

The Modern Sonnet: W.H. Auden, Philip Larkin, and Elizabeth Jennings

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[**Abstract:** The study of the sonnet is, in the end, a study of poetry at its most intense. Sonnets, perhaps more than other forms of poetry, reflect on their own making and their own being. The writing of sonnets engenders new and different forms. Auden's sonnets written in China are an integral part of an experimental travelogue co-authored with Christopher Isherwood. The prolific sonnets written by Philip Larkin and Elizabeth Jennings as youthful aspiring poets can be seen to underpin the virtuosic handling of line and metre and rhythm in their later work. As we have seen, the sonnet is an intensely self-questioning artefact, continually alert to its own formal constraints and transgressions. If it declares its place in a long-evolving history of poetic form and takes its authority and sustenance from that, it also repeatedly demonstrates its own restless and inexhaustible inventiveness.]

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It was W.H. Auden who, more than any other poet writing in the twentieth century, adopted and modernized the sonnet as a form highly suited to the peculiar cultural and psychological pressures of the time, and also ensured its continued use as an instrument of subtle political enquiry and debate. Auden was a prolific and accomplished sonnet writer, and his various experiments with the form include three sonnet sequences: a sequence of love poems sent to Christopher Isherwood in 1934; the sonnets 'In Time of War', an integral part of *Journey to a War* (1939); and 'The Quest', published in *The Double Man* in 1940. In addition, he wrote numerous occasional sonnets, often relating to particular places or people, by turns erotic, sardonic, satirical, moral, philosophical, and theological. He showed himself to be an astute and discerning critic of the sonnet, lecturing and writing on Shakespeare's

sonnets, and editing the excellent Signet edition of Shakespeare's sonnets in 1964. It was in the sonnets 'In Time of War', later reprinted as 'Sonnets from China', that Auden excelled, both forging a link with earlier sonnet writers, including the generation of 1914-18, and refining the sonnet form so that it would become the perfect device for capturing the unremitting tension between historical forces and the individual conscience.

Auden claimed that his first poem had been a Wordsworthian sonnet on Blea Tarn in the Lake District, but only a line and a half are known to exist: 'and in the quiet / Oblivion of thy waters let them stay'.¹ Among his *Juvenilia: Poems 1922-28* there are ten sonnets which tentatively explore the interests, obsessions and preoccupations that would shape the later work: an attraction to obscure and deserted landscapes; a fascination with exceptional individuals, including other writers; clandestine, erotic encounters; the psychological dramas of family history; and political intrigue. 'Rookhope (Weardale, Summer 1922)' is notable for its early admiration of the lead-mining district of County Durham, close to Auden's cherished Alston, and of the lives of the men who once worked there. A regular Shakespearean sonnet, probably written in April 1924, the poem uses its turn resourcefully to move from local description to personal involvement – 'Yet – I have stood by their deserted shafts' – and towards a mystical communion in which the poet is able 'To glimpse the spirit which engendered these' (54). The mystic spirit perceived in wind and rain undoubtedly owes much to the influence of Richard Jefferies, who is the subject of a slightly later sonnet, written in May 1925, the first of Auden's numerous sonnet tributes, including those to A.E. Housman, Edward Lear, and Arthur Rimbaud. 'Richard Jefferies' begins as a Shakespearean sonnet, but its sestet is Petrarchan. The turn is effectively delayed until line 10, so that the celebration of Jeffries' uncanny sensitivity to the vibrant energies of nature, even as he lay dying, can be given maximum impact:

What more? When dying he could praise the light
And watch larks trembling over fields of corn
Until the whole sky sang, with eyes as bright
As kestrel perched upon the splintered oak,
A sentinel, dark, motionless, at dawn. (92)

The fluently articulated syntax (a single sentence drawn out over five lines of the sonnet) and the carefully modulated music of the final line suggest the influence of another follower of Richard Jeffries, Edward Thomas.

Auden's startling originality can be seen in the unrhymed sonnet, 'Control of the Passes was, he saw, the key', which was included in *Poems* (1928), published while he was at Oxford, and later reprinted as 'The Secret Agent':

Control of the Passes was, he saw, the key
To this new district, but who would get it?
He, the trained spy, had walked into a trap
For a bogus guide, seduced with the old tricks.

At Greenhearth was a fine site for a dam
And easy power, had they pushed the rail
Some stations nearer; they ignored his wires.
The bridges were unbuilt and trouble coming.

The street music seemed gracious now to one
For weeks up in the desert; woken by water
Running away in the dark, he often had
Reproached the night for a companion
Dreamed of already. They would shoot, of course,
Parting easily who were never joined. (239)

'Greenhearth' is possibly Greenhurth, not far from Alston, but the sonnet depends on intrigue and anonymity rather than recognition. The poem might well allude to the closing of the Alpine passes into France and Italy by Mussolini in August 1927, but again the identification of specific places and events seems inappropriate to a sonnet that operates primarily in the realm of political and sexual fantasy. The 'unbuilt bridges' in the final line of the octave are figures of psychological, as well as political, isolation, and they suggest (as does the dreaming in the sestet) that repression and frustration are primary motives. John Fuller helpfully points out that 'Love is forced to act as a secret agent because the individual does not consciously recognize his desire (the spy) and represses it. "They", who ignore his wires, and eventually shoot him, represent the conscious will, the Censor, which represses the individual's

emotional desires.’ The last line, taken from the Old English poem, ‘Wulf and Eadwacer’ (‘the monologue of a captive woman addressed to her outlawed lover’) supports the supposition that ‘the situation is one of unconsummated love’.²

In the summer of 1933, Auden embarked upon a sequence of love sonnets, which he sent to Christopher Isherwood the following year. The compositional history is complicated, but it seems that the original opening sonnet began with the line, ‘The earth turns over, our side feels the cold’, which later became ‘Through the Looking-Glass’. The initial impulse behind the sequence appears to have been Auden’s love for a fourteen-year old boy whose portrait had been painted by the art master at the Downs School in the Malverns. A version of the sequence appears as Section XVIII of ‘Poems 1931-36’ in *The English Auden*.³ Most of the sonnets are Shakespearean and the overall design of the sequence, as well as its intimate modes of address, are clearly indebted to Shakespeare’s example. Shakespeare’s finely discriminating moral intelligence and complex dramatisation of the ego made him, for Auden, the most modern of artists, with an enduring capacity for engaging readers in the unfathomable mystery of personality and its ‘millions of strange shadows’.⁴ The Shakespearean sonnet appealed to Auden much as the dramatic monologue appealed to T.S. Eliot. It was a form in which the most private thoughts and feelings could acquire artistic impersonality. For this reason, he had little interest in the identities of the young man and the Dark Lady. The mystery and obscurity of the sonnets were, he believed, an integral part of their artistic accomplishment and lasting appeal.

The sonnets in Auden’s early sequence are revealing stylistically in that they show him savouring the lyric potential of the Shakespearean sonnet (in such smoothly crafted lines as ‘Turn not towards me lest I turn to you’), even while endeavouring to distort and fracture the staple iambic line. Among the rhetorical skills gleaned from Shakespeare’s sonnets is the intimate pause created by a well-placed caesura. The opening line quoted above is replayed as the closing line, with a delicate but decisive difference: ‘Turn not towards me, lest I turn to you’ (146). There is tenderness and devotion in these early sonnets, but fear, jealousy and disappointment prevail, so that like their Shakespearean counterparts they constitute a dramatisation of what Auden neatly summed up as ‘the anxiety into which the behaviour of another person can throw you’.⁵

The sonnets are very likely addressed to the same young man who inspired Auden's moving lyric, 'Lay your sleeping head, my love', and the same gentle imperatives move through the verse:

Turn not towards me lest I turn to you:
Stretch not your hands towards your harm and me
Lest, waking, you should feel the need I do
To offer love's preposterous guarantee
That the stars watch us... (146)

Fuller's comments on the later poem are instructive here: 'It achieves the beauty of its effect by the way in which the moment of happiness is weighed gravely and consciously against an awareness of all that can threaten it.'⁶ The innocence of the recipient is presented from the speaker's guarded, unillusioned perspective, his knowledge of 'the power which corrupts the heart'. The second sonnet in the sequence prepares the young man for inevitable disappointment with a mixture of ironic distance and troubled concern: 'Soon enough you will / Enter the zone where casualties begin' (146). The obliquity and obscurity of the sonnets arise from their self-conscious dramatisation of the psychological confusions and uncertainties of a clandestine love. They function as a sublimation and displacement of desire. The allegorical landscapes of the sonnets constitute a kind of *paysage moralisé* through which the lover's progress is charted: 'Upon the mountains of our fear I climb... / Soon on a lower alp I fall and pant' (149). This is especially evident, as Fuller notes, in a sonnet that was originally included in the sequence, but later numbered separately as XIX in Poems 1931-36: 'To settle in this village of the heart, / My darling, can you bear it?' (154). Here, it becomes clear that changing conceptions of house and home are intimately related to questions of commitment within relationships.⁷ Is it possible to establish a new ideal of community, without this turning to promiscuity and 'the shy encounter / With the irresponsible beauty of the stranger'? In this troubled sonnet, love finds no rhyme at all. The closing sonnet, later titled 'Meiosis', considers the erotic impulse and 'the little death' against the biological processes of fertilisation, chromosome reduction, and the evolution of the species. This time, love finds a tentative, unanchored rhyme in 'The flood on which all move and wish to move' (150).

In 1937, Auden and Isherwood were commissioned by their publishers to write a travel book about the East, and prompted by the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in August of that year, they decided to visit China. They sailed to Hong Kong in January 1938 and made their way to Shanghai, returning to London in July, via Japan, Canada, and the United States. *Journey to a War* (1939) is a remarkable work of travel literature and photography, combining Isherwood's loosely written, entertaining diary of events with Auden's tightly compressed and intellectually commanding sonnets and verse commentary. The book includes a dedicatory sonnet to E.M. Forster and five prefatory sonnets of embarkation and journeying, as well as the twenty-seven sonnets that constitute the sequence 'In Time of War'. Tonally and structurally, the sonnets provide a contrast with the self-deprecating ironies of the diary, in which Isherwood records how the two writers enjoyed the pleasures of the British Ambassador's private villa ('Number One House') as the Japanese tightened their hold on Shanghai: 'In our world, there are the garden-parties and the night-clubs, the hot baths and the cocktails, the singsong girls and the Ambassador's cook'.⁸ One of the functions of the sonnets, initiated by the dedicatory sonnet 'To E.M. Forster', is to strip away privilege and prejudice, and to face the reality of political events with the moral compunction of the inner life:

Here, though the bombs are real and dangerous,
And Italy and King's are far away,
And we're afraid that you will speak to us,
You promise still the inner life shall pay. (11)

As Tony Sharpe points out, 'In Time of War' involves a learning process in which 'privileged insulation falls away in a revelation that is simultaneously of personal vulnerability and personal responsibility'.⁹ The journey is, itself, a dominant metaphor in the book, and the ship is a microcosm of class society complacently going about its business: 'It is our culture that with such calm progresses / Over the barren plains of a sea'. The alexandrine line of 'The Ship' effectively conveys Auden's far-reaching vision and sense of journeying into the unknown, while also bringing the sonnet to an unnerving close: 'no one guesses / Who will be most ashamed, who richer, and who dead' (20).

'In Time of War' has been praised as 'Auden's most profound and audacious poem of the 1930s'.¹⁰ As well as bringing to the course of human history a

comprehensive analysis and a depth of moral understanding, the sequence employs the sonnet form in radically new and inventive ways. Stan Smith has shown how Auden skilfully turns the conventions of the love sonnet inside-out, ‘evacuating the personal’ and using it instead ‘as a vehicle for an objective history of the species’. The opening twelve sonnets function not as an anodyne survey of human development and representative human types, but as a trenchant critique of prevailing political systems and values: ‘By taking the personalized, self-regarding lover of the sonnet sequence, and dispersing him into the multitude of collective subjects who make a history, Auden deconstructs the political and literary traditions of bourgeois individualism’.¹¹ The sequence traces three broad epochs of political disappointment and failure, from the end of the Roman Empire, through medieval Christianity, to the modern machine age. The sonnets open, however, with the dawning of creation and the capacity for choice that distinguishes mankind from other living organisms. ‘Fish swam as fish, peach settled into peach’, but ‘finally there came a childish creature’ whose versatility and adaptability are traits of weakness as well as power: ‘Who by the lightest wind was changed and shaken, / And looked for truth and was continually mistaken’ (259).

The tight containment of individual sonnets, combined with the progression of the sequence, is perfectly suited to Auden’s ambitious condensation of human history. We move through whole epochs of learning and advancement, from the development of agriculture to the monastic tradition, and on towards industrialisation and urbanisation, but with each stage of development there are troubling complexities and uncertainties within the human subject. Sonnet VIII is a brilliant synoptic rendering of the growth of cities, the measurement of time, the documentation of learning and culture, and the regulation of money and credit. With the great human achievements of the Enlightenment, however, come contradictions that steadily undermine the ideal of equality, inducing a condition of alienation and disenchantment:

He turned his field into a meeting-place,
And grew the tolerant ironic eye,
And formed the mobile money-changer’s face,
And found the notion of equality.

And strangers were as brothers to his clocks,
And with his spires he made a human sky;

Museums stored his learning like a box,
And paper watched his money like a spy.

It grew so fast his life was overgrown,
And he forgot what once it had been made for,
And gathered into crowds and was alone,

And lived expensively and did without,
And could not find the earth which he had paid for,
Nor feel the love that he knew all about. (266)

The plain diction, the simple past tense, the repeated anaphoric conjunctions, and the almost comic, childlike rhymes (clocks / box, made for / paid for), all make for what looks initially like a straightforward allegory of human progress. Throughout the sequence, however, any notion of advancement and learning is subtly undermined by a corrosive, ironic awareness of a corresponding human diminishment and ignorance. Beneath the apparently simple, allegorical narrative are moral and psychological depths and complexities: the loneliness of the crowd, the lost sense of value, the disturbing disjunction of thought and feeling.

If Shakespeare provides the model and inspiration for Auden's early love sonnets, it is Rainer Maria Rilke who stands imposingly behind the sonnets in *Journey to a War*. Rilke's obliquity and comprehensiveness, his simultaneous looking back and looking forward, and his enquiries into the nature of being in a time of war leave a strong imprint on Auden's sequence. Sonnet XXIII pays tribute to Rilke, acknowledging his completion of the *Duino Elegies* at Château de Muzot after the First World War. Rilke's patient waiting is structurally embodied in the sonnet's syntactical interruption between octave and sestet:

To-night in China let me think of one,

Who through ten years of silence worked and waited,
Until in Muzot all his powers spoke,
And everything was given once for all... (281)

In the 1936 edition of Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus*, which Auden read and absorbed, J.B. Leishman notes astutely that 'no other writer gives us such thrilling intimations of that inheritance on whose threshold we are standing, and which our civilisation may be about to enter, if it does not perish through its own destructive forces'.¹² Sonnet XIII of 'In Time of War' clearly echoes the opening of Rilke's Sonnet 7 ('Rühmen, das ist!'), with its determination to carry on singing in the face of history: 'Certainly praise: let the song mount again and again / For life as it blossoms out in a jar or a face'. Against this reassurance of lyric plenitude, the sestet reminds us that 'History opposes its grief to our buoyant song'. This mid-point sonnet sets the celebration of human happiness against 'the morning's injured weeping' and prepares us for the 'here' and 'now' of the sonnets that follow (271).

Sonnet XIV is alarming in its immediate declaration of the certainty of suffering and the reality of pain. The searchlights in the night-time sky are both a metaphorical exposure of repression and a frightening illumination of Japanese pilots involved in the aerial bombardment of China:

Yes, we are going to suffer, now; the sky
Throbs like a feverish forehead; pain is real;
The groping searchlights suddenly reveal
The little natures that will make us cry... (272)

The poetic voice here tends towards the sardonic while keeping open an attitude of pity towards the deluded and the complacent, as well as the more obvious victims of abusive power. Sonnet XV is similarly disarming in its tonal complexity, ironically linking the Japanese pilots with the privileged bourgeoisie: 'Engines bear them through the sky: they're free / And isolated like the very rich' (273). The main function of the sonnet, however, is to remind us of the helplessness of the poor, and to reassert the preoccupation of the sequence with the unending conflict between choice and necessity. Echoing the title of Louis MacNeice's 1938 collection of poems, *The Earth Compels*, Sonnets XIV and XV suggest, to the contrary, that the earth might well be at the mercy of 'The intelligent and evil'. In the case of the Japanese pilots, 'They chose a fate / The islands where they live did not compel' (273).

Even when appearing to meditate on abstract ideas, Auden's sonnets are powerfully concentrated on actual events and situations in China. Sonnet XVII notes how suffering displaces all other considerations, isolating the injured in their pain, but

it also draws upon details of the visit that Auden and Isherwood made to a military hospital in Shang-kui: 'They are and suffer; that is all they do: / A bandage hides the place where each is living' (275). At the same time, the theatre of war is not confined to China, and as the sequence progresses it turns its gaze simultaneously on East and West. As Auden and Isherwood journeyed to a war in the early months of 1938, they received reports from Europe that Franco's forces had retaken Teruel from the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War, and that Hitler's troops had marched into Austria. Sonnet XVI, probably the most frequently quoted sonnet in the sequence, begins by directing its attention to the wartime exigencies of 'here', but closes with a compelling recognition of evil in other places. The opening simile – 'Here war is simple like a monument' – belies its own obviousness, since starkness and memorialising are both implied in the monument, but do not necessarily cohere in a single attitude (274). Indeed, the symbols and ideas of war are at some distance from its reality throughout the sonnet. The sestet serves to close the gap between abstraction and actuality, asserting that some ideas are true and presumably worth dying for: 'But ideas can be true although men die'. In the same spirit, it now gives an urgent immediacy to those 'Flags on a map' that had previously seemed the remote and concealing signifiers of a war going on:

And maps can really point to places
Where life is evil now:
Nanking; Dachau.

In a sequence in which concluding rhymed couplets are generally eschewed, the insistence on contemporary coincidences of geography and politics is all the more striking. The curtailment of the sonnet in a final line of just four syllables is a technique borrowed from Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus*, but here Auden achieves both a premonitory abbreviation and a steady focusing of attention over the tercet, unambiguously acknowledging *world* war in the linking of the Nanking massacre and the Nazi concentration camps. John Fuller notes how the contraction acts as both a stifling of emotion and a powerful memorial: 'The effect is at once choked and funereal...The silence is pregnant. Yet the short line itself acts musically, tolling like a bell'.¹³

Having returned to England in the summer of 1938, Auden completed 'In Time of War' and the 'Verse Commentary' that accompanies it in *Journey to a War*,

and then spent part of the winter (December 1938 to January 1939) in Brussels, where he embarked on a new series of sonnets reflecting on the motives of art and the ethical and political responsibilities of the poet. 'Brussels in Winter', in which the stranger coldly contemplates the modern city, serves as a prelude to these musings:

Wandering the cold streets tangled like old string,
Coming on fountains silent in the frost,
The city still escapes you; it has lost
The qualities that say 'I am a Thing.'

Only the homeless and the really humbled
Seem to be sure exactly where they are,
And in their misery are all assembled;
The winter holds them like the Opera.

Ridges of rich apartments rise to-night
Where isolated windows glow like farms,
A phrase goes packed with meaning like a van,

A look contains the history of a man,
And fifty francs will earn the stranger right
To warm the heartless city in his arms.¹⁴

The sonnet is 'a threnody of urban desolation', but in its search for the heart in a heartless world it also probes the fundamental conflicts in Auden's imagination, between private and public morality, and between the individual conscience and civic responsibility.¹⁵ The octave and the sestet invert the typical associations of rich and poor, giving the homeless a sense of sureness and togetherness in the incongruous simile of the opera house, while (in a similarly incongruous simile) the hierarchy associated with 'rising' apartments is undermined by the association with farms. The sexual suggestiveness of 'A phrase' and 'A look' is confirmed in the final line of the sonnet, effectively linking the rich apartments with prostitution and revealing the cold city to be a place where love is a debased financial transaction. The role of the stranger is an ambivalent one, with the closing lines suggesting a wish for some more fulfilling and sustaining relationship.

The idea that art might begin in deprivation and assume the role of transforming what is broken and incomplete informs the sonnets for Arthur Rimbaud, A.E. Housman, and Edward Lear. ‘Rimbaud’ begins with the troubled child’s exposure to ‘The nights, the railway-arches, the bad sky’, and asserts that ‘the cold had made a poet’ (181). Housman, too, is presented as a writer hurt into poetry by circumstance: ‘Heart-injured in North London, he became / The leading classic of his generation’. With a distinctly unromantic view of poetic inspiration, Auden peers into the murky and obscure psychological origins of creativity, finding in Housman’s verse a volatile mix of emotional repression and socio-economic distinctions: ‘his private lust / Something to do with violence and the poor’. The sonnet form allows Auden to conduct an intense case study of each poet, and also to hold in tension the strange oppositions that governed them. If Rimbaud’s dream of a new self necessitates his eventual estrangement from poetry, Housman’s struggle with feeling manifests itself in a ‘dry-as-dust’ pedantry (182). It seems likely that the two sonnets titled ‘The Novelist’ and ‘The Composer’ were written to counter and relieve the bleak psychological theorising of art in the Rimbaud and Housman poems, and that the unnamed exemplary artists that Auden had in mind were his friends, Christopher Isherwood and Benjamin Britten. The poet has much to learn from the novelist and the composer, both of whom exercise a Christ-like humility in facing the world’s hurt, with one having to ‘suffer dully all the wrongs of Man’ and the other prepared to pour out ‘forgiveness like a wine’ (180-81). Mendelson thoughtfully connects these sonnets to Brussels by suggesting that in Auden’s mind ‘An artist’s conciliation with his gift corresponded to a citizen’s concern for his city.’¹⁶ The sonnet for Edward Lear presents a poet and artist who is reconciled with his tears and guided by them to produce a comic art. The final, isolated line of the sonnet depicts the fearful, isolated voyager now become the settling place for other travellers: ‘And children swarmed to him like settlers. He became a land’ (183).

It was in Brussels that Auden wandered into the Musée Royaux des Beaux Arts and, having viewed the paintings of Breughel, was inspired to write not only one of his greatest short poems but his boldest experiment with the sonnet form. ‘Musée des Beaux Arts’ extends the act of witness that Auden had begun in China, where war’s collateral and haphazard injuries frequently went unnoticed and unremarked:

About suffering they were never wrong,

The Old Masters: how well they understood

Its human position; how it takes place

While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully
along...

The inverted word order of the opening line makes absolutely clear at one level what the poem is 'about', but as John Fuller points out, there is 'a rich double meaning' in the opening word, subtly implying that it might well be Breughel's 'very circuitousness of approach...that Auden is interested in.'¹⁷The popular title of the painting, 'Landscape with the Fall of Icarus', spells out its apparent message by relegating the astonishing sight of 'a boy falling out of the sky' to some marginal space and foregrounding the landscape itself instead. The poem is more speculative about the seeming unconcern of the workaday world in its response to disaster, assuming that the ploughman 'may / Have heard the splash' and conjecturing that 'the expensive delicate ship...must have seen / Something amazing', but it nevertheless works towards a concluding image of life going 'calmly on' (179). The ramifications of what the poem is 'about', however, are complex and wide-ranging, and extend well beyond the ethical 'human position' or perspective on suffering to questions that have to do with the seemingly callous but necessary detachment of art and poetry. They also extend beyond what the conventional sonnet of fourteen lines might be expected to contain.

'Musée des Beaux Arts' is an extended sonnet of twenty-one lines. Although it contains half as many lines again as the conventional sonnet, it organises these in verse sections of 13+8, rather than 14+7 (a sonnet and a half) or 12+9 (in proportion to the usual octave-sestet division). Even so, it clearly acknowledges the function of the conventional sonnet turn, and it does so precisely at that moment when it notes, 'In Breughel's *Icarus*, for instance: how everything turns away / Quite leisurely from the disaster'. The rhyme scheme, which appears quite casual and even erratic, steadfastly refuses to follow the quatrain patterns of the Shakespearean sonnet, even though it superficially resembles them: *abcadedbfgfge //hhijkkij*. The centrally positioned 'e' rhyme both holds together the meandering lines of the opening verse and phonetically anticipates the closely related 'h' and 'i' rhymes, with 'tree' gently leading on to 'away', 'may', and 'cry' (179). The casual gait of lines 3-4, with the enjambment adding to the impression of dalliance, is altogether fitting in a poem in which 'life's tendency to overspill art's containment' is a serious consideration.¹⁸

After 'Musée des Beaux Arts', Auden's most radical and ambitious experiments with the sonnet form are to be found in his sequence, 'The Quest', first published in *The New Republic* in November 1940, with a helpful prefatory note: 'The theme of the quest occurs in fairy tales, legends like the Golden Fleece and the Holy Grail, boys' adventure stories and detective novels. These poems are reflections upon certain features common to them all.'¹⁹ Auden's interest in quest literature can be detected at a very early stage in his career, as far back as the 1928 sonnet, 'The Secret Agent'. What makes 'The Quest' distinctive in its handling of the archetypal journey towards truth and knowledge is its unnerving combination of teasing playfulness and dark surrealist fantasy. The trials, tribulations, and transformations of the sequence conjure up *Alice in Wonderland* as if written by Franz Kafka, as Herbert Greenberg shrewdly notes.²⁰ Auden's abiding interest in Freudian and Jungian notions of psychic integration are now complemented by a renewed commitment to Christian ideals of faith and salvation, and by a strong attraction to existentialist ideas of authentic being and selfhood. Among the influences shaping Auden's conception of the quest are Charles Williams's history of Christian spirituality in *The Descent of the Dove* (1939) and Søren Kierkegaard's memorable image of the lonely walker in the dark in his *Journals* (first English edition, 1938).

The twenty sonnets in 'The Quest' chart the individual pursuit of psychic integration and wholeness, acknowledging the obstacles presented by illusion, temptation, and presumptuousness. As Mendelson points out, Auden modeled the poem on his earlier sonnet sequence, 'In Time of War', but also devised it as a corrective. 'In Time of War' depicts psychological or political types that persist across centuries, but 'The Quest' is more obviously concerned with individuals and groups ('he' and 'they') facing difficult existential choices, and might therefore be regarded as 'a set of parables about consciousness and decision'.²¹ The cryptic, riddling qualities of the sequence are more pronounced when the sonnets are simply arranged by number, without the titles assigned them in 1940, and Auden was compelled to make some local revisions. The opening sonnet, originally titled 'The Door', is an obvious case in point. In the 1945 edition of *The Collected Poetry of W.H. Auden*, the opening line of 'The Door' declares: 'Out of it steps the future of the poor, / Enigmas, executioners and rules'.²² Later, Auden neatly amended the line, effacing any distinction between the speaker and 'the poor' while clarifying the central image of the now unnamed poem: 'Out of it steps our future, through this door

/ Enigmas, executioners and rules' (285). From the outset, Auden experiments with the resources of the sonnet, finding freedom within discipline as he earnestly plays with different arrangements of rhyme, line length, stanzaic patterning, and metre. As John Adames shows in his illuminating account of Auden's sonnet variations, 'The elasticity of the sonnet allows him to journey to the furthest edge of our epistemological frontiers without collapsing into nihilism and chaos.'²³

Sonnet III, originally titled 'Crossroads', has twenty-one lines, but it differs from 'Musée des Beaux Arts' in its 6+6+9 arrangement, which subtly retains the bipartite ratio of the Italian sonnet through its rhyme scheme: *aabcbcddecec / fghifgigh*. The sonnet considers 'quays and crossroads' as 'places of decision and farewell', traditionally associated with uncertainty as well as dispersal. It invokes the Christian instruction that 'salvation' (later amended to 'vocation') is earned through a period of suffering (figured in the archetypal 'Bad Lands'), but it also playfully questions the formulaic 'one year and a day' employed in nursery rhymes (Edward Lear's 'The Owl and the Pussycat') and Arthurian legend (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*). In this respect, a thematic concern with the duration of the journey is fittingly recorded in the extended sonnet form (286). Other sonnets (Sonnet 15, 'The Lucky' and Sonnet 19, 'The Waters') employ a 6+6+2 arrangement, which allows Auden to evade the impression of logical progression associated with the three quatrains and closing couplet of the Shakespearean sonnet and instead 'immerse the reader in a series of oblique and riddling circumstances'.²⁴ Sonnet XIX, originally titled 'The Waters', is highly effective in its formal variations, with its brisk iambic tetrameter conveying the ease with which 'Poet, oracle and wit' are all led astray while fishing for truth in the waters of knowledge and perception (295). The poem reverts to a decasyllabic line at the end, but the closing couplet (despite its intimations of Humpty Dumpty) is provocatively enigmatic rather than epigrammatic: 'The waters long to hear our question put / Which would release their longed-for answer, but.' The closing sonnet, originally 'The Garden', moves towards a final sense of completion and transformation – 'All journeys die here; wish and weight are lifted' – but this ultimate state of innocence and freedom is attainable only through what Auden sees as a surrendering of the will, a shifting of 'the centre of volition' (296), and an acceptance of the difficult existential terrain of modern civilisation.

Philip Larkin and Elizabeth Jennings

Among the poets strongly influenced by Auden's impressive command of the sonnet form were Philip Larkin and Elizabeth Jennings. Although Larkin published very few sonnets in his mature collections of poetry, just two in *The Less Deceived* (1955) and two in *High Windows* (1974), he wrote over thirty sonnets in the late 1930s and early 1940s, five of which appeared in *The North Ship* (1945). Auden's dramatization of moral choices, his metaphors of navigation, and his mounting sense of urgency in *Journey to a War* had a profound shaping effect on the young Larkin's own adventurous sonnets 'in time of war'. One of the earliest of these, 'Ultimatum', was published in *The Listener* in December 1940, and included by Larkin in a tentative collection of his own *Further Poems* ('Nine poems of depression and dismay'), with the pleased remark, 'Nicely obscure'.²⁵ Following Auden's example in Sonnet XIX of *In Time of War* ('But in the evening the oppression lifted'), 'Ultimatum' opens abruptly with a conjunction: 'But we must build our walls, for what we are / Necessitates it, and we must construct / The ship to navigate behind them, there.' As Richard Bradford notes, the poem 'reads like a thesaurus of Auden's phrasings and metrical orchestrations'.²⁶ At the same time, Larkin's sonnet shows considerable technical skill and originality, opting for a 7 + 3 + 4 division, rhyming *ababcde ded ffgg*. The three closing couplets are handled subtly and adroitly, with enjambement and simple half rhymes (Peace/pass, boy/ by, now/no) keeping the movement of the verse confidently under control. 'Observation', another Audenesque sonnet whose title (like that of 'Ultimatum') has both private and militaristic connotations, was published in the *Oxford University Labour Club Bulletin* in November 1941. The sonnet registers the extent to which war necessitates a mask, insisting on a brave face, but also the way in which it conditions basic emotional responses ('Range-finding laughter, and ambush of tears'). Like 'Ultimatum', it is 'nicely obscure', though its exposure of 'a government of medalled fears' and its closing assertion that 'nothing can be found for poor men's fires' no doubt appealed to Larkin's Labour Club acquaintances. (105).

Auden's technique of conducting an impersonal, almost clinical, inspection of the anonymous subject can be seen at work in 'Two Sonnets', composed by Larkin in the first few months of the Second World War. The paired sonnets present a troubled 'he' – both self and other – in a dialectical exploration of the mental landscapes of 'The Conscript' and 'The Conscientious Objector'. Larkin wrote to his friend James Sutton in April 1941, admitting his 'fatal gift for pastiche...odd phrases just like

Auden', and noting that the first of these sonnets 'shows how well I assimilated Auden's sonnet style'. The opening line, 'So he evolved a saving fiction as / The moving world abraded him' (157), recalls the opening sonnet of Auden's 'In Time of War': 'So from the years the gifts were showered'.²⁷ Once again, Larkin employs an ambitious run of three closing couplets (*eefgg*). The second poem is a conventional Petrarchan sonnet (*abbacddc//efegfg*), but its rhymes are playful and ambitious, with the balanced disyllabic rhyme of 'revolve' and 'resolve' in the octave contrasting with the uneven syllabification of 'nights' and 'stalactites' in the sestet (157). Both sonnets, however, dramatise the private, individual consciousness within a wartime context where public, collective ideals prevail. The troubled figure of the conscript reappears in a slightly later sonnet, 'Conscript', dedicated to Sutton. The form is Shakespearean (typographically presented as 3+3+3+2), but the oblique allegorical circumstances in which the conscript is abstracted from 'The details of his own defeat and murder' clearly derive from Auden (7). Archie Burnett, the editor of Larkin's *Complete Poems*, helpfully notes, among the debts to Auden, 'the mystery-laden narrative set in the past, the vague identities preserved by pronouns ("he", "they"), and the matter-of-fact reporting of portentous events.'²⁸

The full extent of Auden's influence on Larkin's early sonnets can be seen in those poems that move beyond the immediate wartime context to consider individual psychology, probing both the Freudian unconscious and the shaping effects of religion, education, culture, and politics. Larkin was clearly pleased with the sonnet beginning 'Having grown up in shade of Church and State', stating with ironic self-regard, 'It is one of the few perfect sonnets I have ever come across'.²⁹ In reality, he was a severe and exacting critic of his own work, claiming in a later draft foreword to an unpublished collection that 'almost any single line by Auden would be worth more than the whole lot put together'.³⁰ Even so, there are startling glimpses of Larkin's own distinctive preoccupation with failure and remorse in another early sonnet, written as an undergraduate student at Oxford in 1940:

Nothing significant was really said,
Though all agreed the talk superb, and that
The brilliant freshman with his subtle thought
Deserved the praise he won from every side.
All but one declared his future great,
His present sure and happy; they that stayed

Behind, among the ashes, were all stirred
By memory of his words, as sharp as grit.

The one had watched the talk: remembered how
He'd found the genius crying when alone;
Recalled his words: 'O what unlucky streak
Twisting inside me, made me break the line?
What was the rock my gliding childhood struck,
And what bright unreal path has led me here?' (178)

As Stan Smith notes in his excellent analysis of this sonnet, 'nothing' is 'an unusual, but quintessentially Larkinesque word with which to start a poem', but Auden had already done this in Sonnet XXV of 'In Time of War': 'Nothing is given: we must find our law... / We have no destiny assigned us.'³¹ Larkin seems to have been especially drawn to Auden's insistence on distinguishing 'conventional assumptions of self and role from the existential aloneness of the exceptional individual'. Smith shows convincingly how the poem's movement from glittering success to miserable failure draws on techniques that were well established in Auden's work, including 'the rhetorical questions and reversals, often in a second, internally distanced voice within the poem's main discourse', and 'the exclamatory "O" with which the direct reported speech breaks into the narrative'.³² The turn in the sonnet coincides with a shift of perspective from 'all' and 'they' to the single 'one' who voices his dissenting opinion, and then to the tormented complaint of the 'brilliant' speaker himself. Larkin was to perfect these shifts of perspective superbly well in poems like 'Mr Bleaney' and 'The Old Fools', and the skilful parhyme (which looks back through Auden to Wilfred Owen) was also to become a marked feature in his later style. Most revealing, perhaps, in terms of Larkin's characteristic deflation of illusionary ideals and his fondness for negative prefixes is the startling image of the 'bright unreal path'.

Larkin's earliest known sonnet, 'Winter Nocturne', written in 1938, is reminiscent of eighteenth-century pastoral poetry in its evocative, atmospheric details of dusk, wind, and rain, and probably derives (as its closing line suggests) from Thomas Gray's 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard': 'Dark night creeps in, and leaves the world alone' (99). The title, however, suggests more modern influences,

and might well have been prompted by T.S. Eliot's fondness for musical titles such as 'Preludes' and 'Rhapsody on a Winter Night'. Eliot is unmistakably present in the 1939 sonnet, 'Street Lamps', which draws its desolate urban setting and its strange personification of street lamps from the poems already alluded to, but also borrows its evening sky and slinking animal from 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock':

When night slinks, like a puma, down the sky,
And the bare, windy streets echo with silence,
Street lamps come out, and lean at corners, awry,
Casting black shadows, oblique and intense;
So they burn on, impersonal through the night,
Hearing the hours slowly topple past
Like cold drops from a glistening stalactite,
Until grey planes splinter the gloom at last;
Then they go out.

I think I noticed once
– 'Twas morning – one sole street lamp still bright-lit,
Which, with a senile grin, like an old dunce,
Vied the blue sky, and tried to rival it;
And, leering pallid though its use was done,
Tried to cast shadows contrary to the sun. (100)

The Shakespearean sonnet form is cleverly concealed by the typographical layout of the poem and its fractured ninth line, aptly coinciding with the burning out of the street lamps. The turn accordingly announces the arrival of morning and introduces the speaker (a descendant of the arch, observant aesthetes who inhabit the poems of Baudelaire and Laforgue). If the sonnet looks back to French symbolism through the poems of Eliot, it also has more than a touch of surrealist fantasy about it. Larkin was clearly determined, as he was with his borrowings from Auden, to move beyond pastiche, and there is a knowing, ironic intelligence that tilts the sonnet towards parody. 'Eliotian but amusing' was how Larkin described another experimental poem written around this time.³³ The strong presence of Eliot is all the more surprising, given the emphatic dislike of modernism and 'foreign' literature that Larkin declared in essays and interviews later in his career.

Throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s, Larkin composed a number of sonnets, including 'Neurotics', 'To Failure', and 'To My Wife', exploring those themes that would later become his hallmark: vision and perspective, illusory or confounded choices, regret and remorse, the disappointment of desire, and the jealously guarded autonomy of the writer/artist. Auden and Eliot continue to be immensely fertile influences, but the direction in which Larkin's mature work would go is clearly evident in 'Spring', included in *The Less Deceived* (1955). Written in 1950, and originally titled 'Spring and bachelors', the sonnet is a vivid re-working of a traditional Romantic poetic subject – the seasons: 'Green-shadowed people sit, or walk in rings, / Their children finger the awakened grass.' The green shadows perhaps derive from Virginia Woolf's novel *The Waves*, but people walking in rings recalls *The Waste Land*, and there is further evidence of Eliot's impact in the speaker's Prufrockian caricature of himself amidst abundant and sensuous new life, 'Threading my pursed-up way across the park, / An indigestible sterility.' The empirical, agnostic individual who inhabits 'Church Going' is present here, insisting that distance and difference from the popular celebration of spring and all its suggestions of rebirth and regeneration brings a compensating clarity of vision: 'And those she has least use for see her best' (40). The achievement of 'Spring', however, is that it uses the dialectical possibilities inherent in the sonnet form to hold in tension two different and divided viewpoints: those of the romantic idealist and the pragmatic materialist. As James Booth notes, the sonnet opens with a Shakespearean octave (*abab cdcd*), but forestalls any neat closure by pre-empting the closing couplet in the sestet, which rhymes *effgeg*.³⁴

'Whatever Happened?', written slightly later than 'Spring', explores a subject that clearly interested Larkin, and one that has never been fully explicated in critical studies of his work: the nature of psychological repression. As Larkin put it in a letter to Patsy Strang in November 1953: 'it treats of the way in which the mind gets to work on any violent involuntary experience & transforms it out of all knowledge'.³⁵ The use of the shipping metaphor to suggest a psychological journey recalls Auden's sonnet sequence 'In Time of War', but Larkin's sexual suggestiveness has a distinctively comic, ribald quality: 'Panting...With trousers ripped...We toss for half the night...What can't be printed...Such coastal bedding'. What is also distinctively Larkin's own is the seriousness with which he addresses the ambivalent idea, at the centre of the poem, that 'Perspective brings significance'. As

with ‘Lines on a Young Lady’s Photograph Album’, the poem recognises photography as an art that is both faithful and disappointing in its perspectives. Here, photography is equated with an attitude of detachment and disengagement: ‘All’s kodak-distant’. In the realm of psychology, however, this remoteness amounts to an unhealthy repression that finds its violent release in dreams. The poem pursues its psychological investigation through successive stages of detachment represented in four tercets and a closing couplet –*aba bcb cdc ded ee*– constituting a *terza rima* sonnet reminiscent of Robert Frost’s ‘Acquainted with the Night’. Provoking an effective shift of perspective at the very end, the couplet tends towards a relaxed, common sense view of ‘whatever happened’, only to re-introduce a note of terror in a casual, parenthetical aside: ‘Curses? The dark? Struggling? Where’s the source / Of these yarns now (except in nightmares, of course)?’ (34).

The sonnet form lent itself especially well to Larkin’s intense explorations of loneliness and isolation. ‘Friday Night in the Royal Station Hotel’ and ‘The Card-Players’, both published in *High Windows* in 1974, are concerned at an elemental level with existential notions of survival, though they inhabit strikingly different imaginative worlds. Both are studies in mood: one pensive and melancholic, the other buoyant and zestful. ‘Friday Night in the Royal Station Hotel’ was written in 1966 and first published in a provincial English newspaper. Larkin was casually dismissive: ‘I had a sonnet in the *Sheffield Morning Telegraph* last Saturday, which is how some people *start*, I suppose’.³⁶ Although allegedly based on an actual hotel, The Royal Station Hotel in Hull, the sonnet is notable for its strangely abstract treatment of loneliness and silence at the end of a working week. Every detail works towards the larger, generalised condition of emptiness. The precise observation that chairs are ‘coloured differently’ only seems to reinforce the fact that they are ‘empty’, just as the initially inviting ‘open doors’ lead on to ‘A larger loneliness of knives and glass’, with the particular detail of the unused dining utensils adding poignancy and tangibility to the deserted scene. The physical furnishings of the hotel are themselves emblematic of the general condition: silence is ‘laid like carpet’, and corridors are ‘shoeless’ (without shoes to be polished, but also without the sound of footsteps). Larkin subtly intimates the poem’s preoccupation with duration in its 9+5 typographical arrangement. The poem spills over the usual octave boundary as ‘Hours pass’, and enacts a turn ‘as lights burn’ and ‘*Night comes on*’. The italicised words with which the poem closes, initiated by ‘*Now*’, are a typographical representation of

the act of 'writing home', itself an existential response to the predicament of loneliness amidst the engulfing darkness (80-1).

'The Card-Players' is a work of comic grotesquerie, as the allegorical names and strongly physical actions in the poem attest: 'Jan van Hogspeuw staggers to the door / And pisses at the dark.' At the same time, it has an underlying existential seriousness in its depiction of coarse humanity contending with the storm. Larkin was attracted to the subject of the card-players (a popular image of fortune and destiny in Dutch and Flemish genre painting of the seventeenth century) as early as 1965, but initially considered 'poems about works of art' to be illicit. His letters reveal that the Flemish painter he especially admired was Adriaen Brouwer (1605-38). The poem alludes to paintings such as 'Scene at the Inn' and 'Peasants Smoking and Drinking', as well as 'The Card Players'.³⁷ The fundamental contrast of inner and outer scenes is suggested in a letter to Monica Jones in May 1965: 'One man is flat out on the floor, having spewed (dogs are licking it up), another is pissing out of the back door. The candlelight shows patched clothes, broken cupboards: outside is mud, wind, winter. *But you are all right*' (original emphasis).³⁸ Larkin's not so clean, well-lighted place offers temporary respite from history and a dark, directionless present ('Wet century-wide trees / Clash in surrounding starlessness above / This lamplit cave'), recalling Louis MacNeice's 'firelit cave equipped with drinks and books' in *Autumn Sequel*. As Roger Day notes, the poem is 'somewhat unexpectedly, a sonnet rhyming *abbacddcefeeggf*', but with 'one final, isolated line' offering a near rhyme on 'trees' and 'peace'.³⁹ It wilfully subverts the amatory associations of the Petrarchan sonnet by having the *volta* coincide with the moment when someone 'croaks scraps of songs / Towards the ham-hung rafters about love'. In the penultimate line, Jan van Hogspeuw 'Gobs at the grate, and hits the queen of hearts'. The closing isolated line is an exuberant declaration of resistance *against* isolation, reminiscent of the exclamatory cries of French symbolist poetry: 'Rain, wind and fire! The secret, bestial peace!' (84).

Having been a prolific writer of sonnets in the war years, Larkin used the form sparingly in his later work. The waning influence of Auden partly explains this, but very likely the aspiring novelist in Larkin demanded a more expansive, narrative method, as with 'Church Going', 'The Whitsun Weddings', and 'To the Sea'. At the same time, the sonnets have an important function in providing Larkin with moments of intense concentration and clarification at critical stages in his career. For Elizabeth

Jennings, however, the sonnet was a vital and necessary form that she went on using throughout her long career. Although closely associated with Larkin and the Movement poets in the 1950s and 1960s, largely by virtue of her commitment to traditional verse forms and a clear, well-ordered syntax, Jennings was always a distinctive individualist. The diverse imaginative geographies of her early poetry (much of it written in Italy) defy the commonplace critical notion that Movement poetry is narrowly English and provincial. Her poems of journeying are often subtle explorations of selfhood and self-knowledge, philosophical reflections on how we relate to the world and to others. 'A Sense of Place', first published in *A Way of Looking* (1955), is alert to the changing views afforded by perspective. An inverted sonnet, the poem is less a candid declaration of love than a clear-sighted recognition of how love conditions our vision and informs the way we see and appreciate a place:

Now we cannot hold a sense of place
Entirely by ourselves, we need to share,
Look round for hands to touch, for eyes to bear
Upon the same horizon that we love,
Until we cannot part the hands, the eyes
From the loved view and the close love we prize.

And when the eyes, the hands are are we accuse
The place, say the horizon is at fault,
Thinking it has withdrawn a glory we felt,
Finding in it not in ourselves the loss.
Yet when the sharer is with us again
And the whole landscape seems renewed, rebuilt,
Not mountains or the sun are what we praise
But his mood shared with us, his sense of place.⁴⁰

There is a structural logic in the division of sestet and octave, with the turn initiating the loss of a shared sense of place, before briefly restoring it with an understanding of what John Ruskin termed 'pathetic fallacy': a perception of landscape coloured by mood.⁴¹ The poem differs markedly from what we might expect of a conventional love sonnet. While openly acknowledging 'the loved view and the close love we prize', it addresses the implied lover in the third person with a judicious sense of

distance and disengagement. 'Place' and 'love' ought to rhyme, but 'place' is rhymed instead with 'prize' and 'praise', while 'love' finds only a forlorn phonetic similarity in 'loss'.

Jennings experiments with the sonnet form in translation, including *The Sonnets of Michelangelo* (1961) and versions of 'Evening Prayer' and 'The Sly One' by Rimbaud in *Lucidities* (1971). Once again, the wide European range of her interests puts the lie to charges of insularity associated with the Movement writers. Even so, the disappointment and loss anticipated in 'A Sense of Place' continue to pervade her work. 'A Sonnet', in *Relationships* (1972), is notable for its emotional candour: 'Run home all clichés, let the deep words come / However much they hurt and shock and bruise'. The earlier sonnet had dwelt upon the complex correlation of love and place, but now the view is one of utter darkness, dangerously close to cliché: 'Once the stars shone within a sky I knew. / Now only darkness is my sky, my view' (282). Recovery is found in the 'Sources of Light' sonnets in *Celebrations and Elegies* (1982), which shimmer with a devotional intensity reminiscent of Herbert, Vaughan, and Hopkins:

Gold, all shimmerings, and all excess
Of light, entrances most of us. We cry
At the world's dazzle when we're born but this
Only reveals how sensitive we lie

Under our first shafts of the sun. We grow
Into the well-worn gold, the reach of shine. (497)

In her later work, Jennings turns increasingly to music and painting in search of parallels to inform and extend her own creative endeavours. 'Tribute to Turner', in a volume simply titled 'Tributes' (1989), aptly explores within the sonnet form how 'bonds and limits' might 'keep off sprawl and chaos'. The poem marvels at the aesthetic satisfaction afforded by the sublime depiction of 'fire and flood and steam', compounding danger and delight in a neatly alliterative close: 'And what seems peril has the power to please' (552). Among the tributes is a poem of praise and lament for Philip Larkin, wondering if the silence of his later years was 'the quiet of desperation' (551). Larkin's presence is still there in a late sonnet in one of her final collections, *In the Meantime* (1996). 'Having it Both Ways' uses the dynamics of the octave and

sestet to set up an apparent freedom, 'What liberty we have when out of love', and then to question its adequacy, 'But how long can we live within this state?' Here, in the quick move from declaration to interrogation, Jennings shares with Larkin both a sceptical apprehension of the illusory freedoms we create and a compassionate understanding of our compulsion for contrary states of being: 'Don't we miss the slow encroachment of / Possessive passion? Don't we half-await / Its cruel enchantments which no longer have / Power over us? (737).

The study of the sonnet is, in the end, a study of poetry at its most intense. Sonnets, perhaps more than other forms of poetry, reflect on their own making and their own being. The writing of sonnets engenders new and different forms. Auden's sonnets written in China are an integral part of an experimental travelogue co-authored with Christopher Isherwood. The prolific sonnets written by Philip Larkin and Elizabeth Jennings as youthful aspiring poets can be seen to underpin the virtuosic handling of line and metre and rhythm in their later work. As we have seen, the sonnet is an intensely self-questioning artefact, continually alert to its own formal constraints and transgressions. If it declares its place in a long-evolving history of poetic form and takes its authority and sustenance from that, it also repeatedly demonstrates its own restless and inexhaustible inventiveness.

NOTES

¹ W. H. Auden, *Juvenilia: Poems 1922-1928*, ed. Katherine Bucknell (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 3.

² John Fuller, *W.H. Auden: A Commentary* (London: Faber, 1998), p. 15.

³ *The English Auden: Poems, Essays and Dramatic Writings 1927-39* (London: Faber, 1977).

⁴ William Shakespeare, *The Complete Sonnets and Poems*, ed. Colin Burrow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 487.

⁵ Auden, *Lectures on Shakespeare*, ed. Arthur Kirsch (London: Faber, 2000), p. 93.

⁶ Fuller, p. 264.

⁷ Fuller, p. 168.

⁸ W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood, *Journey to a War* (New York: Random House, 1939), p. 252. Page references are to this edition.

⁹ Tony Sharpe, *W.H. Auden* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 54.

¹⁰ Edward Mendelson, *Early Auden* (New York: Viking, 1981), p.348.

¹¹ Stan Smith, *W.H. Auden* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), pp. 109-10.

- ¹² J.B. Leishman (ed.), Introduction to Rainer Maria Rilke, *Sonnets to Orpheus* (London: Hogarth Press, 1936), pp. 11-12.
- ¹³ John Fuller, *The Sonnet* (London: Methuen, 1972), p. 35.
- ¹⁴ W.H. Auden, *Collected Poems*, ed. Edward Mendelson (London: Faber, 1991), p. 178. Further references are to this edition of the poems.
- ¹⁵ Mendelson, *Early Auden*, p. 362.
- ¹⁶ Mendelson, p. 361.
- ¹⁷ Fuller, *W. H. Auden: A Commentary*, p. 266.
- ¹⁸ Sharpe, p. 91.
- ¹⁹ Fuller, p. 336.
- ²⁰ Herbert Greenberg, *Quest for the Necessary: W. H. Auden and the Dilemma of Divided Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 111
- ²¹ Edward Mendelson, *Later Auden* (London: Faber, 1999), p. 135.
- ²² W.H. Auden, *The Collected Poetry of W. H. Auden* (New York: Random House, 1945), p. 251.
- ²³ John Adames, 'The Frontiers of the Psyche and the Limits of Form in Auden's "Quest" Sonnets', *Modern Language Review* 92 (1997), 574.
- ²⁴ Adames, p. 576.
- ²⁵ *Philip Larkin: The Complete Poems*, ed. Archie Burnett (London: Faber, 2012), pp. 103, 481.
- ²⁶ Richard Bradford, Cited in *Philip Larkin: The Complete Poems*, ed. Archie Burnett, p. 481.
- ²⁷ W.H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood, *Journey to a War*, p. 259.
- ²⁸ *Philip Larkin: The Complete Poems*, ed. Archie Burnett, p. 339.
- ²⁹ *Philip Larkin: The Complete Poems*, ed. Archie Burnett, pp. 171, 676.
- ³⁰ *Philip Larkin: The Complete Poems*, ed. Archie Burnett, p. 682.
- ³¹ Stan Smith, 'Something for Nothing: Late Larkins and Early', *English* 49: 195 (2000), 262.
- ³² Smith, p. 261
- ³³ *Philip Larkin: The Complete Poems*, ed. Archie Burnett, p. 514.
- ³⁴ James Booth, *Philip Larkin: The Poet's Plight* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 14.
- ³⁵ *Philip Larkin: The Complete Poems*, ed. Archie Burnett, p. 367.
- ³⁶ *Philip Larkin: The Complete Poems*, ed. Archie Burnett, p.451.
- ³⁷ *Philip Larkin: The Complete Poems*, ed. Archie Burnett, p. 457.
- ³⁸ *Philip Larkin: The Complete Poems*, ed. Archie Burnett, p. 456.
- ³⁹ Roger Day, "'That vast moth-eaten musical brocade": Larkin and Religion', *Critical Essays on Philip Larkin: The Poems*, ed. Linda Cookson and Bryan Loughrey (Harlow: Longman, 1989), pp. 100-01.
- ⁴⁰ Elizabeth Jennings, *The Collected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2012), p. 31. Further references are to this edition of the poems.
- ⁴¹ John Ruskin's essay on 'On Pathetic Fallacy' is Chapter XII in Volume III of *Modern Painters*. See *The Works of John Ruskin*, 39 vols (London: George Allen, 1903-12), Vol V, pp. 201-20.