CHAPTER - ONE

Introduction

This introductory chapter comprises two sections: the first outlines the project unfurled in the succeeding chapters, and the second overviews the Auden Group of which Stephen Spender was a vivacious member, regarded by posterity as the deuteragonist of the circle.

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Hailed more as a poet of the thirties than as a poet of the century, sometimes dismissed as a 'Pylons poet' who thrived in the penumbra of W.H. Auden, Stephen (Harold) Spender (1909-1995) had long been remembered chiefly for his autobiography *World Within World* (1951) or as a critic and an academic in his own right. In the last quarter of the last century a rehabilitation of Spender as a poet started taking place. Here is Geoffrey Thurley trying in 1974 to re-instate this rather unduly neglected poet of the Auden Group:

> If Spender is not the most unfashionable poet in the world at the present time, it is certainly difficult to think of a more unfashionable one. He is known universally [..] as a Social Poet. Yet there are reputable anthologies of middle twentieth century verse which exclude him altogether, and in the universities he is likely to be scorned. Contempt rather than oblivion has been Spender's lot – contempt for the lapsed fellow-traveller, for the vegetated poet, for the confessor who quite came clean. […] yet Spender was, I believe, Auden's superior as a poet, and […] the most powerful English poet of his time. […] His poetry assumes greater significance today: if we turn to Spender, to David Gascoyne and Dylan Thomas, ignoring both the more facile pylon verse and the more gaseous New Apocalypse writing, a different picture of English poetry emerges from the thirties, one that suggests a new future and avoids the poverty of New Lines and the Movement. […] In such a recasting of a poetic […] tradition, then, a just appraisal of Stephen Spender assumes considerable importance. (152-3)

In spite of this forty-odd years old critical acclaim, the traditional view of Spender as a social poet, a poet of crisis, persisted. The reason is not far to seek. His brief romance with Marxism / Communism, his retrospective self-analysis that "We [the Auden Group] were the Hamlets of the Thirties" and the huge popularity of his poem "The Express" on both sides of

the Atlantic contributed to the indelible image of Spender as poet of social / political enquiry. In fact, people who had interest in the poetry of the 1930s almost habitually neglected the language of emotion in Spender's poetry and were happy with the rhetoric of inquiry there. A proper rehabilitation, however belated, of Spender should be inclusive, and not exclusive in nature so that the two voices – one of emotion, and the other of inquiry – can be explored and juxtaposed with a view to understanding the interplay of aesthetics and politics in his poetry. This, it may be argued, is necessary for a comprehensive evaluation of Spender, for viewing him not simply as a poet *of* crisis, but also a poet *in* crisis. Hence, a work along the line of what is indicated in the title of the present thesis is neither trite nor superfluous.

A traditional and quite popular approach to literature is: behind a book there is a man, and around that man there is the society he belongs to. This 'model' may in geometrical terms be called the concentric circle model where more than one circle has a common, single centre. While viewing Spender as a social poet, a poet *of* crisis, this model does work to a considerable extent – at least as far as his language of inquiry is concerned. His crass and nebulous poetic utterance like 'Our programme like this, yet opposite/Death to the killers, bringing light to life' ("Not Palaces") vindicates the deployment of such a model. Across his works he has revealed a preoccupation with what he metaphorically calls 'the centre and the circumference'. A few examples would suffice to clinch the issue:

1. To break out of the chaos of my darkness
 […] My words like eyes in right store to reach
 A centre of their light […]
 […] my acts […] fly
 On a circumference to avoid the centre. ("Darkness and Light")

2. Throughout these years, I had always the sense of living on the circumference of a circle at whose centre I could never be"

 (*World Within World,* 192)

3. […] the poetic imagination is centripetal, a bringing together of experiences from a circumference which could theoretically be enlarged to include all pasts and presents […].

 (*The Struggle of the Modern,* 55)

4. Shuttered by dark at the still centre
 Of the world's circular terror […].

 (*The Still Centre,* 85)

But the point is that when he concedes that "Both centre and circumference are my weakness" ("Darkness and Light"), we are led to suspect that he is rather engulfed in more than one overlapping circle. And this calls for a second model for a proper evaluation of his poetry. Borrowing from the domain of Mathematics and Logic, we can name this second model as Venn diagram in which a set of circles exist intersectionally. At least two intersecting circles can then be observed in Spender's oeuvre: one registering the language of imagination and the other, that of inquiry. And if the deployment of this model is valid – it may be argued that it is – then it can be worthwhile to explore how Spender navigates between, or negotiates with, the two circles.

Spender's concerns, often disharmonious in nature, for the individual and the social colour the divided world of Spender's imagination and inquiry. In his early writings Spender shared with others of the Auden group two common features: a move away from early individualism towards Marxism and conflicting emotions and intellectual contradictions that stemmed from the move taken. In most of the pieces in *Poems,* Spender voices forth the inhibitions and inadequacies of himself and humanity as denizens of a world listless to the needs of man. He, therefore, seems to grapple with ambivalent motives: a search for absolute certainties, and acceptance of the ruptures in human experience. As Justin Replogle puts it: 'The conflict is between the body and the mind, the world and the absolute' ("The Auden Group" in *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature,* Vol. 5, No.1, (1964). This dichotomy well surfaces in such lines as "An "I" can never be a great man", and "Never being, but always at the edge of Being". And it is not surprising that in *The Still Centre* (1939) his great interest in the individual, nebulously present during his rendezvous with Marxism, resurfaces to claim that personal and social health heavily relies on private love, on the tangent of individual still centres.

It is important to recall that while at Oxford, Spender was reprimanded by his guru Auden for his juvenilia attempts in the romantic vein: "Stop your Kelley and Sheats business", said the guru to the disciple, as he recalled it later in *World Within World.* But romanticism perhaps lurked in his blood forever. Nothing could be more romantic than the Marxian oracle "… and the State shall wither away", [1] and it probably had a latent but profound impact on the young Spender. As a matter of fact, Spender was less

[1] The Marxist concept was coined by Friedrich Engels ,Part 3, Chapter 2 of Anti-Dühring (1978)

temperamentally fitted for Marxism than the other members of the Auden group, and he could never discard the romantic disposition which actually permeated his whole being. He could not get away from demonstrating a veritable record of concern for his own experience as well as for the innate nature of man; and the result was that for him the individual was at the centre of the social. Even in *Vienna* (the most 'Marxist' of his works), he tried to integrate the public events in the city into his private experience. The least ideational poet of the Group, Spender would forever be one with the suffering individual, regardless of his political commitment. The predicament of being caught between two circles is well revealed in his play *Trial of a Judge* where the Judge is portrayed as the only noble human figure despite his liberal, anti Marxist precepts. Spender is of course favouring the inevitable (as it appeared to be in the wake of the Russian Revolution) communism, but at the same time he has a soft corner in his heart for this suffering and dignified man. Replogle has thus rightly observed:

> For Spender Communism was an expedient, the only apparent way to restore individual solvency […]. His allegiance to Marxism went little beyond that […]. Put most simply, Auden, Spender, and Day Lewis […] were firmly rooted in a traditional Western culture which cherished values difficult to reconcile with leftist thinking (ibid.).

No wonder, then, right from *Nine Experiments* (1928) to *Dolphins* (1994), Spender leaves traces of the Venn diagrammatic worlds where the language of imagination and that of inquiry converge.

Book-length evaluations of Stephen Spender's poetry are rather slim and scanty; and researchers, therefore, have to depend chiefly on the articles, reviews and chapters devoted to the discussion of his works in the books on the poets of the 1930s in particular and modern British poetry in general. H.B. Kulkarni's *Stephen Spender: Works and Criticism: An Annotated Bibliography* (1976) is still very valuable for sifting material in this regard. It is, however, clear from the annotations provided in Kulkarni's book the matter of the interface between the language of imagination and that of inquiry did not receive a detailed, systematic and in-depth critical attention up to 1976.

The critical scenario vis-à-vis Stephen Spender's poetry has not altered since the publication of *Bibliography* in spite of Ronald Carter's commendable *Thirties Poets: 'The*

Auden Group' (1984), which indeed created a renewed interest in Spender, and Surya Nath Pandey's (probably the only Indian book some worth on the poet) *Stephen Spender: A Study in Poetic Growth* (1982) which chronicles the poetic progress of Spender in the pre and post World War II decades.

In the 1990s and at the turn of the new century, three important books on Spender were published: David Hugh's *Stephen Spender: A Portrait with Background* (1992), David Leeming's *Stephen Spender: A Life in Modernism* (1999), and John Sutherland's *Stephen Spender: The Authorized Biography* (2004). The publication of three books in a span of a decade testifies to the fact that Spender may not be side lined as a minor poet of the last century. Anyway, as the very titles of these three books indicate, much remains to be explored with regard to Spender's poetic achievement. Hence the present proposal for an evaluation of his poetry can hope to add to the existing Spenderian.

The present study will try and answer some such questions as the following:

1. How was the poetics of Spender's early works shaped by his politics?
2. What, in fact, Spender meant by the 'Destructive' and 'Creative' elements that constitute a poet's engagement with the self (the 'still centre') and the society (the 'other' / the 'circumference')?
3. How did Spender's poet-critic and critic-poet roles reflect the interface between the language of imagination and that of inquiry?
4. What was the impact of Spender's disillusionment with Communism on his later works?
5. Was it a 'world-within-a world' or a Venn diagrammatic world that Spender as a poet was a denizen of?
6. How far does Spender's last work titled *Dolphins* (published in 1994, just a year before his death) differ, if at all, from his earlier works in terms of the language of imagination and that of inquiry?

The second chapter will focus on the subtext of Spender's socio-political poems. In so doing, it will primarily fall back on his autobiography, *World Within World,* which still remains an authoritative exposé of the times between the Wars. The prevalent incertitude has nicely been summed up in this little master piece: "[…] We were divided between our literary vocation and an urge to save the World from Fascism. We were the Divided Generation of Hamlets who found the world out of joint and failed to set it right" (174). The language of

imagination and that of inquiry in his poetry of period were tinged with a deep sense of crises.

Before we enter the world(s) of Spender's poetry, we would do well to try and understand what he actually meant by the 'Destructive' and 'Creative' elements, and also how these elements were in operations in his use of the language of imagination and that of inquiry. Hence, the third chapter would try and adumbrate the ideas contained in his *The Destructive Element* (1935) and *The Creative Element* (1953). These two books adequately register the changing spenderian thoughts about the role of a poet in society. It can be said that *The Destructive Element* is a committed but not stubborn leftist view of 'mattering' of literature and art in the twentieth century. It advocates restrained artistic freedom for the sake of service to society. *The Creative Element,* on the other hand, is about the aesthetic processes: "[…] the creative element is the individual vision of the writer who […] never forgets the modern context […] but he does so only to create more forcibly the visions of his own isolation" (11). In 1935, Spender privileged *inquiry* over *imagination;* eighteen years later he was happy to invert his quondam critical stance.

As a Marxist, Spender's heart lay bleeding for the poor and oppressed. He knew electrification would ruin the beauty of the meadows. He needed a girl to fall in love with, but at same time he could not get away from homosexuality. What could be the poet's steady ethics amidst so many diversions? This question probably plagued him always in his treatment of political events, of man as a social being, of progress as a necessary evil, and of different kinds of love that can bind man to man sexually and asexually. If he failed to find a satisfactory answer, his failure generated a constant dialogue, an interconnection, between the overlapping worlds. The fourth chapter will try and trace the tangents that connect the Spenderian worlds in which imagination and inquiry co-inhabit. But examples are always better than precepts and culling out textual instances, the chapter will depend mainly on his *Collected Poems* (1986), but may also turn to *Nine Experiments* (1928), *Vienna* (1935), *The Still Centre* (1939), *Ruins and Visions* (1942), *Poems of Dedication* (1947), *The Edge of Being* (1949), and *The Generous Days* (1971) for the pieces not included in *Collected Poems.* Published just a year before the poet's death, *Dolphins* (1994) is yet to receive an adequate critical attention. The last years of Spender's life were not very congenial to the octogenarian poet, although he was anxious to bring out a final volume of poems, however tiny, to call it quits. What kind of inquiry and imagination, and with what corresponding language, does this valedictory volume offer? This concluding chapter will centre around

this important question. Spender's penchant for delicate romanticism returns, it appears, with not inquiry but recollection:

> For our farewell, we went down to the footpath circling the lake. You stood there, looking up at Egrets nesting in high branches – while ghosts in a green tapestry. And I stood silent, thinking of Images to recall this moment. (*Dolphins,* 9)

Now beyond the centre and circumference, beyond the tiring navigation between the circles of a Venn diagram, beyond any struggle of the modern, the aged poet can bring imagination and inquiry together like as the pranksters of the sea and humans play out their mutual friendliness.

[ii]

Talking of 'groups' in favourite with historians, be they literary, scientific or belonging to any serious spheres of human activities. The meta physicals were deemed a group, and so were the 'Movement' poets of the 1950s, and then there was the famous 'Bloomsbury' group that shaped the early twentieth century modernism. Writers and artists are 'grouped' when certain dominant common factors can be traced in them. As far as poetry in England is concerned, Oxbridge provided a haven for such group formations. Arthur Hallam was the leader of the 'Apostles' at Cambridge – a group which gradually dwindled due to Hallam's untimely death and the rise of Tennyson as Poet Laureate. English poetry between the Wars saw the emergence of a group of litterateurs with W.H. Auden as its central sun. The influence of Auden on the others of the group was so strong that he was readily accepted as the leader and mentor. Any discussion of Spender's poetry should at the outset attempt a generalized survey of the Auden group and Spender's position in it. It will be seen that the members of the group were actually split into two circles that overlapped with each other like those of a Venn diagram.

As Justine Replogle puts it: "there was such a thing as the Auden 'group', or rather there were two groups, one of which became the radical Auden group composed a Auden, C. Day Lewis, and Stephen Spender …." (133). The others of the 'gang' (Auden's favourite phrase) – Robert Medley, Rex Warner, Christopher Isherwood, Edward Upward – looked like forming a satellite. It can be argued that this latent schism did add, to some considerable extent, to the quick dissolution of the group in general.

Strictly speaking, Louis MacNeice should not be included in the group for several reasons: first, there has been a tradition of reclaiming him as an Irish writer rather than a satellite of Auden; secondly, he had no political axe to grind, whereas we are considering a group of poets with identical beliefs about man and society; and thirdly, notwithstanding Auden's intellectual imperiousness, he never swerved from his calm and sequestered poetic path.

It may be noted that the Auden group had other tags as well : the Oxford Poets, the *New Signatures* group and the Pylon Poets (this one probably originated from Spender's famous poem, "Pylons"). The tag-suppliers seldom gave explicit reasons for their choice, but anyone interested in British poetry of the first two decades of the twentieth century could

easily perceive the advent of a new wave in the writing that flourished in the early 1930s. The origin of the group has finely been traced by Replogle :

> The story begins at Gresham School, Holt, where in the early 1920's [*sic*] Auden, Christopher Isherwood, and Edward Upward began their literary careers. Isherwood and Upward were close friends […]. The history really begins during Christmas vacation, 1925, when Auden and Isherwood met again by chance and discovered that each was a writer. (134)

Sometimes during the fall or winter of 1926, Auden met C. Day Lewis who had already to his credit a slim volume of poetry, rather paltry and utterly Georgian in nature, and was about to bring out another. The togetherness of Auden and Day Lewis in the summer of 1927 impacted heavily on the latter's poetry, and soon they would co-edit *Oxford Poetry* (1927).

Enough records are not there to tell us about how frequently these literary aspirants met or what the exact nature of literary communion was. But when Stephen Spender timidly approached Auden sometime during the 1927-1929 winter, he was aware of, or made aware of by a rather imperious Auden, the existence of a 'group' at least in Auden's mind. It is interesting to note that Spender later confessed that the 'Gang' "existed in [Auden's] mind […] like a cabinet in the mind of a party leader" (WWW:52). The writers, in actuality, never met collectively; but, as Replogle points out, "Yet if the writers never appeared in the same place at the same time, they saw each other in various combinations quite often" (135). Records available show the following events of their meetings, severally: sometime in the summer of 1928, Auden, Spender and Isherwood met in London, while Spender was busy hand-printing a volume of Auden's poems; a little later, Day Lewis met Auden in London, while Isherwood was in the company of Upward on the Isle of Wight; in March, 1929, Auden and Isherwood were in Berlin; the next year Spender went to Berlin on an invitation from Isherwood. Their meetings were therefore held in permutations and combinations, so to say.

The fall of 1930 and the winter of 1931 witnessed a number of happenings important enough for the consolidation of the group. Auden's *Poems* was published in September, 1930, by Faber; in December that year, Spender came in contact with John Lehmann who would edit the works of all members of the group for next ten years; at the beginning of 1931 Lehmann joined the famous Hogarth Press and started planning to bring out an anthology of the emerging poets who, in his opinion, were instilling a new spirits in English poetry. No

sooner had *New Signature* appeared in February, 1932, than Auden, Day Lewis and Spender constituted a 'group' or 'gang' in the minds of the reading public. The year 1933, too, was momentous for these three poets: Spender's *Poems* was published; Auden revised his previously published *Poems*; Day Lewis came up with an Audenesque book poems titled "The Magnetic Mountain"; and, more importantly for the common eye, the three poets reappeared in a second anthology titled "New Country". The overall result was, to quote Spender, "[…] immediately the names of Auden, Day Lewis and Spender were linked together by the critics" (WWW, 138).

More important than the group's early history is the question: what were the common factors that braced these writers together? Michael Robert's contention, put forth in his preface to *New Signatures,* that they united because they revolted against the esoteric and introspective nature of prevailing poetic art, is belied by the anthology itself. For example, Auden's "To My Pupils" of the volume is too confusing and private to sound a voice of revolt. When Roberts prefaced *New Country,* he made some clear points saying that the new poets saw poetry "as a social weapon forged to help give birth to a free communal society in which the individual could flourish" (Replogle, 136). In his *The Creative Element,* Spender makes the point even more clearly: "[…] the movement of the 1930s [was] a shift away from an individualist vision towards an orthodoxy based on a political creed" (145). It may thus be argued that it was 'politics' rather than 'poetics' that helped create the poetic circle.

We will for the sake of convenience concentrate an Auden, Day Lewis an Spender only, with regard to the politics or ideology that the members of the group shared. Auden's early guru-like exhortation to Spender that above all poetry should not meddle with politics complicated the issue of ideology formation among his disciples, as much as his later rather nebulous concept of the society-individual interface. Until 1933 each and all of them had viewed individualism as a prime importance and shared little awareness of the social import of their individualism. Rooted deep in the Freudian idea of repression as it was, Auden's early poetry fostered the notion that man's personal and social malaise was mainly due to repressing his instinctive drives. *The Orators* teems with this idea which resurfaces in *Poems* the last sonnet of which begins

> Sir, no man's energy, forgiving all
>
> But will his negative inversion …. (89)

He did imply that what he called a 'change of heart' could bring about social changes, but he never made his point explicit. The reason for his remaining rather evasive in this regard was probably due his preoccupation with the language of imagination more than with that of inquiry.

The earliest poetry of Spender and Day Lewis, too, does not reflect any social theory worth noticing, although both of them heard 'the sad music of humanity' (to quote Wordsworth's worthy words) and sympathized with man's plight riddled with dilemmas. Marx and D.H. Lawrence cast their shadows on Spender's *Poems,* although he claimed later in his autobiography that the Marxist elements got in with Edward Upward's joining the Communist Party in 1931. Be that as it may, in most of his poems in *Poems* he seems – to quote Replogle again – " […] interested in the inhibitions and inadequacies of himself and other individuals, failing in a world unsuited to the needs of man" (187). It is only towards the end of the volume that a clearer Marxist voice looking for a political remedy for human condition is heard.

Day Lewis's position in his early poetry was different from Auden's and Spender's. Here was a young man pondering his own sense of values and work it out into a consistent vision of life. As Replogle finely puts it, "In *Transitional Poem* (1929) he struggles with ambivalent motives that led him on the one hand to search for absolute certainties and on the other to accept the discontinuities of the earth and human experience" (187). The body-mind, the world-absolute, and the empiricism – rationalism interfaces go to make the poems often turgid and obscure. Towards the end of the work he, however, has tried to resolve the conflicting issues into a form of optimistic materialism – a kind of philosophy which he never gives up.

Initially, then, the common factors that held them together were basically three-fold: academic background and vocation; being put together in two anthologies; and privileging the individual over the social. Their togetherness was further cemented by the rise of Fascism, the failure of democracy to counter it, and the overwhelming economic problems that faced Britain and other countries. The year 1933 saw the writers becoming conspicuously Leftist: Day Lewis, with his *The Magnetic Mountain;* Auden, with his *The Dance of Death;* and Spender with his *Bookman.* Although the 'Marxism' of the group was never well-defined, the members did share certain Marxian ways of looking at the world. Replogle has succinctly summarized their position:

> They all believed that social health demanded changing the environment. They all favoured a policy of action based on an empirical survey of the facts. They all agreed that the value of action was to be measured by its consequences in satisfying human needs. (141)

Auden's essay 'The Good Life', published in 1935, was the group's ideological manifesto. It must be added that the ideas contained in the essay were not radically Marxian, but ones that could be found in the writing of empirical philosophers other than Marx. But the then European political scenario would allow those ideas to pass for Marxism. And so the three poets enjoyed being Marxists, but not without being suspected by hard core communist party workers. Only Day Lewis became more 'committed': he affiliated himself as a Party member in 1937, but anon he relinquished all ideology. There is no record available till date to the effect that Auden ever was a Party member.

It is interesting to see that a kind of paradox always underlay the group's so-called Marxism. Belonging as they did to the middle-class traditions of England by virtue of their birth, upbringing and education, they were, to quote Eliot's famous phrase, 'living and partly living' with Marxism. Day Lewis always believed that poetry is superior to politics, that propaganda was only a peripheral matter in the art of poetry, hence his ideas about poetry were in conflict with those the Marxian doctrine about man, society and art. He went so far as to say that "[t]here can be no such thing as realist poetry" (*A Hope for Poetry,* 49). He did not seem to subscribe even to the Wordsworthian dictum that 'a poet is man speaking to men': he regarded poets as a special kind of people, of seers, whose vision could be understood emotionally rather than intellectually. So, the problematic of the language of imagination and that of (social/political) enquiry is there in his poetry as it is in Spender's. The legacy of I.A. Richards, too, was at work: the stress on the individual and freedom.

With Auden's Marxism, we alight on a rather treacherous ground. Largely generalized and quasi-philosophical in nature, his views on the individual, society and the poet's role in it do not sit well with pure Marxism. He absolutely ignored the deterministic, Hegelian sides of it, and tried to adapt Marxism into his own kind of philosophy. Initially, we must note , Auden was inspired by the Lawrentian concept of instinct and life-force, but his tilting towards Marxism, coated with his empirical yet very private kind of philosophy, harboured "the importance of the human intellect in understanding the world and evaluating

actions […]" (Replogle, 144). Hence, the language of inquiry often rears its head from beneath that of imagination in the latter half of the 1930s, although never very conspicuously or explicitly. The difficulty in assessing Auden's Marxism lies primarily in the fact that he always tries to harness his philosophical outlook with the contemporary events. Even in "Spain 1937", the loudest of his leftist poems that deal with freedom and necessity, does not leave out the point "[…] that man creates his own conditions, and that freedom demands intelligent choice and action" (Replogle, 146). The nebulous political voice was often difficult for his naive disciples to understand. Day Lewis was afflicted by Auden's swinging away from empirical materialism so much so that he regarded *The Ascent of F6* as not only negative and defeatist but dangerous, too, because it suggested "[…] that man's responsibility must begin and end with his own soul" (Replogle, 147).

Spender's wonted, incurable romantic tendencies made him even more ineligible for being a Marxist than others of the group. His perennial crisis is well registered in his famous poem "Darkness and Light": the problematic of the centre and circumference that that faced him from the beginning to the end. The role of the Communists in Barcelona in 1937 appeared to him as sheer treacherous, and then he found them to be vain and meaningless as intellectuals. He did not delay to give up his Marxist affiliation, and he was the first of the group to do so. His poetry since then became more and more individualistic.

Day Lewis stopped his political activities in 1938, and became apathetic to all political issues. He was being aware of the advent of the Second World War, a matter much more serious to him as a humanist poet than the class struggle of Marxian theory. Basically always a naturalistic writer, his non-political materialism returns more vigorously with the disappearance of his Marxism. Then in September 1939, the Panzer Divisions and Russian Tanks rumbling across Poland crushed his and Spender's dream that the State would wither away some day. Auden's change was more complex than his disciples: his change was due more to the change in his philosophical outlook than to the political issues of the time. From Marx he was moving away to Kierkegaard, seeing man's condition as a paradoxical one:

It is not here that we belong
Where everyone is doing wrong
. . . .

Admitting every step we make
Will certainly be a mistake
But still believing we can climb
A little higher every time […]. (*New York Letter,*50)

In hindsight it appears that the group was fated to disintegrate sooner or later, as the very foundation of their sodality was not deeply laid. Changes in European politics changed their politics, so much so that the post-World War II political equations rendered their specious and dubious ideology otiose. As budding, aspiring poets, Spender and Day Lewis needed a smarter guy like Auden to be their guru. But, then, the anxiety of influence was to overtake the disciples and they started realizing that 'groupism' was ruining their poetic idiosyncrasies. In fact, Day Lewis wrote better when he got out of Auden's influence.

Homosexuality, too, was not enough to hold them together for long. They parted ways as the world began to change in geometric progressions, and managed to forget poetry could "make things happen" (Auden's well-known phrase). In front of them lay the posts of Professor of Poetry to reline on, on both sides of the Atlantic.