

The Auden Group of Poets/ Poets of the 1930s/‘New Country’ Poets/ The Pylon Poets (Part-2)

[BA (Hons.), Part-1, paper-1]

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He adulates the Romantic hero in ‘Beethoven’s Death Mask,’ while his awareness of cultural anomalies and conflicts of class interest in inter-war Britain shine through ‘An Elementary School Classroom in a Slum.’ In his poems on the battles he achieves his most effective balance of personal response and public engagement. ‘Two Armies’, ‘Thoughts During an Air Raid’ and ‘Port Bou’ show the poet’s sensuous imagination and appeal to the feelings unlike Auden’s appeal to intellect.

In spite of being a member of the Auden Group, Louis MacNeice never embraced whole-heartedly any political creed, though he was acutely conscious of the failings of the inter-war years. His poems combine keen, analytical observation of contemporary life with a strong common sense, a definite sense of humour and an awareness of music, rhythm and potentialities of language. His poetry is mainly didactic or lyrical, but his avoidance of a positive attitude towards revolution like the others has deprived his work of that driving force essential for a good didactic poetry. The twenty for linked poems in *Autumnal Journal* (1938)

mix topographical description and personal reflection. He yearns for no Utopia: 'All that I would like to be is human, having a share/ In a civilized, articulate and well-adjusted/ Community.'

Cecil Day Lewis's *Transition Poem* (1929) is metaphysical in manner, closely packed and concise in idea and imagery and *From Feathers to Iron* (1931) reveals a considerable lyric gift and a great love of nature. However, the best of his political verse appear in *The Magnetic Mountain* (1933) where he adopts Auden's colloquialism and freedom of manner. Then the Spanish Civil War and the menace of Fascism overcasting all hopes drew forth from him *Overtures to Death* (1938) which strikes a tragic note, indignant and ominous, though not despairing.

However, the synthesis between Freud and Marx, politics and personality that the poets of the thirties attempted at were not generally accepted, and the result was a certain hollowness and emotional thinness in their poetry. Yet, Auden and his circle brought back into poetry a new virility and a new sense of contemporaneity, and their left-wing thoughts expressed the fine virtue of social generosity and sympathy rarely found since the age of the Romantics.