

Winnipeg

David Waltner-Toews *Guelph, Ontario*

for Hildi, a fellow refugee; Guelph, Ontario, July 1981.
"Then if any man say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not."
Matt 24:23.

That night we had wave
after crashing wave of thunder
bouldering down the clouds
I could almost imagine Winnipeg again
God come down in Edmonton or Toronto
or some other God-forsaken place
and Winnipeg she there on her knees
rinsing her soiled hair
in the Red the Assiniboine snaking
at her skirts she so cursing angry
shrieking plautdietsch at Portage and Main
To have come so far
half-way around the world
and still to have missed the Chosen Place
It must not be!

The *real* Messiah will come singing
Handel to Winnipeg reeking of borscht
and rollkuchen porzeltche and paska
round as a laughing buddha
but not laughing serious like raw cabbage
or an uprooted potato but not so offensively poor
a washed potato perhaps singing
certainly a baritone a fine baritone
good enough for Hymn Sing
and after him a whole cherubic chorus
singing kernlieder
singing the Halleluja Chorus
singing for a grande finale
just before the food
Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow

And here in this smug country
in the middle of a summer storm
I could almost imagine the Aryan devil
come down in Winnipeg singing Wagner
the clashes here but faint reverberations
of that mad embrace
the ecstasy of fierce frustration

See God what you have missed!
the love-hate scream thundering
from see to churchly see

And I could almost imagine us
sitting with Jesus a lean and barely laughing
loin-clothed raconteur in Edmonton or Toronto
drinking wine from fingerbowls
from the washroom tap feeling just a little
sentimental drawing circles
with our fingers on the table
waiting
for another parable waiting
for the storm to passover
looking up to see him gone suddenly
and in the distance the exquisite consummation
in low german
Bach's Magnificat