GERMANY IN MAY

Blank space on the Europe map,
fogged with fear and images of Nazis,
I have in memory, now, a parchment
to unroll of summer landscape,
blossom trees and tulips, woods
for huntsmen camouflaged in green.

Pied Piper towns half-timbered, ring
village church bells set in cities,
chiming time for mass, for school and factory.
Ogres lived in castles on the Rhine,
waiting for river plunder, convert
with time to legal toll and tax.

Beneath a golden carriage lamp,
Lola Montez climbed these steps
to dance at Nymphenberg, charmed
palace fit for Cinderella,
then sailed away and whipped
a newspaper editor in Ballarat.
He dared to scoff in print
at her sensational Spider Dance.
Her voice not grand enough
for roles in Wagner's operas,
King Ludwig dug another lake
on his vast back garden stage.

The ghost of Luther wanders
on the Rieperbahn in Hamburg,
the head of the horse, Falada,
speaks to a goosegirl up for sale,
"If thy mother knew thy fate,
Then her heart would surely break."

Dachau, desert of ultimate evil,
has no ghosts. They went with ash
and cold to haunt the human world.
Wise boy in a spa town says,
"I refuse guilt for another generation.
Poor me! I've never seen the sea!"

Square pillow soft with goosefeathers,
cherry cake with cream,
theatre in grey and gold,
and always as we travel, stop,
a plink of mandolins,
the low swing of guitars.