

Auden's "This Lunar Beauty": Keats's Urn and Hardy's *Tess*

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Abstract

W. H. Auden's "This Lunar Beauty" (1930) appears as homage to a pure "lunar beauty" that is defined by its sexual innocence and remoteness from the changes wrought by painful mundane experience. However, Auden, even at this time, argued the necessity of vital experience, even if painful and wrong, and often contemptuously dismissed innocence, especially sexual innocence. Auden's poem can be more readily aligned with these arguments when we recognize its links with John Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. According to Auden ("Robert Frost"), Keats, who was an important early influence on Auden, vigorously interrogates the urn's insistence on an immaculate beauty that excludes the suffering and misery of human experience. In "This Lunar Beauty," Auden, appearing to praise immaculate and timeless beauty, actually warns us against such fashionings. This critique, I will argue in the last third of the essay, is enabled by his distancing of himself from his speaker, as Keats (Auden believed) had distanced himself from the urn (and, though to a lesser extent, from his speaker). Auden's speaker thickly echoes Hardy's Angel Clare, in his fatal and extremely un-Audenesque constructions of pure beauty, pure woman, Tess of the D'Urbervilles.

"This Lunar Beauty" (1930) is an "elegiac distillation" of the "unworldliness" of "prepubertal" innocence (Fuller 65). This nocturnal and timeless "pure beauty" is "remote from both love and sorrow" (Spears 42) and, according to its speaker, is poignantly opposed to the mundane diurnal experiences that will make us inevitably become another. Auden's vision of

timeless "crystalline beauty" even appears to engage in a Wordsworthian "worship" of a child "as untouched and virginal as Diana" (Mendelson, *Early Auden* 83).

How are we to explain this powerful rendering of purity and perfection from a sexually precocious poet who despised "ingrown virginity" ("Sir, No Man's Enemy" [1929]) 36)?¹ The "difficulties" (Fuller 65) and "riddling uncertainties" (Spears 42) of this virgin tribute can be "lessened" (Fuller 65) by recognizing the complications and even the impossibility of love linking to this perfect but isolated beauty. Nevertheless, the praise endures, and difficulties linger. A romanticized child is quite unexpected in a poem by an Auden who rejected a puerile Wordsworth (Mendelson, *Early Auden* 83), identified innocence with emptiness, and aligned permanence and timelessness with eternal stagnation.² The salute seems especially surprising from one who repeatedly will link "perfection" with madness and brutality that is especially destructive of children³: "Perfection, of a kind, was what he was after / [...] And when he cried the little children died in the streets" ("Epitaph on a Tyrant," *EA* 239). "Beauty later" becoming "another" ("This Lunar Beauty," *EA* 52) is at odds with Auden's assertion that "we do not become a different person as we grow up, but remain the same from infancy to old age" ("The Prolific and the Devourer," *Prose* 2: 414 [1939]). Moreover, this immaculate beauty is defined in opposition to, and separation from, the day. Auden will soon announce that he was "witnessing the dissolution of a historical epoch" because it had been "one during which the day life and the night life were segregated from each other" ("Jacob and the Angel," *Prose* 2: 38). He believed at this time (1939) that "the underlying problem" of a world approaching total war was "a privation of some kind of wholeness" of which this segregation was a symptom (Schuler 14). Committing himself to a "Creator / To whom both the day and the night belong" (Mendelson, "Making" 191),⁴ Auden consistently will urge a reconciliation of flesh and spirit, day and night, light and darkness, consciousness and unconsciousness, heaven and earth, eros and agape, and spiritual health with imperfection/open-ended activity/error: "Is it not here [fallen earth] that we belong, / Where everyone is doing wrong, [...] Where if we do not move we fall [...]" ("New Year Letter," *Collected Poems* [CP] 179). Perhaps the poem was a last late burst of "the intense romanticism at the

heart of his earliest work" (Mendelson, *Early Auden* 82),⁵ another brilliant instance of the poet's deploying the "rhetorically effective" even if it expresses "feelings or beliefs which its author never felt or entertained" and perhaps abhorred (15).⁶ In this Foreword to his *Collected Shorter Poems 1927-1957* (1966), Auden repudiates the "shamefully" written lines in his "Spain 1937": "History to the defeated / may say alas but cannot help nor pardon" (CSP 15): "To say this is to equate goodness with success. It would have been bad enough if I had ever held this wicked doctrine, but that I should have stated it simply because it sounded to me rhetorically effective is quite inexcusable" (15). "Spain" was excluded from the volume. "This Lunar Beauty" was not.

Why didn't this conscientious artist exclude it? Perhaps the author, content with the poem's moonlit obscurities, intended, whatever the poem's sources, that "this lunar beauty" be read as a provocatively changeless and timeless lunar beauty (as the moon is usually identified with change and time), which perhaps it would be without the biography. Here, however, I will explain how the poem aligns with Auden's later less Romantic arguments, many of them already characterizing him when he wrote his dreamy masterpiece. Auden usually had some source in mind when composing, and here his primary intertexts are John Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and, almost as important, Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Auden appears to endorse "this lunar beauty" in the same way Keats (according to Auden) appears to argue that "truth is beauty." Just as the ode (as Auden read it) argues for something very different from the urn's utterances, so does Auden's poem undermine the speaker's tribute. This double-argument is enabled by Auden's speaker reflecting, not Auden, but Hardy's late Victorian Romantic Angel Clare in his disastrous idealization of a pure woman.

Auden in "A Literary Transference" (1940) links Keats with the "archetype of the Poetic" who "awakens a passion of imitation, and an affectation which no subsequent refinement or sophistication of his [the reader-poet's] taste can ever entirely destroy" (*Prose* 2: 43-44). Auden locates his own eventual "archetype" in Thomas Hardy, who became when he was sixteen "both my Keats and Sandburg." But Keats had been one of the Romantic poets "on whom Auden first modeled his work." Though yielding to

Hardy, his influence, even as with poets such as Yeats and Eliot, "lingered long after Auden ceased to read or consciously imitate" him (Bucknell xxii; xxi, 25, 153).

If Keats can awaken "a passion of imitation" that cannot "ever" be destroyed, where is the imitation by Auden? His *Juvenilia* contain several poems describing "his 'quailing' at the prospect of joining the ranks of great poets" (Wetzsteon 7; also see Bucknell xxii), and two of these explicitly relate this anxiety to Keats. "To a Toadstool" addresses, in a "lush Keatsian invocation" (Wetzsteon 7), a "Scarlet Beauty" that reputedly can impart the power to "share the passion of the nightingale," but the speaker doubts and "quail[s]" (Bucknell 14). "After Reading Keats's Ode" (1922 or 1923) expresses Auden's anxiety that he might lack the poetic powers of this literary father who generated the "wondrous vision of the divine bird" (Bucknell 16). Auden's "hidden longing for poetic vision of the sort possessed by the Romantic and late-Romantic poets he professed to scorn played a significant part in the course of his development. In time, Auden quietly transformed the self-doubt of his first poems into the longed-for vision" (Bucknell xxii-iii), such as in "Out on the Lawn I Lie in Bed" / "A Summer's Night" (1933). An even earlier transformation is Auden's rewriting of Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" in "This Lunar Beauty."⁷

Keats's Ode continues to generate widely varying assessments.⁸ Luckily, Auden gives us the fundamentals of his own reading of the poem:

If asked who said *Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty!*, a great many readers would answer "Keats." But Keats said nothing of the sort. It is what he said the Grecian Urn said, his description and criticism of a certain kind of work of art, the kind from which the evils and problems of this life, the "heart high sorrowful and cloyed," are deliberately excluded. ("Robert Frost" [1936], *Dyer's Hand* 337)

He expands this insight to define poetry in general: "We want a poem to be beautiful, that is to say, a verbal earthly paradise, a timeless world of pure play" (338). Nevertheless, "a poet cannot bring us any truth without introducing into his poetry the problematic, the painful, the disorderly, the ugly" (338). There is no finer analysis of "This Lunar Beauty" than these comments on Keats's ode. What Auden says Keats does in his ode explains what Auden does do, or thinks he is doing, in his own enigmatic verses on,

not merely a boy's perfect and "pure beauty" but a photograph of a boy, a student at Larchfield Academy, where Auden began as a schoolmaster, April 1930. It, too, is a work of art, like a picture on a Grecian urn (or on Achilles' shield or a painting by Brueghel), or like moonlight itself fallen on the earth.

Auden's speaker tells us in the first stanza that sexual experience would transform this beauty with "no history" into "another." These lines vibrantly dialogue with the ode's opening verses:

Thou still unravished bride of quietness,
 Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,
 Silvan historian, who canst thus express
 A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme [...].
 ("Ode on a Grecian Urn" 1-4)

Child, sex, virginity, innocence defined by an absence of sexual experience, violent/intrusive sexuality backgrounding this innocence, a subject defined by sweetness (Auden's third stanza), abnormal time ("other time" in Auden's second stanza), a subject having "happily no history in the ordinary sense,"⁹ and the magisterial power of beauty—the intertextuality is indeed dense.

Keats quickly links his subject with what Auden read as "the problematic, the painful, the disorderly, the ugly." The speaker interprets the scenes in terms that emphasize the violent and violently frustrated sexuality that a "still unravished bride" quietly reveals. "Still unravished bride of quietness" seems a puzzling description of a Grecian urn until we read the speaker's lurid constructions of the scenes inscribed on the urn by Keats. The lofty, serene virgin and astutely quiet "bride" (probably embodying art or beauty or both) presides over, as articulated by the speaker, a raucous attempt at ravishing of "maidens" (8) amidst struggle, "mad pursuit" (9), foiled escapes, and the endless playing of pipes and timbrels—which music (or din) the next stanza tells (11-12), if heard, would not be so sweet. Here is disorderly ugliness indeed, or so insists the speaker, though on extant Grecian urns the figures most often appear to be enjoying themselves in classical sex-scenes. But Keats's darker "legend haunts" (5) his English urn's story.

And what lurid if not ugly "legend haunts"—in relation to the ode—Auden's poem? "Had"—not "has"—"a lover" suggests the problematic, a fall from innocence, but it is a condition negatively opposed to and sequestered from Auden's persistent and pure beauty. The next stanza appears poised to waken his pure beauty from its lofty inertia, summoning ghosts to haunt this perfection.

These ghosts actually enhance the inviolability of his lunar beauty. The speaker asserts an active daylight's painful "loss" of the perfection of night, rather than a nocturnal (perhaps slumbering) perfection's loss of daylight vitality, again a statement at odds with Auden's articulated beliefs. Ghosts are the flimsiest of realities; and Auden's ghosts, victimized and haunted themselves rather than haunting ("Lost and wanted"), requiring (like sexual maturity as well as sexual satisfaction) "time" and "inches," fade even further into the daylight that is spurned by a timeless beauty without history. They, like daylight, suffer loss when deprived of contact with timeless and nocturnal perfection, haunted, lost, wanted, and hapless.

This salute to eternal stasis is heightened by Auden telling us where, but neither what nor why nor when nor how, the ghosts haunt. His last stanza, rather obliquely, merely tells us what they, "Lost and wanted," do not haunt. Haunting the timeless beauty—reminding it of the problematic and painful—"was never" the "endeavor" of Auden's dissatisfied, dysfunctional ghosts, who do not seem to have any stable purpose. Moreover, Auden seconds the painful and futile results of completed action that Keats's speaker posits: "Nor finished this ["endeavour"] / was ghost at ease" (EA 52). Auden's ghosts when allowed to attain their goal will remain restless, high-sorrowful though cloyed, teased by the ease of classic repose embodied in the photograph.

Auden's speaker then tells us that "Love shall not near/The sweetness here" until "it [this lunar beauty] pass" (EA 52). "Sweetness here," as in the ode, seems to comment on a scene/condition rather than on a person: "heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard / Are sweeter" ("Ode" 11-12). Auden's lines restate this as: experienced sexual love is perhaps sweet, but wonder of pre-pubescent innocent beauty is certainly sweeter. The lines might critique un-sexual perfection by implying other forms of sweetness less saccharine. They might also be denying (and almost certainly are,

in some way) love to this perfect beauty. But the rather formal if not Victorian commandment “shall not” is attached to sexual love, whose action is being limited, while “pass,” usually a positive word as noun and verb, suggests virginal perfection that has been liberated for further development. And “till it pass” is highly conditional, in no way certain, and its passing (though not away) suggests that sexual love will (shall?) undertake to realize the condition that this lunar beauty has mastered before passing. Indeed, “till it pass” echoes “yet unravished bride”; and many readers, as with the ode, might assume or even hope that it will not pass away, at least as an ideal. As human life, it must indeed pass away, but the reader, in light of Auden’s magical words, would be tempted to prefer that it did not.

Auden’s ghosts seem rather anemic in comparison with the romantic ode’s shadowy and brutal hauntings. In his second stanza Keats’s speaker advises the figure that he calls a “bold lover” to cease grieving for a love that, the lover is assured, can never be consummated.

Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
 Though winning near the goal yet do not grieve:
 She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
 For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair! (17-20)

This condition might console many a shyer and more Petrarchan lover, but it likely would intensify the despair of the “bold” and sexually frenzied and despairing one constructed by the speaker—or of a gay hedonist who is looking at a boy’s beautiful picture. Time, and sexual satisfaction, is indeed inches in this scene, and the time and inches have ceased, preventing sexual realization and an attainment of “bliss,” a painful loss indeed.

Nor does anything in Auden’s poem near the tortured lines quoted by Auden:

For ever warm and still to be enjoy’d,
 For ever panting, and for ever young
 All breathing human passion far above,
 That leaves a heart high-sorrowful [as Endymion’s moon?] and cloy’d
 A burning forehead, and a parching tongue. (“Ode” 26-30)

One almost expects next to read of Ixion, Tantalus, or Tithonus. In addition to the problematic "for ever," there's the removal of passion. Many people would welcome this removal as a blessing, but not the figures described by the speaker. These "for ever panting" and "warm" in this "cold pastoral" seem, as they almost pulse into life, caught in a nightmare, though the circumstances are common enough in actual life, and too common in the life of a dying man open to the accusation of grasping for sweets beyond his reach. Despite the speaker's assertion, burning and parching normally describe the before rather than after of intercourse.¹⁰

Where, again, is the ugly truth in Auden's poem which, like Keats's poem for many readers, seems, in some way, to echo "'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,'—that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know" (49-50)? Auden vigorously exonerates Keats by opposing these lines (which he attributes to the urn) to the poet's own supposed beliefs: "He said nothing of the sort. It is what he said the Grecian Urn said." This strongly suggests that Auden also ascribed to the urn "that is all / Ye know on earth," lines indicating a dualism that was often the subject of Auden's critiques. For Auden, the skeptical misery-revealing Keats is heard murmuring behind these lines. Indeed, the highly conjectural statement can read like an accusation before his relentlessly silent urn: "thou say'st" (48) (not *said*) often appears in circumstances not too far removed from "thou liest." And "still" (1) implies the possibility that the urn will suffer the ravishing so serenely expressed on the urn. It also implies that the speaker might be a little surprised that it had not yet happened. One wonders if the urn has not already experienced trauma. "Unravished" is probably a least positive condition in relation to a bride, and quite quiet brides would not seem to be happy, happy brides. On the contrary, the urn would seem not misplaced, in the next generation, in the home of Miss Haversham.

Nevertheless, Keats's speaker, projecting Keats's woeful world into the urn, also has enthused about the enviable and happy state of strictly aesthetic figures (and their human worshippers) who can escape suffering (like the figures on the urn) by seeking the refuge of art and abstraction.¹¹ Auden then, if he believed the poem was Keats's criticism of escapes into art, would have had to distinguish between the poet and his speaker in addition to distinguishing between the speaker and the urn.¹² We should

then allow Auden the creative space that he allowed Keats in configuring the ode's complex of voices. Whatever the biographical circumstances, there is a significant distance between Auden and his speaker. The poem "has no first or second person personal pronouns" (Blake 139), and "the verb forms are all in the third person singular [...] there is nothing personal through the use of first or second person here" (130).¹³ This distancing between speaker and poet is reinforced by Auden's rewriting of another of his poem's primary sources, his "first love" and "the most important" modern model for Auden's earliest poetry (Spears 21, 23; Mendelson, *Early Auden* xix, 27-28, 33, 43): Thomas Hardy, whom Auden closely identified with his childhood and adolescence at Gresham's, where he first learned from him "something of the relations between Eros and Logos" ("A Literary Transference" [1940], *Prose* 2: 47).

"This Lunar Beauty" is one of the English Auden's enactments of Hardy's "hawk's vision [...]. To see the individual life related not only to the local social life of its time, but to the whole of human history" ("A Literary Transference," *Prose* 2: 46-47). This vision is focused on the one who constructs this beauty as much as on the beauty itself. Auden's speaker, impersonal and abstract and generalizing, conversational with "a tone of intimacy" (Blake 142), replicates the late Victorian/Arnoldian/Shelleyan ultra-idealist Angel Clare, who wreaks such havoc in Wessex when he awakes from his dream of Tess D'Urberville/Durbeyfield. "This lunar beauty" is primarily defined by the absence of the conditions that Clare assigns to his formerly pure—or at least purely conceived—Tess when he discovers she is "a young woman whose history will [not] bear investigation" (Hardy 207). She has had a lover and developed the physical feature that most often reveals the fact. Her pregnancy bears sorrow, soon to take her endless look. Tess has become another, with society in general and particularly with Clare:

"But you do not forgive me?"

"O Tess, forgiveness does not apply to the case. You were one person: now you are another. My God—how can forgiveness meet such a grotesque—prestidigitiation as that!"

He paused, contemplating this definition; then suddenly broke into horrible laughter—as unnatural and ghastly as a laugh in hell. (Hardy 179)

Pure moral lunacy continues:

"I thought, Angel, that you loved me—me, my very self! If it is I you do love, O how can it be that you look and speak so? It frightens me! Having begun to love you, I love you for ever—in all changes, in all disgraces, because you are yourself. I ask no more. Then how can you, O my own husband, stop loving me?"

"I repeat, the woman I have been loving is not you."

"But who?"

"Another woman in your shape." (Hardy 179)

This, with its heart-changes, was indeed a lunar, or lunatic, love of a lunar beauty. Auden's speaker, rapt in visions of timeless and unchanging beauty, more positively might have echoed Juliet: "O, swear not by the moon, th'inconstant moon, / That monthly changes in her [circled] orb, / Lest that thy love prove likewise variable" (*Romeo and Juliet* 2.2.109-11). Yet, as in "Out on the Lawn" / "A Summer's Night" (EA 136), "Auden uses the image of the moon to give him the same distant, all-seeing perspective as Hardy's hawk" (Wetzsteon 2).¹⁴ What this lunar perspective records is a speaker who seeks a static perfection in beauty and the moon, each notoriously subject to mutability, which pair is soon joined by that most elusive of realities, dreams. This indicates that, despite the speaker's insistence that he has located a beauty without Tess's imperfections, he (like Clare) will be bitterly (and rightly) disappointed.

Indeed, retributive disappointment seems inevitable, as the speaker insists on his Beauty's isolation from "history" and change and time. This is hardly a positive or safe assumption for such a history-minded poet who repeatedly argued the resistless menace of History's ghosts that preclude a too pure beauty. Auden, like his Keats, says "nothing of the sort" to endorse this timeless embodiment of beauty (which, as N. F. Blake points out, is in fact subject to change—unless it is the beauty of art, such as an urn or a poem). Auden's "ghost," apparently mistily Georgian-poetic, becomes a vibrant historical metaphor when linked with *Tess*, where ghosts are a primary force behind the sexual catastrophe. The revelation that Durbeyfield is D'Urberville triggers a string of catastrophes, from the death of Prince to the ill-fated migration to Trantridge, to the location of the disastrous revelation.

These historical/evolutionary/biological forces (the latter identification especially strongly shared by Auden) are embodied in the “rollicking” D’Urberville ghosts (Hardy 57; 52), whose sexual depredations continued to haunt the Victorian landscape(s) that encompassed their own daughters. Tess, embodying Auden’s own victimized/victimizing ghosts, does not want to be either a haunted D’Urberville or a haunting Durbeyfield, or even a haunted or haunting farm worker. Believing “’tis always mournful not to be wanted” (Hardy 158), especially at the apparently changeless and paradisaical Talbothays, she certainly would not have wished to be (though she is, at least in the poem) one of Auden’s ghosts. Yet she is destroyed by the “retribution” (57) linked with these sexual-historical ghosts, whose originals certainly did not endeavor after perfectly sexless beauty, and who are not often at ease, in 1430, 1630, or 1878 or 1930, when they first encounter this beauty, though very likely are when they are finished with it. They, like most ghosts, do find some ease in initiating retribution, destroying one who had aspired to, and had appeared to Clare to embody, this beauty. Clare had not even danced with the child-like virgin Tess at their first fleeting encounter, at the Marlott Cerealia. Even after having been deflowered by Alec (a ghost of a D’Urberville), Tess at Edenic Talbothays, in love with Clare, wished she could remain “in perpetual betrothal” to Clare (157), avoiding change and sex and another sorrow, a lunar beauty that does not pass away. But Clare, not Tess, had insisted on a wedding night, on extending Tess’s perfection into an active bed. The result is fatal to his pure, for Auden purely puerile, vision of his dream-girl. Auden suggests that she is hardly the last victim so long as lovers insist on perfect, pure beauty: when the ideal passes, love approaches and fades while sorrow arrives to take its own endless and immaculate look.

The ghostly shadows materialize at one of the D’Urbervilles’ old mansions, reduced to a farmhouse. Clare, on his wedding day, experiences the daytime loss of his dream Tess, declaring that she has become another—indeed, another corpse. That night his dream-girl is carried in his embrace, as he insists that his pure woman has literally died—other time kept rather strictly as Tess, still alive, becomes a ghost of herself, lost in the daylight, wanted at night:

"My poor poor Tess, my dearest darling Tess! So sweet, so good, so true!" The words of endearment, withheld so severely in his waking hours, were inexpressibly sweet to her forlorn and hungry heart. (194)¹⁵

Separation of day and night indeed causes catastrophe. Carrying his beauty across the moonlit landscape, Clare insists that Tess conform to his ideal even if it kills her, perfecting an immutable inertia by placing Tess in a medieval stone coffin, not unlike the ones that received the bodies of her D'Urberville forbearers. Auden's apparently innocuous lost ghosts assume a terrible significance when linked with Hardy's doomed, lost, and (un)wanted woman who will end her life on a gallows. Killing perfection, haunted by inescapable sexual ghosts, creating havoc for and in the unconscious, is intensely Auden.¹⁶

The poem, then, is the brilliant result of "Auden's search for a poetic father, a figure who might balance the visionary power of Wordsworthian Romanticism": "The hawk's vision [...] was a substitute for Romantic vision" (Bucknell xxxiv-v). Nearly every line (even "time is inches" with its emphasis on inevitable sexual maturation/experience) of Auden's poem of a pure boy—"Pur" (French for "pure" and the title given it in *The Collected Poetry of W. H. Auden* [1945] 134)—critically intersects with Hardy's novel of "A Pure Woman."¹⁷ These intersections do not generate a single coherent reading of Auden's enigmatic verses. But they clearly destabilize notions of Auden's tight links with the speaker. Few, if any, have empathized with Angel's response to Tess's confession, a response which even Clare's clerical parents, low church of a very old school, thought misguided.

Yet Auden's distinctive rhetoric reconfigures Clare's response to construct a powerful image of the beautiful, much as Keats seems also to seek the refuge of timeless beauty. But Auden, like his Keats, does not yearn to rest in eternal, beautiful inertia. Instead, he prefers a slightly disturbed sleep that will prepare him for the ambiguities of daylight action where everyone, rightly, is doing wrongly. Poetry, Auden believed, makes nothing happen, but at least it can whisper the ugly truth about what we see, and this makes Keats's poem a beautiful but haunted friend, like other beautiful poems on death, such as *Lycidas* (perhaps an even colder pastoral), *Adonais*, and *In Memoriam*. In Shelley's romantic words, our sweetest

songs tell of saddest woe, and tragedies are often considered the most beautiful works of art.

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NOTES

¹Citations of Auden's poetry, unless otherwise noted, will refer by page number to *The English Auden (EA)*. Citations to Keats's poetry will refer to line number.

²In his "Song for Saint Cecilia's Day" (1940), angels come into, rather than escape from, time; an earthly inhabitant, having ascended into Heaven, is invited to return to earth; salvation is linked with the erotic; and his speaker will pray "that what has been may never be again" (*Complete Poetry [CP]* 220-22). Ease is located "where Sorrow is herself, forgetting all / The gaucheness of her adolescent state" (221).

³"Fleeing the Short-haired Mad Executives" counters criminal perfection with the faulty but human, extolling "the faults that flaunt / The life which they [mad executives] have stolen and perfected" (*EA* 149).

⁴These lines are from a draft of the "Song."

⁵Wordsworth "provided the model for his earliest surviving verses" (Mendelson, *Early Auden* 27).

⁶Auden, *Collected Shorter Poems 1927-1957 [CSP]* 15.

⁷Fuller comments upon the ode's influence on "From the Very First Coming Down" (1927) and "Orpheus" (1937), while Spears cites Auden's 1962 article in *Mademoiselle*, where he writes that "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" is an example of the sacred as "'horror and despair'" and the "Ode to a Nightingale" embodies the sacred as "'the romantically mysterious'" (294).

⁸"The poem abounds in multiple and conflicting possibilities for interpretation" (Stillinger 256).

⁹Allott's note in Keats, *Complete Poems* 534n3.

¹⁰Auden does not appear to respond to Keats's fourth stanza, though he would have noted as problematic a scene of slaughter as an act of piety, inscribed on a perfect thing of beauty.

¹¹Keats likely shared more of his speaker's enthusiasm than Auden was ready to acknowledge: "The excellence of every Art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate, from their being in close relationship with Beauty and Truth" ("To George and Tom Keats," December 1817, *Letters* 1: 192). Auden, in his essay on Frost, states the opposite: "Art arises out of our desire for both beauty and truth and our knowledge that they are not identical" (*Dyer's Hand* 337).

¹²Stillinger calls the poem an example of Keats's "self-dividedness," teeming with opposites that are neither consistently rejected nor endorsed (255-56).

¹³Blake concludes, "These features also suggest a proverbial quality on the poem which appears to deal with what is perpetually true and with facts and ideas rather than with people" (141). He also points out that the poem presupposes other lunar beauties who—like Tess—lack these perfections.

¹⁴Wetzsteon adds that this "perspective [...] is a refuge from historical crises rather than a way of casting judgment upon it" (2).

¹⁵Auden might also have had in mind this passage: "How very lovable her face was to him. Yet there was nothing ethereal about it: all was real vitality, real warmth, real incarnation [...]. He had never before seen a woman's lips and teeth which forced upon his mind, with such persistent iteration, the old Elizabethan simile of roses filled with snow. Perfect, he, as a lover, might have called them off-hand. But no: they were not perfect. And it was the touch of the imperfect upon the would-be perfect that gave the sweetness, because it was that which gave the humanity." (Hardy 118)

¹⁶Andrew Robert Deane examines Auden's attraction to Hardy's verse explorations of "death and mutability [...] ghosts, phantoms and shadows" (44).

¹⁷There is also given a title that links with the novel in *Collected Shorter Poems 1930-1944*: "Like a Dream."

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