

In Memoriam White Rose

epiphany at Nuremberg;
in that scotoma between two histories
the air was hissing with tiny poisons
each word carried a hornet sting
even simple truths could not be told,
for the skin of evil is the killing fields
but the core of evil is the shrinking heart
burning of books, erasure of every critical thought -
you turned the opening buds of youth
away from the Nazi sun
to become pale, hunted petals,
white roses of the night;

reading your letters now,
full of the mystery of the stars,
stories of children and family cares
I see a shadow slide across the page
the light-devouring edge of an eclipse,
shadow of the blade at Stadelheim
which even as you wrote was being honed for you,
and how you walked into that shadow
cupping your lanterns, their tender lights
frail against the dark,
how Hans sat in a church at twilight
hearing his own future in a passion by Bach
the betrayal, the washing of the hands.
The Judas purse become three thousand marks

you, lovers of Schubert,
readers of Hölderlin and Rilke,
sleepers in the Nazi whale,
shocked awake to find the waters of madness
washing into its throat, drowning the music,
twisting your language,
a frenzy, boiling, laying Europe waste.

so you stood up and spoke,
someone had to start,
you spoke for those who had no voice
you showed that under the packed snow
green grass still grew
and because in their hearts they knew
you were right they drowned you out
with shouts of "traitor, traitor!"

strange to come across you now,
I, half awake and half asleep
upon the golden pillow of old age,
you, a brilliant light
sharp as the reflection from a falling blade
shining from the darkness of those days
to cast the shadow of the Reaper on my wall,

for I had always thought of Death
as a dark gate,
but now as I draw near
I am amazed and comforted
by those who crowd that gate to bring me cheer,

Hans, who saw the light at Nuremberg,
Christoph, surprised dying was so easy,
and Sophie, remembered still as bravest of the brave
Who walked across that room from life to death
At Stadelheim, still with a flower tucked behind her ear.

Ben Thompson