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W.H. Auden - 1939 (January)

The most significant <sup>Poet</sup> of the present century after T.S. Eliot, Auden's versatility is remarkable. A spokesman of the scientific culture, a leader of the second generation of modernism, creator of operatic ~~libretto~~ libretto, a devotee and author of light verse, Auden the most extraordinary literary phenomenon to appear in recent decades.

During the formative years period of Auden's life W.B. Yeats was producing his maturest poems. Auden grew up to a great admirer of Yeats. He specially admired Yeats' genius for evoking the music of verse while using the language of everyday speech. The indebtedness to the older poet is particularly evident in '1st September 1939' where he deliberately tries to create a Yeatsian effect by the conscious manipulation of conversational idiom.

The poem is in three sections. The change of tone from one section to the next is noteworthy. The poem is a dignified and powerful tribute to the memory of Yeats. It was published as one of the 'occasional poems' in Another Time 1940. It opens with a detached account of the circumstances and setting of the death.

The present poem is an elegy but it differs from the conventional elegy. Auden mourns the death of W.B. Yeats. Traditionally in an elegy all nature is represented as mourning the death, but here nature is represented as going on its course in different and unaffected way. Both <sup>the</sup> man and the nature were not identified with the death of Yeats. In the traditional elegy the dead is glorified and his death is said to be a great loss for mankind at large. Here Auden does not glorify Yeats. In the very first ~~six~~ lines of the poem the poet gives the picture of the dark cold day on which day Yeats passed away.

He disappeared in the dead of winter:  
The brooks were frozen, the airports almost deserted,  
And snow disfigured the public statues;

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The memory sank in the mouth of the dying day,  
what instruments we have agree  
The day of his death was a dark cold day.

The day of his death was a dark cold day  
The poet says that it was too cold that day  
But we have no means of ascertaining if it was really  
so cold as claimed by the poet. But there was  
no effect on natural actions as it is proved by  
this idea in the very next paragraph stanza.

The wolves ran on through the evergreen  
forests  
The peasant river was untempted by the fashion-  
able quays;

The people mourned on his death. However  
only the poet died, even his poetry is unaffected by his  
death. As the day advanced, zeats' condition deteriora-  
ted and it was obvious that it was his last day of life  
on earth. People used to talk of his illness and imminence  
at death. But for him it was his last afternoon as usual.

An afternoon of surges and rumours,  
The provinces of his body revolted,  
The squares of his mind were empty,

Silence invaded the suburbs,  
The current of his feeling failed; he became his admirers'

In the first stanza, the frozen state  
of the physical world in the dead of the winter is para-  
lled by the immobilization of his body on the day  
of his death. The general state of Europe caught in  
the grip of winter is suggested through a few isolated  
images, the frozen brooks, deserted airports and dis-  
figured statues. The widespread immobility is sug-  
gested by the contrast of rural and urban images.  
The ominous state of European politics is hinted at by  
the suggestion of public statues 'disfigured by snow. An  
implied parallel with the mercury sinking in the mouth  
of the dying man. The suggestion of the drop in tempera-  
ture becomes an ominous premonition of the poet's death.  
The contrasts of the instruments, such as 'thermometer'  
(barometer) are noteworthy. Despite the poet's  
death, the rhythms of the natural world are repeat-  
ed without interruption. The convulsions in the  
political atmosphere of Europe not withstanding, life  
flows on uninterupted. The wolves running  
through the evergreen forests and  
rivers following their

customary course suggest the flow of life and is unaffected by his physical passing. A description of Yeats's physical condition on the day of his death. The microcosm of his body was in a state of disintegration. The suggestion may not be far that what was happening to Yeats was paralleled by the explosive nature of European politics at the time. In 1939 when Anden the Poem, this sense of dissolution might be seen coming over a Europe that had once been held together by a concept such as Christendom. ... Some large and complex organism was dying and "dying at the top". Europe at that time was rife with political rumours. There was an ominous atmosphere reflected in the tense state in the provinces, the city squares and the suburbs. But what remains of Yeats is his poetry which is now seen as enjoying an autonomous existence apart from his personal history and intention. Yeats's poetry will be read, enjoyed and judged without assistance from his personal life while the world goes on its customary way with its business and pursuits, the sensitive man will recall the day of Yeats's death with a sense of loss, as though he himself had died that day. Instruments such as 'barometer' and 'thermometer' are also the instruments of 'fate' or 'history', which indicate the removal of Yeats from the scene, at the end of one historical era which his voice dominated, and at the beginning of another very "dark" and "cold" - very impenetrable, very uncharitable and uncharismatic - era of history.

We find an intensely personal and compassionate address to the dead Yeats in highly controlled blank verse in second section of the poem. It is a passage of sharp distinction between "the man who suffers" and "the part who creates". Yeats was silly like all poets. Let me associate himself with aristocratic women such as Lady Gregory without da-merge to his poetic genius. The poet and the woman who flattered him also died, but the poetry of Yeats still alive. The poetry cannot change the destiny of people they have their own madness and weather

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In the third section of the poem we find that time will obliterate his intellectual and political aberrations, leaving only the heritage of his solid, poetic achievement. The atmosphere of suspicions, mutual jealousy, hatred and alarm is powerfully evoked in 'All the dogs of Europe bark, And the living nations wait Each sequestered in its hole, Intellectual disgrace Shows from every human face, And the seas of pity lie Locked and frozen in each eye.'

It was equally a time when intellectuals sadly capitulated to political pressures and blandishments and betrayed the spirit of individual liberty, and dignity and compassion for the suffering of humanity. It is the peculiar quality of great poetry to generate joy out of tragic situations. His achievement is a tribute to the essential free spirit of man. Poetry enlarges our sensibility and enables us live as scholarship human beings.