

Poetry - 9.

Refugee Blues

UNDERSTANDING the Poem

Q. 1 The title, 'Refugee Blues' encapsulates the theme of the poem. Comment.

Answer:

In the poem, the poet highlights the lost and pathetic state of German Jewish people who had to flee their homes and seek refuge in other countries due to the rise of Hitler and Nazism, laws depriving them of their right to live, holocaust, concentration camps. Blues in the title signify the African-American musical genre that originated at the end of the 19th century and has a sad, melancholic tone, which is the tone of this poem. They sing of their agony and pain of homelessness.

Q. 2 What is the poetic technique used by the poet to convey the plaintive theme of the poem?

Answer:

The poetic technique used by the poet is a mix of blues and ballad. Blues were popular in America and ballads were popular in Ireland and Britain. Auden had mixed the two together to bring out the main political situation which was prevalent at the time he was living in America, which was the pathetic condition of Jewish refugees who were homeless and lived in constant fear of death. The first two lines of every stanza rhyme and the third line is repetitive and brings out the style of blues lyrics. The use of refrain (customary to Blues) is used to bring about the realization of the harsh truth of the narrator's and his lover's plight.

Q. 3 What do the references to the birds and animals made in the poem suggest?

Answer:

The references to the birds in the woods and fish in the waters suggest that they are free to live and thrive without fear of being mistreated or driven out from their homes by cruel politics and war. Even the pets such as dogs are kept safe and warm by their owners and cats are allowed to enter buildings and cars as equally as humans who are not Jews. The orders of Hitler had made driven the race of Jews to the holocaust and mass killing and also endangered the lives of refugees who are constantly hunted by Nazi soldiers for immediate killing.

Q. 4 How does the poet juxtapose the human condition with the behavior of the political class?

Answer:

The setting of the poem is in a city of over 10 million people but the refugees like the narrator and his lover are unable to settle in any place because they are 'Jews'. They have no right to live because Hitler had declared that according to ideologies of Nazism, Jews were unfit to live and had to be eliminated without mercy. This thundered across Europe and in the minds of the terrified Jews who are then treated miserably by Europe and other places they sought refuge. They are constantly threatened by death at the hands of the non-Jews.

Q. 5 How is the essence of the poem captured in the lines 'two tickets to Happiness'?

Answer:

The narrator and his lover are homeless refugees who have no place to settle permanently. They agonize their loss of home and identity as human beings. The given line presents a hint of hope for the refugees who can board a train to freedom from merciless killing and deprived state of living. But in reality even the coaches on the trains are full, the tickets are too expensive to afford or they are turned away. Hitler had declared that they had no right to live so they cannot hope to escape from a life where

the cruel Nazi soldiers are hunting them constantly for slaughter or endless wandering.

TRY THIS OUT

Q. 1 Here is a list of devices used in poetry. Elaborate on their use in this poem

Refrain:

Pathos:

Irony:

Sarcasm:

Answer:

Refrain: Auden uses refrain at the end of each stanza as it is used in a blues song. It is used as a dejected realization that the narrator's plight and that of his fellow Jews was sad and pathetic.

Pathos: Is a method used to communicate emotions already present in the minds of the readers to appeal to them. Here, the device is used to make the readers sympathize with the sorry plight of refugees who are forced to flee their homeland to seek sanctuary in foreign countries.

Irony: Irony is placed on the fact that animals in the foreign countries like birds, fish live freely in their natural habitat and pets are treated better than the Jewish refugees who are human as everybody else, but treated worse than these animals when they are slaughtered mercilessly by Nazis.

Sarcasm: Sarcasm lies in the fact that animals are allowed to live freely without politicians depriving them the right to live and hunting them down for immediate execution. Only humans exploited and killed their fellow beings for selfish political gains.

Q. 2 What does the colour 'blue' suggest in the poem? Make a list of other colours and the emotions and moods they carry.

Answer:

The colour 'blue' in the poem suggests the melancholic song of slaves, sky, and water, freedom

The colour 'red' suggests war, violence, danger

The colour 'green' suggests Spring, misfortune, fertility, renewal, youth

The colour 'grey' suggests melancholy, urban life, maturity, soundness

The colour 'yellow' suggests hope, idealism, sunshine, warning, danger, deceit.

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