

Cilt 9, Sayı 1, Haziran 2021

Makale Adı /Article Name

GERÇEKTEN ANLATIYA: W.H.
AUDEN'İN İSPANYA ŞİİRİNE TARİH
YAZIMCI BİR BAKIŞ

FROM FACTS TO NARRATIVE: A
HISTORIOGRAPHIC OUTLOOK TO
W.H. AUDEN'S SPAIN

Yazar

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Yayın Bilgisi

Yayın Türü: Araştırma Makalesi

Gönderim Tarihi: 8 Mart 2021

Kabul Tarihi: 21 Haziran 2021

Yayın Tarihi: 30 Haziran 2021

Kaynak Gösterme

Şahin, F.-Yaşar, T. (2021). From Facts To Narrative: A Historiographic Outlook To W.H. Auden's Spain. *Siirt Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, 9 (7), s.191-201.

Öz

Amerikalı tarihçi Hayden White, *Metatarih: Ondokuzuncu Yüzyıl Avrupası'nda Tarihsel İmgelem* adlı eserinde tarih ve edebiyat arasında söylem açısından büyük benzerlikler olduğunu ve tarihin bir tür edebî yazın / kurgu olduğunu fikriyle nesnel bir tarih anlatısının zorluklarından söz eder. Ünlü tarihçiye göre, bir tarihçi tarihsel olayları ele alırken tarihsel süreç içerisinde önemli gördüğü birtakım anlatıları seçer ve bunları edebiyat yoluyla kurgulayarak okuyucusuna sunar. White tarihçinin edebiyattaki söz sanatlarını kullanarak anlatısının daha ilgi çekici ve anlamlı olmasını sağladığını ifade eder. Bu bağlamda tarihi metinlerde edebiyat olabileceği gibi, edebî metinlerde de tarih anlatımlarına rastlamak mümkündür. Bir başka deyişle, tarihi bir metin edebî eser olabileceği gibi edebî bir eser de tarihi bir metin niteliğiyle okunabilmektedir. Bu çalışma, ünlü İngiliz şair W.H. Auden'in İspanya iç savaşında politik duygularla yazmış olduğu İspanya şiirindeki tarihsel anlatımın metnin ideolojik söylemini nasıl oluşturduğunu, şiirde imgelemler yoluyla anlatılan tarihin nasıl kurgulandığını yeni tarihsel bir bakış açısıyla ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: W.H. Auden, Historiografi, İspanya, Yeni Tarihseçlilik

Abstract

Hayden White, a well-known American historian, in his book *Metahistory: Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, discusses the great similarities between history and literature in terms of discourse and the difficulties of an objective historical narrative with the idea that history is a kind of literary fiction. According to the famous historian, while dealing with history, a historian picks up specific events that he considers important in the historical process and presents them to the reader by fictionalizing them through literature. White states that the historian makes his narrative more interesting and meaningful by using rhetoric in literature. Just like literature in historical texts, it is possible to encounter historical expressions in literary texts. In this respect, a historical text can be a literary work, just as a literary work can be read as a work of history. This study aims to analyse W.H. Auden's controversial poem, *Spain*, which was written during the Spanish Civil War with some ideological impulses. It aims to reveal how the historical narrative of the poem constitutes the ideological discourse of the text.

Keywords: W.H. Auden, Historiography, New Historicism, Spain

Introduction

Literature and history are considered as two distinct subject fields: the former's main concern is fiction, and the latter aims to decipher facts. However, it is likely to find both disciplines interwoven. A historical event may sometimes become the central subject of a literary work. Dickens's "A Tale of Two Cities", Shakespeare's history plays are only a few examples of such works. In this regard, authors, poets, and playwrights sometimes pretend to play a historian's role in their works by recounting past events. While doing this, they use their literary skills blending facts and fiction in their stories. On the other hand, historians may be doing the opposite in their studies. While recounting a past event, they may use their literary skills to "form the historical process they want to mirror" (White, 1978: p.51) and turn their work, which is supposed to be based on only facts, into a hybrid text of history and literature. Since past events reported in the documents are all data and the historian needs to interpret what happened in the past by putting those events into a certain order and make them more meaningful to his readers, he inevitably uses his narrative skills. The narrative makes history and literature alike because the narrative discourse may turn a text into another form. As White states:

history belongs to the category of discursive writing so that when the fictional element or mythical plot structure is obviously present in it, it ceases to be history altogether and becomes a bastard genre, product of an unholy union between history and poetry. (1978: p.83)

Thus, a close reader may find some literature in almost any work of history and some history in almost any work of literature. How does a historian construct his study of the past with a transition from facts to fiction? How much objective is a work of history that includes narrative elements? Let's first figure out how a work of history is constructed. Croce states that "where there is no narrative, there is no history." (1956: p.26) The basic material that a historian has to deal with in his study is the data he collects on the subject. Nevertheless, this data is a mass, and he cannot use all of it in his study. Therefore, he has to choose certain events out of other events and bring them together into a reasonable or convincing form in the eye of his readers. In other words, he needs a good recipe that will make his dish taste good. That is why he appeals to interpreting skills to get a final reasonable form. At this point, the historian's objectivity is open to question because the events he picks up from the data may seem necessary for his interpretation but trivial for another historian, and each historian may have a different form of interpretation for the same subject by referring to different data. This difference turns their work of history into a sort of literary narrative. Postmodern historians, especially Hayden White, posit the necessity for historians to admit their work's literariness, its dependence on narrative and rhetoric, and this narrative turns the subject matter of history into fiction rather than facts. The historian's use of narrative and rhetoric, which mainly consists of figures of speech, creates historical knowledge. White stresses some narrative strategies that the historian uses to explain the past: the first strategy is the mode of *emplotment*. White states that these *emplotments* can be constructed as Romance, Comedy, Tragedy, and Satire and each of them is constituted through four key tropes, which can be listed as a metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony. The use of one of these tropes in the narrative defines the *emplotment* that the historian constructs, and this relationship also reveals the mode of the argument and the mode of the implication as it is presented in the chart below:

KEY TROPE	MODE OF EMPLOTMENT	MODE OF ARGUMENT	MODE OF IMPLICATION
SYNECDOCHE	ROMANTIC	FORMIST	ANARCHIST
METAPHOR	TRAGIC	MECHANISTIC	RADICAL
METONYMY	COMIC	ORGANISTIC	CONSERVATIVE
IRONY	SATIRICAL	CONTEXTUALISTIC	LIBERAL

To understand how narrative and language effects historical explanation, White exemplifies different interpretations of the French Revolution by different historians. Though, historian recount the same events happened in the same country, same period, the way they interpret/narrate differs:

The events which occurred in France in 1789-90, which Burke viewed as an unalloyed national disaster, Michelet regards as an epiphany of that union of man with God informing the dream of romance as a generic story form (1978: p.62).

While Marx defines the old regime's fall as a tragedy, Tocqueville interprets it as an opportunity. These different interpretations demonstrate that what exists in the historian's mind on the subject is determined by the rhetoric he uses throughout his narrative. The historian prefigures writing history by writing within a particular trope, and this selection of trope determines the other modes such as *emplotment*, argument, and implication.

Since Auden's poem *Spain* is structured as yesterday, today, and tomorrow, it includes references to various historical events and becomes a historical narrative and interpretation. In this regard, this paper aims to find out how literary tropes work to construct historical narrative in the poem.

Yesterday all the past. The language of size
 Spreading to China along the trade-routes; the diffusion
 Of the counting-frame and the cromlech;
 Yesterday the shadow-reckoning in the sunny climates. (Auden, 1979: p. 51)

The text's historical narrative starts with a synecdoche in the first line, narrowing down "all the past" events into yesterday, putting all the past events into a whole. Thus, what happened yesterday covers everything that happened in the past. After this interpretation of the past, the verse presents some certain events to construct and expand its narrative of history. The starting point of this narrative is a synecdoche mentioning the spread of "the language of size", which refers to maths and science, "to China along the trade routes." Since the title of the poem is "Spain", the verse implies that the "spread" originated in Spain, and then it was carried to China from Spain. However, this historical explanation in the very first line contradicts what historical data offers. Because Chinese mathematics "flourished independently long before those of Greece and Rome; and in the

middle of the second millennium B.C., the Chinese were already keeping records of astronomical events” (Burton, 2011: p. 26). If maths had developed long before it developed in Europe, then it could not have spread “to” China from Spain. Moreover, “the trade routes”, which probably refer to Silk and Spice routes between ancient empires in the east and the west in the past, did not have a one-way direction from Spain to China; they rather provided mutual interaction between ancient civilizations. In this regard, the text ignores this interaction between the two civilizations and constructs its narrative on the interpretation that there is a flow of knowledge from Spain to China. This line also emphasizes two basic fields in the past by using synecdoches: “language of size” referring to science and the trade routes' referring to the economy. Nevertheless, Silk and Spice routes were not only limited to trade and economic relations between civilizations. Through these routes, "new inventions, religious beliefs, artistic styles, languages, and customs were also transmitted" (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000). The verse goes on its historical narrative by mentioning two inventions in the past: the counting frame and the cromlech. The counting frame is another synecdoche referring to maths and science and also the cromlech¹ refers to any religious belief or faith. Although there have been similar structures like cromlech in different parts of the world with different names like dolmen and tumulus, the line uses a Brythonic name for this megalithic structure. In this regard, the text tends to construct its historical narrative upon a Eurocentric point of view because it regards the birthplace of science as Spain and uses the word “cromlech” for pre-historic structures. The verse finishes with another line of synecdoche, “the shadow-reckoning” referring to the sundial. Since its working principle is based on the sun's position, the sundial may refer to the knowledge of astronomy, geometry, and maths.

Taking the whole verse into consideration in terms of its narrative, it centres on four general concepts through synecdoches: science, economy and religion, and time. Yet, these concepts are not presented in chronological order because the cromlech and China are anachronistic. The synecdoches representing these concepts signify something behind the concepts themselves. The use of words like “counting” and “reckoning” in synecdoches may indicate the expectation of the emergence of something. “The language of size”, “the counting frame” and “shadow-reckoning” may all be considered as instruments that enable humans to know what is about to come. Although the verse does not present a clear depiction of what is coming, reckoning “the shadow” in the sunny climate implies that something threatening the present situation is about to emerge because “the shadow” may challenge the “sunny climate.”

This historical interpretation constructs a “fraudulent outline” (Strauss, 1966: p. 257) which “makes up the sum total of putative ‘explanations’ that historians offer of past structures and processes” (White, 1978: p. 57). This outline has a Eurocentric perspective, centres on science, economy, and religion as the starting point of its narrative, and implies the threat of a shadow to the current “sunny climate”.

¹ A structure of pre-historic age consisting of a large flat or flattish unhewn stone resting horizontally on three or more stones set upright; found in various parts of the British Isles, esp. in Wales, Devonshire, Cornwall, and Ireland. Also applied to similar structures in other parts of the world. (Oxford English Dictionary, 1989)

Yesterday the assessment of insurance by cards,
The divination of water; yesterday the invention
Of cartwheels and clocks, the taming of
Horses. Yesterday the bustling world of the navigators. (Auden, 1979: p. 52)

The second verse almost repeats the narrative presented in the first verse by choosing different words and mentioning other events and inventions. Instead of “counting” and “reckoning”, the verse uses “assessment” and “divination” that carry similar meanings. However, the synecdoches used in the first two lines, “the assessment of insurance by cards” and “the divination of water”, refer to the act of prophecy rather than scientific actions referred by “the counting frame” and “the shadow-reckoning.” In this regard, prophetic knowledge takes the place of scientific knowledge in the text’s historical narrative. “Cards” and “divination” are also metonymies implying change or ironic metaphors emphasizing the absurdity of religious beliefs. Man’s quest for “insurance by cards” may result from the fear of the coming shadow mentioned at the end of the first verse. Since water is essential to life and “in many parts of the world, civilization has flourished around rivers and deltas, and water sources remain an enduring symbol of natural culture” (Nair, 2003: p. 160), the verse may refer to the birth of settlements or cities. With reference to the establishment of settlements, then the text goes on its historical narrative mentioning some other scientific inventions such as “cartwheels” that enables transportation and facilitates work power in agriculture and other fields, “clocks” that enables human to measure time and the taming of horses which also enables transportation, agricultural work, and warfare. All these inventions mentioned in the second verse refers to the advent of a built civilization. In this regard, the second verse indicates an evolvement into more civilized society with its transportation and agriculture. “The bustling world of the navigators” refers to the geographic discoveries in the past, yet the synecdoche in the line implies a sense of anxiety in that period by mentioning that it was a “bustling world.” Thus, the text narrates some roughly chronological historical events in the first two verses, but there is an implication of anxiety in both. The geographic discoveries implied in the verse also take the place of the trade routes mentioned in the first verse, and sundials are replaced with clocks, which implies a sense of evolution.

In terms of its historical interpretation so far, the text uses synecdoches to construct its narrative, and thus the mode of explanation of the narrative is expected to be mechanistic and romantic in terms of *emplotment*. In this regard, the text’s historical interpretation presents different historical events as parts, but all these events come together, serving the establishment of a civilization with its economy, science, agriculture, and religion.

Yesterday the abolition of fairies and giants,
the fortress like a motionless eagle eyeing the valley,
the chapel built in the forest;
Yesterday the carving of angels and alarming gargoyles; (Auden, 1979: p. 52)

The third verse starts with a turning point in religious belief or faith. “Fairies” and “giants” are metaphors for good and evil, or they may refer to superstitious beliefs. They are abolished, giving their place to institutional religion, the centre of which is “the chapel”. Just like economic activities evolve from trade routes into navigations, scientific

instruments like sundials evolve into clocks in the previous verse; this verse emphasizes another religion's evolution. The religious belief becomes single and institutionalized because of belief in 'fairies' and 'giants' since these are given in plural forms and may imply diversity in faith, turning into one belief carried out in "the chapel". With the transformation of religion into an institutionalized form, the text adds another institution to civilization it constructs in the second verse: military or political power referred by "fortress." The image of a fortress watching the valley is a reference to an absolute power, which may be a military, political power, or state authority, controlling its territory. If the fortress is the political power or state authority, then the valley it dominates may represent its land and people. The way it controls its land or governs its people is depicted as "a motionless eagle eyeing". This image of the eagle reveals how the authority works. Eyeing the valley is a metonymic implication of surveillance and control of the political power. The eagle is "motionless" because it is on alert and feels uneasy, and wants to control everything that poses a possible threat to its authority. This alertness and uneasiness remark "the shadow" mentioned in the first line and the anxiety coming from "the bustling world" in the second verse.

While the chapel, institutionalized religion, constructed in the forest, the fortress, political power, or state authority, stands upon the valley. In other words, the political authority manifests its power apparently, yet religion is hidden in the forest. In this regard, the text interprets the birth of institutional religion as having emerged secretly. Since the two institutions in the society, political power, and religion, are presented as two opposing forces, the text poses a rivalry between these two institutions. The last line of the third verse restates "fairies" and "giants" as "angels" and "gargoyles". In this sense, the text raises a question on the nature of religion. Although those sorts of faith in "fairies" and "giants" transformed into a new form, institutionalized religion, in fact, this new form does not differ much from the previous ones. They only change in the form, not in essence; "fairies" and "giants" change their shapes into "angels" and "gargoyles". However, no matter what shape religious belief takes, the text interprets the new paradigm, which is the opposition of political power and religion, as "alarming", which is another reference to the anxiety or uneasiness implied in the poem so far because "gargoyles" symbolize "evil spirits, monstrous entities, and damned souls" (Berendt, 2014) their alarm may sign bad things that might happen in the near future.

The trial of heretics among the columns of stone;
Yesterday the theological feuds in the taverns
And the miraculous cure at the fountain;
Yesterday the Sabbath of witches; but to-day the struggle (Auden, 1979: p. 52)

After the opposition of the political authority and religion is introduced in the third verse, the beginning of the next verse implies that religion took deep roots in the society as it gained the power to punish heretics, non-believers, or anyone posing a threat against it. Religion is not hidden in the forest anymore; it has its roots taking power from its heritage, which is referred by "columns of stones". The verse implies a sort of separation with the phrase "the trial of heretics." Since there are now people called heretics in society, then it is possible to claim the existence of people called "true believers." This indicates that there is a sort of conflict between two opposing religious

groups. This opposition may either be between different religions or sects of one single religion. In both cases, the text interprets religion as a separating institution causing a sort of discrimination among people. The following two lines can be read as an irony revealing the text's interpretation for religion's existence because the "theological feuds" take place in "taverns", which are the places considered the base of non-believers. In this regard, religious practices like "miraculous cure at the fountain" and "the Sabbath of Witches" may be considered a subject that the text approach ironical to emphasize religious practices' absurdity. These non-scientific practices were mentioned in previous lines as "the assessment of insurance by card" and "divination of water".

At the end of the fourth verse, the poem distinguishes the present situation and its historical narrative and demands a struggle for today. At this point, it is not depicted what the struggle will be against. Nevertheless, since the first mention of struggle is given at the end of the verse, which generally comments on religious conflicts and practices in the past, the struggle may be offered as a reaction against religion itself.

Yesterday the installation of dynamos and turbines,
The construction of railways in the colonial desert;
Yesterday the classic lecture
On the origin of Mankind. But to-day the struggle. (Auden, 1979: p. 52)

The fifth verse goes on the historical narrative of the text on the industrial period by mentioning some inventions again as in the previous verses. These inventions are "dynamos" and "turbines" that seem to be complex forms of previously mentioned inventions such as "cartwheels" and "clocks", all of which were outcomes of "the language of size" and "the counting frame" because through the knowledge of maths and science these inventions were all made. In each verse, inventions are given with some means of transportations. For example, in the first verse, the knowledge of science is carried through trade routes, the inventions in the second verse are carried through navigators, and in this verse, the text presents "railways" together with "dynamos" and "turbines." Since "dynamos" and "turbines" are key inventions for the construction of trains and railways, the text creates a correlation between the inventions and the mode of transportation. However, this scientific development starting from "the language of size" ends up with "railways in the colonial desert", which refers to the idea of colonialism itself. From this point of view, the text's historical interpretation for scientific developments claims that scientific developments have moved into a negative direction, creating colonialism which drags humanity away from the "classical lecture on the origin of Mankind". Since colonialism "is a practice of domination, which involves the subjugation of one people to another." (Kohn & Reddy, 2017), it contradicts with the following line that emphasizes Mankind's virtue. In this regard, the fifth verse also offers a struggle against scientific practices that ignore man's dignity and leads humanity into a worse condition.

Yesterday the belief in the absolute value of Greek,
The fall of the curtain upon the death of a hero;
Yesterday the prayer to the sunset
And the adoration of madmen. but to-day the struggle. (Auden, 1979, p. 52)

The sixth verse narrates history by referring to Greek drama, culture, and its values. This historical narrative generally refers to the Renaissance period. Greek culture

in the past is considered to be the intellectual foundation of the western world because nearly all western intellectual heritage dates back to Greek texts, and the text claims that there was a kind of commitment to all those Greek values at “faith” level and they were believed to be absolute. However, this intellectual heritage and turning back to those values again in the Renaissance period also ends up with failure with the “fall of the curtain upon the death of a hero”, like the religious and scientific developments mentioned in previous verses. The image of “the prayer to the sunset” and the “madmen” is the end of the text's historical interpretation.

To depict how the poem creates its historical narrative/interpretation, we must first define what tropes the text appeals to while interpreting history. For the first six verses, the poem uses synecdoches to refer to certain events in the past. In the first verse, the text establishes the foundation of its historical narrative depending on three phenomena: science, economy, religion. For each phenomenon, there are synecdoches in verses that construct possible meanings. Let's have a close look at phrases referring to each phenomenon in six verses. For science, technology, and their development, the text mentions “the language of size”, “counting frame”, “shadow-reckoning”, “cartwheels”, “clocks”, “dynamos”, “turbines” and “railways” respectively as the narrative develops. In terms of these scientific inventions or developments, the narrative follows a chronological order, and the inventions defined start from simple tools like “counting frame” to complex ones like “dynamos” and “turbines”. Nevertheless, the text's interpretation of these inventions finds meaning when they are taken into consideration together with phrases concerning how economic interaction is carried out. “The language of size”, the knowledge of science, is carried along “trade routes.” Inventions like “Cartwheels” and “clocks” established the world of navigators using sea routes, and finally, “dynamos” and “turbines” caused the “construction of railways” but these railways ways ended up with colonialism. As technology and science developed, they led to new forms of trade routes, but this development brought humanism into the state of being exploited and chaos.

In terms of religion, another foundation of the text's historical narrative, the situation goes worse as it is in science and economy. The text starts with one of the first known structures of religion in history and then develops its interpretation by using other religious terms like “fairies and giants”, “the chapel”, “angels and alarming gargoyles”, “trial of heretics”, “theological feuds” “miraculous cure” and “the Sabbath of Witches” respectively. The poem's interpretation of religious transformation seems to emphasize a sort of deterioration in religion. When the chapel is built and become institutionalized, the punishment of non-believers and feuds start, and the religious practice takes the form of the absurd superstitious situation by the practice of “the miraculous cure and “the Sabbath of witches” which are not different from fortune-telling practices like cartomancy and dowsing referred in the second verse.

Some synecdoches in the poem carry some other meanings that foretell the end of the text's historical interpretation. For example, although “the shadow reckoning” refers to the sundial, the line foretells the coming of darkness that needs to be reckoned in the present “sunny climate”. Likewise, the image of a “motionless eagle eyeing the valley” foretells the reader that something about to happen needs to be watched out.

All these deteriorations in different fields construct the text's historical narrative to convince the readers of the necessity of a struggle. The mode of explanation of this

narrative is “mechanistic” because it presents a part-part relationship to bring each part together at the end for a cause-effect relationship. In this regard, the mode of *emplotment* is tragic in the text because the interpretation ends up with failure at the end.

After following 10 verses describing the chaos at present and call for the struggle that is expected to overcome the current trouble, the poem envisions an ideal society in the future from the 20th verse. The verses recount possible inventions, events, and innovations in the future, which show similarities with the first six verses on yesterday. All these inventions are expected to happen “tomorrow, perhaps the future” and this implies that the struggle to overcome chaos may take a long time or longer than expected. The first scientific development mentioned for the future is “the research on fatigue,” This indicates that today's struggle is weary, long, and harsh because people will probably feel tired and try to get rid of this tiredness. Since this tiredness results from the current chaos, the text also means that traces of terror and violence will remain the same in the future. “The movements of packers” may refer to the bustling world of navigators in the second stanza, and this indicates that tomorrow is a kind of repetition of the past. Navigators are replaced with packers. Since the word “packers” belongs to the modern world, which implies the packaging of goods manufactured in factories, the text presents a shift from an exploring society into a consumer society. Furthermore, “the language of size spreading” leaves its place to “enlarging of consciousness”. Thus, the scientific curiosity in the past turns into a state of consciousness in society's future. On the other hand, the political power depicted as “the motionless eagle eyeing the valley” in the past turns into “liberty's masterful shadow” which implies another shift: a shift from an authoritarian political power into a more liberal one. However, the shadow of liberty's master still implies an authoritarian form as people in the future will live under this shadow. Finally, “the trial of heretics” will be replaced by “the young poets” in the future, which means that religious suppression will end and artistic endeavours will find roots in the future society.

To summarize the text's historical narrative with its prediction of the future, the text presents the historical developments mainly under four categories: science, economy, religion, and political power. This narrative interprets the developments in these areas as if going worse in each phase. Scientific and economic developments end up with colonialism; religion transforms from a superstitious form into an institutionalized form of religion in which the church punishes heretics. Finally, the political structure is an oppressive one depicted as an eagle controlling its territory or people. On the other hand, the text envisions a future society using similar descriptions for science, economy, religion, and political structure. It is a society where the economy is based on “the movement of packer” which means a consumer society. People are in a state of consciousness instead of the scientific curiosity implied in the past. Young poets will be everywhere in the future instead of punished heretics, and finally, the tyrannical authoritarian will be replaced with a more liberal form of state.

The text's final stanza leaves a big question mark to its readers because the current imagery it creates does not imply any possibility for the envisioned society in the future. The text directly states that “the stars are dead” and people are “left alone with” the day, and this implies that the desperate situation is more severe than expected. In this regard, what is imagined for the future stands as ironic language implying that nothing will change in the future. Let's look at the description of the future society in the light of

the ironic language. The research on fatigue is only a hint for new diseases in the future. The movements of packers imply a consumer society, and this is the beginning of capitalism. The liberal society will still have a shadow and darkness, which implies that it may not prove peace as it is expected. Finally, people are singing in a “chorus under the dome” which may imply that there still a form of religion in the future's society that punished heretics in the past.

Under the light of this ironic language for tomorrow, the text's historical narrative ends up with tragedy emphasizing the existential pain man suffers today. He is left alone in a desperate situation, and since “stars” have been used to show man the directions for where he wants to go throughout history, now there is nothing that can help him find a way out. Man is in a state which was implied in the first six stanzas in the past. He is in the dark and shadow, and alarming things have all happened.

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Ek Beyan

Yazarlar çalışmaya eşit oranda katkı sağlamıştır