

## W. H. Auden - Hymn to St. Cecilia

### I.

In a garden shady this holy lady  
With reverent cadence and subtle psalm,  
Like a black swan as death came on  
Poured forth her song in perfect calm:  
And by ocean's margin this innocent virgin  
Constructed an organ to enlarge her prayer  
And notes tremendous from her great engine  
Thundered out on the roman air.  
Blond Aphrodite rose up exited,  
Moved to delight by the melody.  
White as an orchid she rode quite naked  
In an oyster shell on top of the sea;  
At sounds so entrancing the angels dancing  
Came out of their trance into time again,  
And around the wicked in Hell's abysses  
The huge flame flickered and eased their pain.

Blessed Cecilia, appear in visions  
To all musicians, appear and inspire:  
Translated Daughter, come down and startle  
Composing mortals with immortal fire.

### III.

O ear whose creatures cannot wish to fall,  
O calm of spaces unafraid of weight.  
Where sorrow is herself, forgetting all  
The gaucheness of her adolescent state,  
Where Hope within the altogether strange  
From every outworn image is released,  
And Dread born whole and normal like a  
beast  
Into a world of truths that never change:

Restore our fallen day;  
O re-arrange.

O dear white children casual as birds,  
Playing among the ruined languages,  
So small beside their large confusing  
words,  
So gay against the greater silences  
Of dreadful things you did: O hang the  
head,  
Impetuous child with the tremendous  
brain,

O weep, child, weep, O weep away the  
stain,  
Lost innocence who wished your lover  
dead,  
Weep for the lives your wishes never led.

### II.

I cannot grow;  
I have no shadow  
To tun away from,  
I only play.

I cannot err;  
There is no creature  
Whom I belong to,  
Whom I could wrong.

I am defeat  
When it knows it  
Can now do nothing  
By suffering.

All you lived through,  
Dancing because you  
No longer need it  
For any deed.

I shall never be  
Different. Love me.

O cry created as the bow of sin  
Is drawn across our trembling violin.  
O weep, child, weep, O weep away the  
stain.

O law drummed out by hearts against the  
still  
Long winter of our intellectual will.  
That what has been may never be again.

O flute that throbs with the thanksgiving  
breath  
Of convalescents on the shores of death.

O bless the freedom that you never chose.

O trumpets that unguarded children blow  
About the fortress of their inner foe.

O wear your tribulation like a rose.

Blessed Cecilia, appear in visions  
To all musicians, appear and inspire:  
Translated Daughter, come down and  
startle  
Composing mortals with immortal fire.