CHAPTER ~~FIRST~~ ONE

INTRODUCTION

Auden began his poetic career in an atmosphere of political and literary ferment. He emerged in the thirties as Justin Replogle puts it, "as a spokesman of dissatisfied generation."[1] It was a period of political termoil and the influence of various political movements on English writers was inevitable. Politically speaking, the post First World War period was the period of economic crisis. In England, the short post war trade boom was followed by a steadily increasing depression. It gave rise to increasing unemployment and numerous strikes. The General Strike of 1926 and the world-wide economic crisis of 1929-30 were important events of the twenties. They produced fear, dread and anxiety among the people. American slum was shifted to Europe due to the collapse of American prosperity during the thirties. Hitler assumed the German Chancellorship in 1933 and the process of re-arming of Germany gradually began. The fascist movements were growing powerful in Europe. The crucial mid-stage of the decade was the opening of the Spanish Civil War in 1936. The decade concluded with the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. The decade was in Auden's phrase, an "hour of crisis and dismay"[2] and the Marxist prophecy of a world revolution seemed to many to be on the brink of fulfilment. This crucial political and social atmosphere of the thirties compelled a number of writers and intellectuals of the time to take an active interest in English and European politics. In 1920, Stephen Spender wrote :

> "The revolution which took place in Europe had the appearance of eruption of despair and barbarism in the minds and bodies of the masses pouring out like lava over the cities. Besides this, the prevailing mood of the intellectuals who had known or been opposed to the war, was one of political pacifism, a conviction that armed remedies can do no good."[3]

This was the political stand of the intellectuals of the post Pound-Eliot period. They were more interested in establishing peace and better social order. Their main object was to fight against Fascism and totalitarian state and to create a new and better world, a socialistic world.

It is important to find out briefly what stand the Pound-Eliot poetic tradition took in such a politically critical period. A few writers like E.M.Forster and T.S.Eliot commented on the decaying society of Europe in terms of tragedy. Eliot expressed in his poetry the boredom and the horror of the contemporary world. He projected the stupidity and the ugliness of the modern urban life. Eliot does not seem to have treated political themes in his poetry, though he declared himself to be a Royalist politically. The poetry of T.S.Eliot does not deal with political ideas and foresee a better world and the possibility of a new community, the community sprung up from social and political revolution. He does not think of human life in political and social terms, as did the Auden group. On the contrary, his poetry primarily deals with the picture of a decaying urban society. On the other hand,

Ezra Pound, was primarily an experimenter in poetry and he led a movement called 'Des Imagist' in 1914. His experiments in poetry influenced a number of poets including T.S.Eliot. The efforts of the imagist poets showed that they were more interested in the formal aspect of poetry such as to use the exact word and to produce hard and clear poetry and to create ne new rhythms. Unlike Yeats and Eliot, Pound's attraction for fascism and "becoming Mussolini's mouth-piece during the Second World War"[4] suggests Pound's fascist political stand, although his poetry does not reveal any such political ideology. ?!

On the whole, it seems that the poetry of the Pound-Eliot period was not political in nature, the way the Auden-group dealt with political themes in their poetry. Auden's was a new group of young poets in the late twenties who began to deal with the political themes for the first time in Modern British Poetry and a new kind of poetry which can be termed as 'Political Poetry' began to emerge. This was an important phenomenon in the Modern British literary world. The group of these young poets was dominated by the powerful personality of W.H.Auden. The group consisted of such intellectuals as Stephen Spender, Cecil Day-Lewis, Louis MacNeice, Christopher Isherwood, John Upward, John Lehman and the leading figure was, W.H.Auden.

The group was thought either a communist group or on the verge of becoming a communist group. Though Auden has described

himself as a "pink liberal"[5], he had developed the Marxist approach, particularly during the thirties. C.D.Lewis, John Upward and Stephen Spender had been the members of the Communist Party for some period of time and John Upward continued to be the member of the party. All of them had seen the crisis of the period and took for granted that the crisis was temporary. As most of them were budding communists, they thought of the crisis as a historical stage. In other words, they viewed the political and the social crisis of the period as the result of the transitional stage between a capitalist and a socialistic society.

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The members of the Auden group were primarily poets and the movement they were involved in was exclusively the bourgeoise poetic movement, as most of these talented personalities came from public school and university culture. Consequently, they brought into their work the language and attitude of the bourgeoise world. These young poets were under the immense influence of Marxism. It was John Strachey's book, The Coming Struggle for Power, that popularized Marxism during this period. The book had seriously affected these young poets. The book advocated the idea that the capitalist system of society was dying and it would not be revived. The book expressed the belief that religion, literature, art, science and the whole human heritage of knowledge would be transformed and that the new forms, whether higher or lower, would depend upon the new

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economic system. The book also offered a new interpretation of British politics from the Marxist point of view.

Being under the immense influence of Marxism during the mid-thirties, the group had formed a political dream. The dream expressed the idea of checking fascism abroad and at home. It insisted on bringing up social and political change in Britain by democratic action. In order to perfect this dream, the group had also an aesthetic dream. The dream expressed the need of appreciating art by the masses, though produced at a higher level of sensibility. This led to the emergence of a number of periodicals and books to promote the left-wing ideas and movements. John Lehman's foundation of New Writing in April 1936 was an important example of left-wing periodical. The primary function of New Writing was to provide a bigger audience for the writers of the Auden group. Auden's important volume of poems, Look, Stranger ! appeared in the same year (Oct.1936); most of the poems from the volume had appeared in New Writing. The other periodicals, such as New Verse (1933), and Left Review (1934) emerged during the same period. They made an attempt to represent the aesthetic impulse of the period. In addition to these periodicals, the establishment and the development of The Left Book Club (1936) was remarkable. The Left Book Club was primarily a publishing house. It also led a social movement. The attempt of the club was "to spread knowledge and all such ideas as may safeguard peace, combat fascism and bring nearer the establishment of real socialism".[6] Thus, the literature of

the thirties was under the immense influence of social and political forces. Auden was faced with developing a personal identity as an English writer in time of such historical crisis. And as a poet he was fully conscious, as well as peculiarly responsive, to the spirit of the time. As Eliot and Pound brought about transformation in poetic taste and sensibility of their age, Auden was able to catch the tone of his age.

With the publication of Look, Stranger ![7] Auden emerged as a political poet during the thirties, and it is this volume where his political ideas took their shape. M.K.Spears remarks, "There is a tremendous political, more and aesthetic impact on Auden's poetry of the thirties as well as on his contemporaries".[8] The principal reason for the extra-ordinary "political impact" on Auden's poetry, however, is certainly historical, and it is related to the political, social and intellectual climate of the thirties. Auden was immensely conscious of this typical climate of the thirties. So he felt the "necessity for action more urgent and to make its nature clear".[9] It was certainly a social and a political action. Most of his poems written during this period make an appeal for a call to action; like a political orator he says :

> "Yesterday the classic lecture
> On the origin of Mankind. But to-day the
> struggle,"
>
> (Ea, p.211,"Spain 1937".)

Probably Auden is convinced that there is now no use to

study the origin of Mankind. It is rather time to struggle and so he urges people to prepare for an urgent and immediate action. The nature of this action is political and cultural. Auden was thus, searching for a cultural-political identity in this period of crisis.

Auden's work falls into well defined periods. During the period, 1927-1932, Auden received education at Oxford. He visited Berlin during the same period and he met Bertolt Brecht there. Auden was heavily influenced by Brecht's dramatic writings and his theory of epic theatre. It was here that he learnt the significance of folk art in theatrical works. The period from 1933 to 1938 is Auden's most creative period. He produced the best political poetry and political plays such as The Dance of Death (1933), The Dog Beneath the Skin (1935), The Ascent of F6 (1936) and On The Frontier (1938) during this period. He also travelled widely during this period. He went to China with Christopher Isherwood and to Iceland with Louis MacNeice. He had been to Spain as an ambulance driver. Journey To A War was written in collaboration with Christopher Isherwood during his China-visit and the long poem, A Letter To Lord Byron was the result of his Iceland-visit. In 1939, Auden went to America and became the citizen of America in 1946. During this New York period, he produced four long poems: New Year Letter (1941); For the Time Being (1944); The Sea and the Mirror (1945) and The Age of Anxiety (1947). The period, 1947-1957 is Auden's period of great activities in opera and criticism. In 1957 he went to Austria and from 1956 to 1961, he worked as Professor

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of Poetry at Oxford. He stayed in England, till his death in September 1973 involved in a number of literary activities.

Much research work has been done on Auden's poetry during the last two decades. Here is a glimpse of some major critical statements on Auden's poetry. The first full/length critical account on Auden's poetry appeared in 1951. (It is Richard Hoggart's book, Auden : An Introductory Essay.[10] Hoggart deals with the psychological and political aspects of Auden's poetry.) It was he, who discussed for the first time the ideas of Freud and Marx in Auden's poetry. J.W.Beach's book, The Making of Auden Canon (1957)[11] comments on the ideological and artistic reasons of Auden's revision, ~~that~~ he worked out in making of "Auden Canon" in 1950. M.K.Spear's book, The Poetry of W.H. Auden : The Disenchanted Island (1968)[12] maintains the view that Auden's poetry offers intellectual excitement, instruction and aesthetic pleasure all in abundance in our time. Barbara Everett's book, Auden (1964)[13] makes a chronological study of Auden's poetry and finds ~~out~~ a sense of uniqueness in all his phases of poetry. Thus, Barbara Everett traces the developmental stage in Auden's poetic career. Justin Replogle's attempt in Auden's poetry (1969)[14] reveals elaborate patterns of ideas and their inter-relationship in Auden's poetry. Frederick Buell's recent book, Auden as a Social Poet (1973)[15] is one of the finest critical books on Auden's early poetry. It mainly deals with the social and political aspects of Auden's poetry. It should be admitted that all these writers discuss the political dimension of Auden's poetry.

The period from 1933 to 1938 is Auden's political period. He assumed the role of a political and social prophet. It was during this period, that Auden was under the great influence of the intellectual climate of Marxism. As Justin Replogle puts it, "... it is the intellectual climate of Marxism, in which Auden's poems have their being, particularly in the period from 1933 to 1938. The philosophy itself drifts in and out of them as psychology did earlier. So the period from about 1933 to 1938 can be labelled as Auden's Marxian period just as earlier can be labelled as 'Freudian".[16] During the early period, 1928-1932, Auden was under greater influence of Freud than Marx. Neverthless, as psychology did not provide Auden any solutions to the crisis of the thirties, he turned towards politics. This enhanced Auden's political interests during the period, 1933-38 with a view to reform the society. It is this major motive of the reformation of sick society that works behind the poetry of this period. Thus, the political ideas became dominant in Auden's poetry with the publication of the volumes such as Look, Stranger ! (1937), Journey To A War (1939)[17] and Another Time (1940)[18]. However, Journey To A War is not a volume of poems but a travel book, written in collaboration with Christopher Isherwood in which a sonnet sequence by Auden entitled In Time of War appears.

It is proposed in the present study to concentrate on the political period of Auden's poetic career and make an attempt to deal with the political ideas and trace the developmental stage

of his poetic career. The first chapter deals with the poems from the volume, Look, Stranger !; ~~and~~ the second chapter deals with the sonnets from Journey To A War entitled, In Time of War, and the third chapter deals with the poems from Another Time.

The poems discussed, from In Time of War and the two volumes, Look Stranger! and Another Time, are mainly political in nature. They are political in nature in the sense that they say something about the politics of the decade. At times they comment on the political events of the time. They sometimes deal with the historical events and the political theories influencial during the decade. So it is necessary to discuss the relationship between a poem and its political circumstances, and between a "revolutionary poet" and his society. Evidently one has to rest content with what the poems "say" about politics, or political events, or about certain political ideas or theories. Besides one should consider the sources of political ideas and also examine what political myths and roles are available to the poet in a particular society at a particular time. At the same time one should examine what the poet believes in a particular poem or the most simplistic way is to ask how an individual work is related to its specific historical or political circumstances. In other words it is to see the poem in terms of its "occasion."

In fact, Auden's best poetry of the thirties "is essentially occasional".[19] Auden always needs an occasion or a particular object or phenomenon on which to focus his thoughts and feelings. It can be shown, therefore that the poems of the thirties are either related to an occasion or to a particular object or to a phenomenon of the thirties. That is why, the only possible way to read Auden's poems is to study them as they originally appeared in a chronological order and without taking into consideration the latter alterations. So the present study relies on the original versions of the poems. The original works of Auden from 1927 to 1939 (that is, poems without alterations and revisions that he incorporated in the making of "Auden Canon") are now available in The English Auden. As the original poems of the thirties focus Auden's unique political sensibility, the original versions of the poems from The English Auden are referred to in the present study.

In order to know the development of Auden's political sensibility during the period 1933-38, it becomes essential to have a brief discussion of his early poetry (1927-1932). Auden's interests until his sixteenth year were exclusively scientific rather than political. He intended to be a mining engineer and his great loves were machinery and mines. At Oxford he read widely in psychology and used to diagnose his friends. Stephen Spender meeting him for the first time in 1928 found him interested not in politics but in "poetry, psycho-analysis, and medicine ... at his early age Auden had already an extensive knowledge of the theories of modern psychology."[20] Auden took

a great deal of interest in dream literature, detective stories and the writings of Franz Kafka. As a result, he began to take immense interest in fantasy things. This fantasy is reflected in his early poetry. Until he saw Brecht in Berlin, he had little interest in politics. So in his early poetry, fantasy being the dominant element, the poems are full of obscure and complex images and they create a fantasy world.

Cite your sources or evidence.

Auden's intense interest in human psychology has been consistent throughout his poetic career with a desire to reform society. He took for granted the psychological ills greater than political. Freud's influence on him was greater than any other psychologist. He conceived of society as sick and diseased and he assumed the role of a doctor. He held the view that the poet must be clinical and dispassionate about life. He is convinced of the urgent need for mental therapy. He believes that the spread and the assimilation of the findings of psychology can help society to cure its illness. Auden's special interest is in what the psychologists call anxiety or dread and neurosis. He refers continually to the lost, the lonely and the unhappy. This is the neurotic loneliness found throughout in modern literature (as in Eliot's Waste Land, "My nerves are bad to-night; Yes bad, stay with me".[21]); but in Auden much more pervasive than in most other writers :

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why the change in tense?

> "No wonder so many die of grief
> So many are lonely as they die",
> or "heavy breathing of the lost."

The neurotic dread, the awful sense of threat, "all those people around us leading/their quiet horrified lives" is constant in Auden. With the help of the study of psychology, Auden explained the deadness of his society, the urge to violence which he dramatized in Paid on Both Sides.[22] The work is highly obscure and full of ambiguities. On one level the piece presents an image of the essential human condition. Whereas, on other level, the piece reveals a political meaning: the feudal society will be abandoned and things will be different in another country. In this poetic piece, Auden presents a sick society, that expresses its disease in an urge to violence.

Poems (1928)[23] consists of recurrent images of war often fused with the world of sports, the spy, the frontier and the like. The general weakness of these poems is obscurity both in a lack of apparent connection among the images and in privacy of reference.

Poems (1930)[24] was Auden's first published volume. It was the basis of his reputation. These poems chiefly reveal socio-political themes. There are images of feud-war-sports and the biological and geological metaphors. These poems give an analysis of bourgeoise society, of decaying capitalist England. But the problem is that the implication is never made clear, and so the poems abound in ambiguities. Besides, the word, "love" that Auden uses recurrently in these poems produces vagueness. There is also a feeling that there is something wrong with "Love." This adds to the obscurities in these poems.

It is very difficult to define what Auden means by "Love". It is not only because the word is used vaguely but the meaning of the word is constantly modified. There is often a generalized feeling about his use of the word. The root idea is that men do wish to live together generously. This is clearly more than "love" in either the sexual or the personal sense. It always looks towards a larger community : Eros / Agape

> "... the word is love
> Surely one fearless kiss would cure
> The million fevers"

(EA, p.156.)

Richard Hoggart points out., "Auden's love in one aspect is a form of mental therapy and effective psycho-analysis. It is a liberator, a cleanser and a releasing and enlarging power."[25] This " releasing and enlarging power" is partly the human urge towards co-operation. It is the source of all that is good and civilized in human community. It encourages "the birth of a natural order"[26] and it flourishes only in the field of relationships. On the contrary, self-love shuts one up in a sterile dream-world. In larger social order it prevents the reign of brotherhood and justice. The highest peak of love (in social context) in Auden is disciplined love. As J.W.Beach remarks, for Auden, "the good of mankind is 'disciplined love'."[27] In other words, for Auden, love does not seek reciprocal pleasure; that is one loves the other because the other is loved by one. On the other hand, Auden thinks of love in a large social

context, where personal pleasure is not sought but the welfare and the betterment of the community is considered more important. Thus Auden related "Love" to positive action, and to scientific and social discipline.

The first poem from the volume, Poems (1930) is addressed to the revolutionary "Will you turn a deaf ear" and the second, "Which of you waking early and watching day-break" symbolizes the dawn of new social and political day. The terms are primarily psychological but the political significance is plain. The old life must die and the new must be welcome. The third poem, "Since you are going to begin to-day" (entitled, "Venus will say Now a Few Worlds", in 1950) portrays the helpless plight of the bourgeoisie. It is an address by Nature to the typical bourgeoisie, explaining him, in short that he is obsolete and he is doomed. At the end of the poem, Nature explains to him that for him there is no escape :

> "Do not imagine you can abdicate;
> Before you reach the frontier you are caught."

(EA,p.45.)

There are recurrent images, symbols and myths in this volume; their associations are psychological and political. The chief figure is that of a wanderer, spy, and the secret agent. A wanderer is the representative figure in Auden. He is a man on "quest" a man who goes out, particularly in a foreign land like an exile, for an important mission. The figure of wanderer who

is an isolated man on a search, appears more frequently in Auden's poetry. The wanderer can take any form. He may take the form of the "Helmeted Airman" (The Orators) or the "Wounded leader" or the "Hawk". He is physically isolated and he surveys from a great height the interesting and muddled life of those below. Neverthless, he can see the possible order in the muddle. He is detached and passionately clinical. He is compassionate and reformative. He may move across the geographical landscapes. These landscapes, consist of vast and empty plains, mountains, the spaces of the sea etc. The wanderer remembers his home fondly while he is on the quest, and he is passionately driven by a desire to find order and meaning in the landscapes. This is the general nature of wanderer figure in Auden, who is primarily a reformer and usually a revolutionary. The landscapes in Auden are allegorical and they present some human situation. Richard Hoggart points out that the landscape in Auden's poetry is "a blackcloth against which some human situation is considered".[28] Auden's landscapes then serve the economic and political situations.

In "Get there if you can and see the land you once were proud to own" Poems (1930 XXII) the speaker is a bourgeoisie intellectual addressing people of his class, like a working class revolutionary. Probably, this is the first poem from this volume which "expresses Auden's ideology".[29] During these years, Auden's ideology was being built up by the ideologies of Marx and Freud. The poem begins with the ambivalent vision of

a decaying industrial landscape with mines, representing what capitalism had done to England. We have not been aware of this, because We have been seduced away from life by bourgeoise tradition. We should better stop talking and lecturing on navigation while the ship is going down, so a call to action is morally desirable:

> "Drop those priggish ways for ever, stop
> behaving like a stone:
> throw the bath-chairs right away, and learn
> to leave ourselves alone.
> If we really want to live, we'd better start
> at once to try;
> If we don't it doesn't matter, but we'd
> better start to die."

(EA, p.49.)

It looks odd at first sight, that the poet should write "ourselves" when he is apparently giving a wild warning to others to drop their "priggish ways".

"Watch any day his nonchalant pauses, see" (Poems, 1930 IV; entitled, "A Free One") portrays the emptiness of the prosperous capitalists, and "Consider this in our time" (Poems, 1930, XXIX; entitled, "Consider") reaffirms the social and political theme. "Look there ! The sunk road winding" (Poems, 1933, XXIII; entitled "Bonfires") embodies the idea of necessity of breaking patterns of behaviour and of destroying the existing society. Auden's ultimate triumph of this volume is, "Doom is dark and deeper than any sea dingle" (Poems, 1930 II entitled

"Wanderer"). Auden's wanderer has not simply lost security through no fault of his own. Doom falls upon him, and in response to the call he goes voluntarily on his dangerous mission into an alien territory. He accepts his exceptional fate. Finally, there is a political ambiguity. The wanderer is, in one sense, doomed by his political awareness to leave his intellectual and spiritual home, and endures hardship and isolation. In the alien country he wakes from his dream of home to hear "new men making another love", a line highly ambiguous in the political sense. Even the last line with its brilliant image of "leaning dawn" has political significance. Similar political ambiguities are found in "From scars where kestrels hover" (Poems 1930, XXIV, entitled, "Missing"). It consists of war and frontier images "unwounded leader of doomed companions"; "fighters beyond the border"; and true bravery is shown in refraining from individual showing off, "resisting the temptations/To sky line operations" all lines reveal political ambiguities (All phrases from the poem, appear on page No.28 in EA).

The problem is what possible compulsions, if at all there, made Auden to be so ambiguous and obscure in the early poetry. Probably, it seems, Auden was gradually moving towards a mature stage of poetic vision in this period and with abundent poetic experimentation, he was trying to bring a novel and fantasy material in English poetry. For example in the poem, "Wanderer"

he writes :

> "There head falls forward, fatigued at evening,
> And dreams of home,
> Waving from window, spread of welcome,
> Kissing of wife under single sheet,
> But waking sees
> Bird-flocks nameless to him, through doorway voices
> Of new men making another love."

(EA,p. 55.)

The phrases such as (as quoted above) "there head falls forward", "Kissing of wife under single sheet" and "waking sees ... new men making another love." are undoubtedly new phrases in Modern English poetry. They are highly obscure and ambiguous.

One of the significant reasons of the obscurity and ambiguity in the early poetry of Auden was, Auden's encounter with ideological conflict. Yet, Auden had not arrived at any fixed ideology. The ideology of Marx and Freud continue to influence him. Consequently his ideological foundation is extremely shaky during this period. John Mander rightly remarks, "Marxism tends to interrupt Freud's psychology"[30] in the early poetry of Auden. In other words, Auden holds sometimes the Marxian view of revolution, or of immediate action and sometimes he holds Freudian view of mental therapy. For example, in the poem "Get there if you can and see the land you once were proud to own", the speaker addresses the middle-class in good Marxist terms and concludes with an

but why should they clash? are they incompatible?

appeal for action. But it would be waste of time to appeal to the doomed middle class to "drop those prigish ways" in terms of Marxist ideology. According to the Marxist interpretation, the supposed symptoms of neurosis are rather symptoms of social decadence and they demand a social cure and not individual cure. Hence, society's only therapy is revolution, and the best thing a bourgeoisie intellectual can do is to abandon his class and put himself on the side of revolution. But Auden wishes to have both things: sometimes to lean to the Freudian view, and at other time with the Marxian view.

The obscure and ambiguous nature of Auden's early poetry has one more important reason. During this period Auden belonged to a loosely knit but highly self-involved group. The important members of this group were Christopher Isherwood. John Upward, Stephen Spender, MacNeice Louis and C.Day Lewis. The group created a set of private fantasies, a self-enclosed school boy world. They called it "Mortmere". Frederick Buell has shown elaborately how Auden's early poetry involves itself so much in fantasy material and he has shown how the "Mortmere World" brought about a number of obscurities in the early poetry. For example, the highly obscure and ambiguous phrases such as, the spy, the secret agent, the trained betrayer etc. appeared in his early poetry. These artistic, ideological and private compulsions probably made Auden's early poetry highly obscure and ambiguous. This obscure and ambiguous nature itself was weakness at the same time strength of his early poetry.

How? Demonstration of this claim is necessary.

In conclusion, it can be said that Auden's early poetry is obscure, and difficult to understand. It brings a new body of material into English poetry, consciously modern and novel. It deals with psychology and politics. It deals with private and fantasy world of the Auden-group. It largely relies on vague evocation and wilful mystification. It exercises a number of poetic experiments. It abounds in symbols, images and myths, suggestive of political and psychological associations. But these obscurities and ambiguities become lesser and lesser from the year 1933. Probably, it is because, Auden frees from the complexes of the Marx and Freud combination. The political stand of Auden becomes dominant in the period 1933-38. The ambivalence is still there but it is now made clear. So with the publication of Look, Stranger! Auden emerges as one of the major political poets of the thirties, though his later poetry is mainly, religious and influenced by the ideology of Christianity and the philosophy of existantialism. So in the present study, an attempt is made to emphasize the political aspect of Auden's poetry during the period, 1933-38.

no evidence cited