



## The Russian Formalist Approach to W.H. Auden's *As I Walked Out One Evening*

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### ABSTRACT

Poetic expressions are associated with focus on emotional depth and biographical interpretations to convey personal or political meanings. However, when examined through the lens of Russian Formalism, a text reveals a deeper formal pattern and linguistic design that defamiliarizes the ordinary perception. Therefore, the present study is centered upon formalism to analyze W.H. Auden's poem *As I Walked Out One Evening*. The analysis aims to uncover the poetic techniques and formal structures that produce artistic estrangement and slow down perception, shifting focus from meaning to method. I.A. Richard's model of close reading has been employed to closely observe diction, imagery, and structure, and a qualitative research approach has been adopted to examine the internal mechanics of the poem. The results reveal that Auden's use of rhythm, time motifs, and irony resist automatic interpretation and creates an aesthetic experience that aligns with Shklovsky's formalist principles. Thus, the poem stands not only as a lyrical narrative but as a constructed literary artifact designed to renew perception.

### 1. Introduction

Literary interpretation has long been shaped by critical approaches that prioritize meaning, emotion, and socio-political context. Traditionally, readers and scholars have attempted to uncover the psychological, historical, or moral dimensions of a poem, focusing on what the text says rather than how it says it. However, the Russian Formalist movement in the early twentieth century challenged this mode of interpretation by suggesting that literature should not be judged by its content alone, but by its unique form and function as art (Eagleton, 2008). The Formalists emphasized the "literariness" of a text, what makes it a work of literature, by studying its structure, language, and technique. Among them, Victor Shklovsky introduced the concept of *ostranenie* or defamiliarization, arguing that the purpose of art is to make the familiar seem strange, to slow down perception and renew human experience through form (Shklovsky, 1965).

Shklovsky's defamiliarization idea gave critics and readers' reading of literature a new perspective. In his opinion, common language and conventional modes of thinking blunt our sensibilities, but literature sharpens our sense of focus by offering a reality in new shapes (Shklovsky 1965). From this point of view, literary text's construction is central and not any symbolic or ideological meanings. Poetic sound, rhythm, meter, and imagery in a text serve, primarily, as means towards a creative end and

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not as direct expression of moral or thematic ideas, according to Russian Formalism (Eichenbaum, 1965). In summary then Russian Formalism stresses the presentation of ideas over substance leading to a heightened awareness of the mechanisms used in literature.

Learning about this theory is best attained through close reading, an analysis technique which was popularized by I.A. Richards in his work, which is regarded as a source of literary theory. Richards emphasized that the unity of a poem and its systematic linguistic analysis, including tone and image, will be most clearly expounded without the mention of the author's life and the society to which he belonged (Richards, 1929). Although Richards's form of literary criticism has no point of origin with the Russian Formalists, he eventually believed alongside them that the object of literary study should be intact text as distinguished from any additional information. Close reading enables readers to recognize the complex network of form and detail that resides in a text and support the Russian Formalist perspective that the text is self-sufficient, not dependent upon the author's life or societal environment.

The present study applies formalism along with close reading as a research method to analyze W.H. Auden's narrative poem *As I Walked Out One Evening*. He was a modernist poet known for blending lyrical beauty with philosophical reflection, composed this poem in 1937. On the surface, it appears to be a meditation on love, time, and death. However, when examined through a formalist lens, the poem reveals a complex network of poetic devices such as meter, structure, paradox, and personification that disrupt habitual reading and force reading.

## 1.2. Problem Statement

While W.H. Auden's poem *As I Walked Out One Evening* has been widely interpreted through thematic, moral, and socio-political lenses, such approaches often overlook the intrinsic literary features that constitute its artistic essence. This study seeks to address this gap by applying the Russian Formalist theory, particularly Victor Shklovsky's concept of defamiliarization, to examine the poem's poetics, forms, literariness, and foregrounding. By focusing on textual mechanics rather than historical or biographical contexts, the research aims to uncover how Auden's use of structured rhyme, imagery, and contrast transforms ordinary themes into an aesthetically rich and thought-provoking poetic experience.

## 1.3. Research Objectives

- To conduct a formalist analysis of *As I Walked Out One Evening* by focusing on its imagery, diction, structure, and rhyme scheme.
- To explore how W.H. Auden employs defamiliarization to present familiar concepts such as love and time in a novel and thought-provoking way.

## 1.4. Research Questions

1. How do W.H. Auden's use of structure, imagery, and rhythm in *As I Walked Out One Evening* contribute to the poem's exploration of time, love, and mortality?
2. How does the technique of defamiliarization, as proposed by Victor Shklovsky, operate within the poem to renew the reader's perception of ordinary themes?

## 2. Literature Review

Formalism, a literary theory which developed in Russia early in the 20th century, examines form and structure of the literary works. The inner elements of a text – language, rhythmic figures, metrical constructions, literary devices – are crucial tools of meaning, according to Russian Formalists (Shklovsky, 1917). At the very center of Formalism lies the idea that the meaning of literature depends on its form, and not on the matter the literature is concerned with. Shklovsky's concept of "defamiliarization" (*ostranenie*) asserts that art should make the familiar appear strange, thereby forcing the reader to see the world anew (Shklovsky, 1917). By distancing the familiar from the ordinary, Formalism enhances perception and deepens understanding (Lemon & Reis, 1965).

Shklovsky's work is foundational in Russian Formalist criticism, and it explores the idea that literary art requires a certain "estrangement" of the everyday experience. Shklovsky (1917) contends that literary texts should not allow readers to passively consume content but should instead make them experience the world through an unfamiliar lens. This "defamiliarization" interrupts the automatic processing of routine experiences and stimulates the reader's attention, forcing them to engage with

the text more critically and reflectively. According to Bakhtin (1981), Formalism encourages readers to analyze the way literary “form” constructs meaning, often breaking down texts to reveal the complex ways that meaning is created through language.

In the context of Russian Formalism, Jakobson (1960) extended Shklovsky’s theories to emphasize “literariness”, the quality that makes a text distinctly literary, distinguishing it from ordinary speech. Jakobson’s notion of the “poetic function” argues that the primary function of literature is not to communicate information but to highlight the language itself. As far as this is concerned, the stylistic aspects of literature, like rhyme, meter, and metaphor, become a decisive factor in creating the general meaning of the text, and not merely a decorative impetus. Literature, by distorting language (Jakobson 1960, Poetry and Language), thereby constructing ordinary occurrences in new and strange ways, accomplishes its capacity to transfigure. By favoring form over content, this view undermines the deep-rooted conviction that literature’s greatest task is to preach a moral or ideological lesson.

Framing the ideas of Formalism, Mukařovský (1932) defined “foregrounding”, i.e., a way of highlighting certain textual features, the purpose of which is to question the standard perceptions. The term ‘foregrounding’ reveals how authors purposefully bring attention to specific linguistic features (such as sound, structure or meaning) to prevaricate a reader’s reading into the text. For Mukařovský (1932), formal elements in literature are primarily designed to communicate meaning and thus central objects of stylistic analysis. The more focus placed upon these formal elements, the “literary” the text seems to be.

In his article *The Cluster Account of Art Defended*, Gaut (2005) presents a pluralistic theory of art, arguing that no single defining feature can capture the essence of art; rather, artworks possess a “cluster” of features such as expressiveness, creativity, emotional power, and formal structure. While not focused exclusively on poetry, Gaut’s model has implications for the evaluation of poetic form, suggesting that structure, such as rhythm, meter, and genre conventions, is one among many interrelated properties that contribute to a work’s artistic status. In the case of W. H. Auden’s poetry, particularly *As I Walked Out One Evening*, the poem’s formal elements (rhyme scheme, meter, and voice structure) play a crucial role in its aesthetic and philosophical effect. Gaut’s framework supports the idea that the poetic form is not an isolated feature but part of a broader constellation that gives the work its artistic value.

In *The Poetics of Prose*, Todorov (1977) provides foundational insights into the structuralist approach to literature, emphasizing the formal properties of narrative and their functions within a text. Although the work primarily addresses prose, Todorov’s analysis of narrative structures and genres offers valuable implications for understanding poetry as well, particularly in how poetic texts can be examined through their internal logic, conventions, and transformations of form. His emphasis on the underlying grammar of literature supports a formalist reading of poetry that considers how structure, voice, and genre interplay to produce meaning beyond thematic content. This framework aligns with structuralist approaches to lyric poetry by highlighting how poetic devices function within established conventions to convey complex human experiences (Todorov, 1977).

Quipp (2007) explores W. H. Auden’s lyric poetry through the lens of “vocality,” emphasizing how poems like *As I Walked Out One Evening* engage readers through multiple voices and rhythmic structures that demand vocal participation. The poem’s interplay between the lover, the narrator, and the clocks exemplifies what Quipp identifies as Auden’s unique capacity to merge personal expression with universal themes, particularly the tension between love and the inexorability of time. This layered vocality reflects Auden’s broader poetic aim to create a space where individual and collective experience converge (Quipp, 2007).

Glaser and Culler (2019), in *Critical Rhythm: The Poetics of a Literary Life Form*, explore rhythm not merely as a metrical device but as a dynamic, structuring force that shapes meaning, perception, and lived experience in literature. Their work repositions rhythm as central to literary interpretation, bridging the gap between form and life. In the context of W. H. Auden’s poetry, particularly in pieces like *As I Walked Out One Evening*, this perspective is illuminating. Auden’s careful manipulation of rhythm, through traditional meters and musical cadences, serves not only aesthetic purposes but also underscores the philosophical tensions in his work, such as the conflict between temporal experience and emotional desire. Glaser and Culler’s theory allows for a deeper understanding of how rhythm in Auden’s verse enacts and critiques the lived rhythms of modernity.

Fleissner (2005) explores W. H. Auden’s *As I Walked Out One Evening*, focusing on the poem’s temporal and thematic complexity. He highlights the interplay between romantic idealism and the harsh realities of time, noting how the structure of the poem, alternating voices and consistent meter, underscores its philosophical depth. Fleissner draws attention to the symbolic function of the clocks and the poem’s balladic form, suggesting that Auden uses traditional poetic structure not to affirm certainty, but to destabilize it. This reading aligns with broader critical views that interpret Auden’s formal choices as central to the poem’s meaning, where structure serves both aesthetic and conceptual purposes (Fleissner, 2005).

What the repetitive form in *As I Walked Out One Evening* brings to a sense of something destined to come up is underscored. For Auden, the essence of the poem’s structure is not simply some external aspect of the poem; it is a tool for conveying the

basic ideas. By repeating rhymes and meter, Auden focuses on the coming back of time, and the inability of humanity to get away from the tireless circle. That argument fits the Russian formalist theory on which form is more than an aesthetic ornament but an essential ingredient in the process of meaning making in a text (Shklovsky, 1917).

Mason (1954) offers an early close reading of Auden's *As I Walked Out One Evening*, emphasizing its fusion of lyrical beauty with ironic commentary on human experience. He interprets the poem as a dramatic dialogue between timeless romantic hope and the relentless truth of temporal decay, embodied in the structured contrast between the lover's idealistic declarations and the clocks' sobering warnings. Mason points out that Auden's deliberate use of traditional ballad form, regular rhyme and meter, intensifies the thematic tension, suggesting that form itself becomes a vessel for irony. This analysis reinforces the idea that Auden's poetic structure is inseparable from his philosophical critique, allowing form to mirror and amplify meaning (Mason, 1954).

### 3. Research Methodology

Close reading is the primary methodology of research for this study to analyze the formal elements of W.H Auden's, *As I Walked Out One Evening*. This way of close reading gives freedom to scour language, structure, and poetic devices in the poem, which shows how form, rhythm, and symbolism affect how the poem is read. According to I.A. Richards (1929), close reading refers to an analytical process which involves stating the specific textual elements such as word choice, sentence structure and imagery for uncovering underlying meanings. By using this approach, Formalism, an important critical gaze, which puts accent on the poem's form, its devices as well as in the process of making the familiar strange, to be considered as the essential elements for the poem's holistic impact, is supported. In turn, the approach helps conduct sequential analysis of Auden's ways of using form, rhythm, and repetition in *As I Walked Out One Evening*, paying attention to such issues as time, love, and human mortality. The approach employed here comes under E. Charles Bressler's method, which focuses on poetics, form, devices, foregrounding, literariness and defamiliarization. Using close reading methods, this analysis attempts to show how Auden's use of form creates a sense of estrangement, poetics and thereby stabilizes the text's literary implications.

#### 3.1. Theoretical Framework

To this investigation, a formalist perspective is used in analyzing poetic texts where essential attributes of poem's text, including language, structure, and form, are the focus to expose the underlying themes in *As I Walked Out One Evening* by W.H. Auden. Building upon Charles Bressler's formalist method (which demands a meticulously structured, step-by-step analysis of the text), the following study is based on. According to Bressler, when the text's poetics, form, literary tools, foregrounding, literariness, and defamiliarization are analyzed the question emerges as to how these are brought together to make the poem's significance (Bressler, 1994). Using Bressler's approach, this study is focused on the text and its formal elements, going into the close analysis of every literary feature to convince the reader how the poem's form works for its thematic purposes.

In the case of formalist analysis, the notion of poetics is central as it refers to the manner of the composition of a text, with its linguistic choices, its formal layout and its sonic qualities. Through the usage of poetic forms like rhyme and meter, Auden effectively reverses the poem *As I Walked Out One Evening* using a rhythm to heighten the voice of themes in the poem about time, love, and mortality. The poetic form should be seen as a crucial element instead of a secondary element in the evocation of meaning (Bressler [1994]). By making use of such things as rhyme and meter, Auden's poem establishes an individual aesthetic and emotional atmosphere viewing on to the temporality of love and human life.

The form referred to in formalist criticism indicates the composition of a text and systematic concatenation of its elements. Bressler (1994) holds that the structure that one uses when writing is important as it modulates the reader's experience of the work. The organization of Auden's poetry forms an integral part of the demonstration of the recurrent patterns of time and life. It is the interaction of dialogue and description that gives the poem's form a dynamic quality reflecting the sense of time's movement which is so important to the themes. The form of the poem segments allows its consumers to understand better the unavoidability of human mortality and the transitory nature of love, both of which can be highlighted by the poem's time inspired imagery.

Viktor Shklovsky writing (1917) characterizes the process of defamiliarization as a fundamental precept of formalist analysis that attempts to rouse uncertainty that the reader would experience in their understandings of familiar things to sharpen their ability to see. Using such an approach, Auden makes us disoriented as to the different ways we perceive our environment and experiences. Auden achieves defamiliarization by writing traditional motifs such as love and time into what he uses as, novel and unfamiliar situations within his poem. In comparison of eternal love to the necessary end, Auden challenges us to rethink the meaning of these words. By using this approach, Auden disturbs traditional romantic viewpoints and inquires the reader to consider the profound meaning of time's pivotless circuits.

Foregrounding is also a formalist term within which certain parts of the text are foregrounded to make the reader aware of them. It highlights aspects of the poem that make them different and herring importance of them in the piece of writing. According to Bressler (1994), literary devices such as atypical word choices; evocative descriptions; and unique sentence structures become the literary means of the technique of foregrounding. The motif of the clock and ticking sound repeated in page after page of the Auden's poem is a foreground that highlights the main idea of time. The effect of the emphasis upon the image of time present in the poem of Auden highlights again the aspects of human mortality and the impermanence of love that are so central to the contemplation of mortality effected by the poem.

The notion of literariness, key to formalism, specifies what makes the object of work distinguishable as a literary work, from an unrelated writing process. Language's "peculiar 'poetic function'" (Jakobson 1960), in the view of the former, distinguishes literary texts as it directs focus on language's form and structure, rather than on explicit message. Considering the "poetic function" of the language, Jakob (1960) provides an understanding of what makes the approach to the language by Auden improve the thematic resonance of poetry. Auden's conscious manipulation of meter, rhyme, imagery in *As I Walked Out One Evening* leads to a work of literature that can be enjoyed by both eye and mind. Using the devices of alliteration, metaphor, and personification, Auden makes the poem more literary and gives everyone places for deep existential questions.

In a formalist approach, two or more of the following – defamiliarization, foregrounding, poetics, form, and literariness, work together to make Auden's poem more important. All these formalist components considerably help to outline the poetry's key ideas, including the impermanent nature of love and an inevitable fact of death. By systematically exploring these components, as advised by Bressler, this research attempts to show how Auden's formal selections enable the poem's ability to create meaningful emotional and intellectual involvement within its readers.

Formalism principles belong to various theorists, such as Viktor Shklovsky in 1917 who even suggested the idea of defamiliarization. Shklovsky stressed an attempt to make familiar things strange to break conventional thinking and engage the readers in the thought of their world understanding. Using common topics rendered in a new manner, Auden makes use of defamiliarization, in accordance with Shklovsky's works of 1917 (Shklovsky, 1917). Similarly, Roman Jakobson (1960) conceptualized literariness as also arising out of his investigation in "poetic function" in language. For language to be deemed as literary, it must depend on its formal and structural aspects, and Auden in *As I Walked Out One Evening* made good use of meter, rhyme, and intricate imagery to raise the poem from ordinary conversation to art. A leading Russian Formalist, Boris Eikhenbaum (1926) emphasized the primary importance of form for literature, as asserting that a text's form and structure give to that work an overall meaning. Eikhenbaum (1926) maintains that the unity of form and content is an indispensable aspect of literature, and this principle is to be seen in Auden's poem in the form of the poem, which is echoed in its motif of mortality and overwhelming powers of time. Todorov's study of 1969 was also progressive for the formalist tradition: foregrounding and organization of narration shows how crucial parts of a text stand out, making them more prominent. From the way through Auden's poem the recurring idea of time is made manifest by the figure of the clock: this idea insists to proclaim the inexorable progress of death and transience of life.

By relying on the work of these eminent formalist scholars, the present study offers a cohesive interpretation of the literary richness in Auden's poem where its formal elements work together to address complex themes of time, love and mortality.

#### 4. Data Analysis and Results

There are number of methods that can be used to study a poem, and Russian Formalism is one of them. It is an outcome of Russia in the early twentieth century established by two prominent groups of scholars. Roman Jakobson and Victor Shklovsky are considered as the main leaders of the field of Russian Formalism. Per this approach literary texts are examined using their form without payment to contextual, political or ideological meanings. Formalism is a literary theory that theorizes that literature is autonomous, autotelic, has defamiliarization, literariness and break habitualization, foreground roughened elements through linguistic items that stay independent. According to this definition of formalism, literature is a self-sufficient entity which doesn't require any other agency to convey its message. Formalists believe that the author is dead after publication of text and now the text is not his/her property. Literature describes itself and through its expression, it reveals the author's feelings. Technique of defamiliarization makes known expressions strange by presenting them in a new way. Literariness is the language used in a text, and it is different from everyday language. The roughened elements slow down our perception, prompting one to ponder and engage in deep thinking. It can be said that literature or a literary text is complete in its nature, requiring no external references for understanding. Poetics are constituent pieces of any literary text, like linguistics and structural features; it uses literary language to present familiar concepts in a peculiar manner, this slows down our understanding and encourages deep contemplation.

*As I Walked Out One Evening* shows the conflict between love and time. In this poem, lover and time both present their arguments, and the poet listens to them as a judge. In formalism study of poetics is an analysis of a text's constituent parts such as structural and linguistics features. Structural features or form is a basic appearance which is also called graphology of a text. Form of any text is cousin to its content which gives an overview of a text. It includes narrative structure, stanzas, rhyme scheme, enjambments etc. In this poem, poet uses iambic trimeter, for example in line "The **crowds upon the pavement**", although its strict adherence varies throughout the poem. While some lines consist of three stressed beats, the pattern of trochees or iambs is not consistently followed in certain instances. The poem is divided into three narrations. The first narrator is poet itself who gives us a description of an evening, then there is a lover who addresses his/her beloved and gives hyperbolic statements and last the third narrator is time. These narrative switches are throughout this poem and distinguished by "apostrophes". These narrations mainly consist between arguments of love and time. This poem contains fifteen stanzas, and each stanza has four lines. There are a total of sixty lines in this poem. Rhyme scheme is ABCB which is same throughout the poem. There is full rhyme words expect "hold" and "world" in fifth stanza, this is half rhyme. Enjambment is also mostly used in this poem for example in line "The crowds upon the pavement", "And down by the brimming river", "I heard a lover song", "I'll love you till the ocean", "is folded and hung up to dry" and "And the seven stars go squawking" etc. Enjambment shows the intensity of thoughts that flow line by line without any punctuation mark.

The internal mechanics of a text are called devices. These devices construct the literariness and artfulness in a text. Each device has its own specific function and possesses peculiar properties. Metaphors, similes, alliteration, assonance, consonance, personification, imagery, symbols are devices. This poem contains many devices, which shows its literariness. Metaphor is a literary device; poets use this to make a direct comparison between two things. In first stanza "The crowds.... field of harvest wheat" metaphorically represents the evening time when yellow light of dying sun makes crowd's head yellow like field of harvested wheat and it also shows the death. The ninth stanza "Into many a green valley/ Drifts the appalling snow;" shows "green valley" as a metaphor for happiness and "snow" for death. "threaded dances/ diver's brilliant bow" shows the beauty of life. "The Flower of Ages" is also a metaphor for eternal beauty. Simile is also a literary device which use for making indirect comparison by adding "like" and "as". The lines "And the seven stars.... Like geese about the sky.", "The years shall run like rabbits," shows the simile in this poem. The poet makes indirect comparison between stars and geese to show their ability to fly and years and rabbits because of their rapid speed: telling the readers how fast time passes.

Alliteration is repetition of consonance sound at the start of neighboring or closely connected words for making a musical and pleasant effect. In this poem there are alliteration in "And the salmon sing in the street", "And the seven stars go squawking" of "s" sound, "w" sound in "walked" and "Walking" in lines one and two of the first stanza and "c" in "clocks in the city". Assonance is a literary device that involves the repetition of vowel sounds in nearby words or stressed syllables. In this poem there are many examples of assonance for example repetition of vowel sounds, such as the "o" sound in "Bristol," "crowds," "road," or the "a" sound in "down," "crowds," "mountain," and "crack." etc. Consonance is a literary device that involves the repetition of consonant sounds in nearby words or stressed syllables. In this poem repetition of consonant sounds, such as the "s" sound in "Bristol," "streets," and "fields," or the "t" sound in "time," "watches," and "teacup."

The poet expresses the idea that a constant love for somebody is boundless by repeating the words "I'll love you" for the lovers' song stanza. The poet builds up the love as a concept which is tough and ageless in standing against the flow of time. Besides, we constantly hear the word "Time", which emphasizes the important role it plays in the poem and brings up its key notion of an inexorable march. By repeating this word, the poet opposes the ephemeral character of life and his continuous impact of time. The repeated using of "plunge" increases emphasis on the very description. In addition to that, the recurring appearance of the word "look" at the beginning of that stanza focuses attention to the mirror and incites one to do a deeper look within oneself thereby promoting self-examination. Through the repetition of the word "look" the poet forces the reader to rethink significantly the meaning of their life and their decisions. On the closing lines, the repeated use of "stand" highlights a marked contrast between the speed of time and the timeless quality of love. This repetition doesn't only focus on standing still and watching but also encourages us to take a break and reflect through chaos of life. It emphasizes the act of standing still and observing, encouraging us to pause and reflect amidst the chaotic flow of life.

Personification is giving human qualities to non-human things. W.H Auden uses personification throughout this poem. There is personification in the lines such as "Till China and Africa meet", "And the salmon sing in the street", "But all the clocks....began to whirr and chime", "Time watches....And coughs", "The glaciers knocks in the cupboard/The desert sighs in the bed" and "Time breaks the threaded dances/And the diver's brilliant bow." The poet personify salmon to sing, brings China and Africa together in a meeting as they are human beings, gives clocks the ability to speak and power to interfere in human actions, glacier to knock and desert to sigh on the bed.

In this poem, symbolism plays a significant role in enriching the verses with depth and meaning. Various instances of symbolism can be identified throughout the poem. For instance, clocks are the symbol of time while the lover is a symbol of the temporary

nature of life. The images of the river jumping over the mountain and the salmon singing in the street represent the breaking of natural boundaries and the merging of different worlds, emphasizing the enduring power of love. The descriptions of the ocean being folded and hung up to dry and the seven stars squawking like geese symbolize extraordinary and seemingly impossible events that would need to transpire for love to end. Whining on about the years dashing by just like hares sums up how fast time flies. Respond. The ticking of the clocks, as they move, turn and chime, says reflection of the ceaseless march of time and proof of its relentless, unpredictable nature. The mental image of a collision within a cupboard of a glacier and of a desert groaning under one's bed illustrates the power of repressed feelings or aspirations over human life.

The poem contains a lot of references to nursery rhymes which give the work additional artistic texture and meaning. The use of allusions in the twelfth stanza is worthy of comment in the ways in which they relate to established touchstones of culture. Further saying "And the Giant is enchanting to Jack", the poem indicates the story of "Jack and the Beanstalk", as the object of enchantment and attraction of Jack. In addition, "And the lily-white Boy is a Roarer" is the reference to John the Baptist, a hero in the Bible, whose piety and integrity were so well known. respond. These deliberate allusions enrich the poem's themes by tapping into the shared cultural reservoir of nursery rhymes, engaging readers on multiple levels and adding depth to their interpretation and appreciation of the work.

W.H Auden captivates readers with its rich imagery that creates vivid visual and auditory experiences. The use of imagery serves as a formalist significance by engaging readers through their senses and inviting them to participate in the poet's imaginative world. The descriptive language for visual imagery, such as comparing crowds to fields of harvest wheat or depicting rivers jumping over mountains, Arch of railway, green valley, plunging of the hands, looking in the mirror and running of river creates striking and memorable mental pictures. These images transcend literal representation and evoke emotions, thoughts, and connections in the reader's mind. The auditory images which are also called onomatopoeia used in this poem, such as hearing a lover song, singing of salmon, and the whirring and chiming of the clocks. They contribute to the poem's aesthetic appeal and emphasize the power of language and imagery in conveying meaning. The formalist significance of imagery in this poem lies in its ability to intensify the reader's experience, evoke emotional responses, and stimulate the imagination, making the poem a multi-sensory and engaging work of art.

Using the technique of defamiliarization, in *As I Walked Out One Evening* W.H. Auden presents known things in a new way. Defamiliarization or 'ostranenie' is the method of exposing familiar objects in unusual ways to change how readers perceive those objects. For instance, the poem is unusual because in a typical setting fish can be found singing on the street. As in the same token, the fact one would consider the ocean to have been folded and hung up to dry challenges our usual outlook regarding its boundless dimensions. To depict a crack of a teacup meaning its entrance into the world beyond brings a familiar object beyond its usual prosaic nature. Further, the poem describes beggars participating in a raffle, the Giant's enchantment, where a "lily-white boy" becomes a "roarer," all this goes against what society here AMA tries to foster in the eyes of the public. reply Further; in displaying Time as something that can watch, deceive and have a sense of imagination it puts forward the notion and gives it life and existence. Direct approaching the reader using phrases such as "O let not Time deceive you" and "O look in the mirror" engages the reader and gets him or her on some personal level as well. Application of these foreground elements contributes to the visual appeal of the poem, engaging the reader more completely and thereby promoting richer reactions to it.

#### 4.1. Discussion

The poem *As I Walked Out One Evening* by W.H. Auden is rich in form and style. Through a formalist lens, it is seen that the poem uses language to make readers pause and think. Auden does not just write about love and time. He makes them feel strange and new. This is the core idea of defamiliarization. The poem's structure is simple but also complex. It has regular stanzas, a set rhyme scheme (ABCB), and uses enjambment to keep ideas flowing. These elements slow down the reader. They make one stop and consider each line. This is what formalists say good literature should do. It breaks the normal way we see things.

The imagery in this poem is powerful. For example, crowds are compared to a field of harvest wheat. This is not something you see every day. It shows the sunset and maybe hints at death. When Auden says, "the salmon sing in the street," it shocks us. It's not possible in real life, but that's the point. It forces us to look at familiar ideas, like love or time, in a new way. He also uses strong metaphors and similes. Time "shall run like rabbits" and "the ocean is folded and hung up to dry." These are not ordinary images. They make the reader see time and love differently. It shows how time is fast and how love wants to last forever. But time wins in the end. Poetic devices are everywhere. There is personification, Time watches and coughs, the desert sighs in the bed. These human actions are given to non-living things. It gives life to the abstract ideas. Clocks, rivers, oceans, deserts, they all become characters. This is another way the poem becomes strange and deep.



Auden also uses auditory elements as alliteration and assonance which appear in many lines. “Seven stars go squawking,” “salmon sing in the street”, these phrases stick in the mind. They add music to the poem. This music helps the message stay with us longer. There are references to nursery rhymes too. “Jack and the Beanstalk” and “the lily-white Boy” show up. These allusions give the poem more layers. They connect readers to childhood, maybe human innocence. But now, these stories feel darker or sadder. Defamiliarization is strong in this poem. It takes everyday ideas and presents them in strange ways. Oceans drying up. Glaciers knocking in cupboards. Time talking and watching. All this makes the reader think harder. It makes love and time feel more serious, even scary.

Auden addresses the reader directly, “O look in the mirror,” “O let not Time deceive you.” These lines bring readers into the poem by making the message personal. It feels like a warning. Time moves fast. Love might not last. But one must still pause and reflect. The poem shows how form and technique can carry meaning. Auden uses formalist tools like structure, rhyme, imagery, and defamiliarization to talk about love and time. He does not only preach but shows. The poem becomes a place where language and ideas meet. It’s not just about what is said, but how it is said.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study shows how W.H. Auden’s *As I Walked Out One Evening* uses formalist elements like imagery, rhyme, structure, and diction to create meaning without needing outside context. The poem uses defamiliarization to present love and time in strange and thought-provoking ways. Common ideas are made new through metaphors, personification, and unusual imagery. Time becomes a living force, and love becomes a dream that tries to fight against it. The poem’s form, its regular stanzas, enjambment, and sound patterns, helps slow down the reader and gives space to think deeply. Auden’s use of poetic devices and nursery rhyme references adds more layers and richness. By using these techniques, Auden does not explain his ideas directly. Instead, he lets the form speak. The poem becomes a world of its own, where language is not just a tool, but the message itself. This analysis proves that formalism helps to see how the poem works from inside, showing its art, emotion, and message in a complete and self-contained way.

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