

THE UNKNOWN CITIZEN

by Wystan Hugh Auden



(1907 – 1973)

W. H. Auden

About the Poet

- ❖ **Wystan Hugh Auden**
- ❖ an Anglo-American poet.
- ❖ one of the greatest writers of the 20th century.
- ❖¹ noted for stylistic and technical achievements,
- ❖ deals with moral and political issues
- ❖ variety of tone, form and content.
- ❖ The **central themes** are love, politics and citizenship, religion and morals.

THE UNKNOWN CITIZEN

*He was found by the Bureau of Statistics to be
One against whom there was no official complaint,
And all the reports on his conduct agree
That, in the modern sense of an old-fashioned word, he was a saint
For in everything he did he served the Greater Community.
Except for the War till the day he retired
He worked in a factory and never got fired,
But satisfied his employers, Fudge Motors Inc.
Yet he wasn't a scab or odd in his views,
For his Union reports that he paid his dues,
(Our report on his Union shows it was sound)
And our Social Psychology workers found
That he was Popular with his mates and liked to drink.
The Press are convinced that he bought a Paper every day
And that his reactions to advertisements were normal in every way.*

THE UNKNOWN CITIZEN (Contd.)

Policies taken out in his name prove that he was fully insured

And his Health-card shows he was once in a hospital but left it cured,

Both Producers Research and High-Grade Living declare

He was fully sensible to the advantages of the Installment Plan

And had everything necessary to the Modern Man,

A phonograph, a radio, a car and a Frigidaire.

Our researchers into Public Opinion are content

That he held the proper opinions for the time of year;

When there was peace he was for peace when there was war he went.

He was married and added five children to the population,

Which our Eugenist says was the right number for a parent of his generation,

And our teachers report that he never interfered with their education.

Was he free? Was he Happy? The question is absurd:

Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard.

Theme of the Poem

- Deals with the effect of science and technology on man.
- A satire on the modern society, which is devoid of religion and human values of life.
- The theme of conformity and absence of individuality.
- Bureaucracy does not bother about the happiness of the individual.
- A modern man who has lost independent thinking
- Man has become a cog in the machine of society.

Literary Devices Used

Metaphor - : a figure of speech that draws comparison between two unlike things to bring out the points of similarity .

- comparison between the Unknown Citizen and a saint.
- the entire poem is an elaborate comparison between the Unknown Citizen, whose accomplishments are ridiculously overstated, and the Unknown Soldier, which was created to honor heroic sacrifices that were never witnessed or confirmed.

Symbolism - **Something that on the surface is its literal self but which also has another meaning or even several meanings.**

The "Bureau of Statistics" is a symbol representing the way bureaucracies treat people as mere numbers and figures.

Literary Devices Used (contd.)

Parody - . A satiric imitation of a work or of an author with the idea of ridiculing the author, his ideas, or work.

The whole idea of the Unknown Citizen is a parody of the serious military concept of the Unknown Soldier, which was created in order to recognize the sacrifice of soldiers who died anonymously.

Irony - A mode of expression, through words (verbal irony) or events (irony of situation), conveying a reality different from and usually opposite to appearance or expectation.

It's ironic that a poem of praise would begin on such a dull and tepid point as the lack of "official complaints."