

Burnt offerings: Vienna Synagogue. 1938.

Burnt offerings: a huge bonfire shivers
at the far end of the gravel walk,
all paper, wood, religious insignificance.

Flaming hebraic woodwork
propped like an old man kissing the holy pavement,
a stiff frock coat, the tendrils of black smoke his beard.

The flames leap and fall in rapid rivers
of light, a confusion of elements.

Scorching scrolled Moses
twisting like a young woman waltzing,
wide crinolined skirts, like live embers her ambered
jewelery.

The flames of fugitive colour, changing light on tiles,
faces at the window, hands at doorways.

Burning golden Menorah
devoid of candles welcoming the joyous sabbath,
but melting in molten flame, suspiciously hinting of
furnace,
with wind whistles through trains whose crew
of passengers have fallen quiet, stopped their canting
and have dropped like the candles,
where they stood, dropped off in broken postures,
parodies of the dance, of grace, recumbering and
carelessness.

Burnt offerings on small alters,
Isaac can see the fires, along the narrow
passages between main thoroughfares.

The heart, the eyes and passions maintain
their vigilance as the holocaust goes up
in smoke.

Doorways: Vienna Ghetto. 1938.

There are certain places healthy to have lived in:
separate and self-contained in existence.

Certain streets, Judenplatz, Judenstrasse, Am Hof,
hard cores of exotic pleasure:
Byzantine gold insinuated into Teutonic gray.

Their doorways are ripe fruit, stay soft & open,
exhaling a fragrance of drains or tobacco.

Some doorways are reflected candles, burning to God,
eating challah, fish and chocolate halvah,
others are more proper, starched and sun-eaten,
doorways where things happen
in a particularly fortunate way, which echo
to words of parting, to words of Torahed prayer, or
thrill to an exact measure
recollected in the design of an arch;
doorways which see military bands march
across a square on a blazing hot afternoon,
or catch a particular angle of the midnight
moon as doorways are shutted and
bolted in metal hinging with terror.

There are places to be happy in if only
you can find them.

The Clockwork Train: Childhood. Vienna. 1938.

I was playing with my Hornby clockwork train
when the intruders arrived.
A toy for which I had a special affection,
it ran perfectly; never broke down.
I experienced feelings of pointless irritability
mixed with restless drowsiness.
About what? I couldn't really tell.
The little red locomotive with its coal truck and two
carriages
whirled round and round on its silver track
recalling happy evenings with my father.
I was safe with my reliable Hornby;
yet I was somehow not reassured.
It ran busily through the wooden tunnel my
lost father had made for it long ago,
and then it began to slow down.

It laboured down the line towards me, slower and slower,
the tension in its clockwork spring almost exhausted
Would it get to me?
This somehow seemed very important, and I told
myself I would pick it up when it reached me.
Sounds of smashing glass and cracking crystal
reached my ears in a storm-trooped assault;
flames reflected from the windows of the Hornby,
running boots echoed in the tiny pistons and
"Juden Raus" seemed to stike me all over my body
like a great silver club lined with shards.

I knew immediately that this was no ordinary occurrence:
the smashing glass had a mighty authority which
said my whole life had been changed;
I was a child, forced into adulthood when I
wished to remain a child; that I had been Chosen.
My train came almost to a stop, but then
gave a lurch which brought it forward
a few more inches.
I badly wanted it to reach me;
then things would be all right.
It did not . . . and stopped.