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Universidad del Zulia
Facultad Experimental de Ciencias
Departamento de Ciencias Humanas
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The socio-political context and the poetic talent: A study in Auden's poetry

Maytham Abed Alrazzaq^{1,*}
¹Iraqi Ministry of Education

Abbas, Mishaal Harb Mkhailef²
²Thi-Qar general directorate of education, Iraq

Abstract

This paper tends to highlight the political context of the poetry that is produced by W.H. Auden, as the poet who was active during the earlier twentieth century via comparative qualitative research methods. As a result, the poetry of W.H. Auden has represented the class differentiation, effects of war, depression, and the bleakness of the political disorder in Europe. In conclusion, the war images, exploitation and class distinction are vivid and honest witnesses to modernism and its degradation.

Keywords: Socio-political, Bourgeoisies, Proletariats, Marxism, Existentialism.

El contexto sociopolítico y el talento poético: un estudio en la poesía de Auden

Resumen

Este artículo tiende a resaltar el contexto político de la poesía producida por W.H. Auden, como el poeta que estuvo activo durante el siglo XX a través de métodos comparativos de investigación cualitativa. Como resultado, la poesía de W.H. Auden ha representado la diferenciación de clases, los efectos de la guerra, la depresión y la desolación del desorden político en Europa. En conclusión, las imágenes de guerra, la explotación y la distinción de clase son testigos vívidos y honestos del modernismo y su degradación.

Palabras clave: Sociopolítico, Burguesías, Proletarios, Marxismo, Existencialismo.

1. INTRODUCTION

Auden is the poet who was interested in pointing out many issues in the political schemes of the world, which created defects in the social fabric, as well as the economic assets of certain countries. After the age of AUDEN (1927) and Stephen Spenders have conducted, the technique of presenting the subject matter that is now stereotypical to modern poetry. Though his poetry is aesthetic and sometimes beyond the mere actual life on a regular vision, it has a profound extent of study, moreover, it unfolds the hidden explanations to the burdens that the society is to confront. Besides his occupation with the political and social discourses, Auden also showed a considerable interest to comment on themes of the crisis of identity, philosophical concerns, and psychological issues (Aghaei et al, 2015).

During the 1920s, Auden was influenced by the prolific poet T.S. Eliot; furthermore, his early verses are done with the war impact of Wilfred Owens and natural views of Thomas Hardy. His poetry articulates the fragmented substances of the modern existence, hinging on potential images and dialectical worries to transfer the psychological and political concerns. Auden is known for his travelogue motif; through the 1930s, his poetry reflected such motif and his interest in the reading of Karl Marx's works and Sigmund Freud. *Journey to War* (1939) a book about travel that he wrote in collaboration with Christopher Isherwood, short sonnets about the experience of China trip, verse interpretation. Moreover, the fascist movement in Europe that led to the warlike of the Spanish Civil war.

AUDEN (1927) is the traveler, psychological, critic, and poet, English by birth and American citizen after 1946, there is some sense of resistance in his poetry to the decadence of the capitalism.

His political opinions are as the left-wing oriented poet has drawn the broader terms of his verses. His poetry presents the disinterested comment on the age right after the First World War. The era of his literary productivity parallels the time of the disturbance and chaos of war, the great depression. The era of Auden's literary career between 1932- 1939, witnessed Auden's attention to the burdens resulting from the social complexities and class discrepancies in the capitalist society. Taking into consideration Auden's belief that all illness is for psychological reasons, he emphasized on the fact that providing solutions to man's problems through identifying his psychological defects and their remedy. Yet, he also points out that the political and the social environment in which man dwells again play a vital role in his life. As a left-wing poet, Auden has condemned the huge social discrepancy between the high class and the lower society, which also led to the dark conditions of the modern man during the first half of the 20th century. Such disparity has resulted in conflict (MARX & FREDERICK, 1952).

Karl Marx has noted that society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat. As a leftist in politics, Auden has realized the society of his time, in a capitalist world, it is the bourgeoisie that controls the key to the resources and material,

meanwhile, the proletariats perform the hard work, yet enjoy no profit but less income and prolonged exploitation and suppression by the capitalists. This domination and subjugation are the reasons that led to enormous economic disparity and social injustice. Such as rapidly increasing economic engulfment, Auden worried that civilization was approaching catastrophe. He also observed the cause of inequality is Greed. The cure is the abandonment of money getting as a motive (MENDELSON, 1981).

Auden believes that mass production, advertising, the divorce between mental and manual labor, magazine stories, the abuse of leisure, are all symptoms of an invalid society, and can only be finally cured by attending to the cause. Auden has realized that the psychological outcome of the theories of Freud and Homer Lane, which he once used to interpret the mentality of the modern man, is not enough and would not assist in solving his problems. Modern individual lives in a society and he is part of it therefore, he is not isolated. If he should lead a healthy and regular life, it is essential that he operate as an individual and so is the society that he lives, both have to be healthy. REPLOGLE (1965) noted, Society's sickness, Auden now claims, comes not from each person's psychological repression, but from human failure to control industrialism. REPLOGLE (1965) Commenting on the literature produced in England in the 1930s, HYNES (1976) remarks:

The decade of the 'thirties was a time of crises, and the most important writing of the period is best seen as a series of efforts to

respond to the crisis. Auden posed the problems very acutely in the mid- 'thirties when he wrote, in a birthday Poem to Isherwood:

The showy arid works reveal

The squalid shadow of academy and garden.

Make action urgent and its nature clear?

Who gives us nearer insight to resist?

The expanding fear, the savaging disaster?

The poet must be strict and adult, qualities that impart moral responsibilities and discipline of writing. His pen and his role as a writer, and not merely as a regular citizen - he will awake men for the need of action, and what action means? His insight must provide men the power to resist their hard conditions. This is not just a simple moral theory of literature; it asserts a direct relation between literature and action in the public sphere.(OYELANA & NINI, 2015).

His poem *The More Loving One* (1923) has a political interpretation of the reference to the stars that are analyzed as an allusion to the sovereign hierarchy, the upper layer that rules over the proletariat. It is a considerable analysis of the poem Auden pins his idea to; Auden, as the social and political investigator that he was, in this poem put attention on the conflict between the upper class like government body and the regular people—dragging people's mind

towards the disproportional society—the growing gulf between the superstructures and the bases. Thus, the ever-widening gyre between the bourgeois and proletariats resulted in the social discordance between the oppressor and the oppressed that eventually grow as a reason for the conflict that the proletariats experience that ultimately resulting in a revolution.

In this poem, Marxism is evident through indicating what changes can be made in a society on the hands of Capitalism, like branches and differentiation within it and expand it to a destructive breath. Such an example is displayed in the intonation of the following/ lines: Of stars that do not, give a damn/I cannot, now I see them, say /I missed one terribly all day. (The More Loving One) As the working and the middle class and of a country get the feeling of being alien and sense that they have been violated, left behind, and betrayed by the elected representatives, those whom they have trusted and admired as their supporters in such a cruel world. Such behavior prepares the ground for a pro-Marxist tendency to come out, which is more clear in the form of a revolution caused by the striving masses. Auden in the poem swings between pessimism and optimism. The last lines of the poem show the disappointment with the politicians in a pessimistic tone the poet mentions: Were all stars to disappear or die, / I should learn to look at an empty sky.

2. METHODOLOGY

Hence, one can realize the despair that the poet tries to reflect through the disappointment with what he named stars that people

adore and consider as their supporters and protectors are in fact just negligible and selfish, their elegance is transitory and ephemeral, that is why we should be ready to open our eyes to see a sky that is empty of stars. Auden used the empty sky to provide an allusion to a society that has no societal hierarchies and disciplined class system. This optimistic method, at any rate, is tightly fastened to the utter notion of a silver silhouette that is obviously generated by an exquisite trust in the revolution that will diffuse the anxieties and tensions encountered by the working class.

Auden is well known for pointing out the present-day matters that are common under totalitarianism, under the façade of aesthetic lyrical pieces. In *The Unknown Citizen* Auden gives details descriptions of a man who is annihilated from his existence in an approach that he is presented like an existed item noted by the several outer agencies that trace his life pace:

For in everything he did he served the Greater Community.
 Except for the War until the day he retired
 He worked in a factory and never were fired,
 but satisfied his employers, Fudge Motors Inc.
 Yet he was not a scab or odd in his views,
For his Union reports that he paid his dues (GREENBERG, 1969).

As an argument on the nature of the title, *The Unknown Citizen* is poem that imparts the feeling on the reader that the poet sincerely gropes to figure out the picture of the citizen as the rolling wheel under the cruel social and political machinery—such as mechanical

representation promotes no evolutionary sense, instead, it prepares a ground for a life articulated by stasis. As man progresses in age, he grows spiritually clean and altered to a machine. What the poet wishes to consciously explain is the abstract idea that any operate, towards the final years of life in a given society, and he does not stay the individual that was born at the start. The Press is convinced that he brought a paper every day/ and that his reactions to advertisements were normal in every way (The Unknown Citizen).

Auden used the capital letters for the names of the agencies to start with, this reflects that idea that he points to in the society, generally speaking, himself man hooked up to all his adamant quests of identity, is minimized by the institution that leads the society and touches the main stakeholders which could be the substantial organization, standardized benchmarks and main owners in the directorial, working mechanism of a given country.

Once again this poem refers to Marxism very openly in Auden's work. This is the situation that results in divisions and marginalizing of the individuals that are productive denizens of the society, degraded and humiliated by the few managing bodies of government that able to utilize their well-founded picture and foundation to put under its feet those masses yet it also uses politics and religious belief to exercise their impact. Was he happy? Was he free? The question is absurd (The Unknown Citizen).

The absurd sense that comes out of the question directly from the period when we examine the title of *The Unknown Citizen*, basically the citizen is the government duty. The poem reveals how the government deals with the citizen as a mere duty that should be looked after with the assistance of a few external sources- making sure that the authentic delight of the citizen is never being part of the priority of the government. In his poem, *In Time of War*, Auden provides a deep interpretation of the entire mechanism of proto-industrial Capitalism. He reflects upon the multiple phases of capitalism touching the natural texture of a given society that is the charge of imparting solidarity among the individuals.

In the Engines, bear them through the sky: they are free and
isolated like the very rich;

Here war is simple like a monument:

A telephone is speaking to a man;

Flags on a map assert that troops were sent;

A boy brings milk in bowls. There is a plan for living men in
terror of their lives,

Who thirst at nine who were to thirst at noon,

And can be lost and are, and miss their wives,

And, unlike an idea, can die too soon.

As one can see the effects of capitalism that crippled man and reduced him to a commodity furthermore it crushed the modern man. The feeling of dejection strangled by fabricated social regulations is victimizing man during the modernism; the poet displays the follies of war and how senseless and inhuman it is. Furthermore, it delineates the irrationalities and the illogicality behind it. It is quite significant here to acknowledge that Auden identifies war straightforwardly with capitalism. Marxism, as opposed to capitalism, is that Auden, politically, calls for in this poem. The rich grow and prosper and the needy get poorer, as the symbolism of an unequal chances society is what Auden has led, a speech was against.

But ideas can be true although men die/Requires their skill; will never see how flying/Is the creation of ideas they hate, (In Time of War) Auden mentions here that the heroic expertise of being more solid is required from the regular individuals of the society by the superior authorities, but the thoughts that dwell within these psychologies could be appropriate, Auden casts light on the idea that it is normal to have individuals get killed in war zone but an outlook cannot perish. Auden has argued that the mystery of war is nothing more than bankruptcy and a futile practice. However, the motivation that the individuals live with provides the stimulus for such a practice and has occupied an important space in Auden's mind and it is this motivation that Auden supports and celebrates. Furthermore, he added that such motivation would enable the individuals to realize their authentic potential as genuine individuals, conscious of the truth that they must not spend energies on practices as war, but have to direct

such energy to usher dramatic changes in the entire system that provide the chance for war.

The verse of Auden during this time focuses on a quite extent on the social, political, and economic circumstances and, hence, it has a great influence on the people of that period. The contemporaries of Auden like Day Lewis C, Louis Stephen Spender, and Mac Niece, too wrote about the same type of poetry. They function as the main intellectuals of the era who are concerned with the agony of the regular people and contend that Capitalism and imperialism are the reasons of their burden. Besides, the fact that Auden has built his vision of a man on the bases of the psychological theories of Freud, Groddeck and Lane, he is also aware of the intensity of the Capitalist system on the individual. In several poems as *The Witnesses*, *What is That Sound*, *Adolescence*, *The Decoys* etc., both of the factors above are found together.

3. RESULT

As mentioned before, he juxtaposes Marxism and Freudianism, for Marxism is concerned with the external domain to the individual's mind, meanwhile the Freudianism with the inner mind of the individual. Thus besides the psychological assumptions of Freud and Lane, the idea about the society envisioned by Marx, Auden thought, would be essential to help man find the right way. AUDEN (1959) Freud and Marx acknowledged that all problems of the individual

internal and external - are inseparably knitted and one generates the other. A man's hardship can result from his mental disorder or internal struggle as well as by the societal environmental factors. Edward Mendelson noted that Auden's politics in the early 1930s were governed by his sense of the impending ruin of his class. In 1932, seeing no hope for the bourgeoisie, he approached a conversion to Communism and awaited the triumph of the workers.

Auden through his poetry aims at the fighting against the class system, which, he thought of as the root reason behind the social evil. Stephen Spender argues about the social and political situation of Europe during the 1930s, in his book *World within World*, From 1931 onwards, in common with many other people, I felt hounded by external events. SPENDER (1951) throughout this statement makes it is evident that the main events of the disturbed times have a very powerful influence on society. Auden too felt that the private world of individuals was being conquered by evils. Such a phenomenon was well reflected in his poem *A Summer Night*. The poem identifies the crisis in the European political arena. Moreover, it foresees the inevitable overthrow of the bourgeoisie ruling class by the proletariat (CALLAN, 1983). HYNES (1976) has provided a resembling idea that *A Summer Night...* is a Marxist poem: it is about the sickness and death of the bourgeoisie, and the revolutionary new world that is coming. (Hyne) It presents two contrasting phases: the first evoking the moment of felt peace and harmony in one's private and personal world and the second giving a simultaneous sense of ominous events in the outer public world. The private or mystic world experienced by

Auden that night in a summer night seems to be ideal, as it is free from fear, grief and death:

That later we though parted then.

May still recall these evenings when

Fear gave his watch no look;

The lion griebs loped from the shade

In addition, on our knees their muzzles laid.

In addition, Death put down his book.

As a mystical poet, Auden seems to discover a Utopian world by his personal experience in one hand, and on the other hand, certain ominous events on the public domain had a powerful impact too. He contemplates how people who are well off are very indifferent to the anguish and agony of their fellow human beings: And, gentle, do not care to know/ Where Poland draws her eastern bow/ what violence is done.

4. CONCLUSION

Auden comments on the political changes and attitudes, how he calls for uprisings and the revolution and the death wish of the wealthy

class resulting in the emergence of a new world order that was an urgent demand and preferable by the majority of people. He predicts a time when revolutions will demolish the dominance and corruption of the social order that represents the source of all evils that inherited within man himself and in his relationships. The crumpling flood, Auden thinks, resembles the force that will substitute all decayed systems that have enslaved man. Auden is quietly optimistic about the reforms in society:

The crumpling flood will force a rent

And, taller than a tree,

Hold sudden death before our eyes

Whose river dreams long hid the size?

In addition, vigours of the sea.

The use of the words the crumpling flood means that the revolution to be started by the proletariat. By the time the revolutionaries succeed, the leading bourgeoisie shall be forced out of society, and an end to their tyranny comes into play:

However, when the waters make the retreat

In addition, through the black mud first the wheat

In shy green stalks appears,

When stranded monsters gasping lie, these images of the wheat found in the black mud in shy green stalks symbolize the fervent enthusiasm for taking the corruption and decadence of capitalism and switch it to communism. Thus, the poetic talent of Auden is manifested in the poems that he wrote to work as a remedy to the dark condition and the inhuman circumstances that the modern man is passing through. The war images, exploitation and class distinction are vivid and honest witnesses to modernism and its degradation. In a more naturalistic approach, Auden has stripped the capitalist system of its crooked representation and introduced it as an exploiting institution that makes use of the war, industrialization and globalization to achieve the materialistic gains.

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