

The Shield of Achilles Character

Writer: W. H. Auden | Generated: Jan 26, 2026

Characters

Thetis: She is Achilles' mother, a sea goddess. She watches Hephaestus making the shield. She expects beauty, harmony, and heroic images. Instead, she sees scenes of war, pain, and emptiness. She represents love, care, and human disappointment.

Hephaestus: He is the god of fire and metalwork. He makes Achilles' shield at Thetis's request. His work shows the cruel modern world. He symbolizes creative power mixed with sorrow.

Achilles: He is the Greek hero of the Trojan War. He never appears directly in the poem. He represents violence, pride, and heroic destruction. The shield shows the world he fights for, cold and heartless.

Historical Background: The poem was written in 1952, after World War II. Europe was recovering from war and fear. Auden compares Homer's heroic world to modern cruelty. The poem shows a world without faith or mercy. It reflects postwar despair and loss of moral values. Auden rewrites Homer's Iliad (Book 18) in a modern way. He turns the ancient myth into a picture of modern humanity.