

W. H. Auden's Left-Wing Political Thinking and Its Impact on His Early Poetry

◎ Bin LIANG

Hunan Normal University

Abstract: Auden's political thinking was rooted in the turbulent times of the 1930s. He chose to stand with the proletariat and paid attention to social realities. Marxism helped him better understand the background and causes of social problems, and find ways to diagnose and treat social ills. Under the influence of these left-wing political thoughts, Auden's poetry showed criticism of the bourgeoisie, exploration of social issues, and a call for social change and struggle in terms of its content. In terms of the form of his poetic creation, this stance was manifested through what Auden termed "the hawk's vision" and highly radical wording.

Keywords: W. H. Auden, left-wing political thinking, poetry

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Wystan Hugh Auden is regarded as one of the most significant modern English poets after W. B. Yeats and T. S. Eliot. Auden emerged in the realm of English poetry in the late 1920s and gained significant fame by the 1930s. He was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1948, the Bollingen Prize for Poetry in 1953, and the National Book Award in 1956, all of which established his pivotal position in modern Anglo-American poetry. Throughout Auden's creative life, his ideological characteristics were variable, inconsistent, and extremely complex. As Rainer Emig pointed out, "His faith is plural and pluriform, and it does not offer the reassurance of certainty—beyond the certainty of desire" (206). During the different stages of Auden's creative work, his thinking underwent constant transformations and can be roughly divided into three phases. The first phase (1927–1932) was mainly characterized by psychological ideas, the second phase (1933–1938) by left-wing political thinking, and the third phase (1939–1973) by Christian beliefs.

Looking at the trajectory of Auden's thinking throughout his life, the ideological tendencies of different stages clearly had a significant impact on his creative process. His ideas underwent dramatic transformations. His childhood perspective originated in Christian family education, but

after receiving medical, psychological, and scientific education and training during his teenage years, he immediately rebelled against the deeply rooted religious family ideas and attempted to understand and analyze the world from a psychological perspective. Later, he was deeply influenced by the fervent political atmosphere and chose a left-wing political stance, expressing his sociopolitical views through poetry. In his later years, he found renewal in religion, rejecting some of the overly radical poetic creations of his youth and entering a peaceful realm of religious belief.

In the 1930s, Auden was dubbed a “left-wing poet” by numerous critics, due to his keen attention to and support for social and political realities and the progressive forces manifested in his poetry. As Humphrey Carpenter commented, “His role as what Edward Mendelson has called ‘Court Poet of the Left’ had its attractions, and at first he had played the part expected of him” (245). Though Auden himself rejected this label, the critical community widely acknowledged that “politicization” was an inescapable theme in the study of Auden’s early poetry. During the “Red Thirties,” the young poet Auden resonated passionately with his era in his choice of poetic themes, firmly believing that poets should shoulder public responsibilities and that poetry should serve a social and moral function in reforming reality and awakening the world (Zhang 182).

Auden’s political thinking was rooted in the turbulent times of the 1930s. He chose to stand with the proletariat at that time and pay attention to the era’s social realities. The labor theory of value, surplus value theory, and historical materialism in Marxist theory had a profound impact on him. He understood the ugliness behind the bourgeoisie and placed his hopes on communism to save the world. It was during such a period that the young Auden swiftly gained prominence in the British literary scene with his *Poems* and *The Orators*. The political ideals and aspirations to actively change society embedded in his poetry swiftly influenced many young intellectuals. The poets and novelists influenced by him were even referred to by critics as the “Auden generation.” Unlike the previous generation of poets, which exhibited an anti-political and apolitical aesthetic tendency, the “Auden generation” preferred to confront the fragmented society and seek their own solutions within it. Moreover, they collectively opted for a political leftist stance as a crucial approach to analyzing society and resolving conflicts (Cai 92).

As a poet, Auden not only possessed abundant emotions and keen perceptions but also had extensive knowledge and ability as a rational thinker. As Narsingh Srivastava commented, “It is no wonder, then, that intellectually enriched by his voracious reading, Auden’s temperamental precocity developed into a remarkable vitality of mind” (21). This knowledge and rationality allowed Auden to transcend the identity of a lyrical writer and participate more in observing and contemplating social phenomena. After World War I, the entirety of Europe fell into great chaos and depression, and the economy was sluggish. Ordinary people were poor and miserable, and the aristocracy was indulgent and extravagant. The social order was chaotic, people’s morality declined, and humanistic consciousness was extremely weak. At this time, the emergence of Soviet communism was felt by Auden and many compatriots to offer a social and political solution that could improve these conditions. Auden quickly followed this left-wing trend and encountered Marxist theory. In his view, Marxism could help him better understand the background and causes of social problems and find a way to cure these ills. This point of healing society was consistent with his motivation for studying psychological theories. He analyzed people’s psychological

pathology layer by layer and dissected social illnesses in an attempt to cure the ugly world he faced as a healer. As Xiao Liu wrote, “Louis MacNeice and Stephen Spender were both Auden’s fellow travelers, who pointed out that Auden fused Freudianism and Marxism, and integrated them into his poetry, hoping to save the chaotic reality of Europe, which had a sense of urgency in reality” (112). This is not to say that Auden was ever a wholly committed Marxist. Though in 1932 he wrote a poem called on first publication, “A Communist to Others,” he never joined the Communist Party of Great Britain, or spent time writing pamphlets or attending tedious meetings (Lucas 152). He drew nourishment from Marxist theory, including dialectical theories about the individual and society, matter and consciousness, and social development and historical formation, as well as political economy theories such as class struggle, labor value, and surplus value. He used Marxist theory to analyze issues caused by modern social development, such as the wealth gap, disorder, spiritual crisis, and loss of humanism, and ultimately called for social change.

Although Auden in the 1920s had already felt the spiritual dilemma brought by the social depression after World War I, fundamentally, he did not have a strong consciousness of the pragmatic realities of war, society, and politics. He writes of how one day, his friend (and later fellow author) Christopher Isherwood came to school wearing a black armband: “I knew this meant that his father was dead, but the words ‘killed in action’ brought no image to my mind” (*Forewords* 504). However, when the economic crisis in the 1930s arrived, his gaze was no longer limited to his individual circle but turned on a broader society. At this time, Marxism provided him with a basis to re-examine the world. The Marxist worldview, based on dialectical materialism and historical materialism, considers nature, society, and the human spirit within an organic and unified category, thereby revealing the essence of the objective world and the universal laws of human social development. In terms of understanding the objective world, it believes that the essential foundation of the world lies in matter, and matter expresses its existence through different specific forms of motion. At the same time, the human spirit and consciousness are determined by objective matter, and people’s spiritual world reflects the real world in the human brain. However, humans have a certain subjective initiative and can react to matter. The Marxist worldview absorbed by Auden was an extension of viewing the world from a psychological perspective. Influenced by Homer Lane, he agreed that the external environmental conflicts determine people’s internal mental states, so he quickly accepted the view that matter determines consciousness. He believed that humans are subject to the objective environment in which they exist, and once the objective environment changes, it will also affect people’s living conditions and psychological states. Auden’s Marxist tendencies stemmed from his belief that changes and transformations in the environment are prerequisites for achieving moral freedom. At the same time, Auden also believed that through people’s own efforts, they can change their internal and external environments. If individuals achieve self-liberation and satisfy their instinctual desires, they can release tremendous energy, realize their personal values, and thereby transform society. In Auden’s view, the relationship between the individual and society became increasingly close, and the freedom of thousands of individuals was the foundation for achieving social equity.

Auden also supported Marxism’s viewpoint on social history. By analyzing the basic contradiction between production relations and productive forces in capitalist society, Marx scientifically

demonstrated that the doom of capitalism and the victory of socialism were two inevitable laws of social development. Turning away from the bourgeoisie and believing in the eventual doom of capitalism were views that Auden had realized from his personal experiences and feelings in his early years. According to his later memories, in 1926, once when he went to his aunt's house near a strike location for lunch, he was immediately discovered by his uncle, who was a bank manager, to have participated in the general strike at Mecklenburg Square. Auden said, "Whereupon, to my utter astonishment, he ordered me to leave his house. It had never occurred to me that anybody took the General Strike seriously" (*Forewords* 514). In the same year, when he returned home, he began to openly oppose his parents' bourgeois values. Through the correspondence between his mother and an Oxford friend, it can be understood that she complained at that time about the difficulty of continuing consistent education for her son. "And I cannot help feeling that self-sacrifice, self-discipline, (self-control even) are looked upon with scorn—instead of as the highest ideals possible" (Carpenter 50).

Auden's early support for the general strike proved his left-wing tendencies. As he continuously paid attention to social politics, he increasingly felt the poverty, crime, death, and many other evils brought by capitalism. From a psychological perspective, he also gradually realized that bourgeois family education and social values were the culprits that restrained people's minds. When wars continuously broke out in various places in the 1930s, such as Japan's invasion of China in 1931, Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, the Spanish Civil War in 1936, Germany's remilitarization of the Rhineland in 1936, and subsequent invasions of Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland, which led to the full outbreak of World War II, Auden gradually gained a direct understanding of the cruelty of war. With the rising power of Italy's Mussolini, Germany's Hitler, and Japanese militarism, as well as the establishment of the Fascist Party in Britain by Oswald Mosley, and after personally experiencing the attack of Franco's army on the Republican government in Spain, he identified a firm enemy to resist—fascism. Many of Auden's works exposed the ugliness of capitalist society. He described the sensational upper class, idle aristocrats, degenerate young girls, and misguided teenagers. Like a preacher, he used poetry to inspire readers to face and think about these real social phenomena. As summarized by John Blair: "Auden is, from first to last, a moralist who wants his poems to arouse his audience into critical self-awareness and to incite them to reform" (6–7). Auden's poems "Spain," created after participating as an ambulance driver in the Spanish Civil War, and "In Time of War," created after visiting China during the Anti-Japanese War, are famous for reflecting his support for the anti-fascist war and inspired many during the war time.

Auden learned about the theory of surplus value from Marxist political economy, which allowed him to penetrate the essence of exploitation in capitalist society. According to the theory of surplus value, the profits that capitalists obtain are realized through the surplus value created by workers. Capitalists pay a certain wage to hire workers for their labor, which superficially appears as an equal exchange of value. However, in reality, the amount of labor performed by workers far exceeds the equivalent labor value of their wages. The value created by this excess labor is known as surplus value. Surplus value, which is originally the product of workers' labor and should belong to them, is instead appropriated by capitalists without compensation. This is how capitalists exploit workers to accumulate wealth and prosperity. After recognizing the true

source of bourgeois wealth, Auden stood even more firmly among the ranks of the proletariat. Although he did not join the Communist Party, he had close interactions during his college years with David Ayerst, the then-chairman of the Labor Party's activity center at Oxford University. Influenced by Ayerst, Auden chose to serve the Trades Union Congress during strikes. At the same time, Auden was greatly impressed by the courage of politician Norman Cameron whose ideas spread throughout Boston and held great significance for thousands of people, including Auden. In his poems, Auden often used satirical language to criticize those so-called aristocrats with noble blood, mocking them as "stork-legged heaven-reachers," "the compulsory touchers," and "masked amazons" (*Collected* 42).

In the early 20th century, capitalist industrial production was still relatively rudimentary in terms of technology. Capitalists relied mainly on extending workers' hours and increasing their labor intensity to extract more surplus value. These oppressive measures inevitably provoked workers' resistance and rebellion, leading to one large strike after another. These struggles waged by the proletarian workers to win their rights and interests are precisely what Marx referred to as class struggles. Marxism believes that class struggles have objectively existed since humanity entered civilized society, and the contradictions and struggles between classes are the internal driving forces promoting social change and development. In every historical society, there exist different class confrontations. In capitalist society, the contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is the most basic one. The class struggle between these two will inevitably lead to the dictatorship of the proletariat and guide the transition from capitalist society to socialist society. Auden's ideology carried a utopian sentiment, and the society described by communism aligned with his ultimate expectations. In the 1930s, although Britain had not fallen under fascist authoritarian rule, it faced enormous threats. Coupled with the economic crisis and the disruption of international trade caused by wars, Britain's economy continued to decline. As a middle-class intellectual, Auden, though not reduced to the same level of starvation as the poor, had limited income and mainly relied on family support, and his family was not wealthy either. The economic depression left him strapped for cash and distinguished him from the bourgeoisie who were still able to indulge in luxuries. However, he did not envy those richer people. Instead, he had a clear mind and saw the loss and degradation of their humanity in their extravagance. The political and economic failures of the big bourgeoisie disappointed Auden greatly, and he saw the downfall of capitalism as a prerequisite for achieving freedom (Wu 25). Therefore, in the class struggle, he supported the dictatorship of the proletariat and the establishment of an idealized society of equality for all, as advocated by communism, through social change.

Changing a society with established traditions often leads to resistance, but young Auden eagerly anticipated this reluctance by British society. He happily predicted that the world would undergo tremendous changes and ultimately be reborn. In his poem "Consider This and in Our Time," he mentioned the impending collapse of the government. In "Paid on Both Sides," written in 1928, Auden began to recognize the issues of the ruling class, which may have been the first time he expressed his political views. At the same time, he explicitly stated that the social and political system in which he was raised was wrong, using a fragmented, abstract, and hybrid modernist approach to negate and transform rigid official culture through poetic

language itself. According to John Blair, Auden used poetry to inspire people to engage in social change. Therefore, he often adopted the perspective of a hawk or a helmeted airman to provide a photographic overview of the world, exposing various social maladies and issues, allowing people to understand the true face of society. However, Auden did not merely provide a broad, panoramic description. For him, the entire society was like a torso on an operating table waiting to be examined and treated. He also conducted special research on those severely injured areas. Therefore, his so-called photographic description was capable of zooming in (Lucas 154–156). In a word, Auden's observation of society did not involve arbitrarily adopting scattered, special, or fleeting news. Instead, he collected abundant social and historical events, rearranged and combined them, and employed psychological analysis methods. He also drew upon a wealth of knowledge and cited classic works to argue his point, thereby achieving a deep analysis of social issues and dispelling the confusion of modern people about the alienated world.

Marxism provided Auden with explanations for many social issues that psychology alone could not fully elucidate. His focus shifted away from self-depression and personal emotions, and he began to pay more attention to the social environment, economic conditions, and people's lives, thereby creating numerous works that were closely aligned with social reality. During the rise of fascism, many writers' creations demonstrated submission to political rule, but Auden firmly opposed using poetry to endorse any particular ideology. His critique of the bourgeoisie and his calls from the proletarian standpoint can be understood, on another level, as efforts to strive for fairness, freedom, and democracy for more people. His political stance enabled his poetry to gain widespread dissemination worldwide, while the public nature and rational thinking conveyed within it endowed his work with enduring appeal.

After 1929, Auden's poetry often revealed his disdain and satire towards the bourgeoisie and the wealthy aristocracy. In "Missing," they were depicted as absurd tourists chasing heroism amidst candlelight and fine wine; in "The Questioner Who Sits So Sly," they were portrayed as neurotic patients with bizarre forms; in "Uncle Henry" and "Consider," they were seen vacationing everywhere, pursuing pleasures, and living extravagant lives. Although they might become celebrities listed in "Who's Who" or embody the wealthy ideals described in "His Excellency," in "A Bride in the 30's," their being bound by vanity, desire, and fear was evident, and their hearts lacked love and warmth. However, in "Our Hunting Fathers," this situation continued due to father-son inheritance and family education, while Auden sang "The Beggar's Song" to ridicule them. In the previous discussion of Auden's psychological thoughts, the deformed patients he described were largely his satire of the bourgeois elite.

In his 1929 poem "The Questioner Who Sits So Sly," he used vivid metaphors to depict the debt collectors, jesters, and various people living with masks: "Will you turn a deaf ear / To what they said on the shore, / Interrogate their poises / In their rich houses; / Of stork-legged heaven-reachers, / Of the compulsory touchers, / The sensitive amusers, / And masked amazers?" (*Collected* 42). From Auden's peculiar metaphors and exaggerated descriptions, it is evident that after experiencing the great strike, he had much disgust for the bourgeoisie's demeanor. It is uncertain what image "stork-legged heaven-reachers" refers to, but the ladies with thick fur coats on their upper bodies and exposed slender white legs on the lower half seemed to fit such a description; while "the

compulsory touchers” portrayed the ruthless faces of those who oppressed the poor for money; regarding “the sensitive amusers,” Auden mentioned in the latter part of the poem that entertaining children with jokes was equivalent to befriending lagging thoughts, a sight pleasing to death; and “masked amazers” described those who hid their true faces. These people had ample leisure time to vacation at the seaside and could afford the extravagant prices of luxurious homes, but their words were, to Auden, worth ignoring. Because Auden understood that although they would not claim to be villains and did not seem to play tricks on the surface, their wealth and comfort were built on the oppression of the labor and sweat of the poor. Therefore, their hearts were distorted, and they needed to carry medications to guard against the outbreak of diseases and pains.

In the same year, in a series of “Shorts,” Auden further revealed the faces of the bourgeoisie. He indicated that these people had no pursuits, spoke nonsense, made no contributions, and did not practice justice, thus ultimately paying the price they deserved: “These had stopped seeking / But went on speaking, / Have not contributed / But have diluted. / These ordered light / But had no right, / These landed on / War and a son. / Wishing no harm / But to be warm, / These fell asleep / On the burning heap” (*Collected* 54). Auden found the fame and wealth pursued by the bourgeois elite meaningless, and their confident statements were considered nonsense. These people made no contributions to society and only engaged in lowly deeds. However, they appeared glamorous, and they might have some desires for beauty and light, but this did not prompt them to act justly. Instead, they could initiate wars in pursuit of profits, sending the poor to the battlefield while leaving their sons to inherit their family businesses. These people believed that money and power allowed them to sleep peacefully, but they were unaware that their actions had ignited flames of anger, which would soon ignite their warm beds.

While depicting the social status quo, Auden was strongly aware of the need to fundamentally solve these social problems, requiring people to stand up and fight for change. Regarding struggle, he had personal exposure to it during his teenage years, and his proletarian stance was evident in his poems expressing struggle. In the 1929 poems “1929” and “On Sunday Walks,” he narrated a scene of the proletariat confronting the police and portrayed people’s fear when being pursued by the police. In the subsequent “Bonfire” and “O What Is That Sound,” he had a deeper sense of this fear of war and called on the oppressed people not to flee helplessly but to stand up and resist. In the 1930s, as fascism continuously stirred up wars in Europe, Auden’s empathy for the struggle grew stronger. He delved into the battlefields of Spain and China, creating “Spain” and “In Time of War,” inspiring the revolutionary enthusiasm of the world’s proletariat. Though he had a clear understanding of the proletarian struggle, in his heart violence was not the only way for revolution, and he was filled with disgust for war. This made Auden more eager for a peaceful solution, namely promoting social change.

In “1929,” he wrote, “It is time for the destruction of error,” and the “bridegroom” was about to appear. In “The Bonfires,” he wrote of the need “To time the double beat, at last together.” He believed that the primary prerequisite for change was altering one’s thoughts, which he mentioned in both “Shorts” and “1929.” Of course, change also required specific preparations. In “Let History Be My Judge,” he listed various tasks for people to undertake during change, and in “The Wanderer,” he also mentioned that new people were embarking on another storm. He used poetic

language to promote the spirit of justice, as expressed in “The Novelist”, and he also skillfully applied poetic language in “Epitaph on a Tyrant,” singing a high-pitched song of accusation against dictatorship. He believed that people’s own strength was sufficient to confront tyranny, with the core of this strength lying in faith, benevolence, and love. In “In Time of War” and “Heavy Date,” he repeatedly mentioned this viewpoint. However, emotional support alone was not enough. He rationally recognized that the most important basis for establishing a new social order was the law. Therefore, he wrote “Law Like Love” and praised the law loudly in “Anthem for St. Cecilia’s Day.” The social change proposed by Auden was a call, a spiritual guidance, and encouragement of confidence launched through his poetic language. With the widespread dissemination of his poetry, his calls, guide, and encouragement played a positive role for the people of the world who were suffering at that time. His positive attitude towards change still holds relevance today, inspiring people to break through social limitations and actively seek solutions.

Auden’s awareness of the proletarian struggle awakened early, and he stood among the ranks of the proletariat, fighting alongside them. In his poem “1929,” he depicted a scene of the proletariat confronting the police: “All this time was anxiety at night, / Shooting and barricade in street. / Walking home late I listened to a friend / Talking excitedly of final war / Of proletariat against police— / That one shot girl of nineteen through the knees / They threw that one down concrete stair— / Till I was angry, said I was pleased” (*Collected* 46). During the days when the proletariat was suppressed, fear permeated everywhere, and gunshots could be heard at any moment during the night. Among those bourgeois friends, a considerable number served as police, yet they were enthusiastic about such violent confrontations. They described with relish the scene of the police shooting at civilians, piercing the knee of a young girl and throwing someone down the stairs. These atrocious acts were merely topics of conversation for friends during their leisure time, exciting and stimulating for them, but for Auden, they filled him with righteous indignation, and he could not sit idly by; he was so angry that he had to leave.

As a poet with a conscience, Auden was filled with sympathy for the civilians who were driven away by the police and fled in all directions. He described their constant state of anxiety and fear: “In his day-thinking and in his night-thinking, / Is wareness and is fear of others, / Alone in flesh, himself no friend” (47). This constant state of vigilance and fear also oppressed Auden’s nerves. In “On Sunday Walks,” he elaborated on his nightmare state of mind at night, fearing pursuit:

Sitting all day / By the open window, / Say what they say, / Know what to know, / Who brought and taught / Unusual images / And new tunes to old cottages, / With so much done, / Without a thought / Of the anonymous lampoon, / The cellar counterplot, / Though in the night, / Pursued by eaters, / They clutch at gaiters / That straddle and deny / Escape that way, / Though in the night / Is waking fright. (51)

In Auden’s early works, although he was accustomed to using obscure language and deep metaphors, at the beginning of this poem, he expressed his intention to speak plainly and expressed the true situation he was in through poetry. Those mentioned in the poem who brought new images and taught new tones to the ancient villages were likely communists. They had

done a lot to break the conservative and stagnant old traditions and paid no heed to sarcasm and incomprehension. However, they could not escape the continuous pursuit of the police, day and night. Some unsteady communists denied their actions to save their lives, while more rushed to escape as soon as possible. They lived under the oppression of confronting traditional forces, with their lives constantly threatened. At night, fear would enter their dreams and awaken them.

In his depiction of social reality, Auden introduced and fully utilized “the hawk’s vision,” standing at the height of a hawk and looking down on all beings from its vantage point, reflecting a comprehensive, panoramic effect. The purpose of this was to present the world in the poet’s eyes more objectively and realistically, while also expressing his high concern for numerous social issues. As early as 1927, in “The Watershed,” he began trying this descriptive approach, providing an objective and calm description of the declining mining industry. In “Missing,” written in 1929, he also used this broad perspective to depict the luxurious scenes of wealthy tourists enjoying themselves in the name of admiring heroes. In “Consider” that followed, he directly asked readers in the poem to pay attention to this real-life scene—the rich feasting and drinking at vacation hotels while farmers toiled hard in the rain and wind to make a living. In “Dover,” he also described in detail various people bustling around the port amid economic decline. “New Year Letter” was a comprehensive organization of his thoughts and statement of his worldview. He adopted a global perspective, discussing the darkness behind the bourgeoisie’s wealth and the injustices in society.

Auden began discussing social issues very early on, mostly adopting a straightforward descriptive approach, which was the initial model of “the hawk’s vision.” For example, in “The Watershed,” he coldly depicted abandoned mining equipment: “Below him sees dismantled washing-floors, / Snatches of tramline running to a wood. / An industry already comatose, / Yet sparsely living. A ramshackle engine / At Cashwell raises water; for ten years / It lay in flooded workings until this, / Its latter office, grudgingly performed” (32). Here, Auden described the Cashwell mine in the town of Alston, which he loved. It had been abandoned, the tram tracks covered by trees, and only an old water pump remained in the mine pit, barely operating.

And, further, here and there, though many dead / Lie under the poor soil, some acts are chosen,
/ Taken from recent winters; two there were / Cleaned out a damaged shaft by hand, clutching
/ The winch a gale would tear them from; one died / During a storm, the fells impassable, /
Not at his village, but in wooden shape / Through long abandoned levels nosed his way / And
in his final valley went to ground. (32–33)

The once roaring mining industry had declined, and people dying in poverty. Some repaired damaged machinery without safety measures and were swept away by the wind. Others perished in the wilderness during blizzards, and even their bodies were difficult to transport back, eventually having to be dragged step by step through the abandoned mine tunnels. Auden’s childhood home was adjacent to the mining area, so he had a special fondness for mining scenes. Here, he used the scene of an abandoned mine to express the passing of Britain’s once glorious industrial civilization. The economic downturn had plunged people’s lives into hardship, and human lives were as fragile as weeds, easily taken by death. His detailed and objective depiction of the scene vividly portrayed the desolation,

stagnation, and helplessness of the declining mining industry with just a few simple scenes.

Written in 1929, "Missing" stood at the height of a hawk to depict the society of that time, contrasting fallen warriors with absurd tourists who pursued heroism. "Fighters for no one's sake, / Who died beyond the border. / Heroes are buried who / Did not believe in death, / And bravery is now, / Not in the dying breath / But resisting the temptations / To skyline operations" (31). In 1929, as the flames of World War I had barely flickered out and the omens of World War II began to emerge, Auden witnessed warriors who perished in border disputes without rhyme or reason. He recalled the Roman heroes of old, who could face battle with blood on their lips. Yet in this era, sacrificing oneself for blind bravery seemed an empty endeavor; true courage now lay in confronting the myriad temptations of material wealth and fame. "Yet glory is not new; / The summer visitors / Still come from far and wide, / Choosing their spots to view / The prize competitors, / Each thinking that he will / Find heroes in the wood. / Far from the capital, / Where lights and wine are set / For supper by the lake" (31). Those leisurely tourists with ample time and money traveled long distances to Rome, ostensibly to pay homage to the heroes of antiquity and seeking inspiration from their bravery, but in reality, they were held captive by the allure of candlelight, fine wine, and banquets. Under the pretext of seeking heroism, they merely went sightseeing on holiday, seeking contests and entertainment, delicacies, and a touch of mystical thrill. The heroism they pursued was useless in the present world, while the heroes of this age were brewing a war that would bring them down.

Although such a radical writing style occasionally appeared in his late poetry, it was particularly prominent in poetry of the 1930s, especially when Auden stood on the proletarian side and shouted for revolution. Many of Auden's poems during his political and ideological period were filled with strong passion and spoke with a high tone, expressing his criticism of bourgeois society, accusations of social injustice, and calls for people to stand up and fight using both military and sports metaphors. It is precisely this passionate tone, highly provocative wording, and emotionally charged spirit that influence one group after another of readers, making them feel that hope is at the forefront and strength is within them. In his 1931 poem "The Bonfires," he presents the proletariat engaging in a fugitive battle with bloodthirsty falcons and constantly forming a counterattack in groups. Auden metaphorically compares the proletariat and laboring masses to tenacious athletes who no longer just endure oppression, but instead struggle with cavalry platoons to launch a counterattack, delivering a heavy blow to the old order and causing the unjust world to crumble:

Look there! The sunk road winding / To the fortified farm. / Listen! The cock's alarm / In the strange valley. / Are we the stubborn athletes; / Are we then to begin / The run between the gin / And bloody falcon? / The horns of the dark squadron / Converging to attack; / The sound behind our back / Of glaciers calving. (50)

In this poem, Auden employs metaphor using the images of heavily fortified farms and roosters sounding the alarm to symbolize the escalation of the proletariat's defense work. They were no longer weak fugitives but had transformed into athletes with enough physical strength and intelligence to fight against brutal police soldiers. The night was no longer just a helpless

nightmare because the horn of counterattack sounded at night, and more and more proletarians formed teams. They had to rely on their own strength to give the bourgeois authoritarian society an earthshaking blow. In “A Summer Night,” he similarly mentions orders, military ranks, sacrifices, and planned to kill the devil no matter what. With regard to his volunteering as an ambulance driver in the Spanish Civil War, “Spain” is a classic of radical poetry, in which he repeats, “But To-day the struggle” to strengthen the battle cry. “In Time of War” is another masterpiece about the anti-fascist war. Auden calmly narrates the various situations during the war, and at the same time, he also uses strong anger to express his own accusations against the war.

Auden's classic poem that inspired the struggle of the proletariat was “Spain,” which he wrote after his personal visit to the Spanish Civil War in 1937. He uses “yesterday” as a metaphor for the various oppressions that people were enduring in traditional society, and called on people to do what they should do today, which is “struggle!”

Yesterday the carving of angels and of alarming gargoyles; / The trial of heretics among the columns of stone; / Yesterday the theological feuds in the taverns / And the miraculous cure at the fountain; / Yesterday the Sabbath of Witches; but to-day the struggle. / Yesterday the installation of dynamos and turbines; / The construction of railways in the colonial desert; / Yesterday the classic lecture / On the origin of Mankind. But to-day the struggle. / Yesterday the belief in the absolute value of Greece, / The fall of the curtain upon the death of a hero; / Yesterday the prayer to the sunset / And the adoration of madmen. But to-day the struggle.
(*Complete* 770–771)

In yesterday's society, theology dominated the mainstream of thought, with various trials, debates, and shamanistic treatments dominating people's lives. Yesterday was a world of divine power, and today people should stand up and fight to overthrow this world. In yesterday's society, colonies were continuously developed with the Age of Discovery, bringing bloody wealth and suffering to the people of the Third World. Yesterday was filled with dirty transactions, but today they should stand up and fight to drive away the colonizers who enslaved them. In yesterday's society, the worship of Greek heroism made people reckless and impulsive, the worship of authoritarianism made people irrational, and crazy emotions were stirred up. Today, people should stand up and fight to completely eliminate the worship of force and racism. Yesterday's world was a world of absurdity, decadence, and unfairness. Today, what we need to do is struggle to change this world and create a better tomorrow. This is the ultimate goal of Auden's agitation for proletarian struggle. He repeatedly said “But To-day the struggle,” and in the language of poetry, he issued loud slogans calling on everyone to stand up and resist.

Auden's left-wing political thinking was shaped by the turbulent political landscape of the 1930s and the prevalent revolutionary fervor among intellectual youth at that time. From his participation in the general strike at the age of 20, he consistently chose to stand with the proletariat, lending his voice to their ideal of establishing a communist society. Auden's left-wing political thinking did not necessarily make him a staunch communist, but fueled his passion for observing society more deeply, understanding social issues, and advancing reforms. He used

poetry as a powerful tool to critique current affairs. To create authentic and heart-wrenching works, he ventured deep into the war fronts of Spain and China, producing classic political poems such as “Spain” and “In Time of War,” which established his reputation as a political poet. Moreover, the group of young left-wing poets dubbed the “Auden generation,” which he led, exerted a worldwide influence through the international dissemination of their work.

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Foreign Studies College, Hunan Normal University
Changsha, Hunan, China, 410081
E-mail: enjflc@hunnu.edu.cn
Tel: +86 0731-88873041