

(“Neutral air”)

- Universality of date. Contrasts with other personal suggestions.
- Outbreak of war not the focus of the poem, but rather the catalyst for contemplation

### **Time & Sequence**

- Endless cycle of events. Theme of repetition and fate.
- Mixed chronology, jumping from references to Greek characters to the more modern skyscrapers.
- Begins by largely focusing on the past, then moves to the present. Rough sense of time and its passing within narrative, but ambiguity and uncertainty extends the indefinite nature of time which is conveyed in the poem.
- Final two stanzas return to present, to himself. Bring the poem into context and perspective, provides focus and relevance to situation.
- Rough transition of narrative of negative to positive. (e.g. “Dives” [drowning, immersion] “uncertain and afraid” to the cautious hope of the “affirming flame”)
- No clear narrative action. Continuously changing tone, abundance of contrast and echoes. Evokes the confusion, perhaps also fear and panic, that Auden may be experiencing at the outbreak of war.

### **Form**

- Regular form and structure, 10 lines, 3 beats between lines.
- Regularity should suggest organisation, but the poem is anything but, and borders on the chaotic.
- Mixture of rhythms and half-rhymes encourage sense of confusion and chaos.

### **Theme of Time**

- Humanity throughout eras and constant allusion to cycles. History and ideology are all intertwined. Without sense of progression/change.
- Cycles of light and dark e.g. Ignorance/Enlightenment, good/evil. “Those to whom evil is done/ Do evil in return”

### **Setting**

- New York, “dives”, seediness, but also hidden and tucked away. “fifty-second street” is out on the outskirts of the city. Simultaneously a social place, full of sulture
- Jazz centre, less conservative and therefore suggests that the poem is more open, he is more free to express himself here than elsewhere.