

EPISTLE  
TO A  
GODSON  
AND OTHER POEMS  
W.H. AUDEN

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TO A GODSON  
and Other Poems

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## SMELT AND TASTED

The nose and palate never doubt  
Their verdicts on the world without,  
But instantaneously condemn  
Or praise each fact that reaches them:  
Our tastes may change in time, it's true,  
But for the fairer if they do.

Compared with almost any brute,  
Our savouring is less acute,  
But, subtly as they judge, no beast  
Can solve the mystery of a feast,  
Where love is strengthened, hope restored,  
In hearts by chemical accord.

What is Death? A Life  
disintegrating into  
smaller simpler ones.

\* \* \*

It is the unimportant  
who make all the din:  
both God and the Accuser  
speak very softly.

\* \* \*

God never makes knots,  
but is expert, if asked to,  
at untying them.

\* \* \*

Does God ever judge  
us by appearances? I  
suspect that He does.

\* \* \*

Instinctively passive, I guess, having neither  
fangs nor talons nor hooves nor venom, and therefore  
too prone to let the sun go down upon your funk,  
a poor smeller, or rather a censor of smells,  
with an omnivore palate that can take hot food.

Unpredictably, decades ago, You arrived  
among that unending cascade of creatures spewed  
from Nature's maw. A random event, says Science.  
Random my bottom! A true miracle, say I,  
for who is not certain that he was meant to be?

As You augmented and developed a profile,  
I looked at your looks askance. *His architecture  
should have been much more imposing: I've been let down!*  
By now, though, I've gotten used to your proportions  
and, all things considered, I might have fared far worse.

Seldom have You been a bother. For many years  
You were, I admit, a martyr to horn-colic  
(it did no good to tell You—*But I'm not in love!*):  
how stoutly, though, You've repelled all germ invasions,  
but never chastised my tantrums with a megrim.

You are the Injured Party for, if short-sighted,  
I am the book-worm who tired You, if short-winded  
as cigarette addicts are, I was the pusher  
who got You hooked. (Had we been both a bit younger,  
I might well have mischieved You worse with a needle.)

I'm always amazed at how little I know You.  
Your coasts and outgates I know, for I govern there,  
but what goes on inland, the rites, the social codes,  
your torrents, salt and sunless, remain enigmas:  
what I believe is on doctors' hearsay only.