



Another Time

W.H. Auden

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Contains poems about people, places and the intellectual climate of the times. This volume by Auden was published after his departure to America with Christopher Isherwood in January 1939.

Another Time Details

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Author : W.H. Auden

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Eamon says

Some really wonderful poems in this collection. Well worth checking out.

Jay Armstrong says

September 1, 1939

By W.H. Auden

I sit in one of the dives
On Fifty-second Street
Uncertain and afraid
As the clever hopes expire
Of a low dishonest decade:
Waves of anger and fear
Circulate over the bright
And darkened lands of the earth,
Obsessing our private lives;
The unmentionable odour of death
Offends the September night.

Accurate scholarship can
Unearth the whole offence
From Luther until now
That has driven a culture mad,
Find what occurred at Linz,
What huge imago made
A psychopathic god:
I and the public know
What all schoolchildren learn,
Those to whom evil is done
Do evil in return.

Exiled Thucydides knew
All that a speech can say
About Democracy,
And what dictators do,
The elderly rubbish they talk
To an apathetic grave;
Analysed all in his book,
The enlightenment driven away,
The habit-forming pain,
Mismanagement and grief:
We must suffer them all again.

Into this neutral air
Where blind skyscrapers use
Their full height to proclaim
The strength of Collective Man,
Each language pours its vain
Competitive excuse:
But who can live for long
In an euphoric dream;
Out of the mirror they stare,
Imperialism's face
And the international wrong.

Faces along the bar
Cling to their average day:
The lights must never go out,
The music must always play,
All the conventions conspire
To make this fort assume
The furniture of home;
Lest we should see where we are,
Lost in a haunted wood,
Children afraid of the night
Who have never been happy or good.

The windiest militant trash
Important Persons shout
Is not so crude as our wish:
What mad Nijinsky wrote
About Diaghilev
Is true of the normal heart;
For the error bred in the bone
Of each woman and each man
Craves what it cannot have,
Not universal love
But to be loved alone.

From the conservative dark
Into the ethical life
The dense commuters come,
Repeating their morning vow;
'I will be true to the wife,
I'll concentrate more on my work,'
And helpless governors wake
To resume their compulsory game:
Who can release them now,
Who can reach the dead,
Who can speak for the dumb?

All I have is a voice

To undo the folded lie,
The romantic lie in the brain
Of the sensual man-in-the-street
And the lie of Authority
Whose buildings grope the sky:
There is no such thing as the State
And no one exists alone;
Hunger allows no choice
To the citizen or the police;
We must love one another or die.

Defenseless under the night
Our world in stupor lies;
Yet, dotted everywhere,
Ironic points of light
Flash out wherever the Just
Exchange their messages:
May I, composed like them
Of Eros and of dust,
Beleaguered by the same
Negation and despair,
Show an affirming flame.

Francesca says

4-4.5/5

Vendela says

Spain 1937. Refugee Blues. Orpheus. Also, incidentally, Auden's most famous poem (another blues). This collection is - I could line up a lot of superlative adjectives here. I'm going to keep coming back to it.

vi macdonald says

Previously I don't think I would have thought to count Auden among my favourite poets. Don't get me wrong, I always really liked his work, I just didn't think he was one of "the best". That said, having now read this, if everything he wrote hit the same highs as this collection, he might well be up there because these were pretty damn amazing.

Lili says

Read many years ago and dip in occasionally.

Courtney Johnston says

In my first year at university, I discovered three poets on the shelves of the abundant Otago University bookshop. I used to pore over those shelves, agonise over them, allocate my pennies warily.

From that time, I have Seamus Heaney's Collected Poems - the thick book with the forest green cover. I fell for his earthiness, his precision, and the fierceness of his 'Mycenae Lookout'. I have three e.e. cummings; I fell for his playfulness, his eroticism, his tenderness. He matched perfectly that thinskinnyed whirl of desire that constitutes your first year away from home. And I have this buff coloured edition of Auden, now sadly foxed after being lugged from flat to flat over more years than I like to remember.

With Auden, it was the tone that I loved - wise, sardonic, occasionally mournful, sometimes nobly resigned, well-manneredly anguished. The part of me that thrills to Auden is the same part that thrilled to the way T.H. White portrayed Arthur, Guinevere and Lancelot. If cummings was for that helium-filled feeling of falling in love, Auden was for the times that you had your heart set on someone who you just couldn't have.

Lines from the poems of this book have sunk so far into my mind that they've become part of the way I think, the way words form in my head. There's the ringing repeated lines: 'O all the instruments agree / The day of his death was a dark cold day', 'Yet there's no place for us, my dear, yet there's no place for us', 'But he frowned like thunder and he went away', 'Will it alter my life altogether / O, tell me the truth about love'.

Auden will always own love for me:

Lay your sleeping head, my love,
Human on my faithless arm;
Time and fevers burn away
Individual beauty from
Thoughtful children, and the grave
Proves the child ephemeral:
But in my arms till break of day
Let the living creature lie,
Mortal, guilty, but to me
The entirely beautiful.

I believed for years that
Love was the conjunction
Of two oppositions;
That was all untrue;
Every young man fears that
He is not worth loving:
Bless you, darling, I have
Found myself in you.

No matter how many times I boredom-watch Four Weddings and a Funeral, 'Funeral Blues' will always move me:

Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead
Scribbling on the sky the message He Is Dead,
Put crêpe bows round the white necks of the public doves,
Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves.

'Musee des Beaux Arts' will always be one of my favourite pieces of art writing:

About suffering they were never wrong,
The Old Masters; how well, they understood
Its human position; how it takes place
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along;
How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting
For the miraculous birth, there always must be
Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating
On a pond at the edge of the wood:
They never forgot
That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot
Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse
Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.

In Breughel's Icarus, for instance: how everything turns away
Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green
Water; and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.

'Roman Wall Blues' will always make me feel like I'm holding one end of a piece of string, and centuries ago, a Roman soldier is holding the other:

Over the heather the wet wind blows,
I've lice in my tunic and a cold in my nose.

The rain comes pattering out of the sky,
I'm a Wall soldier, I don't know why.

The mist creeps over the hard grey stone,

My girl's in Tungria; I sleep alone.

Aulus goes hanging around her place,
I don't like his manners, I don't like his face.

Piso's a Christian, he worships a fish;
There'd be no kissing if he had his wish.

She gave me a ring but I diced it away;
I want my girl and I want my pay.

When I'm a veteran with only one eye
I shall do nothing but look at the sky.

And like what - a million English-speakers around around the world? - this will always be one of the pieces of writing I hold closest to me:

As I walked out one evening,
Walking down Bristol Street,
The crowds upon the pavement
Were fields of harvest wheat.

And down by the brimming river
I heard a lover sing
Under an arch of the railway:
'Love has no ending.

'I'll love you, dear, I'll love you
Till China and Africa meet,
And the river jumps over the mountain
And the salmon sing in the street,

'I'll love you till the ocean
Is folded and hung up to dry
And the seven stars go squawking
Like geese about the sky.

'The years shall run like rabbits,
For in my arms I hold
The Flower of the Ages,
And the first love of the world.'

But all the clocks in the city
Began to whirr and chime:
'O let not Time deceive you,

You cannot conquer Time.

'In the burrows of the Nightmare
Where Justice naked is,
Time watches from the shadow
And coughs when you would kiss.

'In headaches and in worry
Vaguely life leaks away,
And Time will have his fancy
To-morrow or to-day.

'Into many a green valley
Drifts the appalling snow;
Time breaks the threaded dances
And the diver's brilliant bow.

'O plunge your hands in water,
Plunge them in up to the wrist;
Stare, stare in the basin
And wonder what you've missed.

'The glacier knocks in the cupboard,
The desert sighs in the bed,
And the crack in the tea-cup opens
A lane to the land of the dead.

'Where the beggars raffle the banknotes
And the Giant is enchanting to Jack,
And the Lily-white Boy is a Roarer,
And Jill goes down on her back.

'O look, look in the mirror,
O look in your distress:
Life remains a blessing
Although you cannot bless.

'O stand, stand at the window
As the tears scald and start;
You shall love your crooked neighbour
With your crooked heart.'

It was late, late in the evening,
The lovers they were gone;
The clocks had ceased their chiming,
And the deep river ran on.

Seb Choe says

the first third is brilliant

Liam89 says

My favourite poet. "Looking up at the stars, I know full well, that for all they care, I can go to hell."

Sarah Canavan says

Well. I just love this collection. Whenever I get close to someone new, I get this urge to read aloud to them my favorite poems from this book. I usually just end up doing it when I am home and alone because I am shy.

I found a first American edition of this (without cover) at Powell's recently, and though it was pricey, I bought it because of the wonderful annotations within the pages. A previous owner of this copy had some very strong opinions on Auden's 1940 collection. Some highlights from the commentator:

"feeble in logic"

"this seems better than it is"

"The metrics and the imagery are both so obviously valid, that it takes some time to recognize the flaccidity of the thinking and logic here"

I love this comment, in particular: "Auden is not a thinker. He is not an innovator, but simply the freshest and most vigorous singer of his generation."

The annotator though really praises Auden's "In Memory of W.B. Yeats" as "one of the finest poems of its kind -- informal elegy"

Anyway, my personal thoughts on Auden are that while he is a singer, I'm not a great "thinker" and the musicality and the dreaminess of his cadence captivate me. My personal favorites are XXI: Musée de Beaux-Arts, XIV: The Capital and XXVI: As I Walked Out One Evening.

Johan Thilander says

"Time watches from the shadows / And coughs when you would kiss". Mörkt och humoristiskt och medvetet på ett självklart sätt. Auden alltså..!

Robert says

Auden really had a knack for getting under the skin. Read it.

Ade Bd says

I've decided to move this book to my read folder, but it has no finished date, its a 'forever dip into' book, books of poetry are like that, and, this being split between heavy and light, offers something for anyone who like words that rhyme.

Koen Kop says

" Faces along the bar
cling to their average day:
The lights must never go out,
the music must always play.
All the conventions conspire
to make this fortress assume
the furniture of home;
lest we should see where we are,
lost in a haunted wood,
children afraid of the night
who have never been happy or good."

(From "September 1, 1939")
