



# “Light Verse Can Be Serious” in the Songs of W. H. Auden

## W. H. Auden’in Şarkılarında “Mizahi Şiir Ciddi Olabilir”

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### ABSTRACT

This study evaluates Auden’s “Twelve Songs” (1935-38), “Five Songs” (1948-53), “Two *Don Quixote* Lyrics” (1963) representing three different periods in the Auden canon in order to discuss the senses of anxiety and desperateness felt by the poetic personas. As the last major voice of Eliot generation, Auden poeticizes his process of problematic uniformity. In other words, he feels at home after the harassing motion of centring and decentering reflected in his early poems. The songs from the different periods of Auden demonstrate the unchangeable nature of hopelessness in his poems. However, the awareness of a broken link with various defining factors such as love and nature evolves into a humble acknowledgement in Auden’s later works. Thus, the selected poems share a similar attitude towards the basic arguments of love, loneliness, and bourgeoisie values besides the political implications on capitalism and religion. In conclusion, the analysis of “Twelve Songs,” “Five Songs” and “Two *Don Quixote* Lyrics” from his early, transition and later periods suggests that Auden’s poetry cannot be reduced into any formula and reflects his problematic perception of ‘peace’ as the poems waver between the songs of reunification and those of separation.

**Keywords:** W.H. Auden, “Twelve Songs,” “Five Songs,” “Two *Don Quixote* Lyrics,” Anxiety

### ÖZ

Bu çalışma, Auden’in üç farklı dönemini temsil eden “On iki Şarkı,” “Beş Şarkı” ve “İki *Don Kişot* Güzellemesi” adlı şiirlerinde şiir kişilerinin yaşadığı umutsuzluk ve endişe hislerini incelemektedir. Eliot kuşağının son temsilcisi olarak Auden, sorunlu uyum sağlama sürecini şiirleştirir. Diğer bir deyişle, erken dönem şiirlerinde yansıtılan merkeze yaklaşım merkezden uzaklaşmanın bıkırtıcı deviniminden sonra şairin huzura kavuştuğu söylenebilir. Şiirlerin tartışılmasından önce çalışma, Auden’in hayatının şairliğine nasıl bir etkisi olduğu üzerine kısa bir değerlendirmede bulunur. Auden’in hayatındaki başlıca konu veya sorunların seçilen şiirlerde ne derece görünür olduğu da çalışmanın ana tartışmalarından birini oluşturur. Tartışmanın diğer odak noktasıysa şiirlerin imgeler yoluyla Auden’in yaşadığı ve başka bir şiir derlemesinin adını da oluşturan “Kaygı Çağı”ni çarpıcı bir şekilde yansıttığıdır. Üç farklı dönemdeki “şarkılar,” Auden şiirindeki değişmez ümitsizliği yansıtır. Ancak, aşk ve doğa gibi çeşitli belirleyici unsurlarla yitirilen bağlantının farkındalığı, Auden’in son şiirlerinde mütevazı bir kabullenmişliğe evrilir. Seçilen şiirler, din ve anamalı anlayış üzerine belirli imalar taşımanın yanında aşk, yalnızlık ve kent soylu değerleri işleme



bakımından benzerlikler taşımaktadır. Sonuç olarak, erken, geçiş ve son dönemlerinden seçilen şiirler, şairin karmaşık ‘huzur’ düşüncesini yansıtanın yanında hem kavuşma hem de ayrılık şarkıları olduğundan Auden şiirini herhangi bir genellemeye indirgemenin sorunlu olduğunu gösterir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** W.H. Auden, “On iki Şarkı,” “Beş Şarkı,” “İki Don Kışot Güzellemesi,” Kaygı

## Introduction

W.H. Auden, one of the most influential poets of the modernism, exemplifies the tumultuous atmosphere of the twentieth century with both his life and artistic career. Born in an Anglo-Catholic family in 1907, Auden's obsessions and desire for a constant change started within this first established circle of his family. In other words, his conflicting emotions began with his parents, a positivist father and a devout Catholic mother. His father shaped Auden's love for the science and complicated machines, and his mother played an essential role in his later conflicts with the bourgeoisie conventions, she also represented for Auden the 'normal' values of the society such as religion and heterosexuality.

The dualities of ideas and emotions occupy a significant place in Auden's canon and his attempts to resolve certain binary oppositions or to reconcile with them fill the remaining place in most cases. Although it is possible to divide Auden's artistic career into different periods in which he adopts a new poetic stance, his challenge to combine the opposite poles remains unchanged. For instance, despite his disavowal of the Romantics, he openly expresses his yearning to perceive the world in the way the speakers of "Dame Kind" or "The Cave of Nakedness" who find a healing breath in nature, but "without a trace of idealizing" (Mendelson, 2017, p. 717). In other words, even in such poems combining sexuality, fantasy and nature with the implication of hope and reproduction, Auden does not refrain from reflecting the desperateness of the modern man with the acquiescent words "we cannot describe them without faking" (Auden, 1995, p. 217).

As a result of the conflicting and radical emotions of his age, Auden employs 'songs' which seem to be 'light' as he calls them. Nevertheless, he also clarifies his argument, "Light verse can be serious" (1977, p. 364) in his introduction to *The Oxford Book of Light Verse* by employing song form for the description of the problems facing the modern society.

Thus, this study aims to evaluate the place of songs for the representation of anxiety and desperateness felt by the poet by referring to the biography of the poet. In this vein, the study takes the poems analyzed as the voices of the poet's inner conflicts in front of a constantly changing epistemology. Interestingly, the songs from the different periods of Auden demonstrate the unchangeable nature of hopelessness in the poems.

However, the awareness of a broken link with various defining factors such as history and nature changes into a humble acknowledgement towards the end of his life. Thus, "Twelve Songs" (1935-38), "Five Songs" (1948-53), "Two *Don Quixote* Lyrics" (1963) share a similar attitude towards the basic arguments of love as an essential inner and outer force to create the prevalent restlessness in the selected poems. In other words, the poetic personas or the speakers of the selected poems underline different facets of their loneliness in the songs' seemingly nonsequential parts. The parts of the selected songs function as lapses or deviations from the preceding ones in order to emphasize the hopelessness felt in the end, respectively. Furthermore, as a line from "Twelve Songs," "and me with a magic crystal to foresee their places" (Auden, 1994, p. 136) can illustrate, the speakers yearn for grasping what is beyond their borders by resorting to occult powers or liberate themselves from the bonds of corporeality with a peculiar magical realist dislocation. In this way, the poetic persona's recurrent question "will it alter my life altogether?" (1994, p. 145) about love as a phenomenon in "Twelve Songs" is extended to "Five Songs" and "Two *Don Quixote* Lyrics" by reminding the Eliotesque "overwhelming question," (Eliot, 1963, p.3) as the proper answers to it are either dissatisfactory or simply missing. Since love stands as an organizing principle in the selected poems, the study takes the presentation of love and its interconnectedness with the subjectivity of the poet as its reference point in order to clarify the assumed 'truth' of love and the frustrations brought with it.

Auden's poetry has been variously classified as Early Auden, Later Auden, English Auden, Post-English Auden or American Auden. His endeavours to find an idiosyncratic voice which would lead to a style coined as 'Audenesque' later on, can also be demonstrated through three periods as Early, Transition and Conversion. In his early period, the place is the British island, and the obscure tone of his poems deliberately hinders or impairs the communication with the reader. As Hoggart discusses, "in Auden's verse one finds obscurity which arises from an unusual handling of language" originated "from ellipsis, oddnesses of construction, experiments with new forms" (1966, p. 18). Moreover, the borders of the island also demark the borders of representation. In this respect, "Twelve Songs" can be an example for the early Auden period with its double-edged or ambiguous presentation of "another love" (Auden, 1994, p. 138) as the socially accepted intercourse and the juxtaposed one in order to unveil his homosexuality and paradoxically to hide such implications. 'We' pronoun in the poem sequence supports the elliptical language of Auden in this early period as well. The recurrent use of 'we' also underlines the two opposite groups, 'me and you' (him or her) and others. In such

an equation, elitism naturally occurs by limiting shared knowledge and language. As Hecht puts it “this elitist can be greatly magnified by the use of special languages, the employment of an arcane vocabulary, the use of the names of places and persons that might be known only to a select few” (1993, p. 13). In other words, his use of some invented words, jokes/implications or his secret language known merely by his friends change the action of writing poems as an encoded source of experience which is accessible to only an elite group.

Moreover, Emig discusses that “the lack of clear signifieds can be caused by overlapping signifiers to create ambiguity. Another cause of obscure images can be the missing context of signifiers . . . The absence of a definable meaning can also be interpreted as a calculated strategy which fulfils a function of its own in Auden’s early poems” (2000, p. 15). It is also possible to explicate Emig’s argument of signification in Auden’s early poetry with the term floating signifier. For instance, such signifiers as “voluntary love” or “false representations of love” (Auden, 1994, p. 138) in “Twelve Songs” function as empty signifiers as they have no ‘definite’ signifieds. In other words, the ‘obvious’ ambiguity in such poems distinguishes the Early Auden by creating deliberate obscurities and multiple meanings. In this regard, Emig’s discussing Auden’s intentional ambiguous style as “the absence of a definable meaning” (2000, p. 15) understates Auden’s peculiar modernist anxiety of representation. To put it differently, Auden’s concern of representation that can also be traced in his later poems affirms the presence of many “definable meanings” (p.15) Additionally, “missing context of signifiers” (Emig, 2000, p. 15) enables the possibilities of different assumed meanings in the text. Thus, although Auden creates a linguistic barrier with his elitism, the text allows the reader that “by adding my situation to my reading of a work I can reduce its ambiguity” (Barthes, 2007, p. 27). However, As Barthes maintains, ambiguity in the text cannot offer the sense of wholeness in such created meanings since “the work cannot protest against the meaning I give it, but neither can the work authenticate that meaning” (p. 27), which starts the signification process over as it happens in the attempts to describe ‘love’ in “Twelve Songs.”

At the end of the thirties, Auden leaves the extremely private world for another binary, public. The unifying and bordering nature of Britain is also decentered with constant trips to other countries such as Germany and Spain, Iceland, China, and America. His private voice changes into a political one at the transition period too. Paradoxically, his communism begins to evolve into a more mature and objective form

after the experience of the Spanish Civil war. Another important event in this period is his decision to settle in the US with Christopher Isherwood, his collaborator, and close friend. In "Five Songs," Auden reflects the paradoxical pessimist tone of his transition period with the opposition of private and public though a new attempt to understand love as well. Such images as "admiral" or "ambassador" (Auden, 1994, p. 573) delineate the influence lines over the poetic persona. Furthermore, the image of a punishing god and presentation of a hostile world with the absence of love underline the change from a private voice to an objective one in Auden's transition period. As "Five Songs" exemplifies, the negative attitude of "Twelve Songs" evolves into an affirming one towards the end of the poem. At this stage, the poetic personas' reactions continuously change by oscillating between the absence and presence of love. However, as "Pamina and Tamino" (p. 576) demonstrate, although such experience of love is hidden from the speaker of the poem, there is still hope to break with borders of the social.

Auden's transition period prefigures his later acquiescence to the contrasting forces he poeticized in his early poems. As Bucknell states "At fifteen, he was already losing his faith in God; he was scientifically oriented and rational-minded, which should have made it easy for him to decide that magic, fairies, elves, and visionary experiences did not belong to his poetry" (1994, p. 22). Auden rejects the existence of God until the end of the thirties, but during his stay in the US, he feels a rekindled enthusiasm for the Catholic religion of his mother. The interest in rituals and ambience of the ornamented churches signify a new period in which his wholehearted search for a centre is finalized at last. This last reconciliation with God also foreshadows the poet's relieving recognition of his sexual character.

Thus, in "Five Songs," the representation of love is conveyed through a gendered concern and besides, there is almost no implication to the poet's gay identity. To put it differently, the poem primarily engages itself to the presentation of love between a man and a woman. It is known that in the early years of his homosexuality, Auden regarded such experience or tendency as a disease to be cured. Moreover, in order to save himself from that 'abnormality,' Auden used every possible means such as going through a psychoanalytic treatment in Brussels, various heterosexual intercoursés and even an attempt to marry a nurse as his father had done. After the failure of all these so-called remedies, he transformed his notion of homosexuality firstly from disease to a means for personal expression and then into a sin that is admitted and resolved through an innate weakness.

As the last major voice of Eliot generation, Auden reflects that his split emotions find an unchanging and meaningful ground in the end with an idiosyncratic Wordsworthian “tranquil restoration” (“Tintern Abbey,” 1991, p. 114). In this respect, “Two *Don Quixote* Lyrics” reveals that the quixotic attempts to find a reconciling realm comes to an end in Auden’s later period with a rekindled hope and paradoxically the idea of death. In other words, he feels at home after the harassing process of centring and decentering. During the mid-forties, Auden was not satisfied with settling in the US and started regular visits to Europe again with Chester Kallman, his partner. In a way, he reiterated the situation, which led him to leave England. However, Auden’s reconciliation does not mean that he finds ultimate peace through submission. On the contrary, he demonstrates the wrongness or “corruption” (Raichura, & Singh, 1975, p. 34) in society, which forms the basic political trace in Auden’s transition period.

However, Auden’s urge to correct is also in flux. When he was asked as “do you still believe in the writer’s social commitment?” (Raichura & Singh, 1975, p. 34) in an interview, his answer reflects a linguistic concern rather than a social one. Auden’s words “the most important responsibility of the writer is to defend the language against corruption” (Raichura, & Singh, 1975, p. 34) can delineate a new phase in his perception of the public and the political. Thus, in some cases, he offers a possible remedy, but in the others, he just takes it as it seems to be without making an effort to change. For instance, he acknowledges the broken link between the individuals and nature but also regards it as the essential quality of the age. However, being an incongruous member of “the Greater Community” (“The Unknown Citizen,” Auden, 1945, p. 142), Auden alchemizes his sense of uneasiness with the boundaries of the intersubjectivity into a search for an anchoring principle, out of that a peculiar literary career emerges. In this respect, trying to trace the collective anxiety in Auden’s personal experiences and works can help shed light upon the evaluation of the recurrent themes of love and hope/hopelessness in the selected poems.

## **Restlessness as a Nourishing Source for Auden as a Poet**

Auden’s restlessness started with the family circle. Being raised in an Anglo-Catholic family within the codes of middle-class consciousness, Auden began his intellectual development by either rejecting or repositioning the established elements of his early life. Auden’s love of mines or complicated production machines can be originated in the middle or upper-class education pattern. Despite the interest in science and biology,

he left his degree in Natural Science at Oxford University after completing the required first year in 1925 and then he tried to find a more suitable study field through various disciplines such as politics, philosophy and economics, "by the autumn of 1926 he settled on English" (Bucknell, 1994, p. 42). As Davenport-Hines suggests "he was an encyclopaedist who liked to collect, classify and interpret large amounts of information and strove to integrate natural phenomena, spiritual experiences, human history and intimate emotions into a system in which both body, spirit, feelings and intellect cohered" (2004, p. 15). At Oxford University, he fraternized with C. Day-Lewis, Louis Macneice and Stephen Spender, whose long-lasting cooperation would be named as 'Thirties Group' or 'Auden Group' and there he "further explored his homosexuality" (Sharpe, 2007, p. 2).

After graduation, his family offered to finance him one more year, and this resulted in his visit to Berlin. "By October 1928 Auden had settled into a middle-class suburb of Berlin" (Mendelson, 1977, p. 13). According to Sharpe, he deliberately chose Berlin "because he was allured by the reputed sexual adventurousness of the Weimar Republic's capital" (2007, p. 2). There he came across with the epic style of Bertold Brecht and lighter forms such as cabarets and as Bucknell puts it, "alone in Berlin, cut off from family, friends, and familiar institutions, he started to come to terms with the gift of his own weakness" (1994, p. 52). As Michael O'Neill stresses, "Auden's 'poetic land-scape' in his early poems serves as an objective correlative for a sense of England as a county riven by conflict and stratification, a place where something is distinctly rotten" (2007, p. 108). Thus, this first journey was triggered by Auden's dissatisfaction with England and induced various visits to Europe, China and America by turning the poet into "the Wanderer," or "the man on a Quest" (Hoggart, 1951, p. 7).

Auden's literary career can be divided into three periods according to the fundamental changes both in his life and style as 'Early Auden' in the thirties, 'Transition' in forties and 'Later Auden' in fifties as stated before. Additionally, it is possible to classify his development as a poet by the chronological order of important events and trips in his life. In this respect, Auden's life functions as a starting point in order to grasp the richness of representation in his poems. To put it differently, the changing moods in each period underline a characteristic restlessness for the representation of his ideas.

'Early Auden' period covers the years between the twenties up to the forties. At this stage, Auden was an anti-fascist and began to read both Freud and Marx to understand



the sickness of his time as he argues in his essay "Psychology and Art To-day" that "both Marx and Freud start from the failures of civilization, one from the poor, one from the ill . . . Marx sees the direction of the relations between outer and inner world from without inwards, Freud vice versa" (1977, p. 341). Besides the influence of Karl Marx and Freud, he offers a combination of Icelandic sagas (Auden believes his origins go back to Iceland as his father tells stories about their family name), Old English poetry and a schoolboy's bullying humour in the same period. As Spears points out, his poetry evolves into fantasy, mythic and unconscious, or changes from objective voice to finding moral and psychological defects (1963, p. 12). For that reason, Auden's inclination for fantasy has both "social and psychological implications" (Spears, 1963, p. 12) since certain "imaginary worlds . . . served both to provide escape from and to express revolt against the existing order" (Spears, 1963, p. 12). Thus, being an enigmatic poet, Auden reflects his desire to grasp the socio-political concerns from a psychological outlook.

Between 1933 and 1939 his search for a satisfactory discourse and self-expressive voice gained a physical quality with his nomadic lifestyle through journeys across Iceland, China, Spain, and America. His leftist discourse and criticism of the capitalist social order gave way to a more extrovert concern for direct communication with the reader in this period. So, the obscure and introvert poet appealing to only an intellectual minority transformed his previous style for rather propagandistic purposes, which would leave its place to a radical rejection (as seen in his disowning the poem "Spain 1937") and regret later on. Moreover, in his introduction to *The Oxford Book of Light Verse* besides emphasizing the significance of "talent for making something" (2005, p. 66) and artistic medium, Auden suggests a definition for the artist as follows "Those who have no interest in communication do not become artists either, they become mystics or madmen" (2005, p. 66). Thus, to implement a more populist strategy, he found it necessary to change the medium for communication. As a result, he wrote experimental plays such as *Dance of Death* and three plays, *Dog Beneath the Skin* (1935), *Ascent of F6* (1936), *On the Frontier* (1938) in collaboration with his close friend, Christopher Isherwood.

Although "he had already begun to find intolerable his public role as court poet to the left" as Mendelson points out, ironically "immediately after *F6* Auden's poems, which in earlier years had been unable to cross a border or even move 'from town to town,' began to travel all over the map" (1977, p. 19). His travel writings appeared during the thirties. In 1937, *Letters from Iceland* was written with MacNeice after their trip to Iceland.

Sharpe suggests that "the journey there implied both rejection and escape" (2007, p. 25). His desire for a close look at the political events and the tumultuous atmosphere began with a resolution to serve for the republican side in the Spanish Civil War in the same year. He wanted to become an ambulance driver to serve on the front but was placed to work in broadcasting propaganda instead. This experience was embodied in a poem, "Spain 1937" as the start point of the evolving opinions from leftist ideology to a return to Christianity and God that he renounced in his youth.

Auden's interest in politics did not subside, and another travel writing, *Journey to a War* appeared after he visited China in 1939. "The Japanese invasion of China drew the attention of Auden and his friend-collaborator- Christopher Isherwood. Auden and Isherwood decided to go to China to make an on the spot study and bring out an account of their experiences" (Sasidharan, 1991, p. 51). On their way back to Europe via the United States, Auden and Isherwood decided to settle down there. With that resolution, Auden inaugurates a new period in his life, which can be called as his transition period or the second phase of the change he underwent. In his transition period, Auden's "disillusionment with Marxism and his return to Christianity" (Jacobs, 1995, p. 550) indicates the change in his ideology with a particular glimpse of stability for his belief. The fame Auden achieved during the thirties was based on the political left but "he now wished to withdraw from that arena and write a different kind of poetry, less publicly engaged" (Sharpe, 2007, p. 5).

The poetry collections during this period, *Another Time* (1940) and *Double Man* (1941) exemplify his relocated concern for time and place since "by the summer of 1939 Auden had stopped writing poems about places, and turned his attention instead to time" (Mendelson, 1977, p. 20). *For the Time Being* (1944), a religious oratorio represents a renewed outlook on Christianity. *Sea and the Mirror* and *The Age of Anxiety* exemplify a more colloquial language and less obscurity. In 1948, with Chester Kallman, his young partner Auden routinized to leave New York for spending the months from April to October. These regular visits to Europe denote the turning point of reconciliation with his contrasting problems and the beginning of his last period. So, his settlement in New York is infracted with an inverted practice of the previous one that is, migrating from Europe to America. Triggered by common homesickness, as Emig points out, "it is Auden's reduced version of certainties, their eventual shift from metaphysical promise to existential presence, even though this presence is one of absence and yearning" (2000, p. 171). Accordingly, *Shield of Achilles* (1955), *Homage to Clio* (1960), *About the*

*House* (1965) and *City without Walls* (1969) demarcate the reconciliation with the anxiety of the age and the problem of existence.

As the last point for the sources of Auden's restlessness, the variety of the writers who influenced the artistic development of Auden to create his original voice attracts attention. Emig states that "the virtuosity of Auden's poetry, its use of many distinct traditions and allusions to a plethora of poetic models, it is closely linked with the desperation over the suspicion that meaning and reality as firm reference points have vanished" (2000, p. 23). Besides his obsession with Hardy and Eliot, he read the works of other modernists such as Gertrude Stein, Virginia Woolf, Ezra Pound, and Edith Sitwell. He also studied Hopkins, Owen, Katherine Mansfield, D. H. Lawrence, Kafka, and Thomas Mann, whose daughter married Auden to get a British passport in 1936 (Bucknell, 1994, p. 56).

Auden himself acknowledges Thomas Hardy as his first literary influence. Edward Thomas follows Hardy. As Sharpe points out "if from Hardy Auden developed an abiding interest in experimenting with different kinds of stanza and metre, from Thomas he may have learned the value of an unassuming and unsentimental accuracy, and an ability to be satisfied with apparently modest effects: a kind of honest pastoralism" (2007, p. 10) as seen in Hardy's rejection of the Romantic vision of nature. Auden also applies Hardiesque 'hawk's vision' which can be described as the act of looking at the objects around and the life in general from a certain distance in its simplest form.

Bucknell states that "Auden passionately admired Yeats's mastery of language, but this mastery was married in his view to an eccentric vision. He felt profoundly ambivalent towards the vision which seemed to him far more subjective and esoteric than Wordsworth's" (1994, p. 56). Lawrence influenced Auden in his attempts to confront the Lawrencian 'blood conscious' self and in the theme of "the failure of the romantic conception of personality" (Mendelson, 2017, p. 101).

T. S. Eliot became an essential influence on the poetic style of Auden. At the beginning of his career, Auden tried to imitate Eliot with "unexplained illusions, obscure scientific terms, startling and apparently unrelated images" to create "an Eliotic mixture" (Sasidharan, 1991, p. 65). Despite the desire to find an objective and detached means for the illness of society, he did not disregard the need to express the "inner world of fantasy" (Spears, 1963, p. 2). The basic difference in the understanding of two poets

can be summarized with the words of Alvarez, "Where Eliot transformed the sensibility of his age, Auden caught the tone of his" (1958, p. 88). In other words, Auden resolves his dualities through reconciliation in the end.

Auden's vision of doubleness reflects the problem of communication and elitism. In "Light Verse," he mentions the necessity of a hawk's vision but at the same time its hindering influence on the communication with the reader as follows "the more unstable a society, and the more detached from it the artist, the clearer he can see, but the harder it is for him to convey it to others" (1977, p. 364). Thus, Auden regards poetry as a kind of precoded system. In "Introduction to *the Sonnets* by William Shakespeare," Auden clarifies the reader profile he looks for as "the one thing a writer hopes for, is attentive readers of his writings. And he hopes they will read with patience and intelligence so as to extract as much meaning from the text as possible" (2015, p. 94).

A peculiar duality appears in Auden's perception of homosexuality as another source of the restlessness. According to Rodway, "its influence on his work, were it not known of, would be literally imperceptible; known, it is negligible" (1984, p. 18). Similarly, "during his lifetime, Auden's homosexuality had something of the status of an open secret: known to some readers, to be sure, but either ignored by commentators in print or addressed only by implication" (Bozorth, 2004, p. 176). However, Auden's earliest poems aim to discover the quality of the unspeakable and the closet since "there is always another story" and "there is always a wicked secret, a private reason for this" (from "The Eight Song," Auden, 1994, p. 141). By the time the popularity of his poems increased, Auden learns, as Bozorth points out, "to practice sexual politics as the manipulation of signs, so that homosexuality becomes something that both is and is not there in his poetry" (2001, p. 12). Similarly, Auden dualizes his homosexuality by regarding it a sin or disease and way of freedom (Bozorth, 2001, p. 12). Ironically with his relation to Chester Kallman, jealousy, disillusionment and resignation made Auden return from the vision of Eros to a more abstract and divine notion of love (Agape) with a certain way back to the ritual religion of his boyhood. Thus, as Bucknell points out, "the idea of loving without equal return of love became generalized into a model for God's love" (1994, p. 51).

## "Twelve Songs"

The discussion of love stands as a formidable phenomenon not only in Auden's life but also in his poetry. When the elliptic nature of the 'Early Auden' is reconsidered, the

arguments of love in “Twelve Songs” turn into so-called occult prophecies with the combination of “fantasy, mythic and unconscious” (Spears, 1963, p. 12) elements in this period. Moreover, in “Twelve Songs,” Auden employs surrealistic images and a fragmented subject matter, love as if the poet projects his concerns onto changing actors of the poems. As the title suggests, the poem is composed of seemingly unrelated twelve songs. Although the personas are different in each poem, they function as unique mouthpieces for the vacillations of love and the lack of love. The opening of the poem with the chorus-like beggars’ tirade underlines the poet’s previous interest in the sagas and Old English heroic works as well. However, the sarcastic tone of the beggars trivializes the weighty matters such as the absence of love and predominant loneliness, which reflects an early Auden trace again. The poet’s problematic connection with his gay identity is also both apparent and absent in the text with the “missing context of signifiers” (Emig, 2000, p. 15), which creates a continuous ambiguity throughout the poem sequence.

The first part, “Song of the Beggars” denotes the split relations by means of ‘beggar’ image. Similar to the chorus in an ancient tragedy, the beggars convey a different argument each time when they appear on stage,

--“O for doors to be open and an invite with gilded edges  
To dine with Lord Lobcock and Count Asthma on the  
Platinum benches,  
With somersaults and fireworks, the roast and the  
Smacking kisses”—  
Cried the cripples to the silent statue,  
The six beggared cripples. (1994, p. 135)

The elaborate style of the opening creates a false scene for an aristocratic meeting or bards’ ceremonial speeches in a feast. The voice of the chorus is heard from a high heroic tone. However, the backdrop of “Platinum benches” (p. 135), invitation letter “with gilded edges,” (p. 135), the guests or hosts, “Lord Lobcock and Count Asthma” (p. 135) parody the high-born manners. In other words, the castles and the costly utensils or furniture turn into regular clumsy benches at parks. Aristocratic titles are given with the common diseases among the beggars exposed to cold weather due to the ill conditions of homelessness. “Lord Lobcock” (p. 135) can also refer to the Prufrockian inertia with the crushing loneliness and lethargy. Thus, the celebrations, acrobatic

movements and shows of firework during the feasts are also turned upside down with the ambience of a park full of beggars. The roast and mouthful kisses disappear in the bloody coughs of the "six beggared cripples" (p. 135). The yearning tone of "O for doors to be open" (p. 135) creates an insider-outsider duality and "the silent statue" (p. 135) underlines a scene of total indifference in which an insistent beggar's demands are disregarded.

Love offers a glimpse of freedom for the disadvantaged groups in "Twelve Songs." While the first stanza satirizes the social classes and the massive miscommunication between them, the second stanza presents another dimension of the fantasy, the libidinal impulses through which the poem is developed. "To be" (Auden, 1994, p. 136) structure of the first stanza is kept through the other stanzas and in each one, a different yearning is visualized. Unlike the first stanza, the second one denotes that fantasy is not about getting a warm place with delicious foods but about a night with an actress and a queen,

"And Garbo's and Cleopatra's wits to go astraying,  
In a feather ocean with me to go fishing and playing,  
Still jolly when the cock has burst himself with crowing"  
Cried the cripples to the silent statue,  
The six beggared cripples. (1994, p. 135)

Greta Garbo, a famous actress during the thirties and the queen of Egypt, Cleopatra lose their strong will and submit to the beggars. "Feather ocean," "go fishing and playing" (p. 135) and enjoying till the morning imply the presence of a carnal love scene. The stanza reflects the contrasting factors such as ration versus the hedonic love and the removal of class borders. Nevertheless, as the refrain reminds, the description of a cosy bedroom is a mere dream and yearning to "the silent statue" (p. 135) is again fruitless. The sexual implications of the second stanza change into an absurdity in which a palace full of servants or "craning yellow faces" (136) is depicted. "And me with a magical crystal to foresee their places" (p. 136) indicates the desire for supernatural power. Being an outsider, the beggar craves for playing the pivotal role in society by telling the unknown or hidden knowledge.

"Twelve Songs" abounds with many metamorphoses in which the beggars find a kind of consolation for their desperate situation. With this longing for a change, "The

six beggared cripples" (p. 135) project their physical surroundings onto the ones they imagine. Especially the fourth and fifth stanzas voice the desire for a distant, utopian land. "And this square to be deck and these pigeons canvas to rig" and "to the shaded feverless islands where melons are big" (p. 136) of the fourth stanza exhibit the search for remedy through changing places as in the procedure Auden poet himself tried with his decision to settle in the US and then Europe again. The stable square transforms into a ship and the doves into a canvas for sailing.

The images of sea and voyage indicate the traces of relaxation in Auden's early poetry. However, the sea is not an end in itself, but a means for the dreamed place. When 1935, the publishing date of the poem is kept in mind, "shaded feverless island" (p. 136) becomes more meaningful since the search for such a soothing place/space covers the whole life of Auden. The beggars' yearning for reunification with nature is demonstrated with "to follow the delicious breath with tantony pig" and images of ripe melons (p. 136) can also refer to Auden's craving the Romantics' holistic perception of nature, which exemplifies the previously mentioned dualities in the Early Auden. However, the poet admits that he cannot be a poet like them.

Furthermore, the attempts at voicing the natural are mostly marked with political implications. For that reason, the poet cannot poeticize nature without turning it into an instrument for his ideology. The rising capitalism is satirized through the image of a gardener (beggar) with a crutch in hand. For instance, in the penultimate stanza, the beggars wish the shops to transform into tulips as it happens in the square of the previous stanza, which seems as the beggars' desire of alchemizing the ugly into the beautiful. In other words, similar to the wind that would provide a breath of fresh air, the dream of a garden with flowers in the above lines makes the unpleasant park and shops bearable for the beggars. However, in the case of nature, similar to the presentation of love, the idea of hostility and intense rage is foregrounded since nature is not a place of tranquility but a stage out of which violence spouts with a fantastic metamorphosis of the tradesmen into little insects to be crushed,

And these shops to be turned to tulips in a garden bed,  
 And me with my crutch to thrash each merchant dead  
 As he pokes from a flower his bald and wicked head"  
 Cried the cripples to the silent statue,  
 The six beggared cripples. (Auden, 1994, p. 136)

After the "cripple[d]" (p. 135) presentations of love and nature, the last stanza focuses on how faith is perceived in the age of anxiety by referring to the surrealistic images again. In other words, the assumption of a stable centre is again negated with the image of a drilled heaven since it cannot hold too, which typically bears an Early Auden trace. Moreover, the trivialization of certain biblical images is another expression for the poet's toughness towards his mother's Catholicism. In addition to that, the implication of moving from a higher status to a lower one in the lines below questions the basic mission of institutionalized beliefs, the claim of saving souls,

"And a hole in the bottom of heaven, and Peter and Paul  
And each smug surprised saint like parachutes to fall,  
And every one-legged beggar to have no legs at all"  
Cried the cripples to the silent statue,  
The six beggared cripples. (Auden, 1994, p. 136)

In Auden's poetry, the problem of faith functions like a return of repressed material. It also influences the poet's sense of love as the residue of disillusionment. The stanza above opens with negation, a process from ascent to descent, the head of Apostles, Peter who holds the key of heaven as stated in the Bible as "And I say unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (*The Bible*, Authorized King James Version, Matthew 16: 17-18) and another apostle Paul are displaced and fallen from heaven. "Each smug surprised saint" (p. 136) maintains the negative representation of religion since its self-satisfied members disregard the sorrows felt by the beggars. For that reason, it cannot offer any solution to the problems of the modern man, on the contrary, "a hole in the bottom of heaven" (p. 136), creates a gutter image by visualizing the sense of emptiness and dissatisfaction. In other words, certain set of beliefs are already chaotic and cracky, and faith does more harm than good as the line "And every one-legged beggar to have no legs at all" (p. 136) can suggest. The last wish of the beggars may also denote to the missing leg, religion and such a radical desire of losing the one on hand can be a way to nullify the binaries in a nihilistic way. As the last point, the recurrent couplet, "Cried the cripples to the silent statue,/ The six beggared cripples" (pp. 135-6) solidifies the image of an indifferent god with "the silent statue" (p. 135) by negating its traditional omnipotence, which signifies Auden's problematic connection with God and would shape Auden's sense of Agape in his own style later on. Furthermore, the second, third and fourth songs of "Twelve Songs" convey



the first song's prevalent dissatisfaction with the age through the dichotomies of black and white, love and hatred, personal deed and public opinion.

The second song voices the possibility of a healing love as if it is the speaker's wise advice for the lovers and opens with the lines "O lurcher-loving collier, black as night,/ Follow your love across the smokeless hill;/ Your lamp is out, the cages are all still;" (p. 136). Again, Auden proves how a light verse can deal with a serious subject matter with the multilayered meaning of hunt. On the surface level, a coal miner who is fond of hunting hounds follows a lightless track to reach for the beloved one. On the other hand, the speaker's warning tone reflects his fear of witnessing the lost love. In this regard, the love affair between two people seems as vulnerable to outer effects and should always be protected meticulously. Thus, the image of the hunting lover changes the man into a prey surrounded by the enemies of love. In other words, the meaning of hunt is elusive since both lovers are hunts in the eyes of the speaker. The speaker's yearning voice is consistently heard with such wishes as "course for her heart and do not miss" (p. 136). The images of a hunting scene are maintained with the verbs "course" and "miss" (p. 136). Up to the line "For Sunday soon is past and, Kate, fly not so fast" (p. 136), the short poem keeps its song style and gives the impression of a sonnet in which unrequited love is poeticized. Nonetheless, this impression is created just to be destroyed in the following lines. "Be marble to his soot" (p. 136) in the ending lines signifies the desire for a stable unity or organizing principle and "To his black be white" (p. 136) depicts the desire for a proper unification, the yin-yang in the mutuality of love. When Auden's personal disappointments in love are reconsidered, the poem becomes an earnest recommendation in its sense with a lightness in its sound.

Accordingly, the third song of "Twelve Songs," proves that the concerns of the preceding poem's speaker are not without reason by underlining the love that has been lost. In this bipartite song, the first part points to the predominance of love over hatred through imperial/martial images in the lines "Let a florid music praise,/ The flute and the trumpet, Beauty's conquest of your face" (Auden, 1994, p. 137). While the first part keeps the style of English sonnet in sense, the second stanza suddenly turns into a Yeatsian prophecy or to be more precise, "some revelation" "at hand" (Yeats, 1956, p. 185). The second stanza confronts the bitter truth of the modern times with the lines, "O but the unloved have had power,/ The weeping and striking,/ Always time will bring their hour" (p. 137). In other words, the stanza conveys its pessimistic tone like Yeats' "The best lack all conviction, while the worst/ Are full of passionate intensity" (1956, p.

185) in "The Second Coming." The contrast of black and white does not suggest a prospective union as it happens in the second song, on the contrary, the juxtaposition of the colours contributes to the absence of love and imminence of "the unloved" (Auden, 1994, p. 137). Accordingly, Auden's personal experiences in the Spanish Civil war, and the disillusionment of the leftist politics creates a new pessimism visualized with the dominance of the darkness and "unpardonable Death" (p. 37) in the third song. When the aftermath of the Spanish Civil war and the eve of WW II are taken into consideration, Auden's previous subjective tone gradually evolves into a public voice criticizing the wrongness in the structures of society and politics. However, being a spokesman of the leftist ideologies does not bring relief, and they do not provide a sense of wholeness for the poet as well. Moreover, the transition between the private and the public is porous since there is always a fluidity in the poet's sense of love. In other words, while the third song generalizes the absence of love with a more implicit and prophetic language, the following song conveys the absence through the presence of a private love affair in which rejection, despair and inadequateness prevail.

When Auden finds a stable and unified meaning, he immediately commences deconstructing it. Such an assumption is also valid in how the poet evaluates love. In this respect, the fourth song reflects the fragmentized and schizophrenic mood of the persona through a carnal love scene. While the previous songs can refer to heterosexual love, the fourth song implies a gay one with the presence of derogating people "who sat with hostile eyes" (p. 137) in a den of vice "cavernous, lofty as a railway terminus" (p. 137). However, such sexual unification is short-lived and is destroyed with "That you then, unabashed,/ Did what I never wished,/ Confessed another love;/ And I, submissive, felt/ Unwanted and went out" (Auden, 1994, p. 138). The colour imagery of the preceding song is also altered. The images of night and day connote to a Yeatsian interplay of colours in his Byzantium poems. Similarly, as the lines "though the night is gone,/ Its dream still haunts to-day" (p. 137) can suggest, the night image functions as a door for feeling the wholeness of fantasy and its aftereffects seem also healing. However, when the succeeding lines are considered, the duality of night and day carries the pessimistic tone of Eliot's "Till human voices wake us, and we drown" (1963, p. 7). In this respect, Spear's discussion of the imaginary with the words, "imaginary worlds . . . served both to provide escape from and to express revolt against the existing order" (1963, p. 12) understates the slippery function of fantasy in Auden's early poetry since in the fourth song, fantasy cannot furnish shelter for love between two persons. When the lines "And I, submissive, felt/ Unwanted and went out" (Auden, 1994, p. 138) are taken into account,

rather than “revolt against the existing order” (Spears, 1963, p. 12), an Eliotesque inertia is remarkable. In this regard, the song underlines the impossibility of love as a reconstructive force in the subject’s life since neither the “inert and vaguely sad” (p. 138) people “who sat with hostile eyes” (p. 137) nor the persona who yields to his lover’s confession of “another love” (p. 138) can fully experience the phenomenal love. In the end, the outsider position of the beggar image is reiterated with the persona’s words in the ending line, “felt/ unwanted and went out” (p. 138).

Furthermore, the tenth song of “Twelve Songs” describes this feeling of incompleteness and miscommunication between the partners, “I and my John” (Auden, 1994, p. 142). The style of the tenth song calls to mind those of the three ballads “Miss Gee,” “James Honeyman” and “Victor.” The severely broken link is given through various events in which the beloved one behaves oppositely. “And I leaned on his shoulder; ‘O Johnny, let’s play’/ But he frowned like thunder and he went away” (p. 142) structure is repeated through the five stanzas with an alteration in the last line of the song. Thus, “Ten thousand miles deep in a pit there I lay:/ But you frowned like thunder and you went away” (Auden, 1994, p. 142) clarifies the loss and loneliness felt by the persona. In other words, the emotional fragmentation is crystallized in a comical tone by implying that neither ‘normal’ nor ‘abnormal’ love relieves the persona of anxieties in which every attempt of finding a new centre to hold fails as it happens in the fourth song too. The last song questions the nature of love, but the persona cannot find any satisfactory answer. On the contrary, Auden enigmatizes love as a concept by employing a style jumping from presuppositions about love to the stanzas full of absurd questions on what it is like with such lines in the twelfth song as “Some say that love’s a little boy/ And some say it’s a bird” (Auden, 1994, p. 143) or questioning stanzas such as “Does it look like a pair of pyjamas, / or the ham in a temperance hotel?” (p. 143). Scepticism of the persona is represented in extended forms of the question “will it alter my life altogether?” (Auden, 1994, p. 145) and the search for true love or a centre again results in disappointment.

In Auden’s poetry, the discussions of love and nature share a common point, the sense of lack. Accordingly, the relation of nature and love conveys the basic arguments of hostility and apathy in the fifth, “Autumn Song” (sixth song), seventh, and “Roman Wall Blues” (eleventh song). For instance, the opening lines of the fifth song, “Fish in the unruffled lakes/ Their swarming colours wear,/ Swans in the winter air/ A white perfection have,/ And the great lion walks/ Through his innocent grove” (Auden, 1994,

p. 138) create a serenity from which the persona is excluded and becomes just an observer. With "the Devil in the clock" (p. 138) time-bounded worries are conveyed through an apocalyptic perception of future similar to the previous poems. The disharmony with nature is denoted with "We must lose our loves / On each beast and bird that moves/ Turn an envious look" (p. 138). Moreover, the lines also suggest that the love experience should be merged with the natural to feel the sense of wholeness. Then, the lines above turn into a warning with the imperative tone of the speaker. In other words, his love formulated by culture should be sacrificed for experiencing the holism of nature. However, the persona's likening his lover to the swan bearing the gifts of the one "Impulsive Nature gave" (Auden, 1994, p. 139) in the ending lines is not a mere "bless" or "praise" (p. 138) of his lover with the clichés of a love poem. On the contrary, the metaphorized swan image deliberately distances the lovers from the reunification with the natural through language and contributes to the malevolent attitude of the "envious look" (p. 138) by underlining the impossibility of regaining such union with nature.

Similarly, in "Autumn Song" (the sixth song), hopelessness overwhelms the whole atmosphere, and the feeling of a unifying centre disappears again. The falling leaves and withering flowers correspond to the dead nurses and moving prams, "Nurses to their graves are gone/ But the prams go rolling on" (p. 139). The following lines waver between the borders of the real and the surreal. "Whispering neighbours left and right" (p. 139) hinders the lovers "from our true delight" (139), and the mob or "Dead in hundreds" (p. 139) backbite the lovers by criticizing the "false attitudes of love" (p. 139) bitterly. In other words, "the unloved" and the ones "with hostile eyes" (p. 137) are reiterated with the emphasis on the threatening voices of the people towards love. Thus, the social norms threatening the individual preferences transform into the surrealistic giants which move by destroying the forest, "Scrawny through a plundered wood/Trolls run scolding for their food,/ Owl and nightingale are dumb,/ And the angel will not come" (p. 139). With nullified intersubjectivity, Auden's pessimism in the lines calls to mind again a different version of Yeats' "The Second Coming" by stressing the absence of the previous healing beliefs and expectations. In other words, to wait for a saviour in any form merely agitates the hopeless state of modern man remaining firm with his willing impotence. Moreover, "Mountains of Instead" (p. 139) and the fountains descending over the hills of it in the last stanza in "Autumn Song" function as an oasis in the desert and the thirsty persona acknowledges that reconciliation is not possible in any way. To put it another way, the persona cannot heave a sigh of relief in "instead"

since the idea of no-alternative overwhelms and besides, nature conveys a corporeally inaccessible ground since “none may drink except in dreams” (p. 139).

Similarly, such physical and emotional abandonment of “instead” (p. 139) is described with an estranged lover in the seventh song. The “desolation” of lover “underneath an abject willow” (Auden, 1994, p. 140) visualizes the distance of nature. “Bells that toll across the meadows/ from the somber spire/ Toll for these unloving shadows/ Love does not require” (p. 140)” poeticize that religion cannot offer a solution for the persona’s restlessness with the age similar to the parachuted saints and a drilled heaven in the first song. Then, the lines above exclude the Christian perception of Agape from the one the persona experiences since the call of the church bells are only for the “unloved” (p. 137) and “these unloving” (p. 140). Accordingly, such exclusion also delineates the secluded life of the persona by referring to the opposition between ‘me’ and ‘others.’ In this respect, “Love” in personified form can stand for Eros in the lines and demonstrates the Early Auden’s preference for the unleashed love rather than its organized and controlling version.

However, “Geese above you flying, / Their direction know,” and “Icy brooks beneath you flowing/ To their ocean go” (p. 140) mark the persona’s outsider position and again accentuate the gap the persona feels with nature through the definite course of the birds and his indeterminate state. In this regard, the ninth song problematizes the sense of loss by means of love-nature relation. Although an unknown destination does not relieve the persona, he does not follow the desperation of “Autumn Song” in this poem, either and presents a renewed solace through the simple resignation of “I thought that love would last forever: I was wrong” (p. 141). Thus, nature and the experiences of human being are represented on two different lines which do not cross each other in the end. After the separation of the lovers, nature as the source of rejuvenation is consciously rejected although it reminds the ‘joie de vivre’ and wholeness in the time of ruptures, “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” (Auden, 1994, p. 141). Moreover, the rejection of tranquility offered by nature is reiterated in “Roman Wall Blues,” the eleventh song in which Auden describes a lonely legionnaire patrolling on the Hadrian’s Wall in an unfriendly atmosphere, “Over the heather the wet wind blows,” “The rain comes pattering out of the sky,” and “The mist creeps over the hard grey stone” (Auden, 1994, p. 143). The lonely soldier’s concerns about his “girl” and his “pay” (p. 143) are expressed in the backdrop of gloomy nature as well.

The last three poems of "Twelve Songs," caricature the pessimism brought with the unreachable nature of love experience. The tenth song, to illustrate, retells the chasm between "I and my John" (p. 142) by implicating that neither heterosexual love nor the gay one offers an emotional satisfaction with the idea of an impending failure. To put differently, the tone of the last poems conveys the bitterness of truth in 'light' way utilizing a ballad-like versification. However, the repetition of "But he frowned like thunder and went way" (p. 142) at the end of each stanza provides a balanced fatalism about the unrequited love. Even though the poem does not carry the obscure and tragic tone of the fourth poem, such endings remind the harshness of "felt/ Unwanted and went out" (p. 138). In addition to that, the tenth song demonstrates that "another love" (p. 138) with the implication of heterosexuality is also tragic in essence. Thus, the existence of "reciprocal love" (p. 142) seems just as a myth to be demystified with the advances of the persona and the antagonistic reactions of his beloved one. Similarly, the eleventh song, "Roman Wall Blues" dehistoricizes the dissatisfaction with love through the anachronisms of a Roman warder and the melancholy of blues. On the other hand, twelfth song projects the lack of love into several attempts to metaphorize love with the lines "some say that love's a little boy/ And some say it's a bird" (p. 143). Nevertheless, the speaker cannot find a definite answer or proof for his questions and assumptions. Then, the meaning of love becomes blurred by turning love as a concept into an empty signifier. As the lines "Our history books refer to it/ in cryptic little notes" (p. 144) can suggest, the presence of love also denotes the absence of its meaning. Accordingly, the persona's both absurd and rhetorical questions underline that love cannot be stabilized through deconstructions and reconstructions of its possible meanings. Thus, the yearning for a clear cut explanation for love, "Will it alter my life altogether?/ O tell me the truth about love" (p. 145) in the ending lines of the last poem summarizes Auden's efforts to discover a meaningful unit in life. Consequently, as the word "altogether" (p. 145) can denote, finding a totalizing principle that would organize one's life is an unattainable desire for Auden's early years. For that reason, Auden changes his strategy to unveil the so-called right answer or "truth" (p. 145) by turning love into a means for objective correlative with a remarkable difference from the private voice to the public one.

### **"Five Songs"**

"Five Songs" written between 1948 and 1953, proves that Auden's attitude towards his age eludes a precise description or an absolute ideological grasp. However, when

"Five Songs" is compared to "Twelve Songs" of the late thirties, it can be suggested that his restless mind paradoxically remains steady. The first song reminds the third song of "Twelve Songs" which indicates an apocalyptic revelation with "Time will bring their hour" (Auden, 1994, p. 137). Similarly, the first poem opens with martial images such as discarded fleets, admiral, ambassador, and shaggy horse riders. The first two stanzas develop the idea of a total change in which the previous/historical actors or notions disappear. "Deftly, Admiral, cast your fly/ Into the slow deep hover/ Till the wise old trout mistake and die" (Auden, 1994, p. 573) reduces the position of 'skilful' Admiral into a clumsy fisherman whose "skill" (p. 573) is dependent upon the mistake of fish. A radical change and desolation at hand are described with "Salt are the deeps that cover/ the glittering fleets you led/ White is your head" (p. 573). The splendid war ships malfunction and are deserted, the last days of the decaying ships correspond to the perishing admiral. The "ambassador" (p. 573) of the second stanza shares the same fate with the admiral since "The Outer Provinces are lost/ Unshaven horsemen swill/ The great wines of the Chateaux/ Where you danced long ago" (p. 573). The civilization is replaced by the barbarity in which tradition or manners are destroyed as the lines below suggest,

Do not turn, do not lift your eyes  
 Toward the still pair standing  
 On the bridge between your properties,  
 Indifferent to your minding:  
 In its glory, in its power,  
 This is their hour. (Auden, 1994, p. 573)

Unlike the submissive speakers who acknowledge the impossibility of love experience beforehand in "Twelve Songs," the speaker in the above lines challenges the hostile eyes presented in "Twelve Songs." In other words, instead of leaving the place as it happens in "unwanted and went out" (p. 138), the act of staying within the system becomes prominent, which exemplifies the political stance of "Five Songs" to struggle from the inside. The position of "still pair" (p. 573) demonstrates the possibility of a peaceful realm between the opposing forces by means of love. In that limbo, the lovers are immune to both sides and experience the sense of wholeness in the specific temporality. Moreover, "This is their hour" (p. 573) does not only denote a particular time silencing other dominant factors but also announces the time of death, "Nothing your strength, your skill, could do/ Can alter their embrace/ Or dispersuade the Furies"

(p. 573). In this regard, the "unpardonable Death" (p. 138) of the third poem in "Twelve Songs" is repeated from a different perspective since in the first poem of "Five Songs," the speaker only accepts the power of death by excluding the interventions of the dominant discourse represented with the admiral and ambassador images. However, love experience is not romanticized in the poem, on the contrary, as the Furies "with claw and dreadful brow/ Wait for them now" can suggest, the experience of a reconciling love is short-lived and ends in disaster similar to the way it functions as a leitmotif in "Twelve Songs."

Another point that distinguishes "Five Songs" from the preceding "Twelve Songs" can be seen in the handling of love between couples. As a trace of the Early Auden, the presentation of homosexuality in the poet's first period is discussed implicitly with certain wordplays, ambiguous expressions or gender-neutral pronouns. To put differently, the presence of gay experience is conveyed through a vague tone in Auden's early poems. However, "Five Songs" simply overlooks one of the underlying conflicts in the Early Auden, the acceptance of homosexuality not as wrongness or disease. It can also be said that the poet's public voice in his transition period mutes the consistently felt sexual conflicts with a generalized representation of love experience through gender binary, but nonetheless, such disregard does not mean that the poet resolves his complexities connected with sexuality in this period. As the ending of the first song illustrates, even though "Five Songs" stand as a different expression for Auden's 'hawk's vision' to distance himself from his subject matter, loss as the only remnant of love experience overwhelms the poems by calling to mind the recurrent disillusionment with love in "Twelve Songs."

Subsequently, the second song maintains the theme of a total change in which every element or agent transforms into just the opposite, "The Emperor's favorite concubine" (Auden, 1994, p. 574) becomes Eunuch's mistress, "The Wardens of the Marches turned/ Their spears the other way;/ The vases crack, the ladies die,/ The Oracles are wrong" (p. 574). The state of the world is described in a chaotic atmosphere similar to the events in an ancient Greek tragedy. In such a hostile world, the absence of love is given on the same ground with the presence of a distant god image. However, the negativity towards an organized belief is discussed differently in the second song when compared to "Twelve Songs." While such images as "each smug surprised saint" (p. 136) and "bells that toll across the meadows" (p. 140) in "Twelve Songs" share the idea of the distance between the persona and his shattered faith, the second song underlines a



deliberate negated attitude with “a rather scruffy-looking god” (p. 574) image. But in each case, the impression of God, either indifferent and inert in “Twelve Songs” or engaged in “Five Songs” sustains his problematic nonentity.

Accordingly, the belief in God is both “misplacing” and “misplac[ed]” (p. 574) in Auden’s poetic world. For instance, the second song indicates that religion as institution malfunctions and the existence of God does not provide any solution. Moreover, Auden parodies the notion of fate with ‘*Deus ex machina*’, a plot device that solves an intricate situation all of a sudden. In the regular structure of a Greek tragedy, a performer in the role of God is grounded on the stage through a crane towards the end of the play and resolves the conflict. However, in the poem, the traditional presentation of God as the symbol of perfection is subverted with a sluggish appearance, awkward in manners and speech. Similar to the saints’ anachronistic parachuting “from a hole in the bottom of heaven” (Auden, 1994, p. 136) in “Twelve Songs,” descending God offers nothing more than messing the things up,

But-Music Ho! -at last it comes,  
           The Transformation Scene:  
 A rather scruffy-looking god  
           Descends in a machine  
 And, gabbling off his rustic rhymes,  
           Misplacing one or two,  
 Commands the prisoners to walk,  
           The enemies to screw. (Auden, 1994, p. 574)

The third song of “Five Songs” reiterates the incompleteness of love that is not felt wholly or truthfully by taking a heterosexual love to the centre of the poem. This poem can be taken as the mirror reflection of the tenth poem from “Twelve Songs” by poeticizing the acts of the male lover and reactions of the female beloved one. Although both poems handle the love between a couple with gendered conventions, the third song condenses the light tone of the tenth song into its sarcastic style. While the tenth song presents the tragedy of an unconsummated love and the persona’s enticements in vain with the repeated line “but he frowned like a thunder and he went away” (p. 142) between “I and my John” (p. 142), the third song of “Five Songs” criticizes the easiness of a love affair with the fancy words of “the sniveling sonneteer” (p. 575) unlike the persona’s sincere memories in the tenth song. Thus, the shallowness of a particular

love and an emotional hunger following it are recounted from the eyes of two birds calling to mind the functionality of "hawk's vision" again.

Thus, the dialogue between two birds which observe the speech of man and the silence of woman from a certain distance unriddles the man's integrity with the questions at the end of each stanza. The dreamy atmosphere "by a weir" (p. 574) or near a low dam calls to mind that of the fairy tales ending with a lesson (for instance, the fairy tale, "Willow-wren and the Bear" by Grimm Brothers). Furthermore, the poem conveys the argument through two dialogues developing in parallel with each other. "A willow-wren" and "a starling" (p. 574) comment upon the words of the man at the end of each stanza and in each case, the willow-wren is confused by what the man says. "The stare" (p. 574) or the starling plays the role of a wise old man. To exemplify, in the first stanza, the man's artificial language to cajole the woman into having sexual intercourse with such words as "my sweetest duck, my precious goose/ my lascivious lamb" (p. 574) is not understood by the willow-wren, as shown with "what does he want?" (p. 574). "Much too much" by "the stare" (p. 574) signifies that there is an insatiable desire for something beyond what the woman can grant. The man's elaborate style calls to mind that of "sniveling sonneteer" (Auden, 1994, p. 575) and accuses the spring for those outpourings of the love, "For all they fall short of may,/ Dear heart, be still a sign" (p. 575). Again, the willow-wren question, "*Does he mean what he says?*" (p. 575) reflects how language dysfunctions in the case of love by offering other signifiers instead of definite meanings.

Love as a means for bodily pleasures fails in "Five Songs" as well. The starling and the willow-wren's watching the relation of the man and the silent woman can be regarded as a voyeur experience. By the same token, the opening line of the third stanza, "Hark! Wild Robin winds his horn" (p. 575) underlines such sexual connotations. However, willow-wren's question at the end as "Is it only that?" (p. 575) suggests a bitter reality about the modern world, to rephrase it, the belief that love does not exist or it cannot go beyond the limits of corporeality.

Furthermore, the willow-wren's question can suggest that individuals cannot recognize the enormous gap in their emotional world, which makes their position more tragic and desperate. In the last stanza, the man "waking in her arms he cried, utterly content" (p. 575) mystifies the actual intercourse by uttering "I have heard the high good noises,/ Promoted for an instant" (Auden, 1994, p. 574). Emotional fulfilment is replaced by a hedonistic desire without noticing what is lost, "She laughed, he laughed,

they laughed together,/ Then they ate and drank:/ *Did he know what he meant?* said the willow-wren-/ *God only knows, said the stare*" (p. 575), which reiterates the opposition between me and others in "Twelve Songs" by stressing the observant eye's outsider state.

In 1951, Auden wrote an opera libretto called "The Rake's Progress" (an opera by Igor Stravinsky) with Chester Kallman and his interest in operas did not lessen. In the fourth song of "Five Songs," he uses *The Magic Flute* by Mozart as a ground for the representation of two radical notions about love. Auden poeticizes the last trial scene of Tamino and Pamina in the caverns of water and fire with specific alterations and implications. After several difficulties, two lovers are rejoined, and their true love is proved through these trials. In the poem, Fire and Water try to dissuade the lovers from the union,

"When rites and melodies begin  
 To alter modes and times,  
 And timid bar-flies boast aloud  
 Of uncommitted crimes,  
 And leading families are proud  
 To dine with their black sheep  
 What promises, what discipline,  
 If any, will Love keep?"  
 So roared Fire on their right (Auden, 1994, p. 576)

The words of Fire do not hinder the lovers from passing "down the grim passage" (p. 576). Fire's expressions waver between the social and the political, the real and the surreal. "Timid bar-flies" and "leading families" (p. 576) represent the modern man and his unheroic deeds. "When rites and melodies begin/ To alter modes and times" (p. 576) refers to the radical epistemological change undergone in the twentieth century. Water states similar arguments about love or the source of salvation in this case, "When stinking Chaos lifts the latch/ And Grotte backward spin,/ And Helen's nose becomes a beak/ And cats and dogs grow chins,/ And daisies claw and pebbles shriek/ And Form and Color part" (p. 576) reflect the concerns of the era with an emphasis on the loss of a unifying centre. The story of Tamina and Pamina also suggests an existential struggle, that is, the award they gained after the trials is not a mere reunification but the knowledge of God or the real knowledge. The Platonic cave is also subverted with their exit from

the dark caverns as the lines denote, "With his worship, with her sweetness- / O look now! See how they emerge from the cleft/ (Frightened? No. Happy? Yes.)/ Out into sunlight" (p. 576).

Tamina and Pamina find the passage out of the symbolic order through the split surrounding them and reach the real love in the end. Although Auden starts to catch the glimpses of his later optimism with the fourth song since there is hope at least, he paradoxically acknowledges the impossibility of finding such a split to the realm of freedom, which would form an existential basis for the reconciliation in his case. In this respect, the last song of "Five Songs" returns to the argument of the expelled individual who begs the help of an extraterrestrial entity, Moon to change his unrecoverable situation, "Make this night lovable" and "Bless me, One Special," and "Surround our absences" (Auden, 1994, p. 577). Similar to a play, *A Moon for the Misbegotten* by Eugene O'Neill, Moon symbolizes the hope existent but not available for the begging one. "From whose cascading streams/ None may drink except in dreams" (p. 139) of "Autumn Song" is retold almost twenty years later with a wish from the moon, "Grant each your indulgence/ That we may meet in dreams/ For talk, for dalliance, By warm hearths, by cool streams" (p. 577), which shows the duration of an unresolved issue and a restless soul.

### **"Two Don Quixote Lyrics"**

"Two Don Quixote Lyrics" suggests an alternative exit from the chaotic atmosphere of the modern world by consciously creating a false or quixotic centre. The first poem, "The Golden Age" reflects a romantic yearning towards nature. "The poets" (Auden, 1994, p. 719) whose visions are based upon another poem, "Dame Kind" retell "The Age of Gold, an age of love, of plenty and simplicity,/ When summer lasted all the year and a perpetual greenery/ Of lawns and woods and orchards made an eye delighting scenery" (p. 719). The perfectness of that age is sustained with the absence of famine, diseases, and pain. In addition to that, the total unity of nature and man is described through such lines as "And men and beasts were not afraid but lived in perfect amity" and "nymphs and shepherds danced all day in circles with agility" (p. 719).

O but alas!  
Then it came to pass  
The Enchanters came

Cold and old,  
 Making day gray  
 And the age of gold  
 Passed away,  
 For men fell under their spell,  
 Were doomed to gloom. (Auden, 1994, p. 720)

In the above lines, the anxiety felt by the persona is clarified through the degradation of the world from the Golden Age to the Iron Age. In other words, the legend of harmonical heaven on earth is overturned with an opposite age and the poets were replaced by the enchanters. While the poets put the truth into words, enchanters deceive humanity to shatter the previous harmony (*concordia discors*). The “enchanter” is a multilayered word in this poem, and when the twentieth century is taken into consideration, it can suggest skilful orators, the leaders, and politicians of the age. The long stanza summarizes the sickness of the age not only from a political perspective as in “There was hate between states,/ A life of strife/ Gaols [jails] and wails” (p. 720) but from a psychological and social vantage point. So, the spiritual crisis is expressed with “Hearts grew unkind,/ Minds blind,/ Glum and numb,/ Without hope or scope” (p. 720) and the pressure of social power groups is reflected with impositions such as “Donts, wonts,/ Cants, shants/ No face with grace/ None glad, all sad” (p. 720).

In the last stanza, a decisive voice is heard, and it calls to mind those challenging words of Don Quixote when he saw the windmills for the first time. The previous stanza’s desperate mood is destroyed with this robust voice. Thus, Auden achieves a last mock with the hopeful waiting for the resurrection of the golden age,

It shall not be! Enchanters, flee! I challenge you to battle me!  
 Your powers I with scorn defy, your spells shall never rattle me,  
 Don Quixote de la Mancha is coming to attend to you,  
 To smash you into smithereens and put a final end to you. (Auden, 1994,  
 p. 720)

In “Recitative by Death,” the second poem of “Two *Don Quixote* Lyrics,” Auden employs an opera term to express his reception of death as a defining factor in restlessness. Recitative is an opera device in which the performer uses an ordinary language and improvises while stating his argument. Similarly in this poem personified death appears

on stage and directly announces his power over humankind as "Ladies and gentlemen, you have made most remarkable/ Progress, and progress, I agree, is a boon,/ You have built more automobiles than are parkable,/ Crashed the sound barrier" (p. 720). The personification of death creates a voyeur image which peeps out from its hidden place and decides on the life-span of the human race at his sweet will, "Still I sport with the young and daring; at my whim,/ The climber steps upon the rotten boulder,/ The undertow, catches boys as they swim" (Auden, 1994, p. 721).

Auden does not glorify death, nor does he disparage the notion of death. Instead, he confronts the facts about it in a scientific attitude. However, while describing death, he does not leave aside the social criticism, which implicitly or explicitly exists in his poems. The criticism of a meaningless flux of progress is conveyed through the threatening death or an end to that progress in the opening lines. The class distinction, social structures, and institutions are mocked with "Liberal my views upon religion and race;/ Tax-posture, credit rating, social ambition/ Cut no ice with me" (Auden, 1994, p. 721) and "Westchester matron and Bowery bum,/ Both shall dance with me when I rattle my drum" (p. 721). Thus, in the sixties, Auden's anxiety felt for life and death begins to lessen with the confrontation of that windmills are not enemies but just windmills.

## Conclusion

"Twelve Songs," "Five Songs" and "Two *Don Quixote* Lyrics" illustrate how the idiosyncratic experiences of love and hopelessness function by bearing certain traces from the different periods of Auden's poetry career. Despite the idea of death prevalent in the later Auden as the final stabilizing force, the flux in his poetry can be seen in the poet's constant experiments with language and subject matter. Love, as a recurrent theme in the selected poems, always stimulates the sense of lack by arousing a persistent tension between the glimpse of satisfaction and the irruptions of unfulfilled desire. As the poems suggest, particular organizing principles such as religion or nature are far removed from bestowing the sensation of relief for the modern man. Any kind of sexual orientation does not provide fulfilment as well. Thus, in each poem, the presentations of love also bring a definite disillusionment in the end.

Sasidharan points out that Auden's career can be delimited through "the problem of identity, problem of communication and the problem of allegiance" (1991, p. 57). When the factors above are taken as a basis to decide on whether he is rehomed in

the age of anxiety, it can be suggested that after the long period of a struggle to find a true voice and plausible answers, he reconciles with the age and his peculiar obsessions. However, as the songs from his different periods denote, Auden's reconciliation is problematic. To be more precise, he deliberately reconstructs his perception of 'peace' by composing poems wavering between the psychic reunification and the sense of fragmentedness. In other words, the analysis of "Twelve Songs," "Five Songs" and "Two *Don Quixote* Lyrics" from his early, transition and later periods suggests that Auden's poetry cannot be reduced into any formula. Paradoxically, God, nature or social disintegration grant home for him and remind the irresolvable broken link between man and nature. Still, he does not renounce pursuing the means for a meaningful existence. To conclude, Auden acknowledges that he cannot find a way out from the Platonic codification, but he also yearns for leaving that dark cave, as Pamina and Tamina did by finding a split. Thus, his confrontation with the age of anxiety can simply be summarized in the prophetic title of a poem written in 1956, "There Will Be No Peace."

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