



Auden: Poems

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The Everyman's Library Pocket Poets hardcover series is popular for its compact size and reasonable price which does not compromise content. **Poems: Auden** is just another reminder of his exhilarating lyric power and his understanding of love and longing in all their sacred and profane guises. One of English poetry's great 20th century masters, **Poems: Auden** is the short collection of an exemplary champion of human wisdom in its encounter with the mysteries of experience.

Auden: Poems Details

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Giulia says

Although I think Auden is a very strong writer and the poetry featured in this collection show immense skill, I did have a lot of difficulty following the poems, esp. the longer ones. Through most of the book I felt like I was just reading the words without getting the picture. This is more so my error than the author's, though I wish a small context caption was provided for the poems (besides the ones dedicated to other authors).

My favorite poems were 'O Where Are You Going?', "O What is That Sound", and "Funeral Blues". These were the most memorable, to me, and I loved the format of the individual poems. The content is also very powerful.

Ccmaria62 says

A slice of Auden:

Vintage
I
Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.

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.

He was my North, my South, my East and West,
My working week and my Sunday rest,
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;
I thought that love would last for ever: I was wrong.

The stars are not wanted now: put out every one;
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun;
Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood.
For nothing now can ever come to any good.

W H Auden

Nuf said.

Marc says

W.H. Auden, that's quite a name in poetry. I expected a lot of this anthology, but it was disappointing. Auden is a very versatile poet, that's for sure: he had a long career, and went through an interesting evolution. His work shows a great diversity of theme's and of poetic techniques. But, nevertheless, I wasn't appealed by it; especially the longer poems seemed to be tedious. Of course, there are some beauties (the classic "funeral blues" for instance, or the witty "archeology"). Perhaps my irritation is due to the editor of this anthology: there's no explanation about the choice (I don't know if it is in chronological order), and there are no notes that give context. A missed opportunity!

Trish says

W.H. Auden was born on 21st February 1907 in York. He grew up in and near Birmingham in a professional middle-class family. He attended English public schools and studied English at Christ Church, Oxford. After a few months in Berlin in 1928–29, he spent five years (1930–35) teaching in English public schools, then travelled to Iceland and China in order to write books about his journeys. In 1939 he moved to the United States and became an American citizen in 1946.

Auden was also gay, maintaining a lasting but intermittent sexual friendship with Christopher Isherwood, with whom he also collaborated on three plays, while both had briefer but supposedly more intense relations with other men.

In 1939 Auden fell in love with Chester Kallman and regarded their relation as a marriage; this ended in 1941 when Kallman refused to accept the faithful relation that Auden demanded. The two maintained their friendship and from 1947 until Auden's death they lived in the same house or apartment in a non-sexual relation, often collaborating on opera.

From 1941 to 1945 Auden taught in American universities, followed by occasional visiting professorships in the 1950s (he was the Professor of Poetry at Oxford from 1956 to 1961 for example).

From 1947 to 1957 he wintered in New York and summered in Ischia; from 1958 until the end of his life he wintered in New York (in Oxford in 1972–73) and summered in Kirchstetten, Austria, where he died on 29th September 1973.

He won the Pulitzer Prize in Poetry for his long poem *The Age of Anxiety* (published 1947), the title of which became a popular phrase describing the modern era. Unfortunately, this poem was not included in this book; a shame since a collection should always include the best/most known works.

Auden wrote prose essays and reviews on literary, political, psychological and religious subjects. He also worked on documentary films, poetic plays, and other forms of performance. Throughout his career he was both controversial and influential. Critical views on his work ranged from sharply dismissive, treating him as a lesser follower of Yeats and T. S. Eliot, to strongly affirmative (as in Joseph Brodsky's claim that he had "the greatest mind of the twentieth century").

I must admit that I had hoped to love Auden's works more. I discovered him when Stephen Fry recited *Funeral Blues* in one of his documentaries about language and fell in love with the lines. Auden was definitely the romantic type. However, he was strong in expressing political views too, as is evident in *Refugee Blues* (yeah, he seems to have had a thing for „blues“, using that word in several titles). That became my second favourite en par with *Archaeology* and almost en par with *Musée des Beaux Arts* (again, the romantic kind). Also a pretty good one was *The Shield of Achilles*, which describes expectations of war vs reality. To be clear: those deserve 4 to 5 stars each (I'm only mentioning this because of my exceptionally low rating).

Nevertheless, there were only these few works that really stood out; the rest were either not really very memorable or even „ugly“ to me. That was surprising and saddening. Since Auden's poetry was noted for its stylistic and technical achievement, its engagement with politics, morals, love, religion, and its variety in tone, form and content, I had hoped to spend several hours marvelling in the poet's world, seeing that I was understood or learning new perspectives even (which is what poetry is chiefly about) – but that was unfortunately not the case.

So 5 (6 with the Pulitzer-Prize-winning but not included one) out of 102 poems in this collection ... that's not a good bottom line.

Emily says

One of my favorites:

AUTUMN SONG

Now the leaves are falling fast,
Nurse's flowers will not last,
Nurses to their graves are gone,
But the prams go rolling on.

Whispering neighbors left and right
Daunt us from our true delight,
Able hands are forced to freeze
Derelict on lonely knees.

Close behind us on our track,
Dead in hundreds cry Alack,
Arms raised stiffly to reprove
In false attitudes of love.

Scrawny through a plundered wood,
Trolls run scolding for their food,
Owl and nightingale are dumb,
And the angel will not come.

Clear, unscaleable, ahead
Rise the Mountains of Instead,
From whose cold cascading streams

None may drink except in dreams.

Susan Barsy says

I enjoyed carrying this small volume with me on the train and reading a poem or two during my daily commute. I am not an expert on Auden, but I enjoyed the range of poems in this slender collection: some funny, some sweet, some ominous, some startlingly candid, and many peculiarly mysterious (may be true of much good poetry?)

I particularly liked the poem about the death of Yeats, and one called "A Summer Night."

Although the late Auden is the one most vividly preserved in American consciousness, many of the poems in this book capture the terror of the world wars that hung over and shaped Auden's early life, giving his work an apocalyptic feel.

All in all, I cherish a fond affection for this modest Everyman edition of Auden.

Brenna Terry says

Fantastic introduction to a wonderful, witty poet. He is definitely a new favorite!

Tylyn says

I'm embarrassed to admit that I had been given this book ten years ago, and only just now had I gotten myself to read it. Though now having read it, more than embarrassed, I feel bad for myself that I missed out for so long on an experience with Auden.

I like to take my time with poetry anyway, but this is a book that is especially demanding of a slow read. With varying structures of rhyme and meter, as well as different lengths of poems, I found this collection worked better doing short reads of 2-4 poems a sitting than simply going through the entire book at once.

By my understanding just from the text, this is an anthology of sorts, with various poems published from Auden throughout his career. This was also fun for me, to watch certain changes occur, or at least how they're placed. For example, there are a lot of shorter poems in the beginning, and get longer as they go on.

However, the quality of poem, in my opinion, remains the same. Looking at my copy of the book right now, there are more dog-ears than I can count, and many poems that I can tell I'll be coming back to in order to reflect on later.

In a way, I suppose I'm glad I waited this long to read these poems. I doubt that my middle-school aged self would have been able to fully appreciate many of the topics at hand.

Dave Tigges says

Favorites:

'O Where are You Going?'
A Summer Night
O What is That Sound
As I Walked Out One Evening
Autumn Song
Funeral Blues
Roman Wall Blues
O Tell Me the Truth About Love
Epitaph on a Tyrant
In Memory of W. B. Yeats
The Unknown Citizen
Refugee Blues
Woods
Plains
First Things First
The More Loving One
The Shield of Achilles
The Love Feast
Friday's Child
The Cave of Nakedness
A Thanksgiving

Elena Sala says

This is a lovely collection of poems, selected by Edward Mendelson, Auden's literary executor. This edition includes many of his best poems, however, it lacks an introduction or a preface, which may be very useful for a reader encountering this poet for the first time.

Auden is not an easy poet at all. Sometimes he tries too hard to be clever and uses words for effect, without regard of their meaning. For this reason, parts of some of his poems can be incomprehensible. However, with a little help from bibliography, Auden can be made accessible to the novice.

His chief concern was, I think, the question of how we are to live. He is committed to telling the truth, unclouded by any sentiment. Many poems muse on our physicality and the vulnerability that goes with it. Above all, his poetry engages strongly with the landscape and natural life and often some kernel of truth will be distilled from his observation. He is really a wonderful poet, but his poetry requires some patience and much re-reading.

Rebecca says

How does one rate a poem? Or a book of poetry?

A poem which might seem empty at one moment will speak to you with the weight of the world in the next. Familiarity with a variety of poems allows one to archive them away and then retrieve one when the timing is right, and it, like a balm, heals. And so I read poetry.

W.H. Auden is simultaneously accessible and complex. His writing is a paradox; a mixture of modern and ancient, everyday commonplace raised to royal, angry and loving.

I've carried this edition in my handbag for several months now, referring to it whenever I had a free minute. Many of the corners are dog-eared so I can easily return. Here are a couple:

Epitaph on a Tyrant

Perfection, of a kind, was what he was after,
And the poetry he invented was easy to understand;
He knew human folly like the back of his hand,
And was greatly interested in armies and fleets;
When he laughed, respectable senators burst
with laughter,
And when he cried the little children died in the streets.

Law Like Love

Law, say the gardeners, is the sun,
Law is the one
All gardeners obey
To-morrow, yesterday, to-day.

Law is the wisdom of the old,
The impotent grandfathers feebly scold;
The grandchildren put out a treble tongue,
Law is the senses of the young.

Law, says the priest with a priestly look,
Expounding to an unpriestly people,
Law is the words in my priestly book,
Law is my pulpit and my steeple.

Law, says the judge as he looks down his nose,
Speaking clearly and most severely,
Law is as I've told you before,
Law is as you know I suppose,
Law is but let me explain it once more,
Law is The Law.

Yet law-abiding scholars write:
Law is neither wrong nor right,
Law is only crimes
Punished by places and by times,
Law is the clothes men wear
Anytime, anywhere,
Law is Good morning and Good night.

Others say, Law is our Fate;
Others say, Law is our State;
Others say, others say
Law is no more,
Law has gone away.

And always the loud angry crowd,
Very angry and very loud,
Law is We,
And always the soft idiot softly Me.

If we, dear, know we know no more
Than they about the Law,
If I no more than you
Know what we should and should not do
Except that all agree
Gladly or miserably
That the Law is
And that all know this
If therefore thinking it absurd
To identify Law with some other word,
Unlike so many men
I cannot say Law is again,

No more than they can we suppress
The universal wish to guess
Or slip out of our own position
Into an unconcerned condition.
Although I can at least confine
Your vanity and mine
To stating timidly
A timid similarity,
We shall boast anyway:
Like love I say.

Like love we don't know where or why,
Like love we can't compel or fly,
Like love we often weep,
Like love we seldom keep.

Sam Schedler says

favorites:

oh where are you going
oh what is that sound
the dream
underneath an abject willow
at last the secret is out
funeral blues
johnny
oh tell me the truth about love
refugee blues
song of the master and boatswain
miranda's song
lullaby

Eugenea Pollock says

By the end, I was really wrapped up in Auden's witty, urbane, accessible, lyrical verse—though I admit that my affection was not instant. As with making any new friend, it took me a while to catch on to and appreciate his sense of humor, as well as his depiction of love and longing in a broad, inclusive sense. My absolute favorites were *A Summer Night*, *Casino*, *The Lesson*, *Alonso to Ferdinand*, *The Shield of Achilles*, *Nones*, *The Common Life*, and *Archaeology*. Note to the shade of W.H.: I wish we could have been friends.

Andrew says

Auden can be beautiful, delightful, ponderous, and haunting. About 70% of the collection in the Everyman's Library Pocket Poets edition [hand-sized, 256 pages] is easily accessible and enjoyable without contextualizing aids. I understand the publisher's concerns about book size and "pocketability," but I wish this edition included the poems' individual publication dates, if not a brief biographical timeline. Surely this would have only required another five or ten pages?

April Capil says

Every time a starlet gets a Botox injection, I think of W. H. Auden: "O let not Time deceive you. You cannot conquer Time."
