letter” (1940), “Amor Loci” (1965) and “In Praise of Limestone” (1948), for the most part, the notion of Auden's Oxonian identity is simply too prominent and too romantic in the consideration of the poet as part of Modernist mythology to situate the poetry itself

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Davidson, *The Idea of North*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2005) p.85

<sup>2</sup> W. H. Auden, ‘England: Six Unexpected Days’, *American Vogue*, (15th May 1954) 62-63 (p.62)

anywhere but within the grounds of Christ Church College. And this in itself is dangerous: in terms of the analysis of landscape in the poet's earliest works, this approach has led to a reductive and insular scholarship of geography and locality in a poet whose works have become synonymous with the changing landscapes of the twentieth century, and appear especially critically estranged from the north Pennine geographies that informed and characterised them.<sup>3</sup>

The paracosm, too, is a notion that has received comparatively little scholarly attention: the phenomenon is, by its most basic definition, a “prolonged fantasy world developed by children”<sup>4</sup> that often has its own invented (although usually in its nucleic form, rooted in reality) histories, characters and geographies.<sup>5</sup> The application of the concept of the paracosm has perhaps been most prevalent in the study of literary juvenilia, where the term has been used to define the invented fictitious settings of a literary adolescence, specifically those that span more than one instance or volume — C. S. Lewis' invented land of Boxen being the most prominent example, Emily and Anne Brontë's islands of Gondal and Gaaldine another. In more recent scholarship, the definition of paracosm is bisected, albeit with a certain fluidity of definition: the term 'paracosm' becomes representative specifically of the imaginary landscapes of youth and an immature form of the phenomena, and the term 'heterocosm' refers to the imaginary landscape as it manifests itself in works that are published or intended for publication,<sup>6</sup> such as Hardy's Wessex or Peake's

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<sup>3</sup> The recent *Oxford Companion to Twentieth-Century Poetry*, for example, makes no reference to Auden's formative Pennine geographies, instead making vague reference to the poet's connections with the Lake District— Myers & Forsythe, p. 8

<sup>4</sup> Robert Silvey & Stephen McKeith, 'The Paracosm: A Special Form of Fantasy' in *Organising Early Experience: Imagination and Cognition in Childhood*, ed. Delmont Morrison, (New York: Baywood, 1983) pp. 173-197, (p. 176)

<sup>5</sup> Silvey & McKeith, p. 178-9

<sup>6</sup> Kristin Petrella, 'A Crucial Juncture: The Paracosmic Approach to the Private Worlds of Lewis

Gormenghast. What is important for the re-evaluation of Auden's early landscapes, rather than definition, is how within the study of literary juvenilia the creation of the paracosm (and by extension, heterocosm) represent a response to a dissatisfaction with or fear of reality by means of a retreat into an idealised and controllable<sup>7</sup> landscape: they are a response to a series of external stimuli and create a theatre in which the perceived problems of reality are righted.<sup>8</sup> In this, the paracosm and heterocosm provide an invaluable framework within which to further and augment the analysis of the works of an individual artist or author.

The notion of the paracosm and heterocosm has prompted and informed, rather than wholly motivated this analysis of a series of Auden's earliest landscape poems. The following reading of northerliness and northern identity is more concerned with what the structure represents in literature rather than effecting a discussion of whether Auden's early works are part of a consciously generated heterocosm, although the interconnected nature of the narratives of Auden's juvenilia certainly suggest a poetry that is concerned with the creation and augmentation of a particular locality. Particular sites and images appear both emphasised and indeed, resonant throughout the juvenilia, such as the listing monoliths of "The Menhir" and "Lover's Lane" or the recurrent image of the pumping-engine at Cashwell Lead Mine in the North Pennines. The notion is perhaps reminiscent of the idea of 'Auden Country', the popular recurrence of a specific landscape in British literature explored by Samuel Hynes in *The Auden Generation*. 'Auden Country', for Hynes, represents

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Carroll and the Brontës', (unpublished Capstone Project thesis, Syracuse University, 2005) (p.7)

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Laycock, *Dangerous Games: What the Moral Panic over Role-Playing Games says about Play, Religion and Imagined Worlds*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), p. 16

<sup>8</sup> Gregory Braswell, 'Sociocultural Contexts for the Early Development of Semiotic Production', *Psychological Bulletin* 132, (2006) 877-894 (p. 878)

a landscape identified by its “frontiers, passes, railheads, engines, turbines and mine-workings”<sup>9</sup> as a result of the influence of Auden’s early published poetry, apparent in works such as Evelyn Waugh’s *Vile Bodies* (1930) and Cecil Day-Lewis’ “From Feathers to Iron” (1931).

Tony Sharpe notes in “Auden’s Northerliness” that on the matter of northern identity, the poet makes two statements that are invaluable for the consideration of the poet’s Pennine paracosm. The first is that “I spent a great many of my waking hours in the construction and elaboration of a private sacred world, the basic elements of which were a landscape, northern and limestone, and an industry, lead — mining,”<sup>10</sup> and remarking in 1947, Auden terms the industrial north of England the “Never-Never Land of my dreams”.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Peter Davidson suggests in *The Idea of North* that Auden’s ‘North’ is, rather than a geographic destination, a conglomerate formation of several iterations of northernness comprised of both the poet’s landscape memories and the secondary sources of extant literatures, mythologies and poetic invention.<sup>12</sup> Again, the notion appears not too far removed from the definition of a heterocosm as it exists in modern psychology.

In considering Auden’s early landscape poetry as a paracosm there is more scholarly benefit than simply exploring the romance of the “*numinous map*” of “Prologue at Sixty”, perhaps, made literal. Although by no means vital to the

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<sup>9</sup> Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, p.73

<sup>10</sup> W. H. Auden, *Forewords and Afterwords*, ed. by Edward Mendelson (London: Faber & Faber, 1973) p. 502, quoted in Tony Sharpe, ‘Auden’s Northerliness’, in *W. H. Auden in Context*, ed. by Tony Sharpe (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013) pp. 13-24 (p. 14)

<sup>11</sup> W. H. Auden, *The Complete Works of W. H. Auden Volume II 1939-1948*, ed. by Edward Mendelson, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002) p. 185, quoted in Sharpe, ‘Auden’s Northerliness’, p. 14

<sup>12</sup> Davidson, *The Idea of North*, p.67

explications of Auden's earliest works, in considering these early landscape poems as part of a consciously generated fictitious space such as Hardy's Wessex, or even the *Mortmere* of Christopher Isherwood and Edward Upward's imagining we become party to a much more complete and complex picture of what landscape and northernness means in Auden's juvenilia than extant scholarly analysis provides. The very notion of the paracosm prompts discourse upon the notions of response and the retreat that may be key in understanding the unique character of Auden's early poems and their sometimes unusual treatment of the natural landscape.

It is at this point important to note that as a notion, this evident early desire to create and shape a landscape appears oddly distant from how in the much later work *A Certain World* the poet describes the core tenet of the poetic art form as the “moral duty to sacrifice the aesthetic preference to reality or truth” in relation to his early depictions of the Northern landscape.<sup>13</sup> Yet borrowing terminology from the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Auden himself describes the childhood hobby of designing mines as a “sacred, secondary private world” (the primary sacred private world being the mines themselves);<sup>14</sup> effectively delineating the mines and their landscape as separate from reality, distinct in their inherent otherness and demonstrative of the poet's tendencies to alter and augment. This juxtaposition of imagination and truth is what gives Auden's earliest northern landscapes their fragmented and often dreamlike quality, and in the following analysis it is possible to observe the poet again relying upon notions of mythology or landscape history to mend or overcome a perceived problem with reality. In much the same way as the

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<sup>13</sup> W. H. Auden, *A Certain World: A Commonplace Book*, (New York: Viking Press, 1970), p. 425

<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Hufstader, ‘Auden's Sacred World’, *Essays in Criticism* 59 (2009) 234-25 (p. 234)

previous chapter examines the poet's responses to trauma and national mourning, in these poems the folkloric narrative is employed as a means of bridging the problematic polarities of invention and reality, due to its simultaneous real-world connection with the northern landscape and the ethereal, romantic qualities inherent in its form.

My analysis divides Auden's early northern poetry into three largely thematically distinct sections — the pastoral poetry of the earliest juvenilia, the infernal poetry of the later juvenilia and the heroic industrial poetry just prior to the publication of *Poems* in 1928. I am going to explore the changing ways in which northernness is afforded a distinct and powerful identity within these poems, and by examining in detail the language of allusion and inference common to Auden's poetry, posit some of the reasoning behind this unusual early foray into geographic identity and how this is vital in augmenting the understandings of the notion of north in the poet's writing. As the poet himself remarked to Christopher Isherwood, “North means to all. Reject!”<sup>15</sup> and my analysis, although taking its cue from readings such as Sharpe's, aims to expand upon the “consistent and deeply felt tactic of resistance”<sup>16</sup> that the critic identifies whilst considering a broader range of allusion and stimuli in these early texts. This chapter will identify and interrogate the core tenets of northern identity in the poetry of the juvenilia period and how these poetic responses to the notions of disenfranchisement, heroism and nostalgia are vital in the understanding of a period of the poet's career that has as of yet received scant critical attention. Using Sharpe's readings of northern identity in Auden and to a smaller

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<sup>15</sup> W. H. Auden, *The Complete Works of W. H. Auden Volume I 1926-1938*, ed. by Edward Mendelson, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997) p. 185, quoted in Sharpe, ‘Auden’s Northerliness’, p. 13

<sup>16</sup> Sharpe, ‘Auden’s Northerliness’, p. 13

degree, the discourse on Auden's northerness and personal mythology found in Peter Davidson's *The Idea of North*, this chapter is concerned with evidencing and re-emphasising a northern identity that is often critically undervalued<sup>17</sup> in the landscape poetry of W. H. Auden, with the intention of undermining the romantic and distinctly Oxford mythology that colours the understanding of many of the poet's later works.

There is a secondary aim of this chapter, however, and that is to address another troubling vacancy in the scholarship of Auden's northerliness: although there has been little critical consideration of Auden's early northern poetry in relation to broader thematic considerations within the poet's canon, the scant critical literature that is extant appears to utilise only one of the many landscape poems present in Katharine Bucknell's *Juvenilia*, the enigmatic 1927 piece "Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed", characterised by its powerful sense of Pennine identity. The piece forms the cornerstone of analyses of Auden's thematic and linguistic turns such as Richard R. Bozorth's work on Auden and desire<sup>18</sup> and Michael O'Neill's exploration of a Romantic legacy in Auden's poetry,<sup>19</sup> in addition to having devoted dissections of both theme and language in the commentaries of Edward Mendelson<sup>20</sup> and indeed, John Fuller.<sup>21</sup> The reasons behind this relatively reductive scholarship appear twofold; the first is that the piece is one of the most recognisable and resonant of Auden's early landscapes, at once equally mournful and menacing and

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<sup>17</sup> Myers, & Forsythe, p. 26

<sup>18</sup> Richard Bozorth, 'But Who Would Get It? Auden and the codes of Poetry and Desire', *English Literary History* 62 (1995) 709-727

<sup>19</sup> Michael O'Neill, *The All-Sustaining Air: Romantic Legacies and Renewals in British, American and Irish Poetry since 1900*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)

<sup>20</sup> Edward Mendelson, *Early Auden*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1981) p. 32-4

<sup>21</sup> John Fuller, *W. H. Auden: A Commentary*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1998) p. 8-10

rich with the literary allusions that we associate with the works of the mature poet. The second reason is likely related to the critical status of the poem, in that the poet's most devoted biographer, Mendelson, highlights the piece as the one in which Auden makes the transition from the verse of juvenilia to poetic maturity.<sup>22</sup> In this chapter, although much of the research contained within this thesis has been informed and developed by the scholarship relevant to "The Watershed", I will examine the notion of north as an emergent, progressive theme within Auden's juvenilia in order to re-situate the poem as the subject of a developing process of northerliness as opposed to a lone, lauded iteration of the theme amidst a slew of jejune imagery.

### **2.1: Saga Literature and Pastoral Heroism**

Although there is a large amount of natural imagery in the earliest works found in Bucknell's *Juvenilia*, the first piece chronologically within which we might discern the nucleic sentiments of what would become Auden's distinct poetic northernness is the piece titled "Appletreewick" from 1923. Although at first the piece appears trite and more motivated by Georgian sentimentality than any sense of identity, as an exercise in personification the piece is surprisingly consistent and well-crafted, sharing more of its form and mood in common with pieces like "April" (1926) or "An Episode" (1926) than the more loosely structured poems to which the piece is actually contemporary — "The Sower" or "Woods in Rain". Although still mostly fettered by the limitations of the language we would commonly associate with literary juvenilia, there is apparent a sensitivity to the piece especially when we consider the subtlety with which it both designates and appears to champion its northern identity that belies its comparably simplistic nature.

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<sup>22</sup> Mendelson, *Early Auden*, p. 32



Sharpe, in “The North, My World’: W. H. Auden’s Pennine Ways” observes that the manner in which the piece is titled is significant. Although proposing that the poet’s allusions to northern geographies represent specific points of reference as opposed to the creation of a conglomerate, general northerliness such as Hynes’ ‘Auden Country’ suggests,<sup>23</sup> he observes that the title ‘Appletreewick’ acts to designate the location as one that is private and esoteric. Unlike the references to larger northern localities found in “Letter to Lord Byron” in *Letters from Iceland* (“To those who live in Warrington or Wigan / It’s not a white lie, it’s a whacking big’ un’)<sup>24</sup> that are large enough to have a public meaning and typify the industrial decline of the north during the poet’s formative period, “Appletreewick” requires specific knowledge. The title is characterised by its geographic obscurity — rather than a town or city, the name belongs to a small rural village in the West Riding of Yorkshire where the young Auden spent a week in August 1923.<sup>25</sup> As a result of this obscurity, instead of the public notion of decline that we would associate perhaps with the localities of Warrington or Wigan during the middle of the twentieth century, we are subject to the poet’s own private set of associations with the locality<sup>26</sup> that as a reader with no prior knowledge we find difficult to question.

Sharpe also observes that the titular reference goes further in excluding the reader from the locality. The reference to Appletreewick itself effects a duality, creating one readership with prior knowledge of the locality and one without, not only based on geographic familiarity but also knowledge on a more local, rarefied

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<sup>23</sup> Sharpe, ‘The North, My World’, p. 110-111

<sup>24</sup> W. H. Auden & Louis MacNiece, *Letters from Iceland*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1936) p. 59

<sup>25</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 22

<sup>26</sup> Sharpe, “The North, My World” p. 116-117

level — those who, without knowledge of the locality, pronounce the title “Apple-tree-wick” and those who are aware that the accepted vernacular pronunciation is, in fact, “Ap-tick”<sup>27</sup>. The effect of this is twofold: not only is there created a duality of readership that underpins the notion that the north of Auden's “Appletreewick” is characterised by its distance and inaccessibility, but also establishes the poet as unquestionably party to this seemingly arcane knowledge. It represents, perhaps, an early exercise in stabilising a northern identity within the Juvenilia period when the poet's first-hand experience of such northern geographies was relatively scant compared to the image that the juvenilia period appears to attempt to project.

“Appletreewick”, in aspect, appears almost pastoral: “Where heather may be always seen / And there is grass that's really green / Where trees remember how to dance / And squirrels peep through every branch.”<sup>28</sup> The dismantled washing-floors and abandoned levels of later poems such as “Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed” and “Allendale (Weardale, Summer 1922)” are noticeably absent from the narrative, despite, as Bucknell notes, the locality being home to a large lead-mine that featured prominently in one of the poet's boyhood books, *A Treatise on a Section of Strata from Newcastle-upon-Tyne to Crossfell* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1883).<sup>29</sup> Due to its inaccessibility, “Appletreewick” for most of its readership is as pastoral as the young Auden describes it, exploiting the esoteric nature of the knowledge required in order to create an idyll, a largely bucolic landscape that perhaps does not accurately reflect the locality upon which the piece is modelled. The piece is, perhaps, an exercise in using the paracosm or heterocosm correctively,

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<sup>27</sup> Sharpe, “The North, My World”, p.117

<sup>28</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 21

<sup>29</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 22

in order to right a perceived wrong in reality — in this case, distancing these early concepts of northernness and northern geography from the narratives of poverty and industrial decline that Sharpe identifies as motivations behind the piece and its title.

Another point of note regarding the pastoral tradition in “Appletreewick” is the manner in which the figure of the local labourer is represented:

And there are inns where one can go  
And meet the finest men I know.  
There one can sit by blazing fires  
Can smoke and talk for hours and hours  
Of harvesting, of sheep, of carts  
To men with simple lovely hearts

“Appletreewick”.<sup>30</sup>

Although the imagery surrounding these inventions is fettered by the outwardly saccharine and romantic tendencies we might observe when considering the figure of man in the poet's earliest juvenilia, there are notions worth considering when we are to fully interrogate Auden's northern paracosm and the manner in which it interacts with preconceived notions of northernness. The setting of the inn is important to note here, as it occupies a particular place in the English literary consciousness as an arena that represents a refuge from authority or external influence:<sup>31</sup> As spaces, inns appear self-contained and largely devoid of rural authority figures such as the land-owner or the clergy, rendering them not only predominantly working-class spaces, but ones that are defined by their

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<sup>30</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 22

<sup>31</sup> Steven Earnshaw, *The Pub in Literature: England's Altered State*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 5

communitarian nature. In this, the poet appears to be operating in a much older artistic tradition that John Barrell delineates succinctly in the introduction to the 1980 publication *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting 1730–1840*, writing on the rustic art of George Morland and the manner in which “for the most part the art of rural life offers us the image of a stable, unified, almost egalitarian society”.<sup>32</sup> For Barrell, the rural or agricultural landscape — or in the case of this particular application, Auden's early, rustic poetry — offers its audience a delusion of “mythical unity”, and in its endeavour to present an actualised image of rural life makes an attempt to “pass itself off as an image of the actual unity of an English countryside innocent of division.”<sup>33</sup>

This notion is also underpinned by the manner in which the image of “Appletreewick”’s homely, rustic inn devoid of drunkenness or revelry also evokes the image of the Anglo-Saxon *cumen-hus*; a particular permutation of the inn common to the Old English literatures that characterise Auden's canon, a public space that sold no alcohol but rather functioned as a social hub; the lodging-house, village hall and meeting-place of a small community.<sup>34</sup> These connotations appear to correlate with Auden's veneration of working-class northern identities in the *Juvenilia*, which becomes further evident when we explore the connotations of rustic nobility inherent in the use of the rural labourer figure itself.

The “finest men” of “Appletreewick” are characterised by their rustic

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<sup>32</sup> John Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting 1730-1840*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 5

<sup>33</sup> Barrell, p. 5

<sup>34</sup> Frederick Hackwood, *Inns, Ales and the Drinking Culture of Old England*, (London: T. F. Unwin, 1909), p. xxi

sensibilities, seemingly preoccupied with what the young Auden romantically assumes as the common rural conversation topics of sheep and carts, and whilst overly simplistic, these images are important in a consideration of northern identity in Auden's early work. The notion of the ennobled labourer is common particularly to art and culture produced during the height of English industrialism; however the phenomenon appears to represent more than simple aesthetic nostalgia for the rural heritage depicted in the works of Robert Bloomfield or John Clare. The writings of Liberal Party politician C. F. G. Masterman exemplify these notions and their inherent anxieties, writing in 1904 of the English city:

They are most monstrous, and bleak, and disorganised... To some observers the change excites only a lament over a past that is forever gone... To others, again, the change is one charged with a menace to the future. They dread the fermenting, in the populous cities, of some new all-powerful explosive, destined one day to shatter into ruin all their desirable social order.

‘The English City’<sup>35</sup>

This perception of urban space as a threat to an established and accepted social order led to the manner in which for the Victorian writer, the natural landscape and a rural heritage was often equated with the idea of contentment and the 'old order', and urban landscapes with the seeds of social unrest and disruption.<sup>36</sup> Auden's “simple lovely hearts”, ensconced within their rural *cum-en-hus* replete with its connotations of communitarian living are perhaps part of a larger narrative that exemplifies the

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<sup>35</sup> Masterman, Charles, ‘The English City’, *England, A Nation: Being the Papers of the Patriot’s Club*, (London: Brinsley Johnson, 1904) , pp. 46-7 (p. 47) quoted in: John-Paul Hulin, “‘Rus in Urbe’: A Key to Victorian Anti-Urbanism?” in *Victorian Writers and the City (Etudes Irlandaises)* ed. by John-Paul Hulin & Pierre Coustillas, (Villeneuve d’Asque: University of Lille Press, 1979) pp. 9-39 (p. 15)

<sup>36</sup> Hulin, p. 14

deception that Barrell describes in *The Dark Side of the Landscape*. In attempting to represent the natural social cohesion of rural life compared to the oppressive and threatening landscape of the city, the poet is complicit in the age-old tradition of the depiction of an English countryside that remains “innocent of division”<sup>37</sup>— another hallmark of the poet’s growing tendency to romanticise a halcyon or quasi-mythological past within the poetry of the juvenilia period.

The particular phraseology of “Appletreewick”’s “simple lovely hearts” is reminiscent of the agricultural labourer figures found in the works of Thomas Hardy, discovered by Auden in the summer of 1923 several months prior to the date that Bucknell in *Juvenilia* designates “Appletreewick” (“Autumn or Winter 1923”).<sup>38</sup> It is possible to discern Hardy’s literary influence in a number of these early pastoral poems in the form of semantic mimicry, the titular figures of the later “The Sower” and “The Carter’s Funeral” appearing again decidedly *Wessex* in their aspect. The “finest men” of “Appletreewick” adhere to Hardy’s ennobled permutation of the “Hodge” figure beloved of the Victorian literary imagination,<sup>39</sup> the image of the working local echoing the manner in which the agricultural labourer often appears equivalent to the “bearer of Englishness”,<sup>41</sup> a figure whose nobility manifests itself as so innately profound that they appear “...the figure of Destiny, in whose rhythmic

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<sup>37</sup> Barrell, p. 5

<sup>38</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 22

<sup>39</sup> Mark Freeman, ‘The Agricultural Labourer and the Hodge Stereotype, 1850-1914’, *The Agricultural History Review* 49 (2001) 172-186, (p. 172)

<sup>40</sup> Indeed, Auden directly engages with the figure of Hodge during the later juvenilia in the poem “Hodge Looks Toward London”, however the reference appears less exact and perhaps done in irony; the piece a poetic coming-of-age saga driven by the conceit of the heroic journey as opposed to one concerned with specifically rural identities.

<sup>41</sup> Alun Howkins, ‘From Hodge to Lob: Re-Inventing the English Farm Labourer’ in *Learning and Living: Essays in Honour of J. F. C. Harrison*, ed. by Malcolm Chase & Ian Dyck, (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1996) pp. 218-235 (p. 226)

stride and noble sweep of the arm lies the hope of Britain”.<sup>42</sup>

This innate, rustic nobility — “Of harvesting, of sheep, of carts / To men with simple lovely hearts” — coupled with how Auden appears to deliberately designate the setting of Appletreewick as characterised by its separateness, its *otherness* from modern life echoes the manner in which the Hodge figure appears almost spiritually elevated by their rural, labouring status in Hardy's narratives. The patterning echoes the manner in which Hardy appears to relish in differentiating between the practices of straw- and wheat-burning for his unknowing, urban audience in *Far From the Madding Crowd*;<sup>43</sup> or laments how the frivolous city-dweller will never know the “unadulterated warmth” of newly-shorn wool, the “wool as it here exists new and pure” — the rural labourer here, with his arcane, esoteric knowledge, appears almost venerable in addition to representing a faultless English morality. This adulation of the labourer figure — always beatifically working-class, if not always rural — is a notion that we might observe with some prevalence in the poet's juvenilia, and appears of relative importance in the construction of Auden's early conceptions of northern geographies.

It is also important to note that whilst the north of “Appletreewick” is established as distant and inaccessible, it is also particularly dreamlike: reminiscent of the nursery-verse style and language of Walter de la Mare that we might observe in slightly later poems such as “Farglow” and “Song”, the piece is characterised by its natural imagery, purported in childlike terms as if to evoke a sense of

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<sup>42</sup> Frederick Green, *A History of the English Agricultural Labourer 1870-1920*, (London: P. S. King, 1920), p. 5

<sup>43</sup> Terry Wright, *Hardy and His Readers*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 87

timelessness within the narrative. The seasons appear to be suspended, or perhaps occurring simultaneously, with a series of different season-specific images appearing concurrently — “Where heather may always be seen” and “grass that's really green”, from the third and fourth lines, “The birds will sit on nests they've made” from the seventh, “Of harvesting, of sheep, of carts”<sup>44</sup> from the twenty-third. However in addition to these seemingly perpetual seasons, there is another association with the suspension of time that we might discern inherent in the linguistic patterning of “Appletreewick”. In its perpetual seasons and predominance of pastoral imagery, the poem also appears to recall the imagery of a passage from Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* (despite the fact that in later life, Auden branded Tennyson the “stupidest of English poets”)<sup>45</sup> where after the death of Arthur at the Battle of Camlann, the narrative describes the paradisaical island-valley of Avilion.

With these thou seest—if indeed I go  
 (For all my mind is clouded with a doubt)—  
 To the island-valley of Avilion;  
 Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,  
 Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies  
 Deep-meadowed, happy, fair with orchard lawns

‘The Passing of Arthur’<sup>46</sup>

In the predominance of Arthurian mythology, the Island of Avilion or Avalon has often been subject to an association with the apple tree, the name itself a derivative of the Old Breton *aball* or *avallen* (apple tree; fruit tree)<sup>47</sup> perhaps

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<sup>44</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 21

<sup>45</sup> Hynes, ‘Quest for the Necessary’, p. 98

<sup>46</sup> Alfred Tennyson, *Idylls of the King*, (London: Penguin, 1983), p. 297

<sup>47</sup> Ranko Matasović, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, (Leiden: Brill, 2008), p. 23



patterned after the series of British mythologies that appear to conflate the concept of an elysium with the image of the apple — *Emhain Ablach* from the Irish folkloric tradition, or the Old Welsh *Ynys Afallen* — indeed, an early revision of Tennyson's "Morte d'Arthur" describes "an isle / All made of apple blossom in the west".<sup>48</sup> What it is, perhaps, important to note in the analysis of "Appletreewick" is that like its early mythological predecessors, the Island of Avalon is often in Post-Vulgate Arthurian mythology represented as a paradisaical setting and characterised by its agricultural fecundity and perpetual summer<sup>49</sup>. The piece also engages with another folkloric text in that it appears to echo the 1899 William Butler Yeats poem "The Song of Wandering Ængus", in which Ængus, the god of youth and poetry, pursues an ethereal woman (likely the goddess Caer Ibormeith as seen in Yeats' later poetry).<sup>50</sup> The piece concludes:

And walk among long dappled grass,  
And pluck till time and times are done,  
The silver apples of the moon,  
The golden apples of the sun.

"The Song of Wandering Ængus"<sup>51</sup>

The confluence of the two pieces, however, goes beyond mere linguistic similarity: more importantly in the analysis of Auden's sources, in Irish mythology the god Ængus is the ruler of Tír na nÓg — another, more commonly used name for *Emhain*

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<sup>48</sup> David Staines, *Tennyson's Camelot: The Idylls of the King and its Medieval Sources*, (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1982), p. 19

<sup>49</sup> Norris Lacy, *The New Arthurian Encyclopedia*, London: Taylor & Francis, 1996), p. 25

<sup>50</sup> Lester Conner, *Persons and Places in the Poetry of William Butler Yeats*, (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1998), p. 5

<sup>51</sup> William Yeats, *The Wind Among the Reeds*, (London: Elkin Matthews, 1899), p. 15-16

*Ablach*<sup>52</sup> — the “Land of the Young” in the Celtic Otherworld that is often represented as a land of eternal health, beauty and youth,<sup>53</sup> noticeably similar in aspect to the Arthurian patterning of the Isle of Avilion we have already discerned in Auden's “Appletreewick”. It is also pertinent to note the similarity in linguistic patterning between Yeats’ Wandering Ængus and the narrator figure common to the juvenilia, Auden’s Wanderer patterned after the protagonist of the Old English poem *Er Eardstapa* who lauds the bucolic idyll in the same overblown pastoral register as Ængus describes the landscape of the “glimmering girl / With apple blossom in her hair”.<sup>54</sup>

“Appletreewick” also appears to echo the epithets of Tennyson's Arthurian patterning in its usage of *thy* — a mannerism unusual in early Auden and atypically archaic, usually only seen when attempting to emulate Keats in poems such as “To A Toadstool” or “The Dragon-Fly”; yet one that characterises the mode of address in Tennyson's *Idylls*. It is also important to note that Arthurian mythology forms the folkloric basis for several of the riddarasögur narratives<sup>55</sup> that we might observe Auden as a more mature poet interact with (*Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða* and the *Adonias Saga* in *Paid on Both Sides: A Charade*). This considered, it is entirely plausible to read the piece as a reference to the notion of Avalon — it is, perhaps, a patterning inspired by a simple play on words. Considering the predominance of mythological narratives we may observe Auden interacting with within the context

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<sup>52</sup> John Koch & Antone Minard, *The Celts: History, Life and Culture*, (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2012), p. 743

<sup>53</sup> John Koch, *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia*, (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2006), p. 1671

<sup>54</sup> Yeats, p. 15-16

<sup>55</sup> Bornholdt, Claudia, ‘The Old Norse-Icelandic Transmission of Chrétien de Troyes’s: Ívens Saga, Erex Saga, Parcevals Saga with Valvens þáttur’ in *The Arthur of the North: The Arthurian Legend in the North and Rus’ Realms*, ed. by Marian Kalinke, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011) pp. 98-122 (p. 106)

of the *Juvenilia* — indeed, the poet even describing the messianic return of the Arthur figure in “Arthur's Quoit, Dryffyn” written some months after “Appletreewick” — it is, perhaps, an early iteration of what Samuel Hynes describes as the poet's tendency to poetically incorporate almost every site of textual inspiration.<sup>56</sup> It is also pertinent to note that whilst seemingly innocuous to the reader themselves, considering the poet's familiarity with both Old English and Medieval Scandinavian narratives the suffix of the place name “Appletreewick” also appears to connect etymologically with some of the poet's burgeoning signifiers of heroism, denoting a place name of Norse or Anglo-Saxon origin<sup>57</sup> and subtly adding another layer to the historicism of “Appletreewick” itself.

As the first discernible iteration of northerliness that we might encounter in Bucknell's *Juvenilia*, the implications inherent in “Appletreewick” are perhaps surprisingly complex. In removing the industrial context from an industrial setting and establishing instead a bucolic landscape, incorporating both heavy pastoral imagery and much older mythological narratives there is inherent an element of retreatism from the more modern north, the heavy industry and widespread poverty that characterised much of the area during the poet's formative years. According to Sharpe's analysis, the north is not only established as alien by the titular reference to an esoteric locality but in generating a distinction between a reader base with prior knowledge and a reader base without prior knowledge, the piece establishes a

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<sup>56</sup> Hynes, ‘Quest for the Necessary’, p. 98

<sup>57</sup> Isaac Taylor, *Words and Places, or: Illustrations of History, Ethnology and Geography*, (London: Macmillan & Co., 1873) p. 107. The Norse iteration of “Wick” appears to refer mostly to a station for ships and the Saxon iteration a station in a more general sense, such as a farm or homestead. As the Norse configuration of the suffix is, as Isaac Taylor identifies, predominantly coastal, it may be safe to assume that the origin of “Appletreewick” is of Anglo-Saxon descent; however it is also possible to observe a prevalence of Norse-Icelandic place names along the course of the River Wharfe that runs close by the village.

climate of recondite mysticism relevant to the concept of north and northerness.

The locality is not only alien — it appears almost supernatural or even spiritual, far removed from the connotations of northerness likely predominant within its readership.

For this chapter's exploration of northerness in some of Auden's earliest poetry, "Appletreewick" is perhaps more important than the scant amount of critical attention that it has been afforded appears to indicate. Whilst the piece is, in aspect, markedly juvenile and perhaps suffers as a piece of poetry from its overt mimicry of Hardy's rural patterning, the poem is important within an examination of the juvenilia period in that it represents plainly the core tenets of northerness that Auden uses to augment his poetic northern identity: mythology and the folk narrative, nostalgia for a real or imagined past and a glorification of the labourer figure, often equated with notions of heroism or resistance. By exploring a series of poems from the juvenilia period with reference to these central themes that both construct and characterise Auden's early northern landscapes we are not only able to further the scholarly understanding of the ways in which landscape and geographic identity function within these early poems, but also to perhaps go some way as to ameliorate the seemingly dominant notion of Auden's poetic northerness as beginning and ending with "In Praise of Limestone" in 1948.

A thematic successor to the images of northerness found in "Appletreewick", the poem simply titled "The North" from 1923 or 1924 represents not only the emergence of a more mature understanding of language and form within the context of the juvenilia but also appears to consolidate some of the mythological

patterning present within the earlier poem. Katharine Bucknell notes in the editorial addendum to the piece in *Juvenilia* that “The North” bears the influence of two relatively prominent pieces of landscape poetry — similar in sound and sentiment to William Butler Yeats’ “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” (1890) and to Robert Graves’ “Rocky Acres” (1920),<sup>58</sup> the resonance of these two poems throughout the patterning of “The North” is of more relevance than is perhaps outwardly apparent to an examination of Auden’s northernness and the notion of resistance.

Both poems depict a provincial landscape — Yeats’ “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” referring to an uninhabited isle found in Lough Gill on the border of County Sligo in the Republic of Ireland,<sup>59</sup> and Graves’ “Rocky Acres” — likely to have been read by Auden in *Georgian Poetry 1918–1919*,<sup>60</sup> referring to the barren countryside surrounding the town of Harlech in North Wales.<sup>61</sup> However the notion of resistance appears to run deeper here than a rejection of the landscapes of the high English pastoral found in contemporary poetry such as Thomas Hardy’s Wessex or Hilaire Belloc’s Sussex. “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” — Yeats himself instrumental in the Irish Literary Revival movement of the late nineteenth century — is powerfully demonstrative of the hallmarks of Celtic revivalism,<sup>62</sup> featuring the idealised natural landscape and sense of (either legitimate or invented) nostalgia for a rural or agricultural past common to a movement primarily concerned with the

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<sup>58</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 40

<sup>59</sup> Michael Malouf, ‘Duppy Poetics: Yeats, Memory and Place in Lorna Goodison’s ‘Country, Sligoville’ in *Ireland and Transatlantic Poets: Essays in Memory of Denis Donoghue*, ed. by Brian Caraher & Robert Mahony, (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007) pp. 191-204 (p. 200-201)

<sup>60</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 40

<sup>61</sup> Patrick Quinn, *The Great War and the Missing Muse: The Early Writings of Robert Graves and Siegfried Sassoon*, (Pennsylvania: University of Sussquehanna Press, 1994), p. 71

<sup>62</sup> Peter Capuano, ‘Imagination and Recollection: The Power and Process of Memory in “The Lake Isle of Innisfree”’, *South Carolina Review* 33 (Autumn 2000) 146-154 (p. 59)

creation of a poetry distinctly Irish in aspect and origin rather than one dictated by the hallmarks of English poetry and criticism.<sup>63</sup> Graves' "Rocky Acres" too appears representative of some manner of response to cultural Anglocentrism as Harlech, the Merionethshire town of Graves' setting historically represents a site of rebellion against English rule associated with the revolt of Tywysog Owain Glyndŵr. Harlech also features often in the works of the *Cywyddwyr*, the "Poetry of the Princes" — a thirteenth-century flowering of Welsh-language bardic poetry as cultural resistance<sup>64</sup> relative to the fall of the Kingdom of Gwynedd and the beginning of the end of Welsh resistance to Anglo-Norman rule: the second branch of the *Mabinogi*, *Branwen ferch Llŷr* even opens with the image of Brân the Blessed awaiting the arrival of the Irish king Matholwch on the rocky land between Harlech and the sea.<sup>65</sup> The Welsh landscape here appears similar to the Pennine landscapes depicted in early Auden, as characterised by its history and folkloric heritage, a notion underpinned by the distinctly mythological language used to describe the landscape of Graves' poem — a "lost land"; "the first land that rose from chaos and the flood", the "immortal country whose hill-tops have stood / Strongholds for the proud gods when on earth they go".<sup>66</sup>

In considering Bucknell's association of both Yeats' and Graves' poems with Auden's "The North", a precedent is established before any linguistic analysis might take place: both pieces of poetry appear to designate their setting as a site of

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<sup>63</sup> Hugh Kenner, *A Colder Eye: The Modern Irish Writers*, (Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 1983), p.50-1

<sup>64</sup> John Caerwyn-Williams, *The Poetry of the Welsh Princes*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1994), p. iv

<sup>65</sup> Nikolai Tolstoy-Miloslavsky, *The Oldest British Prose Literature: The Compilation of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi*, (London: Edwin Mellen, 1994), p. 125

<sup>66</sup> Robert Graves, *Collected Poems*, (New York: Doubleday, 1955) p. 9-10

resistance against a dominant culture in much the same way as we might observe Auden isolating, idealising and mythologising the northern settings that feature in “Appletreewick” and “The North”. The language of the latter piece, however, appears much less fraught with the tension apparent in the poetry whose influence appears most obvious in its creation: similar to the bucolic attitudes of “Appletreewick”, we are party to another iteration of Auden's trite northern pastoral, a rhyming quatrain populated with a saccharine natural imagery again reminiscent of the nursery-verse of Walter de la Mare:

O the north is a wild land, a splendid and a fair;  
They've deep shadowed grassy dales and wide brown fell tops  
there.  
All day within my aching head insistent voices go;-  
'Friend of our lovely hills, why come you not, why tarry so?'

There's many a white flower, many a windy place  
Many a brown hill water and many a lovely face  
The stone walls ramble up and down the fells and climb about,  
The air is clean and wholesome and the pine trees shout.

“The North”<sup>67</sup>

There is a predominance of natural imagery within the two stanzas, and although the piece stops short of the agricultural bucolic that “Appletreewick” constantly threatens, the linguistic choice of “*wholesome*” coupled with the images of the “*white flower*” and the “*lovely hills*” and “*lovely face*” does little to dispel the notion of the piece being little more than boyish sentimentality. The second stanza of the poem in particular is characterised by a prevalence of personification: the stone walls “*ramble*” and “*climb*”; the pine trees “*shout*”, the dominant presence of

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<sup>67</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 39

present-tense verbs in this almost childlike anthropomorphism contributing to the sense of motion and exhilaration created by phrases such as the first stanza's "*wild land*", the second's "*windy place*". It is, perhaps, important to note that instead of Auden's wistful narrator being resident within the landscape that he describes, he appears distinct from the fells as he describes them, seen in the manner in which the anthropomorphised landscape itself calls "*Friend of our lovely hills, why come you not, why tarry so?*". It is, perhaps, a case of what scholars such as Katharine Bucknell<sup>68</sup> and Michael O'Neill<sup>69</sup> identify as a case of the poet's own curiosity regarding the natural landscape frustrated by the 'guilty fear' that he is unworthy of it or might potentially cause it harm. The poem recalls the sense of estrangement from the landscape felt in later pieces such as "The Road's Your Place" and "Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed", perhaps indicative of the poet's real-life separation from the Pennine geographies that populate his early poetry, or even a hangover from the sense of isolation and exile found in the Old English poem *Er Eardstapa* that likely informs the narrative qualities of Auden's *Wanderer* (a notion that is explored in greater detail in the final chapter of this thesis).

The landscape of "The North" appears almost homogenised, a remarkably sterile conglomerate of created northernness devoid of any geographically distinguishing features such as we might observe in later depictions of northern geographies such as "Allendale", "The Menhir" or "Rookhope, Weardale (Summer 1922)". Similar to the northern landscape of the earlier poem "Alston Moor" (April 1923 or 1924),<sup>70</sup> "The North" appears devoid of both haunted or infernal industrial

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<sup>68</sup> Katharine Bucknell, introduction to Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. xxvii

<sup>69</sup> O'Neill, p. 84

<sup>70</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 32



imagery, as well as the heartfelt, if unpractised addresses to the pastoral landscape found in poems like “Skyreholme Mill” (“The stream will try to race the clouds he loves the best”; “Horses in meadows print the grass with joyous hoof”).<sup>71</sup> Instead this landscape appears characterised by a crisis of identity: the poet relies on the title to evoke an inhospitable landscape, then attempts to subvert the expectation of forbidding and barren geographies with a private romanticism that in its childlike language largely fails to resonate with the reader. In this failed subversion, “The North” represents a poor result of the conjunction of the “personal experience” and “private mythologies”<sup>72</sup> that Peter Davidson in *The Idea of North* identifies as a hallmark of the poet's distinct northerness; and is perhaps emblematic of Auden's growing difficulty in reconciling the imaginative north to the geographic.

However there is more to the poem than the first two stanzas of Auden's clerihew to the northern geographies of his imagination appear to indicate, and a closer reading of the poet's secondary sources and influences reveals a nucleic form of a much more sophisticated address to the northern landscape. With reference to the notions of death and mortality that pervade Auden's early landscapes discussed in the previous chapter, the last six lines of the piece perhaps merit further investigation than a reading solely regarding ideas of northern identity would perhaps permit, and appear to demonstrate a much more sophisticated poetry and depiction of northerness than an analysis of the poem's first two stanzas would indicate.

Calm eyes and fearless have the simple dwellers in that land,  
And there is peace and healing there for all who understand.

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<sup>71</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 33

<sup>72</sup> Davidson, *The Idea of North*, p.67

Though my soul is sick with longing the great time is not yet  
I am counting every day to it for I shall not forget.  
And when the poplar tree has burst his buds to flame, I'll start  
With a song upon my lips and a shouting in my heart.

“The North”<sup>73</sup>

The phrase “calm eyes and fearless have the simple dwellers in that land” appears to clumsily recall a particular kenning from the *Gylfaginning* of Sturluson's Prose Edda, a figurative lexical circumlocution regarding the image of Baldr, one of the Æsir of the Norse pantheon who, having recently died, converses with the messenger Hermódr the Bold after his descent into Helheim as detailed in the previous chapter's analyses of the poem “Stone Walls I”. The dead god is described by Sturluson as 'una óhræddr-auga', ('contented, gaze unafraid'), a phrase visibly similar to Auden's “calm eyes and fearless” of the fifteenth line. In the indication that the “simple dwellers in that land” share Baldr's una óhræddr-auga, we might consider the notion that those dwellers are, in fact, an early representation of the ghosts that Edward Mendelson identifies as characterising Auden's early poetry<sup>74</sup> and that the landscape of “The North” is again a foray into the notion of a Norse-Icelandic mythology, a paradisaal otherworld either reminiscent of or even situated within the Pennine landscape of the poet's imagination.

The narrative itself takes a more sinister turn when we then consider the dialogue between Auden's narrator and the “insistent voices” of the first stanza, which perhaps indicate a reference to the inescapable nature of mortality such as we

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<sup>73</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 40

<sup>74</sup> Mendelson, *Early Auden*, p. 4-6

might see in “The Menhir”. The descriptive fervour of the final lines, however — “Though my soul is sick with longing the great time is not yet”; “And when the poplar tree has burst his buds to flame I'll start / With a song upon my lips and a shouting in my heart”<sup>75</sup> seems to make more sense when contextualised as referring to a paradisaal otherworld as opposed to an accessible, physical locality. Indeed, the landscape appears to Auden's narrator almost exactly akin to what Thomas Hardy describes in the poem “Wessex Heights, 1896” (1914) as “Where I was before my birth and after death shall be”,<sup>76</sup> a setting characterised by a sense of not only the appropriated regional bucolic, but a pervasive sense of homeliness found particularly in the “little scattered houses there, and cosy whitewashed inns / Where you may turn to rest, and talk when the starlight begins”<sup>77</sup> of the fourth stanza. The notion of death appears somewhat benign here, with the narrator blithe, almost anticipatory, perhaps even echoing the manner in which death in Robert Graves' poem “Rocky Acres” — the “fear and shock” of sudden death from the hunting bird in the sky — appears to represent rather than any great drama or sadness, a sense of freedom.<sup>78</sup>

The notion of “The North” as a reference to the Prose Edda narrative appears likely by precedent — the mid nineteenth-century poetic fascination with the narrative of the fallen Æsir inspired a number of poetic works, most notably Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's translation of “Tegnér's Drapa” (1850) and Matthew Arnold's “Balder Dead” (1855). The notion is also supported by the reference made in the second stanza to the dry-stone walls, a feature of the northern landscape that

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<sup>75</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 40

<sup>76</sup> Thomas Hardy, *The Collected Poems of Thomas Hardy*, ed. by Thomas Irwin, (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2006) p. 290-291

<sup>77</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 40

<sup>78</sup> Peter Howarth, ‘Electroplated Fish-Knife’, *London Review of Books* 37 (May 2015) 33-35 (p.34)

characterises Auden's early vistas that often function as a link between the physical world and what appears to be an otherworld of Norse-Icelandic mythological patterning.<sup>79</sup> Indeed, the prevalence with which we might observe the young Auden awkwardly employ linguistic features and images from Scandinavian mythology to augment a sense of northernness<sup>80</sup> is perhaps trumped only by the prevalence of poetry within the context of the juvenilia where a seemingly innocuous narrative disguises a preoccupation with death and spirituality.

With this interpretation in mind, the bucolic backdrop of poems such as “Appletreewick” and “The North” appears to make more critical sense — rather than a case of homogeneous pastoralism, what we are party to in the connections made with the Isle of Avilion and Norse-Icelandic otherworlds is a pastoral elegy in much the same vein as the last stanzas of John Milton's “Lycidas”; the image of the deceased reborn into a pastoral setting after death — indeed, it is perhaps appropriate to consider here the manner in which Edward Mendelson suggests in *Later Auden* that the 1939 elegy “In Memory of W. B. Yeats” takes the form of a response to John Milton's pastoral elegy “Lycidas”.<sup>81</sup> Auden's northern landscape here is not only pastoral but paradisaical, equated with the most lauded of poetic settings and elevated by its connotations in much the same way as the stoic pumping-engine of “Heavy Date” is afforded great philosophical importance by the bedfellows of Spinoza and Malinowski. The reference is unsubtle, juvenile in aspect, but in spite of

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<sup>79</sup> This notion is explored more fully in the first chapter of this thesis.

<sup>80</sup> One of the best definitions of this tendency to somewhat fumblingly superimpose Norse-Icelandic linguistic patterning onto narratives as signifier of northern identity is provided by Peter Davidson in *The Idea of North*, citing the fragmented nature of the poem beginning “Because the sap fell away...” (1927) as being the result of “[...] an incoherent kaleidoscope of northern images. Public schoolboys are shadowed by saga heroes, and a stark northern diction opens up the poetics of remote northern pasts.” — Davidson, *The Idea of North*, p.87

<sup>81</sup> Mendelson, *Later Auden*, p. 125

this appears remarkably well-made: to the narrator of “Appletreewick” and “The North”, the images of the Pennine landscape and the Elysian Fields appear inextricable. A similar patterning — Auden’s Wanderer barely separated from the Paradisal landscape — resonates in a later poem, “The Hidden Lane (Near Selbrigg, March 1925)” although the notion appears transposed onto the landscape surrounding Gresham's School in Norfolk: “Huge clouds lay quietly on the sky / The road ran on till lost to view / Behind a shoulder of a hill / To Paradise, for all I knew.”<sup>82</sup>

However the connections with the notions of death and mortality within “The North” do not necessitate that it remains exempt from this thesis’ explications on Auden and the notion of northernness in a more physical sense. In relating the contemporary landscape to the romance of Medieval Iceland and Viking Northumbria in much the same way Chris Jones identifies as present in *Paid on Both Sides: A Charade*,<sup>83</sup> the poet is, in essence, evoking the conditions that the reader associates with said locations and transposing them onto the high fell landscape of “Appletreewick”. The effect of this is the establishing via allusion of a sense of folkloric sentimentality, evoking another iteration of the heroism that the poet describes as inherent in his construction of north in the quotation from “England, Six Unexpected Days” that precedes this chapter: “*the 'good' direction, the way towards heroic adventures.*”<sup>84</sup>

It is also important to note that in considering “The North” as a more literal

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<sup>82</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 85–6

<sup>83</sup> Chris Jones, *Strange Likeness: Old English in Twentieth-Century Poetry*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p.77

<sup>84</sup> Auden, ‘England: Six Unexpected Days’, p.62

part of this thesis' explications on Auden's northern identity, the piece might also suggest a manner in which the poet engages with the northern landscape that we may not glean from pieces such as "Rookhope (Weardale, Summer 1922)" or "The Pumping-Engine, Cashwell" that engage with the north of England as a physical location more overtly. The implication inherent in both "Appletreewick" and "The North" — that the pastoral north is only accessible in death — perhaps alludes to the notion that in terms of locality, for the poet, some aspect of northern identity has been lost in the industrialisation of the Pennine landscape; that there has been a "death" of this specific northern identity. This sense of nostalgia for a bucolic northernness of decades past — whether legitimate, or constructed in much the same way as explored in the previous chapter in relation to Pierre Nora's theory of *Les Lieux de Mémoire* — appears a dominant theme particularly in the landscape poetry written during the earlier part of the juvenilia period, and the sense of loss apparent in these poems is of particular importance in the exploration of the changing nature of Auden's north of England.

## **2.2: The Infernal North**

The first iteration of the poem "The Old Lead-mine" is dated in the poet's hand as being written during the February of 1924,<sup>85</sup> a three-stanza alternately rhymed piece regarding the nature of man as a destructive force within the natural landscape. The poem does, however, exhibit Auden's tendency to remodel throughout the juvenilia period, and also exists as "The Old Mine", revised and shortened in a notebook of poetry sent to Christopher Isherwood from the 1924–

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<sup>85</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 30

1925 period.<sup>86</sup> For the purposes of this exploration of Auden's northern landscape, the analysis given refers to the poem in its complete twelve-line form from the February of 1924 unless explicitly stated otherwise.

The sentiments of “The Old Lead-mine” appear similar in characteristic to those found in its contemporary poem “The North”, however the landscape of the former piece appears much more forbidding in aspect than the “wild land, a splendid and a fair” depicted in the opening stanzas of Auden's almost Elysian depiction of the Pennine landscape. The first stanza of “The Old Lead-mine” is unambiguous in its address of the destructive effect that the lead-mining industry has had upon the natural landscape, and the scene carries with it a heavy sense of malevolence in its depiction of the avaricious industrialist:

This is the place where man has laid his hand  
To tear from these dark hills his gold  
He found it not, they say, but left his brand  
Of greed upon the spot for all men to behold.

“The Old Lead-mine”<sup>87</sup>

Auden’s Wanderer perceives the scene as heavy with the threat of violence, intimidated by the sense of aggression generated by the linguistic choices of “tear” and “brand” in the first stanza and the oppressive force of the “angry sky” found in the third. The karst landscape here appears almost anthropomorphised, wounded by the hand of man and resentful of its treatment, a northern vista that rather than characterised by its industrial heritage such as we would observe in “Rookhope,

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<sup>86</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, pp. 27-8

<sup>87</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 30

Weardale (Summer 1922)” or “Allendale” appears ruined by it; “scribbled on”,<sup>88</sup> as the revision sent to Isherwood describes. The later version of the poem is unequivocal in its summation of the effect that a seemingly fruitless industrialisation has had upon the vista: “But men / Found little here for all their pains / Broke the silence in the valley and then / Sought wealth in other places, but the scar remains.”<sup>89</sup>

The second stanza of the poem — omitted in the revision sent to Isherwood — contains the first incarnation of the image that becomes one of the most revisited in Auden's poetry. The figure of the uneasy boy dropping stones down a disused Pennine mine shaft appears again in the 1930 poem beginning “Get there if you can and see the land you once were proud to own” (“Head-gears gaunt on grass-grown pit-banks, seams abandoned years ago / Drop a stone and listen for its splash in the flooded dark below”)<sup>90</sup> and in the 1940 poem “New Year Letter” (“There I dropped pebbles, listened, heard / The reservoir of darkness stirred”).

I peered a moment down the open shaft  
Gloomy and black; I dropped a stone;  
A distant splash, a whispering, a laugh  
The icy hands of fear weighed heavy on the bone

“The Old Lead-mine”<sup>91</sup>

The landscape of “The Old lead-mine” appears to seethe with an unspoken malice manifested in “The icy hands of fear weighed heavy on the bone” of the second stanza that eventually cause Auden's wandering narrator to flee the scene. In

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<sup>88</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 31

<sup>89</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 31

<sup>90</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 30

<sup>91</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 30



“The Old Lead-mine”, the image appears in much the same fashion as it does in “New Year Letter”; in conjunction with a sense of trepidation felt at the opening into the earth. The image of the “gloomy and black” adit<sup>92</sup> here appears important in light of its later uses and connotations. The later poem fancies the disused shaft a portal to some manner of otherworld, this time hellish as opposed to Elysian, and populate with the alarming primordial mother-figures common to most of Auden's subterranean localities — “Down to the Outlawed, to the Others / The Terrible, the Merciful, the Mothers”; “The deep Urmutterfurcht that drives / Us into knowledge all our lives”,<sup>93</sup> evoking the “icy hands of fear” that cause the boy of the second stanza to flee. The image is, perhaps, an early reference to the maternal subterranean water-landscape found in poems such as “In Praise of Limestone”: “examine this region / Of short distances and definite places: / What could be more like Mother”; the notion recurring in the lines at the end of the piece, that exult “when I try to imagine a faultless love / Or the life to come, what I hear is the murmur / Of underground streams”.<sup>94</sup> Wronged by man, the northern landscape of “the Old lead-mine” appears resentful, its mother-figures becoming monstrous as opposed to maternal.

The narrative, however, appears to find comfort in the fact that the path leading to the open shaft will soon be obscured by time (“I turned and travelled quickly down the track / Which grass will cover by and by”). The image of grass obscuring a site of trauma is perhaps a reference to the war poetry of Carl Sandburg,

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<sup>92</sup> Adit: a horizontal shaft or passage leading into a mine, usually for the purposes of rubble removal or water drainage.

<sup>93</sup> W. H. Auden, *New Year Letter*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1941), p. 3-4

<sup>94</sup> W. H. Auden, *Nones*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1951), p. 67-70

whose urban-industrial imagery has echoes in Auden's early verse.<sup>95</sup> In the 1918 poem "Grass", Sandburg describes the ability of growing grass to conceal the reality of human mortality after battle: "Pile the bodies high at Austerlitz and Waterloo / Shovel them under me and let me work — / I am the grass; I cover all".<sup>96</sup> The sentiment itself echoes a biblical verse from the Old Testament's Book of Isaiah — "All flesh is grass" (Isiah 40:6, KJV), itself part of a longer comment upon the impermanence of humanity: "All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field — the grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the lord blows upon it."

The notion of trauma does appear to resonate throughout the early landscape poetry of Auden's juvenilia particularly in its attitudes toward industry, and perhaps in Auden's apparent reference to Sandburg's work we might glean some manner of new insight into the juxtaposed images of the ravaged north of the "Lead-mine" poems and the northern pastoral found in "Appletreewick", "Alston Moor" and "The North." These early northern pastoral poems illustrate the degree to which poems such as "The Old Colliery" and (September 1924) and "Allendale" (December 1924), demonstrate a marked change of attitude regarding the manner in which the industrial landscape is depicted in Auden's juvenilia, moving away from the provincial agrarian idyll and into a poetry characterised by the lead-mining industry and its vistas. However these very early pastoral poems represent more than what might simply be viewed as a thematic naïveté common to juvenilia, and in examining the ways in which these landscapes are textually constructed and

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<sup>95</sup> David Izzo, *W. H. Auden: An Encyclopedia*, (Jefferson: MacFarlane & Company, 2004), p. 235

<sup>96</sup> Carl Sandburg, *The Complete Poems of Carl Sandburg*, ed. by Archibald MacLeish, (New York: Harcourt, 1970), p.136

considering the ideas inherent in the “Lead-mine” poems' reference to Sandburg's “Grass”, there is apparent another reading of these early landscapes that belies their simplistic language and ties in to the elysian reading of the poem “The North”.

As examined in the previous chapter, the relationship between death and the natural landscape in some of Auden's earliest poetry is often complicated by the spectre of global conflict and the re-examination both culturally and philosophically of the notion of human mortality in the years following the First World War. It is possible to read these works as representing a first foray into elegiac verse within the context of the juvenilia, and in this early pastoral poetry discern a similar narrative to the one we might observe in poems such as “Elegy” (1924) and “Elegy” (1925) as they examine the notions of human mortality and premature death using the medium of landscape poetry. As we have already explored in the examination of poems such as “Appletreewick” and “The North” there is apparent a sense of nostalgia for a pre-industrial northern heritage characterised by the hallmarks of the Merrie England autostereotype; found in both the prevalence of Hodge-like agricultural labourer figures and the presence of the hallmarks of not only a very English folkloric heritage in the references to the Vulgate-Grail mythology, but in the transposition of a Scandinavian mythological heritage that appears a common phenomenon in the folkloric cultures of the north Pennine region.<sup>97</sup> However it is possible to expand this notion further when we examine the manner in which these earliest depictions of industry appear overtly physical, and more infernal than industrial, in some ways echoing the imagery common to the poetry of the First World War: the “scarred”,

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<sup>97</sup> Riley, Brendan, ‘The Unexplained North: The Monsters of Northumbria’, *Evening Chronicle* (23rd February 2014) <<http://www.chroniclelive.co.uk/news/local-news/unexplained-north-braags-yotuns-lambton-6736846>> [Accessed 15th July 2016]

“scribbled-on” landscapes of the north Pennines are populated with a language that evokes more intense images of conflict than industrial manufacture — to *tear*, to *brand* — suggesting a greater and more human sense of violence than is outwardly inherent in the post-industrial scenery of the “Lead-mine” poems. It is possible that the poet is, here, informing these images of the scarred hillsides of industrial manufacture with a more national sense of damage; and in the bucolic landscape of the north not only demonstrating a sense of nostalgia for a pre-industrial past, but a pre-war one, characterised by the presence of heroes of both ancient and new national mythologies.

This notion is supported by several critical observations relevant to Auden's early works: as Bucknell observes in the invaluable foreword to *Juvenilia*, there is often a pervasive sense of guilt evident in Auden's landscape poetry that characterises his vistas and renders Auden's Wanderer unwilling or unable to connect with the landscape on both the philosophical and physical level that they desire<sup>98</sup> in much the same way as their progenitor in *Er Eardstapa*. This echoes the manner in which Janis P. Stout in the cultural study *Coming out of War: Poetry, Grieving and the Culture of the World Wars* identifies that one response by female poets to the trauma of the First World War was the production of works that have inherent a pervasive sense of guilt, born of the fact that as women, they were rendered non-participant in the actuality of conflict but were culturally viewed as part of the cause for which the 'men at the front' were fighting.<sup>99</sup> It is possible to expand Stout's reading to an analysis of Auden's sense of guilt and seeming inability

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<sup>98</sup> Bucknell, *Juvenilia*, p. xxvii

<sup>99</sup> Janis Stout, *Coming out of War: Poetry, Grieving and the Culture of the World Wars*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005), p. 73

to connect with the natural landscape, in that as a child during the period of conflict, the poet too shared the status that Stout identifies and posit that the binary of elysian northern spaces and the inherent sense of exile felt by the young poet are in some way a response to the pervasive and often maudlin spectre of the Great War in the national consciousness. The notion is also implied in the slightly later poem “The Nursery”, where in the second stanza “Princesses radiant and fair / Are rescued by the ogre's hand / By Princes tall with golden hair”;<sup>100</sup> and in the fifth stanza, where “Down the chimney sing the winds / Whistling a hundred plaintive airs / Till even we with our untutored minds / Feel strangely stirred by dead men's cares”.<sup>101</sup>

It is also relevant to note that some facets of the subterranean mother-figure common to Auden's poetic landscapes support the notion that there is some manner of metaphorical relationship between the “scarred”, “scribbled-on” vistas that mar Auden's north and the cultural effect of the Great War on the national consciousness. The infernal motherhood found in the subterranean levels of abandoned mines — the figures that prompt “the icy hands of fear” of “The Old Lead-mine” and “the deep Urmutterfurcht” of “New Year Letter” — appears not only visceral and terrible, but the nucleic form of what would later become the vengeful, kin-sacrificing mother-figures central to the narrative of *Paid on Both Sides: A Charade* (1930). When the chorus concludes at the close of the drama that “His mother and his mother won”, the Modernist scholar Peter Edgerley Firchow observes that this line is likely alluding not only to the matriarchs Shaw and Nower, but to two specific mother-figures — 'Mother England' and 'Mother Germany',<sup>102</sup> the notion underpinned by the

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<sup>100</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 45

<sup>101</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*; p. 46

<sup>102</sup> Peter Firchow, *W. H. Auden: Contexts for Poetry*, (Newark: University of Delaware Press), p. 45

line's proximity to John Nower's reflections upon the nature of the feud that drives the narrative. Firchow's commentary highlights that Nower's declamation "I know we have and are making terrific sacrifices, but we cannot give in. We cannot betray the dead. Can we be deaf to... those who in the glory of their early manhood gave up their lives for us?"<sup>103</sup> is not only notable for its function as one of the turning points of the narrative, but for the way it almost appears to echo the patriotic rhetoric that the young Auden would have heard regularly at preparatory school during the Great War.<sup>104</sup>

Firchow's hypothesis — and by extension, perhaps, this thesis' positioning of the bucolic northern landscape as part of a broader metaphorical construction regarding Auden's paracosmic constructions of a pre-war north of England — is also evidenced by the manner in which Natrass, home of the Shaw family, and Lintzgarth, home of the Nower clan are names borrowed from Auden's own experience of the north Pennine landscape — the former being a farm to the south-east of Alston and the latter a farm near to the village of Rookhope<sup>105</sup> that features not only in the charade, but in the opening lines of "New Year Letter" and the early piece "Rookhope, Weardale (Summer 1922)". The allusion appears unremarkable, until the theatre programme from the Cambridge production of *Paid on Both Sides* is considered, which reads simply:

Two families (or classes, or industries or nations) are at feud. The Lintzgarth side marries into the Natrass side; but at the wedding the Natrass mother, in revenge for the death of her elder son, incites her younger son to shoot the Lintzgarth bridegroom; and the peace and

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<sup>103</sup> Auden, *Poems*, p. 118

<sup>104</sup> Firchow, p. 46

<sup>105</sup> Humphrey Carpenter, *W. H. Auden: A Biography*, (London: Harper Collins, 1981), p. 83

mutual toleration that had been promised are resigned by personal animosity.<sup>106</sup>

As pieces of landscape poetry, Auden's earliest northern poems are a nebulous and often unsuccessful experiment in reconciling the “*personal experience*” and “*private mythologies*”<sup>107</sup> of Peter Davidson's analysis of Auden's aesthetic northerliness. However poems such as “Appletreewick” and “The North” represent a nucleic form of the mythological landscapes that would inform later works such as *Paid on Both Sides: A Charade* (1930) and *The Age of Anxiety: A Baroque Eclogue* (1947). Although technically lacking and often homogeneously vague, they remain useful to the analysis of northerness and north Pennine geographies in that they not only represent a clear starting point for the intensity of folkloric reference present in later Auden, but in that they appear to evidence the sense of frustration and isolation identified by Katharine Bucknell in the introduction to *Juvenilia* as characterising some of Auden's earliest landscape poetry and allow us insight into the potential motivations behind this textual schism between the poet and his subject. “The Old Lead-mine”, is, perhaps, the most useful piece of the three discussed when attempting to augment understandings of Auden's early northerliness as it contains the first incarnation of the resonant image of the stone dropped down the abandoned mine-shaft in Auden's poetic canon; however like the first two poems discussed, the piece fails to communicate any real sense of northern identity save for what is apparent from the subject matter and prior knowledge of Auden's boyhood haunts.

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<sup>106</sup> Robert Forsythe, (as user:robertforsythe) ‘Paid on Both Sides’ <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paid\\_on\\_Both\\_Sides](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paid_on_Both_Sides)>; <[https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Paid\\_on\\_Both\\_Sides&action=history](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Paid_on_Both_Sides&action=history)> [Accessed 3rd January 2017]

<sup>107</sup> Davidson, *The Idea of North*, p.67

### **2.3: Hodge and the Industrial Hero**

There is evident, however, a marked change in attitude in the juvenilia period when addressing the notions of landscape and industry. Although the occasional pastoral exploration remains a common sight throughout the mid-period of the juvenilia, it is most accurate to say that Auden's poetic attitude towards the industrial Pennine landscape alters during the latter part of 1924, with the advent of poems such as "The Old Colliery" and "Allendale". In these poems, with the more mature linguistic command of a practised poet comes a markedly more celebratory attitude towards both the place of man within the natural landscape and the heavy industry of the Pennines in general, although the relationship between the two is often more complicated than the image of the affectionately foreboding wilderness in later poems such as "Amor Loci" or "Letter to Lord Byron" might suggest. The first poem chronologically in which we might discern the first sentiments of this new, revised attitude towards the industrial landscape and indeed, a much more recognisable Auden is "Rookhope (Weardale, Summer 1922)" written in April 1924; despite the manner in which Edward Mendelson suggests that the poet does not produce a piece in which we might wholly discern his mature voice until "Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed" at the end of the juvenilia period in 1927.<sup>108</sup> Yet in much the same way that the poet himself feels that it was in "Rookhope I was first aware / Of self and not-self, death and dread", it is in "Rookhope (Weardale, Summer 1922)" that we might observe the first sentiments of the mature poet's attitude towards both

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<sup>108</sup> Roger Kimball, 'The Permanent Auden: A Reconsideration of W. H. Auden occasioned by Edward Mendelson's *Early Auden*', *The New Criterion* (June 1994) <<https://www.newcriterion.com/issues/1994/6/four-early-poems-of-wh-auden>> [Accessed 13th February 2018]



physical and human geographies and perhaps discern the nucleic form of the sentiments that would come to maturity many years later in pieces such as “Letter to Lord Byron” and “In Praise of Limestone”.

“Rookhope”, like “Appletreewick” before it, bisects its readership with the esoteric geography of the title and establishes the piece as something clandestine, the resonance of the ghostly landscape made all the more pervasive by this subtle manner of separation from the external world. The specific geography of the setting is unspecified, there being several mines surrounding the village of Rookhope that were abandoned by the early nineteen-twenties, however judging by its chronological proximity to the poem “The Old Lead-mine” the setting is potentially a reference to the abandoned Sikehead Mine on the slopes of Bolt's Law in Northumberland where the Auden scholar Robert Forsythe in the pamphlet *W. H. Auden: Pennine Poet* concludes that the 'casting of the stone' of “New Year Letter” likely took place.<sup>109</sup>

It is, perhaps, inaccurate to label “Rookhope” itself a landscape poem in the same way that we might designate “Alston Moor” or “Allendale” one as the piece remains more reliant upon a sense of mood, and the evocation of a landscape rather than containing a great deal of imagery pertaining to the vista before the narrator — however the potent sense of geographic identity conveyed by the piece appears to consolidate an image of landscape that transcends the relative dearth of aesthetically descriptive language. The piece begins:

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<sup>109</sup> Myers & Forsythe, p. 49-50

The men are dead who used to walk these dales;  
The mines they worked in once are long forsaken;  
We shall not hear their laughter or their tales  
Now, as in bygone days, all these are taken.

“Rookhope (Weardale, Summer 1922)”<sup>110</sup>

The poem takes the form of a sonnet, comprised for the most part of a controlled ten-syllable line (the only lines containing eleven syllables the second and fourth; perhaps accountable is some form of dialect-based elision or, as Bucknell suggests, a remnant that was intended for revision)<sup>111</sup> that in its rhythmic nature provides the piece with a regimented beat, perhaps evoking paralinguistically the sound of footsteps upon the hillside that the poet describes in the first line. The same sense of nostalgia found in “Appletreewick” and “The North” weighs heavily within the piece, although markedly more sombre in aspect and depicted in a faithful past-tense as opposed being alluded to the present-tense imagery that the earlier poems rely upon. This appears in stark contrast to the lines “There are inns where one can go / And meet the finest men I know” from “Appletreewick” and “They've little scattered houses there, and cosy whitewashed inns / Where you may turn to rest and talk when the starlight begins” from “The North”, “Rookhope” instead populate by past-tense verbs: “The men are dead who used to walk these dales; / The mines they worked in once are long forsaken”. Auden's spectral miners used to walk, they worked, and whilst subtle, the effect of a change in tense such as this implies a division between past and present rather than the timeless reality of the present-tense earlier poems.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 54

<sup>111</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 54

<sup>112</sup> Julian Scutts, *The Word in Poetry and its Contexts*, (Raleigh: Lulu Press, 2016), p. 126

“Rookhope” first demonstrates the notion that characterises later poems such as “Below Me, Ticknall Lay But in the Light” and “Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed”, a sedimentary approach to landscape in that the poet demonstrates an awareness of the history of a scene, and uses it to establish within the sense of nostalgia an allusion to the pervasive spectre of human impermanence that appears in many of the poet's early writings. “Nought / Remaineth as a mark to signify / The men they were, the things they did”, the narrator observes dispassionately, likely borrowing the archaic phraseology from a line from the seventeenth-century poet William Drummond's “The Shadow of the Judgement” that shares at least some subject matter<sup>113</sup> with Auden's “Rookhope”: “And late where towers did stand / Now nought remaineth but a waste of sand”.<sup>114</sup>

This sense of impermanence is, however, undermined by the manner in which in the third quatrain, the narrator describes how the abandoned adits of the mine provide some manner of transcendence of the constraints of linear time, and describes how he has “stood by their deserted shafts / While the rain lashed my face and clutched my knees / And seemed to hear therein their careless laughs”.<sup>115</sup> The landscape here appears inhospitable even to the figure of Auden's sympathetic narrator, the violence with which the rain is depicted — “lashed my face”; and the danger implied in the narrator's pose, in “clutched my knees” — appearing to

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<sup>113</sup> The piece likely held some aesthetic interest for the young Auden, featuring lines such as “*Great Ætnas caverns never yet did make / Such sable damp, though they be hideous black; / Stern horrors here eternally do dwell / And this gulf destine for a gate to hell*”, replete with subterranean imagery that echoes in several poems throughout the juvenilia period and indeed, beyond. — from William Drummond, *The Poems of William Drummond of Hawthornden with Life by Peter Cunningham*, ed. by Peter Cunningham, (London: Cochrane and McCrone, 1833), p. 303

<sup>114</sup> Drummond, p. 305

<sup>115</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 54

indicate that this too is an incarnation of Auden's excluded narrator, that they too do not belong in the landscape and that the scene belongs, as it were, to the ghosts that haunt the dale. In this, "Rookhope" appears reminiscent of the sentiments of the final lines of "Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed": although the narrators of these poems might be free to observe the remains of these abandoned industrial spaces, and to perhaps even fancy they might hear an echo of its past, the landscape itself remains unerring in its stoicism — "Stranger, turn back again, frustrate and vexed. / This land, cut off, will not communicate."<sup>116</sup>

The heroic couplet that closes the piece is perhaps more informative in the broader consideration of Auden's northerliness in that it represents a revised vision of the Hodge-figure that appears in the landscapes of poems such as "Appletreewick" and "The North". Although Hodge's pastoral status appears to have been revoked, his "simple-hearted" nobility is still apparent in the final four lines of the poem:

And seemed to hear therein their careless laughs  
To glimpse the spirit which engendered these;  
    Feel in the might of that exulting wind  
    The splendid generous Soul, the simple Mind.

"Rookhope (Weardale, Summer 1922)"<sup>117</sup>

Hodge's transition here is marked not by the manner in which he is depicted; the same glorification of the labourer figure inherent in Auden's patterning here as is

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<sup>116</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 218

<sup>117</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 54

apparent in the works of Thomas Hardy and indeed, the Victorian literary imagination in general, but the manner in which he has become an industrial labourer as opposed to an agricultural one. Rather than the moral laxity we would assume of this new industrial labourer based on inferences of the previously examined landscape poems, Auden's new Hodge here appears still admirable in the conjunction of his “splendid generous Soul” and “simple Mind” — patronising, linguistically galling, but very much the “figure of Destiny, in whose rhythmic stride and noble sweep of the arm lies the hope of Britain”<sup>118</sup> that F. E. Green describes in *A History of the English Agricultural Labourer 1870–1920*. Again, the adjective “simple” appears in conjunction with the Hodge-figure, reiterating his rustic, almost savant form of nobility, similar to the “simple lovely hearts” of “Appletreewick” and the “simple dwellers in that land” of “The North”.

What is apparent in “Rookhope” is that there has been a shift in the poet's conception of the declining mining industry. Instead of being emblematic of a pervasive national violence marring the dales of the poet's carefully created landscape, the industrial landscape now appears not only synonymous with the innate nobility of inherent in the patterning of the figure of Hodge, but an early iteration of the industrial landscape as it appears in the later juvenilia: outwardly formidable, unforgiving in nature, yet inherently noble.

This new industrial permutation of nobility is solidified in the later poem “The Pumping-Engine, Cashwell” (1924). Although not the first iteration of the pumping-engine that would later become one of the most powerful and resonant

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<sup>118</sup> Green, *A History of the English Agricultural Labourer*, p. 5

images found in the poem “Heavy Date” (1945) and indeed, one of the primary motivations behind the exploratory nature of this thesis, “The Pumping-Engine, Cashwell” remains the most complete and simply rendered vision of the sentiments that it represents within Auden's poetic canon. The piece has been critically observed as demonstrative of the influence of Thomas Hardy,<sup>119</sup> and whilst again fettered as a piece of poetry by the language of juvenilia, the poem represents a remarkably well-made exercise in allegory for this early stage in the juvenilia, using the titular pumping-engine as a representative for the spirit of human endeavour.

Like the poem “Rookhope (Weardale, Summer 1922)”, for the purposes of this thesis “The Pumping-Engine, Cashwell” is afforded the definition of landscape poetry in that it represents a particular facet of Auden's own Pennine paracosm than the poem containing any great prevalence of descriptive language regarding landscapes industrial or otherwise. The piece is once again established as northern, alien by the esoteric title of *Cashwell*; the setting establishing a duality of readership far more pronounced than “Appletreewick” or “Rookhope” as the titular setting refers not to a town or village but a specific small mine complex on Alston Moor in Cumberland.<sup>120</sup> The natural imagery within the poem is sparse, however there are some relevant conclusions to be drawn with reference to the poet's depiction of an ore vein in the second stanza.

It is fifty years now  
Since the old days when  
It first pumped water here;  
Steam drove it then

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<sup>119</sup> Fisher, p. 371

<sup>120</sup> Sharpe, ‘Auden’s Northerliness’, p. 15

Till the workings were stopped  
For the vein pinched out;  
When it lay underground  
Twelve years about.

“The Pumping-Engine, Cashwell”<sup>121</sup>

The natural landscape in the first part of the poem appears much the same in aspect as in both “The Old Lead-mine” and to a lesser extent, “Rookhope (Weardale, Summer 1922)” — scant in reference, and characterised by the subtle sense of decay that pervades some of even the poet's most celebratory addresses to landscape within the context of the juvenilia. The image of the ore vein 'pinching out' — a common mining neologism for a lode of ore within a seam dwindling or narrowing within the earth and becoming impossible to excavate<sup>122</sup> — echoes the manner in which the mining landscape of “Rookhope” is similarly characterised by the same sense of thwarted endeavour, of thriving mining communities and large-scale industrial process reduced to the gaunt structures and abandoned adits that populate Auden's earliest landscapes. Again, the final lines of “Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed” appear to resonate within the piece; another case of “This land, cut off, will not communicate” inherent as the landscape itself appears to thwart the spirit of human industrialism. It is also possible that the image is an echo of the anti-industrial sentiments of the earlier “Lead-mine” poems and is intended as a representation of the damage caused by the avaricious industrialist, the landscape itself rendered barren by unsustainable industry, however the thematic volta that appears at the beginning of the third stanza appears to undermine this reading:

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<sup>121</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 74-5

<sup>122</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 75

Then they raised it again  
Had it cleaned a bit  
So it pumps still, though now  
The beck drives it

As it groans at each strike  
Like a heart in trouble,  
It seems to me something  
In toil most noble.

“The Pumping-Engine, Cashwell”<sup>123</sup>

The ninth line of the poem contains a retrospective-prospective turn, shifting the focus of the piece from a historic setting — the “fifty years now” of the first stanza — to a more immediate one, although the manner in which the verbs of the piece only shift tense mid-way through the stanza renders the volta more subtle and again appears to evidence the poet's almost sedimentary approach to the history of a scene; indicative of a subtle progression of time rather than bisecting the poem into the polarities of 'then' and 'now', 'past' and 'present'. The effect of the juxtaposition of the abandoned industrial machinery and its apparent revival in the latter half of the poem is demonstrative of a core tenet of Auden's landscape philosophy; the manner in which the abandoned paraphernalia of the Pennine lead-mining industry manifests itself in the poet's works appears symbolic of a loss of belief.<sup>124</sup> In the fourth stanza — “As it groans at each strike / Like a heart in trouble / It seems to me something / In toil most noble” — the language recalls the image of the noble labourer figure of the previous poems analogised in the image of the pumping-engine itself. The natural landscape and the industrial one — the ore seam of the first stanza and the titular

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<sup>123</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 74-5

<sup>124</sup> Myers, & Forsythe, p. 11



pumping-engine — are by the end of the poem reconciled by the industrialist, the machinery restored, the beck — a small brook or stream — subjugated to drive the engine, and in the conjunction of two oppositions finds some kind of thematic denouement. In the reconciliation of the two polarities, the poet evokes what has been described as “evidence of nature's leaden largesse, and of man's ability to withstand hardship, danger and death to share that bounty”;<sup>125</sup> and thematically achieves some manner of harmony between the natural landscape and the industrial.

“The Pumping-Engine, Cashwell” is perhaps yet more important than is first apparent in this thesis’ exploration of Auden's early poetry in that it appears demonstrative of two of the poet's philosophies on the northern landscape. The poem appears at once a praise of the indomitable nature of man despite the hostility of the natural landscape and a comment upon the inextricable nature of the karst landscape itself and the eighteenth-century industrialism that characterised it. As Nick Jones observes in the foreword to Alan Myers and Robert Forsythe's *W. H. Auden: Pennine Poet*, the northern lead-mining landscape provides the amphitheatre within which the poet realises that “life must integrate honour for nature, respect for human ingenuity, and a faith in the spirit, especially in the face of death”.<sup>126</sup> It is in “The Pumping-Engine, Cashwell” that we can observe the patterning of the industrial labourer shift from something strictly Hodge to something more heroic, echoing both the poet's boyhood fascination with the literatures of medieval Iceland and the allusions to the conflict of the previous decade we might observe in “November at Weybourne” and “The Rookery”.

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<sup>125</sup> Nick Jones, foreword to Myers & Forsythe, p. 5

<sup>126</sup> Nick Jones, foreword to Myers & Forsythe, p. 5

The methodology behind Auden's association of the north and the notion of heroism is in itself unsurprising: partly a consequence of the saga literature that coloured the poet's boyhood imagination, the notion in its actualised form — the heroic industrial labourer — has also been identified as a result of the ongoing decline of the Pennine lead-mining industry contemporary to the poet's first forays into verse. Tony Sharpe cites the “lead-miners, who, for a while, offered versions of a heroism that partly consisted in confronting of the imminence of its own extinction”<sup>127</sup> as the impetus behind Auden's condescending “splendid generous soul” and “simple mind” mythology; and also identifies another iteration of the allusions to the First World War in the figures of the miners that populate Auden's later juvenilia: the manner in which the subterranean labourers resemble the combatants of trench warfare is, Sharpe observes, pertinent.<sup>128</sup>

John Price writes of the heroism in twentieth-century literature that there is a marked deviation from previous form in the patterning of the hero figure itself: although characterised by its dynamic nature and its tendency to oscillate between forms,<sup>129</sup> it is perhaps of some note that Auden's heroes are diametrically opposed to the “hero of imperialism” and the “moral hero of ordinary life” that appear to dominate the literatures of the Victorian period.<sup>130</sup> The dawn of the twentieth century being more associated with the demise of the traditional mode of heroism in

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<sup>127</sup> Sharpe, ‘Auden’s Northerliness’ p. 15

<sup>128</sup> Sharpe, ‘Auden’s Northerliness’, p. 15

<sup>129</sup> John Price, *Everyday Heroism: Victorian Constructions of the Heroic Civilian*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2014) p. 123

<sup>130</sup> Barbara Korte & Stefanie Lethbridge, ‘Introduction: Heroes and Heroism in British Fiction-Concepts and Conjunctures’ in: *Heroes and Heroism in British Fiction since 1800: Case Studies*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017) (p. 3)

literature and the rise of hero-scepticism,<sup>131</sup> Auden's atavist heroes — hovering somewhere between the “moral hero of ordinary life” and perhaps a more rebellious, Romantic patterning in their often ghostly nature — represent not only a poetic longing for a Pennine *Lieu de Mémoire* of the poet's own construction but perhaps also a response to a more immediate form of socio-economic stimuli.

As the concept of heroism evolved in the nineteenth and twentieth-century cultural consciousness the notion became increasingly utilised as a vehicle through which to publicise alternative or non-establishment moral or social positioning;<sup>132</sup> and the tension inherent in the notion might be viewed as one of the impetus behind the transition in the aesthetic nature of Auden's Pennine landscapes. In the focal shift from bucolic to industrial scenery and the heroic patterning of the lead-mining industry and its labourers in the poet's depictions from the latter half of 1924—onwards, we might discern a burgeoning awareness of the conflict narratives that characterise the communities of the declining lead-mining landscape both historic and contemporary.

Although the poet asserts of himself and his Oxford contemporaries regarding the events of the mid nineteen-twenties “We were far too insular and preoccupied to know what was going on [...] Before 1930 I never opened a newspaper,”<sup>133</sup> the ignorance of such an inherent aspect of the culture of northern Pennine identity as the 1926 General Strike appears at odds with the poet's esoteric knowledge of the marginalia of the mining districts and their folk narratives. Indeed,

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<sup>131</sup> Korte & Lethbridge, p. 3

<sup>132</sup> Price, p. 123

<sup>133</sup> W. H. Auden, ‘As it Seemed to Us’, *New Yorker*, (3rd April 1965) 80 (p.80)

the excavatory manner in which the poet approaches the nature of landscape in this early poetry — the depiction of the Bronze Age barrow cemetery at Heath Wood in to the poem “Below Me, Ticknall Lay But in the Light” being a prominent example — is demonstrative of the poet's decidedly interrogatory tendencies in landscape. The notion, too, fits ill with the inferences of Auden's childhood library: the presence of the geologist Thomas Sopwith's *An Account of the Mining Districts of Alston Moor, Weardale, and Teesdale in Cumberland and Durham* (Alnwick: W. Davidson Press, 1833)<sup>134</sup> does largely indicate that the poet would have at least had an awareness of the history of disputes between Sopwith and the mine labourers themselves during the geologist's time in the area leading to the Allenheads Strike of 1849,<sup>135</sup> if not the history of industrial action in Weardale during the past century. It is, in defence of Auden's statement of political ignorance, entirely reasonable however to assume that to the young Auden, the industrial disputes of the previous century merely formed part of the emotional canon of the Pennine mining landscape surrounding Allenheads much the same as the Parker Liddell incident at the Rampgill mine or the coffin abandoned on the fells on the way from Garrigill to Kirkland. If Christopher Isherwood's statement regarding his contemporaries as belonging to a generation that viewed strike-breaking as a “tremendous, middle-class lark”<sup>136</sup> is accurate, we might then assume that Auden is, in making reference to these events, attempting to bridge the apparent gap between himself and the landscape by co-opting the working-class identity of Hodge.

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<sup>134</sup> Myers & Forsythe, p. 9

<sup>135</sup> Christopher Hunt, *Lead Miners of the Northern Pennines in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Davis Books, 1970), p. 129-30

<sup>136</sup> Samuel Hynes, *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s*, (London: Viking, 1979), p. 80

There is also another reading of Auden's systematically potent iterations of place that responds to the notion that there is some manner of correlation between the landscape and its past in the popular (or at least, local) imagination for the poet. Auden's engagement with these historic conflicts and their geographic specificity recalls the nucleic notion of the work of the anthropologist Keith Basso, whose application of the Bakhtinian chronotope in “Stalking with Stories: Names, Places and Moral Narratives Amongst the Western Apache” linked the chronotope with the natural landscape and concluded that landscape features in the narratives of the Western Apache people in east central Arizona often correspond to the action of many moral narratives of Apache history,<sup>137</sup> “coming alive” in the individual imagination.<sup>138</sup> In the viewing of a feature of the natural landscape, one would, according to Basso, recall and act on the moral teachings of their history as they act as a form of subtle yet effective social control. Basso notes that the attachment of these narratives to geographic locations is a “highly social and linguistic process”<sup>139</sup> that achieves its authority via the public retelling and personal recollection — a collectively executed means of social control found in attaching moral narrative to commonly seen sites or features of the natural landscape itself, deterring the errant and re-enforcing the notions of collectivity and communitarian thought. Referring to Bahktin's *The Dialogic Imagination*, Basso denotes that in Western Apache culture, geographic features function as chronotopes in that they are:

Points in the geography of a community where time and space

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<sup>137</sup>Keith Basso, ‘Stalking with Stories: Names, Places and Moral Narratives among the Western Apache’ in *Text, Play and Story: The Construction and Reconstruction of Self and Society*, ed. by Edward Bruner (Washington: Proceedings of the American Ethnological Society, 1984) pp. 19-55

<sup>138</sup> Yannis Hamilakis, *Archaeology and the Senses: Human Experience, Memory and Affect*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013) p. 158

<sup>139</sup> Jennifer Jordan, *Structures of Memory: Understanding Urban Change in Berlin and Beyond*, (California: Stanford University Press, 2006) p. 182

intersect and fuse. Time takes on flesh and becomes visible for human contemplation; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time and history and the enduring character of a people. ...Chronotopes thus stand as monuments to the community itself, as symbols of it, as forces operating to shape its members' images of themselves.

*The Dialogic Imagination* <sup>140</sup>

Although Auden's overwhelmingly present landscape is, in aspect, likely to be less wrought of ideology and more of schoolboy romanticism, intention appears the same: as Basso identifies the Western Apache narrative as recalling the kernel of a morality tale, Auden's lead-mining poetry attaches meaning to these sites of history in the same way, prompting a visceral and active recollection of the industrial heritage and heroism narratives that feature so heavily within Bucknell's *Juvenilia*. Auden's abandoned mines and dismantled washing-floors are, as Bakhtin describes, “monuments to the community itself, as symbols of it, as forces operating to shape its members' images of themselves”, a means of solidifying the image of Hodge and the epithets of the heroic landscape itself in the face of, as Sharpe identifies, the threat of inevitable industrial decline.

It is, then, no surprise that the titles of the pieces from the juvenilia period in which we might discern the most vivid patterning of Auden's heroic miner-type correspond to the three incidences of major strike action in the past century in the north Pennine region; Weardale 1795–6 and 1818 and Allenheads, Allendale in 1849.<sup>141</sup> Both “Rookhope (Weardale, Summer 1922) and “Allendale” are populated

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<sup>140</sup> Bakhtin, Mikhail, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) (p. 44-45)

<sup>141</sup> Hunt, p. 122-137

with the language of heroism, although in aspect the early poem appears much more subtle and less celebratory in nature and incorporates physical iterations of Auden's new, industrial permutation of Hodge, the advent of a more mature poetic understanding of Hardy's landscapes perhaps as "Allendale" appears particularly similar in metre and aspect to Hardy's own "Wessex Heights".

The language of "Allendale" is, indeed, subtly rife with the idea of conflict; the piece relying upon the aesthetic juxtaposition of sets of diametrical oppositions to drive the narrative. The valley of the first stanza — "no smoke is alive there / Down in the valley the furnace no lead ore of worth burns;" — is parallel to the image of the hilltop smokestack from the second, likely the same one from "New Year Letter"<sup>142</sup> — "the chimney still stands on the top of the hill like a finger". The third stanza continues in the same vein: "Dark looming around the fell-folds" followed by, three lines later, "To us the world-face is glowing and flag-starred, / Lit by a vision".<sup>143</sup> The effect of this patterning is deceptively childlike: in adopting this language of parallelism, not only is the tension inherent in the poet's conception of the landscape, it is also made inherent in the landscape of the poem itself.

What is, perhaps, most interesting about "Allendale" is that the poem represents a point where we might discern the most pervasive and intense sense of decay within the context of the juvenilia, the crippled lead-mining industry presented with much the same patterning as we would expect to observe the site of a historic

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<sup>142</sup> The chimney being the one atop Bolt's Law in popular scholarship, however Robert Forsythe in *W. H. Auden, Pennine Poet* argues that the chimney of "Allendale" is more likely to be one of two similar structures found in Langley or in the Allendale works itself. — Myers & Forsythe, p. 50, reiterated by Bucknell, *Juvenilia*, p. 256.

<sup>143</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 70

conflict — akin to, perhaps, the “Men's bones scattered in a gloomy pass / They lie with arched ribs crumbling in the grass”<sup>144</sup> from a sonnet written in 1925, reused in “Lead's the Best” in 1926 — with one notable exception. “Allendale” appears strange for what is, in essence, an elegy in its predominance of present-tense verbs: the smelting-mill stack is *crumbling*; not crumbled, the chimney *still stands*; is “skywardly pointing”. As the first stanza delineates, the image is one of *decaying industries*, not decayed — and in this we might discern the heroic patterning and narrative of futility that appears to characterise Auden's Hodge. Although the “tombs of decaying industries” of the first stanza are “not to survive here / Many more earth-turns”,<sup>145</sup> the narrative is represented as ongoing rather than one that has ended, and although the heroic figure of Hodge is absent from the narrative unlike the ghostly presences found in “Rookhope (Weardale, Summer 1922)” or “The Old Lead-mine”, his presence is still apparent in the defiant structures of the lead-mining industry that are, as of yet, still present, although decaying, and despite the futility of his endeavour. The entire poem is a response to the inevitable decline of the landscape that the poet champions throughout the juvenilia, and in the same way that Basso identifies in Western Apache narratives, the conflict present in Auden's mining localities histories is linked via the poem's language with the localities themselves, a means of preservation via the recollection of a folk memory, or more importantly, a sense of local identity — again, as Bakhtin describes, “ forces operating to shape its members' images of themselves.”

The sense of death is inherent in the poet's linguistic patterning in

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<sup>144</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 102

<sup>145</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 70



“Allendale” — “no smoke is alive there”, “Tombs of decaying industries”, “not to survive here / Many more earth-turns” — the language again generates a sense of unease that as Sharpe identifies in *W. H. Auden in Context*, recalls the conflict of the previous decade,<sup>146</sup> however there remains a possible sense of resilience inherent in the final stanzas of the piece. As the dark — again, a personification, an epithet of the Romantic North — asks of the onlooking narrator in the third stanza, “Why beat you the bars of your prison?”; as the wind and the rain ask in the fourth “What look you for, creatures that die in a season?”.<sup>147</sup> Auden's narrator here is blithe, responding simply “What matter? To us the world-face is glowing and flag-starred”, “We care not, but turn to our dreams and the comfort we find there”. In equal measure comprised of Hodge's stoicism and a typical Auden glibness in the face of eschatology, the responses demonstrate not only an insurgent attitude to the inevitable decay, but even perhaps hint at the true inability to erase the lead-mining industry in its entirety: the landscape preserved in the poetic imagination, one might “turn to our dreams and the comfort we find there”.

“Allendale”'s sense of sanguine resilience in the narrator's responses does not, however, continue into the poem's thematic successor. “Lead's the Best”. Written in the early part of 1926, the poem demonstrates the sense of detachment that might be seen as separating the Auden of the juvenilia from the more mature poetry we might observe from 1925, and instead of attempting to reconcile the death of the Pennine mining industry or preserve it in poetic form, the poet appears to cultivate a sense of distance within the piece that appears new within the context of

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<sup>146</sup> Sharpe, ‘Auden’s Northerliness’ p. 15

<sup>147</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 70

the juvenilia period. The poem appears more history than elegy, and offers a response to the positions of a number of the poet's early pieces in that it appears to understand the death of the Pennine mining industry as an inevitability of history as opposed to the force to rally against as seen in poems such as "Allendale" or "The Pumping-Engine, Cashwell". The piece has, like "Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed" received some small amount of critical analysis, and whilst there does appear in this scholarship the prevailing attitude that the piece is merely representative of the poet's burgeoning linguistic maturity and shifting attitude toward the industrial landscape, there has been one analytical reading of the poem that is of more use to this thesis' explications on Auden's northerness and notion of heroism than a mere supportive aside.

Citing Auden's final-year performance at Gresham as Caliban in *The Tempest*, Jeremy Noel-Tod in a chapter in *Joyce, T. S. Eliot, Auden, Beckett: Great Shakespeareans* positions the servitude of the spirit Ariel to Shakespeare's villain Prospero as a key inspirational factor motivating decaying Pennine landscape and indeed, the manner in which the images of Auden's haggard, industrial permutations of Hodge are constructed.

As he has Caliban say at the end of his speech in *The Sea and The Mirror*: 'it is just here, among the ruins and the bones, that we may rejoice in the perfected Work which is not ours'. But in 'Lead's the Best', the ruins only remind the poet of an historical loss, an 'old country' which was once a great nation. England, by association, itself becomes the small island of Shakespeare's last play, where a once-powerful magic is now only an 'afterglow' of the great civilization which built the Gothic ministers, recalling Prospero's melting vision of 'the cloud-capp'd tow'rs, the gorgeous places, / The solemn temples'. In 1926, a quotation from England's greatest poet is only 'one more pretty sunset thought'. 'Lead's the Best'

allows us to see the young Auden exploring the conflicted identity of contemporary England through an evocation of Shakespeare that is free of reactionary nostalgia.

'W. H. Auden' <sup>148</sup>

The piece is, not unusually for Auden's more mature juvenilia, an exercise in blank verse and is, like "Appletreewick", indebted heavily to the influence of Tennyson.<sup>149</sup> The piece represents perhaps best in the context of these early works the poet's command of history: beginning with a slew of natural imagery of the Pennine fells ('The fells sweep upward to drag down the sun / Those great rocks shadowing a weary land'), the landscape then gives way to the voices of the lead-miners themselves ('I worked at Threlkeld granite quarry once / Then coal at Wigan for a year, then back / To lead, for lead's the best').<sup>150</sup> There is a semblance of melancholy inherent within the piece alongside the pervasive sense of decay, and as the miners' voices give way to the poet's again in the eighteenth line, we are party to one of early Auden's most interesting allusions.

Steps closed the door  
And stopped their mouths, the last of generations  
Who 'did their business in the veins of th'earth'  
To place a roof on noble Gothic ministers  
For the glory of God, bring wealth to buy  
Some damask scarf or silken stomacher-

"Lead's the Best" <sup>151</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Jeremy Noel-Tod, 'W. H. Auden' in *Joyce, T. S. Eliot, Auden, Beckett: Great Shakespeareans*, ed. by Adrian Poole, (London: Continuum Books, 2012) pp. 105-149 (p. 113)

<sup>149</sup> John Fuller, 'Tennyson and Auden' in *Tennyson Amongst the Poets: Bicentenary Essays*, ed. by Robert Douglas-Fairhurst and Seamus Perry, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) (p. 393)

<sup>150</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 127

<sup>151</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 127

The twentieth line of the piece — “Who 'did their business in the veins of th'earth” — is taken from one of Prospero's attacks on Ariel in Act I Scene II of *The Tempest*, where the magician berates the spirit for his ungratefulness in asking for a reduction in the time of his servitude; citing that Ariel sees it a burden when the magician asks him to complete what he himself sees as simple, if onerous tasks. The line's presence in “Lead's the Best” makes an interesting comparison between the figure of the miner — Hodge's final permutation — and the figure of the enslaved sprite; the notion of enslavement appearing within the narrative and the mine-workers of the second section of the poem suddenly rendered subjugate, unwillingly employed in their task. The miner is alienated from the end product of their labour, and in the same manner as the magician Prospero, the beneficiary appears similarly thankless: “To place a roof on noble Gothic ministers / For the glory of God, bring wealth to buy / Some damask scarf or silken stomacher / To make a woman's body beautiful.”<sup>152</sup>

Inherent in this intertextuality are two conclusions: the first is that the miners are enslaved, subjugated to some form of ungrateful elite whether it be the woman with the damask scarf or indeed, the almighty themselves and are forced by an unseen hand to toil for little reward. The second conclusion is a little more subtle, and appears in the thematic dissolution of the figure of Hodge as it appears in the final stanza: no longer noble, a ruined ideal without a cause to which to apply his industriousness, without the force of industry within the natural landscape, he becomes obsolete and is corrupted. He is characterised by his vices, an almost tawdry figure: more Alec Stoke-D'Urberville than the shepherd Gabriel Oak — “And

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<sup>152</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 127

Hodge himself becomes a sottish bawd / Who takes his city vices secondhand / And grins, if he hears Paris mentioned”, much more the mortal, sexually-motivated Hodge of the later poem “Hodge Looks Towards London”. The image also recalls the manner in which the Chorus of *The Dog Beneath the Skin* describes the unemployed as met by Alan as he moves through the street; a terrifying simulation of humanity<sup>153</sup> “...some slackly standing / Their faces in the glimmering gaslight grey / Their eyeballs drugged as a dead rabbit’s”<sup>154</sup> — without industry, however grim, however exploitative, the figure of Hodge fails and is rendered unable to exist within the landscape itself. “Lead’s the Best” is, perhaps, Auden’s eulogy for his Hodge: what is important for an exploration of Auden’s northern identity is that we have several times previously identified that the figure of Hodge is synonymous with the North itself. In the pollution of Hodge we have an allegory, the poet seeming to opine that without its industrial endeavour, the North too will be rendered obsolete; ruined — “...There is no smoke in Fleming’s chimney; the cupolas are cold in Washtub Wood / Daddry and Moonstones weep: at Broken Hill you were defeated”<sup>155</sup> as *The Dog Beneath the Skin* intones, ‘Broken Hill’ being a synonym for the cheaply imported Australian metals that sounded the death-knell for most of the Pennine mining industry.<sup>156</sup>

The volta of the piece occurs in the fifty-fourth line, when in much the same way as in “The Pumping-Engine, Cashwell” the action of the piece is suddenly transported to the present day, beginning with another of Auden’s fairy-tale allusions

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<sup>153</sup> Helen Warden, *British Avant-Garde Theatre*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) p. 119

<sup>154</sup> W. H. Auden & Christopher Isherwood, *The Dog Beneath the Skin, or Where is Francis?*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1986), p. 55

<sup>155</sup> Auden & Isherwood, p. 58

<sup>156</sup> Myers & Forsythe, p. 15

likely to be a hangover from the influence of Walter de la Mare in the very earliest juvenilia poems (or perhaps, as identified by Katharine Bucknell in *Juvenilia*, a reference to “The Coombe” by Edward Thomas).<sup>157</sup>

...All their memory fades  
Like that two-headed giant, slain by Jack  
Who lay for years in the coombe-bottom, where  
Men flocked at first, then fewer came, then ceased  
And only children visited the spot to play  
At hide-and-seek in the dark, cavernous skulls  
Or gather berries from the thorns which hid  
The arched ribs crumbling in the grass.

“Lead's the Best”<sup>158</sup>

The stanza is interesting for a number of reasons: the juxtaposition of the folkloric narrative beginning in the sixty-third line to the more realist images of the decaying lead-mining industry and its miners is much more pronounced than the manner that we see the labourer and the mythological landscape portrayed in poems such as “Appletreewick” or “The North”. Instead of contributing to a consistent, sustained semantic such as seen in these early poems, “Lead's the Best” appears to actively seek to juxtapose the labourer and the magical landscape, identifying their diametrical opposition via the use of a stanzaic break, a change of tense, and a marked shift in tone. Instead of the bleakly realised images of the displaced labourer in his fruitless endeavour — or indeed, the following stanzas and their joyless history of the dales and their battles — we are subject to some manner of grim whimsy in the allusion to the dead giant, whose skulls remain in the coombe as a children's

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<sup>157</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 129

<sup>158</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 128

playground. The narrative that Auden alludes to here is rather more patterned after the Cornish folkloric iteration of *Cormoran* or *Jack the Giant-Killer* as opposed to the more modern and familiar *Jack Spriggins and the Enchanted Bean* mythology; and as a simile the aside serves to lend a sense of scale to the earlier part of the poem — the “great two-headed giant” brought down by a farmer's boy and a hastily-dug pit; the “old country's greatness” of the final stanza felled by something so innocuous as imported lead and the passage of time.

It is interesting to note that in the same way as we might discern Keith Basso's patterning of the Bakhtinian chronotope in the landscape features of “Allendale” or “Rookhope (Weardale, Summer 1922)”, the corpse of the giant in the coombe appears an inversion of the Basso's application: rather than a site of memory that prompts recollection and the consolidation of collective identity, the site is represented as being swiftly forgotten and in popular memory and in conjunction, made obsolete — “Men flocked at first, then fewer came, then ceased / And only children visited the spot to play”. Even the site of the body itself, forgotten, is obscured by the ensuing growth of grass and bramble; “Or gather berries from the thorns which hid / The arched ribs crumbling in the grass”. Again, the image is perhaps a reference to Carl Sandburg's poem “Grass”, as a site of trauma — either the damage caused to the natural landscape by the lead-mining industry, or possibly the trauma inherent in its decline — being obscured by the growth of the natural landscape. The image of the natural reclamation also occurs earlier in the piece, in the fortieth line of the poem “Turf covers up the huge stone heaps, green ferns / The dark holes opening into hollow hills”; depicting the natural landscape obscuring the decaying ephemera of the Pennine industrial landscape. The language used — the

“huge stone heaps” and the “dark holes opening into hills” — recalls the notions of prehistoric burial practice such as seen in the earlier poem “Below Me, Ticknall Lay But in the Light”; the image of the cairn or the barrow burial suggested by the dour imagery, the connotations made darker than the simple reclamation of industrial sites that the language suggests at first glance. As the final lines of the piece baldly intone,

...Naught  
Remains but wind-sough over barren pastures  
The bleak philosophy of Northern ridges  
Harsh afterglow of an old country's greatness

“Lead's the Best”<sup>159</sup>

Death appears a pervasive force within the piece, the hubris of the industrial heritage of the North Pennine lead-mining landscape and all its ephemera, the heroism of Hodge included, either erased or reclaimed by the possessive earth identified in the previous chapter — and it is this burgeoning sense of death, decay and eschatological inevitability that develops to characterise the most lauded landscape of Auden's juvenilia period.

#### **2.4: Nenthead Revisited: Finding Killhope Cross**

The preceding analysis has demonstrated the manner in which the piece beginning “Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed” is the subject of a process of developing skill and ideas of heroism and northerliness as opposed to a single moment of linguistic mastery within the context of the juvenilia period; however that

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<sup>159</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 128



is not to say that Edward Mendelson was entirely inaccurate when making the statement<sup>160</sup> that the poem represents the genesis of Auden's mature poetic voice. Although still far removed from the polished, almost sedimentary manner in which we would see the poet address the many layers of emotion inherent in the northern landscape in "In Praise of Limestone" or "Amor Loci", in the first stanza of "Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed" the poet still effects a sense of strata within the piece, situating a confluence of narratives within the descending structures associated with the lead-mining industry; some above the ground, some below in the abandoned levels.

Who stands, the crux left of the watershed,  
On the wet road between the chafing grass  
Below him sees dismantled washing-floors,  
Snatches of tramline running to a wood,  
An industry already comatose,  
Yet sparsely living.

"Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed"<sup>161</sup>

The manner in which the piece begins is, again, designed to create a sense of alienation between the reader and the text; the *stranger* of the final stanza: foregoing even a geographic designation, the poet only affords the reader the most vague suggestion of where the piece is set, and decoding the allusions inherent in the first line or title of a piece has proved of paramount importance in producing a comprehensive analysis of the specific nature of north in Auden's early poetry. Littered with the ephemera of the decaying lead-mining industry, it is doubtless part of Auden's carefully generated Pennine paracosm, however the tone of the already

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<sup>160</sup> Mendelson, *Early Auden*, p. 32

<sup>161</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 218

particularly subversive piece is made more covert by the lack of even the most esoteric geographic designation. John Fuller notes in *Commentary* that the piece, when sent in original draft form to Christopher Isherwood prior to the publication of “Poems” in 1928, was tentatively titled “Rookhope”;<sup>162</sup> however the specific location appears not to fit the geography encountered in the poem. Edward Callan in *Auden: A Carnival of Intellect* suggests that the 'crux' of the title is Cross Fell,<sup>163</sup> however from the mine complexes close to Rookhope the Cross Fell itself is not visible. There are, however, several alternatives to Callan's position: a likely one is the Bishop's Stones monument (often called “Short's Cross”) between Nenthead and Nag's Head;<sup>164</sup> however the stone cross itself is situated on mostly open moorland with mining structures only visible in the far distance and no “wet road” of the poem's second line visible.

John Fuller suggests that the crux is, in fact, the sandstone cross on the East Pennine road of Killhope Cross, making the dismantled mine the one from the Nenthead Mine complex in Cumbria — “Keeping it to your left while standing on the A689 'between the chafing grass', you do indeed look down towards the scars of the lead-mining process above Nenthead”,<sup>165</sup> the location even appearing in the poet's apparent grimoire, Thomas Sopwith's *An Account of the Mining Districts of Alston Moor, Weardale, and Teesdale in Cumberland and Durham*: “The traveller now descends steeply over wastes of barren and dreary aspect to the mining village of Nent Head... where excellent arrangements are made for carrying on the various

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<sup>162</sup> Fuller, *Commentary*, p. 9

<sup>163</sup> Edward Callan, *W. H. Auden: A Carnival of Intellect*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 53

<sup>164</sup> Alan Kind, *The Old Roads of Britain: Alston, Hartside, Geltsdale* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Holdology, 1999), p. 47

<sup>165</sup> Fuller, *Commentary*, p. 9

processes of washing the ore”.<sup>166</sup> Fuller's argument is compelling, and is supported by Robert Forsythe's considering of the 'watershed' of the title to be the watershed of the Nent and Allen Rivers in *W. H. Auden, Pennine Poet* despite his analysis going on to refute several of the claims Fuller makes regarding the operational status of the lead-mining operations at Nenthead. Fuller claimed Auden would only have known a defunct mining landscape and identified the Nenthead smelt mill closing in 1919,<sup>167</sup> whereas Forsythe demonstrates that the mill which Auden would have known only opened in 1910<sup>168</sup> and indeed, was operational well into the nineteen-sixties.<sup>169</sup>

In situating Auden's crux we have, in some way, obliged the poet in that we have ourselves engaged in some manner of mining to unearth the meaning inherent within the line and address the truly esoteric nature of the title. The action of dissection and identification establishes the piece firmly within a mythological landscape, the northern landscape itself rendered not only inaccessible but arcane due to the manner in which the true location of the narrative is masked, only accessible via this manner of ritual. In this the Killhope Cross and the mining landscape at Nenthead appear as if the poet is pre-empting Basso's patterning of the Bakhtinian chronotope, the sites functioning within the poem as reaffirming a series of emotions and indeed, local identities by recalling a number of folkloric narratives in which they feature.

And, further, here and there, though many dead

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<sup>166</sup> Thomas Sopwith, *An Account of the Mining Districts of Alston Moor, Weardale and Teesdale in Cumberland and Durham*, (Alnwick: W. Davidson, 1833), p. 179

<sup>167</sup> Fuller, *Commentary*, p. 9

<sup>168</sup> Myers & Forsythe, p. 51

<sup>169</sup> Robert Clough, *The Lead-Smelting Mills of the Yorkshire Dales and the Northern Pennines: Their Architectural Character, Construction and Place in European Tradition*, (Leeds: Jowett & Sowry, 1962), p. 32

Lie under the poor soil, some acts are chosen,  
Taken from recent winters; two there were  
Cleaned out a damaged shaft by hand, clutching  
The winch a gale would tear them from; one died  
During a storm, the fells impassable,  
Not at his village, but in wooden shape  
Through long abandoned levels nosed his way  
And in his final valley went to ground.

“Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed”<sup>170</sup>

The first chapter of this thesis discusses the pervasive presence of death and its local folkloric sources within the poem “Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed”, however in order to further the analysis of the landscape of the poem further expansion is, perhaps, required. Bucknell, in *Juvenilia*, designates two tales in particular that appear to resonate with the imagery contained in the first stanza of the poem. The first is the death of the miner Parker Liddell at the Rampgill Mine at Nenthead in 1916<sup>171</sup> — due to blizzard conditions on the surface, when injured during a rock fall, Liddell was carried through the levels of the mine itself to seek medical assistance in the nearby village of Carrshield, yet died of pneumonia a few days later.<sup>172</sup> The poet helpfully dissects the image further in a letter to Christopher Isherwood in September 1927, stating of Isherwood's confusion regarding the esoteric image and the usage of the word 'nosed', “I don't understand your perplexity over the funeral. In his new shape, of course, means his coffin. The shape of the coffin should justify nosed. The deliberate association of the process with animals is obvious — ”.<sup>173</sup> As well as contributing to the 'sedimentary' approach to landscape

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<sup>170</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 218

<sup>171</sup> Myers & Forsythe, p. 51

<sup>172</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 219

<sup>173</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 219

that the poet favours in the later juvenilia, the decaying mining landscape of the first stanza is afforded a sense of humanity.

The reference highlights the dangerous, heroic nature of the mining industry, however in exploring the analogy further we might discern yet more of Auden's changing approach to the landscapes of the North Pennine lead-mining industry. Although the landscape of the poem is definitely designated dying and not dead — “An industry already comatose / Yet sparsely living” of the fifth and sixth lines — the inevitability of death as identified by Sharpe as one of the primary motivations behind Auden's heroic Hodge is exemplified in the manner in which the dying Liddell is already depicted as being within his coffin.<sup>174</sup> The metaphor resonates within several poems from the later juvenilia that we have already explored, in that Auden's hero and the heroic landscape that he represents are, by this point, destined for failure — the death of the miner is protracted and not easeful, characterised by struggle in the vain attempt to reach Carrshield. The metaphor is exact: the scene and all its ephemera are merely the “Harsh afterglow of an old country's greatness / Themes for a poet's pretty sunset thoughts” of the last lines of “Lead's the Best”.

Bucknell also suggests that the poet makes reference to another folkloric narrative from the North Pennine region, found in William Wallace's *Alston Moor: Its Pastoral People, Its Mining and Manors* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1890)

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<sup>174</sup> John Fuller, in *Commentary* (p.10) makes what first appears a more accurate identification of the two narratives and suggests that the poem refers to Liddell's coffin being borne through the levels of the abandoned mine to return the body to Allenheads after itself being abandoned for two weeks, however the statement appears, like Fuller's research on the Nenthead mines, inexact. Robert Forsythe- whose research in *W. H. Auden: Pennine Poet* on Auden's early landscapes appears much more specialised and expansively referenced, even unearthing the identity of the miner Parker Liddell- agrees with Bucknell that the miner was borne alive through the mine; as does Louise Thain in *Through the Ages: The Story of Nenthead*, published prior to both Bucknell and Forsythe's work in 1957. Fuller's suggestion is unreferenced; and as we have explored in the previous chapter it is not unlike early Auden to subvert the physical epithets of the living and the dead.

concerning the “Corpse Road” over Cross Fell, which according to local tradition was used by villagers of Garrigill to transport their dead over the moorland to be buried in the churchyard at Kirkland. Wallace references events from the mid-sixteenth century where a burial party, overtaken by a snowstorm, was forced to abandon the coffin of the deceased upon the moorland itself, returning two weeks later when the snow had thawed.<sup>175</sup> Although Bucknell's analogy appears without any obvious source of resonance within the poem save for “*the fells impassable*” which does, in aspect, appear to be a reference to the death of Parker Liddell, it is perhaps accurate to assume that in the interests of establishing the “sedimentary” approach to landscape we might observe the poet create in the poems preceding “Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed” that the narrative of the coffin abandoned on the Crossfell is likely to appeal to the young Auden, juxtaposing the folkloric heritage of the older world of indigenous Pennine communities to one from the more recent mining landscape. The image also appears to resonate more deeply with the more romantic presences of corpses and ghosts that populate a number of poems from the juvenilia period, the image of the body interred in the snow on the fells is particularly reminiscent of the setting of the barrow cemetery found in “Below Me, Ticknall Lay But in the Light”.

Affectionately ghastly, replacing Norse-Icelandic mythology with more recent local folklore but retaining its inherent connotations of heroism and the supernatural, the presence of these folkloric narratives alters the perception of what appears at *prima facie* a simple iteration of the grim, industrial scenery that characterises early modernism. Underpinned by the image of the metempsyche

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<sup>175</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 219

discerned in the previous chapter, the dying industrial scene is not only represented as populated by its dead but in their presence in the narrative there appears a series of psychopomps, easing — or indeed, spurring — the landscape into the grave. Similar to this is the manner in which the image of the pumping-engine at Cashwell recurs in the sixth to eighth lines of the first stanza; whereas instead of the glorious resurrection of the machinery found in “The Pumping-Engine, Cashwell” where the marriage of the hand of man and the natural landscape appears to create some sense of heroic revival and the resilience of Hodge and all that he is emblematic of, the newly re-purposed pumping-engine of “Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed” is less glorified. Again the inevitability of decline is indicated in the manner in which the engine itself is now described:

A ramshackle engine  
At Cashwell raises water; for ten years  
It lay in flooded workings until this,  
Its latter office, grudgingly performed.

“Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed” <sup>176</sup>

Rather than “a thing / in toil most noble” as it is appears in the earlier poem, the pumping-engine of the later poem has in its relocation merely been transported from one defunct office to another; from the flooded workings where it lay abandoned for a decade to the decaying scene that appears before Auden's narrator, instead of engaged in the “toil most noble” we have come to associate with Auden's Hodge now only *grudgingly* performing its previously sacred duty. The image alludes again to the inevitability of decline, and the fruitless nature of any attempt to delay

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<sup>176</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 218

mortality: like the miner who died even after being borne through the levels of the abandoned Rampgill Mine to Carrshield, the pumping-engine's death is protracted, a struggle, made even more arduous by the inhospitable nature of the landscape itself.

The poet's sense of social exile appears too to have found its finite form in “Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed”: instead of the shifting attitudes of co-option, adoption and extradition to working-class identities that characterise a series of poems from the early juvenilia, “Who Stands” is categorically decisive. Tony Sharpe in the chapter “No Permission to be Idle”: W. H. Auden's Work Ethics' notes that Auden's “desire for insiderhood” in the poem leads finally to a “recognition of exile”: the landscape, where industrial endeavour has fostered what the scholar terms “authentic identity”, refuses to be complicit again in the co-option of these working identities that both Auden and his narrator stand distinct from. Although fascinated, unable to remove themselves from the scene, the *stranger* of the second stanza is directly addressed by the landscape of the dismantled washing-floors below: they refuse, as Sharpe states, to be “accessory content to one / Aimless for faces rather there than here” — to the *stranger* who stands in diametrical opposition to the world of work that characterises the landscape below.<sup>177</sup> It is important to note, however, that this acceptance of the narrator's polarisation from the romanticised figure of the lead-miner in socio-economic conflict also inherent in the patterning of “Allendale” and “Rookhope (Weardale, Summer 1922)” is, however, marginally refuted by John Fuller in *Commentary*, where the scholar notes that an expansion of the title — “Who Stands, the Crux *Left* of the Watershed” — has prompted a series of politicised readings of the poem that take into perhaps too

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<sup>177</sup>Sharpe, “No Permission to be Idle”, p. 279



much consideration the poet's involvement with driving for the Trades Union Congress the previous year.<sup>178</sup>

## **2.5: Conclusion: A Pennine Athens**

By tracing the themes, allusions and images that populate the decaying landscape of “Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed”, it becomes increasingly obvious that Mendelson's assertion regarding Auden's adoption of mature poetic voice is, in fact, only truly accurate when we consider the poet's command of form and language as opposed to the thematic landscape of the poem in its entirety. An ethereal and uncompromising elegy, it is evident that “Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed” is the logical conclusion of “Allendale”, of “Appletreewick” and the sentiments, allusions and images that form its textual heritage despite these earlier poems being fettered by the weaknesses that have prompted scholars to disregard their contributions to a greater understanding of Auden’s earliest approaches to landscape and identity. Examining the poem “Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed” as an isolated iteration of northernness has led to a reductive scholarship, and many of the notions and images found in poems that are analysed in this chapter can contribute a relatively large degree of depth to analysis of the later poems in which they feature — as the introduction to this thesis demonstrates, “Heavy Date”'s “When I was a child, I / Loved a pumping-engine / Thought it every bit as / Beautiful as you” requires a manner of dissection that only an understanding of these nebulous early poems can provide.

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<sup>178</sup> Fuller, *Commentary*, p. 9

North is, in early Auden, a landscape characterised by its mythology as well as its history, a destination transient between the planes of the here and the hereafter in addition to being characterised by its mythologies and histories and the implications of heroism that those allusions entail. What remains important to note is that in Auden's sedimentary approach to these landscapes there is a sense of precedent established, the micro-level augmented with the epithets of the macro-level: these landscapes are not only a result of their present iterations but their histories and potential futures, perhaps a means of evoking the sense of permanence that the wandering narrator appears to be searching for throughout the juvenilia period. North is, as the final poem discussed here describes, “*cut off*”, an arcane knowledge required to access the esoteric geographies of the industrial mining landscape. There is a sense inherent in many of the pieces that the poet is attempting in verse to preserve these provincial identities and lend them a sense of magical resistance to the inevitable, and to combat the decline of industrial manufacture and the mass migration from the North Pennine region that came with the end of the lead-mining and feldspar-mining communities. It is also possible that in this afforded resilience, Auden is perhaps resisting something more removed from the scene: the poet's own sense of distance from the working landscape so admired, both in a physical sense — the poet not being resident in the north for most of his life — and a more socio-economically motivated, class-based one.

As a subset of works, the assertion remains true that there is somewhat of a gap between the skill demonstrated in the thematic content of this northern paracosm and its eventual linguistic execution, however the exclusion of the poems analysed here from popular scholarship is damaging to the critical backdrop surrounding a

poet perhaps most known for his complex and skilful iterations of place. As Auden himself describes of Matthew Arnold in 'Whitman and Arnold', "Arnold attempted the impossible task of writing Victorian London as if it were Fifth-Century Athens, and in consequence his inspiration run dry,"<sup>179</sup> and it is, perhaps possible to say a similar thing of the poet's early approach to the northernness of these early landscapes themselves. In attempting to deify the inhospitable scenery of the North Pennines, the poet achieves only an archaic, saccharine iteration of place that is not only uninviting in a linguistic sense but devoid of any true evocations of poetic emotion. It is only when accepting the inevitable decline of industrial manufacture — sometime around the writing of "Lead's the Best" in 1926 — that these landscapes become recognisably Auden and begin to resonate with the potency of language and emotion that we would associate with the mature poet; only when beginning to consider the mortality of these landscapes, geographies and identities that they begin to resemble works such as "Amor Loci" and "In Praise of Limestone". Auden's north finds form in its own ruination, only solidifying as it ossifies, and in this there is perhaps a more powerful sense of the poet's interactions with modernity than in many later works where Auden has long since found mature voice.

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<sup>179</sup> W. H. Auden, 'Whitman and Arnold', *Common Sense* 7 (1st April 1939) 23-24 (p.23)



### **Chapter III:**

#### **“Art thou richer, humble tree / Than fifty thousand oaks or elms”: Old English**

#### **Mythologies, The Bucolic Idyll and the Construction of Nation within Auden's**

#### **Arboreal Juvenilia**

A small grove massacred to the last ash,  
An oak with heart-rot, give away the show:  
This great society is going to smash;  
They cannot fool us with how fast they go,  
How much they cost each other and the gods.  
A culture is no better than its woods.

“Bucolics II: Woods”<sup>1</sup>

### **3.0: Introduction: Auden's Green Modernism**

During the six-year period preceding the publication of *Poems* by Stephen Spender in 1928, W. H. Auden's landscapes were, in aspect, predominantly industrial. The resonant, elegiac voice found in the conjunction of the inhospitable high fell landscape and the skeletal remains of the North Pennine lead-mining industry is what lends these early landscapes their compelling and almost spectral quality, and despite the inadequacies of linguistic expression and form that tend to permeate the poet's earliest juvenilia, renders them compelling. In the first two chapters of this thesis I have explored the ways in which landscapes both industrial and bucolic are constructed within the poetry written during Auden's unpublished period; however in order to further expand this thesis' analysis of these poems and go some way as to augmenting the current critical landscape's understanding of this

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<sup>1</sup> W. H. Auden, *Collected Poems*, ed. by Edward Mendelson, (New York: Vintage, 1991), p. 560

early work and the themes and impetus behind them it becomes necessary to explore their intricacies regarding one of the more resonant themes within the study of twentieth-century literature, nationhood and national identity.

This chapter aims to, in its analysis of Auden's juvenilia, explore the natural landscape in terms of the spectres of nation and nationalism that both underpin and characterise some of the poet's most intriguing early works. The chapter will interrogate the image of the tree in a series of these early poems, and in exploring how the tree as a textual feature interacts with ideas of history and a series of intertexts, identify and explore the manner in which ideas of nation and national identity are vital in shaping the manner in which Auden first addresses the natural world. As the previous two chapters of this thesis have demonstrated, Auden's earliest works prove to be some of the poet's most nebulous and indeed, ambiguous of subject: by building upon the need that this thesis' previous thematic studies have identified for the innovative consideration of mythological and folkloric source materials and the language of connotation, this chapter will explore the ideas of nation, national identity, heritage and history that are inherent in the language of the poet's juvenilia.

These aims will be achieved via the in-depth linguistic analysis of a series of poems from the period 1922–1928, with reference to the commentaries of both A. S. T. Fisher and Katharine Bucknell. The chapter will effectively map the ephemera of Auden's arboreal geography as encountered by his Wanderer, identifying the particular trees and fauna that feature heavily within these poems — most prominently the oak and the elm, the image of the black bird, and the less frequent

appearances of the willow, ash and plane trees — and examine their relationships relative to the landscape of Auden's juvenilia. Beginning with an exploration of the notion of the image of the tree as representative of humanity, the chapter will then explore and apply this reading to a series of poems such as "Woods in Rain" that has received only the barest semblance of scholarly attention, examining the implications of Edward Thomas' hybrid symbolism of man and tree as a device for reading some of Auden's earliest and most enigmatic poems. The chapter will then go on to explore the manner in which tree- and plant-based imagery is used by the poet as a means of evoking much earlier works from both Anglo-Saxon and Celtic mythological narratives, and how analysis of these sources again leads us to consider the unorthodox ways in which the poet constructs nation and national identity within the landscape of his earliest poetry. Finally, the chapter will consider the implications of the hybrid symbolism of man and tree in relation to Auden's early arboreal poems and the manner in which it gives way to an anxiety in the representations of rural and urban modernity, leading to a conscious linkage with narratives such as the second branch of the Mabinogi (*Branwen ferch Llŷr*), *Grettis Saga Ásmundarsonar*, and *Beowulf*, and what the conclusions drawn of these intertexts and images might indicate for this thesis' broader consideration of Auden's poetry in relation to later explorations of the themes of war, nation and continuity.

There is, also, a second and much broader concern of this chapter: to contribute to the relatively small degree of scholarly Modernism that considers and analyses the resonance of the facets of a natural landscape in a movement where the idea of metropolitan identity and image of the city can be seen to predominate, and what abandoning this reductive urban framework might lead to a scholarly

consideration not only of Auden's early works but the landscape poetry of the Modernist movement as a whole.

In the introduction to the volume *Green Modernism: Nature and the English Novel 1900–1930*, Jeffrey Mathes McCarthy posits that although a dominant force within the Modernist movement, analyses of rural and natural spaces within the British novel written during Auden's juvenilia period have been surprisingly scant. Identifying a reductive critical heritage within the movement, McCarthy volunteers that “Modernism — and British Modernism in particular — carries a 'green' component that has been largely overlooked. At the simplest level, to claim that nature is significant to modernism is to cut against the grain of a century of scholarship”.<sup>2</sup> This is, in part, due to a dearth of nature poetry as a result of the post-war divergence from Georgian poetic forms ascribable to the works of Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot<sup>3</sup> just prior to Auden's earliest poetry, and whilst an essential transitional period in establishing the Modern, establishes a precedent for the exclusion of both nature writing and its scholarship during the early Modernist period.

Although McCarthy's claim is, perhaps somewhat ironically, becoming reductive in light of the rise of ecocriticism within modern scholarly discourse, the fact remains that ideas of the natural are often afforded secondary importance within the critical literatures relevant to the beginning of the twentieth century. For this thesis' analyses of early Auden this represents a problematic interstice when we

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<sup>2</sup> Jeffrey McCarthy, *Green Modernism: Nature and the English Novel 1900-1930*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 4

<sup>3</sup> Peter Howarth 'Georgian Poetry' in *T. S. Eliot in Context*, ed. by Jason Harding, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011) pp. 221-230 (p. 221-223)



consider the degree of natural imagery in these early poems despite the overwhelming prevalence of industrial landscapes within the poems contained in Katharine Bucknell's *Juvenilia*, and in examining the “green component” of this body of work we are perhaps once more descending into the adits of the poet's excavatory approach to landscape itself.

### **3.1: The Fallen Elm: Tree Symbolism and Edward Thomas**

The tree is a major symbol found in ritual practice all over the world,<sup>4</sup> and the veneration of the tree and tree-worship is historically well attested-for in all major European families of religion.<sup>5</sup> The tree in many world religions also represents the notion of shared heritage and social cohesion: the anthropologist Victor W. Turner in the 1967 study of the ritual symbolisms of the Ndembu people of southern Zambia observes how the muddyi tree represents shared ancestry and the notion of a shared mother-figure,<sup>6</sup> and how in doing so acts as a symbol of unity, central to series of socially unifying processes in Ndembu culture.<sup>7</sup> The same framework might also be applied to the figure of the tree within the fictive narratives of literature and mythology, often central to the image of community and representing the connection and coming together of social groups: the *égig érő fa* of Hungarian shamanism that connects the sky, earth and hell, the ash tree *yggdrassil* that bridges

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<sup>4</sup> Maurice Bloch, ‘Why Trees, too, are Good to Think With: Towards an Anthropology of the Meaning of Life’, in *The Social Life of Trees: Anthropological Perspectives on Tree Symbolism*, ed. by Laura Rival, (New York: Berg, 1998) pp. 39-57 (p. 39)

<sup>5</sup> James Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 83

<sup>6</sup> Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), p. 21

<sup>7</sup> David Bynum, *The Dæmon in the Wood: A Study of Oral Narrative Patterns*, (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1978) p. 150-151

the nine worlds of Norse cosmology, even the ancient tree — likely a 'Marriage-Oak'<sup>8</sup> — in Yalbury Wood under which Dick Dewy and Fancy Day are married at the end of Thomas Hardy's *Under the Greenwood Tree*.

This in mind, the association with the figure of the tree with an individual concept of nation is well established within a broader language of symbolism long before the inception of Auden's juvenilia; as a body that not only acts as host to an entire other ecosystem but also as a body that spans many human generations.<sup>9</sup> During the poet's formative years, the predominant cultural conceptualisation of Englishness was largely based on an antiquated ideal of a rural and often woodland landscape; the landscape of John Clare, of John Constable and Thomas Gainsborough. With reference to this notion of nation, the tree itself is also a symbol that appears historically representative of social cohesion:<sup>10</sup> in the study *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500–1800*, Keith Thomas notes that the image of the tree is often representative of the notion of community and “provides a visible symbol of human society”.<sup>11</sup> This notion is perhaps best exemplified in the illustrations found in Jacob George Strutt's 1822 volume *Sylva Britannica*, where the trees of private gentry estates are often depicted offering shelter to the labourers that tend them attentively, the accompanying text

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<sup>8</sup> 'Marriage-Oaks' were large, usually ancient oak trees that would feature in marriage rites and fertility rituals in Anglo-Saxon England. Delia Hooke, *Trees in Anglo-Saxon England: Literature, Lore and Landscape*, (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2010), p. 101

<sup>9</sup> Douglas Davies, 'The Evocative Symbolism of Trees' in *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments*, ed. by Stephen Daniels & Denis Cosgrove, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) pp. 32-43 (p. 34)

<sup>10</sup> Stephen Daniels, 'The Political Iconography of Woodland in Later Georgian England' in *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments*, ed. by Stephen Daniels & Denis Cosgrove, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) pp. 43-83 (p. 43-44)

<sup>11</sup> Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800*, (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 219

emphasising the landmark tree as evocative of a sense of joy that transcends the boundaries of traditional feudal order.<sup>12</sup> Cherished by both “the nobleman, who may be reminded... whilst wandering in his hereditary domains, of the illustrious ancestors by whom it may have been planted” and the labourer, “who, passing it in his way to his daily labours, recalls, as he looks at it, the sports of his infancy round its venerable trunk, and regards it at once as his chronicler and land-mark”,<sup>13</sup> the tree acts as a unifying and solidifying presence within a landscape culturally characterised by its traditional divisions.

The power and allusive resonance contained in the plant imagery in the majority of Auden's early poems is, perhaps, a hangover from the debt of inspiration owed to the works of Thomas Hardy if we are to consider those written after the poet's discovery of the Wessex novels in summer of 1923.<sup>14</sup> Prior to this we might consider the influences of the landscapes of Walter de la Mare and W. H. Davies, whose stylistic sense of wonder and the glorification of the natural<sup>15</sup> find echoes in many of Auden's earliest natural vistas. Specific to the figure of the tree within the juvenilia period, however, there is one source of influence that dominates Auden's arboreal poetry and the manner in which the poet conceptualises both the natural and human geography of the nation during his formative years.

Bucknell recognises in part the debt owed by Auden to Edward Thomas' natural imagery, however these allusions are charted on a poem-by-poem basis in

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<sup>12</sup> Daniels, p. 51

<sup>13</sup> Jacob Strutt, *Sylva Britannica, or Portraits of Forest Trees Distinguished for their Antiquity, Magnitude or Beauty*, (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown & Green, 1830), p. viii

<sup>14</sup> Bucknell, *Juvenilia*, p. 254

<sup>15</sup> Lawrence Hockey, *W. H. Davies*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1971), p. 89

*Juvenilia* and often fall far short of exploring the language of symbolism particular to Thomas' works that Auden adopts throughout the majority of this early arboreal poetry. Auden's fascination with Thomas as a figure is palpable: the poet's death at the Battle of Arras in 1917 inspires the elegy "To E.T.", which intones that although Thomas has departed, "here and there your music and your words are read / And someone learns what elm and badger said / To you, who loved them and are dead".<sup>16</sup> There does, however, exist a tendency to consider the more textual influence of Edward Thomas as a site of poetic inspiration that Auden swiftly left behind after the publication of *Poems* in 1928; the poet's developing mature register far removed from Thomas' melancholy pastoral, however in the analysis of the following poems and their relationship with Thomas' own arboreal imagery a similarity in symbolism becomes apparent that characterises some of Auden's natural works as late as the one beginning this chapter.

There is evident in a number of Thomas poems a thematic link established between the flora of the natural landscape and the human casualties of the First World War — in the poem "In Memoriam (Easter 1915)" the poet responds to the sight of flowers in an unnamed woodland by reflecting upon the "...men / Now far from home, who, with their sweethearts, should / Have gathered them and will do never again."<sup>17</sup> Similarly, in "The Cherry Trees", the poet mourns the falling May blossom of a clutch of roadside trees, likening the image of the falling petals to a wedding now fated never to happen, as "all that passed are dead", "This early May morn where there is none to wed."<sup>18</sup> Thomas' metaphor is perhaps most evident in

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<sup>16</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 100

<sup>17</sup> Edward Thomas, *The Collected Poems of Edward Thomas*, ed. by Robert George Thomas, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 173

<sup>18</sup> Thomas, *Collected Poems*, p. 313

the poem “As the Team’s Head Brass” from 1917, where the poem’s narrator makes his perch on a fallen elm and converses with a ploughman whose friend has died in France, and relates how the tree itself fell on the same day and the poet reflects on how, had his friend not gone to war, the world should have been different:

“One of my mates is dead. The second day  
In France they killed him. It was back in March,  
The very night of the blizzard, too. Now if  
He had stayed here we should have moved the tree.”  
“And I should not have sat here. Everything  
Would have been different. For it would have been  
Another world.

“As The Team’s Head Brass”<sup>19</sup>

The piece sets up an iconography of Englishness in the symbolism of the elm tree, the bucolic labourer and the woodland behind, and in these lines equates the fallen soldier with the fallen tree and indeed, the poet sat upon it in a move to suggest that all — the poet, the soldier, and the elm — are in the same position — likely to be felled.<sup>20</sup> The woodlands of the opening lines take on new significance in light of the realisation: one elm has fallen, and there are many more behind it. The elm is Thomas’ quintessential signifier of Englishness;<sup>21</sup> a bucolic presence tempered with modern melancholy far removed from the more common symbolism of the oak tree and its connotations of the ‘golden age’ of national mythology,<sup>22</sup> a binary that Auden often seizes upon in the following poems. Thomas’ elm also has another meaning inherent in its demise; the fall of the rural English idyll that was for

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<sup>19</sup> Thomas, *Collected Poems*, p. 325-7

<sup>20</sup> Michael Kirkham, *The Imagination of Edward Thomas*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 207

<sup>21</sup> Kirkham, p. 121

<sup>22</sup> Leonora Nattrass, *William Cobbett: The Politics of Style*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 123

Thomas and a number of his contemporaries the ‘essential’ England;<sup>23</sup> the pastoral idyll that Andrew Motion identifies as an invulnerable, ideal manifestation of nation and the “picture of immortal perfection” found in earlier poems such as “Haymaking”.<sup>24</sup>

It is, perhaps, unfair to suggest that Auden’s entire attitude is influenced by Edward Thomas during the juvenilia period’s arboreal poetry — there are many other poetic influences evident within the works examined in the following analysis — however it remains that Auden’s preoccupation with the hybridity of the tree as representative of both man and nation has its lineage in Thomas’ naturalistic nationalism and burgeoning fear of the loss of an intrinsic Englishness as a result of the First World War. This symbolic approach — examining the tree as representative not only of itself, but of humanity as the poet conceptualised it — in conjunction with the following analysis not only appears to offer some formulaic means of decoding and interpreting the poet’s early systems of esoteric reference, but also affording further study to the gap in scholarship that Jeffrey Mathes McCarthy identifies as the impetus behind the volume *Green Modernism*.

### **3.2: Nation and the Tree as Man**

The first concrete iteration of plant imagery found within the juvenilia is the image of the tree found within the poem “Early Morning Bathing” from the first half of 1923 (“What colours there are in the wood/ Green hues I cannot count”);<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Kirkham, p. 207

<sup>24</sup> Andrew Motion, *The Poetry of Edward Thomas*, (London: Routledge, 1980), p. 99-100

<sup>25</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 19

however in beginning the following analysis with the slightly later poem “Woods in Rain” there is benefit in the fact that the piece offers much more upon the subject and exemplifies Auden's early sedimentary approach to the natural landscape. The poem demonstrates a series of influences from Auden's critical sources for natural imagery prior to the poet's discovery of the works of Thomas Hardy in 1923, being described by Michael Davidson in his review of the piece for *Public School Verse: An Anthology (Volume IV) 1923–1924* as being reminiscent of the works of John Clare;<sup>26</sup> and Katharine Bucknell identifying that Auden himself in a radio interview in 1965 describes the piece as “eine Pastiche von einem englischen Dichter W. H. Davies”.<sup>27</sup>

The piece is subject to a complexity of imagery that by far belies the simplistic opening address of “It is a lovely sight and good / To see rain falling in a wood”<sup>28</sup> — again, in much the same way as we have observed with a series of Auden's earliest poems in the previous chapters of this thesis, there is apparent a sensitivity of image and metaphor that appears juxtaposed to the relative simplicity of linguistic choice and form that the pieces demonstrate. There is a sense of the pastoral apparent within the piece, both potent, and in the same manner as we might observe in the later poem “Appletreewick”, clumsily rendered — “Flowers open mouths as wide I say / As baby blackbirds do in May”; “birds are silent, drunk with sound / Of raindrops kissing the green ground”. Although the image appears inelegant, in the sense of collective identity generated between the birds of the poem and the flora of the scene we might read some semblance of the sedimentary

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<sup>26</sup> Michael Davidson, ‘Review: *Public School Verse, An Anthology: Volume IV (1923-1924)*’ *Eastern Daily Press*, (26th September 1924) p. 6 (p.6)

<sup>27</sup> Bucknell, *Juvenilia*, p. 21

<sup>28</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 20

approach to landscapes that the poet demonstrates throughout the juvenilia made literal; the plant and animal life of the woodland landscape for the poet, fundamentally interconnected to the point of anthropomorphic representation in much the same way as the heroic miner and the decaying Pennine lead-mining landscape of the previous chapter. Here Auden's Wanderer appears at his most connected with the natural landscape, still not wholly permitted within it, but nowhere near as exiled from it as we might find within the later industrial poetry, remotely situated within the landscape of the poem in the usage of *I*.

It is, however, interesting to note that whilst appearing at first a stylised, verdant and largely peaceful scene that there is still an element of conflict inherent within the poem in the juxtaposition of the two oppositions of sun and rain found in the final lines of the poem:

But now the sun has come again,  
And he has chased away the rain.  
The rain has gone beyond the hill  
But leaves are talking of it still.

“Woods in Rain”<sup>29</sup>

Unlike the birds and the wood whose relationship appears symbiotic, the sun and the rain appear as opposing forces within the poem — there is either one or the other active within the poem at any one time, and the presence of one appears to necessitate the removal of the other, as demonstrated by the thirteenth and fourteenth lines, “But now the sun has come again / And he has chased away the rain.”<sup>30</sup> The

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<sup>29</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 20

<sup>30</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 20



language used suggests that there is, perhaps, a cyclical nature to the relationship between the sun and the rain, similar perhaps in aspect to the manner in which the oppositions of life and death appear cyclical in the ideas of rebirth found in the methods that the poet employs to address the notion of mortality as explored in the first chapter of this thesis. The cyclical image of the sun and rain does, however, fall short of diametrical opposition — although the titular rain has passed from the scene and the sun has returned to the sky, the “leaves are talking of it still”; indicative of the notion that the rain itself still has some residual presence within the landscape of the poem and more specifically, upon the trees themselves. The effect of the volta appears sobering after the robust woodland pastoral of the first twelve lines of the poem although the image of the rain itself is not represented within the poem as of any particular maleficence — indeed, it appears to bring with it a potent semantic of joy into the landscape of the poem, as denoted by the manner in which raindrops appear to be “kissing the green ground”; the birds themselves rendered “too full of joy to dare to sing”.<sup>31</sup>

Considering the woods of “Woods in Rain” with reference to Thomas’ hybridity of man and tree there are two suggestions to be made. The first, taking into consideration Auden’s early tendency toward natural sentimentalism, is that the piece is a simple exploration of the notion of man within the landscape, man as an animal. Humanity is represented no more or less than the other natural flora and fauna of the scene in its response to the same wind and weather that besets the birds and trees of the poem. The piece appears to act as an almost anti-nationalist rebuke to a notion

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<sup>31</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 20

typical to the period of the decline of the British Empire<sup>32</sup>; that humanity's status as superior to nature also encompassed a moral obligation to civilise and make hospitable the natural landscape both at home and in lands of imperial occupation.<sup>33</sup> The second reading is that the poem is a response — or perhaps again, offering rebuke — to A. E. Housman's poem “On Wenlock Edge the Wood's in Trouble” from *A Shropshire Lad* (1895). Housman's narrator — fearful of the wind in the woods, reflecting with some melancholy upon his own temporary place in history — is replaced by Auden's rather more jubilant narrative, embracing the wind and rain as part of an eternal, natural cycle; perhaps even an early iteration of Auden's disdain for Housman's tentative and studious nature as demonstrated in the 1938 sonnet on Housman's death: “Deliberately he chose the dry-as-dust / Kept tears like dirty postcards in a drawer.”<sup>34</sup>

However there are two lines within “Woods in Rain” that appear to indicate that the piece is, perhaps, more than the sum of a series of relatively naïve component parts: by again applying the reading strategy of image and connotation that this thesis has already identified as vital in understanding Auden's earliest poetry, there is indicated in the latter half of the poem a connection of the image of the tree with an almost childlike approach to ideas of nationalism and, by extension, nation. Building on the basic element of conflict identified between the oppositions of sun and rain in the early part of the poem, there is the suggestion that the

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<sup>32</sup> Joanna Wilson, ‘The Bear and the Tiger: Decoding Attitudes and Anxieties Towards Nature in A. A. Milne’s *Winnie the Pooh* in Post-War Britain’ (unpublished Masters thesis, University of Alabama at Birmingham, 2014)

<sup>33</sup> Medlock, Chelsea, ‘Kipling’s Menagerie: Human-Animal Relations in the Works of Rudyard Kipling’, <<http://animalhistorymuseum.org/exhibitsandevents/online-gallery/gallery-8-animals-and-empire/enter-gallery-8/iii-looking/rudyard-kipling/>> [Accessed 12th December 2016]

<sup>34</sup> Auden, *Collected Poems*, p. 182-3

benevolent, cyclical reading of the different weather systems is perhaps inaccurate.

Again with reference to Thomas' representations of man and tree, the lines:

While trees shake hands as grave and slow  
As two old men I used to know,  
And hold out smiling boughs to find  
Whence comes this sweetest breath of wind.

“Woods in Rain”<sup>35</sup>

appear evocative of the image of a ceasefire: the *two old men* of the tenth line might easily be recognised as representative of two world powers, the image a reference to the recent conclusion of international conflict and the sense of national loss that underpins a number of Auden's early landscape poems. The conceit seems likely: the poet's childhood and adolescence have been described as ‘overshadowed’ by the conflict of the previous decade<sup>36</sup> and the analogy of man and tree here is likely an extension of the one identified in the introduction to this chapter regarding Edward Thomas' arboreal imagery. The “old men” of the personification is, perhaps, a nucleic form of the manner in which the chorus at the close of the drama *Paid on Both Sides: A Charade* (1930) observes of the matriarchs Shaw and Nower that “His mother and his mother won,” — a statement concluded by the modernist scholar Peter Edgerley Firchow to likely be an allegorical reference to “Mother England” and “Mother Germany”.<sup>37</sup> Although in this case a specific tree is not identified within the poem, with reference to the poet's indebtedness to Edward Thomas it is entirely possible to assume that the trees concerned are elm trees, or at least the oaks that appear in William Wordsworth's “A Whirl-Blast from Behind the Hill” that

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<sup>35</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 20

<sup>36</sup> Patrick Deer, ‘Auden and Wars’ in *W. H. Auden in Context*, ed. by Tony Sharpe (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013) pp. 150-159, (p. 151-2)

<sup>37</sup> Firchow, p. 45

Katharine Bucknell notes as a potential site of inspiration for the poem;<sup>38</sup> both species symbolic of English nationhood.

Although the personification is, in this earlier case, masculine, the image does again appear indicative of what Randall Jarrell in the second of the of the 1951-2 Auden Lectures at Princeton University describes as the poet's hallmark tendency toward the “personified abstraction”<sup>39</sup> of a particularly banal subject matter in the 1939 collection *Another Time*, a form of poetic radicalism found in expanding and processing the commonplace into the arcane via a series of esoteric reinventions. This observation appears similar in aspect to the way that the poet alters and interpellates the landscapes of the later juvenilia period, fashioning a new, quasi-mythological sense of nation from the remnants of several other more ordinary modes of addressing Englishness, rendering the obsolete fantastical and the invented as canonical.

Returning to “Woods in Rain”, the eleventh and twelfth lines of the piece also appear to support the notion of reading of the trees of the tenth as being allegorical for the end of the First World War. The image of two trees that “hold out smiling boughs to find / Whence comes this sweetest breath of wind” is evocative of the classical olive bough, a Roman mythological signifier of conflict resolution often associated with Mars Pacifier<sup>40</sup> — the secondary, peace-bringing aspect of the war-god Mars in Roman pantheistic worship — as found in Vergil's *Aeneid* (“Then from

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<sup>38</sup> Bucknell, *Juvenilia*, p. 21

<sup>39</sup> Randall Jarrell, *Randall Jarrell on W. H. Auden*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 49

<sup>40</sup> John Barentine, *The Lost Constellations: A History of Obsolete, Extinct or Forgotten Star Lore*, (Tucson: Springer Praxis, 2016), p. 192

the lofty stern Lord Aeneas thus speaks, stretching forth in his hand an olive bough of peace-bearing.”).<sup>41</sup> The mention of wind in within the narrative relative to the image of the branches also indicates that there is a sense of the cessation of the conflict inherent — in the biblical telling of the Flood Myth, the end of the flood is signalled by a great wind that causes the waters to abate — “And God caused a wind to pass over the Earth, and the water subsided”, (Genesis 8:1); just preceding the arrival of a dove bearing an olive branch or leaf (Genesis 8:11). The four lines reproduced above are also markedly less jubilant in aspect than the rest of the scene, the motions of the trees described as being “grave” and “slow” as opposed to the birds “full of joy” — by comparison, the woodland landscape in its entirety appears beatified by the rain; however the more sombre aspect of the trees lends their presence within the piece a sense of deference. The woodland landscape, the ceasefire alluded to in its reconciling trees and the seemingly inextricable facets of joy and solemnity all appear to solidify the reading that the piece is, indeed, a metaphor for the end of global conflict.

Were we to consider Auden's earliest woodland landscape as an allegory for the national outpouring of relief and joy that greeted the end of the First World War, we might consider the trees themselves as representative of nations or national figures: a woodland at peace is an England at peace. However, such an approach necessitates a closer look at how the figure of the tree appears representative of national identity. In “Woods in Rain”, the personification of the trees themselves and the presence of Thomas’ hybridity of man and tree is representative of nation as a

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<sup>41</sup> Polydore Vergil, *The Aeneid*, ed. & trans. by John William Mackaill, (Los Angeles: Enhanced Media Press, 2017), p. 118

largely unified concept; a poetic reinvention of the notions of national personification that both dominate cultural depictions of nation during the poet's adolescence and characterise the denouement of *Paid on Both Sides (A Charade)*. However there are a number of poems written during the period 1922–1928 that appear to address ideas of nation through the medium of plant and tree-based imagery that require the form of intertextual excavation that has been vital to this thesis' analyses of mortality and geographic identity within the juvenilia period, and in doing so a similar patterning emerges to the manner in which the poet constructs and augments a Northern identity as demonstrated in the previous chapter.

“Autumn”, written during the latter half of 1923 is demonstrative of the development of a much more mature and observational approach to the natural landscape than is present within the previous landscape poetry from the juvenilia period such as “Woods in Rain” or “Appletreewick”. Although still suffering from the inadequacies of poetic language that do not truly resolve until the advent of Auden's industrial poetry (“Apples like ruby gems are set / Deep in long grass that's green and wet”; “The oak has emptied all his cups / The pig upon his acorn sups,”), the poem is comprised of a relatively nuanced series of depictions of the flora and fauna of the autumnal landscape, constructing a rich and derivative imagery. Much of the plant and tree-based imagery contained within the piece is, although visceral, unremarkable, however it is perhaps important to note that in the interests of establishing a more beatific sense of the season, Thomas' bucolic elm with its sense of inherent melancholy has been foregone in favour of the more traditional oak tree as a signifier of pastoral nationhood.

The fourteenth line of the piece is also worth consideration with reference to the topic of nationalism when we discern one of the poem's more prominent intertextualities:

Our hour is scarce a minute old  
But leaves will pelt us with leaf-gold

“Autumn”<sup>42</sup>

There is in “Autumn” an element of the Old English and Old Norse narratives that dominate the poet's early works present within the piece — the phrase used to describe the falling leaves, “leaf-gold” is structured in a similar manner to the traditional hyphenated representation of a Norse kenning in translation; a series of references, perhaps, to the ancient Briton harvest festival of Lúghnasadh. However more interestingly for this chapter's interrogation of the image of the tree and notions of nationalism and national identity, the text to which the poem owes the greatest debt of inference is likely by Edward Thomas' own mentor Robert Frost in the poem “Nothing Gold Can Stay”, published in 1923. By Bucknell's denotation, Auden's “Autumn” is given the probable date of “1922 or 1923”<sup>43</sup> meaning that it is also possible to conclude that the young Auden is merely responding to the same cultural stimuli as Frost and the intertextualities are coincidental; however the similarities with Frost's poem appear distinctive enough that it is possible to conclude the latter date as accurate due to the degree to which the two pieces share a commonality of language and imagery.

Nature's first green is gold,

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<sup>42</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 24

<sup>43</sup> Bucknell, *Juvenilia*, p. 25

Her hardest hue to hold.  
Her early leaves are flowers—  
But only so for hours;  
Then leaves subside to leaves.  
In autumn she achieves  
A still more golden blaze  
But nothing golden stays.

“Nothing Gold Can Stay”<sup>44</sup>

There are marked similarities between the two pieces of verse: with reference to form, both are subject to the same syllabic rigidity and rhythmic couplet rhyme. Both poems seek to juxtapose the imagery of golden autumnal flora with a reflection upon the value found in the mutability of the season and perhaps by extension, the fleeting nature of mortality: The later poem's closing couplet “Rich days that teach our foolish mind / To know Death's face, that it is kind”<sup>45</sup> too appears as if echoing the sentiments of Frost's own closing remark, “A still more golden blaze / but nothing golden stays”. Auden's “Autumn” even appears to adopt Frost's sound patterning (Auden's *old/gold* in the thirteenth and fourteenth lines; Frost's *gold/hold* in the first and second) in the same way as we might observe the young poet adopting the sound patterning found in Walter de la Mare's “The Owl” in its reworking “Below Me, Ticknall Lay But in the Light”. What is interesting — both inherently and for the purposes of discourse relevant to ideas of nation and nationality — is the manner in which Frost's poem has been viewed by some critical sources as representative of a more localised anxiety than human mortality: writing of an albeit slightly earlier draft of the poem, Tyler Hoffman in *Robert Frost and the Politics of Poetry* (2001) propounds that the piece is, in aspect, an exercise in

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<sup>44</sup> Robert Frost, *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, ed. by Edward Connery Lathem, (London: Vintage, 2001), p. 222

<sup>45</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 25



isolationist global positioning in the wake of the First World War — for Hoffman, “Nothing Gold Can Stay” appears to “suggest through its isolation of syntactic units a refusal to become embroiled in global politics: just as nature tries to resist the forces of change, so America must try to resist forces that would pull her beyond her borders even if such resistance may be in vain”.<sup>46</sup> Although Auden's work appears much less concerned with global politics than Hoffman's reading of Frost's “Nothing Gold Can Stay”, it remains undeniable that the central imagery of Auden's poem — the oak trees, rolling fields and lowing cattle — bear the hallmarks of the “lyric version of English belonging, subtly but indelibly tinged with the aura of a potentially violent, regenerative nationalism”<sup>47</sup> identified by Nicholas Jenkins in “Auden in America”.

### **3.3: Early Arboreal Responses to War — Reconciliation and Loss**

There are, however, much more overt representations of nation and plant and tree-based imagery found within the poetry of the juvenilia period: if “Autumn” is representative of the poet's burgeoning sense of the pastoral as relevant to elysian, culturally conservative constructions of nation as well as the classical narrative, “November at Weybourne” perhaps represents the poet's frustration at the inability to reconcile an almost childlike notion of Englishness with the events of the First World War. Written early in 1924 and subject to a series of revisions by both Christopher Isherwood and Auden himself the following year, the poem demonstrates the effect that the discovery of the works of Thomas Hardy in the

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<sup>46</sup> Tyler Hoffman, *Robert Frost and the Politics of Poetry*, (New England: Middlebury College Press, 2001), p. 161-2

<sup>47</sup> Nicholas Jenkins, ‘Auden in America’ in *The Cambridge Companion to W. H. Auden*, ed. by Stan Smith, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) pp. 39-55 (p. 40)

summer of 1923 had upon both the poet's attention to metre and the manner in which the Wessex landscape became a vital and nucleic component part of the remote, rural palimpsest that the poet was beginning to construct.

The starlings gather on the eaves  
And shiver stiff with cold  
The elms that wear bewildered leaves  
That dare not lose their hold  
Yon willow stoops as one who grieves  
For a Spring that is old.

The starlings fly but there are these  
To speak to us instead  
The surge of wind through writhing trees  
The huddled clouds of lead  
The waste of cold dark-featured seas  
And the men that are dead.

“November at Weybourne”<sup>48</sup>

It is a task of some magnitude not to construe the dead of “November at Weybourne” as yet another of Auden's early forays into the ghostly and macabre, however the piece shares much more in common with the veiled war poetry of the mid-juvenilia period such as “Elegy” (1924) than it does with the haunted landscapes of “Allendale” or “Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed”. The piece as a whole recalls Hardy's “The Darkling Thrush” (1900); mimicking the alternate rhymed couplets and hymnal metre that characterise a number of Hardy's poems that share the subject of mortality such as “The Dead Drummer” (“Drummer Hodge”) and “An Upbraiding”.

The two trees central to the poem — the elms of the third line of the first

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<sup>48</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 26

stanza, and the willow of the fifth — appear to relate an interesting narrative when considering their symbolic connotations and the mythologies in which they feature. Thomas' influence is also palpable here, in the presence of the elm — the tree itself is a prominent feature within the landscapes of English pastoral art and literature; John Constable's *The Hay Wain* being backed by a furze of waterside elms, *Dedham Lock and Mill* framed by a copse in the high foreground, even John Clare's "The Fallen Elm" a treatise on the sublimity of the natural landscape in the face of the more destructive tendencies of humanity.<sup>49</sup> The presence of the elm tree establishes the piece within a particular part of the English cultural consciousness; the high pastoral 'past' that dominates poetry such as "Appletreewick" and "The North", and it is these inherent bucolic connotations borrowed from Thomas that form the nucleic base of "November at Weybourne"'s treatise on nation and the conflict of the previous decade. This distinctly English context is then inverted as we are transported, perhaps jarringly in the final lines of the second stanza, across the "waste of cold dark-featured seas" to "the men that are dead" — and although it is tempting to recall the poet's fondness for establishing death and the otherworld within the extant landscape with an almost resolute physicality, it seems here much more likely to be the young Auden looking east across the seas from the coastal villages of Weybourne or Salthouse (both schoolboy haunts of the poet during his time at Gresham's School, three miles away in Holt)<sup>50</sup> to the battlefields of Belgium and northern France.

Considering this, the "bewildered leaves / That dare not lose their hold" of

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<sup>49</sup> Sarah Houghton-Walker, *John Clare's Religion*, (Farnham: Ashgate Press, 2009), p. 134

<sup>50</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 28

the third and fourth lines and the “Spring that is old” of the sixth appear to take on a new textual significance. The elms of the first stanza appear almost frantically clinging to their living leaves despite the late season, perhaps a metaphor for the halcyon Britain of popular cultural memory attempting to retain its previous status and resonance in the national consciousness in the wake of a loss that threatens to undermine understandings of the importance of nationalism and national identity. An alternate reading is that the tree is another of the poet's early exercises in personification, the quintessential idyll of the English tree unwilling to surrender its remaining leaves, either representative of or in addition to the many dead of the First World War. The application of the analogy of Thomas’ tree as man here appears complex in its duality; the figure of the tree representative of both man as a commodity in the resolute leaves, and also of man on a much broader cultural scale in the figure of the English elm, representative of a national ideal somewhat despoiled, struggling to find purchase in a post-war world.

The mention of the willow tree in the fifth line of the poem also appears significant in terms of the notion of national mourning; and interesting in the respect that the poem appears to reconcile the symbolism of Thomas’ melancholy elm with an attitude toward death more distinctly Auden, reminiscent of the katabasis narratives that appear in the first chapter of this thesis. In examples from classical antiquity, the willow is often observed as graveside tree,<sup>51</sup> and particularly in Greek mythology, the tree appears emblematic of mortality and dying. In Homer's *Odyssey*, Odysseus encounters both a willow and a black poplar at the gates of Hades;<sup>52</sup> at the

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<sup>51</sup> Antony Stevens, *Ariadne's Clue: A Guide to the Symbols of Humankind*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 390

<sup>52</sup> Hugo Rahner, *Greek Myth and Christian Mystery*, (New York: Biblo & Tannen, 1971), p. 289

festival of Thesmophoria women fasted sat upon cushions made of willow-bark to commemorate the harvest goddess Demeter's grief at the loss of her daughter Persephone,<sup>53</sup> and in *The Iliad* the willow, elm and tamarisk line the banks of the Scamander River and are burned by the god Hephaestus when destroying the bodies of the Paeoneans slain by Achilles.<sup>54</sup> There is, perhaps, a link to be made here with the more traditional mythologies associated with the elm tree prior to Thomas' reaffirmation of the species as a signifier of Englishness; the tree in Celtic mythology sometimes associated with passage from the waking world to the otherworld or underworld.<sup>55</sup>

There is, however, a second strand to the symbolic interpretation of the willow tree within classical mythologies that might augment this chapter's examination of the prevalence and resonance of the tree within Auden's early constructions of nation, and perhaps informs the textual presence of the willow tree in the poem "November at Weybourne". The willow tree, especially within the narratives of Greek mythology, appears symbolic of motherhood and specifically a 'Mother Earth'<sup>56</sup> figure, and has been observed in many classical Grecian narratives to be linked with notions of femininity and the event of miraculous birth.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, in the volume *Greek Myths and Christian Mystery* (1971), Hugo Rahner suggests that the willow's symbolic function is defined by its duality, as "a symbol of fresh and bubbling life, and also of the womb of death to which all things must return."<sup>58</sup> It is

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<sup>53</sup> Sharon James, 'Women in Greece', in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece and Rome*, ed. by Michael Gagarin and Elaine Fantham, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 235-252 (p. 239)

<sup>54</sup> Rahner, p. 289

<sup>55</sup> Josepha Sherman, *Storytelling: An Encyclopedia of Mythology and Folklore*, (London: Routledge, 2015), p. 136

<sup>56</sup> Rahner, p. 289

<sup>57</sup> Stevens, p. 390

<sup>58</sup> Rahner, p. 290

possible to observe this seemingly contradictory symbolism in the katabasis narrative of Homer's *Odyssey*, as in the far reaches of the underworld, the willows of Persephone's grove bear only dead fruit — although the figure of the willow features frequently in underworld landscapes of Greek mythology, in this instance the figure of the willow has been observed to be indicative both of the fertility expected of a youthful wife and being representative of Persephone's sterility as a result of marriage to the chthonic god Hades.<sup>59</sup>

These classical Grecian connotations in mind, Auden's stooping, grieving willow acts as a striking counterpoint to the elm as it appears a few lines prior: although the association is the similar in aspect to the one found in “Woods in Rain”, in the later poem the notion comes to fruition. Instead of the two trees and jubilant landscape functioning as a reference to relief and joy at warring nations coming to accord, the trees of “November at Weybourne” appear representative of the effects of warfare upon the spiritual body of the nation. The elm — the pastoral ideal — appears possessive, still resolutely bearing its leaves despite the lateness of season in an attempt at resilience, appearing to try to re-situate itself within the paradigms of Englishness as the world that afforded the pastoral idyll cultural importance declines in the face of industrial warfare and perhaps, as early poems such as “Elegy” (1924) and “November at Weybourne” demonstrate, begins to question the price of nationalism. The willow — the mother-figure; classically rooted both in the womb and in the grave — stands as a stark contrast to the resilient elm attempting to stand against the shifting attitudes of both wind and season. The tree appears conflicted in

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<sup>59</sup> Yves Bonnefoy, *Greek and Egyptian Mythologies*, trans. by Wendy Doniger, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 110

nature, yet resigned to its duality of purpose as there appears no conflict inherent in its representation — grieving for the previous Spring, symbolic perhaps of innocence corrupted or youth lost on a national scale, yet still accepting of death as a point of its very nature as opposed to the elm's stalwart refusal to shed its leaves.

“November at Weybourne” is, perhaps, an attempt at apportioning accountability as a means of processing the loss of life on such a prominent scale: as Marjorie Perloff in ““Easter, 1916”: Yeats's First War Poem” posits, “the significance and import of such large-scale events cannot be readily digested — especially not into the lyric fabric. Describing the horrors of war, the poet is too often left with nothing to do but point to its hapless victims and find someone to blame.”<sup>60</sup> The methodology is a common one: the poem appears similar in aspect to the manner in which the war poet Wilfred Owen affords the blame for warfare to the sun in “Futility” (1918);<sup>61</sup><sup>62</sup> the sun, in several mythologies represents the origin of human life, waking mankind from the mud (“Think how it wakes the seeds / Woke once the clays of a cold star”),<sup>63</sup> and in that act is therefore responsible for the loss of human life. In doing so, Auden is not only attempting to apportion blame to the cadaverous forms of idyllic nationalism that the elm symbolises — but also attempting to rationalise the death in allocating blame *somewhere*. If, as “Bucolics II: Woods” later posits, “a culture is no better than its woods” then for the young Auden, Britain — and perhaps even specifically pastoral Englishness — appeared

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<sup>60</sup> Marjorie Perloff, “‘Easter, 1916’- Yeats’ First War Poem’, in *The Oxford Handbook of British and Irish War Poetry*, ed. by Tim Kendall, (New York: Oxford University Press, (2009) pp. 227-245 (p. 240)

<sup>61</sup> Dominic Hibberd, *Owen the Poet*, (London: Macmillan, 1986), p. 145

<sup>62</sup> Indeed, Auden would later introduce the poem “Consequences” (Autumn 1926) with a quotation- “Was it for this the clay grew tall?” from Owen's “Futility”.

<sup>63</sup> Wilfred Owen, *The Poems of Wilfred Owen*, ed. by Owen Knowles, (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1994), p. 90

still fractured as a result of the conflict of the previous decade, if not irreparably damaged, at least stagnated, still grieving its loss and wary of losing yet more of its leaves.

### **3.4: Auden and Industrial Scepticism**

However these early dissatisfactions with the idea of nation and the anxieties of post-war Englishness are not the only way in which the idea of nation manifests within Auden's early landscape poetry. Whilst it remains that the conflict of the previous decade informs a number of works within which the poet's burgeoning sense of exile from the notions of youth, nation and landscape begin to find their form, it does however foster a reductive scholarship to suggest that nation and the spectre of war are inextricable within the poetry of the juvenilia period.

“The Plane Tree” may be seen to mark a change in attitude within the landscape of Auden's juvenilia when examining the manner in which industrial and urban landscapes are constructed. Although Katharine Bucknell in *Juvenilia* expresses that there is a discrepancy in date regarding the work's inception, it remains apparent that the poem's overly sentimental address and rigid adherence to iambic metre suggest a poetry prior to the growing confidence in linguistic expression and prevalence of anecdotal narratives that characterise poems from around the genesis of “The Old Lead-mine” from February 1924. This in mind, it is with some degree of certainty that it is possible to afford “The Plane Tree” the status of being Auden's first poem in which the non-rural landscape is afforded any degree of positive representation, and perhaps the beginning of the industrial poetry that



would grow to characterise the narratives of the juvenilia period.

The poem takes the form of a direct address to the eponymous tree: the whimsical, jejune imagery employed by the stanzas and the resonant, sing-song quality lent by the iambic metre suggests the piece again owes a large debt of inference to the nursery-verse of Walter de la Mare and evokes the sense of a juvenile narrator, perhaps intended to be less than the poet's sixteen years; the “little tap of wearied feet”<sup>64</sup> of the ninth line and the “dear green face”<sup>65</sup> of the twenty-fourth in particular appearing to suggest an almost childlike nature to the address. The poem in its entirety appears to recall the sentiments of *The Travellers and the Plane Tree* accredited to the Greek fabulist Aesop, whose works Auden would later adapt for stage performance in *Moralities* in 1967 — that the plane tree, often considered plain and nugatory, fulfils a much loftier purpose than most perceive.

Within the poem the tree itself is lauded by Auden's elated narration, the poet praising the manner in which it predominates and indeed, flourishes in city landscapes — “Thy home is in the roaring street / Thy only songs are made by trams”, the second stanza gleefully intones; “The skies wear drab and sooted hues / Instead of dappled whites or blues.”<sup>66</sup> Although markedly different in aspect to any other work from the juvenilia period save for perhaps “By The Gasworks, Solihull”, a cursory reading of the work does not disclose any obvious preoccupations with nation or the notion of Englishness, however the manner in which the piece closely follows the paradigms of another poem regarding the urban landscape does offer

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<sup>64</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 34

<sup>65</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 35

<sup>66</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 34

some basis for speculation upon the broader cultural inferences inherent in “The Plane Tree”.

As the panegyric progresses, the narrator begins to afford such lofty qualities to the eponymous tree as “Thou calmest suicides' despairs / And makest youthful harlots weep”<sup>67</sup> — and although there appear few phrases or images of notable literary worth in the final stanza's wild hyperbole — the use of the phrase “youthful harlots” is particularly useful in this chapter's attempt to augment the critical discourse regarding Auden's early constructions of national image. The phrase is borrowed from the sixteenth-century poem “London” by William Blake (whom Auden would later wryly eulogise in 1940 in “New Year Letter”):

But most thro' midnight streets I hear  
How the youthful Harlots curse  
Blasts the new-born Infants tear  
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse.

“London”<sup>68</sup>

Blake's London is a study in squalor: beginning “I wandered through each chartered street, / Near where the chartered Thames does flow / A mark in every face I meet, / Marks of weakness, marks of woe”,<sup>69</sup> the poem navigates human ephemera of industrial London, its chimney-sweepers harlots and soldiers — superimposed against a lurid backdrop of bloodied walls and blackened churches. Auden — although decrying the city in terms much less visceral than Blake's heady diatribe — appears to share both the poem's form and the sentiments that are apparent within the

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<sup>67</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 35

<sup>68</sup> William Blake, *Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience*, ed. by Andrew Lincoln, (Princeton: Princeton University Press & The William Blake Trust, 1994), p. 116

<sup>69</sup> Blake, p. 116

earlier piece; the “roaring street”, the “wearied feet”, the “suicides' despairs” — although instead of openly professing in accord with Blake's assessment of London's human condition, the poem appears to offer gentle rebuke: there is, at least, the plane tree.

The manner in which the poem is titled again supports the notion that the nameless city of “The Plane Tree” is a response to Blake's “London”. The plane tree itself has been said to account for over half of London's trees, planted en masse during the industrial revolution when the rapid expansion of the urban population forced a greater degree of municipal planning,<sup>70</sup> and is the subject of a number of poems from the end of the industrial revolution that laud the species' hardiness and ability to flourish in urban climes. The poet Amy Levy in 1889 describes the tree in similarly reverent terms in the poem “A London Plane-Tree”, praising the manner in which “Others the country take for choice, / And hold the town in scorn; / But she [the plane tree] has listened to the voice / On city breezes borne”.<sup>71</sup> The sentiment is not dissimilar in linguistic aspect to the manner in which the third stanza of Auden's poem declares of the plane tree “Yet thou art richer, humble tree / Than fifty thousand oaks or Elms”;<sup>72</sup> both poems appearing to make a point of comparing the urban plane tree to its rural counterparts. Auden's piece, however, does not seek to condescend the figure of the rural tree as Levy's does — the idyll remains from pieces such as “Autumn” or “Woods in Rain”, replete with images of “*birds upon thy boughs*”, “*flowers*” and “*lovely skies*”. Rather, the notion appears to be that the

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<sup>70</sup> Ben Venables, ‘The Secret History of the London Plane Tree’, *The Londonist*, (27th October 2016) <<https://londonist.com/2015/03/the-secret-history-of-the-london-plane-tree>> [Accessed 3rd December 2017]

<sup>71</sup> Amy Levy, *A London Plane-Tree and Other Verse*, (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1899), p. 17

<sup>72</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 34

plane tree is representative of the presence of beauty within an unlikely arena, the everyday urban milieu, similar in aspect to the manner in which the poet later finds the same sense of frank and unrefined beauty in the remains of the Pennine lead-mining industry. Although existing in diametrical opposition to the pastoral elm, the plane tree's purpose is not dissimilar within the narrative, acting as an opposition to modernity compared to the elm's bucolic retreatism.

It is in further examining Auden's sense of the sublime surrounding the figure of the urban tree that it is possible to more fully augment the discourse of this chapter as it aims to remedy the vacancy in the scholarship of Auden's early constructions of nation and the study of the figure of the tree within the literatures of the modernist period. The title of the piece is significant in its geographic ambiguity: during a period of the poet's career where almost half of the pieces collected in Bucknell's *Juvenilia* are titled with some reference to their location, "The Plane Tree" — although obviously written with a specific geography in mind — lacks any mention of locale. The function of the device is the inverse of the ways in which it is possible to observe titles bisecting and excluding readerships in the later Northern poetry, such as "Rookhope, Weardale (Summer 1922)" and "Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed". Rather than creating an arcane language, a hallowed geography accessible to a small section of its readership, "The Plane Tree" in its lack of a specific, designated geography — although undoubtedly fashioned in the image of London — invites a level of application. The city may be any city of the reader's experience; a nameless city representative of all cities, and in this the poem develops a national scale. The notion of nation is also inferred in the manner in which in the poem's thirteenth and fourteenth lines — "Yet art thou richer, humble tree / Than

fifty thousand oaks or elms” — make mention of two trees that appear in English cultural heritage as representative of the nation itself. The elm, as observed in the poem “November at Weybourne” often appears symbolic of an idealised, bucolic rural heritage in much the same way as the figure of the shepherd or sower; the oak tree a traditional symbol of English nationhood since the seventeenth century and again, often an atavistic literary device evoking the notion of bucolic history and a 'golden age' of national mythology.<sup>73</sup>

This in mind, in affording the plane tree itself such a series of powerful redemptive qualities — juxtaposed to the manner in which, evoking the landscape of Blake's “London”, the urban milieu appears to possess such an inextricable violence — there is a sense of an apology being made for urban modernism. The plane tree offers consolation, reiterating that although Blake's vision of London is indeed judicious, there is still beauty to be found in the seats of urban modernity. The image is, in aspect, trite, but perhaps represents a logical next construction of nation if the previous one found in “November at Weybourne” was that of a nation confronting the fracture of a previous identity in its inability to reconcile the losses of the First World War. “The Plane Tree” posits that although the national milieu appears to be changing, both as a result of increased industrialisation, modernity and the cultures it, for Auden, breeds — there is still beauty of a similar kind present to that which defined the bucolic past. A sense of continuity — a persistence of the halcyon past that is lost and craved in “November at Weybourne” — is achieved, although perhaps laboured in expression.

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<sup>73</sup> Natrass, p. 123

The next iteration of arboreal imagery within the juvenilia period is found in the poem “My Lady of the Wood” from 1923 or 1924; however there is a sophistication to the linguistic patterning of the piece that suggests the later date as perhaps the more accurate one. Although in *Juvenilia* Bucknell observes the influence of Wordsworth's “Lucy Poems”,<sup>74</sup> the piece demonstrates the influence of two more obvious intertexts. The unusual octain rhyme is likely patterned after one found in “Before Dawn” (1866) by the English poet Algernon Charles Swinburne with which the piece shares some subject matter in the juxtaposition of Romantic affection to the flora and fauna of the natural landscape. In addition to this, the title of the piece recalls the manner in which Samuel Taylor Coleridge describes the birch tree in the long poem, “The Picture, or the Lover's Resolution”:

I pass forth into the light - I find myself  
Beneath a weeping Birch (most beautiful  
Of forest trees, the lady of the woods,)

“The Picture, or The Lover's Resolution”<sup>75</sup>

Auden's poem shares a degree of imagery with Coleridge's, in that the anthropomorphised birches of the two poems appear representative of an idealised depiction of rural femininity. Auden's *Lady of the Woods* is described in relation to her situation within the woodland landscape itself — “Lo in the path she walks / Jays cease their chattering talks / Mice drop their barley stalks”<sup>76</sup> from the third stanza, “She dwells the while / Out of the hills and trees / Where stirs a passing breeze / Or

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<sup>74</sup> Bucknell, *Juvenilia*, p. 42

<sup>75</sup> Samuel Coleridge, *The Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge Volume I*, (London: William Pickering & Co., 1834) p. 160

<sup>76</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 41

running water is”<sup>77</sup> from the sixth.

The poem evokes the patternings from several folkloric systems — indeed, in Irish Gaelic poetry the birch is referred to as the *finnbhean na coille*, the “fair woman of the woods”.<sup>78</sup> In Welsh folkloric belief, the notion of the birch and female fertility are interconnected to the point that the traditional May Day maypole — a ritual remnant from the Celtic fertility festival of Beltane<sup>79</sup> — is simply referred to as the *bedwen*, or birch,<sup>80</sup> and in Slavic folklore, birch twigs were used to represent the fertility of maids during the Semik community ritual of Kumstvo.<sup>81</sup> This language of fecundity is interesting when considering the precedent set by pieces such as “November at Weybourne” and the prevalence of mother-figures within Auden's earliest works, and it is perhaps most likely that this uncharacteristically feminine depiction of a tree is representative of a sense of natural, immaculate motherhood, similar to the manner in which the notion manifests itself in the much later poem “In Praise of Limestone”. The effect of the piece is somewhat melancholy, although rooted in an idyllic, feminine landscape, oddly elegiac in the manner in which the piece lists the virtues of the tree in relation to the natural landscape. Reminiscent of the narrative style of poems such as “Elegy” (1924) and the unnamed poem from 1924 beginning “Since the Autumn day / When she went away”,<sup>82</sup> the piece is again demonstrative of the sense of grief and lost apotheosis that characterises a number of

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<sup>77</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 42

<sup>78</sup> Niall Mac Coitir, *Ireland's Trees: Myths, Legends and Folklore*, (Cork: The Collins Press, 2003), p. 6

<sup>79</sup> Mark Taylor, *Refiguring the Spiritual: Beuys, Barney, Turrell, Goldsworthy*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012) p.91

<sup>80</sup> David Watts *Dictionary of Plant Lore*, (Burlington: The Academic Press, 2007), p. 32

<sup>81</sup> Michael Dixon-Kennedy, *Encyclopedia of Russian and Slavic Myth and Legend*, (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 1998), p.159

<sup>82</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 73-4

the poems already explored in this chapter; the birch here representative of a more feminised, more subtle iteration of the symbolism inherent in elm.

The theme of arboreal or plant-based imagery juxtaposed in apparent consolation to urban and industrial scenes recurs, however, and persists throughout the poems contained in Bucknell's *Juvenilia*. Although the references become less frequent after the summer of 1924 as the poet's attention to the Pennine landscape alters, shifting in focus from the pastoral lowlands to the decaying mining industry of the high fell country, the poem "By The Gasworks, Solihull" from June 1924 is worthy of note for several reasons relevant to this chapter's analyses. The first is that in the same way that it is possible to view "The Plane Tree" as a logical continuation of the thought processes behind the genesis of "November at Weybourne", "By The Gasworks, Solihull" suggests an augmentation of the sentiments encountered in "The Plane Tree" some months beforehand. The piece is demonstrative of a newfound linguistic maturity when addressing the collocation of the industrial and natural, and instead of displaying the two landscapes as co-extant — such as the plane tree that flourishes within the urban environment, acting as a balm to urban modernity — there develops a sense of natural reclamation, indicative of the notion that for Auden, the two polarities of urban and natural were again becoming fundamental in their opposition.

This spot is loved by all wild things since men  
Left some old drain-pipes here; all the weeds then  
Had their way with them, until cow parsley  
That the flies seem to love, stands five feet high  
At least; nettle and dock grow up together,  
And to the wren of all places, this is dear  
To pour his joy into; he always sings  
His loveliest among these broken things.



The poem is a reworking of Edward Thomas' “Tall Nettles”, a piece that likely inspired a large amount of the poet's natural imagery during the earliest part of the juvenilia period; Thomas' piece even marked by asterisk in the poet's own copy of *Collected Poems*.<sup>84</sup> Beginning “Tall nettles cover up, as they have done / These many springs, the rusty harrow, the plough”,<sup>85</sup> the imagery in Thomas' poem is similar, however these linguistic choices appear much more benign in aspect than Auden's. Thomas' piece finds a melancholy comfort in the action of nettles slowly obscuring a medley of farming ephemera — likely reminded of the labourers who lay dead across the channel that would have been using the harrow and plough like in “As the Team's Head Brass”. Thomas appears almost comforted by the resurgence of nature, perhaps in that it and its symbolic Englishness persists long after both the missing labourers — and by extension, the poet himself — are gone: it is “This corner of the farmyard I like most”,<sup>86</sup> a pastoral iteration of Rupert Brooke's “...some corner of a foreign field / That is forever England”<sup>87</sup> from two years previously.

Although similar to Thomas' sense of comfort found in regrowth, Auden's more resolute reworking implies a sense of justice achieved in the reappearance of the cow parsley, nettle and dock, almost appearing to relish in the reclamation of the

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<sup>83</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 55

<sup>84</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 55

<sup>85</sup> Thomas, *Collected Poems*, p. 307

<sup>86</sup> Thomas, *Collected Poems*, p. 307

<sup>87</sup> Rupert Brooke, *Collected Poems*, ed. by Lorna Beckett, (Cambridge: Oleander Press, 2010), p. 139

landscape. The urban milieu is decried in no uncertain terms: the abandoned building materials of the second line, the *broken things* of the eighth. Man, here, is a corruptive influence upon the natural landscape similar to the one encountered in some of Auden's contemporary poetry such as "Lead's the Best" — "This is the place where man has laid his hand / To tear from these dark hills his gold / He found it not, they say, but left his brand / Of greed upon the spot for all men to behold".<sup>88</sup> This new, more aggressive representation of humanity, annexing the pastoral landscape indicates that Thomas' conjunction of tree and man is, whilst still present, most likely now irreparably divided, marking the end of the integration of man and nature within Auden's juvenilia. A binary is established where previously there was thematic unity, and this maturing sense of separation from the natural appears emblematic of the burgeoning sense of exile from the natural landscape that the poet would later demonstrate in works such as "The Road's Your Place" and "Who Stands, The Crux Left of the Watershed."

Again, we encounter the same scepticism of urban modernity found in "The Plane Tree", and interestingly, the same reflection upon the human condition in relation to the polarities of the urban and rural — whilst the plane tree is all the lovelier for its urban environment, the wren of the sixth line "sings / His loveliest amongst these broken things". The line implies that whilst man's corruptive influence upon the landscape of "By the Gasworks, Solihull" is condemnable, it has performed some noble office in that it has thrown into relief the artistry and grace of the natural landscape by comparison. The motif recurs in the final stanzas of the slightly later poem "The Old Colliery", where the ravaged landscape of the derelict

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<sup>88</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 30

colliery itself is juxtaposed to the presences of new growth and birdsong:

But close beside  
Stunted, forlorn  
And scarcely green  
There grows a thorn

Where often now  
A thrush will lurk  
Whose singing blesses  
Man's handiwork.

“The Old Colliery”<sup>89</sup>

Regarding this chapter's exploration of the notion of nation and Auden's early constructions of Britain, the notion appears transparent enough, if often crassly handled. Industrial modernity and the manner in which it appears to threaten a previous semblance of landscape — either an agrarian bucolic, or merely natural, arboreal imagery — is demonstrative of the same anxieties identified in the previous chapters of this thesis, the after-effects of the First World War and provincial industrial decline and the social change and loss of the previously substantial identities that they heralded.

In *Modernism, Nationalism and the Novel*, Pericles Lewis identifies that many novelists of the modernist period sought to reconcile the influential yet meaningless social world and the meaningful yet outwardly powerless consciousness of the individual novelist-hero by the textual representation of a national consciousness, which “lent an eternal, if not universal, significance to their isolated experiences and offered a matrix through which to interpret events that otherwise

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<sup>89</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 60-61

appeared to lack any internal logic.”<sup>90</sup> This is arguably what we have observed thus far in Auden's experimentations with allusions to nation and ideas of national mourning; a means of reconciling the singularity of the author to the social world and achieving relevance and also of processing and augmenting personal understandings of external-world events — in Auden's case, the conflict of the previous decade — which are unprecedented in their magnitude. This desire to reconcile and understand characterises much of the poetry from the 1922–1924 period; the poet attempting to form or re-form a connection with the external world in the wake of widespread social change and incoherence in the form of the birth of the modern city, the decline of heavy industry and the losses of the previous generation. However the divergence of the figures of man and tree in the summer of 1924 is emblematic of the death of this almost childlike attempt to harmonise a modern conceptualisation of nation with an age-old bucolic idyll compromised by the social effects of the First World War, and heralds the advent of a new form of nationalism within Auden's early poetry.

The historical sociologist Anthony D. Smith posits that the modernist period is characterised by the de-mystification of nation and nationalism; new perspectives on the origin and persistence of nationhood insisting that nations were in no sense ancient or immemorial, nor rooted in nature or a mythological or tribal “first time” prior to organised nationhood.<sup>91</sup> Nation, for burgeoning modernism, was more the product of recent historical development as opposed to previous constructions of nation that were characterised by their genesis in deep-rooted, natural, mythical and

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<sup>90</sup> Pericles Lewis, *Modernism, Nationalism and the Novel*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 4

<sup>91</sup> Anthony Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism*, (London: Routledge, 2003), p.18

historical forces.<sup>92</sup> In this de-mystification of nation and the sterilization of national history we might recognise the reasoning behind the volta in the juvenilia period's depictions of nation. Although the imaginative and often Romantic sense of nation found within the juvenilia period demonstrates little of Smith's climate of de-mystification, it appears likely that Auden's poetry is still a response to the wider cultural dissolution of a mythical conceptualisation of nation in that it represents an attempt at exhuming the Romantic nationhood common to the art of the last century. As a rebuke to an encroaching sterilisation of myth, the poet establishes an atavist sense of nationhood based in the epithets of Anglo-Saxon narratives, the language of arboreal connotation and the Romantic nationalism of the past.

It is also important in terms of understanding the impetus behind the poet's burgeoning use of allusion and linguistic subtlety in his depictions of a national landscape to appreciate that the period was also subject to the genesis of a secondary response to the ways in which cultural nationalism had been represented during the First World War. The spreading influence of the sentiments of found in the French philosopher Julien Benda's *La Trahison des Clercs* — a 1927 treatise on the perceived 'betrayal' of the European intelligentsia and the manner in which poets, academics and artists were implicit in a criminal deceit in their willingness to create and support nationalist propaganda — also led to a widespread negativity in response to the representation of blatant nationalism in art and culture during the post-war period.<sup>93</sup> However it must be acknowledged that in cinematic depictions of the previous decade's conflict, the dwindling number of British films of the 1920s made

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<sup>92</sup> Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism*, p.19

<sup>93</sup> Christophe Prochasson, 'Intellectuals and Writers', *A Companion to World War One*, ed. by John Horne, (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012) pp. 323-337 (p. 323)

prior to the thematic watershed of James Whale's adaptation of *Journey's End* (1930) still had a tendency to recount the narratives of the First World War in remarkably blasé terms, mythologising conflict and focusing on notions of heroic endeavour and glory,<sup>94</sup> and in this there is perhaps some explanation for the rise of Hodge within Auden's early landscapes. What is evident is that in the combination of these opposing tenets — academic and cinematic, accusatory and hagiographic — is perhaps what affords Auden's later arboreal poetry its unique manner of metaphor within the context of the juvenilia.

Auden as a poet develops his craft during the early nineteen-twenties, in a post-war period characterised by righteous nationalism and English virtue often juxtaposed to narratives of central-European atrocity at the conclusion of the First World War,<sup>95</sup> and although the first textual relationships between country and the previous decade's conflict are often hesitant and mournful, it remains that there is a strong sense of nation within these poems although it is often interrogated with reference to its value and relevance. However, by the mid nineteen-twenties, the depictions of “Merrie England” that populate the poet's youth are replaced by a modern England beset by social unrest, previously solid social order compromised by political upheaval and industrial dispute, concepts of sovereignty undermined by the contraction of empire. This loss of unified cultural nationalism creates a point of crisis within the narrative of the juvenilia, and prompts the divergence of man and landscape that we might observe in poetry such as “The Old Colliery” and “By The Gasworks, Solihull”.

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<sup>94</sup> Lawrence Napper, *The Great War in Popular Cinema of the 1920s: Before Journey's End*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 6

<sup>95</sup> Celia Kingsbury, *For Home and Country: World War One Propaganda on the Home Front*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), p.6

### **3.5: Later Arboreal Responses to War — Ritual and Mythology**

If the juvenilia period's first tree poems are an attempt to reconcile the internal and the external and harmonise pre-extant and often conflicting ideas of nation, then the second sub-set of works can be seen as representative of Auden's attempt to synthesise his own using the duality inherent in the nature of symbolism itself. Returning to Victor Turner's anthropological study on the symbolic resonance of trees within Ndembu ritual culture, it becomes apparent that the tree is part of a larger ritual process: the arboreal is not only important in the manner in which it signifies other notions and concepts, but also in that during ritual process — the ritual, here, being the act of poetry — there is inherent a suspended duality that transcends the notion of ritual being merely transformative,<sup>96</sup> in the way that Lévi-Strauss identifies relevant to the accidents — the transformation — of bread to flesh during the practice of Holy Communion.<sup>97</sup> The true significance of symbolic substitution is that an empirical connection between the two states exists, and that a tree — whilst also representative of mourning, or motherhood, or man — also still functions as a tree; and contains all the symbolic associations of both its status as a tree as well as what it represents in connection with its cultural associations.<sup>98</sup>

The process is, perhaps, illustrative of Auden's developing penchant for literal allegory. In the depiction of an object that is objectively itself, subject to the associations of its culture and histories and representative of much larger themes and

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<sup>96</sup> Bloch, p. 39

<sup>97</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *La Pensée Sauvage*, (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1962), p. 19

<sup>98</sup> Bloch, p. 39

concepts relative to its mythology and symbolism there is evident a pronounced similarity to the pumping-engine in the poetry featured in the introduction to this thesis. In this, the act of writing a tree appears tantamount to ritual in itself: in the same way that Auden's North might only become accessible via the ritual dissection of the poem and identification of the specific esoteric localities as identified in the previous chapter, Auden's England might only be accurately accessed in the identification and analyses of the two inherent meanings of the specific duality represented in the presence of the tree.

This duality is of no small importance when we consider the changing nature of the juvenilia poetry and the manner in which industrial landscapes tend to predominate during the 1924–8 period: as a result of the decline of modern cultural nationalism — either mourning its loss in popular media and culture, or simply emblematic of a burgeoning dissatisfaction with its superficiality — it is possible to observe the poet's constructions of nation alter and adapt. Within Auden's early poetry, the act of writing a tree is, perhaps, a symbolic act in itself — a symbol of pastoral atavism, a statement made regarding the ways in which the poet conceptualises nation and expressing dissatisfaction with the sterilisation and demystification of nation that Smith identifies as a core tenet of Modernist culture, in addition to the other inferences inherent in its species' folkloric significance and surrounding landscape. Using this ritual duality of arboreal imagery — a tree that is a statement in itself, in addition to its more specific commentary within a poem as a means to symbolise a perpetual link with the rural, bucolic past in the base presence of the tree and also, in the interpretation of their greater symbolic significances, romanticise and idealise a personal concept of Britain — the poet attempts to



augment a new sense of created nationhood born of the conglomeration of select actuality, cultural history and mythology.

The first of these new, semi-mythological tree poems is “The Rookery” from September 1924. A. S. T. Fisher notes in “Auden's Juvenilia” that the piece clearly demonstrates the influence of the literary critic and poet Edward Thomas, and suggests as to the poem's setting that the “huge wall of elms” mentioned in the poem's fifth line indicates that the piece is set within the grounds of Gresham's School in Holt,<sup>99</sup> although by September 1925 the poet had left Norfolk for the beginning of Michaelmas term at Christ Church College. The piece details the sudden desertion of a colony of rooks from an ancestral rookery, viewed from a window by an undefined group of onlookers, who appear stricken by the loss of the birds and the sight of the empty elm wood flanking the school lawn. The piece is darker in aspect than any other iteration of arboreal imagery encountered this far in this chapter's analyses save for “November at Weybourne”, and indeed, whereas the earlier poem is characterised by its sense of lethargy and grief, “The Rookery” is animated by a vital energy born of its sense of foreboding.

Although Fisher observes the poetic influence of Edward Thomas within the work, the piece also bears the hallmarks of a poem by William Butler Yeats, “The Cold Heaven” from *Responsibilities and Other Poems* (1916), both in the imagery of the rook — Yeats' piece beginning “Suddenly I saw the cold and rook-delighting heaven”<sup>100</sup> — and the repetition of the archaic word stricken, Auden's “Was all there

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<sup>99</sup> Fisher, p. 372

<sup>100</sup> William Yeats, *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*, ed. by Richard J. Finneran, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), p. 136

was; / The world seemed stricken dumb” patterned after Yeats’ “is it sent / Out naked on the roads, as the books say, and stricken”.<sup>101</sup> The piece, like Yeats’, is ripe with unease, uncharacteristically for Auden written in rhyming couplet form and characterised by a syllabic laxity — lines varying in number from nine to eleven, in no apparent pattern — that lends the work an almost staccato rhythm, evoking a sense of restlessness within the body of the poem. Here is Auden’s Wanderer at their least connected with the natural landscape, separated from the elms by a window, unable to understand the Rookery’s desertion — he is in this instance truly the exile of the Saxon poem, and his lack of ease at the rooks is very similar to the unease felt by their primogenitor at the sight of the dark sea birds in *Er Eardstapa*.<sup>102</sup>

The imagery in itself is disquieting: instead of witnessing the moment of the colony's desertion we are witness only to the aftermath, the abandoned wall of elms and the silence of their wake, pointedly followed by the historical significance of the colony's desertion — again, the poet creates a landscape established on sedimentary or historical principles, established first in the present, then moving into its past, and then into the subjunctive future in the penultimate couplet and the image of the fledgling.

Their tops still glittering from last night's rain,  
They swayed a little, and upon their boughs  
Swung to and fro each black untidy house  
The rooks had made in some past century,  
And mended every Springtime. But no rook  
Showed dark against the early sky, or shook  
Down twigs, or cawed; a hungry fledgeling's cry,  
Waiting a breakfast that would never come.

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<sup>101</sup> Yeats, p. 136

<sup>102</sup> Marijane Osborn, ‘The Vanishing Seabirds in *The Wanderer*’, *Folklore* 85, (Summer 1974) 122-127 (p. 122-123)

The elm appears to occupy a significant position within Auden's juvenilia in that it is mentioned by name more times than any other tree within the poetry of the period. Replete with its connotations of a bygone pastoral Englishness, in the desertion of the elm rookery it is possible to read several notions: the desertion of previously dominant modes of Englishness relevant to the rise of a less nationalist culture of art and literature, the poet's personal desertion of the nationalist ideology that predominated during his youth, or perhaps that the fledgling of the fourteenth line represents the futility of adhering to archaic modes of nationalism when the dominant national culture is beginning to call into question the previous decade's notions of sovereignty and post-war nationalism.

Although unusual for early Auden, in terms of nationalism, the bird imagery contained in “The Rookery” is more significant than the arboreal: the rook, too, is a symbol that features heavily in a series of narratives relevant to the notion of the formation of English identity, although relevant to a much older specific iteration of English nationhood. It is, however, important prior to exacting an analysis of the significance of Auden's rooks to examine the image of the rook in the Old English literatures that have likely informed “The Rookery” and mention the linguistic interchangeability of the figure of the 'dark bird'. Although the word *hroc* (rook) exists in several Old English narratives relevant to the image of a black bird, it must be noted that the notion of species within an Anglo-Saxon context does not appear to

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<sup>103</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 60

have dominated the ways in which birds were described, and there is little evidence to suggest that the *hroc* was not considered as being the same creature as a series of other black birds, often confused<sup>104</sup> or existing as a synonym instead of signifying a distinction in species.<sup>105</sup> In a number of Old English texts, *hroc* exists as a lexeme, interchangeable with the words *hrefn* (raven) and *crawe* (crow): rooks are described in several Old English prose texts using transliterations of *crawe*,<sup>106</sup> the *hrefn blaca* ('black raven') of *Beowulf* considered equally likely to be raven, rook or crow,<sup>107</sup> even the *hrefn... wan ond wælfel* ('raven... dark and slaughter-fierce') of Cynewulf's *Elene* indistinct in the specific bird referred to.<sup>108</sup> There does appear to be a hierarchy regarding the terminology and perhaps the art form within which the reference is found: *hrefn* and *crawe* occur much more frequently, and there are no references in the Old English manuscripts of poetic texts to the *hroc*, only the *hrefn*, the 'lesser' figures of the rook occurring only in prose.<sup>109</sup> This in mind, for the purposes of this chapter's exploration of Auden's early construction of nation and the prevalence and connotations of Old English narratives, it is prudent to examine the mythological significances of the raven and crow in addition to those of the rook.

The image of the rook is symbolically linked with the presence of death, and specifically the foretelling of imminent bereavement. The desertion of a rook from a

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<sup>104</sup> Stephen Roud, *The Penguin Guide to the Superstitions of Britain and Ireland*, (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 138

<sup>105</sup> Kristopher Poole & Eric Lacey, 'Avian Aurality in Anglo-Saxon England', *World Archaeology* 46 (6th May 2014) 400-415 (p. 406)

<sup>106</sup> Eric Lacey, 'When is a hroc not a hroc? When it's a crawe or a hrefn! A Case Study in Recovering Old English Folk Taxonomies', in *The Art, Literature and Material Culture of the Medieval World*, ed. by Meg Boulton, Jane Hawkes and Melissa Herman, (Dublin: Four Courts, 2015) pp. 138-152 (p. 143-4)

<sup>107</sup> Eric Lacey, 'Birds and Bird-Lore in the Literature of Anglo-Saxon England', (unpublished Doctoral thesis, University College London, 2013) p. 55

<sup>108</sup> Lacey, 'Birds and Bird-Lore', p.55

<sup>109</sup> Lacey, 'When is a hroc not a hroc?', p. 143-4

piece of land or a homestead was said to indicate that the owner of the land was soon to die; or that if the head of a family upon whose land they resided died, the rooks would desert their nests in grief.<sup>110</sup> With reference to Auden's "The Rookery", this notion perhaps represents the origin of the sense of foreboding that characterises the piece. In conjunction with the pastoral elm, the notion seems to augment the reading that the poem's symbolic basis indicates the imminent demise of pastoral identity and the righteous tenets of Englishness that had dominated the poet's formative years. Even when we consider the setting of the piece, should Fisher's assertion be correct, the desertion of the rooks from the school setting — representative, perhaps, of the idea of institution and order — appears symbolic of social change, certainly implied by the unnamed viewer's inability to comprehend the desertion of the rooks and the phrase "stricken dumb". This in mind, the abandoned fledglings of the final lines appear to take on greater significance, and seem perhaps a reference to pupils at Gresham's School whose fathers had been either absent like Auden's own father — George Auden having spent the conflict serving in the Royal Army Medical Corps at Gallipoli, and in Egypt and France<sup>111</sup> — or indeed, those whose fathers failed to return from the battlefield at all.

There is, however, another mythological connotation of the figure of the 'dark bird' that might further supplement this chapter's analysis of the ways in which the poet's constructions of nation during the later part of the juvenilia period often rely upon the interpretation of Old English folkloric narrative. The image of the crow — often regarded as unlucky, and like the rook, symbolic of an imminent

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<sup>110</sup> Roud, p. 137

<sup>111</sup> Deer, p. 151-2

bereavement<sup>112</sup> — is also linked in mythology with representations of England.

The crow — and therefore the *hroc* and *hrefn* — is frequently linked with the image of the cephalophore king Brân the Blessed, a mythological leader of the Britons found in the fourteenth-century manuscripts of *Branwen ferch Llŷr* (the second branch of the *Mabinogi*) and the *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*. Although twentieth-century cultural references to Brân the Blessed are not as numerous as those to more well-known mythological figures such as those from post-vulgate Arthurian mythology, there is apparent an appreciation within the Modernist period of Brân the Blessed as symbolic of high or folkloric nationalism. *Imram* (1941) by Maodez Glanndour (Loeiz ar Floc'h) is an account of a sea journey patterned after the mythological voyages of Brân the Blessed,<sup>113</sup> written in the Breton language and focal upon ideas of island identity and the notion of homes, both religious and physical. Furthermore, the English poet Ted Hughes in a letter to Alan Bold writes of his own *Crow* poetry that the “Crow is the bird of Bran, is the oldest and highest totem creature of Britain. England pretends to be a lion — but that is a late fake import. England’s autochthonous Totem is the Crow.”<sup>114</sup> Like the elm, the rook appears to represent an alternative sense of nationhood far removed from the traditional image of the oak and its connotations of bucolic history or a 'golden age' of national mythology;<sup>115</sup> something intrinsically similar yet more mournful, almost arcane.

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<sup>112</sup> Roud, p. 29

<sup>113</sup> William Calin, *Minority Literatures and Modernism: Scots, Breton and Occitan*, (toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), p. 120-121

<sup>114</sup> Alan Bold (ed.) *The Cambridge Book of English Verse*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 234, quoted in a note on Hughes' “A Childish Prank”.

<sup>115</sup> Natrass, p. 123

These connotations in mind, Auden's deserted rookery takes on new significance as an image: in the conjunction of the two alternative facsimiles of Englishness inherent in the elm and the rooks themselves, there is a sense that the reader is witness to the divergence of two distinct strands of English identity, the pastoral and the mythological, that appear perhaps unusually as thematically distinct during the juvenilia period. The piece appears representative either of the sanitisation of conceptualisations of nation — the decline in post-war glorification and imperialism as a result of the contraction of empire, with the 'dark bird' figure representative of the mysticism of national culture, or simply a personal exploration of the multiple conceptualisations of nation already witnessed within the juvenilia period. Nebulous as it is in connotation, “The Rookery” is perhaps vital in this chapter's analyses of the manners in which nation is represented in the years 1922–1928 in that it represents both the confusion inherent in the death of the poet's schoolboy nationalism and again, as we have observed in the previous chapters, a withdrawal into folkloric and mythological narrative as a means of either exacting a retreat from modernity or pursuing the Romantic imagery that would later characterise the poet's depictions of the industrial high fell landscape.

### **3.6: The Flora of Folk Nationalism**

The next poem chronologically in which we might observe the poet's developing relationship with folk nationalism and plant-based imagery is “The Hidden Lane (Near Selbrigg, March 1925)”. The piece contains a single reference to

a “long line of stunted oaks”<sup>116</sup> choked by thistle and bramble, the oak here ostensibly a reference again to the disregarding of traditional modes of English nationalism, however the metaphor appears to have little in the way of thematic continuity within the rest of the poem and may by process of interrogation be considered a coincidence of imagery. There is, however, little doubt about the resonance of the arboreal imagery in a poem written likely around April of the same year, titled “The Mill (Hempstead)”: the prevalence of tree imagery in conjunction with references to several (both mythological and literary) narratives designates the piece as the intellectual, if not linguistic successor to the 1924 poem “The Rookery”.

The poem is one of the longest from the juvenilia period, comprised of fifty lines of unrhymed iambic verse considering the image of a modern mill within a pastorally familiar woodland landscape, and it is in this piece — although still sharing a prevalence of bucolic imagery with the early juvenilia period's constructions of nation — we are able to discern the further development of the poet's created nationalism. The opening of the poem is reminiscent of earlier constructions of nation explored in this chapter, beginning with the idyll that characterises pieces such as “Alston Moor” and “Appletreewick”, a benign synergy emergent between man in the landscape — the destructive tendencies of man as found in “By The Gasworks, Solihull” apparently forgotten — and the natural landscape itself. The mill is notably never described as a pollutant, the woodland landscape is thriving as opposed to the stunted tree found in “The Old Colliery”. Even the miller of the twenty-fourth line is, although sullen, heard singing; the mill-race, although dark, populate with “eels”, “sharp-finned tench”, “great pike” and

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<sup>116</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 86



“otter”. The fundamental interconnectedness — the benign synergy, the coexistence — of mill and landscape; man and idyll is reiterated with each image, the created landscape seeking to reconcile the two oppositions of the rural landscape and human industry first encountered in the poem “By The Gasworks, Solihull”.

As the piece progresses, the woodland landscape and the mill within it appear to take on almost symbolic significance to the narrator of the piece, evoking in their connection a sense of nation and continuity in perhaps its most definite form within the context of the juvenilia period:

The mill is not so ancient, yet it seems  
As old as Britain, not to be destroyed  
While men reap harvest, and while starlings build  
Their villages beneath old hanging eaves.

“The Mill (Hempstead)”<sup>117</sup>

The idea is perhaps most visible in the reversal of the image: for Auden, whilst the mill landscape persists, so must Britain, and whilst Britain persists so must the mill landscape. The association creates a halcyon microcosm in the form of the mill and its woodland, both encompassing and representative of the much larger notions of country and continuity.

In addition to this, the ways in which the arboreal imagery of the woodland landscape itself is depicted evokes a sense of symbolic English nationalism. Auden’s Wanderer is not so much exiled from the landscape here, able to identify and explore

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<sup>117</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 88

the flora and fauna of the scene in a manner similar to the one found in “Woods in Rain”; the same unusual usage of *I* recurring within the narrative. The first lines of the piece are characterised by a “long straight avenue of sombre larches”,<sup>118</sup> the larch not only symbolically interchangeable with the oak tree as a result of larch-wood being used in large-scale manufacture when oak timber was scarce,<sup>119</sup> but also a symbol of national security due to its various usages in ship-building<sup>120</sup> — again, the poet favouring a robust, historic Englishness as opposed to the melancholy elm or otherworldly rook. The seventh line of the piece also recalls the idea of home, of being internal to something larger in the phrase “With its old well all filled with heartstongue fern”;<sup>121</sup> the misspelling of *asplenium scolopendrium* — the *hart's-tongue fern* — appearing conscious, the new morphology evoking imagery of the heart itself and perhaps specifically *heartwood*, an archaic term for duramen, the central core of hard timber within the limb or bole of a tree.

As the piece progresses, similar to the manner in which “The Rookery” augments its sense of nation with the inclusion of the pastoral elm and the birds symbolic of Brân the Blessed, “The Mill (Hempstead)” reaffirms its image, the sense of nation inherent in the landscape not only made conspicuous but further romanticised with a series of references to a specifically English cultural heritage. Bucknell observes in *Juvenilia* that the twenty-fourth to twenty-seventh lines of the poem borrow heavily from the “Prologue” and “The Miller's Tale” of Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*;<sup>122</sup> and that the image of the singing miller is

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<sup>118</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 87

<sup>119</sup> Francis Heath, *Our British Trees and How to Know Them*, (London: The Country Press, 1907), p. 243

<sup>120</sup> Daniels, p. 66

<sup>121</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 87

<sup>122</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 89

reminiscent of a song entitled “There Was a Jolly Miller, Once” from the 1762 comic ballad opera *Love in a Village* by Isaac Bickerstaffe and Thomas Arne.<sup>123</sup> The effect of the allusions is similar to the plant and animal-based imagery of the first twenty lines of the piece, augmenting the sense of natural synergy with a created history, a precedent based in the manorial society of Chaucer's England and the saccharine idyll of village life as depicted in Bickerstaffe and Arne's ballad opera.

However there is evident a set of much more esoteric cultural allusions within “The Mill (Hempstead)” than the ones Bucknell discerns in the piece's commentary on the poem found within *Juvenilia* as a phrase from the poem's forty-fourth line indicates an allusion to a much older text than even *The Canterbury Tales*. Beginning “Cold and remote as some far waterfall / Washing the basalt crags which edge the world”,<sup>124</sup> the language recalls an image and phrase from the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf*. As the fourteen warriors reach the shores of Hrothgar's land, the narrative describes the manner in which “þæt ða líðende land gesáwon / brimclifu blícan, beorgas stéape / side saénæssas· þá wæs sund liden / éoletes æt ende” — “the sailing-men saw the sloping embankments, / the sea cliffs gleaming, tenebrous mountains, / nesses<sup>125</sup> enormous: they were nearing the limits / at the ends of the ocean”.<sup>126</sup> Using a comparison of linguistics alone the allusion resonates in the image of the edge of the sea and the dark mountains beyond, however in considering the phraseology of Auden's “basalt crags which edge the world” there appears an

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<sup>123</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 89

<sup>124</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 88

<sup>125</sup> *Ness*, an archaic English language term for a coastal headland or promontory still in usage in rural Scotland, Orkney and Shetland, in addition to being a common suffix found in coastal place names in the north of England. From the Old Norse *nes*, related to *nose*.

<sup>126</sup> John Hall, *Beowulf: An Anglo-Saxon Epic Poem*, (Washington: Library of Congress Publishing, 2015), p. 35

appreciation of the fact that for Anglo-Saxon imagination as represented in *Beowulf*, the presence of monstrous beings was often associated with a fascination with the eastern edge of the world.<sup>127</sup> Furthermore, the creature's displacement to England in *Beowulf* has been recognised as representative of the Anglo-Saxon sense of how their own isolation in being cut off from mainland Europe parallels the isolation of the mythological creatures said to inhabit the far east, conceptualising England itself as an isolated bastion against a monstrous horde.<sup>128</sup> Again, the allusion relies upon Auden's knowledge of the Old English text before the seminal lecture given by J. R. R. Tolkien at Oxford in 1926, however considering the poet's reliance upon other English mythologies<sup>129</sup> in the juvenilia period and the proliferation of accurate literal translations such as the Heyne-Socin translation by John Lesslie Hall (1892) and one by the celebrated Yale professor Chauncey Brewster Tinker (1902) — alongside multiple editions for children, and as part of children's story collections — the notion appears likely, if unable to be wholly substantiated.

There is also a reference to a folkloric symbolism from the English antiquity contained in the poem's depictions of the pond attached to the mill, specifically in its plethora of inhabitants (the coots and dabchicks of the eleventh line, the tench and pike of the thirteenth, otter of the fifteenth) and the notion of the mill being “not so ancient, yet it seems / As old as Britain”. The teeming pond or pool is often in pagan belief systems seen as representative of motherhood and importantly, *national*

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<sup>127</sup> Kathy Lavezzo, *Angels on the Edge of the World: Geography, Literature and the English Community, 1000-1534*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 153-154

<sup>128</sup> John Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought*, (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1981) p. 103-7

<sup>129</sup> Indeed, Bucknell notes the influence of *The Seafarer* and the homily *The Dream of the Rood* in a poem from October 1927, with reference to transcriptions of each from a notebook manuscript found in the papers of Alan Ansen. *Juvenilia*, p.224

motherhood — perhaps as a result of its concave nature and ecosystems it contains or sustains — and as reminiscent of a womb; perhaps in reference to the “Lady of the Lake” as she appears in “Matter of Britain” Arthurian mythologies as a mother-figure, ushering the future fortunes of Albion, and a link to bygone times.<sup>130</sup> The specific association appears several times within the poetry of the modernist period, and is perhaps best exemplified by Ted Hughes' pond “*as deep as England*”<sup>131</sup> in the poem “Pike” (1959); defined by Raphaël Ingelbien in 2002's *Misreading England: Poetry and Nationhood Since the Second World War* as significant as it seemed to “contain its [England's] buried energies”,<sup>132</sup> and might also be observed in Hughes' “Crowgo” (1970), where the wandering crow “communes with poltergeists out of old ponds”.<sup>133</sup>

The effect of Auden's language of allusion, here, is to imbue the sense of nation inferred by the phrase “The mill is not so ancient, yet it seems / As old as Britain, not to be destroyed / While men reap harvest, and while starlings build / Their villages beneath old hanging eaves” with a sense of continuity, strengthening and reaffirming with a sense of precedent relevant to the created national identity as it appears in the four lines. Auden's mill is modern, however appears perpetual within the landscape and will remain for as long as the natural order of its pastoral world remains unaltered; as long both man and bird fulfil their naturally-ordained functions — as has been the way since *Beowulf*, since *The Miller's Tale*, since the events of the “Matter of Britain”. The inclusion of the folkloric elements inherent in

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<sup>130</sup> Thomas Carrick, ‘Scraps of English Folklore XVIII’, *Folklore* 40 (Autumn 1929) 278-290, p. 283

<sup>131</sup> Ted Hughes, *Lupercal*, (London: Faber & Faber, 2010), p. 57

<sup>132</sup> Raphael Ingelbien, *Misreading England: Poetry and Nationhood Since the Second World War*, (New York: Rodopi, 2002), p. 80

<sup>133</sup> Ted Hughes, *Crow: From the Life and Songs of Crow*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1970), p. 54

the narrative lend the created heritage a sense of mysticism, a romanticism born perhaps of the dissatisfaction with urban modernity that characterises poems such as “By The Gasworks, Solihull”. Nation, for Auden, is evidently becoming somewhat of a paracosm: similar to the manner in which a heroic North is fashioned in the contemporary industrial poetry, a pre-existent notion of nation is altered and adulterated with the Romantic until representative of the sense of prestige and precedent deemed missing, despite the poet's later commentary on the matter of invention that it was the poet's “moral duty to sacrifice the aesthetic preference to reality or truth”.<sup>134</sup>

There is, however, another tree present within the mid- to late period of the juvenilia with connotations that are perhaps more interesting than the simpler iconographies of nation inherent in the oak, rook and elm or even the sense of mourning as established by the presence of the elm and the willow. “The Dark Fiddler” (1925) is one of the last truly rural pieces written during the juvenilia period and reminiscent of a number of works by W. H. Davies in its personifications and short-line structure:

The ash tree hides her face  
Away and grieves  
Her children scattered under  
Dying leaves

All Autumn the Dark Fiddler  
Has often sung  
The poor and old can hear him  
Not the young

“The Dark Fiddler”<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Auden, *A Certain World*, p. 425

<sup>135</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 106

The eponymous “*Dark Fiddler*” is likely a reference to an anthropomorphised Death as it appears in a variety of musical and literary media. Although in early modern history the violin was often associated with the figure of the Christian devil,<sup>136</sup><sup>137</sup> by the nineteenth century the figure of “fiddling death” had become popular within operatic theatre, a self-serving and opportunistic archetype associated with luring the unwitting into bargains that would eventually end in their demise. In the 1874 symphonic work *Danse Macabre* by Charles-Camille Saint-Saens based on a poem by Henri Cazalis, Fiddling Death calls upon the dead to rise from their graves and join a galliard;<sup>138</sup> Frederick Delius' opera *A Village Romeo and Juliet* (1910) also features a “Dark Fiddler” who acts as death's earthly messenger,<sup>139</sup> and in Igor Stravinsky's ballet *The Soldier's Tale* (1918), a fiddle-playing soldier seeks to undo a deathly bargain with the devil in an adaptation of a series of Russian folk-narratives.<sup>140</sup> The association with mortality is plain, and in its conjunction with the grieving ash tree of the first and second lines, the concept is chilling in its simplicity: death — or its earthly messenger — is beckoning the poor and infirm from the ash tree's landscape.

It is tempting to infer a broader metaphorical meaning in the notion, the feminised ash tree as symbolic again of divine motherhood<sup>141</sup> and the source of

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<sup>136</sup> Paula Gillett, *Musical Women in England 1870-1914: Encroaching on All Men's Privileges*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), p. 135

<sup>137</sup> Indeed, Auden's own 1937 poem “*Danse Macabre*” shares this topicality and includes the lines “For the Devil has broken parole and arisen / He has dynamited his way out of prison”.

<sup>138</sup> Gillett, p. 135

<sup>139</sup> Hildegarde Fife, ‘Keller's Dark Fiddler in Nineteenth-Century Symbolism of Evil’, *German Life and Letters* 16, (January 1963) 117-127 (p. 117)

<sup>140</sup> Theodore Ziolkowski, *Scandal on Stage: European Theater as Moral Trial*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 78

<sup>141</sup> Harold Bayley, *The Lost Language of Symbolism*, (New York: Dover, 2006), p. 707

human vitality in Norse-Germanic pagan mythologies,<sup>142</sup> or a church in Christian symbolism<sup>143</sup> and death appearing as an encroaching force — either war or burgeoning secularism determined to devastate her flock — yet the pared-down narrative and persistence of seasonal imagery suggest a much simpler thematic configuration of the figure of the tree.

Autumn passes but Winter  
Still hears the sound  
Level the snow plain stretches  
Miles around

Music struggling with sorrow  
A single cry  
Pierces the night and passes  
Drifting by.

“The Dark Fiddler”<sup>144</sup>

The nucleic notion of the piece is uncharacteristically vague for early Auden, yet the language used straightforward and unembellished: again, the reader is seemingly abandoned in a landscape that is “cut off, will not communicate” with some uncertainty established as to whether even Auden’s Wanderer understands the scene before them, appearing so unusually taciturn in expression, or if they are exiled from it, like in “The Rookery”. The piece appears elegiac, a lament for a landscape conquered by the late season, however in comparing the figure of the tree to one occurring earlier in the juvenilia there is meaning to be discerned. The ash of “The Dark Fiddler” has shed her leaves, her *children* — the autumn’s fall of seed pods — hidden beneath them as they decay; whereas the trees of “November at Weybourne” are unwilling to shed their own foliage — “bewildered leaves / That

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<sup>142</sup> Bayley, p. 766

<sup>143</sup> Vincent Hopper, *Medieval Number Symbolism: Its Sources, Meaning and Influence on Thought and Expression*, (New York: Dover, 2000), p. 134

<sup>144</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 106



dare not lose their hold”.<sup>145</sup> If we are to assume the metaphor's persistence from the earlier poem, the ash of “The Dark Fiddler” demonstrates a faith in perpetuity, a sorrowful, yet willing surrender of life as part of the greater, cyclical vision of renewal, as opposed to a refusal to surrender its last vestiges. Juxtaposed to the elm of the earlier juvenilia period, there is inherent in the ash both grief and hope — and despite the presence of death, the motherly ash tree persists suspended in the woodland landscape representative of nation itself, still propagating, a stalwart symbioticism in much the same way as we might observe of the oak wood and mill of “The Mill (Hempstead).”

The final poem from the juvenilia period within which it is possible to discern the interconnectedness of tree and plant imagery and the idea of nation is the stylistically chaotic “Lovers' Lane”, likely from August 1926. The arboreal imagery is dominant within the landscape of the piece, the poem's first and third numbered sections dense with named trees and flowering plants, and although nebulous, the piece perhaps best represents the development of the mature attitude to landscape that would come to fruition in 1927's “Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed”.

Similar to the manner in which “The Mill, Hempstead” alludes to texts by Chaucer and Bickerstaffe, “Lovers' Lane” alludes to those by more contemporary sources: Bucknell notes that the third stanza of the piece borrows heavily from Thomas Hardy's “The Darkling Thrush” and the fourth from T. S. Eliot's “Whispers of Immortality”;<sup>146</sup> the halcyon landscape of the mill changed and fashioned into

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<sup>145</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 26

<sup>146</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 156

something less wholesome and in aspect somehow ghostly. These more modern allusions, however, are not unique within the context of the poem — Bucknell notes a reference to Shakespeare's *Othello* in the third line of the piece in the usage of the word *antres*- “...where beardless Time / In hollow antres oversleeps himself”.<sup>147</sup> There also appears to be another allusion indicative of the poet's engagement with Norse-Germanic narratives prior to attending Oxford in 1926 in the final lines of the first stanza, “but blinded to / The smirking Past, the bone hands of To-morrow”; the phraseology reminiscent of a description of the draugar Glámr in *Grettis Saga Asmundarsonar*, who in death reaches for the rising dawn with “beins-litr út hendr”,<sup>148</sup> “outstretched hands like bone”; most likely to have been encountered in the William Morris and Eiríkr Magnússon translation of 1863. The effect is similar to the one achieved in “The Mill (Hempstead)”, augmenting the created landscape with a slew of English cultural ephemera, however the resonance of the allusions is less bucolic in aspect, darker and almost reminiscent of the elegiac verse explored in the previous chapter.

In terms of more generalised depictions of nation, the piece opens with the juxtaposition of plant imagery and an image of a subjunctive prehistoric Britain: as the titular lane is obscured by plants symbolic of love, “*Lad's Love*” (southernwood) and “*Love-in-idleness*” (heartsease), and “elder-scent for memory”, referential to the English folkloric symbolism of the elder tree as symbolic of death, eternal sleep,<sup>149</sup> and perhaps its symbolism in the Christian tradition, remorse.<sup>150</sup> Southernwood also

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<sup>147</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 153

<sup>148</sup> Eiríkur Magnússon & William Morris, *Grettis' Saga: The Saga of Grettir the Strong*, (London: F. S. Ellis, 1863), p. 69

<sup>149</sup> Heath, p. 180

<sup>150</sup> Mary Reed, *Fruit and Nuts: In Symbolism and Celebration*, (California: Resource Publications, 1992), p. 52

appears in Edward Thomas' "Old Man", whereupon the poet waxes melancholy at the scent of the herb, unable to recall the memory that it threatens, yet still feeling intrinsically connected with the unknown event or emotion that the scent represents. This is again perhaps a source of inspiration for Auden's retreat into a mythological past as even before the mention of any nation, the first stanza appears a requiem for modernity, man-made roads being overgrown and repossessed by the natural landscape. The piece then continues:

Now England  
Has conquered Wales, until eclipsing clouds  
Pass, and the moon joins Severn to the Dee,  
Making two islands that look up to watch  
A solemn poplar bowing at a star.

"Lovers' Lane" <sup>151</sup>

The third and fourth lines of the above extract refer to an obscure geological fact likely made known to the poet in one of the geological studies favoured in adolescence such as Louis Simonin's *Underground Life* (1869)<sup>152</sup> or John Postlethwaite's *Mines and Mining in the English Lake District* (1877).<sup>153</sup> The notion concerns the original trajectory of the River Severn and how it originally would continue eastward to join the River Dee, almost bisecting the country, but the wend was blocked by ice during the Pleistocene epoch forcing the Severn to divert south-east back into Shropshire, a course it maintained after deglaciation.<sup>154</sup> Again, the idea as it appears in the poem seems to reference the idea of the decline of England;

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<sup>151</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 153

<sup>152</sup> Michael Newman, 'W. H. Auden, The Art of Poetry No. 17', *The Paris Review* 57 (Spring 1974), 19-21 (p.19)

<sup>153</sup> Davidson, *The Idea of North*, p.89-90

<sup>154</sup> David Waugh, *Geography: An Integrated Approach*, (Cheltenham: Nelson Thornes, 2000), p. 122

the line “Now England / Has conquered Wales, until eclipsing clouds / Pass” also seeming to refer to the finite nature of England's conquest of Wales (the fall of the Kingdom of Gwynedd to Edward I in 1282); the “solemn poplar” of the twelfth line symbolic in classical literatures of both death and the underworld landscape,<sup>155</sup> bowing in apparent defeat.

The connecting notion is repossession, of England losing a seven hundred year sovereignty over its neighbour and the Severn finding its previous, prehistoric course; just as the lanes of the opening lines are overgrown and the personified Time sleeps on in ignorance. The first stanza of “Lovers' Lane” is perhaps narratively odd, effecting some manner of historical reversal or a subjunctive reality, in which major events in the formation of the country are reversed. In this chapter's examination of the manner in which the poet constructs the concept of nation, an analysis of the piece is perhaps discouraging as rather than *constructing* a concept of nation the poem concerns itself primarily with the *deconstruction* of a series of the core tenets of Englishness; however in this there is a continuation of the folkloric augmentation of nationhood that it is possible to observe in “The Rookery” and “The Mill (Hempstead)”. “Lovers' Lane” is representative of the notion come to fruition, a country absolved of its modernity, now only characterised by the specific cultural tenets chosen by the poet and the natural landscape of prior to the advent of modern history.

The landscape of the third stanza is again underpinned by a continuing sense of national decay:

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<sup>155</sup> Rahner, p. 289

I squelch through mire past sodden ricks. Behind  
The sunken day; before me now a land  
Stretched out like a dead weasel, lean and stark,  
With here an ashamed willow with its hair down  
And there an ivy-strangled oak, one branch  
Protruding like a blackened tongue, a gasp  
That came to nothing.

“Lovers' Lane”<sup>156</sup>

The willow — the mother-figure identified in “November at Weybourne” is depicted as ashamed; the phrase “its hair down” implying (in reference to its common epithet) the notion of weeping, perhaps in grief for the deteriorating human landscape. It is important to note that it is the oak — symbolic of traditional modes of nationalism, as opposed to an elm and its inherent sense of modern loss — that is “ivy-strangled”, an image similar to the way in which in the first stanza the poet describes the overgrowing of the poem's titular lane. This again contributes to the sense of natural reclamation that pervades the piece, a sense of the futility of endeavour — either human or natural — imbued by the mention of its “branch / Protruding like a blackened tongue, a gasp / That came to nothing”. This specific manner of depiction and the sense of national deterioration explored through the medium of arboreal imagery is perhaps an early iteration of an image from the poem at the beginning of this chapter, “An oak with heart-rot, give away the show:/ This great society is going to smash” / “A culture is no better than its woods”<sup>157</sup> from “Bucolics II: Woods”.

In terms of the manner in which the poet addresses the idea of nation,

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<sup>156</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 154

<sup>157</sup> Auden, *Collected Poems*, p. 560

“Lovers' Lane” is perhaps more important than the other poems analysed during the course of this chapter as it represents not only the fruition of the dissatisfaction with Englishness and nation as a cultural concept borne of the poet's inability to either access or process the events of the First World War but the beginnings of the mature poet's more scathing attitude towards nationalism seen in works such as “Partition” (1966), “The Public vs. The Late Mr. William Butler Yeats” (1939) and “Spain” (1937). Englishness — or even more specifically, depictions of nation — appears to have been problematic for Auden even in the earliest poetry, and seeking to reconcile the bucolic idealism found in the influences of sources such as Thomas Hardy, Edward Thomas and W. H. Davies to the darker realities of urban modernity and the results of European nationalism appears to have been a tense and often arduous creative process.

### **3.7: Conclusion: An English World-Tree**

There is apparent a thematic convergence inherent in the fashion that the poet attempts to augment and reconcile conflicting notions of national identity and the ways in which the anxieties of locality and mortality are addressed within the juvenilia period: there is evident a desire to reunite and reconcile disparate states or identities. In the recurrent conflation of man and tree, an early iteration of Auden's love of symbolism might be found, demonstrative in this case of an attempt to reconcile the separated identities of pre-war and post-war Englishness. Either dissatisfied with the disparity between the pastoral ideal and the modern actuality of England, or even merely the inability to poetically reconcile the two oppositions, there appears a conscious rejection of the bucolic ideal that populates the earliest

arboreal poetry as somehow insufficient for poetic purposes. As a result of this, the notion of nature appears to fluctuate wildly in this formative period, at first occupying the position of an almost primordial driving force behind Auden's (likely Thomas') bucolic sense of nationhood, to depictions where it appears neutered, in the form of a blighted landscape demonstrative of a pastoral nation wronged, besmirched in the process of greed and growing twentieth-century industrialism. This death of the pastoral and decline in the power of nature in these early poems is perhaps an emergence of the "moral duty to sacrifice the aesthetic preference to reality or truth";<sup>158</sup> a notion that whilst an important caveat in analysing Auden's debt owed to realism, appears to fluctuate and wane with the advent of the heroism narrative in the later northern poetry.

However the notion of nature as a force within the landscape resurfaces in Auden's later juvenilia, albeit in a romanticised and augmented form. In these later arboreal poems, it appears that the poet eventually seeks to create a similar paracosm to the one created of the Romantic north of the industrial juvenilia; effecting a retreat both from modernity, the fluctuating climate of cultural nationalism and the zeitgeist of the conflict of the previous decade. There is evident in these poems a heavy thematic reliance upon mythology and the folk narrative, textually utilising the core tenets of mythology — heroic narrative, the presence of the fantastical and supernatural and the transcendence of mortality — to recreate the manner of Romantic nationalism common to art and literature from the previous century, an atavist response to the de-mystification and sterilization of nation in the national consciousness following the events of the First World War and the rise of cultural

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<sup>158</sup> Auden, *A Certain World*, p. 425

Modernism. In this, the arboreal imagery used in the latter part of the juvenilia functions as to reiterate and augment the poet's new constructions of nation; however whilst often skilfully rendered, the extended imagery does little to disguise the inherent anxieties in these depictions of nation and lends them their strange and often dissonant qualities.

This anxiety and confusion is perhaps most obvious in the ways that specific natural ephemera appear within these early poems. Their symbolisms are often contradictory or vague, creating a complicated map of nation and nationhood in Auden's arboreal geographies. In these poems the elm is symbolic not only of katabasis, but a suspended bucolic Englishness, and the national melancholy of those who fell in the First World War, perhaps similar in aspect but inarguably thematically divergent within this early poetry. Englishness itself is denoted by the tripartite iconography of the oak, the dark bird and the elm, at once interchangeable and diametrically opposed, representative not only of historical pastoralism but also the supernatural forces that shape Auden's own folk nationalism. The plane tree is at once intrinsically linked with Thomas' bucolic elm and stands far removed from it; the ash resolute in a cycle of renewal and the elm still clinging to the leaves of those lost to the battlefields of Belgium and France. The landscape is crowded, a mass of roots almost unassailable to both the scholar and Auden's own Wanderer, and in this confusion it is possible to discern one of the reasons, perhaps, that motivates Auden's early reliance upon arboreal imagery. The tree appears in these poems a means of solidifying and augmenting a sense of nation, and whilst often skilful in its execution, does little to disguise the manner in which it is habitually used to bridge the gap between problematic dichotomies of nation — the worlds of modernity and



the pastoral past, the urban and the rural, even the living and the dead. Auden's arboreal scaffolding is a means of reconciling and reuniting the disparate facets of nationhood after the conflict of the previous decade, the manifold disconnected worlds of Englishness reconnected by the image of the tree. In this there is perhaps a critical resolution: as opposed to pursuing a specific sense of nation, the poet establishes a composite nationhood in the form of a world-tree, an English yggdrassil.

Stylistically, although often lacking linguistically, thematically and perhaps in substance, it is accurate to afford Auden's early constructions of nation if not the mantle of technical brilliance at least one of being in-keeping with the post-war decade's cultural aesthetic. These fluctuating images of the halcyon, the grotesque and the fabled characterise a poetry that frequently shifts and creatively undermines its previous iterations. Auden's arboreal poetry limns nation as a finite state, an uneasy conjunction of the oppositions of the natural and human geographies that characterise it; and in this there is perhaps inherent somewhat a of requiem for the era, as previously solid concepts of nation are eroded, the urban becoming dominant and a national culture based primarily on bucolic Englishness struggles to find new purchase in a rapidly shrinking and modernising world.

**Chapter IV: “Under the Hundred Lamps Whose Flare Turns Night to Day” —**

**The Journey, Industrial Modernity and Landscape Exile in Early Auden**

Oft him anhaga are gebideð,  
metudes miltse, þeah þe he modcearig  
geond lagulade longe sceolde  
hreran mid hondum hrimcealde sæ  
wadan wræclastas. Wyrð bið ful aræd!<sup>1</sup>

Who liveth alone longeth for mercy,  
Maker's mercy. Though he must traverse  
tracts of sea, sick at heart,  
-trouble with oars ice-cold waters,  
the ways of exile- Fate is set fast!<sup>2</sup>

**4.0 Introduction: Auden’s Spatial Identities**

The earliest vistas encountered in the study of the works of W. H. Auden are esoteric: we, along with the poet's dutiful itinerant narrator the Wanderer, are made able to travel an almost inaccessible landscape landmarked only by wizened elms and the skeletal remains of pitheads. From Killhope Cross we might see the remains of the lead-mining operations at Nenthead, from the village of Ticknall we sense the presence of the dead of the Heath Wood barrow nexus, from the lone menhir on Hunstanworth Moor, the vista is dominated by the presence of Bolt's Law Hill looming behind. Although beset by contrivances of form and language, these unknown and arcane geographic localities are written into being and made accessible to their readership with a tempered sense of realism and romanticism, and in their

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Dunning & Alan Bliss, *The Wanderer*, (London: Methuen & Co., 1969), p. 105-106

<sup>2</sup> Michael Alexander, *The Earliest English Poems*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970) p. 90

unique attention to landscape and landscape history, we are permitted to travel roads unknown. There are, however, elements of Auden's narratives that have not been fully explored by either this thesis or the extant scholarship relevant to the poet's juvenilia period, and in this final chapter I will go some way to exploring an aspect of Auden's poetry that, although of no small importance in augmenting an understanding of this early landscape poetry, has received almost no critical attention.

In the preceding three chapters of this thesis I have explored the ways in which Auden's unique narrative standpoint — an almost Georgian sense of landscape augmented by the processes of excavation and beneficiation identified in the introduction to this thesis — represents and interacts with these early geographies and the ways in which they both explore and attempt to reconcile with a number of wider societal anxieties that characterise the poet's creative output during the juvenilia period. In Auden's early arboreal imagery there is evident an attempt at reconciling cultural conceptualisations of England to the previous decade's events on the battlefields of Belgium and northern France. In the extensive body of work from the juvenilia period addressing notions of death and mortality there is inherent an effort to undermine the increasing secular de-mystification of death and the fate of the soul. In the later industrial poetry there is a commentary on cultural centralisation and the decline of provincial identities alongside the rapid decay of the lead-mining industry that dominated the high fell country. The narrative stance that the poet takes when addressing such themes is uniquely inventive, subversive and detailed both within the context of a five-decade publishing career and indeed, within the literatures of the broader Modernist movement as a whole, however concerning the

examination of the poet's narrative standpoint as a whole, this thesis' academic explorations have been largely metaphysical in nature.

Although the core tenets of the manner in which Auden's wandering narrator addresses landscape — as a living entity, as a transformative medium, an amphitheatre within which the notions of death, identity and history have been dismantled and re-formed — have been subject to significant theoretical exploration, the spatial has, up until this point, been merely a device by which to access these esoteric geographies as opposed to a legitimate object of study. Again, in this there is the danger of generating a reductive scholarship internal to the study of Auden's juvenilia period, where the acts of observing, moving through and experiencing a landscape tend to predominate, and with regard to this thesis' applicability to later Auden, are often identifiable as the nucleic forms of prose and poetic narratives such as *Paid on Both Sides: A Charade*, “The Secret Agent” and “The Night Mail”.

This chapter, in its deeper exploration of the mobile narrative figure and its thematic and textual effects, addresses the ideas of transport and motion through the natural landscape and will attempt to rectify the scholarly vacancy relevant to the ways in which the poet accesses and traverses these early esoteric geographies and the ways in which Auden addresses the tripartite notions of belonging, exile and transience. This is done with the intention of not only generating a more complete and applicable model for the study of space and landscape within the poet's juvenilia, but also in the interests of exploring the effects that burgeoning modernity and the growing ease with which both personal and public forms of transport are able to be

accessed have upon Auden's poetry during a period of rapid and intense cultural change.

I will do this via textually exploring the series of spaces that the poet traverses within these early works, beginning with the space of the railway carriage and the associated spaces of the station and platform that predominate in the early juvenilia, exploring the notion of liminality with reference to the resonance of esoteric localities identified in the previous chapters of this thesis and the ways in which the act of railway travel appears to have some manner of ritual significance. Building on these analyses, I will then explore the canal towpath as a space and the ways in which it examines the notions of rural nostalgia and the rise of industrial Modernism that prove problematic to the poet throughout the creative output of his formative years. I will then explore the darker recurrence of the railway carriage mentality as it appears in the poem "Last Bus, Saturday Night" and the notions of observation and surveillance in Auden's early poetry. Finally, I examine the road-spaces of "The Road's Your Place" and "The Walk" with reference to the tenets of Auden's Northern paracosm and the sense of exile that dominates the landscapes of the juvenilia period, making reference to Katharine Bucknell's own scholarship on Auden and motherhood in the volume *Juvenilia: Poems 1922–1928*. This is done with the intention of analysing the effects of industrial Modernism as a concept upon the landscapes of the juvenilia, and exploring the ways in which the transient identity of Auden's Wanderer represents the poet's burgeoning unease with the conflict and change of the nineteen-twenties.

The literary output of the early twentieth century is characterised by its

reactions to the advent of greater societal interconnectedness, both in communicative terms and in those relevant to ideas of physical travel and transport. Writing in 1909 for the short-lived literary magazine *The Thrush*, Ford Madox Ford decries the poetry of an older and more creatively conservative literary elite, who “shut themselves up in quiet book-cabinets” and “dream for ever of islands off the west coast of Ireland” bidding them not only begin to foster an understanding of the modern city itself, but interestingly “get it into their heads to come out of their book-closets and take, as it were, a walk down Fleet St., or a ride on the top of a bus from Shepherd's Bush to Poplar”<sup>3</sup>. For Ford, there is apparent an inherent merit in the experience of public transport that not only appears to have the effect of honing an artistic appreciation of modernity, but also exemplifies modern life in how “we know no one very well, but we come into contact with an infinite number of people, we stay nowhere very long, but we see many, many places.”<sup>4</sup> For Andrew Thacker in 2003's *Moving Through Modernity: Space and Geography in Modernism*, Ford's assertions indicate Modern life as characterised by incessant movement, a psychic movement that is “simultaneously social and cultural, metaphorical and literal”.<sup>5</sup> For the scholar, the journey in Modernist literatures is not only an isolated occurrence, a single journey made by a narrator or protagonist, but an event representative of other journeys — personal, political and cultural — present in wider society. In this, the study of transport and movement in literature takes on a new and vital significance as a means of exploring the societal stimuli affecting the period as a whole, and in the study of the poetry of W. H. Auden, afford us another means of exploring the nebulous landscape spaces and motivations of the juvenilia and their wider

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<sup>3</sup> Ford Madox Ford, ‘Modern Poetry’, *The Thrush* 1 (April 1909) 39-53 (p. 46)

<sup>4</sup> Ford, p. 46

<sup>5</sup> Andrew Thacker, *Moving Through Modernity: Space and Geography in Modernism*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p.80

significances in the broader study of the poet's work.

Ford's assertion of transport as a means keeping literature conversant with modernity, although perhaps in aspect reductive, also goes some way as to exemplify the divergence of two particular strands of modernist literatures. For Peter Childs in *Modernism and the Post-Colonial: Literature and Empire 1885–1930*, there is apparent an emerging literature that sought to engage with new systems of transport and the shift from the bicycle to the motorbike, the automobile to the aeroplane, and one that sought to undermine the technological advances in human transit and preserve previous forms of both life and writing.<sup>6</sup> The latter, either disdainful or dismissive of the effects of an improved regularity and accessibility of transport, centred on a seasonal and circadian method of timekeeping as opposed to the rigidity of 'railway time'<sup>7</sup> — as Childs identifies, a thematic juxtaposition, adhering to the “time of nature” as opposed to the modern, urban “time of culture”.<sup>8</sup>

The theme of travel and transport through a landscape in Auden's juvenilia appears a product of both strands of Childs' Modernist binary — although there are potent sentiments of dissatisfaction with urban modernity apparent in the explorations found in the previous chapters of this thesis, the ways in which the poet approaches the notions of transport and travel suggests a much more nuanced conceptualisation of a retreat from industrial modernity and fetishisation of a greater

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<sup>6</sup> Peter Childs, *Modernism and the Post-Colonial: Literature and Empire 1885–1930*, (London: Continuum, 2007), p. 101–102

<sup>7</sup> “Railway Time” was the national standardisation of timekeeping imposed by the Great Western Railway Company in November 1840, requiring all station timetables to adhere to “London Time” as opposed to local mean time variations based on regional sunrise and sunset times that had previously been accepted.

<sup>8</sup> Childs, p. 101

interconnectedness of nation and landscape than we might expect based on previous analyses. This is particularly apparent in the exploration of the railway and its associated ephemera within the context of the juvenilia — although only appearing six or seven times as a setting within the poems collected in Bucknell's *Juvenilia*, the pieces tend to possess a sophistication of metaphor relevant to the notions of movement and transformation that surpasses the ways in which movement through a landscape is described in poems such as “The Canal, Froghall” or “Last Bus, Saturday Night”.

#### **4.1: The Liminal Railway**

Although this chapter is structured as to assess the ways in which the poet employs and develops ideas of movement on a thematic basis — grouped by their dominant space as opposed to the previous chapters and their chronological approach — it remains important for the application of this thesis' working framework for reading Auden's juvenilia to identify that “In a Train” is, with the exception of the katabasis narrative “Christ in Hades”, one of the earliest poems in which we might identify the theme of movement. This indicates that with reference to the accuracy of this thesis' reading of the piece, any conclusions drawn in relation to a wider thematic analysis are fettered by what is often an acutely derivative style of poetry, where we might observe the clarity or logical progression of a conceit or metaphor within the body of the piece impeded by Auden's early tendencies to replicate imagery or sound-patternings from his sources. This does appear to be the case when we consider “In a Train” from March 1924: as Katharine Bucknell notes in *Juvenilia*, the piece plainly demonstrates the influence of Thomas Hardy. The piece invokes the



novelist's tendency to figure descriptive language as part of a linguistic substructure, exploring a vista through the medium of a frame-by-frame sequence of views from the vantage point of a train carriage window.<sup>9</sup> Whilst Auden's poem is indeed an accurate evocation of the ways in which Hardy constructs the railway platform vista in poems such as "Faintheart in a Railway Train" (1919), the effect of its snapshot vision is jarring, leaving the piece disjointed in aspect in the respect that no complete image is formed, the narrative oscillating between tenses and shifting from the present, to the past, and with the advent of the fourth and final stanza, into the subjunctive.

[...] Once my heart would race  
As I neared this place,  
And feverishly scanned  
The platform space  
For a well-known face.

Who'd have dared to say  
There would come a day  
When, passing this spot,  
I should not stay,  
But go on my way?

"In a Train" <sup>10</sup>

For the purposes of our exploration of movement and transport within the juvenilia period, it is imperative to note that both Auden and Hardy's poems take place *within* a train carriage as opposed to external to it. The space created inside the carriage setting of "In a Train" is static, and the external world — the "farm on the

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<sup>9</sup> John Osborne, 'Larkin's Hardy' in *Thomas Hardy in Context*, ed. by Philip Mallett, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012) pp. 459-471 (p. 464)

<sup>10</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 53

hill” and “old mill” of the second stanza and the “platform space” of the third — is in temporal motion, subject to the passage of time. This sense of precedent is indicated particularly in the second and third of these micro-vistas: the “farm on the hill / Gleams there whitely still”, and as the narrator nears the station, they recall that “Once my heart would race / As I neared this place / And feverishly scanned / The platform space” — Hardy's snapshot vision functions as a window to a past, either real or imagined, whilst the train carriage remains static at the station. Even the porters of the first stanza, moving “to and fro” appear in direct contrast to the manner in which the first line of the piece describes the carriages specifically as slowing to a halt. There is a powerful juxtaposition of motion to stillness, of static time to an almost frenzied temporal miscellany, the remembered past (“Once my heart would race / As I neared this place”), the historically established past (“The farm on the hill / Gleams whitely still / And the splashing beck / Tumbles until / It turns the old mill”) and the conjectural future (“Who'd have dared to say / There would come a day / When passing this spot / I should not stay”).

The railway, then, functions as a device for the purposes of landscape atavism: situated in the present, the setting provides Auden's wistful narrator with the ability to access and revert to previous vistas and sounds without leaving the actuality of the carriage. In addition to this, the construction opens a carriage-window into a potential future, albeit one for which the conditions of its existence are now bygone. This temporal travelling within Auden's narrative is made possible by the manner in which the carriage itself functions as a space characterised by its transience, moving from past to future, the happened to the potential. As an object, its primary function appears not to exist as a narrative arena in which action takes

place — we receive little to no description of its interior or other occupants, or even the conditions for the narrator's journey — but one that transports a body from one point to another, and in its ability to perform this office is also rendered able to transcend the normal progression of the passage of time.

The ways in which Auden's railway platform appears to facilitate a narrative fluctuation both temporally and spatially recalls a notion found in Henri Lefebvre's descriptions of social space in 1974 in *The Production of Space*. Not unlike Bakhtin's notion of the heteroglossic nature of language, where each word is subject to a slew of its associated social discourses which augment its meaning amid the constant fluctuations of language,<sup>11</sup> Lefebvre posits that the definition of a local space is, as opposed to being erased or outmoded by the notions of larger regional, national or global spaces, both solidified and characterised by its interactions with them. This idea of a local space as being consolidated as it is “traversed by myriad currents”<sup>12</sup> — an example given by Lefebvre is that of a house, primarily solid and immobile as a space, but when analysed as a social space is “permeated by every direction by streams of energy which run in and out of them”<sup>13</sup> (such as household utilities such as gas and water, and electrical signals such as radio and television) — is perhaps summarised best by Andrew Thacker in *Moving Through Modernity* as a way of writing spaces appreciative of the notion that “a writer's conception of some particular place should be understood in relation to the wider historical and social meanings of that site”.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Thacker, p.18

<sup>12</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith, (Malden: Blackwell, 1991), p. 88

<sup>13</sup> Lefebvre, p. 93

<sup>14</sup> Thacker, p.19

Lefebvre's notion of spatial connectivity as a narrative process of communicating resonance and meaning is certainly echoed in the ways that Auden approaches the site of the isolated railway platform. Textually the location is not afforded a name or distinguishing features — all we might assume by its precedent is that the station is somewhere in the quasi-paracosmic Northern geographies of the juvenilia period; the imagery of the second stanza — the “farm on the hill / Gleams there whitely still / And the splashing beck / Tumbles until / It reaches the old mill” — distinctly reminiscent of the lines “little scattered houses there and cosy whitewashed inns” and “Till every burn is singing and every peat pool fills”<sup>15</sup> from the earlier poem “The North”. There is, however, a prominent defining feature of Auden's station as a space that unusually for the juvenilia period has little to do with its location or symbolic resonance within the landscape. Auden's station is a static space in direct juxtaposition to the movement inherent in the setting of the carriage: the first image we are party to within the landscape of the poem is that of carriages grinding to a halt, its final image that of the narrator considering the significance of passing through, not alighting at the “spot” of the station, a spot, a singularity, as opposed to part of a larger process or journey. However when we are permitted to access, by means of the carriage-window device, the “myriad currents” of Lefebvre's analysis oscillating throughout the platform scene, we become party to a much richer definition of the space. We are suddenly witness to not only its history — the travelling narrator's personal chronicle of alighting at the certain platform and its connections via the narrator with other sites such as the “old mill”, the “farm on the hill” and the “splashing beck” of the second stanza — but also its subverted future in

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<sup>15</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 40-1

that at the poem's close, the narrator appears to recall a time when passing through the station and continuing on their journey would be unlikely or indeed, unthinkable.

“In a Train”, although again beset by the awkward or contrived language and imagery common to the juvenilia period prior to the advent of the industrial poetry proper in 1925, demonstrates a surprisingly sophisticated approach to the space of the railway platform itself. Focusing instead of on the movement of the carriage or the static space of the station, the piece affords the most attention to the transformative power of potential movement, highlighting the personal connections both spatial and temporal inherent in the space that it occupies within the landscape. Transport and its inherent function of movement, here, is a device used for the purposes of evoking a sense of landscape scale, transformative in the respect that it augments a micro-level scene with the epithets of a macro-level one, reaffirming one of the core tenets of the way in which the poet approaches the Northern landscape in that a scene is never simply extant in the time and place that it occupies, but is also a living product of its histories.

The second poem in this chapter's analysis in which Auden operates within a railway carriage space is an untitled poem from 1924, and is again noted by A. S. T. Fisher for the ways in which it demonstrates the linguistic influence of Thomas Hardy.<sup>16</sup> The piece appears to build on one of the notions inherent in the earlier piece “In a Train” in that it addresses the idea of an individual site as a connective force, in its observation evoking a series of other significant *lieux de mémoire*.

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<sup>16</sup> Fisher, p. 371

Whenever I see for the first time  
From road or train,  
No hedges along the field, but grey  
Stone walls again,

That summer flies back to me at once-  
A week of it  
At least, we two spent up on the moors  
Happiness-lit.

Untitled <sup>17</sup>

Examining its theme and narrative positioning apropos the earlier poem, the untitled piece also retains the notion of the train as a vehicle from which a real-world site is explored by way of its evocation of a series of other locations. However — as is often the case with the mid-period of Auden's juvenilia — the representations of the natural landscape itself go on to become entrenched in a deeply emotive imagery, focal on the emotional resonance of notions of memory and personal mythology in a fashion that “In a Train” appears to circumvent in its conjectural, almost detached narration. In the untitled poem, the simple image of the stone wall evokes a seven-stanza rumination on a particular week spent in the moorland landscape (likely, according to Bucknell, to be a recurrent depiction of the holiday spent with Robert Medley in Appletreewick in August 1923)<sup>18</sup> and swiftly abandons the context of the stone wall as seen from the space of the moving vehicle in favour of fully entering the much more descriptive, halcyon landscape of the memory, transitioning from the carriage-space into a much larger natural one.

This in mind, the textual purpose of the rail or road journey appears markedly different in aspect to the one found in the earlier poem. Instead of a means of

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<sup>17</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 75

<sup>18</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 76

exploring the resonance of one space in terms of its evocation of and connections with an entire landscape, although the poem displays a similar association of the ways in which the stone wall evokes a series of landscape memories, the piece appears to be much more focal on the landscape memories themselves. The journey as represented in the first stanza merely acts as a framing device, a means of contextualising and justifying the account of the *lieux de mémoire*, and in this removal from the main scene we might perhaps observe the sense of landscape exile that characterises a number of the later poems from the juvenilia period. It is, however, also possible to read the journey as a form of transport in its basest sense — as opposed to a representation of the narrator's separation from the landscape, acting as a form of ritual by which the arcane landscape spaces of the memory are accessed; a means of transposing the reader and narrator from the moving carriage-space into the landscape of the memory.

The notion of the ritual journey does appear to resonate with the descriptive imagery contained within the depiction of the memory: the manner in which the landscape itself is represented evokes the sense of the magical and mythological that characterises poems such as “Appletreewick” and “Lovers' Lane”. The early stanzas in particular appear to evoke a form of linguistic patterning common to Old and Middle English narratives in their personification of the facets of the natural landscape (most commonly elements and seasons),<sup>19</sup> the “memory visions of white clouds / That raced the wind”<sup>20</sup> in the third stanza and the “waters that flashed sun-

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<sup>19</sup> Eric Stanley, ‘Personification Without Distinction of Capitalisation, Mainly in Early Middle English’, in *Orality and Literacy in Early Middle English*, ed. by Herbert Pilch, (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1996) pp. 199-227 (p. 224)

<sup>20</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 75

kissed, or sang / Deep underground”<sup>21</sup> found in the fourth. The memory appears to spur a sense of melancholy within the narrator, prompting them to reflect on the notion that the time spent in the moorland landscape was, if not wasted, unappreciated and unable to be experienced again. “Who dulled our eyes / That life's great doxology we failed / To recognise”, they lament opposite the image of the mill-wheel in spate. “You never knew days richer than these, / Nor ever will.”<sup>22</sup> As a result of this, the narrator once more appears isolated from the landscape, but perhaps this time sequestered emotionally as opposed to the sense of physical, tangible exile present in poems such as “The Road's Your Place”. The landscape of the memory is at once distant from the narrator in his vehicle, and only accessible in the act of the journey via the suspension of the normal tenets of space and time; a ritual gateway into a private memory landscape.

A similar sense of a private mythological landscape is evoked by the manner in which in the penultimate stanza, the patterning of an image employed by the poet appears similar to a recurrent image from the works of the nineteenth-century novelist Emily Brontë whose influence we might observe in the later poem “Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed”. The lines “Then standing at sundown on the cliff / It fired your hair; / No voice said to me: 'You will not find / Two souls as rare”<sup>23</sup> appear to recall the images of two children often found within Brontë's landscape works, associated both with personification of a series of aspects of the natural landscape, and more thematically, with the private landscapes of childhood, inaccessible to the unordained outsider. The figures of the “Melancholy Boy” and

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<sup>21</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 76

<sup>22</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 76

<sup>23</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 76



their counterpart, the “Child of Delight” found in the Gondal poems “A.E.” and “R.C.”<sup>24</sup> and in the protagonists of the 1847 novel *Wuthering Heights* itself appear to resonate in Auden's “*Two souls as rare*” as they appear in the seventh stanza, intensifying the sense of the Romantic present in the poem and highlighting the almost supernatural air that pervades the esoteric landscapes of the memory.

If the road or rail journey found in the untitled piece functions as a ritual transportation to an arcane geography of memory, it finds its sense of realism again in “The Mail-Train, Crewe” from the same year. Shifting its spatial setting from the railway carriage to the railway platform, the piece appears much more akin to the Auden of the next decade, the poet as an objective, external observer as opposed to active, internal participant within a narrative. Katherine Bucknell acknowledges the debt owed to the works of Thomas Hardy in the poem's “clumsiness”<sup>25</sup> of style and composition, however the piece appears to demonstrate a maturing command of language and imagery that sets it apart from the untitled piece that appears to precede it. As Bucknell's commentary on the piece in *Juvenilia* observes, the eleventh and twelfth lines of the poem — “Who at the postman's slow advance / Trill like a bird” — could have been written a decade after they were, demonstrating the textual preoccupations with railway travel and postal communication that would characterise the poet's works throughout the 1930s,<sup>26</sup> and indeed, the piece appears to be in aspect, if not linguistic competence the nucleic form of a poem produced for the GPO Film Unit, 1936's “Night Mail”.

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<sup>24</sup> Edward Chitham, *A Life of Emily Brontë*, (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2010), p. 149

<sup>25</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 77

<sup>26</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 77

Like the later poem, “The Mail-Train, Crewe” appears to evoke the sound-patterning of train wheels in motion, utilising a predominantly monosyllabic vocabulary and a rigid adherence to iambic metre to add a secondary, paralinguistic dimension to the notion of movement as it exists in the poem, underpinning the narrative with a sense of urgency and hastening its pace. Indeed, the sense of rolling motion is also evoked linguistically, the image of the wheel recurring within the body of the poem as the train itself is described as rolling through the landscape — “But swiftly rolls / Southward;”<sup>27</sup> — in the second stanza. The penultimate stanza too appears to build on the image, expanding the association into a reflection on the nature of the persistence of the national institutions of the mail and railway, reflecting that “There be some whom life has brought / To turn and ask / Wherefore the world is ordered in this sort”; however “No man on earth / Can cast a spoke into the wheel of things”.<sup>28</sup> The wheel, here, appears not only symbolic of persistent onward motion, but also of the peripheral nature of the individual relative to wider society, the modern, cyclical systems of railway and correspondence rolling on uncaring in response to those who might question their purpose. The sentiment is markedly different from the narratives of individual heroism and the prevalence of Hodge-figures found in the industrial juvenilia, perhaps demonstrative of an early interrogation of the impersonal organisation of modern life that dominates a series of works from the end of the following decade, most prominently “The Unknown Citizen” from *Another Time* in 1940: “Was he free? Was he happy? The question is absurd: / Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard”.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 77

<sup>28</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 77

<sup>29</sup> W. H. Auden, *Another Time*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1940) p.84

The poem itself documents the journey of the LMS Mail Train as it passes through a railway junction, observed by a narrator who is, perhaps interestingly for the purposes of this chapter's exploration of the ways that transport functions within Auden's early landscapes, stood upon the southbound platform of Crewe railway station. The setting recalls the way in which the poet describes the borders of his Northern paracosm, using Crewe Junction as a boundary marker indicative of imminent passage into the mythical North; "Years before I ever went there, the North of England was the Never-Never land of my dreams. Nor did those feelings disappear when I finally did; to this day Crewe Junction marks the wildly exciting frontier where the alien South ends and the North, my world, begins."<sup>30</sup> The sentiment, too, is not unique to Auden's own conceptualisations of North — there is a wider culture of identifying Crewe Junction as a threshold where northern and southern geographies intersect — remarking on an exchange found in Philip Larkin's *Jill* (1946), Tony Sharpe in "The North, My World: W. H. Auden's Pennine Ways" observes that "Crewe marks the spot where the South turns into the North — and characteristically, southerners turn back".<sup>31</sup> Auden's junction appears liminal; characterised by its transience and the sense of potential it creates for both itself and any travellers within, similar to Bakhtin's 'Chronotope of Threshold'. For Bakhtin, threshold spaces are inextricable from a sense of spatial and temporal potential, and are described as "places where crisis events occur, the falls, resurrections, renewals, epiphanies, decisions that determine the whole life of a man".<sup>32</sup> This certainly appears true of the manner in which Auden approaches the railway station within the juvenilia period: the station and platform spaces common to the early pre-industrial

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<sup>30</sup> Auden, *The Complete Works Volume II* p. 185, quoted in Sharpe, 'Auden's Northerliness', p. 14

<sup>31</sup> Sharpe, "The North, My World", p. 107

<sup>32</sup> Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 248

poetry are often characterised by their connection potential with other locations, and their ability to transcend the boundaries of linear time.

What is also interesting to note is that in appreciating the extant cultural construction of Crewe Junction as a boundary, the space that the narrator occupies is rendered doubly liminal. The poem appears to indicate that the location possesses the same degree of transience as the railway station of “In a Train” — characterised and solidified as a space by its potential for other geographic and social interactions — but also existing as a space that is neither north or south, a threshold vital to the establishment of the binary, but unable to identify as being part of one side or the other.

This powerful sense of liminality is what marks “The Mail-Train, Crewe” as one of the most interesting transport poems within the context of the juvenilia. The specific location of Crewe station itself is representative of a sense of transience — approaching from the north, the location functions as a boundary marker it indicates the approach of the south, approaching from the south, the location functions as a boundary marker indicative of the approaching north, and with reference to Lefevbre's theory of social space, the location — merely a stop on a railway line — only takes on real-world significance when we consider its potential connectivity with other systems and spaces. In addition to this, there is a significant weight of the poem's imagery that again takes place within an imagined, possible future in much the same way as we might observe in the final stanza of “In a Train”, envisaging the possible destinations of the individual pieces of mail as they travel southwards — “How many souls / That watch the morning dapple on the blind, / Who at the

postman's slow advance / Trill like a bird” ; “Postmen perform without a thought / Their daily task”.<sup>33</sup> The space of the piece is characterised by its juxtapositions; of northward to southward in its location, and of certainty to uncertainty in the conjunction of its stance on the perpetuity of the social institution, the unstoppable rotation of the “wheel of things” and the subject's threshold location and inherent, powerful sense of liminality.

#### **4.2: The Railway and The Life Course**

The inherent liminality of the railway station as a space persists throughout most of its iterations during the juvenilia period, however there are some examples in which the sense of liminality is in turn expanded upon to form the central metaphor of a poem. “Flowers and Stationmaster” (by Bucknell's designation, from late 1925 or early 1926)<sup>34</sup> again appears to be an expanded form of the transient station-spaces found in the previous year's “In a Train” and “The Mail-Train, Crewe”, however in this application of the concept the piece appears to share some subject matter with the mortality poetry that dominates the landscapes of the juvenilia. Likely indebted to Edward Thomas’ “Adlestrop”, the piece is the first of several lengthy free-verse poems from the mid-period of the juvenilia similar in aspect to “Ploughing” and “Hebes Anthos Apollymenon”,<sup>35</sup> and appears to demonstrate similar concerns with the fleeting nature of human life.

The poem begins with a chance encounter, the wandering narrator becalmed

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<sup>33</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 77

<sup>34</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 114

<sup>35</sup> Title translation from Greek characters by Katharine Bucknell, *Juvenilia*, p. 120

on the railway platform of an unnamed station and entering into conversation with its aged stationmaster. Although the analysis Auden's of physical descriptions here seems perhaps superfluous to this chapter's examination of the notions of transport and movement within the juvenilia period, regarding the figure of the stationmaster, the ways in which the character is textually represented does permit us some manner of insight into one of the key tenets of the poem's preoccupation with mortality.

“You like my flowers?” That woke me suddenly  
From staring at the flowers I didn't see  
To stare at that voice- Mountains might have dreamed him  
He was tall and weatherbeaten like that  
And time-worn like an old mossed water-wheel  
With eyes as blue as gazing on the sky  
Three hundred English seasons, nearly, not  
Through windows could have made them-

“Flowers and Stationmaster”<sup>36</sup>

The effect of the piece in its entirety is dreamlike, the narrator's fantasy as to the stationmaster's origins and run-on lines in their depiction of the heat and quiet station languid, almost soporific. The stationmaster, it seems to the poem's presumably adolescent narrator, is both ancient and eternal: a product of the natural processes as growth and erosion, as if “Mountains might have made him”; the specific language used here perhaps a reference to the birth of primordial man or first gods found in Norse creation mythology as represented in Sturluson's Prose Edda. The presence of the figure within the liminal space of the railway station lends the scene a sense of permanence and solidity in much the same way as we might observe of the standing stone in the poem “The Menhir”, a perpetual object against transience that appears

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<sup>36</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 114

juxtaposed to the encroaching darkness and shifting sky. As a result of this undermined liminality, the space appears to possess an otherworldly kind of transience in that it is at once a moment removed from the linear progression of time, and characterised by a figure that is represented by means of the epithets found in lines three to eight as an object of almost primordial origin, persisting into the present-day landscape of the railway station itself.

The effect is strange, yet not entirely unusual within the context of early Auden: by means of its removal from normal temporal progression, the space of the railway platform is not only rendered liminal, but in this is essentially removed from its modern context. The station-space, such as the ones found in “In a Train” and the untitled poem from 1924, exists in both the past, present and possible future, happening at any point from an ancient mythological past to a potential future that has not yet, or may not come to pass. This is similar in aspect to the figure of the stationmaster himself, both ancient and eternal, mythological and anecdotal; an organic analogy for the shifting liminal landscape of the station-space, linguistically imbued with the sense of ancient precedent the poet appears to seek throughout the majority of the juvenilia period.

The figure of the stationmaster also takes on greater textual significance when we approach the final lines of the poem. There is a sense of melancholy evoked as the ensuing conversation between the poem's narrator and the aged stationmaster comes to a close with the arrival of the narrator's intended train, and in the act of leaving, he reflects specifically on the nature of memory, and how “if the day had other things to show / They are forgotten now, I only see / Geraniums

flaming in the summer heat, / The bees, the old man's quavering goodbye".<sup>37</sup> After the narrator and stationmaster converse, towards the end of the poem, The arrival of the train represents in this narrative the crisis of liminality, the landscape of the station altered by the loss of a series of prospective destinations by the arrival of a train with a definite one, the temporal and spatial potential inherent in Bakhtin's threshold space rendered obsolete with the intrusion of the train as a connective force with a definite destination. The metaphor appears to persist from "The Mail-Train, Crewe": the image of the train appears representative of the unstoppable forces of modernity, the manner in which it appears to intrude upon the almost mythological dreamscape of the station-space perhaps a reflection upon the futility of fantasy, landscape mysticism or even merely the persistence of provincial identity in the face of encroaching modernity.

The notion that dominates the poem "Flowers and Stationmaster" is that there is, in essence, an unassailable juxtaposition between the spaces of the carriage and platform: one is a space populated by the becalmed, characterised by its mythology, the other, characterised by its forward motion and its realism. This notion of the railway space as an arena characterised by this duality is not, however, unique to early Auden: the juxtaposition and anxiety inherent in the two spaces is explored more fully less than a decade later by the literary critic and philosopher Walter Benjamin. In an essay for the literaturblatt *der Frankfurter Zeitung*, Benjamin builds upon the notion of the mimesis of railway travel and anxiety as explored in the last century by philosophers such as Max Nordau<sup>38</sup> and describes the act of buying

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<sup>37</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 114

<sup>38</sup> Max Nordau, *Degeneration*, trans. by Howard Fertig, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), p. 39



reading materials in a railway station as akin to an offertory, a safeguard equal to a ritual or religious act by which one might ensure unimpeded passage on a supernatural, inhospitable journey:

At one time or another everyone has reached for the swaying tomes... less out of a pleasure in reading them than out of the dim sense of doing something to please the gods of the railway. He who buys there knows that the coins which he consecrates to this offertory box recommend him to the protection of the boiler god who glows through the night, to the smoke Naiads who romp all over the train, and to the demon who is lord of all the lullabies. He knows all of them from dreams, just as he knows the succession of mythical trials and perils that present themselves to the zeitgeist as a 'train ride', and the unpredictable flight of spatio-temporal thresholds which it passes: from the famed 'too late' of the person left behind — the archetype of all that has been missed — to the loneliness of the compartment, the fear of missing the connection and the dread of the unknown hall into which he draws. Unsuspectingly, he feels entangled in a gigantomachy and recognises himself as the mute witness of the struggle between the gods of the railway and the station gods.

“Kriminalromane, auf Reisen”<sup>39</sup>

Both Auden and Benjamin's identification and exploration of this dichotomy appear to represent a particular zeitgeist that characterises Modernist art and culture, a fear of the unknown generated by the speed at which Europe appeared to be changing, de-mystifying and modernising. There is apparent in both extracts an anxiety of movement, a fear of the danger represented by change and motion, Auden's infernal “wheel of things”, Benjamin's sense of the “loneliness of the compartment, the fear of missing the connection and the dread of the unknown hall into which he draws”. The notion, however, also appears to have an equal inverse:

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<sup>39</sup> Walter Benjamin, ‘Kriminalromane, auf Reisen’, *der Frankfurter Zeitung* (9th January 1930), 13-15 (p.13)

also present within both texts is a palpable fear of the stagnation inherent in non-motion, both personally and culturally. Auden's ancient stationmaster stands wreathed in the epithets of his own mythology, eternal in the unnamed station and fixated on nothing more significant than the well-being of his geraniums, and Benjamin's sorrowful "famed 'too late' of the person left behind — the archetype of all that has been missed" exemplifies the same horror at being left behind, being rendered outmoded, provincial or atavist by the rapid forward movement of modernity.

There is, however, an alternative reading of the intrusion of the train that might be discerned from the somewhat abrupt final lines of the poem that appears more akin to the more existential and spiritual preoccupations of several other poems from the juvenilia period. As the train pulls away from the station and the narrator commits the scene, the geraniums, bees and stationmaster to memory, they also darkly reflect on the presence of a "silence biding patiently its time / Till sunshine make the blackbird tire of song / And I have passed as men have always passed".<sup>40</sup> The conjunction of the phrase "I have passed as men have always passed" in textual conjunction with the image of the oncoming train, a vehicle with a constant onward motion and indeed, a finite destination appears more than coincidental: the forward movement of the train appears a metaphorical representation of the life-course, and its final destination a natural end to the process of living. In this, the station-space is again rendered otherworldly, existing outside of the linear progression of time, a moment external to mortality where the ancient and eternal figure of the stationmaster might exist. This in mind, the *silence* of the twenty-eighth line takes

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<sup>40</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 114

on new significance, becoming almost personified and seeming to indicate the presence of death within the scene — an intrusive, hungering silence “biding patiently its time”. The image is reminiscent of the notion of *memento mori* (the spiritual exercise of remembering the fleeting nature of existence, that one is mortal and has to die)<sup>41</sup> and early modern images of death, often represented as an ominous physical presence waiting with the living, a motif common to fifteenth and sixteenth-century art such as Heironymous Bosch's *Death and the Miser* (1494), Matthias Huss' *Danse Macabre* (1499) and Hans Baldung's *The Three Ages of Man and Death* (1543). For the narrator of “Flowers and Stationmaster”, the notion of movement as represented by the image of the railway, is a bleak evocation of the inevitability of mortality, and the station-space in its liminal and quasi-mythological status represents the futile reprieve offered by, perhaps, arenas in which death does not exist, such as specific folklore, fantasy or the events of dreams.

The railway, for early Auden, represents a problematic space in its entirety. It is, indeed, almost impossible to address the railway itself as a complete space or arena such is the degree to which it appears eternally bisected by the diametrical oppositions of carriage and station, motion and non-motion, modernity and atavism, and time-keeping and the suspension of normal temporal progression. The act of railway travel represents in these early poems yet another exercise in traversing an unknown and often deeply troubling landscape, characterised by a similar existential anxiety that appears to dominate the poetry analysed in the first chapter of this thesis in which the poet descends through the ideas of mortality, death and katabasis, and in

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<sup>41</sup> Joëlle Rollo-Koster, ‘Introduction’, in *Death in Medieval Europe: Death Scripted and Death Choreographed*, ed. by Joëlle Rollo-Koster, (Oxon: Routledge, 2017), p. 1

aspect, is as thematically diverse and appears no more unified in its conclusion. What is perhaps more important for this thesis is the identification of the ways in which these works exemplify Auden's adaptability in the textual formation of a landscape, and how these spaces and their specific resonances and preoccupations again exemplify the conflict and anxiety inherent in a number of the poet's early constructions of the natural and urban world.

### **4.3 Ancient Landscape and Industrial Modernity**

Although it is tempting to dwell on the poet's inventive early railway vistas with regard to spatial analysis — representing in their depth and creativity an unusual and perhaps uncharacteristic divergence from the often derivative spaces found in the poet's early period prior to the burgeoning poetic maturity that is critically heralded by the advent of poems such as “Who Stands, The Crux Left of the Watershed”<sup>42</sup> — it is possible, and indeed beneficial for the purposes of this chapter to expand this analysis into the spaces relevant to several other modes of transport during the period. “The Canal, Froghall” is a poem that again appears to fall victim to the eternal impediment of expression that characterises Auden's earliest poetry, in that a relatively formulaic approach to rhyme and a disparity between innovation and the linguistic ability to express it affords the piece a largely inaccurate *prima facie* sense simplicity. With regard to narrative, the core tenets of the poem bear some resemblance to the notions central to texts such as “By the Gasworks, Solihull” and “The Plane Tree” in that there is present within the poem a critical depiction of the physical effects that the processes of industrialisation have

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<sup>42</sup> Mendelson, *Early Auden*, p. 32

had upon the natural landscape. However there appears one major thematic difference between “The Canal, Froghall” and the two works analysed in the previous chapter: as opposed to the marred pastoral space of “By the Gasworks, Solihull”, there appears to have been an effort made to establish the natural landscape of “The Canal, Froghall” as a natural space that is also specifically designated as ancient.

There runs no road except the towpath through the valley  
And oaks hang over it to make a dark green alley  
Quite covering the weedy sunk canal it follows  
Winding in and out among the hill-ribs and the hollows.  
Beneath the water trees hang downward in their stations  
Glassed in a calm which might have been for generations,  
And save for some few sleepy birds no note is spoken  
The silence and the watercalm are both unbroken.

“The Canal, Froghall”<sup>43</sup>

The first eight lines of the poem establish what appears at first a relatively simplistic pastoral space, the idyll of the natural landscape and the man-made structure of the canal existing in a state of textual consonance. There is, however, a sense that the idyll as represented here is more than the sum of its parts, the hanging oaks of the second line and the hills and hollows of the fourth — the landscape appears markedly different in aspect to the pastoral spaces that appear in poems such as “Allendale” and “By The Gasworks, Solihull” in that the space of the canal landscape is augmented by the sense of temporal precedent inherent in its intertexts and linguistic expression. Despite the presence of the man-made canal central to the narrative, in the same manner as the stationmaster of “Flowers and Stationmaster”

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<sup>43</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 100-101

appears to the narrator both ancient and eternal, the landscape of the canal and its towpath appears almost characterised by its history, populated by the epithets of an archaic conception of the English landscape. As the previous chapter's analyses suggest, the presence of the “oaks that hang over [the canal] to make a dark green alley” of the second line appear indicative of a specific rendering of historical Englishness, the oak tree a cultural symbol central to antiquated depictions of nation in traditional national mythologies,<sup>44</sup> its presence indicative of an antiquated past persisting into the present-day space of the towpath. As the sixth line of the poem indicates, the tranquility inherent in the scene too appears the product of an undisturbed antiquity, the reflections of the treetops in the canal “Glassed in a calm which might have been for generations”.<sup>45</sup>

This sense of historical precedent is compounded by the presence of two figurative linguistic circumlocutions common to Old English and Old Norse-Germanic heroic poetry that this thesis posits are often utilised by early Auden to afford a poem a sense of temporal depth or precedence. Both the “hill-ribs” of the fourth line and “watercalm” of the eighth appear structured in the fashion of a simple kenning: a *stofnorð* (“base-word”), in this case *hill* or *water* augmented by a descriptive *kenniorð* (“determinant”) that adds a layer of poetic metaphor to the feature, in this case — *ribs* or *calm*. Indeed, considering the poem's chronological proximity to the poem “Below Me, Ticknall Lay But in the Light” it appears likely that the kenning “*hill-ribs*” is part of a larger, more complex kenning “*hill-ribs and hollows*” that refers specifically to the image of a barrow, a funerary interment like

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<sup>44</sup> Natrass, p. 123.

<sup>45</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 101

those found at the Heath Wood burial nexus. The similarities in shape between a hill and ribcage, the *hollow* of the barrow and the indicated presence of centuries-old human remains again lends the opening to the poem a sense of historical, almost ancient precedent, excavating the real or imagined past of the towpath space for the purposes of poetic beneficiation.

The image of the barrow present within such an openly idyllic space appears, at first, anomalously macabre: Auden's dead are wont to populate the adits of the high fell country and the tenebrous woodlands of the juvenilia as opposed to a sunlit canal bank, replete with its "sleepy birds" and the seemingly immemorial reflections of trees. Indeed, the "hill-ribs and hollows" as a linguistic notion appear at odds with the majority of the poem even during the markedly more sombre mid-section of the text, however an investigation of another of the intertexts central to the narrative of "The Canal, Froghall" reveals another surreptitious reference to the supernatural within the poem's opening lines. Auden's poem begins with little preamble, stating that "There runs no road except the towpath through the valley",<sup>46</sup> and whilst the line indeed contributes to the sense of rural isolation that pervades the entirety of the poem, the line also makes reference to another road that appears unaffected by the traditional polarities of mortality.

An early twentieth-century poem by Rudyard Kipling opens with a similar image: "The Way Through the Woods" found in the 1910 historical fantasy collection *Rewards and Fairies* begins with a deserted rural road, now all but rendered inaccessible due to the passage of time and its ensuing reclamation by the

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<sup>46</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 100

natural woodland landscape. Beginning “They shut the road through the woods / Seventy years ago. / Weather and rain have undone it again, / And now you would never know / There was once a road through the woods”<sup>47</sup> there are distinct similarities between Kipling and Auden's natural imagery — both woodland landscapes, overgrown — yet the poem itself is markedly more sombre, and whereas Auden's “The Canal, Froghall” appears much more celebratory of the rural scene and its towpath, Kipling's road appears somewhat forgotten, melancholy, the narrative voice possessing an almost resentful tone inherent in the usage of the phrase “And now you would never know / There was once a road through the woods.” The more evident similarities between the two pieces become apparent when we examine the manner in which Kipling's poem concludes, evoking the ghostly presences of a series of the road's previous travellers:

Yet, if you enter the woods  
Of a summer evening late,  
[...]  
You will hear the beat of a horse's feet,  
And the swish of a skirt in the dew,  
Steadily cantering through  
The misty solitudes,  
As though they perfectly knew  
The old lost road through the woods.  
But there is no road through the woods.

“The Way Through the Woods”<sup>48</sup>

Auden's piece mimics some aspects of Kipling's phraseology, the negative grammatical structure of the earlier poem's final line making its way into Auden's first. What is interesting for this chapter's analysis of Auden's early constructions of

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<sup>47</sup> Rudyard Kipling, *Rewards and Fairies*, (London: Doubleday, 1914), p. 89

<sup>48</sup> Kipling, p. 89-90



space is the manner in which the road functions as not only a *lieu de mémoire*,<sup>49</sup> but also an arena in which temporal progression and perhaps even death — the figures decidedly incorporeal in aspect; only evident in the sound of hoofbeats or the motion of fabric — appear suspended. In this, Kipling's overgrown road is much like Auden's Crewe Station; the unnamed station of “Flowers and Stationmaster” and the towpath of “The Canal, Froghall” — a liminal, transportational space where traditional modes of temporal progression — whether chronological or more broadly linked with ideas of the life course and mortality — cease to apply. The effect of Auden's subcutaneous ghostliness, its barrows and forgotten roads, again imbues the towpath space with a sense of the archaic — not only possessing of a “calm which might have been for generations” but evoking the notion that the landscape of said generations is still present within the landscape, in much the same way as is indicated by the presence of the oak tree in the poem's second line. What we become party to is a rural space constructed of a series of component parts that appear specifically chosen for the purposes of the representation of an ancient landscape where the past and even its dead are still present within a present-day scene, adding a third dimension to the space: not only do we pan across the scene, we also descend through its layers, interments and roads overgrown.

This ancient, almost otherworldly pastoral idyll that characterises the towpath space is compromised when the poem is catalysed in the ninth line by the introduction of the horse and bargeman, whose entrance heralds the dissolution of the bucolic and the advent of a much less nuanced imagery. Almost every aspect of the entrance is characterised as an intrusion, marring the previous scene, the

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<sup>49</sup> Nora, p. 199

reflections of the trees marred by the oncoming barge — “At once tree images jostle and soon have vanished” — the horse's bridle “jingling”, “The silences and solitudes quickly banished”.<sup>50</sup> Although the intrusion of the barge and bargeman is depicted in terms much more gentle than we would expect at such a marked volta — “The swaying towrope swishing gently through the grasses”, “One old man beside it walking / And puffing at a blackened clay, or sometimes humming”<sup>51</sup> — it does little to undermine the notion that something has been shattered, the space itself altered, the reflections in the surface of the water disturbed and vanished, something “scattered by their coming”.<sup>52</sup> More metaphorically, the intrusion of the horse, barge and bargeman as a form of mineral transportation appears representative of industry or industrialisation encroaching upon rural space — not only is an age-old, almost immortal idyll disturbed by their approach, but the barge is described as “laden”, encumbered by the weight of coal and iron ore it carries, the “one tired horse” “Slow, patient, forward”,<sup>53</sup> almost begrudgingly making its way through the landscape. Even the bargeman's pipe appears to evoke the notion of industry — and again, perhaps representative of modernity, perhaps representative of the sterilisation of mythology — in their description, the figure appears “puffing at a blackened clay”,<sup>54</sup> the image similar to that of an industrial chimney. In this, the epithets of industrialism appear wearisome, polluting, and in their juxtaposition to the previous idyll, reminiscent almost of conflict, an incoming, opposing force to the epithets of the bucolic space as it exists prior to their entrance.

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<sup>50</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 101

<sup>51</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 101

<sup>52</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 101

<sup>53</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 101

<sup>54</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 101

We also become party via the bargeman's intrusion to the notion that the moving components of the scene have both an origin and destination that exist peripherally on the edges of the towpath-space: they are both coming from, and travelling to a space distinct from the self-contained idyll, the view we have of the canal and bower. As the horse and bargeman travel horizontally through the scene, entering in the ninth line, exiting in the seventeenth, the reader becomes party to the notion that there are locations beyond the confines of the towpath-space, and that the world of "The Canal, Froghall" extends far beyond the confines of the canal at Froghall, again an example of the manner in which Lefebvre's notion of spatial connectivity and the "streams of energy"<sup>55</sup> that enter and exit a space, linking it with larger spaces, places and notions. Auden's horse and bargeman are, this in mind, perhaps indicative of the greater societal and geographic interconnectedness as a result of the advent of industrial Modernism and how the rural idyll becomes compromised, almost disturbed by the intrusion of human modernity in a similar fashion to the one central narrative of the poem "By the Gasworks, Solihull".

What is, however, more important for the purposes of this analysis and the examination of the ways in which Auden's earliest spaces function is the way in which the poem is subject to a second volta after the barge and bargeman exit the towpath-space:

They go their way and the ripples are the only traces  
Until the calm returns which everything effaces  
And images of trees resume their standing places.

"The Canal, Froghall"<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Lefebvre, p. 93

<sup>56</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 100-101

The effect is markedly different in aspect when compared to the turn that takes effect in the eighth line: as opposed to altering the landscape of the towpath-space, introducing the notions of destinations beyond the immediate location and the conflict inherent in the intrusion of the horse, barge and bargeman, the turn functions as a reclamation, returning the space to its first iteration, before the element of conflict entered into the scene. The reflected trees once again become visible in the waters of the canal, and the calm of the first eight lines of the poem descends once again upon the scene, however there is a sense that the disturbance of the travellers within the scene has been regarded by some power as a transgression.

The penultimate line, “Until the calm returns which everything effaces” appears to expand the towpath-space into larger and indeed, more metaphysical realms. It is, perhaps, a micro-level allegory for a larger philosophical conversation in that the calm does not simply efface the ripples in the canal's reflection of the canopy, or the disturbance that the travellers themselves have caused within the scene, but *everything*. The particular phraseology of the line recalls, perhaps, a phrase from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, “tempus edax rerum” (“Time devours all things”) — both syntactically and in sentiment similar to Auden's calm which effaces everything. Although in itself the line appears reminiscent of the notion of *memento mori* that this chapter has already posited plays a part in the manner in which Auden constructs and augments a sense of liminality in railway and platform spaces, the phraseology of the line and the reference to Ovid's gluttonous depiction of temporal progression appears to indicate a similar manner of reclamation that we might observe in the later poem “Lovers' Lane”, as analysed in the previous chapter.

In the same way as “the moon joins Severn to the Dee”<sup>57</sup> (a reference to the prehistoric trajectory of the River Severn and how it originally would continue eastward to join the River Dee), England's concession of its historical conquest of the Welsh marches and indeed, the man-made road of the title becoming overgrown (“grassen”-ed) and “Choked up by blackberry”,<sup>58</sup> Auden's towpath-space is overgrown by the reflected trees, the bucolic, ancient landscape of the first eight lines returning, the calm of the penultimate line “effacing all things”. Indeed, in the textual stipulation “all things” the indication appears that the resurgent calm will reclaim the landscape regardless of the disturbance, perhaps even growing to efface the intrusive modernity that compromises the idyll of the towpath-space in a much broader sense, implying that the natural landscape will, in time, reclaim the peripheral spaces within the poem, the seats of industrial Modernism.

The notion is, perhaps, an exercise in disguising a far-reaching or potentially inflammatory critique or reference within the confines of a much smaller area and inviting allegorical interpretation, as opposed to an overt textual mention or reference. In the same way as Timias' hovel features as an arena within which mention might be implied of the tempestuous life of Walter Raleigh in Edmund Spenser's sixteenth-century epic *The Faerie Queen*,<sup>59</sup> Auden's towpath-space functions as an arena within which the poet might effect a critique of modernity and the effects of modern industrialism upon an ancient landscape without compromising the integrity, linguistic appeal or tone of the text, a notion again demonstrative of a growing poetic and linguistic maturity becoming evident in

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<sup>57</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 153

<sup>58</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 153

<sup>59</sup> Christopher Burlinson, *Allegory, Space and the Material World in the Writings of Edward Spenser*, (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006), p. 211-212

Auden's works in the 1925-6 period.

The borders of the towpath-space fluctuate and change in dimension, at first appearing the self-contained rural idyll of a canal-side bower, at the beginning of the ninth line the confines of the landscape change and the space becomes connected to a series of unknown origins and destinations by means of the intruder's journey. Finally, the towpath-space shifts into a conduit for a metaphysical conceit and becoming a space representative of a much larger world, remaining self-contained as in the first eight lines but now expanding its borders and acting as the macro-level crucible of Auden's natural resurgence. The towpath-space is at once deeply liminal and characterised by its solidity to the point of it appearing an allegorical reduction of a much larger and more complex world, and represents one of the more unique and skilled usages of allusion within the poet's juvenilia period.

This poetic juxtaposition of an almost quotidian natural landscape and its inherent sense of liminality and transience is also, in itself, interesting when we consider the manner in which the poet goes on to depict the landscapes of the high fell mining industry. Characterised both by their real-world solidity — set against the ephemera of heavy machinery, the lead and limestone landscape — and their transience and ghostliness, still populated by the shades of its former inhabitants and communities despite the decades that have lapsed, the core tenets of Auden's industrial poetry appear to recall the image of the towpath-space. Rendered almost hyper-realistically in the linguistic choices depicting its sounds and minutiae of imagery — the noises made by the bridle of the oncoming horse and its barge; the disturbance of reflections in the surface of the water — and underpinned by the

overwhelming sense of liminality, the towpath not only acts as a geographical link, but perhaps also a temporal one. By applying an understanding of the narratives of Auden's later high fell mining landscapes, it is possible to regard the landscape of the towpath as not only representative of a space between destinations — the origin and final objective of the oncoming barge — but perhaps also might invite commentary on the notion of passing time and the *temporal* polarities of the poem, linking the ancient idyll of the earliest lines and the rise of industrial Modernism of the later ones. In the same manner as Auden's mines exist both deserted and populate, decaying and thriving, the towpath-space exists as a demonstration of the forward motion of time and also as a link to a bygone past, similar in aspect to “Flowers and Stationmaster” or “The Mail-Train, Crewe”. It is also perhaps worthy of note for the purposes of this thesis' focus on Auden's constructions of landscape that within the context of the juvenilia period, the landscape itself appears the only entity within this diverse poetry endowed with the power to connect the polarities of past and present. Speaking of the shell of some abandoned agricultural machinery of “The Traction-Engine” from November 1927, the poet uncharacteristically tersely observes:

Here it now lies, unsheltered, undesired,  
Its engine rusted fasted, its boiler mossed, unfired  
Companioned by a boot heel, and an old cart-wheel,  
In thistles attired,

Unfeeling, uncaring; imaginings  
Mar not the future: no past sick memory clings.

“The Traction-Engine”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 67

“The Canal, Froghall” is one of the more densely allusive poems written during the juvenilia period, and whilst thematically laboured does represent one of the poet's mostly linguistically successful attempts at addressing the rise of industrial Modernism when compared to the more contrived imagery of “By The Gasworks, Solihull” or “The Plane Tree”. There are, however, works within Bucknell's *Juvenilia* that represent a manner of depicting and understanding a space on a much more human-centric basis: moving away from the spaces of the open fell landscape or idyllic canalside, we encounter a poetry that appears almost similar to the railway station poems analysed earlier in this chapter, but much more populate, and bearing striking similarities to the manner in which the notions of surveillance and the observation of humanity are depicted in a series of works by the mature poet.

#### **4.4 Surveillance Spaces and Moral Panic**

The poem “Last Bus, Saturday Night” from late 1926 is representative of a more sedate linguistic turn that characterises the juvenilia period following the lyrical intensity of long pieces such as “Thomas Epilogises”, “Lovers' Lane” and “Humpty Dumpty” (Summer–Autumn 1926), and also a return of the end-rhymed couplet as a rhythmic structure within Auden's early poetry. The simplicity and structure of the verse perhaps suggests a return of the childlike naiveté that dominates the poetic representations of human interaction during the early juvenilia period (“Envoi I”; “To a Child in Tears”); however even a cursory reading of the poem reveals the advent of a more mature and outwardly observant narrator, their standpoint shifting from a player within the human interaction to an omnipresent, almost accusatory narrative voice.



The bus jolts on defunctive gasoline  
A Tumbril rattling to the Guillotine

The clucking market women would appease  
The Furies with the price of cabbages.

A quavering voice and hand would make so bold  
To offer the moon something for the cold.

Fat sleep has taken to her vulgar heart  
The drowsy down-lipped Samuel set apart.

The Lovers huddle closer hand in hand  
Like strangers from a far enchanted land.

Two shadows from two worlds they seem to be;  
'O do not hurt us, for we will not see'.

The gibbous moon above who cannot bless  
The uncomplaining benedictionless

The virgin stars dragged through the streets of sky  
By Time who walks out with all, by and by.

Leaves shaken by the owl's outrageous cry  
'The world is weary, but it cannot die!'

“Last Bus, Saturday Night”<sup>61</sup>

The setting of the poem is similar to that of “In a Train” or the untitled poem beginning “Whenever I see for the first time / From road or train,”; the interior of a public transportational vehicle as it wends its way through what is likely Auden's northern paracosm as the narrator makes their journey toward an unspecified destination. There are, however, several marked differences between “Last Bus, Saturday Night” and the earlier, Hardy-esque train poems when we consider both their choices in descriptive language and the shift in tone that characterises the later

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<sup>61</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 160

poem. The most noticeable and indeed, important for the purposes of this chapter and its analyses of Auden's developing spatial consciousness is the transition in narrative standpoint that occurs in "Last Bus, Saturday Night". Almost uncharacteristically for Auden, the narrator no longer appears within the space that they are describing: whereas both "In a Train" and the unnamed poem are characterised by the poet's use of the pronouns *I* and *my*, "Last Bus, Saturday Night" relies upon the title of the piece to contextualise the scene and characters that are recounted and appears from a narrative standpoint, wholly impersonal: no indication is given as to the whereabouts of the narrator, whether they are a fellow traveller or instead, an unnamed observational force focal upon the vehicle and its inhabitants with little personal connection to the scene. An effort appears to have been made to emphasise the narrator's sense of exclusion from the proceedings, either morally or indeed, physically.

The narrator of the poem also appears changed in aspect: no longer are they a lone traveller wistful for the nearby mill and streams, waxing melancholic as they pass a railway station representative of a personal *lieu de mémoire*. They are condemnatory: the vehicle itself is described as a "Tumbril rattling to the Guillotine",<sup>62</sup> a statement at once comical and sinister, perhaps a link with the manner in which we might observe the poet using the description of forward motion and the rotations of a wheel to evoke the notion and temporal progression and ultimate progression toward death, however it appears more likely considering the context of the poem to be mere bile, an almost snide remark regarding the calibre of the occupants of the vehicle as it passes through the unknown exterior. The

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<sup>62</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 160

“clucking market women who would appease / The Furies with the price of cabbages” appear almost Wessex in aspect, and rendered animal in their description — *clucking* about the price of vegetables, their actions characterised by an air of unimportance. Although the clucking women appear initially reminiscent of the market women of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, the image is more likely a reference to Henry Fielding's seminal picaresque *The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling* (1749) in which the fishwives of London's Billingsgate fish market are in jest likened to a series of classical Grecian deities.<sup>63</sup> In either case, the association appears derogatory.

The second character encountered during the narrator's diatribe is the “drowsy down-lipped Samuel” whom “Fat sleep has taken to her vulgar heart”.<sup>64</sup> The manner in which the personification of sleep is described in the line previous again suggests that for the narrator there is something offensive about the image in its entirety: the act of sleeping as the vehicle is in transit appears to be deemed almost vulgar or slovenly. In addition to this, the manner in which Samuel is described also offers insight into Auden's new, damning narrator: as Katharine Bucknell acknowledges in her commentary relevant to the piece in *Juvenilia*, the curiously-constructed adjective *down-lipped* likely refers to the age of the figure, denoting him as adolescent.<sup>65</sup> The notion is typical of early Auden, a descriptor halfway between a coined adjective and a simple kenning, however in the focus upon the figure of Samuel as “down-lipped” we might infer a much greater focus on the minutiae of the scene; an observance so careful and accurate that even a small

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<sup>63</sup> Paula McDowell, *The Invention of the Oral: Print Commerce and Fugitive Voices in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, (London: University of Chicago Press, 2017), p. 205

<sup>64</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 160

<sup>65</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 160

growth of facial hair is noticed, remembered and recorded.

It is also worthy of note that the “*Lovers*” of the seventh to tenth lines appear to be afforded a similar scrutiny: although they appear outwardly innocuous, the narrator, although this time withholding their verbal condemnation, positions them as almost dangerously alien to the space of the vehicle's interior. Described as both “Strangers from a far enchanted land” and “Two shadows from two worlds”<sup>66</sup>, they appear insular as they “huddle closer hand in hand”, at once representing a pocket of unknown conversation that is foreign to the landscape of the bus, their origins a focal point for the narrator as they are questioned and ascertained to be unfamiliar.

The effect of this new, snide narrator and the much greater depth of insight that they demonstrate is the creation of a space much darker and perhaps more Modernist in construction than any we might have encountered previously within the works of the juvenilia period. Simple observation has given way to the spectres of supposition and surveillance; narrative emotion — Auden's own fondness for the “farm on the hill” and the “old mill” of “In a Train” replaced by an almost sinister omniscience, the narrator's observational powers now trained upon the other inhabitants of the interior space as opposed to the exterior of the railway platform and the rural landscape behind it. As an arena, the space itself is rendered claustrophobic, a potent and pervasive sense of unease generated from the manner in which the narrator's fellow travellers are analysed in minute detail and yet appear unknowing of their sudden observation and judgement.

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<sup>66</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 160

Auden's subtle surveillance and apparent burgeoning mistrust of his narrator's fellow passengers also appears to recall a moral panic<sup>67</sup> that dominated the sphere of railway travel in Europe during the latter part of the nineteenth century. Following the in-transit assassination of an eminent magistrate of the Court of Paris in a railway carriage in France in 1860 and the well-publicised murder of London banker Thomas Briggs whilst travelling between Fenchurch Street and Hackney in 1864, the notion grew particularly prominent within the European cultural consciousness, triggering a “collective psychosis”<sup>68</sup> particularly relevant to the notion of travelling in less populated, first-class carriages and eventually leading to the invention and implementation of the inter-carriage communication cord.<sup>69</sup> A folk devil solidified in the late Victorian social consciousness by a series of dissonant voices from contemporary press, *The Times'* notion that whilst on the rail, “It is plain that no man is safe from assassination, no woman from rape”<sup>70</sup> in particular appearing to enjoy particular vogue within the literary world. Such was the widespread belief that railway travel was becoming synonymous with criminality and murder, writing in George Murray Smith's *Cornhill* in 1892 the novelist William Makepeace Thackeray characteristically pointedly wonders of the literary journal's own readership, “Have you ever entered a first-class railway carriage where an old gentleman sat alone in sweet sleep, daintily murdered him, taken his pocket-book and got out at the next station?”<sup>71</sup> The French writer Émile Zola in the Rougon-Macquart novel *La Bête*

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<sup>67</sup> Term employed by British sociologist Stan Cohen in 1972 to describe a process of media institutions arousing mass public concern relevant to what is often a previously disregarded or tolerated societal issue. Cohen, Stan, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2011) p. 5

<sup>68</sup> Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialisation of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014), p. 83

<sup>69</sup> British Transport Police, ‘The First Railway Murder’, <[www.btp.police.uk/about\\_us/our\\_history/crime\\_history/the\\_first\\_railway\\_murder.aspx](http://www.btp.police.uk/about_us/our_history/crime_history/the_first_railway_murder.aspx)> [Accessed 17th January 2018]

<sup>70</sup> Kate Colquhoun, *Murder in the First Class Carriage: The First Victorian Railway Killing*, (New York: Overlook Press, 2011), p. 99

<sup>71</sup> William Thackeray, *Roundabout Papers (From the Cornhill Magazine) to which is added The Second*

*humaine* takes the notion one step further in a tense and overtly sensationalist depiction of murder on the railway. With several acts of infidelity, brutality and homicide taking place around the carriages and railway station at Le Havre, the novel culminates in the image of a driverless train hurtling toward destruction, a heavy-handed metaphor for a society ruined to the point of destruction by the advent of the railway, an arena conducive to acts of criminality and social deviance.<sup>72</sup> Auden's surveillance is, indeed, reminiscent of the late Victorian sense of panic that characterised the infancy of railway travel in Europe, and might again be read as indicative of the poet's growing sense of unease regarding the consolidation of modernity and the notion of inaccurate and invasive surveillance that characterises much later poems such as "The Unknown Citizen".

This in mind, it is also worthy of note that as the poem draws to a close, focus shifting from the internal to the external space of the vehicle, a motif recurs from the May 1925 poem "Below Me, Ticknall Lay But in the Light" — the couplet "Leaves shaken by the owl's outrageous cry / The world is weary, but it cannot die!"<sup>73</sup> again appears to use the cry of the owl as a prompt for the unnamed subjects of the poem to address the issue of their mortality. There are differences in semantic: Ticknall's ancient "shagged men, who had / An older name for home than Derbyshire or Britain",<sup>74</sup> upon hearing the sound, draw closer to the firelight within their bower, "Feeling the dead peer downward through the trees",<sup>75</sup> whereas in "Last Bus, Saturday Night" the sound appears to evoke a sense of humanitarian resolution

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*Funeral of Napoleon*, (London: Elder & Co., 1869), p. 301

<sup>72</sup> Colqhoun, p. 99

<sup>73</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 160

<sup>74</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 94

<sup>75</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 94

within the caustic narrator, prompting the cry “The world is weary, but it cannot die!”.<sup>76</sup> Although the sound of the owl functions differently within the emotional contexts of the two narratives, there is a similarity to be found in the manner in which it enters and alters the spaces it occurs in; drawing the external — the unknown — into an internal space, prompting reflection upon the notions of existence and mortality. The idea is the same: the self-contained space of the interior is rendered an arena where the larger notions of life and death remain unconsidered until an external prompt occurs to bring them to the forefront.

In relation to the poem “Last Bus, Saturday Night”, the notion affords the reader a semblance of the trademark wry reflection upon notion of human observation that characterises later works by the poet such as “The Unknown Citizen” or “The Secret Agent”, that surveillance is a claustrophobic and inaccurate mechanism within a poetic space, both ignorant of larger existential issues and often deeply flawed. The change is marked within the landscape of the poem: at first cynical and accusatory, the cry of the owl appears to function as to chastise the narrative voice, causing it to alter focus from the confines of the interior space to the interior space in relation to the exterior, from micro-level to macro-level reflections upon humanity.

As a result of the volta, the reader begins to question the narrator's suppositions regarding the clucking market sellers, the sleeping Samuel and the Lovers, and questions the narrative viewpoint prior to the volta: is the voice merely caustic, or designed to infer that the narrator himself is demonstrative of a growing political mindset in its observation and recording of the working-class, the young

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<sup>76</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 160

and the alien? Writing of the changing attitudes to society and societal control immediately following the cessation of the First World War, Olga Velikanova in *Popular Perceptions of Soviet Politics in the 1920s: Disenchantment of the Dreamers* observes that during the era, “The modern state practices and new technologies of social intervention included not only the total mobilization of human resources for labour and warfare, but also mass propaganda intent on creating national unity and surveillance over the population.”<sup>77</sup> It is also possible that the poem takes its cue from the print media of the 1920s and its bellicose attitudes toward the exposure of potential Communist elements within society and the constant political surveillance that surrounded the Communist Party of Great Britain during the decade.<sup>78</sup> Auden himself produced two poems in 1932 within which it is possible to discern a consideration of Communist ideas, “I Have a Handsome Profile” and the more cynical “Brothers, Who When the Sirens Roar (A Communist to Others)”, although the poet's legitimate commitment to the movement was generally regarded as disingenuous by his peers.<sup>79</sup>

Auden's developing use of the voyeur as a narrative device and the internal space of the “Last Bus, Saturday Night” are one of the most interesting methodologies utilised by the poet during the juvenilia period, however in terms of this thesis' exploration of Auden's early constructions of space, the conclusions it is possible to draw regarding the poet's early attitudes toward societal surveillance are limited: the populate public transport interior appears only once within the context of

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<sup>77</sup> Olga Velikanova, *Popular Perceptions of Soviet Politics in the 1920s: The Disenchantment of the Dreamers*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 10

<sup>78</sup> Mark Pythian & John Callaghan, ‘State Surveillance and Communist Lives: Rose Cohen and the Early British Communist Milieu’, *Journal of Intelligence History* 12 (April 2013) 134-155 (p. 134)

<sup>79</sup> Yezzi, p. 13



the juvenilia. There are, however, a number of poems that also address the notion of separation from a space, and in the analysis of the poet's exclusion of a narrative figure from an established rural environment — itself becoming a recurring theme within the poet's later landscape works — there are a number of conclusions to be drawn regarding the relationship between narrative voice and rural spaces within the poet's earliest works

#### **4.5 The Wanderer on the Road**

As this thesis has posited in the previous chapter on Auden's North, the sense of exile found within a series of Auden's industrial poems can be ascertained to be a result of several interrelated factors, predominantly the cultural effects of the First World War and the tension felt between the poet's own social and geographic background and that of the populations of the high-fell lead-mining communities that there appears a conscious decision to idolise. This thesis has not, however, examined the notion of exile apropos Auden's rural landscapes and the tension between rural antiquity and industrial modernity, and it is in exploring this juxtaposition and the exploration of the road as a space that it is possible to observe one of the poet's most nuanced sophisticated conceptualisations of space within the juvenilia period.

During the course of *Juvenilia*, Katharine Bucknell's commentary upon Auden's early themes largely serves as a guide on manuscript revisions and the reiteration of broader scholarly thought upon poems by notable Auden scholars such as Edward Mendelson and John Fuller, however the prevalence of the notions of separation and exile from landscapes both rural and industrial within a series of the

poet's earliest works are relatively well-documented within the introduction to the volume. Writing of the poet's earliest poetic landscapes, she candidly observes that:

Where Wordsworth and other Romantic and Georgian poets have a privileged relation with nature, Auden is shut out. In 'To a Field-Mouse', the poet cries out with shame far exceeding his apparent culpability at frightening the mouse. In 'The Old Lead-mine', he drops a stone down a disused mine shaft, the splash below fills him with dread, and he retreats as if he were one of the greedy men who the poem says have left the hillside scarred with shafts. In 'The Road's Your Place', he is turned back from a steep track to a mountain tarn by three threatening hills that voice the admonition of the poem's title and generally behave like the crag that pursues Wordsworth in his stolen boat on Lake Windermere. In 'Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed', the landscape speaks again, saying "Stranger, turn back". But Auden's repeated failure to gain access to the natural world is self-imposed; his curiosity or desire regarding nature is frustrated by his own guilty fear that he is unworthy of it or that he might harm it.<sup>80</sup>

Although Bucknell's assertion is, in more general terms, accurate, it is perhaps for the purposes of the following analysis useful to reiterate that Auden's repeated sense of exclusion from these natural spaces is not irrefutable. Although Auden's early poetry does often suffer from a sense of exclusion from the natural landscape, as this thesis demonstrates, the theme fluctuates in potency and the notion that there is a general, omnipresent sense of exile is undermined by the poet often adding further dimensions to the natural spaces of the juvenilia: the prevalence of landscapes stabilised by the poet's creation of a personal northern paracosm, poetry engaging with the landscape on a mythological level and the recreation of the landscapes of memory all serve as to undermine the poet's perceived exile and to augment and strengthen existing poetic conceptions of the natural landscape. It remains, however, important for this chapter and its analysis of Auden's landscape

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<sup>80</sup> Bucknell, *Juvenilia*, p. xxvi

spaces both temporal and physical to analyse how Bucknell's sense of exile functions within this diverse early poetry and how a natural arena that the poet feels unable or unwilling to access represents an interesting exercise in the division of space.

Although Bucknell writes that the theme of exile is at one of its most potent iterations in the address of the three threatening hills from “The Road's Your Place” (May 1925), it is arguable that the notion of exile appears most palpable and indeed, most interesting in the poem's thematic predecessor from the previous year, a short, three-stanza piece entitled “The Walk”. Whereas the later poem appears to identify and enforce the presence of the three hills as a physical divide between the narrator and the tarn, the poetic representation of a barrier between narrator and subject is much more subtly rendered, much less literal within the rural landscape of “The Walk”; and in the analysis of these two poems it is possible to reaffirm and augment an understanding of Auden's earliest and most nebulous constructions of liminal space.

[...] As soon as I had turned the corner, all at once  
Three crags rose up and overshadowed me  
'What are you doing here, the road's your place'  
-Between their bodies I could see my tarn-  
What could I do but shift my feet awhile  
Mutter and turn back to the road again  
Watched out of sight by three tall angry hills.

“The Road's Your Place”<sup>81</sup>

The storm had passed and now the sun  
Set the black wintry hedge aflame

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<sup>81</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 95

Save for my splashing footsteps, none  
Broke the long silence there, none came.

A dogcart, yellow-wheeled and high  
Came sudden around the hedge's fold  
A farmer and his wife drove by,  
They nodded to me, both were old.

They clattered past me; once or twice  
A bird sang; it was still again  
A secret peace, a Paradise  
I could not enter filled the lane.

“The Walk”<sup>82</sup>

Spatially, both poems appear to demonstrate an appreciation of the liminal nature of the road as a setting in much the same way as the poet addresses the railway and railway station as spaces. Both settings appear subject to the same pervasive existential melancholy that it is possible to discern in poems such as “Flowers and Stationmaster” and “The Mail-Train, Crewe” in their apparent insistence that the road, like the railway, is a force that cannot be delayed, that temporal progression must continue. The thwarted explorer of “The Road's Your Place” is ordered to return to the road from the visceral landscape of the three hills and distant tarn in a similar manner to which the narrator of the untitled poem beginning “Whenever I see for the first time / From road or train”<sup>83</sup> analysed previously in this chapter steps out from their vehicular journey to enter the natural landscape by means of imagination or memory, the notion of an inevitable return to the narrator's actuality inherent in the association. The wandering narrator of “The Road's Your Place” is effectively bid by the three hills to continue on their journey, and in this it is once again possible to discern the poet's appreciation of the road-

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<sup>82</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 57

<sup>83</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 75

space as something at once transient and inevitable, subject to as little inexorability as the narrator's eventual mortality that we might thematically infer with reference to the juvenilia period's earlier railway poems.

In more corporeal spatial terms, “The Road's Your Place” in this juxtaposition of real-world temporal progression (the road) and idle wandering, memory or fantasy (the three hills; the tarn) appears to view the road as distinct from the landscape itself, a separate arena removed from the natural landscape that it bisects. Auden's narrator makes what appears to be a conscious decision to leave the road-space and is later in the poem ordered by the foreboding hillside to return to it. The narrator's departure from the road-space is described with little effort or trepidation evident in the action, describing the manner in which they

...left the road and struck up by the burn  
Along a track which heaved and plunged and leapt  
From side to side to gratify the whim  
Of some once-famous leader of the sheep  
To-day scarcely a name to mountain-lambs.

“The Road’s Your Place”<sup>84</sup>

Similarly, the narrative of the return is coloured with little effort, the narrator merely compelled to “shift [their] feet awhile / Mutter and turn back to the road again”, however the two spaces — the road-space and the natural landscape beyond — appear distinct, the narrator unable to access one for the need of returning to the other, locations existing adjacent and yet fundamentally juxtaposed.

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<sup>84</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 95

With reference to this analysis, it is perhaps important to note that the secondary path that the narrator takes seems subject to a separate set of connotations and is intended to be regarded as much more part of the natural landscape than a road-space similar to the one from which the narrator has diverged. Instead of acting as a tributary of the road-space's evocation of the constant and inexorable passage of time, a journey that must be taken, the path appears meandering, “a track which heaved and plunged and leapt / From side to side”,<sup>85</sup> and a product of an age-old process now scarcely a memory; made by “some once-famous leader of the sheep / To-day scarcely a name to mountain-lambs”.<sup>86</sup> Like the eponymous stationmaster of “Flowers and Stationmaster” the path appears at once ancient and eternal: the phraseology from the slightly later railway poem “Mountains might have dreamed him / He was tall and weatherbeaten like that / And time-worn like an old mossed water-wheel”<sup>87</sup> appearing similar in semantic to the “once-famous leader of the sheep / To-day scarcely a name to mountain-lambs” — again, an object of almost primordial origin persisting into the present day. The couplet also appears subject to a similar mythologisation in that the same sense of a landscape itself being capable of creation becomes apparent — in the same fashion as the poet deems mountains responsible for the genesis of the stationmaster, the ancient sheep are responsible for the creation of the secondary path. There is, once again, an unassailable juxtaposition established between the road-space and the natural landscape beyond: one is an arena where the mythological, the primordial reigns, the other, characterised by its inevitability, forward motion and its connection to reality. As Auden's wandering narrator is exiled from one, he must return to the other, “The Mail-Train, Crewe”'s

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<sup>85</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 95

<sup>86</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 95

<sup>87</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 114

ever-turning “wheel of things”, wider society and industrial modernity. The notion of modernity versus nature, here, takes a different form to how the juxtaposition is represented in poems such as “The Old Lead-mine” and “By The Gasworks, Solihull” — as opposed to the poet making comment upon the avarice of man and nature's enduring benevolence or the eventual natural reclamation of the seats of industry, they are simply subject to what is best described as an environmental seminal sin: by dint of their humanity, they are cut off from the landscape itself.<sup>88</sup>

An analysis of the poem “The Walk” also appears to support the notion of exile as a product of the guilt inherent in humanity's disregard for the natural landscape and embrace of industrial modernity; however the poem adds another dimension to the notion in that it appears to bisect humanity along a class-based or geographically-based axis. The poem begins in the same fashion as many others from the mid-juvenilia period, with Auden's wandering narrator walking alone through a topography that seems at once familiar and foreign, a victim of the inhospitable landscape of what is likely another part of the northern paracosm that would eventually become the ghostly high-fell mining landscapes of the industrial

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<sup>88</sup> This sense of environmentally-conscious exclusion from the natural landscape does appear at odds with other readings of Auden's early exile. Katharine Bucknell designates the prevalence of the theme as a result of the poet's often tense relationship with his mother during late adolescence, writing that the “*conflicting desire and fear expressed toward nature in so many of his poems can be understood in part as a representation of a conflict he felt between desire for independence and a fear of losing his mother's love*” and a “*representation of the conflict between incestuous sexual desire for his mother and fear of gratifying that desire*”. (KB, xxvi-xxvii) There is, perhaps, some merit to Bucknell's supposition: the vengeful mothers of *Paid on Both Sides: A Charade* and the “*deep Urmutterfurcht that drives / us into knowledge all our lives*” of “New Year Letter” do suggest at least a correspondence between the tenets of Freudian motherhood and Auden's own textual proclivity toward the genesis of subterranean, primordial mother-figures, however the notion that the mother-figures of the juvenilia are subject to any greater process of analogy than the association of motherhood and “Mother Nature” being loosely or subconsciously informed by the poet's own maternal relationship is, perhaps, strained. The notion of Auden's narrator and their apparent exile from the natural, maternal landscape seems, however, inextricable from the prevalence of guilt and unease when addressing the effects of industrial modernity upon ancient, rural landscapes, however the topic of Auden's early anti-industrialism appears absent from the majority of the scant scholarly criticism surrounding the poet's juvenilia period.

juvenilia. The first two stanzas of the poem are subject to the same linguistic inadequacies that feature heavily in the poetry of the juvenilia prior to the advent of the poet's mature voice some time in 1927, however the final stanza of the poem represents an interesting conceptualisation of rural space in that there appears to be two distinct road-spaces extant concurrently, and in the same place: as the farmer and his wife pass the wandering narrator, the poet senses that "A secret peace, a Paradise / I could not enter filled the lane".<sup>89</sup> The result is the creation of a secondary metaphysical road-space that the vehicle enters and that the narrator is for some reason unable to access, despite their seeming ability to discern it.

The line is, perhaps, an early iteration of "Stranger, turn back again, frustrate and vexed: / This land, cut off, will not communicate"<sup>90</sup> in the same fashion that it is possible to observe the narrator of "Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed" envisage the dismantled washing-floors and forbidding terrain behind Nenthead as refusing them entry to the landscape on the grounds of their alien status — alien in their geographic origins, their social class — the narrator of "The Walk" is exiled from the "secret peace, a Paradise" as a result of their status as a landscape outsider. Similar to the sheep-path of "The Road's Your Place", the farmer and his wife appear to be depicted as part of a different landscape to that of the narrator. The dogcart clattering past in a high-hedged lane is an image from rural antiquity, a horse-drawn vehicle common to the nineteenth century that by the dawn of the twentieth century had been outmoded by the advent of the governess car and indeed, motorised travel<sup>91</sup> and likely a rare sight in Auden's own limited experience of the northern rural

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<sup>89</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 57

<sup>90</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 218

<sup>91</sup> John Thompson, *Horse-Drawn Carriages: A Sourcebook*, (Fleet: John Thompson, 1980), p. 83



landscape. Again, like the sheep-path, like the stationmaster, the farmer and his wife are deliberately delineated as *old*: the language stands in direct juxtaposition to what little description is available of Auden's wandering narrator, merely described as having “*splashing footsteps*” — the image evoked is almost that of a child, splashing through the wet of a country lane.

In this notion of age, there is apparent a distinction between the two types of travellers within the poem: the farmer and his wife, aged, travelling in their antiquated cart are permitted to enter a landscape that Auden's much younger wandering narrator is not. The poem seems a more complex iteration of the sense of landscape exile felt by the poet in “The Road's Your Place”, however as opposed to the landscape denying the narrator entry on the grounds of their humanity and inherent seminal sin of modernity, it appears to recognise that the farmer and his wife are not complicit in modernity. They are archaic, outmoded, and therefore part of an ancient landscape: there is a sense that the occupants of the dogcart continue on into the landscape of memory, the quaint and saccharine vision of the northern landscape that the poet appears to crave in earlier poems such as “Appletreewick” and “The North”, a fetishization of last-century rural identities thematically akin to the poet's simplistic constructions of the Hodge-figure, the “*secret*” of the eleventh line again emblematic of the “desire for insiderhood” that Tony Sharpe identifies in the chapter ““No Permission to be Idle”: W. H. Auden's Work Ethics”.<sup>92</sup> The wandering narrator is, in their youth and outsider status, cut off from the rural landscape, and whilst the dog-cart passes on into the “secret peace, a Paradise” of the halcyon past, they are left in exile. The narrator's own feelings toward the cart's

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<sup>92</sup> Sharpe, ““No Permission to be Idle””, p. 279

destination are pronounced: described as “Paradise”, a “secret peace”, the farmer's journey is heralded by birdsong, a common symbol in medieval literatures for heaven or heavenly ascent commonly used in the works of Guillaume de Lorris and Geoffrey Chaucer.<sup>9394</sup> The first and second lines of the poem are also indicative of some form of divine journey or ascension: the imagery of the couplet, “... the sun / Set the black wintry hedge aflame”<sup>95</sup> appears evocative of the image of the burning bush from the biblical book of Exodus (3:1–3:17) as Moses is appointed by Adonai to lead the Israelites out of Egypt and into Canaan, the “Promised Land”.

Spatially, Auden's central image of the road is interesting: this particular road-space is liminal not only in the sense that it represents a non-space between two polarities as it is possible to observe of the railway track in the juvenilia period, but exists as liminal in that it has no fixed landscape itself. The road-space of “The Walk” appears to shift dependent upon its human capital: both parties are travelling the same road, however there appear to be different iterations of the same space co-extant — paradise and the narrator's path — effecting a form of layered liminality. The transience inherent in the notion is palpable: again, there is a powerful sense of anxiety within the poem as the narrator observes the dogcart proceed into an arena from which he is excluded. Although the road-space in a predominance of film and literature often functions as a permissive arena where a protagonist can function independent from social systems that they may not agree with<sup>96</sup>, a space that

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<sup>93</sup> David Chamberlain, ‘Signs and Symbols in Chaucer: Convention and Originality’ in *Signs and Symbols in Chaucer*, ed. by John Hermann & John Burke, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1981) pp. 43-81 (p. 49)

<sup>94</sup> James Wimsatt, “‘The Book of the Duchess’: Secular Elegy or Religious Vision?” in *Signs and Symbols in Chaucer*, ed. by John Hermann & John Burke, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1981) pp. 113-130 (p. 120)

<sup>95</sup> Auden, *Juvenilia*, p. 57

<sup>96</sup> Rebecca Umland, *Outlaw Heroes as Liminal Figures of Film and Television*, (Jefferson: McFarland

emancipates the traveller from a “social structure that impinges upon dreams and aspirations”<sup>97</sup>, Auden's own narrator is clearly fettered by their anxieties regarding the juxtaposition of antiquity and modernity, rural identity and industrial Modernism and their place in the landscape itself. There is a social, geographic and generational gap that the narrator — and by extension, perhaps, Auden himself — appears to feel somewhat beleaguered by; a growing awareness of their own inability to transcend the boundary between antiquity and modernity, rural and urban that it is possible to observe done with apparent ease in poetry from the previous year, such as “Appletreewick”. It is, perhaps, this anxiety that heralds the rise of the industrial juvenilia: this “journey poetry”, written between the polarities of the pastoral and the industrial, represents a vital step in the eventual genesis of the poet’s mature style and the emergence of the acceptance of exile that we might find in poems such as “Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed”.

#### **4.6 Conclusion: Wræclastas**

The ways in which Auden addresses the spaces of the juvenilia period are nothing if not thematically diverse. From the introspective landscapes of the railway and their darker reflections upon mortality to the growing sense of industrial scepticism that dominates the landscapes of poems such as “The Canal, Froghall” and indeed, the burgeoning unease that is apparent in the poet's early conceptualisations of modernity and its focus on the urban in poems such as “The

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& Company, 2016), p. 1

<sup>97</sup> Ronald Primeau, *The Romance of the Road: The Literature of the American Highway*, (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1996), p. 69

Walk”, these works appear a particularly nebulous subset of the juvenilia, and represent one of the more difficult tasks in analysing the poet's juvenilia period in that they textually share little save for the character of the wandering narrator.

Auden's *Wanderer* is a strange figure when we consider the simplicity of character that often populates the landscapes of literary juvenilia: beset by a series of anxieties that are more befitting of a mature poet, reflecting upon a lifetime of societal change as opposed to a poet prior to the publication of their first collection — indeed, anxieties and themes appear in these earliest poems that are not to resurface until the advent of the misanthropic Auden of “The Unknown Citizen”. Regarded individually, each poem represents a curious, often vacillating set of reflections upon both the romanticism of early public transportational systems and the inherent anxieties in greater interconnectedness that characterise twentieth-century Modernism as a literary period. In the same manner as the pumping-engine of “Heavy Date” has its origins in the decaying lead-mining landscapes of Auden's north Pennine juvenilia, the societal scepticism and sense of isolation that we could associate with mid- to late Auden is found in its nucleic and least refined form within the poetry of the juvenilia period, and in this, an analysis of these poems represents a significant contribution not only to the study of Auden's earliest works but also functions as to augment the extant criticism on a much more critically viable period of the poet's career.

There is, however, a secondary observation that it appears blithe to ignore to make when regarding Auden's early journey poetry, especially when considering the texts that appear to exert the most tangible influence over the poet's juvenilia period.

Regarded as a fragmentary narrative as opposed to a series of self-contained pieces of poetry, the works in this chapter are akin to a journey in themselves, detailing the wandering narrator's progression as a character through the alien landscapes of Auden's esoteric geographies, struggling with exile, waxing often mournful on the loss of previous identities. In this, there is an obvious comparison to be made: as this thesis ascertains, Auden's own *Wanderer* is perhaps patterned after another literary traveller, and in examining this association further it is possible to explore Auden's Modernist anxieties further.

The titular warrior *Er Eardstapa* ('the earth-stepper') of the Anglo-Saxon Exeter Book's *The Wanderer* is a character whose journey both spiritual and physical appears to resonate within Auden's wandering narrator. The narrative of the tenth-century poem begins as the Wanderer remembers a halcyon past as a young man, being part of a band of kinsmen in the ancestral halls of his liege-lord, and details the manner in which during a battle, all the previous foundations of his previous life are lost as his kinsmen and liege-lord perish and he is driven from his homeland. He mourns them, and wanders the wanders the *wræclastas*<sup>98</sup> — the “paths of exile”,<sup>99</sup> all the while lamenting the landscape that he has lost:

Where are those men? Where is  
the hoard-sharer?  
Where is the house of the feast, where is the hall's uproar?  
Alas, bright cup! Alas, burnished fighter!  
Alas, proud prince! How that time has passed,  
dark under night's helm, as though it never had been!<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Dunning, & Bliss, p. 106

<sup>99</sup> Alexander, *The Earliest English Poems*, p. 90

<sup>100</sup> Alexander, *The Earliest English Poems*, p. 93

As a result of his loss, the Wanderer becomes the *earne anhogan*<sup>101</sup> — the “wretched, solitary one”,<sup>102</sup> the “lone outcast”,<sup>103</sup> exiled and left to wander the land and seas in a vain quest for peace and for kinship — indeed, not dissimilar to the manner in which Auden conceptualises the effects of the intrusive presence of modernity within the ancient, halcyon landscapes of the juvenilia. Driven from an ancient homeland, becalmed between the polarities of the early pastoral poetry and the advent of the deified industrial north as it exists in “Allendale” and “The Pumping-Engine, Cashwell”, the wandering narrator of this journey poetry appears destined to wander the liminal spaces of the juvenilia eternally. Denied entrance into the pastoral past of “The North” and “Appletreewick”, they are exiled to transience, and yet despite their unassailable youth and outsider status they appear unable to come to terms with a new identity although modernity appears, for Auden, inevitable. “Wyrð bið ful aræd!”<sup>104</sup> exclaims the Wanderer: “Fate is set fast!”<sup>105</sup>

It is a textual gesture that does exemplify the often contradictory nature of Auden's juvenilia; attempting to adapt to modernity by way of a narrative patterning borrowed from a piece of tenth-century verse. The notion does, however, go some way as to contextualising the final dominant landscape theme within the context of the juvenilia period identified in the introduction to this thesis, that of transient identity and the itinerant nature of Auden's recurrent narrator. It is devices such as these that afford Auden's juvenilia its uniquely contemplative quality, equal parts

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<sup>101</sup> Dunning, & Bliss, p. 111

<sup>102</sup> Robert Diamond, *Old English Grammar & Reader*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1970) p.153

<sup>103</sup> Alexander, *The Earliest English Poems*, p. 91

<sup>104</sup> Dunning, T. & Bliss, A. (Eds.) (1969) *The Wanderer*, London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, p. 105-106

<sup>105</sup> Alexander, *The Earliest English Poems*, p. 90

Romantic boyish idolatry and the burgeoning fear of society at large when faced with the spectral presences of twentieth-century conflict and change, and whilst nebulous in aspect, represent an invaluable contribution to the ways in which scholarly Modernism addresses the transition between traditional and Modernist literatures.

## **Conclusion**

### **5.0: Methodology**

The aims of this research project were threefold: first, this exercise in reading W. H. Auden's earliest works was done with the intention of demonstrating the importance and continued relevance of the study of literary juvenilia to mainstream scholarly criticism. Secondly, this thesis aimed to develop this notion of the application of juvenilia studies relative to Auden's works from the 1922–1928 period of his career. Examining the ways in which these poems might augment modern scholarship and the critical landscape of Auden studies within Modernism, this thesis aimed to demonstrate not only how metaphysical analysis of these poems reveals a degree of poetic skill previously unexplored in early Auden, but how understanding these poems is a vital component of developing a comprehensive understanding of many of the poet's later works. Thirdly, this thesis intended to reaffirm the presence of a 'Landscape Auden', developing the study of nation, locality and nature within a scholarly canon that appears preoccupied with the narratives of Modernity and cosmopolitanism that characterise to a large degree the poet's later works. By way of conclusion, the key findings of each chapter of this thesis will now be considered against these tenets of enquiry, exploring the contribution made by each section to the study of Auden's works, the study of literary juvenilia and the development of the scholarly notion of a 'Landscape Auden'.



## **5.1: Auden and Mortality**

The first chapter of this thesis explored the poet's early relationship with the notion of mortality. Taking its cue from the Freudian notion that writing after the events of the First World War was often motivated by the desire to seek new ways of understanding and contextualising death in the wake of the large-scale mortalities of the conflict, it explored the ways in which poems such as "Who Stands, the Crux Left of the Watershed" and "Rookhope (Weardale, Summer 1922)" employ a language suggestive of the figure of the ghost to amplify the poet's attitudes toward the decline of the Pennine mining industry, attempting to afford the industrial landscape the sense of permanence that the notion of living beyond death provides. The analysis then went on to expand on this apparent quest for permanence and the fear inherent in the changes that Modernity appeared to bring to the poet's early landscapes, exploring the ways that death functions within a number of these early poems as a means of connecting with previous landscape identities in poems such as "The Menhir" and "Below Me, Ticknall Lay But in the Light". Drawing on katabasis narratives common to both Norse-Icelandic and Classical mythologies, it became apparent that Auden's usage of the man-made structure in these early poems represents a fear of mortality and a means of persisting in some form beyond bodily death, concluding with reference to the notion of premature death in "Elegy" that this largely stems from the poet's relationship with the loss of human life in conflict of the previous decade.

This chapter demonstrates the ability of many works from the juvenilia period to foster the development of a much deeper understanding of the poet's

sources and sites of textual inspiration in scholarly criticism. It demonstrates that a sustained analysis of these unpractised early poems, their meanings much less obscured by the mature poet's sense of subtlety and metaphor, reveal a much greater depth of information regarding the poet's relationship with death than in later poems that share their subject matter such as "A Thought on Death" or "Funeral Blues". This scholarship contributes to the scholarly criticism of the poet more generally, and it becomes evident that particular character of mortality within Auden's poetic works finds its genesis in a sense of national mourning, be it for the dead of the previous decade or a bygone form of identity. In terms of the development of this thesis' concept of the 'Landscape Auden', it demonstrates the power of landscape as a transformative medium within Auden's poetic canon: that there exists a distinct linkage between the concepts of landscape and mortality for the young Auden is telling. The natural and industrial landscapes of the juvenilia function as an arena in which exists for the poet the possibility of transcending mortality, where the poet is simultaneously able to scry into the past and transmute the unrealised futures of the previous generation into reanimation, either by way of a ghostly presence or a return to a possessive Earth.

## **5.2: Auden and Northerliness**

The second chapter of this thesis focused on the manner in which the poet addresses a specifically Northern landscape, positing that the Pennine geographies that characterise the juvenilia period occupy a paracosmic space within Auden's poetry, and how this notion interacts with ideas of nostalgia, heroism and the Victorian ideal of Hodge. Positing that Auden's early pastoral poetry is an exercise

in superimposing a folkloric past onto contemporary Pennine geographies, it explores the poet's tendency to mythologise Northernness and afford it status as something perhaps elysian; often recondite, ancient and separate from Modernity, accessible only to the select. In examining industrial poems such as "The Old Leadmine", it is evident that again the relationship between the poet and the Northern landscape becomes complicated by trauma, the First World War and the spectral presence of the war dead leading to the genesis of Auden's industrial Hodge-figure and a prevalence of heroic patterning during the latter part of the juvenilia period. Finally, in locating Auden's Crux and the ways in which Auden leaves behind Hodge, there is effective a demonstration of the bisected readership established in the analysis of the poem "Appletreewick" and an exploration of the manner in which Auden's shifting sense of North only finds true form in the collapse of the industries that define it.

This exploration of northerliness makes evident the ways in which it is possible to foster new critical understandings of a poet's later works by way of the consideration and analysis of their juvenilia period, demonstrating the applicability of literary juvenilia as a resource: the scholarly comprehension of Auden's later poems such as "New Year Letter" and "Heavy Date" rely upon information gleaned from this period of poetic genesis. This particular chapter contributes to the broader field of Auden scholarship, and the clandestine northerly geographies of poetry such as "In Praise of Limestone" and "Heavy Date" are established as part of a developing sense of Northernness as opposed to isolated incidences within Auden's later works, solidifying the critically overlooked notion of Auden as a Northern poet. The analysis of these poems reiterates the presence of the Landscape Auden, a poet

concerned with the provincial, the northern and the esoteric as well as the modern and cosmopolitan.

### **5.3: Auden and Nation**

The third chapter of this thesis explored the figure of the tree and its relationship with ideas of nation and national identity within Auden's early poetry. Establishing an arboreal map of the juvenilia period, the analysis is structured with reference to the key species — the oak, the elm, the willow, the rook and the ash — that characterise these tree poems and what they represent in terms of the shifting and disparate facets of the poet's conceptualisation of Englishness. Exploring the notion of the tree as a symbol fundamentally connected with social cohesion, the chapter then explores the influence of Edward Thomas' melancholy elm mythos on these early poems and how it shapes Auden's textual representations of nation after the events of the First World War. In dissecting this sense of national mourning what once again becomes evident is a textual retreat from modern: utilising the oak and its symbolism as synonymous with a historical 'Golden Age' of Englishness, the rook as a link to mythological and Old English narratives and the willow and ash as permissive of living in some form beyond death, Auden explores an alternative Englishness within the arena of the wooded landscape.

This form of analysis again contributes to the formal study of literary juvenilia in that it permits an insight into the works of the mature poet in that they might be viewed as a progression of ideas. W. H. Auden's shifting nationalities throughout his publishing career and indeed, the poet's nebulous relationship with

nationalism render any conclusions drawn regarding the topic deeply subjective, an issue that the study of the poet's first, nucleic conceptualisations of nationalism might undermine: the echo of Auden's attitudes to the First World War can be seen in his attitudes to the second. With regard to the more general study of Auden's poetry, it also contributes in no small way to the critical milieu in that it explores and analyses a facet of the poet's works that has received little scholarly attention, the notion of Auden as a nature poet, in addition to augmenting the debate on the poet's shifting attitudes toward the concepts of nationalism and conflict. The critical notion of the Landscape Auden too is reaffirmed by the metaphysical analysis of tree symbolism, demonstrating that not only does Auden display an intense early focus on landscape, nation and natural flora but also reveals the way that he fashions a microcosm of the English landscape in its trees a developing sense of the natural landscape as a theatre for social commentary.

#### **5.4: Auden and the Journey**

The fourth chapter of this thesis is perhaps more complex in its intention: as opposed to exploring landscape with reference to a single dominant theme such as mortality, Northernness or Nation, it analyses Auden's early representations of transport and motion and their function as pathways through the landscapes of the juvenilia by examining the more spatial tenets of their setting. In examining these poems it became evident that Modernity is, once more, an uneasy and invasive presence within the landscape — the ideas of liminality, impersonality and surveillance associated with public transport spaces in "In a Train", "The Mail-Train, Crewe" and "Last Bus, Saturday Night" demonstrate that for Auden the greater

interconnectedness of Modernity also heralds a dearth of the romantic and a threat to previously secure provincial identities. They are still often mythological in their processes: metaphysical readings of “Flowers and Stationmaster” reveal the ways in which Auden augments the modern with the folkloric as a means of reconciling the ancient landscape with the new interconnectedness of his contemporary world, but the sense of trepidation surrounding the act of travel remains. This is, however, untrue of the few poems from the juvenilia period where the narrator of the poem traverses the landscape on foot. In their primordial form, freed from the anxieties of Modernity, Auden’s Wanderer appears beset by the fundamental notion that they are both simultaneously within the halcyon past of the landscape and are also far removed from it, exiled to the road by their outsider status as a product of a more modern world.

This final section of the thesis is illustrative of the manner that literary juvenilia might inform much broader fields and debates within scholarship: the sense of isolation and unease obvious in the poet’s early explorations of public transport is interdisciplinary in its potential. It reveals concerns not only relevant to literary scholarship but that are of import when examining more general societal reactions to the changing world of the nineteen-twenties, and explores the binary of urban and rural in a manner that is applicable to both political and social studies of the era. It also contributes to the scholarly criticism of Auden’s works in that its analysis of the poet’s relationship with the micro-level tenets of modernity — greater societal interconnectedness, the rise of public surveillance and the decline of provincial communities — addresses facets of Auden’s interactions with the changing world that appear absent from most extant scholarly criticism on the poet’s relationship

with Modernity. I would suggest that this analysis also reimagines the concept of the landscape Auden, exploring landscape as a more physical entity that might be encountered or traversed as well as a thematic antithesis to the modern and cosmopolitan. In looking more at the corporal properties of the spaces within which these poems take place, the notion of Auden as a landscape poet is explicated, prompting discourse on the more specific nature of the poet's relationship with these spaces as opposed to merely registering the idea that there are a number of rural and provincial vistas to be found within Auden's poetic canon.

### **5.5: Future Research Pathways**

This research demonstrates the potential of the study of literary juvenilia as a means of expanding and augmenting extant scholarly criticism of an author or movement, and goes some way as to challenge the notion that juvenilia is either not useful or not appropriate as a resource for better understanding these works. It does, however, raise the notion that the under-use of juvenilia as a resource for research need be addressed. Although there have been some forays into the collection and publication of Modernist juvenilia, it remains that the *study* of the available unpublished works of these poets and authors is required, and can contribute greatly to academic understandings of these figures and the literatures of the twentieth century. This might be undertaken by way of discussion of the juvenilia of Auden's most prominent contemporaries, such as Christopher Isherwood and Edward Upward's *Mortmere Stories*, or even the juvenilia of poets who display Auden's influence in terms of landscape such as Ted Hughes.

In its development and application of a new explorative strategy for reading poetry, this exploration of Auden's earliest works has established the fact that there is considerable scope for further research. In utilising and indeed, prioritising the metaphysical analysis of poetry it is made evident that there is a wealth of information within poems that a more textual analysis would find difficult to access, and the study of these intertexts, allusions and connotations would be useful when applied to other poetic works characterised by their indecipherable or nebulous nature.

This project has also aimed to re-evaluate Auden from a fresh perspective. In doing so, it has incorporated discussion of works which literary criticism has not usually considered as part of Auden's poetical canon, particularly ones from the earliest part of the juvenilia period. It has also explored them apropos the notions of landscape, geography and locality, a series of themes that are under-represented in both Auden studies and within the critical landscape of Modernist literatures. It has, in addition to this, identified new affinities and sources of inspiration throughout the juvenilia period and expanded the current scholarly understanding of the poet's most prominent influences, re-evaluating the genesis of the poet's mature style and voice. This research is not, however, exhaustive: there are many smaller aspects of these early poems that have not been covered by this thesis, both regarding the notion of landscape and the poet's developing textual sensibilities in general. A more comprehensive understanding of Auden's juvenilia period and indeed, later poetry would be facilitated by exploratory study into the relationships between the natural landscape and the human body within these poems, the natural landscape and the struggle for masculine identity in the wake of the First World War. The emergence



of Auden's interrogation of the High Anglicanism of his parents would also represent a particular point of critical interest especially with reference to the poet's shifting relationship with Christianity, as would the ways in which the poet addresses the idea of the city following the focus on the rural industrial landscape of the 1924–7 period.

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