

The Auden Group of Poets/ Poets of the 1930s/‘New Country’ Poets/ The Pylon Poets (Part-1)

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The British poets of the 1930s, consisting of the young band of ‘New Country’ poets or the Pylon Poets, encountered the ideal ‘waste land’ of Eliot in the form of the great economic depression and spiritual desiccation of the thirties. In the quest for the Eliotian ‘Shantih’, they rather chose to portray, instead of the symbolic waste land, the literal and practical one. In poetry using slang, jazzy metres and imagery drawn from machinery and boys’ stories, they combined the Marxist philosophy of revolution with Freud’s psychology of the unconscious. As it happened, W.H. Auden sees, ‘Smokeless chimneys, damned bridges...choked canals,’ and Stephen Spender’s heart bleeds when he sees the unemployed loafing in the streets, ‘And turn their empty pockets out, / The cynical gesture of the poor.’ To W.H. Auden, C. Day Lewis, Stephen Spender and Louis MacNeice, socialism appeared to be the means of emancipation from this horrid reality of the thirties.

The leader of the poets of the thirties, W. H. Auden came under the influence of Hopkins and Eliot, and like the latter he was deeply aware of the hollowness of the civilisation. But, unlike Eliot, he found solution in left-wing political ideologies. *Poems of*

1930 explores a variety of new and provocative ways of illustrating the futility of modern English middle class existence. He assaults prejudices and conformities with a rhetorical gaiety and wit. His reputation was further cemented by *The Orators: An English Study* in 1932 and by the collection *Look Stranger!* in 1936. While the former is a wilful play of verse and prose, satire and objurgating, realism, fantasy, mystification and burlesque, in the latter the poet roams freely from himself to society, from private to public, from Freud to Marx and from present to past. He is also conscious of sex and its importance in human life, as witnessed in the poem 'Lay Your Sleeping Head, My Love.' Auden sees life from the vantage point of a cultivated intellectual and rationalist, and continues seeing it beyond the thirties up to the sixties.

While anger and scorn enter largely into Auden's denunciation of the status quo, Stephen Spender is moved rather by compassion for the workless men idling in the streets and the children in the slum schools who have never seen the sea. The Spanish War gave his inherited Liberalism a more definite socialistic direction: 'No man/ Shall hunger. Men shall spend equally...' Spender's early volumes *Twenty Poems* (1930), *Poems* (1933) and *The Still Centre* (1939) intermix public, political and private verse.

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