

# 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.