UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA

PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM LETRAS/ INGLÊS E LITERATURA CORRESPONDENTE

W. H. Auden's inter-war poetry: a political use of ambiguity

por

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Tese submetida à Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina em cumprimento
Parcial dos requisitos para obtenção do grau de

DOUTOR EM LETRAS

FLORIANOPOLIS

ABRIL, 2008

Esta Tese de Gelson Peres DaSilva, intitulada “Auden’s inter-war poetry: a political use of Ambiguity” foi julgada adequada e aprovada em sua forma final pelo Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras/Inglês e Literatura Correspondente da Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina para fins de obtenção do grau de

DOUTOR EM LETRAS
Área de concentração: Inglês e Literatura Correspondente
Opção: Literatura de Língua Inglesa

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Florianópolis, 25 de abril de 2008.

To Jane(cir) Almansa, and Nilda Rocha Pinto (*in memoriam*).

“Everything [is] itself and at the same time something else.”

John Banville in *The Untouchable* (1997).

“O erotismo implica uma reivindicação do instante contra o tempo, do indivíduo contra a coletividade”.
Simone de Beauvoir

ACKNOWLEDGEMETS

I would like to thank the supervision of my advisor Prof. Dr. Maria Lúcia Milléo Martins who believed in this project and helped me through the years of this research. Her patient support not only guided me in reading and analyzing and writing, but especially encouraged me to finish the dissertation by providing me needed advice and suggestions. I thank my sister Sueli and my brother Jeferson for their presence in my life. I would also like to thank the following friends and/or colleagues whose support was fundamental to do this course: (in alphabetical order) Adriano Araújo, Prof. Dr. João Carlos de Carvalho, Denise Deon, Giane Inês Faust, Prof. Dr. Tacel Leal, Silvia Graciela López, Rejane Marson, Prof. Dr. Mailce Mota, Prof. Dr. Alba Olmi, Humberto Luís Olsen, Júlio Orviedo, Prof. Dr. Margarida Gandara Rauen, Fredi Resener, Prof. Dr. Cleidson Rocha, Prof. Dr. Karen Adami Rodrigues, Prof. Dr. Odiombar Rodrigues, Carmen Regina Rohr, Prof. Dr. Osvanilson Veloso.

I thank all my professors and classmates at PGI, as well as the staff of the Secretaria: João and Priscilla for their constant help and support.

ABSTRACT

W. H. AUDEN'S INTER-WAR POETRY

A POLITICAL USE OF AMBIGUITY

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2008

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This dissertation focuses the historical context of the inter-war period in England and Wystan Hugh Auden's poetry. Auden's poetic work has been read, interpreted, analysed and criticised considering his biography, a form of reading that subtly differs from autobiography. I think that his texts are autobiographical pieces that denote the 1920s and 1930s social, cultural, economic and political changes through which England went. For this I analyse autobiographical traces in his poetry and his specific use of ambiguity that constitutes in my point of view a political strategy that shelters the author before the social censorship against homosexuals in that period of the English History.

The poet disguises his subjectivity in masks or third person as a protagonist forced to behave performatively in order to survive in his society. The poems show individuals living in a conservative society and their impossibility to live a love relationship in its completion.

Protected by ambiguity, the poet is able to keep a place in society free from the cruelties engendered against homosexuals who were considered subversive individuals in that epoch.

Auden's political use of ambiguity is thus a strategy to hide his homosexuality, what elicits his concern with gender matters. Moreover, the poems show the poet's awareness towards social class. By bringing up gender and class, Auden's inter-war poetics can contribute to gay, lesbian and queer studies as a form to show socio-cultural views of homosexuality and homosexuals' quotidian lives.

RESUMO

AUNDEN'S POETRY IN THE INTER-WAR:

A POLITICAL USE OF AMBIGUITY

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Esta tese focaliza o contexto histórico do período entre-guerras na Inglaterra e a poesia de Wystan Hugh Auden. A obra poética de Auden tem sido lida, interpretada, analisada e criticada considerando-se sua biografia, uma forma de leitura que sutilmente difere de autobiografia. Eu penso que seus textos são peças autobiográficas que denotam as mudanças sociais, culturais, econômicas e políticas pelas quais a Inglaterra passou. Para isto, eu analiso os traços autobiográficos em sua poesia e seu uso específico da ambiguidade que se constitui em meu ponto de vista em uma estratégia política que protege o autor diante da censura social contra os homossexuais naquele período da História da Inglaterra.

O poeta esconde sua subjetividade em máscaras ou em terceira pessoa como um protagonista forçado a comportar-se performaticamente a fim de sobreviver em sua sociedade. Os poemas mostram indivíduos vivendo em uma sociedade conservadora e sua [dos indivíduos] impossibilidade de viver relacionamentos de amor em sua completude. Protegido pela ambigüidade, o poeta é capaz de manter um lugar na sociedade, livre das crueldades

engendradas contra os homossexuais que eram considerados indivíduos subversivos naquela época.

O uso político da ambiguidade por Auden é assim uma estratégia para esconder sua homossexualidade, o que demonstra sua preocupação com questões de gênero. Além disso, os poemas mostram a consciência do poeta para com classes sociais. Ao abordar gênero e classe, a poética entre-guerras de Auden pode contribuir para os estudos gays, lésbicos e *queer* como forma de mostrar as visões sócio-culturais da homossexualidade e das vidas quotidianas dos homossexuais.

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Chapter I

Introduction

This dissertation is the result of a study that started in 1997 at Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, and has continued in my personal and professional life. In that year I started my Master's degree in which my interest was to do research on homosexuality and its importance in the academic world. In my thesis I did research on the English Renaissance theatre play *Edward II* (1591) by Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593) and the adaptation to the homonymous cinematographic production by Derek Jarman (1947-1991) in the United Kingdom in the 1991. In such work, my focus was homophobia as a socio-political strategy to segregate and prevent homosexuals to access higher socio-political levels. As in the Academy this sort of work is directly related to gender studies for involving human sexuality and social class, I decided to extend my studies in this area of knowledge in my doctorate. Leaving drama aside, but never abandoning it, I began a long and fascinating research on the poetic production by Wystan Hugh Auden (1907-1973) written in the inter-war period (1919-1939) in England.

Auden's lyric production in that period came out as a challenge for me, a Brazilian citizen whose foreign cultural condition in terms of English language and History required a cautious and deep task. My analyses on his poems made me perceive and recognise with critics of his work that the poet's geniality in his writing, since it presents his personal use of ambiguity and an intricate linguistic construction that defies, as my study supported me to say, even English native speakers and his compatriot researchers and critics.

This view has been reinforced and increased in the biographical studies by a frequent criticism that insists on this method to read and interpret his poems turning to his biographical data collected in his letters and writers' books who found in his life a specificity that levelled him to other famous poets of English language. As a homosexual positioned man, Auden's

poetry was and is still pointed as a gay production that collaborates for gender studies and especially to gay and lesbian movements for civil rights throughout the world. Not discarding these contributions, I found that my research should be done by considering his poetry as autobiography, causing criticism and queer studies to be revaluated and enriched. Due to it, I write about the importance this line of criticising a poetic work by presenting historical and theoretical information so my readers can perceive its importance in humane sciences and human rights. According to my exposure, the reader can perceive that my purpose is to emphasise that a poem must be read and interpreted as an autobiography, since I find biographical information limited to such endeavour.

Alan Bray writes that "there was a historical dimension to homosexuality: it had a history" (8). As biography is historical, it is relevant to say that recently in the History of the United Kingdom, a social change has brought benefits to homosexuals for the possibility of same-sex couples to get married and so to have a civil right guaranteed and accepted in legal terms, putting them in equality of treatment with heterosexuals. Joseph Cady writes that "significant differences have clearly occurred in the homosexual situation over time, and homosexuality can never be discussed totally independent of historical and social conditions" (12). Homosexuality was legally prohibited and repressed for centuries in this European nation and still in many countries around the world, causing social discomfort to individuals and organised groups. As we have seen, moved by individuals and groups, laws have been reviewed so as to defend their sexual choices.

The diverse crises in the inter-war period exposed the fragility of human society in the English culture. However, they seem not to have been sufficient to contribute to a social development that could guarantee human rights to homosexuals as heterosexuality had been receiving. As we will see here the political and economic factors did not consider that human sexual practice part of their interests, mainly due to the Christian tradition that valorised

nuclear family as the basis of society. As I perceive, Auden, whose upbringing was Christian, positioned himself inside the politics of the closet that permitted his particular engagement in social matters such as homosexual practices are regarded. For Richard Dellamora, the poet represents an empowerment for the queer culture for finding in ambiguity a wise form of protest strategically to wall his privacy so as to protect himself from censorship.

The advances obtained by gays and lesbians in the British Law puts forth a strong effort from humanitarian movements that have attempted to make these people more visible and accepted. Although we must recognise such conquests, we also must point out the on-going prejudice and social controversy that they have dealt with, since legal changes do not mean concomitant and abrupt social ones. If in some European nations and other countries they have achieved recognition as citizens with wider rights, in others they have confronted total absence of constitutional respect as insistent conservative positioning negates their existence and this sexual position as disease or shameful behaviour. Since the 1960s, nevertheless, homosexuality has been widely discussed in the media, while gay and lesbian studies, queer theory and criticism have become important lines of research in North American and British institutions such as Stanford and the University of Sussex.

According to Dellamora's historical overview of the production of gay male theory "Gay male criticism is the most recent of the critical/theoretical discourses to emerge from the 'liberation' movements – new left, anti-Vietnam War, counter-culture, black, and feminist – of the 1960s and early 1970s" (324). Likewise, Richard R. Bozorth in his *Auden's Game of Knowledge* writes before his introduction about "Between Men ~ Between Women [that] is a forum for current lesbian and gay scholarship in the humanities and social sciences." It includes

> A series [of] both books that rest within specific traditional disciplines and are substantially about gay men and, bisexuals, or lesbians and books that are interdisciplinary in ways that reveal new insights into gay, bisexual, or lesbian experience, transform traditional disciplinary methods in consequence of the

> perspectives that experience provides, or begin to establish lesbian and gay studies as a freestanding inquiry. Established to contribute to an increased understanding of lesbians, bisexuals, and gay men, the series, also aims to provide through that understanding a wider comprehension of culture in general.

This forum is an example in the Academy turned to cultural studies referent to homosexuality and its wide approach as an important line in humane sciences.

Gay activism in itself is a political movement that has a lot in common with the early feminist pursuit of equal rights in the countries that form the United Kingdom. Mary Lyndon Shanley points out that in the last decades of the nineteenth century British women struggled in Parliament in order to alter the laws which did not guarantee them social rights so that they were practically confined to their home, bearing and raising children (79-80). Although laws have not confined homosexuals to their homes, those who could not escape the social stigma of despising individuals have suffered homophobia and been persecuted as criminals, sinners or ill people, as was the case with Oscar Wilde.

Dellamora addresses homosexuality particularly at the end of the nineteenth century in England. He emphasises his writing on Wilde who, he believes, "established a diverse, highly self-conscious set of strategies for articulating homosexual existence and critiquing dominant norms" (325). He considers several other artists such as E. M. Forster and W. H Auden who empowered what he calls "queer culture." Besides artists, he points out Alan Sinfield who has studied "cross-class sexual contacts among homosexuals during and after the war" (325) as well as about closeted homosexuality in London theatre. For Dellamora, the publication of a volume about gay studies in the academic periodical *College English* in 1974 was the point of departure of "a specifically homosexual literary tradition, a process that has continued to engage a number of gay critics" (325) which in the 1980s generally follows either feminist approaches to civil rights of Foucauldian power analysis.

Edward Mendelson, one of the biggest experts on Auden's work, compiled the latter's extensive work. In addition, Auden's theatre play entitled *Paid on Both Sides* (1928), the poems written from 1927 until 1973, the year when he died. As seen in Chapter 02, he did not write only in English language, but also in German. Andrew Sanders informs that in the early thirties he worked as a free-lance writer and published books with Louis MacNeice and Christopher Isherwood. In 1932, his reputation was consolidated by the appearance of *The Orators: An English Study*, and in 1937, by his collection *Look, Stranger!* When he left for Spain with Isherwood to participate in the civil war, he was considered the most famous of the younger English poets (557).

The considerable interest in Auden's work lies in the history of criticism in which queer studies and gay and lesbian studies are recent. The term 'queer' has been appropriated and re-examined by some authors on the purpose to shed light on its complexity as it is also used to allude to homosexuals and their behaviour. In *Cultural Politics* Alan Sinfield explains that "[queer] may be too limiting – yielding up too easily the aspiration to hold a politics of class, race, and ethnicity. On the other hand it may be over-ambitious. There is the danger that inclusion will lead to effacement" (x). As current Western culture has shown in its various manifestations, the inclusion and assimilation of homosexuals in culture becomes in time interesting to socio-economic and political purposes.

The width of the term and its intricacy is also seen by Eliane Berutti, who claims that queer studies permit significant boundary crossings, for literature is a fictional construction of life and all that it involves, such as social, anthropological and philosophical fields that become object for research. In light of queer studies, she continues, traditional socio-cultural views about gays' and lesbians' works have to be reconsidered (4). Such reconsideration can be seen as a form to show the traditional socio-cultural views that do not always correspond to what homosexuals live in their quotidian life.

Auden's work has been examined by many literary critics based on the events in his life, i.e. the biographical information seen as meaningful to the reading and interpretation of his work. The relevance of this critical line is located in experiences lived by a poet[1], exerting influence to understand his/her work, and made potential sources of meaning that can help to perceive the author expressing his world-view. For this group of critics, to ignore the social class position of a particular writer in a particular culture at a particular moment means to underestimate aspects implicit in the work. In criticism there are also those critics who account for the poet's life, for whom the interpretation relies on the work as an autobiographical. These two lines have brought out different views of an artistic piece, and the consequent polemic helps to enrich criticism. In this dissertation, I will show that both these lines, although some obvious convergences, are different.

In this introductory chapter, the focus is also the presentation of queer studies and gay and lesbian studies and their specificities. As readers can see, the concern in each causes a slight but fundamental perspective to the interpretation of poems. This dissertation aims to contribute to both lines since Auden's private homoerotic life and his poems instill a great interest of researchers. We must bear in mind that criticism is always political, exalting aspects that stress a view rather than others so that cultural products can exert their role in society.

The importance of this poet's production in that epoch relates to sexuality and class matters as far as sexual behaviour is directly connected to sociological, economic and political situations that a society lives. Therefore, the study of that specific moment in English history is due to research choices that limited my analyses and to its specific socio-political and economic characteristics.

[1] In this dissertation, for stylistic reasons, I decided to use the third person 'he' and its derivates, him, his, to refer to all nouns whose gender is not marked.

As I show, the British culture concerned with its appearance in the world has stimulated heterosexuality by basing itself on the Christian culture implanted in the isle. One of the forms to prevent homosexuality was to bash same-sex practices seen as subversive against the biological laws of Nature that rule human reproduction. For long centuries, this group was linked to sodomy, being in the last decades of the 19th century named after the medical term ‘homosexualism’ that spread throughout Europe. Henceforth, broadly known as a clinical view of deviation and disturb of personality that had to be healed, until the last thirty years of the 20th century, the medical authorities came to accept it as another expressivity of the complex human sexuality. Such new perception of homosexual practices received a less hostile treatment being then partly ‘sheltered’ under the name of ‘homosexuality’ that decreased the pathological view that it never had in many pre-Christian civilizations. This change has shifted the socio-political view of homosexuals with a little more open-minded approach by few Western societies.

This other view has partially benefited not only the individuals who assume this sexuality as a life style, but also those who although involve themselves in these practices consider themselves as heterosexuals. Thus the tolerance obtained has allowed these two groups to live in society, being more respected. The presumed optimistic change of the social view of homosexuals has not ceased and prevented prejudice, and what has been seen and verified through history is that homosexual practices have been treated so on bases related to economic and political spheres. In other words, the powerful classes have realised that homosexuals comprehend a group of individuals who are a potential slice of society that due to its particular characteristics can consume the production of a continuous growing industrial market. As consequence, homosexuals who do not have privileges of the prosperous classes have been despicably treated, ‘living’ in subhuman conditions exemplified by prostitution. Moreover, many have been attacked to death by extremist anti-gays groups, and/or sentenced

to death under the excuse of behaving against human laws that have ‘safeguarded’ the good costumes of many societies.

Queer studies hold the central idea that gender, class and race are politically constructed in society, considering the relevance of conceptions, manifestations, reception of the intricate and complex cultural products from diverse epochs. Gender studies help us to see that differences and notions of what man and woman, sex, sexuality and eroticism are and that appear to promote privileges and/or advantages to men in many cultures more than to women, to heterosexuals more than homosexuals and bisexuals. In terms of class, some individuals are relegated to a social treatment based on their economic reality that differs from others. And race, that is not our central interest here, is in other examples a reason that attempts to explain circumstances that segregate individuals in society by benefiting white people in general, and neglecting coloured ones in the European and American continents: Negroes and Amerindians are left to a level of subhuman living possibilities.

By considering gender and class, we will find ingredients that increase the definitions of individuals and societies definitions and their agencies. As we analyse the poems in Chapter 04 from the autobiographical perspective, I find some information on his biography relevant: born in 1907 in York, north of England, a white homosexual man, into a traditional Christian English family, whose upbringing and education granted him an intellectual profession as a university teacher should also be well thought-out as his work is regarded. I have not consulted any specific biography on Auden’s life; rather, my knowledge was obtained in my readings of some authors mentioned here.

Auden’s work is autobiographical seen in a contextual analysis that encompasses historical events such as an English strict social censorship that not only forbade male-male sexual relations, but also the social class division that structured human interrelations in sex, sexuality, and erotic terms. Auden was privileged for being a man born into an upper social

class, son to a physician and an honoured mother, in a nation as England, which in the first decades of the 20th century was known as the most extensive empire in history. Such facts seem to have caused his work to be treated in an especial mode that could not be tainted by a 'crooked' behaviour such as homosexuality. That is why, I believe, it is impossible to study Auden's poetry but from the queer perspective that stresses it as a form to exert a very particular politics, since these studies and gay and lesbian studies provide us a political view interested in showing other approaches for their objects of study.

This political dealing towards homosexuals in the Western culture is observed by Gayle S. Rubin whose words show a notable socio-political manifestation that confronts human values damaged by the interests of the dominant class: "sexuality in Western societies has been structured within an extremely punitive social framework, and has been subjected to very formal and informal controls" (quoted in Abelove, 10). Such claimed 'corrective' social construction manifested itself in an immediate need of many anti-gay social laws both in the United Kingdom and still in some States of the U.S.A based on stark conservative values that strive to maintain the 'sacred' nuclear family preached by law-makers and people guides under the alleged Christian moral.

Rubin cites many examples of that hostile social behaviour to gays since the beginning of the twentieth century. Her illustrations help readers to understand the political and social activism against homosexuals in the United States of America in the last century. She argues that the sexual politics adopted by federal and/or state laws expose the diverse social movements such as chases against homosexuals, which led them to flee their homes to go to another State such as California in the 1950s where tolerance to homosexuals was a reality. She also points out that the focus of many organisations of sexuality was, among other points such as prostitution, specifically around the image of the 'homosexual menace' as the 'sex offender' (quoted in Abelove, 5). She adds that, like child molesters, communists and rapists,

homosexuals were considered 'deviants' and in some U.S. States they were pursued after the World War II just as the so-called "witches" were in the late seventeenth century (5) that reminds us of a paranoia that has encompassed societies making them from time to time to find a scape-goat to carry their imperceptible psychotic guilt.

Rubin turns our attention to the Anglo-Saxon North-America: "the realm of sexuality has its own internal politics, inequities, and modes of oppression" (4) that can be verified in facts such as those in the 1970s in some U.S. States and in Canada: "police activity against gay communities has increased exponentially with many arrests and depredations of gay bars and saunas" (6). Dellamora's observation contributes to such view as he states that the North American East Coast gay activism began to resist discrimination in more overt and explicitly political fashion that formed an economic, political high mass cultural issues before Stonewall[2] in 1969 at a New York City bar (325).

As seen above, this political confront against homosexuals has also been present in British soil before, during and after the two World Wars, times when homophobia was vested of different garments that adorned its cruel methods in the United Kingdom, condemning people from all classes. The focus here will be England in the inter-war period, 1919 to 1939, and some of love poems by Auden. At the age of 22 he publishes his first book of poetry entitled *Poems* which becomes his recognisable work among the young poets of his generation. As Bozorth writes,

> apart from Walt Whitman, Oscar Wilde, and E. M. Forster, no male homosexual writer in English has achieved Auden's stature or influence. Yet he has been almost entirely ignored in academic lesbian/gay literary studies, despite his influence on English and American poets since the 1930s. One reason for this neglect may be that he can be credibly cast neither as martyr, as Oscar Wilde, nor as victim, like Hart Crane. His stature has almost certainly been a barrier as well, for unlike, say, Gertrude Stein, he

[2] Stonewall is a street in New York City where on the 28th June, 1969 gays and local police confronted in a riot that ended with many homosexuals killed. This event took place due to an intolerant attitude towards gays. Stonewall Riot is a mark in gay and lesbian political strife for civil rights and is celebrated worldwide every year.

> can hardly be recruited to show the blindness of canon-formation to lesbian and gay writers (4).

He explains that "whatever his neglect says about academic culture wars, it is also true that Auden has rarely been seen as a "gay poet" because he made it so easy to not to do so" and "who, unlike Forster, did not arrange a posthumous literary coming out" (4). Hence, Auden escaped the legal punishments to homosexuals. Nevertheless, some critics of Auden's love poems written during this period of the history of England read and analyse his work under the light of his homosexual position.

Since I decided to bring into discussion these two lines, I found of extreme relevance to write on experience due to its historical validity. Theorists such as Joan W. Scott, David Halperin, Teresa de Laurettis, and Fred Inglis bring fundamental contribution to this aspect. Among the biographist critics, names as Bozorth, Gregory Woods, Jim Elledge, Marsha Bryant and James Miller are very important in this dissertation since the purpose is also to consider their analysis which is in Bozorth's own words a tendency of reading.

To argument my point, I will discuss the autobiographical analysis and its political foundations. Critics and theorists of the subject such as Shari Benstock, James Olney, and Adriane Rich, and their views on this academic line of research help me to show that Auden's poetry of the period in question is autobiographical, permitting readers to see in them pieces written by a homosexual also addressing this marginal group.

According to Bozorth's arguments, Auden's consciousness of the need to create poetry in the way he did allows readers to comprehend strategies such as ambiguity so commonly used in modernist literature. But, as I argue, Auden used ambiguity to make his presence 'disappear' and so have his own career as an educator safeguarded and his poems published. In ambiguity Auden not only acts prudently but mainly creates a specificity of this figurative language that becomes one of the main characteristics of his writing.

Additionally, his love poems are formed by a subject whose identity is hidden in an unmentioned gender, but whose affection and desire for a beloved man is done in a description characterised by elegant words that show poetic sensitivity that remains throughout his work as the poems analysed here can show. As love poems involve eroticism, I use the elements shown by George Bataille, Audre Lorde, and Octavio Paz. For me, Auden brings out situations of homosexuals in their hidden and/or obscure lives in the middle of the quotidian of English society in the two decades. Although the narratives are conflicting as much as human relations can be, his work suggests that in that time any human sexuality in England was still practised under strict care that led law makers to extensively legislate on it. Moreover, his view is especially shown in uncertain conceptions of same-sex desire delimited by external rigid prohibitions that caused an evident internal guilt in the characters' behaviours not exclusively for emotional doubts towards their own feelings, but also and mostly by the laws that frustrated further involvements.

As to the analyses of Auden's poems as homosexual encounters are viewed as human experience in time and space, I find relevant to transcribe to this introductory chapter Halperin's notions which show the differences between sex and sexuality in his article 'Is there a History of Sexuality?':

> Sex has no history. It is a natural fact, grounded in the functioning of the body, and, as such, it lies outside of history and culture. Sexuality, by contrast, does not properly refer to some aspect or attribute of bodies. Unlike sex, sexuality is a cultural production: it represents the appropriation of the human body and of its physiological capacities by an ideological discourse. Sexuality is not a somatic fact; it is a cultural effect. Sexuality, then, does have a history – though not a very long one. (quoted in Abelove, 416).

To say that 'sex has no history' means that this is biological, a human instinct, a natural fact. He alerts readers of the crucial importance existent in the differentiation between these two words, since sex is delimited to the biological realm whereas sexuality is in the political-cultural.

Halperin adds:

> To the extent, in fact, that histories of "sexuality" succeed in concerning themselves with *sexuality*, to just that extent are they doomed to fail as *histories*, unless they also include as an essential part of their proper enterprise the task of demonstrating the historicity, conditions of emergence, modes of construction, and ideological contingencies of the very categories of analysis that undergird their own practice. Instead of concentrating our attention specifically on the history of sexuality, then we need to define and refine a new, and radical, historical sociology of psychology, an intellectual discipline designed to analyze the cultural poetics of desire, by which I mean the processes whereby sexual desires are constructed, mass-produced, and distributed among the various members of human living-groups. (quoted in Abelove, 426).

As he claims, notions of sexuality are mostly confused in their real political sense, and sexual desires constructed by culture. This fundamental knowledge not only poses clear definitions of terminology, but especially sets the grounds that sustain the various interests that the political uses of this term involves. He also shows the principle that links sexuality to a subtle construction encompassing a vast number of individuals in a specific society so as to leave its manifestations either on an unexplainable level due to its intensive imperceptible architecture or to an explanation that always turns back to biological grounds.

These subtleties of human sexuality appear in most of Auden's poetry in the 1920s and the 1930s characterising his work where love relationships are depicted not as an ideal landscape where lovers romantically move on hand to hand in public as in an idyllic pastoral world. His poetry in this period is anguishing, realistically approximating the image of human relationships and homosexuals to their contemporary reality. We see in general an omniscient speaker, that can easily be intra-diagetically, observing characters who participate in the events; or simply the speaker plays the character that remains far from the 'facts' to show readers the efforts of lovers.

This apparent simplification of the restrictions within the sites where the characters live shows itself also bound to what the poems present inside the historical context where they were composed. This was the cause that made this research turn to the importance of the

historical moment through which England went in the inter-war period. The panorama presented in Chapter One aims at giving readers a view of the socio-cultural, political and economic situations that moved men and women in their social classes in England. This view is fundamental for the understanding of the process of creation that is directly connected to the poet's control in selecting words and verse constructions.

As Chapter 02 shows, the production and perception of values related to sexuality comes from a long time ago when people's sexual behaviour was otherwise. I am referring to the Ancient[3], Middle[4] and Modern phases of history when human relationships were structured on other economic, political and social grounds, in which all the technological paraphernalia serves the rigid laws to control human behaviour. Even though, as the growth of cities was all around and the rural exodus changed economic relations, the dominant class set rules that established

[3] The Old Testament shows how the Judeo tradition follows the prejudice view against same-sex practices. The book of Genesis tells the story of two cities, Sodom and Gomorrah, which were destroyed for their various sorts of perversion, being sodomy one of the condemned ones (see Genesis, chapter 19, verses 24-38). Rowse writes about the influence that the Judeo-Christian traditional had on people in the Medieval Age. He raises the commandments in the book of Leviticus concerning the treatment that a male individual should suffer if he was found having sex with another man (1). According to Leviticus, chapter 18, verse 22, and chapter 20, verse 13, when a man lies with another man as if he were a woman (being penetrated), both will have practised abomination and be killed. Rowse reminds the reader that these commandments dated from 2,500 years before the Medieval Age (1). To emphasise the horror against same-sex acts in the New Testament, the Apostle Paul writes to the Romans, chapter 1, verses 26 and 27 similar words. In verse 26, he mentions women and calls their homosexual act "*infamous passions* contrary to nature", and in verse 27, he mentions men and calls their acts as an "inflaming sensuality,... receiving the due reward for their error."

[4] Rowse also mentions that the Christian Church found one apparently convincing criterion to preach a discourse establishing homosexual intercourse as an act of abhorrence to the human species in the Middle Age (1). He mentions the English king William Rufus (c.1056-1100) who favoured men around him (2). But according to Rowse, Rufus defied the Christian Church and its moral codes by laughing at its beliefs (2). Consequently, Rufus was reprehended by the Christian Church which "wrote him down to all posterity and deplored his habits" (2). Rowse also cites Richard Coeur-de-Lion (1157-1199) (3), a king who preferred men and for that he received a warning from the clerics in order to be mindful of the Sodom event and to be away from what was considered unlawful (3). Although both William Rufus and Richard Coeur-de-Lion were able rulers, they did not escape the Christian morality and its condemnations against their way of life. Rowse exposes that persecution and stresses the Christian hypocrisy, since some clerics preferred men, too (3).

determined actions to make social life be governed by their interests. Although rulers sited in monarchs and nobles assisted by the heavy hand of the Christian Church attempted to regulate all classes in all aspects of human life, many individuals openly or concealed opposed their commands as I could learn about the European societies in Middle and Modern Ages.

As the history of European civilizations evolved out to the complexity of urbanization and subsequent bigger control of peoples, country boundaries began to be set up after long wars. The political power until then under the heavy hand of the Christian Church was slowly and partially transferred to a royal person who counted on his 'divine' support and views and decisions. The kings and queens were sustained mainly by the land owners and clerics whose wealth enabled the former and the latter to become the dominant class, centring their authority to form and stand apart from the numerous mass of plebeians that worked to pay taxes to the State's expenses. In some cases, the nobles' intolerance towards anything that might subvert their order, such as sexuality, became the target of strong rules that led many plebeians and even nobles to death.

As I analyse in my Master Thesis entitled *Marlowe's Edward II: from page to screen* (1999), from the medieval England on, both nobles and the clerics saw in homosexual involvements a reason to destitute kings and execute plebeians, whose sexual intercourses with individuals of another class could destabilise monarchy. The dominant class claimed that such sexual practice was 'dangerous' to the perpetuation of humankind in times when good sanitary conditions in urban area were rare. But my research shows that the condemnation of homosexuality was not only based on the danger of human species procreation; it was mainly on the fear that monarchs could benefit their minions, that in general were plebeians, and thus, not accomplish the duties of their political body[5]. The powerful class could usurp power and cease any sign of sedition to the established order of

[5] their political body (i.e. the royal duties) (G. W Bredbeck, 20)

the epoch (G. W. Bredbeck, 20). As an example, Edward II (1284-1327) suffered that persecution for not satisfying the requirements of his political body. But, as Eric Sterling elicits, "if they [kings] fulfilled their duties well, alienated no one of great power, and stole moderately, their illegal doings were inconsequential" (102). As Sterling shows, homophobia was based on other reasons such as class interest and segregation than homosexual practices might mean. Alan Bray writes that until Henry VIII's law against sodomy that encompassed many forbidden practices, homosexuality was not illegal (14).

Sterling's statement declares how corruption is an old element in political milieus and was viewed and used always as a strategy within the walls of power. To exert any condemnation against homosexual practices, the powerful class of homophobe heterosexuals needed a subtle means. Art, one of the expressions of human spirit, then, has become since then a worthwhile instrument for such class to manifest and maintain its political interests in their order in society. This can be exemplified as many pieces of art in medieval epoch and in Renaissance highlight heterosexuality as the normal, if not the only, sexual position.

Rubin shows through Judith Walkowitz's words that the fierce and harsh combat against sex and sexuality was not a merit of the twentieth century. The latter observes the

> "Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, a particularly nasty and pernicious of omnibus legislation. It contained a clause making indecent acts between consenting male adults a crime, thus forming the basis of legal prosecution of male homosexuals in Britain until 1967. The clauses of the new bill were mainly enforced against working-class women, and regulated adult rather than youthful sexual behavior (quoted in Abelove, 5).

Walkowitz's words help readers to see that in combating abuses against women, the real political interest of the powerful classes was mainly to restrict women's freedom towards their sexual behaviour.

Likewise, the dominant classes established rules that would circumscribe homosexual practices either to marginal and controlled locales or to take them to trials that were legally supported to sweep off such individuals to prisons where they were banned. Len Evans in her

article “Gay Chronicles” corroborates with Walkowitz; the former lists the history of same-sex relationships in the Western culture and the approaches to them in Western chronology. Evans observes the similar treatments, despite the different tactics to control or to prevent them. Rubin also mentions Jeffrey Weeks’ contribution to gay history [whose study] particularly has shown that homosexuality as known today is a relatively modern institutional complex (quoted in Abelove, 9).

As this information shows, the issues related to human sexualities have always led and moved conservative legislators to apparently preserve an image of their nation, England, so that the treatment given to homosexuality in general was pejorative not only in literature before and in the nineteenth but also continued throughout the twentieth century exerted as sickening as possible in other artistic manifestations. Cinema, for instance, somehow appropriated literary texts, reiterating and exposing an unfair image towards the real lives of homosexuals in the Western culture: homosexuals were now visually linked to madness or deviation of personality.

In Chapter 03, I bring some reviewers’ and critics’ of Auden’s poetic works as well as theorists that approach ambiguity, autobiography, biography, and experience and its historicity. The awareness of these terms and their meaningful operations in culture seems to have been present for some artists during the inter-war period. Jon Cook writes that poets contemporary of Auden followed his example and elevated his work to an exponential importance.

> Auden enjoyed experimenting with a wide variety of poetic forms and often subverted the distinction between light verse and serious poetry. Auden was an energetic and prolific writer who saw no incompatibility between being a poet and being an intellectual. In addition to many volumes of poetry, he wrote verse plays, opera libretti, and numerous essays (377).

As critics and reviewers point to autobiographical and biographical the importance of the individual’s experience in history, they are approaching the relevance of the historicizing a

given work and its repercussions in culture. By doing so, critics assume that to read a given work, elements that bring and support veracity to an artistic piece and its validity as a cultural product must be elucidated.

As Auden himself qualified his love poems, these narratives speak of a wishful connection permeated by “infelicities and excess of his poetic youth” (quoted in Sanders, 563). What Sanders cites should be true in terms of analysis, since the subjects of sex and sexuality and their complexities in the humane sciences still deserve a more cautious study and discussion, for what Auden affirms may be just another rhetorical strategy among his many others. In Chapter 05 I present my conclusions of this work.

Chapter 2 –

The historical context in the inter-war period England

In 1917, during the World War I, Sir Edward Lutyens, in his words to his wife, expressed his vision of the conflict through which European nations were passing: “What humanity can endure and suffer is beyond belief. The battlefields – the obliteration of all human endeavour and achievement and the human achievement of destruction is bettered by the poppies and wild flowers that are as friendly to an unexploded shell as they are to a leg of garden seat in Surrey.” This citation by Andrew Sanders of the English sculptor of the monument for the war-dead shows “Lutyen’s ambiguity of the future reactions of those remembering or contemplating the wasteful devastation of war” (505). Sanders’ punctual observation elicits the profound changes the war was causing to European culture(s) as alleged geo-political reasons led some recent countries and unstable boundaries to the battle fields. Lutyen’s own words are remarkable as he leaves to readers’ imagination the unlimited human capacity to go through so opposite situations, that separate the horrors of wars and the beauty found in Nature. Sanders also raises the aspect that from such time on humanity was posing itself on a path that would carry for posterity the effects of the cruelties paradoxically surrounded by an apparent acquiescent Nature. The subsequent period of the World War I is known as ‘inter-wars’ and, in the history of England, it is characterised as a moment of contrasts: on the one side, we see stark conservatisms, on the other, individual and group manifestations towards socio-political values in the middle of inevitable innovations in many fields.

Such contrast moved Britain in political, economic, social and cultural aspects that influenced the work of Auden, so that his poetic production is characterised by a particular use of ambiguity and linguistic intricacies that are consequent of the instabilities of the time in socio-political grounds towards cultural products that might quake traditions. After the war, in which England had participated in order to guarantee its dominance in the maritime commerce, this nation maintained its influential status in the European and world political boards. According to Sanders, "Britain and the British Empire had emerged politically unscathed from the war" (505). Due to it, Fred Inglis says in *Cultural Studies*: "education and culture were to do their bit to restore the ravages of war and answer the appeal to remake a country fit for heroes to live in" (30). We can understand through Inglis' words that the English internal politics found in the instrumentation of education and the various cultural areas a way to maintain the image of the nation until then marked by a heroism that had been trespassing its history and reaffirming to people their superiority in the European and world politics. Europe was found devastated by the war and in need of a "readable, teachable way to hold off horror and despair and to quicken the always amazing human capacity to rebuild even the most devastated world" (29).

Finding its foundations quaked by war and its cost, the European image showed a continent that rather than unified on human principles, was shattered by political interests of expansionism and a delicate demarcation of boundaries as empires were knocked down and new nations came up. The need of reconstruction must be found to re-establish its self perception as a continental culture that could be exemplar to the rest of the world. Inglis declares that for England, "the ordinary politicking would no longer do; the social order needed some stronger, more mysterious cement to hold it together. The efforts until then made in the field of a 'diplomacy' recognised throughout the so called civilized world was found bare of providential effects that the era required. That mysterious cement was 'culture',

at the time defined straightforwardly as meaning the usual arts: painting, music, a bit of architecture, a few statues, and above all, poetry. Thus, politics was dissolved into culture." (31). Weirdly as it might seem even in current readings, setting on culture and its arts the amalgam to hold not only countries' internal interests but also and mainly European ones steadily joined seems to have been a fragile solution but whose functioning and effectiveness could rescue what the war had set down.

As prominent as it shows itself out, poetry was made the exponent art among the others, what, in my view, declares the emphasis the English tradition and education system delivered to so complex human abilities as writing and reading as an art form. As a reader and researcher, I would say that such readings were deliberately done under eyes wide open of teachers and governmental ideology so to drive people to a pre-determined path of interpretation that must have induced the exultation of some values and forcefully dropped out all others that did not support the aimed socio-political results. Sanders explains this by saying that due to the government's decision to create a commission that "adjudicated upon the teaching of English in England under the chairmanship of the Poet Laureate Henry Newbolt, a good hearted patriot, who fully endorsed the Commission[6]'s brief enormously to extend access to a national culture with the power to civilize and make better people of all those sympathetically put under its spell" (31). The question that will remain for posterity is: what were the parameters that delineated a good people? According to the English history, they seem to be those based on Christian golden values that presumably form good people.

[6] The Public School Clarendon Commission of 1861-4. "Thomas Arnold, as the universal reformer or re-creator of public schools. Arnold's claim to greatness does not rest upon any purely professional achievement. His moral earnestness and strong religious conviction were naturally reflected in his administration of Rugby, as, also, was his intense belief in the responsibility of his position. His moral fervour, accompanied though it was by much heart-searching and an abiding distrust of the immaturity of boy-nature, worked an extraordinary change in the life of Rugby, and, through Rugby, in public schools and in English education at large. In his view, "the forming of the moral principles and habits" alone constituted education, and, in this country, the process must be based on Christianity." In The Cambridge History of English and American Literature in 18 Volumes (1907–21). Volume XIV. The Victorian Age, Part Two. (www.bartleby.com/224/1425.html)

If politics was dissolved into culture, we can freely question its effectiveness, and try to ensure it as touchstone for a country whose well-known tradition and social values in Europe had been fundamental to stabilise the political situation that could not leave untouched the economic field. As we can clearly see is that since the end of the 19th century, England had been exploiting its colonies in the world, what made it the empire nation and the influential power it has become in all human areas in the Western world. Thus, more than tradition and culture, the English empire's tool was that known by the imposition of values through the use of a strongly armed legions of soldiers that took the lives of all those who did not accept the Englishness lifestyle.

Like the history of ancient empires, we can find in the English architecture of power a very well learnt lesson attended by many centuries of invasions that the Isle suffered in its past, I would add. In relation to economic matters, we are informed by a state media, the British Broad Cast (BBC) website on Britain History entitled "Early 20th Century: The Economy between the wars: the Depression 1918-1939" on the period. In some industries unemployment increased in localized regions of the country, whereas the industrial growth of other regions contrasted so as to enhance the distance between middle-class and labourer class. The aftermath of the First World War comes out with political efforts to paint an image of the nation based on the heroic deeds in the war. One reads that "the war-time coalition government, led by Prime Minister David Lloyd George, was returned to power, promising to build 'a land fit for heroes to live in'." The idea of glory present in these words should, as they suggest, bring a better and rewarding life condition for the English citizens in respect of employment (www.bbc.co.uk/history/timelines/england/ear20_economy_war_depression.shtml.). This article reinforces the idea that media has been for the service of the ruling political class. We

can also expect that the BBC will always show readers a fact of reality that politically exalts the English prominence in the world board of economics and politics.

But as Sanders states, “the Britain to which demobbed troops returned in 1918 and 1919 proved not to be the ‘Land fit for Heroes’ promised by the prime minister’.” It was so because of “the condition of the industrial and agricultural poor, and of the unemployed, often contrasted as starkly with that of the rich as it had in mid-Victorian Britain” (508). The distance among social classes reinforced by economic differences in that period must be remembered as a constant policy in the English tradition. As this article shows, before the war, in 1914, staple industries that exported three-quarters of British production, employed about a quarter of the country’s labour force. Such growth had led to large-scale movements of populations into the areas whose work force now became dominated by a particular industry. The prosperity of these industries reached a peak on the eve of the First World War in 1914. But after the war, Britain found it increasingly difficult to withstand the growing foreign competition for the export markets that she had previously dominated, as one reads on the BBC website.

Nevertheless, industry situations of Britain in the 1920s and 1930s published on the website under the title “Making the Modern World” (2004) shows us that new sorts of factories were prospering, but for a short term. There was, “after a brief spell of post-war prosperity, industrial profits and wages began to fall and demobilised soldiers found it difficult or impossible to find jobs. By the summer of 1921 there were over 2,000,000 people unemployed and strikes were on the increase. There was widespread suffering and deprivation”. Consequently, “the Lloyd George coalition government collapsed after a series of scandals in 1922 and the country's economic crisis continued to worsen.” However, the exploitation of coal mines remained of crucial importance even for the production of

electricity for the industries. Despite the growth of crises, the labourers seemed willing to help their nation. To gain their prompt collaboration, a series of short-term governments attempted to cope with the crisis (including, from 1924, Britain's first Labour government under Ramsay MacDonald). In support of a strike by coal miners over the issue of threatened wage cuts, the Trades Union Congress called a General Strike in early-May 1926. The strike only involved certain key industrial sectors (docks, electricity, gas, railways) but, in the face of well-organised government emergency measures and lack of real public support, it collapsed after nine days. The miners continued to strike but returned to work in August, accepting lower wages and longer hours.

For a nation with its earlier days of the 20th century in a solid economy based on the exploitation of the riches of its many colonies in all the continents, these harsh days in internal economy were not the worst. Britain was at the edge to confront the world financial crisis which led many Western countries to a collapse. The critical period of the Depression followed the crash of the Wall Street Financial Markets in 1929. In Britain, the situation was unbearable, since unemployment rates peaked just below 3,000,000 in 1932. A year before, in August, the Labour government had resigned and been replaced by a Conservative-dominated National Government. Although the British economy stabilised under that government and unemployment began a steady decline after 1935, it was only with re-armament in the period immediately before the outbreak of the Second World War that the worst of the Depression could be said to be over. (http://www.makingthemodernworld.org.uk).

Sanders also observes and describes the political and economic interacting and having an effect on the artistic production. He initially shows the inter-war political scenery as the dominant party controlled and contained all those who were considered counterparts. Strategies were used to assure continuous propaganda that led to victory partly due to

successful manoeuvres of media, including, for the first time radio broadcasting. Constant economic depression and rising unemployment nevertheless helped to ensure both that Labour was able to form a second Government between 1929 and 1931, and that Labour's reforming zeal floundered. The democratic government that seemed to be able to reverse the devastating effects of the economic depression on heavy industry was able to do relatively few efforts (509).

John Baxendale turns to the influence of the economic situation in socio-cultural fields. From his sight, economic consumption becomes a laboratory

> in which new selves are forged, the conduit through which modernity enters everyday life, central to the construction and reconstruction of gender, and even class. For those with jobs, security and middling incomes, the 1930s boom in suburban housing, electrification, consumer goods, motor cars and the new mass media, were not just elements in a better standard of life, but the take-off point for a series of cultural transformations. (http://www.shu.ac.uk/wpw/thirties/thirties%20baxendale.html.)

The decade was going through "changing times in which identities were constructed." He observes that "'The Thirties' had become more than a period of history: it was a cultural construct with a history of its own." For him, there is a "new version of 'Englishness' specific to the period." (http://www.shu.ac.uk/wpw/thirties/thirties%20baxendale.html). Baxendale elicits the importance of culture which served the political interests of that time to preserve the glorious image the various governments attempted to maintain and display to people, but now strengthened by the victorious warriors. In other words, despite the social contrarieties, to be English meant to be a nation of brave men who defended with their lives their nation and its interests.

As history shows, the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th is marked by an enormous innovation in the scientific area such as technology. The specificity of the epoch and its own characteristics are also shown by Sanders who writes that culture was

moulded and remoulded by the upcoming of new inventions. As he shows, the diverse contrasts of the epoch brought these elements that made society readapt to traditional values without sacrificing their centennial principles that had formed the English people so far. The role that arts such as literature had been playing in English society is now rethought and revaluated as the cultural perspective offered by cinema and documentaries comes up. The technological advances presumed to make human life more comfortable proved themselves to be new means through which socio-political values could exert a role to sediment and solidify interests that privileged the dominant class. Auden participated in the production of some documentaries that showed the reality of the miners, as a poet that wrote voice-over poems for the scenes. Such involvement and its importance will be discussed later here. According to Sanders, the "director's freedom to depart from the limitations of a given text, serves as a reminder of the relationship between the viewer and the viewed object, the reader and the text, the past and the present" (509). This new look towards an artistic work brought by cinematography generated "debates about tradition and the rejection of tradition, about the use and interpretation of history, and about the very survival and value of the written word have taken on a renewed urgency as Modernism evolved" (511). Now, viewers did not content themselves with what was played on the screen, because, as Sanders notes, what had been occurring with literature reached cinema so that "it is equally confusing to trust the opinions of contemporaries, without questioning them" (511).

The questioning about works of art aroused popular reactions towards the role of culture. Despite socio-economic problems exemplified by unemployment, in "Making the Modern World" we are told that "Cinemas grew, and reached a mass audience of both those in and out of work." And concerning the importance of the recently invented 'television' we learn that "[it] represented a major technical breakthrough during this period, but it did not yet impact on the lives of many people. Even in the southeast, few people had television in 1939

when television broadcasting stopped for the duration of the war." Along with cinema success, there was a rich diversity of the radical working-class culture of the 1930s, such as the Unity theatre, the Workers' Film and Photo League, the Workers' Theatre Movements and others, as Tony Pinkney exemplifies (17-8). Sanders reminds that "a broad national culture and a sense of participation in all elements of national life were no longer the exclusive preserve of an educated or privileged élite." He adds that popular newspapers helped to mould social opinion by sponsoring easily assimilated cultural material according to class and financial power (509-10). As these examples show, the goals of the dominant class were never easily achieved since the popular movements used to find a way to react against the various operations of the ruling class' instruments.

If the economics and politics realms were not left untouched after the war, as we have seen here, arts such as literature felt the impact with the emergence of cinema and television. Sanders points that there was "a sense of fragmentation, which was as much geographical and historical as it was cultural and psychological, [that] haunted the literature of the 1920s" (507). The cultural tension of the epoch explains the need of a new art, of fragments and images, an art of a language rescued from chaos and from impropriety (Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, 145). Richard R. Bozorth says that the 1920s "after all, saw the growing stature of thinkers concerned less with applying science to the erotic life than with recovering sexuality's moral and spiritual energy" (54). Yet, the literature of the 1920s and 1930s should not be assumed exclusively dominated by images of decay and instability or by a language of fragmentation and reformulation, highlights Sanders (509). In relation to the English modernism, according to Pinkney, it is largely the product of expatriates, exiles, and émigrés, radical students and working class cultures, far more various, adventurous and cosmopolitan (15), or, a combative, experimental, eclectic culture (18). Sanders cites the U.S. writer Ezra Pound's view towards the war and its effects on literature and points out that

“Pound was asserting the rights and privileges of a new literature which would attempt to sever itself from the traditions, and the ‘traditional sanctities of the old botched civilization” (504).

In reference to the marks that the war left on poetry, Sanders writes: “the war provided a disturbing context which forcibly transformed the often placid, elegiac, and unadorned poetry of the 1900s into a painfully observant record or a vehicle of protest” (502). The poetry of that time is also characterised by a lyricism that aspires, first of all, to the originality in its expression form, says Hugo Friedrich (153). For him, the phrase of the modern lyric presents a new texture that is annulled in its elaboration, and in so doing, it is characterised as hostile, avoiding to destabilise contexts and relational orders, and turning to a multifaceted meaning (156). The ‘hostility’ would be the aspect that allows meaning to be located in strange syntactical constructions and in diction so that reading becomes a cautious act. Modern poetry, continues Friedrich, accentuates ambiguity always present in human discourse, to elevate the poetic language above the usual one (157). Max Kommerel writes that “one cannot deny that the affirmation of poetic composition opens up to us, in a sublime way, a whole extension of the poetic expression possible, in the midst of things said, the unsaid and the ineffable are also present, a silence in uttering” (quoted in Friedrich, 158).

The questioning offered by the opening of new cultural media is also perceived by James Miller. In accordance with him,

> During the thirties formalist criticism prevailed, a practice that eschewed the external circumstances as influential during a work's conception. I will argue that Auden's situation and the external circumstances of 1939 pressured him to a degree that may have been overlooked by formalist criticism. A current 2003 reading is able to trace dualistic aspects of Auden's personal life, which may have been highly influential in such poems as "September 1, 1939." Auden's dualism can be defined as the adversarial clash of reigning as the unofficial poet laureate, a position entailing public scrutiny and surveillance and also being homosexual, a position that in the thirties could not bear an ounce of public scrutiny without reprimand. As the unofficial poet laureate, Auden was equivalent to a politician addressing the entire American constituency. Such a position requires extreme caution about how one is received. Prudence was even more necessary because Auden had emigrated to the United States from England and enjoyed American

> citizenship. His position as an esteemed professional poet and professor could also include the duty of giving the political forecast for the United States. Such a position entails a great deal of external pressure. This dualism could in turn pressure the poet to encrypt his personal concerns (2).

In Miller's argumentation, this specific case related to external circumstances of 1939 that pressured artists like Auden so that he may have been overlooked by formalist criticism. This analysis of "September 1, 1939": "Auden [alludes] to the relationship between Nijinsky and Diaghilev." For Miller, this allusion is not perceived by formalists and it purposely comes up to both encode and explore themes such as homoeroticism seen as illegal by British inter-wars society. Miller emphasises the fashion used by Auden to write his poem: "The way the allusion is **encrypted** (italics mine) allows one to understand the wily movements of the poem as a means of critiquing the power of art in an authoritarian and homophobic society (2)." Thus, it is possible to state that poetry also served to question politics with its specific rhetoric that has always characterised it and made it a unique art.

The modern poetry was provided a characteristic by Auden's writing that was added to the other modern poets who "conceived poetry as more than the mere correct versification of philosophical truths but the initiator of truth itself. To be a poet meant a tremendous responsibility – the poet had the key to the hidden mysteries of the heart, of life itself; the poet was not a mere embellisher of everyday life, but the man who gave life its meaning", writes Anthony Burgess (166). This role of the poet in the 1920s and 1930s differed from the precedent. For Auden, a modern poet is different from the romantic one in terms of audience. In Romanticism, each poet wrote to readers who identified with what was written because both the poet and readers shared the similar social conflicts. For Auden, the Industrial Revolution changed things. Bozorth cites Auden's own words: "Each poet knew for whom he had to write, because their life was still the same as his", and Bozorth points out: "

> high-brow or low, the poet belonged to a community. The poet since then has left society for "the Poet's Party". Auden tells the same story in his 1937 introduction to

> *The Oxford Book of Light Verse*: "As the old social community broke up, artists were driven to the examination of their own feelings and to the company of other artists. They became introspective, obscure, and highbrow." The "modern poet", therefore, faces the problem of "how to find or form a genuine community." (166)

With such configuration, modernist art production can be considered as vehicle to write the events occurred in a given society to many 'genuine communities' such as the homosexuals that characterised society as a fragmented body. This perception of art as engaged in social issues is a characteristic of the twentieth century, a period of human history marked by a concern with finding something to believe in, states Anthony Burgess (215). The contrasts existent in the beginning of that century is in that "whereas the first of our moderns were satisfied with their hedonism or liberalism or medievalism, the later age has demanded something deeper, a sense of being involved in a civilisation", continues Burgess (215).

This contextual aspect of poetry is emphasised by Raymond Williams who asserts that a "text [is] inseparable from the conditions of their production and receptions in history; as involved, necessarily, in the making of meanings, which are always political meanings" (quoted in Sinfield, *Cultural Reading*, viii). And as Jeffrey Weeks states, "meaning never floats free: it is anchored in particular sets of statements, institutions, and social practices which shape human activity through the social relations of power" (177). Meaning is political and is situated in cultural products that bear interests of and social patterns of behaviour determined by the dominant class. As one follows Williams' explanation and Sanders' description of the inter-war period, socio-political instability and conflicts stamped their mark on literary art and influenced the contemporary authors who intermixed public, political, and private issues. "The post war period was haunted by long memories, some angry, most sickening. It had taken more than a decade for ex-combatants to come to terms with what the war had meant to them and with 'the debris of its emotional conflicts' before they could begin to transform their experience into literature" (Sanders 505). Sanders exemplifies this as he

considers the poet Stephen Spender's engagement in social matters. Spender was a member of Auden's group of poets whose awareness of the time appears in his concern with "the cultural anomalies and conflicts of class interest in the inter-wars Britain and his sense of historical injustice towards Victorian slum-children" (559).

The artistic participation in social questions by voicing the reality of minority groups such as Mortmere (Auden's group of poets) presents one of the changes that sprang in those times. The continuous alterations of ruling political parties in power elicited by Sanders provide a view of the electors' dissatisfaction and importance in the current and consequent events in their nation. In this aspect, in a country self-perceived as democratic, the British people participated in history as agents and reactors of the events around. For Michel Foucault,

> Man constitutes himself as a subject of history only by the superimposition of the history of living beings, the history of things, and the history of words. He is subjected to the pure events those histories contain. But his relation of simple passivity is immediately reversed; for what speaks in language, what works and consumes in economics, what lives in human life, is man himself; and, this being so, he too has a right to a development quite as positive as that of beings and things. ("The Order of Things", 369)

In his assertion, man is inserted in an environment that exerts limitations on human behaviour; but man, seen not as a part separated from society and culture, but rather as an integral participant, interacts with all things that have their history as well. Thus, man writes his history as he acts in the diverse milieus that simultaneously influence him. "The history of man – a history that now concerns man's being [makes] him realise that he not only 'has history' around him, but is himself, in his own historicity", states Foucault (370). Man can change society and culture because he can act in and interact with them, and they can exert transformations in him due to a connection that inevitably causes man to be the subject of his history and be subjected to the elements that the world around him contains.

On this issue of social subjects and social differences, individuals' interests and behaviour in society, one can see the intervention of the powerful classes that legislated on private realms to control and maintain the national image incorruptible. Weeks explains that

> The construction of categories defining what is appropriate sexual behaviour ('normal'/'abnormal'), or what constitutes the essential gender being ('male'/ 'female'); or where we are placed along the continuum of sexual possibilities ('heterosexual', 'homosexual', 'paedophile', 'transvestite' or whatever); this endeavour is no neutral, scientific discovery of what was already there. Social institutions which embody these definitions (religion, the law, medicine, the educational system, psychiatry, social welfare, even architecture) are constitutive of the sexual lives of individuals. Struggles around sexuality are, therefore, struggles over meanings – over what is appropriate or not appropriate – meanings which call on the resources of the body and the flux of desire, but are not dictated by them. (178)

I would highlight Weeks' word 'construction' to make it more perceptible in this citation, since as he himself states for some scientific areas the meanings deposited on human sex and sexualities are not simply natural occurrences, but moulded by minds and hands that devised an end at the beginning of their meticulous 'building' that has perpetuated values that currently appear natural even to some sectors of the scientific world. For this very imperceptibility of the naturalised socio-political strategies, I do see a severe danger to the ways that the scientific realm has run on. Nigel Edley and Margaret Wetherel write that sex and sexuality is one way that supports the establishment in accordance with its interests. They say that in Western culture "masculinity represents the higher status term of the pair [woman and man]", and the difference between sexes follows the concept of masculinity that emerges out of a contrast in which a man is not what a woman is (153). For the last 300 years, argue Edley and Wetherel, the symbolic equation of women with nature and men with culture had a tremendous impact in terms of the structure of power relations between the sexes (153). "Women were seen as ruled over by dark and dangerous forces; motivated by instincts" (153-4). Femininity was, therefore, connected to weakness, negativity and inferiority, taking the State to interfere in it through laws. Sylvia Walby gives a view of

women by 1850 "[who] were dependents according to the British law: a woman had become little more than her husband's possession; everything she owned passed over to him; she could only do business through him; her children and even her body were defined as his" (quoted in Edley and Wehterel, 154).

In this interaction between the two sexes, Paul Hoch notes how the influence of Christian doctrine on attitudes towards human sexuality can be traced back even further, to the time of the Middle Ages. He exemplifies the Church dominance on people's private dominion:

> The Church had carefully curtailed the number of days on which intercourse might be performed, the allowable hours of the day, and even body position. Although all sex – marital or not – was officially regarded as sin, 'fornication' (sex outside marriage) was held in some penitentials to be a sin worse than murder. (quoted in Edley and Wetherel, 160)

The socio-cultural change in the control exerted by dominant classes on women's lives is exemplified by the achievement of political freedom that the latter conquered after engendering social movements. As Bradbury and McFarlane note, it was only in 1928 that women received the right to vote (493). For Weeks, "we must recognise the changing forms of social regulations, informal and formal, from the operations of churches and state to the forms of popular morality" (179). According to him, "the political context provides the means by which popular passions can be mobilised, legal changes proposed and enacted, relationships constructed between the domain of sexuality and other areas of the social" (179).

The legislative procedure towards groups that were not socially recognised was not different from that which ruled over women's behaviour. Danny Lee writes about the reality of groups such as the homosexuals in the first half of the 20th century and the legal system ruling their lives. In his article "Secret History: The Last Nazi Secret" he comments on the study by Richard Davenport-Hines entitled *Sex, Death and Punishment* published in 1990.

According to it, in England, the persecution of gays also has a long history – as long ago as 1290, there were laws punishing homosexual acts with death. In 1938 in Britain there were 134 prosecutions for sodomy and bestiality, 822 for attempted sodomy and indecent assaults and 320 for gross indecency (http://www.channel4.com/history/microsites/H/history/n-s/pink.html). Lee himself does not provide his reader the exact meaning of a term such as 'bestiality'; however, Jonathan Goldberg defines 'sodomy' as:

> a sexual act, anything that threatens alliance – any sexual act, that is, that does not promote the aim of married procreative sex: anal intercourse, fellatio, masturbation, bestiality – any of these may fall under the label of sodomy in various early legal codifications and learned discourses (19).

This sort of attitude is due to the fact that for centuries the British soil has been one of the influential European nations whose culture is based on Judeo-Christian values that has not spared punishments against those who defy their dogmas.

As Gregory Woods points out, "Science, Church, and State have taken the liberty to divide human sexuality into homo- and heterosexuality [so that] one was declared insane, immoral, and illegal; the other sane, moral, and legal" (1-2). A. L. Rowse reminds the reader that this liberty from those institutions is based on the Christian commandments against any sort of sex that does not involve a man and a woman in marriage dated from 2,500 years before the Medieval Age (1). To emphasise the horror against homosexual acts in the New Testament, the Apostle Paul writes to the Romans, similar words (chapter 1, verses 26 and 27). In verse 26, he mentions women and calls their homosexual act "*infamous passions* contrary to nature" and, in verse 27, he mentions men and calls their acts as an "inflaming sensuality, receiving the due reward for their error." Rowse also elicits the cruelty committed by that moralistic tradition before and after Christ (1). As the book of Leviticus shows,

homosexual intercourses led the man who played the woman's part[7] to be stoned to death. He says that "medieval societies were hardly less barbarous and brutal" than the ancient times (2).

In the Middle Ages, as soon as homosexuality was seen as a menace to the preservation of power, the dominant homophobic heterosexual class rushed to declare homosexuality as a 'danger'. In 1533, Henry VIII presents the Sodomy statute, the first English law to mention homosexuality that, then, was named and included in the wide term sodomy. Len Evans notes that like a later Elizabethan law of 1562, the prohibition has more to do with the struggle for power between the church and expanding secular power, than any moral outcry against homosexuality. Despite the law, there were few sodomy convictions at that time (21). According to Foucault, before Oscar Wilde's notorious judicial case, homosexuality was seen and known as a traditional religious deviation, but after the Irish writer's iconic personality for homosexual civil rights, homosexual becomes a distinct identity (*The History of Sexuality I,* 36-49). Although in a few societies in the Western world laws have guaranteed homosexuals some social rights as marriage, in most homosexuals have still been classified as incapable individuals levelled on the same layer of the ideology against women that has been used by heterosexual discriminatory men against women and homosexuals, claiming that gays (especially) were not men enough to accomplish professional and political positions in society. This pejorative view is supported by the assumption that women and gays are inferior beings, needing to be governed rather than governing.

The connection between women and male homosexuals as weak has perpetrated a gender cut which still serves to privilege white heterosexual men in the various fields of human activity. According to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, gender differences block women's access to power (2). She states that "whereas women tend to help other women in their

[7] *Woman's part* should be understood as the one who in the sexual intercourse is penetrated, which obviously limited women's sexuality to known consequences.

homosocial milieus, this does not happen between males" (3). Sedgwick's statement concerns the fact that among males, heterosexuals protect their interests by imposing their sexuality as the proper one in a patriarchal society (3). This is to say that those men who sexually defer women to prefer men (homosexuals) are subverting the heterosexual economic, social and political system. For such a system to subsist, heterosexual marriage and homophobia are essential factors, argues Sedgwick (3).

The legal and religious views on women's and men's sexuality not only defined social behaviours to heterosexual couplings, but also tried to prevent sexual encounters between men. Such laws and religious dogmas towards human sexual practices show that the function especially the State is concerned with to control people and their manifestations are not always coherent. Edley and Wetherel comment that "it is often assumed that the role of the State or Government in countries such as the U.K. and the U.S.A. is to act as a neutral ringmaster, co-ordinating the different interests of social groups." They add that "the law should incarnate 'disembodied reason' and apply impartially" (175). Nonetheless, this logic is not followed as it comes to sexual conducts since some practices do not serve the dominant classes' political interests. Woods says that "sexual orientation has as much to do with social life and politics" (195). This suggests that the dominant classes in the inter-war period engineered means to favour one practice and discourage the other for power reasons. In that period, any stimuli would cause hard censorship if an issue such as homosexuality was approached as an appropriate practice, since this sexual behaviour was deplored and condemned for not fitting the ideal model of man, which delineated the 20th century construction of masculinity. In that struggle to contain and eliminate homosexuality from the English soil, culture was instilled of social rules that reinforced standardised centennial collective conventions and acceptable behaviours especially through continuous propaganda for heterosexuality.

As the aspects above show, the various crises led the dominant classes to install means to present the British people an image, so to speak, that could dignify and keep their millenary heroic bravery and image in the world during the inter-war period. Thus, models of values were ideologically structured and/or reshaped so that control and governing conditions could be achieved. Cultural ideologies, argue Edley and Wetherel, operate as taken-for-granted world views which frame events in a particular and often partial way (146). The British constant changes of political parties in power did not neglect the importance to limit social expressions that could harm the dominant elite, and whichever the party in power seemed to pay the due attention to maintain social values that 'stabilised' society.

Besides the legal and religious ordinances so effective and efficient during centuries, a method that permitted this regulation is shown by George L. Mosse. He draws on the Western ideology that standardises a model of masculinity as a construction of a civilizatory project. The model of ideal man not only played a "determining role in fashioning ideas of nationhood, respectability, and war, but it was present and influenced almost every aspect of modern history", this is so because "manly ideal means dealing, above all, with the ideals and functioning of normative society" (4), which, in the inter-war period, had to ban and censor any individual who did not behave according to the ideal of man; moreover, in the case of England, soldiers had recently been to war, what helped to show an English way of life represented by brave and exemplary men.

These manly warriors helped the establishment, stimulated by the dominant classes, to achieve the functioning of society on their bases of values. Mosse emphasizes that the ideal of manliness should oppose unmanly men, since manly men influenced normative patterns of morality and behaviour, and symbolized an essentially healthy society that did not merely posit manliness as an ideal to be reached, but made it an integral part of that society (133). Moreover, manly men cultivated their health and strength — true manliness was a synonym

for a fit body, whereas unmanly men were the opposite, being represented by the decadent man, who came to be the "new woman's" brother. The 'new woman' was the one who fought for her civil rights at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th (137), having the company of some artists, and frequenters of cafés (144).

In the first half of the 20th Century, these stereotypes perpetuated normative masculinity through the worship of men's classical beauty, that is, Greek gymnasts, which legitimised a strong reaffirmation of male standard in diverse countries in Europe (149). Contrary to what should be expected towards this model, many homosexuals have given strong support to the masculine ideal as they despised effeminacy, turning to what modern masculinity required from "real" men (151). As one may suppose, this ideal was not a cultural and political stratagem that came up in the inter-wars, as R. J. Park shows, "by the 1890s the ideal male body had shifted completely from lean and slim to a muscular, V-shaped build" (quoted in Edley and Wetherel, 139). This worship towards manly men has rendered this sort of men a perpetuation in culture throughout the century, bringing homophobic reactions against those who do not behave in accordance, since those who did not have a manly behaviour were perceived as homosexuals. Gary Kinsman and Gregory Lehne argue that "the fear of being perceived as homosexual drives men to engage in destructively competitive relationships, [discouraging] them to participate fully in close, loving relations both with other adult men and even their own sons" (quoted in Edley and Wetherel, 155). The social pressure brought by competition that resulted from this fear, stimulates middle-class men whose life conditions in Western societies are not as hard as the working-class men's. This difference deepens the class differences so that one group is better-off as far as material realities are concerned. Max Weber's words expose: "mighty cosmos of the modern economic order is seen an iron prison. This inexorable order, capitalistic, legalistic and bureaucratic determines the life of all individuals who were born into this mechanism" (quoted in Marshall Berman,

27). Berman also points out that other philosophers and critics of the 19th century understand that “the modern technology and social organisation determined man’s fate” (27). This explains the civilizatory project as not only political but also economic, so that class difference assumes a character that denotes an importance to the one that obtains more wealth and another to those who produce and supply for the well-off individuals.

The gap between classes through these two realms, the socio-political and economic project privileges, in terms of social advantages, those who behave inside the norms advocated by the dominant class. To be manly in such a culture is one of the demands to have more access to the whole cultural products. Paul Hoch says that the cults of masculinity are rarely innocent; they invariably work to the advantage of a group (quoted in Edley and Wetherel, 147). This brings up the idea that the dominant classes’ investitures are contrary to the interests of other groups socially and economically stratified as inferior, so as to make the State deliberately legislate over sexual practices that preserve the interests of economy and politics based on heterosexuality. The laws, thus, searched to criminalize homosexuality.

Although homosexuality had been practised for centuries, Jennifer Payne shows that some decades before the inter-war period the parliament members were predisposed against unconventional social behaviours. She refers to the 19th century bill of laws [where] "Labouchere's Amendment" criminalized homosexual acts between men. Payne explains that the parliament radical member, Labouchere, proposed a clause for section eleven of the bill that was accepted without debate and passed with little or no comment from either the politicians or the press. This section of the act gained widespread publicity during the 1890s as the authorities used the law to crack down on male homosexuality. As an example of the effect of this amendment, the famous trial was that of Oscar Wilde who was found guilty and sentenced to two years hard labour. Ironically, Wilde had been an appreciative reader of Labouchere during the politician's tenure as editor to the magazine *Truth* during 1880s. One

can clearly notice that there was a consenting from important social voices towards Labouchere's collaboration to the British social laws related to sexual behaviour of its citizens. In 1923, Evans reports, in "England, the British Society for the Study of Sex Psychology prints an abridged translation of the German pamphlet What the People Should Know About the third Sex, as The Problem of Sexual Inversion." Here one can perceive the connotation that scientific milieus were imprinting on homosexual behaviour not a sexual behaviour but as a third sex; this notion lowered sexual practice by providing a view of it as a variation between the two sexes, and that could be seen as something that did not follow nature as male and female. (http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Aegean/7023/Consent.html).

The history of homosexuality is vast in Western culture. As in past times such as the Middle Ages, social oppositions against homosexuality continued to exist. Bray cites many works written in the Renaissance, which connected the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah with same-sex intercourses. This connection shows the power that Judeo-Christian precepts used to have. He also puts forth the fact that homosexuality was considered as an enormous horror in that time (7). To exemplify this view regarding homosexuality, Bray mentions the execution of John Atherton, the bishop of Waterford and Lismore and his supposed lover John Childe in 1640 (14). Also according to Bray, these two men were executed for ***buggery***[8], a word used at that time to name homosexuality (15). Foucault writes in *The History of Sexuality* that it was only after Oscar Wilde's upcoming that homosexuality became a category: "the sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species" (160). In the 1930s the efforts to stigmatise those who involved themselves in same-sex

[8] ***Bugger*** was a pejorative term used to qualify homosexuals. According to Alan Bray, they [homosexuals] were executed for ***buggery***, a word used at that time to name homosexuality (15). The English law is unique in its use of the term Buggery, in that it called for death by hanging rather than burning at the stake, and finally, and most importantly the frequent commutation of the death sentence to exposure in the pillory. The statute remains essentially the same until 1861, when the death penalty was abolished for this offense. No more than an average of three people a year is executed under the statute between 1561 – 1861, within the entire British Empire. (Len Evans, 2002).

intercourses prevailed, but as Sinfield observes, only those who did not behave as real men suffered the legal imputations and persecutions.

In *Cultural Politics* Sinfield states that: "not all gay men are the same" (x). With this sentence he shows that there are differences among homosexual individuals. In *The Wilde Century,* he writes that on the one level, some homosexuals were related to effeminacy that in pre-Oscar Wilde England qualified those men who were surrounded by women (this period comprehends the years before 1900 when Wilde publicly positions himself towards his homosexuality and is imprisoned for that). This idea contrasts with that which links homosexuals to delicacy or to flamboyant gestures and that nowadays marks gays so as to standardise homosexuals through a stereotype of weakness and fragility culturally related to women (136). Edley and Wetherel verify that: "the stereotypical gay man is seen as rather gentle and pacific, whereas the warrior is portrayed as someone who is (also) fiercely heterosexual" (136). On the other level, stereotypes of manliness and unmanliness are culturally constructed so as to include gay men in the latter. Homosexual men are, thus, what heterosexual men are not, as the comparison between men and women showed above. But these differences exist in some cultures in some periods of history, so that in current studies on homosexuality, there is no model of gay men that can be seen as universal in Western culture.

Whereas homosexual behaviour may differ from group to group, heterosexual men behave according to Western model of manliness as Mosse illustrates. Albeit there are many gay men who follow that pattern and consequently are not seen as homosexuals. One can argue that a reason that explains is that gays' manly behaviour is understandable and can be seen as a political strategy in Western societies due to strong homophobic reactions in some countries. If one bears in mind Sinfield's concept that culture is political, that "gays' situations are within an ongoing contest of representations, and they come vested with varying

degrees of authority", manly homosexuals' social behaviour carries a significant meaning. As homosexuals are accounted as a subculture, a "cultural politics comprises, advances toward, and is redirected by subcultural readings", Sinfield writes (*Cultural Politics,* viii, x). Hence, the perception of the world brought up by unmanly gay groups held as minor before streamline set of values differs from those gays who follow manliness patterns. The diverse *subcultures* can provide a wide range of reading even among homosexuals, whose values and attitudes are not shared or acknowledged by other homosexuals, as well as the mainstream culture. This circumstance proves that the dominant classes can control individuals' social performances, but not individual's sexual desire. J. Clarke explains:

> The dominant culture represents itself as *the* culture. It tries to define and contain all other cultures within its inclusive range. [W]hen one culture gains ascendancy over the other, and when the subordinate culture *experiences* itself in terms provided by the dominant culture, then the dominant culture has also become the basis of a dominant ideology (quoted in Edley and Wetherel, 147).

Subordination of cultures is seen by Sinfield as a matter of position, of layering where the upper one can take in an image of superiority not only due to its being on top, but also for its prominence and scope over the others. He notes that under the dominant culture, there are others that can broaden the views of people in a given country. The strata of culture show that in each level one can situate a group and its modes of understanding the world as though things such as values could be 'drawered' in compartments so order can be maintained. But Sinfield shows that it is not as simple as it seems to be since values interact and interchange from culture to culture; there are those proper to a group and those that connect it to others which are in a superior or inferior position. One can have a clearer perception about this issue in G. W. Bredbeck's explanation: "Culture creates through its power a dichotomy in which the powerful are the *subjects*, and (specifically in the case of homosexuality) the sodomite is the *other*. Since the Renaissance until today, there has been much pressure from the dominant

class (represented by homophobic individuals) to impose a normative pattern of behaviour on the dominated (homosexuals) (27).

The issue of social values that give conservatism of old social models a greater importance, and condemns and avoids any novelties towards human behaviour is focused in Philip Brett's article on Benjamin Britten, an Auden's companion. Brett takes Britten's opera to analyse the role of a homosexual character and the social view on homosexuality in the 1920s and 1930s. Brett writes that the homosexual hero is presented as "the basest member of society" which has "vicious treatment of difference." In his opera Britten writes of "the paranoid nature of society's scapegoating someone who it feels to be threatening but is not." Brett writes that the 'someone' who threatens is the homosexual whose sexuality in Anglo-American society and ideology is seen as an internal enemy causing the dislocation of an otherwise ordered society. He perceives society in a permanent state of dislocation stemming directly from its own blockage, its own contradictions.

> So the dislocation, this internal negativity, was displaced and projected on to those seen ideologically as society's enemies, among whom this "homosexual" was particularly important because of the fragile nature and infinite difficulties surrounding the institutions of heterosexuality, marriage and the family, and also because of the importance that had accrued since its invention in modern times to sexuality itself, which had replaced religion as the ultimate window on to the soul.

As Brett argues, the problematic of homosexuality lies in socio-political interests of the dominant classes that try to control social manifestations that do not cooperate with them. Homosexuality would be one of these that both exposes the immanent failure of patriarchy and is especially demonstrated by, and projected on those individuals who exercise its privilege as men but undermine the principles of sexual relation and patterns of domination on which patriarchal authority is founded also in the modern world. The idea of failure of patriarchy would not fit in the British society so markedly ruled by authoritarian (manly) men during its history.

To increase the difference of minds and values in the 30s, a very important group came to exert a crucial change in university milieu. Inglis analyses the intellectual class of academics such as the ones that the Cambridge University started to receive after 1918. In accordance with him, the new comers were a "social class strange to Cambridge", because those new members brought a quite different realm of principles to the definition and creation of individuality,

> the making of both mental and personal and historical meaning, that broke entirely with the easy inheritance of cultural possession and the certain ascription of canonical value which marked their intellectuals' ancestors. They spoke for a social class which saw its nation as urgently in need of a drastic revaluation of what it held dear and what it despised (37).

The outstanding importance of that academic class in such chain of events that Britain was crossing is relevant. Inglis explains that "a class holds values, certainly, and holds them no doubt in virtue of the domestic and working lives its members inhabit" (38). As he states, the

> petit-bourgeois students, children of a class which won a new prominence during the First World War and pitted against ruling class which they found there with its gentility ad ruthlessness, its ineffable tendency to see its cultivated taste as the justification for its property and privileges and sternly conscientious set of values (38).

This academic invasion by lower classes could harm the political projects to keep classes afar. Besides, university students and teachers in contact with 'inferior' members of society would instil ideas that could destabilise the interests of the dominant classes. The relation with society and individuals as shown by Brett exalts those who follow the established values and condemn those who do not. The theme of the individual who is persecuted by the community for no other reason than his difference cried out to be interpreted in this way, but could not be publicly articulated in those days. For Brett, the allegory in Britten's opera declared a social mechanism of oppression. In describing a part of the work, Brett elicits the social acting inside the individual: "In [this] symbolic moment,

therefore, he [the homosexual] internalizes society's judgment of him and enters the self-destructive cycle that inevitably concludes with his suicide." For Brett, Britten may have addressed his own concerns, and his apparent comfortable state about it. This comment by Brett is comprehensible as one has in mind the fact that many homosexual artists hid their sexual condition in the inter-wars, what, as Brett shows, did not prevent them to deal with the theme in a way that would appear cooperative to the interests of the ruling class.

Britten deals with "male relations, often with an obviously homoerotic text or subtext; yet the subject had been ignored as though it didn't exist", adds Brett. This emptiness, this meaninglessness imputed to homosexuality in these cases is due to "The Sexual Offences Act, which finally legalized homosexual acts between consenting adults in private, [and that] did not pass until 1967. All reference of homosexuality on the stage was specifically forbidden until 1958, and all stage material was subject to state license until 1968." Brett reveals that Britten's own homosexuality and encrypted mention of it came out only in 1980. It was so because

> there was a further and more significant barrier to any criticism that would include material elements, such as politics or sexuality. Art music, like poetry, had become in this century the repository of transcendent or universal values, which is almost tantamount to saying masculine and heterosexual values. This came about for a number of reasons, but one very strong cause was the threat to its status by a widespread notion encapsulated by Havelock Ellis around the turn of the century in a single sentence in his book on what he referred to as *Sexual Inversion*: "it has been extravagantly said that all musicians are inverts."
>
> (http://www.utexas.edu/cofa/music/erlmannseries/Bretttpap.htm)

Brett's text does not provide an explanation for the term 'sexual invert', but L. Terman and C. Miles define it "as woman's soul trapped in a man's body" (quoted in Edley and Wetherel, 156). Again, this notion denotes the link imputed on femininity and homosexuality which are stratified together on the same level of social importance determined by the dominant classes. This bond turns the social view of homosexuality a drive which menaces the status quo, what

led, according to Brett, "artists [to] cultivate[d] images that were as distant as possible from the connection of effeminacy[9], aestheticism and vice that had been discerned in those traumatic events; and this cultivation of masculinity and detachment extended from their personalities to their art, and remained virtually unchallenged until quite recently." Sinfield adds that

> although the attempted separation of life and art produces protection and an honoured place for the arts, it is at the cost of limited influence, marginality, even irrelevance. Their protected status confines them to a reserve, like an endangered species insufficiently robust to cope with the modern world (quoted in Brett).

This role held by arts such as opera can be comprehended in Theodor W. Adorno's "Lyric Poetry and Society" where individuation and the generality of things are analysed in poetry. Adorno states that "the meaning of a poem is not merely the expression of individual experiences and stirrings of emotion. Rather, these become artistic only when precisely because of their defined aesthetic form, they participate in the generality of things. What a lyric poem expresses is not necessarily what everyone experiences." It is so because

> the descent into the individuality raises the lyric poem to the realm of the general by virtue of its bringing to light things undistorted, ungrasped, things not yet subsumed – and thus the poem anticipates, in an abstract way, a condition in which no mere generalities (i.e. extreme particularities) can bind and chain that which is human . (156)

Adorno remarks that "nothing but what is in the works, and belongs to their own particular forms, provides a legitimate ground for ascertaining what the content of the works, the things which have been raised into poetry, represents in a social way" (157). Therefore, the substance of a poem is a view of the social and the cultural. The references to social events and cultural products may appear depicted through traits which can allude to the poet's individuality interrelated with the surrounding reality. One can assume that the presence of

[9] At this point, one can perceive the insistence from the part of the dominant classes to turn *femininity* synonym of *effeminacy*, the former used to describe women's social manners, the latter to individuals whose social manners resemble the women's, what can be questioned if compared. Thus, these two terms converge in the level of pejorative look from superior classes such as the homophobic and women oppressors heterosexuals.

the social in the individual makes him a representative, a *voice-r* of his/her society and so turning him/her into an active subject in the process of transforming society through a cultural product. His/her ideas appear in a lyric poem once the author is connected to the world around him. Adorno helps one to see that the effects of a piece of art can have in an individual can cause a change in perceiving the world, because no one would be disconnected of the chain of events in History.

James Miller approaches the surrounding events that influence the artistic creation as he discusses Auden's poems in the 30s. Like Adorno and Foucault, Miller points out the "external circumstances of 1939 [that] pressured Auden to a degree that may have been overlooked by formalist criticism. A current reading is able to trace dualistic aspects of Auden's personal life, which may have been highly influential in such poems as "September 1, 1939." Miller's contextual view of a poetic piece is endorsed by Marsha Bryant who believes that influences can be seized in other forms of human expressions such as non-fictional productions. She describes the role documentaries and poetry played in exposing realities of social Britain as gender and class relations. She states that "documentary observers of the 1930s transgressed class lines to establish contact with the working classes." "[I]n British literature and film of the 1930s, we can see how a male-on-male gaze shaped the documentary tradition during this decade of social and representational crisis." The external influence is on the part of the social class differences that can be expressed and confirmed in non-fictional cinematographic productions. She examines the documentaries produced on coal miners in the 30s and highlights works such as those produced by George Orwell. In her observation, Orwell's homoerotic economy intersects culturally not only with documentary cross-class scrutiny, but also with homosexual cross-class encounters: "Bourgeois gay men's attraction to working-class men, especially younger ones, often freighted the metaphor of "going over" with homosexual meanings." She explains that such attraction was

> [B]ecause most of the documentarists were bourgeois men who scrutinized working-class men in their texts, [so that] British documentary practice provides a veritable nexus of what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has termed "homosocial desire." Significantly, a major focal point for these documentaries was industrial Britain and its miners, and it was in representing these muscular men that the 1930s documentary most reinforced and undermined dominant constructions of masculinity. (Bryant, 6)

Bryant also presents middle-class men in contact with working-class men. She deals with Auden's participation as a member of a group of documentarists on coal miners' work in industrial areas in England. As she analyses, he wrote poems that were pronounced voice-over as images showed the miner's half-naked bodies. For Bryant, the relevance of Auden's work in the making of those films was related both to his verses and in his own look of the miners. His style in repeating in his poems a word such as "stranger" marks the socio-economic divide that separates the middle-class observer (and reader) from the landscape's working-class inhabitants. "Embarking on "an adventure of observation" – [John] Grierson's phrase for the documentary enterprise, Auden's stranger has traveled to a culturally-coded terrain, but one that is unfamiliar to him personally" (quoted in Bryant, 205). Bryant believes that "just as documentary representations enable us to see the cultural dynamics that underpin Auden's perspectives, so the poet's well-known homosexuality prompts us to acknowledge the sexual dynamics that inform documentary's male-on-male gaze." From her perspective, the epoch was socially and culturally set to make artists have a "cross-class scrutiny and homoerotic looking." Bryant continues, for such behaviour, there was an ambience that provided and stimulated it, because the documentary film movement brought together communities of public school and university men to observe working-class men. According to her, this was a dynamic with Victorian precedents in the men's settlement movement

> that Seth Koven has discussed. Despite some fundamental differences - the settlers established long-term residence in London's slums and devoted their attention to instructing boys-the civic-minded nature of both groups' public activities facilitated the expression of homoerotic desire. Koven's speculation about the homosexually-inclined settlers might well apply to some of the documentarists: "While ostensibly these men

> came to heal the wounds of a class-divided nation, it seems probable that many were also driven by the need to come to terms with their own sexualities" (373). (8)

Bryant states that this attitude towards the miners is very important for the understanding of Auden's poem "The Watershed": "while traditional literary contexts are important for understanding the cultural dynamics of Auden's poem, documentary contexts are crucial.'' It is so because "if we return homoeroticism to the center of documentary practice, we can see that gender and sexuality, as well as class, proved crucial to shaping our century's principal discourse of reality." This statement suggests a haunting presence of unmanliness in British culture that should be held out of everyday life. Bryant also shows that society's concern towards social instability is deeper than simply a class issue: "[i]n most examinations of the 1930s, critics focus on class alone as the driving force behind the decade's social instability, and thus as the driving force behind both Auden's poetry and documentary representation." As Bryant puts, showing one class' culture, life and values can serve to show its set of principles, as well as to erase the existence of other classes and their political concerns. Such portrait also indicates that the middle class was depicted and put forth to all citizens-viewers as *the* paradigm to the others, suggesting that middle-class way of life would only tolerate individuals embodied by heterosexuals and their patriarchal Christian families. Bryant says that another factor proved equally significant in negotiating the decade's uncertainties, such as the social act of "being a man." Documentary texts of the 1930s mark a crisis of masculinity in their sometimes contradictory assertions about "manliness" in the face of industrial Britain. Just as the rise of mass production triggered bourgeois anxieties about losing "individuality," it also triggered anxieties about losing masculinity.

This justification builds up an image of a scary, if not paranoid society that would not be erroneously seen as home of weak and basest individuals, as Brett writes. The reasons that led government's investments to those documentaries are explained by Bryant: "Thus documentary's cross-class scrutiny of industrial labor was inextricably bound with its

investment in masculinity." Such preoccupation is understood as the British culture, taken by Christian traditions, reiterate machismo and male-centred families through a constant propaganda for heterosexuality and an almost, often deviated, view against homosexuality. This meets what Weeks says in relation to the western world wherein "all definitions of the erotic are hegemonised by the prime importance imputed to 'the sexual' (as a source of identity, pleasure and power), and in particular to male heterosexuality" (179). This attitude on the part of the dominant social and political classes was not always openly perceived; indeed, this class totally constructed sexuality in culture according to its political objectives, as Foucault writes in *The History of Sexuality I* (116). In Western culture, those objectives seem to have targeted the manly ideal present in masculine heterosexuality as *the* valid sexuality that continued to be so throughout the 20th century, through the use of different modes of control.

Gayle S. Rubin shows in her article 'Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality' that political mechanisms in the North-Western hemispheres had to be applied caused by the inevitable outcome of homosexual groups who also politically reacted against the homophobic status quo. She says that:

> Contemporary conflicts over sexual values and erotic conduct have much in common with the religious disputes of earlier centuries. They acquire immense symbolic weight. Disputes over sexual behavior often become the vehicles for displacing social anxieties, and discharging their attendant emotional intensity. Consequently, sexuality should be treated with special respect in times of great stress. (quoted in Abelove, 4)

The accentuated aspect of social turbulences in various historical periods show us that one of the basic reasons was put on sexuality that was the escape-valve for the rebellions that moved societies in time.

> The realm of sexuality also has its own internal politics, and modes of oppression. As with other aspects of human behavior, the concrete institutional forms of sexuality at any given time and place are products of human activity. They are imbedded with conflicts of interest and political maneuvering, both deliberate and incidental. In that sense, sex is always political. But there are also historical periods in which sexuality is more sharply contested and more overtly politicized. In such periods, the domain of

> erotic life is, in effect, renegotiated. In England and the United States, the late nineteenth century was one such era. During that time, powerful social movements focused on "vices" of all sorts. There were educational and political campaigns to encourage chastity, to eliminate prostitution and to discourage masturbation, especially among the young. Morality crusaders attacked obscene literature, nude paintings, music halls, abortion, birth control information and public dancing. The consolidation of Victorian morality, and its apparatus of social, medical, and legal enforcement, was the outcome of a long period of struggles whose results have been bitterly contested ever since (quoted in Abelove, 4).

Rubin's comment related to sex as political shows us that besides sexuality that is related to behaviour, sex would be fixed in male and female, a fact that does attract a realm for political interests. I see it as men, the male sex, being treated with more socio-political advantages than women, the female. As she also notes, from time to time in human history moralist groups found in sex and sexuality a scape-goat to solve their unstable and fragile social structures, by punishing all those who did not behave in accordance with traditions of values often questionable for dividing society and frequently discharging on the so-called 'immoral' people their frustrations and incapacities to review their values. She observes that in Western societies "sexuality has been structured within an extremely punitive social framework, and subjected to very formal and informal controls" (quoted in Abelove, 10). This clarification of terms and their inevitable political aspect will permit readers to notice that specifically to the inter wars period the strong moral contextual view based on Christian tradition will be directly and indirectly influencing the way Auden's love poems were written.

On these modes of control and reinforcing Mosse's explanation on the construction of masculinity, Andrew Tolson's argument informs the reason that makes working-class men more manly than middle-class ones. This consideration not only elicits the different constructions of masculinity in different social classes, but also the necessity of the working class men to adopt an exaggerated masculine culture within the workplace - a chauvinistic sexuality, blatant machismo. Tolson also refers to the difference between these two sorts of men that is fundamentally that between the kinds of masculinity which are possible when a

man has a wage versus a salary, works by the clock versus appointment, has a job security and a career structure versus job insecurity and fear of personal injury.

The working class men search for their identity, the sense of who they are dependently on their work, whereas the middle-class men are engaged in an individual struggle with themselves for success. Hence, the existence of male fraternities in working-class milieu, adopting an exaggerated masculinity as compensation and the middle-class men's form of compensation is undermined by systems of authority at work (quoted in Edley and Wetherel, 104-5). Weeks points out the fact that, being sexual identity a social product, "the body possibilities are defined within defined social relations, and are subject to critical political mediations" (181). He also notes that due to the complexity of power operation in relation to sexuality, the problem becomes to recognise "the best forms of intervention necessary to change the relations of power" (181). As Bryant showed above, the object of Auden's documentarists group was the resistant coal miners in the north of England. The term 'resistant' appears here not specifically in relation to those men's physical strength but especially to remind the reader that those men's lives were not easy for reasons that surpass the mining work itself. Noreen Branson and Margot Heinemann assert, "There can be no doubt at all that employed miners, even at the end of the thirties, were living worse than they had done before the First World War" (quoted in Bryant, 9). Bryant also points to the aspect that "traditionally, the cultural configuration of Britain's industrial North combines a body/mind dualism with bifurcations along gender as well as class lines." She quotes Philip Dodd who explains that "the North is masculine, working class and physical; the South, feminine, middle-class and spiritual." This perception of the British society led documentarists to try to do a strategic work, and they went further so as employing various strategies for erasing the North/South divide that threatened to un-man the southern men. One strategy for closing the distance between their own manhood and the miners' was, for

instance, to use their sustained contact with industrial Britain to call attention to the documentarist's position as a man among real men.

Yet, this idea comes out unsteady as K. Devaney shows in his text. He describes the everyday life of miners and entitles their community of workers as a ‘fraternity’. According to his own experience in a pit, he declares to his reader that some types of activities found normal among the miners would be strange in other situations. Devaney exemplifies those activities such as physical contacts directly in the genitals, or even gentle bites or wrestle that are but friendly attitudes considered manly by those workers (quoted in Edley and Wetherel, 107). This is considered an attitude of camaraderie, *normal* as far as performative roles are accounted. The male role is based on a few key norms, although the concept of norm is ambiguous. On the one hand, the behaviour presented by the miners follows a type of rule that is actually recognised and followed by a substantial portion of the membership of a group, explain Lee and Newby. On the other hand, the same notion can be used to describe, not men’s actual behaviour, but the ways in which society expects men to behave (quoted in Edley and Wetherel, 90). Tolson argues that “one of the main characteristics of working-class men is their dependence on local territory and their local community for a sense of identity” (quoted in Edley and Wetherel, 112). Thus, the working class men construct their sexuality different from middle-class men, what leads one to perceive that sexuality is not only conducted by political means; it involves more than legal efforts to limit it, but it is also a class construction made within the boundaries of each one. Somehow, this statement by Tolson indicates that those physical encounters became ‘natural’ among working class men so that there are no questionings about their sexual preference that must be heterosexual. The process occurs in such a way that one can say that the same physical touching would not be expected in a mine between a homosexual and a heterosexual, as well as a miner and his wife.

Another aspect of those contacts in the pit is that none of the men involved in the physical proximity is playing the role of a woman as homosexuals are seen to do.

As one considers the attempt of the British government in the 1930s to show the real men in the masculine North, one meets such apparent contrarieties typical in same-sex sites such as the coal mines. Jeff Hearn and W. Parkin argue that "capitalist practices and organisational culture organise the expression of sexuality within the workplace as well as other aspects of relationship between working men and women" (quoted in Edley and Wetherel, 108). Indeed, one must see in this report that in homosocial places such as coal mines, the homoerotic encounters are not condemned since they occur among same class men. As Bryant showed above, the mingling bourgeois men with young working-class men caused concerns from social views due to its suggestion of homosexuality.

This issue of delimiting class interaction seems to be an institution in English culture as history can show, but as Weeks has pointed out before, society is never a unified body due to its various expressions in the different classes. This concern in the British soil is historically cemented and can be better comprehended as the History of English dynasties is re-examined and King Edward II's court life in the XIV century is viewed as punctual. A. L. Rowse points out that Edward II was pursued and killed for his homosexuality because he was said to be a friendly subject toward plebeians at those times, but this aspect of his personality did not attract the sympathy of those who supported him in throne. His tastes, in other words, were distinctly lower class: he liked hedging and ditching, building and trenching, sports, racing and hunting, gaming and dicing. Rowse adds that "he enjoyed the gay and unrepressed company of jolly workmen, grooms, sailors, rowing men" (4). His reign was crowned by frequent attacks from his nobles who did not accept his way of behaving and governing. As this report presents, one of the crisis in homosexual behaviour in England is the rupture of class boundaries.

Based on the history of one of the English kings and his relation with his peers, one can see that class boundaries have been a concern of the British culture in which the heavy hand of the dominant classes have controlled sexuality by exerting their power to refrain any attempt to avoid invasions of a class into another in society. The physical contact among the miners did not corrupt the ideal masculinity since their touches on each other's bodies are not related to effeminacy. But one can always claim that this is but a cultural construction that segregates individuals in spaces where an act seen as perversion, in another is not. That is, in a private realm some sorts of physical contact are allowed and legal, whereas the same acts are expelled from society if performed in a public sphere. What plays an important role here is that the public money invested in the political strategy to turn the view of the English men masculine through a view of manly men is apparently flawed, destabilized by its contradictions, considering that the miners practised a contact prohibited for those known as homosexuals.

As Edley and Wetherel argue, the civilizatory project engendered by the dominant classes is effective since presupposes an intimacy among heterosexuals whose attitudes are regulated through class and working practices. The functioning worked out because its members remained inside the limits which structured patterns of proximity and opportunity. Heterosexuals are allowed to physical contacts that do not cause any further suspicion of desire, and that respect the authorities of those who are considered superior in terms of abilities and/or aptitude to exert a ruling position. It is not what occurs when homosexual men are among heterosexuals, because the patterns of fraternity that rules their [the heterosexuals'] relationships are strongly dependent on homophobia and gay bashing (108). Thus, the physical proximity inside a class does not subvert the standard behaviour, since it is accepted by the class itself and kept in there without causing the invasion of other classes. The homosexuals not only subvert the image of the ideal English man, but also infringe the

classes' structures on which the British culture has tried to solidify its masculine image to the rest of the world.

With regard to Auden's representations of the manly industrial North, Bryant notes that they mark the beginning of his socially conscious poetry. She instances this aspect with Auden's poem entitled "The Watershed," first published in 1928, which offers an appropriate place to begin reading Auden and documentary practice through one another. The poem participates in documentary's sustained act of looking across class lines, yet it also questions the documentary observer's presence in mining country. Auden's poem surveys this industrial landscape through a double act of looking; we, Bryant says, perceive the scene through a stranger who enters unfamiliar territory, and through the poem's disembodied speaker who observes this stranger's activity.

Another important aspect is the experience lived by the documentarist and poet Auden. Bryant writes that his view of the pit life comes to his lines not only expressing the viewer's (the documentarist-poet's) position behind the camera, but also the miners' dangers while at work. His use of imperatives ("Go home," "turn back") that expel this observer from the scene denies him the visual authority upon which conventional documentaries depend. The alternative dynamics of a poem such as "The Watershed" allow space for critiquing representation, a feature that runs across the spectrum of Auden's documentary work, observes Bryant (14). As a homosexual, Auden's limits were all around in his documentary site. Edward Mendelson notes Auden's use of the word crooked to signify homosexuality (quoted in Bryant, 14), and Bryant states that, in "The chimneys are smoking" published in the 1933 anthology *New Country* and in Auden's 1936 volume *Look, Stranger!*, mines become a trope for the buried, "crooked" love that must "hide underground." Auden's speaker links himself and his male lover with "the colliers" in a world of "double-shadow." From these industrial, underground enclosures (the engine room, mines), Auden creates erotic

spaces safely removed from hostile eyes. The shared industrial terrain of Auden's love poems and documentarists' homoerotic observations of miners provides an important context for British documentary practice in the 1930s (Bryant, 15). One can say that the manly miners might have attracted the ‘un-manly’ middle-class men, but the latter were legally and socially restrained from approaching the former for any sexual act.

Like his contemporaries in all social levels, Auden was encircled by the socio-political and economic contingencies. As Bryant shows, Auden’s participation in working among the producers of the films reveals a poet and a documentarist expressing his contemporary thinking as class and sexual issues were concerned (12). His ‘crooked’ writing expounds his political stance towards social obstacles to homosexual issues. This procedure can be seen as a witty decision to those laws, which granted illegality to same-sex activities. In a sense, his veiling his own perception through his special use of words is related to a dissidence that assures his status quo as a member of society. The ideal man model depicted by Mosse and Miller is put over as a mode to allow his room in the literary wards.

Referring to heterosexuality and homosexuality, Sinfield argues that models have dissident potential (*Cultural Politics*, 69). In 1929 back from Berlin, Auden began his career as a teacher in Larchfield, Scotland, a profession to which he would dedicate the rest of his life. His first book *Poems* was published in 1930. In 1932 at 25 years old, Auden had his reputation consolidated by the publication of works such as *The Orators: An English Study*, and in 1937, his collection *Look Stranger!*, that was considered the most famous work of the young English poet (Sanders, 557). Bozorth affirms that “Auden’s homosexuality has historically had a peculiar status: obvious to some, invisible to others and some notable exceptions, treated by critics as a matter of little or no importance. Auden should be seen as central to a tradition of gay poetics of indeterminacy” (4). The poet’s attitude towards his private life turned him a paradigm of dissidence as the sexual politics of the closet, as Bozorth

calls (19), are regarded. His concealing his sexual preferences bears an aspect of political strategy in the inter-wars conservative England. Woods observes Auden's perception of the world in which the poet seemed to be aware of "sexual acts between men as crimes, and homo-erotic poetry as admissible evidence of them", what made him find "a language for indirection" (170).

The most rigorous policing in that epoch concerned male homosexuality which was seen as a transgression against socio-cultural patterns of Englishness. As it were, the British culture must not be seen as a terrain of and for unmanly individuals that could stain the image so severely safeguarded by all possible means. The illustrations of the past, such as Wilde's case, served inter-war artists to reconsider the ever present social and legal constraints imposed on homosexuals. Auden's "poetics of indeterminacy" protected him from unwanted public confrontation that would destroy his career both as a poet and teacher. Edley and Wetherel write that there is a pattern to men's behaviour, and what men do is to deal with major anomalies that contrast with that model. Hiding behind language possibilities, Auden remained away from any homophobic attacks that might ruin him. In many societies, gay men are the recipients of the violence of other homophobic men, what shows some men acting to oppress and control the masculinity expressed by other men, not always correspondent to the ideal model, remind Edley and Wetherel (128).

Auden's discretion towards his sexuality leads one back to the disparity existent among homosexuals commented by Sinfield and also by Bozorth. The latter reveals that Auden and some poets of his group seemed not to identify themselves with effeminate men. Pinkney cites Auden's own words related to this divergence of behaviour among homosexuals: "I knew no German and no German literature, but I felt out of sympathy with French culture, partly by temperament and partly in revolt against the generation immediately preceding

mine." Bradbury and McFarlane note that the artistic milieu in Berlin was less jocose and decidedly political than the French (457).

Pinkney comments that "Auden then set off to Weimar[10] Berlin, the 'bugger's daydream" (16). He and his poet friends turned their attention to that culture which privileged the masculine ideal and where homosexuality was not persecuted as it was in England.

> Germany seems to have represented for Auden and his friends what France did for Wilde and the decadents of the 1890s, and southern Europe for writers like Pater and Forster. More relaxed attitudes about sex were clearly much of the attraction. In German Auden felt free to write about sex with men. Syntactically and semantically straightforward, they [his poems] wholly lack the distinct landscape and tone of his early work in England. German was safely foreign (Bozorth 22-3).

Bozorth observes that

> the young Auden wrote his most sexually explicit poems in German, and they were shown only to a few friends, remaining unpublished until 1990. They are quite unlike his English poems at the time – and not just because in German Auden felt free to write frankly about sex with men. Syntactically and semantically straightforward, they wholly lack the distinct landscape and tone of his early work in English. If German was for Auden a language "irradiated with sex", it was also safely foreign (23).

Germany was the potential place for liberation of desire, free from the moral sickness of Western civilisation, and where youth could live again, free of the shackles of the past, and

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[10]Weimar Republic: The period in German history from 1919 to 1933 is commonly referred to as the Weimar Republic, as the Republic's constitution was drafted here because the capital, Berlin, with its street rioting after the 1918 German Revolution, was considered too dangerous for the National Assembly to convene there. This culture was often considered to be decadent and socially disruptive by rightists. Germany's liberal Weimar constitution (1919) could not guarantee a stable government in the face of rightist violence. (http://en.wikipedia.org./wiki/Weimar#Weimar_Republic)

where they could find a forward-looking sexual utopia (22). Drawing on his experience in Berlin, Christopher Isherwood, a close friend of Auden wrote two books - *Lions and Shadows* (1938) and *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939) - not explicitly homosexual, though in both a whole variety of sexual tastes, whims, and deviations are touched upon, all of them openly catered for at the clubs, bars, and nude beaches of Weimar Germany (Sanders, 558).

Bozorth cites Stephen Spender's words related to their group of poets, Mortmere, and their common decision to leave for Berlin:

> In the late Twenties young English writers were more concerned with censorship than with politics. 1929 was the last year of that strange Indian Summer – the Weimar Republic. For many of my friends and for myself, Germany seemed a paradise where there was no censorship and young Germans enjoyed extraordinary freedom in their lives. Another result of censorship as to make us wish to write precisely about those subjects which were most likely to result in our books being banned (21).

The dislocation provoked by the attractive reality of cities such as Berlin, also led Auden to other places. David Perkins tells that "early in 1939 Auden left England for the United States (he became a citizen in 1946). He made his living by teaching in schools and colleges" (150).

The next six year the world, especially the European continent, would face the horror and terror of the World War II, which led England to war against Germany. The fragmented societies would then fight as nations against fascist rulers. Likewise, the Soviet Union and the United States of America came in the war, leading these Western countries and other nations to redefine borders and internal and external politics. As a consequence, culture would be deeply influenced by that event, since all the levels of society suffered the consequences of a conflict that provided a rethinking of values and positions.

Chapter 03

Auden's poetry:

Ambiguity, Autobiography and Eroticism

The previous chapter showed us a historical panorama of the inter-war period, which was characterised by fragments of society, its cultural values and concepts. My objective in this chapter is to deal with theoretical apparatuses on the biographical and the autobiographical lines of criticism. I bring some theoreticians' and critics' notions of how human experience in society is perceived and its link with biography and autobiography. I also write about ambiguity in Auden's poetry as such figure of speech turns out as his important poetic strategy.

Being an autobiographical text, a poem is related to the view a poet has of his own life: his spirit, body, emotions and intellect; and to experiences with the external world so he can act in and/or react to it. However, in *Tradition and Individual Talent* T. S. Eliot writes:

> The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality. There remains to define this process of depersonalization and its relation to the sense of tradition. It is in this depersonalization that art may be said to approach the condition of science. I shall, therefore, invite you to consider, as a suggestive analogy, the action which takes place when a bit of finely filiated platinum is introduced into a chamber containing oxygen and sulphur dioxide.

Eliot opens a delicate discussion on the process of creation, since he believes that it is through the poet's 'extinction of personality' that a poem as an art piece can come out during a process that transforms the self with its impressions taken from experience. He adds:

> Honest criticism and sensitive appreciation is directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry. If we attend to the confused cries of the newspaper critics and the susurrus of popular repetition that follows, we shall hear the names of poets in great numbers; if we seek not Blue-book knowledge but the enjoyment of poetry, and ask for a poem, we shall seldom find it.

His position is evidently authoritarian and definitive as he evaluates criticism, highlighting the importance of the text itself as art, and discarding the poet's presence in his writing. At a first moment, we can perceive his insistence to position an artistic piece as it comes to have a unique condition that makes it be what it is. By evaluating an art work, Eliot sees the text as container of message, since the artistic piece is a result of a process of transformation of the author's mind in his experience.

> The analogy was that of the catalyst. When the two gases previously mentioned are mixed in the presence of a filament of platinum, they form sulphurous acid. This combination takes place only if the platinum is present; nevertheless the newly formed acid contains no trace of platinum, and the platinum itself is apparently unaffected; has remained inert, neutral, and unchanged. The mind of the poet is the shred of platinum. It may partly or exclusively operate upon the experience of the man himself; but, the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material.

The key word in this paragraph is 'combination' in the conditional tense regulated by the presence of another element that will help the outcome of a new other that in the chemical case is exemplified by the platinum. For Eliot, the mix does make the presence of the artist's self form another thing that we call the art piece. To reinforce his view, he qualifies the artist that to be perfect must be separate from his creation. This example is understandable, but Eliot does forget that portions of the mind of the author, at least, remain there in the blend, not excluding the presence of the author's personality.

> It is not in his personal emotions, the emotions provoked by particular events in his life, that the poet is in any way remarkable or interesting. His particular emotions may be simple, or crude, or flat. The emotion in his poetry will be a very complex thing, but not with the complexity of the emotions of people who have very complex or unusual emotions in life. Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things.

Eliot's perception of what the artist feels and what he writes is remarkable, since the theorist seemed to believe poetry not as a place where the artist hides himself but as a local where we

will not find any trace of the poet. Eliot exalts ideas intelligently composed, but the view that he has of poetry makes it be destitute of the complexities of the poet's emotions; creation is disconnected from creator, i.e., the product comes out as some levels of the subjectivity of the author are absent of the poem: the author's self transformed in experience, obliterating his presence. There is a problem in this view of poetry since this artistic expression is not simply an elaborate legible syntactical construction of thoughts and emotions about things around, for the poet, as we will see here, feels the world as a social individual that cannot separate himself from the strata of his personality. As the poet contacts the world in his experience, he is totally influenced by the various levels and categories of cultural manifestations that comprehend the reality in which he is inserted. But we can argue as we see such transformation containing amounts of the poet's emotions and ideas.

As we connect Eliot's conception with Auden's work in the inter-war period, we will see that socio-political conditions influenced the process of creation so that the latter had to use ambiguity; that is, his mind was there choosing words and constructing phrases that would not allow his homosexuality appear. And as we regard his work as autobiographical, we are led to think of his feelings that were in a given moment of the poet's experience touched and urged him to write what and how he did. If an art piece were without the artist's self, Auden would not find in this figure of speech a means to hide it.

3.1. Experience

We can see experience directly connected to biography and autobiography as we conceive them as description of a life and presence of an individual's self. In such way, poetry is consequently linked to the poet's experience, since he is an individual with thoughts and emotions who influences and is influenced by the socio-cultural context. This is so since

humans live in societies ruled by traditions and laws that encourage or not some behaviours. In “The Evidence of Experience”, Joan W. Scott writes words about human contacts with each other and/or the world around:

> The evidence of experience, whether conceived through a metaphor of visibility or any other way that takes meaning as transparent, reproduces rather than contests given ideological systems – those that assume that the facts of history speak for themselves and those that rest on notions of a natural or established opposition between, say, sexual practices and social conventions, or between homosexuality and heterosexuality. Histories that document the “hidden” world of homosexuality, for example show the impact of silence and repression on the lives of those affected by it and bring to light the history of their suppression and exploitation. But the project of making experience visible precludes critical examination of the workings of the ideological system itself, its categories of representation (homosexual/heterosexual, man/woman, black/white as fixed immutable identities), its premises about what these categories mean and how they operate, and its notions of subjects, origin, and cause (quoted in Abelove, 400).

As we move forwards to examine works of art such as Auden’s poems written in the inter-war period, we can see that the term ‘hidden’ evidences not only his behaviour, but his society that managed to maintain itself organised in a structure that appeared to be controlled. If history is seen as fixed, there is a sense of passivity that does not sustain itself as the characteristic activity of experience in the level of individual and group is dynamic. Moreover, this notion of history accommodates possible mistakes committed against some individuals and groups, ‘comforting’ those who are benefited by it. As political efforts try to massify experience under strong pressure that the cultural products exert in society, the dynamism of experience requires a continuous rearrangement of politics, forcing the rise and fall of some social values. We could see in the previous chapter that World War I caused England, as a European nation, different actions and reactions in its internal and external politics so that its culture could continue to be held.

Scott goes to the individual’s experience by citing Michel de Certeau’s words: “the authority of the ‘subject of knowledge’ [is measured] by the elimination of everything concerning the speaker” (quoted in Abelove, 403). In terms of literature, de Certeau’s postulation points out a separation between the author’s voice and the narrator’s in order the

reader does not confuse them. This idea leads us to Eliot's view of an art work that, as we have discussed above, is so for transformed with other elements that do not present autobiographical traces. De Certeau's partition promotes in the text a questionable passivity or absence that the author, comprehended as the subject of knowledge, is imbued as if the work of art were void of his experience that would not be in the artistic piece. Scott explains: "his [the narrator's] knowledge, reflecting as it does something apart from him [the author], is legitimized and presented as universal: accessible to all" (quoted in Abelove, 403). When she writes of the existence of a legitimisation, she suggests an appreciation based on a number of values that guide and rule a society with the intention that legitimises a cultural product or not. These principles are based on the narrator and his social group in an agreement that can positively signalise for what he tells. But it seems another attempt to discard the emotional part of the author in the process of creation: where is a narrator from? From a limited rational dimension that reaffirms the socio-political establishment? If the answer reiterates the separation from the author and the narrator, it reinforces the disappearance of the connection between them on a level that is impossible to be conceived, since a work of art does contain traces of the author.

An author lives diverse experiences in time and space, which provide him learning that can be exchanged with his group. In so doing, he faces his group's reactions based on its beliefs and values that increase or not the importance of it, so that what he lived can lead people to new perceptions of the world. Scott adds: "history is *an* interpretation (my emphasis), a selective ordering of information that through its use of originary categories and teleological accounts legitimises a particular kind of politics" (quoted in Abelove, 404-5). The group to which the individual belongs selects information, by considering and favouring some, rejecting or depreciating others. As society eliminates some information, we can see a preference for a particular politics that necessarily valorises the interests of the ruling group.

Such act is based on the amount of benefits a social class will have in human relations, imputing on art a political role to have meaningful influence in socio-cultural life.

Scott moves further into this point by asking a crucial question about experience and its historicising: “how do we authorise the new knowledge if the possibility of all historical objectivity has been questioned?” She answers: “By appealing to experience, which in this usage connotes both reality and its subjectivity apprehension” (quoted in Abelove, 405). Such authorization delivers responsibility to everyone, and it is linked to the meaning that ‘experience’ has as it connects to the author of a product and its reception by readers as social agents. Thus, according to her, it is in our discernment of experience and its importance that we, members of a society, will use to set on an individual the role he obtains when he produces an artistic piece. In other words, what makes us impute such ‘authorization’ if history and its complexities put inside it profound questionings of its role in culture? Scott says that what a person lives in reality is partly constructed by devices such as cultural products that assist the dominant class to form subjectivity through political means, as acceptance of what experience provided to contribute to the purposes of society.

Furthermore, information may come to mean much to the individual and his group, especially when it is related to referents that are shared among them. Scott exemplifies: “the experience of women in the past and of women historians who can recognise something of themselves in their foremothers” (quoted in Abelove, 405). Now in the present women who study the events of women in the past recognise themselves in their predecessors and in their social conditions because the former and the latter share cultural referents that have been perpetuated by culture. What the women historians have discovered linked to women in the past allows the former to understand what the latter lived because in the present some cultural aspects of their lives continue to be treated and/or seen like they were in the past. With additional information found in the experiences of members of society, the comprehension of

the present of some groups can be widened, providing a perspective until then simply unperceived of their history or unconsidered by the dominant class. In literary terms, it is in the individual's recognition of common referents that what he reads speaks of his life in a culture, so what the writer expresses links him with the past and present of his civilization.

In another article entitled "Experience", Scott refers to the autobiographical work of Samuel Delany in documenting his own experiences as an individual who is part of a society culturally characterised by the various human expressions. As an artist, his quotidian is seen as

> histories [that] have provided evidence for a world of alternative values and practices whose existence gives the lie to hegemonic constructions of social worlds, whether these constructions vaunt the political superiority of white men, the coherence and unity of selves, the naturalness of heterosexual monogamy, or the inevitability of scientific progress and economic development (quoted in Smith & Watson, 58).

She points out his reality as a social member: he was a black homosexual whose alternative values and practices questioned the prevailing hegemonic socio-cultural constructions, as much as a man of his conditions inevitably poses all the surrounding structures into a review of values. As Scott informs, he not always agrees with the responses of some social events that follow the patterns stipulated by the dominant culture, being an agent who sets up his voice through the narrator's.

In his specific case, we have queer matters as gender, race, and social class conflate in his life and artistic work that touch visibility, one of the most approached aspects of gender studies: "making the movement [of sexual practices] visible breaks the silence about it, challenges prevailing notions, and opens new possibilities for everyone", adds Scott (quoted in Smith & Watson, 57). He opted for this sort of politics: to be direct, to break the 'comfortable' silence that society has always chosen, as homosexuality is discussed or a theme in artistic works. As Scott writes, Delany's work is autobiographical as it is a junction between the author's subjectivity and agency and the narrator's, that is, the narrator's voice is

the author's.

For Delany, Scott cites, "the revolution will come precisely because of the infiltration of clear and articulate language" (quoted in Smith & Watson, 57). Whereas Delany exerted his sexual politics through visibility, it is Auden's 'invisibility' and articulate language in indeterminacy that his agency could cause 'revolution' that breaks his apparent silence towards homosexuality. The historical characteristic of the former's political attitude appears in his opening his homosexuality, causing reactions in society as his agency converges with his narrator's. Scott points out that Delany's literal transparency is crucial to his project (quoted in Smith & Watson, 58), what means that the author also exerted changes by posing activity in his narrator. In Auden's way to deal with language, we perceive an intricate articulation that does not make his work an easy reading, although he maintains a level of communicability in his words. I would say that rather than showing prudence in order not to offend the traditional Christianised Anglo-Saxon societies, especially the British, his agency operates by containing a message for those whose sexual practices were restricted by anti-homosexuals laws. All that might suggest passivity is re-questioned by Auden so what we do see is an agency well operative in an apparent agreement with the *establishment.*

Scott also refers to the constitution of subjectivity and its direct connection with discourse:

> Subjects are constituted discursively, but there are conflicts among discursive systems, contradictions within any one of them, but multiple meanings possible for the concepts they deploy. And subjects have agency. They are not unified, autonomous individuals exercising free will, but rather subjects whose agency is created through situations and statuses conferred on them. Being a subject means being "subject to definite conditions of existence, conditions of endowment of agents and conditions of exercise (quoted in Smith & Watson, 66).

Such constitution of subjectivity is a permanently unstable ground, since legitimised by the group or not, influencing each member. Thus, agency takes place as the members of the group valorise a subject for political reasons, causing divergences and dissidences. Nonetheless,

Scott reminds readers that as a group valorises a subject as an agent, it is indeed done with intentions that re-affirm values that are politically 'interesting' to the group.

Scott's assumptions elicit the closeted status that individuals like Auden put themselves in so their privacy could be safeguarded. It could lead us to see him as reactionary, assimilating the British legal view of issues such as homosexuality, but Auden's case is not as simple as it seems to be. We can see that his subjectivity was exerted as he shielded it behind his particular use of ambiguity and other linguistic devices such as metaphors that could be connected with his experience voiced by the narrator who veiled the poet. To reinforce it, Scott considers Teresa de Laurettis' definition of experience:

> [It] is the process by which, for all social beings, subjectivity is constructed. Through that process one places oneself or it is placed in social reality and so perceives and comprehends as subjective (referring to, originating in oneself) those relations – material, economic, and interpersonal – which are in fact social, and, in a larger perspective, historical (quoted in Smith & Watson, 61).

As de Laurettis shows, an individual's subjectivity is created as he experiences several events that occur inside a world that has been constructed by the others who preceded him. In this setting the meaning given to cultural products serves to increase or decrease the value of an experience that builds the subjectivity of an individual in time; the social characteristic compels the relations among individuals to happen inside boundaries that permit or repress their desires. In other words, a society is ruled by a dominant class that permits others to move according to its pre-existent interests, whose socio-cultural manoeuvres work to construct the human relations, giving these contacts a historical characteristic as social forces work to valorise or ignore events.

Scott also elicits the idea that the process described by de Laurettis "operates crucially through differentiation; its effect is to constitute subjects as fixed and autonomous, and who are considered reliable sources of a knowledge that comes from access to the real by means of their experience" (quoted in Smith & Watson, 61). In this frame constructed and held by pre-

set social rules: this operation denotes that meanings are pre-conceived, establishing what is fixed and autonomous, and reliable or not, the subjectivity of individuals happens, making them all 'unequal', and providing a questionable 'personal' view of the world. A poet as social member singularly reads the world, but like all the others, his expressivity is examined by those who exert power, being accepted or refused.

From this angle, de Laurettis's assumption in relation to the constitution of subjects takes a political aspect. As we consider sexual politics, heterosexuals' subjectivity is constructed so as to permit them to have advantages in most of the social milieus, since their sexual behaviour is in accordance with the interests of those who have control. Homosexuals are judged according to their sexuality considered subversive, immoral and jocose, and thus confined to external spheres that do not grant them the same civil rights that heterosexuals have. Notwithstanding, these views of homosexuals are not totally true: the previous chapter showed that society provides some benefits to those who can dissuade their homosexuality under an appearance of manly heterosexual, or practise their homosexual encounters in 'unseen' places demarked by society. Since some homosexuals agree with this, the notion that subjectivity is constantly worked to be constituted as fixed is reinforced, and their autonomy is questionable, for being always an unstable status as much as these individuals' expressivities presuppose their 'freedom' limited by values pre-set by culture.

History is, thus, fundamentally a woven tissue of facts that are put together in line so we can comprehend causes, effects and consequences that generate other events and so on. But the events brought to light due to their importance can be questioned since there are individuals who are not contemplated by the values politically constructed. The vectors of reproduction of ideological systems are subtle and give history an opaque image that works for the interests of the dominant class, making this humane science not fixed or neuter. The relevance of these points here is that values seen in many literary texts function by favouring

the System that filters and displays categories and notions in accordance with their finalities in culture. Auden and some of his peers in the inter-war period seem to have comprehended the movements of the wheel of history and its operations, for they invested in an invisibility of their beliefs concerning sexual liberty as citizens and artists, and strived to make their views come out through the artistic or linguistic possibilities. Scott writes about the importance of what the historical and cultural operations on individuals' experiences means as she observes representation in literature:

> Reading for "the literary" does not seem at all inappropriate for those whose discipline is devoted to the study of change. Rather, it is a way of changing the focus and the philosophy of our history, from one bent on naturalizing "experience" through a belief in the unmediated relationship between words and things, to one that takes all categories of analysis as contextual, contested, and contingent. (quoted in Smith, & Watson, 68)

Experience can be an artificial construct of exchanges between individual and world in time, for cultural products aim to achieve results that benefit the interests of the dominant class. Thus, reading a literary work requires from us to conceive experience as something that comes out as political inside the social system, because humans are intrinsically political. Scott perceives that representation is therefore carefully formulated to solidify a sort of behaviour or belief that favours the powerful class:

> How have categories of representation and analysis – such as class, race, gender, relations of production, biology, identity, subjectivity, agency, experience, even culture – achieved their foundational status? What have been the effects of their articulations? What does it mean for historians to study the past in terms of these categories; for individuals to think of themselves in these terms? What is the relationship between salience of such categories in our own time and their existence in the past? Questions such as these open considerations of what Dominick LaCapra has referred to as the "transferential" relationship between the historian and the past, that is, of the relationship between the power of the historian's analytic frame and the events that are the object of his or her study. And they historicize both sides of that relationship by denying the fixity and transcendence of anything that appears to operate as a foundation, turning attention instead to the history of foundationalist concepts themselves. The history of these concepts (understood to be contested and contradictory) then becomes the evidence by which "experience" can be grasped and by which the historian's relationship to the past she writes about can be articulated. (quoted in Smith, & Watson, 68)

Experience is thus the opportunity which leads individuals to contact the world and its representations in the diverse areas of human culture known to be manoeuvred in order to make events have a facet according to the angle of interest of the dominant class. Human experience consequently is inscribed in the history of a community, such as the Western civilization, not simply as a natural exchange but as a socio-political construct that carries interests of some individuals who hold power so as to allow other members of society to build pictures of reality in which they are immersed. The literary work as representative approximates imaginary conceptions of a time past and the present that helps to verify the verisimilitude of the narratives, reviewing the values of social concepts already strengthened in and by culture and tendencies of analyses that always benefit a class to have power over others.

In "Is there a History of Sexuality?" David M. Halperin considers individuals' experience and observes that

> we must train ourselves to recognise conventions of feeling as well as conventions of behaviour and to interpret the intricate texture of personal life as an artefact, as the determinate outcome, of a complex and arbitrary constellation of cultural processes. We must, in short, be willing to admit that what seem to be our most inward, authentic, and private experiences are actually, in Adrienne Rich's admirable phrase, "shared, unnecessary/and political (quoted in Abelove, 426).

His observation poses on the various cultural products a political view not always perceived because they are arbitrary, receiving values imposed and valorised by the conventions of society, held to pre-conceive interpretations that benefit the individuals and/or the group who determines values. Rich's phrase shows the individual's actions and reactions under influences of his cultural models that cannot be discharged of profound political content that leads individuals to read the world from points of view emphasised by culture on its various products. However, social evolution shows that there have been examples of men and women whose constant actions and reactions try to subvert social determinations, enriching society and culture, and interfering to sediment or destabilise values on an individual's ground and

consequently on his group.

In "Experience into History: Theory and Biography" Fred Inglis also observes experience inserted in history as an event that is

> generalized as the sum of all that has happened to humankind in the roughly 250,000 years of its duration so far. The experience of one's own or favoured others is, like one's feelings, sometimes treated so respectfully as to be incorrigible. That is, what my experience is can only be pronounced upon as to truth or validity by *me*. I can tell you what it is, but you can't tell me. It is only accessible to introspection (204).

The historicity of experience occurs with an individual whose deeds have been achieved with the participation of others who influence each other in various levels. The link with truth that trespasses human history can also be confirmed by the person's life that valorises experience or not as much as he accounts and permits it to exert its action in his life. The individual's angularity to see, qualify and quantify something is restricted to his personal world. Thus, two individuals apprehend reality on slightly different degrees in their experiences, since the internal process of individuation is distinct to each. Nonetheless, Inglis seems to pass over this 'individual singularity' to see the world that may be a result from subtle mechanisms that are strategically transmitted.

Lived on the level of the individual, experience is a socio-cultural event: "intersubjective and trans-individual definitions and meanings, constituted by the language and symbols we have for interpreting and therefore giving experience its meaning and value. Experience, on this account, is not yours or mine; it is ours" (Inglis, 205). An individual lives in a group with which he shares codes whose meanings are to be understood by all the others so social life can occur. Thus, experience is "public" (205), because "[it] not only denotes what we have learned, it also denotes what we have learned *from*" (205). The social interaction in a cultural sphere where the weight each element has, and how culture regards it as common rights and duties, limits or amplifies actions, permitting individuals to influence others or not.

Individuals valorise every cultural product by either exalting or refusing them. The poet in his subjectivity is sometimes fenced in by patterns whose politics allows him to express reality as far as his work strengthens the values of society. But the complexity of societies subtly works to benefit the powerful class; manifestations that appear to be opposite to the purposes of the controlling class allow individuals and groups to question and attack the prevailing cultural system to re-affirm their power. By narrating events of human relationship, Auden gives a historical aspect to his poetry, since they tell of human experience such as the same-sex.

3.2. Biography

Experience and its historicity are relevant since related to the depiction of a life. Throughout the 20th century literary criticism evolved, and in gender studies the 'normal-people' label once only addressing heterosexuals shows that notions on sexuality have also been reconsidered, and the work of art being directly connected to the poet's experiences could help reading and interpretation.

Bozorth writes in *Auden's Games of Knowledge* that through his distinctive writing, Auden's early poems leaves us "fascinated but unsure what it all means" (2). Such reaction caused in readers and critics was due to his prolific poetic production characterised by a sophisticated diction. For Bozorth

> Auden's work embodies a process of homosexual self-interrogation with few parallels in modernist literature: he should be seen not just as a major figure in twentieth-century poetry in English, but as a crucial one in gay/lesbian literary history. His importance as a homosexual poet consists in his lifelong practice of poetry not as the bearer of compulsory certainties, but as an open-ended engagement with his own desires and with those of his readers as real lovers or virtual intimates (3).

Bozorth's comment shows the poet's particular writing as a fundamental piece in sex politics in 20th century literature since Auden's sexual position helps readers to interpret his love

poems, although the critic writes that the poet never externalised his homosexual practices either in his social appearances: “Unlike Christopher Isherwood, he did not identify publicly – or, it seems, privately – with gay liberation” (4), or in his work: “homosexuality only rarely becomes something the reader must acknowledge, and Auden’s own homosexuality would be, according to his oft-asserted view, irrelevant to the meaning of his poetry” (5). He emphasises that “Auden was adept at encoding his homosexuality in his work” (7).

In *The Dyer’s Hand*, Auden defines poetry: “a structure of meaning detached from biography, culture and history; [in poetry] all facts and beliefs cease to be true or false and become interesting possibilities” (19). From this point of view, poetry is purely representation not obligatorily connected to the experience of the poet in a society and the truthfulness presupposed in history. Bozorth sees in this definition that Auden was “wearing a mask of the modernist sage when he attacked the biographical fallacy” (6); attacking biography due to its misleading and limited notion to interpret a text, Auden does not bring upon himself the same social persecution that writers such as Wilde did.

Yet, Bozorth shows that there are critics that prefer to discard any sort of data on the poet’s life to interpret the text: “[it] sounds like very much the New Critical line, whereby referentiality and the “sources” of a poem in the poet are irrelevant to its meaning and truth-value” (5). But, as he affirms, this method to read Auden’s own work “would be to bracket out the facts of his life including the sexual ones” (5). In my point of view both the New Critical line and the biographical can help interpretation.

The evolution of criticism after the 1940s would not always mean a different view of homosexuals and their artistic productions. Bozorth’s view in his book published in 2002 exemplifies it, where Auden is playing a ‘game of knowledge’, by opening his work for possibilities that indeed are only strategies that Auden uses to universalise his poetry: “Auden’s aspiration to universality should be questioned even more radically, for ‘insistence’

in the realm of sexual politics can be a rhetorically intricate gesture" (6). Bozorth seems to notice a fragile argument in Auden's position towards his poetics since the poet's indirectness in terms of politics seems to provide an expected effectiveness as far as ambiguity works to this goal: Auden's "early work's concern is with obscure meanings and meaningful obscurities" (64). For him, Auden's life comes out as a help to readers to pulling the thread, the capture of ideas in his verses, a procedure that in his poems of the late 1920s denotes the poet's understanding of a "high modernist technique that is ambiguity" (18-19), which permitted to hide his homosexuality.

Auden's own definition of poetry would conceal his homosexuality and his approach of it, permitting him to speak through the universal to the homosexual reader as well, to publish his works by respecting the existent censorship, and to work out his politics by not clearly addressing homosexual events. That is Robert K. Martin's position as he comments that Auden "insisted that his poems must not be seen as homosexual, that they were universal" (quoted in Bozorth, 5). In reference to these aspects of his love poems, Thomas Yingling asks: "from what vantage point is the universal constructed, why did Auden find it the 'proper' one for poetry, what subjects make it illegitimate?" (quoted in Bozorth, 6). To answer such question, in the next chapter some analyses of how he deals with indeterminacy and how universal his poems are can give readers a view of the reasons that may have led him to make his work complex.

In Auden's own words, a poet extends freedom to his reader to interpret: "you cannot tell people what to do, you can only tell them parables, and that is what art really is, particular stories and experiences, from which each according to his immediate and peculiar needs may draw his own conclusions" (quoted in Bozorth, 138). For Bozorth the term 'parable' is based on its symbolic characteristic, working as a metaphor to some events occurred in reality: "[parable] is a term that focuses the intersections of form, sociology, and sexuality" (138).

The critic gives the word ‘parable’ a meaning which converges with the importance of form, and its sociological implication in the extent that Auden’s homosexuality was contained in it as a manifestation of human behaviour inside a society:

> Parable has become a keyword for Auden’s critics because it points up his desire for political art distinct from propaganda. The concept of parable helped him discover how art might preserve differences, so that his poetry could accommodate both his own particularities as a homosexual poet and those of his readers. Parable would be a way of rendering private experience into usable art – as Auden does according to his immediate and peculiar needs, and for readers to use according to theirs (138).

The poems are considered an instrument for sexual politics rather than an open pamphlet for a cause which in the inter-wars could be harmful. Bozorth goes further: “We have seen how Auden used “parable” to articulate the social value of poetry as an antiuniversalizing form. My largest claim is that Auden came to treat poetry itself as a kind of lovers’ discourse” (175). The meaning and range that ‘parable’ covers is linked to Auden’s poetry as a structure possible to exercise politics as the context is accounted; consequently, Bozorth sees his particular poetics a political strategy addressed to homosexuals.

Bozorth believes so because in his view the environment wherein the poet lives influences the “meaning [that] is initiated and elaborated in social networks and institutions where truth is very much a matter of what is speakable” (25). I agree with him, since meaning is imputed by social interests and simultaneously is attributed to things that give society a power to set up values that an individual must follow. He also considers Auden’s technique as a ‘game of knowledge’ (my quotation marks), alludes to those who know what he is speaking about, transgressing some linguistic requirements and concomitantly adapting them according to the prescriptive and normative systems of society.

Whereas Auden decided for ambiguity and his characteristic linguistic construction, Bozorth cites the poet’s contemporary Stephen Spender, a writer who belonged to Auden’s group of poets, and in 1988 wrote in introduction of his *The Temple*, first drafted in 1929 and based on his travels in Germany” (20). Bozorth observes that, like E M. Forster who showed

his book *Maurice* to his friends in the 1930s to test out different endings, Spender acted likewise by submitting it to a publisher, Geoffrey Faber, who "pointed out that there could be no question of publishing a novel which was pornographic according to the law at the time" (21). Based on this sort of observation, Spenders writes:

> another result of censorship was to make us wish to write precisely about those subjects which were most likely to result in our books being banned. All this explains, I think, a good deal about *The Temple*. This is an autobiographical novel in which the author tries to report truthfully on his experiences in the summer of 1929. In writing it I had the sense of sending home to friends and colleagues dispatches from a front line in our joint was against censorship. (quoted in Bozorth, 21)

According to this reality, Bozorth sees Auden's poetics an antiuniversalizing work as much as it was directly written to the homosexual public, but Auden did universalize his poems as he used linguistic constructions to refer to the general, arranging language possibilities such as ambiguity in form, visual images and situations of real life (and the subjects: the lover and the beloved) as far as love and its implications are concerned. Auden's specific way to set the subjects away from love possibilities declares in part a mark as well as the absence of the author, and would allow the reader to realize that the narrator is not absent for the latter is participating in the narrative intra and/or extra diagetically. But as this chapter shows this act involves factors that make Auden's efforts to leave his subjectivity covered.

Inglis defines biography as "the personal art-form of the imagination" and as "life-histories" (214) formed by a set "[that offers] the best chance we have of making sense of our bit of experience" (204). Biography is thus a literary genre, a product of a writer's imagination, or defined as a historical narrative of an individual's life in time (the protagonist as the subject of his own history and narrative), "it provides the form, and consequently the explanation of individual life" (Inglis, 204). From a biography, we can learn how a certain individual led his life, what drove him to his various acts historically characterised, providing pictures of an existence immersed in a socio-cultural milieu.

Inglis observes this historical aspect and exemplifies the political significance of some

biographies whose low social status voices their group or class: “set down the form of their own lives on behalf of all those similar lives which had neither form nor voice” (216). An individual’s biography exposes people’s lives: “We can only see the glow of that biography as we look backwards in a certain historical light” (216). We can argue that the main reason that permits lower-class individuals’ biographies to be known can be explained as an individual’s life-history shows the existent separation among social classes that is kept by the dominant class.

The expressivity of a lower-class individual can show his socio-economic conditions, and, in some cases, how he did not respect the social limits determined to him by the powerful class, since his biography exposes his refusal or acceptance of the treatment that his group received. The fundamental characteristics of this literary genre founded on a life-history leads reading to a description openly outlined by the social identity that a writer receives. Inglis remarks that this group factor helps to “understand a biography, our own or anyone else’s, in terms of the culture and tradition within which it is embedded” (217). This conception shows that an individual is socially contextualized in his group according to his actions and reactions in it. But in my point of view it is a limiting factor as we assume that an individual’s constitution comprehends more than his class shows out.

Biography is inscribed in history because it is based on an individual’s experience and consequent participation in the succession of events that tell of the whole group. Inglis elicits the role of the

> *figura* – the swift outline of a biography – that may be used to capture and contain much in the epoch. It catches science, for sure, and science as its best, its most disinterested (sic) and hopeful. It catches politics, and catches it at a moment at which moral fame and intellectual resistance stand in the way of the juggernaut of power and menace, and make it slow down a pace. It catches a great ethical tradition and gives it narrative actuality. It shows us how to make the most of a splendid story, and to use it in order to live well (225).

As we know about an individual’s life, the whole human collection of knowledge can be

enriched, since events can contribute to provide images and information to the reading of the history of his time. A biographical content of an individual is a series of events represented that can make his life be a standpoint to picture his epoch, offering credibility since such order implies the various sides of an existence. The importance situated in this biographical account allows readers to grasp patterns for their lives, and in re-examinations of a given life, the events can help to reconfigure history and epochs.

> Biography is what happens. It is what takes place within the physical and mental encounter-with-events. Even that encounter, however, is not a simple collision of me, body and soul, with the real-world-out-there. To meet the world I have to interpret it. My interpretation will be grounded in the narrative tradition of which I am part of and which in part constitutes who and what I am (Inglis, 207).

Thus, biography is a historical text as an individual inserted in a culture acts and reacts to events based on his background of values.

> Hence there is no straightforward suggestion of an opposition between interpretation understood as discursive and therefore of experience as lived (that is as non-discursive). My experience, like yours, can only *be lived* in relation to my (and your) narrative tradition. Neither of us can turn mere events into interpreted experience unless and until we place them into a story (Inglis, 207).

Biography is a view of the world, because individuals are moved by their own experience to do a reading based on an amount of knowledge that he can live as he experiences the several possibilities of life. The cohesion between what was actually lived and what is turned into a story gives them a characteristic that goes beyond individuality so as to concern components that are related to a person's own history with his group. Further steps into life and its obscurities do not take off the importance that such positing delivers to him to influence or be influenced by as he contacts the world.

Gregory Woods writes that "unfortunately, where sexuality is concerned, the critics have not found it difficult to act within the spirit of the ban on biographical revelation" (169), and he claims that "the biography of the author may be little more than a signpost, indicating both where one's most likely to find texts open to certain readings, and what kind of reading a

given text is most likely to reward" (4). As we read about Auden's life, we can find in it information that will help us to understand his creation, eventually possible explanations for this or that text and its historicity. Woods recognises the biographical method to interpret a work but his words 'a signpost' suggest that its efficiency in interpreting is limited, leading the reader to evaluate the fact that some poems cannot be reached out by simply knowing the poet's biography. He adds:

> Auden's reluctance to write openly about his homosexuality resulted in a corresponding reluctance, on the part of his commentators, to grant his sexual orientation any but the most limited relevance to his work. In a curious way, the 'discretion' (for which, read 'ambiguity' or 'obscurity') of the poems was accepted as a gag on any attempt to understand the experiences which were their source and often, indeed, their subjects. (169)

Woods' words seem to point to a direction that evidences not only a personal decision of the artist while reality is considered, but also to a preoccupation of critics that had not an option but to be almost silent about the poet's sexual position. This attitude very openly exposes the concern that critics had (or still have) as sexuality is brought into discussion when biographical information can help reading and interpretation as Woods claims. He continues his comment: "critical perception of the poems has largely failed to reach what turns out to be a rich strain of interest in the nature of homosexual love and, thus, managed to distort Auden's view of sexuality, and of love in general" (169). I understand Wood's words as I consider the English literature canon that sacred by those whose power determine value to cultural products does not comfortably see homosexuality as notable as it is for some readers and critics. Moreover, Woods insists that in Auden's case his homosexuality comes out as a very important aspect that can have a unique role in his work.

Woods turns to Clive James' point: "Auden's involuntary discretion about his homosexuality forced abstraction into the concreteness of his style" (185). Indeed, Woods adds, that Auden is more than discreet in terms of homosexuality in his work: "homosexuality is entirely non-verbal, an emotional matter" (185). We can understand that discretion turns out

as a euphemistic word to speak of caution inside a reality that forced artists to almost silence about this issue, as we have extensively seen here. In the critics' attitude, we can see a trace of the claimed Englishness that James Miller informed us in the previous chapter, although I would say that Auden simply comprehended his time and its movement. Due to it, I do not agree with Clive James when he seems to minimise the historical and cultural situation by affirming that the poet was involuntary discreet, since the critic should consider not only the aspect of social censorship, but others such as cultural forces that drive the artistic creation.

The limitation caused by cultural forces makes readers observe Auden's linguistic intricacies that, according to Woods, are exemplified by the poetic construction when the poet deals with the gender of pronouns such as the ambiguous 'you'. For the critic, the use of this pronoun is one of the poet's strategies consequent of his awareness of the oppressions against artists who approached homosexuality. The use of this personal pronoun universalises the poem, flexibly referring to either a female or a male lover, according to the inclination of the reader (170). Besides, Woods affirms, Auden also wisely and prudently had to use some of the oppressor's tools that appear in references addressed to homosexuals in negative terms in his books *Poems* (1930), at *Look! Stranger* (1937) and at *The Orators* (1932), revealing an atmosphere of suspicion, and political and social subterfuge (171). The reader is demanded an action as the next citation shows: "to find out what, if anything, a parable means, I have to surrender my objectivity and identify myself with what I read. The meaning of a parable, in fact, is different for every reader" (*The Dyer's Hand*, 160). Auden realises that in reading an artistic work, and in interpreting it, the reader must consider it a representation of reality that demands the readers to give up objectivity and see between the lines something else that can be apprehended as the words and phrases and elements of the narrative tell him something that may be linked to his individuality.

In *The Dyer's Hand* Auden writes in his essay "The I without Self" that he agrees with

those who claim that to know an artist's life to understand a work can turn interpretation into a more accurate act. But he delimits and explains when it is convenient: "for writers like Kafka, biographical information is a great help by preventing one from making false readings". But he adverts: "(The true readings are always many.)" (160). We can understand Auden's assumption as a warning that can help to lead us to a proper reading and interpretation, for he certainly considers this writer's singular works and the necessary awareness that can help to read them. Auden's sentence in parentheses emphasises his belief that there are many readings, mainly in complex texts.

In his exposition about the self, Auden writes that the hero in Kafka's works is seen as an 'I' without a self, he is not conscious of himself and, in constant torments, lives imprisoned in himself (163). This means that the 'I' of the hero is void of subjectivity and agency for not interfering in his milieu since not conscious of his subjectivity, and agency. This is characterised as he cannot reach his self, shutting himself in away from the world and its complexities; consequently expressing himself in reactionary way.

In his introduction to the Greek poet Cavafy's book of poems, Auden writes that "a poem is the product of a certain culture, [and] that it is the expression of a unique human being" (xvi). He emphasises that

> The poet fabricates his poem in solitude. He desires, it is true, a public for his poem, but he himself need not be personally related to it and, indeed, the public he most hopes for is composed of future generations which will only come into being after he is dead. While he is writing, therefore, he must banish from his mind all thoughts of himself and of others and concentrate on his work. However, he is not a machine for producing verses, but a human being like other human beings, living in a historical society and subject to its cares and vicissitudes. (19th)

Auden opens thus the text for possibilities, expanding the perceptions obtained in experience and its link with poetry that displays the poet's emotional involvement with what he is in contact:

> The poet is constantly tempted to make use of an idea or a belief, not because he believes it to be true, but because he sees it has interesting poetic possibilities. It may

> not, perhaps, be absolutely necessary that he believe it, but it is certainly necessary that his emotions be deeply involved, and this they can never be unless, as man, he takes it more seriously than as a mere poetic convenience (*The Dyer's Hand*, 19).

The poet's control of the text, his intellectual portion in creation corroborates with the idea of his presence and is not a mere poetic convenience that might convey a strictly rational construction. In this citation he writes of his ideas and sensations that experience provides, not being purely intellectual but also deeply emotional. This blend of intellect and senses becomes a verse with meaning, whose arrangement is not necessarily a personal truth, but an emotional perception of it, bringing sense to the work, distinguishing the "interesting poetic possibilities". Therefore, Auden's definition of poetry universalises his poetry so his work would be seen far from the author's life.

But like Bozorth, James Miller believes that Auden's poems allude purposefully to homoeroticism just at the point the poet manages to both encode and explore this illegal theme seen in his writing: "The way the allusion is encrypted allows one to understand the wily movements of the poem as a means of critiquing the power of art in an authoritarian and homophobic society" (3). Miller's observation points the rational aspect without decreasing the emotional view that Auden's poetry has since it shows society's political treatment against homosexuals and questions the legal censorship against this practice. Homosexuality appears as a prominent biographical trace impossible to be sided out in his poetry that is the locus where he could safely express himself about it. We can assume that he accommodates history as his verses focused the context of the English tradition and his internal desires in order to try to ambiguously disrupt the long termed cultural construction of homosexuality.

3.3. Ambiguity

C. Hugh Holman defines ambiguity "as an expression that gives more than one meaning and leaves uncertainty as to the significance of the statement." He points out that the "chief causes of unintentional ambiguity undue brevity and compression of statement, 'cloudy' reference, faulty or inverted sequence, and the use of a word with two or more meanings" (15). Another fundamental point in ambiguity, he continues, is that

> language functions on other levels than denotation in literature, where words demonstrate an astounding capacity for suggesting two or more equally suitable senses in a given context, for conveying a core meaning and accompanying it with overtones of great richness and complexity, and for operating with two or more meanings at the same time. The kind ambiguity which results from this capacity of words to stimulate simultaneously several different streams of thought all of which make sense is a genuine characteristic of the richness and concentration that makes great poetry. (15-16)

The phrase 'several different streams of thought all of which make sense' comes up here as central to the purpose of this work, for it links itself with Auden's universalisation of poetry as ambiguity allows flexibility in meaning so that a definitive thought would never be possible in reading his poems. As Holman notes, ambiguity also reaches vaster horizons as it opens for possibilities that Auden also avowed, what can be seen as a form that does not privilege one meaning only.

William Empson also shows the different types of ambiguity, which are:

> (1) details of language which are effective in several ways at once; (2) alternative meanings that are ultimately resolved into the one meaning of the author; (3) two seemingly unconnected meanings that are given in one word; (4) alternative meanings that act together to clarify a complicated state of mind in the author; (5) a simile that refers imperfectly to two incompatible things and by this 'fortunate confusion' shows the author discovering his idea as he writes; (6) a statement that is so contradictory or irrelevant that the reader is made to invent his own interpretation; and (7) a statement so fundamentally contradictory that it reveals a basic division in the author's mind. (quoted in Holman, 16)

Some of these different sorts of ambiguity imply the author's conscious selection of words

implying his awareness of external events that lead him to act in such fashion. As I have claimed here, the many cases of ambiguity can be in the social reality where the poet lives, in the denotative meaning of words, or in the connotative compelled by events. This idea is reinforced by Empson:

> ambiguity can mean an indecision as to what you mean, an intention to mean several things, a probability that one or other or both of two things has been meant, and the fact that a statement has several meanings. It is useful to separate these if you wish but it is not obvious that in separating them at any particular point you will not be raising more problems than you solve (173).

The control exerted by the writer points out an imperative mindful interference in the process of creation which signals the poet's concern as he carefully observes the impact a word inside a verse can have.

According to Joseph Cady, the English writer Francis Bacon was aware of this as he used the word "'friendship' that did not allude to homosexuality" in the XV Century, although this term hid the sense of eroticism between men[11]. In his "Of Marriage and the Single Life" Bacon praises unmarried and childless men as the best friends, best masters, best servants and as the sources of the best works, of great merit for the public (15). Cady writes that

> There is disagreement among new-inventionists about exactly when "the invention of homosexuality" took place. Most favour the late nineteenth century, when laws directed specifically against homosexuality (instead of against a more broadly defined "sodomy") appeared in the West for the first time and when our contemporary terms "homosexual" and "heterosexual" first came into being and were later promulgated by the new medical and social sciences" (10).

Cady adds that "the presence of these languages does not of course mean that earlier homosexuality can be understood in all the same ways as twentieth-century homosexuality" (29). His next words reiterate the status of homosexuality in time:

> But they clearly show that one key shift in recent Western sexual history has not been from the "non-existence" to the "existence" of homosexuality. Rather, among the most

[11] What I perceive is a shift on semantic grounds that the Renaissance people were aware of between what "friendship" meant and what "masculine love" did.

> significant developments in the homosexual situation over that time (developments that either occurred or accelerated at the points when new-inventionism claims homosexuality was in fact "invented") were moves from more "local" or tacit acknowledgments of homosexuality and homosexuals to more universal and frank admissions of their existence (jumps of this kind occurred in both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) and a shift from a more affective, descriptive, variegated language for homosexuality/homosexuals to a more "scientistic," non-visual, monolithic terminology for them (this was consolidated in the turn from the nineteenth centuries). (29)

After the trial of Wilde the categorization of 'homosexual' comes out as Michel Foucault writes in his *The History of Sexuality*: "Sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; the nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a species" (43), or even "the sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species" (116). Wilde's political position was so remarkable that from then on homosexuals that are *out of the closet* have strived to conquer civil rights.

This discernment is explained by Empson for whom a word "may have several distinct meanings; several meanings connected with one another; several meanings which need one another to complete their meaning; or several meanings which unite together so that the word means one relation, one process" (quoted in John Cook,173). We can state that there is no obviousness when we are before ambiguity, since the apparent obvious may be a fake that can lead to other interpretations. Thus the choice of words such as ambiguous ones is an author's procedure that indicates the poet's presence in a literary piece found in aspects such as his control of choices, polysemics, diction and phrasal intricacy, for they expose the author's awareness of the historical and cultural events that so interfere in the process of creation.

In his introduction to *Masquerade. Queer Poetry in America to the end of World War II*, Jim Elledge shows that pre-Columbian and more recent writers wrote in ambiguous words and structure. He presents many examples of texts that were written in indigenous languages in the territory today known as the United States of America and explains that, "many queer writers before Stonewall wrote for two audiences simultaneously. For such they strove for

ambiguity." As we see, he uses the term 'queer' to refer to homosexuals of old times, before the medical term 'homosexual[12]' appeared in the 19th century. As Elledge writes, ambiguity was used centuries before when writers were conscious of social prejudice against homosexual involvements.

Elledge also shows that society has been ruled by heavy laws that forced individuals to obey its impositions. The political control in society against those who dared to question and/or behave contrary to its determinations created laws and reinforced the importance of traditions, transforming some sexual behaviours into a taboo, and inflicted in them a value that guaranteed human kind throughout centuries from disappearing:

> On the one hand, they wrote for society at large, a heterosexual world, the one which they found themselves and which they negotiated daily, often for their survival. They wanted their works read by family, neighbours, and friends, as well as the reading public in general – which always means heterosexual – sphere, then, meant that a queer poet had to accept what many contemporary scholars have rightly called "compulsory heterosexuality". This simply meant that the poets should be married with children to guarantee that they would "pass" as heterosexual in their everyday lives. In terms of their literary careers or aspirations, this also meant they had to be discreet to the extent of obliterating from their work all hints of any sort of same-sex desire, point of view, or content, however small. Compulsory heterosexuality also meant that, regardless of what the poets may have wanted to negotiate or discuss in their work, their subjects had to be anchored somehow in a heterosexual context. In short, compulsory heterosexuality dictated compulsory invisibility. On the other hand, queer poets wanted to write for themselves and for other like them, attempting to put into words their actual feeling, thoughts, experiences, dreams – not those camouflaged by a thin veneer of heterosexuality. In order to negotiate compulsory heterosexuality safely, they learned to encode the personal aspects of their lives into an acceptable – i.e., heterosexual context" (20thx).

This citation exposes the main motive such as historical social values that have perpetuated in time and created limitations that were in conflict with the desire of the poets listed. Besides, Elledge sees the applicability of ambiguity from an angle of gender which suggests a

[12] Joseph Cady notes that "the words "homosexual" and "heterosexual" were not coined until 1868, when they appeared in a May 6th draft letter to Karl Heinrich Ulrichs by Károly Mária Kartbeny, a German-Hungarian writer and translator who originally called Benkert and is sometimes still referred to by that name in the scholarly literature. In the next year, the words "homosexuality" and "homosexuals" appeared in print for the first time, in two pamphlets Kartbeny published anonymously in Berlin to protest the harsh laws against male homosexuality that the North German confederation was in the process of adopting from the Prussian Penal Code. The word "heterosexuality" seems to have been used in print for the first time in 1880, by the German zoologist and anthropologist Gustav Jaeger, in the second edition of his Die Entdeckung der Seele (The Discovery of the Soul)" (33).

profound importance to the political aspect implicit in human relationships as sexuality is concerned. Ambiguity thus requires search, uncovering, but it does not provide final conclusion of an object, for ambiguity is necessarily various, never one only view: ambiguity relies on suggestion, never on a definitive idea.

Elledge uses this term too as a pedagogical form in his book, eliciting the social imposition of a sexual behaviour such as heterosexuality that led poets to search for linguistic possibilities as strategy for surviving in society. Through ambiguity in many epochs of human history poets could blur their sexuality instead of denying or omitting it in their works. Thus, in terms of politics, ambiguity became a means of contenting society and simultaneously subverting the obligation to remain 'invisible' in culture ruled by a compulsory heterosexuality: poets have showed themselves as foreigners in their own land, since some alleged democracies have not permitted sexual freedom as claimed in some constitutions of Western countries' so far. Besides ambiguity, the idea of universalisation of poems might be related to Elledge's phrase "veneer of heterosexuality". The 'veneer' might be related to the apparent transparency of the material being seen through the slight obscurity that ambiguity can present as it can conceal the idea of the author's voice.

Ambiguous language comes out as very convenient and shows that Auden's perception of his time and preoccupations must be taken into account since his first poems were created in a social time when individuals' views exerted a significant part in voicing different ideas in many cases considered subversive by the dominant socio-political class. In its fashion, as an encrypted language, his work in the inter-wars could be seen as pedagogical to other writers and readers for having stimulated a cautious behaviour to other writers in society. Whereas Benjamin Britten showed homosexual as a base individual in society, protecting himself in irony, Christopher Isherwood and Louis MacNiece went beyond, allowing themselves to be widely exposed to the dangers of social restrictions.

Marsha Bryant writes that Auden ‘crooked’ words and phrases, making ambiguity more than a modernist mark. This figure of speech denotes his view of the society that considered homosexuals’ behaviour as not straight as much heterosexuality was. Bryant elicits that his poems are “a *double* act of looking” that may indicate one thing or another. She accounts for the context in which the poems were produced and their connection with the images portrayed in the films. She recurs to the male/female opposition that prefigures a command that Auden issues in his 1955 poem "The Truest Poetry is the Most Feigning" (12). The poem is as follows:

> If half way through such praises of your dear/Riot and shooting the streets with fear, /And overnight as in some terror dream/Poets are suspect with the New Regime, /Stick at your desk and hold your panic in, / What you are writing may still save your skin: Re-sex the pronouns, add a few details /, And, lo, a panegyric ode which hails/ (How is the Censor, bless his heart, to know?)/The new pot-bellied Generalissimo.

This poem, written later in the 1950s, shows the poet’s continuous concern with the necessary care that would grant other poets a safe place in society. The World War II was the setting of conservative and extremists’ actions that declared how prudent it was to use ambiguity in writing. This poem also re-affirms and confirms that the same pressure that artists and any individuals had been and were to suffer if their sexuality was not in accordance with the allowed sexual behaviour.

Bryant’s article “Auden and the homoerotics of the 1930s documentary” shows how Auden carefully created his poems, observing the documentary visual language and technological novelties for that epoch. She perceives the final lay-out of the cinematographic works, as she considers the poet’s authorial presence behind the camera and the verses, the poem being voiced-over by a woman, and the images exposing the men’s physique that all joined in one work creates an intriguing piece of art:

> the status of the women's chorus in a male-centered documentary film, although there are some key differences. In both cases the "woman" facilitates negotiations between men, and the relationships between her and each male serve to shape the text to a much lesser degree than does the relationship of the men to one another.

Thus, putting a woman's voice to recite the verses was a prudent choice in the 1930s documentaries because the woman's voice highlighted the Christian centered constitution of the sexual interest between a male and a female. Inserting a man's voice would necessarily sound strange for suggesting an interest from a male for another. Bryant adds: "The women's chorus begins as the miners leave the pithead, so that the men remain objects of desire after their work is performed." The words they [women] chorused are:

> O lurcher loving collier black as night, Follow your love across/ the smokeless hill. Your lamp is out and all your cages still./ Course for her heart and do not miss And Kate fly not so fast,/ For Sunday soon is past, And Monday comes when none may kiss./ Be marble to his soot and to his black be white. (Plays 421)

For Bryant it was Auden's strategic attitude to put women on the chorus:

> The male/female opposition, for example, prefigures a command that Auden issues in his 1955 poem "The Truest Poetry is the Most Feigning". If the poem's imperative heterosexual coupling is, in effect, no more than a set of stage directions, then the true site of desire in Coal Face is the underground enclosures where male documentary observers watch half-naked miners. (20-21)

This citation raises the important aspect that is expressed in the arduous exercise that poets, documentarists, filmmakers etc. had to observe as an artistic piece was created. Bryant helps readers and viewers to perceive that art is a terrain where conscious minds are in constant vigil so human expression can be uttered concomitantly with the whole complexity that is inherent in such process. Moreover, we can perceive that in a more profound analysis a work of art can reveal evidences of external operations that tenaciously force creation to be expressed as it is.

Analysing the poem "The Truest Poetry…", Alan Sinfield detects "a closeted gay aesthetic" (*Cultural Politics,* 60). He says that, when in U.S. soil in the 1950s, Auden writes that poem to advise poets to have the most elaborate style as possible (60), which indicates that the same homophobic treatment of the 1920s and the 1930s towards homosexuals continued in the next decades. Auden perceived in figures of speech a way to hide his

sexuality and concomitantly open his work to different possibilities of readings, so keeping his homosexual practices in privacy. David Perkins observes that Auden's first book published in 1930 under the title of *Poems* came out as a "vivid, uncanny, fascinating, authoritative work" (116). These adjectives qualify in short a complex set of poems, without decreasing the antithetical aspects that remarked them: they were full of life, but weird; charming, but respectful. Such aspect was exposed by metaphors that "have Auden's generality and wit", Perkins notes (118). Perkins writes that through metaphor Auden could link, the personal and the social in one thought, and battle in both spheres with one act (132). The word 'battle' suggests poetic complexities that help us to realise that the poet's writing required a care in expressing his ideas and feelings in a contextual analysis. He also sees that his "tolerant imperfection of phrasing and his colloquial tones, had exalted the range and hence the potential relevance of poetry, making it possible – to the extent that his poetry was talk – to talk about anything" (149). Perkins writes: 'tolerant imperfection of phrasing', eliciting the intricate syntax so characteristic in the poems that rather than imperfection turn out as a characteristic of the poet's work.

In Perkins' observation Auden subverts the limits of language so the *moi* (the poet's I) and the *je* (the poetic I) can be seen as distinct, shielded from external attacks; that is, his subjectivity may be hidden in the subjectivity of the poetic I or in the interlocutors'. In the indefinite pronoun 'anything' Perkins points Auden's ambiguity as it opens to a wider plan of meaning(s): "anything could lead to a generalisation, or rather set off the collision and ricochet of general points of view in which so much of his poetry consists" (156). Perkins observes poetic language as universalising, functioning in a movement close to imperceptible natural phenomena: Auden "in the thirties exploited an idiom that made for velocity, compression, ambiguity, wit, and concrete impact", achieved through his

> syntax, ellipsis (especially of articles, demonstrative pronouns, conjunctions, and prepositions), peculiar and ungrammatical constructions, and inversions; in diction,

> archaic words, periphrasis, puns, and a characteristic, un-English use of the definite article, either for emphasis or for an air of detachment, generalization, and knowingness. (157)

This shows us that Auden's poetics subverted the phrasal structure, language is carefully 'touched', indicating an authorial imprint that makes us feel and see his authority. Such appropriation of language also makes us feel a sensation of compression that the word 'universal' characteristically has.

3.4. Autobiography

In *Metaphors of Self. The meaning of autobiography*, James Olney writes: "Man has always cast his autobiography and has done it in that form to which his private spirit impelled him, often, however, calling the product not an autobiography but a lifework" (01). These words impose the idea that a work of art is inevitably a product of a man: emotions and intellect, containing traces of his particularities as he experiences and feels the world. Olney says:

> Then the final work, whether it be history or poetry, psychology or theology, political economy or natural science, whether it take the form of personal essay or controversial tract, or lyric poem or scientific treatise, will express and reflect its maker and will do so at every stage of his development in articulating the whole work (01).

For Olney, autobiography

> determines both the nature and the form of what he [the poet] creates. We may expect to be able to trace therein that creative impulse that was uniquely his: it will be unavoidably there in manner and style, since autobiography is an attempt to describe a lifework, in matter and content as well. We may expect to be able to trace therein that creative impulse that was uniquely his: it will be unavoidably there in manner and style, since autobiography is an attempt to describe a lifework, in matter and content as well. (5)

A poem is autobiographical because it originates in the self, in an individual's inner that is impossible to be located or measured. Olney adds: "the models organized by a man are a reflection of the internal order" (10). He poses in a work of art a perception of the

individuality of the artist as the latter reads the world, gives meaning and values things, solidifying or creating other perspectives. In my point of view, Olney's observation is correct, but I believe that an individual is born into a pre-set social structure that influences and limits him with its imposition of meanings that must also be considered to formulate his.

He says that "the relational groupings that determine meanings in symbolic logic, must come all from within, none from without (17)". Olney brings out an importance to the uniqueness of each individual's value of things, enabling him to give his particular view to what is produced in culture. This assumption is also too assertive in my opinion, since it places in the internal perception a logic that orders, for instance, a poem. As common knowledge states, the symbolic images that an individual structures in his mind come first from the external architecture created by socio-political interests. If we leave up to the internal view, we can find no concrete basis that can assist a person to arrange his own world and in consequence see the meanings that may not always be his. However, I think Olney's words lay on the individual view an extremely important political responsibility as he says that "must all come from within", for linguistic rules denote that there is a level of tolerance that must be respected in order the text has legibility and so meaning can be grasped. The individual's own perceptions will guide the process of creation, but, as we have seen before, society is formed by elements that compel the observation of basic limits so it can be controlled.

Olney states that "the structure of the world that each man works out for himself in his deep self-consciousness and projects onto the world, though it may resemble other such structures here and there, will be unique as a whole" (22). This shows that each individual, although born into a certain culture, has a view of things, taking him to evaluate the world from his own particularities so what he shows is also particular. This view becomes meaningful as we turn to the inter-wars society characterized as fragmented, formed by

personal visions.

Olney describes the poetic creation instant as “the intensely pitched selfhood [of a poet] poured into everything he created” (23), and “moments of completion, of ecstasy and of seeming transcendence – those highest peaks of selfhood that rise out of the foothills and lowlands indiscernible to memory or to the bare rationalizing intellect” (26). Autobiography results from such particular moment of creation that necessarily goes through a high but immeasurable amount of sensations as the individual touches and reversibly is touched by elements of reality that move his sensitivity. This ‘phenomenon’ occurs in an incalculable time when the poet’s conscious and unconscious indelibly contact each other, turning the outcome into a unique piece. Feelings, sensations, perceptions, or even those things that language does not own a word to name are directly connected to a dimension of the poet’s self: “Consciousness goes with, and is inextricably involved in, the here and now” (Olney, 27).

As Olney explains,

> the poet seeks images that might make the experience available to the reader to order and to express the emotional order that they have sought and so found. Our sense that there is meaning in something – in a poem, in experience – comes only when the elements that go to make up that thing take on a relation to one another. The reader, like the poet, extends the possibilities of meaning-pattern in himself. (30)

Such emotional reaction expressed in poetry through a special use of linguistic possibilities, if we consider the political ground, may indicate a strong subterfuge that serves the poet as a strategy. The use of figures that represent all that is sensed is founded on

> Metaphors [that] are something known and of our making, or at least of our choosing, and so to help us understand; the lonely subjective consciousness gives order not only to itself but as much of objective reality as it is capable of formalising and of controlling; a coherent vision of all reality, the point through which the individual takes the universe on his own order, metaphor: a conjunction of single subject and various objects. (Olney, 30)

As Olney views, metaphor is something to which we recur to make an art work understandable. As far as art is a representation of reality, it will be characterised by figures

of speech that allude to things that exist in the known world, helping to compose image(s). It is also the way the poet finds to speak of his own perception of his inner world in contact with the external. Metaphors carry an upper level of meaning, not what a word or phrase or sentence denotes, but what it suggests.

If we regard the idea that a poet searches for legibility, he needs to create a picture of what he experiences to transmit it to readers. The attention to the fundamental structure of the portrait that the poet brings out is consequent of each component of depiction that must be arranged in a way that the reader can recognise them, by relating them in order that the poem makes sense and meaning can be grasped. Notwithstanding, as we will see in the next chapter, Auden's poems are syntactically structured so readers cannot easily apprehend the message.

Metaphor can also serve to hide his subjectivity and agency: "Metaphor says a great deal about what I am, or am like" (32) and "it is only metaphor that thus mediates between the internal and the external, between conscious and total being" (Olney, 35). Poetry conflates the external with the internal world of a poet, permitting the 'interesting possibilities' that are present in a poem as an art form. Olney sees the text as a set of a writer's impressions, since "[the] self expresses itself by the metaphors it creates and projects and we know it by those metaphors; but it did not exist as it now does and as it now is before creating its metaphors" (34). That is, we can only see the metaphors, never the self; and one of the gains that metaphors bring is to make what the poet writes comprehensible in a certain level because the use of figurative language presents images and possibilities to the reader.

Olney perceives a poet as an individual who "write[s] about the self" and in so doing he is "produc[ing] autobiography [that] is a metaphor of the self at the summary moment of composition; what he knows and what he experiences, is all from within" (35). Olney does not define 'self'; however, he extensively examines the existence of this in the individual constitution of a human being. He poses himself at an angularity that leads readers to a view

of the artist whose particularities and work are our objects of analysis; the artist is thus an autobiographer because what he symbolically expresses in his poems is in a conflation of his self and own experience with the world. Olney's view helps us to assume that a poet is not narrating some events in his life in a poetic piece as if poetry was purely the result of a rationality, a fruit of a mental organization in a chronological line.

Considering Olney's view of autobiography and Auden and his poetry, we can state that it consists of a homosexual theme that is there, under the surface of a complex writing, containing immeasurable parts of the poet's self, sexuality being *one* of them. Consequently, Auden's love poems express his subjectivity, all that makes him be who and what he is as a unique individual. His poetry, carefully organised, presents traces of his personality. Although complex, his poems reach out a linguistic operation that provides it comprehensibility. And so Auden, a man conscious of his society's limitations did not allow his sexuality to be exploited so as to harm his life: he encrypted meaning in his poems through carefully elaborate sentences. In my view, it is an external influence on the poet's life that forms his internal perception that will make him select them. We may say that all the levels of Auden's being such as the unconscious were touched as he contacted the world that caused him sensations consciously controlled in various ways such as choice of words, the construction of sentences, the use of figures of speech as we have seen in his ambiguous verses.

Auden himself mentions the importance of the poet's personal experience within the world that surrounds him:

> all attempts to write about persons or events, however important, to which the poet is intimately related in a personal way are now doomed to failure. Yeats could write great poetry about the Troubles of Ireland, because most of the protagonists were known to him personally and places where the events occurred had been familiar to him since childhood (quoted in Jon Cook, 381).

Auden admits the fact that a poetic text is based on the poet's experience. Hence, Auden's use of an intricate language is purposeful so the poet's 'I', is hidden in diction speaking of the

world, the cultural milieu, as well as of the sensitivity of the author touched as he acts and reacts to things. Auden recognizes the extension of the poetic text can reach, and the emotional instant of the poet inserted in historical events that are directly or indirectly linked and expressed through diction in a piece of work.

The form of Auden's verse and choice of words contrast with themes such as love relationship, showing a handful of deviations from linguistic norms and the use of metaphors that can be linked to the socio-political rules of his country as far as those 'deviations' break the social order arranged under strict laws and heterosexual male centred tradition. The content of some poems describes the poet's *apparent* emphatic silence towards homosexual encounters, but speak of ordinary life conventionally posed in heterosexual relations.

As Auden's poems in chapter 04 show, the transgression of some linguistic norms are an autobiographical trace, also subverting social values and structures of a pre-set order and meaning. As Olney says, a poem is a "characteristic way of perceiving, of organising, and of understanding, an individual way of feeling and expressing that one can somehow relate to oneself" (37). A poem is necessarily a composition of a unique personality, something that can never be repeated, despite revisions done by the author, and the massification of culture that try to transform individuals.

The presence of the author in his work as he controls the constructions of his poem is also a trace of autobiography for Shari Benstock in "Authorizing the Autobiographical." She claims that "this conception of the autobiographical rests on a firm belief in the conscious control of artist over subject matter; this life history is grounded on authority" (quoted in Smith & Watson, 151). The author's perception of the surrounding reality is there as words emerge out to the verse connected to the poet's intimate voice, and his awareness of social limitations that compel him to use some words in detriment of others that might harm him.

To reiterate her position, Benstock cites Georges Gusdorf's definition of

autobiography as “the mirror in which the individual reflects his own image” (148). According to his definition, the poem functions as a reflection of all the characteristics of the poet, both internal, his emotions, and external, his approach of the world. But as a mirror, it exposes an image of the object in an inverted mode. Diction would thus speak of the poet and his image. Yet, as a symbol, a mirror inevitably denotes an object in which the reader can use to see himself, identify with the narrative.

But Benstock perceives that Gusdorf’s definition “overlooks what might be the most interesting aspect of the autobiographical: the measure to which “self” and “self-image” might not coincide, can never coincide in language – because certain forms of self-writing are no investment in creating a cohesive self over time” (148). Self is unreachable and the images the poem suggests and/or shows through language are limited, because language is a code whose rules and limits aim at communicability.

She adds that “indeed, they seem to exploit difference and change over sameness and identity: their writing follows the “seam” of the conscious/unconscious where boundaries between internal and external overlap” (148). The ‘certain forms of self-writing’ would work out more properly to help readers to differentiate elements that seem to move at almost imperceptible margins between the social life of the poet and his internal view of the world with its cultural and social principles. In other words, the limit that separates these two realms, the conscious and the unconscious, is unknown and therefore immeasurable so that to estimate the amount of either in the text turns out a useless arithmetical work. Benstock observes that for Gusdorf “the autobiography that is devoted exclusively to the defense and glorification of a man, a career, a political cause, or a skilful strategy is limited almost entirely to the public sector of existence” (149). This is exactly what Auden searches not to do, for his poems show an evident complexity that works out to blur aspects that autobiography can bring out.

Benstock continues her comment:

> In either kind of autobiography, the writing subject is the one presumed to know (himself), and this process of knowing is a process of differentiating himself from other. The chain-link fence that circumscribes his unique contributions is language, representative of the very laws to which this writing subject has been subjected; that is, language is neither an external force nor a "tool" of expression, but the very symbolic system that both constructs and is constructed by the writing subject. As such, language is both internal and external, and the walls that defend the *moi* are never an entirely adequate defense network against the multiple forms of the *je*. (149)

Her explanation reinforces the idea that the process of individuation goes trough differentiation, and language functioning as a code that is shared by a group that speaks of the world on the level of arbitrary meanings that refer to referents apprehended by all the individuals who use it. A poet is inescapably limited by these conventional meanings, sometimes subverting or giving them other values, but Auden appropriates language by constructing and re-constructing it as a protective tool that conceals his self. Yet, the socio-political arrangements of culture show that language in its limitations cannot always shield the self, rendering slight signals of the poet's "I" through the poetic I. This point is so delicate that we find ourselves in a complex terrain that requires constant care, so that if a reader intends to point out the poet's I in a poem, he may discover that it is protected by the multiple expressions of the poetic 'I'. Benstock raises questions related to this:

> The relation of the conscious to the unconscious, of the mind to writing, of the inside to the outside of political and narrative systems, indicate not only a problematizing of social and literary conventions – a questioning of the Symbolic law – but also the need to reconceptualize form itself. In other words, where does one place the "I" of the autobiographical account? Where does the Subject locate itself? In definitions of autobiography that stress self-disclosure and narrative account, that posit a self called to witness (as an authority) to "his" own being, that propose a double referent for the first-person narrative (the present "I" and the past "I") (151).

These interrogations elicit still unknown margins between self and reality mixed in a poetic work and from art (literature) and science, i.e., representations and descriptions of reality. Her words show that while biography and science are located in factual details, autobiography and art cannot be measured. As she phrases 'to his own being', she delivers to autobiography a

necessary relation with the author's self; and 'double referent' alludes to ambiguity so we can affirm that poetic language would express the emotions and impressions that a poet apprehends from his experience with the world (the poetic I linked to the poem and the poet's I to reality) expressed metaphorically.

This exclusive experience is observed by Adrienne Rich who says that "a poem is not a slice of the poet's life, although it obviously emerges from intense places in the poet's life and consciousness and experience" (253). Rich writes that due to its distinction a poem does not come from a chronological time called life, but from a moment when, conscience is mixed with the unconscious and at the same time overlapped by an intensity of emotions, innumerable surfaces and depths of the individual experience of reality.

For her the moment of creation is unreachable; it is a time division inestimable due to its characteristic connection to self. She describes this instant: "the breathing in of experience and the breathing out of poetry" (235) that allows what Auden calls "interesting possibilities." The breathing is an act mostly characterised by the unconscious functioning that here alludes to a vital and inevitable activity that occurs as the poet interacts with the world. She names the interaction that occurs between the poet and the world as 'transmutation' (253), a process which involves two moments: the act of inhaling experience and exhaling poetry: "there is a sense of transmutation, something has to happen between the breathing in of experience and the breathing out of poetry. It has been transformed, not only into words but into something new" (253). Rich alludes not only to a movement that causes change, but to 'something', as she calls the moment that splits the two almost imperceptible acts because of their nature, i.e., like breathing occurs instinctively to maintain life. Such 'something' must be the indescribable sum of sensations fused and then ordered, coming out as a product never existent before. There is a very unique moment in the inner self of the poet as those experiences 'inhaled' touch the self; in this instant the poet's I experiences reality in direct

contact with his most intimate that gives the experience an also unique quality, because the poet, like all individuals is unique. Thus, Rich explains that the poetic I (the subject of the poem consequent of that contact) is different from the poet's I (the author's conscious perception): "[the] I in a poem is the consciousness from which the poem comes, but it's not the I to whom I subscribe when I sign an affidavit, when I set forth facts in order to get a driver's license or passport. A poem is not a biographical anecdote" (253). The poet does not simply choose words and constructions of sentences to tell of an experience happened in a certain time and space, but he is part of his poetry as other levels of his being are involved in it. Rich states:

> [F]inally a poem is a construction of language that uses, tries to use everything that language can do, to conjure, to summon up something that's not quite knowable in any other way. Using the tonal and musical aspects of language, the image-making aspect of language, the association between words, the merging aspect of language in metaphor where one thing can actually become another and throw light on both (253-4).

Monique Witting in "The Mark of Gender" affirms that

> Gender is not confined within the third person and the mention of sex in language is not a treatment reserved for the third person. Sex, under the name of gender, permeates the whole body of language and forces every locator, if she belongs to the oppressed sex, to proclaim it in her speech, that is, to appear in language under physical form and not under the abstract form, which every male locutor has the unquestioned right to use. The abstract form, the general, the universal, this is what the so-called masculine gender means, for the class of men have appropriated the universal for themselves. (65-66)

Auden appropriates the abstract as Woods exemplifies, but Witting observes the political characteristic of gender refers to the 'oppressed' sex. We can relate her view to reading a poem written by a homosexual man whose social condition in the inter-war period was similar to women's. To interpret it by relating the text to a same-sex encounter is possible as the abstraction found in the general and universal are considered. There is a complexity here as we deal with homosexual men that are socially oppressed by rules and laws as seen before. Yet, as men, homosexuals can also be included in this appropriation of the universal.

Wittings's statement that 'sex permeates the whole body of language' is an assumption

with a heavy weight that limits linguistic possibilities, exposing a cultural tendency. English language, characterised by an absence of gender in some pronominal cases, could be culturally stuck to 'the so-called masculine gender'. Auden's use of the third person 'he' and genderless pronouns emphasises that a dislocation of subjectivity influences the interpretation of poetry due to gender neutrality through the freedom that it offers. His poetry permits debates on Witting's thought, since Auden's use of ambiguity provides the reader a possibility of reading in some poems that subverts gender. Such 'game' with gender of pronouns is one of his ways to destabilize the author's subjectivity and turn readers' attention to the universal that abstraction can suggest even if the masculine preponderates in it. Notwithstanding, Witting adds that

> to destroy categories of sex in politics and philosophy, to destroy gender in language cannot happen without a transformation of language as a whole. It concerns (touches) words whose meanings and forms are close to, and associated with, gender. But it also concerns (touches) words whose meanings and forms are the furthest away. For once the dimension of the person, around which all others are organised, is brought into play, nothing is left intact. Words, their disposition, their arrangement, their relation to each other, the whole nebula of their constellations shift, are displaced, engulfed or reoriented, put sideway. And when they reappear, the structural change in language makes them look different. They are hit in their meaning and in their form. (quoted in Nancy K. Miller, 67)

She highlights the complexity that involves 'categories of sex' and insists on the propensity of critics and readers to interpret as they remind 'the dimension of the person, around which all others are organised'. As she writes this phrase, Witting may refer to the poet that, if a man, forces gender of the pronouns 'I' and 'you' to be read and interpreted as masculine. But when she affirms 'nothing is left intact', she suggests, the tendency to consider the author's gender for interpreting his work. To legate to the characters' gender such value is to make meaning be forcedly imprisoned by the gender of the author, dislocating the subject (as agent) to 'he' or to 'you', or even to "I" that in Auden's case creates a variety of subjects so the author's own subjectivity can be concealed in one of them. This generalisation occurs exactly as Auden poses in various subjects, I, you, whose genderless mark indicates abstraction,

referring to men. Witting's view of the universal instead of opening for possibilities limits it to a social structure where the masculine prevails.

3.5. Eroticism

Lyric poetry is known as a literary genre characterised by emotions and feelings such as infatuation, sadness, and mainly love, that is also known by the Greek word *eros*. This term originated the word *eroticism.* As love in Western culture is directly linked to human involvement between two or more people, Audre Lorde writes on the function of the erotic in a relation:

> The erotic functions for me in several ways, and the first is in providing the power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person. The sharing of Joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference.

Lorde focuses the various aspects that eroticism can exert its role in the human nature, happening at least between two beings whose purpose is to unite them through the basic sensation of joy that the moment can provide. As two beings, differences abound and eroticism comes into the sharing of all that the instant can bring up in order to diminish the gap that naturally exists between the protagonists of the encounter.

> Another important way in which the erotic connection functions is the open and fearless underlining of my capacity for joy. In the way my body stretches to music and opens into response, hearkening to its deepest rhythms, so every level upon which I sense also opens to the erotically satisfying experience, whether it is dancing, building a bookcase, writing a poem, examining an idea.

The 'capacity of joy', something that can be easily unperceived in the human nature due to our frequent contact with it, but that eroticism highlights as we can sense the pleasure that an

experience with another person can provide. Lorde suggests that eroticism appears in many forms, and its functioning must bring joy to the participants.

> That self-connection shared is a measure of the joy which I know myself to be capable of feeling, a reminder of my capacity for feeling. And that deep and irreplaceable knowledge of my capacity for joy comes to demand from all of my life that it be lived within the knowledge that such satisfaction is possible, and does not have to be called *marriage*, nor *god*, nor an *afterlife* (quoted in Abelove, 341).

These words show that there must be a self perception of a joy that an individual has towards himself, which indicates his capacity to feel, and such consciousness leads to the possibility of sharing with another human being all that is sensed. Lorde raises the idea that such 'satisfaction' with myself is the pre requisite to establish an erotic relation with another person.

In *The Double Flame*, Octavio Paz states that eroticism is the poetry of the body and poetry is the eroticism of language (2). As Paz states, eroticism transcends sexuality, which is directly related to physical desire (3, 8). He says that "pleasure serves procreation; in erotic rituals, pleasure is an end in itself or has ends other than procreation**"** (3-4). In this perspective, the sexual act that can be void of eroticism (6), since love or eros does not refer only to copulation. Paz also defines eroticism as an infinite variety of forms in which it manifests itself. Being derived from sexual instinct (7), eroticism is sexuality socialised and transfigured by the imagination and the will of human beings (8). Eroticism is invention, constant variation; sex is always the same (9). In his view eroticism is ambiguous: fascinated with both life and death; whose metaphor says many things, but in all of them two words figure: pleasure and death (11; 13).

The idea of pleasure and death are also devised by Georges Bataille in *Erotism*, who sees it as a mechanism that

> strikes the inmost core of the living being, so that he heart stands still. The transition from the normal state so that of erotic desire presupposes a partial dissolution of the person as he exists. The two individuals are mingled, attaining at length the same degree of dissolution. The whole business of eroticism is to destroy the self contained character of the participants as they are in their normal lives (17).

These two words also characterise eroticism as a mechanism that breaks down the "inmost core of the living being, so that the heart stands still" (17). Bataille explains that eroticism dissolves individuality of the individual who lives in the realm of discontinuity. In their normal lives, individuals have self contained character that is destroyed when they participate in erotic activity, and consequently the social order is stricken as individual's dissolution occurs. After being dissolved, both individuals fuse themselves and continuity happens (17-18). Bataille considers the idea of possession of the beloved as crucial for life, because it is in the beloved's hands the possibility of continuity between two creatures: "only the beloved can in this world bring about what our human limitations deny, a total blending of two beings. If through continuity love happens, it is also through love that a fraud promise of possessing the beloved appears**"** (20). Bataille reminds the reader that the possession is only an idea that indeed does not exist, it is a 'fraud promise'; the union comes about through love, involving the idea of death, which denotes passion (20-21). Death is the metaphor for fusion that in Bataille's further explanation happens when discontinuity disappears and continuity becomes infinite.

Lorde remarks the importance of this awareness, and we will see in the analyses of Auden's poems that this perception not always is clear to the subject and his object of love: joy often absent and gives space to a contrition in some examples reserving the moment between both characters to a physicality that does not provide such sensation.

Chapter 4

Analyses of Auden's Poems

In *W. H. Auden. Collected Poems* Edward Mendelson's foreword related to the titles of Auden's poems says: "in his early years Auden was reluctant to assist his readers with titles, but his attitude had softened by the end of the 1930s" (20thii). And to dates of composition:

> Auden did not append dates to his published work, although he used dates in the titles of a small number of poems. The dates supplied here for the poems and two forewords are editorial additions. They are the dates on which the poems achieved approximately their present form, although many of the poems, especially those written in the 1930s, were later heavily revised. Evidence for dates of the early poems derives mostly from Auden's notebooks and manuscripts (20thiii).

Mendelson observes that "Auden's habit of revision began early. The poems he wrote from 1927 until around 1942, when he began planning a collected edition, were often reworked, abridged, or rearranged in the months and years immediately after they were first written" (17th).

In relation to his poetic production written in the inter-war period, Auden's comments are:

> A good many of the poems have been revised. I can only say that I have never, consciously at any rate, attempted to revise my former thoughts or feelings, only the language in which they were first expressed when, on further consideration, it seemed to me inaccurate, lifeless, prolix or painful to the ear. (20thvi)

We can see in Auden's words that his review was done as he considered the importance of the context of the time when they were created. As we have seen previously here the inter-war time was a unique epoch in the history of Europe and England. For this country the many changes that occurred in those two decades led it not only to affirm its role in the European politics but also in the world. The changes also took place in the artistic field as Margaret Rees comments about the 20s-30s. In her review of Mendelson's *Auden's poetry and his last*

years. Later Auden she refers to the 1920s and 1930s poetry and the diverse crises through which England and the world were going through: "Auden, in response to them [the crises], was searching for a leap in literature, for a poetry that could play a positive role in such a period."
(http://www.wsws.org/articles/1999/nov1999/aud-n20.shtml). Besides his engagement in social and political issues, Auden was also articulating personal dramas related to love and homosexuality. Avoiding confessionalism and the risk of exposure, he opted for the device of camouflage and ambiguity. Thus, his poetry shows an individual concerned with his reality, having to hide behind a behavior that we could call performative. As we will see in the analyses, the poet will appear as an apprehensive individual who has to prioritise his survival in a society full of restrictions against all that was not in accordance with the English tradition and modes of behavior.

Gregory Woods refers to Auden's poems and characterizes the subject as an "unapproachable" (189) individual. Woods refers to the psychological aspect of individuality that safeguards the subject from frustrating emotional and sexual involvements. We can understand such characteristic as a strategy that the poet used to escape social condemnation, veiling aspects of life such as his sexuality. In the next poems unapproachability, located in the lover or in the beloved, is resultant from matters such as social demands that force an individual to move in accordance with them. There is in this procedure a protection found in fiction that Auden uses in order to exert his subjectivity by projecting it in the characters. In *The Dyer's Hands*, Auden writes that "[the] characteristic hero is neither the "Great Man" nor the romantic rebel, both doers of extraordinary deeds, but the man or woman in any walk of life who, despite all the pressures of modern society, manages to acquire and preserve a face of his own" (quoted in Cook, 382).

In his introduction to *Making Something Happen* Michael Thurston observes Auden's production:

> At the end of the 1930s and in the midst of a European war, after his skeptical experiments with instrumental verse and political commitment, after proclaiming poetry's inability to affect the machinations of history, Auden holds out a vital role for poetry: the transformation of lived experience into fruitful freedom through the cultivation of imagination. So while "poetry makes nothing happen" in that it cannot directly effect change in history, it makes quite a lot happen in the indirect and mediated ways Auden leaves open for it.
> (http://uncpress.unc.edu/chapters/thurston_making.html).

Thurston's sentence "it makes quite a lot happen in the indirect and mediated ways Auden leaves open for it" can be understood in the poet's work as the possibilities to interpret his works due to their intricacy and ambiguity. This comment opposes Auden's statement that poetry makes nothing happen, and it also reinforces our observation that the poet can wield his politics by locating it in diction such as ambiguity and intricate syntactical constructions of the poems. Cary Nelson writes about poetry between 1910 and 1945: "[it] became one of the most dependable sources of knowledge about society and one's place and choices within it. Indeed, for some people, poetic discourse was capable not merely of talking about but actually of substantially deciding basic social and political issues" (quoted in Thurston). Such maneuvers with language allow the author to exert his authority in his society so that poetry can cause changes in the chain of events.

According to Bozorth, Auden's first book *Poems* came in 1928 "when [Stephen] Spender offered to print a book for Auden" which was published in London by Faber & Faber (32). Bozorth observes that this early work **"**was first produced within and received by a limited, coterie readership, rather than within a commercial framework for a mostly anonymous public" (32). Bozorth also notes that "few of Auden's academic critics refer to the 1928 *Poems*, and those who do have not pursued the implications of its sociology for his work" (32). In the compilation *W. H. Auden. Collected Poems* by Mendelson, we can see Auden's prolific writing in 1929, the year when he returned to England from Germany. In

relation to the poems which were published in the 1930 edition of *Poems,* Woods writes that they "reveal an atmosphere of suspicion, and of political and social subterfuge" (171). He adds:

> Auden refers again and again to leaders, heroes, fighters, borders, locked and unlocked doors, raids, betrayals, bombs, interrogation, physical and moral torture, sentries, traitors, enemies, spies, conquerors, bribery, tricks, and so on – all in a recognisable English context of schools and villages, factories and playing fields, which in some of the verse of his contemporaries seems reassuringly domestic. (171)

The idea of unapproachability is mentioned**:**

> When he thought of social pressures on individual liberties, he came up with an image of 'Sentries against inner and outer', which neatly fuses both oppression and self-oppression. The hunted transgressor would adopt a disguise, with which, involuntarily implicated in his own hounding, he falsified himself. (171)

Some of those characters appear in settings that show out the cultural view of human relationships in the English society. The ambiguous possibilities that the poems present permit the poet to criticize that context and subvert the romantic tradition that prevailed in that time. In the poem below**,** the poet exposes the protagonist's need to perform in such world so he can be free from the social censorship constantly surrounding him.

A Free One

Watch any day his nonchalant pauses, see
His dextrous handling of a wrap as he
Steps after into cars, the beggar's envy.

"There is a free one," many say, but err.
He is not that returning conqueror,
Nor ever the poles' circumnavigator.

But poised between shocking falls, in razor-edge
Has taught himself this balancing subterfuge

Of an accosting profile, an erect carriage.
The song, the varied action of the blood,
Would drown the warning from the iron wood,
Would cancel the inertia of the buried:

Travelling by daylight on from house to house
The longest way to an intrinsic peace
With love's fidelity and with love's weakness.

March 1929.

The speaker presents the protagonist as a free man, but this quality is questionable and ambiguous if we consider that "many" observe him in a social context. One of the observers is the speaker that perceives "his nonchalant pauses" and "his dextrous handling of a wrap." Indeed he lives, in relation to society, as if he were in prison, destitute of the privacy that would make him be the free one. What makes him be watched is not connected to any brave act like the English soldiers' who returned home from the battle fields in the World War I. Rrather, he is compared to men who marked history with their deeds: "he is not that returning conqueror, nor ever the poles' circumnavigator."

Bozorth notes that in Isherwood's prose: "he [the author] effaces his narratorial identity in order to bear witness to history like a 'camera'" (26); we see that Auden works the possibilities of effacement as he attempts to separate his identity from the protagonist's and the speaker's. Likewise he separates the identities of these two latter individuals. In the poem, the speaker shows the main character behaving with an air of arrogance — "an accosting profile" —, a perception from an external perspective that works as a disguise to prevent the identification between protagonist and poet. Thus, the device of projecting the self to a third person functions as a mask for the poet. He is "nonchalant," a word that emphasises his performative behaviour so he can keep an image of an upper-class member, in order not to confront the consequences of the repression against all those who subvert the social establishment. The central character is aware of the constant dangers in the surroundings: "poised between shocking falls, in razor-edge." Due to it, "he taught himself this balancing subterfuge," acting out his "nonchalant pauses," "dextrous handling of a wrap as he / Steps

after into cars," "accosting profile," "erect carriage." These are details that only the protagonist could know, so we can assume that the protagonist is a projection of the poet's self. In other words, the poet is avoiding confessionalism; he is rather being performative as if he needed to preserve himself from social censorship.

Moving so, he seems not to be confronting internal and external oppositions. "Many err," he is in a dilemma because he must live in a constant performance to hide his privacy. Thus he is not actually free, because his social class and position impose on him patterns of behavior which may not correspond to his own nature. Moreover, he appears to be a man who is shut in himself, whose ideas and values must be secretly kept so nothing concerning his private life such as his sexuality can be unveiled.

As we could see in chapter two, such social procedure is characteristic of the Western ideology that standardises the model of an ideal man. Mosse says that such pattern not only played a "determining role in fashioning ideas of nationhood, respectability, but it was present and influenced almost every aspect of modern history." This was so because "manly ideal means dealing, above all, with the ideals and functioning of normative society" (4) which forbid and censored any individual who did not behave according to this ideal. As Mosse says the modern masculinity influenced normative patterns of morality and behaviour that is typical and acceptable ways of behaving and acting within the social setting of the past centuries (4). Mosse adds that the man's body represented the need for order and progress, self-control and moderation (4). As we have discussed previously, some societies provide benefits to those who can hide their homosexuality under an appearance of manly heterosexual.

While he prudently moves in public, "the song" comes out as the place where he can manifest his individuality, and he "would drown the warning from the iron wood." The poem being the song would be a way he finds to ambiguously express his ideas without exposing

himself. In the poem he can do something against censorship, where he can make things happen in his milieu, a means to "cancel the inertia of the buried" that can be understood as other individuals who could not resist or survive repression. In the poem**,** the poet can express carefully, and can be relatively free in this transmutation of the self: "the varied action of the blood." Being so, the poem can make things happen such as denouncing social repression through the power of its ambiguity. From such view, we can agree with Michael Thurston who writes that Auden "frequently expressed in his verse the pressures exerted on private life by the inexorable forces of history."
(http://uncpress.unc.edu/chapters/thurston_making.html)

Thus, the last stanza takes us back to the initial image: "[stepping] after into cars," **"**traveling from house to house," he lives without rest, anguished in his dilemma. His impermanence is the "longest way to an intrinsic peace," an ambiguous peace "with love's fidelity and with love's weakness." We can consider this dissonance between his mind and external world as a critique against romantic views of human relationship in an epoch when England was in deep transformations of values. Bozorth reminds us that Auden writes poetry in the inter-war period characterized as a transition from a romantic vein into the lyric of the closet (39). Inglis's assumption that experience is public is applicable here since the protagonist, having assimilated the values of his group, feels the heavy weight that forces him to live such a performative life, strongly limited by social values and interests. Woods writes about the male body whose constant "tension produces defence" (49) which can be seen in his constant performative acts. As Auden states in the foreword to *The Complete Poems of Cavafy*, a poet is "not a machine for producing verses, but a human being like other human beings, living in a historical society and subject to its cares and vicissitudes" (19th). A deep care towards social impositions suggests that the individual in his everyday experience is forced by social conventions that are opposite to his individuality. He is a tense individual: his

capacity for joy may be blocked because he cannot be open, as Lorde observes, to erotically satisfying experiences, having to show out an individual that he is not. Therefore, the absence of joy appears due to his internal concerns to keep a way of life demanded by the need to pretend, to “appear” someone rather than “being” who he really is.

As we argued in the previous chapter, the poet’s subjectivity is sometimes limited by social patterns whose politics only allows him to express himself provided that his work strengthens the values of society. If we consider the protagonist in the poem a projection of the poet’s subjectivity, we can see the poet suffering social impositions as he uses camouflage in order not to bring upon himself social oppositions. The speaker’s attitude shows the dilemma of revealing and veiling, because he shares the information with the reader in a very cautious way that only “poetic possibilities” such as the use of mask and ambiguity would allow to.

As Elledge shows, ambiguity allows the poet to camouflage his message by a thin veneer of heterosexuality, on the one hand writing for society at large, a heterosexual world; on the other, for himself and others like him, or the few ones who would identify the issue of homosexuality in his writings, expressing in an oblique way his actual feeling, thoughts, experiences, and dreams. In “A Free One,” we can also read gaps or lacunae as silences that somehow speak of the central character’s way of life in a repressive society, as far as his expressions can only be a mask of an irreproachable or unapproachable behaviour. The poet is thus an agent who can diagnose the pretense of his society and criticize it.

In the poem above the poet exposed the reality of a subject who is forced to express a performative behaviour by the social context; in the next poem Auden writes about a subject who leaves his house because of doom that is not revealed. After leaving, he becomes “the wonderer,” “a stranger to strangers.” If in the previous poem the protagonist is ironically

viewed as “a free one” within society, here the protagonist is an outsider, suffering the risks of marginality.

The Wanderer

Doom is dark and deeper than any sea-dingle.
Upon what man it fall
In spring, day-wishing flowers appearing,
Avalanche sliding, white snow from rock-face
That he should leave his house,
No cloud-soft hand can hold him, restraint by women;
But ever that man goes
Through place keepers, through forest trees,
A stranger to strangers over undried sea,
Houses for fishes, suffocating water,
Or lonely on fell as chat,
By pot-holed becks
A bird stone-haunting, an unquiet bird.
There head falls forward, fatigued at evening,
And dreams of home,
Waving from window, spread of welcome,
Kissing of wife under single sheet;
But waking sees
Bird-flocks nameless to him, through doorway voices
Of new men making another love.

Save him from hostile capture,
From sudden tiger’s leap at corner;
Protect his house,
His anxious house where days are counted
From thunderbolt protect,
From gradual ruin spreading like a stain;
Converting number from vague to certain,
Bring joy, bring day of his returning,
Lucky with day approaching, with leaning dawn.

August 1930.

As the title indicates, a person moves without a destiny in life, impelled by an interior force to leave home. Clive James says that “the idea of the homosexual’s enforced exile is strongly present, although never explicit, in the first stanza” (quoted in Woods, 180). His

staying with those he knows has been for too long and “no cloud-soft hand can hold him, restraint by woman.” He seems not to find in that place a meaning. But to travel by veering, to wander and see what he stumbles across such as the dangers of the places-to-be-known seem to be preferable. The first line foreshadows a harsh fate: “Doom is dark and deeper than any sea-dingle.” The protagonist is a sort of gauche who saw in the inevitable departure from home the only way out to continue his life.

Auden’s early poems are often characterized as fragments of individual’s private life. In the introduction to *Auden. Selected Poems*, Mendelson corroborates this idea:

> These first poems often have the air of gnomic fragments; they seem to be elements of some private myth whose individual details never quite resolve themselves into a unified narrative. The same qualities of division and irresolution that mark the poems also mark the world they describe, a world where doomed heroes [or anti-heroes] look down in isolation on an equally doomed society. The elusiveness and indecipherability of the early poems are part of their meaning; they enact the isolation they describe. (ix)

The imprecision and indecipherability of these poems come out as parts of their meanings, enacting the social segregation of the protagonist who feels misplaced in his milieu. Such reality can be connected to a discomfort caused by the performative behavior like the one the protagonist is forced to live in the poem “A Free One.”

An internal force instigates him to confront other difficulties that unknown places bring: “But ever that man goes / Through place keepers, through forest trees, / A stranger to strangers over undried sea.” In the chosen exile, when lonely in Nature, he does not need to perform as he did in his homeland, but he feels the fatigue of such walk, as a “bird stone-hunting, an unquiet bird.” There is an important transition from “dreams of home” to “waking.” Besides evoking romanticism in the English society which idealized the coupling between man and woman, the images “Waving from window, spread of welcome, / Kissing of wife under single sheet,” stand for the appeal of coziness, home, in a heterosexual society. This is in contrast with the next lines: “But waking sees / Bird-flocks nameless to him,

through / doorway voices / Of new men making another love." Suggestive of a homosexual society, this image implies not only the poet's "waking" to this other world but his impossibility of naming it. Woods remarks that

> throughout the *Collected Poems*, we find individuals subject to contrary forces within themselves: the lonely individual, in revolt against his conditions, tries to forge an intimate bond with another individual [but] he [the individual] discovers that to be known is to be kidnapped: the individual sets up around himself impenetrable barriers against what would most welcome. (189)

The protagonist sees in leaving the comfort of home and trying a new life a better idea than staying. But the individual sees himself in need to avoid invasion of his privacy by keeping a behaviour that does not permit him to be discovered. As Paz writes, eroticism goes beyond physical encounters, so that it can be seen as a secret agent operating in the shadows and interstices, always putting him in risk of being exposed and betrayed by himself. Eroticism receives here a singular characteristic: it is something veiled, living in his interior; it is a powerful strength whose possibilities he does not permit himself to explore in his home because, as the poem suggests, he fears repression and violence. Like in "The Free One," he moves from place to place in hope of finding one where he can live his real self free from the social constraints that an autobiographical reading allows us to link to his sexuality.

Similar to the birds that for being different stimulate his eyes and mind, his ears are moved by an erotic sound: "voices of new men making another love." Here the poet is safe as an observer; a voyeuristic position that provides him not only images of something to be experienced but also guarantees him unapproachability. Yet, he recognizes the dangers he is exposed to in that place. The last stanza ironically sounds like a prayer to "save him from hostile capture," to "protect his house, where days are counted," "from thunderbolt protect," "from gradual ruin spreading like a stain."

The prayer may be the voice of the family asking for the wonderer's safety and return, or the wanderer's (in complicity with the poet's). In this case, the prayer is an acknowledgement of the dangers he is exposed to. We can see ambiguity in "where days are counted": implying that he may return to the original home (the family's prayer); or he is in a sort of dead end and being caught is just a matter of time, or yet, as James suggests, he is under siege in his own house, counting the days to leave. His prayer can also be read as a critique the poet addresses against his society held on the Christian religion that puts in supernatural forces the solution for social problems.

In reference to this poem, Woods writes

> If, as Clive James says, 'the idea of the homosexual's enforced exile is strongly present, although never explicit', in the first stanza of 'The Wanderer'; and if in the second stanza's mention 'Of new men making another love', is a reference to homosexual intercourse, as Edward Mendelson suggests; then it is not unreasonable to interpret the third and final stanza as a plea for the safety of an unnamed, homosexual man, under siege in his own home. (180)

The references to "hostile capture," "sudden tiger's leap," "thunderbolt," "ruin" are metaphors for the dangers he is exposed to in his wanderings. Taking this as emblematic for his displacement as homosexual, the risk would be being caught or suffering violence in a homophobic society. Yet, the "tiger's leap at corner" may refer to an assault by one of those "new men" who make "another love." The capture mentioned can be a metaphor to the way the new men, "those tigers", approach other men. The "sudden tiger's leap at corner" would be a moment when he perhaps would walk in the streets at night and be grabbed by those men who would desire him for that other kind of love. If he was somewhat safe from such possible attacks in his home place, in the new land he is vulnerable to them. He finds himself surrounded by social contracts that differ from those with which he was used to dealing; his unawareness puts him in a dangerous situation.

The next poem “Meiosis” makes use of ambiguous images and an unusual form, that is, an extremely complex syntax, to depict a sexual intercourse. As Bozorth considers, the poem “allegorises a sperm cell released by ejaculation to fertilise an ovum” (189). Also about this poem, John Fuller comments that “[this is] the final poem in a sequence of love poems which Auden collected in 1934. The subject of the sequence was [a] young man” (174). In the sequence of love poems, “Meiosis” is preceded by “Through the Looking-Glass,” an eight-stanza composition, which describes the poet’s passion for a fourteen-year old boy whose beauty attracts him deeply.

Meiosis

Love had him fast but though he fought for breath
He struggled only to possess Another,
The snare forgotten in their little death,
Till you, the seed to which he was a mother,
That never heard of love, through love was free,
While he within his arms a world was holding,
To take the all-night journey under sea,
Work west and northward, set up building.

Cities and years constricted to your scope,
All sorrow simplified though almost all
Shall be as subtle when you are as tall:
Yet clearly in that ´almost´ all his hope
That hopeful falsehood cannot stem with love
The flood on which all move and wish to move.

Summer 1933.

This poem brings the idea that there is an inseparable bond between love and death. The narrative of love affair denotes a person’s deep infatuation towards his object of love and speaks of a wishful connection permeated by sorrow due to no accomplishment.

As I argue here, Auden’s writing constitutes a political attitude that is capital for the understanding of this poem “Meiosis”, which is an example of how he has camouflaged his message through ambiguity. His devices in the poem point to what he used to urge poets to do

as they wrote in a turbulent political persecution against homosexuals also in the period after World War II. The complexity of ambiguous words and sentences revealing erotic images strategically stimulate imagination for various interpretations.

Ambiguity can be sensed from the title. Ralph E. Taggart explains meiosis as a specialized type of cell division that occurs in the formation of gametes such as egg and spermatozoon. It is really just two divisions in sequence. Meiosis I, the first of the two divisions, is often called “reduction,” “division,” since it is here that the chromosome compliment is reduced from 2N (diploid) to 1N (haploid). Meiosis II is a mitotic division of each of the haploid cells produced in Meiosis I.

(http://taggart.glg.msu.edu/bs110/meiosis.htm)

Another meaning ‘meiosis’ holds is linked to the linguistic realm; the electronic encyclopedia *Wikipedia* describes this term as derived from the Greek *mei-o-o* (“to make smaller”, "to diminish"),

> [as] a figure of speech, which intentionally understates something or implies that it is less in significance, size, than it really is. It is a form of litotes, but where litotes is often uses understatement to amplify the importance of something, meiosis aims to make its subject appear smaller. For example, a lawyer defending a schoolboy who has set fire to his school might call the act of arson, a "prank."
> (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meiosis_(figure_of_speech)

The title alludes to something that is half said about an erotic and sexual intercourse between the speaker and his object of love. In the two stanzas, we have the erotic and the sexual joined in one moment conveyed through an intricate writing. On the first line of the poem, a ‘he’, an anaphoral pronoun, appears without any previous reference, we can ask: who is ‘he’? As a masculine pronoun, it takes the place of a man’s name. The two words ‘he’ and ‘Another’ encompasss the existence of two individuals: ambiguously “Another” he, or “Another” human being (he or she)? As we read on, we ask: but why ‘Another’ with capital initial? This capitalization is ironic if we consider the name’s absence.

We read that love made him fast: had him in his grip. The ambiguous sense of a single word opens the reading for different interpretations. The next line moves to a snare, which was hidden in their little death. It was a snare forgotten. Therefore, they knew of it, but they did not remember it. Did they set the snare or was there a snare in their little death and they did not see it, so that they ended up caught in it? Ambiguity is seen in the snare that was forgotten and yet present in their little death. Both individuals: him and his "Another" have in common a "little death," emblematic for orgasm. As Bataille explains, erotic activity resembles death as discontinuity ends. If discontinuity ends for haploid cells when they fuse in one another, this implies "life." In the case of lover's fusion, according to Bataille the end of discontinuity means "death."

In "Till you, the seed to which he was a mother," 'he' paradoxically assumes the female function of being "a mother" to seed as 'he' originates the seed, spermatozoon. This relation between the male gamete and the title is evident, because meiosis is exactly the reproduction between gametes that are completed as they mix to become a fertilized egg that will originate a new being. In the process of meiosis, as shown above, the idea of incompletion present in haploid cells can be linked to the fusion between the two gametes, but this is not possible, if the lovers are two males. A paradox is in two aspects: "he" is "a mother" to the seed, and is freed through love without having ever heard of it.

The act of embracing is like holding a world: "While he within his arms a world was holding" (l.vi). 'He' and 'you' suggest togetherness, no more incomplete, discontinuous, because their erotic union joins them. This verse suggests an ambiguity in the expression "within his arms": holding a world within his own arms, or in the arms of another he? The scene suggests one is leaning on the other's chest, being held by the other's arms and having the sensation of holding a world at that moment so that the discontinuity, as identified by Bataille, disappears in the erotic sexual act.

“To take the all-night journey under sea” (l.vii) denotes a feeling of grandeur at such a moment. The seed has to take journey under sea. It has to move in the darkness of the sea. The seed must move on ‘to set building’. Freed and immersed in the roticism of the moment, the seed moves towards its destiny. This describes a sexual intercourse. Hence, the seed that was freed through love in their erotic sexual intercourse must “work west and northward, set up building.” In a heterosexual intercourse, the spermatozoon is released to ‘build’ another being as it meets the ovum. In a homosexual intercourse, the meiotic process obviously never happens.

On the first line of the second stanza we have “Cities and years constricted to your scope.” All the magnitude denoted by the cities and years is summed up before the seed. The universe, the civilizations are under the responsibility of the spermatozoon that determines the future of the species: “all sorrow simplified” to the scope of a seed. All the complexity of human life – cities, years, sorrow – is “constricted” to the seed in its all-night journey.” When the seed grows, generating life, not all sorrow is subtle (or can be simplified).

If in the two stanzas the speaker is conveying a relation between two male lovers and the perception of their erotic encounter, this is possible due to the ambiguous wording and intricate syntax. But this does not help the reader to categorise the poem assuredly as a gay piece. The subtleties of words in a complex arrangement seem to indicate the knots put forth by the speaker, who uses it as a hideout to show something that cannot be expressed in its totality. Camouflaged in what they suggest, the words may declare an epoch and a site that do not allow a depiction of a love relationship prohibited in the outer world that still does not accept it.

Human relationship is also the theme of the next poem where the poet narrates the barriers imposed not only by sexual censorship but also by social class differences. Again, love relationship is characterized by limitations that make it frustrating to the protagonist.

Who's who

A shilling life will give you all the facts;
How Father beat him, how he ran away,
What were the struggles of his youth, what acts
Made him the greatest figure of his day;
Of how he fought, fished, hunted, worked all night,

Though giddy, climbed new mountains; named a sea;
Some of the last researchers even write
Love made him weep his pints like you and me.

With all his honours on, he sighed for one
Who, say astonished critics, lived at home;
Did little jobs about the house with skill
And nothing else; could whistle; would sit still
Or potter round the garden; answered some
Of his long marvelous letters but kept none.

1934.

The title of the poem indicates that there is a concern with identity that isrelated to social class. "A shilling life will give you all the facts": the speaker is telling of a person whose life course apparently does not have much value, perhaps for being commonplace or having nothing extraordinary to reveal. In the first stanza he presents the events of the main character's life: "How Father beat him, how he ran away, / What were the struggles of his youth, what acts / Made him the greatest figure of his day." The information about the protagonist is put in a sequence of fragments with gaps serving the purpose of "half-revelation." The same device is extended to the account of the relationship "he" had with a person whose gender is veiled as the poet uses the neutral word "one": "he sighed for one."

Auden capitalizes the word “Father” as a way of emphasizing the importance of the male genitor in an ironic critique against the patriarchal world wherein the protagonist and the beloved lived. The father can also be emblematic for the values of the previous generations that still reached out the inter-war generation. Even being men who shared the privileges of their sex in the English culture, they had difficulties in relating with each other for a reason the speaker does not inform: “How Father beat him”: a reprehension for an act that the father did not accept from his son. If we consider the context of a Western male-centered culture, it could be something that might dishonor its codes of behavior or the family’s name. While he emphasizes the father’s figure, he silences about the mother, suggesting the image that women had for centuries in patriarchal societies in a submissive status quo. Whether she fought for her son or not, or whether she was physically present in her family life, the omission of references to her does not allow us to be sure of her role as a mother.

Despite difficulties, as consequence of his struggles, the main character became “the greatest figure of his day”, and “he fought, fished, hunted, worked all night, / though giddy, climbed new mountains; named a sea.” He acquired a very high position in society; however, in his emotional life we read that “love made him weep his pints like you and me.” As an autobiographical piece, we have allusions to the poet’s early prominence due to his book *Poems* published in 1928. As in other poems, Auden uses the device of camouflage, transferring the self to a third person. As with the use of gaps and ambiguity, this sort of detachment allows him to recreate his experience without taking the risk of revelation. Thus, considering what Adrienne Rich calls process of “transmutation,” autobiography turns into art. As autobiography, the gender of the protagonist coincides with the poet’s. The speaker narrows his proximity with the reader by sharing with him a fact about the protagonist, a point that is common to the three individuals: their humanity as far as love is concerned. The poem

is describing something that is suggested to be known by the reader who, as part of history, can respond to and empathize with the protagonist's drama.

The reader identifies, in Auden's words, as he or she surrenders to the text, involving in the narrative. Hence "you" as a universal term, as Woods writes (170), appears in this case because the information chain seems to be known by the reader as something that human beings experience. Scott writes that "his [the narrator's] knowledge, reflecting as it does something apart from him [the author], is legitimized and presented as universal: accessible to all" (quoted in Abelove, 403). Bozorth observes this method used by Auden: "the poem as a dialogue of poet and reader" (3); and "poetry as a site of intimate relation between poet and reader in all their particularities" (175). By doing so, the speaker puts on the reader a responsibility to interpret the two lives and thus to connect the information of this story with history: "acts made him one of the greatest figures of his day."

"With all his honours on, he sighed for one who, say astonished critics, lived at home." In using the word "one", the poet veils the beloved's gender. While the speaker provides information about the protagonist's deeds that led him to a higher social class, all the reader knows about the beloved is restricted to his ambiguous way of living, suggesting both male and female identity. "[Living] at home" was proper to women, but "doing little jobs about the house" is not exclusively male or female. It may suggest repairing things (men's attribute) or housework (women's task). Anyway, none of the alternatives would socially qualify the beloved as ideal for the protagonist. This implies the prejudiced and sexist view of the "critics" mirroring society.

The phrase "astonished critics" shows that the protagonist was known by his work: he became a famous member of society, but shocked critics with his behavior for being emotionally interested in someone who could maculate his reputation, if the beloved was a man, and someone whose deeds were not at the same stature of the protagonist's. The author

uses irony to criticize the ‘sacred’ English tradition in the indication of a relationship with someone who was considered so plain in terms of social position. England had at that time suffered with economic recession and to have a prominent job was something valuable such as Auden’s that was a university teacher. Thus obeying social rules would be a wise form to maintain his occupation that provided him a privileged position in society. Therefore, the poem subverts these rules by showing the protagonist interested in someone who was a member of an inferior social class. The poet also omits information about the beloved’s gender, what can be interpreted as a form to safeguard the two individuals from social hostility, since if their relationship was homosexual they would be in a difficult situation. The speaker is cautious as he deals with such matter, so what he writes can be seen not only as a critique to that prevailing social problem in the inter-war period, but also and mainly as a wise way to escape censorship and all the consequences implicit in it.

In considering the critics’ points of view, the speaker grants the protagonist a favourable position that does not cause him any further trouble and does not reveal the beloved’s identity. Consequently, the two characters’ identities are veiled, protecting them from their social classes’ censorship. Ambiguity is in the beloved’s way of living, not in the protagonist’s: Veiling the beloved’s identity through ambiguity indicates the author’s concern with him. Meaning is thus “rhetorically withheld” as Bozorth writes (64), not only because of neuter and vague words such as “the one”, but in the kind of information about the protagonist and the beloved.

Another important aspect of the poem is that it shows a detachment between the protagonist and the beloved; that is, it presents the former’s platonic love for someone who seemed not to care for him as much as he wished — a portrayal of the protagonist’s romantic emotional life. Woods writes that “early in his career, Auden’s poems show a marked gap between desire and actuality” (176). The protagonist does not have a relationship with his

object of love, the relation is only desired so that eroticism happens as Paz reminds us that it is more than sex, than physical encounter, leading us to see in desire an important element that characterises this poem as an erotic piece where social difference and sex prejudice can work as complicating factors against their involvement.

Whereas the concerns of the protagonist remain in his external world where he achieved a remarkable place, he differs himself from his beloved who has other aims such as staying at home, without a troubled life. The beloved's occupation is turned to a discreet life: "did little jobs about the house with skill and nothing else; could whistle; would sit still or potter round the garden." Nevertheless, he gave the protagonist some attention: "answered some of his long marvellous letters but kept none." We can ask: Why not keeping? Is it a gesture of carelessness or extreme care in eliminating proofs of a forbidden love? Ambiguity conceals the real reason.

The social and sexual prejudices criticized in the previous poem are treated in the next between two characters that meet each other in a specific place. The situation shows the beloved in an ambiguous behaviour concerning his relationship with the lover, reinforcing his ambiguous sexuality characterized in the poem by uncertainty about his homosexuality.

IV

Dear, though the night is gone,
Its dream still haunts to-day
That brought us to a room
Cavernous, lofty as
A railway terminus,
And crowded in that gloom
Were beds, and we in one
In a far corner lay.
Our whisper woke no clocks,
We kissed and I was glad
At everything you did,
Indifferent to those

Who sat with hostile eyes
In pairs on every bed,
Arms round each other's necks,
Inert and vaguely sad.

What hidden worm of guilt
Or what malignant doubt
Am I the victim of,
That you then, unabashed,
Did what I never wished,
Confessed another love,
And I, submissive, felt
Unwanted and went out.

March 1936.

This poem is part of a set started to be written in the spring 1935 and completed in January 1938, entitled "Twelve Songs." The first five are called "Song of the Beggars", IX and X integrate the "Autumn Song", and the last two are grouped in "Roman Wall Blues." In number IV the speaker is addressing a person treated as "Dear", who is reminded of the memories of the previous night that still confusingly "haunts today." The place where they spent the night is described as huge, somber, but strangely "crowded in that gloom", full of beds where other people also had the night together. Such a setting where the two lovers are observed by other eyes in their loving moment makes the scene obviously uncommon as we consider the Western culture and its customs that establish such moments to happen in privacy.

In this poem, besides an evident concern with the characters' identities, we can see something very specific: the device of indeterminacy of gender, since the speaker does not inform the partner's gender, what strengthens the protection to their identities. An autobiographical approach allows us to see two men immersed in an interchange of affections and attracting other people's eyes: he and his beloved were in the same place other people were and who watched them. Whereas their physical exchanges were observed, they were "indifferent to those / Who sat with hostile eyes / in pairs on every bed, / arms round each

other's necks, / Inert and vaguely sad." The speaker, as naively as a romantic lover can be, was glad at everything the beloved did, apparently not caring for the presence of the people around. But such attitude establishes a behaviour that reinforces an idea of a too romantic person, the lines: "What hidden worm of guilt / Or what malignant doubt / Am I the victim of", ambiguity here in the use of the word "guilt" implying pain and delight, self-reproach for forbidden pleasure. "That you then, unabashed, / Did what I never wished, / Confessed another love": we can see ambiguity here as love can be understood the beloved's feeling for another person, or as another kind of love different from that he felt for the lover.

In this and other poems of the time, the poet is turned to love relationships frequently described as frustrating for the speaker/protagonist. "We kissed and I was glad / At everything you did"—joy is perceptible here as the speaker is open to live an uncommon situation in which he spends a night with his beloved surrounded by strangers. Such joy can be connected to Lorde's notion of eroticism: "The sharing of Joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference" (quoted in Abelove, 341), for the protagonist is satisfied to have that moment with his beloved. Yet, his disappointment is elicited as the beloved confesses to love another person. This behavior shows the speaker's passivity exposing his incapacity to decide about the relationship. As in the previous poem, the lover is in the hands of the beloved, the one who controls the situation. We can interpret it as a characteristic of an infatuated heart romantically submissive to love.

Woods sees the beloved as a double-crosser (181) who lives his heterosexuality in society and his homosexuality in marginal places. So he can be someone who only wants to live homosexual encounters without involving himself in a deeper relationship where love can be and dissolution can happen. Such behaviour would bring out the need to hide his bisexual identity in society and to live his homosexual desires in places as the one described in the

poem. Thus the unapproachable aspect of the beloved comes out also in this poem as another example of Auden's use of camouflage that protects his identity.

In the previous poem the poet presented a critique against the socio-cultural limitations that the protagonist goes through by submitting to his beloved's ones in order to be with him and exchange physical affection, whereas in the next the poet narrates the story of a protagonist that is totally immersed in a romantic view of love for someone who is not present in his life anymore. Once more the poet makes an ironic critique against the romantic conception of love and social status quo that prevailed in that time.

IX

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,
Silence the piano and with muffled drum
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.
Let aeroplanes circle the moaning overhead
Scribbling on the sky the message He Is Dead,
Put crêpe bows round the white necks of the public doves
Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves.

He was my North, my South, my East and West,
My working week and my Sunday rest,
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;
I thought love would last for ever: I was wrong.

The stars are not wanted now: put out every one;
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun;
Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood.
For nothing now can ever come to any good.

April 1936

Regarding this poem Bozorth writes: "As Mendelson notes, its dedication to Benjamin Britten's favorite soprano, Hedli Anderson was a form of disguise Auden used only for love poems with masculine pronouns." (174) Benjamin Britten was Auden's boyfriend. The dedication to a woman fits the patterns of heterosexual relations serving the purpose of

camouflage. Bozorth observes yet another ambiguous aspect in the poem that, besides being "Auden's private response to the end of a homosexual love affair," can also be an

> expression of grief as a means for reflection on love. While it is almost irresistible to the poem as voicing utter desolation at a breakup, impermanence had always haunted Auden's love poems. From this angle, [this poem] might sound contrived or even cruel, since it mourned someone still living. But the poem might also be read as a confession that grief can be a self-indulgent performance, as manipulative of oneself as it is of others. (175)

Thus, the poet would be disguising homosexual love through the dedication to a woman and the use of a masculine pronoun for the beloved, leaving open the possibility of a male speaker. The use of imperative has a rhetorical effect expressing the poet's dramatic appeal for the world to join him in his mourning.

The poet subverts the romantic tradition as he leaves the reading open for a homosexual love. The poet *wants* the world to mourn his loss, but the world (or nature) is indifferent to his suffering. So, the mirror game between poet / world (or poet / nature) only happens in his desire: death reaped his beloved man. Having been immersed by himself in a delusory romantic conception that his feelings could make their love be for ever (a time humanly unconceivable by reason, but possible in the terrain of emotions), the speaker loses the sense of limits and proportion. He can be seen as a hyper romantic figure of hero who believes to attract the world's comfort towards his state in a time when such conception does not fit anymore. This image of the protagonist can be understood as a strategy used by the author to show his unapproachable character, covering him up with the romantic features of a subject that broke up with the real world.

Notwithstanding he brings the urban context showing out or suggesting the modern times that are all around in the diverse crises of the time. Absorbed in a sense of grandeur provided by love, the lover is incapable of realizing his human condition before the unpredictable ironic odds of real life. His situation is obliterated by pain and opposes rationality to sentiments. His commands are pathetic for they do not respect the logical

rhythm of reality, increasing the adversity between the real world and his fantasized inner one: “Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone”, or, “Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood.” Eventually, he surrenders to his limitations: “For nothing now can ever come to any good.” His life, that knew no limits when he and his beloved were together, loses its meaning and nothing else matters. In a succession of impossible wishes, the speaker ignores the laws of Nature and its movements, until then known as the refuge for the romantics.

Love in the poem can imply both the beloved and the feeling. As Bozorth observed above, meaning moves in the realm of rhetorical possibilities. Ambiguity thus allows reading the poem as mourning the death of someone “still living”, if we consider Auden’s biography; or yet mourning the loss of love itself. Also, as already discussed, there is the issue of the speaker being male or female. It is this indeterminacy that makes possible to consider the poem as the depiction of a homoerotic relation. As we turn to Bataille’s observations about eroticism, if dissolution with his beloved existed in the past, it is destroyed in the present by the beloved’s rejection.

In the fourth stanza the final resolution comes up strangely represented by no need of light: “the stars are not wanted now: put out every one; / pack up the moon and dismantle the sun”: the romantic aspect of their relationship has lost its beauty. Here Auden subverts the romantic tradition of reverence to nature to portray the crude reality of love coming to an end. The speaker ends his discourse with the uselessness of time, a measure created by humans, and also seen here as an idea that has been overcome, since the beloved or love itself is not with him anymore.

Again making use of a critique against the romantic tradition already out of place at the time, the poet writes a poem in which a submissive woman’s voice narrates the lovers’ involvement. The behaviour of the protagonist’s beloved leaves questions in the air as he does

not deepen his involvement. Such attitude shows an ambiguous procedure related to his sexuality, what can be interpreted as a critique against the heterosexual social patterns.

X

"O the valley in the summer where I and my John
Beside the deep river would walk on and on
While the flowers at our feet and the birds up above
Argued so sweetly on reciprocal love,
And I leaned on his shoulder; 'O Johnny, let's play':

But he frowned like thunder and he went away.
O that Friday near Christmas as I well recall
When we went to the Charity Matinee Ball,
The floor was so smooth and the band was so loud
And Johnny so handsome I felt so proud;
'Squeeze me tighter, dear Johnny, let's dance till it's day':
But he frowned like thunder and he went away.

Shall I ever forget at the Grand Opera
When music poured out of each wonderful star?
Diamonds and pearls they hung dazzling down
Over each silver and golden silk gown;
'O John I'm in heaven,' I whispered to say
But he frowned like thunder and he went away.

O but he was as fair as a garden in flower,
As slender and tall as the great Eiffel Tower,
When the waltz throbbed out on the long promenade
O his eyes and his smile they went straight to my heart;
"O marry me, Johnny, I'll love and obey":
But he frowned like thunder and he went away.

O last night I dreamed of you, Johnny, my lover,
You'd the sun on one arm and the moon on the other,
The sea it was blue and the grass it was green,
Every star rattled a round tambourine;
Ten thousand miles deep in a pit there I lay:
But you frowned like thunder and you went away.

April 1937.

As we consider the male centred society that prevailed in the historical context of the 1930s in England, the first impression we have is that this poem shows a relationship between

a man and a woman. They live in a normative society where only heterosexuals are allowed to walk by a river, showing their exchange of physical affection that is culturally permitted.

We can see ambiguity in the possibilities of the speaker being male as he uses a female mask to hide, or female who is submissive to the beloved. In the case of the mask, the poet uses the ironic repetition of patterns of heterosexual romanticism and patriarchal rules of marriage in the words "I'll love and obey" so the identity of the protagonist can be hidden in such model**.** The use of a woman's voice can work as irony not only to criticise the heterosexual romanticism, the patriarchal rules of marriage, but also to conceal the author's voice in a passive character. The beloved's attitude in "frowning" and "going away" leaves questions such as why he acts so. His attitude suggests that he is dissatisfied with his partner or with a heterosexual relationship. The poet does not solve the beloved's behaviour, what can be another way to leave open to ambiguity where he [the author] can hide and be free from censorship.

We see two persons and their attachment being described in the public realm. The picture is depicted in the romantic models of a love relationship: close to Nature, they seem to have found a bucolic place to express their freedom: "O the valley in the summer where I and my John…" Although they share nice moments, there is a tone of clear disappointment and frustration, for the approximation of the speaker causes a discomfort in John, making him go away.

It is worth noting here what Bozorth calls the reader's freedom: the poem is not inducing the reader to picture a two/man nor a man/woman involvement,

> for interpretation inevitably involves suspect gestures of narcissistic projection and identification, whether positive or reactively negative. The reader's knowledge includes recognition of its own contingence and of poetry's refusal to consummate our desires with the certainty of an embrace. (262)

We can compare Bozorth's words to Auden's when he writes about the reader having to surrender his/her objectivity and identify with what he or she reads. Nevertheless, identification can also be either "positive or reactively negative": so, the sort of relationship the two characters have can be possible to be determined as a mirror that reflects the reader's projection or identification with the poem.

Notwithstanding, the author sets the characters in public; such a detail of encounters in public is exactly what makes the hypothesis of a homosexual affair improbable: what can function as a camouflage as Elledge observed: "camouflaged by a thin veneer of heterosexuality. In order to negotiate compulsory heterosexuality safely, they [the poets] learned to encode the personal aspects of their lives into an acceptable – i.e., heterosexual context" (20thx). "O the valley in the summer where I and my John / Beside the deep river would walk on and on"; "when we went to the Charity Matinee Ball"; "squeeze me tighter, dear Johnny, let's dance till it's day." The poem shows a love between two persons who live everything in a hyperbolic, big, gorgeous, glittering, and rich atmosphere: "shall I ever forget at the Grand Opera when music poured out of each wonderful star? Diamonds and pearls they hung dazzling down over each silver and golden silk gown; 'O John I'm in heaven'": "O but he was as fair as a garden in flower, as slender and tall as the great Eiffel Tower." They seem to share good and memorable moments, and the speaker is depicted as someone prompt to be submissive like a young woman in love as romantic stories tell: "O marry me, Johnny, I'll love and obey." This strategy of Auden in putting a female speaker to tell of a love relationship is observed by Gregory Woods's in the following comment:

> So, let us suppose that Auden has taken heterosexual archetypes to illustrate homosexual particulars. The first point of this hetero-homosexual transposition is, of course, to demonstrate the essential similarity between the sorrows and triumphs of the two sexual orientations. Do not imprison the man who persistently engages in sexual encounters in public places, if you continue to regard Don Juan as an admirable and amusing rakehell; and do not persecute homosexual lovers, if you continue to regard Tristan and Isolde's example as evidence of the nobility of human love. (183)

Woods's argument is only valid if taking into account an ideal world, with no prejudice against homosexuality. As for the poem simply showing "similarities between the sorrows and triumphs of the two sexual orientations" is not much convincing. The argument of irony would fit in here as the poet criticizes heterosexual romantic infatuation. Thus the poet would not only criticise the romantic heterosexual coupling that puts women in a submissive position, but also the compulsory heterosexuality. The author is also ironic as he repeats John's attitude in the refrain "he frowned like thunder and he went away." Moreover, as the narrative shows, a woman's voice turns the reader's attention to a conventional relationship between a man and a woman. The use of mask — the voice of a female persona disguises the link between the speaker's voice and the author's, and at the same time is an ironic strategy to subvert the romantic tradition in a pathetic version of a love relationship.

Bryant discusses this strategy concerning the documentaries poetised by Auden in the 1930s and recited by women's voices. She sees that "the poem's imperative heterosexual coupling is, in effect, no more than a set of stage directions, then the true site of desire in Coal Face [the documentary title] is the underground enclosures where male documentary observers watch half-naked miners." Behind the voice of a woman, we can consider the author's voice exposing the out-fashioned passivity and where he can be safely hidden.

As we can see in Elledge's comment, poets who practiced homosexual acts in their private lives**,** learnt to encode the personal aspects of their lives in an acceptable heterosexual context. Readers must take into account the English Christian culture and legal system that in the inter-war period did not encourage homosexuality, neither in private nor in public. As David M. Halperin writes about individuals' experience, we must train ourselves to recognise conventions of behaviour and to interpret the intricate texture of personal life as an artifact of a complex and arbitrary constellation of cultural processes (quoted in Abelove, 426). As we

could see in Chapter II human experience and its credibility lie on the grounds of historical and cultural values, what Fred Inglis observes as he analyses the public aspect of experience. Thus, the first image we can form is that culturally accepted picture of the characters coming out to a site where other people can see them. From this view, the image of a man and a woman becomes obvious: the shared meanings inside culture in the quotidian have stimulated and reinforced heterosexual encounters in public spheres and never homosexual ones as far as the English inter-war society is concerned.

John's attitude makes the narrative complex; the possibilities of reading considering ambiguity allow the hypothesis of a heterosexual relation wherein a man unsure of his sexuality avoids going beyond into it. On the one side Auden would be implying the difficulties a man had to go through to live his homosexuality, on the other, his attempts to live performatively the appearance of heterosexuality in order to be socially accepted. Thus, the poem would be a critique against a social imposition of a compulsory heterosexuality and a critique to the heterosexual romantic tradition.

The poet's critique against the romantic view of love relationships that characterized the romantic tradition is also seen in the next poem that shows a romantic protagonist that is led by the surrounding reality and the effects of time to re-conceive his values and open himself to his homosexuality.

As I Walked out one Evening

As I walked out one evening,
Walking down Bristol Street,
The crowds upon the pavement
Were fields of harvest wheat.

And down by the brimming river
I heard a lover sing

Under an arch of the railway:
“Love has no ending.

“I’ll love you, dear, I’ll love you
Till China and Africa meet,
And the river jumps over the mountain
And the salmon sing in the street

“I’ll love you till the ocean
Is folded and hung up to dry
And the seven stars go squawking
Like geese about the sky.
“The years shall run like rabbits,
For in my arms I hold
The flowers of the Ages,
And the first love of the world.”

But all the clocks in the city
Began to whirr and chime:
“O let not Time deceive you,
You cannot conquer Time.

“In the burrows of the Nightmare
Where Justice naked is,
Time watches from the shadow
And coughs when you would kiss.

“In headaches and in worry
Vaguely life leaks away,
And Time will have his fancy
To-morrow or to-day.

“Into many a green valley
Drifts the appalling snow;
Time breaks the threaded dances
And the diver’s brilliant bow.

“O plunge your hands in water,
Plunge them in up to the wrist;
Stare, stare in the basin
And wonder what you’ve missed.

“The glacier knocks in the cupboard,
The desert sighs in the bed,
And the crack in the tea-cup opens
A lane to the land of the dead.

“Where the beggars raffle the banknotes
And the Giant is enchanting to Jack,
And the Lily-white Boy is a Roarer,

And Jill goes down on her back.

"O look, look in the mirror,
O look in your distress;
Life remains a blessing
Although you cannot bless.

"O stand, stand at the window
As the tears scald and start;
You shall love your crooked neighbour
With your crooked heart."

It was late, late in the evening,
The lovers they were gone;
The clocks had ceased their chiming,
And the deep river ran on.

November 1937.

In "As I walked out one evening", the poet shows us three moments: in the first he hears a lover singing the romantic conception of love in which it is immortal; in the second he reflects on the opposite, the fatal power of time that limits life and changes values: "You cannot conquer time," "Time will have his fancy / To-morrow or to-day." The meditation about the destructive action of time then leads the poet to consider his own condition: "O look, look in the mirror, / O look in your own distress." In the third and the most striking for the use of ambiguity is as he perceives the revelation about himself —"You shall love your crooked neighbour / With your crooked heart" — these two verses close the poem with the poet's strategy to encode homosexuality through the use of a word such as 'crooked', what suggests an unconventional kind of love, possibly an implicit reference to homosexual love.

The poet shows that the romantic conception of love is adjusted to past patterns of human relationships which established models of coupling and behaving based on the compulsory heterosexuality: "Love has no ending. / "I'll love you, dear, I'll love you / Till China and Africa meet, / And the river jumps over the mountain / And the salmon sing in the street / "I'll love you till the ocean / Is folded and hung up to dry / And the seven stars go

squawking / Like geese about the sky." These verses show how the romantic conception is hyperbolic, describing an ideal relationship. In all these images we can see the author's critique against the exaggerations of a romantic conception of love.

The author repeats his reference to Time as a form to emphasise its inevitable action on social values: "The years shall run like rabbits, / For in my arms I hold / The flowers of the Ages, / And the first love of the world." This last line shows that although he recognizes the action of time, he is still stuck to the romantic conception of love that prevailed in the inter-war time. Nevertheless he knows that "You cannot conquer Time.", so that he sees himself in another epoch where changes caused by time are occurring around in Nature: "The glacier knocks in the cupboard, / The desert sighs in the bed, /And the crack in the tea-cup opens / A lane to the land of the dead." Forced by the action of time and by the images that appear in the world around, the speaker [the author] gazes his own condition in the world: he has to love his neighbor that is 'crooked' as himself.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

As the analyses of the poems in the previous chapter show, poetry can be an autobiographical discourse which not only gives access to a historical milieu, but is itself a historical text. The poems also elicit Auden's use of ambiguity in the inter-war period as a way to express the dilemmas of homosexual experience under severe censorship.

In "A Free One," Auden shows an individual occupied in showing the society around an image that is in accordance with the establishment. The mask can be read as a device to hide his homosexuality, granting his survival in a social milieu that censors all those who do not behave according to its rules. In "The Wanderer," the protagonist lives a situation that forces him to leave the stability of his known world in order to find another where he hears voices "Of new men making another love." This is suggestive of his awakening for homosexuality. "Meiosis" ambiguously describes a same-sex intercourse while ironically meditating on the phenomenon of procreation. The encounter is characterised by difficulties that surpass sexual desire, evoking the complexities of a homosexual relationship. In "Who's Who," the protagonist ascends socially and his status interferes in his living his sexuality, since he loves someone ambiguously depicted as male/female but who is not in the same social class. It may suggest that, if the two lovers belonged to the same social class, there would be no problem. In poem "IV," we are presented a situation in which the characters live an erotic moment watched by eyes that force them to meet in a clandestine place where their sexual practice is tolerated. However, the poet shows that more than external oppositions, the lovers confront their internal conflicts related to their desire and sexuality. In poem "IX," the protagonist, an extremely romantic individual, is frustrated since his beloved is gone away from his life. In poem "X," the author hides behind a feminine mask giving the reader the viability of a love

relationship on heterosexual foundations, but the author does not solve the beloved's behaviour he leaves the lover. The poem shows the beloved in a cruel dilemma for having to live a compulsory heterosexual relationship. "As I Walked out one Evening" finally frames the poet recognizing his homosexual condition characterized as 'crooked'.

Seen as depictions of the complexities of the human character, the poems reiterate the connection between gender and class: homosexual men trying to live their sexuality surrounded by the constraints of their social class; between aesthetics and politics: ambiguous words and sentences to express the author's politics; between composition and reception: the poet's need to express his art and to be published, and his disguising the self in his art as a means of conforming and subverting censorship**.** Edley and Wetherel show that aesthetics is directly linked to social and political value in order to form or destroy whatever can destabilise the comfortable equilibrium of society. The poems bring out the complexities and instabilities in the inter-war society of a not so harmonic reality of the English status quo right after the World War I. They also expose the fragility of a nation formed by men and women whose desires and sexual practices had to be heavily controlled by the dominant class through cultural products. Such control would safely grant the permanence of the appearance of the English nation as a country formed by heterosexuals whose political and economic powers were invested and spread around the world in a vast empire.

As autobiographical and historical document, these poems reveal Auden's society represented by appearances, in which a hidden subjectivity lies in a cautious behaviour. Although innovations were occurring by the turn of the 20th century, they did not provide radical social changes such as accepting homosexuality. Sanders comments: "although Queen Victoria's reign appeared to patriotic observers to mark the apogee of national and imperial glory, 'Victorian' values, beliefs, and standards of personal and social behaviour were already being challenged by a new generation of intellectuals and writers" (457). Sanders adds that

the literary works produced in that age were seen conservative in form, however, not without frequent radicalism of content (458), as exemplified by some contemporaries of Auden such as E. M. Forster, Christopher Isherwood, and Louis McNiece who confronted society and its values in open approaches of homosexuality in their works. The prominence of manly behaviour in the inter-war England assured both the conservative establishment and the honour seen in heterosexuality and consequently in the English nation to perpetuate. Masking homosexual love in poetry would allow the English and the European cultural statuses to be challenged without an open manifesto that might clearly be a dangerous offence.

Auden's recognition that the poet is influenced by the historical events around him/her only confirms the validity of considering the context as a possibility for interpretation. His poems picture the inter-war society wherein the protagonist relates with another individual still perceiving human relationships as romantic. The protagonist is shown as having to revaluate his notions and values so he can live his relations and sexuality without increasing the limits that his society imposes on those who do not follow its heterosexual precepts of behaviour. The lover is led by the time and the surrounding changes to perceive that the human relationship becomes as complex as possible when two persons are involved. They are socially prohibited to live their homosexuality openly; the protagonist learns that in order to deal with his homosexual position he has to camouflage himself under a performative behaviour that pleases society. He not only grants himself a place in society, but also he can live his sexuality where it is allowed, that is, on the margin of society.

Auden helps readers to view his stance about the homosexual individual hidden in an appearance of a heterosexual. By using ambiguity in his texts ambiguity, the poet remained veiled behind a mask that clouded his individuality and privacy. He shows the agency of his subjectivity by eliciting the beauties and pains of being human, as well as of loving same-sex

people in a time when heterosexuality and manliness were stimulated and maintained at high costs.

The poems also show Paz's notion on eroticism: the inseparable bond between love and death is seen in narratives of love affairs, denoting the protagonist's deep desire and infatuation for his beloved. The main character wants to live a satisfactory relationship with his beloved inside the romantic parameters that still prevailed in that time, but he has to struggle to change his out fashioned conceptions of love because of the social censorships that force him to live his desire and sexual relations concealed. Thus the narratives are characterised by the protagonist's frustrations for a desire that must be contained under a camouflage of an individual who obeys society and its values so that he does not harm himself and can keep alive.

The poems bring out individuals attempting to conciliate the social determinations with their inner desires. Homosexual individuals constantly have to wear armour so they can protect themselves against a culture whose apparatuses of censorship pitilessly judged all those that might corrode the millenary English image so strongly constructed. Auden uses irony to scorn the 'sacred' Englishness set on heterosexual manly men. He responds to the social oppositions by emphasising his need to conceal homosexuality through ambiguity and other linguistic means that provided dubious readings and interpretations. By doing so, his individuality was preserved and he could criticise social values so far hardened by tradition. Thus an autobiographical reading of his poems plays a political importance in discussing class and gender; and queer artists' works are reconsidered now in the light of other perspectives of analysis rather than the dominant classes' point of view that stressed their censorship against dissidents such as homosexuals were in the inter-war period.

As some reviewers show Auden's 1920s and 1930s love poems can be pedagogical as ambiguity constitutes a way to conceal the poet's subjectivity. The poet's concern shows his

ambiguous poetics as a way to learn how to protect against censorship for they comprehend a work of art where the author perceives the social constraints as homosexuality is approached. As Bozorth shows us, Auden, instead of being discouraged by censorship, found a way to confront and scorn censorship. His method became a form of exerting politics through art; if in past times art could be a tool in the hands of the powerful classes, in Auden's poems it is aimed at combating the socio-cultural establishment and its impositions. His camouflaged language indicates the limits defined by the social and political censorships to artistic expressivity.

After this research I can see that in the inter-war period there was a pejorative image of homosexuals who were segregated on the margins of society. The political analysis emphasised by queer studies provides us a view of those individuals since the way they were treated changed in Western countries through the 20th century. What we can see can in the inter-war period has been culturally modified under the economic interest of the powerful classes whose politics has been spread throughout the world in the capitalist societies. Such political positioning of the powerful classes is observed by Jurandir Freire Costa as he analyses the change that occurred in the distinction between men and women; according to him women came to exist as a separate sex as a result of their politico-economic importance in the n and especially in the 19th century, rather than the biological (104).

The same has been applied to homosexuals in society in this first decade of the 20thI century in the United Kingdom. The British Legislation changed its perception concerning gays' and lesbians' civil rights as these people existence was perceived as economically important in society. Such a change of seeing homosexuals has changed not only their status in legal levels but also and mainly in their potential in increasing the economic market. Thus the consequent benefits that such a shift caused put the British nation again on a recognisable place in the European Union board and in the world.

Auden's politics in that turbulent time places not only a new strategy to deal with the opponents, but also it does not trivialise the importance that the homosexual love and its meaning has. Auden's poetry takes on the role of sharing with the reader the significance of art in the quotidian life, if seen as coterie poetics as Bozorth reminds readers. Auden's politics of the closet can drive individuals' perception to a discrimination and segregation still present in some parts of the planet. As we have discussed some social interests are more relevant than others in a world where the powerful classes' politics exist to grant its interests. But as Auden's inter-war poems show individuals can exert their political positioning by being cautious and using forms to combat censorship.

Such lateness to re-appropriate and re-conceptualize or to simply guarantee human expressivity as far as legal laws do in other fields leads to what Witting affirms in her article 'One is not born a Woman':

> We must try to understand philosophically (politically) these concepts of "subject" and "class consciousness" and how they work in relation to our history. Consciousness of oppression is not only a reaction to (fight against) oppression. It is also the whole conceptual revaluation of the social world, its whole reorganization with new concepts, from the point of view of oppression. This operation of understanding reality has to be undertaken by every one of us: call it a subjective, cognitive practice. The movement back and forth between levels of reality (the conceptual reality and the material reality of oppression, which are both social realities) is accomplished through language. (quoted in Abelove, 107)

When the appropriation of art as literature and language as a means to exert a particular politics in the fragmented society and political classes' interests were instable, Auden hid in a speaker endowed of a subjectivity forced to review its values and adapt to the changes of the time. Oppressed as his whole group was and felt, the poet had the 'cognitive practice' after feeling the terror that the exerting power in his time against homosexuality could engender, and struck it back through his careful use of language and its multiple possibilities.

Becoming a category according to Foucault, homosexuality came to contain an unavoidable status of political stance in the world. The legal changes mark the beginning of

the 20thI century taking England and the United Kingdom out of an inhuman treatment against homosexuals. The politically and economically based modifications are questionably timid for the homosexual cause; the slow changes that come to consider homosexuals as effective members of society can be a way to politically assimilate this group. Nevertheless, such recognition can be an example for all other countries also in terms of the political inclusion of differences.

Auden's contribution to the human expressivity will endure for its ambiguity, and its wide capacity to express sexuality. This dissertation shows the vast possibilities that can be found in a person's life and in the autobiographical text as contextualised. As Rich said, a poem is more than a slice of the poet's life. Auden was aware of his historical situation as viewed by Woods, and reinforced by Perkins: that he was "wholly a poet of the contemporary situation, not only by topical allusion and reportage but also because he explored and expressed the feelings of vague guilt, anxiety, isolation, and fear that so many shared" (158).

The autobiographical reading can thus provide us another view of Auden's work in the inter-war period: his subjectivity is there in his diction. The work of critics who use the biographical reading to interpret his poems will always be helpful, but this line of criticism should be considered as a form of discourse that attempts to give linearity to experiences that are per se fragmented. Reading poetry as autobiographical discourse is to recognise the fragmented character of experience in its transmutation into luminous details not only of the poet's life but also of his/her time and place.

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