

And the distortions of ingrown virginity.
 Prohibit sharply the rehearsed response
 And gradually correct the coward's stance;
 Cover in time with beams those in retreat
 That, spotted, they turn though the reverse were great;
 10 Publish each healer that in city lives
 Or country houses at the end of drives;
 Harrow the house of the dead; look shining at
 New styles of architecture, a change of heart.

Oct. 1929

1930

On This Island¹

Look, stranger, at this island now
 The leaping light for your delight discovers,
 Stand stable here
 And silent be,
 5 That through the channels of the ear
 May wander like a river
 The swaying sound of the sea.

Here at the small field's ending pause
 Where the chalk wall falls to the foam, and its tall ledges
 10 Oppose the pluck
 And knock of the tide,
 And the shingle scrambles after the suck-
 ing surf, and the gull lodges
 A moment on its sheer side.

15 Far off like floating seeds the ships
 Diverge on urgent voluntary errands;
 And the full view
 Indeed may enter
 And move in memory as now these clouds do,
 20 That pass the harbour mirror
 And all the summer through the water saunter.

Nov. 1935

1936

Lullaby¹

Lay your sleeping head, my love,
 Human on my faithless arm;
 Time and fevers burn away
 Individual beauty from
 5 Thoughtful children, and the grave
 Proves the child ephemeral:

¹ The title is from Auden's later collections.
¹ Title from Auden's later collections.

But in my arms till break of day
 Let the living creature lie,
 Mortal, guilty, but to me
 10 The entirely beautiful.

Soul and body have no bounds:
 To lovers as they lie upon
 Her tolerant enchanted slope
 In their ordinary swoon,
 15 Grave the vision Venus^o sends
 Of supernatural sympathy,
 Universal love and hope;
 While an abstract insight wakes
 Among the glaciers and the rocks
 20 The hermit's sensual ecstasy.

Roman goddess of love

Certainty, fidelity
 On the stroke of midnight pass
 Like vibrations of a bell,
 And fashionable madmen raise
 25 Their pedantic boring cry:
 Every farthing² of the cost,
 All the dreaded cards foretell,
 Shall be paid, but from this night
 Not a whisper, not a thought,
 30 Not a kiss nor look be lost.

Beauty, midnight, vision dies:
 Let the winds of dawn that blow
 Softly round your dreaming head
 Such a day of sweetness show
 35 Eye and knocking heart may bless,
 Find the mortal world enough;
 Noons of dryness see you fed
 By the involuntary powers,
 Nights of insult let you pass
 40 Watched by every human love.

Jan. 1937

1937, 1940

Spain¹

Yesterday all the past. The language of size
 Spreading to China along the trade-routes; the diffusion
 Of the counting-frame and the cromlech;²
 Yesterday the shadow-reckoning in the sunny climates.

2. A quarter-penny, at one time the smallest and least valuable British coin.

1. The Spanish Civil War, which began in 1936 as a rebellion by General Franco's right-wing army against the left-wing, elected Spanish government, was viewed by British liberal intellectuals as a testing struggle between fascism and

democracy. Written while the war was raging, this poem appeared separately in 1937, the proceeds of its sale going to Medical Aid for Spain. In 1940 Auden retitled the poem "Spain 1937," deleted lines 69–76, and made other changes; later he removed the poem from his canon.

2. Ancient stone circle.