

AUTUMN OF THE TYRANT

Anything can happen again.

-- Einstein

I

He reviled the spring, that effete
season of soft new life,
of flowers pushing from thawed and
slumbering ground,

of ungainly foals fumbling on the hills
of Bavaria;

He despised too the summer, with its
long and languid evenings, the fruit
swelling on the vine,

fecund, vulgar, dripping with nectar.
And though winter had its beauty,
its austere palette of blacks and whites,
its flaws were its shrinking shadows,

its daily-measured loosening grip,
the inevitable, warming, segue to spring:

There is too much hope in winter.

II

No, his season was autumn—late,
late, crepuscular autumn,
the waning days of the
limping sun,
when the leaves had been stripped
from the breeze,
and the fields shaved to spiky stubble—
 and the bier-gold harvest, with its singing,
 sunny, sheaves of wheat, and its buxom,
 braided barmaids of October cheer
 gone, silenced—their laughter bitten off
 in the November chill,

and all across the gunmetal sky,
 the up-reaching,
surrendering
 branches
etched out his impeccable destiny.

Dead leaves at
the window, terminal hope:
1000 puddled boot heels;
armies on the road.

III

He so loved the throes of autumn,
its funereal charcoal gloom,
that when he at last forsook his
brushes, and rushed the swaggering
stage, he aroused fulminating
Wotan to wrathful war on other
days, to shear them of their green
and their insolent violet blooms
and smash them all to smoke and ash, and
plant children in the tombs.

IV

And so the war came. Oh,
 yes, it came;
it came rolling in the dark,
with its barbed wire and harsh
diesel music: its clanging panzers,
screaming Stukas, cities
laid waste before the *krieg*; it came
with its boys' brains burst upon the grass
and milky twitching limbs;
cadavers a-hiss in greasy stacks

and skeletons shivering in latrines;
and the deaths of fifty millions and the pain of billions more
and his dream of some bold future
without gypsies, Poles, and Jews.

V

And on the 30th of April, 1945,
having shattered Europe to atoms,
and drowned his fathers in their
blood; and having split *der Welt*
and unloosed its hells—the magma rage
 in Vulcan flood;
the red star rising sickle sharp, mowing
down Barbarossa rows;
and in the west the spitting Shermans
spewing fire into badger holes, immolating
grizzled gray-hairs and beardless
youth too small to fit their coats;
And while his chin-jutting double,
begobbed and dripping with spit

was hanging head-down from a meat-hook,
il prosciutto di Milan,
not wanting that cruel reversal,

that duce denouement,
to be dragged from his burrow like a
blinking mole, red-eyed and alive,
he fed death to his *schafenhund*
and Eden bunker bride,
and then pressed to his head
the expedient solution
of his Walther 7.65, and blew
from that sudden, irruptive hole
his 1000-year Reich

988 short of its goal.

VI

And so that's the way it ended,
right then, right there,
in a burst of blood and bone—the

the misfires of failed assassins
mere history.

And in that final second,
as his finger squeezed the gun,
foreseeing his bath of petrol and
in the garden burned,

a plot of fractured rubble in his
Carthage of the north—facades
of naked struggle, nihil,
nothing, *nein*—

and out from there, in bombed and
buried craters, in
pocked and pitted rings,
a continent destroyed,
a moon a-wreck,
a limbless, treeless waste;

and though he'd never been that peerless painter,
that great expresser of umbrous
fall, and hadn't once even approached,

in a single inch of canvas and oil—the
brilliant shadow of Caspar Friedrich—his
crazed and broken oaks,
he'd scorched his autumn vision
into a much more sensitive cloth—the
nerve-tight, keening skin
of the recoiling, membranous world;

and in that flash illumination
as the bullet ripped his brain,
annihilating his indwelling furor,
his skototropic rage,
did it succor him to know that he had
rendered upon the earth,
so memorably,
so generously,

in perfect pitch of hate

that stark and savage

late

November beauty?