

On the Image of Full Moon in *This Lunar Beauty* by W.H. Auden

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ABSTRACT: As one the greatest poets in the 20th century literature, W. H. Auden's early poems are simple but original, which is hard to imitate by other poets. This paper aims to introduce one of W.H. Auden's early poems in which the image of full moon intends to express the author's emotions about love and loss. Various kinds of legend about full moon are also explained in both western and Chinese sense.

KEYWORD: Image of full moon; Symbolic meaning; Emotion

1 INTRODUCTION

The Moon has fascinated mankind throughout the ages, full of romantic and blue color. By simply viewing with the naked eye, one can discern two major types of terrain on the moon: relatively bright highlands and darker plains. It has also been known for more than a century that the Moon is less dense than the Earth¹. Although a certain amount of information was ascertained about the Moon before the space age, this new era has revealed many secrets barely imaginable before that time. Current knowledge of the Moon is greater than for any other solar system object except Earth. This lends to a greater understanding of geologic processes and further appreciation of the complexity of terrestrial planets². Despite geographical feature of the Moon, people always like to put the moon into literature particularly poems to express variety of their emotions. The image of full moon has been endowed with many symbolic meaning all over the world, often out of aesthetic need.

2 LEGEND ABOUT FULL MOON

For centuries legend has held that full moons make people go crazy. Full moons have been linked in popular culture with a rise in suicides and even epileptic seizures, but there's little to no scientific evidence backing these ideas up. In nature, the moon is nothing to scoff at. Animals time routine activities around the light, and the oceans' tides depend on it. The moon and the sun combine to create tides in Earth's oceans (the gravitational effect is so strong that our planet's crust gets stretched daily by these

tidal effects). But tides are large-scale events. They occur because of the difference in the gravitational pull felt on the side of the Earth closest to the moon, compared to the side of the Earth farthest. Even though our bodies are about up to more than 60 percent water, the difference in the moon's pull on one side of our body compared to the other is much too small to have an impact⁴. As for animals, the moon does show some effects. For instance, a few nights each year, after the full moon, hundreds of species of reef-building corals spawn synchronously, releasing their eggs and sperm into the water in one of the biggest moonlight sex events on Earth. It's because the light-sensitive gene may be key which seems to be most active during full-moon nights. And creatures who prowl the forests of Argentina after dark, are more active on full-moon nights. Full moon in western sense is also symbolic of the height of power, the peak of clarity, fullness and obtainment of desire. The nature-wise, and cosmically conscious Native America Indians recognized power of full moons to the extent they framed each month's fullness with a contextual attribute. In other words they recognized the full moon in each month as having a specific (restorative, outstanding) quality¹.

As one of the traditional festivals in China, to appreciate the glorious full moon on the Mid-autumn Festival has been the choice of many. In ancient times, the clear and bright moon was a symbol of reunion. Today, the Mid-autumn Festival not only means to have a reunion, but also to enjoy the moonlight in the historical places. In Chinese minds, the moon is associated with gentleness and brightness, expressing the beautiful yearnings of the Chinese. On the 15th day of the 8th month of the

lunar calendar, the moon is full and it is time to mark the Moon Festival, or the Mid-Autumn Festival. The round shape symbolizes family reunion. Therefore the day is a holiday for family members to get together and enjoy the full moon - an auspicious token of abundance, harmony, and luck. According to traditional Chinese culture, the moon is a carrier of human emotions. Ancient Chinese myth and philosophy explain why the Chinese prefer the moon³.

From the royalty to the populace, it is an important custom to sacrifice to and appreciate the moon during the Mid-Autumn Festival. During the Mid-Autumn Festival, Adults will usually indulge in fragrant moon cakes of different varieties with a good cup of hot Chinese tea, while the little ones run around with brightly-lit lanterns. After nightfall, entire families go out under the stars for a walk or picnics, looking up at the full silver moon, thinking of their nearby relatives or friends, as well as those who are far from home. A line from a verse "The moon at the home village is exceptionally brighter" expresses those feelings³. It can also be a romantic night for lovers, who sit holding hands on riverbanks and park benches, enraptured by the brightest moon of the year. Reams of poetry have been devoted to this romantic festival. Contrary to what most people believe, this festival probably has less to do with harvest festivities than with the philosophically minded Chinese of old. The union of man's spirit with nature in order to achieve perfect harmony was the fundamental canon of Taoism, so much so that contemplation of nature was a way of life.

3 FULL MOON IN ONE OF AUDEN'S EARLY POEMS

3.1 *About Auden and his early poems*

W.H. Auden remains a giant of 20th century literature. His 400 published poems cover of vast array of themes, subjects and styles, establishing a reputation as a witty, versatile and prolific writer. The central themes of his poetry are love, politics and citizenship, religion and morals, and the relationship between unique human beings and the anonymous, impersonal world of nature. His early poems from the late 1920s and early 1930s, written in an intense and dramatic tone and in a style that alternated between telegraphic modern and fluent traditional, established his reputation as a left-wing political poet and prophet. Many of his early poems were influenced by Anglo-Saxon verse and he frequently resorted to virtuoso alliteration then and later. His unconventional poetic attitude gives the reader of the early Auden an odd exhilaration. By contrast with older poets, readers could sense his voice at home in the industrial landscapes of Britain. It was family holidays in Wales, and Bradwell in

Derbyshire between 1913-1916, it appears, which had first given rise to Auden's fascination with underground spaces and mining machinery.

Auden began writing poems at thirteen, mostly in the styles of 19th-century romantic poets, especially Wordsworth, and later poets with rural interests, especially Thomas Hardy. At eighteen he discovered T.S. Elliot and adopted an extreme version of Eliot's style. He found his own voice at twenty, when he wrote the first poem later included in his collected work, "From the very first coming down". This and other poems of the late 1920s tended to be in a clipped, elusive style that alluded to, but did not directly state, their themes of loneliness and loss. Twenty of these poems appeared in his first book *Poems* (1928). *Poems* is the title of three separate collections of the early poetry of Auden. But Auden refused to entitle his early work because he wanted the reader to confront the poetry itself. Auden's poems of the late 1920s are full of images of lead mining set against a background of fell, farm and valley, rock and water. These early poems seem to hold some degree of self-protection and reticence as important qualities and themes. This *Lunar Beauty* (assumed title) is one of such poems.

3.2 *This Lunar Beauty and its symbolic meaning of full moon*

This lunar beauty
Has no history
Is complete and early;
If beauty later
Bear any feature
It had a lover
And is another.

This like a dream
Keeps other time
And daytime is
The loss of this;
For time is inches
And the heart's changes
Where ghost has haunted
Lost and wanted.

But this was never
A ghost's endeavor
Nor, finished this,
Was ghost at ease;
And till it pass
Love shall not near
The sweetness here
Nor sorrow take
His endless look.

In this short poem, Auden uses smallest measure that meter can sustain in each line. With two beats and three or four words per line, Auden conveys his

simple but profound understanding of love and sorrow. The first three lines impress the reader deeply by saying the beauty of the moon has no history not resulting from gradual development but has been absolute from the time of the moon's coming into existence⁵. The first stanza gives reader an impression of a beautiful and pure clear full moon hanging up above the night sky. The image of full moon may symbolize the profound pure love, even the first love in one's life. If something happens to this love, it may not be as complete as the very beginning when love arises. The second stanza continues to describe the feeling for love. Like a fleeting and rhythmic dream, when daytime arrives, this love may disappear because man's heart may get lost deep in confusion due to some uncertain ghostly power. The ghost here may mean a spirit controlling one's sanity who sometimes disturbs a man from making the right decision and makes him hesitant about upcoming changes in life. In the third stanza, even the ghost in peace could not endeavor to end this love. One could only wait till confusion and loss pass quietly. After going through such complex feeling about love, love would no longer bring out sweet flavor to you and me. Nor would sorrow last longer. Sorrow here is personified as a person with sad looks due to loss of love.

The overall tone of this poem shows the inhibition of love by employing a good metaphor of lunar beauty. Indicating that pure love is always fresh and ideal full of romance and anticipation, Auden tries to show us delicate emotions of human being. Emotions may change along with the context as people go over bitterness, sweetness, sadness and happiness under different circumstances, but the most beautiful feeling will never fade away as it is complete from the very beginning even a ghost could not break this completion and perfection. The image of a beautiful full moon is deeply imprinted in reader's heart to a long lasting effect. This image

may also signify a sense of loneliness in love and enlightening revelation to love.

4 CONCLUSION

The main function of the image is to stimulate the sense of human and strike chord with similar feeling and emotional experiences of readers. The image of full moon is always favored in both western and Chinese legends, indicating auspicious meaning like fulfillment of desire and happy get-together, etc. It has reposed many expectations and ideals of human, particularly in poems it is the relying of poetic life and emotional expressions of poets. Auden's early poems are well-known for its simplicity and originality. The image of full moon is properly used in *This Lunar Beauty* to express his understanding of pure fresh love, the subtlest feeling in human world. By means of image and metaphor, readers could have a better appreciation of this beautiful poem.

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