

Bibliothèque Nationale

I find a snapshot of the man folded
in foxed pages on Brecht and Kabbalah,
and try to picture him as he once was:
drummed out of the academy, scolded
by professors and officials, he stays
slouched over a dark library table,
contemplating the scholar as hero,
and scribbles a short note on Baudelaire.
Groucho Marx moustache and uncombed black hair
make him look the part, a latter-day Nero
fiddling, as Rome's troubled façade crumbles,
with marginalia.

Speech and action
determine which souls enter Valhalla;
his received a failing grade. Suicide
his own final solution, he died
at the Spanish border, a mind on edge.
What else could have been done? Not fear but pride
brought him up short. Now he fills a dirt wedge
on foreign soil, alone, under a hedge.

KEVIN MCNEILLY