

To Mr. Auden in a time of war

by [Jeanne Murray Walker](#) in the [February 6, 2007](#) issue

*In the nightmare of the dark
All the dogs of Europe bark,
And the living nations wait,
Each sequestered in its hate*

W. H. Auden

In this dark time, I want to make light bigger,
to throw it in the air like a pizza chef,
to stick my fists in, stretching it
till I can get both arms into radiance to the elbow
spinning it above us.

But oh, dark is such a genius at argument,
using all the rhetorical figures.
And you aren't bad yourself, Mr. Auden,
elucidating war, how it subtracts and subtracts light
till each nation becomes a blind man
alone in his own dark, gripping
his cane, unable to cross to his lover
who waits by the pizza parlor. Unable even to see her,
unable to sing out to her
the way a lover might sing out, *Susan, it's you!*

In truth, the dark is that personal, fluttering
like a red moth behind my eyelids.
My Texas cousin lies dead this afternoon
and his widow's at the Funeral Home
with their child, trying to explain where he went.
Isn't that the brilliant final move
of dark, Poof! to separate us from each other?
Between us, Mr. Auden, you and I have multiplied

the dark till some might say there's
no escape. But seeing darkness
is seeing something. Maybe that's why,
as Susan crosses to the blind man, I notice the horizon
begins leaking into the sky. Light reaches
the treetops. It falls in chutes. And then, god help us, like everything, it
breeds and breeds.