

Oradour-sur-Glane

It's teatime in Oradour. You can smell the apple flan
baked by Gran'mémé red cheeked at the hot oven
wiping her floury arms; you can see the smeared lipstick
of a flustered wife in her polka dot frock
wiping away a kiss hurrying
back to her children
who wait for her.

It's teatime in Oradour. The soldiers entered.
In the meadow behind the barn they took the men and boys.
The church was locked: inside women screaming,
the children muffled by the roaring falling timber.
That red hot afternoon in June, at 16h 31,
the hands on all the clocks and watches
stopped.

In the concrete grey and glass it's the red I notice:
resin comb, button, the peeling paint of a toy truck,
a child's scuffed shoe. Then the rosebud lips of a doll,
hair singed, eyes glassy, wide, and then the markings
in a child's book and a tin box with its ledger of receipts.
And there's a charred scrap of red polka dots on white.

At the blackened altar below the stained window:
pram wheels, push chairs.
It didn't take long.

Picking a small red apple from the ground
I smell the tarte aux pommes.
It's teatime in Oradour.

On June 10th 1944, in reprisal to French resistance, German soldiers marched into Oradour-sur-Glane and set fire to the village, murdering its residents.