

## Poem No.

4

**O Where are You Going?***(W.H. Auden)*

O where are you going? said reader to rider,  
That valley is fatal when furnaces burn,  
Yonder's the midden whose odours will madden,  
That gap is the grave where the tall return.

O do you imagine, said fearer to farer,  
That dusk will delay on your path to the pass,  
Your diligent looking discover the lacking,  
Your footsteps feel from granite to grass?

O what was that bird, said horror to hearer,  
Did you see that shape in the twisted trees?  
Behind you swiftly the figure comes softly,  
The spot on your skin is a shocking disease?

Out of this house, said rider to reader,  
Yours never will, said farer to fearer,  
They're looking for you, said hearer to horror,  
As he left them there, as he left them there.

**Theme**

The poem is a dialogue between two imaginary persons personified as reader and rider. The rider is a bold and courageous person, ambitious to make his way through thick and thin.

The reader, full of awe and reverence, tells him that the valley beyond is full of dangers and that heaps of dung and rubbish lie on his journey ahead, whose bad smell sickens and maddens the mind.

The opposite force is working to discourage the traveller from going farther and farther. Fear and horror try to discourage the rider from going on his path to the pass.

The way to glory and success is vague and uncertain, but it can be paved through with courage and perseverance.

## Glossary

fatal	causing or ending in death
midden	dung hill, heap of refuse
odour	bad smell
diligent	a hard working
granite	hard rock used in building
dusk	the darker stage of twilight
horror	intense feeling of fear

## EXERCISES

- Summarize the poem in your own words.
- Answer the following questions.
  - What kinds of feelings does the poet create in the minds of his readers?
  - How do you feel after reading the poem?
  - What does the title of the poem signify?
  - Write down the rhyming words in the poem.
  - Explain the third stanza of the poem in your own words.
- Mark the statements true / false.
 

a.	The valley is fatal when the furnaces burn.	T/F
b.	That dusk will not delay on your path to the pass.	T/F
c.	Your footsteps feel from granite to grass.	T/F
d.	The spot on your skin is a shocking disease.	T/F