

Poem No.

2

# Night Mail

*(W. H. Auden)*

This is the Night Mail crossing the Border,  
Bringing the cheque and the postal order,

Letters for the rich, letters for the poor,  
The shop at the corner, the girl next door.

Pulling up Beattock, a steady climb;  
The gradient's against her, but she's on time.

Past cotton-grass and moorland boulder,  
Shovelling white steam over her shoulder,

Snorting noisily, she passes  
Silent miles of wind-bent grasses.

Birds turn their heads as she approaches,  
Stare from bushes at her blank-faced coaches.

Sheepdogs cannot turn her course;  
They slumber on with paws across.

In the farm she passes; no one wakes,  
But a jug in a bedroom gently shakes.

## About the Poet

W.H. Auden was born in 1907. He was educated at Oxford and taught in England and Scotland for sometime. He wrote poetry and won fame in political and social circles. Among his famous volumes of verse are: *Look Stranger* (1936), *Another Time* (1940), *The Age of Anxiety* (1948). Auden showed a deep interest in language and metaphor, satire and parody

which are often dazzling and sometimes cruel. He is lively and provocative, skilled and ingenious.

### Theme

The poet describes the journey of a coach that travels all night bringing mail which contains letters, postal orders, cheques for people who live in various parts of the land.

Sometimes the journey is a steep upward climb, sometimes it runs steadily on plains.

Whether the railway track is an upward ascent or is a sloping descent, the night mail is always on time and follows the time schedule.

The grass land, cotton fields, moorland and the white clouds above, all pass by quickly and swiftly.

The birds stare at the approaching coach from their nests but the sheepdogs, unmindful of the noise of the mail coach, continue to slumber.

No one wakes up from slumber. Only a jug gently shakes as the coach passes by a farm.

### Glossary

border	boundary
gradient's	ascending or descending with a uniform slope
boulder	rounded stone, small hill
shovelled	threw off
slumber	sleep

## EXERCISES

### 1. Choose the correct answer.

- i. The Night Mail is
  - a) an express train.
  - b) a passenger train.
  - c) a train that carries mail.
- ii. The Night Mail reaches
  - a) in time.
  - b) on time.
  - c) before time.

- iii On the arrival of Night Mail the birds are
- frightened.
  - pleased.
  - flown away.
- iv. Why do the sheepdogs continue to sleep on the arrival of the train? Because they can't
- attack it.
  - bite it.
  - turn her course.

2. **Mark the statements true or false.**

- The Night Mail travels by day.
- It brings flowers and presents for the people.
- It brings letters for the rich and the poor.
- It snorts noisily like a horse.
- It disturbs the life on farms.
- The children peep from bushes at her blank faced coaches.

3. **Write two more rhyming words in each line.**

e.g. girl, pearl, curl.

- mail, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_
- night, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_
- letter, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_