The Express by the Auden Generation poet, Stephen Spender is a modern Romantic Poem glorifying the Express train in motion, which can be regarded as a symbol of industrial revolution. The poem is an answer to the degenerating world of the 20th century, with hardly anything to speak or think of imaginatively. With the steaming Express train placed beyond "the bird's song" & "boughs breaking with honey buds", the poet drives home the message that the new age Romanticism will not wither away. A true Romantic is likely to find new "wild happiness" from amidst the machines, gas works and pistons. The poem is literally “a living poem in motion" with its alliteration, blank verse and concrete images covering power and glory, death, metaphysical transcend. It's a personal meditative poem starting from the plain of reality and ascending to the realms of metaphysical.

In the first stanza, Spender personifies an Express train and compares it to a queen. Just like a declaration of an arriving queen, the Express makes its assertions in the form of its loud whistle and puffs of black smoke venting out its chimney. Then, with an aristocratic majesty of queen, it slowly makes it move, in an imperious and stately motion. The houses surrounding the railway tracks seem to be making way for the Express’ passage just like people do before a queen is to proceed. They stand humbly and the queen crosses, without even noticing their great reverence, as she is so used to these customary yet mandatory reverence paid to her. Something like this is the glory of the initiating Express train too.

The train covers a long journey and passes through a variety of places, cities, towns and villages. It passes through factories and then to those out skirts or neglected areas where the dead lie (graveyards). Beyond the country’s last limits, it moves in to open fields and spaces and instantly seems to acquire the entire world or become an indispensible part of it. At this juncture, the poet cannot help recalling the calm and composure of ships in the oceans. The ships and the ocean seem to be sharing a bright and beautiful relationship with each other. It appears as if a tiny ship knows it way across a wide and deep formidable ocean. Similar confidence and sense of belonging is felt by the Express when it covers long distances through unknown places on land.

Once in full speed, the Express begins to hum its own song and seems to be enraptured in its own lively and animated music. The whistle it blows and the sound of brakes and countless bolts all perform together to create a harmonious melody which is so distinct and unique to this magnificent creation. In the frenzy of its music and performance, it becomes so light that it strikes us as joyfully elevated. Originating from heavily industrialized areas, it reaches to those far off places where industrialization hasn’t intervened with the old values and happiness is still pure and untouched by malice and materialism. In her speed, she blurs all shapes visible from inside rending them strange and abstruse. While she makes a broad arc for every twists and turns, her tracks always remain clean and unobstructed parallel lines just like the trajectories of a gun.

Eventually, the poet feels that the Express, in its intoxication and speed, moves much ahead the limits of horizon and reaches the last threshold of the world. She rises to the space or stars and becomes a part of this universe, where there’s no brightness but faint light of stars and planets both near and far off. She becomes a comet, a ball of fire and acquires a music and mystery which is much more attractive that Nature can produce.

The poem is a beautiful piece of imagination in which the poet has not only skillfully captured the structure, motion and sound of an Express train but has artistically converted into a spirited, majestic and strange creature possessing the grandeur of a queen. The theme of the poem is to celebrate the might and prowess of the Express which transgressing the limits of a physical world reaches to the heart of the dead and elevates to purity of heaven. There is no phenomenon real or imaginable that this mysterious creature has left untouched. With its extraordinary power, beauty and song it even bewilders Nature and the poet believes that Nature has nothing more beautiful to challenge the beauty of an Express train.