

Poem  
**02**

## Night Mail

(W. H. Auden)

### Words and Expressions

border	—	boundary; frontier	سرحد
steady	—	continuous; constant	مسلل - لگاتار
climb	—	ascent	چڑھائی
moorland	—	heath; a waste plain where nothing grows	ویرانہ، غیر مزروعہ
boulder	—	a large piece of rock or stone	پتھر کا بڑا ٹکڑا
gradient	—	ascent; slope	چڑھائی
shovel	—	throw	پھینکنا - چھوڑنا
snort	—	force air through nose making a noise	پھنپھننے کی آواز پیدا کرنا۔ مراد ہے انجن سے نکلنے والی چھپا کے کی آواز
approach	—	arrive; come close to; come near	قریب آنا
coach	—	railroad car; carriage	ریل گاڑی
course	—	path; direction; route	راستہ
slumber	—	sleep; doze; drowse; catnap; snooze	سونا۔ او گھٹنا
paw	—	foot of an animal that has claws or nails	پنجہ
shake	—	tremble; quiver	کانپنا
blank-faced	—	dull; impassive; expressionless	بے حس

### Multiple Choice Questions

Choose the correct synonym.

- This is the Night Mail crossing the **Border**.  
A) shade B) frontier  
C) limit D) breadth
- Pulling up Beattock, a **steady** climb...  
A) fast B) low  
C) continuous D) upcoming
- Pulling up Beattock, a steady **climb**...  
A) ascent B) descent  
C) bluff D) dale
- The **gradient**'s against her, but she's on time.  
A) ascent B) boulder  
C) moorland D) tract
- Past cotton-grass and **moorland** boulder.  
A) plain B) lowland  
C) heath D) wetland
- Past cotton-grass and moorland **boulder**.  
A) valley B) curve  
C) border D) stone
- Shovelling** white steam over her shoulder.  
A) appearing B) absorbing  
C) taking D) throwing
- Birds turn their heads as she **approaches**.  
A) arrives B) departs  
C) halts D) ascends



9. Stare from bushes at her **blank-faced** coaches.

- A) expressionless      B) ugly  
C) monstrous          D) thunderous

10. Stare from bushes at her blank-faced **coaches**.

- A) seats                      B) mailboxes  
C) compartments      D) engines

11. Sheep-dogs cannot turn her **course**.

- A) situation              B) plan  
C) path                    D) shape

12. They **slumber** on with paws across.

- A) enjoy                    B) wait (Board 2010)  
C) sleep                    D) reflect

13. But a jug in a bedroom gently **shakes**.

- A) rolls                    B) flows  
C) quivers                D) stumbles

## Answers

1. B	3. A	5. C	7. D	9. A	11. C	13. C
2. C	4. A	6. D	8. A	10. C	12. C	

## Questions and Answers

Q.1. What is the Night Mail and what does it bring? OR

(Board 2007)

What does the Night Mail bring? OR (Board 2022)

What kind of train has been described by the poet in "Night Mail"?

(Board 2008)

Ans. The Night Mail is a train which comes from across the border and brings mail consisting of letters, postal orders and cheques for the people living in various parts of the land. There are hurdles in its way but it is never late.

Q.2. For whom does the "Night Mail" bring mail?

Ans. It brings letters for everyone, rich or poor. It also brings letters for the shopkeeper and for the girl at the next door.

Q.3. What kind of letters does the Night Mail carry?

Ans. The Night Mail carries all kinds of letters. It carries letters for the rich as well as for the poor. It also brings business letters and love letters.

Q.4. What is the reaction of the sheep-dogs on the arrival of the Night Mail? OR

How do the sheep-dogs react at the arrival of the Night Mail?

(Board 2015)

Ans. The sheep-dogs do not bother to run after the train as they know they cannot cause her any obstructions or change her course. They are unmindful of the Night Mail and sleep undisturbed with their heads on their paws.

Q.5. What happens at the farm as the Night Mail passes by?

Ans. At the farm, nobody wakes at the arrival of the Night Mail. There is no disturbance. Only a jug in a bedroom gently shakes.

Q.6. Why do birds stare at the Night Mail? OR

How do the birds react on the arrival of the Night Mail? (Board 2022)

Ans. Unlike human beings, birds have no interest in the Night Mail. To them, its coaches are expressionless. So they stare from bushes at its blank-faced coaches.

Q.7. What is the most significant quality of the Night Mail?

Ans. Punctuality is the most significant quality of the Night Mail. There are several hurdles in its way but she always reaches its destination on time.

Q.8. Write a brief note on the "Night Mail".

(Board 2010)

Ans. "Night Mail" is a train that brings letters, cheques and postal orders. It does so without discrimination between the rich and the poor, man and woman. It faces several impediments in the way but it is never late.

Q.9. The poet calls the coaches of the Night Mail "blank-faced". Why?

Ans. The poet calls the coaches of the Night Mail "blank-faced" from the point of view of birds. To them, the train appears empty and expressionless. This suggests a contrast to the attitude of the people who must be concerned with its arrival, for it brings letters, cheques, and postal orders for them.



## Explanation with Reference to the Context

### Lines 1-2:

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

### Reference:

These lines have been taken from the poem "Night Mail" by W. H. Auden.

### Context:

Night Mail is a train that brings letters, cheques and postal orders. It does so without discriminating between the rich and the poor, man and woman. It faces several impediments on the way but it is never late.

### Explanation:

The poet describes the journey of a train that travels all night crossing the border. It has left England and is entering Scotland. It is carrying letters, cheques and postal orders for people who live in various parts of the land. Its uninterrupted journey takes it from one place to another, crossing boundaries of different countries and handing over mail to all kinds of people. The Night Mail overcomes all sorts of barriers and never shows any discrimination or prejudice. It performs its duties maintaining its steadiness despite all the difficulties in its way.

### Lines 3-4:

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

### Reference:

These lines have been taken from the poem "Night Mail" by W. H. Auden.

### Context:

Night Mail is a train that brings letters, cheques and postal orders. It does so without discriminating between the rich and the poor, man and woman. It faces several impediments on the way but it is never late.

### Explanation:

The Night Mail carries different kinds of letters for various classes of people. It serves humanity as a whole whether high or low, rich or poor. It takes business letters to shopkeepers and personal letters to girls. As it brings the awaited messages to all segments of society, it is a source of satisfaction and comfort for all. The writer gives a universal appeal to the train by saying that it brings letters for all, without discrimination between the rich and the poor.

### Lines 5-6:

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

### Reference:

These lines have been taken from the poem "Night Mail" by W. H. Auden.

### Context:

Night Mail is a train that brings letters, cheques and postal orders. It does so without discriminating between the rich and the poor, man and woman. It faces several impediments on the way but it is never late.



**Explanation:**

The Night Mail passes through a tough hilly terrain. There are steep climbs but they fail to check its progress. It moves on like a vibrant force and reaches its destination on time. These sharp inclines stand for hardships of life in general. The poem suggests that staying firm in the face of difficulties is the key to success. Tough terrains are always followed by plains and grassy fields which are quite easy to cover. All one needs is a strong will and steady efforts to get through the journey of life successfully.

**Lines 7-8:**

(Board 2011)

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

**Reference:**

These lines have been taken from the poem "Night Mail" by W. H. Auden.

**Context:**

Night Mail is a train that brings letters, cheques and postal orders. It does so without discriminating between the rich and the poor, man and woman. It faces several impediments on the way but it is never late.

**Explanation:**

The train keeps moving across the cotton fields and uncultivated rocky lands without taking any notice of them. These lines show the Night Mail as a vibrant force shoveling steam over her shoulders while moving smoothly to reach her destination. The journey of the train continues and it seems as if it is only concerned with conveyance and transportation of the correspondence.

**Lines 9-10:**

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

**Reference:**

These lines have been taken from the poem "Night Mail" by W. H. Auden.

**Context:**

Night Mail is a train that brings letters, cheques and postal orders. It does so without discriminating between the rich and the poor, man and woman. It faces several impediments on the way but it is never late.

**Explanation:**

Creating loud snorting sound, the train moves on from one place to another. It covers long distances and passes by the grassy fields where the grass is bent due to the pressure of the air. The train keeps proceeding, breaking the silence that prevails the expanse. 'Silent miles' here means that there is no noise in the vastness. Using the figure of speech called "transferred epithet" the poet has created a special auditory effect. In this figure of speech, an adjective is transferred from its proper word to another closely related word to heighten the effect.

**Lines 11-12:**

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

**Reference:**

These lines have been taken from the poem "Night Mail" by W. H. Auden.

**Context:**

Night Mail is a train that brings letters, cheques and postal orders. It does so without discriminating between the rich and the poor, man and woman. It faces several impediments on the way but it is never late.

**Explanation:**

Due to the noise and blast of the coming train, the birds turn their heads to look at it from the bushes. They look at it with surprise and curiosity. They find its carriages impressionless as they can see no human faces in them. They realize that the coach has an impassive face. It is only related to its objective of distributing the postal matter on time. The lines give an impression of its routine journey concerned with conveyance and transportation of the correspondence on time. It is not a subject of curiosity for the birds.

**Lines 13-16:**

Sheep-dogs 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.

**Context:**

Night Mail is a train that brings letters, cheques and postal orders. It does so without discriminating between the rich and the poor, man and woman. It faces several impediments on the way but it is never late.

**Explanation:**

The lines show that Night Mail passes without creating any disturbance around. Birds and animals take it for granted. They are not bothered by its arrival. They remain indifferent to the passing train. The people on the farm are fast asleep while the train continues its onward journey with letters, postal orders and cheques. They all are not disturbed by her noise. She does not wake anybody while passing through the farm because all are accustomed to her noise. The only thing that happens is that the jug which is lying in the bedroom is slightly shaken.