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Dr. Subodh Kumar Jha
Associate Professor & Head
Department of English,
S.N. Sinha College, Jehanabad
(M.U., Bodh Gaya), Bihar,
India

Corresponding Author:
Dr. Subodh Kumar Jha
Associate Professor & Head
Department of English,
S.N. Sinha College, Jehanabad
(M.U., Bodh Gaya), Bihar,
India

W.H. Auden as a Wonderful Creator of Situation

Dr. Subodh Kumar Jha

Abstract
W. H. Auden, an English-American poet, is known for stylistic and technical achievement in his poetry. His poetry forges a wonderful engagement with politics, morals, love, and religion in a variety of tone, form and content. Auden possessed a formidable technique and an acute ear. His linguistic innovations are so remarkable that they have been termed as "Audenesque." Auden's forte as a poet is his skill to create a situation wonderfully appealing as well as convincing. The present paper takes up his poem **"In Memory of W. B. Yeats": a Memorable Elegy"** to demonstrate how Auden possesses a wonderful skill of creating situations in his poetry. The paper makes detailed analysis of this Elegy to substantiate the point. The poem may be looked upon as a commentary on the nature of Yeats's art and its role during a time of great calamity — as well as the ordinary time of life's struggles. In terms of structure, the poem is organized into three sections. The first section is mournful and it describes the coldness of death. The second section is a reflection on the generative power behind Yeats' poetry. It was "Mad Ireland" that "hurt" Yeats and inspired his poetry as a form of survival. The third and final part brings the reader back into mournfulness.

Keywords: linguistic innovations, Audenesque, generative power of poetry, creator of situation, etc

Introduction
Wystan Hugh Auden (21 February 1907 – 29 September 1973), an English-American poet, is known for stylistic and technical achievement in his poetry. His poetry forges a wonderful engagement with politics, morals, love, and religion in a variety of tone, form and content.
Throughout his career Auden was both controversial and influential, and critical views on his work were either sharply dismissive or strongly affirmative such as Joseph Brodsky's statement that he had "the greatest mind of the twentieth century". He won the Pulitzer Prize in 1948 for *The Age of Anxiety*. At Oxford Auden became the pivotal member of a group of writers called the "Oxford Group" or the "Auden Generation." [1]
Auden possessed a formidable technique and an acute ear. In her book, *Auden,* Barbara Everett commented on the poet's facility: "In his verse, Auden can argue, reflect, joke, gossip, sing, analyze, lecture, hector, and simply talk; he can sound, at will, like a psychologist on a political platform, like a theologian at a party, or like a geologist in love; he can give dignity and authority to nonsensical theories, and make newspaper headlines sound both true and melodious." Jeremy Robson noted in *Encounter:* "The influence of music on Auden's verse... has always been salient: even his worst lines often 'sound' impressive."
Auden has a special knack of using right words at the right place to create the situation, as a result of which the reader finds before his mind's eye the unfolding of a scene as if everything is happening before him. The reader, therefore, not only remains a reader but also becomes a participant in the process.

Auden's linguistic innovations [2] are so remarkable that they have been termed as "Audenesque." James Fenton wrote in the *New Statesman:* "For years — for over forty years — the technical experimentation started by Auden enlarged and enriched the scope of English verse. He rediscovered and invented more than any other modern poet.... And yet there grew up... a number of mannerisms, such as the use of nouns as verbs, or the employment of embarrassingly outdated slang, or the ransacking of the *OED* [Oxford English Dictionary], which became in the end a hindrance to his work."

[1] "Oxford Group" or the "Auden Generation," included Stephen Spender, C. Day Lewis, and Louis MacNeice. The group adhered to various Marxist and anti-fascist doctrines and addressed social, political, and economic concerns in their writings.
Auden's linguistic innovations, renowned enough to spawn the adjective "Audenesque," were described by Karl Shapiro in *In Defense of Ignorance* as "the modernization of diction, [and] the enlarging of dictional language to permit a more contemporary-sounding speech."

In Memory of W. B. Yeats: a Memorable Elegy

In Memory of W. B. Yeats [3] is a wonderful elegy written by Auden. In terms of structure, the poem is organized into three sections. It may be looked upon as a commentary on the nature of Yeats's art and its role during a time of great calamity - as well as the ordinary time of life's struggles.

The First Section: Mournfulness

The first section is mournful and it describes the coldness of death, repeating that "The day of his death was a dark cold day." The strength of this section is the creation of the environment which wonderfully reflects the coldness of death: rivers are too frozen to run; hardly anyone travels by air; statues of public figures are desecrated by snow. These conditions symbolize the loss of activity and energy in Yeats' death.

At the same time, the scenery far away includes wolves running and "the peasant river" flowing outside of the rest of civilization ("untempted by the fashionable quays"), keeping the poetry alive. The implication here is that the poems live even though the man may be dead. The difficulty with this situation, however, is that the man can no longer speak for himself; "he became his admirers." His poems, like ashes, are "scattered" everywhere and are misinterpreted ("unfamiliar affections" are brought into the poems). The ugly fact of bad digestion modifies the poems as "The words of a dead man / Are modified in the guts of the living."

Furthermore, as in "Funeral Blues" and "Musée des Beaux Arts," the events of the average day go on — a trader yells on the floor, the poor suffer — for most people, the day goes unmarked. It takes a special soul to mark the importance of the day of the death of a great poet, and only "a few thousand" have such a soul. As scholar James Persoon writes, "These two elements — the poet's death as national and natural crisis and the poet's death as almost completely insignificant — describe a tension within which Auden explores the life of the work after the death of the author." Thus, in addition to the thermometer telling us so, the speaker of the poem tells us that it is "dark cold day" with respect to the popular reception of Yeats' poetry.

The Second Section: reflection on the generative power behind Yeats' poetry

In the second section the speaker briefly reflects on the generative power behind Yeats' poetry. It was "Mad Ireland" that "hurt" Yeats and inspired his poetry as a form of survival. For him, "silly" like other poets or, more broadly, like other Irishmen or humans, poetry was a "gift" that survived everything other than itself — even Yeats' own physical degeneration, the misinterpretations of "rich women," and Yeats' own failings. Poetry itself, from this perspective, survives in the midst of everything, not causing anything, but flowing out from isolated safety (perhaps the Freudian subconscious) and providing voice (metaphorically a "mouth") to that deep level of raw and unassailable humanity.

The Third Section: back to mourning

The third and final part brings the reader back into more familiar territory, with six stanzas of AABB verse, every line in seven-syllable trochaic verse (three long-short feet followed by a seventh stressed syllable).

The body of Yeats ("the Irish vessel") rests in the ground, the warring nations fight (metaphorically, the "dogs of Europe bark"), people misinterpret his work ("intellectual disgraces"), yet somehow, his poetry retains a place somewhere. The true poet, like Yeats himself, will "follow right/To the bottom of the night" (to the primordial humanity expressed in Yeats' poetry), to that fundamental human freedom where an "unconstraining voice" can "persuade us to rejoice" in our existence.

True enough, the human "curse" (evoking the Fall of Man in *Genesis*) remains; death awaits. This is all too true in a time of war. But the poet can turn the curse into a "vineyard" where sweet poetic drink can form. On the one hand there are "deserts of the heart" and human distress, yet on the other hand, with this wine a "healing fountain" can release a man from "the prison of his [mortal] days." A poet like Yeats, despite everything, can "teach the free man how to praise" that fundamental spark of existence that survives in one's poetry.

Summing up

In his elegy to Yeats, as the one to Freud, Auden suggests that Yeats was a man whose work was immensely appreciated: "the provinces of [Yeats's] body revolted," and "[Freud] wasn't clever at all." Yeats and Freud presented realities that influenced others; through their deeds of poetry and psychology they brought changes into people's lives and made the future bearable. In all of the poems Auden grapples with larger questions; with Yeats it is the role of poetry, with Freud it is the nature of evil, and with Bonhoeffer it is with moral judgment and freedom of choice in a Christian civilization. All three men thus become symbols of what they influenced; Freud, for example, is now a "whole climate of opinion." But all are now dead and must be interpreted by others.

It may also be claimed that Auden's elegies for Yeats and Freud are partly anti-heroic statements, in which great deeds are performed, not by unique geniuses whom others cannot hope to imitate, but by otherwise ordinary individuals who were "silly like us" (Yeats) or of whom it could be said "he wasn't clever at all" (Freud), and who became teachers of others, not awe-inspiring heroes.

One may or may not agree with Joseph Brodsky's claim that Auden had "the greatest mind of the twentieth century" but for sure one cannot ignore him or his contribution to literature.

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In Memory of W. B. Yeats" is Auden's tribute to W. B. Yeats, along with his piece on the death of Sigmund Freud, is a most memorable elegy on the death of a public figure. Written in 1940, it commemorates the death of Yeats in 1939.

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