

# Another Time: A Peerless Work of W.H. Auden

Shipra Harsh<sup>1\*</sup>, Mantosh Kumar Pandey<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, University Department of English, Binod Bihari Mahto Koyalanchal University, Dhanbad, India

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, University Department of English, Binod Bihari Mahto Koyalanchal University, Dhanbad, India

**Abstract:** W. H. Auden is undoubtedly one of the greatest English poets of the twentieth century. He had been a great admirer of Freud since his childhood. He wrote and acted on plays during his school days. Initially a student of science Auden was intently influenced by various other disciplines at a very young age. Philosophy and politics in particular caught his attention right from the very beginning. Auden studied a wide variety of subject during his college days. He was a man of heightened interest in various fields that brought universality in his theme and style of writing. Not only this but Auden also happened to belong to a group of poets who advocated liberal thoughts and ideas in their poems that might bring some effect on the political scenario of their country as a whole. Auden was also a travel lover and many of his poems contain vivid description of the places that he travelled far and wide and the people whom he met there and the impression that they created in his mind. Besides this, Auden was highly sensitive to his surrounding and nature. His education combined with the keen sense of observation and travelling experience has made him a man of stature.

**Keywords:** Freud, philosophy, politics, sensitive.

## 1. Introduction

*Another Time* by W.H Auden is an excellent book of poetry that contains some of the best works by the British American poet. The book contains poems written by Auden between 1936 and 1939 and is divided into three parts- "People and Places", "Lighter Poems" and "Occasional Poems." As their name indicates the first part deals with the places that Auden visited and the people whom he met during his travel. The second part is usually a presentation of the lighter ideas of the poet related to various socio, economic and political scenario of his surroundings. The last and the final part of the book deals with the Spanish Civil War and the its after effect including the deep impact it had on the emotional side of the people. The book is dedicated to Auden's friend, an -American poet, Chester Kallman. Auden by birth was British but later he changed his nationality. It was published in 1940 in Britain and America. The book was published at the time when Auden departed to America from England with his friend Christopher Isherwood in the winter of 1939. This was a time of extreme political unrest in his own homeland and thus he was condemned by many of his contemporaries. *Another Time* was initially published untitled. Like many other volumes of Auden's poetry this volume is also transparent in its language but at the same time elusive in its underlying comprehension. This volume of poetry was written by Auden when he was living in England

during the late 1930s. This book consists of poems that are a reflection of the turbulent times of World War II. The book is a proof that Auden could cross frontiers both literal and existential to create a social vacuum that could merge with the realistic world. This particular work of Auden is noted for its stylistic brilliance, political engagements, religious fervor and moral intensity.

The collection of poems is about people who move from the real time to search meaningfulness in some other situation that may seem to match their mental state at that point of time. *Another Time* captures this very particular theme in a manner that it leaves the readers in a disarming state hence justifying the act of leaving one's own country at a time of extreme political turbulence. Auden's wit helps him take part in process of reclaiming a private space for himself while promoting a wider world view. Auden's wit is also implanted in the way he draws various points of view and finally by way of cohesion arbitrates them into a complete whole. Wit, an important aspect of modern poetry has been an apparatus by which Auden used to elude his readers into a world of bigger elucidation. Auden was an expert at striking a chord in his readers by his treatment of the moral and political issues that the people were facing at that point of time. *Another Time* also contains elegies to famous poets like A.E Houseman, Matthew Arnold and W.B Yeats. These poets had a deep impact on the aesthetic development of Auden. He had been an intent follower of these great poets all his life and career seemed to have been shaped by the way he felt for them and the way he used to worship them as his God. In these poems we find a complete rejection in the faith on poetry and romantic ideals. This volume also indicates Auden's reconversion to Christianity that he had abandoned while still at school. The dramatic persona in which he spoke all throughout in the volume seems to acquire self-expression of the poet which comes from his choice of a personal tone.

## 2. Discussion

*Another Time* is the eventual title given to a book of poems that was originally titled as "For us like any other fugitive" by the opening line of the first poem of the collection. The very first line of the poem is indicative of the theme that runs throughout the book. The word 'fugitive' is a clue to the subject of the poem. 'It is today in which we live' is another significant line that throws immense light into the theme that is deep dug inside the poems. For Auden the main problem that lingers

\*Corresponding author: mukherjee.trayee1989@gmail.com

around is that of 'try to say Not Now'. People try to run away from the reality with which their lives are bound up with. For Auden the concept of nationalism is outdated as people follow old-fashioned actions of paying reverence to their country, bowing in front of their national flag etc. He compares them to tribal who followed such acts centuries ago to show belongingness to their material objects.

Auden here projects an ever-present interest in the experience of poetry. The experience of art is always over and above the access of truth. Art inevitably reveals the reality of our social, communal, political and economical existence. Auden's poetry which is often lyrical has the ability to offer ideal invitation to exemplify the real experiences of the various ethical values of life to which one clings himself all throughout life.

However, eventually Auden displays things as much more enigmatic and subjunctive. He contradicts himself and says that these people were not actually wrong as the actions to show belongingness is quite justified. Auden in a way is against narrow-minded nationalism and obsolete attitudes that people show to prove their love towards their nation. Auden in a way also personifies time and hints towards moving away from outdated ideas of nationhood and rethinking in a new way about the idea of citizenship and nationalism. Auden's lines are succinct when he attempts to make a mockery of syntax. Just like T.S Eliot, Auden also uses his own system of punctuation to create his own verse.

There are a few perplexing and confusing connotations. For instance, the penultimate line: 'No one has yet believed or liked a lie.' The poet himself had written about Hitler's idea of nationalism as people were fooled into believing the idea of blind nationalism so how can Auden himself a few years later call Hitler's nationalism false or a 'lie'. He questions whether someone truly believes and follows the idea of reverent nationalism. The question that Auden puts up is very difficult to answer in the sense that how can one quit the habits of showing respect to one's own country by bowing in front of the national flag. Auden embraces a traditional set of poetic form and rejects the love of allusion that is followed by modernists. This hardly suggests that Auden's works can easily be interpreted. Auden's most notable poem in this collection, 'Funeral Blues' is often misinterpreted as an elegy when it is actually intended as a parody.

Auden left his country in the early 1939 just on the onset of the Second World War that made him susceptible to the criticism of many especially this drew the annoyance of his fellow writers for whom this action was extremely unjustified from the country's point of view. He was even condemned for shunning his political duties. Auden mourns for political leaders but when his country needs him the most he shows no gratefulness but instead runs away from his motherland to a foreign country.

Another significant poem of the book 'The Unknown Citizen' is an epitaph of a man who is recognized by a combination of letters and numbers like that of social security personnel. The speaker of the poem is a man who had lived an average life all throughout. Actually, Auden here criticizes the

system of modern bureaucracy that has reached a state where citizens are known by a combination of letters and numbers and not by names. Auden not only criticizes government organizations but also but even the employees who find themselves contented and the press that takes no responsibility to dismiss this system. This loss of individualism is linked to the entire community and not just a particular section as the responsibility of the loss has to be taken up by the whole society.

The part 'Poems and Places' in Auden's *Another Time* is a whole lot of historical events of the past the crowds in the mind of the poet and the distinct feelings that the poet has for each of them. This part of the poem can be to some extent compared to the 'In Memory of Robert Gregory' by W.B Yeats where Yeats has used certain events to create the analogy that he wants to create. Auden has also said that Gregory had acquired a typical and inert significance under the pen of Auden. It can be best said that nothing in Auden is just what it is and no one in Auden is just who is but everything goes beyond itself or themselves. Auden in section of the book talks on a very personal note and just like Icarus he points out that men will always show indifference to all events and actions until and unless it affects them directly.

The part 'Lighter Poems' in Auden's *Another Time* include poems that were written in mainly accessible and light style about experiences, emotions and feelings that difficult styles could present in a distorted manner or would lead to false presentation. Therefore, this light verse was intentionally taken up by the poet for a purpose. This use of light verse often brings in an interesting note which is just not quick and neat but also witty that draws humor from the readers to end on a note that avoid excess. The imageries that the poet uses that not only creates vivid images but also adds something new to the varieties of the different experiences of human life like- love, death, victory, glory etc. Overall, Auden suggests that these experiences can be private or public, subtle or bombastic and even can be eternal or fleeting all separately or simultaneously for his readers. However, the main limitation of these poems is that it displays only the partial truth that leads to the creation of confusing characters and distorted rationality at the same time.

Auden's poetry mainly deals with poems of places, people, climate and intellect of people. Auden poems in the book are essentially loaded with realism and the power to transfer us from one state of mind to another. The deep impact of the Spanish War had an enormous impact on the emotional and mental state of the poet. In the words of George Orwell, the poem 'Spain' is, "one of the few decent things that have been written about the Spanish War". However, according to Auden himself the poem is "dishonest" and can only be rhetorically effective. This is because of he has described certain political ideas in these poems in which he hardly believes in or has comparatively less faith. The poem 'Spain' is a beautiful representation of the events that finally led to the onset of the immediate cause of the Spanish War with the International Brigades leading up to the war front and then it anticipates the various consequences or the aftermath of the war on the various aspects of mankind. Auden's tone here is also quite measured

and precise and the use of superfluous words is restricted to a large extent. He is actually moralizing and hence his tone is rather delicate than didactic. We need to remember that the book was written just before the onset of the Second World War when the nations were preparing for the conflict and were busy in preparing their army and hence in a sense to moralize Auden adds his delicate diction to show how futile wars are and that they end up in nothing but death, destruction and loss.

### 3. Conclusion

The present paper under consideration deals with the various aspects of Auden's poetry. The themes running throughout the book has been explored to make a detailed study of both the power and limitations of Auden as a poet. Auden was an ardent follower of T.S Eliot. According to Auden *The Waste Land* by Eliot has transformed the entire poetic outlook far from "Tennysonian" and had paved the path for "modernism." Auden later was even greatly influenced by Wilfred Owen and Thomas Hardy. The reflections of these poets are very clear in the poems of Auden who wrote on similar subjects like- war, politics, religion and many more. However, as we come to his later poems which are mostly about travel we can distinctly find him immersed in the works of Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud. We find Auden more often collaborating with Christopher Isherwood whose ideas and beliefs somewhat matched to write short sonnets and verse commentary.

Eminently Auden rose to prominence for his bold treatment of contemporary issues that humanity faced at large at the wake of totalitarianism. Auden's *Another Time* is considered as a collection of his finest works that has proved the fact that Auden is a poet par excellence. His lyrical verse and his powerful diction have left the readers in awestruck. Although he was highly criticized by his fellow poets and writers for his indiscriminate act of leaving his own country and migrating to

foreign land at the wake of the Second World War.

Auden's poetry also has certain limitations in the fact that Auden had concealed various truths to bring out the poetic fervor and create a lyrical aura. Auden volunteered himself for Republican cause during the Second World War but more than that he ignored the fact of nationalism and love of one's nation. He has even condemned the acts of showing reverence and tribute to one's nation as outdated and old fashioned that hardly has any significance in the modern period. However, we need to understand that nation comes first and there is nothing wrong in showing tribute to the symbols of nationalism like the national flag. Nationalism that causes harm, death and destruction without cause is to be shunned and taking up rationale step in so far as love and respect for one's country is concerned is desirable according to the poet.

Auden's poetry has inspired many poets of the century to create great works of art and will continue to inspire young and upcoming poets at all times. Through his work Auden has infused a new and more interesting way of thinking about various natural and man-made phenomena all around us. Those actions which we think justified may not be always as it seems and vice-versa. This very characteristic in Auden's poetry makes them one of the most read and admired of all times. It breaks monotony and stereotypes.

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