

Week 12 Day 1: The Auden Generation

ENGL201: Introduction to Modernist Literature



Wystan Hugh (W.H.) Auden (1907-1973)

- English poet
- One of the most prominent poets of the generation immediately after high modernism
- Known for accessible style and perception of poetry as a political tool
- Volunteered for the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War to serve as an ambulance driver

Nancy Cunard

- British editor, anthologist, publisher, poet, activist, journalist, and socialite
- Founded *The Hours Press* (1928-1936), published major anthologies like *Negro* (1935) and *Nous gens d'Espagne* (1945-1949)





Our eyes are directed to Rome, to Byzantium, to Montparnasse, to Mexico, to the Etruscans, to the Subconscious, to the solar plexus—to everywhere except the places where things are actually happening. When one looks back at the 'twenties, nothing is queerer than the way in which every important event in Europe escaped the notice of the English intelligentsia. The Russian Revolution, for instance, all but vanishes from the English consciousness between the death of Lenin and the Ukraine famine—about ten years. Throughout those years Russia means Tolstoy, Dostoevski, and exiled counts driving taxi-cabs. Italy means picture-galleries, ruins, churches, and museums—but not Blackshirts. Germany means films, nudism and psycho-analysis—but not Hitler, of whom hardly anyone had heard until 1931. (George Orwell, "Inside the Whale")

1920s

introspection

formal density and difficulty

1930s

activism

documentary plain style

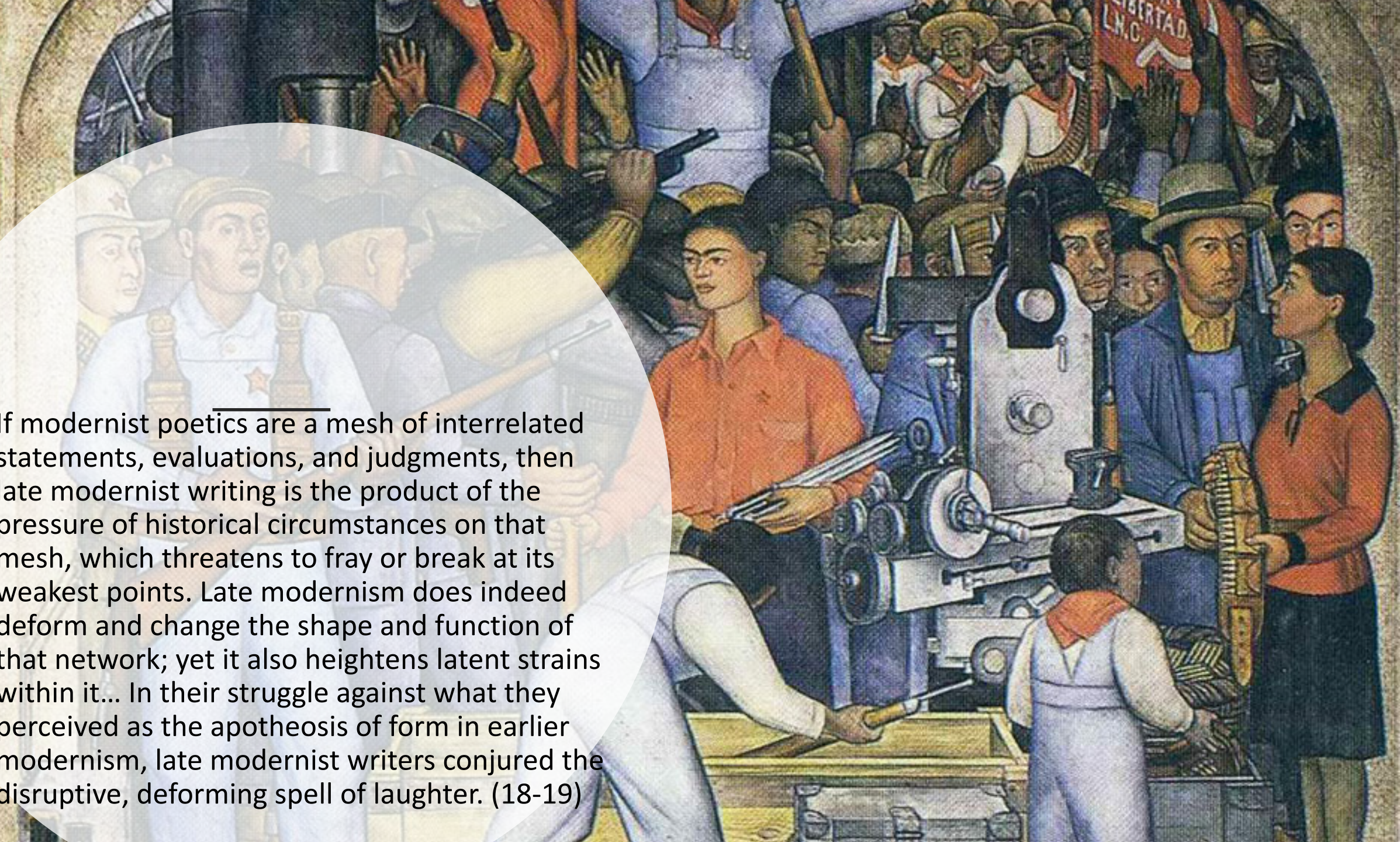
- Tyrus Miller: late modernism
- Alan Wilde: late modernism (different)
- Brian McHale: limit-modernist
- Kristen Bleumel: inter modernism
- Other approaches: the Auden Generation, Literature of the 1930s, the Red Decade



How far it makes sense to extend the term 'modernist' to include the writers of the so-called 'Auden generation' is arguable. Its very self-conscious sociability and accessibility certainly suggest a sharp break with the major modernist writers of the previous decade: Auden's often quoted declaration in a 1933 poem that 'we rebuild our cities, not dream of islands' is as good a way as any of registering the distinction between the era of high modernism and what succeeded it. (Marina McKay, "Violence, Art, and War," 473)

La senda de revolución proletaria

If modernist poetics are a mesh of interrelated statements, evaluations, and judgments, then late modernist writing is the product of the pressure of historical circumstances on that mesh, which threatens to fray or break at its weakest points. Late modernism does indeed deform and change the shape and function of that network; yet it also heightens latent strains within it... In their struggle against what they perceived as the apotheosis of form in earlier modernism, late modernist writers conjured the disruptive, deforming spell of laughter. (18-19)

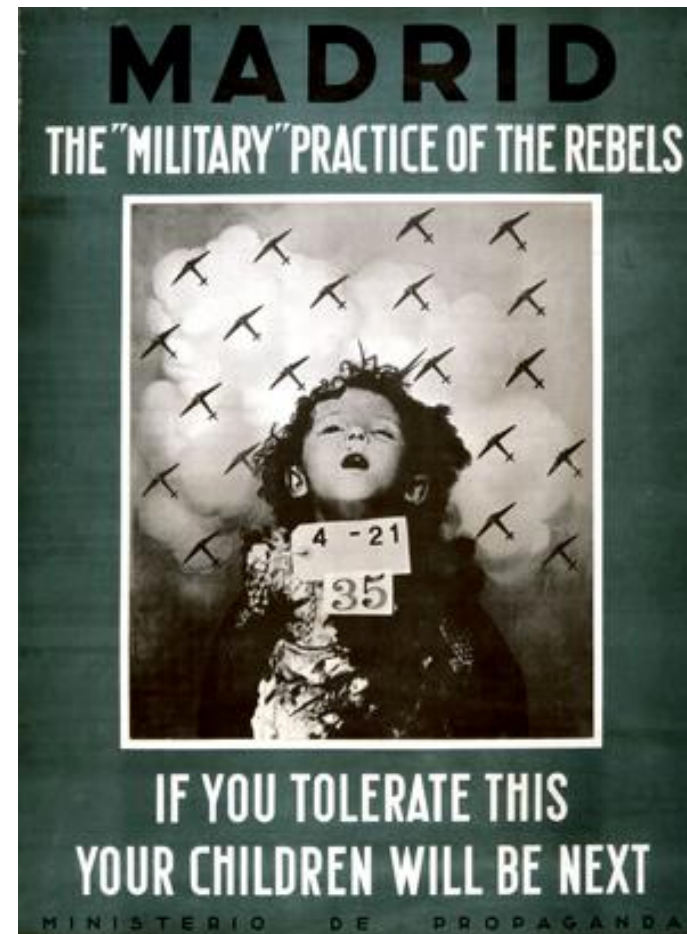
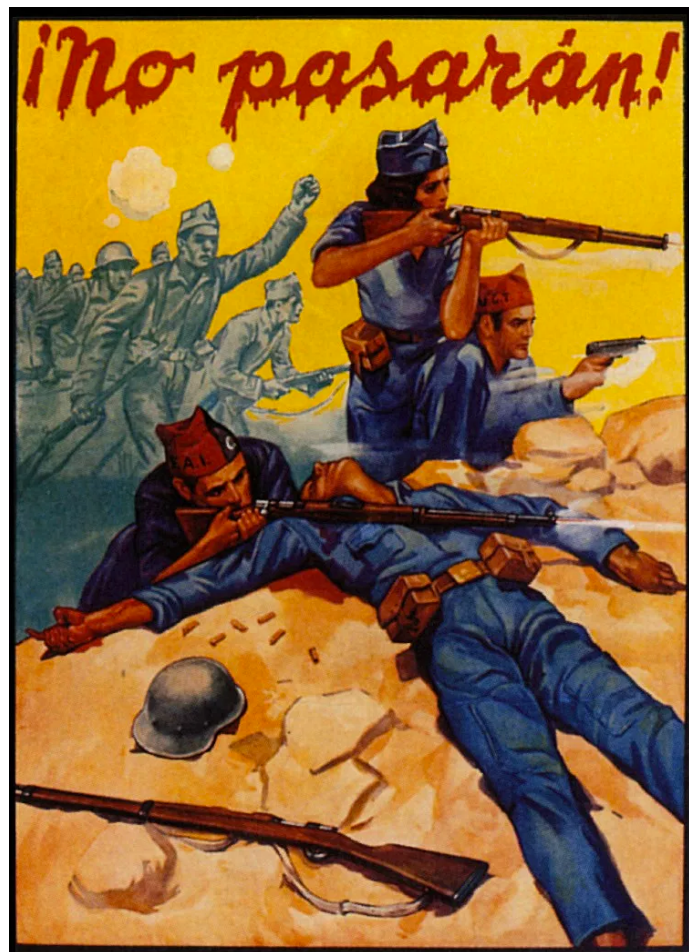


Spanish Civil War

- Spain had recently reformed its government into the Second Spanish Republic
- Fascist forces led by Francisco Franco led a military coup against the legally elected government
- Major Western countries signed the Non-Intervention Pact to declare that they would not offer arms or assistance in the conflict
 - Germany, Italy, and Soviet Russia did not stick to the pact
- International Brigades: between 32,000 and 35,000 members, 15,000 who died in combat, up to 20,000 brigade in combat at a time



LOS INTERNACIONALES
UNIDOS *de* LOS ESPAÑOLES LUCHAMOS CONTRA *el* INVASOR





To the Writers and Poets of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales

It is clear to many of us throughout the whole world that now, as certainly never before, we are determined or compelled, to take sides. The equivocal attitude, the Ivory Tower, the paradoxical, the ironic detachment, will no longer do.

We have seen murder and destruction by Fascism in Italy, in Germany—the organization there of social injustice and cultural death—and how revived, imperial Rome, abetted by international treachery, has conquered her place in the Abyssinian sun. The dark millions of the colonies are unavenged.

To-day, the struggle is in Spain. To-morrow it may be in other countries—your own. But there are some who, despite the martyrdom of Durango and Guernica, the enduring agony of Madrid, of Bilbao, and Germany's shelling of Almeria, are still in doubt, or who aver that it is possible that Fascism may be what it proclaims it is: 'the savior of civilization.'

This is the question we are asking you:

Are you for, or against, the legal Government and the People of Republican Spain?

Are you for, or against, Franco and Fascism?

For it is impossible any longer to take no side.

Samuel Beckett

! UPTHEREPUBLIC !

George Barker

I AM FOR THE PEOPLE of Republican Spain, for the people of China, for the people of England, for the people of Germany, etc. I am against Fascism, Franco, Mussolini, Japanese Generals, Hitler, Walter Chrysler, the Archbishop of Canterbury, etc.

Louis Golding

I AM FOR THE LEGAL GOVERNMENT and the People of Republican Spain, which means I am against Franco and Fascism. I would be against Franco if I were the most dyed-in-the-wool jingo flag-wagger. But that is not my reason. I am against him because he is a fist of Hitler; or at least, a little finger. *Ecrasez l'infâme !*

Jack Hilton

FOR THE PEOPLE of Republican Spain.
Against Franco and Fascism.
Yes. Yes. Yes.

Sean O' Faolain

DON'T BE A LOT OF SAPS. If X and Y want to cut one another's throats over Z, why on earth must people who do not believe in the ideas propounded by either X, Y, or Z have "to choose between them"? If you want to know, I do think Fascism is lousy. So is your Communism, only more so. But there are other ideas in the world besides either of them—thank God (whom neither of you believe in).

For the love of Mike cut loose from this fixation that the artist no longer can have the guts to be what every artist worth his salt has always been—*an individualist*. . . .

(May I say how much I like your postal address?)

Yours contemptuously

Samuel Beckett

UPTHEREPUBLIC !

BLESS the **HAIRDRESSER.**

He attacks Mother Nature for a small fee.

Hourly he ploughs heads for sixpence,

Scours chins and lips for threepence.

**He makes systematic mercenary war on this
WILDNESS.**

**He trims aimless and retrograde growths
into CLEAN ARCHED SHAPES and
ANGULAR PLOTS.**

W. H. Auden

I SUPPORT THE VALENCIA GOVERNMENT in Spain because its defeat by the forces of International Fascism would be a major disaster for Europe. It would make a European war more probable; and the spread of Fascist Ideology and practice to countries as yet comparatively free from them, which would inevitably follow upon a Fascist victory in Spain, would create an atmosphere in which the creative artist and all who care for justice, liberty and culture would find it impossible to work or even exist.

Lionel Britton

THE WORLD IS FACED with disruption because men do not realise that privileges cannot be retained for ever. In a last attempt to save their privileges against the rising tide of men, the privileged classes are giving up the only thing that makes life worth while—freedom. Some freedom must be given up for the sake of order, because without order civilisation is impossible; but this is not intelligent unless we receive from the collective order more freedom than we individually give up.

The Spanish Government was a legal government, elected by majority opinion; and though majorities are not always right, to suppress this by force where it cannot be done by argument, is to revert to the practices of ages we now consider uncivilised.

C. L. R. James

AGAINST FASCISM, against Franco, but against bourgeois democracy too. For the independent action of the workers in the struggle for a Soviet Spain, the defence of the U.S.S.R., and international Socialism.

Kay Boyle

I AM AGAINST FASCISM and its exponents as symbols of a material and not a spiritual triumph; I am against Franco and for the people of Spain. I am for the people of every country who have, because of a tradition of ignorance (or because of colour), been exploited and betrayed.

Norman Douglas

I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY about your questionnaire. I cannot excite myself over nations and causes and creeds—my contempt for humanity in general is too great. Individuals are the only things that interest me. If Spaniards like to cut each other's throats and get Germans and Russians to help them—why not let them? It's not my affair. If they eat each other up to the last man, like Kilkenny cats, let them! This will sound unsatisfactory to you. But if you want the truth, there it is. Nobody is going to

compel me to "take sides". To hell with sides. If Fascists annoy me, I hop it. If Communists annoy me, I hop it. Everything that ends in "ism" is just b . . . s, so far as I am concerned.

Eleanor Smith

I WAS DELIGHTED to receive your unprejudiced brochure.

Naturally, I am a warm adherent of General Franco's, being, like all of us, a humanitarian.

The destruction of so many beautiful objects, and the massacre of so many innocent persons, makes one pity profoundly the ignorant red masses—subsidized by Russia—in Spain.

Do you not agree?



“Will you please stop sending me this bloody rubbish. This is the second or third time I have had it. I am not one of your fashionable pansies like Auden and Spender, I was six months in Spain, most of the time fighting, and I have a bullet-hole in me at present and I am not going to write blah about defending democracy or gallant little anybody.

[.....]

By the way, tell your pansy friend Spender that I am preserving specimens of his war-heroics and that when the time comes when he squirms for shame at having written it, as the people who wrote the war-propaganda in the Great War are squirming now, I shall rub it in good and hard.”