Spring 5-2-2022

Relandscaping Eden: Northern European Topography as Theology in Auden's Poems

Merrill Brouder
ebrouder@skidmore.edu

Ethan Merrill Brouder

Relandscaping Eden:

Northern European Topography as Theology in Auden's Poems

Prof. Joseph Cermatori

Senior Thesis

May 4, 2022

"'Nothing is better than life.' But was it? Yes, the fight
Against the false and the unfair
Was always worth it. So was gardening. [...]"[1]
(Auden, *Collected Poems* 250)

The Anglo-American poet W.H. Auden was acutely aware of nature's capacity for cruelness and indifference. Many of his most celebrated poems pit their speakers and characters directly against the cold cruelty of the heavens and the earth. In "In Memory of W.B. Yeats," death comes when "the provinces of [Yeats'] body revolted" while "Far from his illness / The wolves ran on through the evergreen forests" (Auden, *Collected Poems* 247); in "Funeral Blues" a mourner implores some giant, unnamed force to "Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun, / Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood" (141); and the unrequited lover of "The More Loving One" struggles to come to terms with the fact that, although he loves the stars and their beauty, "for all they care, I can go to hell" (584). In each of these poems, and in many of Auden's other poems, the vastness of human experience seems, at first, to resist the finite language of individual experience. This presents a dilemma for the poet, who can neither explore nor express that which can not be articulated. Auden's solution to this problem is reminiscent of the style of the Metaphysical Poets who came centuries before him. He turns to cosmic language, ecological language, and the language of landscape as a way of exploring personal philosophy

[1] From the poem "Voltaire at Ferney." The tercet references the conclusion of Candide: « Cela est bien dit, répondit *Candide*, mais il faut cultiver notre jardin » (Voltaire 224). (*"That's all well and good, responded* Candide*, but we must cultivate our garden."*)

and theology. While he uses landscape as a projection of his ideas, landscape also guides his own thinking. Landscape and the self, consequently, become intertwined in Auden's poems.

The relationship between the environment and the mind of the poet is most striking in Auden's writings that occupy themselves with some of the most extreme landscapes in the world: the arctic and subarctic regions and their peripheries in the far North of Europe and the North Atlantic. In these poems, half-frozen travelers are forced to face snow and ice, the brutalizing viciousness of the northern seas, the abrasive effects of endless summer days or winter nights, and the alien silence and emptiness of the region. Signs of life do present themselves in these poems, but only as muted or hardened plants and animals, or in the form of abandoned ruins and of graves. What is surprising about these poems is that, despite the coldness which they embody, Auden—as he does equally in his prose—stresses that these landscapes are "the never never land of [his] childhood" and an "Eden" of "his own business" (Auden, *Dyer's Hand* 6). Auden even goes so far as to reimagine the natural elements which render the North inhospitable and to turn them into expressions of the region's divine love for mankind. For example, the absolute silence of a tundra scarred by ruins in the poem "Hammerfest" becomes an expression of the environment's hopes for humanity and the loving ear with which it listens to the commotion of our species. This surprising stylistic and thematic choice, being rich in symbolism as well as contradiction, demands careful study if it is to be explained and understood. The product of such a study is a map of Auden's Eden which, being similar to but also significantly different from conventional depictions of Eden, charts Auden's personal theology: a theology that combines Auden's Anglo-Catholicism with Greek Paganism and Christian Existentialism.

The paradoxical paradise which Auden draws out of his vision of the far North is especially confounding given the time and culture in which he was writing. An interest in the savagery or emptiness of nature is one of the standard markers of early 20th-century literature. This was, in part, a reaction to the excesses of late Romanticism and Georgian literature, as well as to the world in which the writers of the time were living: a world mangled by the two worst

wars in human history, a global pandemic, the rise of Fascism and Soviet-Communism as unprecedented agents of human suffering, and the Atomic Era. It is therefore remarkable that Auden would have the audacity to search for, and—through his poetry—claim to find, an Eden on earth at the same time that Eliot's "The Wasteland" was wildly considered to be *the* Modernist poem, and critics were wondering if poetry could exist after Auschwitz (Eliot).[2] Nevertheless, this is exactly what Auden did in the years between the 1930s and the early 1970s.

The intellectual and artistic seriousness with which Auden discussed themes of love or paradise was often criticized in his time as sentimental and bourgeois. These criticisms were especially harsh in the left-leaning circles to which Auden had belonged as a younger man. There, some accused Auden of being aloof and old-fashioned to the point of "amoralism."[3] However, these criticisms—which were leveled with particular harshness against his earlier, topical poems—miss something important in Auden's œuvre. Paola Marchetti, contemporary critic, takes a much more even-handed approach in her study of Auden's ideology. She suggests that Auden's "passive" poetics are not naively Romantic; instead, she argues that they are struggling to find a stable balance between natural instincts for "reasoning" and for "feeling," and between barbarism and higher virtues. Auden's works are therefore engaged in the "historic quest, in which the ideal is repeatedly threatened with relapse back into barbarism" (Marchetti 200). Marchetti continues, more philosophically, that "Landscape forms the backdrop for such journeying along an unending road, with a great city behind and unexplored regions ahead." and that this journey is "the search for the right place, the Just City," be it political or existential (201). Imagining Auden's poems as the search for a balance between feeling barbarism and reasoned virtue is useful, and the model is especially applicable to his poems that describe northern landscapes. The

---

[2] "[...] after Auschwitz, to write a poem is barbaric." (Adorno 34).

[3] George Orwell, who admitted to admiring some of Auden's poems, was also one of his most biting critics. He wrote the following on the political poetry of Auden's youth: "Mr Auden's brand of amoralism is only possible, if you are the kind of person who is always somewhere else when the trigger is pulled. So much of left-wing thought is a kind of playing with fire by people who don't even know that fire is hot." (Orwell 237).

search for an equilibrium between moral and natural instincts defines and unifies these poems as much as the geographical motifs which they depict.

However, the effectiveness of framing Auden's poems as a quest through a wilderness and towards "the Just City" is more ambiguous. The lens may be one of the best ways so far offered by critics to historically place his œuvre, but the approach is more utilitarian than Auden's poems or personal philosophy. Firstly, although it is undeniable that Auden is interested in the theological history of humanity, starting with Genesis and the Fall and ending, one tends to hope, past the gates of a New Jerusalem, it is difficult to imagine Auden as any kind of guide for that journey (especially in his poems written after the Second World War). This is, after all, the man who famously insisted that "poetry makes nothing happen: it survives" (---. *Collected Poems* 248), and repeatedly dismissed his own work and life with comments to the effect of "a writer is a maker, not a man of action" (*Tell me the Truth About Love* 0:03:15*)*; such remarks are not nihilistic (as they may at first seem), but they do demonstrate that, for Auden, poetry is not a means to an end but its own end—a fixed location in "the valley of its making" (---. *Collected Poems* 248). More to the point, Auden also *repeatedly* denounces the idea of New Jerusalem, as well as its citizens and its architects—even going so far as to write, in the poem "Horae Canonicae: *Vespers*," that he "would like to see [the proponents of the New City] removed to some other planet" (---. *Collected Poems* 637). Furthermore, the journey analogy suggests that the darkly savage landscapes through which one travels on a "quest" from Creation to paradise are nothing more than obstacles that stand in the way of the greater goals of the individual and of humanity as a whole. But why, then, should Auden make the landscapes themselves into the subject of so many of his poems, and New Jerusalem into the subject of so few? Why do rocks, lochs, and tundra earn such admiration from the writer, while he dismisses his alleged destination with such indifference? Most importantly, why was Auden so interested in voyaging into wildernesses such as the Icelandic interior or the Norwegian arctic? And, finally, why would he

refer to these wildernesses as “never never land[s]” or “Eden[s]” if they are merely the post-lapsarian road-bumps on the path between the first and final paradises?

Auden explicitly tells his readers, in his poems and in his prose, that he considers these natural environments to be representations of an Eden. He concedes that the North may be a dark region, icy and barren or that the harshness of the North does force men to display “the controlled ferocity of the human species” (Auden & MacNeice 148), but these facts do not prevent the far North from also being the image of Auden’s Eden on earth. Instead, he subverts these brutalizing elements in order to confirm that the wild spaces of the European North are edenic. One way to understand these contradictions is to consider that Auden—a serious Anglo-Catholic—is, in these poems, proposing a solution to a dilemma which he lays out in The Dyer’s Hand:

> “A writer brought up in a Christian society has to cope with a problem which his Pagan predecessors were spared. [...] his Eden, like the Pagan one, must be a fortunate place where there is no suffering and everyone has a good time—but he has to devise a way of making outward appearances signify subjective states of innocence and happiness to which, in the real world, they are not necessarily related.”
>
> (---. *Dyer’s Hand* 414)

The Christian Eden must, for this reason, be “grotesque” (414). In a word: the traditional Christian vision of Eden falls flat for Auden because it is not always possible to behave well in a Christian sense while also having a good time. A Christian paradise may have its moral virtues, but it is, for the postlapsarian, also a place of natural, intellectual, and sensuous suppression. An Eden which is wild, however, avoids this problem. If Eden is neither ignorant nor unambiguously conducive to happiness—as the North is—then this clash between subjective states and outwards appearances disappears.

Auden takes this line of criticism even further. The Edens in his poems do more than engage with the “grotesque” struggle between the outward appearances of and subjective states of innocence that are both indicative of an Eden and yet contradictory so that they must com-

pete within Eden; they also demonstrate a way in which these two elements can be reconciled through a reimagining—or, perhaps, a *relandscaping*—of Eden. Auden, in his poems, provides several reasons for this relandscaping, but they all return to one essential chain of thought: traditional Edens are flawed because they don't allow space for sin, doubt, or pleasure—essential parts of the human experience; thus, the conventional image of Eden is unacceptable to Auden because it is a "paradise" which either rejects its *all-too-human* inhabitants or deprives them of that which makes them human.[4] The Pagan, Pre-Socratic Eden of the Greek Arcadia, on the other hand, allows for sensuousness, irreverence, and sin, but does not provide any moral framework through which they can be understood and assuaged. Utopianism, one proposed solution to this dilemma, is even worse than Arcadia or the traditional Eden. For Auden, the forces that are typically understood to advance the causes of worldly utopias actually suppress the individual's ability to imagine—and, by consequence—enter a paradise worth inhabiting. The construction of a New Jerusalem necessitates the acquiring of superfluous material goods (like claret and radios) and the establishment of strict order.[5] Neither of these developments are conducive to the conditions of the postlapsarian individual. For these reasons, Auden's poems describe an Eden which remains Christian while also embracing the grotesque, the empty, and the savage. This is an Eden that utterly rejects the promise of a New Jerusalem—which Auden sees as the "antitype" of Arcadia (---. *Collected Poems* 637).

Through this rejection, Auden discovers both internal peace and divine communion. The topographical model which Auden develops for such an Eden is the European far North, as this landscape can be employed to allegorize a new kind of Eden—complete with violence, silence, light, and desolation *as well as* God's love. Auden believes this Eden to be more conducive to human nature, which—understood via his own nature—is invariably interested in material conditions as well as spirituality. This is not as much of a contradiction in logic as it may at first

---

[4] A phrase coined by Nietzsche. Several important Nietzschean ideas intersects with with Auden's vision of the North. See pages 10 and 46 of this essay.

[5] Objects referenced in "Amor Loci" and "Iceland Revisited;" see pages 34 and 29, respectively, for more context.

appear to be. Since the days of St. Augustine, Christianity has often tolerated human folly in so far as the Fall is a necessary precondition for redemption. Consequently, the seemingly less-than-edenic Eden of the North opens itself to the major themes of Christianity: faith in the face of doubt, forgiveness, and love. With this in mind, it is unsurprising that, for Auden, Eden must be a synthesis of a theological ideal and the acceptance of the flawed material conditions of the the world.

While this is an Eden that borrows shameless hedonism from the Arcadia of the early Greeks and traditional Christian ideas of a prelapsarian paradise, it also draws from the philosophies of Christian Existentialists, namely Kierkegaard. If the North is a place where pleasure is Pagan and Pre-Socratic, it is also a place where "our grief is not Greek" (Marchetti 208), but rather Christian and existentialist.[6] In this way, the North represents a synthesis of two dialectically opposed visions of Eden: the Pagan, which is primarily focused on material and natural goodness, and the Christian and the existentialist, which are concerned with the maximization of spiritual and moral goodness and the search for meaning. What results is an imagined divine landscape where Auden's hedonism and aestheticism can coexist with Christian values of asceticism; where sensation is not shameful and where suffering is still meaningful.

The far North, in Auden's poems, is an Eden that demonstrates this synthesis. There, humans are free to indulge in violence and gluttony without fear of expulsion from the Garden or condemnation by God. At the same time, as an Eden, the North represents a closeness to God which has remained uncorrupted by the developments of history and culture that followed the Fall. Auden's project, therefore, is not to discover the path towards a new Utopia. His goal is to reconceptualize the individual's position in relation to himself and to God through the allegorization of the wildernesses which have always existed just to the North of Europe's major civilizations.

The Barbaric North: Why Landscape Matters

---

[6] Here, Marchetti is quoting Auden directly.

Auden develops a stylistic methodology in order to give form to his abstract ideas. He overlays his theological themes onto the landscapes of the far North (namely Northern Scandinavia, Iceland, and the English and Scottish Highlands) in a way that might be best described with the title which he gave to one of his own poems—a sestina describing the moral history of civilization—"Paysage moralisé" (---. *Collected Poems* 119).[7] The turn of phrase is interesting not only because it implies that the country has an essentially moral element, but also because, in using the past participle of the French intransitive verb "moraliser" as an adjective, he robs the noun of the phrase of its chance to be the subject. Thus, the phrase searches for a subject; the title asks, "moralized by whom?" This question is not an easy one to answer. The moralizer could be Auden or the speaker of the poem under the title, or it could be the characters in the poem. Perhaps it is even the divine or poetry itself. Regardless of this unanswered mystery of syntax, it is important to note the subtle way in which Auden is telling the reader that the relationship between landscape and morality is one that must be imagined and built by the observer. They must step into the spot abandoned by the grammatical subject. Auden's northern landscape poems provide many examples of this. In "Hammerfest" is only when the observer chooses to notice that tundra can be "a listening terrain" for which "Religion had begun with the Salvation Army" (---. *Collected Poems* 724) that the tundra becomes tender, innocent, and divine. Similarly, the traveler in "Journey to Iceland" must look upon "glaciers; the sterile immature mountains" of Iceland and "faintly" dare to "hope" "Let me be far from any Physician" (149) for the landscape to promise anything to that refugee from civilization. In "Paysage moralisé" itself, the great philosophical choice of the civilization is whether they chose to dream of "evening walks through learned cities" or "of islands" (119).

---

[7] *"Moralized landscape"*

Auden chooses to describe the landscapes that he encountered or imagined in the world north of York as an Eden.[8] This act represents several aesthetic and philosophical principles. One of these concepts is the philosophy that Hannah Arendt describes as *amor mundi*: a love for the world as it is, through which the lover learns to critically understand and accept not only the world but also themselves. The discovery of this kind of love is a central theme in Auden's arctic and subarctic poems, poems in which the world is systematically de-romanticized so that the narrator (who is typically either Auden or a thinly disguised version of Auden) can come to love the region truthfully and sincerely. This is no small task because, as Auden, a poet preoccupied with Truth, complained in an interview, "love is always a difficult subject because it is the subject in which, probably, we deceive ourselves more than any other;" this, Auden continues, should foster a healthy skepticism of the concept of love in poetry "because everybody knows that it is harder to be honest in that field than any other" (*Tell me the Truth About Love* 0:06:58*)*. Thus, the hardness of the Auden's northern Eden serves as a sort of litmus test. Since the climate of the North Pennines—to use the example which Auden uses in his poem "Amor Loci"—is conducive neither to the development of distractions in the domains of culture and economics nor to sentimentalization more generally, the "small burn[s]" and "lonely sheiling[s]" of this place represent a paradise which can only be enjoyed when approached with a humble heart and an open mind.[9] To one so qualified, this ascetic landscape offers:

> [...] much: a vision,
> not (as perhaps at
> twelve I thought it) of Eden,
> still less of a New
> Jerusalem but, for one,
> convinced he will die,
> more comely, more credible
> than either day-dream.

---

[8] Auden was born and raised in York, in the North of England.

[9] The specific loci in this poem is the Valley of Rookhope, in County Durham ("W. H. Auden - Poetry International 1970" 06:52)

(---. *Collected Poems* 780)

This love is candid and, despite being realized through the poet's interaction with the outside world, an inward-looking love. Such a love is natural in the context of Auden's denouncement of poetry's political potential, and it binds him and his work even more closely to Hannah Arendt's vision of the painful necessity of total love, as he searches to discover and accept his own total love for the imperfect world of the North. "What is most difficult," Arendt wrote in a letter to Karl Jaspers, "is to love the world as it is, with all the evil and suffering in it." (Penaluna & Hill). Still, this love in the face of evil forms the foundation of *"amor mundi*." Arendt describes *amor mundi* as something which is "not only apolitical but antipolitical, perhaps the most powerful of all antipolitical forces" (Arendt 452).[10] Again, this necessary but tumultuous love is a useful tool for deciphering Auden's relationship with the North. His turn towards the top of the world is simultaneously an escape from politics and an embrace of the challenge of imagining a kind of Eden.

Through the desolate North, Auden also appears to be engaging with the existentialist concept of the abyss. Early existentialists recognized the terror of the void created by the collapse of traditional religious principles at the dawn of the Modern Age. Nietzsche warned "He who fights with monsters should be careful lest he thereby become a monster. And if thou gaze long into an abyss, the abyss will also gaze into thee." (Neitzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*). Kierkegaard—who profoundly influenced and inspired Auden—also wrote on the theological terror of silence: "Silence is the snare of the demon, and the more one keeps silent, the more terrifying the demon becomes; but silence is also the mutual understanding between the Deity and the individual," as demonstrated by the "oath of silence" which existed between Abraham and Yahweh (Kierkegaard). The North, equally, is a sort of void; it is, in many ways, devoid of direct evidence of God. It is a cold, quiet, empty place—and yet this absence drives Auden to discover

---

[10] This principle was, and still is, highly controversial. (It is worth conceding that, for Arendt, even antipolitical love could be used as a political tool. She wrote that *amor mundi* can also make "us politically minded" (Moreault).) Regardless, antipolitcal love is essential to Auden Auden's vision of agape and the North.

an Eden in which he can believe. For him, the barrenness of the region encourages a sense of spiritual solitude which, paradoxically, confirms the existence of the divine.

Many of Auden's poems yearn for this more barren state. As far as he is concerned, the great civilizations of Europe—be they the Roman Empire or the bourgeois Protestants of the 19th century—had, in their overly zealous quest to enter what Kierkegaard would have described as the second sphere, the "ethical sphere," systematically denied humanity of its natural instincts.[11] This is not to say that Auden was a Romantic. He emphasized in his prose that to be only naturally good—that is to say, to only fulfill one's biological and aesthetic needs—is to fail the ethical obligations of the reason-endowed individual (Emig 222).[12] It is simply to say that he recognized something obvious: that civilization's march towards "New Jerusalem" is a march away from nature and, by extension, the *natural man*. This, he worried, represented a challenge to elements of the human condition that, after the Fall, can not be changed. The consequence of this process is the denial of essential elements of the self, a prospect which Auden considers to be just as "dangerous" as the savagery of the *natural man* (222). In a passage that he wrote, privately, in the early 1950s, Auden explains that these trends are a constant in human history by comparing 20th century civilizations to the Roman Empire. He laments that both societies fetishize power and technology at the expense of humanity:

> To all of us, I believe, in the middle of the twentieth century, the Roman Empire is like a mirror in which we see reflected the brutal, vulgar, powerful yet despairing image of our own technological civilisation, an imperium which now covers the entire globe, for all nations, capitalist, socialist and communist, are united in their worship of mass, technique and temporal power. What fascinates and terrifies us about the Roman Empire is not that it finally went smash, but that, away

---

[11] Kierkegaard imagines the realization of the self as a process with three major stages, described as "spheres": the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. In brief, the aesthetic sphere is defined by the search for the self through sensual fulfillment, while the ethical sphere is defined by the search for the self through social relationships.

[12] In fact, Auden is often associated with Ant-Romanticism.

> from the start, it managed to last for five centuries without creativity, warmth or hope.
>
> (Davenport-Hines 282)

The cold Arcadia of the far North is conceptually significant in light of this "terrif[ying]" realization about civilization because it represents a shelter from the storm of human progress. Yes, "Cerebrotonic Cato may / Extol the ancient disciplines," writes Auden in his 1947 poem "The Fall of Rome," but "Altogether elsewhere, vast / Herds of reindeer move across / Miles and miles of Golden moss, / Silently and very fast." (---. *Collected Poems* 333).

This leads to yet another appeal of the North: its relative timelessness. What little life survives there, beyond the northern burns and Hadrian's Wall, is set upon arctic plains as undeveloped and open as the primitive pastures in Renaissance paintings of Arcadia. The local industry is—for the most part—limited to herding, although sheep and goats are replaced by reindeer, or fishing and whaling (a sort of Norse equivalent to the Artemisian hunt). Even more importantly to Auden—who confesses, in his poems, that the inhabitants of his Eden are "nameless to me, / faceless as heather or grouse" (---. *Collected Poems* 779)—the physical elements of the landscape are frozen in an endless Edenic present. With stormy seas, vast plains of ice, barren rocks, and extreme temperature and light conditions which conspire to keep civilization at bay, nature has made a literal paradise of the Arctic circle and its surrounding regions.[13] Its inaccessibility and hostility to industry and culture mean that it remains the last Eden on the continent, an isolated "refuge" where "Europe is absent" (---. *Collected Poems* 150) and the individual is free to be true to their nature. This freedom allows him to imagine—and, in doing so, create—his own Eden.

For Auden, such a philosophical discovery is best done through landscape. As Marchetti writes:

---

[13] "Paradise" comes, through Greek and then French, to English from the Avestian word "pairidaēza," meaning a walled garden or enclosed park (Paradise).

> "[Auden's] approach to the physical landscape [...] consistently transforms the perceived world into symbolic, allegorical and metonymic modes, as vehicles for intellectual and moral ratiocination. [...] He uses allegory and symbolism as the poetic counterpart of the basic duality he perceived in human nature between Logos and Eros: allegory being a more active and rational approach to the world (via analogy); symbolism being a more passive, visionary expression of [the] world of perceptions."
>
> (Marchetti 200)

Marchetti, in these words, is alluding to moments in poems such as the following from "Bucolics," in which Auden writes of temperate plains:

> I cannot see a plain without a shudder:
> "Oh God, please, please, don't ever make me live there!"
> [...] think of growing where all elsewheres are equal!
> So long as there's a hill-ridge somewhere the dreamer
> Can place his land of marvels [...]
> Here nothing points [...]
>
> (---. *Collected Poems* 565)

In this passage, the flatness of a landscape becomes inseparable from the idea of moral and imaginative flatness. Auden fears the plains because to grow "where all elsewheres are equal" is, in a sense, not to grow at all. How, Auden asks, can one possibly develop a sense of morality or maturity when they live in a place where there is no topographical discrimination to cultivate a hierarchy of thought?

For Auden, who once wrote that his own being was created of "eros and dust" (Auden, "September 1, 1939"), thought is not the only abstract human process that needs the foil of the material world. Love, too, is a link between living beings, their world, and the immaterial. If Auden, then, is to discover something important about the relationship between his mind and his love and the world, he must go to a place where the landscape points—where the intense physicality of the topography both reflects his nature it cultivates it. This is why Auden turns, in his poems and his travels, to the North.

The extremely barren conditions at the ends of the earth have long represented, for Europeans, a space that ought to be avoided. Travelers rarely ventured into them, and a significant percentage of those who did not return. Up through the 18th and 19th centuries, the travels of Englishmen to these regions were still quite rightfully referred to as "expeditions," and their motives were purely political, scientific, or economic. Many, for example, made ill-fated efforts to find a Northwest Passage, but few—if any—traveled to the arctic or its surroundings in search of an Eden. Auden changed this. After a childhood spent in the North of England, Auden made three major trips to the far North in his lifetime: first to Iceland in 1936, then to Northern Norway in 1961, and again to Iceland in 1964.[14] Auden also lived in Helensburgh, in central West Scotland, between the years 1930 and 1932, where he was a school teacher. All five of these chapters feature largely in his life as well as his writing. He describes, for example, the months which he spent in Iceland as "among the happiest in a life that has been, so far, unusually happy" (Auden & MacNeice 11).

The North, for Auden, was a great source of a profound, often religious happiness. Thought his life, it represented a place of magic—a paradise where the divine was married to the material. After returning from his second trip to Iceland, Auden wrote in the foreword to a republishing of Letters From Iceland:

> In my childhood dreams Iceland was holy ground; when, at the age of twenty-nine, I saw it for the first time, the reality verified my dream; at fifty-seven it was holy ground still, with the most magical light of anywhere on earth. Furthermore, modernity does not seem to have changed the character of the inhabitants. They are still the only really classless society I have ever encountered, and they have not—not yet—become vulgar.
>
> (Auden & MacNeice 10)

Iceland, and the North more broadly, was not only "holy" to Auden, but also Edenic. Consider these points from Auden's atlas of his personal "Eden," from the essay "Reading":

---

[14] One might also consider Auden's 1939 trip to Manchuria, from which he returned via a transcontinental train across Canada, to represent another artistically productive trip north for Auden; however, that journey to China and the Americas is outside of the scope of this essay.

> *Landscape* Limestone uplands like the Pennines plus a small region of igneous rocks with at least one extinct volcano. A precipitous and indented sea-coast.
> *Ethnic origin of its inhabitants* [...] a slight Nordic predominance.
> *Sources of Natural Power* Wind, water, peat, coal. No oil.
> *Economic activities* Lead mining, coal mining, chemical factories, paper mills, sheep farming, truck farming, greenhouse horticulture.
> *Means of transport* Horses and horse-drawn vehicles [...] No automobiles or airplanes.
>
> (---. *Dyer's Hand* 6-7)

This is a description of a landscape that is more than a wellspring of childhood nostalgia for the landscape which Auden described in his personal correspondences as his "Mutterland" (Mendelson 56). The elements described in the passage are the stone from which the major pillars of the Eden in Auden's poems are carved: a harsh landscape, a timeless and old-fashioned way of living, a cool climate, and a limited socio-political hierarchy. It is difficult to ignore how this list of edenic elements also includes several contradictions, as many of the points listed are mutually exclusive. (How, for instance, can truck farming exist in a society with no automobiles?) Accepting that Auden's Eden is a place of contradictions, the reader can understand it as both an imagined, perhaps impossible space, as well as a stylized description of Northwestern Europe.

This is not to say that Auden sees Northwestern Europe simply as a materialization of Eden, although Iceland, Finnmark, etc. often do represent his vision of Eden. Auden's relationship with the North is extremely inward-looking. His project is to use the landscape—and, to a lesser extent, the culture and history—of the region to allegorize human nature and the relationship of humans to God and paradise. The North is useful for this project for several reasons. The first of these is the impression of moral detachment created by the extremely barren and remote nature of the North. This is useful for allegorizing and understanding questions of the abyss, sin, and forgiveness. Similarly, Auden uses the unique qualities of sound and light in Northwestern Europe to give form and language to highly abstract ideas about the aspirations and expectations of postlapsarian humans. This method of thinking would be, for Auden, impossible in

more southerly regions of Europe or in the Mediterranean because the local earth has been so thoroughly modified that one can not use its shape for the development of an authentic relationship to the self and the divine.[15] Auden furthers this argument by contrasting the far North with the imperiums of Europe. The former, he notes has largely been ignored by history. It therefore continues to represent fundamental truths about the human condition. The latter, however, are more interested in the worship of the transient and the powerful than an understanding of the self.

There is no corner of Europe more northwesterly than Iceland. Auden's first encounter with the "holy ground" of that island is recounted in the poem "Journey to Iceland." This piece, which describes Auden's arrival in the port of Reykjavík, describes an Iceland which is both naturally beautiful and marred by humanity. It is, Auden writes, "an island and [it therefore] should be / a refuge" (---. *Collected Poems* 150). This being said, refuge status doesn't necessarily make Iceland peaceful. Auden makes it clear that Iceland has a barbarous history. He refers to the thrice widowed Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir of the Laxdœla Saga, who said of her drowned and murdered husbands "He that I loved the / Best, to him I was worst" (Auden & MacNeice 24);[16] "the church where a bishop was put in a bag" (24), which a probable reference to Bishop Jón Arason, who was brutally mutilated and murdered by a Lutheran and Royalist mob (Buck 221);[17] and describes a hostile guard with a gun and the pathetic cries of a "doomed man" thrown from his horse. Iceland is not a place of peace, but still, Auden argues, it represents the "limited hope" of the traveler (Auden & MacNeice 23). This is a startling contradiction.

---

[15] A reference to an essay by Auden on Robert Frost; see page 20 of this essay.

[16] The syntax of the line has been noticeably distorted. The original Icelandic is quoted in Style, by F.L. Lucas: "Theim var ek verst, er ek unna mest" (Lucas 96).

[17] It is not clear which burial, specifically, Auden is referring to in this poem; however, I propose that he is referring to Arason because that story is not only one of the most significant in the popular history of Iceland, but also because Arason was a celebrated writer and Auden writes that the church in which the body is burred is visited by "the student of prose and conduct."

The idea that violence can exist within the space is the most striking contradiction in Auden's northern Eden. This concession is, for Auden, a necessary one, as he viewed the Fall of Man as—in the words of Gareth Reeves—"a psychological fact" (Reeves 194). Consequently, any Eden he imagines must accept humans as sinful and disenchanted. One striking example of this is in "Hammerfest," a poem that recounts Auden's trip to the city in Finnmark, Norway, which holds the title of being the worlds northernmost municipality. The poem imagines the surrounding terrain as being divine in its innocence. Repeatedly, the poem stresses that the landscape does not condemn humanity for the monstrous violences that it has practiced. Auden writes of the environment:

> The only communities it had to judge us by
> Were cenobite, mosses and lichen, sworn to
> Station and reticence: its rocks knew almost nothing,
> Nothing about the glum Reptilian Empire
> Or the epic journey of the Horse had heard no tales
> Of that pre-glacial Actium [...]
> [...] For all it knew,
> Religion had begun with the Salvation Army,
> Warfare with motorised resentful conscripts.
>
> (---. *Collected Poems* 726)

This beautiful vision of a part of the world still unaware of the malice of mankind is contradicted by Auden in an earlier stanza. There, he alludes to the history of Hammerfest. The first stanza of the poems references scars on the landscape, which are explained with the words "louts, though —German this time—/ Had left their usual mark" (725). This is a reference to the fact that the city was burnt to the ground by a retreating Wehrmacht in 1945. (Not referenced by Auden, but also worth noting, is that the city was sacked in 1809 as part of the Napoleonic Wars.) It is therefore extremely surprising that anyone would describe Hammerfest as being unaware of war, fanaticism, or willful killing. The contradiction is explained by the last two lines of the poem, which read in part, "My intrusion had not profaned [Hammerfest]: / If innocence is holy, it was holy" (---. *Collected Poems* 726). Here, the word "innocence" furnishes one of the keys to under-

standing the poem. The landscape may be innocent, but this does not mean that it is ignorant of human brutality; after all, the rocks know *almost* nothing of Actium.

This distinction between innocence and ignorance is a significant one. It is ultimately not the case that “Ground so bare might take a century to realise / How we behave to regions or to beings / Who have anything we're after” (726); there can be no doubt that this ground has witnessed the worst kinds of human ambition. Yet "ground so bare” manages to remain innocent because it itself does not offer anything that humans are after. Armies may have twice sacked the city, but this was not the fault of the earth beneath it. It was humans who built upon the barren land the valuable quays and warehouses which would ultimately become targets for aggression and so, here, humans bear the responsibility. This had not changed by the time Auden visited the region. In the 1960s, the only material offerings of the place were still man-made commodities—to wit, the novelty items of "deep-frozen fish-sticks” and “the beer of the world's most northern brewery”—while the ground around Hammerfest was as fruitless as it had ever been. Just as in 1945 or 1809, the landscape Auden encountered in 1961 played the role of a passive witness to the triumphs of the humans who make their way upon it. This passivity is how the North remains holy in spite of human intrusion. It is materially disinvested space, an environment that produces no irresistible fruit. Humans may be barbarous upon it, but they will not be barbarous because of it. The disinvestment of the North returns to the idea of a relandscaping of Eden. In the Garden of Eden, there is great abundance and therefore great temptation. In Auden’s language, the landscape of Eden *has something that people are after*: the forbidden Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. This is ultimately the undoing of Adam and Eve, as Eve condemns mankind because she cannot resist the temptation to taste of the tree’s fruit. In Finnmark, however, there is no temptation intrinsic to the environment. No sin is likely to be committed in the name of lichen or moss, and so the landscape is—even more so than the Garden in Genesis—a holy refuge.

The austerity of the North transforms it into a liberated Eden. According to Auden, “Eden is a place where its inhabitants may do whatever they like to do; the motto over its gate,

'Do what thou wilt is here the Law.'" (---. *Dyer's Hand* 409). This is generally congruent with the Old Testament concept of Eden, as a place before guilt, work, pain, or shame; however, in the Old Testament's Eden there *is* one law that is not to be violated upon pain of exile—to take from the garden that which is not meant for man or woman. The Christian Eden, according to Auden's definition, is not an Eden because it could not sincerely display the quasi-anarchist motto offered by the poet. The garden of the arctic tundra, on the other hand, has no essential rules because it has no resources to regulate; it is "barren ground;"*do what thou wilt is there the Law*. It is, perhaps, possible to act poorly in the North, but the bad actor does not have to fear any sort of punishment from the Earth. "Mosses and lichen" are not necessarily incapable of judgment, but they are "cenobite" and "sworn to Station and reticence" (---. *Collected Poems* 726). In other words, they may judge but they can not pass judgement. Regardless of what one does in this true Eden, they will still matter to the landscape and will not be exiled.

The contrast between the two holy spaces of Genesis' Eden and Auden's North, which are diametrically opposed here is exacerbated by the emphasis on the idea of innocence and ignorance. Because the tree from which Adam and Eve eat is the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, the idea that ignorance and innocence are linked is implicit in the story of the Garden. Auden rejects this contradiction, writing of a landscape in which innocence is independent of ignorance. He does this by describing the North as a place that is entirely innocent while also aware of the true nature of Good and Evil. This conclusion about the landscape has allegorical relevance to the people who live upon it or, as is the case with Auden, the people who visit it. Just as the landscape surrounding Hammerfest is aware of human evil without becoming evil itself. The narrator of the poem can know and regret humanity's ability to disgust "good-natured topsoil," "farmyard beasts," and, of course, "garden plants," but this knowledge does "not [profane]" the holiness of the space (---. *Collected Poems* 726). What it does do is echo ideas from other Auden poems set in the North, namely "Journey to Iceland," wherein knowledge of Bishop Jón Arason's murder has no effect on the visitors' education by the landscape or the ugliness of Reykjavík can not hide the beauty of the cliffs and glaciers.

The distinction between innocence and ignorance and their relation to Eden is further developed in Auden's prose. In The Dyer's Hand, Auden imagines "a mythical character" who "is innocent, that is to say, who has not eaten of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and is, therefore, living in Eden. He then eats of the Tree, that is to say, he becomes conscious of the reality of Evil but, instead of falling from innocence into sin [...] he changes from an innocent child into an innocent adult" (---. *Dyer's Hand* 409). This mythical vision seems to be the magic in Auden's North. Auden—the speaker in "Hammerfest"—confesses that, since a childhood five decades past, he has "payed [...] atlas homage" to the imagined Eden of the North. Now, he has grown up, learned the history, and, like the landscape, become aware of the "reality of Evil"—he can no longer help but see its "mark." Nevertheless, the poem's maturity does not represent a loss of innocence for either Auden or Finnmark. The former has tasted of the fruit and been transformed into the innocent adult of Auden's hypothetical, ideal Eden. The place remains innocent and can still accept its visitors as "pilgrim[s]" (---. *Collected Poems* 725). Both have seen through the spell of ignorance, yet the landscape is not disappointed in Auden's pilgrimage and Auden, in turn, is not disappointed in the North.

The Topography of Allegory

This relationship between Auden and the landscape of Northern Europe allows him to escape the demands and the conventional modes of thought of the great imperiums. He can, consequently, discover something in the North about nature and himself. But what specifically about the climate and landscape of the region makes it the source of such realizations? Traditionally, Europeans who have attempted to understand themselves through landscape, climate, or culture, have looked south—to Italy, Greece, Provence, or the Holy Land. Auden, however, insists that these landscapes are not conducive to the development of a philosophy of the self or useful for those searching to understand the true nature of the world—and, by extension, the divine. Why? Because, as Auden wrote in an essay on Robert Frost, "thanks to centuries of culti-

vation, Mother Earth has [in England and on the Continent] acquired human features." This cultivation of the European continent means that the writers who study these landscapes can only express themselves "abstractly," in "theory and temperament rather than by facts." (---. *Dyer's Hand* 348).[18] Auden concedes in "XVIII" of "Sonnets From China" this was not the case in the "ancient South" (---. *Collected Poems* 638), which was "innocent" (Marchetti 206), but the South has changed while the human condition has not. This makes it more difficult—at least according to Auden—for the typical European thinker to there discover their natural relationship to the world. The North provides an antidote for this malaise; its visitors encounter unadulterated "holy ground." A writer in the South may think that they have engaged in communion with the landscape, but, in truth, they have only parleyed with their earth-altering ancestors. If *amor mundi* is defined as a love for the world as it is, it must be more different to cultivate a strong sense of *amor mundi* in a place where the world is not as it truly is. Thus, one must travel north of the Hadrian's Wall to enter an authentic communion with the landscape.

Yet the holy ground of the North is not only holy because it is authentic. Many of the original features of the northern world are philosophically and theologically inspiring to Auden. These features include the tendency of the North's inhabitants towards violence and its barrenness—which is related to its natural authenticity and which has already been discussed—but also its silence, its light, and its permanence through time. These features, once allegorized by Auden, illustrate the profoundly Christian nature of the landscape, revealing the ways in which the North is a half-hidden Eden and offering insights into the nature of the individual, the divine, and the relationship between the two.

A "Philistine realist" (---. *Dyer's Hand* 137) would likely insist that the profound quiet of the region is simply the product of muffling snow, the limited industry and population, and the absence of walls of trees or stone off of which sound can be reflected. Auden would not have ar-

[18] This passage is from Auden's comparison of English and American literature; still, the observation is equally true of the relatively wild North of Europe when compared to the cultivated South.

gued with these material facts. Even so, Auden's poems transform this silence into a testament to the region's edenic nature and its divine love for our species. In doing this, he creates an image of the North as a space deliberately crafted to reflect his personal vision of Eden, fit for the presence of postlapsarian humans such as himself.

Beyond violence, perhaps the most paradoxical feature of Auden's northern Eden is its silence. In the traditional Christian Eden, the landscape is not silent. There, God and the angels are integrated into the landscape, and they often speak with each other or directly to Adam and Eve. In these Edenic poems Auden cannot help but notice, time and time again, how quiet the North is. In "A Happy New Year," for example, he remarks of the Scottish landscape, where "stillness was total" (Auden, *English Auden* 451), that "No strange sound laid my echo on the road / And when where two little lanes branched off I stood, / On either side the moorland grew away, / Luminous all Glen Fruin lay / And the sky was silent as an unstruck bell" (---. *English Auden* 444). Similarly, in "Amor Loci, we are told that, for the North Pennines, "Any musical future / is most unlikely" and that the hammering of miners belongs to "days preterite" while the herds of reindeer in "The Fall of Rome" are described as moving "Silently."

This silence is significant in a Christian Existentialist understanding of the North. Kierkegaard writes, as part of a prayer in The Third Ear, "I [...] learnt that praying is hearing, not merely being silent" and "I found I had less and less to say, until finally, I became silent, and began to listen. I discovered in the silence, the voice of God" ("Søren Kierkegaard on Silence and Prayer"). Auden echoes this sentiment in his own prose, writing in "Words and the World," that "One might say that for Truth the word 'silence' is the least inadequate metaphor, and that words can bear witness to silence only as shadows bear witness to light [...] The only witness to the living God [...] which poetry can bear is indirect and negative." (McDiarmid 119). This embrace of cosmic silence as an expression of Negative Theology is especially significant in "Hammerfest," where a stanza which does much to explain the significance of silence in Auden's northern poems reads as follows:

> Was it as worldly as it looked? I might have thought so

But for my ears: something odd was happening
Sound-wise. A word, a laugh, a footstep, a truck's outcry,
Each utterance rang singular, staccato,
To be cut off before it could be contradicted
Or confused by others: a listening terrain
Seized on them all and never gave one back in echo,
As if to land as desolate, as far up,
Whatever noise our species cared to make still mattered.
Here was a place we had yet to disappoint.
(---. *Collected Poems* 726)

Here, the paradox of sound in Auden's northern Eden is directly, if not cryptically, addressed. Conventionally, silence is associated with the worst elements of isolation—indeed, many of Auden's poems that discuss silence also stress the desolation of the North—but he also discovers a profound communion in the massive quiet that he encounters there. In fact, it is the silence of the region that proves that the space has a higher significance superimposed onto the material. He discovers, in the "listening terrain," the omnipresence of the divine and, consequently, an Eden.

Auden's subversion of silence is remarkable. It is almost a given that an English gentleman such as Auden would care (at least superficially) for nature, but it is unorthodox to imagine that nature would care about him. This poem illustrates the relationship of "radical anthropocentrism" which critic Rainer Emig argues is characteristic of Auden's work (Emig 212). The landscape surrounding Hammerfest, Auden tells us, seizes upon every sound humans make. Auden understands the silence to result from the fact that, in a place such as this, *our species still matters*, as *we had yet to disappoint* it. Considering Hammerfest's history, one might expect the landscape to have been more than disappointed in mankind, so the landscapes willingness to listen seems to speak to a willingness to forgive. One explanation for this could be that the landscape of Finnmark, being cold and brutal itself, understands the brutality of human ac-

tions and can therefore sympathize with them.[19] Either way, the choice by Auden to describe the thieving silence surrounding the city as a "listening terrain" and not as a reflection of any personal isolation emphasizes the unique nature of the relationship between person and place which develops in Auden's North.

That relationship is established between the noisy humans and the landscape by the personified landscape's seizing of sound. Its effect is to demonstrate landscape's capacity for forgiveness. These ideas, in turn, are inseparable from the Christian idea of the divine. No matter what profanities our all-too-knowing species creates against this silence, the silence will remain—universal and unwilling to condemn mankind. Thus, silence as physical element of the region's geography becomes an allegory for a type of love so perfect that it makes the place *"unworldly."* This unworldliness, again, turns the attention of the reader back to the idea of the Arctic as a reclaimed Eden in which those who know the difference between Good and Evil and who have disobeyed divine law—in a word, the Fallen—may still reside. Auden says that to "Bring up" (---. *Collected Poems* 726) man's sins is to profane the landscape of the North, but one can do so anyway without risking disappointing the space because the earth will swallow the profanity without losing its compassion for our species.

In some Christian traditions, most notably the Eastern Orthodox tradition, the gates of Eden were reopened after the crucifixion. Forgiveness of sin represents, to these believers, the opportunity to reenter Eden. The silence encountered by Auden does something similar. It represents an unworldly love so saturated with the most Christian of traits—forgiveness and compassion—that it refuses to eject even a troublesome noise-maker.

This being said, Auden does recognize that this relationship with sound might be one that is imagined and not necessarily one which is real. He concedes this in writing that it is *"As if" man still mattered to the landscape* instead of simply asserting that, in the area around Hammerfest, man still mattered to the landscape. While *as if* can be used in a speculative or

---

[19] Another way of interpreting these lines might be to read the as an acknowledgment of the desolateness of the place, which would make it flattered to be the sight of any human settlement at all and, therefore, more willing to forgive our transgressions than another landscape might be.

meditative sense which recognizes the probability of a fact without risking a *cum hoc ergo propter hoc* fallacy, it is more often used as the foundation of a simile. The former interpretation would not in any way erode the theological weight of the local silence; instead, it would simply betray Auden's own apophatic orientation and his sense of linguistic humility. The latter interpretation—however, at least at first glance—would appear to challenge the strength of the connection between the symbol of silence and and the theological meditations which follow for Auden. The use of a simile necessitates that the comparison being drawn exists between two essentially different things. (In other words, *"as if" man still mattered* is to say that the appearance of significance is superficial, that humanity does not matter to the landscape of Hammerfest, that the silence in the poem is only silence.) However, "as if" is also the very heart of allegory, as allegory is built upon the principle that an "as if" relationship between a sign and its referent is as philosophically and pedagogically rich as a referent's relationship to itself. Furthermore, allegory actively invites a moral or theological interpretation of a story. Far from eroding the integrity of his ideas, Auden's "as if" invites his readers to interpret the silence of the landscape as an expression of larger ideas. In this case, the ideas are that the Arctic is a place where mankind still matters and that it offers a lesson on the true nature of the landscape.

Light—like violence and quiet—is everywhere in Auden's description of the North. This is not surprising because light near the poles of the earth has a set of unique optical qualities. Due to the tilt of the earth, light must pass through an especially thick layer of atmosphere before it reaches the poles. This alters its strength and its hues. Furthermore, as the seasons change, the ends of the world alternate between seasons of endless day and of endless night[20]. Auden describes the product of these atmospheric and astrological conditions as the "most magical light of anywhere on earth," and it is therefore no surprise that this light is an important element in Auden's Eden.

---

[20] The arctic and antarctic circles are, in fact, delineated by the occurrence of complete darkness or or light on the solstices. Light is therefore a definitional element of the arctic.

Light embodies the fundamental contradiction which Auden meditates upon as he travels north. Traditionally, in religious iconography, light can be used as a one-to-one stand-in for the divine. God has been, and often still is, represented as a beam or figure of light, and Christ and the saints are almost always depicted with halos of light. In the Book of John, Christ says "I am the light of the world: he who followeth me shall never walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (Holy Bible 617). However, in the 1600s, the image of light began to be associated with the very scientific, political, and philosophical ideas that existed in opposition to the Church and that formed the basis of the "Age of Enlightenment." As a result, light represents two seemingly irreconcilable poles of understanding: one theological and one secular. With this in mind, one can imagine Auden's vacations from the traditional centers of Western Civilization to be trips away from the light of reason and into the realm of "magical light" (---. *Collected Poems* 728). To an extent, we see such voyages between kinds of light unfolding in his poems. Yet these poems also blur the line between the two ways of understanding light, again demonstrating how Auden's edenic North is a synthesis of the material and the divine, the world and the unworldy—a necessary synthesis for an Anglo-Catholic poet in the increasingly humanistic Modern Age.

Auden's poems offer many examples of this use of Light. In "Hammerfest," Auden dreams "during / Three sunny nights." Through these dreams he challenges the Southern Norwegian stereotype that the North is an especially sinful space. The moss in "The Fall of Rome" shines "Golden" on the plains in a way that seems to both parody and echo the philosophical and scientific work being done in the poem's Rome. Auden uses light to totally reject the dichotomy of reason and superstition in the poem "Iceland Revisited," in which the penultimate stanza copies the Edenic language from Auden's prose. It reads: "Once more /A child's day dream verified / The magical light beyond Hekla" (---. *Collected Poems* 728).[21] *Verified magic* should be an

[21] Helka is a major volcano in the south-west of Iceland; see appendix.

impossible contradiction, but in Auden's vision of the North it is not only a possible juxtaposition but a natural one. Some of the most effective light imagery in Auden's northern poems is found in "Journey to Iceland." In this poem, the light around Iceland illuminates the way in which the region serves as a "refuge" from Europe and a symbol of a pilgrim's hope to escape the reasoned world of the imperious while also suggesting that Iceland, despite being a land of light, is not more enlightened than the rest of Europe. The poem opens with the stanzas:

> And the traveller hopes: "Let me be far from any
> Physician"; and the ports have names for the sea;
> The citiless, the corroding, the sorrow;
> And North means to all: "Reject".
>
> And the great plains are for ever where cold creatures are hunted,
> And everywhere; the light birds flicker and flaunt;
> Under a scolding flag the lover
> Of islands may see at last,
>
> Faintly, his limited hope; as he nears the glitter
> Of glaciers; the sterile immature mountains intense
> In the abnormal day of this world [...]
> (Auden & MacNeice 23)

Regardless of the glum tone which prevails in the first stanza, the two following stanzas brighten the image. The small birds are "light," presumably because they both weigh very little and because they are light in color and their feathers have the greasy gloss of seabird plumage; their movement is a "flicker," which, again, gives them a bright, glittering quality reminiscent of a candle or torch. The glaciers also shine and the "abnormal day of this world" intensifies the glaciers and mountains. Light is a dominant feature of this landscape which, like the other spots in Auden's North, comes to represent a kind of Eden.

In this poem, Auden does not explicitly state that this world is an Eden, but, when the poem is contextualized with Auden's other writings on the North, its edenic features become impossible to ignore. Upon revisiting Iceland much later in his life, Auden said that the trip

reverified his childhood dreams of the place; when this assertion is combined with the assertion in "Amor Loci" that dreamscape of Northern England is not Edenic *but more than Edenic* and that, as a child, he had seen the North of the Pennines as an Eden, a strong circumstantial case can be made for these verses being a representation of Auden's idea of an Eden. Yet one does not have to look outside of this poem to see that the traveler expects to find an Eden as his ship approaches the rocky coast. The light around Iceland illustrates the ways in which the island, despite its "corrosion" and "sorrow," represents an Eden-like space. This is because the light is key to the traveler realizing his hopes. The poem opens with the traveler's surprising wish of "Let me be far from any / Physician."[22] Right from the get-go, the reader is encouraged to conflate the place from which the traveler has embarked, Europe, with doctors and—by extension—modern, scientific society. Iceland offers this opportunity because it is "an island and [it therefore] should be / a refuge" from time and civilization, but also because it is a land of light. The line "Faintly, his limited hope; as he nears the glitter" provides compelling evidence for this. Because of the enjambment of the line, the meaning of these words as they first appear is that the closer the traveler gets to "the glitter" the more he sees "hope." In this way, the light of the island is made into a unique thing that exists in opposition to the lights of Europe; the "abnormal day" light in the poem is as isolating as the North Atlantic. Partly because of this light, the North "means to all: reject." Auden insists in his prose that an Eden must be outside of time and must be opposed to the cities; as these light conditions resist modernity, the light of Iceland can be understood as both something that makes Iceland appear edenic and something which preserves the edenic nature of the island.

Yet even the "glitter" of edenic "hope" can not conceal the dark side of this landscape. In this poem, the intense white of a blizzard also proves "blinding" and "deadly" for the traveler (Auden MacNeice 24). This is as true of the geography of Icelands as of its people and history, which, Auden notes are—in some ways—morally unenlightened. The poem is filled with images

---

[22] Auden appears to be playing with the phonetic expectation that traveler would be attempting to escape a "position." (Indeed, I have heard this poem incorrectly recited in this way.)

of human suffering and cruelty: the man thrown from horseback, the dying, the murdered bishop, and the dying words of Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir, etc.. So, while literal light touches everything in this depiction of Iceland—the geological, the living (i.e. the birds), and the sterile, so intensely that the day seems strange to the worldling who approaches them—Iceland is simultaneously a place of moral darkness. Iceland, Auden wrote in a later version of this poem, "Present[s] then the world to the world with its mendicant shadow."[23] Again, the reader sees the nuance in Auden's vision of the North: it is a place which allows for moral anarchy which, despite being gratifying and even Edenic—a Pagan Arcadia—also wants for salvation and civilization. The same, later version of "Journey to Iceland" also implores the culture of the place to adopt the "flash" of "jazz" and "commerce." Auden's choice to not pick a "favorite suburb" of time and space, but rather to unify the best fashions and ideas of a South which is civilized with the ascetic significance of the North which is magical via the same motif—light—creates a sense of *discordia concors* (Auden, *Selected Poems* 50). It invites the reader to synthesize the Pagan and Arcadian with the Christian and the civilized. As it was with silence, these poems approach the divine and the material through an abstraction of regional geography and culture, "as shadows bear witness to light." What is discovered through this process is that the light of God and the light of reason both bear witness to each other.

In spite of the prominence of the motifs of light and noise, Auden's poems are neither devoid of darkness nor sound. Music, a symbol of sensual pleasure strongly associated with the Greek Arcadia and with Modern life, is important to one moment in "Iceland Revisited." In this poem, the narrator observes that "Where the harmonium stood / A radio:—," which leads him to wonder "Have the fittest survived?" (---. *Collected Poems* 727). Such a rhetorical question strongly suggests that we are not to believe that the fittest have survived, but rather, to lament the fact that the beautifully old-fashioned instrument has been replaced by a radio. This lament demonstrates another major reason that Auden sees the North as Edenic: for Auden, the far

[23] Auden published at least three different versions of this poem in the late 1930s.

North is a place that exits—or, at least, which ought to exist—outside of time. In his essay "Dingley Dell & The Fleet," he explains that, for someone to even acknowledge the existence of the future is to "[take] his first step out of Eden and into the real world, for [...] Eden has no conception of the future for it exists in a timeless present." (---. *Dyer's Hand* 424).

The North, for Auden, fulfills Eden's need for "a timeless present" because time passes there at a geological scale that is effectively imperceptible to humans. Yes, Auden's sense of the North develops slightly as he ages and allegorical narratives are also present; still, our sense of rate is stunted. This retardation is best demonstrated by the poem "Amor Loci." The description of the people and landscapes in this poem is shrouded in a remote and rawky tone that fossilizes them. The people, as mentioned earlier, are "nameless and faceless," just as their dead "too vague for judgement." Thus, the dead and the living are indistinguishable. This failure to differentiate between the two binary states of an organism's existence through and relationship to time creates a breakdown in the concept of time itself. If, in the Pennines, the dead are hardly different from the living, then the Pennines must be a place where change does not take place. The marks of humans on the landscape are equally unchanging. The occasional "tough chimney," "dejected masonry," and "decomposed machines," which dot the landscape are bits of stone and metal that can, and often do, last for hundreds (if not thousands) of years.[24] The use of the word "tough" stresses that the brickwork actively resists the natural erosion of time, while the use of the simple past tense for the verbs *to deject* and *to decompose* stresses that their temporality is over; the masonry and machines have escaped the stresses of chronology and, in doing so, have stepped back towards Eden. The natural landscape also manages to transcend the passing of time. Auden's narrator (who is, presumably, Auden himself) tells us that, though he is much older than he was when he was first exposed to this landscape, he "could [still] draw its map by heart, / showing its contours, / strata and vegetation, /name every height, / small burn and lonely sheiling" (---. *Collected Poems* 779). This proves that the place described in the poem,

---

[24] Auden's reverence for abandoned buildings reclaimed by nature may have been influenced by Robert Frost. See Dyer's Hand, page 345.

the North Pennines, does not change—or, if it does change, it does so at a geological and ecological pace that is imperceptible to Auden. As a result, the North is perceived as static, and static is what Auden insists Eden ought to be.

According to Marchetti, while Auden's concept of time in paradise is "not linear," but rather "endlessly repetitive and cyclical," it also "contains the possibility of a genuine break and discontinuity, into redemption and transcendence." (Marchetti 208). As these paradises are timeless, this "break" is possible in any moment in which one chooses to reenter Eden, so long as the break happens in a single moment. This total rebirth is an essential Christian idea, that Auden then integrates into his personal life through its relationship to northern landscapes. Auden may be returning to this space as a much older and less naïve man, but the fact that the place which he finds upon his return has not perceptibly changed does more than assure him that the place is Edenic. It assures him that the place is *better* than Eden. The stasis becomes proof that the place is "more comely, more credible" than Eden itself. Its lonely permanence allows Auden, in the poem "Amor Loci," to:

> [...] by analogy,
> imagine a Love
> that, however often smeared,
> shrugged at, abandoned
> by a frivolous worldling,
> does not abandon [...]
>
> (---. *Collected Poems* 780)

In effect, the permanence of the North performs a similar function as the silence in "Hammerfest" (or in other northern-edenic poems by Auden). In both "Amor Loci" and "Hammerfest," the facts of the geography, through the device of allegory, come to represent a particular kind of supernatural love. In this sense, the North is actually a better Eden than the traditional Eden. While Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden, and the Lord "placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life." (Holy Bible 3), the North is an Eden from which one can not be expelled. In "Amor

Loci," the love of the Pennines opens Eden's gates to Auden and others no matter what they have learned or done. This is strongly evocative of Christian ideals concerning the universal ability to be saved and welcomed into heaven so long as one searches for forgiveness and sufficiently humbles oneself. One can even choose to forsake this Eden and return to it years later and find that, although they abandoned and besmirched the Eden of the North, that Eden had kept things in order awaiting their return.

If the geography of Northern Europe make it edenic, then Southern and Middle Europe—the land of the imperiums—are, in Auden's model, necessarily less edenic. For this reason, and in order to underpin that which makes the North his paradise, Auden's northern poems also deal with the faults of the imperiums. He does this by contrasting the material and technological fetishism of the rest of the Europe with the more ascetic, antiquated, and sincere North. This contrast, nevertheless, resists reduction to a simple binary in which the North is a land of Marxist-Primitivist *good* and the South a land of Imperialist and Capitalist *evil*. Instead, Auden's South and the objects therein are sensually and aesthetically stimulating to a fault; the fault being that the obsession with the future that comes with technological progress and the distractions from the nature of the self that come with the constant, undirected change and stimulation of fashion obscure the idea of Eden. This rhetorical choice does not completely deny the existence of fashion, technology, and pleasure in the North. It is difficult to imagine that Auden—who was, in his own life, quite familiar with the character imagined in "Amor Loci," "Mr Pleasure"—would describe a place completely without any of the comforts of Modern Life as an Eden. Auden's Eden, after all, requires harmony between "outward appearances" of happiness and the sincere satisfaction of that pleasure-seeking instinct. An Eden which is entirely devoid of pleasures would not be able to escape the "grotesque" flaws which Auden describes in his prose writings on the subject of the Christian Eden. The completion of Eden is, therefore, to be found

in contrast and contradiction. Auden's poems imagine the European North as a place that resists the excesses of the European imperiums, encouraging an appreciation of the joys of trinkets, hot baths, and drinks without obscuring the logotheraputic instinct. In Auden's North, the contradiction between goods and goodness reaches an equilibrium.

One way in which the North competes with these excesses is to resist the base materialism and sterile objects of the imperiums. Like the poem "Amor Loci," the poem "Horae Canonicae*: Vespers*" describes an Eden which is filled only with obscure, old, and useless man-made objects. Auden contrasts this Eden with the sterile, modern technology of New Jerusalem: "In my Eden we have a few beam-engines,[25] saddle-tank locomotives,[26] overshot waterwheels and other beautiful pieces of obsolete machinery to play with: "In his New Jerusalem even chefs will be cucumber-cool machine minders" (---. *Collected Poems* 638).[27] The poem then expands the list of edenic and obsolete objects to include "krumhorns, doppions, sordumes" (638).[28] These objects are archaic and unfashionable, yet their ability to resist change over time is not a rejection of the objects' value but a rejection New Jerusalem. The player of krumhorns or saddle-tank mechanic can enjoy the intricate mechanical workings of these artificial objects without being forced into the futurism of fashion or, more broadly, the imperiums. The artifacts therefore represent a kind of compromise: they satisfy Auden's desire for beautiful things with which to play without forcing him into the "worship of mass, technique and temporal power" which he characterizes as indicative of "technological civilisation."

---

[25] A type of vertical steam engine primarily used to pump water from mines during the early years of the Industrial Revolution.

[26] An early steam powered train in which the water was carried in a distinctive cylindrical tank located over the boiler.

[27] While the landscape in the poem is not explicitly northern, it is Edenic. It also echos motifs in Auden's Northern Poems, such as the harmonium and the obscure historical references in "Iceland Revisited," as well as "the corroding" (Auden & MacNeice 23) and the rejection of modern medicine in "Journey to Iceland."

[28] Obscure musical instruments of the late Middle Ages and Renaissance.

When these "beautiful pieces of obsolete machinery" are compared to, the fashionable objects of the civilized Europe to which Auden belonged, the latter seem "frivolous" and absurd.[29] In "Iceland Revisited," an air-taxi spotted through a blizzard is described as a "Perseus" who has "Come to snatch / Shivering Andromeda / Out of the wilderness / And bring her back / To hot baths, cocktails, habits" (728). The invoking of one of the great Greek myths in this context highlights the ways in which, according to Auden, modern civilization is increasingly like the Roman Imperium—which is to say, blinded by the "worship" of "technique" and completely "without creativity, warmth or hope." In the wild, pre-Socratic times of the Pagan Perseus, being rescued by the hero meant the saving of one's life and the promise of love. In Auden's poem, however, the rescue loses its meaning because the drama of the myth is gutted out and replaced with philosophically vacuous materialism. Andromeda, in "Iceland Revisited," is not saved from real peril, only the minor and temporary inconvenience of bad weather; her reward is not love but a martini in the tub. The world south of Auden's North may have many pleasurable pastimes, but they are material and societal rewards—the fashions and idols more associated with New Jerusalem than with Eden. Fashion is the antithesis of the reticent timeliness that Auden describes as essential to the furniture of Eden.

Still, these fashions and consumer goods are not entirely incompatible with Auden's Northern Eden. Auden admires the blizzard, but he admires it the most when a hot bath is still an option and his Eden reflects this fact of his personality. The northernmost municipality in the world is, after all, also a land of frozen fish-sticks and novelty beers. A philosophical or theological crisis only arises when the fashionability of the traditional centers of European Civilization—Rome, London, Paris, etc.—is taken in such excess that creates a wall of material separation between the individual and their vision of Eden or fosters an obsession with the future over a con-

---

[29] A reference to "Amor Loci;" see page 31 of this essay.

sideration of the edenic present.[30] Frozen fashion, however, like obscure objects, is a compromise; it offers aesthetic pleasures and good times without distracting from the nature of time in the North and in Eden.

In "Amor Loci," Auden explains why the geography of the North makes the region particularly suited to such a balance between hedonistic materialism and obscure asceticism. He argues that unfashionable features which make the North edenic are not a coincidence, but rather that they are an extension of the land itself. He writes:

> Industry wants Cheap Power,
> romantic muscle
> a perilous wilderness,
> Mr Pleasure pays
> for surf-riding, claret, sex:
> it offers them none.
>
> (---. *Collected Poems* 779)

The idea expressed in these lines is startlingly similar to some of the themes in "Hammerfest," where "Ground so bare might take a century to realise / How we behave to regions or to beings / Who have anything we're after." The North (at least in the early-to-mid-20th-century) had relatively few resources, and what resources it did have are particularly difficult to extract. The entire apparatus of capitalism is, consequently, slow to expand towards or develop in the North. This creates a geographical and economic space which slows the proliferation of material goods, a walled garden, and encourages moderation between aestheticism and asceticism.

The absence of excessive material superficiality in the North is significant within the context of these poems because the denuded spaces, free from distractions, force their viewers to see themselves. Thus, the landscapes in the North are primarily significant not because they re-

---

[30] In Auden's atlas of Eden, published in 1962, he writes that the formal dress in Eden should still be "The fashions of Paris in the 1830's and '40's" (---. *Dyer's Hand* 7)

veal a truth about the natural state of the world—although they do—but because they provide a useful foil against which a so-called civilized human may construct and study their own humanity. This is a common observation in Auden criticism, with many scholars—including Marchetti, Tim Youngs, and Emig—coming to similar conclusions. Emig, in his essay "Auden and Ecology," sums up the scholarly consensus. He writes:

> "Ecological motifs in Auden's poetry are a far cry from romanticising and idealising nature as an ontological given. Defined at the start from a narcissistic human perspective, a radical anthropocentrism which turns it into a mere human projection, nature, still allegorised, then becomes a marker enabling the human creature to perceive its own limits. This move still turns nature into a radical other, a pole in the construction of what it means to be human."
>
> (Emig 224).

Using the landscape as an allegorical tool for self-scrutiny is, for Auden much more difficult in a developed and populated urban context than in the far North. One poem which illustrates this principle is "September 1, 1939." Although Auden would later disavow "September 1, 1939," believing many of its verses about love and war to be overly sentimental and naïve, other ideas articulated in the poem appear to have guided Auden's thinking throughout his life. One of these principles is the idea that the *modern man* uses the "furniture" of daily life as a distraction that allows him to ignore his immaturity, sorrow, indecency, guilt, and fear. An expert from the poem reads:

> The lights must never go out,
> The music must always play,
> All the conventions conspire
> To make this fort assume
> The furniture of home;
> Lest we should see where we are,
> Lost in a haunted wood,
> Children afraid of the night
> Who have never been happy or good.

(---. “September 1, 1939”)

If the North is a land untraveled by “Mr Pleasure”—relatively devoid of trinkets claret, cocktails, music, and sex—as Auden observes it to be, it is a land where one must look inwards. This may well be an unpleasant effort, but it is valuable because it shows us our true selves. We are, in spite of everything, *shivering worldings*. For better or for worse, European civilization has been explicitly designed so that we remain ignorant of our own lack of innocence, the fact that we "have never been happy or good.” Thus, just as one must travel to the North in order to discover an authentic landscape, one can also travel to the North to discover their authentic self. Cold, savage, and largely empty, the North serves as a reflection of one’s worst instincts and most primal fears. In such an environment, it is impossible to ignore the “achievement[s] of a sort” which offend the topsoil, farm animals, and garden plants south of Hammerfest, and which we would prefer to bury.

Auden uses allusion to demonstrate that deliberate ignorance is not possible in the North. In “Iceland Revisited,” the folly of dilution is discussed twice: once in the stanza which reads “The bóndi’s sheep-dog / And the visitor from New York / Conversed freely;”[31] and again in the following stanza, “Snow had camouflaged / The pool of liquid manure: / The town-mouse fell in.” The detail about the dog, taken at face value, does little more than recognize the fact that the speaker is “Unable to speak Icelandic” (---. *Collected Poems* 727); however, the specific reference to the bóndi demands a deeper reading. The fact that the speaker is not able to relate to the members of decent society, the bóndi, but experiences a connection with the dog owned by members of that society, betrays his uncultivated nature. He, too, is an animal at heart. Nevertheless, he can not understand this communion as an expression of himself, and this forces him to define by its relationship to a society via the dog.

---

[31] The bóndi was the the proto-middle-class of the Viking Era. It included landed farmers, artisans, and merchants.

The stanza in which the town-mouse falls into the manure also exposes a vulgar truth. The town-mouse is an explicit reference to a canonical fable by Aesop. This allusion, like the "as if" in "Hammerfest," again invites an allegorical interpretation of the stanza. Snow is habitually associated with ideas of purity. Here, however, snow is merely a disguise for a swirling pool of feces. The moral of the story? In Iceland, a visitor cannot help but to stumble into the foul things which lay hidden below the pristine surface. It is also worth noting that, in the fable of "The Town-Mouse and the Country-Mouse," the town-mouse justifies living in a dangerous and cat-filled neighborhood by extolling the fact the city proves him with pastries, fine fruits and cheeses, and wine. The country-mouse refutes this, arguing that it is better to be gnawed on by poverty in the country than to gnaw on figs in the city. This reference reiterates a theme which Auden develops with motifs of the barren North and the decadent city: one thinks more clearly—yet also more ecstatically, more profoundly, more sensuously—when one is deprived of certain excessive and fatuous pleasures. There is, Auden tells us, "Universal love and hope; / While an abstract insight wakes / Among the glaciers and the rocks / The hermit's sensual ecstasy." (Auden, *Another Time* 31).[32]

Of course, Auden is—as much as any other member of our species—prone to his moments as a "frivolous wording." A man of many vices, he courted "Mr. Pleasure" and engaged in the same pastimes as the faux Andromeda of "Iceland Revisited." This does not undermine the religious vision that the North offers him; in fact, his hedonistic bend speaks to the urgency of his ideas about Eden and the North. Auden was a man who "abandoned" the North many times in his life, always returning from the glaciers in order to live his comfortable life, yet the icy Eden which he left "does not abandon" him as punishment for his infidelity. It, unchanged, always awaits his return. For Auden, the North of "Iceland Revisited" is a necessary Eden.

---

[32] From the untitled, canonical poem sometimes referred to as "Lullaby" or by its first line, "Lay your sleeping head, my love." In a later edition of the poem, the word "sensual" was replaced with "carnal" (---. *Collected Poems* 157)

In “Hammerfest,” knowledge of Good and Evil does not profane the holiness of the Eden of Finnmark. Equally, in “Iceland Revisited,” Auden’s own relationship with Mr Pleasure does not profane the landscape. The landscape of the North is one that allows a pleasure-seeker such as Auden to visit Eden without forcing him to change Eden or himself. Although the relationship between knowledge of violence as an authentic representation of human nature in the North is inverted here, as humanity’s Arcadian, pleasure-seeking instincts are associated by Auden with the South, the motif still presents a return to the North as a voyage to neutral ground of compromise between a materialistic and self-conscious society and an austere and morally-liberated North.

The Pastoral and the Arcadia of the North

The timelessness of the North allows the aesthete to appreciate the pleasures of life and his uncivilized instincts while also profiting from the profundity of the region’s bareness. The origins of this arresting of time in Auden’s Eden reflects the nature of time in Genesis. “The triumph of [‘Horae Canonicae: *Prime*’],” writes Reeves of the poem that describes the readjustment period immediately after the Fall of Man, “has been to create a simulacrum of time suspended, a timeless now, this holy moment, before the onset of History and the benign of time.” (Reeves 195). This seems to be an equally apt description of “Hammerfest,” “Paysage moralisé,” and Auden’s broader vision of the North. The brief moment in Christian historiography, between the Fall and history, is defined by a paradox. In the temporal sense, it is—with the exception of the the prelapsarian state—the closest that humanity has ever been to God, having only just been expelled from God’s Garden moments before. Simultaneously, in the moral sense, this moment is the furthest that humanity has ever been to God. This is a time before either the covenant with Mosses or the Crucifixion, so in this moment humanity has lost its direct connection with the divine without yet having a chance to reestablish that connection. In this primitive

period, just past the gates of Eden, humanity's capacity for brutality is first discovered when, mad with jealousy, Cain slays Abel. Similarly, the space of the North is the place where Auden discovered "the cold controlled ferocity of the human species." (Auden & MacNeice 148). For Auden, this discovery came while watching a whale—which he describes as "the most beautiful animal I have ever seen" and as something that "combines the fascination of something alive, enormous, and gentle, with the functional beauties of modern machinery"—being "torn to pieces with steam winches and cranes" (147).[33] In spite of this, Auden's North, like the verses directly following Genesis 3:24, is a place where God is still just behind the actions of mankind, paying close attention to and even intervening in human actions. This moment of biblical prehistory may be its most savage, but it is also its most edenic-adjacent.

Eden is, according to Auden, a place where there are "no morals" (---. *Collected Poems* 638), and Auden repeatedly observes that the North is—at least in his poetic vision—also such a place. In "Hammerfest," Auden even uses the phrase "Moral Circle" (724), an ironic term used by Southern Norwegians to describe the Arctic Circle; the term refers to the fact that, in the popular imagination of the Norwegians, those who live in the Arctic are especially *immoral* (more prone to alcoholism, extramarital affairs, etc.) ("W. H. Auden - Poetry International 1970" 08:59). The phrase "Moral Circle" is a good way to conceptualize the similarities between Auden's vision of Eden and his vision of the North. Both are closed spaces, surrounded by a sort of wall, and both of these walled spaces represent a pleasure dome where immoral behavior may be practiced but where this immorality can't yet be described as "immoral" because it exists as an abstraction outside of the southerner's construct of civilization. Auden himself "claimed that there are two kinds of goodness, 'natural' and 'moral,'" explains Emig (Emig 222). Emig continues that, according to Auden, "An organism is naturally good when it has reached a state of equilibrium with its environment. All healthy animals and plants are naturally good in this sense." This biological anarchy, again, describes Eden, the time immediately after Eden, and the North of Auden's poetry because they are all places where humans are "naturally good," as they have

---

[33] Auden witnessed this butchering in the village of Talknafjördur; see appendix.

not yet had moral judgment revealed to them by God (or missionaries from the South). Thus, the North and the immediate postlapsarian moment are equivalent liminal realms, close enough to Eden so that one passing through them can imagine them as a gate through which they can pass into Eden.

Here enters the significance of the concept of Arcadia. "Arcadia" is a slippery term because it has two dramatically different definitions. The older of these two definitions is a Greco-Pagan allusion to the Greek region of Arcadia as an impenetrable wilderness in the center of the Peloponnesian peninsula where nymphs, satyrs, and Pan himself were believed to reside. This was a place of violence and lust, but also a sort of closed garden which the Greeks considered to be especially close to the gods. Later Roman and then Christian writers would reimagine Arcadia as a near-synonym for the pastoral.[34] Auden, like several other artists, finds this double meaning to be fruitful, as one consequence of this tension is that the Arcadian mode can be both reminiscent of Eden and a wilderness populated by monsters and as a righteous place of leisure. Thus, in his poem "Bucolics,"[35] modernized pastoral moments such as the image of "Pan's green father" who "suddenly raps out /A burst of undecipherable Morse" while "cuckoos mock in Welsh / and doves create / In rustic English over all" (---. *Collected Poems* 559) coexist with "old saints" (---. *Collected Poems* 564) and "Lake Eden" (563) as well as "primal woods [...] where nudes, bears, lions, sows with women's heads, / Mounted and murdered and ate each other raw."[36]

This more Arcadian version of Eden—which Auden pledges fidelity to in "Horae Canonicae*: Vespers*" when describes himself as an "Arcadian" (637) who comes from an "Eden" (638)—may be as grotesque as any Christian Eden, but the reasons for which it is grotesque are entirely

---

[34] This was a gradual diachronic change, with both definitions coexisting for many centuries, as evidenced by Giovanni da Verrazzano's use of the term "Arcadia" to describe the wildernesses of North America in the 16th century.

[35] The bucolic is a submode of the pastoral.

[36] A probable reference to Piero di Cosimo's "Forrest Fire" which depicts, among other things, a sow with a woman's head (to the left), separated from a herdsman with his cattle in a pasture (to the right) by a raging forest fire. The panting also has two lions.

different. The Christian Eden is grotesque to Auden because it is an artificial and unnatural place where human nature is repressed in the name of moral good, while Arcadia is an Eden which is grotesque because humans are there free to be their grotesque selves. In a moral sense, this makes the landscape of Arcadia less perfect as an Eden, but, in a natural sense, it makes the landscape more Edenic. Because this brutal vision of an Arcadian Eden overlaps with Auden's depictions of the North in several of his most important northern landscape poems, one can understand that the barbaric nature of the North is also a reflection of the natural goodness of the space. The North is, for Auden, an Eden which is naturally good. Moral goodness, Auden suggests, can not be imposed upon either the North or Arcadia—as a New Jerusalemite would insist—rather, moral goodness is the responsibility of the individuals who earnestly contemplate the space, as Auden does in "Amor Loci," "Hammerfest," and "Iceland Revisited," *and* who are able to appreciate the sense of moral good that is cultivated by society. Through this opportunity to be true to his natural self and nature while under the auspice of a province removed from civilization, the citizen "imagine[s]" the "Eden" and a "Love" which "does not abandon" the Arcadian or force him to abandon his vices (780).[37]

Marchetti writes that, in Auden's poems, "the desert, a void and barren landscape of metaphorical absences [like] the island, [...] is progressively transferred to the image of the garden (sometimes, the oasis), a powerful symbol associated with the religious and the aesthetic spheres, reflecting human self-division. [...] From an aesthetic perspective, [they are] an ideal refuge." (Marchetti 207). This allegorization of the desert and the island by Auden is undeniable. However, the observation misses the fact that Auden's vision of the North is similarly preoccupied, and that this preoccupation of Auden's has a similar—but also much more thoroughly developed and embraced effect than either the island or the desert. In the poem "Paysage moralisé," Auden writes an injunction against "dream[s] of islands," and in "Moon Landing" he

---

[37] The relationship of the "citizen" to the landscape is a peculiar one. Auden explores it in "Bucolics," ""Horae Canonicae," and in "Journey to Iceland."

complains, “Mneh! I once rode through a desert / and was not charmed: give me a watered / lively garden” (---. *Collected Poems* 844). On the other hand, the North—which contains within it some of the most void and barren spaces on Earth, including many islands and deserts—is both real and impressive to Auden, as evidenced by the continual return of his poetry and body to the region.

More than the island and far more than the desert, the material conditions described through Auden’s poetry of the North inform his vision of the Garden. Auden was not the first artist to imagine a flawed but beautiful landscape as something approaching a postlapsarian Eden. The pastoral is, for an example, an entire mode of art that yearns nostalgically for an edenic space while simultaneously acknowledging the facts of work, pain, sin, and death—thus the proclamation of the skull in Guercino’s *Et in Arcadia ego*. Auden’s poems borrow from this tradition, but they also deviate from it in crucial ways that are related to a fundamental difference between the pastoral’s vision and Auden’s vision of the North. The pastoral, like Auden and his poems, yearns for Eden, but the pastoral is obsessed with reminding the audience that Eden has been lost.

This sense of loss is inseparable from time. Terry Gifford, in his book on the pastoral, writes that the mode is defined by an “essential paradox,” a cycle of “retreat” and “return” (Gifford 82). This paradox can take an overtly topical and political tone or be “merely escapist, as in the anthologies of the Georgian poets after the First World War,” in which “there is an implicit attempt on the part of the written to resist return, to stay out there in the safely comforting location of retreat, in their case in the city of a mythic Old England where stability and traditional values were located” (81). Alternatively, the retreat can be metaphysical, as it is in Marvel’s or Milton’s visions of the Garden of Eden (69). In both cases, the pastoral is a mode that exists upon the plane of time, located somewhere between a past ideal and an unfortunate present. The pastoral’s position in time, argues Erwin Panofsky of pastoral painting, is important for the achievement of the educational effect of the Renaissance pastoral. As he explains in an essay on the paintings of Piero di Cosimo, “in the representations of subjects like 'Hercules at the Cross-

roads' […] the antithesis between Virtue and Pleasure is symbolized by the contrast between an easy road winding through beautiful country and a steep, stony path leading up to a forbidding rock." (Emison 125). The space between these two divergent paths is the loci of the "early history of man" (Panofsky 12), the time in which the pastoral is imagined to have existed.[38] In this way, the pastoral is firmly situated on a timeline—a road between two "bipolar" moments in the history of human morality (Emison 131).

Even Auden engages with the idea of the pastoral as a moment in time in several of his poems, including "Paysage moralisé." While this poem is not a pastoral—at least in any traditional sense—it contains within it a pastoral dream:

> They built by rivers and at night the water
> Running past windows comforted their sorrow;
> Each in his little bed conceived of islands
> Where every day was dancing in the valleys
> And all the green trees blossomed on the mountains
> Where love was innocent, being far from cities.
>
> (---. *Collected Poems* 119)

The common dream of these villagers, living after the onset of history, is of a pastoral life—of a return to Eden. They yearn for a utopia characterized by its "green" and "blossom[ing] newness," a leisurely lifestyle where activity is detached from work, "Where every day was dancing," and where the inhabitants enjoyed "innocent" freedom from law or shame—in other words, they dream of returning to an edenic Garden. The reader knows that this is a garden because of the "green" and the reference to blossoms which suggests the presence of fruit trees, as well as the fact that "Love was innocent" in that place. The innocence of love means that its inhabitants were either unaware of the distinction between right and wrong, or that they had not yet discovered shame. The space is described as existing before the need for work, as every day was but dancing. These ideas are inseparable from Eden. The problem is that this paradise is a place that

---

[38] The essay from which this line comes, "The Early History of Man in a Cycle of Paintings by Piero di Cosimo," is the source of the term "Paysage moralisé," which Auden borrowed for the title of one of his poem (Emison 125).

"was," as is evidenced by the fact that every detail is in the past tense. This imagined chapter of man's history is overtly Edenic, but—like the country of the Georgian poets or the crossroads before Hercules—it is an Eden defined by its being over and the return which the settlers use to escape the intolerable present. This vision of time situates these lines from "Paysage moralisé" in the tradition of the pastoral.

The paradise of Auden's northern poems, however, does not exist as a temporal state between the present and the past, but as a permanent Garden suspended in the moment after the Fall. His vision of the North is one of "a timeless present." Consequently, Auden's North is less of a pastoral and more of a proper (if post-lapsarian) Eden. In "Bucolics," Auden explains that regions which are sufficiently remote are places isolated from temptation but also from history, places where neither "the long arm of the Law," nor the "continental damage" of Napoleon's wars and ambition, nor the "female pelvis can / threaten their [Saints] agape."[39] He contrasts this to the more accessible and civilized parts of the world where "dejected wordings now / Do penitential jobs" and where "exterminated species played / who had not read Hobbes." (---. *Collected Poems* 564). This might explain the injunction at the end of "Paysage moralisé," where the narrator speaks of a new era that will come when the glacial sorrow which oppresses the people melts, as though it will be a baptism, as images of "gush[ing]" and "flush[ing]" water are used to describe the beginning of a new, "green" era in the landscape. ("Green," here, seems to symbolize both the lushness of the coming era and its newness and freshness.) Most significantly, in the last line of "Paysage moralisé" Auden proclaims that this renaissance will coincide with the rebuilding of the cities. Specifically, the last line reads "And we rebuild our cities, not dream of islands." The use of the present tense form of the verb "rebuild," as opposed to a future tense form or a conditional form, is striking. The absence of a conjunction such as "when" or "then" is

---

[39] Because Auden was particularly threatened by the *female* pelvis, it may be best to interpret this playful line as a broader symbol of the struggle between restraint and lust as it relates to universal human nature. The female pelvis is a signifiant symbol because of the universality of temptation (which plagues, we are told, even saints), not because it is of personal importance to Auden's edenic project.

equally important. That Auden should write "And we rebuild," as opposed to something to the effect of "Then we would rebuild" demonstrates a deliberate effort to emphasize *simultaneity*. In other words, it is as naïve to postpone the rebuilding of the cities as it is to dream of islands. Instead, the abandonment of the dreams of islands, a renewed investment in the rotting settlements, and the baptism of a new era must all happen in unison; each development necessitating and permitting the others. This abrupt and complete transformation invokes Marchetti's argument that Auden's Edens are nonlinear spaces defined by the "possibility of a genuine break [...] into redemption and transcendence." Auden may imagine the North as a spacial realm which exists outside of time, but this does not mean that the individual becomes frozen in time when they visit the North. Instead, the stillness of the North is a foil which encourages a radical break from unenlightened mundanity.

This effect is strengthened by the form of the "Paysage moralisé." The sestina is governed by a highly cyclical logic that resists the progression of time. Because each sestet must end its lines with a predetermined remixing of the same six words, the form is often used to describe memory, grief, or other psychological states which resist the transpiring of time. This creates a tension with the narrative nature of "Paysage moralisé," which appears to tell a story about the Fall of Man. This tension in the poem is only resolved in the closing tercet which, in a sestina, brings all of the guiding words of the poem into just three lines so that they must share both lines and a concise moment on the page. In "Paysage moralisé" this final stanza reads: "It is our sorrow. Shall it melt? Ah, water / Would gush, flush, green these mountains and these valleys, / And we rebuild our cities, not dream of islands." (---. *Collected Poems* 120). Thus, the form of the poem unites the stylistic elements of the poem with the moral and narrative effect created by Auden. The resolution, the re-greening of a sort of Eden as expressed through a compression of time and thought into an (almost) timeless event which occurs simultaneously with the settlers' choice to imagine a paradise, acknowledges the nature of time and change in Eden.

"The Never Never Land"

To enter Eden is, for Auden, an imaginative act. There is no literal place on Earth which can be described as perfectly prelapsarian. Arcadia is a more likely place, but only a hedonist who is also a sociopath or a narcissist—a pleasure-seeker for whom empathy is impossible—could enjoy the partial return to Eden that pure Arcadia represents. Eden is—according to Auden—a place where "the self is satisfied whatever it demands; the ego is approved of what ever it chooses" (---. *Dyer's Hand* 411), which means that the superego of the Arcadian must be erased or imprisoned. Thus, the moral indifference of Arcadia may make it more Edenic (by Auden's definition) than any vision of paradise imagined by a Christian Perfectionist in regard to the subjective states of innocence and happiness, but the total acceptance of Arcadia proves imperfect, too. In the postscript to "Dingy Dell & the Fleet," entitled "The Frivolous & the Earnest," Auden laments of the Greek Arcadia: "An aesthetic religion (polytheism) draws no distinction between what is frivolous and what is serious because, for it, all existence is [...] meaningless."[40] He concludes: "What is so distasteful about the Homeric gods is that they are well aware of human suffering but refuse to take it seriously" (---. *Dyer's Hand* 429). The Arcadian's relationship to the human condition is therefore no better than the Christian's. The Christian paradise is "grotesque" because it is too austere and too inhuman.[41] Arcadia is equally "distasteful" for its frivolity; it is, like the plains, a place where "nothing points." This would be acceptable if humanity had never been expelled from Eden and had never known the pains of work, childbirth, and death, or the necessity of moral and spiritual development, but this is not the case. What Christianity offers that Pre-Socratic Arcadia of Greek Paganism does not is a system through which suffering and grief are rationalized and even elevated to philosophical and aesthetic significance. Christianity makes itself necessary by creating a system that transforms the inevitability of mis-

---

[40] The phrase "aesthetic religion," and the premise that "aesthetic religion" is a synonym for "polytheism," are ideas taken from Kierkegaard's model of spheres.

[41] Nietzsche describes the fountain of Christian asceticism as the "hatred of anything human, animal or material [...] abhorrence of the senses, of reason itself; fear of happiness and beauty, the desire to escape from all illusion, change, growth, death, wishing, even desire itself." (Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* 145)

fortune from an unpleasant fact to an opportunity to commune with God through an empathy with Christ.

Recognizing the values of pleasure fulfillment, the dream of perfection, or of disciplined communion, many in Auden's era attempted to create Arcadias, Utopias, and Edens. It did not matter if the ideologues' tools of choice were politics or poems, all of their efforts were catastrophes—doomed from the start. Auden, eventually, recognized this. While his earlier poems, inspired by radical Marxist politics and a Freudian belief in the power of the subconscious, represented calls to arms, his faith in progress via poetry or the state started to decline before even the end of the Second World War. As early as 1940, Auden began to mock the concept of the ideal Modern Man and his perfect society.[42] In the poem "The Unknown Citizen," A bureaucrat asks of a recently deceased citizen who was—among other things—a supporter of his union and a willing soldier, "Was he free? Was he happy? The question is absurd: / Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard." (---. "Unknown Citizen").[43] After the war, Auden entirely rejected the political power of poetry. At a 1971 event hosted by Swarthmore, Auden made his position clear when he corrected a questioner thusly:

> "I wrote several things about Hitler in the thirties, but nothing that I wrote prevented one Jew being gassed or shortened the war by five seconds. […] if Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, Mozart, Beethoven, Michelangelo […] had never lived we should have missed a lot of fun, but the political and social history would have been the same."
>
> ("An hour […] with Auden")

His view of paradise as a political project was no brighter than his view of poetry. "The forward looking Utopian," he writes, "believes that his new Jerusalem is a dream which ought to be real-

---

[42] Auden's shift away from politics happened to occur around the time he first came to America. He arrived in Manhattan in 1939, and begin to change almost immediately. Still, this change was a gradual process. He was, for example, still toeing the Marxist line in regards to American politics and race as late as 1943 (Jenkins).

[43] In this poem, the Modern Man is dehumanized. He is never named but referred to by a sort of social security number: JS/07 M 378 (---. "Unknown Citizen"). This emphasizes the way in which modernity de-individualizes its inhabitants in its pursuit of perfection.

ized [by] actions." He goes on to demonstrate that this has devastating consequences; he offers the following example: "Hitler, I imagine, would have defined his New Jerusalem as a world where there are no Jews, not as a world where they are being gassed by the million day after day in ovens, but he was a Utopian, so the ovens had to come in." (---. *Dyer's Hand* 410).

Auden's dream vision of paradise is the opposite of the New Jerusalemite's; it is as reticent as the mosses and lichens of "Hammerfest." Like the Arcadian, Auden concedes that the Fall is a fact and that "his dream, therefore, is a wish-dream which cannot become real" (---. *Dyer's Hand* 410). Nevertheless, as the North is a necessary Eden, Eden itself is a necessary dream. Driven by this sense of necessity, Auden's turn to the North. To an extent, his choice to so honor the region is partially arbitrary. The features of the North's landscape are representative of Auden's eccentric theology, but the allegories which he employs are sometimes flawed and often self-contradicting. At times, the North is "unworldly," but the space is still earthbound and—consequently—still imperfect. In some moments, the aging Auden is overtly nostalgic. He doubles down on his childhood fantasy of the North as a place of perfect magic and religious wonder.[44] At other times, he doubts that, for humanity, there can be a real Eden; however, this realization is not a rejection of his Edenic quest. Like Kierkegaard's Knight of Faith, it is through these moments of doubt that Auden comes to embrace the theological significance of the North. In "Amor Loci," Auden writes that, "for one, convinced he will die," the northern landscapes of his childhoods are more appealing than the promise of an impossible dream. He echos this sense of acceptance in "Hammerfest," wondering (even in the face of the memory of Nazi atrocities) "How much reverence could I, / Can anyone past fifty, afford to lose." One must not only be willing to imagine Eden, they must also be ready to accept the imperfection of their own vision.

When one compares Auden's early writings on the North and on Eden to his later works, one is struck by the consistency of themes. Auden is clearly aware of this continuity; he often alludes to the fact that his vision of the paradise of the North has been one which he has constantly cultivated since his early childhood. The difference comes down to the tone, which be-

---

[44] Reference to an excerpt from Letters From Iceland; see page 14 of this essay.

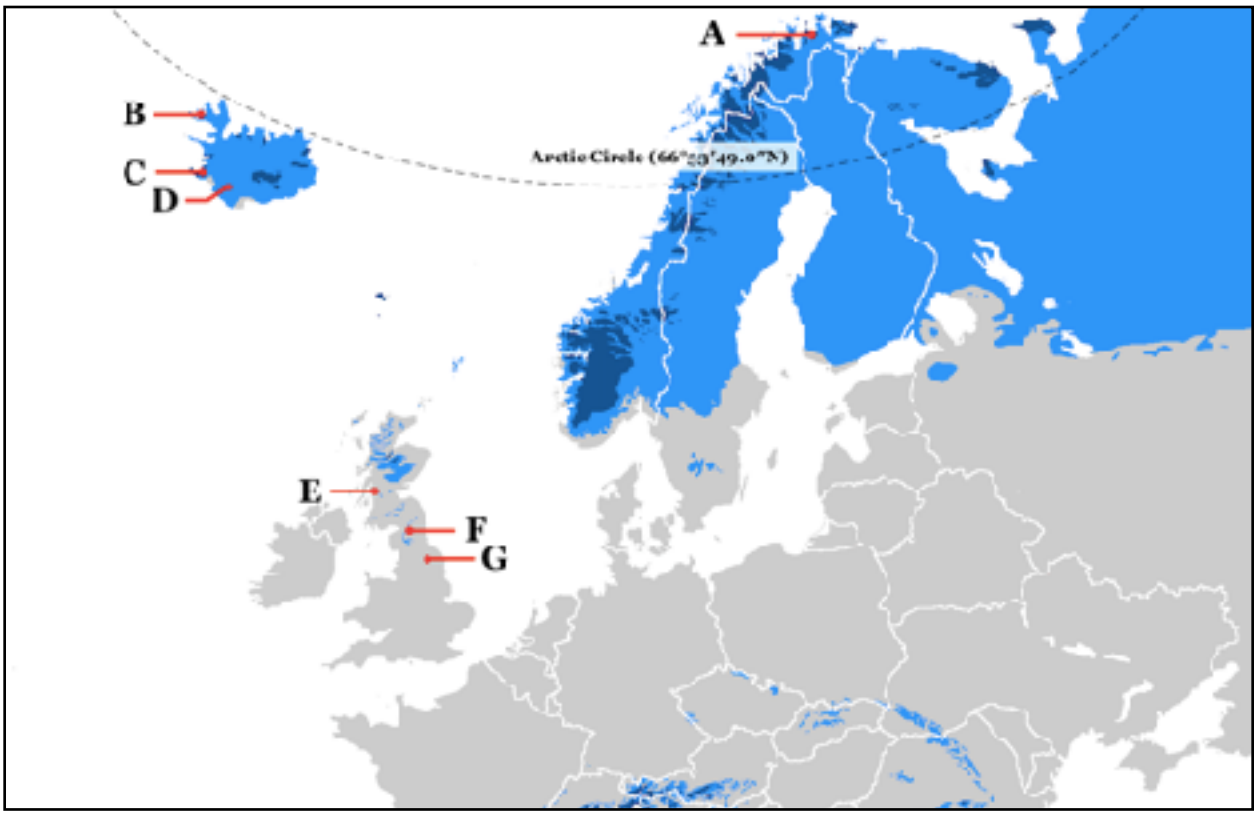
came more somber and self-reflective with age. For example, the stress placed on simultaneity in "Paysage moralisé," written in 1933, is repeated three decades later in Auden's 1962 essay "Dingy Dell & the Fleet." There, he writes that "Eden is a world of pure being and absolute uniqueness. Change can occur but as an instantaneous transformation, not through a process of becoming." (---. *Dyer's Hand* 401). Yet the tone of the earlier pieces is much brighter. While "Paysage moralisé" promises blossoms and green meadows which will come with the melting of sorrow, "Hammerfest," "Amor Loci," and even "Dingy Dell & the Fleet" focus instead on the relationship between the past and the present. This nostalgia even goes so far as to flirt with the pastoral. The poems also become less formalistic and acoustically choreographed, favoring a less structured and more meditative style, or even free-verse. For a young Auden who, as a child, had day-dreamed about vikings and fantasized about being the king of a lead-mining outpost in the Pennines, the North appears to have represented an Eden of absolute personal control and the step of fantasy into the real world (Davenport-Hines 17); it was his "platonic ideal where everything would be right" (*Tell me the Truth About Love* 0:11:32*)*. This North was a place that promised the perfect freedom to think, do, and believe whatever one wished.

Be that as it may, just as Auden turned against the ideology that drove the radical topical poetry for which he first became famous—poetry that demanded perfect agape from every person—he became less and less enthusiastic about a perfect vision of the North. The silent North offered him peace, but he would come to realize that that peace hid a gruesome history. Its inhabitants embodied the virtues of a less strictly civilized life, yet they also demonstrated the cruelty and profanity innate in human nature. Auden used the austerity of the North to test the values of material culture, but these tests never made a hermit of him. He thought the North to be worth visiting and revisiting, but he—like the "shivering Andromeda"—never stayed there. His poems do not reject the North as an Eden, but they do eventually come to question its perfection. Auden, aging, accepts these flaws. Perhaps there can be no ideal Eden, but this is no tragedy; there is no ideal person which could inhabit such a place. Auden chooses to embrace a

sense of enlightened false consciousness instead of denying this truth.[45] He writes of the North as an Eden which is good enough and which is his. The poem "Journey to Iceland" provides—perhaps unwittingly—a striking representation of this concession through an allegory of a withdrawal to the North. "Journey to Iceland" ends first with the lament "Tears fall in all the rivers," then continues, in spite of this sadness,"Again a driver / pulls on his gloves and in a blinding snowstorm starts / Upon his deadly journey." This image, Auden tells us, parallels the image of a "writer run[ning] howling to his art." (Auden & MacNeice 24). It also reflects an image of a disillusioned Auden who, turning towards the kingdom of his childhood, runs for the glaciers of the Eden of his own making.

[45] "Enlightened false consciousness" is a concept borrowed from Peter Sloterdijk (Rennesland).

Appendix:



Dark Blue: Arctic Climates. Light Blue: Sub-Arctic Climates. | *Significant Places*: A, Hammerfest; B, Talknafjördur; C, Reykjavík; D, Helka; E, Helensburgh; F, Rookhope, in the North Pennines; G, York.

Works Cited:

Adorno, Theodor W., "Prisms," translated by Samuel and Shierry Weber. https://moodle.ufsc.br/ pluginfile.php/1407246/mod_resource/content/1 Theodor%20W%20Adorno%20Prisms%20%28Studies%20in%20Contemporary%20German%20Social%20Thought%29.pdf.

"An hour of questions and answers with Auden (November 15, 1971)." W.H. Auden at Swarthmore. Swarthmore Library. http://www.swarthmore.edu/library/auden/ QandA_pt2.html.

Arendt, Hannah, *The Human Condition*. 2nd ed., University of Chicago Press, 2018. Apple Books.

Auden, W. H., *Another Time*. Cornwall, Faber & Faber, 2007.

Auden, W. H., *The Dyer's Hand & Other Essays*. New York, Random House, 1963.

Auden, W. H., *English Auden: Poems, Essays, and Dramatic Writings, 1927-1939*. New York, Random House. 1977.

Auden, W. H., and Louis MacNeice. *Letters from Iceland*. London, Faber & Faber, 2018.

Auden, W. H., and Edward Mendelson. *Collected Poems*. New York, Vintage International. 1991.

Auden, W. H., and Edward Mendelson. *Selected Poems*. London, Faber & Faber, 1979.

Auden, W. H.. "September 1, 1939." poets.org. https://poets.org/poem/september-1-1939/.

Buck, Thomas. "An Icelandic Martyr: Jón Arason." Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review, vol. 46, no. 182, Irish Province of the Society of Jesus, 1957, pp. 213—22, http://www.jstor.org/stable/30103574

Davenport-Hines, Richard. *Auden*. New York, Vintage International. 1999.

Eliot, T.S., "The Waste Land." poets.org. https://poets.org/poem/waste-land/.

Emig, Rainer, "Auden and Ecology." *Cambridge Companion to W.H. Auden,* edited by Stan Smith. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press LLC. 2004. pgs 212-225.

Emison, Patricia. "The Paysage Moralisé." Artibus et Historiae, vol. 16, no. 31, IRSA s.c., 1995, pp. 125—37, https://doi.org/10.2307/1483501.

Gifford, Terry. *Pastoral*. New York, Routledge. 1999.

Jenkins, Nicholas, "Auden in America." *Cambridge Companion to W.H. Auden,* edited by Stan Smith. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press LLC. 2004. pgs 39-54.

Holy Bible: King James Version, Vereeniging, Christian Art Publishers. 2016.

Kierkegaard, Søren. "Fear and Trembling," translated by Walter Lowrie. https://www.sorenkierkegaard.nl/artikelen/Engels/101.%20Fear%20and%20Trembling%20book%20Kierkegaard.pdf

Lucas, F.L.. "Style." The Camelot Press Ltd., London and Southampton. 1965.

Marchetti, Paola, "Auden's Landscape's." *Cambridge Companion to W.H. Auden,* edited by Stan Smith. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press LLC. 2004. pgs 200-211.

McDiarmid, Lucy. "Apologies for Poetry: Poems 1948—1973." Auden's Apologies for Poetry, Princeton University Press, 1990, pp. 119—58, http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7zv43j.10.

Mendelson, Edward, "The European Auden." *Cambridge Companion to W.H. Auden,* edited by Stan Smith. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press LLC. 2004. pgs 212-225.

Mendelson, Edward. "Investigating the Crime." Early Auden, Later Auden: A Critical Biography, Princeton University Press, 2017, pp. 418—47, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvc77bs5.25.

Moreault, Francis. “Hannah Arendt, Lectrice de Rosa Luxemburg.” Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue Canadienne de Science Politique, vol. 34, no. 2, 2001, pp. 227–47, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3232694.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. “Beyond Good and Evil,” translated by Helen Zimmern, Project Gutenberg, 2013. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/4363/4363-h/4363-h.htm.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Genealogy of Morals,* translated by Michael Scarpitti. Penguin, New York, 2013.

Orwell, George. “Inside the Whale.” *Essays,* edited by Peter Davidson. New York, Everyman’s Library, 2002. pgs 211-249.

“Paradise.” New Oxford American Dictionary. Apple Dictionary.

Panofsky, Erwin. “The Early History of Man in a Cycle of Paintings by Piero Di Cosimo.” Journal of the Warburg Institute, vol. 1, no. 1, The Warburg Institute, 1937, pp. 12—30, https://doi.org/10.2307/750066.

Penaluna, Regan, and Samantha Rose Hill. “Samantha Rose Hill on Hannah Arendt: 'You see the politics on her face.'” *Guernica,* Oct. 25, 2021. https://www.guernicamag.com/samantha-rose-hill-on-hannah-arendt-you-see-the-politics-on-her-face/.

Reeves, Gareth, “Auden and Ecology.” *Cambridge Companion to W.H. Auden,* edited by Stan Smith. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press LLC. 2004. pgs 55-67.

Rennesland, Anton Heinrich L.. “Nihilism Today: Enlightened False Consciousness.” *TALISIK: An Undergraduate Journal of Philosophy*. University of Santo Tomas. https://philarchive.org/archive/RENNTE.

“Søren Kierkegaard on Silence and Prayer.” Parabola: The Search for Meaning. https://parabola.org/2015/12/30/soren-kierkegaard-on-silence-and-prayer/.

Tell me the Truth About Love. Directed by Susanna White, archive footage of W.H. Auden, 2000. BBC Four, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gvezOvM_VgQ.

Voltaire, *Candide : ou l'optimisme*. Paris, Librairie Nizet, 1959.

"W. H. Auden - Poetry International 1970." YouTube, uploaded by thepostarchive, May 5, 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uyXr9_gOckU.