

September 1, 1939

by W. H. Auden

I sit in one of the dives
On Fifty-second Street
Uncertain and afraid
As the clever hopes expire
Of a low dishonest decade:
Waves of anger and fear
Circulate over the bright
And darkened lands of the earth,
Obsessing our private lives;
The unmentionable odour of death
Offends the September night.

Accurate scholarship can
Unearth the whole offence
From Luther until now
That has driven a culture mad,
Find what occurred at Linz,
What huge image made
A psychopathic god:
I and the public know
What all schoolchildren learn,
Those to whom evil is done
Do evil in return.

Exiled Thucydides knew
All that a speech can say
About Democracy,
And what dictators do,
The elderly rubbish they talk
To an apathetic grave;
Analysed all in his book,
The enlightenment driven away,
The habit-forming pain,
Mismanagement and grief:
We must suffer them all again.

Into this neutral air
Where blind skyscrapers use
Their full height to proclaim
The strength of Collective Man,
Each language pours its vain
Competitive excuse:
But who can live for long

INVASION OF POLAND BY NAZI
GERMANY

ALLUDES TO THE
OVERWHELMING PRESENCE
THAT NO ONE SPEAKS OF—
DEATH & FEAR OF DEATH.

QUESTIONING GOD
AND HUMAN NATURE.

LIVING IN A DREAM OF THE PAST—
WE ARE BLIND TO OR MORE OFTEN
IGNORE THE CERTAINTIES IN
FRONT OF US.

Comment [g1]: Lutherism—Separate from state mandated religion.

Also, an anti-Semite

Comment [g2]:

Comment [g3]: Hitler's birthplace.

Comment [g4]: First to publically suggest recording history for accuracy not pride.

In an euphoric dream;
Out of the mirror they stare,
Imperialism's face
And the international wrong.

NEED FOR IMMORTALITY OR IGNORE
DEATH AS IT APPROACHES

Faces along the bar
Cling to their average day:
The lights must never go out,
The music must always play,
All the conventions conspire
To make this fort assume
The furniture of home;
Lest we should see where we are,
Lost in a haunted wood,
Children afraid of the night
Who have never been happy or good.

EARTH= HAUNTED WOODS
AFRAID OF DEATH
DISCONTENT

The windiest militant trash
Important Persons shout
Is not so crude as our wish:
What mad Nijinsky wrote
About Diaghilev
Is true of the normal heart;
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.

Comment [g5]: Dancer—Student of Diaghilev who went insane because of the pressure his teacher put upon him.

From the conservative dark
Into the ethical life
The dense commuters come,
Repeating their morning vow;
"I will be true to the wife,
I'll concentrate more on my work,"
And helpless governors wake
To resume their compulsory game:
Who can release them now,
Who can reach the deaf,
Who can speak for the dumb?

IDEA THAT PEOPLE PANIC IN
TIMES OF DEATH TO RECTIFY
THEIR WRONGS—THEY OFTEN
REVERT WHEN DEATH CREEPS
AWAY.

All I have is a voice
To undo the folded lie,
The romantic lie in the brain
Of the sensual man-in-the-street
And the lie of Authority

Whose buildings grope the sky:
There is no such thing as the State
And no one exists alone;
Hunger allows no choice
To the citizen or the police;
We must love one another or die.

Defenceless under the night
Our world in stupor lies;
Yet, dotted everywhere,
Ironic points of light
Flash out wherever the Just
Exchange their messages:
May I, composed like them
Of Eros and of dust,
Beleaguered by the same
Negation and despair,
Show an affirming flame.

FAMOUS LINE

NIGHT= DEATH

LIGHT=TRUTH

SPEAKER IS JUST LIKE US—
WORRIES OF THE SAME
THINGS—BUT “AFFIRMING
FLAME” SHOWS WISDOM AND
HOPE OF UNDERSTANDING OR
COMING TO TERMS WITH
WHAT IS TO COME.

Comment [g6]: God of Love