

UNIVERZITA PALACKÉHO V OLMOUCI

Filozofická fakulta

Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

**The Main Themes in Louis MacNeice's Poetry between the
Years 1937-1945**

Olomouc 2016

Lada Smejkalová

Vedoucí bakalářské práce: Mgr. David Livingstone, Ph. D.

*I declare that I worked on this thesis on my own and I provided
all the cited bibliography.*

.....

I would like to thank my supervisor, Mgr. David Livingstone, Ph.D.
for his professional advice.

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to analyze the selected poems by Louis MacNeice, a British poet born in Northern Ireland, and find typical repeating themes in them that would characterize the poet's work. The poems selected for this analysis were all written between the years 1937 and 1945. The main topics discussed are, therefore, the emotional impact of the Second World War for many in Britain, and the resonance of historical places connected with the poet's life. The very salient theme of human individuality is discussed in this work, and MacNeice's writing style is compared with the style of his contemporaries (mainly W. H. Auden). The conclusion of the thesis is that the themes appearing in the works of Louis MacNeice, of the connection of individuals with the effects of the war, and of the nature of empathy as a result of personal tragedy, demonstrate much that was shared in British culture and people between the years 1937-1945. In addition, the poet's style is common with the style of the other poets from the Auden Group. The first part of the thesis is theoretical – an introduction and a short description of the poet's life and places that were important for him and that appear in his work. A brief historical background is also given. The second part is more practical in literary analysis. It contains concrete analyses of selected MacNeice's poems and discusses the themes appearing in them, especially the theme of the human individuality affected by the occurrences of the period from 1937 to 1945.

Abstrakt

Tato bakalářská práce má za cíl analyzovat vybrané básně Louise MacNeice, britského básníka pocházejícího ze Severního Irska a nalézt v nich typická a často se objevující témata která by charakterizovala básníkovu dílo. Všechny básně zvolené pro tuto analýzu byly napsány mezi lety 1937 a 1945. Hlavní témata, která budou rozebrána v téhle práci, jsou proto druhá světová válka ve Velké Británii a historie míst spojená s básníkovým životem. Důraz je dán také na velmi výrazné téma lidské individuality, kde jsou rozebrány konkrétní příklady v autorových básních. MacNeiceův básnický styl je porovnáván se styly jeho současníků (zejména W. H. Audena). Závěr spočívá v definování toho, jaká témata se objevují v básních Louise MacNeice a co vypovídají o britské kultuře a společnosti ve letech 1937-1945 a také je kladen důraz na to, v čem se MacNeiceův styl psaní podobal stylům ostatních spisovatelů z Audenova kruhu. První část práce je teoretická – je to úvod do problematiky a krátký popis básníkovu života a míst, která byla pro jeho život zásadní a často se objevují v jeho básních. V první části je také popsán historický kontext doby. Druhá část je naopak praktická. Obsahuje konkrétní analýzy vybraných básní Louise MacNeice a zkoumá témata, která se v nich objevují, obzvláště téma lidské individuality ovlivněné událostmi doby mezi roky 1937 a 1945.

Table of Contents

1 Introduction.....	7
2 Historical Background as the Platform for the Second World War.....	9
2.1 The Events in the Pre-war Period in Great Britain	9
2.2 The Second World War in London	11
3 Auden’s Group, the 1930s Poets, Their Style and Opinions, Their Attitudes towards the Second World War	13
3.1 The Term ‘1930s Poets.....	13
3.2 W. H. Auden and Other 1930s Poets.....	14
3.3 Typical Features of the Poetry of the Auden Group.....	15
4 The Features of Louise MacNeice’s Poetry.....	17
4.1 MacNeice’s relation with Auden.....	18
4.2 Louise MacNeice’s Childhood, Events that Affected His Work.....	19
4.2.1 Carrickfergus	19
4.2.2 A Loss of His Mother	19
4.2.3 Conclusion of the Features of Louis MacNeice.....	20
5 Analyses of Poems by Louis MacNeice from the Years 1937 to 1945.....	21
5.1 Pre-war and War themes.....	21
5.1.1 The Coming of the Second World War in Louise MacNeice’s “Sunlight on the Garden”.....	21
5.1.2 The Second World War and Events in London in “London Rain”	25
5.1.3 The Mind of the Individual — ”Prayer Before Birth” Analysis.....	28
5.2 Other themes (Personal Life).....	31
5.2.1 How “Carrickfergus“ Explains MacNeice’s Life.....	32
5.2.2 “Autobiography”, The Biggest Turning Point in the Life of Louis MacNeice.....	34
6 Conclusion.....	36
7 České shrnutí.....	38
8 Bibliography.....	40

1 Introduction

This work's main concern is with the themes of the poems that were written shortly before or during the Second World War. It is certain that some of them are obvious to everyone – fear, loss, chaos and death – because they follow in the wake of every war. Although these and many more appear in the poems by Louis MacNeice and his contemporaries, MacNeice's poetry, nevertheless, typically demonstrates something else that I would call the inner power of an individual.

In his war poetry, Louis MacNeice's centre of attention is the individual. He always wonders the effects of evil events that came with the war can cause in the mind of an individual. Examples of this could be seen in his poem "Prayer Before Birth" where an unborn child pleads to have the strength to decide for him/herself when he/she is born. Various different ideologies that arise during every war greatly affect masses of ordinary people and can make them react in the same way. The unborn child in MacNeice's poem wants to avoid the effects of this even though he or she cannot yet have any observation about the world. Similarly, in "London Rain" and in "Sunlight on the Garden" there is an attempt by the individual to avoid evil.

There is a quote from Bible that says, "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil."¹ In the times of war these two are sometimes confused. It is not unknown for political movements to claim the moral high ground and label all the rest as evil. There are masses of ordinary people who believe that what they do is good because of propaganda and political brainwashing, but who are in fact doing evil to other people. MacNeice indicates that his times were difficult for people's inner moral compass and by answering questions about what is right or wrong he made moral-decision less confusing.

The main point of this thesis is the relationship of human mind with a society that is changed by difficulties connected with war. MacNeice lived during the Second World War period and he was one of these individuals. His poetry shows the inner processes that result in making clear and good decisions.

The thesis also introduces some topics from MacNeice's life. The fact that the loss of his mother at an early age made for a hard and painful childhood inevitably shaped him as a person. The themes, therefore, are not only negative and melancholic,

¹ Isaiah 5:20, Bernard Darwin et al., ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), 53.

but sometimes they are cheerful and encouraging like some beautiful moments in life. The hints of love, light, hope and “the real values”, as MacNeice calls them, are also present in his poetry, mixed among all the sadness, melancholy, loss and indecision.

And it can be argued that many of the issues identified with people living in the late 1930s and early 1940s are in some way present even nowadays. Even though Louis MacNeice is not as famous a poet as, for example, W. H. Auden, the nature of his poems, nevertheless, mean that his poetry has a resounding impact with people today.

2 Historical Background as the Platform for the Second World War Poetry

2.1 The Events in the Pre-war Period in Great Britain

In this chapter I will briefly describe the period in which Louis MacNeice completed the poems analyzed here. This includes the most important events of that time that affected MacNeice and influenced his themes and style of writing. I will also mention the mental and political streams that influenced his attitude towards society.

The Second World War in the years 1939-1945 came to gradually affect nearly the whole world. With war came chaos and fear. The situation was not different for Great Britain, where chaos and fear suitably describe the daily events of the war and the way it affected its citizens and changed society.

The pre-war period was also full of important, and sometimes not very pleasant, occurrences. With this in mind, I will describe how the situation in Britain before the Second World War affected the poetry of that period analyzed in this thesis.

The late 1930s saw great changes in the social situation across Europe. Chief of these was the menace from Nazi Germany. Even after the Munich meeting of Neville Chamberlain with Adolf Hitler at the end of September 1938, and the following occupation of Czechoslovakia, war was not a certainty. Many thought the situation would improve and that Hitler would be satisfied now that he had gained new and productive territories, especially those that had beforehand belonged to Czechoslovakia. At the Munich Treaty:

...Chamberlain and the French Prime Minister, Edouard Daladier, confirmed that they would not fight for a far-away country, about which they knew little, in the words of Chamberlain. Instead, they agreed to inform the hapless Czechs that they must hand over to Germany a third of their population and some of their most important industrial areas.²

After the Munich Treaty there was a general belief in Britain of peace. Hitler obtained what he wanted and the heads of the states thought they had averted danger. Many politicians thought the Treaty would be enough to prevent a conflict. After the Munich Treaty, most opinions were optimistic:

² Roger Eatwell, *Fascism: A History* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1995), 136.

Peace was the message London newsboys ran through the streets upon the Prime Minister's return – “peace for our time” he [Chamberlain] told his fellow countrymen, having just paid Hitler's price and participated in the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia.³

Nevertheless, other important people of the period held different opinions on the issue and knew that the Second World War was inevitable. Winston Churchill not only said that war was imminent, but that he was prepared to psychologically prepare the nation when the time for war finally arrived. He came to represent a figure of great moral support for British people in that difficult time:

In the dark early days of the Second World War Churchill had few real weapons. He attacked with words instead. The speeches he delivered then are among the most powerful ever given in the English language. His words were defiant, heroic and human, lightened by flashes of humour. They reached out to everyone in Britain, across Nazi-occupied Europe, and throughout the world. As journalist Beverley Nichols wrote, 'He took the English language and sent it into battle.'⁴

Winston Churchill was not alone in thinking that acquiescing to the German dictator's demands was wrong. To them, the lasting peace of the inter-war years and the recent proclamations on the streets of peace in our time remained unconvincing. The political and military situation in Nazi Germany grew more alarming and Britain and other European countries took limited measures to ready themselves should the situation deteriorate into conflict. Louis MacNeice saw the War coming too, as can be seen through the analysis some of his poems from the pre-war period.

In Britain the first measures were taken in 1938, before the outbreak of hostilities. In preparation for the chaos from the impending war, it was decided to evacuate big cities of the most delicate members of the populations, such as children and older people. Therefore, a rehearsal evacuation of children took place in 1938 in London⁵. In the run up to the war, fear grew enormously and evacuations were done for real in the first few months after September 1939.

³ Philip B. Kunhardt Jr. et al., *Life World War II* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1990), 23.

⁴ "How Churchill Led Britain To Victory In The Second World War", James Taylor, Imperial War Museums, accessed June 18, 2016, <http://www.iwm.org.uk/history/how-churchill-led-britain-to-victory-in-the-second-world-war.html>.

⁵ John Macnicol, "The evacuation of schoolchildren," in *War and Social Change – British society in the Second World War*, ed. Harold L. Smith. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 6.

Nevertheless, it was evident that evacuation was not necessarily the best course of action. It created confusion, wherein the children were taken from their families and sent to remote villages where they were ill-adapted to country living, and by early 1940 as many as 80% of evacuees had returned home.⁶

The poets and other artists of that time focused on what was happening in Europe and in their native countries and the topics of their works were more and more connected with the impending war. This dangerous environment was a subject matter for many artists to discuss in their works. An example is W. H. Auden's poem "September 1, 1939" written after Poland was attacked by Nazi Germany. The poet describes the beginnings of this huge world conflict:

And darkened lands of the earth,
Obsessing our private lives;
The unmentionable odour of death
Offends the September night.⁷

Auden describes Germany as the "darkened lands of the earth". It suggests a danger and evil that has already come. Once the German army attacked Poland war became inevitable. Although Hitler in fact did not break his promise (he did not attack any of the countries participating in the Munich Treaty), he nevertheless attacked a country protected by the Anglo-Polish military alliance⁸. Britain and France, the great western European powers, finally had to respond. Auden here sees the conflict as something that is offending the peaceful September night, the -until now- peaceful lives of people. When he mentions "September", it is clear that he talks about the beginning of the war – the occupation of Poland. We can say that even from the title of the poem. The strongest words are definitely "the unmentionable odour of death" that say that the death is coming.

2.2 *The Second World War in London*

Every conflict is characterized by material destruction, violence and death. If we look more closely at the events that happened in London during the Second World War it is

⁶ Macnicol, "The evacuation of schoolchildren," 6.

⁷ W. H. Auden, *Another Time Auden* (New York: Random House, 1940).

⁸ "Anglo-Polish Agreement," [ibiblio.org](http://ibiblio.org/pha/bb/bb-078.html), accessed June 21, 2016, <http://ibiblio.org/pha/bb/bb-078.html>.

obvious that because London, as the capital city, is a political centre of Great Britain, then what happened there greatly affected the rest of the country.

The London Blitz had a tremendous impact on the citizens, both in terms of casualties and in material damage:

Londoners were forced to spend sleepless nights in air raid shelters and Underground stations. The bombing cut gas, water and electricity supplies and brought transport chaos after heavy raids.⁹

Louis MacNeice was in London during that time of the War. His poem “London Rain” shows some aspects of the conflict, (and will be analyzed further in the theoretical part of the thesis). This poem clearly shows his attitude toward the war and its affects on the individual.

MacNeice and other poets of the 1930s were not concerned just with the material loss. Their analysis of the mood of the people –their thoughts and questions of conscience, and of how it is hard for them to make good decisions under such a pressure– is clearly noticeable in some of their war poems.

⁹ Hugh Clout, ed., *The Times London History Atlas* (London: BCA, 1991), 118.

3 Auden's Group, the 1930s Poets, Their Style and Opinions, Their Attitudes towards the Second World War

3.1 The Term '1930s Poets'

Louis MacNeice began his poetry career publishing, *Reminiscences of Infancy*, in 1926, and his writing career continued until his death in 1963¹⁰. Nevertheless, the most productive times of his career were the 1930s and the years during the Second World War. This is the period analyzed in this thesis.

To begin with, specific terms like 'the 1930s poets' will be explained, and a short introduction given to the general themes of the works of the writers classified as the members of the Auden Group, or Auden Generation. Then a closer look will be made on the concrete themes in Louis MacNeice's work.

Literary critics coined the term '1930s poets'. W. H. Auden, a contemporary poet, was the main figure of the Auden Group, the writer's society of which Louis MacNeice was also a member. Auden did not agree with this name for the society. In his book *Selected Essays* he wrote:

Then they classified them by eras, the Augustans, the Victorians, etc., and now they classify them by decades, the writers of the '30's, '40's, etc. Very soon, it seems, they will be labelling authors, like automobiles, by the year¹¹

Nevertheless, according to *The Routledge History of Literature in English*, the term '1930s poets' is still used when talking about Auden's Group, for together they "regularly present a clinical catalogue of familiar objects, places and ideas."¹² In fact, the authors never worked together in one room. According to the *History of Literature in English*, those that belonged to this group are described as poets who have interests in the issues and social problems of that period and who write about them in their poems.¹³

¹⁰ Michael Longley, ed., "Introduction" to *Louis MacNeice Selected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), xiv.

¹¹ W. H. Auden, *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1962), 19.

¹² Ronald Carter and John McRae, *The Routledge History of Literature in English: Britain and Ireland* (London: Routledge, 1997), 348.

¹³ Carter and McRae, *History of Literature*, 346.

3.2 *W. H. Auden and Other 1930s Poets*

W. H. Auden was the most important of the 1930s poets. Literary critics recognised him as founder of that group of poets. Indeed, he extended a great influence on younger poets, although he always disagreed with any collocation to some group. The other poets, including Louis MacNeice, Stephen Spender, Cecil Day Lewis, obtained great inspiration from Auden's work and, although each one had certain individual quality to his work, produced similar poetry. Topics they had in common, and with which W. H. Auden began his career, were an interest in contemporary issues and in efforts to bring poetry closer to the wide public and to ordinary people. This can be seen in opposition to an idea represented in the modernist perspective, that of "art for art's sake". W. H. Auden stated in one of his essays about writing:

Writers can be guilty of every kind of human conceit but one, the conceit of the social worker:
"We are all here on earth to help others; what on earth the others are here for, I don't know."¹⁴

Some of the 1930s poets were so interested in social issues that they generally held common agreement with left-wing politics, particularly socialism. It can be clearly seen that aspects of socialist ideology appear in the poems of the authors of the Auden Group, and also in that of Louis MacNeice.

A Socialist perspective, it can be argued, can be found in Stephen Spender's poem, "What I Expected":

What I expected was
Thunder, fighting,
Long struggles with men
And climbing.
After continual straining
I should grow strong;
Then the rocks would shake
And I should rest long.¹⁵

¹⁴ Auden, *Selected Essays*, 22.

¹⁵ Stephen Spender, *The Oxford Library of English Poetry*, ed. John Wain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 419.

3.3 *Typical Features of the Poetry of the Auden Group*

One of the main European political events of the 1930s which drew a response from writers was the Spanish Civil War (1936-39). They felt that its outcome would shape the future, particularly since a second world war seemed close.¹⁶

As stated before, the 1930s poets were keenly interested in actual problems observed in society in the 1930s. As well as those things, there also grimly appeared on the horizon not only the fearful oncoming perspective of the Second World War, but also dreadful contemporary events, such as the Spanish Civil War. Their poetry is, therefore, full of issues connected with those events. Although conflict is a familiar topic for poets, the 1930s poets thought about war not merely as some evil that affects ordinary people and does not allow them to live normal lives, but as a feature of socialism.

The members of the Auden Group were also concerned with people and with social issues, and on many occasions their language and structure is simple, in order that it be simply understood by anyone.

Their poetry is diverse but there is again a focus on social themes and on a use of clear, ordinary language and popular forms.¹⁷

W. H. Auden focused intensely on contemporary issues and thought that current events would be of interest to wider society. The following quotation successfully demonstrates that as we are all a part of society we should harbour feelings for others. If there is evil somewhere, it is of concern to all people, whatever their status and wherever they are from. This attitude is shown in many of his poems, and although the topics of war, murder and politics appear in his works, he is not only concerned with portraying them. Such activities are always inter-connected with lives of ordinary people, and are made apparent in their sufferings and fears. Auden seemed in his works to always feel for others:

When he laughed, respectable senators burst with laughter,
And when he cried the little children died in the streets.¹⁸

¹⁶ Carter and McRae, *History of Literature*, 345.

¹⁷ Carter and McRae, *History of Literature*, 346.

¹⁸ Auden, *Another Time Auden*

In these two lines from a poem “Epitaph on a Tyrant” we can notice a certain irony. The person of the tyrant obviously maintains an unpleasant presence through his use of force. In this regard, the reference could be that of Herod the Great or another of the more infamous tyrannical figures, but the fact that Auden was always more interested in the present issues, must lead the reader to suppose the tyrant would be Adolf Hitler who was steadily assuming the role of biggest tyrannical figure of the 1930s. The excerpt from the poem also suggests that such leaders who are evil adversely affect the lives of the ordinary people, a familiar result from those that have led humanity into innumerable wars and conflicts.

Other topics that appeared in the works by the Auden Group poets, and particularly in the poetry of Louis MacNeice, is of a love connected with loss. Not necessarily related to war, the 1930s poets wrote frequently about the people they had lost and that had been of significant importance for them.

Soul and body have no bounds:
To lovers as they lie upon
Her tolerant enchanted slope
In their ordinary swoon,
Grave the vision Venus sends
Of supernatural sympathy,
Universal love and hope;
While an abstract insight wakes
Among the glaciers and the rocks
The hermit’s carnal ecstasy.¹⁹

What is clear from Auden’s poem of January 1937 above, “Lullaby”, is that love came to assume a central theme in his poetry and that it was rooted in personal experience – one shared by ordinary people in their lives.

To conclude, the topics in the poems of W. H. Auden are always social topics and topics of the individual’s feelings and thoughts about the world. His main concerns are with people, and how their contemporary lives are changed by the difficulties of different life situations that they cannot change, and he questions how these situations come about and what can be done about them.

¹⁹ W. H. Auden, *The Oxford Library of English Poetry*, ed. John Wain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 400.

4 The Features of Louise MacNeice's Poetry

The key figure of this thesis is Louis MacNeice and the analysis of his poetry. In general, MacNeice's poetry style is very similar to that of W. H. Auden. As a known poet and member of the Auden Group, he was recognised as one of Auden's followers by the similarity of his written style and in his use of similar topics. He too was also concerned with the issues of ordinary people, wrote about contemporary events and used simple language in order that his poems could be accessible to a wide audience.

MacNeice's poetry contains many observations on life in the 1930s and seems to suggest that poetry itself is not special but is democratically open to all readers and their experiences.²⁰

Yet while sympathetic to the daily routine of most lives, MacNeice also expresses his concern about the mechanised, modern world which is dependent on material values (...) ²¹

From the similarity of their styles, it is generally accepted that Auden much influenced MacNeice and that one of the most important issues that they shared was their mutual concern with social issues. The difference for MacNeice was that, except for all this, he appeared more concerned with the material world and with real values. The main features of MacNeice's style will be shown on the analysis of the poem "Prayer Before Birth" in the third chapter of this thesis.

... Go back where your instincts call
And listen to the crying of the town-cats and the taxis again,
Or wind your gramophones and eavesdrop on great men.
Jazz-weary of years of drums and Hawaiian guitar,
Pivoting on the parquet I seem to have moved far
From bombs and mud and gas, have stuttered on my feet
Clinched to the streamlined and butter-smooth trulls of the elite,
The lights irritating and gyrating and rotating in gauze –
Pomade-dazzle, a slick beauty of gewgaws – ²²

²⁰ Carter and McRae, *History of Literature*, 347.

²¹ Carter and MacRae, *History of Literature*, 347.

²² Louis MacNeice, *Louis MacNeice Selected Poems*, ed. Michael Longley (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), 4.

MacNeice shows in the language of “An Eclogue for Christmas” an understanding, even in rejection, of real and material values.

4.1 *MacNeice’s relation with Auden*

As previously stated, the Auden Group poets did not have, in general, a very deep relationship with one another. An exception was MacNeice and Auden who on very good terms with each other. They were meeting frequently and the influence that they had on each other is noticeable in their similar style of writing, similar themes and opinions. They also enjoyed travelling together. They visited Iceland in 1936²³ from where came *Letters from Iceland*, in which they collaborated. The book, as the title suggests, is a compilation of letters written in Iceland, and of notes they were taking during their journey.

Born in the same year, Auden continued to live nearly ten years after MacNeice’s death from Pneumonia. Indeed, the death of MacNeice hit Auden very hard, which is visible in a poem called “The Cave of Making” written after MacNeice’s death and dedicated it to his memory.

I wish, Louis, I could have shown it you
while you were still in public,
and the house and garden: lover of women and Donegal,
from your perspective you’d notice
sights I overlook, and in turn take a scholar’s interest
in facts I could tell you (for instance
four miles to our east, at a wood palisade, Carolingian
Bavaria stopped, beyond it
unknowable nomads). Friends we became by personal
choice, but fate had already
made us neighbors. For Grammar we both inherited
good mongrel barbarian English
which never completely succumbed to the Roman rhetoric
or the Roman gravity, that nonsense
which stood none.²⁴

²³ Longley, “Introduction”, xiii.

²⁴ Auden, *Library of English*, 412.

Auden here shows that he regrets that he cannot talk to MacNeice anymore or show him things he would wish. The poem describes their friendship and also there is a mention of the similarity of their style. Auden writes that they “inherited the same Grammar”, which means that they both chose to write in a simple style of English rather than in some elevated language full of Latin expression about what they did not think very much. The social themes and the target in a wide common people audience, they shared.

4.2 *Louise MacNeice’s Childhood, Events that Affected His Work*

4.2.1 Carrickfergus

Carrickfergus is a small, sleepy town in Northern Ireland. Louis MacNeice’s family moved there where he was two years old. It is nevertheless a port with a rich history. In his poem called “Carrickfergus”, that will be also analyzed in the third chapter, Louis MacNeice uses the town not only to describe crucial points in the history of his nation, but also to explain his childhood and the environment in which he was raised. Carrickfergus may not have been a very exciting place to live in, and MacNeice maintains a certain distance when he makes reference about it in his poems.

4.2.2 A Loss of His Mother

There were some crucial moments in MacNeice’s early life that affected him forever and that also had a great influence on his work. One of the most important ones was the loss of his mother whom he loved very much. Michael Longley, writing in his introductory essay about life and work of Louse MacNeice, maintains that:

The illness, mental breakdown and early death of his mother disturbed MacNeice for the rest of his life.²⁵

It also much affected his poetry. In September 1940 he wrote the famous poem “Autobiography” in which he describes his feeling after the loss:

When I was five the black dreams came;
Nothing was quite the same again

²⁵ Longley, “Introduction”, xiii.

4.2.3 Conclusion of the Themes of Louis MacNeice

The topics within Louis MacNeice's poems between the years 1937 and 1945 can be divided into two main categories:

- a) Pre-war and War topics defining his attitudes toward contemporary events of that period and his opinions about society

- b) Topics from his childhood and personal life

The following chapter is practical. In it MacNeice's poems and the two main topics will be analyzed and some references to the period and to the W. H. Auden's style will be found.

5 Analyses of Poems by Louis MacNeice from the Years 1937 to 1945

5.1 *Pre-war and War themes*

The majority of MacNeice's poems from the period 1937-1945 are naturally connected with the Second World War. He shows that the war clearly affected the nation, but specifically influenced the mind of individuals. The poems selected for the analyses are "Sunlight on the Garden", "London Rain" and "Prayer Before Birth".

5.1.1 The Coming of the Second World War in Louise MacNeice's "Sunlight on the Garden"

When Adolf Hitler invaded Poland on September 1 1939, any hope for a lasting peace had definitively and finally evaporated. A few days later, on September 3, Britain together with France declared a war on Germany.

Although Louise MacNeice's poem "Sunlight on the Garden" (1937) has various interpretations, I will show in this chapter, that its main focus is upon the beginning of the Second World War, and with the end of the pre-war period. It shows that the threat of the oncoming war caused a psychological change in addition to also greatly affecting the poet.

From the beginning of the poem we have a feeling of certain oppression. It starts with the expression "sunlight on the garden", which is also significantly the title of the poem. Sunlight represents something good, something positive. But it "hardens" and "grows cold", meaning that the positive associations will vanish or they are under threat. It could also be inferred that sunlight does not last forever, and that it represents some period of time, and one that will eventually end. We can find out, in the first stanza, that if the "sunlight" disappears, not much would remain. Sunlight is essentially an unstable element: once the night comes or the light fades away, it is gone. In the poem the prediction of disappearing light is in the second line – that it "hardens" and "grows cold" – could be said to mean that something bad or dark is coming to replace the light.

The sunlight on the garden
Hardens and grows cold,
We cannot cage the minute
Within its nets of gold,
When all is told

We cannot beg for pardon.²⁶

The minute in the third stanza could mean one concrete minute, because there is a definite article in front of it. Therefore, the situation could be about the immediacy of the present. The minute cannot be caged – time cannot be stop because it will continue and whatever evil is in the future, it will come and people will not be able to take back the time. Again, this is an allusion to the upcoming war.

In the second stanza, the poet uses more concrete expressions. The freedom that is coming to its end, or words like nets and cages, underlines the feeling of something bad that is about to come and affect people's lives. The word "freedom" is very important here and the procession of the free towards conflict is described:

Our freedom as free lances
Advances towards its end;²⁷

The oppression of freedom is certainly one of the most characteristic factors connected with any war, or with the workings of any totalitarian regime. In this poem, descending sonnets and birds, which could be said to mean the curtailment of entertainment, and maybe even culture, quickly follow the advancing lances of freedom. Perhaps because the sonnets are an artistic expression, all art is suppressed under a dictatorship in order that people's eyes remain firmly closed to corruption and misdeeds of the government. Another reason for the descending of artistic acts may be that people simply are not in a mood for any sort of entertainment. They are so devastated by the upcoming events connected with the war that there are no thoughts of distraction at all.

The most appalling is the third line in the third stanza: "And every evil iron". It has, perhaps, a certain sound symbolism. All the four words begin with a pronounced glottal stop, which, when pronounced, gives impression of a rattling iron that soldiers wore at the previous wars in the history. Apart from the sound symbolism, there is also a fact that the "evil iron" is preceded by the line, "Defying the church bells".

The church bells could also mean something negative here since "The sky that was for flying" (which may mean freedom or light heartedness) is in opposition to them.

²⁶ MacNeice, *Selected Poems*, 38.

²⁷ MacNeice, *Selected Poems*, 38.

And then the evil iron follows. These church bells may therefore symbolise death as the sounds announcing a funeral and the arrival of enemy warplanes.

In the third stanza, there also appears the word siren. The meaning of “siren(s)” is always negative. It is a warning, a call for an alert. It representative of the closeness of danger and that everyone should be prepared, whether by police sirens, sirens of a building or, as indicated by the origin of this word, by the Sirens in Greek mythology: such creatures called young men to their deaths, when they crashed their ships upon rocks. Sirens also appear in various popular songs as a symbol of warning before something horrible that is coming.

Lay down here beside me in the hallowed water
Beside me where the silver lining stays until
The sirens' calling.²⁸

These lyrics help to declare that the word “siren” has always had negative connotations and was similarly viewed in the past. It is a very insistent warning and in this poem, the siren could represent the warning before the coming war, particularly when one keeps in mind the year it was written.

The Earth Compels (1938) is a title of the collection of poems from which “Sunlight on the Garden” comes. It is also a line that repeats in this poem, more specifically in the second and in the third stanza. It may be the most powerful line in the whole text. The Earth represents everything – stability, people’s home. It is the biggest force that people recognise. It means life. When the poet writes, “The Earth Compels”, there is, perhaps, the suggestion that there is an element that has given them life until that moment which compels, or even forces people to do something. And although they may not want to do it, because it might bring bad consequences, the Earth does not ask questions, for everything will succumb to the war.

Another interesting line is the last line of the third stanza:

We are dying, Egypt, dying.²⁹

It may be an allusion to Shakespeare’s play *Antony and Cleopatra*:

²⁸ Cher Lloyd, “Sirens,” in *Sorry I’m Late*, Epic Records, 2014.

²⁹ MacNeice, *Selected Poems*, 38.

Ant.: I am dying, Egypt, dying; only
I here importune death awhile, until
Of many thousand kisses the poor last
I lay upon thy lips.³⁰

In another place:

Ant. I am dying, Egypt, dying:
Give me some wine and let me speak a little.³¹

Antony says the words in the scene of his death. It signified his giving up, where he finally recognizes that he does not have strength to live anymore and that he must leave his country and his people.

It is interesting to note that Louis MacNeice uses these words from Shakespeare's play in "Sunlight on the Garden" in order to emphasise his own situation. Perhaps the poet feels an affinity with the Antony of the play, and is about to give up because of the loss of his forces.

In general, we can perceive an incredible modesty throughout the whole poem. The poet is addressing someone whom he calls "friend". It can be many things – his real friend, his partner, some unreal person or the reader. From the analysis we can tell that the person is someone whom the poet has closeness. And it may be someone he might fear losing, particularly in view of the poet's general approach before the war and the chaos it will bring. MacNeice hated the War. He was scared of it.

But glad to have sat under
Thunder and rain with you,
And grateful too
For sunlight on the garden.³²

In the last stanza there appears a first hope. It comes back to the sunlight as it was in the first stanza. Here it seems to be a small thing, something almost negligible. But the poet suggests being grateful for it. In general, the theme here is that if the bad times are

³⁰ William Shakespeare, "Anthony and Cleopatra," in Complete Works of William Shakespeare, compiled (London: The Waverley Book Company Ltd., 1947), 772.

³¹ Shakespeare, "Anthony and Cleopatra".

³² MacNeice, *Selected Poems*, 38.

coming, we shall still be grateful for simple things and have some hope in the form of sunlight.

5.1.2 The Second World War and Events in London in “London Rain”

Just as “The Sunlight on the Garden” foresees the concern of an imminent Second World War, so also does “London Rain” sets out bad times, but in this case they have already come. The poem was written in July of the year 1939, when British participation in the war was almost a certainty, or would at least be so in a short time. Military action was taking place in many European countries and also in the rest of the world. *Plant and Phantom*, the whole collection of poems by Louis MacNeice, including “London Rain”, was published in 1941, which means during the most crucial part of the Second World War.

The main theme in the poem “London Rain” is the rain. It is easy to see that the rain in this case refers to something that brings negative events, something that causes the war in this case.

Firstly, the poem is based on opposites. It starts with a description of the city and it uses opposite colours, light and darkness put together in one line.

The rain of London pipples
The ebony street with white
And the neon lamps of London
Stain the canals of night.³³

The first stanza is a regular introduction to the situation. The poem is set in London where the rain is falling. It is mostly a visual stanza. We can imagine the white splash of rain on the dark streets and the artificial light of the lamps. The colours are contrasting which suggests the problem of choices.

Across the countless chimneys
The horses ride and across
The country to the channel
Where warning beacons toss,
To a place where God and No-God
Play at pitch and toss.³⁴

³³ MacNeice, *Selected Poems*, 71.

In the second and third stanzas, there is an image of horses that run across the city, even across the whole country. The horses are the poet's wishes. It is more possible that they represent the evil wishes of his, because he describes them as dark and violent.

My wishes turn to violent
Horses black as coal –³⁵

The horses – his wishes – metaphorically ride on the sky across the country. Their target is a channel with beacons that are personified at this point – they are tossing. Who is tossing? Are there two supernatural figures in the poem – God and No-God? These two ideas are certainly in opposition, just as the first stanza is full of opposites. In this regard, the competition between God and No-God might simply mean the fight of good and evil, of order and chaos, of life and death. It may also connect with violent horses in that the wishes may suggest that this kind of fight happens primarily in the poet's mind. Should he turn to God or to No-God?

Whichever wins I am happy
For God will give me bliss
But No-God will absolve me
From all I do amiss³⁶

Here the poet seems indifferent to which one of them will win in his mind. He says it is all the same, because both of them can be of benefit. God can make him happy whereas No-God can arrange that he will not feel bad for the things he does wrong. The offer from No-God may sound cynical, and perhaps the poet may see it that way, but the cynicism of a bad choice continues throughout the whole poem from this moment. In the fourth stanza, there also appears the word “conscience” which is a very important element here.

And I need not suffer conscience
If the world was made amiss.³⁷

³⁴ MacNeice, *Selected Poems*, 71.

³⁵ MacNeice, *Selected Poems*, 71.

³⁶ MacNeice, *Selected Poems*, 71.

³⁷ MacNeice, *Selected Poems*, 71.

Perhaps he simply justifies himself by saying that he does not have to have such a bad conscience if the world was ruined. This allusion to destruction cause by the war leads the poet to ask where his conscience went when the people made wrong decisions. And if someone chose to make the right one, he could reason that there are some many others around that make the wrong ones that ultimately it would not matter. And no one needs to feel bad, because this world is simply wrong. His cynicism appears even stronger here. In the next stanza he even states:

But if we are under No-God
Nothing will matter at all,
Arson and rape and murder
Must count for nothing at all.³⁸

In this is the very strength of the poem. He states that if he chose No-God, nothing would matter, even deeds like murder, rape and arson. These three are commonly connected with every big conflict, in this case with the Second World War. I think it is fair to say that the poet is suggesting society has got to the point where murders and rapes are a daily regimen and no one appears to be affected by a bad conscience. Later on in the poem, the poet appears to justify evil deeds. He says that he can do anything he wants – that it is logical if we are under No-God. The poet appears here as a prototype of a tyrannical figure who does not stop in front of anything.

Nevertheless, there are some moments when indecisions come. In the poem the stopping of the rain represents these moments:

Logic and lust together
come dimly tumbling down,
And neither God or No-God
Is either up or down.³⁹

The poet's attitude is changing throughout the poem. When the rain stops, he seems to recover and from that moment on, he denies everything what was said before about the conflict between the reasoning of God and the No-God. The rain stopped, the sunshine

³⁸ MacNeice, *Selected Poems*, 71.

³⁹ MacNeice, *Selected Poems*, 72.

came and now the poet can think differently. He says that ultimately we as people are responsible for our choices:

The word is what was given,
The world is what we make⁴⁰

MacNeice says that the world as it is now, is the result of people's deeds, and of their choices. And he states that people do not necessarily need any special metaphysical forces to make those right decisions, and that this should come naturally. The symbol he employs for the wrong thing, which is despair, indecision and bad decisions, is rain. On the contrary, he uses sunshine as the opposite and he tells that these two –the sunshine and rain– alternate, and when one comes, the other goes away. In the last stanza he again returns to the description of his wishes as horses that fly in the sky, this time in the direction of home. At that moment, the rain comes again and the poet simply lies down, listening to it. He is waiting with closed eyes for that dangerous moment to pass.

5.1.3 The Mind of the Individual — "Prayer Before Birth" Analysis

This poem shows the poet's interest in social topics and with the issues of the contemporary world at a time towards the end of the Second World War, as I previously commented in Chapter 3 of this thesis. It is told from the point of view of a child that was not born yet, but must somehow understand all the problems that a society could cause him when he is a part of it. The atmosphere of the poem is sombre and dark, and has a hopelessness and fearful quality:

I am not yet born; O hear me.
Let not the bloodsucking bat or the rat or the stoat or the
club-footed ghouel come near me.

I am not yet born, console me.
I fear that the human race may with tall walls wall me,
with strong drugs dope me, with wise lies lure me,
on black racks rack me, in blood-baths roll me.⁴¹

⁴⁰ MacNeice, *Selected Poems*, 72.

⁴¹ MacNeice, *Selected Poems*, 93.

The addresses “O hear me” and “Console me” sound like pleading before someone who stands above the human race – to God, maybe. The poet, an unborn child, wants to be safe from all the evils life could put him through. First, he pictures the evil using some monsters or fairy tale creatures that suggests a more abstract feeling. Bloodsucking bat and club-footed ghoul are distant, exotic or even mystical creatures. The rat and the stoats are evil parasites of the animal world. None of these creatures is pleasant and if we know the voice is from that of a small child, then the fear of them even increases.

Then he wants to be safe from concrete evils that human race can create for him. Abstract evil transfers into a dangerous reality that people can put him through. The child is scared of people lying to him, and he is afraid that he can believe them and that this will change his vision of world. He is afraid that people might use drugs to somehow brainwash him so that he has in command of his own sane opinions. Therefore, he could be “rolled in blood” which is again an abstract expression.

There are certain obstacles described in the poem: tall walls that people can create, drugs that they can use on him, black racks. But nothing from that has a literal meaning except from “wise lies”. The poet is afraid of people’s wise lies which are real and that could affect him and lead him to believe something untrue. He also uses the word “blood” in both of the stanzas. Once it is connected with a bloodsucking bat and then with the baths of blood in which the human race can roll him.

Similarly as in “Sunlight on the Garden”, so also in this poem some hope appears, this time in the third stanza when the poet describes elements that he sees as positive, and he wants the world to surround him with them.

I am not yet born; provide me
With water to dandle me, grass to grow for me, trees to talk
to me, sky to sing to me, birds and a white light
in the back of my mind to guide me.⁴²

The elements as water, grass, trees and sky mean nature. They are living growing things, which means that the child can have some connection with nature, which is a hope for him. There is also a symbol of light. It is not literary light, but it is “light in the back of my mind”. The child wants to keep his own sanity and judgement that would help him with decisions he must make during his life.

⁴² MacNeice, *Selected Poems*, 93.

The fourth stanza of the poem is yet another part where the poet pleads for protection from the human race. It can make us think that hope, even though it exists, is small and is easily overpowered by negative elements – otherwise, the part with the hope would continue until the rest of the poem. It does, however, not continue and its opposite, danger, increases more and more.

My treason engendered by traitors beyond me,
my life when they murder by means of my
hands, my death when they live me.⁴³

Nevertheless, this part is different because of the fear demonstrated here, and that he could actually be the dangerous element for himself quite apart from other people. He is afraid that he could be pushed into something he would not normally do because of the pressure of society and therefore it would be seen as his fault as well. Here appears the vision of people (or a nation) as a majority that make wrong decisions. It alludes to the Second World War when the many in Germany manipulated by the speeches of Hitler and by Nazi propaganda were led to believe that acts that would normally be unacceptable, like murders, racism etc., were normal.

I am not yet born; rehearse me
In the parts I must play and the cues I must take when
old men lecture me, bureaucrats hector me, mountains
frown at me, lovers laugh at me, (...) ⁴⁴

Here the poet feels hopeless. He is not pleading for strength and sanity anymore. He is instead asking the force above him to prepare him for the acts that society will expect from him. He describes how different people will want to push him somewhere, so that he will be forced to act the way they want him. He uses the word “roles” which refers to acting. He also uses the term “rehearse” about himself, that is reminiscent of some theatre play or movie in which he will have to act.

In the sixth stanza, he talks about one concrete person, not the whole society.

Let not the man who is beast or who thinks he is God

⁴³ MacNeice, *Selected Poems*, 93.

⁴⁴ MacNeice, *Selected Poems*, 93.

come near me.⁴⁵

Even though he neither mentions any name nor does concretise anything about that person, we can think, from the year the poem was written or from other clues about the war that will be discussed in the following paragraph, that this must refer to a political demagogue like Adolf Hitler.

The seventh stanza is full of expressions that allude to the war.

I am not yet born; O fill me
With strength against those who would freeze my
humanity, would dragoon me into a lethal automation,
would make me a cog in a machine, a thing with
one face, a thing (...)⁴⁶

He says here that another person can freeze his humanity – make him lose it and make him into a cruel person. “A lethal automaton” is a machine, and he does not want to be a machine without any emotions or feelings. This is what war makes out of people. He repeats the word “thing” in the poem to describe himself. This word is so impersonal and it is not normally used to describe something human. He is afraid that some people could make him “a cog in a machine” – just a part of some system.

The end of this poem is very definitive:

Let them not make me a stone and let them not spill me.
Otherwise kill me.⁴⁷

By no means does he want to be a part of society that acts, according to him, in the wrong way. He does not want to be transformed into something inhumane and do the same wrong things as a big part of the society. The last line is very powerful. He expresses that he prefers to be dead than to be a cruel and heartless person.

5.2 Other Themes (Personal Life)

To classify other themes that in some way shaped MacNeice’s life and his attitude towards the world, it is necessary here to review some important events of his life that

⁴⁵ MacNeice, *Selected poems*, 93.

⁴⁶ MacNeice, *Selected Poems*, 94.

⁴⁷ MacNeice, *Selected Poems*, 94.

affected him for many years. These will be underlined and analyzed, particularly in the poems “Carrickfergus” and “Autobiography”.

5.2.1 How “Carrickfergus“ Explains MacNeice’s Life

The poem “Carrickfergus“ is a very autobiographical poem wherein Louis MacNeice briefly describes his whole life.

He recounts how he moved with his family from Belfast to a town in Northern Ireland called Carrickfergus. He describes both places as very sunken cities and uses the words “lost sirens” for Belfast, which suggests that the place is very quiet and lost in history. About Carrickfergus he wrote:

Where the bottle-neck harbour collects the mud which jams⁴⁸

A harbour that collects mud may be a metaphor for the town – it is so quiet that mud is allowed to settle there.

Further on, he reveals us some key moments from history of the city, that it was attacked by the Normans who later occupied it, and who built a castle there to practically take over the land. In this way some voices from history are still present in Carrickfergus. He also mentions the relations of different nations living in that part of Ireland.

The Scotch Quarter was a line of residential houses
But the Irish Quarter was a slum for the blind and halt.⁴⁹

Here we can see the differences in society. The Scots were generally richer than the Irish, who generally lived poorer lives in slums where the environment was not so clean. MacNeice says that the rivers were yellow because of factory production and that everything was old and dark. And in these surroundings MacNeice spent his childhood.

As a son of the rector he had a special position. His father served in the Anglican Church and that this gave their family certain respectability and meant they could be included in the richer sphere of the society.

⁴⁸ MacNeice, *Selected Poems*, 24.

⁴⁹ MacNeice, *Selected Poems*, 24.

I was the rector's son, born to the Anglican order,
Banned for ever from the candles of the Irish poor,⁵⁰

Nevertheless, even though the problems of poverty of the common Irish people did not directly apply to the MacNeice, the nation was still one of his chief concerns. He never stopped caring about the ordinary people. This showed in the style of his writing, as well as in his themes connected with the Second World War.

He also mentions a war in this poem, but according to the date and the fact that he still talks about his childhood, this can be supposed to be World War I. The war affected Carrickfergus much as it did many other parts of Britain and other European countries. MacNeice shows from the style of his writing that he hated war and that he thought bad times would never end. He describes the soldiers with their arms, as it all came unexpected.

I thought that the war would last for ever and sugar
Be always rationed and that never again (...) ⁵¹

At around that time, MacNeice moved to London with thoughts that the situation would not improve. But the war finished in 1918. These were the main incidents that appeared during his childhood and his young age in Carrickfergus. He ends this autobiographical poem with the lines in which he says that this was his life and this is where he came from. And all those events equipped him for his further life.

I went to school in Dorset, the world of parents
Contracted into a puppet world of sons
Far from the mill girls, the smell of porter, the salt-mines
And the soldiers with their guns.⁵²

In his last stanza, everything is summarized as it describes his relationship with his parents and lifts the war situation. The last line is the most striking: MacNeice finishes this poem by describing the soldiers. All the events are framed by the war, that it is the biggest event of all. It might also resonate in that another war conflict would inevitably come about, and that MacNeice was predicting the Second World War. The fact that

⁵⁰ MacNeice, *Selected Poems*, 24.

⁵¹ MacNeice, *Selected Poems*, 24.

⁵² MacNeice, *Selected Poems*, 25.

“Carrickfergus” was written in the year 1937 shortly before the beginning of the Second World War appears to confirm this.

5.2.2 “Autobiography”, The Biggest Turning Point in the Life of Louis MacNeice

“Autobiography” was written in 1940, what was many years after MacNeice’s mother’s death. In the poem the poet describes his childhood how it was almost idyllic before the big turning point came – the death of his mother. He also mentions his relationship with his father. These two things might have had the biggest impact on him and would have changed his early life, affected his behaviour and also his work. It is a very moving and personal poem that shows author’s deep feelings.

In the way he describes his father as a person, we can see that his appears to have been a strict man:

My father made the walls resound,
He wore his collar the wrong way round.⁵³

His father was a rector of a Church of Ireland in Carrickfergus where the family lived. As a rector he was very hard on his son. In contrast, his mother was the opposite. MacNeice wrote:

My mother wore a yellow dress;
Gently, gently, gentleness.⁵⁴

His mother is pictured as a gentle woman in yellow dress, a colour not unintentionally selected – the colour yellow is gentle and can be seen as a symbol not only of harmony, but also of happiness. In the poem, his mother is described as the very opposite of his father. She is gentle and delicate, whereas he is a very strict father who is hard on his family. Later on he describes the disappearance of his mother and how it affected his life.

When I woke they did not care;
Nobody, nobody was there.⁵⁵

⁵³ MacNeice, *Selected Poems*, 88.

⁵⁴ MacNeice, *Selected Poems*, 88.

⁵⁵ MacNeice, *Selected Poems*, 88.

It is possible to detect a heartbreaking fear and sadness that came with the poet's loss of his mother, for in her he lost the person that would most care about him. His strict father was not the one who would psychically support him, but the loneliness that MacNeice suffered as a child is expressed here. The poem itself is very lyrical. It has more regular structure than the majority of the other poems by the same author. There is also one line that repeats after each stanza of the poem. That line is:

Come back early or never come.⁵⁶

It sounds like some echo resounding at the end of each stanza. What does it mean? Is it directed at MacNeice's mother, specifically to the memory of her after she passed away? He is clearly so moved by his loss of her that he wants her back with an immediacy. Nevertheless, he wishes that time to be sooner, or he says that she should never come. A shadow of a sad resigned anger is noticed here.

The first two words "come back" does not need a deeper explanation for they express the poet's wish to have his mother back with him. The last two words, "never come", are more perturbing, for they must mean the exact opposite. That he will get used to her absence and learn to live without her presence and even her memory.

It is possible that the two opposites were competing in the mind of the poet and created a great confusion with the fact that he was a small child in the time when this personal tragedy happened to him. On the one side, he wishes his mother back, but on the other side, with the common sense he knows, that she can never come back. That makes the poem even more moving for the reader.

⁵⁶ MacNeice, *Selected Poems*, 88.

6 Conclusion

In this thesis, selected poems by Louis MacNeice were analyzed with respect to the period he lived in and the ambience that was surrounding him. Also other examples of poems by various contemporary authors were given to describe the events and mood of the period of 1937-1945. Some main themes in MacNeice's and other author's poems were specified. Finally, I divided the main themes found in Louis MacNeice's poetry in the two main areas – the themes connected with the events occurring during the Second World War and before it. Those themes were political, connected with the announcement of war, and the most salient one was the effect the war had on an individual. The second set of themes was taken from the poet's life, mostly events from his early childhood that shaped him as a person.

The themes were divided and proved with concrete examples from the poems selected to the analysis. Of the poems from the first category, "Sunlight on the Garden", "London Rain" and "Prayer Before Birth" contained direct allusions to the impact of the Second World War, with reference to times coming or to times in the past. In all three poems could be shown the inner difficulties that occur when individuals are forced to deal with the threat of conflict and with its consequences.

In the next section the poems "Carrickfergus" and "Autobiography" contained concrete and truthful facts from MacNeice's life. The place where the poet spent his childhood coupled with his personal tragedy of losing his mother at a very young age was formative in MacNeice's personality right through his adulthood. It taught him empathy and an ability to feel deeply about the events that happened either to him or to other people and this ability can be clearly shown in his poetry.

What was also crucial for MacNeice's poetry was his long and deep friendship with W. H. Auden, his contemporary and his great inspiration. It is shown in this work that they mutually inspired each other in their writing and that they also had similar opinions on the world.

It can be stated that in this thesis the main themes of MacNeice's poetry between the years 1937 and 1945, of the connection of individuals with the effects of the war, and of the nature of empathy as a result of personal tragedy, were clearly underlined and it was explained why he chose to write about such things. A highly important source of his inspiration was the contemporary political situation before and during the Second World War, and the life-changing effects of these events, in addition to the "passive"

things that happened to him, like the occurrences in his childhood that also were formative in shaping his character. What cannot be overlooked was that his friendship with W. H. Auden helped to inspire him, develop his style of writing, and promote the choice of the certain themes. And this is one of the primary reasons for his inclusion as a member of Auden Group and one of the better 1930s poets.

7 České shrnutí

V této bakalářské práci byly analyzovány vybrané básně od Louise MacNeice v kontextu doby, ve které básník žil, a prostředí, které ho obklopovalo. Předloženy byly i ukázky z jiných básní od různých autorů té doby, aby pomohly dokreslit události daného období mezi lety 1937 a 1945. Díky tomu byla specifikována některá z hlavních témat básní Louise MacNeice a některých jeho současníků. Nakonec jsem hlavní témata nalezená v MacNeiceových básních rozdělila do dvou částí. V první z nich byla témata spojená s příchodem druhé světové války a událostmi těsně před ní. Tato témata byla spíše politická, ohlašující příchod války a také to hlavní – vliv událostí války na jednotlivce. Druhé zařazení souviselo více s MacNeiceovým životem, s událostmi, kterými si prošel jako malý chlapec, a které ho ovlivnily v dospělosti.

Toto rozdělení témat v MacNeiceových básních bylo podloženo konkrétními příklady básní zvolených k analýze. V první kategorii to byly básně “Sunlight on the Garden“, “London Rain“ a “Prayer Before Birth“. Ve všech třech byla zřejmá zmínka o konfliktu, ať už šlo o hrozbu války nebo skutečný příchod druhé světové války. V každé z těchto básní se objevují jednotlivci, kteří vnitřně bojují s hrozbou války nebo s důsledky jejího příchodu.

Ve druhé sekci, v básních “Carrickfergus“ a “Autobiography“ se objevují pravdivá doložená fakta z MacNeiceova života. Mezi ně patří popis městečka ve kterém básník trávil své rané dětství a také jedna z největších a nejbolestivějších událostí b jeho životě – smrt jeho matky. Tyto události ho formovaly jako osobnost a důsledky si odnesl až do dospělosti. Kruté události ho naučily empatii, daly mu jeho schopnost hluboce se vcítit do situace, ať už jde o něj samotného nebo o druhé. Tuto schopnost častokrát ukazuje i ve své tvorbě.

Zásadní pro MacNeiceovu poezii bylo také jeho dlouholeté a hluboké přátelství s W. H. Audenem, jeho současníkem, který pro něj představoval obrovský zdroj inspirace. V uměleckých dílech obou je vidět, že vzájemně inspirovali jeden druhého, měli podobný styl psaní a sdíleli i některé názory.

Může se tvrdit, že v této práci byla specifikována hlavní témata MacNeicových básní v období 1937-1945 a vysvětleno, co autora vedlo k psaní o této tematice. K důvodům patřilo, že jeho hlavní zdroj inspirace pramenil v politické situaci těsně před druhou světovou válku, potom v samotném válečném konfliktu a událostech, které ho provázely. Dále čerpal z věcí, které nemohl ovlivnit, ale které se mu staly, například

smrt jeho matky nebo prostředí, ve kterém vyrůstal. Nesmíme zapomenout na jeho přátelství s W. H. Audenem, které také představovalo důležitou inspiraci pro MacNeiceův život a tvorbu. Tyto věci, které jsou zde vyjmenované jsou důvodem proto, že dnes Louise MacNeice známe jako člena Audenova kruhu a zařazujeme ho mezi básníky třicátých let.

8 Bibliography

Auden, W. H. *Another Time Auden*. New York: Random House, 1940.

Auden, W. H. *Selected Essays*. London: Faber and Faber, 1962.

Carter, Ronald and John McRae, ed. *The Routledge History of Literature in English: Britain and Ireland*. London: Routledge, 1997.

Clout, Hugh, ed. *The Times London History Atlas*. London: BCA, 1991.

Darwin, Bernard, ed. *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953.

Eatwell, Roger. *Fascism: A History*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1995.

Kunhardt Jr., Philip B. *Life World War II*. Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1990.

Ibiblio. "Anglo-Polish Agreement." Accessed June 21, 2016.

<http://ibiblio.org/pha/bb/bb-078.html>.

Imperial War Museums. "How Churchill Led Britain To Victory In The Second World War." Accessed June 18, 2016.

<http://www.iwm.org.uk/history/how-churchill-led-britain-to-victory-in-the-second-world-war.html>.

Lloyd, Cher. *Sorry I'm Late*. New York: Epic Records, 2014.

MacNeice, Louis. *Louis MacNeice Selected Poems*. Edited by Michael Longley. London: Faber and Faber, 1988.

Macnicol, John. "The evacuation of schoolchildren." In *War and Social Change: British Society in the Second World War*, edited by Harold L. Smith, 3-31. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986.

Shakespeare, William. *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*. Compiled. London: The Waverley Book Company Ltd, 1947.

Wain, John, ed. *The Oxford Library of English Poetry*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.