



Tikrit University

College of Education for Women

Fourth Year/ Modern poetry

Subject: Musee des Beaux Arts by W.H. Auden

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W.H. Auden

Wystan Hugh Auden, commonly known as W.H. Auden, was an English-American poet, playwright, and critic. He was born in 1907, and passed away in 1973. Auden's works are known for their intellectual depth, technical mastery, and wide range of themes. He explored various subjects, including love, politics, religion, and the human condition. Auden's poetry often reflects his social and political concerns, and he is considered one of the greatest poets of the 20th century.

Since W.H. Auden is a poet of the 1930's , his time was very difficult, which he called "The Age of Anxiety" because of the threat of the war on the one hand and the destruction of Industrialization on the other hand . Auden, as well as the other poets of the 30's, puts imagination aside and makes science and reason as main themes of most of his poetry. So, he is considered a member of the social-realism movement of the modern age. Which characterized by:

1-Focus on themes of social justice, equality, and the plight of the working class.

2-Socialist poetry frequently critiques capitalism and its impact on society.

3-Socialist poetry is deeply engaged with political issues and often seeks to inspire political activism.

Musee des Beaux Arts

"Musee dex Beaux Arts" is a poem about a trip to a museum and the poet's observation of a fine painting in Brussels by Brueghel that Auden viewed in 1938 when he visited the museum. He says that the classical artists were accurate in picturing human suffering, and they understood this suffering better than modern people.

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.

Poem's Analysis:

In the first stanza, Auden introduces the idea of suffering and how it often goes unnoticed. He mentions the "Old Masters," referring to artists who depicted scenes

from mythology and Christianity. The first line, "About suffering, they were never wrong," suggests that the Old Masters understood the nature of human suffering and accurately portrayed it in their art. However, the line also implies that people in general tend to overlook or ignore the suffering of others.

In the second stanza, Auden focuses on specific examples of suffering. He mentions the story of Icarus, who flew too close to the sun and fell to his death. Auden describes how Icarus's fall was witnessed by a "boy" and a "farmer," but they did not pay much attention to it. This highlights the indifference of ordinary people to the suffering of others, even when it occurs right in front of them.

In the final stanza, Auden broadens the scope of the poem to encompass the entire world. He describes how life goes on as usual, despite the presence of suffering. People continue with their daily activities, such as "eating or opening a window." The last two lines, "The dogs go on with their doggy life, and the torturer's horse / Scratches its innocent behind on a tree," emphasize the contrast between the innocence of animals and the cruelty of humans.

Irony:

The title means a "Museum of Fine Arts". Verbal irony can be found in the title, because it suggests that the poem is about beautiful things, while its content talks about people who are suffering and dying. There is also a situational irony when Icarus is falling to his death and the people in the painting are just going on with their life's.

Themes:

The main themes of "Museum of Fine Arts" by W.H. Auden are the indifference of the world to human suffering and the resilience of art in the face of tragedy. The poem explores the idea that while great tragedies occur, life goes on as usual for

most people, who remain oblivious to the pain and suffering of others. It emphasizes the contrast between the ordinary activities of everyday life and the profound suffering depicted in famous works of art. The poem also highlights the power of art to capture and preserve these moments of human suffering, allowing them to be remembered and acknowledged.