



Refugee Blues



Wystan Hugh Auden

Say this city has ten million souls,
Some are living in mansions, some are living in holes:
Yet there's no place for us, my dear, yet there's no
place for us.

Once we had a country and we thought it fair,
Look in the atlas and you'll find it there:
We cannot go there now, my dear, we cannot go there
now.

In the village churchyard there grows an old yew,
Every spring it blossoms anew:
Old passports can't do that, my dear, old passports
can't do that.

The consul banged the table and said:
'If you've got no passport you're officially dead';
But we are still alive, my dear, but we are still alive.

Went to a committee; they offered me a chair;
Asked me politely to return next year;
But where shall we go today, my dear, but where shall
we go today?

Came to a public meeting; the speaker got up and said:
'If we let them in, they will steal our daily bread';
He was talking of you and me, my dear, he was talking
of you and me.

Thought I heard the thunder rumbling in the sky;
It was Hitler over Europe, saying: 'they must die';
We were in his mind, my dear, we were in his mind.

Saw a poodle in a jacket fastened with a pin;
Saw a door opened and a cat let in:
But they weren't German Jews, my dear, but they
weren't German Jews.

Went down the harbour and stood upon the quay,
Saw the fish swimming as if they were free:
Only ten feet away, my dear, only ten feet away.

Walked through a wood, saw the birds in the trees;
They had no politicians and sang at their ease:
They weren't the human race, my dear, they weren't
the human race.

Dreamed I saw a building with a thousand floors,
A thousand windows and a thousand doors;
Not one of them was ours, my dear, not one of them
was ours.

Went down to the station to catch the express,
Asked for two tickets to Happiness;
But every coach was full, my dear, every coach was
full.

Stood on a great plain in the falling snow;
Ten thousand soldiers marched to and fro:
Looking for you and me, my dear, looking for you and
me.

ABOUT THE POET

Wystan Hugh Auden (1907–1973) was a student and later a Professor of Poetry at Oxford University. One of the most important poets of the century, he has published several collections of poems noted for their irony, compassion and wit.

Although a modern poem, 'Refugee Blues' uses the ballad form of narration.



UNDERSTANDING THE POEM

1. The title, 'Refugee Blues' encapsulates the theme of the poem. Comment.
2. What is the poetic technique used by the poet to convey the plaintive theme of the poem?
3. What do the references to the birds and animals made in the poem suggest?
4. How does the poet juxtapose the human condition with the behaviour of the political class?
5. How is the essence of the poem captured in the lines 'two tickets to Happiness'?

TRY THIS OUT

1. Here is a list of devices used in poetry. Elaborate on their use in this poem
Refrain:
Pathos:
Irony:
Sarcasm:
2. What does the colour 'blue' suggest in the poem? Make a list of other colours and the emotions and moods they carry.

SUGGESTED READING _____

1. 'Taller Today we Remember' by W.H. Auden
2. 'Our Hunting Fathers' by W.H. Auden.

