

Rites & Ceremonies

I. The Room

matrix: liberation of the camps 1945

icon of the Holocaust: roomful of hair, shoes, valises

"This is one of the places never explained"

the mystery of absolute evil - crucible of inexplicable cruelty
eclipses German culture, Christian mercy

frame

affirmation of God's omnipotence

the child Emmanuel: harbinger of messianic era →

corpse of a child inducted into German army →

sign of the child/savior

vicious suffering

the post inside the room

the vents - to let the spirits depart?

imagines someone else reciting Psalm 3

What makes this so affecting?

II. The Fire Sermon

1. The Black Death 1349

spread of the plague: 1st by sea

heathen king dies \rightarrow \leftrightarrow Christians, too, struck

even Christian orders; sheep

"Was it judgment"? → no, the Jews are to blame

2. Strasbourg Massacre

pyre erected in Jew. cemetery

flash forward: tour guide desc.

everyone comes out to watch - complicity of the spectators

3. The Sermon

God indifferent to the prayers of the victims
even the child is not saved

- Themes:
- Cruel hypocrisy of Christian culture:
fear of death → fear of God → slay the heathens who came
for baptism & then have bad thoughts
 - The facade of European civilization
 - God's deafness

III The Dream

Thesis: The contemplation of horror is not edifying

Neither does it strengthen the soul.

eg. looking at pictures of the Saints being tortured

Fear shapes itself in dreams

Not more fantastic than brute fact

Joschim du Bellay, French poet (1522-60)

sensitive, sorrowing French poet "in exile"

Watching a carnival, a morality play, animals, & finally
naked Jews running the gauntlet

neither his poetic soul nor the contemplation of horror has an
effect on his moral behavior

cf George Steiner on "Human Literature" A Kind of Survivor

IV Words for the Day of Atonement

return to present

the wilderness of comfort in which we dwell

prayer for forgiveness

no moral superiority for those who have survived

may have deserved death

Jobian questions

who is left to forgive us?

God, not for our sake, but for the sake of those who
suffered

return to intimate tone of personal supplication

More Light! More Light!

NTC 1923-2004

German-Jew. parents; liberation of Flossenbery
would wake up screaming from what he saw there

Goethe's last words = title is the utterance

human utterance has meaning; deathbed legacy
whole Enlightenment agenda
God is light of the soul

I Failed execution; Tower of London heretic being burned
diction: formal

"composed" = never hear those words; he himself is composed

@ peace because he's dying for a cause

went away but his soul is dying pure

even if he's a heretic his suffering will redeem him

dignity: witnessed; they hear his composition in

3rd stanza difficult to scan; ceremonial

II Weimar / Buchenwald; 16th → 20th cent

more prosaic; (28) journalistic

death stripped away of its meaning

Pole finds his soul stripped away too

"We" implicates us

The Lijer slave remains alive

sacrilege of German Kultur

German plays w/ them

Q: Who do we identify with? The Pole who refuses?

The victims? The Nazi?

∴ death has no dignity, transcendence

III Codex - much later, years even

"in those hours" = title of the book

Pole's body remains unburied 10 these many years later
anonymous; soot constantly settles on his corpse
only the dead mourn the dead

Poeticized narrative realism in I-II while III = totally unrealistic
corpse remains pristine

mute ghosts: neither seeing nor saying

Paul sees the ghosts no more proactive

elite dedication; politics of citation - parodizes

Goethe-in-Weimar: ~~no~~ mimics his belated-form

invites his friends there

is this an aberration or ~~is~~ is it a product thereof?

∴ an issue of western culture?

As Goldin

Pretz / Western 1st

= Hecht

Enlightenment