

Auden and Shamlou's Subversive Voices against Capitalism: A New Historicist Study

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Abstract

Under the influence of their main advocate, Stephen Greenblatt, the new historicist critics have almost always argued that in the interactions between literary texts and their socio-political milieu, texts act rebelliously to highlight the falsifications hidden beneath the verisimilitude of the accepted reality of an era. Applying such a remark on the poems of W. H. Auden and Ahmad Shamlou—the former being a British poet, and the latter an Iranian poet—the researcher aims to display how selected poems of these two poets act subversively to show up what claims to be hidden beneath the reality of a socio-historical culture called capitalism. In fact, in the present study, the researcher shows how the two poets provide the readers not with the fantasy of growth and improvement—these being advertised by the capitalists' authorities—but with the despondencies that the capitalist system has brought about for the people.

Key Words: Acquisitive Impulse, Bourgeois, Capitalism, Deterritorialisation, Destratification, Discourse.

1. Introduction

In *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (1926), R. H. Tawney (1880-1962) declares that business in the modern sense of the word developed only when societies were given a naturalistic instead of a religious explanation, or when science and reason took the place of revelation. According to Twaney, a century after Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527), a dramatist and political theorist, had emancipated the state from religion, the doctrine of the self-contained department with laws of its own began generally to be applied to the world of business relations (18-24). Twaney also argues that modern economic history seems to begin in an age which its Reformations—at least in economical sphere—represented 'the triumph of the commercial spirit over the traditional social ethics of Christendom' (92). Thus the secularisation of the political thought and social theory which were the fruit being yielded in the sixteenth century, sown the seeds for a secularised and a scientific economy, which, according to Twaney, flattered its followers with the 'smiling illusion of progress won by the mastery of the material environment', 'private property', 'freedom of contract', and "competition" (Tawney 227- 230).

Yet, Twaney claims that this individualistic, competitive situation did not go undisputed. The Humanists, as he puts it forward, turned a stream of pungent criticism on the social evils of the age of economic and financial enterprise, regarding it as an instrument of wealth and luxury (90-91). Hence, the sixteenth century, as the age of economic revolution; and the nineteenth century, as the epoch of industrial upheaval, were welcomed by those who fancied progress, yet struggled by those who deemed the economical and the industrial enterprises as contrary to the humanity and spirituality of mankind.

2. Auden: A Critic of Modern Economical and Industrial Culture

In fact, one of the critics who could not accept the values of these economic and industrial revolutions was Auden—a poet that most of his poems seem to be attempts to question and defy the spirit of capitalism and industrialism. In fact, it appears that most of Auden's poems, especially those of the thirties, stand in marked opposition to the materialized and industrialized spirit of their age.

In fact, As John Van Druten claims in "He Bridged the Atlantic" (1945): "There is in Auden a note of awful warning, a series of symbols of doom and disaster hidden in the innocent and humdrum trapping of material living ... " (361).

Thus, it appears that not only does Auden not find capitalism an appealing civilization, but he also regards it as a culture deserved to be struggled and rejected. In short, whereas the capitalists' authorities attempt at picturing this culture as a winning and promising civilization, Auden aims at showing the very idea of advancement in this society as illusions behind which almost always pest exist. Indeed, to Auden, as he versifies it in number "10" (1930) in *Poems* (1930), this culture is:

A polar peril, a prodigious alarm,
Scattering the people, as torn-up paper
Rags and utensils in a sudden gust,
Seized with immeasurable neurotic dread. (*SP*, 15)

Hence, as it occurs to Auden, this is not progress but malaise, 'the immeasurable neurotic dread', which is spreading among people, 'scattering the people', in the triumphant of economic and industrial life of capitalism. Thus, in opposition to the so termed fantasy of improvement, being advertised by the capitalists' authorities, Auden seems to be trying to capture the individuals' mind to the despondencies that this materialized and industrialized life has brought about for the people.

To Auden, one of the negative effects of capitalism on the life of the modern men has been the creation of pecuniary spirits. In fact, as Auden conceives it, capitalism is an emblem of a mercantile society, in which people experience a shift in the value of money, and, thereby, in the order of consciousness. As Auden argues in *The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays* (1968), capitalism is a culture in which money has ceased to be a convenient medium of exchange and has become a form of social power that can be gained or lost. Hence, in the new economical system, social power can be derived from the accumulation of capital and wealth. As a result, the presence of wealth equals gain and fortune, and the absence of it loss (218-220). Therefore, as Auden maintains, with the development of societies from feudal to capital people have arguably experienced a value shift of money from being an object of trade to an object of power, and this in its own turn has awakened a new order of awareness that gives priority to the accumulation of capital and therefore social power. To Auden, as Henry Bamford Parkes notes in "An Expatriate view" (1933), capitalism is a culture which is "organized mainly for the encouragement and satisfaction of the acquisitive instinct; other human impulses cannot usually be expressed in form provided by society and are therefore liable to be frustrated" (125). Therefore, it appears that Auden's fury against the capitalist society stems from his recognition of the fact that the only 'aspiration' which sounds to gain the main concern in a capitalist society is the satisfaction of what Bamford Parkes calls 'acquisitive instinct'. In fact, a number of Auden's poems, especially those of the thirties, give the impression that individuals in a capitalist system have, almost solely, been constructed to believe that 'money' and the 'possession of worldly objects' are the keys to freedom, power, success and ,thus, happiness in life.

In other words, Auden regards capitalism as a milieu which looks up to money-orientated characters—those individuals who are solely conscious of the desires that are conductive aspects to economical gains, and are ignorant of the feelings that are inconsequential factors in these achievements. In fact, as Auden reveals in *The Sea and the Mirror* (1943), it is in a capitalist civilization that what looks to be in plain sight is:

Greed showing shamelessly her naked money,
And all love's wondering eloquence debased
To a collector's slang, smartness in furs,
And Beauty scratching miserably for food ... (*CP*, 157)

Therefore, Auden appears to conceive of capitalism as a culture in which Greed and Voraciousness are the instincts taking the upper hand; yet, other human inclinations like love and beauty, which used to embellish the human spirit, occupy no place.

In "14" (1930) in *Poems*, for instance, as Fuller contends in *W. H. Auden: A Commentary* (1998), Auden is in part showing sarcastically how love in a capitalist society is linked with materialism and acquisitiveness of money (80). Indeed, it is in the first stanza of this poem that Auden speaks of the capitalistic version of love:

What's in your mind, my dove, my coney;
Is it making of love or counting of money,
Or raid on the jewels, the plants of a thief? (*SP*, 19)

Hence, it looks as if in a capitalist empire if there is anything to be in love with, that thing would be the worldly and materialistic impulse. In fact, it is in such a state of affairs, that even the spiritual and the religious love sounds to be moved to the chair of affections for worldly and materialistic profit. This is what has been shown, in part, in "Miss Gee" (1937):

Let me tell you a little story
 About Miss Edith Gee;
 She lived in Clevedon Terrace
 At Number 83.....
 She'd a velvet hat with trimmings,
 And a dark-grey serge costume;
 She lived in Clevedon Terrace
 In a small bed-sitting room.
 She'd a purple mac for wet days,
 A green umbrella too to take,
 She'd a bicycle with shopping basket
 And a harsh back-pedal brake.
 The Church of Saint Aloysius
 Was not so very far;
 She did a lot of knitting,
 Knitting for the Church Bazaar.... (SP, 56)

Hence, what seems to be dominant in the description of an economical character like 'Miss Gee' is the materialistic description, the sketch of her costume and things alike. Even when it comes to the account of church, this place does not appear to be the portrayal of a location which is for one's saintly love; nevertheless, it is an area where people fulfil their economic needs.

In short, for the economic man in a capitalist society this is arguably the accumulation of capital and wealth which sounds to be at the top of his / her to-do list. In fact, to Auden, as he shows it in part of his verse play *The Dog Beneath the Skin* (1932, 1934?), in a capitalist society the importance of capital reaches to the point that the economic characters are ready to sacrifice everything, let alone love, to gain money; indeed, it seems to be in such a point in time that

The Splendid and the proud
 Naked stand before the crowd
 And the losing gambler gains
 And the beggar entertains" (SP, 41)

Therefore, as Auden conjures it up, the new life of mankind is in a way that everything—even human dignity—is at the service of money and its achievement. Differently put, it is in the chorus part of the above mentioned play that Auden perceives of modern man as a character who "is Changed by his living"; an individual whose "concern today is for that which yesterday did not occur" (ibid, 38). Thus, as discussed so far, in the new economical order, the new concern that looks to be occupying a central place in the inner and outer life of the individuals is money.

Yet, to Auden, the accumulation of capital is not the only new concern that has occurred in the new life of mankind. In fact, in a so termed materialistic era, there are a number of other interests being created for the individuals. Indeed, to Auden, the advent of capitalism and its industry have resulted in the spread of the manufactured items, and that, in its own turn has caused the creation of desirous individuals, miss Gee like characters, whose materialistic desires are not quenched but by the ever consumption of the manufactured goods. Indeed, as Mendelson sees it, to Auden the industrial age is responsible for the creation of bourgeois individualism—a desire that urges the individuals towards ever 'new interests' and 'new desires' (EA, 174-176). Thus, for Auden, in the so called triumphant age of industrialism, especially industrialism in a capitalist society, people have been turned into bourgeois individuals—characters whose new concerns are possibly the satisfaction of their perpetual 'new interest' and 'new desire'.

Actually, as a number of Auden's poems suggest, in past, a man, was defined as a male figure who worked hard—and this work probably was for his natural need, his requirements to be alive—but today a modern character is a figure who is not a man of action; indeed, this character looks to be the one whose salient concern is conceivably responding to his so termed false natural needs or desires. In fact, in "5" (1929) in *Poems* Auden depicts, in part, one of these bourgeois individuals, as if referring to all the other bourgeois members of a capitalist era:

He is not that returning conqueror,
Nor ever the poles' circumnavigator.
But poised between shocking falls on razor-edge
Has taught himself this balancing subterfuge
Of the accosting profile, the erect carriage. (SP, 4)

As Fuller avers, here readers are given some accounts of an inflexible, precarious, and evasive character, a chaperon who is not a man of action (55). Indeed, this character is probably like the one in no. "VIII", a sonnet in *In Time of War* (1938), who has "turned his field in to a meeting place" and has "formed a mobile money-changer's face", and also has "lived expensively" (SP, 68). Therefore, in modern age, notably the age of the ruling capitalism, most of the individuals have changed their lives into an easy life of gain and spend.

Actually, as Auden puts it in the "Unknown Citizen" (1939), in the modern age, especially the age of capitalism, these characters are the ones that, "in the modern sense of an old-fashioned word" are credited as having some of the important characteristics of being "saint": they are the ones who possess "...everything necessary to the Modern Man, / A gramophone, a radio, a car and a frigidaire", and also their "reactions to advertisements" are "normal in every way" (SP, 85). Therefore, unlike the old ages when people were mostly valued for their religious deeds, or heroic actions, the new age of capitalism sounds to give priority and credit to those who seek their happiness and success in economical and consuming action. Indeed, it sounds as if Auden sees eye to eye with Susan Santag (1933-2004) when in her book *Illness as Metaphor* (1978) she introduces capitalism as a society in which "refusal to consume or spend" is considered "abnormal growth, regression of energy" (63). Thus, like Susan Santag, Auden regards capitalism as a culture in which the life of those who display demurral to the materialistic standard of living is, almost always, judged a failure. On the contrary, in such a milieu, the existence of those who show eagerness to the very acquisitive impulses is advertised a success—these people are regarded as 'saints'.

But, the question that may occur is that in reality, unaffected by the ideologies and advertisement of capitalism, 'do these bourgeois individuals live a life of success, happiness, and freedom?' In fact, what is arguably eye caching—in the reality that Auden divulges in most of his poems—is that almost no one of these bourgeois characters is living a happy life; at least, almost none of Auden's poems talks about their happiness with certainty. Indeed, in contrast to the capitalists' statistics that depicts successful and happy lives of the bourgeois, almost never in his poems does Auden talk of the bourgeoisie happiness with certainty—as if demanding the readers to look with suspicious eyes at what is alleged to be the victorious life of the bourgeois middle class. In "5" in the poems, for example, the way Auden talks about the freedom and the real happiness of the bourgeois character is with doubt:

Watch any day his nonchalant pauses, see
His dextrous handling of a wrap as he
Steps after into cars, the beggar's envy.
"There is a free one," many say, but err. (SP, 4)

So, As Fuller notes about this poem, here we are given a caricatured member of a capitalist society, an emotionally constipated middle class who is an apt example of other evasive and precarious members of his society (55). But, even this carefree middle class who is 'the beggar's envy' is not shown, to be a free and happy person in a capitalist society; although many may say ' he is the free one', this poem gives an account of his freedom with a doubt, saying 'but err'.

Actually, the way Auden speaks about the living of bourgeois individuals is not always with doubt; indeed, a number of his poems talk about the frustrated lives of these characters with assurance. As Auden perceives it, the life of bourgeois individuals is more like an absurd and frustrated living than a happy and successful one. Indeed, "9" (1931) in the *Poems* epitomises in part such a character of late capitalism, asking:

Here am I Here are you:
 But what does it mean? What are we
 going to do? (*SP*, 10)

In fact, as Jarrell opines in the review of this piece

The *I* of the poem is supposed to be anonymous and typical, a lay-figure of late capitalism; he has not kept even the dignity of rhetoric, but speaks in a style that is a blank parody of popular songs. He has arrived at the end of his own blind alley with a wife, a car, a mother-fixation, a vacation, and no use for any of them (36).

Therefore, as Jarrell argues, the above piece by Auden shows in part that, unlike what was promised, the materialistic living has failed to bring the individuals success and happiness. In fact, these characters seem to be the ones that more often than not keep complaining about their lives, the monotonous lives in which there seems to be neither love nor hope:

A bird used to visit this shore:
 It isn't going to come any more.
 I've come a very long way to prove
 No land, no water, and no love.
 Here am I, here are you:
 But what does it mean? What are we going to do? (*EA*, 42-3)

Hence, it is in this seemingly cruel and loveless life that even the bourgeois individuals—those who are advertised to have a free and happy life—appear to be trapped, and to live their absurd life, without anyone caring about these individuals' other feeling than the acquisitive ones. In fact, it sounds as if, for Auden the idea of consumption and the ideology of bourgeois individualism are not equal to happiness; on the contrary, they are wishes that will arguably lead to the more consumption on the part of the bourgeois individuals, and more production, and therefore higher interest, on the part of capitalism. In fact, as Rainer Emig argues in *W. H. Auden: Towards a Post Modern Poetics* (2000), to Auden, the capitalists demand is to "subordinate the individuals to the hegemonic demands of a mass market, such as consumer capitalism and its related media empires" (192). Therefore, it appears that what in part has caused Auden's rage against the capitalist society is his recognition of the fact that in a capitalist society the idea of happiness, freedom, and success are debatably nothing but illusions helping the capitalists reach their end of subordinating the individuals to the capitalists' markets and manufactured items. In other words, to Auden, the idea of the creation of a paradise on earth—a paradise gained by the consumption of the manufactured goods—was nothing, but an illusion helping the late capitalist culture get out of the ditch of being completely obsolete after the crash of the stock market, this being the time when production was far more than the consumption and the industrial as well as economical condition was failing its failure. Therefore, as a number of Auden's poems suggest, what was promised at the beginning of the new economical and industrial life, this being a successful and winning industrial and economical situation as well as a successful and happy life of the individuals—later proved to be just illusions.

In fact, it sounds to be in this effort to draw the readers' attention to the mal products of the late capitalist culture, Auden tries to give the readers a panoramic view of the neurotic and almost doomed society in which they are living, a technique that Auden is said to have learnt from Thomas Hardy (1840-1928). In fact, as Auden himself puts it in verse in number "10" in the *Poems*, he observes "the immeasurable neurotic dread" of an era "as the hawk sees it or as the helmeted airman"(14). Hence, he sounds to be giving his readers sweeping shots of the sick society under scrutiny, most of these shots being taken by an aerial photographer to provide the readers with wider perspectives of the very social milieu. As Stan Smith argues in the introduction to *Cambridge Companion to Auden* (2006), Auden seems "to look down from a high altitude on the neuroses of Western Civilization and the sicknesses of capitalism" (17). He also asserts that Auden defines "the stance of a generation, looking down on its culture with disdainful detachment" (4). Therefore, Auden alludes to social ills and crises from an aloof position, a stance that seems help him present the readers with objective and in-depth records of the social and industrial failures.

One of the poems in which Auden beholds, from above, the chaotic situation of the capitalist culture is number "1" (1927) in *Poems*:

Who stands, the crux left of the watershed,
 On the wet road between the chafing grass
 Below him sees dismantled washing floors,
 Snatches of tramline running to the wood,
 An industry already comatose,
 Yet sparsely living. A ramshackle engine.... (SP, 1)

Actually, Auden's present occupation sounds to be that of showing the collapse of a civilization, the decline of a society. He seems to be picturing a social dereliction, a failure being epitomised in the industrial 'Watershed' of 'dismantled washing floors', 'snatches of tramline', and an 'industry already comatose'. As Patrick Deane writes in his essay "Auden's England" (2006), this poem displays that the "Relics of an industry now 'comatose' litter the landscape" (26). Thus, in this poem, the industrial landscape is perceived not as something that the capitalists' authorities boast about its progress; but as 'dismantled', 'comatose', and 'ramshackle', a decaying industry.

As a matter of fact, the promise of running a successful business and industry, which is said to be held out by the capitalists' authorities, seems to remain unfulfilled, at least in so far as most of Auden's poems witness the situation. As it happens, apart from the already quoted poem in which Auden talks about an unsuccessful industry, almost whenever Auden wants to take up the very issue of talking about capitalism, he willy-nilly supplies the reader with as many disappointing images as possible. To stay with the matter of the decaying industry, which is claimed to be one of the products of the capitalism, discussing number "22" (1930) in *Poems* seems to be another apt example. In this poem, once again, the chaotic industrial situation appears to be accentuated, since the scenery being exhibited to the readers is a landscape filled with:

Smokeless chimneys, damaged bridges, rotting wharves and choked canals,
 Tramlines buckled, smashed trucks lying on their side across the rails;
 Power station locked, deserted, since they drew the boiler fires,
 Pylon falling or subsiding, trailing dead high-tension wires; (SP, 27)

As John Baylay maintains in "W. H. Auden" (1978), this poem shows that "Everything is hopeless and the country is going to the dogs" (357). So, the fictional promise of experiencing and enjoying industrial and economic development and progress is displayed to be given way to witnessing moments of crises and disasters. To put the whole thing in a nut shell, to Auden, as Jarrell avers: the capitalists "represented business, industrialism, exploitation—and worse than that a failing business, an industrialism whose machines were already beginning to rust" (35). Therefore, the opposition to the capitalists' business and industry, especially a failing business and industry, appears to be endemic in Auden's poems, since, as Auden perceives it, this so called business and industry have created not a progressed situation but a hopeless one. So, unlike the capitalist authority who attempted at picturing a winning situation in a capitalist society, Auden aims at shattering this illusion by portraying the seemingly failing package which this culture has had to offer to its inhabitant, this probably being a failing industry as well as unredeemed humanity.

3. Shamlou and Subversion against Capitalism

In fact, in grappling with capitalism, Shamlou's criticism is more destined towards blaming capitalism as a system in which money plays a primordial role. To Shamlou, in the genesis of capitalism, the power of money is to the point that it bears the stamp of an authority, becomes the most important means to gain power and success. As Shamlou highlights it in a number of his poems, under the condition of capitalism, money makes a large difference—meaning that the accumulation and the presence of it will assure fortune, success, as well as power, and the loss or the absence of it will cause desperation. It is actually in a part of poem "4" (1965?), a poem in *Aida: The tree & the Dagger & the Dream* (1964-65), that Shamlou refers the readers to this seemingly overriding power of money in a capitalist society. In this poem, he introduces capitalism as:

The age when hands
Do not make the destiny
And will power
Does not take you anywhere
The age that the guaranty of your prosperity
In the graft that you pocket
Cause of your power
From the second-hand dealers
And the managers of the brothels; (CP, 519)

Hence, as the above lines show, Shamlou regards capitalism as an age when the only thing that will guarantee the individuals' victory is capital. In other words, in Shamlou's opinion, in a capitalist society it is not the individuals' endeavour that guarantees their success and fortune, but either the possession of money or the relation to those who have amassed capital. In fact, it seems that in this poem Shamlou wants to introduce capitalism as a system that has created a situation in which mottos like 'do your best, God will do the rest', and 'no pain, no gain' have given way to mottos like: 'do your best, Money will do the rest', and 'no wealth, no gain'.

In Shamlou's opinion, it is under such condition, a situation with the absolute power of 'money' and 'material gains', that what characters are led to think of is the accumulation of 'money' and 'capital'. As Shamlou versifies it in number "3" (1966), a poem in *Phoenix in the Rain* (1375-76), in this particular socio-economic formation, the individuals' dreams have become limited to:

...Piling up
The more the better
Yes
Cause the empty hands
Are just
Good for hitting on the head (CP, 609)

Thus in Shamlou's opinion, since in a capitalist sovereignty, the presence of money will assure the individuals' progress, and the absence of it will spell the failure of them, the desire of the characters is nothing but a desperate attempt to amass wealth and therefore, power. It is, in fact, in a part of number "4" (1965?), a poem in *Aida* that Shamlou refers the readers to this dominant spirit in a capitalist society. To Shamlou, in such a society, people are made in a way that:

... in their shop of faithlessness
Every thing
Can be bought
In lieu of a coin ... (CP, 520)

Therefore, it seems that in a capitalist society the accumulation of 'money' is what has occupied a central place in most of the individuals' mind. In fact, this explanation that Shamlou gives about capitalist era parallels Max Weber's¹ (1864-1920) account of a society under capitalism. It is, indeed, in his book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (2000) that Weber considers capitalism as "an approach to the acquisition of money in which reason is tasked with calculating the outcomes for profit and loss in any and every situation" (64). Indeed, like Weber, Shamlou blames capitalism as a system in which people's way of thinking is shaped in a way that the only crucial desire in any and every situation is 'material gain'. Shamlou's poem "An Anecdote" (1986), which, on the surface, seems to be a poem about a wedding party, is said to be a poem which sheds light on materialistic spirit in a capitalist society. In this poem, the minstrel exhibits a characteristic very much like the other money-oriented characters, characters that are the products of capitalism.

¹ . Weber was a [German sociologist](#) and a political economist, who profoundly influenced social theory, social research and the discipline of sociology itself.

In *The Name of All your Poems: The Life and the Poetry of Ahmad Shamlou* (2004) Ali Pashaei notes that in this poem, the musician takes advantage of the presence of guests and the wedding party to reach his aim of receiving money; what he really cares about is not the happiness of the guests at the party, but the gift of money handed out to him. Pshaei argues further that the minstrel also makes an unfair use of the pleasant song of the lark to make his music seem nice, and to coax people into giving him more money. But, in Pashaei's view, what is important is that at the end of the party, when the minstrel takes advantage of the pleasant song of the bird; and, therefore, gets his share of money, he does not even look bothered seeing the bird dead on the floor (991-5). Hence, this minstrel can be considered as a typical character under the condition of capitalism, a character whose first and foremost matter of interest is his or her own benefit. Parts of the poem "An Anecdote" are as follow:

The minstrel came in
 On the handle of his musical instrument a lively lark
 The cheery guests
 started dancing ...
 The bride
 Was taken away with the arm of covetousness.
 The tired sunny gests dispersed away.
 The minstrel returned
 With his instrument
 The last plectrum in his mind
 A pile of handout in his hat.
 The tumultuous hall deserted
 With oily, dirty table cloth and
 The seat turned upside down and
 The quiet platform of the minstrel
 And a dead lark
 On the cold carpet of the tile. (*CP*, 963-964)

In fact, in Shamlou's view, capitalism has falsified thoughts; moreover, it is a culture the development of which has brought with it the inhumane living of most of the individuals—a living in which most of the individuals only care about materialistic achievement; a life in which social relations are constituted by money and economic gains. It is indeed in a part of number "1" (1965?), a poem in *Aida* that Shamlou refers the readers to this aspect of life—this being a life in which:

.... principle
 Is but a memoir
 Or a book on the bookshelf
 And a friend
 Is a ladder
 You can put your leg on his shoulder
 To release yourself from the cavity ... (*CP*, 509)

Therefore, Shamlou deems capitalism as an era in which the idea of circles of friends and love of others are no more valued; for him, capitalism is a system in which most of the people are in favour of private profit, and a capitalist society is an era which is the scene of the reification of human relations. In fact, what Shamlou maintains in the above lines is like what Fred Rush² (b. 1956) argues in his essay "The Conceptual Foundation of Early Critical Theory" (2004). In this essay, Rush notes that in a capitalist society the social status of happiness and pleasure is reduced to the satisfaction of atomistic plus egotistic desires (29). Hence, in a capitalist age, these are the egotistic desires that are counted worthy; moreover, in such an era, social relations are valued to the point that they help individuals reach these desires.

² Fred Rush has studied philosophy at Columbia University and the University of Munich. He has held visiting research appointments at Cambridge and Munich universities. He is the recipient of Mellon, Fulbright and ACLS fellowships. His main research interests are in Kant, post-Kantian German philosophy, aesthetics, and social and political philosophy.

In fact, Shamlou broadens his criticism of inhumane living in a capitalist jurisdiction when he talks about the abolishment of once precious human attributes—characteristics like heroism and bravery—in a capitalist system. To him, in the age of capitalism, money becomes a touchstone against which characteristics related to human spirit—aspects like courage, bravery, friendship, etc.—are judged. As Shamlou versifies it in "Nocturne" (1965), a poem from the already mentioned volume *Aida*, it is in a capitalist era that:

... human 'n humanity
 Like date 'n lentil
 Is measured with the scale of gold, ...
 And courage is calculated with the silver 'n gold
 Which you have in your leather bag; — (CP, 508)

Hence, since the attitude of people in a capitalist society is towards what capitalism encourages—this being valuing economic as well as materialistic desires—humane features like courage and heroism, which once used to embellish the human soul, are dead and devoid of meaning. Therefore, in Shamlou's opinion, the function of money in a capitalist society is to the point that it affects the individuals' consciousness completely; to him, in such an era, almost every aspect of living in any and every situation is reduced to calculable events; in fact, these aspects are valued if they are related to material gains. Indeed, what Shamlou argues is similar to the points that Raymond Geuss³ (b. 1946) highlights about people's consciousness in a capitalist society. In his article "Dialectics and the Revolutionary Impulse" (2006), Geuss says that the "positivism" or the "objectifying attitude that people in a capitalist society have towards their world ... is both a reflection of the way people ... people tend to think ... and a justification of that way of looking at society" (118-119). So, in a capitalist society, people's consciousness is curved up in a way that it becomes objectified and money-oriented. Furthermore, this new consciousness is created in a way that it considers this new objectified manner as a justified objectified attitude.

Actually, in Shamlou's opinion, it is because of this objectified manner that even the social ranking of the individuals is affected by the amount of 'wealth' or 'assets' they have gathered. Indeed, to him, the new consciousness, through which everything comes down to money, is constitutive of social differences—meaning that those who comply with this objectified attitude, or as it named by many, the bourgeoisie, are credited as determinant of social life; and those who do not or who cannot, are deemed as unimportant and therefore are marginalized. It is in fact, in his poem "The Banquet" (1972), a long dramatic poem in *Dagger in plate* (1971-77), which Shamlou both highlights and rejects this social difference. In his review of this poem, Kashani notes that the class discrimination in a capitalist society is apparent in this poem. For him, this poem is an apt example of an unjust society—a society in which the selfishness, superiority, greed, and the cruelty of the owners of wealth stand in marked contrast with the desperation, poverty, and the inferiority of the poor. Indeed, Kashani is of the opinion that this satirical poem, which is in the form of drama, incorporating characters like narrator, hosts (the bourgeois), wanderer and some other characters, criticizes the materialistic life of capitalists and the bourgeois. In Kashani's view, the satirical voice of the poet is heard through the dialogues of the wanderer—a desperate and poor character who sneers at the meaningless life of the bourgeois—the narrator—who talks about the viciousness of the capitalist life—and the clown—who speaks with mockery as well as content about the wealth of the capitalists (320-4). Hence, as also argues, this poem builds up a dichotomy between the world of those who have been marginalized in a capitalist system, and the world of those who are the possessors of capitals and therefore centralized. It is actually in this dichotomy that the poet takes sides with the marginalized group—the narrator, the wanderer, and the clown—and through these characters he voices his hatred towards the capitalists and the bourgeois. It is, for example, in the part of this poem that the clown speaks sarcastically of the wealth and the property of the capitalists:

The garden
 Without cherubs
 Is an incomplete beauty! (CP, 757)

³. Raymond Geuss is a political philosopher and scholar of 19th and 20th century [European Philosophy](#). He works in the general areas of political philosophy and the history of Continental Philosophy.

The clown also adds somewhere else that:

... the garden of decay
is a prized legacy!
The garden of decay.
The garden of decay... (*ibid*, 767)

In another part of the poem, the narrator refers the readers to the hypocrisy of the bourgeois:

Into the guests' chalices
the slaves pour poison
from ancient decanters.
Their smiles tulips and lies⁴. (*ibid*, 756)

Thus, in this poem not only does Shamlou show the class discrimination created by the capitalist, but he also highlights his rage against this very difference. Therefore, whereas the capitalists' authorities try to show a prosperous picture of the modern system of economic organization, Shamlou attends to execute a movement of deterritorialization and destratification. In fact, Shamlou wants to prove that the discourse being formed and spread by the capitalist society is not 'the true' discourse to be swollen immediately; quite conversely, there are other discourses that can question and challenge the authenticity of the one shaped by the capitalist.

As a matter of fact, in this opposing discourse, not only does Shamlou sound to refer the readers to the so termed negative effects of the modern economic system of capitalism on people's lives, but he also catch the readers' attention to unconstructive impact that the machinery and the technological life of capitalism has brought about for the people. In fact, Shamlou's poems present a body of thinking which mounts up challenges to most of the aspects of capitalism, even if that aspect is the scientific and technological one. Actually, while, for many, modern technology has an ability to inspire delight—this being due to the power of technology in the accomplishment of what could only be fantasized in years past—for Shamlou, the new technology has an ability to inspire rage. In other words, in the technological world of capitalism, in which the sense of delight with technological development seems to be universal, Shamlou tries to draw the readers' attention to the monstrous side that the technological progress of a capitalist society can have. It is, indeed, in a part of number "4", that Shamlou highlights the abominable face which the new technology can take; for him, as he discusses in this poem, when it comes to the interest of the capitalists, even the appealing technology will sound appalling and disastrous. As a matter of fact, to Shamlou, the technological age of capitalism is:

... the age when the men of knowledge
Send the grief 'n impurity
With Rockets to the depth of God
And beg their children's supper
From the barrack, ... (*CP*, 521)

Actually, the picture that is given in the above lines is not the picture of a utopian modern technological world in which technology has provided the people with a better life; quite conversely, the fresco being presented is a picture of a fiasco caused by modern technology, a picture of a dystopian world in which modern technology has brought about universal disasters, notably the first and the second world wars. Indeed, as the quoted lines put forward, Shamlou sees the modern age of technological development as an age in which aircraft bodies are supplied to the war department; an age that these technological bodies provide the capitalists with enough equipments to start wars against other nations, and get their lion share out of these wars. In Shamlou's opinion, technological life is a life estranged from trust; for him, not only has the human aspiration for a better life not come true, but the technological life has also created a situation in which people have experienced calamities like the two world wars. In fact, in another poem called "This Voice" (1992), once again Shamlou refers the readers to the danger of wars in the modern technological world:

⁴ . All the above lines from the poem "The Banquet" are translated by Iraj Kaboli and Khashayar Shahriary.

Iron ...
 Has become the lancet of a hatred
 Searching its inferiority pain
 In your throat ...
 Helical steamroller ...
 Is the one crushing the slaves
 Who one day
 Blindfoldedly
 Gave it
 The power to move. (CP, 898)

Therefore, it seems that, to Shamlou, technological world has provided the ground and has paved the way not for a secure life but for a life of distress and threat. As Jalal Abasi writes in *A Concise Dictionary of Shamlou's terms: Words, Irony, Metaphors, symbols* (2010), in this poem steamroller can refer both to "modern technological life" and "tank"; he is also of the opinion that "lancet" is also an "instrument with which one can kill others" (177, 246). Therefore, to Shamlou, modern technology is used more to create disaster than comfort; for him modern technology is a means by which not the fortune but the misfortune of people has been brought about. In fact, as Ali Shariat Kashani argues, Shamlou's questioning of the dream of reaching fortune in an age of technological development becomes clear when he focuses on the dreadful incidents caused by this technology—these being the disastrous incidents, like the one launched by Hitler, that have resulted in universal calamities. As a matter of fact, to Shamlou, in the modern age of industrial and technological development—an age which he considers it, in number "4", to be "The age of gigantic magnitudes of buildings and / lie ..." (CP, 517)—not only are the individuals not the masters of the environment, but they are also enslaved by it and their lives conditioned by it. It is in a part of number "4" that Shamlou describes this age as:

... an offensive age in which humanity
 Is a corps
 With a minute chance for the agony of death,
 And to their prosperity
 Situated
 At the furthest distance ... (CP, 522)

Indeed, according to Shamlou, this claim is recorded in Pashaei's book, in modern technological "What we do cannot be called 'living', we just breathe. Actually, this is the only right that has not yet been taken from us. Indeed, it does not mean that they do not want to deprive us of this right ... they have not discovered how to do so. In fact, as soon as one of the makers of the atomic bombs and missile ... finds the scientific way, he or she will announce an official code called N. B. R (this being an abbreviation of No Breathing Right); and therefore, will impose a ban on individuals' breathing" (Pashaei 973). Hence, it seems that, for Shamlou, in the modern life of technological and industrial progress, these are not the individuals who decide for their lives, and condition their living as well as their environment; on the contrary, this is the technological and scientific life which decides for the life of the individuals, even their right to breathe. Shortly put, Shamlou is not optimistic about the modern technological life; first, because he does not regard this age as an age in which the promises of reaching a better life are kept; for him, modern technological age is an age in which the actual horror of wars—wars which their needed equipment is supplied with the aid of modern technology—is a substitution to the dream of a fortunate and prosperous life. Moreover, Shamlou is not optimistic about the modern age of technological development, since he does not consider this era as the one in which the promises of the mastery of the individuals over their environment are kept; to Shamlou, this age is an age that the individuals are overwhelmed by the power of technology.

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