The Second Spanish Republic was proclaimed in 1931. (The First Spanish Republic was a short-lived affair from 1873-1874). In 1931 a wide coalition of conservatives and liberals overthrew the dictatorship of General Primo de Rivera and sent King Alfonso XIII into exile. In 1936 the Popular Front (an alliance of communists and left-wing republicans) won the elections. In response, Generalissimo Francisco Franco began a coup d’état in Spanish Morocco, and a Nationalist uprising was initiated in mainland Spain by the Falange (phalanx). The coup failed but the subsequent Spanish Civil War lasted until 1939, when the Republic was annulled and the Nationalists given complete power. Franco ruled Spain for 36 years until his death in 1975.

The civil war was the culmination of the rivalry between right and left for the minds and government of the people. Citizens of many other countries came to Spain to fight for one side or the other. The Mackenzie–Papineau Battalion was a group of Canadian volunteers who fought on the side of the Loyalists (Republicans).

The painting in this first slide is one of Robert Motherwell’s series of paintings triggered by the Spanish Civil War. These paintings formed an elegy for the Second Spanish Republic. Motherwell created over 170 paintings on this theme from 1940 right up to his death in 1991. To him the Spanish Civil War was crucial to any understanding of the modern world. The paintings are abstract but all have a similar form. The basic image might be related to the display of the dead bull’s testicles in bullfighting. They are also perhaps a way of coming to grips with the murder of Frederico Garcia Lorca by the Falangists in 1936. The series of Motherwell’s paintings on the Elegy for the Spanish Republic is large. Many of the important poems of the 1930s are long.
The 1920s and 30s were the years when dictators came to power. The dictatorships were on both the left and the right of the political spectrum. All dictators claim to rule for the benefit of the people. They enflamed the fears of the people, brooked no opposition and used harsh police tactics to quell any dissent.

The slide only mentions the most important dictators of the 20th Century. Autocrats of all kinds – from military generals to Arab sultans ruled most of the world’s nations. Democracy was not common. The only type of dictatorship not yet prominent in the 1930s was that driven by religion – theocracy. That came later in the century.

The photograph of Big Brother was made my Nancy Burson who used computer morphing programs to put together the faces of various 20th Century dictators.
Against the dictators stood the poets. The poets of the 1930s reacted to the troubling times though it is uncertain how much effect they had. The famous 1960 photograph of the Faber poets shows the main English poets who came to prominence in the 1930s – MacNeice, Auden and Spender together with the editor of Faber and Faber, T. S. Eliot, who fostered their careers, and a new young poet, Ted Hughes.

The photograph was taken at one of the sherry parties that Philip Larkin was to satirize in *Vers de Société*:

> Funny how hard it is to be alone.  
> I could spend half my evenings, if I wanted,  
> Holding a glass of washing sherry

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**Four Quartets**

Eliot formally converted to the Church of England in 1927. During the 1930s he wrote plays (*Murder in the Cathedral*, *The Cocktail Party*) and poetry (*Ash Wednesday*) related to religion and redemption. *The Four Quartets* consider these issues using meditations based on four different locations.

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One response to the problems of the world was spiritual rather than political. Sometimes this can empower social activism; sometimes it leads to withdrawal from the world.

T. S. Eliot was the main force in poetry during the inter-war years. Unlike most of his colleagues he tended toward the right in politics – he stated that he was “a classicist in literature, a royalist in politics and an Anglo-Catholic in religion.” He had been brought up as a Unitarian. In England after much soul-searching, he became an Anglican.

Burnt Norton was the first of a series of long poems that was entitled *The Four Quartets*. Each of the poems was modelled on the form of a string quartet – in their division into movements and their sense of things eternal they bring to mind the late quartets of Beethoven. Each of the poems is set in one particular place – time and history can only be understood when one is in a particular place at a particular time. *Burnt Norton* is an estate in the Cotswolds in south-central England. *East Coker* is a village in Somerset whence Eliot’s ancestor Andrew Eliot left to go to America in 1669. *The Dry Salvages* is a small group of rocks off the coast of Massachusetts where Eliot sailed as a young man. *Little Gidding* is a village in Cambridgeshire where Nicholas Ferrar established a small Anglican religious community in 1626.
Eliot visited Burnt Norton in 1934. The old mansion on the estate was destroyed by fire in 1741. The house was rebuilt. Left from the original estate were the rose garden, some garden architecture, and two empty pools that used to contain waterlilies.

Eliot’s poem Burnt Norton is based on his visit to an estate of that name in Gloucestershire. While there he experienced what might be considered a mystic vision of how time past and future are all one when considered *sub specie aeternitatis*. Much of what he describes in the poem is imagined rather than real – footsteps, music and the voices of children. These sensations are like the fragrance that arises when one disturbs a bowl of dried rose petals.

These are the empty pools in the gardens at Burnt Norton. Eliot saw them as empty but imagined them as full:

- And the lotos rose, quietly, quietly,
- The surface glittered out of heart of light,
So we moved, and they, in a formal pattern,
Along the empty alley, into the box circle,
To look down into the drained pool.
Dry the pool, dry concrete, brown edged,
And the pool was filled with water out of sunlight,
And the lotus rose, quietly, quietly,
The surface glittered out of heart of light.

The main thrust of Eliot’s experience in the garden is the oneness of time
Go, go, go, said the bird: human kind
Cannot bear very much reality.
Time past and time future
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present

Garlic and sapphires in the mud
Clot the bedded axle-tree.
The trilling wire in the blood
Sings below inveterate scars
Appeasing long forgotten wars.
The dance along the artery
The circulation of the lymph
Are figured in the drift of stars
Ascend to summer in the tree
We move above the moving tree
In light upon the figured leaf
And hear upon the sodden floor
Below, the boarhound and the boar
Pursue their pattern as before
But reconciled among the stars.

The second movement of the poem considers the state of man in relation to things eternal.
The illustration shows wild garlic and bluebells.

*Erhebung* means elevation. In the poem it is the sense of things that one gets when lifted out of
the moment and into the “the still point of the turning world.” Desire and sin are eliminated; the
world goes on “the boarhound and the boar pursue their pattern as before” but one is “reconciled
among the stars.” The word Erhebung also alludes to the elevation of the host during the Eucharist.

There is not time to hear or to consider deeply the third and fourth movements of this poem. The third is a gloomy adagio on the experience of the London Underground. The fourth is a brief scherzo triggered by the flash of a kingfisher’s wing.

The finale returns to the themes of time and eternity and consider the importance of pattern and art. Art can access the stillness:

- Words move, music moves
- Only in time; but that which is only living
- Can only die. Words, after speech, reach
- Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern,
- Can words or music reach
- The stillness, as a Chinese jar still
- Moves perpetually in its stillness.

The word “stillness” combines the ideas of lack of movement with quietness and serenity and with the concept of lasting despite the passage of time.
MacNeice had an unhappy childhood. His father was an Anglican clergyman in Carrickfergus in Northern Ireland. His mother was severely depressed. When Louis was 5, she left home to be cared for in a nursing home until her death a year and a half later.

At Oxford, he became friends with W. H. Auden, who described MacNeice as “a tall, languid undergraduate from Merton, rather foppishly dressed.” The two of them travelled together to Iceland, producing the book *Letters from Iceland* for Faber and Faber in 1937.

The next of the Faber poets that we consider is Louis MacNeice. Though overshadowed by his friend and colleague W. H. Auden, MacNeice wrote some of the finest poetry of the century. He special talent was an ability to convey emotions within the sounds of his verse.

Following the success of the book with Auden, Louis MacNeice and Nancy Sharp visited the Hebrides in 1937, producing the book *I Crossed the Minch*. They experienced the despair and black humour that resulted when government intervention could not solve the economic depression. One of poems in the book was *Bagpipe Music*. Madame Blavatsky was an occultist. The Yogi-man (or bogey man) may be Krishnamurti. A ceilidh is a Scottish celebration with music and poetry. A “cran” is a weight of herring. The “glass” refers primarily to a barometer, but makes allusion to a mirror.

And so we move from mysticism to satire. *Bagpipe Music* is MacNeice’s most famous poem. It tries to portray the sound of the bagpipes in the rhythm and the words of the poem. Bagpipe music uses one or more ongoing “drones” – these are pitched at the octaves below the tonic note of the “chanter” and provide a basic harmony. The melody is played on the chanter. Both the drones and the chanter are operated by air coming from the bag which is kept full by musician blowing into a blowpipe. The poem’s insistent lilting rhythms (reminiscent of an Irish jig) and sloppy rhymes are a good approximation of the bagpipe’s sound.
Bagpipe Music is full of details – it is almost completely opposite to the abstract concepts that were the subject of Burnt Norton. We have already met Madame Blavatsky in our discussion of Yeats and his love of the occult. The satirical humor of the poem takes aim at the pervasive sense of denial (the Laird o’ Phelps) and the refusal to take responsibility (Mrs. Carmichael). I am not sure of the meaning of some of the images. John MacDonald who found a corpse might refer to the stories of Bonnie Prince Charles who at one time escaped to the Hebrides with the help of Flora MacDonald. Perhaps John is a descendent of Flora and the corpse is the history and traditions that have died?

“It’s no go” is a Midlands expression meaning that something will fail. The basic idea of the poem is that nothing seems to be able to bring back meaning to modern life. MacNeice had hoped that he could find the truth of life by visiting the Hebrides, where the principles of Celtic culture might have been preserved. He was completely disillusioned by what he experienced. The poem combines “ferocious gaiety and jaunty despair” (Moore).

The style of the poem with its rapid-fire rhythm and over-the-top rhymes has many similarities to modern rap poetry.

The poem was written during MacNeice’s trip to the Hebrides. He had hoped to discover the true vigor of his Celtic ancestors, but his experience there convinced him that everyone was giving up and succumbing to the opiates of Capitalism – the picture palace and the stadium. The government could not support good jobs but only provided grants.

The illustration shows one of the black houses – these had thick stone walls and turf roofs. The drawing is by Nancy Sharp, who was traveling with MacNeice.
One of the most famous photographs of the 20th Century shows the moment when a Republican soldier is fatally shot. Robert Capa (1913-1954) stated that he took the photograph holding the camera above his head and never saw the image before he clicked the shutter. Some people have doubted the authenticity of the photograph and claim that it was staged. Like many other events in history we may never know the truth.

This poem by Stephen Spender records the death of a young soldier. His body lies between the lines and cannot be retrieved for burial. The title of the poem Ultima Ratio Regum means “last argument of kings,” This voices a similar idea to “War is merely the continuation of policy by other means” (Clausewitz). Louis XIV of France had it engraved on his cannons.

The poem gains an added poignancy from the fact that Spender was just ending a long homosexual affair with Tony Hyndman, a beautiful young Welshman, who had volunteered to serve with the Republicans in Spain. Unlike the silly young man in the poem, Tony survived the
war. This may have been partly due to Spender who pulled strings to get him sent home to England after he had been imprisoned for desertion.

Spender wrote about these things in his memoir *World within World* (1951). David Leavitt wrote a novelistic interpretation of Spender’s early life in 1995 entitled *While England Sleeps*. Spender sued – he thought the novel was pornographic (his memoir never mentioned sex) – and the initial press run of Leavitt’s novel was pulped.

**Wystan Hugh Auden**

(1907-1973)

Auden’s father was a Yorkshire doctor interested in psychology, and his mother a nurse with high-church religious feelings. At Oxford University, Auden acknowledged his homosexuality and decided to become a “great poet.” After a decadent year in Berlin with Christopher Isherwood, he published his first poems. He travelled extensively, finally settling in the United States in 1939, and becoming a citizen in 1946. He returned often to Europe with Chester Kallman, staying in Ischia and in Austria, where he died.

And so we come to W. H. Auden, the quintessential poet of the 1930s. His poetry was encyclopedic both in its subject matter and its style. He wrote about the great currents of history and about the tiny details of relationships. He was adept at forms as disparate as alliterative verse and pop-songs.
Auden disowned some of his famous poems as being dishonest. One of the most famous of these was written after visiting Spain during the Civil War. *Spain* was first published in 1937 as a pamphlet with the royalties going to support Medical Aid for Spain – this is the version represented in the text files. The poem was revised and reprinted in 1940, but Auden dropped the poem from his *Collected Shorter Poems* (1966) because it was “dishonest”.

Again, and much more shamefully, I wrote
History to the defeated
may say alas but cannot help or pardon.
To say this is to equate goodness with success. It would have been bad enough if I had ever held this wicked doctrine, but that I should have stated it simply because it sounded to me rhetorically effective is quite inexcusable.

The poem tries to understand why human history has led to a state of affairs where war and murder are rampant and civilization is dying. The poem begins with yesterday. In early human history mankind learned to measure, to trade, to count, to remember the dead and to estimate time. The cromlech or dolmen is a megalithic structure with one large stone supported over others. It was used as a tomb or as a memorial to the dead. The illustration shows the Pentre Ifan Dolmen in Pembrokeshire, Southwest Wales.

The poem continues with scenes of modern life culminating in

For the fears which made us respond
To the medicine ad, and the brochure of winter cruises
Have become invading battalions;
And our faces, the institute-face, the chain-store, the ruin

Are projecting their greed as the firing squad and the bomb.
Madrid is the heart. Our moments of tenderness blossom
As the ambulance and the sandbag;
Our hours of friendship into a people's army.

The poem is loosely organized on what happened yesterday, what is happening today and what we hope for tomorrow.

However, those tomorrows may never come for today is the struggle and we may not win:

The stars are dead. The animals will not look.
We are left alone with our day, and the time is short, and
History to the defeated
May say Alas but cannot help nor pardon.

Should we consider this poem? Auden revoked it. Should we not acquiesce to his evaluation?
Journey to a War

Having effectively annexed Manchuria in 1933, Japan launched a full scale invasion of China in 1937. In 1938 Auden and Isherwood travelled to China to report for Faber and Faber. Among the writings that were published in the resultant book was a sonnet sequence entitled *In Time of War*. Most of the sonnets were not specific to the conflict in China but meditations on the human condition.

Yet Chian-Yu
Terror Bequeathed

Auden travelled to China in 1938. At that time the country was engulfed in a tripartite conflict. The Civil War between the Communists (under Mao Zedong) and the Kuomintang Nationalists (under Chiang Kai-shek) was overtaken by the invasion of Japan. The tenuous common front between the two Chinese groups was unable to prevent the Japanese army from taking the major cities along the coast (such as Nanking and Shanghai). However, inland China remained undefeated and continued to drain the resources of Japan throughout World War II.

The illustration was used as the frontispiece for *In Time of War*. It shows Japanese planes bombing the fleeing Chinese civilians.

He turned his field into a meeting-place,
And grew the tolerant ironic eye,
And formed the mobile money-changer’s face,
And found the notion of equality.
And strangers were as brothers to his clocks,
And with his spires he made a human sky;
Museums stored his learning like a box,
And paper watched his money like a spy.
It grew so fast his life was overgrown,
And he forgot what once it had been made for,
And gathered into crowds and was alone,
And lived expensively and did without,
And could not find the earth which he had paid for,
Nor feel the love that he knew all about.

Members of the revolutionary army, let the nation resist the foe

The sonnets that Auden included in the book *In Time of War* did not deal directly with China. Rather they continued his interrogation of history. This particular sonnet considers the developments of the Renaissance and Enlightenment – the beginning of banks and paper money,
the rebirth of the notion of equality, the foundation of museums. Auden rues that some of the most important aspects of man – his relations to the land and to his fellows – were lost during these advances
The slide attempts to illustrate the dissociation between the poem and its context by including the Chinese posters from that time.

Nothing is given: we must find our law.
Great buildings jostle in the sun for domination;
Behind them stretch like sorry vegetation
The low recessive houses of the poor.
We have no destiny assigned us:
Nothing is certain but the body; we plan
To better ourselves; the hospitals alone remind us
Of the equality of man.
Children are really loved here, even by police:
They speak of years before the big were lonely,
And will be lost.

And only
The brass bands throbbing in the parks foretell
Some future reign of happiness and peace.
We learn to pity and rebel.

This sonnet describes modern life – the rivalries of capitalism, the plight of the poor, and the lack of meaning behind all the false promises of utopia.

The Germans invaded Poland on September 1, 1939. Germany invented the excuse that Poland was persecuting its German-speaking inhabitants and violating the border with Germany.
However, everything had all been planned out long before the invasion, and the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact was designed to let Germany and Russia divide Poland between them. The illustration shows Hitler reviewing the troops as they move across the border.

*September 1, 1939* is another of Auden’s disowned poems. The famous line “We must love one another or die” appeared in retrospect to be false – we die whether we love one another or not. He tried changing it to “We must love one another and die” but that did not seem to work and so he dropped the poem. Nevertheless, it has remained one of his more popular. Lyndon Johnson used “We must love each other, or we must die” in his 1964 presidential campaign against Barry Goldwater. I think that Auden may have misremembered what he initially meant to say – that if we do not love each other we ultimately wind up killing each other.

The poet describes the fear as the clever hopes of Chamberlain’s 1938 Munich Agreement are confounded. He wonders whether Luther’s reformation might have led to the bitter national rivalries in Europe, now being exploited by Hitler, who was born in Linz, Austria. Though we have known about democracy and dictators ever since Thucydides (460-404 BCE), we still let Hitler come to power. Auden quotes from the diary of Nijinsky, who danced in Diaghilev’s *Ballet Russes*: “Some politicians are hypocrites like Diaghilev, who does not want universal love, but to be loved alone.”

The first two verses are read by Dylan Thomas. He sounds quite different from Auden, but they both were familiar with the dives of New York City.

The last two verses of the poem are read by Tom O’Bedlam.
Anna Akhmatova
(1888-1966)
Born Anna Andreevna Gorenko in Odessa, daughter of an aristocrat, Akhmatova used a pen name to publish her poetry. She and her husband, Nikolay Gumilev, were in the group of poets called the Acmeists in St. Petersburg. Her lyric poetry was very popular but, as the communists became stricter in their interpretation of art, she was considered decadent. Gumilyov was executed in 1921, and her son Lev was imprisoned from 1938 to 1956. Despite this she insisted on bearing witness to what was happening during Stalin’s purges. Requiem was written between 1935 and 1961 but not published in Russia until 1983.

During the early 20th Century, Russia gave to world many great poets – Boris Pasternak, Osip Mandelstam, Anna Akhmatova, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Marina Tsvetayeva. They did not fit easily within Communist society. Tsvetayeva and Mayakovsky committed suicide; Mandelstam died in the Siberian Gulag.

Akhmatova’s husband was executed on the basis of fabricated charges that he had participated in a monarchist plot to overthrow the Soviet government. His son Lev Gumilyov was imprisoned and sent to the Siberian labor camps. He was ultimately released in 1956 (after the death of Stalin in 1953), and became an anthropologist.

Akhmatova was perhaps the most glamorous of the 20th Century poets. In her youth she was painted by Altman and sketched by Modigliani.
In 1936 Stalin unleashed the Great Terror. In Russia it is often known as the Yezhovschina – the “doings of Yezhov,” the chief of the Soviet secret police. Many thousands of Russians were arrested for anti-Soviet activities by the secret police. Those arrested were interrogated and then either exiled to Siberia or arbitrarily executed. Some were given large “show trials” but most were summarily condemned. Many individuals committed suicide rather in the hope that their families would thus be spared. Estimates of the deaths caused by the Great Terror exceed many hundred thousand.

Tony Judt has pointed out the ties between Spain and Russia. During the early 1930s Russia had been promoting the formation of Popular Fronts in European countries. Communists allied themselves with socialists and other progressive parties. The idea was that once in power they would then become completely communist. The Spanish Popular Front came to power in 1936. This triggered a revolt by the generals. This probably made Stalin fearful that Russian generals might decide to overthrow his government. A huge purge of the Russian military occurred early in the Great Terror. Marshal Tukhachevsky, his wife and his two brothers were all shot. His three sisters and his daughter were sent to the Gulag.

The prison outside which Akhmatova waited for news about her son was modeled on the Panopticon of Jeremy Bentham who is more famous for his idea that moral decisions should be made to promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people (utilitarianism).
Akhmatova’s poem follows the format of a Greek Orthodox Requiem Mass. The culmination of the mass occurs with the crucifixion:

Mother, I beg you, do not weep for me

Mary Magdalene beat her breasts and sobbed, His dear disciple, stone-faced, stared. His mother stood apart. No other looked into her secret eyes. No one dared..."

John Tavener, 1980

Akhmatova Requiem

Mystic Suprematism
Kazimir Malevich, 1922

The translation of Akhmatova’s poem by Stanley Kunitz and Max Hayward is impressive. It gives sense of both the rhythm and the rhyme scheme of the original.

The first selection from John Tavener’s setting of the Requiem (sung by John Shirley-Quirk) is part of the actual liturgy. The second (sung by Phyllis Bryn-Julson) is a section of Akhmatovas’s poem. The two are excerpted from the Crucifixion.

The illustration is a painting by Malevich. Abstract art was initially considered revolutionary. By the 1930s it was attacked as decadent. Even in abstract art symbols like the cross persist.

And if my country ever should assent to casting in my name a monument,
I should be proud to have my memory graced, but only if the monument be placed not near the seas on which my eyes first opened–my last link with the sea has long been broken–nor in the Tsar's garden near the sacred stump, where a grieved shadow hunts my body's warmth, but here, here I endured three hundred hours in line before the implacable iron bars. Because even in blissful death I fear to lose the clangor of the Black Marias, to lose the banging of that odious gate and the old crone howling like a wounded beast.

In the epilogue to the Requiem, Akhmatova asked that any monument that might be made to her be constructed near the prison where she stood waiting for news of her son:
Because even in blissful death I fear to lose the clangor of the Black Marias, to lose the banging of that odious gate and the old crone howling like a wounded beast.

And from my motionless bronze-lidded sockets may the melting snow, like teardrops, slowly trickle, and a prison dove coo somewhere, over and over, as the ships sail softly down the flowing Neva.

A monument was finally constructed in 2006 across the river looking toward the prison.

The concluding illustration is an engraving by Picasso. It is part of the Vollard Suite, as series of etchings and engravings that attempted to portray the life of the artist – from raging passions to serene contemplations – and the nature of art – from representation to creation. The minotaur is a creature – half man and half bull – from Greek mythology. The blindness of the minotaur is Picasso’s creation. The meaning of this image is not known. The minotaur seems to have just disembarked from a boat that may perhaps belong to Ulysses. He is being led by a young girl that looks like his mistress Marie-Thérèse Walter. She is carrying a dove, the archetypal symbol of peace. The sailor on the left may represent the artist. Is the minotaur Picasso? Or does he more generally represent humanity trying to find peace and respite from his lust. We must love one another or die.