

**THE POETICS OF HUMAN RIGHTS:  
AUDEN AND AL-JAWAHIRI  
IN THE 1930S**

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## Dedication

To ***My Father***, whose funeral I couldn't witness  
Or be with him in that hour of need  
This, *Hāj Faisal*, is a day of happiness  
For you and all my friends whom Death ceased  
Let your blessed souls have fun today  
I will join you later, as a Dr., I pray.

## Abstract

This is a comparative study of human rights in modern English and Arabic poetry. It is an attempt to find out answers for the ongoing controversies on human rights across cultures, as well as between the humanitarian and the legal perspectives of human rights. It is also a step towards inspecting further dimensions in the relationship between human rights and literature, considering poetry as a main literary genre. Through narrative, argumentative and analytic methods this research project tackles a selection of the poetic careers of W. H. Auden and Mohammed Mahdi al-Jawahiri in the 1930s.

Three poems are selected from each of the two poets, according to subject matter and its relation to human rights, chronological development, surrounding events and the poet's character, his reactions and concerns. From Auden I have selected "Musée des Beaux Arts," "Epitaph on a Tyrant" and "Refugee Blues;" while from al-Jawahiri, "Taḥarrak al-Laḥd" (The Coffin Moved), "Fī al-Sijn" (In Jail) and "al-Iqtā'" (Land policy). Being divided into three pairs, the six poems ('Musée des Beaux' Arts with 'Fī al-Sijn', 'Epitaph on a Tyrant' with 'Taḥarrak al-Laḥd' and 'Refugee Blues' with 'al-Iqtā'') will be identified and analysed in terms of human rights. The comparison targets similar human rights topics raised in each pair and highlights differences and similarities in understanding, approaching and defending them.

The research focuses on the 1930s as a decade in which many significant events and issues are enfolded, especially in terms of human rights and the relationship between Britain and Iraq where the two poets come from. While the 1930s preceded the establishment of an international legal umbrella of rights, the decade's events led to major violations of rights that occurred in World War II. As a transitional period for human rights, this research underlines the role of poetry as a means for defending rights in the lack of legal protection in the 1930s.

Human rights in the poems of Auden and al-Jawahiri are approached from a number of respects: what are the topics of human rights raised in the poems, why are these topics prioritized, how did the poets react to violations and crimes and how are human rights seen by each poet and why. These questions and concerns are argued in the four chapters of this research project.

## List of Contents

<b>Abstract</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>IJMES Transliteration Table</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>Acknowledgments</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>Declaration</b>	<b>ix</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE</b>	
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER TWO: W. H. Auden</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>2.1. Preliminary Steps</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>2.2. Section One: “Musée des Beaux Arts”</b>	
2.2.1. Introduction	22
2.2.2. The Poet as an Intellectual	27
2.2.3. Auden, Brueghel and the Anatomy of Suffering	30
2.2.4. “Musée des Beaux Arts” as a Human Rights Report	37
2.2.5. Icarus between Auden and Williams	40
2.2.6. Jarrell’s <i>Musée</i>	43
<b>2.3. Section Two: “Epitaph on a Tyrant”</b>	
2.3.1. Introduction	46
2.3.2. The Freudian Marxist Alloy	48
2.3.3. The Poet vs the Tyrant	50
2.3.4. The Two Sides of Coin	57
2.3.5. Brodsky’s Tyrant	59
<b>2.4. Section Three: “Refugee Blues”</b>	
2.4.1. Introduction	64
2.4.2. Auden’s Cinematic Technique	65
2.4.3. Auden, ‘Blues’ and Human Rights	69
2.4.4. Auden and Arendt	78
<b>2.5. Consequences</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>CHAPTER THREE: Al-Jawahiri</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>3.1. Preliminary Steps</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>3.2. Section One: “Taḥarrak al-Laḥd”</b>	
3.2.1. Introduction	108
3.2.2. The Search for the Hero	109

3.2.3. Stooping to Conquer	115
3.2.4. “Taḥarrak al-Laḥd” & “Spain”	122
3.2.5. Al-Jawahiri’s Dualism	123
<b>3.3. Section Two: “Fī Al-Sijn”</b>	
3.3.1. Introduction	130
3.3.2. Prison Writing & Human Rights	133
3.3.3. The Poet as Icarus	137
3.3.4. Resistance within Resistance	145
3.3.5. Visual / Audio Suffering	149
<b>3.4. Section Three: “al-Iqṭā’”</b>	
3.4.1. Introduction	153
3.4.2. The Anatomy of Land Policy	156
3.4.3. The Pillars of Land Policy	161
3.4.4. The Question of Violent Justice	169
<b>3.5. Consequences</b>	<b>175</b>
<b>CHAPTER FOUR</b>	
<b>4. Conclusion</b>	<b>178</b>
<b>Appendix (a):</b> Translation of the selected poems of Auden	187
<b>Appendix (b):</b> Translation of the selected poems of al-Jawahiri	190
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>201</b>

## IJMES Transliteration System for Arabic:

### A: Consonants

ء ' a	ا-ى a	ب b
ت t	ث th	ج j
ح ḥ	خ kh	د d
ذ dh	ر r	ز z
س s	ش sh	ص ṣ
ض ḍ	ط ṭ	ظ ḏ
ع ' gh	غ gh	ف f
ق q	ك k	ل l
م m	ن n	ه h
و w	ي y	ة a - ah- at
ال (al-)		

### B: Vowels

<p>Long:</p> <p>ا or ى ā و ū ي ī</p>	<p>Doubled:</p> <p>يِّ iyy (final form ī)</p> <p>وِّ uww (final form ū)</p>
<p>Diphthongs:</p> <p>او au or aw اي ai or ay</p>	<p>Short:</p> <p>ا a u i</p>

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My dear friends in the BSB (Sebastian, Rahul, Dima, Ruwaishid, Hakim, Nick and Daniel), and our dear friend Anna Cowell: many thanks.

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Thanks to everyone and please accept my apologies if I forget to mention you.

**Ahmed Faisal Khaleel**  
**December 10, 2014**  
**University of York**



## DECLARATION

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, this thesis is the result of my own research and authorship and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of York or any other institution.

As part of my work in progress, I have submitted and presented material from this work in academic conferences in the UK and UAE. Particularly:

A paper presented in Centre of Applied Human Rights (February 2011) and in the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Amnesty International in the University of Hull-Scharborough in December 6, 2011, entitled: *A Portrait of Arab Poets as Human Rights Defenders*. Part of it has been later inserted in the introduction to this thesis.

A paper presented in the graduate conference of the University of Edinburgh in November 2013, “Art & Resistance in the Middle East: History & Change,” department of Islamic & Middle Eastern Studies. The paper is part of chapter 3, section 2, entitled: *Resistance within Resistance: al-Jawahiri 'In Prison'*.

I also participated in the Second Annual Translation Conference of the English Literature department in the United Arab Emirates University-College of Humanities and Social Sciences, “From Periphery to Center: Arabic Literature in English Translation in January 22, 2014. I used part of the thesis from chapter 3 and the selected poems of al-Jawahiri as samples of Arabic human rights poetry in a paper entitled: *Translating Cultural Identity: Arabic Poetry and the Question of Universal Human Rights*.

# CHAPTER ONE

## 1. Introduction

This project is an argument about human rights and poetry in the 1930s in the works of two prominent poets of the period. The project's aim is to introduce, through a comparative study of selected poems by W. H. Auden and Mohammed Mahdi al-Jawahiri,<sup>1</sup> examples of the relationship between human rights and poetry and human rights across cultures. It provides samples for the study of human rights poetry and the two poets as human rights defenders. This project also looks into how each of the two poets who belong to different cultural backgrounds, reflect his culture in understanding and approaching human rights and how this is embodied in each poet's career.

Hannah Arendt's description of poetry as "the most human and the least wordly of the arts" opens the door for questions about the relationship between poetry and human rights: how poetry, being the most human of the arts, communicates human rights and how it, as the least worldly of the arts, approaches them.<sup>2</sup> In the field of human rights itself there are numerous controversies about the accommodation between the legal and humanitarian perspectives of human rights, and clashes between cultural rights activists and universalists. These controversies and clashes appear in times of crisis, especially wars, during which major violations of human rights and crimes against humanity occur.

Through analysis of a selection of poems by two prominent poets of the 1930s, this project aims to present examples of the role of poetry as a voice for rights, especially in reacting to violations and in raising awareness. It also shows how poetry with its unique language, its closeness to the thought that inspires it together with the gifts of remembrance and durability, as Arendt describes it, reacted to major violations of human rights.<sup>3</sup>

The choice of the 1930s in this research project rests on the following reasons; firstly, it was a decade of major political and economic crises in many parts of the world. The condition of human rights in the 1930s was a critical one as Samuel Hynes

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<sup>1</sup> As for the system of transliteration in dealing with the poems of al-Jawahiri, I will rely on the IJMES. It is important, however, not to break the balance of verse lines. Thus I will abide by the system of IJMES but in cases where transliterating the sound is necessary for the balance and harmony of lines such as when words end with *tanwīn* (un, in, and an), I will transliterate case markers. The name of al-Jawāhirī, however, will be written as "al-Jawahiri" without markers on letters, in addition to other names that are also written and known without markers such as Ahmed and Mohammed.

<sup>2</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 169.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 169-170.

describes it. Politically, it was the decade of the rise of dictatorships and economically the decade of a growing social injustice, depression and unemployment, especially in England.<sup>4</sup> The situation in Iraq at the same time was no better; foreign occupation, military coups, corruption and poverty formed the mood of the period in the young kingdom. Secondly it is an interwar decade; the ghost of war was always present in the 1930s. For the development of human rights, this decade can be seen as a transitional period during which the need for human rights became more urgent alongside the state of increasing violations and crimes. The end of this decade witnessed the onset of World War II, whose experience led to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. “The decade of the thirties,” says Hynes, “was a time of crises, and the most important writing of the period is the best seen as a series of efforts to respond to crisis.”<sup>5</sup>

In this project I will focus on the 1930s poetic careers of the Anglo-American Auden and the Iraqi al-Jawahiri. The period in England, as Patrick J. Quinn points out, is an Audenesque one:

Very few critics and academics would disagree that English literature in the thirties centered around the person and writings of W. H. Auden. [...] He was the pollinator of thirties literature in England; many of his ideas were borrowed and developed by writers such as Spender, Isherwood, Day Lewis, and Mac Neice, as well as lesser-known authors of the period.<sup>6</sup>

The 1930s’ poems of Auden, who was the most significant poet of the group, reflect his deep preoccupation with the events of the period and prompt reactions to them. In the same period where Auden is seen as a dominant literary figure in Britain, Mohammed Mahdi al-Jawahiri is seen likewise in Iraq. In his book *Reading Iraq*, Muḥsin Jāsim Mūsawī quotes an interesting description by ‘Alī Jawād al-Ṭāhir on Iraqi literature in the 1930s:<sup>7</sup>

The “new” means then [i.e., in the 1930s] to be on the side of people, the mass population of workers and peasants, to fight back exploitation. Exploiters are landowners, politicians, landlords, along with colonialism, and British colonialism in particular. Thus, good literature emerges from that, a literature that makes some achievement forward, reaching a wider readership. It is not surprising that al-Jawāhirī (1899-1997) was the greatest

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<sup>4</sup> Samuel Hynes, *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 65.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>6</sup> Patrick J. Quinn, *Recharting the Thirties* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 1996), 11.

<sup>7</sup> ‘Alī Jawād al-Ṭāhir (1911-1996), is an Iraqi prominent critic and literary scholar.

among poets, adding the new to the old, along with his wealth of ancient learning.<sup>8</sup>

The two poets, each in his country, are dominant figures of the period. Iraq was also under British mandate in the 1930s. Although the mandate ended in 1932, the country remained politically and economically controlled by Britain. This relationship between the occupier and the occupied has had its impacts on the Iraqi cultural scene as well. Over 40 years of domination, many aspects of the language and culture of the English can still be distinguished in Iraq today. A considerable number of English vocabulary and expressions have been adopted, hammered and twisted to look more like Arabic words. Examples of these words are *stearin* (steering), *ṭraybīl* (trouble), *timman* (ten men) and *ṭowayrīch* (two-way reach).<sup>9</sup> These examples show to what extent the Iraqi absorbed British culture on the local level. This relationship makes the comparison between Iraqi and English poetry in the 1930s a reasonable one. Here we must notice that highlighting affinities between the two poets and their poems is not one of the aims of this project. The comparison between Auden and al-Jawahiri is not based upon any personal or literary relationship between the two poets. It is rather based on identifying each one of them as a poet of human rights and the role he played in the 1930s as a defender of rights, as well as on the cultural variety between them and its impact on their poems of human rights.

The choice of this topic is the result of accumulations of experiences and situations that began with teaching English poetry in Syria in 2007 and ended with studying human rights in Britain in 2010. In both countries I was a refugee fleeing the horrors of violence in Iraq. I noticed how the heat of summer in Iraq and Syria made the students wonder why Shakespeare compares his beloved to ‘a summer day’, as it made the students of Arabic language in the University of York wonder why winter is a lovely season in Iraq? Questions like these naturally appear when we talk about language, traditions and customs across cultures. Both differences and affinities of this kind, in approaching similar human rights topics in the poems of Auden and al-Jawahiri will be highlighted to see what these poems can tell us about the role and impact of cultural diversity on understanding human rights.

As far as Arabic poetry is concerned, the 1930s was a crucial decade as in Britain. It was marked by the rise of communism, especially in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Egypt.

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<sup>8</sup> Muḥsin Jāsim Mūsawī, *Reading Iraq: Culture and Power in Conflict* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), 135.

<sup>9</sup> The words *Ṭraybil* and *Ṭowayrīch* are names of towns in Iraq, while the Iraqi people use the word *timman* to refer to rice. When the British occupied Iraq they brought an Indian brand of rice called ‘Ten Men’.

Arguments and controversies among intellectuals and political movements about Arab nationality, freedom from colonialism and westernizing the Arab world were the topics of the time. The Arab-Israeli conflict began to escalate from 1936. Al-Jawahiri's poetry revolves around most of the major political, social and economic events of the period.

Among the many studies on human rights and literature, studies revolving around human rights and poetry in particular can hardly be found. Among the recent scholarly works on human rights and literature, Joseph Slaughter's book *Human Rights, Inc: The World Novel, Narrative Form, and International Law* is a distinguished one. Besides Slaughter's book, which focuses mainly on the conception of the individual and other relationships between the modern novel and international human rights, there are other similar works. The majority of these works concentrate on fiction, such as Elizabeth Anker's *Fictions of Dignity: Embodying Human Rights in World Literature*; Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith's *Human Rights and Narrated Lives: the Ethics of Recognition*; and *Theoretical Perspectives on Human Rights and Literature*, edited by Elizabeth S. Goldberg and Alexandra Moore. In this latter monograph that combines essays on human rights law, literature and culture, Carolyn Forché's essay *Reading the Living Archives: The Witness of Literary Art* discusses the poetry of witness as a means of revealing unperceived experiences, such as those of torture in countries under authoritarian regimes.<sup>10</sup> None of these studies, however, reads anything from Arabic or English poetry or argues on human rights poetry.

As for studies on human rights and Arabic literature, the majority of them as well, and they are few, are on the novel such as *al-Ittijāh al-Insānī fī al-Riwāyah al-'Arabīyah* (Humanitarian Trends in the Arabic Novel) by Mustafa Abd al-Ghanī, published in 2006; and *Ḥuqūq al-Insān fī Riwāyat Abdul Raḥman Munīf* (Human Rights in the Novels of Abdul Rahman Munif) in 1983. I relied on a work related to human rights poetry, *Shi'r al-Sujūn fī al-Adab al-'Arabi al-Ḥadīth wa al-Mu'āšir* (Prison Poetry in Modern & contemporary Arabic Literature) by Sālim al-Ma'ūsh, published in 2003. The latter book is more like an anthology of prison poetry rather than a critical study of prison writing in modern Arabic literature. The only study of modern Arabic poetry and human rights is issued in 2000 by the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, *al-Ḥadātha Ukht al-Tasāmuḥ: al-shi'r al-'arabi al-ḥadīth min manzūr ḥuqūq al-insān* (Modernity as the Sister of Tolerance: Arabic poetry from a human rights

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<sup>10</sup> Carolyn Forché, "Reading the Living Archives: The Witness of Literary Art," in *Theoretical Perspectives on Human Rights and Literature*, ed., Elizabeth Swanson Goldberg and Alexandra Schultheis Moore (London: Routledge, 2012), 135-49.

perspective), by Sālim Ḥilmī. This work traces the footprints of human rights in modern and contemporary Arabic poetry and sheds light on the cases poets like Adonis, Mahmoud Darwīsh and al-Bayātī raised, such as the Palestinian dilemma, torture and oppression in the Arab world.

This project sets an argument on human rights poetry to show how human rights are articulated in numerous ways throughout the works of two poets belonging to two different cultural backgrounds. A variety of human rights terms will be discussed, such as natural and basic rights, positive and negative rights and civil and political rights but only within the boundaries of their communication in the selected poems. The shape of the argument, in other words, will be based on the analysis of human rights in these poems. Since they are in the first place reactions to violations of human rights, human rights will be argued in the manner of being violated, lacked and demanded rather than secured and developed. This project would hopefully serve as an invitation to further studies and developments in the field of human rights and poetry to emerge.

This thesis is divided into four chapters. Chapter one functions as an introduction to the research project. It focuses on the relationship between human rights and poetry, using poetry as a key to cultural codes. The main objective of this chapter is to introduce the rationale of this project, why it has been chosen and what are its aims. It also presents a review of similar works and contributions to the interdisciplinary genre of human rights and poetry.

Chapter two concerns human rights in W. H. Auden's poetry during the 1930s. Three poems by Auden have been chosen: "Musée des Beaux Arts" (1938), "Epitaph on a Tyrant" and "Refugee Blues" (both written in 1939). Through close analysis of these three poems in terms of human rights, I want to show how Auden can be understood as a defender of rights and what the primary issues he was interested in are in this respect, and why. The analysis will show the way the poetry of Auden can be read as an interpreter of human rights as he, as an English poet, understands them. It will also argue how poetry works as an eye in spotting violations and crimes, as a voice in raising public awareness and as a pen that documents those violations. The way poetry reinforces human rights through its distinctive tools will also be examined. Each of the three poems will be analysed in a separate section. Sections one and two present examples of the visual and written aspects of poetry, and section three presents an auditory aspect.

Section one on "Musée des Beaux Arts" will mainly discuss social apathy versus social justice, negative and positive rights and the suffering of the individual in a

community. This section presents an analysis of an ekphrastic poem being used as evidence of violations of human rights. A comparison, in terms of defining the poet of human rights, is made by studying other poems by Randal Jarrell and William Carlos Williams, written on Brueghel's painting of the fall of Icarus.

Section two tackles tyrants and tyranny through "Epitaph on a Tyrant." This poem reads like the outcome of what the poet warns against in "Musée des Beaux Arts": social apathy leading to political apathy and, thus, to the emergence of authoritarian regimes and dictatorships. The poem sheds light on the suffering of a community at the hands of an individual. It presents an example of how Auden as a public poet was able to present accurate diagnosis of negative social behaviours and predicted their outcomes. Another example is the poem itself as a means of prompt reaction to threats against human rights.

"Refugee Blues" deals with the suffering of refugees and their lack of rights. This poem is an example of a majority group abusing the rights of a minority within a community, as well as an example of the clash between a legal system and a humanitarian perspective of rights. The three poems together present an example of how an Anglo-American poet like Auden approached human rights and implemented his poems to defend them.

Chapter three explores human rights in the poetry of Mohammed Mahdi al-Jawahiri during the 1930s. This chapter will take the same shape as the previous chapter in the selection of poems and their analysis as poems of human rights. Three poems by the Iraqi poet are analysed in the same way as Auden's poems. Together they provide an example from neoclassical / modern Arabic poetry on the manner human rights are understood and approached. Al-Jawahiri as an example of the Arab poet as human rights defender is introduced and compared to Auden. This comparative analysis will define the differences and similarities that marked the two poets' communication of human rights, each according to his background and the circumstances in which he lived. Differences between the two poets will be highlighted in terms of demanding human rights according to priority, the manner of reaction to violations and the imagery they derived, each from his culture. Each poem by al-Jawahiri will be analysed and compared with one of Auden's poems, chosen to match up with it, also in a separate section.

Section one of Chapter three concerns an analysis of "Taḥarrak al-Laḥd" (The Coffin Moved), written in 1936. This poem will be analysed as an equivalent of Auden's "Epitaph on a Tyrant", as the two poems deal with the making of tyranny and tyrants,

and especially with the social and political circumstances that lead to the emergence of tyrants. Although it is not an epitaph, al-Jawahiri's "Taḥarrak al-Laḥd" will also be studied as an immediate reaction to a possible threat from which al-Jawahiri warned. Differences and similarities in style, manner of approach and implementation of poetic tools will be highlighted to find out how the cultural codes that are folded in the poems are used to reflect the poet's understanding of human rights according to his background.

Section two tackles al-Jawahiri's "Fī al-Sijn" (In Prison), written in 1937 while al-Jawahiri was in jail. The main emphasis here is the suffering of the individual in a careless community; a theme that makes it comparable to Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts." The poem is an example of prison writing and the poetry of witness, which makes it unquestionably a poem of human rights. This poem shows the poet's ability to uncover hidden violations of human rights in a poem that captures victims' inner feelings of suffering and the pressure they suffer in prison when other means of witness are unavailable.

Section three presents al-Jawahiri's poem "al-Iqtā'" (Land Policy), written in 1939. The analysis revolves around the clash of rights between majorities and minorities, and among different social classes in a given society. As in Auden's "Refugee Blues", al-Jawahiri's "al-Iqtā'" criticises the conflict on the social level in which political corruption and bureaucracy play an important role in agitating it. Although al-Jawahiri's poem is not about refugees, it sheds light on the sufferings of landless peasants who were also forced to be internal refugees in 1939. Those peasants were the victims of the huge gap in class division created by the land policy law of 1933. By this law they were deprived from the lands in which they lived and worked. In a wider circle, the poem talks about the clash between State rights and Community rights, i.e., when human rights are bound by a set of bureaucratic regulations. Members of community in this case suffer violations or lack of certain rights as a result of the state's commitment to law-enforcement. This case stands as an example to the clash between the humanitarian and legal perspectives of human rights.

Chapter four will present the results of this project, namely what Auden and al-Jawahiri as poets teach us about human rights, how poetry can support human rights and mediate between institutional and normative concepts of human rights.

I will focus in this project on the humanitarian perspective of rights, in relation to the political and legal (institutional) one. In terms of practice, human rights are built on relationships between individuals, individuals and communities, and between both with



institutions such as states. Before the emergence of the legal framework of human rights after World War II, moral and religious frameworks were the umbrellas that answered the need for rights and protected them.

There are two main controversial issues surrounding the international legal framework of human rights today. The first is related to the fact that human rights are not merely legal and the second is the universality of human rights. Rights are legalised by law-makers, according to Tibor Machan, because those who demand them believe that these rights exist in some sense, such as civil or women's or gay rights.<sup>11</sup> Apart from the legal system, rights are essentially built on human affairs: the relational nature of rights "pertains to the moral responsibilities that arise among humans."<sup>12</sup> There was no law that forces people to help each other, apart from their moral responsibility which confirms the humanitarian origin of rights. We shall see further discussion of this case in the next chapter, with the analysis of Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts."

The second controversial issue is the universality of human rights. Rights are universal in the sense that principles of human rights, such as freedom and equality are universally recognised and required. In terms of identifying, understanding and approaching these principles, however, there might be slight and yet significant differences. These differences are based on cultural diversity and the nature of the cultural identity of every nation on the globe. Even within the same nation there are local communities that have their own cultural identities.

Human rights are (or should be) universal, inalienable and indivisible. However, questions and controversies about cultural diversity and its conflict with the universality of human rights are still going on. The fact that the roots of human rights found in the Hammurabi's Code, the Hebrew Bible, Greek and Roman Laws, Christianity and Islam might reinforce the idea that human rights are universally acknowledged. Yet, each of the above versions of rights was born in a culture, or adopted and nurtured by it. Cultural differences appear from time to time to oppose human rights universalism for a variety of reasons, such as commitment to cultural identity and misunderstanding and misinterpretation of human rights concepts. In the following example, Micheline Ishay shows us how cultural variety might produce different interpretations of an idea or principle:

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<sup>11</sup> Tibor R. Machan, *Individuals and their Rights* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1989), 1.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

This debate [on cultural differences], however, can be traced to ancient times, when the historian Herodotus argued more than 2,000 years ago that there were no universal ethics. To illustrate his point, he told the story about the Persian king Darius. The king, wrote Herodotus, summoned several Greeks and asked them how much money it would take for them to eat the dead bodies of their fathers. Outraged, they proclaimed their refusal to perform such a gruesome act at any price, adding that cremation of the dead was a sacred obligation. Darius then called upon some Indians, who by custom ate their deceased parents, and asked them if they would consider burning the bodies of their fathers. Insulted, they replied that such an act would be a horrible crime. The lesson, concluded Herodotus, was simply that each nation regards its own customs as superior.<sup>13</sup>

This example shows to what extent cultural identity is engraved in the human mind and how it determines its beliefs and social behaviour. By studying human rights in the poetry of Auden and al-Jawahiri, this thesis will focus on defining the poetry of human rights, the role of poets, especially in times of crises and lack of legal protection for rights.

Reading poetic texts that recount stories of suffering, pain and other violations of human rights reinforces Domna C. Stanton's statement that "human rights and the humanities have a long, shared history."<sup>14</sup> Human rights literature as an interdisciplinary genre, according to Goldberg and Moore, has focused mainly on prose writings such as fiction, non-fiction and the short story.<sup>15</sup> The role of poetry as a voice for rights in both English and Arabic literatures, however, can be recognised in many early and modern texts. As for English poetry, the words of Blake on animal rights, his poem "The Chimney Sweeper," and Elizabeth Browning's poem "The Cry of the Children" are undoubtedly on rights. These poetic calls for rights, I believe, helped to make human rights publicly recognised.

In the Arab world poets and poetry played a very important role in demanding and defending human rights. Texts that reject injustice and call for equality and freedom from discrimination and fear date back to the pre-Islamic age. We find in the poems of 'Antarah al-'Absī (525-608), for example, a rejection of slavery and strong demand for freedom and dignity. Since Islam emerged in Arabia it has shaped the Arab and Muslim version of rights and provided them a sort of a legal protection: the larger part of studies and research in the field of human rights in the Arab and even the Muslim world

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<sup>13</sup> Micheline Ishay, "What are Human Rights? Six Historical Controversies," *Journal of Human Rights* 3, no.3 (2010): 364.

<sup>14</sup> Domna C. Stanton et al., "The Humanities in Human Rights: Critique, Language, Politics," *PMLA* 121, no.5 (October 2005): 1518, accessed November 17, 2014, 10.1632/pmla.2006.121.5.1515.

<sup>15</sup> Elizabeth Swanson Goldberg and Alexandra Schultheis Moore, *Theoretical Perspectives on Human Rights and Literature*, 2.

revolve around the fundamental role of Islam in setting the background for rights. However, between those who see Islam opposing human rights and those who see it supportive of human rights comes the question that is repeatedly asked in the Muslim world about the difference between real Islam and what Muslims make us see as Islam. “What Muslims make of Islam,” says Anthony Chase, “is, indeed, quite changeable” but these changes do not necessarily represent Islam but they are, indeed, part of their adopters’ cultural identity in many cases.<sup>16</sup> Although it might be irrelevant, this matter is mentioned in the context of the argument of this thesis as one of the key points of disagreement between the two cultures. It is necessary to recognise it because in the differences in interpreting and prioritising certain rights in the two cultures, the Islamic concept of human rights plays an important role. However, this issue is not clearly mentioned in the poems of al-Jawahiri.

Through the analysis of their poems, I believe there are many interlaced and intersected beliefs, ideas and attitudes to argue about Auden and al-Jawahiri as poets of human rights. Al-Jawahiri, for example, was a communist poet; he devoted many of his poems entirely to defending the poor and oppressed especially workers and peasants. These poems, however, show in return a clear criticism of those poets who, at least in his eyes, were not truly empathetic enough with the lower and working classes. The Iraqi poet Jamīl Ṣidqī al-Zahāwī and the Egyptian poet Ahmed Shawqī were among those he did not admire. Both belonged to the aristocratic class, while he admired the Iraqi poet Ma‘rūf al-Ruṣāfī for being socially and politically the opposite of al-Zahāwī and Shawqī. The relationship between al-Jawahiri and Ahmed Shawqī, especially the disagreement between them over political allegiances and the passion for aristocracy, is similar to the relationship between Auden and Yeats. This matter, however, can be traced in the poetry of Auden and al-Jawahiri in the elegies they had written for the poets they disagreed with. First we have al-Jawahiri who, on the death of the Prince of Arabic Poetry<sup>17</sup> in 1932, wrote an elegy, which he started with the following lines:

*Ṭawa al-mawt rabb al-qawāfi al-Ghurar / wa aṣbaḥa Shawqī rahīn al-ḥufar*  
*Wa ulqiya dhāk al-turāth al-‘aẓīm / li-thiql al-turāb wa daḡḡt al-ḥajar*<sup>18</sup>  
 Death folded the lord of fine verse / among holes Shawqī now lives

<sup>16</sup> Anthony Chase, “The Tail and the Dog: Constructing Islam and Human Rights in Political Context,” in *Human Rights in the Arab World: Independent Voices*, ed., Anthony Chase and Amr Hamzawy (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 21-25.

<sup>17</sup> Ahmed Shawqī was awarded this title in 1927.

<sup>18</sup> Mohammed Mahdi al-Jawahiri, *Ahmed Shawqī*, “adab.com,” accessed July 14, 2014, <http://www.adab.com/modules.php?name=Sh3er&doWhat=shqas&qid=66750&r=&rc=6>.

And thrown is that great heritage / to suffer the pressure of dirt and stones.

(“Ahmed Shawqī”: 1-2)

On these lines, Ḥasan al-‘Alawī asked al-Jawahiri in 1957, “What have you done to the prince of Arabic poetry? Al-Jawahiri replied “what should I have to do?” I replied, says al-‘Alawī, “you should, at least, avoid mentioning death, just like in the elegy you had written for al-Ruṣāfi”. Al-Jawahiri’s elegy for al-Ruṣāfi in 1945, who was a simple poor man, is totally different in tone and style from that he had written for Shawqī:

*Lāqayt rabbaka bi-al-ḍamīr / wa anart dājiyat al-qubūr*

*Ma ‘rūfu nam fawq al-turāb / falast min ahl al-ḥarīr<sup>19</sup>*

You shall meet your Lord with a clear conscience / and enlighten the  
darkness of graves,

Sleep, O Ma ‘rūf, with dignity on the dust / for you don’t belong to silk-  
wearers.

After a short silence, says al-‘Alawī, al-Jawahiri smiled but did not say a word.<sup>20</sup> In the two elegies al-Jawahiri wrote, we notice how he implemented his sense of poetic justice to give the former a terrible death and the latter a peaceful one. All this was only because he found in al-Ruṣāfi an example of the real public poet who chose to stand for his people’s rights, regardless of the consequences that led to his tragic death. Further details on this issue will be found in the introduction of the third chapter.

As for Auden, we find the beginning of his elegy for Yeats, the poet he condemned for fancying aristocracy and admiring the poor ‘as long as they remain poor’, a cruel image describing the circumstances of his death:

He disappeared in the dead of winter:

The brooks were frozen, the airports almost deserted,

And snow disfigured the public statues;

The mercury sank in the mouth of the dying day.

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<sup>19</sup> Ḥasan Al-‘Alawī, *Al-Jawahiri Diwān al-‘Aṣr* (Damascus: The Ministry of Culture, 1986), 249-50. I could not find this poem anywhere, but this couplet is the first of an elegy al-Jawahiri had written for al-Ruṣāfi after 1951 as Jalīl al-‘Aṭīyya says in his article “Limādhā ‘āsh al-Ruṣāfi ba’d mawtīh wa limādhā yamūt al-aḥyā’ min al-shu‘arā’?” *Al-Madā*, March 13, 2011, <http://www.almadasupplements.com/news.php?action=view&id=1560>.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.

What instruments we have agree

The day of his death was a dark cold day.<sup>21</sup>

Although the rest of the poem shows Auden's sadness for the death of Yeats, it equally shows his disagreement with him. Even in death he seized the chance to say that Yeats will be punished and haunted by what he had written, by "the foreign code of conscience" and the modification of his words in the guts of the living, including "the poor [who] have the sufferings to which they are fairly accustomed."<sup>22</sup> In both cases, a poet's commitments to principles and defense for them are central characteristics with which poets of human rights are identified and recognised.

Through out the two poet's reactions to specific violatuions of human rights in the 1930s, this research project will present to the reader how these certain topics are approached in these poems and why, and what kind of measurement or assessment they provide for human rights in terms of their reactions to violations, abuses and crimes.

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<sup>21</sup> W. H. Auden, *In Memory of W. B. Yeats*, in *The English Auden: Poems, Essays and Dramatic Writings, 1927-1939*, ed., Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), 241.

<sup>22</sup> Auden, "The Public v. the Late Mr. William Butler Yeats," in *ibid.*, 389.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Modern English Human Rights Poetry: W. H. Auden in the 1930s**

- Preliminary Steps
- Section One: “Musée des Beaux Arts”
- Section Two: “Epitaph on a Tyrant”
- Section Three: “Refugee Blues”
- Consequences

## 2.1. Preliminary Steps

W. H. Auden has been chosen to represent the thirties as a poet of human rights in this project for a number of reasons. Firstly, Auden was born in England and later became an American citizen; being an Anglo-American poet grants him a unique position as a representative for English poetry with interesting insights for the purposes of this chapter. Secondly, Auden created a substantial body of work with a poetic, dramatic and prose career that engaged with the main issues of his time. Thirdly, the decade during which he was influential is a transitional period that paved the way for the emergence of human rights as we understand them today.

Many labels have been bestowed upon Auden: the English, the Anglo-American, the communist, the Freudian, the intellectual and the magician.<sup>23</sup> This research is an attempt to go beyond these familiar titles and consider Auden as a poet of human rights. This chapter aims to analyse Auden's artistic triptych on human rights at the end of the 1930s through three poems which articulate human rights in different artistic media: the visual in "Musée des Beaux Arts," the sculpted in "Epitaph on a Tyrant" and the auditory in "Refugee Blues."

This chapter is divided into three sections. Section one presents an analysis of "Musée des Beaux Arts," which showcases Auden's approach to human rights, as natural rights, from a humanitarian and moral perspectives. It describes his ability to see suffering in places where no one expects to find or even discern it. The poem advocates the right to fulfil one's duties and responsibilities to the community, a basic right that establishes a foundation for the right to have rights.

Section two is a study of "Epitaph on a Tyrant", a short poem in which Auden displays one of the most important outcomes of the lack of a community of rights: tyranny. The poem delves deeper into civil and political rights, although its main topic is the concept of the lack of negative rights, and the outcomes of apathy and egoism as it is in "Musée des Beaux Arts." "Epitaph on a Tyrant" is, however, the opposite of the latter poem in the sense that in "Musée des Beaux Arts" we have a powerless individual facing a powerful community while in "Epitaph on a Tyrant" we have a powerful individual facing a powerless community.

The third section contains an analysis of "Refugee Blues." This poem shows a clearer engagement with human rights. It involves natural, civil and political rights set

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<sup>23</sup> See Adam Phillips, "Auden's Magic," in Adam Phillips, *On Balance* (London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd., 2010), 270-87, and "Sounding Auden," in Seamus Heaney, *The Government of the Tongue: The 1986 T.S. Eliot Memorial Lectures and Other Critical Writings* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), 109-28.

together to claim the rights of German-Jewish refugees in the USA in 1939. In this poem, Auden criticises authoritarian systems and also democratic states for being overly bureaucratic. All three poems present a central human rights topic: suffering. In each, this topic is approached from different perspectives and visions as the poet saw them, and presented in a manner that is closer to the reality of suffering, rather than the appearance of it.

The three poems together give us a glimpse of human rights in English poetry in the 1930s and how a poet of human rights would approach them. In order to ascertain whether poetry and human rights share common threads we need to explore the relationship between them in terms of their response to crises and atrocities. The three poems by Auden teach us that poetry could provide a better understanding of human rights by presenting a better understanding of human nature. Unlike human rights, poetry is not confined by legal frameworks or by time and place. It draws universal lessons from reality and concrete facts that have the power to teach across borders and times.

What defines him, in John Lehmann's words, as "the spiritual physician of his generation"<sup>24</sup> was his effective contribution as a poet and intellectual. Without him the cultural landscape of the 1930s would arguably have been both aesthetically tasteless and intellectually vague. While Samuel Hynes has described the 1930s as 'the Auden Generation', Ian Sansom, in his reference to Auden's influence in its wider scope that included British and American poets, has called it 'the Auden Generations'.<sup>25</sup>

In a decade as fraught with crises as the 1930s, it is quite possible to find a growing sense of submission towards the continuing atrocities. People had not yet recovered emotionally from the trauma of World War I and had yet to bear additional burdens of pain; the 1930s was a decade of hardships, starting with the Great Depression and rising unemployment and ending with World War II.

Auden's voice in the midst of these difficult circumstances was one of many voices that appeared individually to refute the domination of persecution before the establishment of human rights in its postwar guise. Poets were among the first and most effective writers who helped define a vision of human rights. Paul G. Lauren describes them as:

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<sup>24</sup> John Lehmann, *I Am my Brother* ([S.l.]: [s.n.]), 31.

<sup>25</sup> Ian Sansom, "Auden and Influence," in *The Cambridge Companion to W.H. Auden*, ed. Stan Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 226-39.



the courageous men and women who refused to accept the prevailing cultures of impunity of their time, who envisioned a world in which all people enjoyed certain basic rights, who believed that they had a responsibility to others, and who refused to be silent in the face of abuse.<sup>26</sup>

Auden was described by Stefan Collini as an intellectual “who knew about being clever and about popular attitudes to it.”<sup>27</sup> Unlike most intellectuals, he was not a prisoner of his own commitment to analytical reasoning.<sup>28</sup> His self-awareness was such that he did not consider himself to be highly important or as a prophet-poet figure. He kept an equal distance and detachment from both his personal emotions and his political allegiances. Even his interest in Marx, according to Spears, “was more psychological than political [...] as a technique of unmasking middle class ideologies.”<sup>29</sup>

Due to the fact that the events of the 1930s were inter-related, one cannot approach them separately without relationships and impacts of previous, surrounding and following events. This also applies to Auden’s poetry, which is a reflection of a whole generation. The analysis of the poems, in this respect, will consider the surrounding circumstances and events upon which they were inspired. These three poems were chosen precisely because they address human rights issues. The main theme that defines them as poems of human rights is suffering, but each one presents suffering from a different angle. “Musée des Beaux Arts” revolves around the suffering of the individual. “Epitaph on a Tyrant” deals with the suffering of the community. The third poem, “Refugee Blues,” approaches the suffering between two groups (the majority vs the minority) and that between the state on the one side, and individuals and groups on the other (the rights of citizens vs the rights of man). These poems also reflect what type of poet their composer is. Defenders of human rights, according to Amnesty International, are those who move according to their own initiative on behalf of others to promote and protect human rights. They are defined by action rather than profession; they could be musicians, engineers, lawyers and poets.<sup>30</sup>

Auden was among the few poets who used their poetry as a tool to reinforce principles and preserve a commitment to them before the public. During the Spanish civil war in 1937 he drove an ambulance. He also offered to marry Erika Mann, the

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<sup>26</sup> Paul Gordon Lauren, “History and Human Rights: people and forces in paradoxical interaction,” *Journal of Human Rights* 7, no. 2 (2008): 93.

<sup>27</sup> Stefan Collini, *Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 35.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Monroe Kirklyndorf Spears, ed., *The Poetry of W. H. Auden: The Disenchanted Island* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), 86.

<sup>30</sup> Amnesty International, “Human Rights Defenders,” accessed May 10, 2012, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/human-rights-defenders>.

daughter of Thomas Mann, a German novelist and anti-Nazi activist so that she would be able to leave Germany safely. Despite having never met her before, they were married in 1935. They separated after the marriage but remained legally married until her death in 1969.<sup>31</sup> While we may conclude that Auden had an altruistic personality, we cannot prove that this was his main motivation at the time. Auden's career, however, shows that he was aware of the poet's inability to translate his words into actions or of the poem's inability to enforce action: "For poetry makes nothing happen."<sup>32</sup> This apparently 'anti-poetic' line raises the question of the benefit of poetry, which Auden himself answers in the same poem. He states that the poet's "unconstraining voice" in hard times can at least "Still persuade us to rejoice."<sup>33</sup> He also addresses this question in his essay on Yeats: "poets, i.e. persons with poetic talent, stop writing good poetry when they stop reacting to the world they live in."<sup>34</sup> The conclusion of this argument on the role of poetry in life ends with the assertion that poetry, as words easing suffering or providing guidance in difficult times, is indeed worthwhile.<sup>35</sup> The moral question in this argument suggests that poetry cannot practically contribute to easing suffering. This question, raised by the anti-poet, is immediately answered by the poet: "it survives, / A way of happening, a mouth."<sup>36</sup> Thus, it is not words that are to blame for not making anything happen but, rather, the mouth (the poet). S/he chooses the words that reflect whether s/he is reacting to the world around her/him or not. The elegy for Yeats ends with a valid point on the value of poetry, which also gives literature the passport to human rights: poetry teaches "the free man how to praise."<sup>37</sup>

Immanuel Kant argues that altruistic behavior needs a beneficent (*wohltun* or doing good) rather than a benevolent (*wohlwollen* or wishing well) person.<sup>38</sup> Being beneficent, according to Kant, means that altruism should be accompanied by action, not just emotion. Auden, as we shall see in the argument on the three selected poems, saw the problem originally from a psycho-social aspect, in the dominance of negative feelings and conduct such as hatred and egoism. In return he encouraged for positive feelings and conduct such as altruism and love. From 1936 on, however, he began to realize how

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<sup>31</sup> Stephen Spender, ed., *W. H. Auden: A Tribute* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975), 175.

<sup>32</sup> W. H. Auden, *In Memory of W. B. Yeats*, in *The English Auden: Poems, Essays and Dramatic Writings, 1927-1939*, ed., Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), 241.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Auden, "The Public v. the Late Mr William Butler Yeats," in *ibid.*, 389.

<sup>35</sup> Justin Replogle, *Auden's Poetry* (London: Methuen, 1969), 93.

<sup>36</sup> Auden, *In Memory of W. B. Yeats*, 241.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*. Translated by Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 452.

serious the situation was: “I thought that love would last forever: I was wrong.”<sup>39</sup> It seems that Auden put his faith in love and altruism as the last defense that could have prevented war or at least reduce its evils. Even in the 1940s, he repeated the same call for love, as if suggesting it as a post-war remedy: “If equal affection cannot be / Let the more loving one be me.”<sup>40</sup> He could not bear to be the one that did not step up to the mark and, therefore, would rather be the one who suffered because of it rather than see someone else suffer for his own inadequacies.

The task of creating an effective public voice for Auden in the 1930s was not easy. Justin Replogle points out that Auden was not always clear in being a spokesman for a dissatisfied generation. Thus, a turbulent decade gave his poetry a vague, allegorical tone. Richard M. Ohmann observes that Auden was a poet who “could never state one position without feeling the tug of its opposite.”<sup>41</sup> Yet, “the more blurred the poetry [was], the more easily could hopeful admirers see in it the message of their own desires.”<sup>42</sup> This cannot only be observed in the themes and ideas his poems treat but in his style as well. In his poems, Auden uses a subtle, diplomatic technique of addressing dominant negative beliefs and behaviors. He is keen not to protest against them directly but to approach them in a manner that does not exactly mean what it displays. In “Musée des Beaux Arts” for example, the beginning of the poem echoes great admiration for the Old Masters’ understanding of suffering: “About suffering they were never wrong, / The Old masters: how well they understood / Its human position”. In “Epitaph on a Tyrant,” he follows the same strategy: “Perfection, of a kind, was what he was after, / And the poetry he invented was easy to understand”. At the same time he includes words and phrases that shock the reader, such as “the dreadful martyrdom,” “the torturer’s horse” and “the disaster” in “Musée des Beaux Arts,” as well as the last line in “Epitaph on a Tyrant”: “And when he cried the little children died in the streets.”<sup>43</sup>

Auden tended to follow a medical method of analysis in his poems. As the son of a doctor, Austin Warren argues, he “readily used the words diagnostician, disease, and symptom.”<sup>44</sup> He manifested in his writings the way others were going to think and write, and followed this strategy in his poetry and prose by depending on the diagnosis

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<sup>39</sup> W. H. Auden, *Stop All the Clocks*, in *The English Auden: Poems, Essays and Dramatic Writings, 1927-1939*, ed., Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), 163.

<sup>40</sup> Auden, *The More Loving One*, in Auden and Mendelson, *The English Auden*, 246.

<sup>41</sup> Richard M. Ohmann, “Auden’s Sacred Awe,” in *Auden: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed., Monroe K. Spears (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: [s.n.], 1964), 175.

<sup>42</sup> Replogle and Auden, *Auden’s Poetry*, 3.

<sup>43</sup> W. H. Auden, *Epitaph on a Tyrant*, in Auden and Mendelson, *The English Auden*, 239.

<sup>44</sup> Austin Warren, “The Quest for Auden,” *The Sewanee Review* 78, no. 2 (Spring, 1979): 229.

and treatment of a situation.<sup>45</sup> His words reflect the complexities and contradictions with which the 1930s were fraught. He was concerned, as Frederick Buell points out, “with creating a new, more effectively public voice for his poetry.”<sup>46</sup> The tool of diagnosis and treatment he used in the “hour of crisis and dismay” was his “strict and adult pen” that “Can warn us from the colours and the consolations, / The Shadowy arid works, reveal.”<sup>47</sup>

In this respect, Auden stressed that a good artist is rarely expected to be a good politician.<sup>48</sup> Truth, as a point of strength for poetry, is what Auden meant when he argued that “by telling the truth, [one aims] to disenchant and disintoxicate.”<sup>49</sup> This statement has been interpreted by Adam Philips from a psychoanalytic perspective. Philips argues that Auden’s commitment to truth, especially in 1939, came as a remedy for credulity, the element of magic that poetry usually brings forth.<sup>50</sup> A disenchanting poetry was important for Auden not only for the purpose of making poetry which fitted with his scientific (psychological) analysis, but also because his poetic words would have no value without truth. The truth Auden communicated, however, was poetic truth; he focused on the essence of truth that lies beyond the truth of knowledge or, as Adam Philips called it, “alternative reality.”<sup>51</sup> The truth in Auden’s poems aims to help the reader reach the moment of realization or realized truth through the common truth they already know.

Art, according to Auden, consists of perceiving – a process dealing with what lies beyond abstract ideas – and telling, which is a translation of the process of perception.<sup>52</sup> As an intellectual, Auden understood the world of ideas common people are not aware of, and as a human he realized that most of their actions are controlled by emotions and not ideas. In order to satisfy both, he tried as a poet to achieve the following strategy: “Personally the kind of poetry I should like to write but can’t is ‘the thought of a wise man in the speech of the common people.’”<sup>53</sup> Through this, he aimed to show people how to control the uncontrollable; how to understand their emotions and the ideas that emerge in the mind as a result of what the heart feels. This works for human rights in helping to understand suffering and pain or realizing the consequences of egoism,

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Frederick Henderson Buell, *W. H. Auden as a Social Poet* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973), 118.

<sup>47</sup> Hynes, *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s*, 12.

<sup>48</sup> Auden, “Poetry, Poets, and Taste,” 359.

<sup>49</sup> Ohmann, “Auden’s Sacred Awe,” 174.

<sup>50</sup> Phillips, *On Balance*, 274.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> W. H. Auden, “Poetry, Poets, and Taste,” in Auden and Mendelson, *The English Auden*, 359.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 360.

hatred and violence. This awareness-raising strategy appears in Auden's technique of narrating parables rather than telling people what to do in all three poems, and especially in "Epitaph on a Tyrant." In this poem, Auden brilliantly displays the true face of tyrants to those who, following their emotions, are completely deceived by appearances and propaganda. He did not say to the people: 'this tyrant is deceiving you'. He simply said that this tyrant "knew human folly like the back of his hand" and, thus, gave his readers the chance to question what they believed.

It should be noted, however, that Auden focused on 'truth' as the message true artists should deliver. This is why he detached his personal voice in his assaults on authoritarian systems and figures as possible as he could. Auden saw the communication of politics as degrading for artists because it might blur their vision of the truth. According to Adam Phillips, he intended to disenchant his poetry "without making disenchantment itself enchanting."<sup>54</sup> Seamus Heaney wrote on Auden that "a poet cannot bring us any truth without introducing into his poetry the problematic, the painful, the disorderly, the ugly."<sup>55</sup> This shows that Auden was not against enchantment rather than simply aware of the true function and role of art.

The young Auden, as an individual committed to his generation (whether in his support for the proletariat or his sympathies for the oppressed), was preoccupied with the crucial issues of his time. Time for him was like a rope in a tug-of-war game between good and evil: "We are left alone with our day, and the time is short and / History to the defeated / May say Alas but cannot help or pardon."<sup>56</sup> In 1937, he warned about wasting time and losing the moment of chance in his "Spain." Two years earlier he had sounded the same alarm, albeit on a less urgent level: "Thousands are still asleep / Dreaming of terrifying monsters."<sup>57</sup> Thus, we are made to confront the hypothesis that the development of Auden's career, especially during the 1930s, was as attached to the unfolding current events, like a play whose plot is strictly bound to the unities of time, place and action. In 1936, for example, Auden was still enjoying "limited hope" as he expressed in "Journey to Iceland." In 1937, as we notice in Spain, his tone of hope accelerates alongside action: "What's your proposal? To build the Just City? I will."<sup>58</sup> In 1938, he and Isherwood were together in their journey to China. His sonnets of that time entitled *In Time of War* sound a retreat from his hopeful outlook: "Yes, we are

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<sup>54</sup> Phillips, *On Balance*, 274.

<sup>55</sup> Heaney, *The Government of the Tongue: The 1986 T.S. Eliot Memorial Lectures and Other Critical Writings*, 110.

<sup>56</sup> W. H. Auden, *Spain*, in Auden and Mendelson, *The English Auden*, 210.

<sup>57</sup> W. H. Auden, *Night Tale*, in *Collected Shorter Poems, 1927-57* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), 84.

<sup>58</sup> Auden, *Spain*.

going to suffer, now; the sky / Throbs like a feverish forehead; pain is real.”<sup>59</sup> This anti-climactic acceleration continues in “Musée des Beaux Arts” with a quiet, almost hopeless tone: “About suffering they were never wrong,”<sup>60</sup> as well as in “September 1, 1939” where Auden admits that he is “Uncertain and afraid / As the clever hopes expire / of a low dishonest decade.”<sup>61</sup> Written on the eve of war, this poem declares the end of the game of hope for love, the just city and peace in the world in the 1930s.

Poetry belongs to a world of its own; it is a reflection of the real world as seen by the poet. It represents the poet’s ability to see the aspects of reality that lie beyond or within the world of the senses. “Musée des Beaux Arts” and the other two poems of Auden are examples of this transcendental power of exploring hidden realities, as following sections will show.

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<sup>59</sup> W. H. Auden, *In Time of War*, in Auden and Mendelson, *The English Auden*, 256.

<sup>60</sup> W. H. Auden, *Musée des Beaux Arts*, in *ibid.*, 237.

<sup>61</sup> W. H. Auden, *September 1, 1939*, in *ibid.*, 245.

## Section One

### 2.2. “Musée des Beaux Arts”

About suffering they were never wrong,  
The old Masters: how well they understood  
Its human position: how it takes place  
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully  
along;  
How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting  
For the miraculous birth, there always must be  
Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating  
On a pond at the edge of the wood:  
They never forgot  
That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course  
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot  
Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse  
Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.

In Breughel's Icarus, for instance: how everything turns away  
Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may  
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,  
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone  
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green  
Water, and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen  
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,  
Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.

#### 2.2.1. Introduction

This section is a study of “Musée des Beaux Arts” as a human rights poem in the context of Auden’s reactions to the escalating events of the 1930s. This poem is about suffering. Suffering is generally understood as pain, but as we shall see in “Musée des Beaux Arts,” the reaction towards suffering might differ not only across cultures but even across time and circumstances within the same culture. Poetry here captures these differences in a manner that triggers our awareness of suffering, in addition to providing a minute description of the understanding of suffering on the level of the man in the street whose actions are purely native. It is a reaction on suffering by the poet as a defender of human rights.

The genesis of human rights is moral and ethical, which means that human behaviour is judged according to the principles in which an individual or a group of individuals believe. Consequently, confusion about the relationship between rights and duties has

given rise to debates about whether one is more important than the other and which one comes first.

Claims for rights usually appear for the purpose of changing dominant negative rules or situations that cause deprivation from or violation of rights. This makes the idea of human rights a revolutionary one or at least a protest against these dominant negative rules. The other issue at stake here is the conflict between the rights of an individual and those of his community and, on a higher level, between an individual, a group of individuals or a community and the state they live in. Every one possesses rights and a number of duties in return, since the four parties exist together inextricably. Therefore, it is quite normal that one should enjoy his/her right to freedom from fear and want but it is morally abnormal that s/he denies the rights of others or disavows his/her duties to help them claim and protect their rights. These are the central issues that Auden stirs in “Musée des Beaux Arts.”

Auden's criticism of Brueghel in “Musée des Beaux Arts” is based upon the idea mentioned above: why does everything turn away from the disaster? This question echoes the second line in the poem in which Auden wonders how the Old Masters understood suffering and its human position. In order to gain a better understanding of the poem, however, we should ask an artistic question: why did Auden not react aesthetically towards Brueghel's portrait?

Auden wrote from Brussels, on 31 August 1938, that he was taken by the vitality of the paintings around him,<sup>62</sup> but that he was looking for a painting that would tell a parable. Finally, he found in Brueghel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, something important to write about.<sup>63</sup> Since poetry and painting have long been considered sister arts, it would not be difficult for a poet to find something interesting to write about in an art gallery. Yet, Auden was more alarmed than amused while studying the paintings; his mind was preoccupied with memories and ideas that did not suit those of a tourist. The ghost of a horrible war hung over him and scenes of death and havoc, which he had witnessed in Spain and China, helped him imagine how terrible the world would be in the near future. Alexander Nemerov argues that Auden transformed Brueghel's painting into “a surrealist diagram concerning the place of the intellectual in violent times. What

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<sup>62</sup> John Fuller, *W. H. Auden: A Commentary* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), 266.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* Auden wrote to Mrs Dodds from Brussels on 31 August 1938: “I have been doing the art gallery and trying to appreciate Rubens. The daring and vitality take one's breath away, but what is it all ABOUT?”



do artists and poets and critics do in the face of catastrophe?”<sup>64</sup> A few months earlier, Auden had written about suffering as if he was its victim, as in sonnet 14 from *In Time of War*.<sup>65</sup> Further on in the same sonnet, Auden extends to explain who those ‘we’ were: “All women, Jews, the Rich, the Human Race.”<sup>66</sup> He imagined what would happen from a battle scene he witnessed in China. First, he gave priority to those who would suffer in the beginning: women for their sex, the Jews for their ethnicity and the rich for their wealth; all of them are civilians. The whole of humanity should suffer eventually; even poets and artists, as he realized later in 1939, were among the victims.

Auden’s poems of 1938 focus on how evil corrupts human nature, as an antagonist that opposes love. In “Musée des Beaux Arts,” he criticizes passivity in human nature but focuses on its collective form. He talks in detail about refraining from doing good as a negative individual behaviour (the ploughman, the shepherd and the ship crew) but within its community, in order to show how the latter legitimizes and naturalizes the dominance of evil. Before this, however, he presents a more shocking image:

How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting  
For the miraculous birth, there always must be  
Children who did not want it to happen<sup>67</sup>

Auden here refers to apathy or passivity as an activity that encourages evil to prevail, rather than a sort of neutral immobility. Its dominance in a society could corrupt even innocent children. His choice of Christ as a victim, inspired by paintings on his suffering in the museum, is a subtle one; it carries many implications, religious and moral and humanitarian. Double meanings are hidden in the lines of the poem, in addition to the subtle use of imagery. The aged who did nothing except to wait passionately for Christ’s birth versus the children who did not want it to happen reflect the fact that the events in the 1930s were socially and politically deteriorating due to the dominance of apathy and lack of awareness among the majority of the public. They just wait while at the same time we have ambitious politicians whose anti-peace policies were similar to those children’s refusal of Christ (peace). Those children in the poem are doing nothing but what they used to do: “skating / On a pond at the edge of the

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<sup>64</sup> Alexander Nemerov, “The Flight of Form: Auden, Brueghel and the Turn of Abstraction in the 1940s,” *Critical Inquiry* 31, no. 4 (Summer 2005): 780-810.

<sup>65</sup> W. H. Auden, *In Time of War*, in Auden and Mendelson, *The English Auden*, 256.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> W. H. Auden, *Selected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), 87.

wood,” but they are totally unaware of the risks of playing far from their village on the frozen surface of a lake. Susan Sontag describes war as a “man’s game,” and indeed a very dangerous one.<sup>68</sup> Then Auden moves on from pre-disaster moments to the time of its occurrence to display, in a crueller image the continuity of surrender and apathy and its negative consequences. Here we have “the torturer’s horse” whose behind, unlike the master of the horse, is innocent. Although the whole line is devoted to describing the animal’s innocent behind that stands as a main character in the poem, it is ‘the torturer’ that remains important. Both the horse and its master represent the forces of good and evil: powerful evil versus powerless good.

It is notable that Auden’s analysis of this odd relationship would better be approached psychologically, not politically. The torturer’s horse in “Musée des Beaux Arts” is a paraphrase of Freud’s theories of the id, ego and superego. Freud describes the relationship between the id, which is driven by libido and seeks to avoid pain and displeasure (the pleasure principle), and the ego (the reality principle) as a relationship of exploitation:

Thus in its relation to the id it is like a man on horse-back, who has to hold in check the superior strength of the horse; with this difference, that the rider tries to do so with his own strength while the ego uses borrowed forces.<sup>69</sup>

While the id in Auden’s poem pleases “its innocent behind on a tree,” the ego “controls the approaches to motility” by the consciousness and common sense it enjoys.<sup>70</sup> The ego, according to Freud, was part of the id “modified by the influence of the perceptual system, the representative in the mind of the real external world.”<sup>71</sup> Between the id and the ego stands the observer or narrator who identifies evil and warns against it. The manner of Auden’s poetic- psychological strategy of not telling people what to do but raising their awareness of good and evil put him in the position of the superego. Auden’s interest in the horse’s behind and the dogs more than the torturer brings us to the fact that this torturer could never have existed without these ids, whose apathy led to the production of tyranny. In the next section on “Epitaph on a Tyrant,” we will see a detailed description of the consequences of collective apathy in producing tyrants.

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<sup>68</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2003), 5.

<sup>69</sup> Sigmund Freud et al., *The Ego and the Id, and Other Works*, ed., James Strachey and Anna Freud. Translated by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1961), 15.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

The torturer's horse was the last image Auden borrowed from Brueghel's paintings to create his own (Part I, lines 1-13). The second part looks separate with its full devotion to Brueghel's *Icarus*. This extended octave-and-sestet sonnet has recreated the whole scene, showing what lies beyond the frames of the painting. Alexander Nemerov points out that Brueghel "made *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* in 1538 – or so W. H. Auden helps us see."<sup>72</sup> Auden's painting ends with the torturer's horse scratching its behind on a tree; an image emptied from any kind of artistic decoration that Brueghel used to marginalize the pains and horrors of suffering. He had embedded the martyrdom of Christ to show the true and ugly guise of suffering.

As for the image of Christ's martyrdom, the art gallery itself includes paintings that describe the pains and sufferings of Christ. These paintings might have exacerbated Auden's image of suffering, leaving a deeper impression in his mind. Pictures and paintings give one the chance to look, feel and think at the same time. In the process of examining a picture, many will think only about the artist's skill. A substantial number, however, will look for the pain lying behind the aesthetic appearance and take pleasure from it, but very few people would recognise the reality of the suffering folded in the beauty of the painting. In this context, Sontag argues that:

It seems that the appetite for pictures showing bodies in pain is as keen, almost, as the desire for ones that show bodies naked. For many centuries, in Christian art, depictions of hell offered both of these elemental satisfactions [...] No moral charge attaches to the representations of these cruelties. Just the provocation: can you look at this? There is the satisfaction of being able to look at the image without flinching. There is the pleasure of flinching.<sup>73</sup>

It does not matter so much what the images Auden employed exactly stood for, whether they were applicable to the circumstances during which they were formed or to any similar circumstances. Suffering is almost the same everywhere, at any time. Auden, however, was preoccupied with the sustainability of suffering more than its occurrence: "how it takes place/While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along." It looks as if Auden wanted to write how *wrongly* they understood its human position, especially in relation to their belief about the inevitability of suffering. "Musée des Beaux Arts" reflects Auden's intellectual method of criticism, based upon a sharp contrast that shows a certain idea or a theme blended with its counter-theme.

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<sup>72</sup> Alexander Nemerov, "The Flight of Form," 780.

<sup>73</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2003), 36-37.

Words, in many of his poems, are pregnant with double entendres both in meaning and in feeling. He approaches pain, for example, with seriousness coated by irony, as in the torturer's horse and its innocent behind, to make the reader feels pain and relief at the same time. Cleanth Brooks asserts that "it is the use of sharp contrasts which gives vitality to Auden's verse. It is by way of becoming a hallmark of his poetry."<sup>74</sup> This contrast appears in Auden's cinematic depiction of the moment of disaster: "Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse / Scratches its innocent behind on a tree." These two lines are puzzling. There is nothing peculiar with dogs living a doggy life. Why would Auden care about dogs, or people who were as harmless as dogs? In January 1939, one month after writing "Musée des Beaux Arts," Auden wrote in his elegy for Yeats: "In the nightmare of the dark / All the dogs of Europe bark."<sup>75</sup> This line is a reply to its predecessor in "Musée des Beaux Arts;" the dogs are much worse than the horse, whose master fully controls him. Unlike the first scene where they look helpless as they "go on with their doggy life," they look active in the elegy for Yeats but only for evil.<sup>76</sup> Auden's assault on apathy or helplessness in "Musée des Beaux Arts" was based upon his belief that there is no neutrality in apathy. Adam Phillips, in quoting Strachey's definition of helplessness as "the accumulation of excitation" or traumas, refers to it as an incapability leading to a negative capability.<sup>77</sup> The image of dogs echoes this definition in the sense that those who are too passive to do good are more inclined to do evil.

### 2.2.2. The Poet as an Intellectual

It might be true that this integrated treatment of suffering made "Musée des Beaux Arts" one of the most memorable ekphrastic poems in English literature. The setting, as located in the title of the poem, is the art gallery in Brussels, Belgium. The time is December 1938. But what really matters here is action, or to be accurate, the lack of action which gives way to the continuity of suffering, especially in times of crisis. In the preface to the paperback edition of *Letters from Iceland* in 1967, Auden describes the political and economic circumstances of that time:

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<sup>74</sup> Cleanth Brooks, "Auden's Imagery," in *Auden: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed., Monroe K. Spears (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 18.

<sup>75</sup> Auden, *In Memory of W. B. Yeats*.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Phillips, *On Balance*, 120-22.

Though writing in a “holiday” spirit, its authors were all the time conscious of a threatening horizon to their picnic – worldwide unemployment, Hitler growing everyday more powerful and a world war more inevitable. Indeed, the prologue to that war, the Spanish Civil War, broke out while we were there.<sup>78</sup>

One realizes, from Auden’s words above, that he was observing the events unfolding around him with the eye of a public intellectual. Even on his holiday, he was concerned with public affairs. Auden’s humanitarian concerns as a poet do not differ from his concerns as an intellectual. Both share the same individual and group (within the Auden gang) solicitude to address public issues on behalf of the people in a time of crisis.

In the 1930s, intellectuals played an important positive, as well as negative, public and political role. The word ‘intellectual’, at the beginning of the twentieth century, as Mike Gold mentions, became a synonym for ‘bastard’.<sup>79</sup> Stefan Collini has referred to the 1930s as “the decade in which this term [intellectuals] began to be widely used or abused.”<sup>80</sup> Among the reasons why intellectuals were abused, their unexpected political allegiances, unpredictable personal views and their disappointing isolation come first. English intellectuals were described by Orwell as those who “take their cookery from Paris and their opinions from Moscow.”<sup>81</sup> Orwell was particularly referring to the ‘Auden gang’.<sup>82</sup> However, what Orwell criticized in Auden and his group as a “lack of patriotism” because of their adoption of Marxism, could be viewed from another perspective as objectivity and open-mindedness. The Auden gang poets were free from the emotional and geographical chains of nationalism that restricted many of their peers, like Orwell, intellectually.

It is true that many intellectuals isolated themselves and preferred to stay in their country houses while the whole world burned. Others, like Ezra Pound, became propagandists for fascist authoritarian regimes. Auden himself chose to leave for the USA with Isherwood on the eve of war. Yet, not all the theories intellectuals adopted were mere personal hallucinations. Some of them provided necessary guidance for public policy by raising the level of public debate. In this context, Stephen Spender argues that: “[i]f a small but vociferous and talented minority of what were called ‘intellectuals’ were almost hypnotically aware of the Nazi nightmare, the majority of

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<sup>78</sup> W. H. Auden, *Letters from Iceland*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), 8.

<sup>79</sup> Mike Gold and Michael Falsom, *Mike Gold: A Literary Anthology* (New York: International Publishers, 1972), 153.

<sup>80</sup> Collini, *Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain*, 33.

<sup>81</sup> George Orwell, *The Lion and the Unicorn*, in *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, ed., Peter Davison (London: Secker, 1998), 406.

<sup>82</sup> Collini, *Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain*, 34.

people [...] seemed determined to ignore or deny it.”<sup>83</sup> Stefan Collini states that the term ‘intellectuals’ in the 1930s was used by those writers who espoused a political position. Poets were above those writers, i.e. those who were also known as intellectuals. They were young Left-wingers who declared their devotion for the cause of ‘the proletariat’.<sup>84</sup> This was actually the one and same reason for Orwell’s hostility against Auden and his group.

Orwell was a harsh critic of the intelligentsia who adopted communism and socialism. He described the principles of social equality and utopian socialism as a lack of reality, and accused Auden and his fellow-poets of being too young to have enough experience of war. Yet, Orwell, in his assault on the younger generation of intellectuals was defending “a tradition that was at its end.”<sup>85</sup> The effects of the First World War had left heroism, glorification of sacrifice and other traditional principles that Orwell called for, valueless, especially in the eyes of the middle-class youth who had survived the horrors of the first War. Conversely, Auden and his group, who were young middle-class intellectuals, adopted a popular attitude:

To the man in the street who, I’m sorry to say,  
Is a keen observer of life,  
The word *intellectual* suggests right away  
A man who’s untrue to his wife.<sup>86</sup>

The above lines together with the lines of “Musée des Beaux Arts,” in which no one reacts to the sound of the splash and the forsaken cry, refer to the same idea. This is the idea that intellectuals, at least in the eyes of Auden, were not so different from the ploughman, the shepherd or the ship crew. The conflict over ideologies in the 1930s was a conflict among individuals; every intellectual tried to prove the righteousness of his allegiance at the expense of others while war was approaching. It might be true that not all of them had seen what Auden had witnessed in Spain and China. Yet, his desire to take the risk of going to the front marks him out as having the same sense of commitment and responsibility human rights defenders have. Auden was an individual addressing a community in which the concept of rights needed to be free from

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<sup>83</sup> Stephen Spender, *The Thirties and After: Poetry, Politics, People (1933-75)*, (London: Macmillan, 1978), 22.

<sup>84</sup> Collini, *Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain*, 33.

<sup>85</sup> Samuel Hynes, *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s* (London: Faber and Faber, 1976), 19.

<sup>86</sup> W. H. Auden, *Shorts*, in *Collected Shorter Poems 1927-1957* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), 190.

individual, egoistic preoccupations. As a dominant phenomenon, the popularity of individual egoism was developed gradually into collective egoism.

Auden believed that the enduring power of poetry could make positive individual efforts survive in the face of communal negative acts. In his “Introduction to Poems of Freedom,” he wrote:

Reading this anthology will teach no one how to run a state or raise a revolution; it will not even, I think, tell them what freedom is. But it is a record of what people in many different social positions [...] have noticed and felt about oppression, and so also it is a record of what we still feel. The details of our circumstances of injustice change, so does our knowledge of what is unjust and how best to remedy it, but our feelings change little which is why it is possible still to read poems written by those who are now dead.<sup>87</sup>

“Musée des Beaux Arts” can be seen as an instance where poetry proves its value as a perpetual human rights machine. The vision both intellectuals and poets advertised in the 1930s was not a mere coincidence; it helped pave the way for the emergence of human rights in the 1940s, as Auden’s ruminations on suffering in the *Musée* show. Auden brilliantly made suffering the central theme of Icarus’ story, a theme that Brueghel had aesthetically embodied in his painting.

### 2.2.3. Auden, Brueghel and the Anatomy of Suffering

According to Plato, poetry is an imitation of an imitation of an imitation, thrice removed from reality.<sup>88</sup> In this context, the story of Daedalus and his son Icarus from the eighth book of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, for instance, can be regarded as the first imitation;<sup>89</sup> Brueghel’s *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* as the second, and Auden’s “Musée des Beaux Arts” as the third. The story of Icarus in classical mythology, which is the ‘archetypal’ version, focuses on the protagonist’s *hubris* as the tragic flaw that eventually led to his downfall. The hero’s suffering is stressed only in the form of a punishment that he deserved, not for a crime he committed but because of an innate flaw. In *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, Brueghel portrayed the tragic story in a way that gives it a further dimensional scope. The painting highlights the fact that the fall of

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<sup>87</sup> W. H. Auden, “Introduction to ‘Poems of Freedom’,” in *The English Auden: Poems, Essays and Dramatic Writings, 1927-1939*, ed., Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), 237.

<sup>88</sup> Plato, *The Republic, Book 10*, in *The Essential Plato*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (n.p.: Book-of-the-Month Club, 1999), 382.

<sup>89</sup> Daedalus and his son Icarus are also mentioned in the sixth book of Virgil’s *Aeneid*.

Icarus, like the fall of a yellow leaf in autumn, went almost unnoticed. Auden's imitation, in a reversed reference to Plato's attack on poetry, is thrice removed not *from* reality but *towards* it. It is not the reality in Plato's mind but rather the reality that, according to Aristotle, arouses pity and fear even on the level of imitation or creation of an action. It is the reality that suffering, as Connolly says, "can work as a reminder [...] [that] the reality of pain, loss and trauma [...] can pose dilemmas not easily contained within our moral languages."<sup>90</sup> Auden's poem fulfills the whole scene and makes it three-dimensional. The poem comments in detail on the reactions of the ploughman, the shepherd and the ship's crew. While the painting captures only the moment of Icarus' fall, the poem cinematically describes the scene in action: "and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen / Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky," and gives an end to this short film where the ship "Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on."<sup>91</sup>

For approximately five months in 1935, Auden was part of a film unit to produce documentaries from a socialist perspective.<sup>92</sup> With this in mind, "Musée des Beaux Arts" could be seen as a documentary film, a biography or a life-cycle of suffering. The first scene, opening with the poet as a narrator or reporter, tells the readers the story of suffering with a flashback taking them to how it began. Then, the camera moves to the present moment where the narrator is watching "Brueghel's Icarus" closely. The succession of vowels /au, o, æ, ə/, which are followed and preceded by fricatives and /r/ keep the airstream continuous. This harmonic combination of sounds gives the impression of slow-motion continuity. When one comes to a scene of atrocity in the poem, s/he notices a succession of explosives and sharp consonants, such as /t/, /d/, /s/, /k/, mixed with the short vowels /ʌ/, /o/, and /a/. These sounds line up in a manner that mirrors the cruelty of the scene, such as in the dreadful martyrdom that "must run its course," and "the splash, the forsaken cry." In these lines, the motion of sounds becomes faster and more crowded with events the nearer to the water Icarus comes. Finally, it slows down again after the boy falls into the water. The film closes with the camera following the ship that "sailed calmly on."

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<sup>90</sup> William E. Connolly, *The Augustinian Imperative: A Reflection on the Politics of Morality* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), in *Human Rights and the Borders of Suffering: The Promotion of Human Rights in International Politics*, M. Anne Browne (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 4.

<sup>91</sup> Auden, *Musée des Beaux Arts*, 237.

<sup>92</sup> Edward Mendelson, *Early Auden* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 282.



While watching this tragic scene Auden wondered “how it takes place / While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along.”<sup>93</sup> This could be a reference to himself as he walked dully along in the gallery.<sup>94</sup> Auden was no doubt aware of his own paradoxical situation, whereby he was raising the issue of inaction at the same time as being party to it himself. The photographer Kevin Carter faced similar issues when he was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for his photographs, published in *The New York Times* in April 13, 1994. His award-winning photograph showed a vulture perching near a child who had collapsed from hunger in Sudan. How did Carter allow the vulture to get so close without doing something to protect the child? What did he do after the picture was taken? In spite of the fact that Carter chased the vulture away after taking the photograph, as Arthur and Joan Kleinman argue, he did initially neglect the child’s suffering for the purpose of his professional success. Eventually, he committed suicide because, as he wrote in his suicide note, he was “haunted by the vivid memories of killings and corpses and anger and pain.”<sup>95</sup> Yet, the question remains why did he not help the dying child at the moment he saw her and, as Arthur and Joan Kleinman wondered, “what of the horrors experienced by the little Sudanese girl, who is given neither a name nor a local moral world?”<sup>96</sup>

Despite the anachronism, I believe that Auden was aware of the cold reception to documented scenes of suffering because in the 1930s documentary photography captured so many scenes of atrocity, especially during the Spanish civil war (1936-1939). It was the first war, according to Sontag, to be covered by photographers in the modern sense.<sup>97</sup> Frances Richard describes the effect of such photographs from a psychological-human rights perspective:

When the object of attention is a photograph of atrocity or abject misery, the viewer can hardly begin with enjoyment. To begin with revulsion would seem to deny the raw response with which the upsetting photograph seizes one's awareness, as surely as a feeling of pleasure would poison that response with prurience.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Auden, *Musée des Beaux Arts*.

<sup>94</sup> Hugh Haughton, notes on the draft of section one of *Musée des Beaux Arts*, May 03, 2012.

<sup>95</sup> Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das, and Margaret M. Lock, *Social Suffering* (California: University of California Press, 1997), 5.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>97</sup> Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 18.

<sup>98</sup> Frances Richard, “The Thin Artifact: On Photography and Suffering,” *The Nation*, December 13, 2010, <http://www.thenation.com/article/156634/thin-artifact-photography-and-suffering>.

It might be true to say that what Carter did was what Auden was likely aware of, namely that the continuity of apathy might perpetuate the naturalization of suffering. However, marginalising or capitalising human suffering can be expected as a primary concern for a sharp observer like Auden. Furthermore, most tragic scenes are horrible enough to be engraved in the mind forever.

It seems that Auden's poem "about suffering" was not only inspired by a few paintings in a gallery. Stan Smith states that when Auden toured Iceland with Louis MacNeice in 1936:

He watched a great whale being torn apart by winches and cranes worked by men who were indifferent to its suffering, and had a repulsive vision of humankind's inexorable, disciplined yet workaday ferocity. This incident provided a theme for "Musée des Beaux Arts" (1938), in which people are too selfishly inattentive to notice the great harm happening near them.<sup>99</sup>

It might be true that the paintings he saw in Brussels reminded him of the whale hunting scene, or other scenes of suffering he witnessed after 1936. From January to June 1938, Auden was with Isherwood in China writing their book, *Journey to a War*, which they finished in Brussels in the same year. The horrors of war Auden had seen left a long-lasting impression according to David Pascoe who met Auden in Brussels. Pascoe observed that: "suffering was on Auden's mind; he had witnessed it in a Chinese field hospital six months earlier and had not recovered."<sup>100</sup>

Auden learned the truth about suffering and its human position through a series of experiences and events he witnessed; a fact which he reflected upon in "Musée des Beaux Arts" in the manner of narration. In the three iterations (the myth, the painting and the poem) we notice a development as well. The main theme in the myth of Icarus, as described by Ovid, is moral. It warns the reader of excessive ambition and concentrates on punishment for this tragic fall. In Brueghel's painting, the hero is almost unseen except for his white legs, which appear to be flying in the air. It appears quite deliberate that Brueghel made Icarus fall in a small dark corner of his painting where the water is shallow and "green." All other aspects of diurnal life in the painting are clear and normal. Auden's poem fills the gaps by highlighting what the myth and the painting neglected: the victim, his suffering and the ugly face of apathy.

In *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* there are three central images: the ploughman in the centre, the sun and the "delicate ship." They represent the earth, the sky and the

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<sup>99</sup> Smith, *The Cambridge Companion to W.H. Auden*, 18-19.

<sup>100</sup> Nemerov, "The Flight of Form: Auden, Brueghel and the turn of abstraction in the 1940s."

water. Everyone in the painting is too busy to look towards the source of the sudden splash. They are either too poor like the shepherd or too rich like the expensive delicate ship whose crew found this fall amusing. The ploughman's reaction is as normal as anyone's watching news of a calamity on TV while drinking their morning coffee. Thus, it appears logical to say that Brueghel, in painting the past, was focusing on the present, while Auden was looking towards the future through the past and the present. He was already burdened with stories and images of suffering while he was touring in the art gallery; yet, the actual heavy burden was his fear that these worries would come true.

These fears and worries were agitated not by the white legs of Icarus but by the rest of the body Brueghel brilliantly concealed in the green water. It might also be true that very few people would have noticed Icarus' legs if Brueghel had not given his painting this title. Furthermore, there is absolutely no sign of Daedalus in the sky or the melting feathers of Icarus' wings. Heffernan argues that although the three standing figures in the painting should remind us of book 8 of *The Metamorphoses* where a ploughman (or a fisherman or a shepherd) notices the two flying men, it would still be impossible to "recognize the splashing legs as those of Icarus."<sup>101</sup> Also, Auden referred to the work as "Brueghel's Icarus" instead of mentioning the actual title of the painting. This reflects Auden's detachment from Brueghel's point of view.

It is a fact that the suffering of individuals is shocking when help is possible but not given. But it is more shocking when an individual suffers alone while they are surrounded by a careless community who does not react to their pain, or in the event that they do show sympathy, they do not forget that "even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course."<sup>102</sup> Icarus and his father suffered persecution at the hands of King Minos who exiled them to Crete. His tragic death, from a modern human rights perspective, occurred as a result of persecution and abuse of his right to freedom: a basic natural right. According to the myth of Daedalus and his son, there are two victims although only Icarus appears in either the painting or the poem. Yet, it is quite reasonable that the two were flying together and Daedalus must have suffered terribly while helplessly watching his son's tragic fall. Heffernan points out that both Brueghel and Auden also had Daedalus in mind while they each created their masterpiece, but it seems that they focused on the one who suffered most. The shepherd in the picture who is looking

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<sup>101</sup> James A. W. Heffernan, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 148.

<sup>102</sup> Auden, *Musée des Beaux Arts*.

skywards “is not heartlessly turning his face away from the drowning son but rather looking up at the winged father.”<sup>103</sup> Auden also alludes to Daedalus, perhaps unwittingly, says Heffernan, when he says that the ship “must have seen / Something amazing.”<sup>104</sup> The father, accordingly, must have suffered almost as much as his son. Heffernan’s hypothesis, however, is true if we apply it to both Ovid’s story and Brueghel’s painting. In the case of Brueghel, the shepherd is looking up while the boy has already fallen behind him. As for Auden, he directly referred to what the ship crew must have seen: “a boy falling out of the sky.” Again, in terms of a human rights case, the evidence in Auden’s hand, specified by a frame, clearly shows one victim alone.

According to Anthony Hecht, the ploughman is the prominent figure in the painting but there is another important depiction, the bald head of an unburied corpse, concealed in a thicket on the left hand side of the painting. This head can hardly be seen but Hecht nonetheless believes that it is as important as the unnoticed drowning boy. He argues that “this painting, despite its name, is meant to illustrate a well-known proverb, ‘Es bleibt kein Pflug stehen um eines Menschen willen, der stirbt’, which means, ‘No plough comes to a standstill because a man dies.’”<sup>105</sup> This argument shows that Brueghel intended to embody this proverb. It is, nevertheless, an exaggeration to group those who are already dead with the dying for the purpose of prioritizing the right to life only for the living.

From a human rights perspective, help is given according to the necessity of human need. Auden concentrated on one thing: “a boy falling out of the sky”. Although Icarus is caught at the moment of drowning in Brueghel’s painting, Auden describes him as still falling. Besides its role as a reply to Brueghel’s intention described above, this line also resembles the falling of a soldier in an airdrop or a pilot whose airplane was hit. Auden saw this scene when he was in China with Isherwood:

Presently a shell burst close to one of the Japanese bombers; it flared against the blue like a struck match. [...] Then came the whining roar of another machine, hopelessly out of control; and, suddenly, a white parachute mushroomed out over the river while the plane plunged on, down into the lake behind Wuchang.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Heffernan, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery*, 148.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>105</sup> Anthony Hecht, *The Hidden Law: The Poetry of W H Auden* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1993), 100.

<sup>106</sup> W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood, *Journey to a War* (New York: Random House, 1939), 172-73.

Alongside *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, the idea of apathy is involved in two other paintings by Brueghel; *Massacre of the Innocents* and *The Census at Bethlehem*. It comes in the form of centralizing the normal and neutralizing the extraordinary; the sun shining, the dogs “go on with their doggy life” and the torturer’s horse “Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.” However, others in the painting, such as the ploughman, the ship’s crew, the person who watches from the window or the one who is “just walking dully along” as in the *Massacre of the Innocents*, must be aware to some degree of something untoward. While the whole world was waiting for the “miraculous birth” of Jesus, there were children who did not want him to come because they did not want to share in the enjoyment of “skating / On a pond at the edge of the wood” with him. Although the figure of Christ has given this image a religious guise, its recurrence in Auden’s poems asserts that the poet was concerned with criticizing human egoism morally, as we shall see later in “Refugee Blues.” In *The Census at Bethlehem*, the Virgin Mary and Joseph, dressed as peasants, gather with other people in order to pay the tax. In this context, Smith points out that “Musée des Beaux Arts” is implicitly a Christian poem. He says:

Auden approaches his subject circuitously, for before his poem gets round to mentioning the Brueghel painting in line 14, it notes, as if in passing, the world's unconcern both at 'the miraculous birth' (the word 'Christ' being studiously circumvented) and, almost in the same breath, at the crucifixion: 'They never forgot / That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course'.<sup>107</sup>

In his reference to the crucifixion of Christ, Auden combined the pagan (the old masters) with the religious in the sense that both entailed the same kind of indifference. The marriage of contradiction Brueghel portrayed was criticized in the poem in a reversed style, by focusing on the exceptional Brueghel had belittled. Auden found in Brueghel’s style a chance to warn against repeating the tragedies of World War I, Spain and China. It is also notable that he himself was preoccupied with the feeling of living in a world of contradictions as he was writing a poem during his vacation in a quiet place while the world around him was boiling; a fact possibly echoed in “Musée des Beaux Arts” in Auden’s “walking dully along” in the art gallery.

In Auden’s wondering, “how it takes place / While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along” and “In Brueghel’s Icarus, for instance: how everything turns away / Quite leisurely from the disaster,” there is a denouncement of

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<sup>107</sup> Smith, *The Cambridge Companion to W.H. Auden*, 194.

the world's shameful silence towards suffering. This denouncement is expressed in "Musée des Beaux Arts" as quietly as the calmness of the art gallery. This retreat in tone reflects Auden's realization of the powerlessness of the voice of the intellectual or the poet, as well as the inevitability of suffering, especially with Hitler's occupation of Austria in 1938.

Auden also wanted to remind people of the suffering of those who had died. Those who were still living had to protect their right to life before it was too late. Icarus died without having the chance to defend his right to life and, more importantly, no one raised any awareness for him in the way Auden did. In this context, Etzioni argues:

It seems all too simple to state that dead people cannot exercise their rights, yet it bears repeating because the extensive implications of this observation are often ignored: when the right to life is violated because basic security is not provided, all other rights are undermined – but not vice versa.<sup>108</sup>

In spite of the fact that Auden's voice was explicitly about human suffering, he managed to preserve a "necessary impersonality" by keeping his personal emotions at a distance from the poem.<sup>109</sup> Hoggart argues that the reason behind Auden's admiration for Brueghel might be the latter's ability to show "this very contrast between the personal horror and the ceaseless, unknowing stream of life which gives to such an event its peculiar pathos."<sup>110</sup> Both characteristics (emotional neutrality and raising awareness) are primary requirements for human rights practitioners.

#### **2.2.4. "Musée des Beaux Arts" as a Human Rights Report**

Most of the stories narrated by Auden and Isherwood in their travel book *Journey to a War* in 1938 reflect the two as war correspondents. Auden's poetic narration of this journey in his series of sonnets, *In Time of War*, shows further aspects. Pain in these sonnets, as Auden expressed while observing the Sino-Japanese war, is 'real'. This close observation of suffering helped him notice the suffering folded in Brueghel's painting. In sonnet XIV, for example, the mountains that "cannot judge us when we

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<sup>108</sup> Amitai Etzioni, "Life: The Most Basic Right," *Journal of Human Rights* 9, no. 1(2010): 105.

<sup>109</sup> Richard Hoggart, *Auden: An Introductory Essay* ([S.l.]: Chatto and Windus, 1961), 29. Hoggart says: "In one of his direct statements of purpose Auden said that a poet must preserve a 'necessary impersonality'. But that impersonality is not meant to narrow or restrict: its scope is as wide as Keats's 'negative capability', although –and the difference is illuminating – it does not imply the immersion in sensuous experience which Keats required, and is meant always to be charged with active intelligence and purposiveness."

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

lie”<sup>111</sup> and the sun that “shone / As it had to on the white legs” are the same, simply because “We dwell upon the earth; the earth obeys / The intelligent and evil till they die.”<sup>112</sup> Unlike “Musée des Beaux Arts,” the voice of suffering in these sonnets is as loud as the noise of bullets and warplanes. In his reports, Auden described suffering as a disease that occurs “Where life is evil,” in places like Nanking and Dachau.<sup>113</sup>

This is what distinguishes human rights in the 1930s and before, from human rights in late 1940s and after. Before the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the background for rights was mainly moral and religious. Human rights proponents struggled before that date due to the lack of a universal legal protection of rights. Yet, with the rise of awareness among people, especially intellectuals, politicians and even poets, the need for a legal framework for human rights became imperative. This marks the 1930s and the first half of the 1940s as a transitional decade; a decade in which not only the quantity of crimes and atrocities peaked but also the quality by which these crimes were reported (photography, films, journalistic reports and art). It may be true that poetry is the least effective of these forms of documentation, yet it remains the most sustainable in the long term and unique in the way it unfolds hidden and unseen details.

Paul Gready states that human rights work has two primary points of reference, the law and the story (such as the story of Icarus).<sup>114</sup> Human stories and storytelling have less influence than law but are nonetheless essential resources, as they attempt “to spark the law into life, transcend cultural and political difference, and cement the solidarity of strangers.”<sup>115</sup> Auden brilliantly played the role of a human rights practitioner, especially in his re-narration of the story of Icarus. A case of human rights, says Gready, needs a victim, a violator or perpetrator, and a form of redress. Its trademark methodology is naming and shaming: naming the violator and shaming their deeds.<sup>116</sup> Icarus in “Musée des Beaux Arts” is a victim whose case remained marginalized, as we see in Brueghel’s painting, until Auden came to be the victim’s voice. He raised awareness of the issue of suffering, using the case of Icarus as an example, Brueghel’s painting as evidence and the public as the target.

It is true that human rights cases are built on factual stories and incidents; yet, the way human rights practitioners approach them follows a specific formal and legal

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<sup>111</sup> Auden, *In Time of War*, XIV. In *The English Auden: Poems, Essays and Dramatic Writings 1927-1939*, ed., Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), 255.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> W. H. Auden, *In Time of War*, XVI, 257.

<sup>114</sup> Paul Gready, “Responsibility to the Story,” *Journal of Human Rights Practice* 2, no. 2 (June, 2010): 177.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 182.

framework. Auden's choice of a mythical story to raise a case of human rights would never be accepted as a source by human rights practitioners. Only poetry (or Literature in general), however, can raise awareness and change minds and attitudes through unreal stories. This is impossible in the field of human rights because factuality would be at stake; even actual stories that are not supported by evidences remain suspect and unreliable. Poetry, on the other hand, does not necessarily rely on a real story but rather an imitation of it. In one of his essays written in 1936, Auden defined this poetic merit: "The secret of good art is the same as the secret of a good life; to find out what you are interested in, however strange, or trivial, or ambitious, or shocking, or uplifting, and deal with that, for that is all you can deal with well."<sup>117</sup> We should also remember that the roots of human rights emerged mainly from stories of pain and suffering that occurred in small places and were documented in books, poems or even in paintings:

Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home – so close and so small that they often cannot be seen on maps of the world. Yet they *are* the world of the individual person; the neighborhood [...]; the school or college [...]; the factory, farm, or office [...]. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination.<sup>118</sup>

The role of poetry, in this respect, is to document these private stories and let everyone read them, like a report or any other type of witness. In terms of human rights, "Musée des Beaux Arts" could be regarded as an informal human rights report that imparts the following details:

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<sup>117</sup> Auden, "Poetry, Poets, and Taste," in *The English Auden*, ed. Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), 360.

<sup>118</sup> Lauren, "History and Human Rights: People and Forces in Paradoxical Interaction," 94. This quotation is by Eleanor Roosevelt, available at: [http://quotes.dictionary.com/Where\\_after\\_all\\_do\\_universal\\_human\\_rights\\_begin](http://quotes.dictionary.com/Where_after_all_do_universal_human_rights_begin), accessed January 12, 2012.



<b>Subject:</b> Suffering.
<b>Location:</b> Musée des Beaux Arts, Brussels-Belgium.
<b>Victim:</b> Icarus, son of Daedalus.
<b>Perpetrators:</b> The Old Masters, someone eating or opening a window or just walking dully along, the ploughman, the shepherd, the crew of the expensive delicate ship.
<b>Witnesses:</b> Brueghel, the dogs, the torturer's horse innocent behind. <sup>119</sup>
<b>Crime:</b> Turning away quite leisurely from the disaster.

Human rights practitioners must deal objectively with human rights cases. Auden's "necessary impersonality" fulfils this requirement. This technique places him, says Hoggart, "above the scene he describes, from his appearing to look *at* the object without being fully involved." Yet, it might "suggest a failure of imagination at some points" because it makes the language of poetry look brittle.<sup>120</sup> The poem's strength and beauty, however, lie in Auden's subtle and keen observation of Brueghel's sarcastic combination of the exceptional and the normal. The way Auden reflected on this tragedy with all the apathy going around it gives the reader an elegant sense of aesthetic pleasure. Further, this treatment uncovers other aspects of Auden besides the poet, namely the public or organic intellectual, the moralist and the faithful Christian although, according to Smith, "he was not addressed to a God until 1941."<sup>121</sup> He raised public awareness about the right to life by speaking on behalf of a dead victim in an attempt to deny the culture of impunity and abuse. This should also firmly position him as a defender of human rights.

### 2.2.5. Icarus between Auden and Williams

It is a fact that the majority of poets are intellectuals. Yet, not every intellectual poet is a defender of rights, and not every human rights practitioner is a poet. In his volume *Pictures from Brueghel* (1962), William Carlos Williams wrote a poem entitled "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus." At first reading, Williams' poem appears to be no more than a homogeneous ekphrastic reflection of Brueghel's painting. It begins with

<sup>119</sup> The torturer's horse is found in Brueghel's *The Slaughter of the Innocent* but it is not scratching its back. Heffernan admits that he "cannot quite detect any torturer's horse scratching its ass on a tree in this picture". Heffernan, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery*, 147.

<sup>120</sup> Hoggart, *Auden: An Introductory Essay*, 31.

<sup>121</sup> Smith, *The Cambridge Companion to W.H. Auden*, 18.

the title itself. While Auden named his poem “Musée des Beaux Arts,” Williams named it “Landscape with the Fall of Icarus.” In his comparison between the two ekphrases, Heffernan points out that “Williams’s response to Brueghel’s art differs sharply from Auden’s. While Auden sounds like a man long familiar with museums and the masterworks they exhibit, Williams often sounds like an amateur seeing a picture for the first time.”<sup>122</sup>

Auden’s poem was designed to “ironize the painting’s central irony,”<sup>123</sup> while Williams’ was meant to make the reader not only see but also feel “the painful irony of death in the midst of life.”<sup>124</sup> Williams’ poem does not refer to the myth or the Old Masters, but it nonetheless adds to the main theme in Brueghel’s painting what visual art could not present as vividly as poetry, namely the heat that made the ploughman “sweating in the sun / that melted / the wing’s wax.”<sup>125</sup> Williams devoted the whole poem to the painting and detached himself from it, as the rest of the lines are built on the first one that begins with: “According to Brueghel”. On 23 March 1951, an article in the *Times Literary Supplement* mentioned that the detachment Williams shows in his poems “is sometimes so definite that it might almost amount to a lack of interest.”<sup>126</sup> This lack of personal engagement in Williams’ poem proves his “emphasis on form rather than on content,” as well as a personal admiration for Brueghel.<sup>127</sup> It could also reflect the impact of his profession as a doctor, as he used to write his poetry in the same way that he dealt with his patients. In order to present an objective analysis of Brueghel’s painting, any kind of personal interference of emotions had to be marginalized.

Williams was aware of the idea of enhancing the relationship between poetry and painting. Shimon Sandbank mentions that this relationship has been paradoxical, less harmonious and built upon envy.<sup>128</sup> In this context, James Merrill argues that “[t]he writer will always envy the painter. Even those who write well about painting, he will envy for having learned to pay close attention to appearances.”<sup>129</sup> Conversely,

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<sup>122</sup> Heffernan, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery*, 155.

<sup>123</sup> Kenneth M. Mason, “Auden’s *Musée des Beaux Arts*,” *Explicator* 48, no. 4 (Summer:1990): 283.

<sup>124</sup> David W. Cole, “Williams’ *Landscape With The Fall Of Icarus*,” *Explicator* 58, no. 3 (2000): 151.

<sup>125</sup> William Carlos Williams, *Pictures from Brueghel and Other Poems by William Carlos Williams* (London MacGibbon and Kee, 1963), 4.

<sup>126</sup> Charles Doyle, *William Carlos Williams, the Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), 223.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> Shimon Sandbank, “Poetic Speech and the Silence of Art,” *Comparative Literature* 46, no. 3 (Summer, 1994): 225.

<sup>129</sup> J. D. McClatchy, *Poets on Painters: Essays on the Art of Painting by Twentieth-Century Poets* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 312.

McClatchy argues that the position of poetry remains above that of the fine arts due to its capacity for direct abstraction and the explicit addressing of “spiritual matters.” He also states that the visual arts suffer from a limitation of perceptible objects and a restriction of time and place. What could be the reason Williams wrote this poem is another weakness in fine arts, which attracts poets to be ekphrastic. This is the visual art’s “inaccessibility to sound and other sensory phenomena.”<sup>130</sup> Williams’ philosophical analysis of Brueghel’s *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* has given the silent painting a voice for the purpose of making its message more vivid. He mentioned Icarus, for example, twice: in the beginning “when Icarus fell,” and in the end, “this was / Icarus drowning”. The words “unnoticed” and “unsignificantly” strengthen the touch of irony in the painting. Bernard Duffey states that in Williams’ poems there is “a lack of attention to the moralism that often motivated Brueghel’s work. In this and other respects he responded to the painter as a kind of sixteenth-century Williams.”<sup>131</sup>

According to Mary Ann Caws, Auden’s poem subordinates the disaster to “the aesthetic stress of the picture: ship and sea in their splendor, dwarfing the human fate.”<sup>132</sup> Michael Riffaterre, on the other hand, argues that the poem “assumes a moral authority which pre-empts the aesthetic standards of the painting.”<sup>133</sup> Here, we find that Williams’ words highlight the disaster that was already aesthetically presented by Brueghel. Conversely, Auden focused on the disaster by stressing how the painter pretended to ignore it. Auden’s poem, says Heffernan, “makes us see how the moral meaning of the painting – the meaning it is said to illustrate – is largely constructed by the words of the title with which the museum has labelled it.”<sup>134</sup>

Both Auden and Williams wrote a poem based on Brueghel’s painting, but the way each one dealt with it also depends on their circumstances, as well as on each poet’s allegiances and experience. As two poets presenting two different views on a single work of art, we are confronted with two different intellectuals. Williams added more embellishment to suffering by devoting all his lines to the painting, while Auden, says Duffey, gave two-thirds of his poem “to a general consideration of suffering.”<sup>135</sup> The major contrast, however, remains how each poet assessed the painting. It is true that

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<sup>130</sup> Sandbank, “Poetic Speech and the Silence of Art,” 228.

<sup>131</sup> Bernard I. Duffey, *A Poetry of Presence: The Writing of William Carlos Williams* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), 217.

<sup>132</sup> Mary Ann Caws, “A Double Reading by Design,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 41, no. 3 (1983): 323-30.

<sup>133</sup> Michael Riffaterre, “Textuality: W.H. Auden’s *Musée des Beaux Arts*,” in *Textual Analysis* ed., Mary Ann Caws (New York: MLA, 1986), 7.

<sup>134</sup> Heffernan, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery*, 218.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

Williams detached himself and reflected Brueghel, while he himself had described the painting as “horrible but superb.”<sup>136</sup> Auden, on the other hand, was not taken so much by the visual charms of the painting but, instead, wondered “what was it all about.”<sup>137</sup> Upon first inspection of the painting, he showed more concern for what is beyond the scene rather than give a raw response entirely dominated by the admiration and pleasure such a masterpiece of art brings forth. This shows that Williams was looking aesthetically *at* the painting while Auden was looking aesthetically, ethically and politically *into* it.

### 2.2.6. Jarrell’s “Musée”

Another American poet tackled Brueghel’s *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, but mainly within his criticism of Auden’s “Musée.” Randall Jarrell published in 1941 a critical review of Auden’s early and late career, entitled “Changes of Attitude and Rhetoric in Auden’s Poetry.” Jarrell knew Auden, although not very well, and this might be why his criticism of the latter remains controversial. His criticism of Auden generally echoes a complaint that European intellectuals seemed to think of America as a “backward Europe.”<sup>138</sup> Ian Sansom points out that Jarrell used Auden’s work to exercise his judgment. Yet, even Jarrell, who treated Auden with a tone of condescension, describes him as “an instrument of justice.”<sup>139</sup>

Jarrell’s poem, in which he replies to Auden’s “Musée des Beaux Arts,” is an example of both his offensive criticism of Auden and, according to Sansom, “[his] profound dependence on Auden as a role-model and father-figure who must be resisted but who cannot be denied.”<sup>140</sup>

About suffering, about adoration, the old masters  
 Disagree. When someone suffers, no one else eats  
 Or walks or opens the window--no one breathes  
 As the sufferers watch the sufferer.

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>137</sup> Fuller, *W. H. Auden : A Commentary*, 268.  
<sup>138</sup> Collini, *Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain*, 228.  
<sup>139</sup> Ian Sansom, “‘Flouting Papa’: Jarrell and Auden,” in *In solitude, For Company: W. H. Auden after 1940, Unpublished Prose and Recent Criticism*, eds., Katherine Bucknell, and Nicholas Jenkins, *Auden studies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 272-90.  
<sup>140</sup> Ibid. 287.

Later Christ disappears, the dogs disappear: in abstract  
Understanding, without adoration, the last master puts  
Colors on canvas, a picture of the universe  
In which a bright spot somewhere in the corner  
Is the small radioactive planet men called Earth.<sup>141</sup>

Jarrell's poem is more detailed but it is almost entirely based on Auden's poem rather than on Brueghel's paintings. Regardless of his intention to criticize "Musée des Beaux Arts," Jarrell has doubled Auden's concentration on suffering by increasing the number of sufferers. Finally, he agrees with Auden that Brueghel was wrong in regarding Icarus' failure as unimportant. This again sharpens Auden's point of view about the significance of Icarus' fall.

It could be true that Auden's commitment to the cause of the proletariat has led him to choose Brueghel's painting. His words, which admit no excuses for the ploughman, the fisherman, and the shepherd, indicate the Marxist concept of a future community. For Marx, in order to achieve the public good, individuals must limit their rights so that there is no conflict of interests or doing harm to others while one is doing whatever he/she likes.<sup>142</sup> "Musée des Beaux Arts" is a human rights poem; its message concerns balancing individual interests with the public good by criticizing a community's apathy towards an individual who is in need of help. The main theme of the poem echoes Albert Einstein's dictum: "The World will not be destroyed by those that do evil; but by those who watch them without doing anything."<sup>143</sup> Auden's words in the poem, in terms of human rights, confirm the right to receive aid as well as the duty to give it.

"Musée des Beaux Arts" is an example that poetry can be "memorable speech"<sup>144</sup> and a powerful tool for human rights as a reminder and reviver of forgotten and lost cases. It is also quite evident that human rights is rooted in poetry; one needs to dig deep in the figurative language of the poem in order to reach the hidden implications the poet kept safe within his words. The charm of poetry lies in the connotative implications that engrave it in memory and enable it to trigger our inspiration. What we can see from analysing "Musée des Beaux Arts" as a poem of human rights is the fact that Auden had

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<sup>141</sup> Randall Jarrell, *The Lost World* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1965), 63-64.

<sup>142</sup> Karl Marx, *On the Jewish Question*, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 3 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975), 162-63.

<sup>143</sup> Albert Einstein, "The World will not be destroyed by those that do evil but by those who watch them without doing anything," "quoted.dictionary.com," accessed January 27, 2012, [http://quotes.dictionary.com/search/Albert\\_Einstein,%20The\\_World\\_will\\_not\\_be\\_destroyed\\_by\\_those\\_that\\_do\\_evil;\\_but\\_by\\_those\\_who\\_watch\\_them\\_without\\_doing\\_anything](http://quotes.dictionary.com/search/Albert_Einstein,%20The_World_will_not_be_destroyed_by_those_that_do_evil;_but_by_those_who_watch_them_without_doing_anything).

<sup>144</sup> Auden, "Introduction to The Poet's Tongue," 327-330.

a diverse audience, both during his life and after his death. This audience itself is a goal for human rights, as well as for poetry, and while they may have little in common with each other, we can say that Auden spoke to both.

In “Musée des Beaux Arts” Auden demonstrated a critical exegesis of the freedom of action or, more accurately, the right to refrain from action, by presenting a brief and yet comprehensive synopsis of the consequences of human inaction on the communal level. His communication of rights remained within the borders of natural and civil rights, as his interest was mainly social and not political, and also because he was aware of the relative powerlessness of poetry. Poetry is powerful on the social and moral level, especially in raising awareness and changing convictions among the public.

In the next poem, “Epitaph on a Tyrant” we will see the opposite of “Musée des Beaux Arts,” namely the public suffering at the hands of an individual. The two poems complement each other, as together they reflect Auden’s interest in creating the “just city,” a community in which love bounds individuals in a world without consequences.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Ohmann, “Auden’s Sacred Awe,” 173.

## Section Two

### 2.3. “Epitaph on a Tyrant”

Perfection, of a kind, was what he was after,  
And the poetry he invented was easy to understand;  
He knew human folly like the back of his hand,  
And was greatly interested in armies and fleets;  
When he laughed, respectable senators burst with laughter,  
And when he cried the little children died in the streets.

#### 2.3.1. Introduction

This is one of Auden’s shortest poems, written in January 1939. It is a light poem, Anthony Hecht points out, “only by a perverse extension of the word.”<sup>146</sup> The poem tells a lot in few words; its narrative is cast in the form of the long poems of Dryden and Tennyson even if it is not written in pentametric rhymed couplet. In other words, the six lines look like the introduction or prologue to a long poem. It might be true to argue that Auden sought to prepare his readers for the actual atrocities European tyrants had not yet committed when this poem was composed.

Auden wrote “Epitaph on a Tyrant” in the same month in which he and Isherwood sailed to New York. Their departure could be the reason why Auden chose to write an epitaph. This was Auden’s last year as a young English poet. The fellowship of the Auden gang did not survive; his hopes for the Left vanished along with any sign that war could be avoided. It is not known whether he composed “Epitaph on a Tyrant” in England or in the USA but the poem may have been the last one Auden wrote before he left Europe. Later in the same month Yeats died, and Auden on the other side of the Atlantic wrote “In Memory of W. B. Yeats” in February 1939. Tyranny and the making of tyrants is the central idea “Epitaph on a Tyrant” is about.

Auden’s approach to rights corresponds with Gewirth’s concept of human action and inaction in his argument about positive and negative rights. Gewirth argues that the distinction between the two concepts of rights revolves primarily around the duties of the respondent.<sup>147</sup> Auden’s approach to rights focuses mainly on the negligence of duties; his criticism of human apathy in “Musée des Beaux Arts” is similar to the argument put forward by Gewirth:

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<sup>146</sup> Hecht, *The Hidden Law: The Poetry of W H Auden*, 115.

<sup>147</sup> Alan Gewirth, *The Community of Rights* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 33.

But an argument against the reality of this distinction may be drawn from an analogy to the more general distinction between letting something happen (which is like noninterference) and bringing something about. For this latter distinction may make no moral difference in certain circumstances, such as when one lets someone die by not interfering with his dying (as against killing him) when one could have saved him.<sup>148</sup>

Auden in “Epitaph on a Tyrant” moves from human negative inaction (the right to refrain from action) into negative or evil action (freedom of will and action), which is a violation of human rights from a social and moral perspectives. From a human rights point of view, he moves from the socio-moral definition of rights as a matter of a community’s commitment to duties towards individuals in need into civil rights where he presents the dilemma of a community’s fate in the hands of an individual. At this stage negative rights such as the right to freedom from torture and fear, for example, are rights sought by the community and achieved in the form of the tyrant’s refrain from action. This makes “Musée des Beaux Arts” and “Epitaph on a Tyrant” look like cause and effect in terms of the lack of action / inaction. In “Epitaph on a Tyrant” Auden describes the consequences of the domination of apathy and egoism on the social level displayed in “Musée des Beaux Arts.” A community whose individuals fail to act beneficially towards each other is a fertile soil for breeding evil and tyranny. The right to one’s privacy and liberty here, as Auden depicts it in his poems, turns into a sort of negative behaviour when it hinders positive action. Here, one might also confuse negative rights and negative liberty. Negative liberty, according to Tibor Machan, is freedom from the forcible intrusions of others in one’s life.<sup>149</sup> Negative rights, such as civil and political rights, are the rights according to which the government refrains from doing violations of human rights, such as torture. In “Musée des Beaux Arts” we observe a refrain from doing positive rights, which lie in not offering help to a dying man. In the meantime, those who did not offer their help used their negative right (the right to mind their own businesses). This, however, led to the violation of both negative and positive rights in “Epitaph on a Tyrant,” as we will see in the following pages.

In “Epitaph on a Tyrant,” the first four lines convey a common truth about the tyrant but in the last two lines Auden confronts his readers with the realized truth: “When he laughed, respectable senators burst with laughter / And when he cried the little children died in the streets.” This enables us to discern the real truth when that is difficult to see.

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 33-34.

<sup>149</sup> Tibor R. Machan, *Individuals and their Rights* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1989), 184.



Truth is lost in the complex interaction of contradictions; the tyrant combines the savageness of a dictator with the delicateness of an artist. Bertolt Brecht shares Auden's concern about this issue:

Inside me contend  
Delight at the apple tree in blossom  
And horror at the house-painter's speeches.  
But only the second  
Drives me to my desk.<sup>150</sup>

The lines above describe Hitler as an artist and Auden's poem describes the tyrant as a poet, both also referring to his brutality. Brecht here, however, highlights an important issue related to the true function of poetry, the one which drives him to his desk. There is something wrong in this odd combination of art and tyranny. Auden thinks this is very easy to understand as false but not everyone enjoys the gift of knowing it. Brecht, on the other hand, who saw people being horrified to talk, finds himself responsible to let them know.

During the 1930s, Auden focused on truth mainly for the purpose of poetic integrity. He also maintained a non-directive, narrative approach. The merit of Auden's poetry, in this respect, would be, as Dr Johnson said, making new things familiar and making familiar things new.<sup>151</sup> This explains his escape from aesthetic enchantment, which reflects other types of enchantment in poetry that ranked secondary to the enchantment of the poetic form, namely the enchantment of truth, which the brevity of words reflected directly and brightly. Auden relied on the power of truth and the manner in which he communicated it rather than on figures of speech and traditional tools of poetic enchantment, as in "Epitaph on a Tyrant." The enchantment here lies in revealing either a hidden truth or an unspoken one, and especially a truth people are too afraid to talk about. In this poem truth is presented in a biographical synopsis and psychological analysis of a tyrant in few words that reads the future in the present time.

### **2.3.2. The Freudian-Marxist Alloy**

The double-sided vision in Auden's poetry can be regarded as a balance between the theories of Marx and Freud. Auden used both in the application of his strategy of

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<sup>150</sup> Bertolt Brecht, *Bad Time for Poetry*, translated by John Willett and Ralph Manheim, in *Second World War poems*, ed. Hugh Haughton (London: Faber and Faber, 2004), 35.

<sup>151</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The Beauties of Samuel Johnson: Maxims and Observations. To which are now....* (London, 1804), 104.

diagnosis and treatment, the former as a voice of the outer world and the latter in his analysis of the inner world.

Auden believed that the theories of Marx and Freud could be used as tools to create a world, more aware of its perfections and imperfections. He states in “Psychology and Art To-day” in 1935, that the doctor and the social reformer complete one another “because both their criticisms raise the question of the nature of artistic activity.”<sup>152</sup> Auden, however, accused Freud of “caving in to the status quo,” while Marx “fail[ed] to understand himself.”<sup>153</sup> On the one hand, Auden found in Marx a promising set of principles on which his dream of a community, bound by love, could be founded. On the other, the similarity between psychology and art was for him a satisfying method of narrating “particular stories of particular people and experiences” from which everyone “may draw his own conclusions,” since it is not telling people what to do but rather increasing their understanding of good and evil.<sup>154</sup> Art, according to Auden, is a mirror “in which [people] may become conscious of what their feelings really are.”<sup>155</sup> “It is easy to see how the psychoanalyst might do this, or attempt to,” wonders Adam Phillips, “but more difficult to see how a poem would.”<sup>156</sup> The answer to this question lies in Auden’s admiration and adoption of Freud’s therapeutic practices, as John R. Boly observes,<sup>157</sup> which he describes as a common method shared equally with the fine arts:

The task of psychology, or art for that matter, is not to tell people how to behave, but by drawing attention to what the impersonal unconscious is trying to tell them, and by increasing their knowledge of good and evil, to render them better able to choose, to become increasingly morally responsible for their destiny.<sup>158</sup>

Although in a time of crisis one should directly point at evil and warn people against it, we find Auden in “Epitaph on a Tyrant” strictly committed to applying his own method. Instead of telling people what to do to avoid having “the children died in the streets,” he mentions few characteristics of his tyrant, such as “perfection,” “easy to understand,” “human folly” and “armies and fleets.” He intended to include these keywords for his readers to help them think and know themselves that it is easy to know when you read

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<sup>152</sup> Auden, “Poetry, Poets, and Taste,” in *The English Auden*, ed. Edward Mendelson, 358.

<sup>153</sup> Auden, “Art and Psychology To-day,” in *ibid.*, 341.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> Phillips, *On Balance*, 271.

<sup>157</sup> John R. Boly, “Auden and Freud: The Psychoanalytic Text,” in *W. H. Auden in Context*, ed. Tony Sharpe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 160.

<sup>158</sup> Auden, “Art and Psychology To-day,” 341.

his poetry what kind of perfection he was after, but human folly helped him gain power and achieve the perfection he was after through others' imperfections.

### 2.3.3. The Poet vs the Tyrant

Germany was the first country Auden visited as a young poet looking for a place where he could establish himself autonomously, away from the traditions and norms of his native country. He went to Germany in 1928 and spent nine months in Berlin with Christopher Isherwood. Berlin was the place where he could recover from the disappointment of having received a third class degree from Oxford. When he arrived in Berlin he wrote that he "ceased to see the world in terms of verse,"<sup>159</sup> although it was there that he started to write "The Orators," whose prologue reflects his fondness for the place.

Auden continued to visit Berlin frequently with Isherwood and other friends until 1932. Berlin provided a perfect place for Auden to experience his "desire for separation, from family, from one's literary predecessors,"<sup>160</sup> as he said, in addition to being able to express his homosexuality. By 1933, Nazi Germany had become extremely dangerous and unwelcoming for intellectuals, artists, communists and homosexuals. However, in his assault on tyranny and its dominant figures in poems such as "Epitaph on a Tyrant," Auden's personal voice could hardly be distinguished from the voice of the oppressed to whom he dedicated them.

"Epitaph on a Tyrant" conveys Auden's concerns about the fate of humanity under the reign of a tyrant whose poetry "was easy to understand," even though "he knew human folly like the back of his hand"; he was a man who wanted to possess everything in the world, even things that are possessed only by gift, such as poetry. Auden's reference to poetry which was easy to understand is also an allusion to the fact that under most authoritarian regimes, poetry and art are restricted from producing work which does not glorify the leader and his party. This meant that the subjects of the tyrant's poetry are already known to everyone: poetry which is easy to predict is easy to understand, especially by those who live under the tyrant.

Every two lines in the poem an image is provided, moving from inward (Freudian analysis) to outward (Marxist analysis). It could also be, as John Fuller argues, that Auden intended to portray "a simple dictator, flattered, manipulated and ultimately

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<sup>159</sup> R. P. T. Davenport-Hines, *Auden* (London: Heinemann, 1995), 87.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

innocent,”<sup>161</sup> although seeking perfection sounds the opposite. The period of the poem’s composition was an age of tyrants: “[in] 1919 there were no dictators in Europe” as Martin Roberts states, whereas in 1939 “they were the rule rather than the exception.”<sup>162</sup> When Auden was writing these lines, Europe was dominated by totalitarian dictators: nationalist Franco in Spain, fascist Mussolini in Italy, communist Stalin in Russia and Nazi Hitler in Germany. None of them was showing any signs of decline in 1939. The question remains: why was Auden composing an epitaph to a tyrant while tyranny thrived?

Before answering this question we should consider why Auden chose the word ‘tyrant’ instead of ‘dictator’. This might provide an answer to the question to whom exactly the epitaph was alluding. Auden’s protagonist is not a monarch but an individual who had seized power by force. He was originally an ordinary man; the easy poetry he had invented indicates that he was not a well-educated person and his keen knowledge of human folly means that he was born and raised an ordinary man rather than away from the public in a palace. In this respect, both Mussolini and Hitler were tyrants rather than dictators.

John Fuller presumes that “Epitaph on a Tyrant” was inspired by a book Auden and Isherwood read in China during their journey in 1938, *The Rise of the Dutch Republic* by J. L. Motley. Fuller has quoted a sentence from the book which bears a striking resemblance to the last line in Auden’s poem: “And when he cried the little children died in the streets.” The passage Fuller highlights states that “[as] long as he lived, he [William the Silent] was the guiding star of a brave nation, and when he died the little children cried in the streets.”<sup>163</sup> Auden’s epitaph, in this respect, was meant to commemorate the classical version of a tyrant whose 1930s incarnation was innocent, passionate and easy to flatter.

It can also be argued that Auden found a similarity between the revolution William the Silent (1533-1584) led against King Philip II of Spain and the events in Europe in the 1930s. Auden admired Motley’s book, especially its account of the terrible atrocities, which he found typical of what was going on in his time.<sup>164</sup> It is clear that Motley’s words inspired Auden, who borrowed the words John Fuller has quoted. The dictator in “Epitaph on a Tyrant,” however, is different from both ancient and modern

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<sup>161</sup> Fuller, *W. H. Auden: A Commentary*, 281.

<sup>162</sup> Martin Roberts, *The New Barbarism: A Portrait of Europe 1900-1973* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 120.

<sup>163</sup> Fuller, *W. H. Auden: A Commentary*, 281.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

dictators, especially if we connect him to a particular dictator or interpret Auden's words literally. Not all dictators were poets. This makes us wonder what Auden meant by saying: "And the poetry he invented was easy to understand."<sup>165</sup>

In his "Introduction to 'The Poet's Tongue'" (1935) Auden defined poetry as "memorable speech," and specified its function as "extending our knowledge of good and evil."<sup>166</sup> According to this definition:

The 'average' man says: 'When I get home I want to spend my time with my wife or in the nursery [...] not to read poetry. Why should I? I am quite happy without it.' We must be able to point out to him that whenever, for example, he makes a good joke he is creating poetry [...]<sup>167</sup>

This presents two possible explanations for the description in "Epitaph on a Tyrant." The first and simpler one is that Auden portrayed an image of an average tyrant, a simple man, desperate to achieve perfection in order to cover his personal weaknesses. He tries to appear wise and well educated by writing poetry and although his poetry is shallow, people would say out of fear that "the poetry he invented was easy to understand," i.e. simple and close to the heart. Instead of saying that his poetry is bad, poets and critics use the word 'easy' to compromise between their sense of loyalty and their safety. No one dares to criticize his poetry, neither the public whose children will die in the streets when this dictator cries, nor the respectable senators who burst with laughter when he laughs. This example is applicable to many authoritarian figures such as Hitler, Mussolini, and even modern non-European tyrants like Saddam Hussein, al-Gadhafi and others. It reflects the fact that art under such tyrants, especially poetry, is emptied from its true spirit and turned into a mere propaganda machine.

There is only one tyrant who was in actual fact an artist if not a poet: Adolf Hitler. This provides another interpretation for Auden's words: he refers here to Hitler's failure as an artist whose shallowness everyone, at first glance of his artistic work, would easily understand. Just like in "Musée des Beaux Arts," Auden's analysis of the tyrant's character develops chronologically with the keyword, 'perfection', mentioned in the first line as his tragic flaw. The young Hitler's ambition to be an artist reflects his quest for perfection, which he mistakenly thought he would find in the world of fantasy in art. He failed the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts admissions test twice in 1907, which proves

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<sup>165</sup> W. H. Auden, *Epitaph on a Tyrant*, in *W. H. Auden: Selected Poems*, ed. Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), 88.

<sup>166</sup> Auden, "Introduction to 'The Poet's Tongue'," in *The English Auden*, ed. Edward Mendelson, 327.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 329.

his imperfect talent as an artist.<sup>168</sup> At that time, Hitler was a poor young man whose art, unlike his name, lacked longevity, according to Werckmeister, “because of [his] unintellectual understanding of painting as a mere trade.”<sup>169</sup> After becoming Führer, Brecht points out, the only art Hitler was capable of creating was war.<sup>170</sup> Yet, Hitler did not desert his concern for art but rather used it, as a politician, to impose his vision on reality: “artists and children make history,” as Richard Euringer wrote in 1936.<sup>171</sup> This statement confirms Auden’s words about the poetry his hero wrote and the children who died in the streets when he cried.

Furthermore, an integral part of the propaganda employed by totalitarian dictatorships is to show the human side of ‘the leader’, a strategy of softening political ideologies applied by totalitarian regimes in the 1930s. This occurs within a wider propagandistic agenda that targeted the public emotionally. Fascism, according to Mussolini, “wants to remake not the form of human life but its content, man, character, faith.”<sup>172</sup> Mussolini confirmed the image of the easily flattered dictator. He is described by Martin Roberts as a shallow comic figure in comparison to Hitler or Stalin,<sup>173</sup> although this was not the opinion of the prominent poet Ezra Pound. Pound’s meeting with Mussolini in 1933 had a decisive impact upon him. According to Tim Redman, “Benito Mussolini was an immensely charming man,” and Pound was overwhelmed by him.<sup>174</sup> The hero-worship Pound displayed for the Italian dictator could be described psychologically as a delusion. Redman points out that the figure of Mussolini was highly cathected in Pound’s psyche.<sup>175</sup> In other words, he was taken in by the dictator’s dominant charisma. Unlike Auden, who was aware of the risks of these kinds of engagements and remained outside the circle of politics, Pound chose to engage in the game, and was ultimately exploited as a propagandist for Fascism until his arrest in May 1945.

What reinforces the assumption that Auden had in mind the image of a naïve dictator is the fact that he actually presented this image three months before writing “Epitaph on a Tyrant.” In October 1938, “On the Frontier,” a play by Auden and Isherwood, was published by Faber. It was performed in Cambridge in November 1938 and in London

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<sup>168</sup> O. K. Werckmeister, “Hitler the Artist,” *Critical Inquiry* 23, no. 2 (Winter, 1997): 277.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> Bertolt Brecht, “Der grösste aller Künstler,” *Werke*, 22:1, 569, originally published in *Die neue Weltbühne*, 22 September 1938, 1188-89.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 287.

<sup>172</sup> Roberts, *The New Barbarism: A Portrait of Europe 1900-1973*, 126.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>174</sup> Tim Redman, *Ezra Pound and Italian Fascism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 95.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

in February 1939. The play was critical of the totalitarian dictatorships of Europe. The protagonist, the leader of an imaginary country named Westland, is a lunatic fascist dictator. His over-confident replies, such as “Everything interests me. When I study any subject, I acquaint myself with its smallest details,”<sup>176</sup> clearly show that he stakes a claim at perfection. The artificial laughs of Valerian and Stahl in response to the leader’s laughs, the leader’s interest in war and the havoc his anger wreaks almost match the description Auden presented in the poem. The leader in “On the Frontier,” as Fuller observes,<sup>177</sup> is a puppet: unlike the dictator of the poem he has little knowledge of human folly. In “On the Frontier” Auden reveals the follies of a dictator, while the dictator in “Epitaph on a Tyrant” understands “human folly like the back of his hand.”<sup>178</sup> The second assumption is more concerned with Auden’s close observation of the progress of tyranny and tyrants. The dictator in “Epitaph on a Tyrant” resembles the leader of “On the Frontier” in everything except his knowledge of human folly. This disparity between the two is probably a sort of retraction or modification that Auden felt necessary for his verdict in light of the surrounding events. “On the Frontier,” Fuller observes, “gives little insight into the fascist mentality.”<sup>179</sup> Auden certainly wanted to present an image reminiscent of the European dictators of the 1930s among whom Hitler was the most dominant totalitarian figure in the world at the time. The ‘easy to understand’ poetry is a reference to Hitler’s effective use of propaganda, which was formed according to his keen knowledge of human folly.

“Epitaph on a Tyrant” is divided into six parts in terms of its narrative form, and three parts according to its argumentative form. Narratively, every line tells something about the tyrant, but taken as couplets further avenues of analysis are opened. The lines of the poem rhyme (a, b, b, c, a, c). If we re-arrange them in the form of heroic couplets (aa, bb, cc) we are presented with the following:

Perfection, of a kind, was what he was after,  
 And when he laughed respectable senators burst with laughter;  
 He knew human folly like the back of his hand,  
 And the poetry he invented was easy to understand;  
 He was greatly interested in armies and fleets

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<sup>176</sup> W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood, “On the Frontier: A Melodrama in Three Acts,” in *The Complete Works of W. H. Auden: 1928-1938*, ed. Edward Mendelson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 372.

<sup>177</sup> Fuller, *W. H. Auden: A Commentary*, 247.

<sup>178</sup> Auden, *Epitaph on a Tyrant*, 88.

<sup>179</sup> Fuller, *W. H. Auden: A Commentary*, 247.

And when he cried the little children died in the streets.

According to the new rhyme scheme, each of the three couplets deals with an idea in the form of action/reaction or cause/effect. This arrangement shows Auden's criticism of the tyrant, which is almost folded into the narrative form. In terms of action and reaction, the first couplet refers to the tyrant's feverish quest for perfection, which results in him being surrounded by a group of flatterers. The second relates to his profound knowledge of human folly, which justifies his interest in poetry. This tyrant employed poetry for his own ends. Auden's description of his poetry as 'easy' reflects a shallow or, in other words, propagandistic poetry. The final couplet reveals the fact that all tyrants are interested in armies and fleets and that the first victims of this lust for power are innocent people, including women and children. This reading, however, does not give us a new version of "Epitaph on a Tyrant;" rather, it provides a clearer vision of Auden's own concerns.

The poem mirrors Hitler's life, despite the fact that he was not a poet. Hitler was, in the words of Martin Roberts:

[An] electrifying public speaker with a remarkable ability to sense the mood of his audience and, having won their attention, to carry them away. As a leader, he knew exactly what he wanted and pursued it with an abnormal intensity of purpose. Power was the one interest, indeed passion, of his life.<sup>180</sup>

The word 'cried' in the last line of the poem can be used as evidence that Auden meant Hitler in "Epitaph on a Tyrant." Besides Hitler's fiery cries in his speeches, Auden in "Refugee Blues," written about two months after "Epitaph on a Tyrant," describes the cries of Hitler as "thunder rumbling in the sky". While the cries of the tyrant in the "Epitaph" lead to the children dying in the streets, we see Hitler in "Refugee Blues" also crying "They must die." Auden, however, vividly describes the poetry his tyrant wrote as "easy to understand". If we take the word 'poetry' connotatively, it could be a reflection of Auden's resentment of dictators, not just politically but also intellectually and artistically. The radio made the electrifying speeches of Hitler, who realized the immense power of radio to mould public opinion, intensely powerful.<sup>181</sup> Hitler competed with intellectuals and poets in his skills of addressing the public and his voice attracted a huge audience:

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<sup>180</sup> Roberts, *The New Barbarism: A Portrait of Europe 1900-1973*, 138.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.



Hitler was a master of deception. When he wished he could be both reasonable and charming and, with experience, he learnt to play convincingly the part of the sober, moderate statesman. Before 1934 he managed to deceive most leading Germans, and between 1934 and 1939 he was equally successful in deceiving foreign statesmen. But when all is said and done, the key to Nazism success was its ability to respond to the mood of Germany better than any other political party.<sup>182</sup>

This was the same public opinion that Auden was trying to mould. In 1933, more than a million copies of Hitler's book *Mein Kampf* were sold. Although the Führer's words were racist – calling for the expansion of the Aryan race at the expense of other inferior races – they were also memorable and powerful, especially within Germany and Austria. Hitler was a convincing speaker, who knew how to attract the masses to his cause. He responded to rising unemployment in 1933 by declaring a 'Battle for Work' and providing a million temporary jobs.<sup>183</sup> This makes us see why Auden believed that he did not possess the power to turn his words into action. Moreover, Hitler's theories were quickly integrated into the German education system; people were either forced to accept them or face a brutal punishment. Joseph Brodsky observes that Hitler's triumph was seen by European intellectuals as a triumph of vulgarity.<sup>184</sup> In two other poems of 1939, Auden admitted that "poetry makes nothing happen"<sup>185</sup> and "All I have is a voice / To undo the folded lie."<sup>186</sup> Nonetheless, he remained committed to his belief that poetry "makes us more human" and "more difficult to deceive."<sup>187</sup>

Auden sought to guide the public but never tried to force his ideas and beliefs on them. In this respect, Brodsky states:

Besides, every poet is a bit of a Führer himself: he wants to rule minds, for he is tempted to think that he knows better – which is only a step away from thinking that you are better. To condemn is to imply superiority; given this opportunity, Auden chooses to express grief rather than to pass judgment.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>184</sup> Joseph Brodsky, "On *September 1, 1939* by W. H. Auden," in *Less than One: Selected Essays* (New York: Farrer Straus Giroux, 1986), 324.

<sup>185</sup> Auden, *In Memory of W. B. Yeats*, in *The English Auden*, ed. Edward Mendelson, 242.

<sup>186</sup> Auden, *September 1, 1939*, in *ibid.*, 246.

<sup>187</sup> Auden, "Introduction to 'Poems of Freedom'," in *ibid.*, 371.

<sup>188</sup> Brodsky, "On *September 1, 1939* by W. H. Auden," 324.

Brodsky points out that Auden reacted to Nazism on a personal level, seeing it as entirely hostile to sensuality and subtlety.<sup>189</sup> The battle, however, between the poet and the tyrant was not equal, especially in the face of a tyrant who claimed to be poet. Although he only had his voice, Auden employed it successfully where it was most effective. He made his poems evidentiary rather than representational, especially in telling the truth about suffering, tyranny, egoism and how in certain circumstances, human actions or follies bring them about.

Auden's "Epitaph" looks like a final touch to the end he devised for the leader of "On the Frontier," who is finally killed in his office. In an attempt to explain the process of the production and continuity of evil, the neutral tone of the poem reflects his tendency to present a psychological analysis of a tyrant built upon facts rather than emotions.

#### 2.3.4. The Two Sides of Coin

In the last two lines of "Epitaph on a Tyrant" Auden wrote: "When he laughed, respectable senators burst with laughter / And when he cried the little children died in the streets." These two lines present two issues: the mechanism of evil and how evil exploits good in order to fulfil its goals. The political and economic crises of the 1930s and the events of World War II and the Holocaust that followed were reactions to the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, which imposed numerous restrictions upon Germany. In reference to this treaty, Auden mentioned in his poem "September 1, 1939" that evil produces evil: "Those to whom evil is done / Do evil in return." This cause-and-effect mechanism of evil made, not only those who waged the war, but also those who suffered its consequences eager to avenge themselves. The Hitler Youth, for example, were only children when the Treaty of Versailles was signed. By 1938, they numbered 8,000,000.<sup>190</sup> This army of child-soldiers was prepared physically and mentally for one purpose:

Its aim was to produce citizens strong in body and Nazi in mind. From the age of 6 to 10, the member served a period of apprenticeship [...] He then took an oath of loyalty to Hitler which ended 'I am willing and ready to give up my life for him. So help me God'.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Martin Roberts, *The New Barbarism: A Portrait of Europe, 1900-1973* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 139.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

Those children were both Hitler's whip and his victims. They were, McArdle states, "hammered and twisted like iron on the anvil into weapons for [Hitler's] ends."<sup>192</sup> There was no care for the rights of those children or the physical and mental damage that war left them with. The boys and girls who were dying for Hitler were just like the torturer's horse in "Musée des Beaux Arts": guilty for their deeds but innocent at heart.

The tyrant himself here is also exploited by the senators who used to look respectable but "burst with laughter" when he laughed. They were revealed as worse than the tyrant whom they flattered. Although this tyrant knows human folly very well, he might have fallen victim to those senators' deceptive nature. Auden here shows us how evil feeds on power to survive and dominate. It is not the production of an individual but a complete system disguising itself behind an individual who, in the eyes of the public, bears all the responsibility alone. This means that his death will not necessarily stop evil. The six lines of "Epitaph on a Tyrant" describe a tyrant whose evil will continue even after his death, as long as the rest of the system exists (the armies and fleets and the senators). This tyrant, Mendelson points out, "is neither the apocalyptic madman of [The Dance of Death] nor the compliant simpleton of "On the Frontier," but a sharp-witted perfectionist, even something of a polymath. [...] His death will bring no peace; terror will find other agents."<sup>193</sup> Whether this tyrant is naïve, unlike what most people view him as, or very intelligent as he wants to appear, the suffering he brought about is much more complicated and brutal than the one in "Musée des Beaux Arts." Again, the issue of suffering is raised but with further dimensions; it is not the suffering of a single boy while everyone turns away. This time everyone suffers because of an individual and his entourage. The main theme, however, remains the continuity of human apathy and egoism as implied earlier in "Musée des Beaux Arts" and later in "September 1, 1939":

For the error bred in the bone  
Of each woman and each man  
Craves what it cannot have,  
Not universal love  
But to be loved alone.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> D. McArdle, *Children of Europe: A Study of the Children of Liberated Countries: Their War-Time Experiences, Their Reactions and Their Needs with a Note on Germany* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1949), 19. See also Ed Cairns, *Children and Political Violence* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 107.

<sup>193</sup> Mendelson, *Early Auden*, 362.

<sup>194</sup> Auden, *September 1, 1939*.

Although he preferred to breathe “neutral air,” Auden remained dedicated to the public and to the principle of love. In his poems, whenever suffering was mentioned he included himself among the sufferers: “We must suffer them all again.”<sup>195</sup> Auden’s commitment to his generation in such a hard time was extraordinarily unusual:

However it might arrive, the future was certain to bring pain. Auden had already begun to accept in himself the dull ordinariness of suffering, but responsibility for others’ suffering was a different matter. [...] Now in Brussels, he began to sense a more immediate relation.<sup>196</sup>

It should be noted that Auden wrote “Epitaph on a Tyrant” shortly after his return from Brussels. In the poem, he presents an image of children as victims while in “Musée des Beaux Arts” he displays children as the infringers. “Epitaph on a Tyrant” can be interpreted as the second part of “Musée des Beaux Arts,” in the sense that it displays another aspect of the hierarchy of suffering. Taken together, the poems are the two sides of the same coin; the hierarchy of suffering is shown in the individual’s suffering from a society that suffers in return at the hands of an individual.

Children in the 1930s were victims of war in two ways: either dying as civilians or as soldiers. The totalitarian dictatorships of Europe during the 1930s recruited the young (namely the Hitler Youth and Mussolini’s black shirt squads) and prepared them to kill and be killed. In Germany, boys aged 10-18 were performing war duties; their minds were corrupted and deformed to accept hatred. These experiences left the children with serious emotional injuries and long-lasting negative effects, such as depression and nightmares. By mentioning children in the last line of the poem Auden highlights the fact that by the death of children the last ring in the chain of human rights is violated under this tyrant.

### **2.3.5. Brodsky’s Tyrant**

Auden brilliantly plays the role of the psycho-analyst in “Epitaph on a Tyrant,” in the sense that he does not show any sign of direct antagonism against his tyrant, but rather an ironic and elegiac tone. It should be noted that the poem is a rare example of such analysis of a tyrant in verse. Eva Hoffman observes that there are not enough psychological observations of such figures, since tyrants and torturers go into therapy

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Mendelson, *Early Auden*, 362.

much less frequently than their victims.<sup>197</sup> “Epitaph on a Tyrant” sheds light on the dark corners of the character of tyrant. The elegiac tone of the poem, which fulfils the mood of an epitaph, reflects pity for a tyrant who laughs and cries just like normal people, while the touch of irony in the poem criticizes his deeds. Auden intended to give a glimpse of his protagonist’s behaviour and insight into his deeds. He did not mean to confuse his audience but, rather, to show them further dimensions of reality upon which judgments may be corrected. In writing about Auden’s poetic magic, Adam Phillips points out:

Confusion – the fog that holds contradictions together – is often what Auden’s best poetry is staving off, and trying to think about: because one of the things that magic does is confuse; it shows us something about the nature of confusion. It confuses our sense of reality by showing us an alternative reality, always a contradiction in terms.<sup>198</sup>

The question why Auden chose a tyrant as the subject of his poem is similar to the question why poetry and human rights? This, in addition to Domna C. Stanton’s statement that “Human rights and the humanities have a long, shared history,” is related to how poetry approaches human rights.<sup>199</sup> “Epitaph on a Tyrant,” for example, reflects this matter in the way tyranny and tyrants are presented which, according to Phillips, shows alternative reality. This other reality tells us that the tyrant is a production of human follies; the community in which he lived bears part of the responsibility. Auden was not interested in revealing the follies of the tyrant because he did not see him as the main problem. The origin of the problem rests with the common negative behaviour that resulted in the emergence of totalitarian dictatorships. If we read the poem from bottom to top, we find that the respectable senators are responsible for the political violence that led to “the little children [dying] in the streets.” They flattered him, out of fear and greed, because the tyrant controls military power, which would not be possible without his understanding of human folly. For this kind of detailed poetic anatomy of good and evil in human nature, human rights owes much to poetry.

This fact was reinforced by Brodsky who followed Auden’s steps in his anatomy of tyranny and tyrants, in theory as well as in practice. He explains that tyrants are made, not born, and that tyranny is not a vocation but a political game of exploitation and

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<sup>197</sup> Eva Hoffman, “The Balm of Recognition: Rectifying Wrongs Through the Generations,” in *Human Rights, Human Wrongs*, ed. Nicholas Owen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 296.

<sup>198</sup> Phillips, *On Balance*, 278.

<sup>199</sup> D. C. Stanton, “The Humanities in Human Rights: Critique, Language, Politics,” *PMLA-Publications of the Modern Language Association* 121, no. 5 (2006): 1519.

attraction. “If a man has such a vocation [as tyranny], he usually takes a shortcut and becomes a family tyrant, whereas real tyrants are known to be shy and not terribly interesting family men.”<sup>200</sup> In the light of Auden’s epitaph, Brodsky points out that tyrants are partly the product of politics (“politics is but geometrical purity embracing the law of the jungle”), and partly the product of their own ambition. This ambition is usually accompanied by a blend of cruelty and hypocrisy; some of them “are more keen on cruelty, others on hypocrisy.” This ambition, eventually, turns to be adorning dullness when the tyrant’s sole purpose, after many years in power, is focused on maintaining his control.<sup>201</sup>

Brodsky lived under the tyrannical regime of the Soviet Union until 1972. He sought to remain neutral, neither supporting nor opposing it, but his use of Auden’s approach to illuminate the public while living in the USSR required him to adopt oblique and cryptic forms of allusion to political figures and institutions.

In January 1972, Brodsky wrote his poem “To a Tyrant,” because of which, according to Alexander Veytsman, he was forced to leave his native country a few months later.<sup>202</sup> His poem is not an epitaph although the influence of “Epitaph on a Tyrant” is clear, especially Auden’s style of displaying short cinematic shots: “When he laughed, respectable senators burst with laughter.” Brodsky wrote: “When he comes in, the lot of them stand up / Some out of duty, the rest in unfeigned joy,” and “He drinks his coffee – better, nowadays – / and bites a roll, while perching on his chair.”<sup>203</sup> In both Brodsky and Auden, the depiction of fear blended with flattery towards the ruler is vivid. Brodsky, however, was keener than Auden to convey the sense of nostalgia some people might feel towards a deceased tyrant. Having said that, Auden’s elegiac tone was not intended to be nostalgic; his aim was to show the other side of reality to the public rather than blame an individual for all the disasters, without referring to those who assisted him or remained silently complicit.

For Brodsky, tyranny was the rule, not the exception. For approximately three decades (1922-1953) the Soviet Union was under the leadership of Joseph Stalin. Tyranny is engraved upon the Russian psyche: in 2006, 35% of Russians claimed that they would vote for Stalin if he was still alive, while the majority of contemporary

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<sup>200</sup> Joseph Brodsky, “On Tyranny,” in *Less than One: Selected Essays* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1986), 113-22.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Alexander Veytsman, “A Tyrant Up Close: Joseph Brodsky’s *To a Tyrant* Poem,” *Cardinal Points Literary Journal* 1(2010), accessed August 10, 2012, [http://www.stosvet.net/lib/contents12\\_vol1.pdf](http://www.stosvet.net/lib/contents12_vol1.pdf).

<sup>203</sup> Joseph Brodsky, *To a Tyrant*, trans. Alan Myers, in *ibid*.

Germans still revile Hitler.<sup>204</sup> This nostalgia Brodsky captured in his poem was also expressed in his essay “On Tyranny”:

So if one still feel elegiac at the tyrant’s funeral, it’s mostly for autobiographical reasons, and because this departure makes one’s nostalgia for “the good old days” even more concrete. [...] He was a plain tyrant, and yet leaders of the greatest democracies eagerly sought to shake his hand.<sup>205</sup>

Brodsky’s adoption of Auden’s approach of displaying the truth everyone knows and the truth very few know results in a slightly different tyrant. Auden’s tyrant is more engaging. He writes poetry and laughs with senators, while Brodsky’s tyrant feels lonely and misses his pre-dictatorship life. Brodsky’s tyrant is a twentieth century tyrant while Auden’s is one for all ages. The scene in Brodsky’s poem is a café and his victims are its habitués, killed by the tyrant in order to remove any unwanted witnesses to his past. He killed them in revenge “for all the lack of cash, the sneers and insults, / the lousy coffee, boredom, and the battles.”<sup>206</sup> Brodsky’s tyrant is old, dull, deserted and, above all, ashamed of his past. This is a detailed description of a dictator in the winter of totalitarian regimes in Europe after World War II.

The six-line epitaph Auden presents is a definition of a tyrant in six steps. Brodsky was more detailed and less comprehensive than his Anglo-American predecessor. Both poets, as the majority of poets, were non-state actors who witnessed violations and crimes against humanity and reacted to them. A poet like Brodsky is normally expected to act against the totalitarian regime he lived under. His world was different from Auden’s; the latter’s was a world in which human rights were beginning to be enforced upon individuals and the state. Brodsky was inspired by a man who enjoyed democracy most of his life but wrote about the horrors of tyranny and suffering as if he was born and raised in the house of a tyrant. “Epitaph on a Tyrant” might not be accepted as a human rights document because there is no evidence of specific abuses, names of abusers, victims and the time and place of violations. No such formal document will be considered but in comparison with documents of the same genre, we can hardly find a poem similar to it in terms of subject matter and style. If we read the poem line by line in order to uncover what implications of human rights lie within, we find a range of

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<sup>204</sup> Sarah E. Mendelson and Theodore P. Gerber, “Failing the Stalin Test,” *Foreign Affairs* (January 1, 2006), accessed August 10, 2012, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/61367/sarah-e-mendelson-and-theodore-p-gerber/failing-the-stalin-test>.

<sup>205</sup> Brodsky, “On Tyranny,” 121-22.

<sup>206</sup> Veytsman, “A Tyrant Up Close: Joseph Brodsky’s *To a Tyrant* poem”.

topics tackled systematically in an arrangement that describes the life-cycle of tyranny. On a social level, the poem moves from legal, individual rights, such as the right to satisfy one's ambitions, and ends with the tragic outcome of fulfilling one's rights at the expense of others' lives. On a political level, it demonstrates that crimes of political violence are not the product of a tyrant but of a whole regime, whose members are equal to their leader in tyranny. On a moral/humanitarian level, it raises awareness about the situation of children, both of those who died in the streets (genocide) and those who live in them (homeless children).

The comparison between Auden and Brodsky's poems shows a common idea: time vs tyrant. In Auden's poem, the tyrant is finally defeated by time when he dies, but it seems that he had not wasted it because he was always busy with his armies and fleets or with writing his easy-to understand poetry. "Epitaph on a Tyrant" also reflects Auden's limited experience with tyrants when, unlike Brodsky's poem, the tyrant does not show any regret. Brodsky's poem, on the other hand, captures the final moments of the tyrant's life in which he desperately fights against time, after losing his formerly innocent and quiet life as just an ordinary man. He also discovers that his life as a tyrant was artificial and that the laughter and flattering was not real. This was also captured by Auden and to some extent reflects the negative side of the outwardly happy life of a tyrant. In the end time defeats the tyrant both in the way he lives and after his life when he becomes a history.

On an artistic level, Auden's direct approach to suffering in his poetry was broadened to include tangible and intangible, inner and outer dimensions. In "Musée des Beaux Arts" he communicated suffering socially via visual art and from the point of view of the oppressed. In "Epitaph on a Tyrant" he displayed the psychological/individual analysis of a tyrant as an oppressor. Artistically, the former is a portrait and the latter is a sculpted piece of art. The next poem, "Refugee Blues," displays the auditory (musical) level. It reflects Auden's early experience of his new home after he immigrated to the USA with Isherwood in 1939. The poet, who was born in York, sought to be reborn in New York. With poems like "September 1, 1939" and "Refugee Blues," Auden in the USA became a British poet almost only by birth, but there he also continued his mission of "undo[ing] the folded lie."



### Section Three

#### 2.4. "Refugee Blues"

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 to-day, my dear, but where shall we go to-day?

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":  
O we were in his mind, my dear, O 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.

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.

#### 2.4.1. Introduction

“Refugee Blues” was written in March 1939 in New York, which Auden has described in “September 1, 1939” as “this neutral air / Where blind skyscrapers use / Their full height to proclaim / The strength of Collective Man.”<sup>207</sup> Claims about Auden’s cowardice arose in Britain, especially in 1939 and 1940. Evelyn Waugh states that “Auden had fled to the USA at the first squeak of an air raid warning.”<sup>208</sup> These claims, in fact, show why Auden wanted to flee to the USA. He said to MacNeice in 1940 that he felt lonely and was always in opposition to a group in England.<sup>209</sup> Auden had proven his bravery in Spain and China, as Richard Hines asserts.<sup>210</sup> The issues he raised in his poems also demonstrate an extraordinary courage in confronting his inner fears and pains, as well as in taking the responsibility to carry the burdens of others and defend their rights. Hines argues that the reason for Auden’s flight to the USA was that “he wanted a place he could not romanticize,” or as the poet had said to MacNeice: “an artist ought either to live where he has live roots or where he has no roots at all.”<sup>211</sup>

The words of Auden show that where to live and among whom meant a lot to him, especially in the sense of what could the place and its people provide. In “Refugee Blues,” Auden describes what lay beyond the world of the senses; he saw souls rather than people, homelessness among hundreds of buildings and skyscrapers, youth in the village churchyard “old yew” and violation of rights in the heart of a liberal democratic state.

In “Refugee Blues” Auden displays the follies of negative rights on a deeper level. On the social and moral level, he focuses on ethnic discrimination by presenting a detailed description of the suffering of German-Jewish refugees. On the civil and political level, the poem sheds light on the conflict between human rights and state rights. Hannah Arendt argues that refugees are central to the contradiction between the professed commitment of a liberal democratic state to human rights and its claim to

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<sup>207</sup> Auden, *September 1, 1939*.

<sup>208</sup> Davenport-Hines, *Auden*, 180.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*

national sovereignty at the same time.<sup>212</sup> This conflict makes such states eager to protect their national sovereignty by restricting membership, which, according to Arendt, makes refugees no better than stateless individuals.<sup>213</sup>

#### 2.4.2. Auden's Cinematic Technique

The poem shows a change in style and technique from Auden's earlier career, resulting from the change of place and the, by now clear, inevitability of war. Auden's voice in "Refugee Blues" is bolder, especially in mentioning names of political figures such as Hitler in the seventh stanza and in criticizing political and governmental policy. On the level of human rights, his focus shifts to international issues, although talking about the suffering of German Jews in America still sounds like a continental issue. His criticism of the international community came a few months later in his poem "September 1, 1939": "Out of the mirror they stare, / Imperialism's face / And the international wrong."<sup>214</sup>

In "Refugee Blues" Auden applies cinematic techniques, especially in moving his focus from one place to another giving us various snapshots of the suffering of refugees. He shifts between place, time and action and gives us more than one aspect of each of them. In terms of place, for example, the first image is a city crowded with millions of people. Then, he focuses closely onto mansions followed by holes. In order to give us a sense of time, the poem presents the image of an old yew that in "every spring blossoms anew." In this image, we have the new green leaves of an old tree compared with the yellow pages of an expired passport which, by comparison, is not as old as the yew. As for action, we have the image of the furious consul and the speaker in the public meeting.

Auden has used these cinematic techniques before, especially in "Musée des Beaux Arts" and in "Epitaph on a Tyrant." Yet, in "Refugee Blues" he applied dialogue as if he intended to present the scenario of a film or a poetic drama. The third long line at the end of each stanza simulates a dramatic monologue in terms of the speaker and the addressee. The speaker is one of the refugees talking to someone whom he addresses as "my dear." The addressee listens while the speaker talks, as if he comments on the image given in each stanza.

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<sup>212</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London: Deutsch, 1986), 277.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 281.

<sup>214</sup> Auden, *September 1, 1939*.

In terms of place, Auden moves both vertically and horizontally. Vertically, the poem provides a comparison between the urban and the rural, showing the ugliness of the modern city where animals have better chances than some people, juxtaposed with the beauty and freedom one can find in a wood. Horizontally, the poem gives us a snapshot of the sky rumbling with the voice of Hitler, the ten thousand soldiers marching in the falling snow and the fish that are swimming freely near the quay. The image of the free life in the wood where the birds sing at ease as if “they had no politicians,” contrasts with the previous two images of the quay and the poodle. Auden also used his cinematic technique to display the suffering of German-Jewish refugees in New York through animated imagery. Stanzas 8, 9 and 10 give us a comparison between animals and those refugees. The image of the poodle and the cat reflect the misery of German-Jewish refugees in a modern city where even pets, unlike them, have the right to freedom. Then, the focus moves away to the edge of the city and a point where there is a different world. As the camera moves away from the crowd of the city, life gradually gets better until we come to the wood where the birds enjoy their freedom of expression: “They had no politicians and sang at their ease”. It is interesting to mention in this respect that Auden was fond of pets. In Spender’s book *W. H. Auden: A Tribute* Auden appears in a picture with a black poodle whom he and its owner Ursula Niebuhr had baptized “Winnie.”<sup>215</sup> This shows how intimately and effectively the environment in which the poet lived is reflected in his poems: a painting he saw in Brussels, a book he read on his journey to China and a poodle he remembered while closely watching group of homeless refugees. The image of the dog and cat is used to bring the reader closer to realising the kind of suffering those refugees had in search for their rights.

In Auden’s early poems, Paola Marchetti observes, places have political connotations.<sup>216</sup> This is reinforced by the comparison between the city where politicians live and the wood where the birds suffer none. In this context, it is notable that animals, which regularly appear in Auden’s poems, also carry similar connotations. The poodle and the cat, for example, give off almost the same impression as the dogs that live their doggy life and the torturer’s horse in “Musée des Beaux Arts.” They represent the negative indifferent part of society, while the birds stand for freedom and their singing to the freedom of expression.

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<sup>215</sup> Spender, *W. H. Auden: A Tribute*, 140.

<sup>216</sup> Paola Marchetti, “Auden’s Landscapes,” in *The Cambridge Companion to W. H. Auden*, ed. Stan Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 200-11.

The aim of the analysis of Auden's cinematic technique is to show the importance of approaching human rights through poetry, where the poet is the provider of stories as evidence, depicted and narrated in a special manner that focuses on what needs to be highlighted and reveals what must be known. The concept of human rights in practice, according to Paul Gready, has two main parts: legal norms and human stories. In general terms, "Refugee Blues" is the story: "it is an attempt to spark the law into life, transcend cultural and political difference, and cement the solidarity of strangers."<sup>217</sup> This story, as we see it in "Refugee Blues" is narrated in a manner that also sparks one's ability to visualise the actual scenes and almost share in the same feelings, not of sympathy that one might feel after hearing the story, but the impression that makes us realise pain and suffering.

The four stanzas, from 4 to 7, show various situations invoking the suffering of refugees: governmental, non-governmental, public or social, and political. The governmental is represented by the bureaucratic consul. Auden had experienced a similar situation when he married Erika Mann in 1935 in order to give her the chance to escape Nazi Germany by acquiring a British passport. Auden criticized the bureaucratic system that turned its officials into machines run by rules and regulations: "if you've got no passport you're officially dead." This situation is followed by its opposite, with the committee that understands the suffering of those refugees but does not have the power or the ability to help them. Stanzas 6 and 7 together are two pieces of one image, which Auden had experienced in 1939 in the USA. Auden himself recalled that a few months after the German invasion of Poland he had a terribly shocking experience echoed on these two stanzas in "Refugee Blues":

[Auden] went to a theatre in a German-American district of Manhattan and saw a German newsreel depicting the attack. He was shocked when "quite ordinary, supposedly harmless Germans in the audience [...] [began] shouting 'Kill the Poles.'" This experience fuelled his already gnawing doubts about the sufficiency of the liberal philosophy that had sustained him earlier in the 1930s.<sup>218</sup>

Auden's blues was meant to be a protest against both the bureaucracy of state laws that increased the suffering of refugees and the social egoistic reactions towards them: "if we let them in, they will steal our daily bread." In "Refugee Blues" this issue is raised

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<sup>217</sup> Paul Gready, "Responsibility to the Story," 177-90.

<sup>218</sup> Humphrey Carpenter, *W.H. Auden: A Biography*, 1st American ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1981), 282-83.

on three levels in stanzas 4, 5 and 6. We see that a group of people who appeared in the middle of a crisis cannot be protected by the state, which is supposed to be a liberal democratic one, both legally and nationally. On a legal level, we have the consul who “banged the table and said, / ‘If you’ve got no passport you’re officially dead.’” On the second level, we have a committee or foundation that understands the situation of those individuals and is willing to help them but does not enjoy the authority to apply any sort of legal enforcement: “Went to a committee; they offered me a chair; / Asked me politely to return next year.” The refugees from Nazism, said Arendt, were expelled from their homelands and reluctantly accepted by other states, temporarily, or not accepted at all. This made Arendt define human rights from the manner they react to plights, namely that ‘human rights’ came to represent either hopeless idealism or feeble-minded hypocrisy.<sup>219</sup> The scene of the consul in “Refugee Blues” embodies the fact that loss of official documents meant expulsion from humanity since citizenship in his mind is conferred by a piece of paper rather than possessed by its holder. The third level lies in the public meeting stanza which criticizes the ugliness of negative rights in their communal guise. The image of the public meeting in which a man declares that those refugees will steal their daily bread is the climax of the series of the images that criticise human egoism Auden presents in the three poems.

The cinematic technique in the poem takes the form of successive snapshots. Together, these images narrate the story of the suffering of refugees in their efforts to find a solution to their problem. Suffering a series of disappointments, negligence and hateful reactions, they were finally left alone to face their destiny: “It was Hitler over Europe, saying, ‘They must die.’” This tragic outcome is stressed in the final stanza which ends with the speaker in a plain white land that has no shelter for him to hide from the ten thousand soldiers looking for him and his addressee.

### **2.4.3. Auden, ‘Blues’ and Human Rights**

Art in general possesses the power to ease suffering and enable us to live with it. Suffering is unforgettable and it often takes a long time for the person who suffers to become capable of living with their traumatic experience. Art, especially poetry, provides a means by which those who have experienced trauma can heal. Its exceptional power to communicate emotions teaches us how to acknowledge, endure and be sympathetic towards suffering.

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<sup>219</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 269.

“Refugee Blues” has been identified by Seamus Heaney and Robert Hull as a human rights poem.<sup>220</sup> It focuses on the atrocities refugees suffered during the late 1930s. Auden was among the thousands of immigrants from Europe who fled to New York: “Say this city has ten million souls / Some are living in mansions, some are living in holes.” “Refugee Blues” is a human rights poem not only because of its subject matter; there are other aspects whose presence in Auden’s poems renders them equally poems of human rights. Good art, regardless of its creator or their beliefs, is itself a human right. Any sort of persecution against artists is a double violation because it is a crime against the gift of art, which does not belong to the artist alone. “Refugee Blues” is a story of marginalized victims for whom Auden raised awareness as a defender of rights to add a humanitarian value to the poem and an artistic value to the case.

Artists were violently persecuted in Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and Soviet Russia, especially those who refused to participate in propaganda for authoritarian political regimes. Auden appreciated and affirmed the autonomy of art. In his “Memory of W. B. Yeats” he had excused Yeats and Kipling’s hetero-political allegiances because of the masterpieces they had produced. In his elegy of the Irish poet, Auden showed the value of art, especially in times of crisis, as the poet’s “unconstraining voice / Still persuade[s] us to rejoice.”<sup>221</sup> Poetry, in Seamus Heaney’s essay on Auden, in its educative force as well as in the sheer aesthetic pleasure it offers is a requirement for “proper living.” Michael Cavanagh comments on Heaney’s defence of poetry: “In Heaney’s terms, poetry serves reality in one way or another. Its combination of educative force and sheer pleasure together is a mark that proper poetry must be true and enchanting.”<sup>222</sup> This reinforces the importance of poetry for human rights as a medium of story-narration that enjoys the power of survival and sustainability, in addition to pleasure and truth. Heaney compares these two elements in Auden’s poetry to Shakespeare’s Ariel (magic) and Prospero (truth), and says that Prospero means that “proper *living* is proper writing,” whereas Ariel means that “proper *writing* is proper living.”<sup>223</sup> This equation was based on Auden’s poetry. In “Epitaph on a Tyrant,” his reference to the poetry that was easy to understand denoted improper writing, which flourished in the time of

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<sup>220</sup> See Dinyar Godrej, *Fire in the Soul: 100 Poems for Human Rights* (Oxford: New Internationalist, 2009) and *Breaking Free: An Anthology of Human Rights Poetry*, ed. Robert Hull (New York: Thomson Learning, 1995), 50.

<sup>221</sup> Auden, *In Memory of W. B. Yeats*.

<sup>222</sup> Michael Cavanagh, *Professing Poetry: Seamus Heaney's Poetics* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 48.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*

improper living where “respectable senators burst with laughter” and “the little children died in the streets.”<sup>224</sup>

In his essay “Sounding Auden,” Seamus Heaney focuses on two important points Auden raised theoretically and practically. The first is the autonomy of art which he calls “poetic authority,” and the second is “poetic music.” Both are necessary communal demands; the former is the poet’s commitment to truth, which he cannot communicate without introducing “the problematic, the painful, the disorderly, the ugly.”<sup>225</sup> The latter is beauty or enchantment, which Heaney considered a communal requirement as well: “Ariel stands for poetry’s enchantment, our need to be bewitched.”<sup>226</sup> Accordingly, it is self-evident that art is itself a human right, not only as a means for the freedom of expression but for the expression of freedom as well.

“Refugee Blues” adapts the conventions of the blues, a popular American lyric form, which according to André Breton “represents a fusion of music and poetry accomplished at a very high emotional temperature.”<sup>227</sup> Auden’s choice of the blues was not an arbitrary one. In form, it is dualistic. It consists of three-line stanzas in which the third line replies to the first two, and differs from them in rhyme (aab). In content, according to James Held, it carries two main themes: suffering and celebration.<sup>228</sup> It meets exactly what Auden, from the song, hoped for: “[...] To be bewildered and happy, / Or most of all the knowledge of life?”, or as Heaney describes it, the combination of ‘beauty’ and ‘truth’ in Auden’s poetry.<sup>229</sup>

“Refugee Blues” is not Auden’s first blues poem. He wrote “Funeral Blues” or “Stop All the Clocks” in April 1936 and “Blues” in early 1937, which was dedicated to Hedli Anderson. Unlike “Refugee Blues,” both poems are written in quatrain rhyming stanzas (aabb), and the language is more British than American although in “Blues” he used some US slang expressions, such as ‘subway’, ‘sugar daddy’, and ‘G-man’.<sup>230</sup> “Refugee Blues” shows the impact of the USA on Auden. It does not contain US slang but it shows the impact of the place upon the poet socially and culturally, the tall buildings, the crowded city of New York and the public meetings. Yet, it also echoes the British side of Auden, especially in the repetition of “my dear” throughout the poem.

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<sup>224</sup> Auden, *Epitaph on a Tyrant*.

<sup>225</sup> Seamus Heaney, “Sounding Auden,” in *The Government of the Tongue: The 1986 T. S. Eliot Memorial Lectures and Other Critical Writings* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 110.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>227</sup> Paul Garon, *Blues and the Poetic Spirit* ([S.l.]: Da Capo Press, 1978), 23. Garon has paraphrased Breton’s statement about the blues.

<sup>228</sup> James Held, “Blues Convention and Auden’s *Refugee Blues*,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 18, no. 1 (Winter, 1992): 139-42.

<sup>229</sup> Heaney, “Sounding Auden,” 110.

<sup>230</sup> Fuller, *W. H. Auden: A Commentary*, 296.



What makes “Refugee Blues” a poem of human rights, I want to argue, is both its content and its form. The blues is a form of popular music, which emerged for the purpose of protesting against tyranny and discrimination.<sup>231</sup> It depends on the first person, as a narrator or speaker, to deliver the message it carries. This served Auden by making him personally involved without being impersonalised at the same time. It appears to the reader that Auden exists in the poem as a narrator of personal suffering rather than just a witness. The blues, according to Ralph Ellison, “is an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one’s aching consciousness. [...] As a form, the blues is an autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe expressed lyrically.”<sup>232</sup> This style puts the reader himself/herself in the position of the sufferer to realise pain and learn how to endure it.

Like “Musée des Beaux Arts” and “Epitaph on a Tyrant,” this poem is not occasional although it directly refers to German Jews. It opens with an image referring to nowhere in particular, in a city, among millions of people, and ends nowhere in a plain land full of soldiers. The blues was designed to address a mass audience, as Robert Switzer points out, making them “conscious of their dissatisfaction [...] by speaking to their everyday reality.”<sup>233</sup> In the poem, we notice that Auden triggers the human conscience in the way he displayed the everyday life of the refugees, starting with the image of the consul.

The poem consists of introductory images that are separate, moving the reader towards the climax in the fourth stanza. In the seventh stanza, Auden clearly mentions Hitler. This, however, does not necessarily have anything to do with him changing his position of keeping a distance between himself and engaging in politics rather than changing his location “Into this neutral air.”<sup>234</sup> In New York, he was in a geographically safer place and felt more encouraged to speak vividly, without folded messages or inventing poetry that is uneasy to understand. I believe, however, that Auden was keen to convey the worries and fears of those refugees among whose Hitler was the most terrifying one. In both cases it was necessary to name Hitler as the source of their suffering because the blues itself is revealing in nature, as Charles Simic points out:

The blues poet has been where we are all afraid to go, as if there was a physical place, a forbidden place that corresponds to a place in ourselves

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<sup>231</sup> Francis Davis, *The History of the Blues* (Cambridge, Mass.: Da Capo, 2003), 239.

<sup>232</sup> Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act* (New York: Random House, 1964), 78.

<sup>233</sup> Robert Switzer, “Signifying the Blues,” *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 21, The Lyrical Phenomenon (2001): 25-76.

<sup>234</sup> Auden, *September 1, 1939*.

where we experience the tragic sense of life and its amazing wonders. In that dive, in that all-night blues and soul club, we feel the full weight of our fate [...] we are simultaneously wretched and happy, we spit on it all, we want to weep and raise hell, because the blues, in the end, is about a sadness older than the world, and there is no cure for that.<sup>235</sup>

The words of Simic indicate that there is a sense of revolt or protest in the blues, which is one of the reasons it was developed by African-Americans as a form of peaceful social protest against slavery, discrimination and colour-racism. In this respect, Angela Davis observes: “[n]aming issues that pose a threat to the physical or psychological well-being of the individual is a central function of the blues.”<sup>236</sup>

African-Americans were savagely oppressed at the hands of American whites who, during the 1920s and early 1930s, treated them as members of an inferior species. Between 1880 and 1930, an estimated 3,200 African-Americans were lynched in the southern states of the USA.<sup>237</sup> Following the end of the civil war, black slaves who had gained their freedom endured another phase of slavery with the passing of ‘Black Codes’. Blues music emerged as a voice for black people to express their protest against this discriminatory legislation:

As a product of African American resistance to post-slavery America, blues music – which most likely emerged in the Southern United States during the late nineteenth century – has been a source of protest, a cry by African Americans seeking to secure their basic human rights.<sup>238</sup>

According to Mendelson, everything Auden had written in 1939 was “an attempt to clarify his mixed feelings about the rival claims of private gift and public good.”<sup>239</sup> In “Refugee Blues,” we notice this attempt in the complete unity of both claims. One can hardly recognize the voice of Auden as a narrator from the voice of the German-Jewish refugee as the speaker on behalf of his group. Auden in the poem used the collective pronouns ‘we’ and ‘us’ in stanzas in which he referred to places (the city, the country in the map and the building) or to the committee, the consul and Hitler. These stanzas focus mainly on the case of the German-Jewish refugees, whereas in the public meeting

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<sup>235</sup> Charles Simic, “No Cure for the Blues,” in *On Music*, edited by Daniel Halpern and Jeanne Wilmot Carter (New Jersey: Ecco Press, 1944), 133-39.

<sup>236</sup> Angela Y. Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998), 33.

<sup>237</sup> Adam Gussow, *Seems like Murder Here: Southern Violence and the Blues Tradition* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 45.

<sup>238</sup> Stephen A. King, “The Blues, Trauma, and Public Memory: Willie King and the Liberators,” in *Popular Music and Human Rights*, ed. Ian Peddie, (Surrey: Ashgate e-book, 2011), 67-77, <http://lib.myilibrary.com/Open.aspx?id=315832&src=0>.

<sup>239</sup> Edward Mendelson, *Later Auden* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1999), 16.

and the ten thousand soldiers Auden used the form of one-to-one dialogue. In these two stanzas (6 and 12), Auden used 'you' and 'me'. Here, one would be confused about who the speaker is. Although the whole manner of dialogue simulates the form of dramatic monologue, it opens the door for another possible interpretation. The poem consists of 12 stanzas, where in three (5, 7 and 11) the speaker refers to himself as 'I' or 'me', while in stanzas 1, 2 and 4 he uses 'we' or 'us'. There are also four stanzas where there is no pronoun referring to the speaker (3, 8, 9 and 10). In the remaining two stanzas (6 and 12) we can say that 'me' refers to the speaker who sometimes uses 'I', 'we' or 'us', while the pronoun 'you' refers to the non-responding addressee, though it might also be the addressee who replies to the speaker using 'you'. The usage of pronouns in the poem, however, addresses the reader cordially in a way that s/he feels emotionally involved and morally aware of his/her duties and responsibilities, as well as his/her rights. This is reinforced by the comparison between the world of man and the world of animals in stanzas 7, 8 and 9 that ends with the line: "They weren't the human race, my dear, they weren't the human race."

Auden and Isherwood liked Berlin. They spent time there almost every year after they first lived in the city in October 1928. The young poet sought escape from the censorial life of England (homosexual acts were criminal in Britain until 1967)<sup>240</sup> to the freedom of Berlin with its cabarets, gay-brothels and street boys. In Berlin, Auden was able to express his homosexuality without restrictions. In 1932, Isherwood (who was then in Berlin) returned to London to tell Auden about the Nazi menace.<sup>241</sup> In February 1933, Hitler came to power and an end was put to Auden's life in the German capital. This might be one of the reasons for the satirical assault against Hitler he and Isherwood raised in their play "The Dance of Death" (1933). The following stanza from "Refugee Blues" might also refer to Auden's inability to go back to Berlin:

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.

On another level we see that Auden used first person narrator, while in stanzas 8, 9 and 10 pronouns are completely concealed. In these three stanzas, we have three images

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<sup>240</sup> Davenport-Hines, *Auden*, 108.

<sup>241</sup> Charles Osborne, *W.H. Auden: The Life of a Poet* (London: Methuen, 1980), 98.

depicting the lack of freedom. The first is ethnic discrimination, where dogs and cats enjoy the rights that German-Jewish refugees lack:

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.

The comparison between the human condition and the animal condition here is interesting. In "Musée des Beaux Arts" we also have a comparison between the torturer and his horse. The torturer's horse and the poodle in a jacket were invoked by Auden for two reasons. First, the move from the narrative to the descriptive gives the reader the ability to imagine and feel the scene while reading the poem; and second, both of the images are ironic. Auden tried to resist this irony by presenting it alongside a serious image, a matter which balances between the irony and seriousness of the idea and sharpens the image as in the torturer's horse and his innocent behind, and the poodle in a jacket compared to the homeless refugees.

Then, from images of everyday life Auden moved out of the city to give us an image, closer to nature but harsher in the sense of the restrictions imposed upon those refugees:

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.

The comparison here between 'free' animals and human beings sharpens the contrast between them and reveals the true force of the political situation. Being a stateless refugee means that one has no legal protection since only a state can provide the basic safeguards of a home and protection from harm. Without this protection, animals, while only "ten feet away," are metaphorically worlds away and freer than those humans. These three images together provide a comprehensive description of suffering due to the lack of freedom and the loss of identity. In their lives, those refugees became worse than animals. In the first image, they are barred from entry while in the second they are barred from escape. Both images reflect their suffering from the lack of the right to home and housing. In the third, they are prevented from expressing themselves even in isolated places like a wood:

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.

This image stresses that the sense of place is rooted in his sense of community, the community Auden sought and the one he actually lived in. This sense of community appears in "Musée des Beaux Arts" where "there always must be / Children who did not specially want it to happen." In "Epitaph on a Tyrant" it appears in the last line but in a reversed situation: "And when he cried the little children died in the streets." In both cases, the poet saw people suffering from deficiencies caused by negative traits such as egoism, apathy and hate, which put him between two choices: either to change the community or change the place. In "Refugee Blues" this dilemma is highlighted more sharply by focusing on each of the two options from many perspectives, including the public, social and governmental in the complex sense of community, and the country, city, building, mansion and holes in the complex sense of place.

Before they went to New York both Auden and Isherwood had hopes and dreams that America would be a better place. They spent Christmas and New Year's Eve in Brussels together, and Auden hosted a party in which he recited "Ode to the New Year" (1939). In this poem, he also addressed Isherwood: "So I wish you the peace that you lack; / May your life in the States become better."<sup>242</sup> He sought a place where the struggle for the survival of art would be less stressful for the poet. Auden confronted this issue in his elegy for Yeats: "mad Ireland hurt you into poetry," but for himself he still had to find a suitable valley for his poetry to survive in. He left England with expectations that were not fully realised. In April 1939, he wrote to his brother John Auden: "New York is awful; we have no money, and few prospects of getting any."<sup>243</sup> For the purpose of obtaining money he found himself obliged to talk about political issues in public speeches. This was an activity he did not want to do any more, as Richard Hines states:

[Auden's] decision to abandon political activism came after making a speech at a dinner in New York to get money for 'Spanish Refugees' on 16 March. 'I suddenly found [...] I could make a fighting demagogic speech and have the audience roaring,' he reported to Mrs Dodds. 'So exciting but so absolutely degrading; I felt just covered with dirt afterwards.'<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> Peter Parker, *Isherwood: A Life* (London: Picador, 2004), 411.

<sup>243</sup> Davenport-Hines, *Auden*, 186.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*

Regardless of any implied personal reference, in poems like “Refugee Blues” Auden shed light on the conflict over rights between the individual and the community on the level of natural rights, and the citizen and the state on the level of civil rights. He kept his argument about political rights enfolded within his critical and analytical approach that was also negative in the manner of argument, i.e. he never talked about the virtues of rights nor presented an optimistic overview about a better world under the umbrella of rights. He demanded rights through commemorating their loss or violation or warning from it, as well as through defending them at the moment of need. This fact underlines his poems as immediate and practical reactions or appeals for rights.

Auden was not an explicit propagandist for human rights and this might have prevented him from being described as a human rights poet in his life or after his death. He was, however, a witness to atrocities in Spain and China, a keen observer of anti-human rights social and political behaviour, as in “Musée des Beaux Arts” and “Epitaph on a Tyrant,” and a spokesman for fellow-sufferers as in “Refugee Blues.” The manner in which Auden wrote his parables and his purpose of addressing the public in times of crisis using such alarming topics was appreciated by many intellectuals including William Empson who said that “the work of Auden in preparing the public mind for the war to come, which was coming, had been extremely important.”<sup>245</sup> By the time Auden wrote “Refugee Blues” war was inevitable. He focused on the case of German-Jewish refugees as a message that the worst would occur when the spirit of solidarity is lost among people in a time of crisis. The last lines that come in the end of every stanza address this issue. These lines, which are longer than their preceding couplets, are divided by the phrase ‘my dear’ which comes between commas. These lines force the reader to confront the main problem each stanza deals with, each of which was a crucial problem that needed an urgent solution, as in the fifth stanza: “But where shall we go to-day, my dear, but where shall we go to-day?” Yet, the speaker knows that there is no solution at the moment and the rhetorical question he asks confirms this fact.

In the third line of each stanza, Auden uses his cinematic technique but this time playing on sounds to create impressions. The reason for the length of these lines is the repetition of one sentence. This repetition gives the reader the chance to take a breath and consider it, especially through the phrase ‘my dear’ that directly addresses the reader as if calling him to think about this line. The succession of long vowels in the

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<sup>245</sup> Adam Piette, “Empson, Piaget, and Child Logic in Wartime,” in *Some Versions of Empson*, ed. Matthew Bevis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 57.

words of the third lines, such as ‘there’, ‘place’, ‘my dear’, ‘now’, ‘go to-day’, ‘can’t do that’, ‘talking’ and ‘they weren’t’, reflects a sense of slow motion as a result of hopelessness and despair. The third lines in stanzas 6 and 12 in which Auden used ‘you and me’, leave the door open for further negative expectations. In the public meeting stanza, for example, the speaker says “he was talking of you and me,” which at the same time reminds the reader of the consequences of such hateful acts and prepares them for the worse if such hateful expressions were naturalised. Auden was a sensitive man. He avoided being a public speaker although he was regarded as a public poet and intellectual. This was noticed by Frederick Prokosch when he met Auden and Isherwood shortly after their arrival in New York. He said: “There was always a certain remoteness about Auden, as though he yearned for friendship but shrank from a deeper intimacy, and the enigma of his character lay in this remoteness.”<sup>246</sup> Regardless of any psychological implications folded in this remoteness, it did not prevent Auden from being in the public eye. This sensitivity, which was reflected in shying away from any contact with humans that may somehow harm him and also in a high responsibility towards them, also reveals to us why Auden is a poet of human rights.

#### **2.4.4. Auden and Arendt**

Hannah Arendt mentions that Auden enjoyed an irresistible inclination to being good and doing good. What is peculiar here is the manner with which he reflected in his poems this irresistible inclination towards benevolence, with all its private and individual passions and thoughts. She learned from Auden that “Private faces in public places / Are wiser and nicer / Than public faces in private places.”<sup>247</sup> Here, Auden unfolds the privacy of pain and suffering, not necessarily his own but rather the folded pain of others as he did in “Refugee Blues.” He communicated this pain and hatred through love, which is expressed in the refrain “my dear.” We can say that Auden was inspired by love or the lack of love, rather than by hatred and suffering. Arendt stresses that among private experiences, pain is the most private and least communicable of all. It is “perhaps the only experience which we are unable to transform into a shape fit for public appearance.”<sup>248</sup> I would argue, however, that Auden succeeded in presenting private pain in a way re-shaped for ‘public appearance’, and that in “Refugee Blues,”

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<sup>246</sup> Davenport-Hines, *Auden*, 182.

<sup>247</sup> Auden and Mendelson, *The English Auden : poems, essays and dramatic writings, 1927-1939*, 59.

<sup>248</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 50-51.

this occurs through his appropriation of the African-American form of the 'blues', and the sense of intimate private address caught in the choric address to "my dear."<sup>249</sup>

Even his communication of love was different from how poets usually address the subject. Auden saw love as the opposite of evil rather than hatred, and called for using it as a pre-war prevention measure, "we must love one another or die,"<sup>250</sup> and a post-war cure "If equal affection cannot be / Let the more loving one be me."<sup>251</sup> In her essay "Remembering Wystan H. Auden, Who Died in the Night of the Twenty-eighth of September, 1973," Arendt mentions that Auden also enjoyed "rare self-confidence which does not need admiration and the good opinions of others, and can even withstand self-criticism and self-examination without falling into the trap of self-doubt."<sup>252</sup> This divine gift was sometimes mistaken for arrogance, but Arendt argues that this is not the case. Artistically, Auden might not have been so concerned in the critical judgments of others, but as a human being he was greatly interested in their feelings for him, and especially their love. Stephen Spender mentions that in the poems Auden wrote during the mid-1930s he was seeking objective authority on the idea of love, invoked in poem after poem as the solution to all human problems.<sup>253</sup> Spender played with this idea of Auden in his poem "Auden at Milwaukee": "He shares remoteness from them like a joke. / They loved him for it. This because they feel / That he belongs to none yet he gives to all."<sup>254</sup> This innate virtue was the source of Auden's happiness and sadness at the same time. Arendt states that Auden was "hurt into poetry" more than Yeats because of the outcome of unrequited love through which his "misery and unhappiness had become more and more unbearable."<sup>255</sup> This misery is echoed in "Refugee Blues," where the end of each stanza expresses the impact of others' negative reactions explicitly upon refugees and almost implicitly upon Auden himself. Although the poem vividly portrays the atrocities inflicted upon German-Jewish refugees, it communicates Auden's personal emotions and thoughts in a peculiar style, especially by using 'I' and 'me' or 'we' and 'us'. On the one hand, the usage of singular pronouns individualises public feelings as if they were his and at the same time de-individualises

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<sup>249</sup> A comment on the draft by Hugh Haughton, dated 28/11/2012.

<sup>250</sup> Auden, *September 1, 1939*.

<sup>251</sup> W. H. Auden, *The More Loving One*, in *W. H. Auden: collected shorter poems 1927-1957* (London: Faber & Faber, 1966), 282.

<sup>252</sup> Hannah Arendt and Susannah Young-ah Gottlieb, *Reflections on Literature and Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 297.

<sup>253</sup> Stephen Spender, "W. H. Auden and His Poetry," in *Auden: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. M. K. Spears (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), 26-38.

<sup>254</sup> Spender, *W. H. Auden: A Tribute*, 242.

<sup>255</sup> Arendt and Gottlieb, *Reflections on Literature and Culture*, 300.



his reaction to them. This unity of private and public feelings is portrayed in the refrain in which Auden used either ‘we’ and ‘us’ or ‘you and me’.

“Refugee Blues” is a song for human rights, for social justice and civil rights. It completes the entire canvas of rights that Auden approached through art, in which he examined obscure relationships between humans and the idea of their rights, such as presenting a better understanding of human emotions and feelings that can lead to a clearer identification and recognition of human rights. The concept of rights itself, as it developed in Europe and America in the period leading up to World War II, focused less on fulfilling the rights of humans through understanding their inner requirements and needs and more on their outer needs, such as their rights to privacy, property and freedom of expression. The role of Auden’s work was to fulfil this inner requirement. Nevertheless, his career makes his readers feel that art itself is a human right and a tool through which the inner life of a person or a group is understood and can be equally shared.

## 2.5. Consequences

The three poems analysed in this chapter provide a glimpse of Auden’s role as a human rights poet in the 1930s in defending human rights. A role that was not powerful enough to prevent war, but necessary to raise public awareness in a time in which awareness was desperately required. Suffering has played a significant role in the emergence and development of human rights; the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was founded primarily as a reaction to the Holocaust. The continuous occurrence of suffering everywhere in the world has rendered it almost commonly accepted and justified socially and culturally as one of the faces of “the natural order” of the universe.<sup>256</sup>

Suffering differs in the same culture according to circumstances and events as we see in the three poems of Auden, as well as the reactions to it. When the right to life, for example, is at stake as we have in “Musée des Beaux Arts” we find nothing mentioned about hunger or the right to housing as we have in “Refugee Blues” where the right to life is relatively beyond threat. I mention this idea here to pave the way for the understanding of suffering across cultures in the following chapter, where we have a rearrangement of priorities regarding what is the most fundamental right whose violation brings about utmost suffering.

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<sup>256</sup> Lauren, “History and Human Rights: People and Forces in Paradoxical Interaction,” 91-103.

Auden may have been unaware or even reluctant to be described as a human rights advocate, as much as he was unwilling to become involved in politics. He also wished that he could contribute something more than words to lead the way out of the wasteland: a spirit and career that do not overstep the framework of human rights. He was a unique poet whose words, in the thirties, carried the spirit of human rights, no matter what he actually wanted to be:

The most obvious social fact of the last forty years is the failure of liberal capitalist democracy, based on the premises that every individual is born free and equal, each an absolute entity independent of all others; and that a formal political equality, the right to vote, the right to a fair trial, the right of free speech, is enough to guarantee his freedom of action in his relations with his fellow men. The results are only too familiar to us all. By denying the social nature of personality, and by ignoring the social power of money, it has created the most impersonal, the most mechanical and the most unequal civilization the world has ever seen, a civilization in which the only emotion common to all classes is a feeling of individual isolation from everyone else, a civilization torn apart by the opposing emotions born of economic injustice, the just envy of the poor and the selfish terror of the rich.<sup>257</sup>

The above statement by Auden shows that he focused on the social-humanitarian side of civilization, which is where human rights begin and end. His motivation for human rights was suffering, which his three poems approach each from a different angle. In these three poems, Auden targeted the core of the problem focusing on the social side: the negative inclinations of human nature. He presented three examples of these inclinations as dominant forms or phenomena. On the basis of the relationships of human beings among themselves, these examples were formulated as follows: community-individual, individual-community and a small community or group versus a larger one. He also displayed two examples of the relationship between the state and the community, one under an authoritarian regime as in “Epitaph on a Tyrant” and the other in a democratic state in “Refugee Blues.” Out of this systematic approach to suffering we notice that Auden, who never refers to ‘human rights’ or talks about them, was a poet of human rights in content rather than in form. He practiced human rights in his poems, especially in the topics he chose to write about and the audience he addressed.

Auden’s communication of suffering was peculiarly rooted in time and place. In “Musée des Beaux Arts” he sailed backwards into the past from his present time and

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<sup>257</sup> Auden, “The Public v. the Late Mr William Butler Yeats,” in *The English Auden*, ed. Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), 392-393.

place (Brussels, 1938). In “Epitaph on a Tyrant” he gave us a vision of the future, as if he had travelled back from it to show us the world after the death of his tyrant. These two poems were written in Europe and the tone in both echoes the spirit of the continent in the 1930s historically, politically and culturally.

As non-state actors, human rights defenders are moved by their personal concerns and positive considerations for rights. Some of them are more concerned with helping those who are in need, while others try to create a climate that would bring about conciliation between individual and collective rights in order to avoid conflict. This defensive-protective strategy is a central theme in many of Auden’s poems of the 1930s. His main objective was founding the ‘just city’, and this justifies why he remained within the circle of the moral and social framework of human rights.

This Audenesque translation of the decade, however, is not so much topical as illustrative. Auden was keen not to display much interest in visual senses because, as Robert Craft writes, “he was more concerned with the virtues of gardening than with the beauty of flowers.”<sup>258</sup> On the one hand, Auden was interested in what stands behind what is seen, heard or touched, as we have seen in the three poems. On the other, we can also say that he was more scientific or reasonable than romantic, as Isherwood pointed out.<sup>259</sup> This is reflected in his poems, in which Auden focused on truth rather than on appealing to the emotions of the public as the propagandist machines of authoritarian regimes did.

In his description of Auden’s time in Spain, Spender wrote that he offered his services and took the risk of going to the front just because “he wanted to do something.”<sup>260</sup> Until 1937, his actions and his words, driven by responsibility, came when there was a strong necessity for something to be done or said. This also explains the way through which he wrote “Musée des Beaux Arts,” “Epitaph on a Tyrant” and other poems, where the voice of undoing “the folded lie” continued in spite of his inability to take action. In doing this, however, Auden was asserting what he considered to be the main function of poetry as he stated in 1938, in his “Introduction to ‘Poems of Freedom’”: “[t]he primary function of poetry, as of all the arts, is to make us more

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<sup>258</sup> Spender, *W. H. Auden: A Tribute*, 150. See also Hecht, *The Hidden Law: The Poetry of W H Auden*, 98.

<sup>259</sup> Christopher Isherwood, “Some Notes on Auden’s Early Poetry,” in *Auden: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. M. K. Spears (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 10.

<sup>260</sup> Claud Cockburn, “Auden in Spain,” *Oxford Review*, Nos. 11-12 (n.d.): 51, in Christopher Bone, “W. H. Auden in the 1930s: The Problem of Individual Commitment to Political Action,” *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 4, no. 1 (Spring, 1972): 3-11.

aware of ourselves and the world around us. [...] I think it makes us more human, and I am quite certain it makes us more difficult to deceive.”<sup>261</sup>

What makes Auden probably the most influential poet of the 1930s was his awareness that great poetry does not necessarily make a great poet. A great poet is one who employs his gift to present a better understanding of life, when such understanding is desperately needed. In “The Public v. the Late Mr William Butler Yeats,” he points out:

A great poet. To deserve such an epitaph, a poet is commonly required to convince us of these things: firstly a gift of a very high order for memorable language, secondly a profound understanding of the age in which he lived, and thirdly a working knowledge of and sympathetic attitude towards the most progressive thought of his time.<sup>262</sup>

In this magnificent piece of criticism, Auden vividly makes his point about the function of modern poetry: “Poetic talent, in fact, is the power to make personal excitement socially available. Poets, i.e. persons with poetic talent, stop writing good poetry when they stop reacting to the world they live in.”<sup>263</sup> His main concern was the human and its position in a world of conflicts. From 1937 to 1939, Auden’s concern about the fate of people appeared stronger than ever, primarily through the spirit of struggle or revolution against tyranny as demonstrated in “Spain,” which echoes the same spirit of resistance in Arabic poetry, which we will review in the next chapter. Then, after he realized the reality of suffering and ‘its human position’, he became a defender of love and peace through condemning evil.

Accordingly, we can say that Auden did not see in tyranny, war and political corruption primarily reasons for human suffering, but instead the outcomes of the negative aspects of human nature. These outcomes were brought about by egoism, apathy and other types of negative traits that led to the above catastrophes to happen. As a remedy, he suggested love; he believed in it as the only weapon with which to confront war machine and the hatred that operated it. In the next chapter we will see how this is similar to or different from the work of al-Jawahiri who in the 1930s, in reaction to dilemma of rights in Iraq, also approached human rights in his poetic career.

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<sup>261</sup> Auden, “Introduction to ‘Poems of Freedom’,” in *The English Auden*, ed. Edward Mendelson, 370.

<sup>262</sup> Auden, “The Public v. the Late Mr. William Butler Yeats,” in *ibid.*, 389.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Neoclassical / Modern Arabic Human Rights Poetry: Mohammed M. al-Jawahiri in the 1930s**

- Preliminary Steps
- Section One: “Taḥarrak al-Laḥd” (The Coffin Moved)
- Section Two: “Fī al-Sijn” (In Prison)
- Section Three: “al-Iqtā’” (Land Policy)
- Consequences

### 3.1. Preliminary Steps

This chapter is a study of human rights in the poetry of Mohammed Mahdi al-Jawahiri (1899-1997) in the 1930s. His work, in terms of human rights poetry, offers a window into the major events of the 1930s in Iraq in a manner comparable to Auden's poetry of the same period. This poet's work reflects his awareness and concerns about major local, national and international issues. Before studying questions of human rights in the poetry of al-Jawahiri, it is necessary to set the cultural, social and political contexts in which he lived and to which he reacted. This requires a glance at his early life and career, which began to attract fame and popularity in the beginnings of the 1920s.

Many critics and writers agree that the modern literary, cultural and political history of Iraq cannot be studied without referring to al-Jawahiri, known as *Shā'ir al-'Arab al-Akbar* (the Great Poet of Arabs).<sup>264</sup> He was given this title as he was the last neoclassical poet living in the modern age of Arabic poetry. It is significant to mention in this respect that al-Jawahiri was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, interestingly not for the Nobel Prize in Literature, for devoting his poetry to defending freedoms and world peace.<sup>265</sup>

This chapter is divided into three sections, each dealing with a single poem by al-Jawahiri written in the 1930s. The focus will be on examining these poems as advocating human rights and accordingly equivalent to each of the three poems by W. H. Auden analysed in the previous chapter. The chosen poems are: "Taḥarāk al-Laḥd" (The Coffin Moved) – 1936, "Fī al-Sijn" (In Prison) – 1937, and "al-Iqtā'" (Feudalism or Land Policy) – 1939. These poems will be analysed in terms of human rights in the same way the poems by Auden are analysed in the previous chapter. On a cultural and intellectual level, the comparison will highlight the differences in priorities, as well as the manner in which human rights were approached poetically, between al-Jawahiri and Auden on account of their cultural backgrounds. In the process, it will be revealed that there are important common threads shared between the two poets in terms of their humanitarian spirit and their intellectual interest in Marxism. Both al-Jawahiri and

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<sup>264</sup> In 1958, he was officially awarded the title of "The Poet of the Republic," which is equivalent to a poet laureate. In his later life, he acquired the title of the greatest poet of the Arabs (in modern times), often described as such by authors of books written on him and his career. When he died in July, 30, 1997, the official Syrian TV declared that his death marked the death of the last master of classical Arabic poetry. For further information, see *al-Jawahiri Fāris Ḥalabat al-Adab*, by Mohammed Jawad al-Ghabbān (Damascus: al-Madā Press, 2006), 8-20.

<sup>265</sup> Firas Dehdari and Suhad Jadirri, "Al-Waṭaniya fi Shi'r Mohammed Mahdi al-Jawahiri," *Diwan al-Arab* (2012): 34, accessed March 22, 2013, <http://www.diwanalarab.com/spip.php?article32983>.

Auden sought to guide the wider public using almost the same methods: both adopted socialist notions and both had inclinations towards Marxism. In the case of al-Jawahiri, during World War II this developed into strong sympathy towards communism.<sup>266</sup>

Although the poems of al-Jawahiri have been chosen to match Auden's poems according to the central human rights topics raised in each one, the poems in this respect are not fully identical. Al-Jawahiri's "Fī al-Sijj," for example, is paired with "Musée des Beaux Arts" on the bases of the theme of individual suffering, which is tackled in both poems. Other issues in "Musée des Beaux Arts," however, like the suffering of Christ and the 'torturer's horse' are not mentioned in "Fī al-Sijj" and vice versa. This would bring into the scene other poems by Auden such as "Spain" and "September 1, 1939" as well as other poems by al-Jawahiri for the purpose of studying similar or related themes, attitudes and circumstances that do not exist in the selected poems.

Al-Jawahiri was born in Najaf. His family is widely known in Iraq by his great grandfather whom the title, al-Jawahiri, was attached to him in reference to his book in Shiite Jurisprudence *al-Jawahir*.<sup>267</sup> His father was a religious figure and his elder brother, Abdul Aziz (1890-1976), was a religious scholar and a poet. Al-Jawahiri mentioned in an interview he gave on Syrian TV that he was born in 1903 but writers and critics, such as Mohammed Jawād Ṭāher, Muhsin J. al-Musawi, Mīr Baṣrī and Terri DeYoung, insist on 1899 or 1900 as the year of his birth.<sup>268</sup> He is coeval with the modern history of Iraq from the final years of Ottoman rule until the final years of the Baath regime under the reign of Saddam Hussein.

Al-Jawahiri was brought up by his father to be like himself: a Shiite religious scholar. When he was around eight years old he was forbidden to play outdoors until he had finished his daily compulsory homework: a poem by al-Mutannabī, two articles from *Nahj al-Balāghah* by Imam Ali bin abī Ṭālib and *Al-Amālī* by al-Qālī.<sup>269</sup> This deprivation of childhood sparked his awareness on the meaning of freedom and other basic rights that were denied in his community. In his memoir, as well as in almost every interview he made, he would tell the story of how one day coming back home he had found that his father had killed the only and dearest friend he had, a little gazelle, in order to provide a feast for his guests.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> M. M. Badawī, *Modern Arabic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 60.

<sup>267</sup> Mīr Baṣrī, *A'lām al-Adab fī al-'Irāq al-Ḥadīth*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Hikma, 1994), 180.

<sup>268</sup> Istikana, "Poet Muhammad Mahdi Al-Jawahiri," in *Daftar Al-Ayam*, "Istikana.com," accessed March 31, 2013, <http://www.istikana.com/en/episodes/daftar-alayam-32>.

<sup>269</sup> Abu Ali al-Qālī's (901-967) book, a collection of prose and verse, is one of the pillars of Arabic literature.

<sup>270</sup> Mohammed Mahdī al-Jawahiri, *Dhikrayātī*, vol. 1 (Damascus: Dār al-Rafidayn, 1988), 58-59.

Al-Jawahiri did not gain the freedom to decide his future until the death of his father, but rigid social restrictions remained as long as he lived in Najaf. He secretly began to read books by Darwin and other western thinkers, as well as world literature translated into Arabic. These books were prohibited in Najaf, and their readers were accused of atheism.<sup>271</sup> Those texts, however, not only helped him break the chains his father had tried to impose on him but also realize why some of the highly conservative tribal and religious figures in Najaf insisted on preserving ignorance among the ordinary people. In his memoir, he describes some of them as feudal lords who lived off exploiting the common people in the name of religion and traditions.<sup>272</sup>

In the manner he defended freedom and rights, especially the rights of the poor and oppressed in his revolutionary poetry; Mīr Baṣrī describes al-Jawahiri as an Iraqi Victor Hugo.<sup>273</sup> His classical mentors, al-Mutanabbī (d. 965) and al-Ma‘arrī (d. 1057), were both inspired by their personal suffering, although the latter’s poetry reflects involvements in public issues but mainly in the manner of mere criticism. Al-Ma‘arrī discussed the suffering of people and social inequality in a philosophical and critical manner: he was indignant at his society and against it in almost everything, even in food preferences, as he was vegetarian. As for the contemporary Iraqi mentors of al-Jawahiri, Jamīl Sidqī al-Zahāwī and Ma‘rūf al-Ruṣāfī, they demanded social and political reforms and called for freedom and democracy but each according to his personal perspective. They were addressing the public from their ivory towers: al-Ruṣāfī being too ideal, while al-Zahāwī, like al-Ma‘arrī, too elitist.<sup>274</sup> Al-Jawahiri was more reasonable and chose to reflect a more realistic picture of his time. Al-Jawahiri was closer to the people: a choice he declared on many occasions such as in the poem, “al-Witrī”<sup>275</sup>, which he recited in front of the whole government on a formal occasion:

*Mādhā yaḍurr al-jū‘? majdun shāmikhun / Innī aḍal ma‘ al-ra‘iyyati  
saghibā*<sup>276</sup>

*Innī aḍal ma‘ al-ra‘iyyati murhaqan / Innī aḍal ma‘ al-ra‘iyyati laghibā*<sup>277</sup>

<sup>271</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid., 51-55.

<sup>273</sup> Mīr Baṣrī, *A‘lām al-Adab fī al-‘Iraq al-Ḥadīth*, 184.

<sup>274</sup> Hadi Al-‘Alawī, *Al-Jawahiri: Critical Studies*, (Najaf: Annu‘man Press, 1969), 18-20.

<sup>275</sup> Hāshim al-Witrī was the dean of the college of Medicine in Baghdad. Al-Jawahiri was asked to compose a poem for him on the occasion of honouring the dean's acceptance of an honorary doctorate from King's College School of Medicine in London in 1949.

<sup>276</sup> Further to previous explanation on the use of transliteration, ignoring the case marker in the word *al-ra‘iyyati*, for example, and writing it as *al-ra‘iyya*, the line will be shorter than the one before it.

<sup>277</sup> Mohammed Mahdi Al-Jawahiri, *Al-Witrī*, “adab.com,” accessed April 01, 2013, <http://www.adab.com/modules.php?name=Sh3er&doWhat=shqas&qid=66902>.



What would hunger spoil? fake glory! / Then, I choose to starve with the  
public  
I choose to stay among them and strife / I choose to stay among them and  
sweat. (“al-Witrī”: 95-96)

Accused of political sedition, al-Jawahiri was taken to jail for the second time after this poem. These lines, however, mark a crucial difference between al-Jawahiri and Auden, which stems from their respective cultural backgrounds. Auden, even on the eve of World War II in 1939, did not make such a decisive and extreme choice, between either starving with the people or going against them. This reflects, on the one hand, the hyperbolic emotional trend in the poetry of al-Jawahiri and Arabic poetry in general. On the other, it can be argued that al-Jawahiri had created a special ivory tower from which to address members of the political elite and other dominant figures. His poetry is different from that of most of his classical and contemporary mentors in two aspects: firstly, his poetry is revolutionary and challenging; on many occasions, it put him in difficult situations. Secondly, he showed great respect to the public, and the disadvantaged in particular and regarded himself as being, alongside them, a victim of corruption and the lack of justice.<sup>278</sup>

Al-Jawahiri’s determination in 1929 to be a great poet is reminiscent of Auden’s confidence. In his answer to Coghill’s question about his future plans, Auden replied: “[Y]ou don’t understand at all. I mean to be a great poet.”<sup>279</sup> Another common point between them is the fact that both rebelled against some sort of smothering domestic morality. As Auden travelled to Germany to get away from the moral restrictions of family and community, so did al-Jawahiri when he moved to Baghdad. The latter, however, was more reckless in this respect: in his early career, poems such as “al-Nazgha” (The Whim), “Jarribīnī” (Try me), and “Aryāna” (Naked) were immediate reactions against his previous, firmly conservative life. They were the most explicit poems written in the 1920s in Iraq. The reason why al-Jawahiri composed them is obviously not just the expression of playfulness. He meant to rebel both against his previous life and against the exploitation of the common people in the name of religion and traditions. In the poem “Jarribīnī,” for instance, he says:

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<sup>278</sup> Ḥasan Al-‘Alawī, *Al-Jawahiri Diwān al-‘Aṣr* (Damascus: The Ministry of Culture, 1986), Introduction.

<sup>279</sup> David Horan, *Oxford: A Cultural and Literary Companion* (Oxford: Signal, 1999), 23.

*Ana ʿidd al-jumhūr fi al-‘aysh wa al-tafkīr ṭarran wa ʿidduhū fi al-dīnī*

.....

*Al-taqālīd wa al-mudajāt fi al-nās ‘adduwwon likul ḥurrin faṭīnī*<sup>280</sup>

I am against the public in living and thinking like cattle, and so I am in religion

(Reactionary) traditions and the deception (of people) are the enemies of the mentally free.<sup>281</sup> (“Jarribīn”: 11, 13)

Al-Jawahiri in these poems sought to rebel against repressive traditions. Abd al-Karīm al-Dujaylī who was a friend of al-Jawahiri observes that he highly appreciated everyone who rebel against dominant reactionary traditions and beliefs. This was one of the reasons why he admired Socrates, Russo, al-Mutanabbī and al-Ma‘arrī.<sup>282</sup>

In order to justify why al-Jawahiri was chosen to represent Arabic poetry as a poet of human rights in this study, we need to compare him to the other poets who lived in the 1930s. The most renowned poets in Iraq at that time were al-Zahāwī and al-Ruṣāfī. Al-Jawahiri was on good terms with both of them in spite of the fact that they looked at each other through eyes of mutual rivalry. Al-Zahāwī was fascinated by western civilization: he studied science, called for the liberation of women and adopted secular, even atheist, philosophical notions. His poetry is a mere reflection of his personal voice, while al-Ruṣāfī was more likely to be seen as a reformist, and for that he was admired by al-Jawahiri. Like al-Zahāwī, he also had an inclination towards secularism and attacked religion and political figures of authority, but he did so without presenting solutions. His satirical poems were popular among the public as an outlet for their stress and suffering, as well as for the sarcastic reaction his over-idealism stirred in them, according to Hādī al-‘Alawī.<sup>283</sup> In this respect, al-Jawahiri differs from both poets: he attacked corrupt religious and political figures rather than religion and politics *per se*. His main themes, al-‘Alawī observes, mirrored reality, not the illusion of telling hungry people stories of western etiquette, and his poetry was an echo of the public’s pulse. Thus, his poems always came as reactions to major events, carrying the voice of the public up to the dominant political hierarchy.<sup>284</sup>

<sup>280</sup> Mohammed Mahdi al-Jawahiri, *Diwan al-Jawahiri* (Najaf: al-Ghara Press, 1935), 86.

<sup>281</sup> In addition to al-Jawahiri’s lengthy poems, they also follow the style of repetition in classical Arabic poetry. I use ellipsis in this respect to avoid mentioning repetitious lines.

<sup>282</sup> Abd al-Karīm al-Dujaylī, *al-Jawahiri Sha‘ir al-‘Arabiya*, vol.1 (Najaf: Al-Ādāb Press, 1972), 35-36.

<sup>283</sup> Al-‘Alawī, *Al-Jawahiri: Critical Studies*, 26.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-29.

Although al-Jawahiri lived longer than Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb (1926-1964), he is still regarded as a neoclassical poet and the last of the *fuhūl al-shi'r* (the masters of poetry). Al-Sayyāb is one of the founders of modernism in Arabic poetry in Iraq in the 1950s. Together with Nazik al-Mala'ika (1923-2007), he established the free verse movement that broke the chains of the strict rules of the Khalilian metres.<sup>285</sup> Al-Jawahiri, who was a friend of al-Sayyāb and other modernist poets, has always been regarded as a reviver of the classical school. In Iraq, he is usually compared to the greatest among the classical poets, such as al-Mutanabbī (d. 965) and Abu al-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī, and is especially linked to the former who was born in Kufa, the centre of Najaf where al-Jawahiri was born.<sup>286</sup>

At this point, it is important to mention Abū al-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī and his influence on al-Jawahiri. Al-Ma'arrī is one of the most controversial names in the history of Arabic literature. The blind poet who moved between Syria, Iraq and Turkey was famous as a secular 'humanistic and pessimistic rationalist', as Paul Starkey describes him, and a vegetarian who supported the rights of animals.<sup>287</sup> He was an ascetic and had melancholic views about life, death and life after death, as expressed in his prose work *Risālat al-Ghufrān* (Epistle of Forgiveness). In this book, al-Ma'arrī describes a journey to the afterworld. In what can be considered as an equivalent to Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, al-Ma'arrī presents his belief in good manners as a substitute for religion. The book, however, is based on Quranic descriptions of heaven and hell, and good and evil deeds in a way that shows in many parts of it a complementary, rather than contradictory, moral framework. Accused for heresy, al-Ma'arrī was punished with house arrest. Since then, he was known as *rahīn al-mah̄bisayn* (the double-prisoned), in reference to both the house arrest and the prison of his blindness. Al-Jawahiri always looked up to al-Ma'arrī, together with al-Mutanabbī, who also had secular views in his early poetic career, as models for their revolutionary thoughts, attitudes and their distinctive poetic styles.<sup>288</sup>

Turning now to the poetic career of al-Jawahiri, it can be easily observed that throughout his work he forgot or perhaps avoided to attach the composition dates for his poems. Even his books of selected poems published in 1935, 1949 and 1968 do not

<sup>285</sup> Al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad, in full Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī al-Azdī (born c. 718, Oman—died c. 791, Basra, Iraq), Arab philologist who compiled the first Arabic dictionary and is credited with the formulation of the rules of Arabic prosody. For further details see Encyclopaedia Britannica, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/316139/al-Khalil-ibn-Ahmad>.

<sup>286</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Dhikrayātī*, 1: 29.

<sup>287</sup> Paul Starkey, *Modern Arabic Literature* (Washington, D. C.: Georgetown University Press, 2006), 16.

<sup>288</sup> Cyril Glassé, *The New Encyclopedia of Islam*, 3rd ed. (Lanham; Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 278-79.

abide to a chronological arrangement. Jabrā Ibrahīm Jabrā explains that al-Jawahiri insisted on the timelessness of his poetic career. In spite of the fact that he represented more than 60 years of the modern history of Iraq in his poetry, he believed that time, place and occasion should not bind his poetry with any sort of specification.<sup>289</sup> As he rendered his poetry out of time, he was also keen to make it out of place. On every occasion or event that sparked his poetic appetite, he seized the chance to present a poem that could transcend the time and place of its composition. An example of this is the poem he composed for his brother Ja‘far who was gunned with hundreds of students in the uprising of 1948. Although al-Jawahiri was overwhelmed by his grief over the loss of his younger brother, he devoted most of the poem to the glorification of martyrdom, freedom and patriotism.

Hasan al-‘Alawī points out that after the revolution of 1920, the British were keen to ensure that such an act would not happen again. Tribal shaykhs were tempted with land, money and high positions to surrender their loyalty and support. This has caused further complications in the political situation and created a huge crack in the social structure.<sup>290</sup> The only solution in this situation, as al-Jawahiri believed, was in revolution and violent action against tyrants and their corrupt entourage. In addition to this, he was aware that the Iraqi people are too impatient to accept slow change. This is evidenced in the history of Iraq, which is full of revolutions against rulers. ‘Alī al-Wardī who has another point of view, points out that the revolutionary nature of the Iraqi people originates in the conflict between the urban and the nomadic or Bedouin classes. It is a conflict of rights based on differences in social class and local culture.<sup>291</sup>

As has been argued, al-Jawahiri, who was born in a city that to the south and south-west borders with the edge of the desert, and to the north and north-east with the edge of urban territories, was the best representative of this conflict between the man of the city and the man of the desert. He is a suitable example of the Iraqi nomadic-civilised conflict:

Iraqi society is a mixture of two old social systems that contradict, rather than fulfil each other: the nomadic system, which came from the Arabian Peninsula with all its desert-principles and traditions and the urban civilised system that dates back to the ancient Mesopotamian civilisations. Thus we

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<sup>289</sup> Al-‘Alawī, *Al-Jawahiri: Critical Studies*, 45.

<sup>290</sup> Al-‘Alawī, *Al-Jawahiri Diwān al-‘Aṣr*, 81.

<sup>291</sup> ‘Alī Al-Wardī, *Dirāsa fī Ṭabī‘at al-Mujtama‘ al-‘Irāqī* (Baghdad: Dar al-Warraq Press, 2007), 11-14. Also available online at: [http://www.4shared.com/office/QN86DLit/-\\_.html](http://www.4shared.com/office/QN86DLit/-_.html).

can describe the Iraqi people as a perplexed nation that has to walk, at the same time, through two different paths.<sup>292</sup>

When he lived in Najaf, al-Jawahiri found an outlet in reading about western civilisation. After he came to Baghdad and became an Effendi, he introduced himself to his urban antagonists as a Bedouin or a desert snake, *Şill al-Falā*, as he describes himself in his poems. In his autobiography, for example, in the episode where he mentions the problem between himself and King Faisal (who came from the Arabian Peninsula) after he praised the Saudi prince, he describes himself as a civilised urban man facing the anger of a Bedouin King.<sup>293</sup> Al-Jawahiri the Bedouin appears vividly in his criticism of politicians from Baghdad and Mosul, such as Nūrī al-Sa‘īd, Yāsīn al-Hāshimī and Ḥikmat Sulaimān. He is a Bedouin among civilised antagonists and a civilised among Bedouin ones.

There is no clear evidence that al-Jawahiri knew of Auden but he was a friend of some people who might have introduced him to English poetry, such as al-Sayyāb and the Palestinian writer and translator Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā. Those two were graduates of the department of English at Baghdad University. In his autobiography, al-Jawahiri refers to his readings of Thomas Carlyle and William Wordsworth, whom he calls “the pride of the literary history of Britain and the whole world.”<sup>294</sup> A few among al-Jawahiri’s poems, such as “Aphrodite” which he wrote in the late 1920s, seem to be attempts to imitate the odes and sonnets of English romantic poets in form, as well as in content. In his essay on the poetry of al-Jawahiri, Jabrā refers to affinities between key lines in al-Jawahiri’s poem “al-Maḥraqah” (Holocaust) and others from Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.” Al-Jawahiri also wonders in his poem: “Do I dare/ Disturb the Universe?”<sup>295</sup> Jabrā, in his essay “The Poet, the Ruler and the City,” focuses on al-Jawahiri’s poems of the late 1920s and 1930s, and especially those revolving around the love for life, which the poet presents via celebrating the beauty of nature. In this respect, Jabrā says:

Although [al-Jawahiri] in some poems expresses feelings of deserting the temptations of life as his background sometimes pushes him to say so, he returns shortly to rebel against it by reacting to the sensual pleasures around him. In two of his poems “Samarrā” and “al-Qariyah al-‘Irāqiyah” [The

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<sup>292</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>293</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Dhikrayātī*, 1: 259.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid., 91-92, 113.

<sup>295</sup> Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā, “Al-Shā‘ir wa al-Ḥākim wa al-Madīna,” in *Al-Jawahiri: Critical Studies*, ed. Hādī Al-‘Alawī, 50-53.

Iraqi Village], both written in 1932, we see that these two poems, especially the first one equal what Wordsworth has written. Al-Jawahiri's celebration of nomadic and rural life that had not yet been spoiled by the corruptions of the modern world certainly carries the romantic spirit of Wordsworth and Rousseau.<sup>296</sup>

The romantic touch in the early poetry of al-Jawahiri was a reaction to what he heard and read about English romantic poets and romanticism, as is evident in his poem "al-Shā'ir ibn al-Ṭabī'a al-Shādh" (The Poet is the Perverse Son of Nature), written in 1931. His interest in romanticism was additionally fuelled by his background, namely his rural hometown with its outlook onto the desert. This made him appreciate all the more the green side of nature, as well as the values attached to this environment such as innocence, generosity, solidarity and other principles of the simple rural life. His poems on the natural beauty of Iran and northern Iraq (Kurdistan), such as "alā Karkand" (On Top of Karkand)<sup>297</sup> and "al-Rīf al-Ḍāḥik" (The Laughing Countryside), both written in the mid-1920s, show in the first place how much he was overwhelmed by the beautiful scenery he saw there.

In Iraq, there were crises no less catastrophic than the ones in Britain and Europe during the 1930s: military occupation, ignorance, oppression, poverty, class-conflict, ethnic struggles and a military coup. For al-Jawahiri, the task of discovering himself as a public poet was more difficult because above all he had to gain intellectual autonomy before embarking on a quest to find his true identity. He relied on his profound background in Arabic that he had acquired at a very early stage in his life to write poems and send them to journals under the pseudonym of Ṭarafa. All the poems he sent to *al-'Irāq* journal in 1920 were published. These poems dealt with crucial topics, such as the Iraqi revolution of 1920, on which he wrote:

*Hattā idhā mā Wilsonun / dāqat bihā minh alyadū*  
*Wa lam yajid līnan bihim / wa hal yalīn al-jalmadū*  
*Wama ra'ā dhanban siwā / ann ḥuqūqan tunshadū*  
 . . . . .  
*Māl ilā al-ḥaqq walam / yakun liḥaqqin yarshudū*<sup>298</sup>  
 And when Wilson<sup>299</sup> found himself totally helpless

<sup>296</sup> Ibid.

<sup>297</sup> Karkand is a mountain in Kurdistan, northern Iraq.

<sup>298</sup> Mohammed Mahdi al-Jawahiri, *Thawrat al-'Irāq*, "adab.com," accessed July 11, 2013, <http://www.adab.com/modules.php?name=Sh3er&doWhat=shqas&qid=64225&r=&rc=4>.

And found no flexibility (in them), and are stones flexible?

He turned to admit that it is a revolution for rights

And yielded to the truth he never accepted before. (“Thawrat al-‘Irāq”: 51-53, 57)

Here, al-Jawahiri commemorates the victory of the Iraqi revolution of 1920 against the British, which forced the latter to answer some of the demonstrators’ demands for independence from British rule and the establishment of an independent state. The way al-Jawahiri talks about defending rights and restoring them from a greater power in this poem echoes his personal experience to restore his own rights and gain his independence from his father. Ḥasan al-‘Alawī points out, that personal reflections can almost always be noticed in the poetry of al-Jawahiri, especially when the topic is Iraq.<sup>300</sup> When al-Jawahiri’s name is mentioned, the following line is always remembered: *Ana al-‘Iraq, lisānī qalbuhū wa damī / furātuhū wa kayānī minh ashṭārū* (For I am Iraq, my tongue is his heart, my blood his Euphrates and my soul is part of his).<sup>301</sup> Thus, it can be argued that al-Jawahiri failed to detach his personal feelings from his poetry. This, however, cannot always be a failure in human rights poetry, especially when poems are provoked by a poet’s personal feelings of sympathy and pain for the suffering of others.

As for the question what poetry can do or make, al-Jawahiri too was not always sure that poetry can provoke change, especially in the face of the tragedies Iraq witnessed in the 1930s. Even before the 1930s, in one of his 1920s poems called “al-Waṭan wa al-Shabāb” (Homeland and Youth), al-Jawahiri describes how in the middle of catastrophic political, social and economic crises, words are sometimes too powerless to bring about change:

*Fa-yā waṭanan tanāhabat al-razāyā / ḥashashatahu wa aqlaqat al-mihādā  
Biraghmī ann dā’ak lā ‘aqīhi / wa jurḥuk la uṭīq lahū ḍhamādā.*<sup>302</sup>

Your crises plundered what is left / (from you), O my homeland and  
troubled your peace

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<sup>299</sup> Sir Arnold Talbot Wilson was the British civil commissioner in Baghdad between 1918-1920, and the colonial administrator of Mesopotamia (Iraq) during and after the First World War.

<sup>300</sup> Ḥasan al-‘Alawī, *Al-Jawahiri Dīwān al-‘Aṣr*, 64.

<sup>301</sup> This is not a line from a poem but a single line al-Jawahiri declared in 1957. It looks, however, as part of a poem he recited in Lebanon in 1951, whose first line says *Bāqīn wa a ‘māru ul-ṭughāti qiṣārū* (you will live while tyrants’ lives are short). For further details see <http://al-nnas.com/ARTICLE/RJasani/27jawhri.htm>.

<sup>302</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Diwan al-Jawahiri*, 173.

Regretfully, your disease I cannot medicate / nor to your wound I have a  
bandage. (“al-Waṭan wa al-Shabāb”: 2-3)

Although the poet here relies on the Arabs’ passion for poetry, he admitted that in some situations (similar to those Auden experienced in the 1930s) “poetry makes nothing happen.” Yet, these words might also refer to the poet himself, not his words. While Auden drove an ambulance in the Spanish Civil War, al-Jawahiri was working as Chamberlain in the Iraqi royal court when he wrote this poem. He remained in this position for three years until he voluntarily decided to leave King Faisal’s court in 1930 in order to establish his own journal, *al-Furāt*. It was his poetry that had drawn the king’s attention to him; King Faisal had once told him that he would become “the greatest poet in Iraq,” although al-Jawahiri did not understand the King’s intentions until many years later. The chance he had given to al-Jawahiri was actually a giant leap in his life. Within just three years the young poet, who had previously been publishing his poems anonymously, became famous. He socialised with the most important figures in Iraq, including the Prime Minister Nurī al-Sa’īd and the two masters of neoclassical poetry, al-Zahāwī and al-Ruṣāfi.<sup>303</sup>

Constitutionally, Iraq since 1921 became a monarchical state designed on the model of the British monarchy whose power, even during the post-mandate period, remained politically dominant until the military coup of 1958. The economy during the 1930s, in the words of Samira Haj, was a vulnerable one “buffeted by the ups and downs of the world market,”<sup>304</sup> and especially sensitive to those of the British economy. The modern state of Iraq was marked as officially dependent on the British Empire until 1932. The Iraqi Kingdom under the British mandate (during the 1920s) was a less rigid and repressive political system than in the post-mandate period (following 1932). This, however, does not mean that the British attempts to establish a version of Western liberal democracy in Iraq succeeded, quite the opposite. The discovery of oil in Iraq in 1927 played a very important role in deciding how long the British should stay in this intractable country.<sup>305</sup> The British divided Iraq into three provinces: the province of Baghdad in the centre, Basra in the south and Mosul in the north. This strategy for setting up the British mandatory power in Iraq was based on highlighting ethnic, religious and tribal diversities, and transforming them into a background for conflict.

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<sup>303</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Dhikrayātī*, 1: 237.

<sup>304</sup> Samira Haj, *The Making of Iraq, 1900-1963: Capital, Power, and Ideology* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1997), 79.

<sup>305</sup> Dilip Hiro, *Inside the Middle East* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), 30.



The classification of Iraqi people into tribespeople and townspeople, Muslims, Christians and Jews, Sunni and Shi'a, Arabs and Kurds was exploited to keep Iraq fragmented in order to ensure dominance on its soil. Haj points out in this respect:

Furthermore, the British invented new methods to secure their dominance, [by] boosting the political and economic power of the rising shaykhly landowning class at the expense of the development of a more efficient modern economy. This course of action also proved inconsistent with "democratic" and "liberal" values that they professed to promote. [...] In brief, under this new government, political freedoms, individual rights, and other forms of "mass representation" associated with Western liberal democracy were virtually nonexistent.<sup>306</sup>

The 1930s in Iraq and the rest of the Arab World represented the peak of the Arab cultural revival that started in the mid-nineteenth century in Egypt. This *nahḍa* was born out of the growing weakness of the Ottoman Empire and a growing awareness among Arab intellectuals, such as Rifā'a al-Taḥṭawī (1801-1873), Mohammed 'Abduh (1849-1905), Qāsim Amīn (1863-1908) and Abd al-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī (1849-1902). Cairo was the capital of the Arab cultural revival and the centre of modernization, established by Mohammed 'Alī Pasha who ruled Egypt from 1805 to 1849. Baghdad remained the centre of Ottoman culture and power in the Arab world until 1919.<sup>307</sup> For a variety of reasons, without poetry, the Arab *nahḍa* would not have expanded in the Arab world, in spite of the fact that the majority of the population was illiterate. A significant number of Arab intellectuals were poets, including Ahmed Shawqī and Hāfez Ibrahīm in Egypt, Mohammed Sa'īd al-Haboubī, al-Zahāwī and al-Ruṣāfī in Iraq and others in Syria and Lebanon. This literary age marks a new chapter in Arab civilization after centuries of stagnation, especially under the rule of the Ottomans. Its aim was to revive the literary heritage of the Abbasid Age (750-1258) that ended with the Fall of Baghdad at the hands of the Mongols.

The poets and intellectuals of *nahḍa* in Iraq were divided into two main groups. On the one hand, there were the liberal intellectuals or adopters of the western model, such as al-Zahāwī, Mohammed Mahdī al-Baṣīr (d. 1974) and Fahmī al-Mudarris (d. 1922). On the other, there was a more moderate circle, one that was more aware of the importance of preserving an Arab identity. This group consisted mainly of journalists, poets and religious scholars who were inspired by the French revolution as a western

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<sup>306</sup> Samira Haj, *The Making of Iraq, 1900-1963: Capital, Power, and Ideology*, 81.

<sup>307</sup> Elizabeth Suzanne Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Thought: Cultural Critique in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 18.

model for change. At the same time, they resisted the idea of importing any aspect of western civilization and applying it blindly. They tried to strike a balance between the highly conservative majority and the liberal elite. Many of the figures in both groups were in contact with their contemporaries in Egypt, such as Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, al-Kawākibī and Mohammed ‘Abduh in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Najaf was controlled by strict Shi‘ite rules and old-fashioned tribal traditions. The appearance of Mohammed Sa‘īd al-Habbūbī (d. 1914), however, was an unprecedented event that paved the way for the emergence of al-Jawahiri. Al-Habbūbī was widely known as a religious figure and a prominent poet but for al-Jawahiri he was also an influential reformer who boldly attempted through his poetry to break the rigidity of the social and cultural life in Najaf.<sup>308</sup> Besides al-Zahāwī and al-Ruṣāfī, al-Habbūbī was the first poet whose influence can be discerned in the early life, as well as the early career of al-Jawahiri. As he explains in his autobiography:

Those who know the other sides of [al-Habbūbī’s] character are so few. For in addition to his profound knowledge he enjoyed a delightful sense of humour and, more important than this, was his ability to impress the public, especially the poor. He was the first poet and intellectual who led two public uprisings against two occupations: Turkish and British. It is great enough for him that he bravely died in the battlefield while he was fighting on the frontline against the British in Shi‘ayba.<sup>309</sup>

Al-Jawahiri describes in his memoir how, for the first time in his life, he heard the word ‘freedom’ and how he felt it as a boy.<sup>310</sup> He was eight years old when he heard his father, who was also a renowned religious figure in Najaf, talking about freedom and change with other local leaders, including al-Habbūbi. These people, in the words of al-Jawahiri in his criticism of the following generations of religious scholars, were first and foremost poets and public intellectuals and then religious scholars.<sup>311</sup>

The comparison between the al-Jawahiri and Auden in this chapter is meant to clarify why al-Jawahiri was chosen as a poet of human rights and as an equivalent of Auden. In spite of the cultural differences between the two poets, there are many common threads between them that make a comparison in terms of human rights plausible and illuminating. It is important in the context of this argument to point out that each poet approached human rights according to the circumstances, priorities and needs of their

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<sup>308</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Dhikrayātī*, 1: 74.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*, 75. Shi‘ayba is a village in Basra in southern Iraq where a battle took place between British forces and Iraqi tribes in 1914.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.*, 73-74.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

community. Both poets witnessed crises and even experienced some of them. Al-Jawahiri, for example, witnessed the revolution of 1920 and the siege of Najaf by the British forces before it. He was in Baghdad when official buildings in the city were bombed in the military coup of 1936.<sup>312</sup> The two poets share a strong rejection of Nazism but for al-Jawahiri this attitude, which was bolder and more explicit, forced him to flee to Iran in 1941. Although the two poets are different, a comparison between them in terms of human rights is reasonably acceptable, especially in their awareness and the manner by which they reacted to violations of human rights.

Another important point that connects Auden with al-Jawahiri can be found in Auden's essay on Yeats. A great poet, he says, must demonstrate three qualities: "firstly a gift of a very high order for memorable language, secondly profound understanding of the age in which he lived, and thirdly a working knowledge of and sympathetic attitude towards the most progressive thought of his time."<sup>313</sup> These three qualities are easy to find in the poetry of both Auden and al-Jawahiri (and even in the poetry of Yeats himself). Auden, however, equated these criteria to specific characteristics of Yeats, such as his admiration of the poor as long as they remain poor, his rejection of social justice and reason, and his praying for war.<sup>314</sup> These were the characteristics for which Yeats was condemned in the trial and have nothing to do with poetry, which "existed in some private garden of its own."<sup>315</sup> For Auden, who related these three criteria to a fourth one that had nothing to do with the gift of poetry found Yeats guilty of failing to be great. The fourth criterion that Auden did not mention, but by which he measured the other three, is the poet's responsibility to humanity. This quality is the end that justifies all the means poets such as Auden and al-Jawahiri adopted. Means, however, as we shall see in the next sections, may differ in the manner of understanding and approach according to cultural background, priorities and circumstances.

In terms of reacting to crises, the comparison between the two poets reflects some interesting issues. In spite of the fact that Arabic poetry "was lagging far behind the mainstream of world poetry,"<sup>316</sup> the poem "Thawrat al-'Irāq" (Iraq's revolution), for example, is as politically charged as Auden's "Spain." It reflects a similar approach to Auden's in his poem, especially in presenting the timeline of past, present and future as

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<sup>312</sup> Ibid., 327-35.

<sup>313</sup> W. H. Auden, "The Public v. the Late Mr William Butler Yeats," in *The English Auden*, ed. Edward Mendelson, 389.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid.

<sup>316</sup> Salma Khadra Jayyusi, *Modern Arabic Poetry: An Anthology* (New York ; Guildford: Columbia University Press, 1987), 1.

dependent on and supported by each other just like the rings of a chain. Already, the first line of al-Jawahiri's poem carries the same concerns about time. In "Spain," Auden writes: "Yesterday all the past," then "But to-day the struggle."<sup>317</sup> In the same vein, al-Jawahiri writes: *In kān ṭāl al-amadu / faba 'd dha al-yawm ghadu* (If it has been long-time this way in the past / Truly, tomorrow will be a better day).<sup>318</sup> Both poets use *today* as the decisive moment that will determine how tomorrow looks, while both refer to yesterday as a reason why today there should be a struggle for change. The two poems are almost the same in length and move between representations of the time-action dilemma and the poet's sense of responsibility to the public. As regards the latter issue, in Auden's situation there is more at stake: he needs to do something more than write words to prove his solidarity: "Tomorrow for the young the poets exploding like bombs."<sup>319</sup> As for al-Jawahiri, his poetic voice is sufficient to make people take this risk:

*Kam khuṭbatin naffāthatin / fihā tuḥall al 'uqadū*  
*Wa miqwalen qassar 'an / ta 'thīrih al-muhannadū*  
*Hādhā lissanī shāhidun / 'adlun matā tastash-hidū*  
*'Ahdan akīdan fa thiqqū / iñī 'alā mā a 'hadū*<sup>320</sup>

Verily, how many crises / solved by a rhetorical oration  
 And a speech that has done / what a sword failed to do  
 My Tongue is a just witness / waiting [for you] to call it [for witness].  
 A confirmed vow, be sure / I shall remain to my word true.  
 ("Thawrat al- 'Irāq": 65-67)

Al-Jawahiri in these lines does not only tell us what his poetry can do. He tells us many things about the nature of Arabic poetry, such as its hyperbolic, full of grandeur and heroism style and its high position among Arabs and the authority it enjoys over their hearts and minds. These characteristics also reflect the cultural background of Arabs such as their artistic interests, their thoughts, values and other implications that interpret the Arab mind.

<sup>317</sup> Edward Mendelson, ed., *The English Auden*, 210.

<sup>318</sup> Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri, *Diwan al-Jawahiri*, accessed July 11, 2013, <http://www.jwahri.net/>.

<sup>319</sup> Edward Mendelson, ed., *The English Auden*, 211.

<sup>320</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Thawrat al- 'Irāq*, "adab.com," accessed July 12, 2013, <http://www.adab.com/modules.php?name=Sh3er&doWhat=shqas&qid=64225>.

When he worked in the royal court al-Jawahiri was torn between his poetic conscience and the temptations of his elevated position. Abd al-Karīm al-Dujaylī points out that al-Jawahiri, on many occasions, found himself obliged to flatter the King or the government in poems that clearly did not reflect his own views.<sup>321</sup> On other occasions, he severely criticized corrupt politicians and religious figures, a matter that caused embarrassment to the King. In 1929, he attacked members of the political elite and religious bigots in his poem “al-Raj‘iyyūn” (The Reactionaries) for standing against the opening of a school for girls in Najaf. This is by all measures a poem of human rights reminiscent of Auden’s “Refugee Blues,” especially in its spirit of challenging dominant negative behaviours and the poet’s sense of responsibility to defend the rights of others: a fact on which al-Jawahiri, in spite of his awareness of the consequences it might have on him, wrote:

*Alam tara ann al-sha’b jull hoqūqihi / hiya al-yawm lil-afrād mumtalakatū*  
 .....  
*Ghadan yumna’ al-fityān min ta’līmihim / kama al-yawm ḡulman tumna’ al-*  
*fatayātū*  
 .....  
*A tujbā malayīnun li fardin wa ḥawlahū / ulūfun ‘alayhim ḡullat al-*  
*ṣadaqātū*  
 .....  
*Yadī biyad al-mustaḡafīn urīhimū / min al-zulm mā ta’yā bih al-kalimātū*  
 322

Don’t you see that most of the people’s rights / today have been seized by  
 few individuals  
 And tomorrow even boys will be deprived / from education as aggressively  
 girls are today.  
 How millions are collected for one man whereas / thousands around him fall  
 due for charity  
 My hand is in the hands of the oppressed masses / to show them oppression  
 words cannot describe. (“al-Raj‘iyyūn”: 5, 8, 24, 37)

<sup>321</sup> Abd al-Karīm al-Dujaylī, *Al-Jawahiri Shā’ir al-‘Arabiya*, vol.1 (Najaf: al-Ādāb Press 1972), 429.

<sup>322</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Diwan al-Jawahiri*, 122.

The lines here referring to depriving girls from education echo the same Audenesque manner of criticism of social egoism and misuse of individual rights as in “Epitaph on a Tyrant”: “And when he cried, the little children died in the streets.” However, there is another echo of Auden’s realization that poetry alone is not enough, but al-Jawahiri in this poem asserts that words are no less effective than action, especially poetic words that can describe what ordinary language cannot. This poem was published on the front page of *al-‘Irāq* newspaper in 1929 after some long hesitation.<sup>323</sup> The newspaper’s editor-in-chief consulted a lawyer about the legal consequences on the newspaper and the poet before he decided to publish it. According to al-Dujaylī, the poem was the beginning of a revolution al-Jawahiri led against corrupt politicians, feudal lords and bigoted religious figures. What caused their anger and fear in response to the poem was not only its poetic force but also the fact that it was written by someone who knew them very well.<sup>324</sup> This gave it public credibility. The poem, however, managed also to divide the public, especially in Najaf, into two groups: one which cursed al-Jawahiri and another which regarded him as a patron of the poor and the oppressed. A large segment of the common people criticised him for assaulting their religious leaders, but this made him more determined to continue his fight to change their attitudes.<sup>325</sup>

From that moment, al-Jawahiri realized that he could no longer remain in his position among the entourage of the King. He decided to become a journalist. Although the King tried to convince him that journalism could be a risky job, al-Jawahiri preferred the challenges involved in being a public poet to the temptations associated with a high governmental position. He said to King Ali<sup>326</sup>, when he asked him to stop writing troublemaking poetry that he would “write and write and give up a thousand jobs for the sake of poetry” as he expresses in his autobiography.<sup>327</sup>

In relation to the poems analysed in the previous chapter, it can be argued that al-Jawahiri himself is the equivalent of Auden’s Icarus. Al-Jawahiri had to face unemployment, prison and exile in return for standing up to defend rights. In addition, common social apathy, as described in Auden’s “Musée des Beaux Arts,” is difficult to trace in the poetry of al-Jawahiri, or Arabic poetry in general. The phenomenon of social apathy towards an individual, as Auden depicts it, is less common in Arab culture. Generosity, hospitality and chivalry are still key factors in the definition of

<sup>323</sup> Al-Jawāhirī, *Dhikrayātī*, 1: 212.

<sup>324</sup> Al-Dujaylī, *Al-Jawahiri Shā‘ir al-‘Arabiya*, vol.1: 462-465.

<sup>325</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Dhikrayātī*, 1: 214-216.

<sup>326</sup> Ali bin al-Hussein was the king of Hejaz (1924-1925) and the elder brother of King Faisal I of Iraq. He abdicated his kingdom and lived in Iraq after his defeat by the forces of King Abdul-Azīz Āl-Sa‘ūd.

<sup>327</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Dhikrayātī*, 1: 216.

Arab culture that conflict with social apathy. However, there are other negative factors that helped in a way or another to bring about apathy, such as ignorance and submission to reactionary traditions.

We can find many references to ignorance as a sort of a social, cultural and political apathy in al-Jawahiri's poetry. Ignorance, as he stressed in 1929, provided a suitable environment for tyranny and corruption to prevail in Iraq:

*Fī dhimmat al-shi'r mā alqā wa a'zamuhū / annī ughannī li'aṣnāmin wa  
ahjārī*

.....

*Lau fī yadī laḥabast al-ghaith 'an waṭānin / mustaslimin wa qaṭa't al-salsal  
al-jārī*

.....

*Al-kull lāhūn 'an shakwā wa mawjīdatin / bimā lahum min lubānātin wa  
aṭwārī<sup>328</sup>*

For the sake of poetry I face disasters, but the worst / is that I sing to pillars  
and stones

If I had control, I would cease the rain / and cut off the river from this  
surrendered nation

Everyone is too busy with love and life / to object or complain.

(“Thawrat al-Wijdān”: 5, 7, 10)

The lines above show one of the biggest challenges the poet was faced with: how could he become a public poet without an audience? Illiteracy, which was widespread in the 1930s especially among men in rural areas and women, was a major problem in Iraq. That is why he insisted in his early poetic career on education and the importance of providing it for females. Yet, he also found himself obliged to face the consequences of illiteracy, such as ignorance being the main reason for social and political apathy to prevail, especially apathy in regard to identifying and maintaining one's rights and demanding them.

Al-Jawahiri was a master of puns and double entendres. He knew how and where to use words with opposite meanings, antitheses, synonyms and figures of speech, especially in satire and criticism. In one of his poems from the 1930s, “‘Ibādat al-Sharr” (Worshipping Evil), he criticises social, moral and political corruption by ironically

<sup>328</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Dhikrayātī*, 1: 213.

encouraging for it. In the form of a dramatic monologue, he is giving advice on how to survive in this evil world:

*Wa lā tukhda ‘an bi-qawl al-ḍī‘āf min al-nās annak ‘aff al-yadī*

.....  
*Wa ma-iṣṭa ‘t faqṭa ‘yad al-mu‘tadā / ‘alaīh wa qabbil yad al-mu‘tadī*

.....  
*Wa nafsak fī al-naḥf‘ lā tublihā / Wa ‘aqlak fī al-khair lā tujhidī*<sup>329</sup>

Do not be deceived by the weak people / who tell you to be honest

Cut the hand of the oppressed if you can / and kiss the hand of the oppressor

And do not bother yourself with doing good / nor your mind in thinking  
about it.

(“Ibādat al-Sharr”: 2, 29, 31)

Al-Jawahiri tended to use this ironic technique to shock the reader by exposing the negative reality of a situation, rather than marginalising it through displaying its positive characteristics or encouraging for positive action. In time of crises and disappointment al-Jawahiri tended to use this style, which also reflects in its bewilderment the confusions and complexities of the period. “Ibādat al-Sharr,” for example, was written during the time of the struggle for power and the local wars among tribes in the first half of the 1930s. This poem is an example of dark comedy in the poetry of al-Jawahiri. He used to express his ideas in the manner of dark comedy or black humour when he felt helpless in the face of a hard situation, as Zāhid Mohammed Zuhdī observes in his book *Al-Jawahiri Ṣannājat al-Shi‘r al-‘Arabī* (al-Jawahiri the Mouthpiece of Arabic Poetry).<sup>330</sup> Humour here becomes one of the means to allude to suffering and oppression. Al-Jawahiri brilliantly implemented the kind of dark comedy for which al-Mutanabbi was known, especially in his criticism of tyrants, corruption, ignorance and discrimination. His most popular dark comedy poems, alongside “Ibādat al-Sharr,” are “Ṭarṭarā” (False Pride, 1945) and “Tanwīmat al-Jiyā” (A Lullaby for the Hungry, 1951). The appearance of this style in the poetry of al-Jawahiri marks the deterioration or further complication of a crisis, against which the poet felt powerless. Through this medium, he strove to reflect on the true size of the crisis at hand in his poetry. Thus, we find such poems from the late 1940s onwards, more than during the 1930s, due to the

<sup>329</sup> Al-Jawahiri, ‘*Ibādat al-Sharr*, “adab.com,” accessed July 12, 2013,

<http://www.adab.com/modules.php?name=Sh3er&doWhat=shqas&qid=66758&r=&rc=166>.

<sup>330</sup> Zāhid Mohammed Zuhdī, *Al-Jawahiri Ṣannājat al-Shi‘r al-‘Arabī* (Beirut: Dar al-Qalam, 1999), 381.



dramatic escalation of political events in Iraq, especially after the revolutions of 1941 and 1948.

In other poems, such as “al-Awbāsh” (The Riffraff, 1931), inspired by Émile Zola’s novel *Germinal*, we find al-Jawahiri presenting an image opposite to the image of common apathy and surrender.<sup>331</sup> Unlike Auden in “Musée des Beaux Arts,” al-Jawahiri gives details about a community that does not know apathy. He adopts Zola’s idea of defending the working class against negative exaggerations regarding their manners and behaviour, using this topic to criticise the corrupt elite by displaying the merits of the poor common people:

*A ta’rif man hum al-Awbāsh Zola / yurīkuhumu ka’aḥsan mā yurā’ū*  
*Yurīkuhumu unāsan lam yullaṣāq / bihim ghadrun wa lam yunkar wafā’ū*  
*Taṭīḥ boyūtuhum ḥifẓan li-baytin / yaḍumuhumū wa ṣāḥibuh al-ikhā’ū*<sup>332</sup>

If you want to know who the riffraff<sup>333</sup> are / Zola is the best to show you  
You will see people who know no treachery / but trustfulness and self-  
denial

They would sacrifice their homes / for true friends and friendship.

(“al-Awbāsh”: 39-41)

These lines show how al-Jawahiri, alongside his criticism of the common people’s surrender to oppression, highlights their good characteristics in an attempt to evoke social solidarity among them. Al-Jawahiri here is describing these French “riffraff” in a manner that an Arab reader would understand. An Arab would also come to appreciate the fact that they shared principles with those who are called riffraff, examples of which are extreme generosity and hospitality. This poem is one example from Arabic literature that attempts to create a form of understanding across cultures via the matching of principles. The poem is also an indirect satire against the upper class, especially feudalists and corrupt political figures. It is important, in this respect, to note that feudalism or landownership in Iraq is not the same as feudalism in Medieval Europe, especially during the 1930s when lands were given to certain individuals for political reasons. This issue will be discussed in greater detail in the third section of this chapter.

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<sup>331</sup> Ibid.

<sup>332</sup> Al-Jawahiri, “adab.com,” accessed July 13, 2013, <http://www.adab.com/modules.php?name=Sh3er&doWhat=shqas&qid=66734>.

<sup>333</sup> Al-Jawahiri meant to refer to the common people in Iraq whom the majority, in spite of their extreme poverty and lack of basic rights, did not change their principles, such as their attitude towards the British occupation or their traditions of generosity and hospitality.

As a public poet, al-Jawahiri used every single line of his poems to encourage action in the harsh satirical tone he was known for. The poem marks the beginning of a new style of writing, a pastiche of a western literary work. This style introduced western literature and culture to the Arab world. In other poems, like “Aphrodite” (1932), one finds that the poet uses for the first time an exotic form, similar to the English ode, rather than the strict form of classical Arabic poetry. In this love poem, in which al-Jawahiri addresses Aphrodite and describes her beauty, he combines non-Arabic images with Arabic ones. Examples on the former in the poem are *sallat al-zahr* (a basket of flowers) and *kharīr al-mā’ fi al-ghāba* (the murmuring of water in the forest), while on the latter we have *aḥṭhū wujūhahum bil-turāb* (throwing dust at their faces) and *ḥayrā tajūb al-qifār* (wandering aimlessly in the empty desert). This poem also marks a preliminary and innovative step towards breaking the chains of classical poetry and ushering in new forms with which the messages enfolded in a poem would appear clearer and directly delivered.<sup>334</sup> It also presents how simply and directly poetry can demonstrate cultural differences, as well as similarities; the poem introduces an example of the western theme of love to Arabic readers both in form and in content.

Al-Jawahiri was a rebellious and revolutionary poet. Being a member of the royal entourage did not prevent him from acting and writing recklessly. After throwing his scholarly gown and headwear, or *‘Imāmeḥ*, away, for example, he did not hesitate to declare it:

*Qāl lī ṣāhibi al-zarīf wa fi al-kaff / irti ‘āshun wa fi al-lisān inḥibāsa*  
*Ayn ghādart “‘Immatan” wa iḥtifāzan / qult: innī ṭaraḥṭuhā fi al-kināsa*<sup>335</sup>  
 My humoristic friend said to me / with a trembling hand and stammering  
 tong  
 Where did you leave your piety and your turban? / I replied: in the trash.  
 (“al-Nazgha”: 36-37)

In this poem, “al-Nazgha” (The Whim), al-Jawahiri describes nothing but his red nights in Baghdad. Such poems were extremely embarrassing for the royal court, the name of his family and his native community of Najaf. In accordance with his religious background, al-Jawahiri was aware that those actions were sins, as much as he was aware that he was free to do whatever he desired with his personal life. In this respect,

<sup>334</sup> Before al-Jawahiri, al-Zahāwī also wrote poems with which he encouraged breaking the rules of the Khalilian Metres, such as *Thawra fi al-Jahīm*. See Paul Starkey, *Modern Arabic Literature*, 51.

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

we find that his patriotism and his devotion to defending the rights of the oppressed were things with which he filled the gap between his cultural background and his personal desires. In his poem “Fī al-Sijn” (In Prison), he revealed his deep inner feelings on sin, as we shall see in section two of this chapter. Some of these poems, however, like “Badī‘a,” “Aryāna” and “Aphrodite” were written in the 1930s as al-Jawahiri states in his autobiography, to “tone down the disasters of the period.”<sup>336</sup>

At this point, we come to the conclusion that al-Jawahiri, like Auden, used his poetry to react to the major events of his time, although not exactly in the form of parables as Auden did. His poems of the 1930s record the most important events of the decade and each part of his *Dīwan* (complete works) concentrates on a decade, from the 1920s to the 1980s. The most important difference between him and Auden, however, is that he was more emotionally involved in these events. Al-Jawahiri, like Auden in Britain, was a unique phenomenon in neoclassical / modern Arabic poetry. His work can be described as old wine in new bottles: he brought Arabic poetry back into the heart of the political and intellectual scene. He protected the classical form of *qasīda* from the state of deterioration during late medieval age, by bringing back the spirit of sublimity, especially in addressing the major issues of life and society, back to neoclassical poetry.

We need to remember, however, that al-Jawahiri in the 1920s was not the same as he was in the 1930s. In terms of his personal life, he was walking autonomously on the path he had chosen as a journalist and a public poet, a path whose consequences would prove politically and financially disastrous on many occasions. As for his poetic career, he was reacting to the major events of the decade as a public poet. This, as we shall see in this chapter, was the source of many troubles not only to himself but also to his family and close friends. Again, like Auden, al-Jawahiri chose to survive through the survival of his poetry “in the guts of the living”: *Wa ‘allalt atfālī bisharr ta‘illatin / khulūd abīhim fī buṭūn al-majāmi‘* (I have left the worst heritage for my children / their father’s immortality in the guts of books).<sup>337</sup> Auden appears to have had no other choice than to struggle to become a great poet, while al-Jawahiri had many promising prospects ahead. Yet, he decided to be a great poet despite what he saw could be the possible outcome of this risky adventure, especially taking into account the fate of al-Ruṣāfī who had lived his last days off charity and died poor on a cheap rusty old bed, as al-Jawahiri describes in his memoir.<sup>338</sup>

<sup>336</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Dhikrayātī*, 1: 281.

<sup>337</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Al-Witrī*.

<sup>338</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Dhikrayātī*, 1: 269-70.

Al-Jawahiri was identified as a poet early in the 1920s but this decade is known for him as 'the search for the poet' period. Shortly after he obtained freedom and decided to become a poet, he found himself oscillating between a fancy position in the royal court and being journalist and public poet. His greatest poetic achievements took place in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. The 1930s, nonetheless, remain the decade that formed his character as what he was later called 'the great poet of Arabs' and the voice of the oppressed.

## Section one

### 3.2. “Taḥarrak al-Laḥd” (The Coffin Moved!)

#### 3.2.1. Introduction

This section is a study of al-Jawahiri’s “Taḥarrak al-Laḥd” as a poem of human rights.<sup>339</sup> It was written in 1936, the year in which the first military coup in the modern history of Iraq took place. The poem as a reaction to the military coup is a combination of al-Jawahiri’s hope for change and his fear that the worse might come. It is about tyranny and the making of tyrants. Tyranny and tyrants are among the key factors as to why human rights are being violated in Iraq and the rest of the Arab World.

The poem is written in *al-ṭawīl* (the long) metrical form, with which most of classical Arabic poetry is written. It is a monorhymic, two parts lines of 32 syllables in each line. The *ṭawīl* is an iambic octameter verse form (8 metra per line). Al-Jawahiri used to rely on *al-ṭawīl* in poems whose content needs to recall the grandeur and elegance of classical Arabic poetry, especially when the topic is highly significant. Even when the poem is an elegy, eulogy or satire the person around which the poem revolves is usually a king or any other member of the elite. Here in this poem, “Taḥarrak al-Laḥd”, we can see the spirit of al-Mutanabbī, especially in his subtle choice and use of words, sounds and images to deliver more than one message to the audience. And since al-Jawahiri was in a highly sensitive situation where he couldn’t frankly express his thoughts, he relied on this technique of playing with words. The poem at first glance is a long one; most of it is dedicated to the leaders of the coup and to encouraging them, as well as the people, to make this step fruitful for the well-being of Iraq. Yet, the poem also carries an implied message as we shall see in the following pages.

In the manner in which tyranny is approached, “Taḥarrak al-Laḥd” is the Arabic equivalent of Auden’s “Epitaph on a Tyrant.” The theme of tyrants is always approached either through absolute eulogy or absolute satire in Arabic poetry. This poem is written in the style of criticism or satire masked by eulogy. In addition to that, it predicts the future consequences of the military coup of Bakr Ṣidqī in 1936, an end that does not differ so much from the one Auden predicted for his own tyrant.

What is important to be highlighted here is the choice and arrangement of poems to be discussed. In the previous chapter, the poems of W. H. Auden were selected and

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<sup>339</sup> To see the full text of the selected poems of al-Jawahiri in translation, please go to Appendix (b) on page 201.

analysed with regard to their chronology (from 1938 to 1939). This is important because the selected poems correspond to the development of events and the poet's reaction to these events. With al-Jawahiri, it would be inadequate to select three poems that match those of Auden in terms of the date of composition, and analyse them regardless of any cultural, circumstantial and other issues related to human rights. That is why this section will be an analysis of the poem "Taḥarrak al-Laḥd" (1936) in juxtaposition to Auden's "Epitaph on a Tyrant": this issue comes first in the poetry of al-Jawahiri. The three selected poems in this chapter are also arranged in a chronological order from 1936 to 1939, with regard to topical affinities between them and Auden's other poems. Before targeting "Taḥarrak al-Laḥd," however, we need to know how al-Jawahiri sought to achieve justice and rights in the 1930s.

### 3.2.2. The Search for the Leader

In al-Jawahiri's poetic career of the thirties we notice an important theme: justice and rights for al-Jawahiri are not embodied in a place like 'the just city' but in a person. He was looking for the principles of justice, freedom, equality and other rights in the heart of a powerful man, such as a dominant political or social figure. In other words, he was looking for a leader who believed in these principles and who would use their authority to enforce them for the sake of making Iraq a better place. Thus, it can be argued that while Auden was busy in his search for the just city, al-Jawahiri was busy in his search for the just man or a hero. This hero was expected to be found among military officers and politicians, especially the nationalists.<sup>340</sup> This matter, in terms of the situation of human rights, reflects the gap between Britain and Iraq. Al-Jawahiri was looking for an individual to restore the rights of community while Auden was looking for a community in which an individual can secure his own rights. In other words, the problem of rights for Auden was a problem of individuals or small groups like refugees but for al-Jawahiri it was the problem of a nation looking for its rights.

It is important, in this respect, to note that in many parts of Iraq, especially in Najaf where al-Jawahiri came from, the social and religious framework is based upon the dominance of tribal Shaykhs and religious figures that the majority of the public follow. In Shiite doctrine, the image of the leader is a dominant one. In addition to the eleven Imams who are regarded as spiritual and political leaders, it is strongly believed that the twelfth Imam, called al-Mahdi will appear to rule and fill the earth with justice as it was

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<sup>340</sup> Peter Wien, "Waiting for the Superman: A New Generation of Arab Nationalists in 1930s Iraq," in *The Making of the Arab Intellectual*, ed. Dyala Hamzah (London: Routledge, 2013), 212.

filled with injustice before him.<sup>341</sup> Thus, the idea of principles embodied in a man or a man who applies them and the idea of searching or waiting for him was, and still is, strongly expressed religiously, culturally and even politically in Iraq.

The leader or hero al-Jawahiri had in mind is different from the Stalinist or Nietzschean superman, who is fundamentally identified in terms of power. Although power is required, what is important for al-Jawahiri is courage and more important than courage, goodness. What distinguishes this hero for al-Jawahiri, however, is the gift of leadership: the true hero for him remains the people but he believed that they need a good leader to follow. In all the poems where he praised a leader or a political figure, such as al-Ḥussain bin ‘Alī, the Sheriff of Mecca and father of both King Faisal of Iraq and King Abdulla of Jordan, he referred to the image of the leader as dependent on and inseparable from his people:

*Yā nāhiḍan bi-ubāt al-ḍaym muntafiḍan / ‘an an yamud yadan li-al-dhull  
wa al-‘āri*

*Fi dhimmat Allah wa al-tārīkh mā tarakat / ayyāmur al-ghurr min maḥsūd  
āthāri<sup>342</sup>*

O leader of oppression-deniers who rejected / begging shamefully (for their rights), and rebelled

God bless your glorious days and history / shall remember your great good deeds. (“Sajīn Qubrus”: 28-29)

According to this understanding of the type of hero al-Jawahiri had in mind, it can be argued that he was looking for a ‘super-defender of rights.’ This latter description was the one al-Jawahiri had in mind. Even the eulogies he wrote for Stalin and the Red Army during the Second World War revolve around one single idea: doing good in fighting Nazism and Hitler, whom al-Jawahiri regarded as a plague threatening the entire human race.<sup>343</sup> In his search for the hero, however, al-Jawahiri did not follow or implement any radical theories. He was guided by traits that are culturally ingrained in the Iraqi mind. Nevertheless, he identified this hero as a man of principles and courage,

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<sup>341</sup> Abdulaziz Abdulhussein Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism: The Idea of Mahdi in Twelver Shi’ism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1981), Introduction.

<sup>342</sup> Mohammed Mahdi al-Jawahiri, *Sajīn Qubrus*, “adab.com,” accessed July 12, 2013, <http://www.adab.com/modules.php?name=Sh3er&doWhat=lsq&shid=327&r=&start=120>.

<sup>343</sup> Al-‘Alawī, *Al-Jawahiri Diwān al-‘Aṣr*, 115-19.

rather than a man of steel capable of everything and yet “not another species but our very human flesh and blood.”<sup>344</sup>

The “poetic family members of al-Jawahiri,” Ḥasan al-‘Alawi states, are “the rebel, the prisoner, the starving or oppressed and the martyr.”<sup>345</sup> These four characters are the protagonists in most of his poems, as well as his heroes from the public (especially the rebel and the martyr). The starving or oppressed was the one he addressed most and the one he severely criticised, while at the same time, he hailed the martyr. The rebel was the character he passionately called and waited for but never came as he wished. These four characters were chosen by al-Jawahiri according to his criteria of human rights. The rebel and the martyr are demanders and defenders of rights while the prisoner and the poor or oppressed refer to the majority who suffer the lack of rights. They are also indicative of what the situation regarding human rights in Iraq from the 1930s onwards was like. While he criticised the starving and oppressed for their apathy, he encouraged them to rebel; this explains why al-Jawahiri always hailed and glorified the rebel and the martyr. Even when his own brother, Ja‘far, died in the uprising of 1948, al-Jawahiri devoted the larger part of the poem for the glorification of revolution and martyrdom:

*A ta ‘lam am ant lā ta ‘lamū / bi ‘ann jirāḥ al-ḍahāyā famū*  
*Famun lays kal-mudda ī qawlatan / wa lays ka ‘ākhar yastarḥimū*  
*yaṣīḥ ‘ala al-mudqi īn al-jiyā ‘ / arīqū dimā ‘akum tuḥ ‘amū*<sup>346</sup>  
Do you know, or you do not know / that martyrs’ wounds are mouths  
Mouths not like those of the liars / nor those begging for food  
Mouths crying out against the starving poor: / shed your blood to live.  
(“Akhī Ja‘far”: 1-3)

Here we notice how in the same time in which he glorifies martyrdom he criticises surrender and apathy. This style of *al-targhīb wa al-tarhīb* (carrot and stick policy) is one of the distinguished characteristics in the style of al-Jawahiri.

Early in the 1930s, al-Jawahiri had realised that the hero or saviour he was looking for could not be one of the dominant figures who ruled at the time. Later on, he

<sup>344</sup> M. William Salter, “Nietzsche’s Superman,” *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods* 12, no. 16 (1915): 422.

<sup>345</sup> Al-‘Alawi, *Al-Jawahiri Diwān al-‘Aṣr*, 334.

<sup>346</sup> Al-Jawahiri Network, accessed July 15, 2013, <http://www.jwahri.net/>. This poem *Akhī Ja‘far* (My Brother Jafar), was written upon the uprising of 1948. Al-Jawahiri recited it in public while he was on top of a ladder held for him by the people in the centre of Baghdad near Maude bridge (later, the Martyrs’ bridge), where his brother and others were killed by British forces.



surrendered to the idea that he could seek out the best among them, as we see in his temporary support for Yāsīn al-Hāshimī and his pan-Arab inclinations in 1934. This temporary support reflects the poet's hope that al-Hāshimī might have been this hero. Al-Jawahiri's search for the hero, however, never stopped until the 1960s, when he finally realised that such a man can no longer be found or made, especially when constantly tempted by land, money, power and the public's lack of awareness.

In 1935, when Yāsīn al-Hāshimī became prime minister, al-Jawahiri was already on the black list by order of King Faisal himself before his death in 1933. The reason behind that was a poem in which he praised Prince Faisal Āl-Sa'ūd of Saudi Arabia on the occasion of his visit to Baghdad in 1932.<sup>347</sup> Ḥasan al-'Alawī observes that this poem is not only a eulogy; it stands as a landmark among anti-authoritarian critiques. Al-Jawahiri seized the chance, according to al-'Alawī, to criticise the Iraqi government by praising the Hashemite family's former rival.<sup>348</sup>

*Waqa Allāh al-Ḥijāz wa sākinīh / befaḍl abīk min ghuṣaṣ al-hawānī*

.....  
*'Alā ḥīn iṣṣṭalā jīrān Najdin / bijamr lazā wa summ al-uf'uwānī*<sup>349</sup>

May God protect Hejaz<sup>350</sup> and its people / By your father it has become prosperous

While the neighbours of Najd suffer / The blaze of fire and the poison of snake. ("Faiṣal āl-Sa'ūd": 21, 23)

By the "neighbours of Najd," al-Jawahiri referred to the Kingdom of Iraq that was under the rule of the Hashemite family. The poem, compared to al-Jawahiri's earlier poems in which he praised King Faisal and his father, particularly "Sajīn Qubruṣ" (Prisoner of Cyprus), reflects his hope that this Bedouin king, as he called him in his autobiography, might be the saviour Iraq was waiting for.<sup>351</sup>

Al-Jawahiri also severely criticised al-Hāshimī in 1935. In the poem "Fi Sabīl al-Ḥukm" (For the Sake of Rule), he attacked his government and the civil war he waged against his opponents. Yet, when he died in exile only a small number of journals

<sup>347</sup> King Faisal (1906-1975) of Saudi Arabia was a prince at that time.

<sup>348</sup> Al-'Alawī, *Al-Jawahiri Diwān al-'Aṣr*, 66-67.

<sup>349</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Faiṣal āl-Sa'ūd*, "abgad.com," accessed October 15, 2014, <http://www.abgad.com/poem/40766/%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%B5%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%AF../>.

<sup>350</sup> Hejaz and Najd together form what is today the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

<sup>351</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Dhikrayātī*, 1: 259.

mentioned the news of his death, with the exception of al-Jawahiri who published both an article on the front page and a poem in his journal.<sup>352</sup> He still believed, as he wrote in his autobiography, that al-Hāshimī enjoyed all the characteristics of a great leader. He described him, after his death, as a “noble and patriotic” leader in spite of his failings. Al-Jawahiri did not conceal that he once had hopes that al-Hāshimī might have been the hero of Iraq.<sup>353</sup> The elegy comes to express the poet’s sadness for losing a good man whose bad choices led to his downfall:

*Asafan fakull ‘azīmatin ghallābatun / maghlūbatun bi-muqaddarin mahtūmi*  
 . . . . .  
*Qad kunt fadhan fi al-rijāl nubūghuhum / waqfun ‘ala al-tabjīl wa al-ta ‘zīmi*  
 . . . . .  
*Lākin tumūhun lays yurđī ahlahū / an tastamirr siyāsāt ul-tarmīmi*<sup>354</sup>  
 Alas, for every promising gift of greatness / is destined to fall by a greater  
 power  
 Among men you were rare with your intelligence / that deserved nothing but  
 high respect  
 But your ambition did not help your people / nor your slow progressing  
 policy. (“Dhikrā al-Hāshimī”: 6, 12, 17)

In this poem, al-Jawahiri clearly expressed his sadness for the death of al-Hāshimī. Addressing the Iraqi people, he wrote that one must be noble in their judgments and not try to expose only the negative characteristics of their opponents. He saw al-Hāshimī as a tragic hero whose downfall took place because he was surrounded by greater powers who kept him busy how to stay in power (making reference to Britain and its local allies).

The search for the hero in the poetry of al-Jawahiri transcended the borders of Iraq and the Arab World. As a leftist poet, he saw in Stalin, during the Second World War, the hero who fought the Nazis in order to save the world from evil.<sup>355</sup> This is the picture al-Jawahiri drew in his ‘Soviet Poems’, which he started to write after Russia joined the war. Al-‘Alawī argues that al-Jawahiri believed that the Soviet Union was fighting for

<sup>352</sup> Ibid., 320.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid., 321-22.

<sup>354</sup> Mohammed Mahdi al-Jawahiri, *Dhikrā al-Hāshimī*, “abgad.com,” accessed October 15, 2014, <http://www.abgad.com/poem/40803/%D8%B0%D9%83%D8%B1%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%B4%D9%85%D9%8A-.../>.

<sup>355</sup> Al-‘Alawī, *Al-Jawahiri Diwān al-‘Aṣr*, 118.

the wellbeing of the whole world and not just for itself.<sup>356</sup> In his poem, “Yarā‘ al-Majd” (Glory-drawing Pen, 1941), he addressed the Soviets as:

*Yā bunāt al-ḥaqq wa al-‘adl ‘alā / mal‘abin min qaiṣariyyin kharibī*

.....  
*Yā yanābī‘ rajā‘in fujjirat / li-dīmā‘in wa jiyā‘in sugḥabī*<sup>357</sup>

O constructors of rights and justice upon / Rotten Caesarean ruins

O springs of hope that sprang / for every thirsty and starving human. (“Yarā‘ al-Majd”: 11, 13)

This couplet shows two things about the words al-Jawahiri chose (justice, rights, hope). Firstly, his support for the communist camp was based on the aforementioned principles, and secondly, he was trying to convince his audience to join him in supporting the communist cause against Nazism. Many Iraqi people, especially political and social figures, supported the Nazis because they found in Hitler the hero that would save them from the British. Al-Jawahiri had a different opinion that reflected his acute awareness. A large group of politicians and military officers, such as Rashīd ‘Ālī al-Gailānī, Ṣalāḥ al-dīn al-Ṣabbāgh and Yūnis al-Sab‘āwī, supported the Nazis because they saw in their victories thus far a chance to gain independence from Britain. The Prime Minister, Nūrī al-Sa‘īd and the Sherifians declared their support for the Allies upon the outbreak of war in 1939 and wanted to go further by declaring war against Germany, but al-Gailānī, who became prime minister in 1940, opposed this decision. Al-Jawahiri maintained neutral in his journal but continued to criticise Nazi ideology alongside his daily attacks against the British. This, as al-‘Alawī states, highlights al-Jawahiri’s level of political awareness that many of his contemporary politicians lacked, in spite of his many revolutionary uncalculated attitudes.<sup>358</sup>

The hero-search for al-Jawahiri was not without negative consequences; he was criticised for his oscillation between praising people and then criticising them. In this section, which examines “Taḥarrak al-Laḥd,” al-Jawahiri presents an example of this oscillation, praising and criticising a person in the same poem. This reflects the struggle

<sup>356</sup> Ibid.

<sup>357</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Yarā‘ al-Majd*, “abgad.com,” accessed October 15, 2014, <http://www.abgad.com/poem/40867/%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%AF/>.

<sup>358</sup> Al-‘Alawī, *Al-Jawahiri Diwān al-‘Aṣr*, 239.

between his hope to have found the hero he was looking for and his fears that he might have picked the wrong one.

### 3.2.3. Stooping to Conquer

Few months before the coup of 1936, al-Jawahiri wrote his poem “Fī Sabīl al-Ḥukm” (For the Sake of Rule, 1935), in which he criticises the political situation and declares that it was the time in which Iraq needed a hero the most. Politically, the tension between the younger, more ambitious generation and the older, ruling class escalated into action. Every leading politician stirred his family and supporters from amongst the tribal shaykhs against his rivals. Al-Jawahiri mentions in his autobiography that a promise for a chair in the parliament was enough to make a shaykh move his tribe into armed conflict against another who supported a rival politician.<sup>359</sup> This was a sign of the level of corruption in the Iraqi government during the 1930s.

Economically, the law of land distribution had widened the gap between the rich and the poor.<sup>360</sup> These problems were enough for the opposition to begin undermining the government. The most influential group that combined nationalists, liberals, socialists and advocates of populist thought was the *al-Ahālī* group, established in 1931.<sup>361</sup> This nationalist group was founded by Iraqi and Arab nationalists from all ethnic and religious backgrounds, such as Ja‘far Abu al-Timman and other figures from Syria and Lebanon.<sup>362</sup> Both Bakr Ṣidqī and Ḥikmat Sulaimān<sup>363</sup> knew that they had to rely on wide public support in order to succeed in their military coup. They convinced *al-Ahālī* to support them and everyone, including al-Jawahiri himself, was already persuaded that action was needed. They believed that the situation could not be any worse than it already was. Since 1931, al-Jawahiri was waiting for such action that would bring about form, although he seems to be rather pessimistic in his poems. In the opening of “al-Awbāsh,” for example, he wrote:

*Jahilnā mā yurād binā faqlnā / nawāmīsun yudabbiruha al-khafā’ū*  
*Falammā ayqazatnā min subātin / makā’id dabbarathā al-aqwiyā’ū*

<sup>359</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Dhikrayātī*, 1: 315.

<sup>360</sup> This issue is tackled with further details in the third section of this chapter.

<sup>361</sup> Muhsin Jasim Musawi, *Arabic Poetry: trajectories of modernity and tradition* (London: Routledge, 2006), 22-23.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid.

<sup>363</sup> Ṣidqī was a nationalist general who implemented the coup of 1936 that made Ḥikmat Sulaimān a prime minister until August 1937, after the former was murdered while he was on his way to Turkey.

*Walays hunāk shakkun fī ḥayātin / tadūs al- ‘ājizīn walā mirā ’ū* <sup>364</sup>

When we could not realize what is going on / we said: hideous business of  
the unseen

Until we have been awoken from our long sleep / by the evil plans of the  
powerful

And there is absolutely no doubt that life / doubtlessly steps on the helpless  
and crushes them. (“al-Awbāsh”: 1- 3)

His attitude changed in 1936, a reflection of how the situation itself had changed. In the opening of “Taḥarrak al-Laḥd,” al-Jawahiri reacts to what he thought a turn of the tide:

*Kilū ila al-ghayb mā ya ’tī bihi al-qadarū / Wa istaqbilū yawmakum bil ’azm  
wa ibtadirū* <sup>365</sup>

Lay your burdens on the unseen / and receive your day with optimistic  
determination. (“Taḥarrak al-Laḥd”: 1)

Although in the following lines of the poem he would go back to stressing the necessity of effecting change rather than waiting passively for it to occur, the first line is subsumed with a feeling of desperation or positive uncertainty as it calls for waiting to see what the coming days would bring forth. Al-Jawahiri supported the coup from the beginning; he reopened his journal, which had been closed down, and changed its name from *al-Furāt* (Euphrates) to *al-Inqilāb* (The Coup).<sup>366</sup>

During this time, al-Jawahiri pushed for two opposing agendas: first, applying reform and enforcing justice, and second, to achieve this quickly, and if need be by force. The coup provided the first quick and necessary step: changing the government. Politically, the King and Britain were both shocked by the news of the military coup but they did not move against it since it did not seek to change the monarchical system or threaten the British interests in Iraq. What happened was exactly the opposite, as al-Jawahiri had predicted in “Taḥarrak al-Laḥd.” Al-Jawahiri initially tried to take advantage of the opportunity by calling both on Sulaimān, who became prime minister,

<sup>364</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Al-Awbāsh*, “abgad.com,” accessed October 15, 2014, <http://www.abgad.com/poem/40752/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%88%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B4../>

<sup>365</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Taḥarrak al-Laḥd*, in *Ibid.*, <http://www.abgad.com/poem/40800/%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%83-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%AF-!../>

<sup>366</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Dhikrayātī*, 1: 321-23.

and on Şidqī, the new minister of defence, to prove their good intentions and implement reforms immediately:

*Inn al-samā' allatī abdayt rawnaqahā / yawm al-Khamīs badā fī wajhihā  
kadarū*

.....  
*Faḥāsib al-qawm 'an kull al-ladhi ijtaraḥū / 'amma arāqū wama ightālū  
wama iḥtakarū*<sup>367</sup>

The sky of Thursday that looked bright / by your deed, started to trouble  
Thus you must punish them for their crimes / every blood they spilled and  
everything they stole. (“Taḥarrak al-Laḥd”: 36, 39)

The lines reflect a mixture of hope and fear in the heart of al-Jawahiri. Fear was the result of the bloody action Şidqī took against the minister of defence, Ja‘far al-‘Askarī and the royal court chief, Rustum Ḥaidar, who both enjoyed good reputation among Iraqis. Conversely, they had failed to arrest or punish anyone on the grounds of corruption, or implement any of the reforms they had promised to at the beginning of the coup. After a year, Nūrī al-Sa‘īd with the help of the British eliminated Şidqī and Sulaimān and restored the status-quo ante. Al-Jawahiri was at the heart of all these events as a former member of the royal entourage, who still had good relationships with most of the powerful political figures, and as a popular poet and journalist. This position, especially his popularity, gave him the power to address the politically dominant figures of the time fearlessly:

*Aşbaḥtu aḥdhar qawl al-nās 'an asaḥn / min an yaraw tilkum al-āmāl  
tandathirū*

*Taḥarrak al-laḥd wa inshaqqat mujaddadatan / akfān qawmin zanennā  
annahum qubirū.*<sup>368</sup>

I’m feeling sorry that hopes among people are vanishing;  
The coffin has moved and the shrouds of those whom we thought dead are  
torn. (“Taḥarrak al-Laḥd”: 50-51)

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<sup>367</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Taḥarrak al-Laḥd*, “abgad.com”.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid.

These are the last two lines in the poem, in which al-Jawahiri indirectly expresses his fears and doubts about the real intentions of the leaders of the coup. These words, however, annoyed the government of the coup and after six months they decided to close al-Jawahiri's journal and shortly after put him in jail.

This kind of engagement with politicians and political affairs was a unique phenomenon in the poetic circles in Iraq. All the Iraqi poets who can be described as defenders of rights such as al-Sayyāb (1926-1964), Muẓaffar al-Nuwāb (b. 1934) and Ahmed Maṭar (b. 1954), have been keen to keep away from political participation or building relationships with politicians. It is important, however, to point out that those poets gained fame and popularity either after their death, as al-Sayyāb, or in exile, as al-Nuwāb and Maṭar. The fact that al-Jawahiri's personal relationship with a large circle of dominant figures, did not only grant him early fame but protection as well. Members of the political elite feared the anger of the masses that loved al-Jawahiri. Yāsīn al-Hāshimī, for example, told al-Jawahiri that he will help him get a chair in the parliament instead of sending him to jail, if al-Jawahiri promised 'not to step on his boot'.<sup>369</sup> He also knew how to criticise a dominant figure like a prime minister and, later on, remain smiling at him while warmly shaking his hand.<sup>370</sup> The strategy of stooping to conquer that al-Jawahiri followed by being too close to those he attacked to get them punish him also shows that he had his own personal ambitions as well. He too, however, had to deal with this carefully in order not to fall from the eyes of his audience.

If al-Jawahiri was in a situation where he could not directly criticise a certain powerful political or religious figure for any reason, he used to follow a circuitous approach. In the following two lines from his poem "Allimūhā" (Teach Her, 1929), for example, we see al-Jawahiri criticising a religious figure:

*Aslamū amrahum ilā al-shaikh 'umyānan wa sārū yaqfūnahu ḥaiṭh sārā  
Wa imtaṭāhum ḥattā idhā nāl bughyan khala 'a al-lajm 'anhum wa al-  
'idhārā*<sup>371</sup>

They surrendered to the sheikh (religious bigot) and blindly followed him  
wherever he went

He rode them to his destination and stole the rein from them after he arrived.  
(“Allimūhā”: 25-26)

<sup>369</sup> Al-Jawāhirī, *Dhikrayātī*, 1: 317.

<sup>370</sup> Al-'Alawī, *Al-Jawahiri Diwān al-'Aṣr*, 172.

<sup>371</sup> Al-Jawahiri, 'Allimūhā, "abgad.com," accessed October 15, 2014,

<http://www.abgad.com/poem/38384/%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%85%D9%88%D9%87%D8%A7/> .

From the lines above, we understand that the sheikh, whom al-Jawahiri attacked, was a very popular one. Yet, this diplomatic strategy of attacking an anonymous figure or group in a certain time and occasion with which everyone would know who is meant protected al-Jawahiri both from legal pursuit and from the anger of the followers of those religious bigots.

The strategy of implied criticism used by al-Jawahiri in “Taḥarrak al-Laḥd” is folded in poetic figurative expressions, such as allegories, metaphors and double entendres. These poetic techniques would raise the quality of the poem if subtly and properly applied, especially when those figures of speech are incorporated in a masterly style supported by a clever choice of words and sounds. Al-Jawahiri used to rely on these techniques to avoid explicit criticisms that might put him in difficult situations. He used, for example, to get away with criticising corrupt politicians through addressing the common people, as in “Taḥarrak al-Laḥd.” The poem starts with encouraging the people, especially the youth, and praising the coup but implicitly, al-Jawahiri was alarming his audience rather than encouraging them:

*Atatkumu zumratun yaḥdū ‘azā’imahā / mā khallafat qablahā min sayi’in  
zumarū*

*Alfat ‘alā kull shibrin min masālikahā / yalūḥ mimā janā aslāfuhā atharū*

*Muhimmatun ‘aḥumat ‘an an yaqūm bihā / fardun wa an yataḥaddā amrahā  
nafarū*

*Ma in lakum ghairuhu yawmun falā tahnū / wa qad atakum bimā  
takhshawnahū nudhurū*<sup>372</sup>

There comes a group whose ambitions are motivated / by the evil deeds of  
its predecessors.

On every inch of their path / there is a sign of a crime that has been  
committed before them.

This is a task, beware, too big and serious / to be taken by one man or a  
small group,

And today is your chance, do not hesitate / after you saw what you fear  
might happen. (9-12)

<sup>372</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Taḥarrak al-Laḥd*, “abgad.com”.



The first line above, within the context of the poem, implies that the leaders of the military coup were motivated by the evil deeds of the group they replaced (the ousted government) to rise against it. However, if anyone reads this part alone, as it is extracted now, s/he will understand that al-Jawahiri intended to warn against leaving this group unobserved, rather than encouraging people to support it. The reason, as al-Jawahiri explains, is that change cannot be achieved by one person or a small group but, rather, by a public revolution in which all people, especially youth, must participate. The last line is important in this respect. If the people do not seize this opportunity and rise, this man, Sulaimān, and his group will become tyrants and al-Jawahiri's doubts against them will come true.

Al-Jawahiri, in addressing the leaders of the military coup of 1936, especially Sulaimān, was very careful not to expose his doubts and fears explicitly in the poem. Thus, if the poem is read as a whole, one will understand that al-Jawahiri praises Sulaimān and encourages him to punish the corrupt politicians of the former government. This, according to Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā, is “the only example in the poetry of al-Jawahiri, in which a poet gives such advice”:<sup>373</sup>

*Aqdim fa'anta 'alā al-iqdām munṭabi'un / wa ibṭush fa'anta 'ala al-tankīl  
muqtadirū*

.....  
*Lā tubqi dābir aqwāmin watartahumū / fa hum idhā wjadūhā furṣatan  
tha'arū*

.....  
*Fa ḥāsib il-qawm 'an kull al-ladhī ijtarahū / 'ammā arāqū wa mā ightālū  
wa mā iḥtakarū*<sup>374</sup>

Assault, for this is what you were born for / and crush, for this is what you  
can do

Do not leave from them anyone behind / they may return if there at any  
chance

Punish them for every crime they committed / what they stole, killed, and  
tortured. (30, 32, 39)

<sup>373</sup> Al-'Alawī, *Al-Jawahiri: Critical Studies*, 59.

<sup>374</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Taḥarrak al-Laḥd*, “abgad.com”.

If the first line from the above extract is quoted in isolation, one would understand something different. Within the context of the poem, it is an invitation to kill and crush those who have themselves killed and crushed others, but alone it describes the addressee as a merciless tyrant, not different from Auden's. The words *Baṭsh* (crush) and *Tankīl* (torture), which al-Jawahiri used to address Sulaimān, are usually employed to convey a negative or ironic impression. The technique of the double entendre in the poetry of al-Jawahiri was important for him in terms of avoiding direct collision with those in power. After al-Jawahiri wrote "Jarribīnī" (Try Me), for example, he was interrogated by King 'Alī, known for his strong faith and commitment to traditions, who found the poem extremely gross:

*Anā ʔidd al-jumhūr fī al-ʔaish wa al-taḥkīr ṭarran wa ʔiddahū fī al-dīni  
Kull mā fī al-ḥayāt min mutaʔ al-ʔaysh wa min ladhatin mihā yazdahīni  
Al-taqālīd wa al-mudājāt fī al-nās ʔaduwwn li-kull ḥurrin faṭīni*<sup>375</sup>

I am against the public in living aimlessly like a cattle, and against it in religion

All the joys and sweetness of life do tempt me,

(But reactionary) traditions and deception do not suit those who are free and sharp-minded. ("Jarribīnī": 11-13)

Al-Jawahiri explained to the King that he was against the public in thinking carelessly about their religion as they do in their life and not against religion per se. The line can be interpreted both ways. It was a diplomatic manoeuvre by al-Jawahiri in order to avoid unnecessary conflicts both with the public and the elite.<sup>376</sup>

There is also an auditory aspect in the lines of "Taḥarrak al-Laḥd." Al-Jawahiri repeatedly used the letters of *qalqalah* (the sound-recurring letters, similar to alliteration), such as in the letters *qāf*, *dāl*, *ṭā* and *bā*. This style is used in every line and would give different meanings when read separately, an example being the last line in the poem:

*Taḥarrak al-laḥd wa inshaqqat mujaddadatan / akfān qawmin zanannā  
annahum qubirū.*

<sup>375</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Jarribīnī*, in *ibid.*

<sup>376</sup> Al-Jawāhīrī, *Dhikrayātī*, 1: 216.

The coffin has moved and the shrouds of those whom we thought dead were torn. (“Taḥarrak al-Laḥd”: 51)

In this line, there is a repetition of *qalqalah* letters in addition to other words with repeated syllables, e.g. *mujadadatan* and *zanannā*. This musical rhythm of repetition meets with the idea of the poem that tyranny was repeating itself in this coup but with new faces. The repetition of *qāf*, *kāf* and *dāl* is similar to the sound of hammering, whereas *shīn* and *fā* indicate continuity. ‘Alī ‘Azīz Ṣāliḥ states that al-Jawahiri employed the sounds of Arabic letters and words visually and musically in order to embody their semantic aspect and create a tangible image in the reader’s mind and heart.<sup>377</sup> Further, according to Ibrāhīm al-Sāmarra’ī, al-Jawahiri was a master of poetic imagery, deriving his images from his harsh and stiff Bedouin-rural background. Snakes, scorpions, the dry hot wind, skulls and so on populate his poems. He implemented these images subtly, and restored with them the true spirit of classical Arabic poetry and Arabic language.<sup>378</sup>

#### 3.2.4. “Taḥarrak al-Laḥd” & “Spain”

Al-Jawahiri’s comparison between the past and present in “Taḥarrak al-Laḥd,” especially his insistence on the necessity to seize the chance ‘today’ is reminiscent of Auden’s words in “Spain”: “We are left alone with our day, and time is short, and / History to the defeated / May say Alas but cannot help nor pardon.”<sup>379</sup> Al-Jawahiri here highlights his belief that acting quickly today might prevent the worse tomorrow. “Taḥarrak al-Laḥd” is similar to Auden’s “Spain” in spirit: both poems react to the moment where the choice will become history and both stress the necessity to act ‘today’. The words *iqdām* (going forward), *‘azm* (determination), and other similar words referring to the present as a decisive time do not differ, in meaning and purpose from Auden’s phrase “But to-day the struggle.”<sup>380</sup> While Auden in the first six stanzas gives snapshots of human history, referring to it as ‘yesterday’, we see al-Jawahiri also using the same word *ams* (yesterday), but he refers to the near yesterday in which the British and their local allies took control of the country. In Auden’s poem we notice that

<sup>377</sup> ‘Azīz ‘Alī Ṣāliḥ, *Shi‘riyat al-Naṣṣ ‘Ind al-Jawahiri: Al-Iqā‘ wa al-Maḍmūn wa al-Lughah* (Bayrut-Lebanon: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah, 2011), 153.

<sup>378</sup> Ibrāhīm al-Sāmarra’ī, “Lughat al-Shi‘r ind al-Jawahiri,” in *Al-Jawahiri: Critical Studies*, ed. Hādī al-‘Alawī, 189-91.

<sup>379</sup> W. H. Auden, *Selected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), 57.

<sup>380</sup> Edward Mendelson, *The English Auden: Poems, Essays and Dramatic Writings, 1927-1939*, 210.

‘yesterday’, ‘to-day’ and ‘tomorrow’ are chronologically arranged while in al-Jawahiri’s poem they are intermingled. However, almost the same key images are used by both poets: the romantic death, the same combination of hope and fear in reference to outcomes of present on future and the depressive tone in the concluding lines. The romantic death, for example, is expressed in “Taḥarrak al-Laḥd” as *muddū jamājimakum jisran ilā amalin* (make from your skulls a bridge into hope). In both poems the romantic death or dying for hope is not the purpose. It is the moral choice that makes the struggle a must: the struggle, according to Samuel Hynes, “between sickness and health, and Spain is a case.”<sup>381</sup>

Both al-Jawahiri and Auden share almost a similar impression on tyranny; an affinity in the diagnosis of problem according to correct reading of human nature. It is based on the fact that tyranny from a social perspective is not spontaneously created but, instead, allowed through people’s apathy, which makes the appearance of tyrants possible. This is why in “Spain” and “Taḥarrak al-Laḥd” we notice how in those crucial moments the voices of the poets are louder, decisive and cruel. For al-Jawahiri’s readers, they are used to this cruelty of expression, especially in his criticism of corruption, but for Auden it is rare. Hynes describes “Spain” as a pitiless poem. Behind this pitilessness the need for moral choices to be made *now* stands.<sup>382</sup> The depressive tone in the end of the two poems refers to uncertainty about the future of the Spanish war and the Iraqi coup of 1936, which in both cases depends on choice of *al-yawm* or to-day.

### 3.2.5. Al-Jawahiri’s Dualism

One of the major differences between al-Jawahiri and Auden lies in their views on how to achieve justice and rights (compare how this appears in “Taḥarrak al-Laḥd” to the telling of parables in Auden). In “Epitaph on a Tyrant,” Auden implicitly points out that the problem is socio-political: a tyrant is made by the environment in which he lives and the people around him. The solution he suggested in “September 1, 1939” was a socio-moral one: “We must love one another or die.”<sup>383</sup>

Al-Jawahiri is not different from Auden in his diagnosis of the creation of tyranny, but he differs in the solutions he suggests. Hunger and ignorance were the most pressing issues al-Jawahiri faced, and yet he had to deal with the lack of dignity and liberty. Religious and political issues were involved as much as social and economic ones in all

<sup>381</sup> Samuel Hynes, *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 254.

<sup>382</sup> *Ibid.*, 254-55.

<sup>383</sup> Auden, *W. H. Auden Selected Poems*, ed. Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), 97.

these problems. The situation was complicated in Iraq because of the dominance of a foreign power over the country. Thus, he was among the few (most of them were pan-Arab nationalists and communists) who believed that a quick, comprehensive and decisive solution, such as a revolution, was what the country needed. This solution also rested on cultural implications and perspectives. The right to dignity and liberty in Arab culture comes before the right to life itself, as dignity and liberty are integral parts of the concept of honour. As becomes evident from the following lines, al-Jawahiri encouraged the people to sacrifice their lives for the sake of regaining their rights:

*La tatrūkū al-ya's yalqā fī nifūsihumū / lahū madabban wa lā ya'khudhkum  
al-khawarū*

.....  
*Muddū jamājimakum jisran ilā Amalin / tuḥāwilūn wa shuquq al-darb wa  
ikhtaşirū*<sup>384</sup>

Do not let despair step inside / yourselves or weaken your hearts  
Make a bridge out of your skulls / and take a shortcut into hope. ("Taḥarrak al-  
Laḥd": 3, 6)

Unlike Auden in the late 1930s, al-Jawahiri supported the idea of an armed revolution and encouraged it by telling his audience that it was the quickest way to gain their rights. One might say that al-Jawahiri was a violator of rights, in the sense that he called for violence, rather than calling for peace and love as Auden did. Both poets were doubtlessly acting according to their nature, cultural background and the circumstances each one of them experienced. It does not mean that the nature of Arabs is violent and aggressive: we cannot pass this kind of judgement without studying the circumstances that made al-Jawahiri call for a revolution. For him, the most important right – the right to dignity – was at stake because of a foreign military occupation that did not fully comprehend the cultural identity of its subjects, in addition to the fact that a military foreign occupation itself means humiliation and dishonour. Al-Jawahiri, as most Iraqis, was haunted by the concept of honour, which is regarded as a key human right in Arab culture. This non-negotiable right was violated by force and had to be regained by force:

*Fa inn al-ḥaqq yaqtur jānibāhu / daman şinuw al-murū'ati wa al-samāḥi*

<sup>384</sup> Al-Jawahiri, "abgad.com," accessed October 16, 2014,  
<http://www.abgad.com/poem/40800/%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%83-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%AF-!./>.

.....  
*Lanā ḥaqqun yurajjā b- iltimāsin / wa bāṭiluhum yurajjā b-al-silāḥi*<sup>385</sup>

Verily the two sides of rights are blood-dripping / as equally they are  
dripping peace and forgiveness

How our rights are regained by begging / while they have been taken from  
us by force. (“Dhikrā Wa‘d Bilfour”: 7, 48)

In these lines, in which al-Jawahiri compares rights to a sword, talks about force as a right and a means for restoring rights and defending them. Force that comes in the form of defence was demanded as a solution for two dilemmas: the first was occupation or any similar humiliating act of aggression, and the second was treason, which is identified as any sort of help given by individuals or groups to the occupiers. Under these circumstances, force or resistance starts to be perceived as a natural, legal right.

Unlike Auden who kept a distance between himself and politicians, al-Jawahiri had many acquaintances in political circles in the 1930s. Auden, on the other hand, avoided any contact with members of the political elite. This difference between the two poets clearly highlights the fact that al-Jawahiri was mainly influenced by emotionality: most of his poems are direct reactions to events and situations, such as “Taḥarrak al-Laḥd.” At the moment of reacting poetically to one of these events, he was largely unaware or careless of what the consequences would be. However, he remained keen to keep this odd relationship between himself and politicians, which he describes in his poem “al-Witrī” (1949) as follows:

*Anā ḥatfuhum alij al-biyūt ‘alaihimū / ughri al-walīd bishatmihim wa al-  
ḥājibā*

.....  
*Anā dhā amāmak māthilan mutajabbiran / aṭa’ al-tughāt bishis ‘ na ‘lī  
‘āzibā*<sup>386</sup>

For I am their death, entering their homes / to tempt the infant and the  
servant to mock them.

<sup>385</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Dhikrā Wa‘d Bilfour*, “abgad.com,” accessed October 16, 2014, <http://www.abgad.com/poem/40884/%D8%B0%D9%83%D8%B1%D9%89-%D9%88%D8%B9%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D9%84%D9%81%D9%88%D8%B1.../>.

<sup>386</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Hāshim al-Witrī*, “abgad.com,” accessed October 16, 2014, <http://www.abgad.com/poem/40920/هاشم-الوترى/>.

Here I am, in front of you standing / setting my slipper on the necks of all tyrants. (“al-Witrī”: 101, 106)

These two lines present us with two entirely different images: the poet entering their houses and at the same time attacking them. This may explain why his relationship with King Faisal deteriorated; especially after he left the royal court to become a journalist. They also provide an example of the dualism between al-Jawahiri the poet, and al-Jawahiri the man from a famous Najaf family, and al-Jawahiri the resident of Baghdad and al-Jawahiri the semi-Bedouin poet. In the lines above and any similar lines in which al-Jawahiri challenges tyranny we find him in the form of the simple Bedouin who owns nothing but his dignity and fears nothing. In his autobiography al-Jawahiri mentions that he composed this poem with the spirit of the Bedouin. His wife, while he was repeating the lines with himself, said to him “‘awāfī abu Furāt,” meaning ‘bon appétit’, in reference to the consequences he will face after this poem.<sup>387</sup> Al-Jawahiri, who spent a month in jail afterwards, recited these lines in front of the political elite while they did not expect him to attack them on the occasion of a formal celebration. He tore the poem into pieces and threw it into their faces after he finished, and left. These lines reflect the culture of the Bedouin spirit of challenging tyranny, especially that of the pre-Islamic era, which can be found in the poetry of ‘Antara al-‘Absī and ‘Amrū bin Kalthūm. Al-Jawahiri enters into the houses of politicians as a friend and yet this does not prevent him from criticizing them in their own homes. This can still be regarded, however, as a unique act of courage and boldness or just emotional hyperbolic reaction as many poets used to do. In both cases al-Jawahiri intends to remind his readers of the spirit of resistance in Arab culture, by writing something that would revive this spirit and its heroes. ‘Antarah was a black slave but also a very brave warrior, who used his tribe’s need for his sword to gain freedom. ‘Amrū bin Kalthūm who was a tribe leader, killed King ‘Amrū bin Hishām inside his palace because he tried to humiliate him.<sup>388</sup> Both stories are still very popular in the Arab world as examples of tyranny-rejection and protecting the right to dignity. For many critics and writers, such as Abd al-Karīm al-Dujaylī, al-Jawahiri was a reviver of Arab culture and classical Arabic language.<sup>389</sup> In this respect, Muhsin al-Musawi states:

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<sup>387</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Dhikrayātī*, 2: 58.

<sup>388</sup> ‘Amrū bin Hishām, one of the local kings of Arabia in pre-Islamic age.

<sup>389</sup> Al-Dujaylī, *Al-Jawahiri Sha’ir al-‘Arabiya*, vol.1, 55-57.

Al-Jawāhirī poetics derives its strength from belonging to tradition in its eloquent rhetorical manifestations of rebellion and opposition as accommodated presently for contemporary concerns [...] His poetic poignancy and richness, tinged with leftist sentiments, faith in the masses, engagements with nationalist issues, and wide knowledge, along with his known revelries despite his many exiles, situate him in the very rich nexus of modernity and tradition.<sup>390</sup>

The words of al-Musawi shed a light on the most important characteristics of the poetry of al-Jawahiri. This revolutionary spirit made of al-Jawahiri the poet of crises, even after his death. As mentioned earlier, he wrote his poems without referring to a particular time or incident. In his poem on Damascus, for example, written in 1978 for the annual festival of the Syrian Ministry of Culture, he included an elegiac line in the middle of a eulogy written for a happy occasion. This line today, especially in Syria, is very popular precisely because it transcends the boundaries of time and occasion:

*Dimashq ṣabran ‘ala al-balwā fakam ṣuhirat / sabā’ik al-dhahab al-ghālī  
famā ihtaraqā*<sup>391</sup>

O Damascus, be strong in the face of hardships / as gold being melted many times but never burns out. (“Dimashq Jabhat al-Majd”: 44)

The dominance of sentiment in the poems of al-Jawahiri does not only reflect it as part of Arab culture but also, in the context of this argument, as a main point of difference between al-Jawahiri and Auden. In a reference to the Irish revolution and to Yeats in particular, Auden has written: “Of all the modes of self-evasion open to the well-to-do, Nationalism is the easiest and the most dishonest [...] Still, it has often inspired men and women to acts of heroism and self-sacrifice.”<sup>392</sup> Auden was referring to Yeats and the Irish spirit of nationalism, which was closer to the spirit of nationalism in Iraq in terms of the country’s relationship with Britain. In the lines above, Auden does not state that he is against nationalism but, rather, that he is against the exploitation of people in the name of nationalism. In this respect, we have two different ways of approaching the concept of nationalism: Auden’s way of warning against the exploitation of nationalism, and al-Jawahiri’s who feared people’s apathy might lead to the absence of nationalism. If we read the political poetry of al-Jawahiri after his brother was killed in the uprising

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<sup>390</sup> Musawi, *Arabic Poetry: Trajectories of Modernity and Tradition*, 70-71.

<sup>391</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Dimashq Jabhat al-Majd*, “al-Jawahiri network,” accessed October 17, 2014, <http://www.jwahri.net/#top>.

<sup>392</sup> Edward Mendelson, *The English Auden*, 389.



of 1948, we will notice that it is less enthusiastic about the idea of revolution. In 1951, al-Jawahiri declared that the people he kept calling on for years to act were, in fact, sleeping. As he expressed in his poem, “Tanwīmat al-Jiyyā” (A Lullaby for the Hungry), translated by Terri De Young:

*Nāmī jiyā ‘al-sha ‘bi nāmī / ḥarasatki ālihat al-ṭa ‘āmī*  
*Nāmī fa-in lam tashba ‘ī / min yaqẓatin fa-min al-manāmī*  
 . . . . .  
*Nāmī wa-lā tatajādālī / al-qawl mā qālat Ḥadhāmī<sup>393</sup>*  
*Nāmī ‘ala al-majd al-qadīm / wa fawq kawmin min ‘izāmī<sup>394</sup>*  
 Sleep, hungry folk, sleep / may the food gods protect you,  
 Sleep, for if you do not eat your fill / awake, then surely you will in  
 dreamland.  
 Sleep, and do not dispute / words are not for the slaves  
 Sleep upon that ancient glory / resting on a pile of bones.<sup>395</sup> (“Tanwīmat al-  
 Jiyyā”: 1-2, 43-44)

This poem is one of al-Jawahiri’s masterpieces, especially since its topic makes it also a poem of human rights. In more than a hundred couplets, al-Jawahiri criticises the ruling class, corruption, oppression and the lack of rights, in addition to the apathy of the people who, in spite of their suffering and all his enthusiastic calls they failed to move into action. The central message in the poem, as the above lines show is: rights are won, not handed out.

What is interesting about Auden and al-Jawahiri as poets of human rights is the fact that both predicted the worst and stressed that the victims of the game of struggling for power are always the innocent. For Auden in “Epitaph on a Tyrant,” the victims were the children who died in the streets, while for al-Jawahiri:

*Taṣawwar al-amr ma ‘kūsan wa khudh mathalan / mim mā yajurrūnahū laū*  
*annahum nuṣīrū*  
 . . . . .

<sup>393</sup> Ḥadhām is a woman known for her wisdom. The proverb says “listen to Ḥadhām,” but al-Jawahiri is using it ironically here.  
<sup>394</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Tanwīmat al-Jiyyā*, “adab.com,” accessed July 19, 2013, <http://www.adab.com/modules.php?name=Sh3er&doWhat=shqas&qid=72470>.  
<sup>395</sup> Saadi Simawe and Daniel Weissbort, *Iraqi Poetry Today: Modern Poetry in Translation*, New series (London: King’s College, 2003), 94-99.

*Wa Allāh laqtīda Zaidun bism Zā'idatin / wa la-iṣṭalā 'Āmirun wa al-  
mubtaghā 'Umarū*<sup>396</sup>

Imagine the opposite and take an example / about what would happen if  
they regain power

By God, Zaid will be taken for the crime of Zā'da / and 'Āmir will suffer  
instead of 'Umar. ("Taḥarrak al-Laḥd": 45, 47)

Al-Jawahiri here encourages Sulaimān to enforce justice upon the corrupt figures of the former government, and then in the manner of warning he predicted what will happen in the near future. In fact he was warning from Sulaimān himself that he will be the tyrant who oppresses people if he failed to be the one to enforce justice.

"Taḥarrak al-Laḥd" shows the difference between the traditional Arab poet, who used to earn a living through praising the ruler and his entourage, and the other poet whose gift, as al-Jawahiri contested, was a heavy burden and a great responsibility.<sup>397</sup> In spite of the mistakes al-Jawahiri committed in supporting the coup of 1936, he revealed his doubts and warned that public apathy leads to the emergence of tyrants. In this section, we introduced one of the protagonists of al-Jawahiri, the rebel, who resembles the one Auden adopted in "Spain" (1937). We also introduced al-Jawahiri's concept of revolution as a human right, related to other basic rights such as the right to freedom from hunger, oppression and the right to dignity. In the next section, discussion will focus on al-Jawahiri as a prisoner in juxtaposition to Auden's Icarus.

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<sup>396</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Taḥarrak al-Laḥd*, "Adab.com," accessed July 19, 2013,  
<http://www.adab.com/modules.php?name=Sh3er&doWhat=shqas&qid=66782>.

<sup>397</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Dhikrayātī*, 1: 15-16.

## Section Two

### 3.3. “Fī al-Sijn” (In Jail)

#### 3.3.1. Introduction

“Fī al-Sijn” was written by al-Jawahiri in 1937, while in jail. It is discussed here as a comparable example to Auden’s “Musée des Beaux Arts,” although at first glance one might hardly find any affinity between the two poems. There are two reasons why this poem was chosen: the first was the study of a poem inspired by imprisonment in order to provide an analysis of prison writing as a genre that is central to the idea of the poetry of human rights. Prison is one of the pillars of suffering in the Arab World, especially individual suffering. The second reason was to examine the individual sufferer in the poetry of al-Jawahiri, in the same way as with Auden, as the locus of the clash between rights-responsibilities and individual versus community’s rights.

The metrical construction of this poem is *al-kāmil al-tām* (the perfect), which consists of 8 syllables in each half line (iambic tetrameter). This verse form is usually very strict but al-Jawahiri in this poem meant to break the rhythm of the lines, although he did not move from *al-kāmil al-tām* into another metrical verse form. It provides a more flexible space for the employment of sounds, and makes the poem suitable for *tarnīm* (chanting). The choice of this meter is perfect for reflecting the unchanging atmosphere of prison whose monotony is often broken by the clinking of chains or the sounds of pain made by prisoners. The slight change in the rhythm also provides an irregular but familiar tone, such as:

**1-[Mādhā turī][du min al-zamānī] / [wa min al-raghā][’ibi wa al-amānī]**

[mustaf’ ilun] [mutafā’ ilātun] / [mutafā’ ilun] [mutafā’ ilātun]

**2-[Awa kullamā] [shārafta min] / [āmālika al]-[ghurri al-ḥisānī]**

[mutafā’ ilun] [mustaf’ ilun] / [mustaf’ ilun] [mustaf’ ilātun]

The change, as we notice from these two lines, can hardly be recognised but by toning them, one becomes better able to notice it and like it as well, because it breaks the rigidity of *al-kāmil al-tām* metrical form. Choosing to tone a sad poem, however, might reflect how al-Jawahiri felt in prison and what can this ‘toning’ offer to help him in this difficult situation.

The previous section has presented an example of poetry as a close observer of the government's need for absolute hegemony and its attempts to legalise anti-rights procedures to achieve its goals. As for al-Jawahiri, he saw that Iraq was suffering, on the one hand from the political domination of Britain, and on the other from poor enforcement instruments and administrative formations. This situation paved the way for corruption to grow in cities at the hands of political figures, as well as in rural areas at the hands of tribal shaykhs. The collaboration between the two local powers had established a state within the state: the former allowed the latter to increase their power through the new policy of landownership in return for the latter's loyalty and support. Al-Jawahiri mentions that many local wars launched amongst tribes were echoes of wars over power amongst political figures in Baghdad, such as those between Yāsīn al-Hāshimī and Ḥikmat Sulaimān in 1935.<sup>398</sup>

Al-Jawahiri believed that legal action in this corrupt environment would not lead to political, social and economic reform. He expressed in a short poem he named "al-ʿAdl" (Justice, 1937) how big was the gap between law and justice:

*La ʿamruk inn al-ʿAdl lafẓun adāʿuhū / basīṭun wa lākin kunhuhū  
muta ʿassirū*

.....  
*Yufassiruh al-maghlūb amran munāqīdan / limā yertaʿih ghālībun wa  
yufassirū*

*Wa lammā raʿāh al-ḥākimūn qadhīfatan / tuḍa ʿḍi ʿu min ahwāʿihim wa  
tudammirū*

.....  
*Atawh bitaʿwīlātihim yufsidunahū / qawānīn bism al-ʿAdl tanhā wa  
taʿmurū*<sup>399</sup>

Justice is a simple word to utter / but very difficult to realise

The oppressed see it totally the opposite / of what oppressors understand

And when rulers saw in justice / a threat to their sick dreams

They wrapped it with laws / that in the name of justice tyrannize.

("al-ʿAdl": 1, 3-4, 6)

<sup>398</sup> Ibid., 299, 310-14.

<sup>399</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Al-ʿAdl*, "abgad.com," accessed October 29, 2014, <http://www.abgad.com/poem/40799/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%AF%D9%84./>.

The lines here show that al-Jawahiri in his definition of justice describes how corruption may turn the force of law into unjust violence. According to Nick Mansfield who describes the relationship between law and violence as problematic, violence is the perimeter of law in the sense that law must resist violence. The state of lawlessness for Kant is a state of violence: to resist this violence law must deploy counter-violence.<sup>400</sup> Al-Jawahiri, however, refers here to legitimating tyranny in the name of law enforcement; a matter which, in his opinion, requires counter-violence or resistance in the form of revolution or any similar action, as expressed in “Taḥarrak al-Laḥd” and other poems.

What al-Jawahiri suggested was alternative to the activation and protection of human rights by a law that enforces justice. It is an attempt to restore common sense to nonsense. Human rights as we see them today have been described by Joseph Slaughter as “nonsense on stilts.”<sup>401</sup> This in the first place happens because of the gap between legal enforcement and political interests.<sup>402</sup> The relationship between rights as justice and their need for law, especially law as a practical translation of justice, to maintain and protect them is essential: a fact that had been confirmed since the time of Plato as we see in the following words by Cicero:

But the most foolish notion of all is the belief that everything is just which is found in the customs or laws of nations. Would that be true, even if these laws had been enacted by tyrants? [...] For Justice is one; it binds all human society, and is based on one law, which is rights reason applied to command and prohibition.<sup>403</sup>

The words of Cicero together with al-Jawahiri’s poem stress that this issue determines the fate of human rights everywhere at any time. The lack of incorruptible justice makes human rights seen as nonsense. The role of poetry in this respect, much like the novel as Slaughter says, serves to naturalise the common sense of the legal regime by targeting what literature, from a cultural point of view, criticises as nonsense or injustice: “In contrast to the weakness of the legal apparatuses, cultural forms like the novel have

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<sup>400</sup> Nick Mansfield, “Can Literature Really Be of Any Help with the Politics of Human Rights?,” in Elizabeth Swanson Goldberg and Alexandra Schultheis Moore, *Theoretical Perspectives on Human Rights and Literature*, Routledge interdisciplinary perspectives on literature (New York: Routledge, 2012), 201.

<sup>401</sup> Joseph R. Slaughter, *Human Rights, Inc.: The World Novel, Narrative Form, and International Law*, 1st ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 24.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid.

<sup>403</sup> Cicero, *The Laws*, 1.15., in *The Human Rights Reader: Major Political Essays, Speeches, and Documents from Ancient Times to the Present*, ed. Micheline R. Ishay (New York: Routledge, 2007), 16-17.

cooperated with human rights to naturalize their common sense – to give law the Gramscian force of culture.”<sup>404</sup> Here, poetry as a literary genre is not far from Slaughter’s description about the novel. Where the novel is a landmark in western literature, so is poetry in the Arab world, although today not as much as it was in the 1930s. It is poetry that pops to mind first when Arabic literature is mentioned, as the most comprehensive and minute representative of Arabian cultural identity. This, nonetheless, confirms that there are many common cultural points in the literary output of different nations, which need to be highlighted.

### 3.3.2. Prison Writing & Human Rights

“Fī al-Sij̄n” is one of the best examples of prison writing in Arabic poetry. Its importance stems from the opportunity prison writing provides “to understand those ideas that have been nurtured by prison and to understand prison as a school for writers.”<sup>405</sup> It is also important because of the identity of the incarcerated: the majority of prisoners in Iraq in the 1930s were either illiterate, people with basic education or educated people who lacked the ability to convey their experiences to the world in verse, as al-Jawahiri did.

As a piece of Arabic prison writing, “Fī al-Sij̄n” is a reflection of individual suffering, which occurs as a result of standing in the face of tyranny and oppression. In this respect, it represents an aspect of resistance to oppression. The poem comes as the final scene in the tragedy of the military coup of 1936 to which al-Jawahiri reacted in “Taḥarrak al-Laḥd.”

Almost five months after the coup of Ṣidqī, al-Jawahiri decided to turn against Sulaimān and his government. His journal, *al-Inqilāb* (The Coup) soon became one of the most popular newspapers in Iraq because of its name, its owner and editor-in-chief, and its fiery topics that attacked the government, the British, Nazi Germany and its ambassador in Baghdad, Dr. Grobba.<sup>406</sup> Newspapers hawkers were usually tempting people to buy from them by announcing the most interesting headlines.<sup>407</sup> One of those headlines in 1937 from the *al-Inqilāb* revealed dangerous information in an article written by al-Jawahiri. He obtained from a friend, by a written letter, information regarding the role of British intelligence agents in the middle-Euphrates region in agitating conflict among tribes. Al-Jawahiri in his article accused the government and

<sup>404</sup> Slaughter, *Human Rights, Inc.*, 25.

<sup>405</sup> Ioan Davies, *Writers in Prison* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 3.

<sup>406</sup> In support for the coup, al-Jawahiri reopened his journal and changed its name into *The Coup*.

<sup>407</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Dhikrayātī*, 1: 330.

the British of pushing Iraqi tribes to fight against each other in order to keep them busy. The next morning al-Jawahiri met with the seemingly polite and calm Prime Minister, Sulaimān, who asked him about his source for the information. He told al-Jawahiri that the British embassy was very angry. Al-Jawahiri showed him the letter without letting him see the sender.<sup>408</sup> A few days later, al-Jawahiri was arrested and taken in custody.<sup>409</sup>

Prison poetry is important, in relation to human rights, as a means for recording witnesses of the violations and crimes that are committed in prisons. The prologue of the Russian poet Anna Akhmatova to her poem “Requiem” highlights the importance of poetry in the most crucial times as a voice for the hopeless. She wrote this poem during the years of her son Lev Gumilev’s imprisonment. He was incarcerated because he was the son of two poets: his father was Nikolai Gumilev who had been executed in 1921.<sup>410</sup> In the prologue she wrote the following words:

In the fearful years of the Yezhov terror I spent seventeen months in prison queues in Leningrad. One day somebody 'identified' me. Beside me, in the queue, there was a woman with blue lips. She had, of course, never heard of me; but she suddenly came out of that trance so common to us all and whispered in my ear (everybody spoke in whispers there): "Can you describe this?" And I said: "Yes, I can." And then something like the shadow of a smile crossed what had once been her face.  
1 April, 1957, Leningrad<sup>411</sup>

For her description of the Russian prisoners’ great insistence on learning the poems of Akhmatova by heart while she was in prison with them, Amanda Haight comments:

In a time when a poem on a scrap of paper could mean a death sentence, to continue to write, to commit one’s work to faithful friends who were prepared to learn poems by heart and thus preserve them, was only possible if one was convinced of the absolute importance and necessity of poetry.<sup>412</sup>

This was, and still is, the situation with many prominent poets living beyond English-speaking countries, especially in the Arab world. Their poetic careers, which Carolyn Forché calls “poetry of witness,” however, deserve credit for exploring the suffering of

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<sup>408</sup> Ibid.

<sup>409</sup> In his autobiography, Al-Jawahiri does not mention the titles of his journal articles, nor to my knowledge do any of the books on al-Jawahiri. I tried to have a friend to look for the journal in the National Library in Baghdad and get the title for me, but it seems that large part of the archives were lost or burnt in 2003.

<sup>410</sup> Goldberg and Moore, *Theoretical Perspectives on Human Rights and Literature*, 135-36.

<sup>411</sup> Anna Andreevna Akhmatova, *Requiem* (Durham: Black Cygnet, 2002).

<sup>412</sup> Amanda Haight, *Anna Akhmatova: A Poetic Pilgrimage* (New York; London: Oxford University Press, 1976), 224.

individuals and communities in the most hideous secret places, such as the dungeons and interrogation rooms of authoritarian regimes.<sup>413</sup>

According to Ioan Davies, it would be “impossible to understand Occidental thought without recognizing the central significance of prison and banishment in its theoretical and literary composition.”<sup>414</sup> As for Arabic literature, prison writing is identified today as one of the main literary genres due to the huge amount of prison writing texts that can be traced back to the pre-Islamic era.<sup>415</sup> Although this genre has not been studied adequately in the Arab world until the last decade of the twentieth century, it remains widely recognised, especially in Iraq. There are also many other Arab prisoner-poets, such as the Syrian Salīm ‘Anjūrī (1856-1933), the Lebanese Fāris al-Khūrī (1873-1962), the Egyptian ‘Abbās M. al-‘Aqqād (1889-1964) and other contemporaries of al-Jawahiri that deserve attention.

Since prisons were first built in the Arab world, poets were on top of the list of inmates. One of the earliest and most popular stories concerns the 7<sup>th</sup> century just Caliph ‘Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb and the poet al-Ḥuṭay’a. The latter was put in prison for his satirical poetry but was released shortly after promising never to satirise anyone any more.<sup>416</sup> Other famous poets were incarcerated for religious purposes, such as al-Mutanabbī who was put in prison for claiming prophethood as his title ‘the prophethood claimer’ shows.<sup>417</sup> The main reason, for which poets were incarcerated, however, remains a political one. During the times of the Umayyad Caliphate (661-750) and the Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258) tens of poets were incarcerated for expressing their sympathies and support to the Hashemite family’s right to rule, including al-Farazdaq (c. 641- c.728-730) and ‘Alī bin al-Jahm (803-863).<sup>418</sup>

The book of the Egyptian writer ‘Abbās Maḥmūd al-Aqqād (1889-1964), *‘Ālam al-Sudūd wa al-Quyūd* (The World of Walls and Chains), is marked as one of the earliest books of the prison writing in modern Arabic literature. Although it was meant to

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<sup>413</sup> Goldberg and Moore, *Theoretical Perspectives on Human Rights and Literature*, 138.

<sup>414</sup> Davies, *Writers in Prison*, 3.

<sup>415</sup> Sālīm al-Ma‘ūsh, *Shi‘r al-Sujūn fī al-Adab al-Ḥadīth wa al-Mu‘āṣir* (Beirut Dar al-Nahdha al-Arabiya, 2003), Introduction.

<sup>416</sup> ‘Inād Gh Ismail, “The Arabic Qasida: Its Origin, Characteristics, and Development to the End of the Umayyad Period” (PhD diss., University of Durham, 1978), 347.

<sup>417</sup> James L. Kugel, *Poetry and Prophecy: The Beginnings of a Literary Tradition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 238.

<sup>418</sup> The Hashemite family is the family of Prophet Mohammed whose last Caliph was al-Ḥasan bin ‘Ali, the grandson of Prophet Mohammed who willingly decided to step down in order to prevent civil war between Muslims (his followers against the supporters of Mu‘āwiyah who succeeded him). He was poisoned later and died, while his younger brother Imam Ḥussain was killed by Yazīd, Mu‘āwiyah’s son who succeeded his father. As this stepping down ended the democratic system of elections in Islam, called *Shūrā*, it has created deep political and religious divisions, whose consequences are still strongly present today in the Muslim World.



narrate the story of al-Aqqād's nine-month experience in prison between 1930 and 1931, the book captures minute details of the dark world of prison and the suffering of prisoners, both in prose and in poetry.

In modern Arabic literature, prison has become the inevitable destiny for all resistant poets, and any attempt to avoid it without giving up one's principles usually led to exile or assassination. Many prominent Iraqi poets suffered one or more of those consequences, such as Ahmed al-Ṣāfi al-Najafī, al-Jawahiri, al-Sayyāb, Muẓaffar al-Nuwāb and Ahmed Maṭar. This is a reflection of the fact that poets are seen by authoritarian regimes as a serious threat, when they fail to win them over to their side or at least buy their silence. Poets, as witnesses to crimes against humanity, differ from all other types of witnesses, including legal witnesses and media reporters. Although the testimonies poets give are informal, they are, in terms of means of communication, much easier to spread among the public and much more influential upon them. Crucially, it is impossible to wipe out those 'poetic' testimonies, especially from the memories of the public; this is also why authoritarian regimes in the Arab world have been keen to recruit loyal poets. There have been, in this respect, many prominent pro-authoritarian regime poets in Iraq, such as 'Abd al-Wahāb al-Bayātī and 'Abd al-Razzāq 'Abd al-Wāḥid. Prison poetry, however, is a reflection of the political regime's level of authoritarianism measured by the reaction of poets, their awareness, and the importance of their words in recoding and documenting the world of prison.<sup>419</sup>

It is a fact that the majority of Iraqi poets who explicitly opposed tyranny or even implicitly referred to freedom and reform were tortured, banished and imprisoned, as al-Ma'ūsh indicates.<sup>420</sup> Before al-Jawahiri, al-Zahāwī, for example, was jailed because of his criticism of oppression under Ottoman rule and his calls for reform.<sup>421</sup> Ahmed al-Ṣāfi al-Najafī (1898-1977) wrote a book of poems in prison and named it *Ḥaṣād al-Sijn* (The Harvest of Prison), in which he continued to attack the British occupation of Iraq and other Arab countries.<sup>422</sup> The book, which narrates the story of his experience in prison in 1934, was published in 1949. Al-Najafī was arrested by the British forces in Iraq but they decided to incarcerate him in exile; he was taken to a prison in Beirut to

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<sup>419</sup> Goldberg and Moore, *Theoretical Perspectives on Human Rights and Literature*, 135.

<sup>420</sup> al-Ma'ūsh, *Shi'r al-Sujūn fī al-Adab al-Ḥadīth wa al-Mu'āṣir*, 60-61.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid., 108.

spend 40 days in jail and more than 45 years away from Iraq. He did not return until 1977, where he died a few months later.<sup>423</sup>

Although al-Jawahiri in the 1930s suffered many crises in return to his pro-human rights attitude, he was luckier than many of his successors, such as Muẓaffar al-Nuwāb and Ahmed Maṭar. These poets faced the tyranny of the post-monarchy republican regimes that made al-Jawahiri himself regret almost everything he had said and done against the kings and the governments of the monarchy.<sup>424</sup> The monarchy in Iraq was ended by the revolution of 1958 that brought military officers, starting with Abd al-Karīm Qāsim, then Abd al-Salām ‘Ārif, Ahmed Ḥassan al-Bakr and finally Saddam Hussein. Since that time, Iraq has turned into an authoritarian police state and al-Jawahiri found himself obliged to leave Iraq many times. He spent seven years in Prague, returned in 1968 and then fled to Syria in 1980 to spend the rest of his life there as a political refugee.

This section presents al-Jawahiri in one of the most difficult situations in which he was, and shows how he captured the dark and gloomy world of prison in his words, as well as how he reacted to this situation and endured it.

### 3.3.3. The Poet as Icarus

Whilst the image of Christ had been used by Auden in “Musée des Beaux Arts” to reinforce the theme of individual suffering, al-Jawahiri and other Iraqi poets, such as al-Sayyāb, used it to refer to the poet himself and his suffering in the midst of a careless community. As he was suffering from tuberculosis in his exile in Kuwait in 1952, al-Sayyāb writes:

*Min laylik al-ṣaiḥiyyi ṭallan fīhi ‘iṭruk yā ‘Irāq*  
*Bayn al-qura al-mutahaiyyibāt khuṭāya w-al-mudun al-gharībah*  
*ghannaytu turbatak al-ḥabībah*  
*Wa ḥamaltuhā fa’ana al-Masīḥ yajurr fī al-manfā ṣalībah.*<sup>425</sup>  
The summer night’s dew carries your perfume, O Iraq!  
In strange villages and cities that do not recognise my footsteps

<sup>423</sup> Ahmed al-Safi al-Najafi, *Ahmed al-Safi al-Najafi: Shā‘ir al-Ghurba wa al-Alam* (Beirut Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 1993), 1-3.

<sup>424</sup> Mohammed Mahdi Al-Jawahiri, *Dhikrayātī*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (Damascus: Dār al-Rafidayn, 1988), Introduction.

<sup>425</sup> Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb, *Gharīb ‘Ala al-Khalīj*, “adab.com,” accessed October 31, 2014, <http://www.adab.com/modules.php?name=Sh3er&doWhat=shqas&qid=68075&r=&rc=71>.

I sang to your lovely soil, which I have carry with me

For I am Christ, dragging his heavy cross in exile. (“Gharīb ‘Ala al-Khalīj”: 57-60)

While al-Sayyāb describes his patriotism, for which he was exiled, as a cross that he carried with him, in his poem “Abū al-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arry” (1944) al-Jawahiri went further in using the image of Christ to refer to poets and intellectuals who died for the freedom of thought:

*Li-thawrat al-fikr tārīkhun yuḥaddithunā / Bi-ann alfa Masīhin dūnahā  
ṣulibā*<sup>426</sup>

The history of the revolution of free thought tells us / that a thousand Christ were crucified for its sake. (“al-Ma‘arry”: 25)

This familiarity with the image of Christ in Arabic poetry, in parallel with the English, demonstrates how cultural affinities play a role in bringing diverse cultures closer to each other. Poetry here works as the key to activating and highlighting these similarities. Reinforcing those affinities in understanding and interpreting human rights across cultures may have the capacity to bring the theory of the universality of human rights closer to actual practice. Here, for example, both poets (Auden and al-Jawahiri) used the image of the crucifixion of Christ to present the idea of an individual suffering alone for those around him, while everyone else around him or her is careless. This unites the audiences’ understanding of individual suffering and apathy across cultures: a matter that would potentially make the legal dimension of human rights more effective eliminating to a degree some of the cultural misunderstandings.

Going back to 1937, the charge for which al-Jawahiri was taken to jail was not political. The government was aware of his popularity; by this time al-Jawahiri had become very popular outside Iraq, as well as enjoying widespread acceptance in Iraq.<sup>427</sup> Thus, in order not to stir public opinion against them, the government and the British, as al-Jawahiri says in his autobiography, used the Jewish crisis of *Kāshīr* and *Ṭārīf* to put him in jail. The Jews in Iraq used to refer to the meat of animals killed according to Jewish rules as *Kāshīr* (kosher), in juxtaposition to non-Jewish meat called *Ṭārīf*, such as the halal meat of Muslims. The prices of *Kāshīr* were decided by the Chief Rabbi,

<sup>426</sup> Mohammed Mahdi al-Jawahiri, *Abū al-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arry*, “adab.com,” accessed October 31, 2014, <http://www.adab.com/modules.php?name=Sh3er&doWhat=shqas&qid=66859&r=&rc=214>.

<sup>427</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Dhikrayātī*, 1: 409-12.

Sāsōn Khaḍūrī, who decided to raise them. Al-Jawahiri, wrote an article in his journal in which he defended the cause of the Jews who demonstrated against the Rabbi and threatened to buy *Ṭārīf* instead. Although al-Jawahiri avoided any personal criticism of the Rabbi and merely showed his support for the rights of the non-affluent Jews, he was accused of stirring sectarian conflict and disturbing national peace. The evidence for this accusation was based on the calls of the hawkers in the streets that were announcing the headline of his article.<sup>428</sup> Ḥasan al-‘Alawī argues that al-Jawahiri adopted the Jewish crisis of *Kāshīr* and *Ṭārīf* in his journal in support of the Jewish poor who could not afford to buy the newly expensive *Kāshīr*. He asserts that the chief rabbi in Iraq, Sāsōn Khaḍūrī, was instigated by the minister of interior, Ṣāliḥ Jabr, who encouraged him to take legal action against al-Jawahiri.<sup>429</sup>

Turning to the connection between al-Jawahiri and Icarus, the point that al-Jawahiri was in fact a political prisoner needs to be stressed. In his poem, he indicates that the crime for which he was put in jail was his rejection of the temptations offered to him by the government in order to buy his silence. The poem provides a detailed description of the poet’s inner feelings: the metrical form is short and the last word in every line has two long vowels /ā/ and /ī/. This makes the lines of his poem open-ended in tone, as well as in giving the impression of uncertainty about the future, especially for how long he would have to stay in that dark place. The shortness of the lines also refers to his impatience and his desperate desire to get out. The poem starts with the poet blaming himself in a regretful and sorrowful tone:

*Mādhā turīd min al-zamānī / wa min al-raghā’ib wa al-amānī*  
*Awa-kullamā shāraft min / āmālik al-ghurr al-ḥisānī*  
*Wa ra’atk altāf al-’ināyati / b-al- rafāh wa b-al- amānī*  
*Ughrimt b-al- āhāt / ighrām al-ḥanīfati b-al- adhānī<sup>430</sup>*  
 What further wishes and desires / do you seek from life  
 Have you been offered / to see all your dreams come true  
 And the mighty hands were / willing to satisfy you  
 But you love to suffer / like the pious’ love for *adhān*<sup>431</sup> (“Fī al-Sijj”: 1-4)

<sup>428</sup> Murād al-‘Imāri, “When al-Jawahiri was in Jail,” in “al-Jawahiri network,” accessed October 31, 2014, <http://www.jwahiri.net/#top>.

<sup>429</sup> Al-‘Alawī, *Al-Jawahiri Diwān al-‘Aṣr*, 266.

<sup>430</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Fī al-Sijj*, “adab.com,” accessed October 31, 2014, <http://www.adab.com/modules.php?name=Sh3er&doWhat=shqas&qid=66784&r=&rc=192>.

<sup>431</sup> The Muslim call for prayers.

The tone here, especially the succession of consonants and vowels, is similar to the opening lines of Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts." The opening lines in both poems are intended to leave the impression of the slow passage of time when suffering is involved. The words "wrong" and "along" in Auden's poem also have /n/ preceded by the vowel /ɒ/, as in *Amān*, *Ḥisān* and so on in al-Jawahiri's poem. The last long vowel /ī/, pronounced at the end of the last words, is not a letter but the sound of one of the case markers, called *Kasrah* in Arabic and usually pronounced as a short /i/. It is left to linger in the poem in order to give the impression of ambiguity and growing impatience with the slow passage of time inside a prison cell. This similarity is not a coincidence; in both poems the tone reflects the same feelings of sorrow and the same uncertainty and fear for future events.

This depressing tone, however, does not reflect the true fighting spirit of al-Jawahiri, unless something that he could not endure had befallen him. While he was in prison, al-Jawahiri received news of the sudden death of his nine-year-old daughter, Ramūneh. In his autobiography, he accuses the Nazi embassy in Baghdad of killing her in revenge for his daily attacks on Nazism in his journal. He also states that a few years later his doubts were confirmed, but he does not give any more details.<sup>432</sup> The death of his daughter, who was very close to his heart, made him quite vulnerable. Al-Jawahiri was tried twice; in the first trial, he yelled against the court and the judge when he sentenced him to one month in prison. Following the death of his daughter, he cried before the judge during the final trial and apologised for insulting the court, but the judge decided to sentence him to another month for this offence.<sup>433</sup>

Sālim al-Ma'ūsh points out that the majority of the poets who have been tortured or imprisoned for adopting anti-authoritarian principles usually, under the unbearable pressures of isolation, humiliation and torture, surrender in the end. The reason for this emotional schism is the frustration that stems from deep oppression, repression and other mental confusions that bring about negative feelings, such as doubts of being betrayed by a close friend, neighbour or relative. Such feelings are reactions to one idea: suffering alone in a community that does not care about him/her, or turn away from him/her in hard times to avoid the same fate.<sup>434</sup>

There is, however, another reason for this negative reaction, related to the poet's obsession with "abstract idealism" while he is fighting for his cause. He/she strongly

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<sup>432</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Dhikrayātī*, 1: 333.

<sup>433</sup> *Ibid.*, 336-38.

<sup>434</sup> Al-Ma'ūsh, *Shi'r al-Sujūn fī al-Adab al-Ḥadīth wa al-Mu'āshir*, 146-147.

believes that an idea *must be* because it *should be*. Many Arabic literary works revolve around this theme such as the novel *Sharq al-Mutawassiṭ* (East of the Mediterranean, 1975) by Abd al-Raḥmān Munīf. The novel is based on a real story of an Iraqi young political activist, Rajab Ismail, who was arrested and tortured in prison until finally he betrayed his colleagues and signed a ‘recantation’ in return for his freedom. Outside the prison he found out that he lost his beloved, family, neighbours and friends who deserted him due to his betrayal. This story is also captured by al-Nuwāb in his poem *al-Barā’a* (The Recantation). In Munīf’s novel, however, it concentrates on prison as a stage in the protagonist’s life in which he realises the world as it is through a series of shocking painful disillusionings. Although al-Jawahiri did not belong to this category of day-dreaming poets, his hopes of a rapid and comprehensive revolutionary change certainly sound very idealistic. His hopes, nonetheless, are relatively justified when we compare his time, in which the state was relatively fragile and dependent upon the super power of Britain, to the time of Ahmed Maṭar and al-Nuwāb. These two poets (together with al-Sayyāb), whose resistance to the tyranny of the military state in the 1960s and 1970s was by all means extraordinary. While this makes their cause theoretically a ‘lost cause’, it does not make it so practically when resistance itself becomes the cause. In his poem “Ghaḍbah” (Anger, 1949), al-Jawahiri asserts that resistance by words has become a fatal challenge:

*‘Arat al-khuṭūb wa kayf lā ta ‘rū / fa-ṣabart ant wa dir ‘uk al-ṣabru*

.....

*Al-naf‘ rakhwun last ṣāhibahu / wa akhūk hādha al-shāmikh al-ḍurrū*

*Ajrat wa al-dunyā famā ṣaṭarat / illā wa ‘indak fawqahā ṣaṭrū<sup>435</sup>*

Calamities came all together upon you at once / but your armour is patience,  
Benefit (via corruption) is not your style / and does not fit with your  
principles,

For every line life writes to challenge you / you have a line upon it.

(“Ghaḍbah”: 1,10)

There are many examples of poets who did not surrender in spite of all the suffering and pain they bore, and al-Jawahiri is one of them. Each poet, however, has their special method of resistance. After the first four lines of the poem “Fī al-Sijn,” al-Jawahiri tries

<sup>435</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Ghaḍbah*, “adab.com,” accessed October 31, 2014,  
<http://www.adab.com/modules.php?name=Sh3er&doWhat=shqas&qid=66891&r=&rc=246>.

to look at the bright side of his incarceration, or ironically pretends to do so in order by pretending that his situation in prison is better than outside:

*In kunta taḥsud man / yaḥūṭ al-bāb miḥu ḥārisānī*  
*Fa ladayk ḥurrāsun / ka'nnak minḥumu fī ma'ma'ānī*  
*Wa muwakkalūn b-mā tuṣarrif / fī al-daqa'iq wa al-thawānī*  
*Uskint dāran mā lahā / fī al-ṣīt wa al-'aḥamūt thānī*  
*Mā in yubāḥ dukhūluhā / illā l-dhī khaṭarin wa shānī*<sup>436</sup>

If you envy those who have guards at their doors  
You, amongst your guards, look like a king among his entourage  
Spending their time watching you while you waste your time  
You have been placed in a house whose unprecedented glory and fame  
Makes no one access it, except those too important or too dangerous.  
(“Fī al-Sijn”: 5-9)

Al-Jawahiri here does not only comfort himself but subverts the situation by referring to life outside as the real prison. We also notice the importance of prison writing as evidentiary rather than representational, as prisoner-poets provide us with documents on the hidden world of prisons and dungeons, as well as on how the outside world is seen by those inside. These reflections reveal important psychological, political and cultural implications coded by the figurative language of poetry. Al-Jawahiri, for example, uses the image of the outer world as a bigger prison to let us know about the suffering of common people, and their apathy and complete surrender to oppression. He also uses this image to acclimatise himself to the new situation, which was expected as one of the outcomes of the risks he took:

*Tashakkā al-ṭumūḥ min muḥīṭin ajā'ahū / f-aṭ'amahu ghurr al-qawāfī*  
*dawāmiyā*

.....  
*La'amrī innī sawf akhtaṭṭ khuṭṭatan / tuḍā'if dā'ī aw takūn dawā'iyā*<sup>437</sup>

A poet's ambition saw a frustrating environment / and decided to enlighten  
it with the best of his verse

<sup>436</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Fī al-Sijn*.

<sup>437</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Al-Ma'āsī fī Ḥayāt al-Shu'arā'*, “adab.com,” accessed October 31, 2014,  
<http://www.adab.com/modules.php?name=Sh3er&doWhat=shqas&qid=66780&r=&rc=188>.

Indeed, I will take forward a risky step / that will either hasten my doom or  
make a solution. (“al-Ma’āsī fī Ḥayāt al-Shu‘arā”: 18, 23)

Al-Jawahiri wrote these lines one month before the military coup of 1936. When he saw that the coup did not fulfil any of the peoples’ hopes of eliminating corruption and applying reform, he took this risky step forward. In his poetic assaults, as Ḥasan al-‘Alawī observes, al-Jawahiri targeted the four pillars of authoritarianism in Iraq: members of the political elite, corruption, land policy and the British occupation.<sup>438</sup> In the poem discussed previously, “Taḥarrak al-Laḥd,” he attacked corruption and corrupt political and social figures. In April 1937, Sulaimān and Ṣidqī decided to punish him. Although al-Jawahiri wrote only one poem after “Taḥarrak al-Laḥd,” in which he laments wasted youth in Iraq and the complete negligence of their abilities and skills, he kept attacking the government in his journal. Ḥasan al-‘Alawī states that this poem, “Shabābun Ḍā’i” (Wasted Youth) was the key that opened the cell-door for al-Jawahiri.<sup>439</sup> Ṭāha al-Hāshimī in his autobiography gives another reason for al-Jawahiri’s incarceration. He says that al-Jawahiri was taken to prison after he published the diary of Salmān al-Ṣafwānī, in which he attacks the government of the coup by revealing secret information about them.<sup>440</sup> Al-Ṣafwānī was in prison when al-Jawahiri published his diary, but the information revealed in al-Jawahiri’s journal made Ṣidqī very angry and determined to punish him.<sup>441</sup>

In the midst of these events, al-Jawahiri continued to attack the aforementioned four pillars of authority, in addition to his almost daily articles in which he warned against the Nazi project in Iraq. Although the news of his incarceration stirred public rage, Sulaimān insisted on taking revenge on al-Jawahiri, declaring in parliament that “he deserves it because he is a troublemaker.”<sup>442</sup> Al-Jawahiri refers to this justification in his poem “Fī al-Sijn”:

*Yā ‘ābithan bi-salāmat / al-waṭan al-‘azīz wa b-al-amānī*  
*Wa mufarriqan zumar al- / Yahūd ṭarā’iqan kullān li-shānī*

<sup>438</sup> Al-‘Alawī, *Al-Jawahiri Diwān al-‘Aṣr*, 87-89.

<sup>439</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>440</sup> Salmān al-Ṣafwānī (1899-1988) was a prominent Iraqi journalist, intellectual and a leading communist. He was imprisoned many times. His journal, *al-Yaqzah*, was one of the most popular magazines in Iraq. In 1936, he was accused by the government of the coup of participating in the revolution of the tribes of the mid-Euphrates region and remained in prison for four months. In 1958, he was appointed minister while he was in exile.

<sup>441</sup> Ṭāha al-Hāshimī, *Mudhakarāt Ṭāha al-Hāshimī* (Baghdad: Dar al-Talee’a 1978), 201.

<sup>442</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Dhikrayātī*, 1: 336.



*Mā ant wa al-Kāshīr wa / al-Ṭārīf min baqarin wa dānī<sup>443</sup>*

O troublemaker and disturber of your dear country's peace

And riot-stirrer amongst the Jews and breaker of their unity

What business do you have with the meat of cows and sheep! (25-27)

Al-Jawahiri here, ironically describes the unreasonable claim for his punishment as a serious crime for which he deserves to be in prison. This irony is sharpened by revealing the real reason along with it: one's freedom of expression is granted when he uses it to praise the authority that has given him the chance to enjoy it:

*Inn al-ṣaḥāfa ḥurratun / lākin 'alā sharṭ al-ḍamānī*

*Sabbih b-an 'umihim wa 'in / 'ānāy minhum mā tu 'ānī<sup>444</sup>*

Freedom of the Press is guaranteed, but according to the guarantee you present

Otherwise, you should still remain grateful if you only suffered a lot. (28-29)

These two lines above also refer to an essential human right: freedom of expression. In the eyes of all Arab authoritarian regimes, and particularly in Iraq, freedom of expression is a crime whereby punishment could incur many years in prison or the death penalty. Al-Jawahiri here intends to put the two images together, giving a positive description of the negative image and vice-versa. This technique doubles the effect of irony and sharpens the contrast between the two images, while at the same time giving the reader a chance to think critically. The reader here can feel the power of the words and enjoy the witty style. Auden also uses this technique in his poems. In "Musée des Beaux Arts," for example, one might think while reading the first three lines of the poem for the first time that Auden admires the Old Masters' understanding of suffering. As differences highlight the necessity to take cultural diversity into consideration, similarities should be considered as well. This is shown in the similarities of the styles and techniques al-Jawahiri and Auden use to highlight the importance of freedoms and rights or criticise negative attitudes, traditions and behaviours. In the two poems, "Fī al-Sijn" and "Musée des Beaux Arts" we have the suffering of an individual seen as a normal thing that might happen to him/her regardless of why. Even reasons that are supposed to be legal like ambition or freedom of expression are twisted and presented

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<sup>443</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Fī al-Sijn*.

<sup>444</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Fī al-Sijn*, "adab.com".

as sins in order to justify suffering. Both poems criticise this phenomena in almost the same ironic style:

*Mādhā turīd min al-zamānī / u 'tīt mā-lam u 'ta thānī*

.....

*sabbiḥ bi-an 'umihim f-'ant / bi-faḍl mā awlūk jānī*

*Ṣakk al-ḥadīd 'alā yadayk / jazā' mā janat al-yadānī*<sup>445</sup>

What further do you seek / no one enjoys what you have

Be thankful to them for your sin / is denying their blessings

And iron today locks your hands / in return for what they committed. (21,

23-24)

Al-Jawahiri in these lines ironically pretends to admit that he deserves punishment for committing the sin of the right to freedom of expression as Auden in likewise refers to the acceptance of suffering and its inevitability: “That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course.”<sup>446</sup> When a comparison between two poets, who are entirely different from each other in terms of thought, culture and language reveals that they agree on the necessity for rights and on defending and protecting them, it underlines that ‘universality’ is valid in this respect.

### 3.3.4. Resistance within Resistance

The main dilemma of poets in the Arab world lies in their right to freedom of expression and their attempts to communicate this right without restrictions or chains. The more famous the poet, the more difficult their situation becomes: in many situations it becomes a matter of ‘to be or not to be.’ Those Iraqi poets who chose to speak out in times of silence like al-Jawahiri, al-Nuwāb, Maṭar and others, established their fame at a high cost. However, when speaking out becomes a matter of challenge and resistance, it reflects the true efficiency of poetry, especially when the poet is “a poet of the people,” as Wiebke Walter describes al-Jawahiri.<sup>447</sup> Despite their suffering, those resistant poets succeeded in creating a front that revealed most of the hideous crimes and violations of human rights committed in the Arab world. In certain times, such as during the 1960s,

<sup>445</sup> Ibid.

<sup>446</sup> Auden, *Musée des Beaux Arts*.

<sup>447</sup> Wiebke Walter, “My Hands Assisted the Hands of Events: The Memoir of the Iraqi Poet Muhammad Maḥdī al-Jawāhirī,” in *Writing the Self: Autobiographical Writing in Modern Arabic Literature*, ed. R. C. Ostle, C. M. de Moor, and Stefan Wild (London: Saqi Books, 1998), 250.

they were almost the one and only voice that resisted such oppressive and repressive acts as we shall see in the following pages.

Although al-Jawahiri was imprisoned in 1937, he did not find himself forced to flee the country, as he did in 1959 after the fall of the monarchy by the military coup of 1958. The new republican regimes became more suppressive and their reactions more cruel towards intellectuals, writers, and especially poets. This unprecedented brutality, however, was confronted by an unusually fierce resistance whose protagonists were poets, such as Muḏaffar al-Nuwāb. He took the place of al-Jawahiri as a defender of rights while the latter was in his exile in Prague, and faced what al-Jawahiri would have faced if he were in Iraq at that time. His story in prison also provides a good example of what a resistant poet can do, and an example for the right to remain silent as well. Al-Nuwāb was imprisoned in 1963 for writing political poetry that instigated the people against the regime. He was taken to one of the most notorious prisons in Iraq called *Nuqrat al-Salmān*, in the middle of the desert near the Saudi-Iraq border. All political prisoners used to be taken there for ‘the crime’ of the freedom of expression. Al-Nuwāb wrote his poem “al-Barā’a” (The Recantation) in that prison, a poem that since 1963 has become one of the best-known poems in Iraq. Political prisoners in that prison were forced to speak against their will, as Barbara Harlow observes:

“The Recantation” (or *al-Bara’a*), a poem written in 1963 by the popular Iraqi poet Muzaffar al-Nuwwab, likewise insists on the function of the discursive in the urgent and critical intersection of the social and political in resisting paradigmatic authoritarian control responding to the prison system’s brutal efforts to force from their political prisoners “recantations” of their political allegiances and commitments, renunciations that would then be published in newspapers further to demoralize and discredit the progressive opposition to the new putschist regime ... Muzaffar [in the poem] describes the pleas of a mother and sister to their son and brother not to “shame” them through such a betrayal.<sup>448</sup>

According to Abdul-Salām Yūsif, this poem, which al-Nuwāb wrote in the Iraqi southern accent was circulated among prisoners, many of whom learnt it by heart. It is believed that “thanks to it, many political prisoners declined to sign recantations.”<sup>449</sup> Al-Nuwāb represents a group of poets who, despite their small number, demonstrated their unprecedented spirit of challenge, clearly showing that poetry ‘can make something

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<sup>448</sup> Barbara Harlow, *Barred: Women, Writing, and Political Detention* ([Middletown, Conn.]: Wesleyan University Press, 1992), 75.

<sup>449</sup> Abdul-Salaam Yousif, *Vanguardist Cultural Practices: The Formation of Alternative Cultural Hegemony in Iraq and Chile, 1930s-1970s* (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1988), 225.

happen.’ Al-Nuwāb also was an intelligent poet; he used a colloquial accent although most of the prisoners with him were well educated because his target was not the prisoners themselves but their families and relatives in the first place. The characters in his poem were a mother and a sister: both, he was sure, were uneducated and the only thing that could move prisoners and strengthen their will. Women, in the culture of Arabs, represent honour and at the same time represent the opposite characteristics of manliness, such as valour. In making two women urging a man not to shame them by his weakness, he was giving those prisoners no chance to surrender. The use of colloquial accent made the poem spread out all over Iraq easier and faster than if it was written in standard Arabic. This made it easy to understand and memorise by illiterate people, especially those who were related to political prisoners.

Although the poetry of al-Jawahiri that had strong classical roots with its “classical strength and beauty and its rhythmic sweep [that] shows yet again the strong affinities Arabs still feel with the classical mode of expression,” poetry in the vernacular was almost equally powerful.<sup>450</sup> Local accents in the Arab world have their own milieu and their own literature, based on everyday speech. In Iraq colloquial poetry enjoys a strong presence today; its popularity especially among the public is stronger than that of classical literature, especially poetry. This form of poetry in Iraq began to expand in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century at the hands of two poets: Ḥājj Zāyir (d. 1920) and Mulla ‘Abbūd al-Karkhī (1861-1946). The former developed the art of *zuhayrī*, one of the most popular forms of colloquial short verse in southern Iraq, and the latter for his political satires.<sup>451</sup> It is Muẓaffar al-Nuwāb (b. 1934) who led the movement of Iraq’s colloquial poetry since the 1950s. Although he wrote in standard Arabic, his colloquial poems represent a turning point: the simplicity of the Iraqi southern local accent he used made him more capable of loading the language with powerful images he derived from the heritage of Shī‘ah, the local culture and rural society. His poetic voice, Marilyn Booth observes, mingles with the weeping of mourning women. It was a detailed depiction of all that was almost forgotten of the memory of Iraq that had started to change or vanish.<sup>452</sup> Al-Nuwāb represents the hero-figure and reckless type of poet, both outside and inside prison. Al-Jawahiri, on the other hand, reflects a more realistic attitude that goes up and down to provide a precise assessment of a situation or event. In the previous section we have seen how, in spite of welcoming the military coup, he remained careful and

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<sup>450</sup> Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature*, 165.

<sup>451</sup> *Ibid.*, 467.

<sup>452</sup> *Ibid.*, 478-79.

avoided exaggerating about it. This poem, “Fī al-Sijn,” is a process of re-assessment of positions and attitudes written in the tone of quiet self-meditation. Al-Jawahiri needed a chance to go through this process:

*Ḥajabūk ‘an laḥz al-‘uyūn / ta’alluqan lak fī al-ṣiyānī*  
*Wuqqīt fīhā raghm anfīk / min khabī’āt al-dinānī*  
*Wa ḥufīzt fīhā min ghurūr / al-māl aw sihr al-ḥisānī*  
*Mithl al-Mu‘aydi<sup>453</sup> al-samā‘ bihī ahabb min al-‘ayānī<sup>454</sup>*

You have been kept away from wasting time with the charms of life  
 And forced to be protected from its dangers and evils,  
 Such as the temptations of money and beautiful women:  
 Like al-Mu‘aydi: better to hear about than to see him. (12-15)

Here, al-Jawahiri also ironically displays the merits of prison, especially in granting him the chance to think about his personal mistakes but he wishes that he never had this chance in such circumstances. The turn to what sounds like his personal sins, such as his love of money and women marks a climax in the struggle between al-Jawahiri and the prison. It shows that there is a feeling of guilt deep inside him that the prison succeeded in bringing up: the denial of his origin as a religious scholar as his father was and wanted him to be. Although he was a family man, al-Jawahiri also lived what was regarded in the local community, especially in Najaf, an uninhibited life. He also did not hesitate to document in his poems many of his adventures with women and his love of drinking. This explains, from another angle, the repentant tone of the poem, which shows his belief that he deserved a tragic fall like prison. Al-Jawahiri even stresses, in his reference to the judge’s decision to extend his incarceration another month that he deserves two punishments instead of one:

*In lam tufīdk ‘uqūbatun f-‘asā tufīd ‘uqūbatānī*  
*Aw lam yufīdk muṭahhirun f-‘asā yufīd muṭahhirānī<sup>455</sup>*

If one punishment isn’t enough, two might suffice:  
 Or if a purifier isn’t enough, two will do. (30-31)

<sup>453</sup> “You had better hear about al-Mu‘aydi than to see him.” This is a famous Arabic proverb.

<sup>454</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Fī al-Sijn*.

<sup>455</sup> Ibid.

Through a comparison between the reasons for his incarceration that al-Jawahiri listed in the poem, we find that the tone of the poem changes from irony into seriousness when he comes to mention his personal sins. The prison, in this respect, was a very difficult experience, if not the most difficult, especially for a poet. It represents a more complicated level of resistance with which the poet had only one choice: either to defeat the prison or to be defeated by it.<sup>456</sup>

Al-Jawahiri defeated his prison not by challenging it as al-Nuwāb did, but by surrendering to it. His admission or realisation, that he deserves two punishments, instead of one when he mentions his personal mistakes, had put him in a state of satisfaction with which he was able to live with the fact that he was put in prison for something good he did and not bad. He convinced himself that he deserves this unjust punishment for mistakes he committed but went unpunished. This way he was able to defeat his prison through the power of endurance acquired by this realisation. This also reveals, however, the kind of suffering man experiences when his freedom is taken away from him.

### 3.3.5. Visual / Audio Suffering

In his poem al-Jawahiri illustrates different images of suffering presented in a manner that combines bitterness with irony. Auden also uses the same technique in “Musée des Beaux Arts” that blends inner feelings of agony with the irony of the ongoing routine of everyday life. He presents a panorama of visual images that provide a chronological synopsis of suffering with examples, such as the suffering of Christ and the suffering of Icarus. Auden’s poem includes more visual than auditory images, since the poem itself was inspired by what he saw. It is important, in this respect, to remember the place of composition: the Museum of Fine Arts in Brussels where Auden was able, in spite of the peaceful and quiet environment around him, to find the most indelible scenes of suffering.

Al-Jawahiri was in a totally different place when he composed “Fī al-Sijn.” His portrait of suffering, which is not as comprehensive as Auden’s, relies upon what he listened to rather than upon what he saw, because the prison was dark. In his poem, al-Jawahiri used a comparative style: he presents images in pairs, one from inside the prison and one from outside the prison. Between them, he favours the images of prison:

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<sup>456</sup> Al-Ma’ūsh, *Shi’r al-Sujūn fī al-Adab al-Ḥadīth wa al-Mu’āshir*, 228-32.

*Wa 'alām taḥsud man talahhā b-al-mathālith w-al-mathānī*  
*Aw-lays khashkhashat al-ḥadīd aladh min 'azf al-qiyanī*  
*Yashdū b-hā min ajl lahwik alf makrūbin wa 'ānī*  
*Awzān shi 'rik ba 'd awzānin ḥawathā b-ittizānī<sup>457</sup>*

Why do you envy those who enjoy their life outside?

Isn't the clinking of iron more charming than the voice of chanteuse?

For your joy, a thousand sufferers and oppressed are playing them;

That even the rhythms of your verse are built upon some of theirs. (16-19)

In spite of the irony of the charming voice of chains and the sufferers who, like musicians, play with them to amuse al-Jawahiri as he describes, one can feel the bitterness folded within these lines. The choice of words plays a central role in sharpening the comparison between contrasting images, as well as in displaying the auditory tone. Al-Jawahiri, for example, uses the word *Ḥadīd* (iron) in his reference to chains because this word gives the impression of the heavy weight of those chains, the coldness and hardness of the metal, akin to the kind of suffering in prison. He also describes the sound of the iron clinking as rhythms, some of which his poetry was built upon, to indicate that this poem tells part of the story of suffering, but not all of it. However, the poem also provides an interesting description of the level of suffering in Iraq during the 1930s. While this is the kind of experience al-Jawahiri had in prison, we notice in the poetry of Muẓaffar an-Nuwāb and Ahmed Maṭar much crueller images that reflect the truth about the development in the techniques of oppression and violence. What remained attached to all these records of suffering was the tone of irony and sarcasm that coated the cruel images. Ahmed Maṭar in this respect says:

*Kalb Wālīna al-Mu 'azzam, 'adḍani al-yawm wa mā*  
*Fa-da 'ānī ḥāris al-amn l-u 'dam*  
*Ba 'd an athbata taqrīr al-wafāt*  
*Ann kalb al-sayyid al-wālī tasammam.<sup>458</sup>*

The dog of his Excellency our Leader bit me today and died

The guards arrested me to be hanged for murder

When they found in the forensic report

<sup>457</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Fī al-Sijn*.

<sup>458</sup> Ahmed Maṭar, *Kalb al-Wali*, "adab.com," accessed November 03, 2014, <http://www.adab.com/modules.php?name=Sh3er&doWhat=shqas&qid=1646&r=&rc=10>.

That his Excellency's dog died by poison.

The sarcastic tone of describing suffering is one of the most vivid characteristics of the poetry of resistance. Its effectiveness lies in ridiculing the violence of authoritarian systems to encourage people to challenge them and refuse their tyranny. The general context of the poem of al-Jawahiri, out of its relationship to the main purpose of composition, can be taken as an example of resistance and tyranny mockery. Sālim al-Ma'ūsh in this respect says:

In spite of the horrors of prison, which poetry has described, it was also a place for reviving the spirit of resistance, challenge and ridicule that those poets were their protagonists. The reason for this is the fact that most of them were defenders of rights: the rights of their nations [...] and in most cases the prison was turning into a weapon that they used against their oppressors.<sup>459</sup>

What distinguishes al-Jawahiri's poem, "Fī al-Sij̄n," is its description of the level of suffering in Iraq in the 1930s, which al-Jawahiri in his memoir *Dhikrayātī* describes more much less brutal than in 1958 and after.<sup>460</sup> It is also important to note that the situation during the rule of the military coup was also exceptionally violent.

Al-Jawahiri's poem provides important implications about the role of poets in capturing significant but often unnoticed moments, and preserving them in a manner that conveys the visual, the auditory and the sensory aspects of past experiences. Those poets willingly accepted to be poets of resistance and defenders of rights, out of their full awareness of their responsibility to the people, and suffered the consequences of their commitments alone. In the end of his experience in prison, al-Jawahiri continued fighting corruption and tyranny even harder than before. He also became more romantic and less explicit in his love poems, which indicates that he had defeated his prison experience.

Two days after al-Jawahiri was released from prison, he listened to the radio news describing the end of the coup by a counter-coup that Nūri al-Sa'īd did with the blessing of the British. The minister of defence, Bakr Ṣidqī who was the protector of Sulaimān and the one who gave the order to put al-Jawahiri in prison was killed while trying to escape to Turkey. Sulaimān was sentenced to five years in prison and the story of al-Jawahiri and the coup of 1936 was over.

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<sup>459</sup> Al-Ma'ūsh, *Shi'r al-Sujūn fī al-Adab al-Ḥadīth wa al-Mu'āṣir*, 507.

<sup>460</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Dhikrayātī*, 1: 330-36.



### Section Three

#### 3.4. “al-Iqtā’” (Land Policy)

##### 3.4.1. Introduction

This section is a study of al-Jawahiri’s “al-Iqtā’.” It was written in 1939, upon the case of the crisis of *ta’āba* (land cultivators) that occurred in the Iraqi southern district of ‘Amāreh. In 1939, thousands of peasants who lived in little mud cottages built on those lands on which they worked for years were forced to evacuate their houses as well as the lands by order of the new owners. Suddenly they found themselves and their families jobless and homeless.

This poem is written in *al-basīṭ* (the outspread) metrical form. This form is similar to *al-ṭawīl*, which al-Jawahiri used in “Taharrak al-Laḥd”, in the sense that it also consists of four feet in each half line (octameter), but the syllables are between 26 and 27 in each full line. The difference between the two poems is as follows:

1-“Taharrak al-Laḥd”:

**[Kilū ilā] [al-ghaybi mā] [ya’tī bi][hi al-qadarū]**  
[fa’ūlun] [mafā’īlun] [fa’ūlun] [mafā’īlū]  
**[wa istaq][bilū yawmakum] [bi-l’az][mi wa ibtadirū]**  
[fa’ūlun] [mafā’īlun] [fa’ūlun] [mafā’īlū]

2-“al-Iqtā’”:

**[Alā quwwatun] [tasṭī’u] [daf’a al-ma][zālimī]**  
[mustaf’ilun] [fā’ilun] [mustaf’ilun] [fā’ilū]  
**[Wa in ‘āsha] [makhlūq][in ‘ala al-dhullī][ nā’imī]**  
[mustaf’ilun] [fā’ilun] [mustaf’ilun] [fā’ilū]

The content of the poem is fully dedicated to the case of *ta’āba* and their suffering before and after they lost their houses and jobs. As for the rhyme, we notice that in this poem and in “Fī al-Sijn,” al-Jawahiri chose the nasal sounds /n/ and /m/, both followed by extended vowels. In both cases this combination in the end of the lines of each poem recalls sadness and stirs the sympathy he meant to make his readers feel. This shows to us that al-Jawahiri is a composer of *shi’r* (poetry) rather than *naẓm* (verse): all poetry, in this respect, is verse but not all verse is poetry. *Naẓm* usually lacks the power of

imagination and inspiration that real poetry or *shi‘r* enjoys, because in the former the composer writes the first line that ends with a particular rhyme and then tries to put together words that end with the same rhyme. Al-Jawahiri as a prominent poet, used to choose the rhyme previously and then the lines flow spontaneously from his heart and mind into his mouth. He used to read them aloud with *tarnīm* (toning) while he was walking back and forth in the basement of his house in Najaf or on the roof of his house in Baghdad.<sup>461</sup>

Reinforcing various national and humanitarian causes, as we have seen in the previous section with the case of the poor Jews in Iraq, in addition to defending the rights of women and opposing tyranny are what established al-Jawahiri as a poet of human rights. This section sheds light on “al-Iqtā‘” as a poem that carries the same concerns Auden raised in “Refugee Blues.” However, here, al-Jawahiri is defending the rights of a majority against a minority (peasants versus land owners); a matter that in terms of defending human rights shows the big gap between Iraq and Britain or the USA in the 1930s.

As mentioned in the previous section, al-Jawahiri targeted the four pillars of authoritarianism in Iraq: the British authority, the government, corruption and land policy. Land policy or landownership in 1930s’ Iraq, was the natural outcome of the growing corruption whose sponsors were the British authority, politicians, and other dominant non-political figures such as tribal shaykhs.<sup>462</sup> In this respect, ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Zāhir points out that the system of landownership existed in Iraq during the Ottoman rule but it remained limited because the local governor Midḥat Bāsha sold the lands to wealthy tribal shaykhs and merchants instead of distributing them among peasants.<sup>463</sup>

After the revolution of 1920, the British authority punished those tribal shaykhs who participated in the resistance against them, such as Nūr al-Yāsirī and Shaykh Ḍārī al-Maḥmūd. Punishments included imposing more taxes on them and seizing the lands that were previously recognised as their inherited properties but were not legally registered in their names. On the other hand, those who supported the British forces were given more lands and thus more power: some of them were given fifty thousand acres, as al-Zāhir states:

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<sup>461</sup> See al-Jawahiri, *Dhikrayātī*: 1 & 2.

<sup>462</sup> Land policy in Iraq during the time of the Ottoman Empire was similar to European Medieval feudalism only insofar as the land for service relationship between the authority and certain individuals and families was concerned. It had, and this remained so after 1919, almost no political or religious implications.

<sup>463</sup> ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Zāhir, *Al-Iqtā‘ wa al-Dīwān fi al-‘Irāq* (Cairo: As-Sa‘ādeh Press, 1950), 20.

The worst crimes against humanity had been committed by the lords of *iqṭā'* in Iraq, especially in the district of 'Amārah. Vast lands were given to few tribal shaykhs who were loyal to the British authority, who hired tens of thousands of poor peasants to work for them for ultimately minimum wages. Peasants and farmers in 'Amārah suffered extreme poverty and hunger... this was a black spot on the forehead of the Iraqi monarchy.<sup>464</sup>

The unfair distribution of land widened the gap between the rich class of landlords or *mullāk*, and the working class of poor peasants or *ta'āba*, who were the majority in Iraq. In addition to the low wages they received for their hard work in the lands of the *mullāk*, those peasants and their families were deprived of education, social care and health care. Many of them, according to al-Zāhir, were infected with malaria, amoebic dysentery and other diseases that left them thin and weak.<sup>465</sup> In 1939, in the governorate of 'Amārah, when those peasants were evicted from the lands, they moved to cities in search for a better life. This massive migration from rural to urban areas had a negative social, economic and demographical impact on urban life, as well as on the future of rural life and agriculture.

Most interesting among those negative outcomes, in this respect, was the clash of rights between the residents of urban areas and rural migrants. Those rural migrants were the victims of urban citizens' individual rights whose maintenance and protection left the migrants deprived of fundamental rights such as the right to treatment with humanity and dignity. However, those urban individuals were the last to blame: this was a crime against humanity in which all four pillars of authoritarianism in Iraq were involved. This situation is similar to the one Auden describes in "Refugee Blues," in the sense that those poor peasants who escaped to the cities in search for a better life neither received any care from the government nor any legal protection or solution. This was in fact similar to the situation of Jewish refugees in the USA in 1939. The peasants eventually lived in slums around cities, which they built with tins and mud because there was no place for them inside those cities, while at the same time, they could not go back because the lands on which their houses were built had been taken away from them.

The problem of land policy in Iraq was highlighted and criticised by some writers, such as 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Zāhir and Mohammed Riḍā al-Shabībī during the 1940s and 1950s after it became an unavoidable and complicated social, economic and political dilemma. Those writers emerged as considerable journalists and intellectuals from al-

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<sup>464</sup> Ibid., 20-21.

<sup>465</sup> Ibid.

Ahālī group, which strongly reinforced the cause of the landless poor peasants against exploitative landowners.<sup>466</sup> However, their writings, which mainly addressed the small group of the educated elite, incited a storm of counter replies that attacked them severely. Not far from those attempts and calls for reform, al-Jawahiri was one of the earlier and most influential voices that opposed the feudalist system of land policy and attacked its lords.

### 3.4.2. The Anatomy of Land Policy

The system of land ownership in Iraq from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was similar, only in the unjust distribution of land and the ultimate exploitation of peasants, to feudalism in Medieval Europe. Feudalism, in the words of Murray Hunter, has been described as a society governed by those eligible through birth right:

It is seen as a grant of land, the sharing of power and privilege in return for favour and loyalty, and structuring of society with well-defined layers where each layer forms a sub-culture with different set of values, beliefs, assumptions, and aspirations. Economic organisation will also follow this hierarchical order where wealth will be concentrated within the upper echelons of society. The basis of power is through land, capital, military, or political control, and these arrangements are hereditary and within selected families from generation to generation.<sup>467</sup>

Property according to W. B. Friedmann is a “bundle of powers”; it means in other words “the degree of control that a physical or corporate person exercises over an aggregate of tangible things, be they land, shares, claims, or power of disposal.”<sup>468</sup> The lack of property, in this respect means the lack of power; and the lack of property in the sense of being entirely controlled by others means slavery, as Orlando Patterson argues.<sup>469</sup>

The system of land ownership flourished in Iraq as a result of the lack of two of the most important requirements a new-born state needs for its survival and development: justice and rights. When the coup of 1936 took place and both the British and King

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<sup>466</sup> Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 82.

<sup>467</sup> Murray Hunter, “How Feudalism Hinders Community Transformation and Economic Evolution: Isn't Equal Opportunity a Basic Human Right?,” *New Mandala* (August, 2012), accessed October 22, 2014, <http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/newmandala/2012/08/24/the-curse-of-feudalism/>.

<sup>468</sup> Philip P. Wiener, *Dictionary of the History of Ideas: Studies of Selected Pivotal Ideas*, Philip P. Wiener, editor in chief, vol. 3 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), 650-56.

<sup>469</sup> Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, [Mass.]; London: Harvard University Press, 1982), 20-27.

Ghazi<sup>470</sup> found themselves obliged to accept it, the new Prime Minister Hikmat Sulaimān made a short statement about his government's policy. In this statement, he declared that justice for all should be achieved by a fair redistribution of land. This aroused the hostility of the powerful landlords and tribal shaykhs who accused the new regime of being Communist, while Sulaimān's failure to mention anything about Arab unity aroused distrust amongst the nationalist group.<sup>471</sup> Majid Khadduri points out that such criticism and distrust against the government of the coup forced the Prime Minister to make lavish promises, which he could not fulfil. Sulaimān's promises of making comprehensive reform in Iraq were actually beyond the capacity of any government in Iraq to carry out at that time.<sup>472</sup> Soon the government's promises for fair distribution of land vanished when it realised that this would threaten its survival.

This, however, was the case for tens of thousands of poor peasants who were eager to gain entitlement to land, not only to improve their living conditions but, more importantly, to regain their liberty. This case shows, in this respect, that the right to property involves other basic rights that cannot be ensured without it, such as the right to liberty, safety, dignity and privacy. Even other rights, such as the right to possession, to equality, freedom from discrimination and the right to family are violated when the right to property is violated, as was the case in the 1930s Iraq. David Feldman, in his argument about the right to property, maintains that public and private landholding must be respected and that it is neither necessary nor desirable to limit this issue by public rights and freedoms.<sup>473</sup> Yet, the case in Iraq was neither private nor public in the sense that the lands in which peasants worked and lived belonged to the government and were given to a few individuals to run them by the law of *lazma*, and later to own them.<sup>474</sup> This law identified the right to put hands on those lands by possessing a water pump, which practically prohibited poor peasants from winning entitlement to the lands they were working on, because they were financially incapable of buying the required water pumps.<sup>475</sup>

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<sup>470</sup> Son of King Faisal I, Ghazi ruled Iraq from 1933 to 1939. He died in a car accident but theories still abound regarding the real scenario of his death.

<sup>471</sup> Majid Khadduri, *Independent Iraq, 1932-1958: A Study in Iraqi Politics* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 95-96.

<sup>472</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>473</sup> Brian W. Harvey, Franklin Meisel, and P. J. Cook, *Property and Protection: Legal Rights and Restrictions: Essays in Honour of Brian W. Harvey* (Oxford; Portland, Or.: Hart Publishers, 2000), 28.

<sup>474</sup> *Lazma* is a law passed in 1932. It is a permission given to individuals to appropriate unused lands that belong to the government but only by reclamation. For further information, see the database of Iraqi legal and juristic regulations:

<http://www.legislations.gov.iq/LoadLawBook.aspx?SC=200220063763752>

<sup>475</sup> Laith Abdul Hasan Jawad Zubaydi, *Thawrat 14 Tammuz fi al-Iraq* (Iraq: Maktabat al-Yaqzah al-Arabiyyah 1981), 148.

Local tribal rules developed in Iraqi rural areas during the Ottoman Empire age to substitute the state authority in distant and isolated lands: the state authority was concentrated mainly on urban parts and around them such as in Baghdad, Mosul and Basra. In return for granting this local authority to tribal shaykhs over rural parts, they used to collect taxes for the Ottoman Empire. Although the law and courts under the British mandate improved by far with the situation under Ottoman rule, tribal traditions in Iraq continued to dominate in rural areas and among seminomadic tribal cultures. The British interference in the issue of land distribution, by granting loyal tribes more lands, made the situation worse. It led to the practical abolition of civil, political, social and economic rights by neutralising state authority and the rule of law in those areas. The slow improvement and development of the state, especially in reacting to the need for immediate reform, also rendered tribal law as the only available alternative in some cases, such as civil crimes and local disputes over land.

In his autobiography for instance, Al-Jawahiri mentions some of the dominant acts of injustice in tribal law that remained strongly present due to weakness in state rule and the lack of awareness about its negative social and cultural impact. Some of those ‘reactionary traditions’ as al-Jawahiri describes them, were valid even in cities such as Najaf. His sister, Nabiha, was a victim of one of those backward traditions called *nahwa*. It meant that the dominant man in a family could give a female child to a male child from the same family such as her cousin, to marry her when they grow up. In that case the poor girl could not determine her own future, and in many cases neither could the boy. Al-Jawahiri’s sister, who was named for her cousin, Jawad, married another cousin whose name was also Jawad because the first one that Nabiha was due to marry did not propose. Suddenly, when the first Jawad, who was away from Najaf, heard about the marriage, he came back to claim his right. According to tribal law, he had the right to kill both the second Jawad and al-Jawahiri’s sister if this marriage took place. Al-Jawahiri reacted very quickly; after he failed to change the betrayed Jawad’s mind, he took the couple out of Najaf until this problem was resolved by an accident that happened to the first Jawad and eventually led to his death.<sup>476</sup> Al-Jawahiri, in his continuous defence for rights, always attacked such reactionary traditions:

*Inza ‘ī yā baldatī mā rath min hādhi il-thiyāb*

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<sup>476</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Dhikrayātī*, 1: 304-307.

*Itrukū kull qadīmin minhu yas ‘ā fi tabāb* <sup>477</sup>

O my town, take off these worn out clothes

And leave behind every rotten old tradition. (“Dars al-Shabāb”: 1, 12)

From his early poetic career, al-Jawahiri criticised backward tribal laws and traditions. He believed that the progress of Iraq was conditional upon the abolishment of the role of tribal judiciary in controlling social life. One of the most tyrannical impacts of the tribal judiciary was the denial of women’s rights in inheritance, education, work and in deciding their own future, especially who to marry. Al-Jawahiri defended the rights of women in early poems, such as “‘Allimūhā” (Give Her Education) and “al-Raj’iyyūn” (The Reactionaries) in 1929. Later on, he realised that the abolishment of tribal rules was conditional upon the elimination of feudalism or the landownership policy, which was the main source of wealth and power for the tribal shaykhs and their local domination.

In his book on the history of Iraq between 1900 and 1950, Stephen Hemsley Longrigg confirms that the committees of land distribution formed under the supervision of the British mandate were unjust. They were criticised for being “too favourable to the shaykhs and half-absentee urban land-developers, and unjust to the actual cultivators.”<sup>478</sup> Longrigg, who asserts that the members of those committees had no shaykhly sympathies, justifies what happened as a legal procedure based on the fact that the lands were registered in the names of shaykhs and other rich families. All other claims of rights to lands, which were in the thousands, were rejected due to lack of legal proof:

It was true, indeed, that thousands of these remained legally landless and as dependent as ever; that many shaykhs, whose agricultural functions had been always limited and ill performed, became the registered owners of personal heritable ‘*lazma* rights’ of considerable areas: and that town dwelling pump-land exploiters were over rewarded, by similar grants, for their enterprise... The Committees created no rights; they recorded what rights they found to exist.<sup>479</sup>

Those who opposed this decision were jailed. Some of them spent many months in prison for the crime of opposing the law and unruly behaviour.

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<sup>477</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Dars al-Shabāb aw Baldatī wa al-Inqilāb*, “adab.com,” accessed November 05, 2014, <http://www.adab.com/modules.php?name=Sh3er&doWhat=shqas&qid=64356&r=&rc=135>.

<sup>478</sup> Stephen Hemsley Longrigg, *Iraq, 1900 to 1950: A Political, Social, and Economic History* (London; New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), 260-61.

<sup>479</sup> Ibid.

The reason for the crisis of *ta'āba* in 'Amāreh is the low level of productivity of its lands. In 'Amāreh there were no fruit groves or date palm woods as in Basra, Ḥilla and Karbala. Only few crops can be grown there, such as rice in the winter and sesame and cotton in the summer. This problem was reflected on the income of landowners who, under the lack of any legal protection for the rights of peasants, decided to fire them and sell the lands in which they had worked for decades. Formal reactions to this act occurred in parliament, and were confronted by counter-reactions from other deputies as well as from the government.<sup>480</sup> Large parts of the lands controlled by the new landlords were not gained by *lazma*: those lands belonged to the government as *awqāf* (common state lands). Permissions were given to those who can reclaim the lands and in that case, the peasants were financially incapable. Theoretically and practically those poor peasants, who were the actual workers in those lands, should have had the right to own them. This issue, however, according to Charles Tripp, was a matter of “cementing relations of power” rather than ensuring justice:

[T]he political gains for the British authorities and for many of the most prominent political figures had been too great to sacrifice [entitlement to land] in the name of fiscal orthodoxy. Thus, the king, successive prime ministers, ministers and well-placed officials had acquired extensive landholdings for themselves and for their networks of family and political clients.<sup>481</sup>

In his book, *Internal Migration in Iraq*, Rīyaḍ Ibrahīm al-Sa'dī points out that internal migration in Iraq was not considerable before 1927, in spite of the miserable living conditions in rural areas. The main reason was the impossibility of moving due to the lack of roads and modern means of transportation. After 1929, all these obstacles were eliminated and, in the early 1930s, roads and railways between rural and urban areas were paved, and viable means of transportation, such as automobiles and trains, were introduced. This connection led to the emergence of a new generation of feudalists who used the modern water pumps to reclaim lands; after 1931 Iraq's agricultural production improved enough to cover its internal needs. This improvement, however, was not reflected on the income of peasants whose financial conditions deteriorated as the increase in production led to dramatic price falls.<sup>482</sup> The consequences of this situation,

<sup>480</sup> Al-Zāhir, *Al-Iqtā' wa al-Dīwān fī al-'Irāq*, 45.

<sup>481</sup> Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 67-68.

<sup>482</sup> Rīyaḍ Ibrahīm al-Sa'dī, *Al-Hijrah al-Dākhiliya l-alsukān fī al-'Irāq* (Baghdad: Dar al-Salam Press, 1976), 78-79.



in addition to the lack of basic human rights such as health care, education, justice and equality led to a one-way migration towards urban areas.

### 3.4.3. The Pillars of Land Policy

In this poem, al-Jawahiri tackled three dilemmas attached to the system of land policy: justice and law enforcement, the social structure and the human mindset. Hunter describes these dilemmas as the layers of feudalism.<sup>483</sup> As for the first layer, the rule of law, al-Jawahiri begins his poem by criticising the absence of state law-enforcement power in the following lines:

*Alā quwwatun tasfī‘u daf‘ al-mazālimī / wa in ‘āsh makhlūqin ‘ala al-dhull  
nā’imi*

*Alā a ‘yunun tulqā ‘ala al-sha‘b hāwiyan / ilā ḥam‘at al-idqā‘ nazrata  
rāḥimi*<sup>484</sup>

Is there a force that could push away tyranny / and save creatures long-lived  
in agony

Are there any eyes that would look with mercy / at those who have fallen  
into the lava of poverty? (“al-Iqtā’”: 1-2)

This short invocatory prologue by al-Jawahiri reflects the difficulty and complexity of the dilemma of land ownership. These two lines summarise the problem and suggest a solution: in the first line, he uses the words ‘tyranny’ and ‘force’ and in the second, he uses the words ‘mercy’ and ‘poverty’. This appeal, which al-Jawahiri rarely used in his critical and satirical poems, indicates the urgent need for the relief of those homeless and poor peasants and their families.

As for the first line, al-Jawahiri does not specify what kind of force should be implemented because the situation was too urgent to wait for the proper type of force. In these lines, we also notice that al-Jawahiri does not seem as keen on ‘revolution’ as he used to be.

Revolution, as Herbert Aptheker states, is a “sudden and violent change in government or in the political constitution of a country, mainly brought about by

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<sup>483</sup> Hunter, “How Feudalism Hinders Community Transformation and Economic Evolution: Isn’t Equal Opportunity a Basic Human Right?”.

<sup>484</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Al-Iqtā’*, “adab.com,” accessed November 05, 2014, <http://www.adab.com/index.php/images/mytheme2/modules.php?name=Sh3er&doWhat=shqas&qid=66791&r=&rc=4>.

internal causes.”<sup>485</sup> Aptheker lists as ‘internal causes’ the exploitation by the ruling class and its effective domination of society, as well as its political identification as an irresistible power.<sup>486</sup> In particular, al-Jawahiri uses the word *quwwa* (force or power) to refer to the desperate need for change, a change that can be achieved by powerful or forceful action only. The word *quwwa* could also denote a legal force but not necessarily an armed force. It was not unusual for al-Jawahiri, as a 1930s Iraqi communist, to believe strongly in revolution as a means for change; the Iraqi Communist Party was after all “a Marxist-Leninist Party with an internationalist perspective and revolutionary politics.”<sup>487</sup> Yet, this diplomatic statement echoes certain implications enfolded in the mind of al-Jawahiri, which necessitated being more careful and less exaggerative about the topic of revolution, as we shall see in the rest of the poem.

The forceful or violent trend of Iraqi Communists who emerged from al-Ahālī group can also be attributed to the hard circumstances they went through during the 1930s. After al-Ahālī group and its communist members failed to convince Bakr Ṣidqī to accept a liberal programme, the group turned against the coup. In return, Ḥikmat Sulaimān and Ṣidqī suppressed activists in al-Ahālī and in the newly formed Communist group. In order to put an end to the threat of Communism, Parliament passed legislation in 1938 outlawing Communism in Iraq and punishing any person involved in Communist activities with penal servitude or death. Under those circumstances, the Communist movement suffered from oppressive acts by the government and those who opposed Communism. They were not able to act again until August 1939, when the Soviet Union signed the Non-Aggression Pact with Nazi Germany, because Rashīd ‘Ālī al-Gailānī interfered and helped them. In return, the communists actively supported him until he seized power in 1941.<sup>488</sup>

The system of land policy in Iraq between 1921 and 1958 was protected by the general recognition of property as “a civil right, born of occupation and sanctioned by law”<sup>489</sup>, or by labour, as it happened in ‘Amāreh and in other regions. The relationship between the powerful landowners and the powerless peasants in Iraq was very similar to

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<sup>485</sup> Herbert Aptheker, *The Nature of Democracy, Freedom, and Revolution*, [1st ed.] (New York: International Publishers, 1967), 76.

<sup>486</sup> *Ibid.*, 77-78.

<sup>487</sup> Haj, *The Making of Iraq, 1900-1963: Capital, Power, and Ideology*, 92.

<sup>488</sup> Khadduri, *Independent Iraq, 1932-1958: A Study in Iraqi Politics*, 359.

<sup>489</sup> Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, “What is Property? Or, an Inquiry into the Principle of Right and of Government,” in *The Human Rights Reader: Major Political Essays, Speeches, and Documents from Ancient Times to the Present*, ed., Micheline Ishay, 208-23.

slavery; it was like under Roman law, robbery and abuse within the limits of the law.<sup>490</sup> The situation in Iraq, however, was more complicated because ‘feudalists’ in Iraq did not seize certain peoples’ properties by force. They seized abandoned lands and lands on which peasants were working and living, which both legally belonged to the government. This shows, on the one hand, the level of power those feudalists possessed, and on the other, the level of corruption and powerlessness of the government, which al-Jawahiri describes:

*Ta ‘ālat yad al- iqtā‘ hattā ta ‘aṭṭalat / ‘an al-batt fī aḥkāmihā yad ḥākimi  
Wa ḥata istabaddat b-al-sawād za ‘ānifun / ilā naf‘ihā tastāquhu k-al-  
bahā’imi*<sup>491</sup>

The hands of feudalism were raised higher and higher / until no authority or law could reach them.

And the majority have been exploited like cows / by few stooges who seized power. (4-5)

These lines are the response to the first line in which al-Jawahiri asks for a force. The system of landownership was protected not only by the armed force of the tribes or the British, but also by the law. This makes al-Jawahiri talk about the right to property from a humanitarian-religious point of view. He turns to address, in other words, his audience from moral and cultural perspectives to raise their awareness as much as he can:

*Hiya al-arḍ lam yakhlūq laha Allah mālikan / yuṣarrifuhā mustahtiran fī al-  
jarā’imi  
Wa lam yabghi minhā an yakūna nitājuhā / shaqāwat mazlūmin wa ni‘mat  
zālimi*<sup>492</sup>

This is God’s earth; it belongs to all / not to a bunch of criminals to seize it for their own interests.

And God does not want it / to make the rich richer and the poor poorer. (8-9)

Here al-Jawahiri stresses the fact that the right to property is a fundamental natural right. Al-Zāhir in this respect points out that many tribal-landowning shaykhs refused to

<sup>490</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>491</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Al-Iqtā‘*.

<sup>492</sup> Ibid.

listen to what Islam says about the rights of women or the right to property, because most of their laws and traditions disagreed with the teachings of Islamic doctrine.<sup>493</sup> Although peasants were not slaves, they were in the same position with ex-slaves, where the freedman, who had little choice, used to continue working for his ex-master. According to Islamic Sharia, “Patronage belongs to the emancipator,” but the peasants received no patronage as they were regarded, theoretically, partners in business with the landowner.<sup>494</sup> Thus, al-Jawahiri tends to use this style to support his case with humanitarian-religious evidence.

Under this regime, the peasants or *ta‘ābeh* became bound to the landowners. The only way to survive was to surrender to working for them like slaves - if not worse - as al-Jawahiri describes:

*Idhā aqbal al-shaykh ul-muṭā‘ wa khalfahu / min al-zāri ‘īn al-arḍ mithl al-sawā‘imi*

*Min al-muzhaqī al-arwāḥ yaṣlī wujūhahum / mahabb a ‘āṣīrin wa lafḥ samā‘mi*

*Qiyāman ‘alā a ‘tābihi yumṭirūnahā / khunū‘an wa dhullan bil-shifāh il-lawāthimi*<sup>495</sup>

When the Shaykh comes, you see those poor peasants / following him like beasts,

Almost dead and their faces are burnt / by the summer’s wind poisonous heat.

You see them kneeling down to his shoes / and slavishly kissing his feet.

(15-17)

This image, which al-Jawahiri uses to illustrate the relationship between peasants and landowners, takes us to the second layer of the impact of land policy: the impact on the social structure. This relationship is bound to the right to property, which is a luxury for rich landowners and a matter of life or death for peasants. The image of kissing the feet of the landowner highlights the level of indignity those peasants were ready to accept in order to secure their right to housing, work and food. However, as we see in “al-Iqtā‘,” the rule of law, the social structure and the human mindset are highly interrelated and interdependent. In Auden’s “Refugee Blues,” for example, we observe a similar

<sup>493</sup> Al-Zāhir, *Al-Iqtā‘ wa al-Dīwān fī al-‘Irāq*, 140.

<sup>494</sup> Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*, 241.

<sup>495</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Al-Iqtā‘*.

approach: a matter that confirms the interdependence of the rights to privacy, housing, dignity, safety and liberty, and their dependence on the right to property. The refugees in Auden’s poem lost those rights when they were forced to flee their country. This makes the dilemma of Jewish refugees revolve around the right to property, even in New York where they faced obstacles related to the rule of law and its bureaucratic processes, the social structure, and the human mindset. These are illustrated in “Refugee Blues” in the image of the animals of the rich, which were allowed to access homes while the refugees were deprived, and the egoism of citizens in warning from letting those refugees in because they will steal their bread. These three layers in Auden’s poem have the same arrangement in al-Jawahiri’s poem, although the two subjects are different. In terms of the right to property, however, the two poems are identical, especially in moving from mentioning the problem in the beginning on to the obstacles that maintained the problem.

As we observe in the lines above, however, al-Jawahiri deals with this problem in relation to his background as an Iraqi communist poet. The following image of the contrast between the slums of the poor and the big houses where the rich live has been described by both Auden and al-Jawahiri. Here, Auden writes:

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.

Al-Jawahiri presents a similar image in the following lines from *Al-Iqtā’* :

*Ḥanāyā min al-akwākh tulqī zilālaha / ‘alā mithl jubbin bāhit al-nūr qātimi*  
.....  
*Wa bātāt buṭūnun sāghibātun ‘ala ṭawan / wa utkhimat al-ukhra biṭīb al-  
maṭā’imi*  
.....  
*A hādhā sawādun yubtaghā limulimmatin / wa naḥtājuh fi al-ma’ziq al-  
mutalāḥimi*<sup>496</sup>  
Shadows of little poor cottages / cast upon pale dark holes  
And empty bellies trying to sleep / while others are full of fine food

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<sup>496</sup> Ibid.

Are those the majority on which we rely / in hard times and great events?

(19, 21, 23)

Here, we see that almost the same image has been used for different purposes: Auden intends to arouse sympathy with the case he raises, while al-Jawahiri intends to do more, as the third line in each one of the above extracts show. Al-Jawahiri uses this image not only to raise his audience's awareness of the miserable situation of the peasants but to also agitate – beyond sympathy – their feelings of anger. The circumstances during which he wrote his poem might have also had their impact: Auden was uncertain and afraid of the future in 1939: “Uncertain and afraid / As the clever hopes expire / Of a low dishonest decade.”<sup>497</sup> This uncertainty made Auden avoid mentioning the future. Al-Jawahiri, on the other hand, put his hopes in the future because he was desperate in the present and had nothing to lose. He was also reading the political, social and economic situation in Iraq in terms of what the consequences would be, rather than what they looked like in the 1930s.

Although the issue with Auden was the suffering of a minority at the hands of the majority, the two poets agree that apathy, as a constant frailty in the human mindset, is one of the problems that led to the huge gap in social structure. Al-Jawahiri in “al-Iqtā’” stresses this fact:

*Wa Inna sawādan yahmil al-jūr mukrahan / faqīrun lihādin bayyin al-nuṣḥ  
ḥāzimi*

*Yashunnu ‘ala al-iqtā’ ḥarban mubīdatan / walā yakhtashī fi al-ḥaqq  
lawmat lā’imi*

.....

*Siyāsat ifqārīn wa tajwī’ Ummatin / wa taslīṭ afrādin junātin ghawāshimi*<sup>498</sup>

A majority forced to live under oppression / desperately needs a truthful  
advisor and guide

Who launches a war against land policy / and never hesitates to say the  
truth:

A policy that made a whole nation starve / at the hands of few tyrants and  
oppressors. (31-32, 35)

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<sup>497</sup> Auden, *September 1, 1939*, in *Selected Poems*, 95.

<sup>498</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Al-Iqtā’*.

The lines here show that al-Jawahiri appointed himself as a guide for the people: a guide whose mission was to tell people what to do rather than to tell them parables. His task as advisor in this poem was to raise the audience’s awareness on their violated rights, for which they bore part of the responsibility for wasting them, as well as making them aware of the need for justice and advising them on how to achieve it. As for inequality, which al-Jawahiri criticises in the above lines, one might say that being rich or poor has nothing to do with rights, and al-Jawahiri in this respect might be seen as a socialist dreamer. In his identification of ‘inequality’, Hugh McLachlan points out that “not all inequalities are unjust.”<sup>499</sup> This classifies natural inequalities, such as being short rather than tall or ugly rather than handsome, as a matter of luck. Other inequalities, such as being poor, uneducated and leading a miserable life, depend on the available opportunities and the right to action. Apathy, which leads to submission, conflicts with opportunity-seizing, as al-Jawahiri explains, while at the same time referring to the fact that this situation is not a matter of luck, but one of corruption:

*‘Ajibtu likhalqin fi al-maghārim rāzihin / yuqaddim mā tajnī yadāh li-ghānimi*

*Wa anka’ min hādha al-taghābun qurḥatan / ghabāwat makhdūmin wa fiṭnat khādimi*<sup>500</sup>

I wonder how a majority living in misery / while doing their best to make a few rich richer

And more shocking than this unfair situation is / the mind-thickness of the master and the wit of the servant! (10-11)

In these two lines, al-Jawahiri apparently criticises the apathy of the majority of those poor peasants who surrender to the miserable life they lead. However, he also criticises a third party whose interference created this social and economic imbalance: the government and the British authority behind it. Al-Jawahiri in this poem blames the masses’ surrender, but at the same time he says that the emergence of this group of new feudalists is not a matter of luck but one of conspiracy, as he refers to their lack of wit, or any similar sort of qualification, as he describes in the lines above. McLachlan states in this respect that: “[t]here is, in my understanding and use of the term, a relationship

<sup>499</sup> H. V. McLachlan, *Social Justice, Human Rights and Public Policy* (Glasgow: Humming Earth, 2005), 28.

<sup>500</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Al-Iqtā’*.

between justice and rights which does not exist between fairness and rights nor between luck and rights.”<sup>501</sup> For instance, according to Charles Tripp, the struggle for power created this inequality: “often very immediate political considerations shaped the pattern of landholding in much of Iraq.”<sup>502</sup>

Al-Jawahiri, as mentioned in the previous section, stressed in his autobiography that one of the reasons for which he was put in prison in 1937 was an article he published in his journal about the role of British intelligence in agitating local conflicts in the south of Iraq. In this article, al-Jawahiri named particular agents, in addition to Amīn al-Rayḥānī who was visiting Iraq at that time.<sup>503</sup> Sulaimān informed al-Jawahiri that the British embassy became very angry and that he needed to provide supporting evidence.<sup>504</sup> Tripp also reinforces al-Jawahiri’s viewpoint:

Henry Dobbs (revenue commissioner during the military occupation and later high commissioner under the Mandate, 1923-9) saw the confirmation and grant of title to land and the distribution of leases as the most effective means of ensuring order in the countryside.

Strongly influenced by his belief in the ‘natural’ authority of shaikhs over tribesmen, Dobbs used land to reinforce—sometimes to create—the powers of tribal shaikhs over their tribesmen... Given the wide variety of perspective and other rights attached to land in different regions in Iraq, this policy sometimes had the opposite effect, provoking resistance and rebellion among those who suddenly found themselves dispossessed or beholden to shaikhs whom they felt no special attachment.<sup>505</sup>

This environment of conspiracy, corruption and injustice was the reason why al-Jawahiri believed nothing could invoke change like a public revolution. That is also why it is one of the central topics he raised in “al-Iqtā’.” He believed that this was the only way to bring about justice and regain rights in a country whose political and social environment in the 1930s put it at the crossroads. Although this belief exists in “al-Iqtā’,” it looks quite different from what is mentioned in earlier poems, such as “Taḥarrak al-Laḥd.” It reflects a less hyperbolic and more reasonably balanced mindset. In the poem we notice al-Jawahiri seeking justice rather than calling for a public revolution through which justice and rights are regained. Yet, he predicts the occurrence of revolution as a natural outcome of the deteriorating situation. In his autobiography he

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<sup>501</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>502</sup> Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 51.

<sup>503</sup> Amīn al-Rayḥānī was a Lebanese Arab-American writer, intellectual and political activist. Al-Jawahiri accused him in his autobiography of being an agent for the US intelligence, and of doing unsavoury business for the British intelligence in Iraq.

<sup>504</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Dhikrayātī*, 1: 327-32.

<sup>505</sup> Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 51.



echoes a regretful tone when he mentions supporting every coup and uprising that occurred between 1936 and 1958.<sup>506</sup>

#### 3.4.4. The Question of Violent Justice

When Ḥasan al-‘Alawī talks about the political poetry of al-Jawahiri, he states that al-Jawahiri, who was a good reader of history, was also a good reader of the future. He demonstrated by the doubts he expressed in “Taḥarrak al-Laḥd” and especially his fears that a military coup will bring nothing but more misery to Iraq. His severe criticism of land policy and his predictions of its consequences is another accurate reading of the future according to al-‘Alawī as well.<sup>507</sup> In “al-Iqtā‘,” al-Jawahiri warns that there would be a revolution in the near future: this time he predicts its inevitability because it would be a revolution sparked by hunger, not by political ambitions:

*Wa mā anā bi-al-hayyāb thawrat ṭāmi ‘in / walākin jimā ‘ al-amr thawrat  
nāqimi*

.....  
*Nadhīruk min khalqin uṭl imtihānuhu / wa in bāt fī shakl al-ḍa ‘if al-  
musālimi*

*Bilādun taraddat fī mahāwin saḥīqatin / wa nā ‘at b-aḥmālin thiqālin  
qawāṣimi*

*Tabīt ‘alā wa ‘din qarībin bifitnatin / wa tuḍḥī ‘alā qarnin min al-sharri  
nājimi*

.....  
*Ghadan yastaḥiq al-ḥālimūn idhā mashat / rawā ‘id min ghaḍabātihi kal-  
zamāzimi<sup>508</sup>*

There will be a revolution, not of the ambitious / but a revolution of the  
wrathful hungry

Beware of those who lived long under oppression / even if they look  
peaceful and vulnerable

The country has fallen into a bottomless abyss / and a heavy back-breaking  
loads burden it

It stands on the edge of a great turmoil / and a fateful evil produced by evil

<sup>506</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Dhikrayātī*, 2: 169.

<sup>507</sup> Al-‘Alawī, *Al-Jawahiri Diwān al- ‘Aṣr*, 247-49, 286-87.

<sup>508</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Al-Iqtā‘*.

Tomorrow the dreamers will be woken up / by the thundering rage of the hungry. (41, 43-45, 49)

Al-Jawahiri, carefully chooses terrifying words in the lines that address oppressors such as *nāqim*, *nadhīr*, *mahāwin saḥīqatin*, *qawāṣim* and *qarnin min al-sharr*; as well as scolding and encouraging words. With scolding words such as *bahā'im* and *sawā'im* (brute or beasts), *idhlāl* (humiliation), *hazīl* and *'ajūz* (weak and old), he was addressing the very revolutionary and resistant nature of Arabs, especially the young. This style, known as *Jald al-dhāt* (self-flagellation) is used extensively in Arabic poetry and it was widely known in the twentieth century. It depends on ironically recalling the glories of the past to compare them to a present shameful situation in the Arab world.<sup>509</sup> Al-Jawahiri implemented this technique as a negative method for mobilisation, while in the same poem he also used the positive method, which recalls the glories of the past with famous mottos and principles, such as *al-'Arab Ubāt ul-Ḍaym* (Arabs are oppression-rejecting) and so on. The lines in the poem that mention the revolution of the hungry intend to terrify and warn, with words like *ḥarḃun mubīdatun* (mass-destruction war), *rawā'id* (thunders) and *ghaḍabātih* (increasing rage). Many of these expressions are derived from the Quran, such as *nadhīr* (ill-boding), *taghābun* (to wrong one another) and *khalq* (creation, people) and from the poems of al-Mutanabbi, such as *zamāzim* (storming thunder) and *buṭūn al-ma'ājim* (bulky dictionaries or books). These figurative borrowings, called *al-badī'* (equivalent to diction) in Arabic rhetoric, make the poem more influential and convey the messages enfolded in its lines more effectively.

As a prominent public poet, Ḥasan al-'Alawī observes, al-Jawahiri also invented his own rules; he wrote poems of glorification and pride only in his early poetic career, when the revolution of 1920 was still remembered. Self-flagellation was also among his main topics since 1935, as in "Fī Sabīl al-Ḥukm." After his prison experience, however, he became more reasonable and less hyperbolic. Yet, al-Jawahiri himself, in the words of al-'Alawī, was a mirror of Iraq: "I found him a quiet man when the political and social life was quiet in the country and extremely alarmed when the situation was troubled or martial law declared."<sup>510</sup> His predictions of a terrible, but inevitable, revolution in "al-Iqtā'" suggest that for the first time al-Jawahiri shows his fears that the coming revolution could be disastrous, fears which were later confirmed. Three major

<sup>509</sup> Doris Jedamski, *Chewing over the West: Occidental Narratives in non-Western Readings* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), 33.

<sup>510</sup> Al-'Alawī, *Al-Jawahiri Diwān al-'Aṣr*, 240-41.

events occurred afterwards: the military revolution of 1941, the uprising of 1948 in which his younger brother was killed, and finally the revolution or military coup of 1958 that ended the monarchy and established the republic. None of these uprisings and coups or revolutions, as al-Jawahiri mentions in his autobiography, was the true revolution he dreamt of. He mocks the description of the military uprising of 1941 as a revolution, because of its leader, the Prime Minister Rashīd ‘Ālī al-Gailānī, who had Nazi sympathies. He also comments ironically on the revolution of 1958 and its consequences, saying, in his eighties, that he truly regrets any kind of support he spoke of or provided to it. For him, it was the revolution that turned Iraq into a police state. He concludes that he distrusts any sudden military coup, even if it gains wide public approval.<sup>511</sup> The theory of revolution as an idea that haunted al-Jawahiri’s mind however, was not at an end, nor was his communist sympathies and beliefs. They were no more than tools that he used to fight hunger, poverty and social inequality, which al-‘Alawī highlight as central themes in his poems.<sup>512</sup>

Although al-Jawahiri and Auden are entirely different in terms of cultural background, language, religion and manner of thought, there are still many common threads between them as poets of human rights. The case of landless peasants in Iraq in 1939, for example, was similar in terms of the lack of rights, especially the right to property and humanity, to the case of the Jewish refugees in the USA in 1939. Like al-Jawahiri, Auden criticises the non-humanitarian bureaucracies of law, the apathy of the majority of all classes, social inequality and egoism. Yet, the way these topics are approached in each poem sheds light on the cultural differences between the two poets, which are reflected on their prioritization of the topics. The following table shows how they approached human rights in their poems:

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<sup>511</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Dhikrayātī*, 2: 105-68.

<sup>512</sup> Al-‘Alawī, *Al-Jawahiri Diwān al-‘Aṣr*, 241.

<b>Auden</b>	<b>Al-Jawahiri</b>
Suffering	Injustice
Human apathy: lack of responsibility to help individuals in need & egoism.	Human apathy: ignorance and the dominance of reactionary traditions.
Tyranny: social apathy leads to tyranny.	Tyranny: ignorance and reactionary traditions lead to apathy and tyranny.
Individual vs group rights: human apathy and egoism.	Majority vs minority rights: corruption and injustice
Negative rights: The right to freedom from fear, inequality and discrimination.	Negative rights: The right to treatment with humanity and respect for dignity, freedom from oppression, inequality & discrimination
Positive rights: The rights of refugees to citizenship & housing	Positive rights: The rights of citizens to freedom from hunger. The right to housing, education and health services.
Remedy: Love	Remedy: Revolution or public uprising
Human rights vs state rights: the bureaucracy of law	Human rights vs state rights: law as a means for implementing corruption and injustice.

From this table, we understand that each poet built his case on his own cultural background and the surrounding circumstances. Both sought justice, for example, but al-Jawahiri straightforwardly underlined the necessity for justice as a right and a means for securing and protecting rights. Here we notice in his demands for justice via revolution how the foreign occupation of his country is seen according to his cultural background as a major violation of rights. An aggressive violation that needs aggressive remedy:

*Yamudd yadan tu 'ṭi al-ḍi'āf ḥuqūqahum / wa yastū b-'ukhrā bāṭishan ghayr rāḥimī*<sup>513</sup>

To take back the rights of the oppressed with a hand / and use the other to punish the oppressors mercilessly. (33)

The word *yastū* here means to use force or assault, which al-Jawahiri carefully chose to indicate that aggression in his situation is not a crime but a sort of remedy with which *ḥuqūq* (rights), as clearly mentioned are restored. This line sums up the message: it is a problem of rights rather than one of land distribution or poverty. All the images in the poem revolve around the case of rights. It is important to mention here that all themes listed in the table above are repeated twice or more in al-Jawahiri's poem, especially the case of the right to dignity, violated by oppression and humiliation. These repetitions, which are limited in "Refugee Blues," were also found necessary by Auden for giving another image or example on the same topic, such as the image of homelessness and the image of fear. For al-Jawahiri, repetition is a technique for addressing his audience in different modes on the same topic. In the beginning of the poem, for example, al-Jawahiri criticises the majority's apathy and submission when he writes:

*A hādha sawādun yubtaghā limulimmatin / wa naḥtājuhū fi al-ma'ziq al-mutalāḥimi?*<sup>514</sup>

Are these [surrendering] masses the ones / we rely upon in hard times and great catastrophes? (24)

Later in the poem, al-Jawahiri repeats the same sentence but with a tone of encouragement rather than irony:

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<sup>513</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Al-Iqtā'*.

<sup>514</sup> Ibid.

*Lanā ḥājatun ‘ind al-sawād ‘azīmatun / sanafqiduhā yawm ishtidād al-malāḥimi*<sup>515</sup>

We shall greatly miss our need for the masses / when hard times come upon us. (30)

This technique of ‘carrot and stick’ is implemented by al-Jawahiri as a soul-stirring one, sometimes through the ironic-satirical style, and sometimes through adopting a tone of encouragement. He also coated this technique with a warning tone. These three qualities became dominant in his political poems after 1939: criticism (present compared to past), encouragement (past compared to present) and warning (future). In another poem “al-Ya’s al-Manshūd” (Desired Despair) al-Jawahiri explains why he used this style:

*Ruddū ila al-ya’s mā lam yattasi ‘ṭama ‘ā / sharrun min al-sharr khawfun minhu an yaqa ‘ā*

*Sharrun min al-amal al-makdhūb bāriqūhū / an taḥmil al-hamm wa al-ta’mīl wa al-hala ‘ā*<sup>516</sup>

Give back to despair what hope couldn’t afford / waiting for hope to occur in such a situation is the worst of evils

Worse than the false glittering of hope / is to continue dreaming of hope in the midst of despair, fears and worries. (“al-Ya’s al-Manshūd”: 1-2)

This tone of despair, however, reflects what al-Jawahiri came to realise in 1939 and after. It is similar to what Auden also realised after 1937, and what he later expressed in his “In Memory of W. B. Yeats,” through the phrase: “poetry makes nothing happen.” The situation of al-Jawahiri, however, was not about what a poet *can* do, but what a poet *will* do. He was aware that it is quite sufficient for a poet to be a defender of rights using the written word, but what he could not afford is receiving bullets, torture and prison in return for words.

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<sup>515</sup> Ibid.

<sup>516</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Al-Ya’s al-Manshūd*, “adab.com,” accessed November 05, 2014, <http://www.adab.com/modules.php?name=Sh3er&doWhat=shqas&qid=66878>.

### 3.5. Consequences

In this chapter in which we have reflected on the benefits of identifying Mohammed Mahdi al-Jawahiri as a poet of human rights, it remains to ask: If al-Jawahiri did not exist at all, would this have changed any of the events and incidents that occurred in 1930s Iraq?

The answer to this question can be both ‘yes’ and ‘no’: on the one hand, none of the events that happened in Iraq during the 1930s and following would have changed if al-Jawahiri had not existed. On the other hand, if one asked any Iraqi writer, such as Ḥasan al-‘Alawī, Hādī al-‘Alawī and Jabra Ibrahim Jabra: ‘can you imagine the modern history of Iraq without the poetry of al-Jawahiri?’ their reply would be a resounding ‘no.’<sup>517</sup>

As for the first question, the same hypothesis can also be applied to human rights, especially in their legal guise: can poetry provide any sort of protection to human rights? The answer here is both ‘yes’ and ‘no’ as well. Poetry cannot provide any means of legal enforcement and does not necessarily have to. What is required from poetry in its relationship with human rights is to keep this thread between human beings and their rights tight, and to remind us of the reasons for their existence or in other words, what our rights are.

Throughout the poetry of al-Jawahiri, especially the poems analysed in this chapter, we find that his approach to defending rights revolves around raising awareness for the power of the people in the face of a ‘legalised’ oppressive force. He found that the lack of rights was a result of disorder in legal norms, caused by external and internal collaborating forces. Since the law, however, according to Joseph Slaughter, “projects and depends upon cultural narratives for its effective operation, legitimation, and social compulsion,” there were social, cultural and religious implications alongside political ones that provided a suitable environment for the formation and domination of local and state laws.<sup>518</sup> This highlighted the necessity to address the dilemma by targeting the law makers/appliers and those who should abide by it almost equally.

In the first poem, “Taḥarrak al-Laḥd,” al-Jawahiri mainly targets authoritarianism. Yet, we see him, at the same time, addressing the people: sometimes he encourages them and others he warns them. Al-Jawahiri was not able to criticize social apathy as Auden did, without targeting other crucial problems that helped to maintain apathy,

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<sup>517</sup> Mohammed Jawad al-Ghabbān, *Al-Jawahiri Fāris Ḥalabat al-Adab* (Damascus: al-Madā Press, 2006), 18, 247. See also, Al-‘Alawī, *Al-Jawahiri Diwān al-‘Aṣr*, Introduction.

<sup>518</sup> Slaughter, *Human Rights, Inc.: The World Novel, Narrative Form, and International Law*, 44.

such as illiteracy, hunger, lack of health care and the dominance of detrimental local traditions.

In the light of those differences in situations and circumstances between the two poets we notice another interesting point that has not been highlighted yet. In the comparison between Auden's "Epitaph on a Tyrant" and al-Jawahiri's "Taḥarrak al-Laḥd," we notice that Auden talked about his tyrant, even before the Second World War, in the past tense, while al-Jawahiri talked about his tyrant, before he became a tyrant, in the present and future tense. This style was chosen by each poet, according to an accurate reading of the respective situation. With a reference to his crimes against humanity, Auden talked about a living tyrant as a dead man, as if he was telling us that the phenomenon of European tyrants in the 1930s is temporary, not permanent although there will be much suffering. Al-Jawahiri talked about tyrants, not one tyrant, as resurrected dead men and did not tell us when they will die again. His words indicated that tyranny will prevail for a long time; and that is why he strongly reinforced the idea of revolution as the only way to send them back to their graves. The historical events in Iraq and Europe that followed, proved what the two poets said was true.

The poems of al-Jawahiri also focus on suffering but in a slightly different way from that of Auden: al-Jawahiri uses the words *ẓulm* and *mazālim* (injustice, oppression or despotism) rather than words that stand for the exact meaning of suffering, such as *mu'ānāt* or *alam* (pain). He was also interested in specifying the sources of injustice or oppression in detail, such as hunger, the lack of women's right to education, and, in the case of landless peasants, corruption. The main reason for this is that there was a comprehensive lack of rights rather than certain incidents of violations or crimes against humanity. In addition to this, the violators of rights were in front of his eyes. He knew them very well, visited them in their houses and used to see them in his daily life. Yet, he did not hesitate to criticize them: even this kind of grotesque relationship is derived from the very culture of Arabs, especially where al-Jawahiri came from. In Najaf, whose people is mostly Shia, they are committed to the principles of the Hashemite family who were known for their opposition to all forms of injustice since the martyrdom of Imam al-Ḥussein bin 'Alī in the year 680 in Karbala. Al-Jawahiri himself, who wrote three poems on the martyrdom of the grandson of the prophet and the son of the fourth caliph, was truly committed to these principles and the poems highlight the idea of righting wrong and telling the truth in the face of tyrants.<sup>519</sup>

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<sup>519</sup> Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature*, 330, 361.



In the second poem, “Fī al-Sijn,” al-Jawahiri presents a picture of individual suffering, but also, due to the bigger challenges he faced, he seized the chance to present a picture of resistance to oppression. The suffering of al-Jawahiri in prison carries the same implications that the suffering of Icarus does in Auden’s poem: it is one of the consequences of collective apathy that al-Jawahiri warned about in 1936. In terms of human rights, the poem displays the image of the suffering of an individual to underline the right to dignity rather than the right to life as presented in Auden’s “Musée des Beaux Arts.”

From the poems of Auden we understand that the right to life denoted the right to humanity, as the concept of human rights in its western guise confirms. The right to humanity is the general basic right, which encompasses a wider range of rights, such as the right to safety, freedom from discrimination and the right to dignity. The concept of human rights, as we see it through the poems of al-Jawahiri is somewhat different. It makes the right to life dependent on the right to dignity. The right to dignity, according to the cultural identity of Arabs, acts as an umbrella under which other basic rights, such as the right to humanity, safety and equality fall.

This distinction can be seen vividly in “al-Iqā’” and other poems of al-Jawahiri when compared with “Refugee Blues” and Auden’s other poems. While Auden stresses the right to humanity as a basic requirement without which the right to life remains incomplete, al-Jawahiri emphasizes dignity as a requirement without which the right to life is meaningless and needless. This understanding brings us closer to understanding Iraqi culture, and why exaggerated reactions are preferred in cases where dignity is at stake.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### 4. Conclusion

At this point it remains to ask: what would a study on human rights in the poetic careers of Auden and al-Jawahiri during the 1930s add? Firstly, this project presents poetry, especially at a time during which the need for human rights was urgent, as one of the tools used for setting an immediate reaction to this need. This reaction proved validity in many ways, in identifying violations of human rights in unexpected places as in “Musée des Beaux Arts,” providing detailed description of unseen violations as in “Fī al-Sijn,” warning against possible future violations due to the continuation of negative social and political attitudes, such as in “Epitaph on a Tyrant” and “Taḥarrak al-Laḥd;” and raising awareness among people on the vices of securing an individual or a group’s rights on the account of others’ in “Refugee Blues” and “al-Iqtā’.” Secondly, it demonstrates the importance of poetry as a means of understanding cultural similarities and differences to provide a better identification and interpretation of rights. We also notice that the six poems analysed in this project highlight interesting affinities and differences. In stressing the need for rights, defending them and criticising violations, violators and even those who were neutral and refrained from interfering to protect rights or prevent violations, the two poets agree. When these common themes meet we notice similarities in style such as in the criticism of apathy / surrender, the ironic admiration of the Old Masters / offering gratitude to authority, and the criticism of egoism / inequality. Differences such as the prioritization of rights and the kind of solutions suggested by each poet as a sort of remedy underline the value of poetry in spotting them. Thirdly, the poems analysed in this project, especially in the light of the two poets’ doubts and queries about the role of poetry in hard times, show that these poems of human rights work in the first place within the boundaries of guidance and endurance to suffering and pain.

Towards the end of the 1930s while Auden was in New York, his mind was preoccupied with the question of the poet’s role in hard times. He realised as he declared in “New Year Letter” that “No words men write can stop the war / Or measure up to the relief / Of its immeasurable grief.”<sup>520</sup> The poems of Auden and al-Jawahiri, however, teach us that in such a troubled time there was a need for the poet to provide a

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<sup>520</sup> Auden, *Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), 204.

deeper and clearer meaning of guidance and encouragement for people. Five days after “September 1, 1939,” Auden wrote:

Art cannot be helpful through our trying to keep and specially concerning ourselves with the distresses of others, but in so far as we bear our own distresses more passionately, give now and then a perhaps clearer meaning to endurance, and develop for ourselves the means of expressing the suffering within us and its conquest more precisely and clearly than is possible to those who have to apply their powers to something else.<sup>521</sup>

These words indicate that a human rights poet is not only a person capable of describing the suffering of others in verse without being involved in it. Involvement means being with the people if not necessarily among them. Having the ability to realise and react to their pain would help easing its impacts emotionally and mentally, especially in a manner that encourages resisting the negative outcomes of suffering. Hannah Arendt, in this respect states: “I have become more convinced than ever that [Auden] was ‘hurt into poetry’, even more than Yeats.”<sup>522</sup> Arendt refers to the injustices of the world, the crookedness of the desires and the infidelities of the heart as ‘curses’ that Auden could not ignore, even when he was in his literary exile in the USA.<sup>523</sup>

For al-Jawahiri the last months of the 1930s were extremely difficult to endure, especially after the sudden death of his wife in April 1939. Although his suffering was personal, the poem he wrote in the beginning of 1940 “Ajib ayyuha al-Qalb” (Answer, O Heart), interestingly shows that the two poets share the same idea on the role of poetry in times of distress:

*U ʿidh al-qawāfi zāhiyāt al-maʿālī ʿī / mazāmīr ʿazzāfin aghārīd sāji ʿī*  
*liṭāfan b-afwāh al-ruwāt nawāfidhan / ilā al-qalb yajrī siḥruhā fi al-*  
*masāmi ʿī*  
*takād tuḥiss al-qalb bayn suṭūrihā / wa tamsaḥ b-al-ardān majrā al-*  
*madāmi ʿī*

.....  
*Ajib ayyuha al-qalb al-ladhī surra ma ʿsharun / bimā sāʾahū min ḥādithāt*  
*al-qawāri ʿī*

<sup>521</sup> W. H. Auden, “Rilke in English,” *The New Republic* 100 (1939): 135, accessed October 21, 2014, <http://www.newrepublic.com/book/review/rilke-in-english>.

<sup>522</sup> Hannah Arendt, “Remembering Wystan H. Auden,” in *W. H. Auden: A Tribute*, ed. Stephen Spender (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975), 185-86.

<sup>523</sup> Ibid.

*Bimā rī' mink al-lub naffast kurbatan / wa dāwait awjā'an b-tilk al-rawa'i ṭ*

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I seek refuge in the elegant-looking lines / of which the shepherd and the  
Bedouin sing,

So delicate in the mouths of narrators / into the heart their charms open a  
window,

You can feel the heart beating among them / and see them wiping out the  
tears of the distressed,

Answer those, O my heart, who were / happy with the hardships you  
suffered,

How many times you eased the suffering of others with yours / and heeled  
wounds with these words. (1-3, 10-11)

This poem came after months of silence during which al-Jawahiri, in the middle of the political Nazi-British struggle over Iraq, did not say anything after his elegy “Nājayt Qabrak” (A soliloquy to Your Grave), written for his wife. This poem as al-Jawahiri says in his autobiography, had left a different impact on him, one that was deeper and stronger than in his other poems.<sup>525</sup> In this poem as the above lines show, al-Jawahiri describes how through his poetic reflections on personal and public sufferings he provided remedy. Al-Ruṣāfī who also ‘hurt himself into poetry’ and was living the last days of his life in solitude, sent a letter to al-Jawahiri in which he attached a pastiche, and told him that the poem made his tears flow.<sup>526</sup> This shows that poetry and poets during the 1930s occupied a unique position in the Iraqi society as well as in the cultural and political scenes. Both Auden and al-Jawahiri, however, realised at the end of the decade the limits and borders of their roles as reformist-poets.

It is important to note that this thesis does not claim the existence of hidden troves of human rights advocacy in poetry. Instead, the main concern has been to show reflections on human rights in poetry, across two very different cultures, and to shed light on the extant similarities and differences as key factors that should be taken into consideration. Auden and al-Jawahiri’s poems, analysed in this research project, highlight what Hannah Arendt classifies in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, in the context of her analysis of the decline of the nation-state, as the rights of Man

<sup>524</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Ajib ayyuha al-Qalb*, “adab.com,” accessed October 21, 2014, <http://www.adab.com/modules.php?name=Sh3er&doWhat=shqas&qid=66846>.

<sup>525</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Dhikrayātī*, 1: 362.

<sup>526</sup> *Ibid.*, 362-63.

(individual) and the rights of peoples.<sup>527</sup> “The right to have rights,” Arendt argues, focuses mainly on the right to a fair distribution of rights or justice within the concept of the rights of citizens (political rights), as Peg Birmingham observes.<sup>528</sup> Arendt, however, clearly stresses that the rights of man are an ‘inalienable’ part of the rights of the people in any nation and, according to the fact that the world is a family of nations, the question of national emancipation would make the people, not the individual, as the image of man.<sup>529</sup> The poems as reactions to certain violations of rights were attempts to defend the rights of individuals among their people. In terms of their cultural backgrounds, which shaped their reactions, each poet presents an image of how the rights of his people, as approached in the poems, look like or should be.

As argued by James Dawes, “human rights work is, at its heart, a matter of storytelling.”<sup>530</sup> The poems of human rights, both in English and in Arabic, as examined in this thesis, tell stories of violated rights “to extend our knowledge of good and evil” and lead us “to the point where it is possible for us to make a rational and moral choice” as Auden expressed.<sup>531</sup> The poems in this research project have shown us a different type of storytelling, more capable of moving people to do good or refrain from doing evil through its ability to rouse the heart, awaken the conscience and activate the moral drive. They have simply given human rights a tongue: they revealed inward feelings and rendered the poor, homeless and hungry by conveying their voice to the world. Yet, the poems of Auden and al-Jawahiri not only call for feeding the hungry or helping the poor; their central concern is rights that, if achieved or restored, would emancipate the hungry and the poor.

The relationship between poetry and human rights, as this project has shown, involves identifying the poetry of protest, prison, torture and ongoing abuses as poetry of human rights. It demonstrates that these poems can provide stories that are testimonial, evidentiary and documentary, and reinforces reading poetry as a voice for human needs and aspirations. The radical consideration of social, historical, religious, political and intellectual domains in poetry, whether or not human rights are directly involved, helps to “[find] new ways to represent the enigmas we are living.”<sup>532</sup> In other

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<sup>527</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1994), 267-71, 291.

<sup>528</sup> Peg Birmingham, *Hannah Arendt & Human Rights: The Predicament of Common Responsibility* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2006), 1-2.

<sup>529</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 291.

<sup>530</sup> James Dawes, “Human Rights in Literary Studies,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (2009): 394.

<sup>531</sup> W. H. Auden, “Psychology and Art To-day,” in *The English Auden*, ed. Edward Mendelson, 340-41.

<sup>532</sup> Nick Mansfield, “Human Rights as Violence and Enigma: Can Literature Really Be of any Help with the Politics of Human Rights?,” in *Theoretical Perspectives on Human Rights and Literature*, ed. Elizabeth Swanson and Alexandra Schultheis Moore Goldberg (London: Routledge, 2012), 213.

words they enhance our understanding of the feelings that emerge out of such experiences; or as Harold Schweizer observes, “[if] suffering then cannot be authorised or mastered, it can yet be told—told as one tells stories, sings songs, paints pictures, or recites poetry.”<sup>533</sup> The six poems by Auden and al-Jawahiri also tell us how and why violations of human rights occurred in a manner that presents remedy alongside diagnosis. “Musée des Beaux Arts” is an immediate reaction to a scene of suffering. This reaction, however, comes in the last part of the poem whereas the first lines are devoted to telling us how suffering used to occur until it has been naturalised. In the poem’s brief and yet accurate analysis of human apathy and egoism as reasons for suffering to take place there is a message: to achieve and protect human rights we must understand human beings. The three poems of Auden, as well as those of al-Jawahiri, equally show humans as victimisers and victimised, oppressors and oppressed. What is important here, in terms of understanding the human, is calling for love in Auden’s poems and resistance in al-Jawahiri’s as rights; the right itself here is a means for remedy. Both solutions are seen as appropriate according to the cultural background, the circumstances that led to the violation and the importance of the violated rights.

In his analysis of human rights and wrongs, Auden presents examples of how rights are related and dependent upon one another; an individual’s right to freedom of action does not imply foregoing one’s duties and responsibilities towards others, and vice versa. He uses the fall of Icarus and the crucifixion of Christ as examples where extreme suffering is met with extreme apathy. Al-Jawahiri’s “Fī al-Sijn” was juxtaposed to Auden’s “Musée des Beaux Arts,” as both revolved around the idea of the individual and personal suffering. The two poems go further in showing detailed aspects of individual suffering as well as means of dealing with them. As a piece of prison writing, “Fī al-Sijn” provides an example of the ‘poetry of witness’ and presents resistance to tyranny and oppression from a psychological-mental point of view. It can be argued here that while al-Jawahiri’s poem deals with rights inside the prison, “Musée des Beaux Arts” deals with them outside the prison, especially since the latter sheds light on the tragic death of Icarus after his escape from prison. The two poems in this respect fulfil each other.

“Epitaph on a Tyrant,” written a few months after “Musée des Beaux Arts,” presents a very short but detailed description of a tyrant, especially in the image of laughed / cried in the last two lines. In this poem, Auden’s fears that tyranny would spring out of the people’s apathy and egoism are materialised. A community in which individuals

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<sup>533</sup> Harold Schweizer, *Suffering and the Remedy of Art* (New York: State University of NY, 1997), 19.

suffer while no one cares about them is more inclined to producing an individual who makes it suffer in return. In this poem, Auden stresses the fact that the innocent, such as the children, are always the first victims of the consequences of such negative social practices. Similarly, in “Taḥarrak al-Laḥd,” although it seems that al-Jawahiri maintains optimism in his poem, he warns that the continuity of public apathy would lead to the appearance of a tyrant or tyrants in Iraq. In a voice louder than that of Auden and in a more direct style, al-Jawahiri urges his audience to take action and warns them of disastrous consequences if they remained unaware and unwilling to realise the full extent of the importance of the military coup of 1936 in changing the conditions in Iraq to better or worse.

Al-Jawahiri did not narrate parables to his audience nor did he give them time to think. In terms of specifying the reasons that lead to the rise of tyranny the two poets agree, but there is one point where they diverge. Auden presents an image of a dead tyrant, while al-Jawahiri presents the image of a resurrected tyrant. This difference in predicting the future of tyranny was built upon a true reading of culture: tyranny feeds on public support, regardless of how this is gained (apathy, ignorance, illusion or fear). From the 1940s onward in Germany, Spain and Italy, especially after World War II, public support for tyrants was diminishing while in Iraq it was flourishing. This explains the style al-Jawahiri used in his poems, especially his harsh criticism of ignorance and surrender, his encouragement to the people to move and his revolutionary spirit of challenge against the corrupt pillars of authority.

In this respect, we notice that Auden, with the exception of “Spain,” which is imbued by the same spirit of challenge as al-Jawahiri’s poems, mainly deals with the violation of rights as a background against which he approaches human rights. Al-Jawahiri, on the other hand, argues in all three of his poems for the right to have rights. This difference reveals that the situation of human rights in Britain was better and less complicated than in Iraq, which is still suffering from a lack of rights to this day in many aspects. Auden’s style as in “Musée des Beaux Arts” and “Epitaph on a Tyrant” indicates that all these social, moral and political troubles were primarily related to serious and yet temporary crises: the emergence of tyrants and war. Thus his revolution was one of love in the face of hatred. As for al-Jawahiri, although the British occupation was a temporary crisis, the consequences it wrought and the already existing negative traditions were not. The revolution he kept calling for until the late 1950s was nothing but a precautionary measure that might have prevented worse things happening in the future, namely the stabilization and naturalization of authoritarianism and injustice. The

truth is that since the revolution (or the military coup) of 1958, the situation of rights in Iraq has been steadily deteriorating due to the dominance of military authoritarian rule.

The main topic of the third poem by Auden, "Refugee Blues," is the rights of refugees in 1939, under which fall the right to identity, housing, freedom from hunger, dignity and security. The poem sheds light on the discrepancy between human rights from the perspective of the state (and citizens) and rights from a humanitarian perspective. It shows the way law fails on many occasions to ease suffering, as in the case of the Jewish refugees. The poem stirs the question of the origin of human rights, especially in the consul stanza, in which the legal system becomes part of the problem. It also shows another kind of egoism, coated by law, in the way citizens react to and deal with those refugees as non-citizens who had come to steal their bread. Auden, in this poem, touched upon the core of the problem of what human rights are and what they should be.

At almost the same time al-Jawahiri in Iraq was dealing with the case of the landless peasants, or *ta'āba*, who were also victims of the 'injustices' of law. In his poem "al-Iqtā'," he criticised doing injustice in the name of law by which thousands of peasants were deprived of their work, home and other basic rights because of the system of land-policy. In both poems we find, in addition to criticising the failure of law in protecting the rights of peasants and refugees, a criticism on the social level of the way those, whose interests were protected by the law, reacted to the situation. Poetry reminds us of the restrictions people, especially those in power, should abide by in the course of their lives in order to ensure rights for all. The two poems teach us, especially in the manner of their reaction to the violation of the right to property, how important this right is seen by both poets. In the two poems it is described as a basic right upon which other fundamental rights are dependant: for Auden it is the right to life and humanity. For al-Jawahiri it is the same but since the violation of the right to humanity is a violation of dignity, the right to life becomes meaningless. Violent action here becomes itself a right with which the most fundamental right (dignity) can be restored even if it may lead to the loss of the right to life.

Both Auden and al-Jawahiri use key words with which they identified the dilemma of rights in the 1930s; Auden generally used the word 'suffering' while al-Jawahiri used the word *ẓulm* (injustice). The latter word as al-Jawahiri uses it in his poems refers to injustice as intentionally enforced rather than a natural outcome of a social negative behaviour or reactionary traditions. Images of suffering in the poetry of Auden, such as the "dreadful martyrdom" and the "forsaken cry," can be found in the poetry of al-



Jawahiri but in a more exaggerated manner, as in *ightālū* (they assassinated), *āhāt* (groans of pain) and *alf bākin* (a thousand people crying). The images used by al-Jawahiri are pluralised, meant to appear crueller and expressed in a manner that alludes not only to crimes and victims but to doers as well. Words such as *ifqār* (to make someone poor), *tajwī‘* (to make someone starve), *iqṭīd* (to imprison or to take someone to execution) and *idhlāl* (to humiliate) are all used as constant reminders of criminals, not only crimes.

Al-Jawahiri was in a more precarious situation in the 1930s; the newly formed state was vulnerable and unable to hinder the steadily growing corruption and foreign intrusion, while the social and cultural norms suffered from reactionary social traditions. All these problems were dominant in Iraq and none of them seemed to come to a conclusion. The lack of justice affected by the intrusion of a greater foreign power was why the manner by which he approached rights was closer to demanding and defending them. Auden’s manner was more like protecting and securing rights. However, where there were similar situations to those al-Jawahiri used to face, we interestingly find Auden reacting to them in the same way. Similarly, the aestheticisation of violence can be found in Auden’s poetry in similar circumstances as in “Spain”: “But to-day the struggle,” to “build the just city.”<sup>534</sup> Here we find Auden in the position of a defender of rights, calling for struggle as a means to gain them. However, while al-Jawahiri’s calls for fighting for rights and justice were hailed in Iraq, Auden’s words received severe criticism. In his essay “Inside the Whale,” Orwell criticised Auden’s idea of “necessary murder,” which Orwell apparently considered amoral and reminiscent of Stalinist ‘liquidation.’<sup>535</sup> Patrick Deer argues, however, that “Spain functions not as a pretext for violence, but instead as a screen on which fantasies of political action and violence are projected.”<sup>536</sup> Auden was caught in the middle of that action, as was al-Jawahiri in Iraq; yet, during times when Auden was not as involved in action as he shows in *Spain*, he avoided any reference to violence and criticised it, as can be seen in the three poems examined in this thesis. This demonstrates how poetry reacts to events according to their nature, registering minute details of circumstances to provide reflections of the external world of man, as well as a genuine understanding of inner human nature.

While dealing with all these topics, however, each of the two poets reflected his own culture. One of the cultural aspects, for example, is the impact of the surrounding

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<sup>534</sup> W. H. Auden, *Spain 1937*, in *The English Auden*, ed. Edward Mendelson, 210.

<sup>535</sup> Patrick Deer, “Auden and Wars,” in *W. H. Auden in Context*, ed. Tony Sharpe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 154.

<sup>536</sup> *Ibid.*

environment on the mind of the poet. In talking about freedom, for example, Auden refers to animals like the poodle, the swimming fish and the birds on trees in “Refugee Blues,” while al-Jawahiri uses words like *ṣill* (desert snake), *falāt* (wide desert) and *lafḥ al-samā’im* (the feeling of hot wind on the face).<sup>537</sup> In their reference to freedom both poets use the image of an isolated rural place, where nature has not yet been spoiled by the complications of urban life. Auden uses the image of a green wood where birds sing at their ease, while al-Jawahiri envisions the desert where snakes roam free too. Yet, al-Jawahiri was mostly concerned with the right to defend human dignity and self-determination, while Auden with the protection of the right to freedom, or more specifically, the right to humanity. Al-Jawahiri could have used the image of a bird singing in the desert or in an oasis, which is familiar to the Arab culture, but the reference to a snake is closer to stressing the need to fight for rights if necessary and be ready to do it. In addition to their cultural implications, these images show how critical is a person’s right to remain physically and emotionally related to their cultural background. In naturalising the universality of human rights, such local implications need to be identified and accommodated within the international legal apparatus. Studies of human rights poetry can help providing further insight into understanding human rights via understanding them through the social, cultural and humanitarian perspectives. This study has shown to us that poetry deals with rights in the first place according to who needs them most, what rights are needed, when and why rather than just providing a poet’s view on human rights. This identification of rights according to need rather than ‘do we need them or not’, especially across cultures, presents poetry as one of the important voices for human rights both in theory and practice.

This research project opens the door for future projects, such as anti-rights poetry or what might be called the poetry of terrorism, and the translatability of human rights in poetry. Each of these topics could be approached comparatively, and both may further our understanding of human rights and how they are perceived and expressed in different cultural settings.

Discrimination, encouragement of violence, military expansion, racism and eulogies for tyrants and other related topics have all been raised in verse. Future studies on this topic could explore the reasons why anti-human rights poems are composed and what implications and messages they try to convey. They help identify this interdisciplinary genre in relationship to the circumstances and cultural atmosphere that led to its

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<sup>537</sup> Al-Jawahiri, *Taharrak al-Lahd*, “adab.com,” accessed October 24, 2014, <http://www.adab.com/modules.php?name=Sh3er&doWhat=shqas&qid=66782&r=&rc=190>.

existence and in what way these poetic works could leave negative/positive impacts on human rights.

When talking about the study of human rights in poetry across cultural spheres and the universality of human rights, one cannot ignore the important role of translation as a medium through which meaning is conveyed. In this research project, I translated the poems of Auden and al-Jawahiri that were analysed in the context of this research project.<sup>538</sup> During the translation I had to deal closely and practically with all the cultural implications both in form and content. It was very important to present a translation that would function as much as possible like the source text. Two main questions appeared in terms of this process; the first was about form and content and the second about the translatability of poetry, based on the belief that the beauty of poetry would be lost in translation and should remain untouched. Studies in this respect would discuss the translatability of human rights poetry, especially the translation of cultural images and expressions through which rights have been approached.

Studying similarities and differences in interpreting terms of human rights across cultures, such as the meaning of freedom, equality, and privacy, will pave the way for a more adequate translation of poetic texts, built on an understanding of the cultural implications inherent in poems of human rights. This strategy can also be applied to the study of anti-human rights poetry. In the translation of the poems of Auden and al-Jawahiri, I tried to create a form that suits the target language and yet does not veer too far, in theory, from the source language forms. In other words, I translated poetry into poetry, as much as possible although, however, I still believe that I failed to give an adequate translation of al-Jawahiri's poems. It was beyond my skills to present a translation that would convey the music, strength, brevity and the subtle choice of words all together in the target language. Thus I thought it would be better to focus on meaning and present it in a manner that brings the impression al-Jawahiri intended to convey as close as possible in the target language. Translation here was employed in the first place as a tool for the measurement of cultural differences and affinities.

To conclude, this thesis has underlined that we may employ poetry in order to present a better understanding of culture and push human rights practice beyond the spheres of the legal forms back to the humanitarian perspective. In addition to the novel way it has proposed for approaching human rights in poetry, this research project also suggests a new way of reading poetry and identifying poets as human rights protective figures and defenders.

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<sup>538</sup> For the translation of Auden's poems into Arabic see appendix, 194.

## Appendix (a)

### Translation of Auden's poems into Arabic:

#### Musée des Beaux Arts متحف الفنون الجميلة

عن الأسي لم يخطنوا.. عرفوه معرفة اليقين  
وكذاك عرف الأقدمين  
عرفوا في النفس مكنه ووقع حجوله  
عرفوا علامته.. فحين نزوله  
لا بد من لاه هناك بمأكلٍ ، أو ها هنا من يفتح الشباك  
أو يمشي ثقيل الخطو دون الالتفات الى الشمال او اليمين.  
أو كيف ينتظر الشيوخ ظهور معجزة الولادة ثم يفنى في انتظارهم الوقار مع الحنين  
لكن وحين مجيئه.. لا بد ثمة من صغارٍ رافضين  
في جانب الغابة مثواهم وبركتهم ،  
حيث التزلج عندهم لا يستقيم لغيرهم أو يستبين  
وكذاك عرف الأقدمين  
ما غاب عنهم أن أعظم محنةٍ لا بد عند وقوعها من غفلة الأيام أو غدر السنين  
ومكانها في أي زاويةٍ مبعثرة.. أو بقعةٍ منسيةٍ  
حيث الكلاب تعيش حياتها الكلبية المثلى،  
والمستبد على حصان ذي مؤخرة بريئة  
منشغل في حكها بشجيرة كي تستكين.

وكذاك إيكاروسُ عند برويغلٍ مثلاً: فالكل في شغلٍ عن الكارثة الكبرى؛  
فإما سمع الفلاح صوت سقوطه في الماء أو سمع الأئين ،  
لكنه لم يلتفت، ليس مهما عنده ما قد جرى؛  
والشمس أبصر ضونها ساقان بيضاوان ينغمسان عند الجرف حيث الماء أخضر؛  
أو ربما تلك السفينة أبصرت ما كان أندرا: غلامٌ من فم الأفق هوى،  
ولكن في هدوء أدبرت عنه وابتعدت تلك السفين.

#### Epitaph on a Tyrant مرثية على شاهد قبر طاغية

ما سعى إلا لإحراز الكمال  
وله شعرٌ بسيطٌ ، فهمه سهل المنال  
وله علمٌ بزلات الرجال  
شغله الشاغل تجييشُ الفيالقِ والكتائب للقتال  
كان إذ يضحك، يعم الضحكُ والتهريجُ في الملامِ الوقور

وإذا يبكي، ترى الطرقات بالأطفال قد صارت قبور.

### ترنيمة اللاجئين *Refugee Blues*

من الملايين عشرٌ بهذي المدينة  
بعضهم في البيوت وأكثرهم في الجحور الدفينة  
فهل هنالك يا صاحٍ مأوى لأرواحٍ تكلى حزينة

كان لنا ذات يومٍ وطنٍ ..وكان جميلاً على ما أظن  
راجع الأطلس سوف تراه بصدر الصحيفة لا في الركن  
لكننا يا صاحٍ لا نستطيعُ الرجوع اليه انا وأنت معاً

بقربتنا في فناء الكنيسة..صنوبرةٌ شاخٌ منها البنان وأضحت عنوس  
ولكنها عند كل ربيعٍ تعودُ عروس  
ليت الوثائق يا صاحٍ كالزرع تخضُرُ بعد يبوس

زمر القتل فينا ثم هاج وماج..ضارباً مكتبه بيديه ليحدث فينا ارتجاج  
و صاح بنا: دون وثائقٍ ليس لكم في الحياة احتياج  
انكم موتى، رغم أنا يا صاحٍ أحياءٌ دون اعوجاج

ذهبتُ الى لجنةٍ أطلبُ الاستغاثة  
وكانوا لطافاً معي..أجلسوني ثم قالوا بكل دماثة  
عد بعد عامٍ ..فماذا سنفعل يا صاحبي اليوم دون إغاثة

ذهبتُ الى محفلٍ ورأيتُ منهم خطيباً ينادى القوم:  
لا تمنحوهم ملاذاً ، منكم سيسرقون الخبز كل يوم  
انا وانت صرنا عليهم يا صاحٍ مصدرشوم

لازلتُ أسمعُ رعداً هادراً يمزقُ السماء  
إنه هتلرُ عبر أوروبا ينادي بالفناء  
إننا في باله يا صاحٍ دوماً دونما إنقضاء

ثم رأيتُ كلباً يرتدي معطفه ذو المشبك الجديد  
وقطةٌ تُفتَحُ من امامها الأبواب حيثما تريد  
يا صاحٍ لاتعجب..فالكلب والقطة ليستا من اليهود

وقفت في المرفأ عني اري شينا يسر  
رأيت أسماكاً تمارس الحرية.. وكان بيننا مسافةً تقاربُ المتر  
ياصاح كم كانت قريبةً مني ملأ العين و النظر

هناك ذهبت الى غابةٍ حيثُ لم ار ساسة  
سمعتُ غناء الطيور، تعبرُ عن رأيها بكل سلاسة  
أين الأتام ياصاح منهم.. فهل أصبح الطير أكثر منا كياسة

ألم أحدثك من قبلُ أنني رأيت في منامي عمارة  
بها ألفُ بابٍ ودورٍ وألف الف ستارة  
لكنها ياصاح ليست لنا.. فحال المنامات فينا اشدُ واقسى مرارة

وواقعا ليس سوى جرداء قاحلةٍ إلا من الثلج ومنا  
ومن بضعة الاف من الجند في كل صوبٍ ومرنى  
فأين المفر ياصاحبي .. والكل يبحث عنا.

ترجمة: أحمد البحر

## Appendix (b)

### Translation of al-Jawahiri's poems into English:

#### 1- تحرك اللحد : The Coffin Moved

وَأَسْتَقْبَلُوا يَوْمَكُمْ بِالْعِزِّ وَابْتَدَرُوا	كَلُّوا إِلَى الْعَيْبِ مَا يَأْتِي بِهِ الْقَدَرُ
وَأَزْرَوْهُ عَسَى أَنْ يَصْدُقَ الْخَبْرُ	وَصَدَّقُوا مُخْبِرًا عَنْ حُسْنِ مُنْقَلَبٍ
لَهُ مَدْبَأٌ وَلَا يَأْخُذُكُمْ الْخَوَرُ	لَا تَتْرُكُوا الْيَأْسَ يَلْقَى فِي نَفُوسِكُمْ
سَدَّ الطَّرِيقَ عَلَيْهَا الْحَازِمُ الْحَذِرُ	إِنَّ الْوَسَاوِسَ إِنْ رَامَتْ مَسَارِيهَا
فَقَدْ تَكُونُ لَكُمْ فِي طَيْهِ عِبْرٌ	تَذَكَّرُوا أَمْسَ وَاسْتَوْحُوا مَسَاوِنَهُ
تُحَاوِلُونَ وَشَقُّوا الدَّرْبَ وَاخْتَصَرُوا	مُدُّوا جَمَاجِمَكُمْ جِسْرًا إِلَى أَمَلٍ
شَعَبٌ إِلَى هِمِّ السَّاعِينَ مُفْتَقِرٌ	وَأَجْمَعُوا أَمْرَكُمْ يَنْهَضُ بِسَعِيكُمْ
أَيَّامٌ تُوحِذُهُ الْأَرْزَاءُ وَالْغَيْرُ	إِنَّ الشَّبَابَ سِنَادُ الْمَلِكِ يَعْضُدُهُ
مَا خَلَفَتْ قَبْلَهَا مِنْ سَيِّئٍ زُمِرُ	أَتَتُّكُمْ زُمْرَةً تَحْدُو عِزَانِمَهَا
يَلُوحُ مِمَّا جَنَى أَسْلَافُهَا أَثْرُ	أَلْفَتْ عَلَى كُلِّ شَبِيرٍ مِنْ مَسَالِكِهَا
فَرْدٌ وَأَنْ يَتَحَدَّى أَمْرَهَا نَفْرُ	مُهْمَةٌ عَظُمَتْ عَنْ أَنْ يَقُومَ بِهَا
وَقَدْ أَتَيْتُمْ بِمَا تَخْشَوْنَهُ نُذْرُ	مَا إِنْ لَكُمْ غَيْرُهُ يَوْمَ فَلَا تَهْنُوا
عَلَى الْبِلَادِ وَإِنَّ الصَّبْحَ يُنْتَظَرُ	طَالَتْ عِمَايَةَ لَيْلٍ رَانَ كَلْكَلُهُ
لَا الْوَعْدُ يُغْفِرِي وَلَا الْأَقْوَالُ تَنْتَشِرُ	وَإِنَّمَا الصَّبْحُ بِالْأَعْمَالِ زَاهِيَةٌ
بِمَا جَسَرْتَ عَلَيْهِ الْبِدْوَ وَالْحَضْرُ	وَأَنْتَ يَا بِنَّ " سَلِيمَانَ " الَّذِي لَهَجْتَ
حَتَّى طَغَى فَرَأَيْنَا كَيْفَ يَنْفَجِرُ	الْكَابِتُ النَّفْسَ أَزْمَانًا عَلَى حَنْقٍ
لَحْمُ الْعُلُوجِ عَلَى الْأَقْدَامِ يَنْتَثِرُ	وَالضَّارِبُ الضَّرْبَةَ الْكَبِيرَى لَصَدْمَتِهَا
أَمْ أَنْتَ بِالْأَجْلِ الْمَمْتَدِّ مُعْتَذِرُ	هَلْ أَدَّخَرْتَ لِهَذَا الْيَوْمِ إِهْبَتَهُ
وَلَا يُنْهِنُهُ مِنْ تَصْمِيمِهِ الْخَطَرُ	أَقْدَمْتَ إِقْدَامَ مَنْ لَا الْخَوْفَ يَمْنَعُهُ
أَنَّ الطَّغَاةَ عَلَى الْأَعْقَابِ تَنْدَحِرُ	وَحَسْبُ أَمْرِكَ تَوْفِيقًا وَتَوْطِنَةً
تَتْلَى مَائِزُهُ عُمْرًا وَتَذَكَّرُ	دَبَّرْتَ أَعْظَمَ تَدْبِيرٍ وَأَحْسَنَهُ
يَأْتِي الْقَضَاءُ بِهَا أَوْ يَذْهَبُ الْقَدَرُ	فَهَلْ تَحَاوَلِ أَنْ تَلْقَى نَتَائِجَهُ
وَالْمُسْتَعْلِينَ أَنَّ الْأَمْرَ مَبْتَسِرُ	وَهَلْ يَسْرُكُ قَوْلَ الْمُصْطَلِينَ بِهِ
عَلَى التَّبَدُّلِ فِي الْأَسْمَاءِ مُقْتَصِرُ	وَأَنَّ كُلَّ الَّذِي قَدْ كَانَ عِنْدَهُمْ
مَا دَامَ قَدْ لَاحَتْ الْأَوْضَاحُ وَالْغَرَرُ	وَهَلْ يَسْرُكُ أَنْ تَخْفَى الْحُجُولُ بِهِ
لَهَا الطَّوَاغِيَةُ وَارْتَجَّتْ لَهَا السُّرُرُ	أَعْيَدُ تِلْكَ الْخَطِيئَةَ جَبَّارَةً صُعِقَتْ

أَنْ يَعتري وَقَعها من رَبكةِ زَلَلٍ	أَوْ أَنْ يَثبُطَ من إِقدامها الحَدْرُ
ماذا تُريدُ وَسيفٌ صارِمٌ ذُكْرٌ	يحمي الثغورَ وَ أنتَ الحيةَ الذُكْرَ
والجيشُ خلفَكَ يُمضي من عزمتهِ	فرطَ الحماسِ وَيُذكيها فَتستعِرُ
أَقْدِمِ فَأنتَ على الإقدامِ مُنطَبِعٌ	وَأبطشُ فَأنتَ على التنكيلِ مُقتدرُ
وثقُ بأنِ البلادَ اليومَ أجمَعها	لما تُرجِيه من مسعاكَ تَننظِرُ
لا تُبقي دابِرَ أقوامٍ وَتَرْتَهَمُ	فهم إذا وَجدوها فرصةً ثأروا
هُنَاكَ تَننظِرُ الأحرارَ مَجزرةً	شنعاءُ سوداءُ لا تُبقي ولا تُدرُ
وَتَم شِرذمةُ الفتِّ لها حُجباً	من طولِ صَفحٍ وَعفوٍ فهي تَسْتترُ
إني أَصارحكِ التَّعبيرَ مُجترباً	وما الصريحُ بذي ذُنُبٍ فيعتذرُ
إنِ السماءَ التي ابديتَ رَوْنَقها	يومَ الخميسِ بدا في وَجْهها كَدْرُ
تَهامَسَ النَّفْرُ الباكونَ عَهْدَهُمُ	أَنْ سَوفَ يَرجعُ ماضيهمُ فيزِدُهُمُ
تَجري الأحاديثُ نكراءً كعادَتِها	ولم يُرغِ سامرٌ مِنْهُمُ ولا سمرُ
فحاسبِ القومَ عن كلِّ الذي اجترحوا	عما أراقوا وما اغتلوا وما اختكروا
للآنِ لَمْ يَلعُ شبرٌ من مزارِعِهِمُ	ولا تَرزحَ مِمَّا شيدوا حَجْرُ
ولم يزلْ لَهُمُ في كلِّ زاويةٍ	مُنوَّةٌ بمخازيهِمُ ومُفتخرُ
وتلكَ لِلحرِّ مأساةٌ مُهيجَةٌ	يَدْمى وَيدمعُ منها القلبُ والبَصْرُ
فَضيقُ الحبلِ وَاشدُّدُ من خناقِهِمُ	فَرَبَّما كانَ في إرْخانهِ ضَررُ
ولا تَقَلَّ تِرَةٌ تَبقى حَزازَتُها	فَهُمُ على أيِّ حالٍ كُنْتَ قد وُتِروا
تَصوِّرُ الأمرَ معكوساً وَخُدَّ مَثلاً	مما يَجْرُونَهُ لو أَنَّهُم نُصِروا
أكانَ لِلرِّفيقِ ذِكْرٌ في مَعاجِمِهِمُ	أَمْ كانَ عن " حِكْمَةٍ " أو صحبَةٍ خَبِرُ
واللَّهِ لاقتيدَ "زيدَ" بِاسمِ " زاندةٍ "	ولأصطلى " عامرٌ " والمبتغى " عَمْرُ "
ولا نحمي كلَّ رَسَمٍ من مَعالمِكُمُ	ولا شتفتُ بِكُمُ الأمثالُ والسَّيرُ
ولا تزالُ لَهُمُ في ذاكِ مَأربَةٌ	ولا يزالُ لَهُمُ في أخذِكُمُ وطَرُ
أصبحتُ أَحذرُ قولِ الناسِ عن أسفِ	من أن يروا تَلْكُمُ الأمالَ تَنذيرُ
تَحَرَّكَ اللحدُ وانشقتُ مُجددةً	أَكفانُ قومٍ ظنَّنا أَنَّهُم قَبِروا

### 1- (The Coffin Moved)

Lay your burdens on the unseen / and receive your day with optimistic determination.

And believe a news teller that he brought good ones / and have good faith in him so that it might come true.



Do not let despair step inside / yourselves or make your hearts be frail,  
Worries lead to hesitation but / the determined one never let them prevail,  
Remember yesterday and recall its tragedies / to feel the need today to  
change it.

Make a bridge out of your skulls / and take a shortcut to the hope you  
expect,

And rise united, rises with you / a nation in desperate need of those with  
high-spirit,

The Youth are the backbone of rule / and a real power in times of disasters  
and hardships.

A group has come, whose firm will is motivated / by the evil deeds of  
previous groups,

On every inch through their marching / they saw a sign of a crime  
committed before,

A mission, so serious, they took / that no individual or another group can  
bear,

Today is your day, do not hesitate / otherwise it will come true, what you  
fear,

So long the dark night has been over the country / and now the dawn is  
awaiting,

But the dawn shines only through deeds / not by mere words and false  
promises.

And you, son of Sulaiman, who has done / what neither urbans could do, nor  
the Beduins,

Who kept his anger for decades within / until we saw at once how it  
exploded,

And the one whose mighty strike / left everywhere the flesh of the tyrants  
scattered.

Have you prepared yourself well for this day and after / or you will just rely  
on future?

Your fearless step has already been taken / and danger, I'm sure, will not  
weaken your will,

And so far we are pleased to see / some tyrants flee from you and retreat,

You have planned well for it / and your deed shall be remembered for  
decades as great,

Do not stop and leave it unfulfilled / and for things to happen, do not wait;

Don't you hear them saying / that this matter is nothing but a game,

And that nothing has changed / more than the change of names!

Are you pleased to have conspirators / among those whose foreheads are  
saintly.

I pray for these noble feet whose steps / made tyrants shake with fear and  
the oppressed happy,

To stumble or get lost / or to be slowed down by fear and worry.

What are you waiting for: you have a mighty sword<sup>539</sup> / protecting the land  
and you are the virile snake,

And the army with you, full of / high spirit and strong will, ready:

Assault, for this is what you were born for / and crush, for this is what you  
can do,

And trust that all the country wishes / that what they have been waiting for  
you can do,

Do not leave from those criminals anyone behind / there at any chance they  
might return,

If this happens there will be a massacre / against the free that will leave  
none,

And there is still a gang which / you have left behind you untouched,  
hidden;

I dare to speak boldly to you / and telling the truth is not a crime and need  
no apology,

The sky of Thursday that looked bright / by your deed, started to trouble:

And those who lost power started whispering / that their lost glory will be  
back,

Such evil gossips are everywhere / openly declared in midnight meetings

Thus you must punish them for their crimes / every blood they spilled and  
everything they robbed,

Until now they still keep the lands, farms / and the palaces they stole,

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<sup>539</sup> The reference here is to Bakr Şidqī the minister of defence.

And in every corner there is still / a memory of a crime they were proud to commit,

This, for the free ones, is a shameful tragedy / that makes good hearts and eyes bleed,

So, tighten the rope and choke them / it is too dangerous to let it loose,

And do not say: violence leads to revenge / they are already inclined to do it anyway,

Imagine the opposite and take an example / about what would happen if they regain power,

Is there any word of mercy in their dictionary / or any smell of wisdom, or odour!

By God, Zaid will be taken for the crime of Zā'da / and 'Āmir will suffer instead of 'Umar.

And they will leave nothing referring to you, standing / and make you topics for myths and tales;

They still today seek to do it / and they still can do it against you.

I'm feeling sorry while listening to people, that / hopes among them are vanishing;

The coffin has moved and the shrouds of those / whom we thought dead began to tear.

## -2 في السجن: In Jail

وماذا تريد من الزمان	ومن الرغائب والأمانى
أوكَلما شارفت من	أمالك الغر الحسان
ورعتك الطاف العناية	بالرفاه وبالأمان
أغرمت بالآهات إغرام	الحنيفة بالأذان؟
إن كنت تحسد من يحوط	الباب منه حارسان
فديك حراس كأتك	منهم في معمعان
ومؤكلون بما تصرف	في الدقائق والثواني
أسكنت داراً مالها	في الصيت والعظمت ثاني
ما إن يباح دخولها	إلا لذي خطرٍ وشان

أَوْ عَدُوِّ بِالْبَنَانِ	دَارٌ يُشِيرُ لَهَا صَدِيقٌ
وَادَّعَاهَا أَلْفُ بَانِي	أَهْوَى عَلَيْهَا أَلْفُ بَاكِ
مِنْ خَبِيئَاتِ الدِّنَانِ	وُقِيَّتَ فِيهَا رَغَمَ أَنْفِكَ
أَوْ سِخْرِ الْحَسَانِ	وَحَفِظْتَ فِيهَا مِنْ غُرُورِ الْمَالِ
تَأْنَقًا لَكَ فِي الصِّيَانِ	حَجْبُوكَ عَنِ لِحْظِ الْعَيُونِ
بِهِ أَحَبَّ مِنَ الْعِيَانِ	مِثْلَ الْمَعِيدِيِّ السَّمَاعِ
بِالْمِثَالِثِ وَالْمِثَالِي	وَعَلَامَ تَحْسُدُ مِنْ تَلَهَّى
أَلْدُ مِنْ عَزْفِ الْقِيَانِ	أَوْلَيْسَ خَشْخِشَةَ الْحَدِيدِ
لَهْوِكَ أَلْفُ مَكْرُوبٍ وَعَانِي	يَشْدُو بِهَا مِنْ أَجْلِ
أَوْزَانِ حَوْتِهَا بِاتِّزَانِ	أَوْزَانِ شَعْرِكَ بَعْضُ
أَعْطَيْتَ مَا لَمْ يُعْطَ ثَانِي	مَاذَا تَرِيدُ مِنَ الزَّمَانِ
أَنْ يُشِيعَ النَّيِّرَانِ	أَعْطَيْتَ مِنْ لُطْفِ الطَّبِيعَةِ
يُوحِي إِلَيْكَ الْفَرْقِدَانِ	صَبْحًا وَإِمْسَاءً ، وَأَنْ
بِفَضْلِ مَا أَوْلَوْكَ جَانِي	سَبَّحَ بِأَنْعُمِهِمْ فَانْتَ
جِزَاءُ مَا جَنَّتِ الْبِدَانِ	صَكَ الْحَدِيدَ عَلَى يَدَيْكَ
الْعَزِيزِ ، وَبِالْأَمَانِ	يَا عَابِثًا بِسَلَامَةِ الْوَطَنِ
طَوَانِفًا كَلًّا لَشَانِ	وَمُفْرَقًا زَمَرَ الْيَهُودِ
مِنْ بَقْرِ وَضَانِ	مَا أَنْتَ وَ " الْكَاشِيرِ " وَ " الْطَارِيفِ "
لَكِنْ عَلَى شَرْطِ الضَّمَانِ	إِنْ الصَّحَافَةَ حَرَّةً
عَانَيْتَ مِنْهُمْ مَا تَعَانِي	سَبَّحَ بِأَنْعُمِهِمْ وَإِنْ
فَعَسَى تُفِيدُ عَقُوبَتَانِ	إِنْ لَمْ تُفِدْكَ عَقُوبَةٌ
فَلَقَدْ يُفِيدُ مَطْهَرَانِ	أَوْ لَمْ يُفِدْكَ مَطْهَرٌ

## 2- (In Jail):

What further wishes and desires / do you seek from life,  
Havn't you been offered / to see all your dreams come true,  
And the mighty hands were / willing to satisfy you;  
But you love to suffer / like the pious' love for adhān<sup>540</sup>  
If you envy those / who have guards at their doors,  
You, amongst your guards / look like a king among his entourage

<sup>540</sup> Muslim call for prayer.

Spending their time watching you / while you waste your time.  
 You have been placed in a house / whose unprecedented glory and fame  
 Makes no one accesses it / except those too important or too dangerous,  
 A house that is highly respected and feared / by the enemy and friend,  
 A house that made a thousand weep / and another thousand claiming its  
 possession.  
 You have been protected in it / from the unseen evils of villains,  
 And kept, against your will, from / the temptations of money and beautiful  
 women:  
 You have been kept away from / these charms for your sake,  
 Like al-Mu'aydi: better to hear about / than to meet.  
 And why do you envy those / who enjoy their life outside?  
 Isn't the clinking of iron / more charming than the voice of chanteuse?  
 For your joy, a thousand sufferers / and oppressed are playing them;  
 That even the rhythms of your verse / are built upon some of theirs.  
 What further do you seek / no one enjoys what you have,  
 You have been given by nature / what enlightens the sun and moon  
 Day and night, and above that / you have been gifted with inspiration.  
 Be thankful to them; for your real sin / is denying these gifts  
 And iron today chains your hands / in return for your crimes.  
 O troublemaker and disturber / of your dear country's peace  
 And riot-stirrer amongst the Jews / and breaker of their unity:  
 What business do you have with the meat of cows and sheep!  
 Freedom of the Press is guaranteed / but according to what you offer,  
 Otherwise, you should still remain grateful / if you only suffered:  
 If one punishment isn't enough / two might suffice:  
 Or if a purifier isn't enough / two will do.

### 3- الإقطاع: Land Policy

وإنعاشَ مخلوقٍ على الدَّلِّ نائمٍ	ألا قَوَّةَ تسطيعُ دفعَ المظالمِ
إلى حَمَاةِ الإِدْقَاعِ نظرةً راحمِ	ألا أعيُنَ تلقى على الشَّعبِ هاوياً

وهَلْ ما يَرْجِي المُصلِحونَ يرونهُ	مواجهَةٌ أمْ تلكَ أضغاثُ حالِ
تعالَتْ يَدُ الاقْطاعِ حتّى تعطلَّتْ	عَنِ البتِّ في احكامِها يَدُ حاكمِ
وحتّى استبدَّتْ بالسَّوادِ زعانِفٌ	إلى نَفْعِها تستاقُّه كالبِهانِمِ
إذا رُمَتْ أو صافاً تليقُ بحالِهِ	تعرَّفَتْها ضاقتُ بطونُ المعاجِمِ
ألا نستحي منْ أنْ يُقالَ بلادُهُمُ	عليها مِنَ الإذلالِ ضربةٌ لازمُ
هي الأرضُ لم يَخْصُصْ لها اللهُ مالِكاً	يُصرِّفُها مُستهْتَرّاً في الجِرائِمِ
ولم يَبِعْ منها أنْ يكونَ نَتاجُها	شقاوَةٌ مظلومٍ ونعمةٌ ظالمِ
عجبتُ لخلقِ في المَغارِمِ رازِحِ	يُقَدِّمُ ما تجني يداهُ لغانِمِ
وأنا من هذا التغاينِ فرحةٌ	غباوَةٌ مَخْدومٍ وفِطنةٌ خادمِ
وكم من خُمولٍ لاحَ في وجهِ مَنزِفِ	وكم من نيوغِ شَعٍ في عينِ عادمِ
لو اطلَّعتُ عيناكِ أبصرتِ ماتماً	أقيمُ على الأحياءِ قبلَ الماتِمِ
والأفما هذا الشقاءُ مُسَيِّطِراً	لَهُ في جباهِ القومِ مثلُ المياسِمِ
إذا أقبلَ " الشيخُ المُطاعُ " وخلفهُ	منَ الزارعينِ الأرضَ مثلُ السَّوانِمِ !
منَ المزهقي الأرواحِ يصلي وجوهَهُمُ	مَهَبٌ أعاصيرِ ، ولفحُ سمانِمِ
قياماً على اعتابه يُمطِرونها	خُنوعاً وذلاً بالشِّفاهِ اللوائِمِ
رأيتُ مثالاً ثمَّ لابنِ ملانِكِ	تَنزَّلَ منَ عليانهِ وابنِ آدمِ !
حنايا مِنَ الأخواخِ تلقِي ظلالِها	على مثلِ جُبِ باهتِ النُّورِ قاتمِ
تلوَّتْ سباطُ فوقَ ظهرِ مكرِّمِ	مِنَ اللُّومِ مأخوذٍ بسوطِ الألائِمِ
وباتتْ بطونٌ ساعِباتٌ على طوئِ	وأتمَّمتِ الأخرى بِطيبِ المطاعِمِ
أهذي رعايا أمةٍ قد تهيَّأتْ	لِتَسقُبِلَ الدُّنيا بعزمِ المُهاجِمِ !؟
أهذا سوادٌ يُبتَغى لِمِلمَّةِ	ونحتاجُهُ في المازِقِ المتلاحِمِ ؟
أهذي النفوسُ الخاوياتُ ضِراعةِ	نُباهي بها الأقرانِ يومَ التَّصادِمِ ؟
أمنُ ساعدٍ رخوٍ هزيلٍ وكاهِلِ	عجوزٍ تُريدُ المُلكَ تُثبِتُ الدَّعائِمِ !
مِنَ الظلمِ أنا نَطْلُبُ العزمَ صادقاً	منَ الشعبِ منقوضِ القوى والعزائمِ
وأنْ نُنشُدَ الاخلاصَ في تضحياتِهِ	ونحنُ تركناه ضحيَّةَ عاشِمِ
وأنْ نبتغي رِكضاً حثيثاً لِغايَةِ	نُحاولُها مِن راسِفِ في أداهِمِ
لنا حاجةٌ عندَ السَّوادِ عظيمةِ	سنفقِدُها يومَ اشتدادِ الملاحِمِ
هُنالِكَ لا تُجدي فتيلاً عِصابَةِ	إذا جَدَّ خطبُ فتَهي أولُ راجِمِ
وإنْ سواداً يَحْمِلُ الجَورَ مُكرَهاً	فقيرٌ لِهَادٍ بَينَ النُّصحِ حازِمِ
يَشُنُّ على الاقْطاعِ حرباً مُبيدَةً	ولا يَخْتشي في الحقِّ لُومَةً لائمِ
يَمُدُّ يداً تُعطي الضعافَ حُقوقَهُمُ	ويَسطو بِأخرى باطشاً غيرَ راحِمِ

ويجنت إقطاعاً أقرت جذوره	سياسة تفريقٍ وحوز مغاتم
سياسة إفقارٍ ، وتجويع أمة	وتسليط أفرادٍ جناة عواشم
لقد قلت لو أصغى إلى القولِ سامعٌ	وما هو مني بالظنونِ الرواجم
ألا إنَّ وضعاً لا يكونُ رفاهه	مُشاعاً على أفرادِه غيرُ دائم
أمبتدراتٌ بالخُمورِ تتلجّت	وبالماءِ يَغلي بالِعُطُورِ الفواغم
ومُفتَرِشاتٌ فضلة في زرائب	يُوسدُها ما حولها من ركام
أمن كدحِ آلافٍ تفيضُ تعاسة	يُمَتّع فردٌ بالنعيمِ المُلازم
وما أنا بالهَيَّابِ ثورة طامعٍ	ولكن جماعُ الأمرِ ثورة ناقم !
فما الجوعُ بالأمرِ اليسيرِ احتمالُه	ولا الظلمُ بالمرعى الهنيءِ لطاعم
تَذيرُك من خَلقٍ أطيلَ امتهانُه	وإن باتَ في شكلِ الضَّعيفِ المُسالِم
بلادٌ تردتُ في مهاوٍ سحيقةٍ	وناءتُ بأحمالٍ ثقالٍ قواصِم
تَبَيّت على وعدٍ قريبٍ بفتنةٍ	وتُضحى على قرْنٍ من الشرِّ ناجم
ولو عُولجِ الاقطاعُ حُمَّ شفاؤها	ومَنْ لي بطبِّ بَيْنِ الحُدقِ حاسم؟
ولم أرَ فيما ندَّعي من حضارةٍ	وما يَعتري أوضاعنا من تلاوم
وها إن هذا الشَّعبَ يطوي جناحَه	على خَطِرٍ من سَورةِ اليأسِ داهم
غداً يستنفيقُ الحالْمونَ إذا مَشَت	رواعدٌ من غضباتِه كالزمامم.

### 3- (Land Policy)

Is there a force that could push away tyranny / and save creatures long-living in agony,

Are there any eyes that would look with mercy / at those who have fallen into the lava of poverty?

And will the words of reformists make change or / they just false dreams.

The hands of feudalism were raised high / until no authority or law could reach them.

And the majority have been exploited like cows / by few stooges, who seized power.

If you seek to explain this misery / that I see, all the dictionaries cannot help;

Aren't we ashamed to be described / by other as happy to live with humiliation and oppression?

This is God's earth; it belongs to all / not to a bunch of criminals to seize it  
for their own interests.

And God does not want it / to make the rich richer and the poor poorer.

I wonder how a majority living in misery / while doing their best to make a  
few rich richer

And more shocking than this unfair situation is / the mind-thickness of the  
master and the wit of the servant!

For how many time we see a stupid and lazy rich / and how many times you  
see smart poor!

If you look you shall see a funeral / made for the living, not for the dead,  
And this explains the misery by which / the faces of those people are  
stamped.

When the obeyed Shaykh comes, you see those poor peasants / following  
him like beasts,

Almost dead, and their faces are burnt / by the summer's wind poisonous  
heat,

You see them kneeling down to his shoes / and slavishly kissing his feet;

There you see an example of / a man seen as a noble angel, surrounded by  
the sons of Adam!

And shadows of little poor cottages / cast upon pale dark holes,

And backs of noble (but poor) humans, whipped / by those rich villains,

And empty bellies trying to sleep / while others' are full of fine food.

Are those the citizens of a nation / that wants to be great again?

Are those the majority on which we rely / in hard times and great events?

Are these (surrendering) masses the ones / we rely upon in hard times and  
great catastrophes?

Do we seek to build a strong state / with these thin and weak arms?

It is great injustice to seek firm will / from those who are powerless and  
lacking will,

And still demanding them to sacrifice / while they are victimised by a bunch  
of tyrants,

And seek their ambitious deeds / while they have nothing with which they  
cover their naked bodies!

We shall greatly miss our need for those masses / when hard times come  
upon us,



Then, the rich gang will not help us / but be the first to help against us.  
And verily, a majority forced to live under oppression / desperately needs a  
truthful advisor and guide,  
Who launches a war against land policy / and never hesitates to say the  
truth:  
And take back the rights of the oppressed with a hand / and use the other to  
punish the oppressors mercilessly.  
And uproot this *Iqtā'*, whose roots / are legalised for the sake of corruption  
and division,  
A policy that made a whole nation starve / at the hands of few tyrants and  
oppressors.  
I would say, if there is a true listener / and what I say is not a sort of  
hallucination:  
If prosperity is not given equally to all / by the state, this state will soon fall;  
Few are enjoying good wine / and boiled perfumed-water baths,  
While others sleep in cowsheds / on piles of dirt and scum.  
How few enjoy their lives / on the account of thousands of hard working  
poor?  
There will be a revolution, not of the ambitious / but a revolution of the  
wrathful hungry,  
For hunger is not easy to bear / and oppression is not sweet to live with.  
Beware of those who lived long under oppression / even if they look  
peaceful and vulnerable;  
The country has fallen into a bottomless abyss / and a heavy back-breaking  
loads burden it,  
It stands on the edge of a great turmoil / and a fateful evil produced by evil.  
If a solution has been found to end feudalism / this crisis will end, but no  
cure is yet found,  
And I have seen nothing civilised / in what we say and do, or related to our  
past civilisation,  
And this nation is folding its wing / on a serious danger unleashed by  
despair:  
And tomorrow the dreamers will be woken up / by the thundering rage of  
the hungry.

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