

# Dictat

poems in a time of autocracy

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## Absence

*March 1943: Wolfsschanze ('The Wolf's Lair'), Poland*

A man walks out of a room, his back field-grey,  
his trousers and boots black. A secretary remains—  
Traudl—she won't go along to the Eastern Front.

She continues her work, looks down at her typewriter,  
winds up the paper, excises an error with a steel-hubbed  
eraser, its abrasions audible over the bunker ventilator.

It is cool at 11°C, she would say cold. Traudl positions  
memo, carbon papers, copies and clasps the roller on,  
leans in to watch the key strike, rubs her cold wrists,

buffs fingers on fingers, palm on palm. Looks around,  
listens. He's gone. It's as if the power's been switched off.  
Winds out her work, files duplicate, triplicate.

Gives a uniformed man the top-copy. Machines  
whirr trapped East-Prussian air. Outside, beyond  
birches, a Mercedes flaps red and black pennants,

speeds to an airfield on snow.