

Refugees flee to a country to seek help, refuge, freedom, and peace in a place that is not dangerously volatile as their home. Instead, they are met with a lot of xenophobia and unacceptance from people who feel disdain and fear at the sound of the word “refugee”, “asylum seeker”, or “immigrant”.

We often read, especially recently, of the migration crises whether in Europe, America, or our own country Lebanon. We often watch news reports about refugees, but we seldom hear them, and we seldom know their voices and stories. After all, the freedom of the press only exists for those who own it. Through Auden’s poem “Refugee Blues”, the narrator offers the perspective of the unwelcomed, marginalized refugee who is dehumanized and degraded below the moral status of a human. Even animals live a more decent life, for they are not subjected to the injustice and discrimination that refugees are sadly subjected to. As he walks and sees the birds in the trees, the narrator says, “They had no politicians and sang at their ease/ They weren't the human race,” (Lines 31, 32). Animals— those that are not displaced out of their natural habitats— get to revel in their liberty while refugees suffer from injustice and oppression. They are respected and welcomed right into people's homes whereas refugees are denied basic human rights and decency, for animals receive a very meticulous humane treatment as a poodle is kept warm with a “jacket fastened with a pin, and a door is opened for a cat let in” (Lines 24, 25). Moreover, the narrator says the “human race” rather than “German Jews” to emphasize the idea that humans—ironically being the superior species— are actually tainted and corrupt. Where there is injustice, inequality, oppression, and slavery, there is the tragically contaminated human race. Where there is a social hierarchy, exploitation, and discrimination, there you will find entitled humans who establish themselves as elites above others. In addition, the irony is depicted in the last lines where the narrator says, “Ten thousand soldiers marched to and fro:/ Looking for you and me” (Lines

35, 36). Animals are usually hunted, but the refugees are sought and hunted due to being German Jews.

The speaker also highlights the socio-economic gap between the upper and lower class as he says that “some are living in mansions, some are living in holes” (Lines 1,2), but when it comes to refugees who are barely living there's no place— in the physical world and in the hearts of people. What stands between them from religious and ethnic differences is more important to people than what unifies them from common humanity and fraternity.

In this vast world with a dominant capitalistic system, an individual is promised greatness with endless opportunities. Capitalist entrepreneurs and the elite will happily tell you that you can be anything regardless of your background, educational level, and social status, yet refugees are not allowed a decent life specifically because of their background. On this vast earth, they can't even find a place to settle, but for capitalists, the sky is the limit. For refugees, this reality does not even appear in their wishes, prayers, and dreams. For instance, the narrator says, “In the village churchyard there grows an old yew/ Every spring it blossoms anew/ Old passports can't do that, my dear” (Lines 7-9). Not only passports can't be renewed, but the lives of refugees also can't be renewed. There is no hope for rebirth. There is only despair because of a life that is very unlikely to be retrieved and a life that could not start. Refugees are not only in the process of mourning their home, but they also mourn any spark of hope they had for a new one. They come bearing the heavy burden of fleeing their homes only to be further challenged and discriminated against by prejudicial and desensitized people as described in Auden's poem. It is a tragic reality, for you would think that the word “refugee” at its etymological heart would evoke sympathy, but it instead triggers xenophobia and hatred towards undesirable people.