

W. H. AUDEN

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*For the Time Being*

W. H. AUDEN: CRITICAL EDITIONS

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*For the Time Being*

*A Christmas Oratorio*

Edited by Alan Jacobs

W. H. AUDEN

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Time Being*

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A Christmas Oratorio

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EDITED BY

Alan Jacobs

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## PREFACE

In August of 1941, Constance Rosalie Bicknell Auden died in her sleep at her home in Birmingham, England, at the age of seventy-two. At the time her son W. H. Auden was living in the United States and visiting a friend in Rhode Island. The telephone call announcing her death was taken not by Auden himself but by his companion, Chester Kallman, who then came to Auden's bedroom and gave him the welcome news that they would not be attending a party that evening that Auden had been dreading. Then Kallman told him why they would be staying home.

Auden was stunned and grieved, and not only because he had been very close to his mother all his life. He was already in a state of emotional fragility, having learned just the month before that Kallman, whom he loved and to whom he considered himself married, had been having sex with other men and meant to continue the practice. Auden would later write, "When mother dies, one is, for the first time, really alone in the world and that is hard"; but that experience of isolation was surely made far more intense through its arriving in the midst of hopes already ruined. Some months after the crisis he told his friend James Stern, "I never really loved anyone before, and then when he got through the wall, he became so much a part of my life that I keep forgetting that he is a separate person, and having discovered love, I have also discovered what I never knew before, the dread of being abandoned and left alone."

These experiences were made still more complex for Auden by his recent return to the Christian faith in which he had been raised. His mother's attachment to High Church Anglicanism had shaped his early religious experience, and it was that form of Christian belief and

practice that Auden had embraced in the year or so preceding her death. In poems he wrote during this period, especially “In Sickness and in Health,” Auden clearly associated his transition from unbelief to belief with his transition from a sexual promiscuity focused on physical beauty to faithful marital love. The wedding ring he began to wear at some point in 1939—“this round O of faithfulness we swear”—testified simultaneously to his love for Kallman and to his belief in the God whom in another poem he called “the author and giver of all good things.”

In a Christmas verse letter to Kallman he wrote, “Because it is through you that God has chosen to show me my beatitude, / As this morning I think of the Godhead I think of you.” It is noteworthy that this letter was written in the Christmas season of 1941, *after* the revelation of Chester’s infidelity. Rather than allow the complex, mutually reinforcing interrelations among his love of his mother, his love of Chester, and his embrace of Christianity to unravel, Auden made the decision to renew and reinvigorate them, by an act of intellectual and poetic will. The chief public evidence of this decision is “For the Time Being: A Christmas Oratorio,” which he began writing about two months after his mother’s death. It would become the most explicitly Christian and biblical poem of his career; it includes a character based on himself—Joseph, the husband of Mary; and it is dedicated to the memory of Constance Rosalie Auden.

In preparing this edition I have been the beneficiary of much direct and indirect assistance. My most abundant thanks must go to Edward Mendelson, who, as he did when I was working on *The Age of Anxiety*, offered counsel, instruction, and photocopies of obscure documents. Among the other Auden scholars who have gone before me, my greatest debts are to John Fuller, Nicholas Jenkins, and Arthur Kirsch: they have laid the foundation for the annotations and explanations presented here. The staffs of the Manuscripts Division of the Princeton University Library, the Harvard University Archives, and especially the

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## INTRODUCTION

### THE POEM

Auden's arrival in America in January of 1939 inaugurated an era of remarkable productivity for him that would last throughout the Second World War. To some extent this was economically necessary: he had to write critical prose to make a living. But Auden was also in the process of reassessing his whole intellectual and poetic equipment, and this required an enormous amount of reading and, then, writing about what he read. The dozens of reviews that he produced during the war years are, taken collectively, the work of a man thinking through the largest of issues in the most thoroughgoing of ways. Auden wrote about politics, philosophy, psychoanalysis, art, erotic love, and marriage; and he wrote about most of these topics in theologically inflected language.

In his first two years in America he also produced many short poems and completed two major artistic projects. One was the libretto for *Paul Bunyan*, an operetta whose music was composed by Auden's friend Benjamin Britten. The second project was a long verse epistle, "New Year Letter," in which he strove to work through his recent reading and thinking, especially about art, politics, and human community. The poem explores theology only in its final lines and only by implication: when Auden wrote it, he had not yet committed himself to Christianity.

Auden and Britten had worked together in England on several projects, starting with the remarkable short film *Night Mail* (1936), a product of the General Post Office Film Unit. They had also collaborated on work for the Group Theatre in London, as Britten set texts Auden

had written in collaboration with Christopher Isherwood. Britten and his partner Peter Pears—a singer for whom Britten composed much music over the years—had come to New York soon after Auden, and for a time they all lived in the same house in Brooklyn Heights, so it was natural for them to continue their collaboration.

*Paul Bunyan* did not succeed, either artistically or commercially: it was first performed in 1941, more than a year after it was completed, and then only by a student group at Columbia University. Britten and Auden alike were working in idioms not fully natural to them, and Auden's attempt in his libretto to write a distinctively American English never wholly convinces and at times induces cringing. Yet he enjoyed working with Britten; moreover, the world of classical vocal music—especially high opera, to which Kallman had introduced him—had become a source of increasing fascination. It made sense, then, that when he considered another major artistic project, it would be a words-and-music work, but one that arose more directly from the ideas and concerns that were driving his self-transformation—and that had recently led him from the speculative meditations of “New Year Letter” to explicit religious commitment.

A few weeks after his mother's death Auden moved to Ann Arbor to begin a year of teaching at the University of Michigan. By October Auden was drafting an application for a Guggenheim Fellowship in which he proposed to write “a long poem in several parts about Christmas, suitable for becoming the basis of a text for a large-scale musical oratorio.” (Asked to identify the project's significance, he simply wrote, “There may still be much to be discovered about ways of combining language and music.”) If an operetta about Paul Bunyan written by two Englishmen had been a peculiar enterprise, a poem about Christmas might be thought even less promising: rescuing the validly sayable from a morass of sentimental associations and purely secular observances would be a difficult task indeed.

Yet Auden had come to believe that all the matters he was strenuously reassessing—art, community, erotic love, politics, psychology—

had been fundamentally altered by a single event: the entry of God into human history, what Christians call the Incarnation. The Christ child, as every character agrees in the poem he would write, changes everything. And that radical disruption of the world, and therefore of all the things human beings typically think about the world, needed to be accounted for. Auden set about that task.

Auden had always read widely, but late in 1939 he wrote to a friend, “I have never written nor read so much. For the first time I am leading a life which remotely approximates to the way I think I ought to live.” Much of this reading was theological, including his literary reading: he studied Blake and Dostoevsky for their theological insights, along with Augustine, Pascal, Kierkegaard, and many others. These inquiries would deeply inform “For the Time Being.”

Two themes dominated Auden’s theological reflections during the war years. The first was essentially private and personal: a recognition of what Martin Luther called “the bondage of the will,” the sinner’s simple helplessness to do what is right. As St. Paul puts it, in tortured syntax, “In me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do” (Romans 7:18–19). It was Kierkegaard who, in his characteristically paradoxical way, convinced Auden that this lamentable condition paves the way for the greatest of blessings, forgiveness—thus the title of the sermon that concludes *Either/Or*: “The Edifying in the Thought that Against God We Are Always in the Wrong.” This vision of sinners under universal judgment and wholly dependent on the mercy of God deeply appealed to Auden, and it turns up repeatedly in his poems in his first American years: “All will be judged,” he writes in “At the Grave of Henry James”; “Beloved, we are always in the wrong,” he writes in “In Sickness and in Health.” For some years the Kierkegaardian form of this Pauline insight provided the first principle of Auden’s theology, though eventually he would come to see the perils of overemphasizing it.

Auden's second chief theological theme during this period looked not at the inner life but at the public sphere, though it too centered on a paradox. An itinerant prophet named Jesus claimed to be the Messiah of Israel, but though he was not accepted as such by most Jews, the religion that centered on him became, within three hundred years, the official religion of the Roman Empire. Surely little could be stranger than an intersection of Jewish messianic expectation and *Romanitas*; yet that intersection became arguably the central event in the history of the Western world. The two books that primarily guided Auden in his attempts to come to terms with this event were *The Descent of the Dove* by Charles Williams (1939) and Charles Norris Cochrane's *Christianity and Classical Culture* (1940).

In 1956 Auden wrote, "I have been reading and rereading *The Descent of the Dove* for some sixteen years now and I find it a source of intellectual delight and spiritual nourishment which remains inexhaustible." (Williams himself, an editor with Oxford University Press in London whom Auden had first met while working on *The Oxford Book of Light Verse*, had a similarly powerful effect on him. He would write of their initial meeting, "For the first time in my life, I felt myself in the presence of personal sanctity.") Writing in 1956 Auden would single out for commendation Williams's "orthodoxy of . . . imagination" and his "ecumenical passion"—"Never was there a historian more courteous to all alike"—but when he first read the book, he seems to have been struck primarily by its political theology, its reading of the whole of history as complicit in a narrative of redemption. Williams gave *The Descent of the Dove* the subtitle *A Short History of the Holy Spirit in the Church*, and he conceives of history largely in terms of the movements of that Spirit through individual persons and through human institutions. He begins his book by invoking the upward movement of Christ's Ascension (Acts 1) and the subsequent downward movement of the Holy Spirit on the gathered disciples in Jerusalem (Acts 2), and throughout much of the rest of the book he emphasizes what he calls "co-inherence," the mutuality of Christian existence: "dying each oth-

er's life, living each other's death," as he puts it in one of his Arthurian poems. Williams's history is therefore dominated by a series of vertical transactions that give rise to a vast and complex network of horizontal ones. And all of those transactions are generated by the energies of divine Love.

The political consequences of this way of reading history are immense. Williams declares that "'The conversion of time by the Holy Ghost' is the title of the grand activity of the Church," and goes on to say that this conversion happens in public space, in a kind of tense negotiation between the Kingdom and the City. Jesus proclaimed the arrival of the Kingdom of God, or Kingdom of Heaven, in our midst; and the conclusion of the last book of the Bible, the Revelation to John, offers a vision of a Heavenly City, the New Jerusalem, as the proper home of humanity. But all this is articulated under Roman rule, in a world dominated by *that* city, thus creating profound tensions between what Augustine would later call, the City of God and the City of Man. Williams puts the problem in his usual paradoxical, teasing way: "The Kingdom—or, apocalyptically, the City—is the state into which Christendom is called; but, except in vision, she is not yet the City. The City is the state which the Church is to become."

In Williams's analysis, the conversion of the empire under Constantine inaugurates an era in which the relations between the Heavenly and Earthly cities are negotiated with some flexibility and charity; it is only much later, toward the end of the medieval period, the Church comes to strive for "a dominant culture, an achieved society"—that is, a society which believes that it already and now enters into its full inheritance, and therefore is justified in creating what Williams calls "the method of the imposition of belief." But this is destructive of the realization of the Kingdom of Heaven among living persons: "the practice of the Co-inherence seems to drive back more and more secretly into the hearts of the saints, who are few in any age."

This "imposition" produces, as an inevitable reaction, the Reformation, and the hope for a whole Christendom grows dimmer and

dimmer; only a few thinkers seem to have a clear vision of how it might be rescued, chief among them, Williams argues, Søren Kierkegaard (then a little-known figure in the English-speaking world). Though Williams covers the post-Reformation period far less thoroughly than he does earlier eras of Christendom, he gives Kierkegaard more attention than anyone except Augustine. This emphasis clearly caught Auden's attention, since he began reading Kierkegaard's *Journals* at about this time, in an Oxford University Press edition whose production had been overseen by Williams. Kierkegaard's insistence on the inevitably paradoxical character of the Christian message, especially in the modern age, and on the centrality of suffering to the Christian life, indicates for Williams the possible routes by which "the Order of the Co-inherence" might be restored—and with it, eventually, Christendom itself.

Auden read *The Descent of the Dove* in early 1940; it is likely that he encountered Cochrane's *Christianity and Classical Culture* a few months later. As writers and as personalities, Williams and Cochrane could scarcely be more different: Williams is eccentric, paradoxical, and mystical, while Cochrane is scholarly, assured, and urbane. Williams is a largely self-educated Cockney who somehow drifted into a job in publishing, Cochrane an Oxford-educated academic. Both men's books are urgent and charged with energy, but where Williams's energy gathers in his language, Cochrane's arises purely from ideas. The rhyming of their arguments struck Auden forcibly.

In 1944 Auden convinced the *New Republic* to allow him to review Cochrane's book. He begins the review by stating that in the four years since the book's appearance he has read it "many times," and has become increasingly convinced of its importance to an understanding not just of the ancient world but also of the contemporary one. Cochrane's revolutionary insight, Auden argues, lies in his claim that the Roman state is best understood as an inadequate answer to a philosophical problem, the problem of how to give meaning and value to human life. As Cochrane announces at the outset of his book,

the Roman state is based on certain core premises of classical philosophy that yield the belief “that it was possible to attain a goal of permanent security, peace and freedom through political action. . . . This notion the Christians denounced with uniform vigor and consistency.” He asserts that “the fall of Rome was the fall of an idea, or rather of a system of life based upon a complex of ideas which may be described broadly as those of Classicism; and the deficiencies of Classicism . . . were destined sooner or later to involve the system in ruin.” The success of Christianity in the empire was largely due to its ability to refute the absolute claims of *Romanitas* and to demonstrate that (in Auden’s words) “the Christian faith can make sense of man’s private and social experience, and classical philosophy cannot.”

So in Cochrane’s account the error of Rome was to presume a *political* response to a *philosophical* problem; the Christian Gospel gave a more adequate answer, one that redefined the place of the political. Rome said that the human world can be saved “through submission to the ‘virtue and fortune’ of a political leader” who is a human representation of divine power, law, and necessity; Christianity responds with a story of a God who, acting voluntarily according to love, sacrifices himself for his creatures and thereby inaugurates a new order, a new City, grounded in the human imitation of that love. In this radical reconstitution of *Romanitas*, says Auden, “there can, for the Christian, be no distinction between the personal and the political, for all his relationships are both; every marriage is a *polis*, every *imperium* a family; and he has to learn to forgive and sacrifice himself for his enemies, as for his wife and children.”

In other words, the Christian must participate in what Williams calls “the Order of Co-inherence”; to do so is to redefine what it means for an individual human to flourish—Cochrane refers to early Christian philosophy as “the discovery of personality”—and simultaneously to redefine the political order. This redefinition Cochrane describes largely in social, political, and philosophical terms, while Williams prefers a mystical language, in keeping with his emphasis on the paradoxical

character of sinful human beings silently directed by the Holy Spirit of God; but in Auden's mind they are both talking about the same world-transforming events.

Moreover, Auden understood both writers to be thinking historically in ways peculiarly relevant to their own moment in time. Williams and Cochrane alike hint at the contemporary application of their arguments, but Auden makes such application quite explicit in his review of *Christianity and Classical Culture*.

Our period is not so unlike the age of Augustine: the planned society, caesarism of thugs or bureaucracies, paideia, scientia, religious persecution, are all with us. Nor is there even lacking the possibility of a new Constantinism; letters have already begun to appear in the press, recommending religious instruction in schools as a cure for juvenile delinquency; Mr. Cochrane's terrifying description of the "Christian" empire under Theodosius should discourage such hopes of using Christianity as a spiritual benzedrine for the earthly city.

Auden might also have been thinking here of Williams's lament for the spiritual consequences of "the method of the imposition of belief." Auden's recognition that those last few centuries of the Roman Empire might serve as a mirror for the twentieth-century self-immolation of the West is the initiating insight of the project that would become "For the Time Being."

It seems, then, that Auden had determined to produce a large work that would in some fashion pay tribute to his mother and to the Christianity that they shared when he was young and had come to share again in the last year of her life; that would in some fashion address the public crisis of the West that had led to the Second World War; that would in some fashion address the very personal crisis that had come to him as a result of Kallman's infidelity. Up to this point in his career when Auden had embarked on large-scale projects, he had

tended to cast them in dramatic form and to work with collaborators. He would follow that practice now. Quite early on he settled on the oratorio as the proper form, the Nativity narrative from the Gospels (primarily Luke) as the source text, and Britten as the composer. He began to write.

According to the Christian liturgical calendar each year begins with the season of Advent, which uniquely concerns itself with past and future events: it remembers the first coming (“advent”) of the Messiah and looks forward to the day when, as the Nicene Creed puts it, Christ “will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.” To be a Christian is to live between these two advents, to be thankful for the salvation brought by the first Advent and to be soberly penitent in light of Christ’s inevitable return in judgment. The believer therefore lives poised, as it were, on a cusp, with Before and After falling off on either side of the moment.

This is a major theme of another book that for a time influenced Auden deeply, Paul Tillich’s *The Interpretation of History* (1936). That work became famous for its treatment of the biblical term *kairos*, “the fullness of time” or “the appointed time,” which is opposed to *kronos* (sequential or “clock” time) and—more important for Tillich—*logos*, the timeless eternal Word. Tillich seeks to describe time not as “mere duration,” “but rather qualitatively fulfilled time, the moment that is creation and fate. We call this fulfilled moment, the moment of time approaching us as fate and decision, *kairos*.” It comes to us as fate because we have no power to alter or delay its arrival; it comes to us as decision because we *must* respond in some way to it. This condition is largely what Auden means by “the time being”: to be faced with the necessity of radical choice, but a choice that must be made as a kind of leap of faith, since the fateful moment does not impose an interpretation but rather calls one forth from us. This was true even for those who saw Jesus in the flesh, but still more true for those who encounter

the Christian claims in this in-between time. A response is invited, even in a sense demanded, but what that response will be is neither enforced nor predetermined.

The Nativity narrative is particularly fertile ground for a poetic embodiment of these reflections because in it the Incarnate Word is present but silent. The Christ child does not speak or act, but is rather the object of speech and action. This stage of the Incarnation is congenial also to Auden's views about the representation of the sacred, which were consistently skeptical and dubious. As he would later write,

The Incarnation, the coming of Christ in the form of a servant who cannot be recognized by the eye of flesh and blood, but only by the eye of faith, puts an end to all claims of the imagination to be the faculty which decides what is truly sacred and what is profane. A pagan god can appear on earth in disguise but, so long as he wears his disguise, no man is expected to recognize him nor can. But Christ appears looking just like any other man, yet claims that He is the Way, the Truth and the Life, and that no man can come to God the Father except through Him. The contradiction between the profane appearance and the sacred assertion is impassible to the imagination.

It makes perfect sense for a reader of Tillich who has these suspicions to write a thoroughly Christian poem in which Christ does not, in the strict sense, appear at all.

In light of all these reflections, it cannot be surprising that the poem's mood at its outset is not festive but rather anxious, full of foreboding: dominated, then, by the prospect of the second rather than the first Advent. Thus the clear indications early in the poem of a contemporary setting: the second line of the opening section mentions "the clock on the mantelpiece," the fourth refers to a mirror. (Clocks and mirrors are not only modern instruments, but also central images for the whole poem.) In the second section of Part 1 the mirror appears again, this time set "over the fireplace" of a house with

a living room and a wine cellar. Moreover, “The violent howling of winter and war has become / Like a juke-box tune that we dare not stop.”

The furnishings of the modern world recur throughout this poem, even when it commences its retelling of the Gospel narrative, and when Auden sent this poem to his father, the older man—a learned and cultured physician, but not a litterateur—expressed some perplexity about this. Auden wrote him a long letter explaining his method:

Sorry you are puzzled by the oratorio. Perhaps you were expecting a purely historical account as one might give of the battle of Waterloo, whereas I was trying to treat it as a religious event which eternally recurs every time it is accepted. Thus the historical fact that the shepherds were *shepherds* is religiously accidental—the religious fact is that they were the poor and humble of this world for whom at this moment the historical expression is the city-proletariat, and so on with all the other figures. What we know of Herod, for instance, is that he was a Hellenised-Jew and a political ruler. Accordingly I have made him express the intellectual’s eternal objection to Christianity—that it replaces objectivity with subjectivity—and the politician’s eternal objection that it regards the state as having only a negative role. (See Marcus Aurelius.) . . .

I am not the first to treat the Christian data in this way, until the 18th Cent. it was always done, in the Mystery Plays for instance or any Italian paintings. It is only in the last two centuries that religion has been “humanized,” and therefore treated historically as something that happened a long time ago, hence the nursery picture of Jesus in a nightgown and a Parsifal beard.

If a return to the older method now seems startling it is partly because of the acceleration in the rate of historical change due to industrialization—there is a far greater difference between the accidents of life in 1600 AD and in 1942 than between those of 30 AD and 1600.

For Auden, the “humanizing” of religion is effectively the historicizing of it, the construction of a wall to demarcate historical eras. Auden’s “return to the older method” is meant to dismantle the historicizing wall and thereby to place the reader within a story that *began* “a long time ago” but *continues*, effectually, today.

But the sense of foreboding that dominates “Advent” reflects the position of a person, or of a whole world, not yet initiated into that history. The second section ends with a flat affirmation—“This is the Abomination. This is the wrath of God”—and the remaining sections of “Advent” are therefore appropriately dotted with questions about this predicament: “Where is that Law for which we broke our own?” “O where is that immortal and nameless Centre from which our points of / Definition and death are all equi-distant?” “How can his knowledge protect his desire for truth from illusion?”

For Auden, a certain kind of temperament provides exceptionally fertile ground for the cultivation of illusion: the “Arcadian,” he would come to call it, the celebrant of an ideally innocent past—or, in the terms of this poem, the one who longs to return to the Garden. What was once the Garden has become “our dreadful wood”: an evocation of the *selva oscura* in which Dante the pilgrim found himself lost in the first lines of his Comedy. In a fundamental sense, Auden says, “the garden is the only place there is”—it is the proper home of humanity—but it cannot simply be reclaimed: after all, angels with flaming swords have been posted to prevent reentry (Genesis 3:24). Humanity must turn its back on that original Garden and look for the experience of wholeness elsewhere; “but you will not find it / Until you have looked for it everywhere and found nowhere that is not a desert.” Arcadianism is, in brief, the refusal of this hard and purgative path, and the corresponding longing for the angels and their swords simply to go away. Hoping to return to the Garden is like hoping to return to the womb.

Auden knew this temptation well—his own temperament was resolutely Arcadian—and for that reason he mocked it ruthlessly. In the poem that would follow “For the Time Being,” “The Sea and the Mir-

ror,” he did this through the character of Caliban, who ventriloquizes the Arcadian plea:

Carry me back, Master, to the cathedral town where the canons run through the water meadows with butterfly nets and the old women keep sweetshops in the cobbled side streets. . . . Give me my passage home, let me see that harbour once again just as it was before I learned the bad words. . . . Look, Uncle, look. They have broken my glasses and I have lost my silver whistle. Pick me up, Uncle, let little Johnny ride away on your massive shoulders to recover his green kingdom . . .

In “For the Time Being” his spokesmen are more gentle, simply pointing fallen, broken people toward the necessary desert, a wilderness like the one that separated the Israelites from their Promised Land. The biblical narrative, onto which he has chosen to map the structure of his poem, is one that moves relentlessly forward: from the Garden to the Flood, from the Flood to the call of Abraham, from Abraham to the call of Moses, and so on until the Advent of the Messiah, it is a linear progression. And to those in the middle of the story, those caught in “the time being,” the general outlines of the narrative can be nearly impossible to discern.

What is called for, then, is an acceptance of absurdity and incomprehension: “Therefore, see without looking, hear without listening, breathe without asking.” In advocating this quietness of spirit Auden assumes an Eastern tone otherwise uncommon with him, and this is largely an effect of Auden’s deep admiration, at this moment in his career, of T. S. Eliot. Auden always admired Eliot personally—he once told Louise Bogan, “I shall never be as great and good a man if I live to be a hundred”—but his opinion of Eliot’s poetry fluctuated and was rarely very high. During the Second World War it was at its peak. In 1943 Auden concluded a lecture at Swarthmore by reading the concluding lines of the recently published “Little Gidding” and then naming Eliot “the greatest poet now living, . . . one whose personal and

professional example are to every other and lesser writer at once an inspiration and a reproach.”

As the notes at the end of this volume will show, Eliot is often echoed in “For the Time Being,” but Auden also knew that Eliot often succumbed to the temptation of Arcadianism; and every homage to Eliot, and Eliot’s seeking for the impassive nonattachment so central to Hinduism and Buddhism, is accompanied also by a critique. That critique begins in the next part of the poem.

Because a straightforward return to the Garden is impossible, answers to the challenging questions pressed at the end of “Advent” must be sought elsewhere. Possibilities come into view in “The Annunciation,” which somewhat surprisingly begins neither with Mary nor with the angel Gabriel but with the “Four Faculties” as described by Carl Jung in his book *Psychological Types*: Thought, Intuition, Sensation, and Feeling. Auden was a born taxonomist who loved making charts and fitting people, events, and artworks into them, and at this time he was particularly interested in Jung’s categories. (Many years later, though, he would open to this section in a copy of the poem and write in the margin, “Bosh, straight from Jung.”) In the notebook containing most of the surviving drafts of the poem, he attempts to relate Jung’s four types to other categorical schemes: like the people who would later develop the Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator system, he employs Jung’s opposition between the Introvert and the Extravert, and adds some binary pairs of his own: Objectivity/Subjectivity, Active/Passive, Actual/Possible, Ethical/Observational. He even associates the four Faculties with the four humors of early modern medicine, seeing Thought as “Melancholic,” Intuition as “Lymphatic” (instead of the usual Phlegmatic), Sensation as “Sanguine,” and Feeling as “Choleric.”

In the poem these Faculties are made to serve a theological purpose: “We who are four were / Once but one, / Before his act of / Rebellion,” which is to say that before the Fall, Adam’s intellectual, perceptual, emotional, and sensory capabilities were unified and gov-

erned by a single unerring impulse. What Eliot claimed to be true for the Elizabethan dramatists, that “thought and feeling were one,” Auden says was true only in Eden. To be sure, we suffer from a “dissociation of sensibility,” but that is the condition of *all* the children of Adam. To think that in any particular historical period—whether Eliot’s Elizabethan age or Yeats’s “Byzantium during the reign of Justinian”—human beings could achieve that oneness of being is pure Arcadian sentimentality. After Adam’s “act of / Rebellion” our faculties split, and now struggle with one another for dominance. A kind of *psychomachia* or internal warfare is the common lot of humanity, a point Auden would develop more completely in his later and longer poem *The Age of Anxiety*.

The Faculties peer into the Garden from which Adam and Eve were exiled. That exile initiated time as we know it (thus the clocks) and anxious self-consciousness (thus the mirrors). Auden sets the Annunciation, the archangel Gabriel’s telling young Mary that she will be impregnated by the Holy Spirit of God and will bear the world’s Savior, in the Garden of Eden to indicate that Mary’s acceptance of her role is the key event in the renewal of the world that had been broken by our first parents. Auden here embraces the ancient theological commonplace that Mary’s humble obedience in response to Gabriel’s invitation—“And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word” (Luke 1:38)—inverts and sets right Eve’s prideful response to the serpent’s invitation to eat the one fruit that God had forbidden. But in characterizing the fundamental human need addressed by Mary’s obedience as a psychic one, the anxiety produced by self-consciousness and inauthentic being, Auden is drawing not on ancient sources but on a theological movement generated primarily by Kierkegaard and developed by his twentieth-century successors, especially Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, Auden’s friend Reinhold Niebuhr, and in a sense Jung himself. This dynamic union of contemporaneity and traditionalism characterizes Auden’s Christian thought.

Though Luke describes the Annunciation in detail, it is Matthew who gives us the response of Mary's fiancé to her pregnancy: "Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily" (1:19); only then does he get angelic instructions laying out *his* part in the story, a part it could not have been easy for him to accept. Of the poem's third section, "The Temptation of St. Joseph," Auden once said, "Joseph is me." After discovering Kallman's infidelity, Auden was tempted to kill Kallman, his lover, or both, once even closing his hands around Kallman's throat while the younger man was sleeping. Kallman's lover was an upper-class English sailor, and in the complete typescripts of the poem—that is, at a very advanced stage in the composition—Auden was including this detail in the poem itself, in this late-deleted stanza of Joseph's account:

Disjointed items stopped my life to say  
 How proud they were to satisfy  
     My own true love:  
 Hair, muscle, clothing noses, necks,  
 A prince's purse, a sailor's sex  
     Appeal;  
 And my horns grew up to the sky;  
 When I asked if they were real,  
 All giggled and ran away.

The horns are of course those of the cuckolded husband.

Some years later, in an essay identifying the key events in his conversion to Christianity, Auden would describe his psychic condition in those days:

And then, providentially—for the occupational disease of poets is frivolity—I was forced to know in person what it is like to feel oneself the prey of demonic powers, in both the Greek and the

Christian sense, stripped of self-control and self-respect, behaving like a ham actor in a Strindberg play.

It is telling that Auden calls this experience “providential”: he was rescued from frivolity by having to confront his own potential murderousness, his own powerlessness when possessed by the demon of jealousy—the extent to which against God he is always in the wrong.

But none of this characterizes the Joseph of his poem. Rather, that figure is befuddled, ignorant of what everyone else seems to know, an object of pity; most important of all, he seems ready to forgive Mary and trust God, if he can manage it:

All I ask is one  
Important and elegant proof  
That what my Love had done  
Was really at your will  
And that your will is Love.

When this request is denied, Joseph falls silent. Silence can never be definitively interpreted, but throughout the passage there is no indication of anger, only a desperate wish that the trust he is already placing in his betrothed and in God will not be misplaced. And indeed, by the time that he wrote these words Auden had determined to continue his relationship with Kallman, even though Kallman made it clear to him that that relationship would no longer have a sexual dimension. He confessed to James Stern, “I love him to distraction and cant help boring my friends about him,” and at Christmas 1941 he wrote a long verse letter to Kallman that includes this hopeful affirmation:

Because, although our love, beginning Hans Andersen, became Grimm, and there are probably even grimmer tests to come, nevertheless I believe that if only we have faith in God and in each other, we shall be permitted to realize all that love is intended to be;

As this morning I think of the Good Friday and the Easter Sunday implicit in Christmas Day, I think of you.

But the poem's Joseph is only partly a self-portrait: in another sense, one that carries more weight in the poem as a whole, he is a representative of his sex. The poem's Narrator—serving, as he often does, to provide corrective or supplemental theological context for us, especially when the characters in the midst of the story don't clearly understand what's happening to them—says, “you must now atone, / Joseph, in silence and alone” for the multiple injuries your fellow males have inflicted on women. Joseph must accept his completely marginal role in the story, as the birth of the Messiah is accomplished by parthenogenesis, without need for his services. Joseph thus becomes, not precisely a “Christ-figure,” but a kind of personified adumbration of the vicarious suffering his wife's son will eventually perform for the world.

So the presence of the Four Faculties indicates a narrative of original psychic integration broken to pieces by the Fall, with the Incarnation marking the beginnings of reintegration. But then, in the latter sections of “The Annunciation,” Auden begins to apply a similar analysis to the social world. Those who rejoice at Mary's acceptance of her task include “number and weight” (the inanimate world) and, among human beings, the great, the small, the young, and the old. The developing story of redemption is received by all, affects all, but in different ways according not only to psychological inclination but also to social emplacement. This emergence of a social taxonomy marks a key transition in the poem: persons shaped by various combinations of the Four Faculties enter the public realm, and that realm will be consistently present for the rest of the poem. At the end of “The Temptation of St. Joseph” Joseph and Mary—neither of them exceptional in themselves, but only in the roles they have been chosen to play—become the proper patrons of “common ungifted / Natures,” of the “roman-

tics” and the “bourgeoisie,” people who according to their varying natures follow the “Average Way” but who are nevertheless the objects of God’s redemptive love.

The fourth part of the poem, “The Summons,” concerns itself with the exceptional, to whom the arrival of this Child comes as worrisome news, or worse: says the Star of the Nativity, “I am that star most dreaded by the wise,” who fear “the doom of orthodox *sophrosyne*.” *Sophrosyne* means moderation or temperance (“nothing too much”), and the radical intrusion of God into history threatens to disrupt any and all attempts to employ disciplined, methodical thought to bring the human world under rational control. The natural scientist, the philosopher, and the social scientist alike must confront both their inevitable failure and the vices their attempts at control have led them to.

Something fundamental to Auden’s reading of history appears when the purgative journey of these Wise Men is interrupted by a chorus praising Caesar. Cochrane argued that the Roman imperial project justified itself by promising to solve the most intractable problems of classical philosophy and thereby to make the Good Life not only possible but inevitable. In this “fugal-chorus” Auden translates this claim into contemporary terms. When the projects of modern natural science, philosophy, and social science are absorbed by the State—an absorption dramatically accelerated by war—then twentieth-century Caesarism achieves social domination more comprehensive than anything the Romans could have dreamed of. The state that controls the economy (“the Kingdom of Credit Exchange”) and an ever-expanding pharmaceutical industry (“the Kingdom of Organic Dwarfs”) is well-placed to make the final conquest: “the Kingdom of Popular Soul.”

Auden repeatedly insisted, throughout the war, on the absolute necessity of defeating Hitler, and indeed sought a meaningful role: after being rejected by the draft board for his homosexuality, he at one point in 1942 considered signing up for the Merchant Marine. (At the war’s end he joined the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey in Germany, receiving as a civilian the equivalent rank of major.) But much of his

*writing* during the war, and immediately after, was driven by concern for what sort of Western society would emerge from an Allied victory. Thus his statement, in 1944, about a new translation of *Grimm's Fairy Tales*: "It is unlikely that there will be another event during the current publishing season as important as this," and the peroration of his review:

So let everyone read these stories till they know them backward and tell them to their children with embellishments—they are not sacred texts—and then, in a few years, the Society for the Scientific Diet, the Association of Positivist Parents, the League for the Promotion of Worthwhile Leisure, the Co-operative Camp of Prudent Progressives and all other bores and scoundrels can go jump in the lake.

This emphasis infuriated Randall Jarrell: a year later in *Partisan Review* he wrote, "In the year 1944 these prudent, progressive, scientific, coöperative 'bores and scoundrels' were the enemies with whom Auden found it necessary to struggle. Were these *your* enemies, reader? They were not mine." Jarrell misunderstands Auden's position: being unable to fight himself, he could do nothing about the progress of the war. But as a poet and thinker he could, and needed to be, concerned about the cultural consequences of even a successful war; like many other intellectuals at this time, including Reinhold Niebuhr, he feared that "the danger is that, in order to win [the war], the democracies will construct an anti-fascist political religion, and so, by becoming like their enemies, lose the peace." This accounts for his decision to write, in wartime, a long poem that has relatively little to say about war but a great deal to say about the dangers of Caesarism, especially in the soft-totalitarian form in which he felt it was likely to emerge in the West.

Thus after the chorus's praise—"Great is Caesar; God must be with Him"—the Narrator provides a voice of gentle dissent. Caesar's conquests are not complete after all: within the Kingdom of Credit Exchange there are "problems" that, "experts" reassure us, are "practically

solved”; “public morale” is improving only with “restrictions / Upon aliens and free-thinking Jews”; and then there is the threat posed by “the rising power of the Barbarian in the North.” It would appear that the perfected empire is always a promise but never quite a reality. Moreover, the Narrator’s affirmation that “Powers and Times are not gods but mortal gifts from God”—an echo of “Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s”—quietly but completely repudiates the claims made for Caesar’s empire in the fugal-chorus. Preceding that chorus the Narrator had asked us to “stand motionless and hear” Caesar’s proclamation; now his instruction is simply, “Let us pray.” And not to Caesar.

After this imperial interruption, the poem’s social taxonomy returns with the introduction of the Shepherds. They are, as Auden explained to his father, “the poor and humble of this world” who, unlike the Wise, do not seek control—but who also refuse to be simplified and objectified, refuse “to behave like a cogwheel / When one knows one is no such thing.” Their role is to watch and wait, striving to maintain hope. Thus to them the Chorus of Angels proclaims, though with altered pronouns, the declaration from Isaiah 9: “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given.”

And now, with the fifth part, “At the Manger,” the Child is indeed born, and Mary, the Wise Men, and the Shepherds gather around him. (Joseph has disappeared from our view until the last pages of the poem.) Mary, who understands what her son is called to do and be—in Renaissance paintings of the Annunciation she is sometimes portrayed reading the “suffering servant” passage from Isaiah 53—simply wants her “Little One” to sleep and dream while he may, but Auden uses the responses of the Wise Men and the Shepherds to illustrate what may well have been his favorite binary opposition, that between Arcadians and Utopians. The Arcadian temperament we have already explored, and it is manifested here in the Shepherds, who “never left the place where [they] were born” and are afflicted by the “sullen wish to go back to the womb” and to have “no future.” By contrast, the

Utopian temperament looks with “arrogant longing” towards a perfected future and therefore wishes “To have no past”; it is embodied in the Wise Men and, by extension, in all who seek shaping power over their worlds.

Thus earlier in the poem the Shepherds, in the section “Levers nudge the aching wrist,” hear voices tempting them to suicide; at first their only reply is “No, I don’t know why, / But I’m glad I’m here,” but once they have seen the Child, they cry, “O here and now our endless journey starts.” Only the Child has the power to sweep away “the filth of habit from [their] hearts.” Conversely, the Wise Men, with their Utopian temperament, must arrest their determination to remake the world, and instead must find all meaning in the Child: so at the manger they cry, “O here and now our endless journey stops.” Each group must discover genuine hope by achieving release from its habitual “phantasy.” Earlier in the poem a Chorus had asked, “How can [Man’s] knowledge protect his desire for truth from illusion?” The answer is that knowledge cannot: such illusions are displaced only by “Living Love,” a Love incarnate in this infant.

The next two parts of the poem, “The Meditation of Simeon” and “The Massacre of the Innocents,” introduce no new themes but rather develop in more detail ideas already present: the challenge this Child poses to intellectuals in search of knowledge and to political leaders in search of power. The characters encountered are therefore a theologian and a king.

Auden’s Wise Men are secular intellectuals whose encounter with the Star of the Nativity, and then with the Child himself, opens them for the first time to the transcendent. Simeon, though, is a serious believer, and the challenge the Child poses to his intellectual framework is of a wholly different order. In keeping with his commitment to contemporaneity, Auden strips the biblical Simeon of his Jewishness: readers will learn nothing from this poem about how the very idea of

an Incarnate God might have struck a man in Jerusalem who “was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel” (Luke 2:25). Instead we hear from one who can discourse learnedly about Time and the Infinite, the Unconditional and the historically conditioned, the relations between Virtue and Necessity, and the ways that a stenographer might or might not resemble Brünnhilde. Moreover, his language is specifically Christian throughout, paraphrasing or commenting on the early creeds and Augustinian theology. The famous words of the biblical Simeon—“Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation”—do find their echo here: “having seen Him, not in some prophetic vision of what might be, but with the eyes of our own weakness as to what actually is, we are bold to say that we have seen our salvation.” But otherwise his language is resolutely modern and enmeshed in the terminology of post-Kierkegaardian philosophical theology. (How Auden thought this meditation could be accompanied by music is not immediately obvious. Certainly he knew that the density of Simeon’s exegesis posed difficulties for performance: he told Theodore Spencer, “The chief reason for the choral interjections in Simeon’s prose is to give the audience’s attention a moment’s rest.”)

The burden of Simeon’s discourse is essentially twofold: he sets out to explain how God could assume human form, and then how that Incarnation can repair the damage Adam and Eve inflicted on themselves and all their descendants. Simeon’s initial task is to close off the Arcadian retreat, then to block the Utopian advance: the first six paragraphs outline what in another poem Auden would call “the alternative routes . . . by which the human effort to make its own fortune arrives all eager at its abruptly dreadful end.” Simeon conceives of intellectual history as a series of impasses. It was necessary that each of those impasses be explored, and then recognized as offering no outlet, before humanity could be ready to confront the truth of God’s purpose: “The Word could not be made Flesh until men had reached

a state of absolute contradiction between clarity and despair in which they would have no choice but either to accept absolutely or to reject absolutely.”

This absoluteness of response is required by the absolute absurdity of the Word’s being made Flesh. Were the claim merely a symbolic one, some interpretative negotiation might be possible; “but of this Child it is the case that He is in no sense a symbol”: he is, rather, as human and as historical as any of us. King Herod, in the following section, understands the choice he is offered in precisely the way that Simeon does:

Why can’t people be sensible? I don’t want to be horrid. Why can’t they see that the notion of a finite God is absurd? Because it is. And suppose, just for the sake of argument, that it isn’t, that this story is true, that this child is in some inexplicable manner both God and Man, that he grows up, lives, and dies, without committing a single sin? Would that make life any better? On the contrary it would make it far, far worse. For it can only mean this: that once having shown them how, God would expect every man, whatever his fortune, to lead a sinless life in the flesh and on earth. Then indeed would the human race be plunged into madness and despair. And for me personally at this moment it would mean that God had given me the power to destroy Himself.

The difference between Simeon and Herod lies not in understanding but in response: where Simeon replies to the news by joyously affirming, “we are bold to say that we have seen our salvation,” Herod replies with blunt opposition: “I refuse to be taken in.” With a sigh of deep regret, he orders the slaughter of the Israelite children.

Simeon the theologian may have found it difficult to accept the idea of God Incarnate, but for Herod it is impossible, because acceptance would require him to relinquish his position as the chief local instrument, in Judaea, of *Romanitas* and the Caesarist project. And this he lacks the strength of will to do. In one of his more striking artistic

choices, Auden renders Herod's dilemma and decision comically. Herod's speech opens with a parody of the dedicatory preface to Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations*: he thanks, among others, his brother Sandy, "who married a trapeze artist and died of drink—for so refuting the position of the Hedonists." Herod himself is a Stoic whose self-satisfaction depends on his belief that he carries out his bureaucratic duties faithfully—"I've hardly ever taken bribes"—and that he genuinely desires no harm to anyone: "I'm a liberal," he moans. "I want everyone to be happy." This is the little man behind the curtain of the stentorian imperial chorus in praise of Caesar we heard earlier; here is where the Utopian "phantasy" comes crashing ridiculously, but also violently, to earth. Herod is absurd in a rather less dignified sense than the philosophical. And such, Auden implies, is the fate of all who refuse the absolute contradiction that Simeon accepts.

"For the Time Being" is a poem that ends, as well as begins, in *medias res*. After the extravagant rhetorical set pieces of Simeon and Herod, the poem draws to a close in a welter of disparate voices. Herod's soldiers sing a jaunty chorus, full of campy slang, about a child adopted and reared, rather than killed, by them. Auden introduces Rachel in order to echo Matthew (2:18) who, in describing Herod's massacre, had echoed the prophet Jeremiah (31:15), who had echoed the grief and bitterness the biblical Rachel suffered because of her barrenness (Genesis 30:1). And then the Holy Family flee Israel, only to be tempted and tormented by "Voices of the Desert" who paint phantasmagorical, Bosch-like images. They continue to Egypt, bearing "our new life."

The reasons for this chaos become manifest when the poem returns, via its calm and straightforward Narrator, to the present moment and a local habitation. For while the Star of the Nativity may have proclaimed "the doom of orthodox *sophrosyne*," we continue to live in "the moderate Aristotelian city / Of darning and the Eight-Fifteen." While the Christmas narrative, especially as seen by Simeon and Herod, presents us with an absolute contradiction that demands an absolute

response, "Once again / As in previous years we have seen the actual Vision and failed / To do more than entertain it as an agreeable / Possibility." The poem's inconclusiveness mimics that of its audience. And therefore it must end not with resolution but with an invitation: to follow, seek, and love the one who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. It is almost the tone of a revival meeting. In the poetic presentation of spiritual things, Auden would never again be so explicit. In 1946 he told Alan Ansen, "It's the only direct treatment of sacred subjects I shall ever attempt."

On 11 November 1941 Auden wrote to Britten that he had sketched out "Advent." Edward Mendelson has deduced that the writing from that point went more or less as follows: Also in November he began the second part, "The Annunciation." He had completed "The Temptation of St. Joseph" by January 1942, along with the first half of "The Summons." In February he wrote the fugal-chorus in praise of Caesar and the chorale ("Our Father, whose creative Will"). In the next month he wrote "The Vision of the Shepherds." It is not clear when he produced Mary's song "At the Manger" or the long prose meditations of Simeon and Herod, but presumably it was over the next few months. Possibly in July he wrote "The Flight into Egypt." The recitative at the end of the section, "Fly Holy Family," was added very late, sometime around May of 1943.

It is clear that throughout the poem's composition he had a musical setting firmly in mind. In all the surviving notebooks and typescripts—the latter coming very late in the process of composition—speeches are introduced not with the characters' names but with vocal identification: "Tenor Solo," "Boys semi-chorus," and so on. Auden always assumed that Britten would set the poem, and occasionally gave him reports on how the writing was progressing: for instance, in November of 1941 he told Britten, "I have stretched out the First Movement of the Oratorio (1. Chorus and semi-Chorus. 2. Narrator. 3. Trio. 4. Narrator. 5. Chorus) and am starting the 2nd Movement which opens with a boys chorus." In January of 1942 he sent Britten "The

Temptation of St. Joseph” and the first half of “The Summons.” But he did not at any point invite Britten to comment or offer suggestions, and after these early communications ended up sending the composer a complete text as a *fait accompli*. Britten was not pleased. As Peter Pears recalled many years later,

Ben had expected a text for music, but it turned out to be a major opus, quite unsuitable without *vast* cuts for an oratorio libretto. . . . I remember the receipt of “For the Time Being” and how Ben was bitterly disappointed with, for instance, the fugue (a few syllables are enough for a fugue)—Wystan wrote 7 stanzas of 10 lines each. . . . And one of the things Ben had learnt from *Paul Bunyan* was that in creating new large-scale musical works it was of the *utmost importance* that the poet and composer should work together from the outset. When a large section of the work arrived, Ben was desperate at how far Wystan had gone ahead without him, and as he was much more confident of himself as a composer now, he abandoned the whole idea.

Moreover, some of Auden’s letters in this period angered Britten: he felt that Auden was patronizing about his relationship with Pears, and too strongly critical of his and Pears’s decision to return to England. Their friendship would never recover, and Britten ended up setting only two brief pieces from the oratorio: for a 1944 BBC program called *Poet’s Christmas*, he wrote music for the chorale “Our Father, Whose creative Will” and for a “Shepherd’s Carol” (“O lift your little pinkie”) that Auden removed at a very late stage in the poem’s composition. So “For the Time Being” ended up as an oratorio in name only. In the published versions of the poem no vocal indications are present, though a sparse scaffolding—distinguishing individual speakers from choruses, naming some speeches as recitatives—remains in place.

In 1956 an American composer, Philip James, set parts of the poem for women’s chorus and string quartet under the title *Chorus of Shepherds and Angels*. And another American composer, Marvin David Levy, did what Britten had declined to do: he set the whole poem to music.

His setting was first performed at Carnegie Hall, by the Collegiate Chorale, in December 1959.

In January 1967 Austrian television broadcast a ninety-minute condensation and adaptation of “For the Time Being” titled *Inzwischen* (Meanwhile), with music written by the Austrian composer Paul Kont. A manuscript survives in the Berg Collection of a note Auden wrote for this production. In it he provides a rationale for his artistic approach very similar to the one he had given to his father more than twenty years earlier:

Anyone who attempts to use [a sacred event] as a theme for a work of art has to do justice both to the historicity of the event and to its contemporary relevance. This is not easy. If, in treating the Christmas story, he writes as a secular historian would, ie, he makes the clothes, the architecture, the dialogue as nearly what they actually were in Palestine during the reign of Augustus as scholarship can bring them, his piece will, for a twentieth-century artist, be simply an archaeological curiosity. [But] if he makes all his properties and imagery contemporary, the story ceases to be one which the audience are required to believe really happened, and becomes an entertaining myth.

Auden’s purpose in “For the Time Being” was to steer between these two dangers, to avoid the “archaeological curiosity” as well as the “entertaining myth,” and thereby to present the Nativity narrative as nothing less than a *kairos* moment, an opportunity for his readers to see “the time being” as infinitely rich in possibility and infinitely demanding of choice.

## THE TEXT

The chief notebook Auden used when drafting “For the Time Being” was eventually given by the poet to his friend, fan, and occasional pa-

tron Caroline Newton. It is now in the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library. Two complete typescripts of the poem survive. One was formerly owned by James Stern, a poet and translator who was for many years a close friend of Auden's; its present location is unknown, although a photocopy is in private hands. The second was sent to Benjamin Britten and is held by the Britten-Pears Library in Aldersburgh, Suffolk. The two typescripts are almost identical, but the second features a number of strike-throughs and contains an autograph appendix listing changes and additions. These variants are indicated in the notes, with the exception of the many small changes in punctuation made in the printed version. (Auden was a notoriously uncertain punctuator and relied on professional copyediting assistance in such matters.) There is also, at Princeton University, a typescript of the first two parts of the poem that differs only in minor ways from the complete typescripts but appears to be slightly earlier than them.

"For the Time Being" was published by Random House on 6 September 1944, bound with "The Sea and the Mirror," the long poem that Auden began writing immediately after completing the oratorio. *For the Time Being* is the title Auden gave to the book. A second impression with corrections appeared in October, but the book was out of print less than a year later, largely because both long poems were included in *The Collected Poetry of W. H. Auden* (Random House, 1945).

A British edition was published by Faber & Faber in March 1945, with its text based on the first American printing, not incorporating the corrections to the second impression, and inadvertently omitting these three lines from the Narrator's last speech:

Without even a hostile audience, and the Soul endure  
A silence that is neither for nor against her faith  
That God's Will be done, that, in spite of her prayers . . .

The British edition of *For the Time Being* was reprinted several times between 1945 and 1966. All further editions of the poem were based

on the text of the second Random House printing. In 1968 the poem appeared in the *Collected Longer Poems* (both Random House and Faber), with corrections, and has been included in each edition of the *Collected Poems* edited by Edward Mendelson, starting in 1976. The text here is nearly identical to that prepared by Edward Mendelson for the most recent edition of the *Collected Poems* (2007), with variations indicated in the notes.