

W. H. AUDEN
Selected Poems

NEW EDITION

Edited by
EDWARD MENDELSON



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Your torrents, salt and sunless, remain enigmas:
what I believe is on doctors' hearsay only.

Our marriage is a drama, but no stage-play where
what is not spoken is not thought: in our theatre
all that I cannot syllable You will pronounce
in acts whose *raison-d'être* escapes me. Why secrete
fluid when I dole, or stretch Your lips when I joy?

Demands to close or open, include or eject,
must come from Your corner, are no province of mine
(all I have done is to provide the time-table
of hours when You may put them): but what is Your work
when I librate between a glum and a frolic?

For dreams I, quite irrationally, reproach You.
All I know is that I don't choose them: if I could,
they would conform to some prosodic discipline,
mean just what they say. Whatever point nocturnal
manias make, as a poet I disapprove.

Thanks to Your otherness, Your jocular concords,
so unlike my realm of dissonance and anger,
You can serve me as my emblem for the Cosmos:
for human congregations, though, as Hobbes perceived,
the apposite sign is some ungainly monster.

Whoever coined the phrase *The Body Politic*?
All States we've lived in, or historians tell of,
have had shocking health, psychosomatic cases,
physicked by sadists or glozing expensive quacks:
when I read the papers, You seem an Adonis.

Time, we both know, will decay You, and already
I'm scared of our divorce: I've seen some horrid ones.
Remember: when *Le Bon Dieu* says to You *Leave him!*,
please, please, for His sake and mine, pay no attention
to my piteous *Dont's*, but bugger off quickly.

April 1971

A Lullaby

The din of work is subdued,
another day has westered
and mantling darkness arrived.
Peace! Peace! Devoid your portrait
of its vexations and rest.
Your daily round is done with,
you've gotten the garbage out,
answered some tiresome letters
and paid a bill by return,
all *frettolosamente*.
Now you have licence to lie,
naked, curled like a shrimplet,
jacent in bed, and enjoy
its cosy micro-climate:
Sing, Big Baby, sing lullay.

The old Greeks got it all wrong:
Narcissus is an oldie,
tamed by time, released at last
from lust for other bodies,
rational and reconciled.
For many years you envied
the hirsute, the he-man type.
No longer: now you fondle
your almost feminine flesh
with mettled satisfaction,
imagining that you are
sinless and all-sufficient,
snug in the den of yourself,
Madonna and Bambino:
Sing, Big Baby, sing lullay.

Let your last thinks all be thanks:
praise your parents who gave you
a Super-Ego of strength

that saves you so much bother,
digit friends and dear them all,
then pay fair attribution
to your age, to having been
born when you were. In boyhood
you were permitted to meet
beautiful old contraptions,
soon to be banished from earth,
saddle-tank loks, beam-engines
and over-shot waterwheels.
Yes, love, you have been lucky:
Sing, Big Baby, sing lullay.

Now for oblivion: let
the belly-mind take over
down below the diaphragm,
the domain of the Mothers,
They who guard the Sacred Gates,
without whose wordless warnings
soon the verbalising I
becomes a vicious despot,
lewd, incapable of love,
disdainful, status-hungry.
Should dreams haunt you, heed them not,
for all, both sweet and horrid,
are jokes in dubious taste,
too jejune to have truck with.
Sleep, Big Baby, sleep your fill.

April 1972

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A Thanksgiving

When pre-pubescent I felt
that moorlands and woodlands were sacred:
people seemed rather profane.

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Thus, when I started to verse,
I presently sat at the feet of
Hardy and Thomas and Frost.

Falling in love altered that,
now Someone, at least, was important:
Yeats was a help, so was Graves.

Then, without warning, the whole
Economy suddenly crumbled:
there, to instruct me, was *Brecht.*

Finally, hair-raising things
that Hitler and Stalin were doing
forced me to think about God.

Why was I sure they were wrong?
Wild *Kierkegaard, Williams and Lewis*
guided me back to belief.

Now, as I mellow in years
and home in a bountiful landscape,
Nature allures me again.

Who are the tutors I need?
Well, *Horace*, adroitest of makers,
becking in Tivoli, and

Goethe, devoted to stones,
who guessed that—he never could prove it—
Newton led Science astray.

Fondly I ponder You all:
without You I couldn't have managed
even my weakest of lines.

? May 1973

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