

# Refugee blues analysis

Business



“ Refugee Blues” by WH Auden, is a ballad and, as such, has a sense of musicality that is created by both its structure and the repetition of certain phrases.

The poem contains twelve stanzas of three lines each. The first and second line of each stanza rhyme. The two rhyming lines of each stanza tell the story, while the third line contains a repeated phrase (like a chorus) that develops the theme of the poem. For example, the first stanza ends: “ yet there’s no place for us, my dear, yet there’s no place for us. ” The poem’s sense of musicality is also evident in its title.

The ‘ blues’ is a musical style that is today considered to be a sub-genre of jazz, but that was born in the slave communities of the American deep south. Blues songs tell a melancholic story using regular chants or refrains. Blues hold an emotional intensity within it and are very critical of society, as seen throughout Refugee Blues. This song, which was written in 1938 shortly before the outbreak of World War II, is about a pair of refugees who have fled Germany to escape Nazism and Adolf Hitler’s twisted master plan to ‘ safeguard’ the purity of the Aryan race.

The refugees, however, have nowhere to escape to.

Refugee Blues is narrated by one of the pair of refugees, who is bemoaning their fate to the other. The repeated use of “ my dear” suggests that the couple are married, but doesn’t give a clue as to whether it is the husband or wife speaking. In the first two stanzas, the refugee sets the context for the poem. The first stanza notes that the city they have fled to is full of people, both rich and poor, yet there is no space for them.

With the use of word such as “souls” it suggest something valuable or holy about each and every one of the people within the city, it also implies that they are all the same. This idea of “souls being the same” is juxtaposed with the line “some are living in mansions, some are living in holes: Yet there’s no place for us” this suggests that the refugees are treated very differently by being alienated and not belonging anywhere.

In the second stanza, the refugees reveal that they once had a home - presumably in Germany - but “We cannot go there now” .

The next four stanzas reflect on the bureaucracy of the situation that the refugees are in. Their passports are old and no longer valid, so they cannot be accommodated by the governments of the countries they flee to, this idea is reinforced with the line “If you’ve got no passport you’re officially dead”. When they appeal to a committee, they are asked to “return next year” despite the desperate circumstances they are in. Meanwhile, the public up are arguing about the consequences of admitting the refugees. “if we let them in, they will steal our daily bread”.

The reminder of “Daily Bread” reminds us of the Christian prayer and this is where Auden clearly shows his belief that people who stand against refugees are selfish and behaving in an unchristian like manner. Meanwhile, in Europe, war is brewing. Written in 1938, the poem prophesies the brutal war that would break out the following year when Hitler invaded Poland. The refugee hears “the thunder rumbling in the sky” (which could be read as the gunfire of war) and interprets it as the voice of hitler, condemning him and his wife to death. n the final stanza of the poem, the refugee dreams of “Ten thousand soldiers” hunting them. in the ninth and tenth stanzas, the refugee <https://assignbuster.com/refugee-blues-analysis/>

highlights the ridiculousness of the situation they are in by contrasting it with the freedom of the fish swimming in the ocean and the birds singing in the trees.

“ They had no politicians” and “ they weren’t the human race” (line 30), says the speaker. The next stanza reinforces this by describing a dream in which the refugee sees a building with many rooms. however, the speaker laments that “ not one of them was ours” (line 33).

The bleakness of these final stanzas leaves the reader with a sense of the hopelessness that the refugees must feel. in “ refugee Blues”, auden is quite obviously criticising a society that would not look after people suffering from oppression, as well as condemning the society that creates these refugees.

in this context, the two, fictionalised refugees are symbolic of the other, real refugees created by hitler’s actions. This poem is a good example of the role poets and their works can play in social change. auden not only makes readers aware of the refugees’ plight, but also requires us to empathise with and understand it.