I lived on this Earth...

Hungarian Poets on the Holocaust

Selected and edited by George and Mari Gömöri

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Acknowledgments

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Editors' Note

It has been a moving experience for us to select these poems from the many that exist on the subject of the Holocaust. We have dedicated *I Lived on this Earth*... to the memory of the millions who perished, including members of our own families. It was important for us to include poems not only relating to the Jewish victims, but poems also on the suffering inflicted by the Nazis on the Gypsy community, which is often overlooked.

We have tried to avoid too many notes, only clarifying those names, which we felt might not be familiar to British readers. We have left the German expressions, and in one case Latin, in the original and in a few places have changed the American spelling to the English version.

George and Mari Gömöri
January 2012
Foreword

These powerful poems will resonate with all those for whom the Holocaust is almost beyond comprehension. It is through the eyes of poets that one can glimpse with clarity many aspects of that terrible reality. The eighteen poets in this remarkable collection are all Hungarian. The first, Miklós Radnóti, perished in a death march in 1944: his voice is the best known, and places associated with his life, including the student dormitory where he lived in Paris, and his apartment in Budapest, are places of pilgrimage.

It is Radnóti who summarises with both a poet’s and a participant’s eye the essence of those few but devastating years when ‘man fell so low he killed with pleasure/And willingly, not merely under orders’, and when the living – with poison seething on his plate – ‘Would envy the grave-dweller the worms eat.’

Radnóti also wrote of that age ‘When poets too were silent’, waiting for the Prophet Isaiah ‘to rise and speak again –/Since no one could give voice to a fit curse/But Isaiah himself, scholar of terrible words.’

This volume could well have been subtitled ‘a fit curse’, for the poets writing here, articulate that curse in many ways, each poem fitting to the enormity of the events on which they reflect. There are harrowing scenes. István Vas saw his own mother among those driven from Budapest ‘her tiny body labouring/Towards Ujlak out of breath, in the foul dark.’ János Pilinszky describes a group of slave labourers ‘dragging a massive wagon,/which grows as the night does,/their bodies split between the claims/of hunger, trembling, dust.’
How does one reflect on the Holocaust years? How does one draw conclusions? András Mezei turns the Biblical phrase 'the chosen people' into 'the chosen scapegoat race', and goes on to ask, with a poet’s pain: 'Have you received Lord, alleluias/sung in the Auschwitz tragedy?' and with a poet’s plea: 'Don’t send them psalms of self-delusion.'

Each poem in this volume is a world of its own, an assertion of the struggle of the human spirit faced with inexplicable torments. The fate of the Gypsies, an integral part of Hitler’s perverse racial plan, is also the object of poetic understanding in these pages. The nineteen translators have captured the voices and moods of the poets in an uncanny manner. They have also underlined the universal message of the poems by the volume’s dedication 'To the victims and to those who were not afraid to help'. It is hard to read these poems without wishing – amid tears – that for every person who helped there were not a hundred more, or that for every hundred people who harmed, there were not ninety-nine fewer.

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MIKLÓS RADNÓTI

Fifth Eclogue

In memory of György Bálint
(Fragment)

My dear friend, how the cold of this poem made me shiver,
How afraid I was of words. Today, too, I have fled it.
Have scribbled half-lines.

I tried to write about something –
About anything else, but in vain. This furtive night of terror
Admonishes: 'Speak of him.'

And I start up, but the voice
Is silent again – like the dead, out there on Ukrainian fields.
You're missing.

And autumn's brought no news of you.

Again

Wild prophecy of winter soughs through the forest, clouds
Fly heavy across the sky, till snow-laden they stop.
Alive still? Who knows?

Now I don't, and I don't flare with rage
When people shake their heads or in pain hide their faces.
And they know nothing.

But are you alive? Or just wounded?
Are you walking through fallen leaves and the odour of forest mud
Or are you yourself but a fragrance?
Snow flutters over the fields.

'Missing' – the news thuds home.

And my heart thumps once, then freezes.
Between two of my ribs, at such times, there's a pain that tenses and throbs,
Words you said long ago now live in my mind as clearly
And I feel your bodily presence, right here, as vividly
As if you were dead...

And today, I still can't write of you.

21 November 1943

Translated by Clive Wilmer and George Gömöri
Editor’s note: György Bálint, a left-wing journalist, sent to the Ukraine in a forced labour battalion; listed missing in 1943.
Fragment

I lived on this earth in an age
When man fell so low he killed with pleasure
And willingly, not merely under orders.
His life entangled, trapped, in wild obsession,
He trusted false gods, raving in delusion.

I lived on this earth in an age
That esteemed informers, in an age when heroes
Were the murderer, the bandit and the traitor.
And such as were silent – or just slow to applaud –
Were shunned, as if plague-stricken, and abhorred.

I lived on this earth in an age
When any who spoke out would have to flee –
 Forced to lie low and gnaw their fists in shame.
The folk went mad and, drunk on blood, filth, hate,
Could only grin at their own hideous fate.

I lived on this earth in an age
When a curse would be the mother of a child
And women were glad if their unborn miscarried.
The living – with poison seething on his plate –
Would envy the grave-dweller the worms eat.

I lived on this earth in an age
When poets too were silent: waiting in hope
For the great Prophet to rise and speak again –
Since no one could give voice to a fit curse
But Isaiah himself, scholar of terrible words.

19 May 1944

Translated by Clive Wilmer and George Gömöri
Seventh Eclogue

You see? As dark comes on, the barracks and the grim oak fence,
Girded with barbed-wire, dissolve: night soaks them up.
Slowly the eye relinquishes the bounds of our captivity
And the mind, only the mind, can tell how taut the wire is.
You see, dear? Even the fancy has no other way to freedom;
The broken body's released by the fair deliverer, sleep
And the whole prison-camp, then, takes flight for home.
In rags, with their heads shaven, snoring, the prisoners fly
From the blind heights of Serbia to homelands now in hiding.
Homelands in hiding! Ah, does our home still exist?
It might have escaped the bombs? It still is – as when we left it?
Will that man who moans on my right, and this on my left, reach home?
Is there a land still, tell me, where this verse form has meaning?

Without putting in the accents, just groping line after line,
I write this poem here, in the dark, just as I live,
Half-blind, like a caterpillar inching my way across paper.
Torches, books – the guards have taken everything –
And no post comes, just fog, which settles over the barracks.

Among false rumours and worms, we live here with Frenchmen, Poles,
Loud Italians, heretic Serbs, nostalgic Jews, in the mountains.
This feverish body, dismembered but still living one life, waits
For good news, for women's sweet words, for a life both free and human,
And the end plunged into obscurity, and miracles.
A captive beast among worms, I lie on a plank. The fleas
Once more renew their assault, though the flies have gone to rest.
It's night, you see: captivity now is a day shorter.
And so is life. The camp is asleep. Over the land
The moon shines: in its light the wires go taut again.
Through the window you can see how the shadows of armed guards
Go pacing along on the wall through the noises of the night.

The camp's asleep. You see, dear? Dreams fan their wings.
Someone starts and groans, turns in his tight space and
Is already asleep again, his face aglow. I only
Sit up awake – on my lips, instead of your kisses, the taste
Of a half-smoked cigarette; and no sleep comes bringing rest,
For I can no longer die without you, nor can I live.

Lager Heideman, in the mountains
above Zagubica, July 1944

Translated by Clive Wilmer and George Gömöri
Letter to my Wife

Deep down there, worlds dumb and silent lie:
The silence howling in my ears, I cry
But no one here can answer me in far
Serbia, stunned and crumpled into war.
And you are far off. Twined around my dreams
Is your voice, which by day my heart reclaims,
So I am silent. Cool to the touch and proud,
The many ferns around me hum aloud.

When I can see you once again – who were
Lovely as light, lovely as shadow, sure
And grave as a psalm is – I do not know.
Were I blind and dumb, I'd find you even so.
My mind projects you: in landscape you hide
But flash upon my eyes from deep inside.
You are but a dream again now, who were real;
My youthful self – I fall back down that well

And beg you 'Do you love me?' jealously,
And hope again that one day you will be
(When I have reached my prime of youth) my wife.
I fall back on the road of conscious life
Then, for I know you are. My wife and friend.
Three cruel frontiers, though, have intervened.
Slowly it's autumn. Will that too leave me here?
The memory of our kisses grows more clear;
I once believed in miracles – now though
I forget their dates... Above me bombers go...
I was just admiring your eyes' blue in the sky
But clouds came and a plane up there flew by
With bombs longing to fall. A prisoner,
I live despite them. All I have hopes for
I've thought out, yet I'll find my way to you,
For I have walked the soul's full length for you –

And the roads of all these lands. Through scarlet ash
I'll charm my way if need be, through the crash
Of worlds on fire – and yet I shall get back.
If need be, I'll be tough as a tree's bark,
And the calm that hardened men have, who each hour
Know danger, stress – a calm worth guns and power –
Soothes me and, like a cool wave of the sea,
Sobering, 'two-times-two' breaks over me.

_Lager Heideman,
August - September 1944_

Translated by Clive Wilmer and George Gömöri
Forced March

A fool he is who, collapsed rises and walks again,
Ankles and knees moving alone, like wandering pain,
Yet he, as if wings uplifted him, sets out on his way,
And in vain the ditch calls him back, who dares not stay.
And if asked why not, he might answer – without leaving his path –
That his wife was awaiting him, and a saner, more beautiful death.
Poor fool! He's out of his mind: now, for a long time,
Only scorched winds have whirled over the houses at home,
The wall has been laid low, the plum-tree is broken there,
The night of our native hearth flutters, thick with fear.
Oh if only I could believe that everything of worth
Were not just in my heart – that I still had a home on earth.
If only I had! As before, jam made fresh from the plum
Would cool on the old verandah, in peace the bee would hum,
And an end-of-summer stillness would bask in the drowsy garden,
Naked among the leaves would sway the fruit-trees' burden,
And there would be Fanni waiting, blonde, by the russet hedgerow,
As the slow morning painted slow shadow over shadow –
Could it perhaps still be? The moon tonight's so round!
Don't leave me friend, shout at me: I'll get up off the ground!

15 September 1944

Translated by Clive Wilmer and George Gömöri
Postcards

From Bulgaria, wild and swollen, the noise of cannon rolls:
It booms against the ridge, then hesitates, and falls.
Men, animals, carts, thoughts pile up as they fly;
The road rears back and whinnies, maned is the racing sky.
But you in this shifting chaos are what in me is constant:
In my soul’s depth forever, you shine – you are as silent
And motionless as an angel who marvels at destruction,
Or a beetle burrowing in a hollow tree’s corruption.

In the mountains,
30 August 1944

II

No more than six or seven miles away
Haystacks and houses flare;
There, on the meadow’s verges, peasants crouch,
Pipe-smoking, dumb with fear.
Here still, where the tiny shepherdess steps in,
Ripples on the lake spread;
A flock of ruffled sheep bend over it.
And drink the clouds they tread.

Cservenka,
6 October 1944

III

Blood-red, the spittle drools from the oxen’s mouths,
The men stooping to urinate pass blood,
The squad stands bunched in groups whose reek disgusts.
And loathsome death blows overhead in gusts

Mohács,
24 October 1944
IV

I fell beside him. His body, which was taut
As a cord is when it snaps, spun as I fell.
Shot in the neck. 'This is how you will end,'
I whispered to myself. 'Keep lying still.
Now, patience is flowering into death.'
'Der springt noch auf,' said someone over me.
Blood on my ears was drying, caked with earth.

Szentkirályszabadja,
31 October 1944

Translated by Clive Wilmer and George Gömöri
April

April. A new joke of some sort:
Above my heart I should now sport
A bright canary yellow star.
It seems the Scythians who let
the Goths come in have ordered it.
– How oddly keen the Scythians are!

Yet not so odd: we know the line
From back in 1849
When 'Muscovites' prepared the route
For Russian troops with fife and drum
in much the same way as this scum
welcome the crunch of German boot.

Behold the new and read the old:
From minister to bought-and-sold,
It is the same repulsive crew.
Not much reward for all their graft,
Just *Is it OK now to laugh?*
A circus or two will have to do.

I can't escape the thing I am
However I look on and damn
The ragged ranks of serf and toff.
However repulsive, they define
What's not just theirs but also mine,
The ugliness I would cast off.
If it were up to me, all hell
Should break on them and me as well,
who burn with wild self-murdering flame.
It's not those who today wear stars,
Under my own I bear the scars;
My country's yellow mark of shame.

Translated by George Szirtes
November

It was three weeks since I had walked the street. Even now it was just for a single day I crept from the dusky piebald library. The sky was black, a thoroughly black November. People in town were occupied in looting, Policemen, soldiers, Arrow Cross militia, Both Germans and Hungarians. In handcarts In large laden trucks, in wheelbarrows, They dragged their booty off into the Vár And other places. Now and then explosions And heavy guns boomed out their mene-tekels To shattered townsfolk who were used to it And continued to swarm across the makeshift wooden bridge with idiotic indifference. It was the first time I saw Margaret Bridge, The pointlessly imploring messenger Of Pest’s destruction, knee-bent in the river. Just for a day I left my hiding place, Wanting a glimpse, if no more, of Hold utca, Of Szabadság tér, cafés, Chain Bridge. But There was no time for even that. I saw My mother. She could barely keep in step With others driven along. Then suddenly A ten-year old boy leapt clear of the queue, Looking to run: a young lout with a rifle Took aim at him and fired, and he collapsed. His mother ran to him but she was merely Wounded. A woman on the pavement said To her son, ‘Look there! See, they’re driving out The Jews!’ The child just stared. There were few Swabians among the guards. Most had local accents from Vas county, the lowlands or from Nógrád cheerfully goading their captives, moving quickly. By the time I caught a ferry over to Buda
They were all there, each with a small bundle.
I saw my mother too in the pouring rain,
Dressed in black, her tiny body labouring
Towards Ujlak out of breath, in the foul dark.
That night the company – perhaps as consolation –
Was busily discussing who should hang.
I'd sooner have imagined mama lying
Dead in the mud, a merciful bullet in her.
Maybe the woman I'd met in the afternoon
Would soon be saying to her son, 'See there?
They're driving out the fascists!' I also thought
I might survive ten or twenty more years,
And how being condemned to be Hungarian
Was a life sentence. After midnight the rain
Came down so heavily we could hear it inside,
And I knew that the same rain was beating hard
On my mother in the open factory-brickyard.
But we had fire. Busily drinking and eating.
Meat and red wine. Marika did my weeping.

Translated by George Szirtes
Editor's note: Vár- The Castle District, mene-tekels- biblical words of warning from the writing on the wall, utca-street, tér- square
Rhapsody: Keeping Faith

1.

Reading Radnóti’s diary

So little there is of Life: of Letters, page on page!
And how the life strikes through the barren verbiage!
Three days I’ve watched and listened, while days that have long died
Gather and strike and leave their froth upon the tide.
A disembodied light, a sieved and flickering screen,
Permits one ghostly dusk to filter in between,
As if again we sat and looked down on the same
Danube with her bridges, and all our shame
Gathered and struck through words and the heart’s animus.
In whom did that shame burn so fiercely as in us?
Our country’s! the whole world’s! His voice is furious:
Is this to be our youth? this bitterness? this test
Of character, this shame of intellect oppressed,
This time of baited traps and tortuous arguments,
These awkward situations, these filthy lineaments
Of shady confidences, this terror of events!

And behind these literary chaste
Tantrums with their helpless hiss, the waste
Of steam, vain intellectual effort. Not enough:
Our limbs grow loth and leaden in the spreading slough.
However much we differ, days and events combine
Once and for all to weave our lives to one design,
The monster-breeding river, the past-for-present years,
My name bobs in their river foam, appears and disappears,
The war’s first autumn turns all suffering to stone,
And there’s the catafalque, and there the dead march on!
In a subordinate clause night rattles out her dirge,
And shows us walking home together from the verge
Of someone’s grave. O world, where death-rattles resound!
Our agonies, like brothers, are each to the other bound,  
And in the pages where another's life winds down  
I see the creeping on of death – this time, your own.  
If I should once forget, but once, your agony,  
May no-one ever owe fidelity to me.  
Never may I enjoy a moment of relief  
Should I but once betray our bond or our belief.  
May I be stricken down, as senseless as the sod  
If I once curse the cause, or death's obedient rod.  
You poor, you saintly ones, the kind and brave and true!  
Dry bones be all my brains, should I be false to you.

2.

Two days later

If ever I denied desires dear to us...  
But did you desire what we did, on your precipitous  
And evangelic route, that final beaten track?  
I'd try to see it through, but intellect starts back.  
For you a painful death and final cleansing wait.  
I flee through realms of filth, escape the well-sprung bait.  
How much of hiding, feigning, tricks and trickery!  
Till Götterdämmerung, and lastly, liberty!  
Later, the sulphurous marsh, the pestilential pool.  
The fever that kills by stealth, and more perfidious rule.  
When dreams we entertained, in their fashion, came true,  
Fulfilment soiled intentions, the disgrace soaked through,  
Shame courses in our veins, the curse still circulates,  
And each one falls and sinks obeying the dictates  
Of his own nature, since the will that should defend  
Turns counter: even fear finds guilt a nagging friend  
Who lathers in his spittle the clear untainted head –  
Must I keep faith with this to keep faith with the dead?
I fled and so I escaped and so I stayed alive.
Friendly hands and unknown hands had helped me to survive!
Since then how many a faithful or faith-restoring face,
Fresh heart or eye has blithely preserved me in its grace.
How often fresh hope folded me round in close embrace,
And new friends through new terrors strengthened in their place!
And that, for which we longed, is an opposing tide,
Which slowly kills them off or drowns the spark inside,
As it would kill you too, the best parts, the most true –
How can I not break faith, and yet keep faith with you?

Up here and down below are much the same to me,
The living ones, the dead ones bind us equally,
It's not enough to keep faith with things for which we long,
Since everything that happens ties new knots just as strong,
In vain to know each act of trust means something new,
That fierce opposing armies claim service is their due,
Since it isn't my affair to put the world to rights,
My heart and mind keep faith with equal opposites,
Each moment has its twin that moment grafted on
Dry bones be all my brains, should I be false to one.

3.

*Summa Fidei*

Each moment has its moment grafted on its back
And I am stretched both ways on an eternal rack,
Now I observe it calm, precise, where not self-consciousness,
But faith, the axis of my being, splits under the stress.
They say the ancient Magyars could afford a type
Who, though impaled upon the stake, contrived to puff a pipe –
So self upon its rack, takes bitter comfort in
The moment split asunder striving with its twin.
They cancel out each other in mutual endeavour:
Choose this or that! cries pain. But I'll choose neither. Never.
Not while I am myself, or sense my single core,
I'll not surrender faith to any Either/Or.
If one terror oppresses me and consciousness wears thin,
Or my sphere of being starts to whimper and gives in,
If trembling and fear protest, 'Anything but that!,'
If even my will surrenders and turns confederate,
Or, scared of what might come, when dark runs through my brain,
I cry to the passing moment, 'Let that which is remain' –
It's only fear in action, not I myself that act,
My faith is what it was, timeless, whole, compact.
Maddening, faith-destroying, infernal Either/Ors –
Dry bones be all my brains if I walk through your doors.

Each moment has its twin grafted on its heart –
O, all preserving Pity, let them not fall apart,
And you, Affection, true to each as is his due,
Be one to whom new hearts in new ways might be true,
You mysterious Sympathy, you radiant Secret, be
The ones who turn betrayal to fidelity,
You to whom a hundred different loyalties lead,
Accept the contradictions my own fidelities breed,
O you in whom erratic knowledge seeks to know
Itself, show my stray paths the way they ought to go,
You, pastor of kept faith, accept me at the gate
Where those things are made whole which now disintegrate,
Where Either/Ors, those tyrants, may not gain passage through,
Where I'll discover all I owe allegiance to,
That those once rent asunder may never be undone,
Be, all transforming Love, a thousand shapes in one.

Translated by George Szirtes
Editor's note: Miklós Radnóti's diary was not published until 1989
I keep on seeing them: a shaft rears and the moon is full – there are men harnessed to the shaft. It's a huge cart they pull.

They are dragging a massive wagon, which grows as the night does, their bodies split between the claims of hunger, trembling, dust.

They bear the road, the horizon, the beet fields shivering, but only feel the burdening land, the weight of everything.

Their neighbours' fallen flesh seems stuck into their own, as in each other's tracks they sway, to living layers grown.

Villages keep clear of them and gates avoid their feet. The distances approaching them falter and retreat.

Staggering, they wade knee-deep in the dark, muffled sound of clattering clogs, as if unseen leaves carpeted the ground.
Silence accepts their frames. Each face is dipped in height, as if straining for the scent of troughs in the sky far off.

And like a cattle-yard prepared for the herded beasts outside – its gates flung open violently – death, for them, gapes wide.

Translated by Clive Wilmer and George Gömöri
On the Wall of a KZ Lager

Where you've fallen, you will stay.  
In the whole universe this one  
and only place is the sole place  
which you have made your very own.

The country runs away from you.  
House, mill, poplar – every thing  
is struggling with you here, as if  
in nothingness mutating.

But now it's you who won't give up.  
Did we fleece you? You've grown rich.  
Did we blind you? You watch us still.  
You bear witness without speech.

Translated by Clive Wilmer and George Gömöri
The Passion at Ravensbrück

One steps clear of the others, stands
in a block of silence, still.
The prison garb, the convict's scalp
blink like an old film-reel.

Fearful to be a self alone:
the pores are visible,
with everything around so huge
and everything so small.

And that was it. As for the rest –
for the rest, without a sound,
simply forgetting to cry out,
the body hit the ground.

Translated by Clive Wilmer and George Gömöri
MENYHÉRT LAKATOS

Holocaust

Above the flaming furnaces' flashing bayonets
dark bells silently toll
the dark power of the world
the sky has been skinned and in its gaudy fur coat
sings pale songs.
In the eyes of mottle-headed wild geese
the stars glow blue.

Ah, if the blue stars fall to earth,
ah, if the sting of cold
is not crackling in our lame bones,
we are damned to eternal torment.

Light up our autumn tangled hair;
look, there's revelry in the halo of the moon.
There is a bow in St. David's hand.
God is having a good time.
Don't drag our black bodies down to damnation;
Can you howl our song like a tyke?
Howl exultantly!
Let us be obedient to the gods,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Put the years in chains and 
do not cry for those who’ll be maimed tomorrow, 
so many wailing, so many whimpering 
are not the prize for half of your sandals.
Awakening remains the eternal dream 
inside their foreign dreams.
Be obedient for the people!

Because theirs is the homeland

Translated by Michael Castro and Gábor G. Gyukics
ANDRÁS MEZEI

Let Your People go

Let Your people die, Almighty. 
Be merciful, they must be saved. 
So, let the bulrush basket founder, 
and leave the stone blocks unengraved.

May their harp-strings slowly wither 
on willows of oblivion, 
don't sing them psalms of self-delusion, 
toss them to greedy Babylon.

Let Your people face extinction 
by nations of another kind, 
drain their blood, which is more restless 
than anyone will ever find.

Let Your people go, Almighty. 
have mercy on them, let them die. 
Deny them now Your gift to mankind: 
don't let them grow and multiply.

The sea shall not divide before them. 
Don't bring them manna any more. 
Rock shall not give them drinking water, 
nor burning bush their guiding law.

And let their blood turn into water: 
they shall be frogs, vile to the smell, 
and let the gurgling swampland swallow 
the last remains of Israel.
Lord, let this nation be a hailstorm, 
a race that will not understand 
their mission. Let them smash their own dreams 
and never dwell in Goshen's land.

Their fate shall lead them into darkness 
to occupy a special place 
between Yourself and other nations: 
to be the chosen scapegoat race.

For even when the stakes are blazing 
the burning bush is what they see. 
Have you received Lord, alleluias 
sung in the Auschwitz tragedy?

Don't make the sun stand still again, as 
In Gibeon, but place the dense 
shroud of the night upon Your people 
And bury Judah's gleaming tents.

The lamp keeps burning in the temple 
long after it runs out of oil, 
till bitterness begins to billow 
in a never-ending coil.

For three men saved in Babylon 
six million burn and suffocate. 
Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego: 
You only rescued them for bait.

Their coats and hats and other garments 
escaped the fire, but in fairness 
they should have died, the three together, 
in the burning fiery furnace
and so your people wouldn't live now
tainted by the smell of fire,
nor would Poland have been chosen
to host the huge funeral pyre.

Faster than Your magic deeds,
in unbidden cosmic silence,
Your every promise fast recedes.

And who has gained when You decided,
against their instincts and insights,
(when they preferred to be in Tarsis)
to foist them on the Ninevites?

You have decreed the great Dispersion,
and let their hearts forever bleed
for their despoiled Jerusalem.
Dispersion was enough indeed.

I wish that stone had sealed the well-mouth,
and time's unfathomable springs
had not welled up into redemption's
transparent rescue-offerings,

as dreamy Joseph had brought Egypt
out of famine's gaping teeth...
I wish that stone had sealed the well, and
the captive had staid underneath.

You have created visions for them
to be their balm for every pain.
You should have toppled Jacob's ladder,
on Beth-el's stony, dark terrain.
You led them by Your pillar of fire, but should have struck them from the rear, and burnt the Word and burnt Your people in sizzling, incandescent fear.

You made them read the holy scriptures. If Sabbath had not been decreed, just barren skies instead of Sabbath: that would have been enough indeed.

You sent the prophet Jeremiah, but, Lord, laments they did not need. Your massive wall of barren sandstone, that would have been enough indeed.

Jerusalem lay there in ruins and You gave them the Law to read. Words have replaced the broken stonework, stones would have been enough indeed.

You have decreed them Pontius Pilate. If Jesus had not been decreed... The unfulfilled promise of pardon: that would have been enough indeed.

Let Your people die, Almighty. Be merciful, they must be saved. So, let the bulrush basket founder, and leave the stone blocks unengraved.

May their harp-strings slowly wither on willows of oblivion, Don’t sing them psalms of self-delusion, toss them to greedy Babylon.
EPILOGUE

Lord, make their women dry and barren,
the men unfit to procreate,
cancel the covenant You entered
and do not make Your people great.

Jesus? One Jew can be too many,
as human history confirms.
Don't judge the Gentiles through Your people,
Especially on moral terms.

Should You one day, have mercy on them,
On every last Israelite,
Lead Egypt out of Your doomed people.
You know it is Your holy right.

Translated by Peter Zollman
Two Landscapes

1.

For weeks I've been gazing at the lake,
I fell asleep, the water froze.
The German brass band then arrived,
trumpets, bassoons and piccolos.

Three poplar trees stepped out in line,
the ice grew thicker, I could see.
The lake capsized, the sky became
a dreadful ceiling over me.

I rest now here like one exiled
to some galaxy far away.
Wherever I would try to go
I'd be a stranger come what may.

2.

Alas, the huge gnarls on the trees.
A face rots in the soggy clay.
Alas, the birds, the winter rains.
Yet another German day.

The game is lost for evermore,
clog-boots, lager-uniforms.
The game is lost for evermore,
clog-boots, lager-uniforms.

Translated by Peter Zollman
Christmas

When Mengele sent Mary and the child to the left
The Saviour yet was born into the carpenter's empty arms

Translated by George and Mari Gömöri

A 20179

The tattooed Auschwitz number on my left inner arm
like ink on blotting paper or imbedded splinters
shouts out in the summer when I travel on the tram
in my short-sleeved blouse and forgetting my arm for a moment
reach for the strap above

- - -

Let my right arm wither if I should forget my tattooed left

Translated by George and Mari Gömöri
The Order

He prescribed an ointment
for the frostbitten foot of the soldier.
He even told him whilst they walked,
where a pharmacy was open that day,
in a Budapest under siege –
as the hobbling soldier led him
to the prescribed place of execution.
The Jewish doctor
had carried out the order.

Translated by George and Mari Gömöri
SÁNDOR CSŐRÍ

*Remembering an Old Street*

Little crooked street:
Discarded melon slice.
Black seeds are your cobbles.
You are covered with flies.

Your synagogue's face:
A stuffed heifer's face.

The earlocks of your small Jews are curly,
Their skinny hands flat matzos roll,
They only have their god, no department store,
They came riding the winds from Bethlehem.

Who has seen Moses with beard of oakum?
He comes by here every night;
He draws water from the stones,
He draws water from the walls,
And by dawn your pavement is a muddy sight.

My listlessness looks at you,
My pondering eyes glance back from here;
A little Jewish girl returns my greeting,
Her eyes are six-pointed stars of constant fear.

A straw flies up now, caught in air?
You! The living! Can you see?
The little Jewish girl's yellow bone
Flies into a yellow nullity.
It flies to mother: green gas in space,
It flies to father: lampshade on the moon,
It flies to brother: rectangular dry soap
In a shop window of the next world of hope.

Little street, little street, Europe's
Tiny poppy-seed street; death's footprint
Can you see in your black mud,
Despite your eyesight, weakening?

I am moving out, away from you, forever;
Leaving only my memories:
Your windmill trees will grind them up with ease,
And your birds will devour them.

Translated by Andrew Feldmár
ÁGNES GERGELY

You are the Sign on my Doorpost

I don't have any memories
and if I do, I don't take care of them.
I don't scout around in cemeteries
and am not appalled by organic chemistry.

But at times like this, around November,
when fog descends and behind
misted-up windows, I gasp for air
– not knowing where your body lies –
a gesture of yours still seeps up
deep from my vegetative state of mind.

I sense your long fingers' agitation
as they handle a thermos, penknife, or blunt tin-opener,
a knapsack, with its mouth agape,
prayer-book and warm underwear,
and beneath this weightless burden
your back creaks, yet still can bear it all.
I sense that you're going. You leave, a well-dressed vagabond,
you set off each time, though never go.
A thirty-eight year old, you look back and laugh,
I'll be back soon, you signal with a nod,
– it would have been your birthday next day –
and like a Mednyánszky picture, whimpering, internally you cry,
and wave – oh, how you wave!
You are the sign on my doorpost, you have become attached;  
the Ferdinand bridge, those bars so small,  
the slushy road, your gorging on grass, the final decline;  
images, just blind images born out of my mind,  
for you see I lied, sometimes I see you,  
under a stifling November sky,  
you set off with me, you breathe with me,  
and I allow your tears to constrict my throat,  
while up there, where it has no business to be  
a slender Memphis cigarette, knocked from your mouth  
burns a hole through the skin of a star.

Translated by Mari and George Gőmőri
Editor's note: László Mednyánszky, 19th century Hungarian painter
Crazed Man in Concentration Camp

All through the march, besides bag and blanket
he carried in his hands two packages of empty boxes,
and when the company halted for a couple of minutes
he laid the two packages of empty boxes neatly at each side,
being careful not to damage or break either one of them,
the parcels were of
ornamental boxes
dovetailed by sizes each to each
and tied together with packing-cord,
the top box with a picture on it.

When the truck was about to start, the sergeant
shouted something in sergeant's language,
they sprang up suddenly,
and one of the boxes rolled down to the wheel,
the smallest one, the one with the picture:
'It's fallen,' he said and made to go after it,
but the truck moved off
and his companions held his hands
while his hands held the two packages of boxes
and his tears trailed down his jacket.
'It's fallen,' he said that evening in the queue –
and it meant nothing to him to be shot dead.

Translated by Edwin Morgan
GEORGE GÖMÖRI

Abda

In memory of Miklós Radnóti

They made us dig. Leaden, grey,
the sky is empty of all but the beat –
exhausted, slow – of a rook's wings.
Carts over there, bored soldiers.
(How banal it is, the entire setting!)
And these aren't even Germans.
We speak the same language and yet the guard
can't understand a word I say.
The Book's prophecy and that of my own
prophetic soul are proving true.
The sponge is dipped in vinegar.
I pocket the little notebook now,
still inhaling the pasture's damp
and the brushwood smoke that wreathes the willows.
Non omnis moriar – yes, I know,
but now for the last time I can say I am:
I shall be a flame that soars in the broad sky,
a silent body laid in the damp earth.

Translated by Clive Wilmer and George Gömöri
Editor's note: Radnóti was shot dead near the village of Abda.
Yes, No

An old man so it's hard for him to remember
yes he was always a law-abiding man
no it wasn't the kind of work he liked
yes but then that was his job
no he was never idle at the workplace
yes the State demanded it
no he never slapped anybody's face
yes beating was forbidden in the regulations
no later on he never gave much thought to it
yes at night they drank and played cards
no he has never felt any racial hatred
yes well what else just an average sort of person

but orders are orders are orders are ORDERS

the final sum is 250,000 (people)
but it may be more
or less

as you get older you start forgetting
nicht wahr?

.......................

why bother about details
once upon a time there was
once there was a little Polish village
Sobibor

Translated by Clive Wilmer and George Gömöri
Editor's note: Sobibor: an extermination camp in occupied Poland during World War II.
Sequence from a Film

The blond, good-looking lad leaps forward and, trampling on bodies just bludgeoned to death, merrily plays the Lithuanian anthem on his accordion. Even for the Germans this is going too far. Later, it's true, many of the executioners are themselves to be executed. Now, though, there's a survivor who gapes at the camera with reptilian eyes, his face, through the frost-mask of old age, declaring:
– For a good overcoat or a pair of boots, sure you can kill, but from sheer curiosity too: what it's like when it's up to me whether one of God's creatures moves or breathes or in my hands turns into a jerking puppet or, if I choose, is still, exists no more.

Translated by Clive Wilmer and George Gömöri
German Lesson, January 1945

hunger
cold
thirst
snow
frost
rain
wind
man
typhoid
death

-------------
der Tod
when a person changes from masculine or feminine to das Ding, neuter

Translated by George and Mari Gomori
My Grandfather's Journeys

My grandfather never flew on an aeroplane and went abroad only once, as a young man, when as he put it 'they shot my horse from under me three times out there on the Piave front'.

All he really knew about was horses, buying and selling them. I was always a little afraid of them but still went with him whenever he went to market. His old man’s moustache, fit for a sergeant, suited him and there was in his bearing something of the Hussar. He could never have imagined the days-long train journey which was to take him, now a sick old man, across the border for the second time to a death in this case absolutely certain.

Translated by Clive Wilmer and George Gömöri

Editor's note: The Italian front on the River Piave during World War I.
MAGDA SZÉKELY

*Martyr*

The dreadful throne is floating
in the vortices of standing fire.
No griffin here, no seraphim, instead
they wait, their bones burn bright.
The grotesque forest of their hands
flails in the void, scraggy wings
like so many living staffs
sway in the light-spoked silence.

The air is thickening.
The heights are knotted to a thread,
broken into rungs, stretched taut,
I alone must hold the ladder steady.
Beneath me earth crumbles into dust,
above is sky more obdurate than steel,
and the anthems of the blessed
choirs strike up and start to peal:

Holy, holy, holy am I,
my body is nothing but gas,
soap and gas, soap and gas,
my halo is abomination.

Their faces just one scrap of flame,
who could pick out one among them?
The sky is smouldering, live decay
stripped of its clothes is smouldering.
Which is his face? He stands there too
among the thirty kilo cherubim.
One sheet of fire, six million identical
bright coruscations screen him.
The ladder whirs, its glittering rungs climb up into the highest realms. Its narrowing foot is earth herself, its summit propped against the flames, and all are snatched up to the heights, not my will – but mine is ineffectual; I sink my teeth into the altar's living embers, still aglow and dreadful.

Six million steel columns gleam white-hot. Who was whose mother? Who knows now? Whirls of fire spiral, spurt, hurry to hurl themselves against my very bones. Lo here I am, lo here I am, I struggled over every barricade, each hill, each ditch, and here I am burning, for they too are ablaze.

Translated by Elisabeth Watson Liebert
The Living

I would rather have perished with them
than to live like this, filled with their death.
Like vultures, upon me they descend
and tear from me their allotted end.

They have a right. My body is a body for them.
For sixteen years I have been
carrying their last minutes. As if
on a cross, on my odd heart they are hanging.

I'd carry them onward with me,
to have their weight ferment in me,
to have them, like the trees,
grow and renew power unremittingly –

The living is weakening. I wish
I was not carrying the final minute,
but the one in which, reaching the ditch's edge,
they remembered a good mouthful of bread.

Translated by Len Roberts and Mária Kurdi
OTTÓ ORBÁN

The Wallenberg Report

In Valhalla gods drink foaming red blood with their roast; Eichmann is their purveyor by appointment. So much is clear... But what does Wallenberg’s mysterious life and death mean – if he has died, and isn’t still alive somewhere as a brainless living corpse? That even the Forger of Fate can miss his stroke? Or was God having a nap? Or is there no good and bad? Or are we dreaming awake when we fancy a human face under the cosmic wig where nothing but the suffocating vortex of kneadable ideas whirls? Take care not to know more than others do, because you can be caught between two armies and then you may not be a judge any more, only a witness for the defence...

A Swedish diplomat. Wears a white silken scarf with his black frock-coat. He is inconsiderate, a daredevil. He lies the damned out from their cauldrons. He is led towards Bethlehem by the light of crematory ovens and leaves nothing behind but a notebook with addresses and the question mark of the world's destruction.

Translated by István Tótfalusi
And their Scattered Bones will Shine

And their scattered bones will shine –
felt not the stones in their shoes,
even if upon their feet, they had no shoes,
and no age, occupation, children:
threaded through each other’s gaze, as in a needle,
ey they staggered like drunkards;
was feared they would fall flat,
as among the red-faced glowing fruit,
they themselves hung fruitlike,
drunk with glory and ridiculous...

And their scattered bones will shine –
the squeezed guttural sound, clouded pupils,
the personal details embodying the bodiless whole,
for them alone significant;
the infinite (and thus the finite) becomes,
from abstract notion, fuzzy touchable velvet:
a green jungle-blast in inter-stellar space,
and in the foaming leaf and liana-cascade
the Earth’s hidden nature is visible,
a fireball lightning from dark panther cheeks...

And their scattered bones will shine –
now they are the universe, fish in water,
but also rippling water around fish;
adverbs of place lose meaning:
falling, rising, swirling,
in each other, from each other, through each other,
swishing on one spot neither-up-nor-down;
now thundering sweat rolling into valleys,
now the deaf sky above chattering teeth:
full emptiness, shiny faced raving darkness...
And their scattered bones will shine –
on the X-ray plate of an open fracture,
sparkling spinal column, generations;
their footfalls covered by the incessantly
shifting quartz-sand of the time-desert,
yet a raindrop-sized cell continues to recall:
there is eternity as long as there is death,
and in eternity they’ll wander on a pebbly path,
and as if the wind blew from the village,
their hair will flutter, blissfully.

Translated by Gerald Gorman
DOMOKOS SZILÁGYI

The Shadow of Death

(Excerpt)

Once we bent over the lap of earth opened in the plough’s track, we bustled behind counters, peeled steel at the lathe, our eyes climbed the ledger’s columns of numbers that stretched to the sky, we begot children, went on strike for higher wages, for the right to assemble, we admired the beetle-backed towns from planes, we recited, sang, wept, wrote poems, we tamed plank with plane, till our hands grew rough, we smote the anvil with wheezing hammer, brushed horses, produced cartridges, too, when necessary, and we didn’t know they were to be used against us, we stood in line for bread, and we didn’t know there were worse things than hunger, we thronged in shelters, we didn’t know there were worse things than death, we sold fish for wrinkled money, killed living trees so they would warm someone else, we wove cloth in coats with elbow holes, we painted pictures on empty stomachs, drank wine-and-soda on Saturdays, now and then we went to a movie, a funeral, a Christening – we still had names, voices, sky, songs, sweethearts, hopes for peaceful deaths – but the world splattered, like a skull under the gun butt – here we learnt: Jedem das seine! – our clothes are striped, our souls are striped – here we learnt: Liebe zum Vaterlande! – love the barbed wire, it protects you from thieves – and we learnt: Sauberkeit! keep the trash heap clean, for it’s your table –
and we learnt: *Pünktlichkeit!* –
let’s practise precise death! –
and we learnt: *Gehorsamkeit!* –
die obediently, so you can get to heaven –
and we learnt: *Wahrhaftigkeit!* –
confess openly that you like it here –
and we learnt: *Fleiss!* –
let's breathe diligently the hydrogen cyanide –
and we learnt: *Opfersinn!* –
give the poor, starving bloodhounds a bit of flesh from
your thigh –
and we learnt: *Arbeit macht frei!* –
– come on, come on, heave, carry, sweat, gasp, come
on, move, you’re still alive, a single, heavy, hideous kindness,

come on, – *los*! – bend, moan, wail, howl, if you
dare, strike if you can,
for the main things here are Cleanliness, Accuracy,
and that you Don’t Lie,
and – Generosity, Diligence,
Many Wonderful Citizens’ Virtues,
Obedience, o marvellous, Patriotism burning in hearts –
while you collapse, light slips off the back of your neck,
*Es gibt nur einem Weg der Freiheit!* –
and a bullet sets you free.

Translated by Len Roberts and Katalin Miklós
They took away the Gypsies, took them all, to dig enormous ditches. The ditch grows deep, deeper and wider till they stand in muddy water.

Poor lads – they're just the same as us. The gendarmes harry, goad and beat them, squeeze them in an iron grip. Stragglers feel their rifle butts.

What's it for, this ditch they're digging, this ditch so dark and fathomless? They've no idea – how could they know? The gendarmes won't be telling them!

If only they knew why they were digging a ditch so vast – for them and others. It gapes for them and for their fellows, even for children and their mothers.

The evening of the day that follows the blue sky wears a hem of red, brightest red, the blood of Gypsies, who've paid the price with their clean hearts.

Never forget that day, my brothers, Gypsy friends, remember always that darkest day of grief, the darkest dawn of endless mourning.

Translated by Jamie McKendrick and Mari Gömöri
In Memory of the Gypsy Victims of the Holocaust

The road came to a dead end in Auschwitz-Birkenau. The earth erupted, God's sky was darkened with fire. For God too was orphaned at the Gypsy Lager Gate, like black fire like black fire. The freshly dug grave-ditches were left empty. Our dead were shot and dumped in the Drava and Duna in the Vistula and the Tisza. Our dead lie without epitaph. Who now tends or remembers their unmarked graves? They don't speak, silent and empty are the coffins and graveyards. They let our dead float away like piles of felled logs. There are no marked or unmarked gypsy graves And no one remembers any more Why? Only the scorched earth. Only the scorched earth. Though there were Gypsy soldiers too Who froze at the Don Bend. Did God prepare a welcome in His country for those Gypsy souls that rose from the smoke of the crematoria? Do they sit at the Father's right hand? Beneath the outstretched arms of the crucified Christ?
Or do the *kopja* posts
there too trample over the simple wooden cross?
The victim Gypsy souls,
there too, as on earth, Lord,
do they fail to find a manger and a roof?

Then where is Your power, pray,
where is Your power?

Translated by Jamie McKendrick and George and Mari Gömöri

Editor's note:
*kopja* post is a traditional Transylvanian-Hungarian carved wooden post marking graves, recently expropriated by the nationalist Right in Hungary, as an alternative to traditional Christian symbols.
It's not the fortress walls, the battlements, or watch-towers of the castle, or the gate; it's not the wreaths, or late heads bowed, too late, nor is it an entire nation's monuments. It's not Death's engineering, covert, crafted, nor lawns, green-engineered, and handsome-grafted in carpet-squares, to look as if just grown actually there. No, it's the old photos shown.

It's not the tiered bunks crammed into the gloom of barrack blocks. It's not the urine-drains. It's not the shower-roses' plural bloom from cellar ceilings, or twin-vents for grains of ash beneath the oven-bed's sprung coils. It's not the lamp that gleamed over the tiles in the operating-theatre. These don't tell the place. A bunch of faded snapshots shows its real face.

It's not the corpses carted, ditched and heaped, or skeleton-survivors, chosen ones, but the photos the camp-guards took, and kept, of one another, portly myrmidons — smug, rosy-cheeked, these murder-orgy fellows, pistol cases belted on belly-pillows, greed, lust and envy smouldering in their eyes, ready to rage, again, should ever chance arise.

Translated by Richard Berengarten and George Gömöri
ISTVÁN TURCZI

*Memento*

(the last journey to the railway station of the Tata Jews)

*Nothing but a photograph remains of this generation*

Mordechai Avi-Shaul

Remember!

Like tattered fog-mountains in a threadbare dawn
   silence blooms
and wilts in the final smoke-filled moment.
   They walk in pairs
up the hill; they hurry, as if on the way to prayers.
   As though beyond the tracks
between the pages of the Siddur hope hides expectant;
   abandoned
objects of worship catch obscure rays of the morning sun.
   The house of worship is empty:
Queen of the Shabbat, tell me where you hide?
   The landscape too is plundered,
irreproducible, a grey mass this lovely land
   has no self worth
for it is no longer home, a refuge of long ago.
   For them remains
no more than the glowing shame behind closed eyes
   and the unspoken words;
its meaning even from each other: iberleben!
   Belzec, Treblinka,
Sobibor, Dachau, Chelmno and Auschwitz... 
   in the night of terror
sifting through fog and melodies.
   Oven-deep silence
representing the fate of millions, the short word SHOAH amid the scene of action:
whiplike it herds you forward, never, never so again.
The sages told
nine hundred and three deaths were devised by the Lord.
Then he created one more,
in case the attention of today's sons of Moses should wander.
The heart of the method preserved
by lists, records, photos and the phonograph.
A crackling voice announced,
befitting the final solution, the Arierparagraph,
sixty years against six million...
if you should ask, my son, for whom, or against whom.
Time turns into dust in my palm.
– there is no answer; memory is unforgiving.
But count them
because each and every one of them counts.
Take them into account,
they who walked as humans what was not walkable.
Keep account of them:
the heart is not an empty folder kept in archives.
Two candles are too few for your own fate.
If at times it cracks
the dry fragile branch of mercy,
only thus will your life again
have roots, leaves, a true Hungary.

Translated by Keith Bosley and Mari and George Gömöri
In my Skull

Dream clutters
in my skull
in the burnt out eye sockets
of our horses

like a black planet
darkness is nesting
I carry
the flame of our final neighing
in the amber of my sorrow

Translated by Michael Castro and Gábor G.Gyukics
Auschwitz 1944

Death's black trains
pull grating, clattering wagons
through my mind
on stricken, screeching rails –
an inmate with blood-stained temples
coughs and spits
the tubercular Spring
and the feral whip of salt water
rends his belly
while Death's soldiers
with their death's-head insignia
cross the barbed-wire fences
on which the stars expire
to rip out the pearls of the young boys' loins
and with howls of laughter
toss them into the mud
where among the cut-out tongues of the dead
blood runs its final course –
shivering orphans stand
in the grey breath of gas-chambers
in the stark angles of the gallows
and mother's wombs
looted reek in the fire
yearning in vain for
the rye-brown faces of their little ones

Translated by Jamie McKendrick, George and Mari Gömőri
Editor's note: In August 1944 approximately 20,000 Hungarian Gypsies were exterminated by the SS in Auschwitz-Birkenau.
The Forget-me-not

My family led a typical bourgeois life. My parents had a garment workshop for linen and children’s clothes. Forty employees in Nefelejcs Street. A two-roomed office in nearby Garay Street. A hackney for deliveries, later an automobile. An apartment on Svábhegy, in Karthauzi Street. I was an only child. All that was due to a middle-class boy, I received: entry to gymnasium, patriotic education, private tuition and swimming lessons. The latter in particular came in handy. I was twelve in nineteen-forty-four. March 19th, the Germans marched in. The sewing machines had to be entrusted to someone else. Had to move out of Karthauzi Street. In May my father was called up for forced labour. The rest of the family had to move to a ‘yellow-starred house’. On October 15th, my father, half his former weight, came back from Szolnok, which had been taken by the Russians. That was the day of the Regent’s proclamation. Tanks appeared in front of the house on Népszinzház Street. We were herded out to the racecourse. Kept there for two days, while Szálasi consolidated his rule. Rumour had it, that Swiss letters of protection were to be had in Vadász Street. Queuing, jostling, anxiously waiting, but – got them! Meanwhile we moved to Tátra Street, to number 47. Seventeen of us sleep in a tiny room. At the beginning of November armed Arrow-Cross thugs enter the house, where only old people and children remain. Get in line to the sound of cowbells from the courtyard. The men to forced labour brigades, the women under forty herded west for forced labour. My mother escaped, ended up in the ghetto. The Arrow Cross round up the children in the courtyard. Stand them in line, herd them out to the street. March to the Danube river bank. Line up at the waterside, jackets, shoes, placed by feet. They start shooting at the line. Running out of ammunition. Pity if there was not enough for them all. They tie the children in threes. Aim at the middle one, to drag in the other two. I am on the outside. I am moving in the water without being aware. My wrist being thin, I manage to free my hand. Then my body. I am swimming in the numbingly cold river. Underwater, as shots aimed at moving heads splash by. My coach’s words ring in my ear, “Keep going, courage! Never look to the side, never look back – race now for life or death. I scramble out near Boráros Square. Darkness of dawn, the deserted street. I tread gingerly, barefoot on cobbled stones. In Gát street, people my Father knew take me in. For a week they take care of me. I get back on my feet. Must go on.
Go to city. I find myself in Városliget park. Go to ghetto. I chance upon Mother in long line. Her face deathly pale, as was mine.

Translated by Mari Gömöri

The Sequence of Entjudung

One day God pronounced the word: Entjudung.
It was the month of May. On the ninth, in the city of Munkács, the schedule was finalized. The SS commander, Dr. Uray, transmitted, to all the ghetto-centre mayors, written instructions. Theodor Gangenmüller, the head of Deutsche Reichsbahn, voiced his concern that lines would be overburdened. The chief transportation expert for the Sonderkommando, Franz Novak, considered that proper scheduling would be necessary to safeguard the rolling stock. The trains would be marked "D.A.-Umsiedler" – resettlement of German labourers. In Vienna, at the beginning of May, it was established: every day four trains would be sent along the Kassa-Prešov-Muszyna-Tarnów-Kraków route to Auschwitz. The number of people in each full train should be marked on the outside with chalk. The mayors themselves would be obligated to provide, for each transport, 90 padlocks, 30 cm of chain, and the chalk. Pál Szohor, the mayor of Nyíregyháza, proclaimed: "Not one Jew may be left behind, they must all go!" Dr. Uray then noted: "They can be packed in like herrings, for the Germans need resilient people. Whoever can't take it can clear out. We don't need any ladies of fashion here." The Germans took control of the wagons from the Hungarian gendarmes in Kassa. The Sicherheitspolizei will be assisting in the operation, gentlemen: you may turn to your colleagues with full confidence. Before ex-
termination, have the Jews write postcards home with the following phrases: 'We are in Waldsee now and are having a good time.' – How shall we begin to comprehend a word like *dejudification*, the meaning of which has become obscure, even if the transports rolled along so smoothly? And if following this paradigm, we were to create other neologisms, as for example, *dechristification*, *de-deification*, will we be any closer to the Sabbath?

Translated by Ottilie Mulzet
The Sanctification of the Name

On that evening when the Righteous One was betrayed – was born,

died and laid to rest, when in the grave his body trembled and

the eyelid swelled up as if it were a potato, or rather

it became like a piece of rotting fruit, weighing heavily down

upon the eyeball, from which then the Sage of Worms could hardly see the bearers of

the cross, when his torturers grew weary, and the rabbi's head drooped to one side,

on that evening when the Lamb was betrayed and all his children under the age

of sixteen condemned to death were processed as mere waste material, as were

the elderly, the sick, the defective, and the name of God, who has no

congregation, was not pronounced, on that evening when the righteous were scorned and the

Three became one, the spirit of the Father the Son and the Mother in the fire
and turned into smoke in the chimneys, when Otto Moll perfected his technique of using
ditch-cremation for the separation of the crackling, reusable fat.

Translated by Ottilie Mulzet
GÁBOR T. SZÁNTÓ

each family meal

each family meal
is an apostrophe
predecessors' descendants'
missing chairs
around the table
their missing laughter
the missing memory of missing relatives
instead of their missing smiles

food is life
nothing must be left on the plate
during the conversation
mundane things
they who could recall
are not here to recollect
words are a cover
for their missing absence

Translated by George and Mari Gömöri
A Vision

and they will not let you rest the dead
face after face appears in the night
though unknown to you yet they haunt
inhabit your dreams, they sneak into your days
into your words and the pause between your sentences
the spirit of the dead will speak to you
from the wardrobe, from the carpet, from the bedding
no use swatting them away no use remaining silent
amongst each other or in front of strangers
the voice speaks to you from inside
and does not let you rest whilst you sit in your homes
whilst you are out whilst you lie down or rise
until you speak with their voice
speak with their words speak in your tongue
instead of them for them in their name
calling yourselves
calling them
each one by name

Translated by George and Mari Gőmöri
GÉZA RÖHRIG

A 27281

We all had to undress
then for a moment hell was forgotten
a hermaphrodite stood there in the beetroot field
an old woman with a penis

not to stare at her
was only possible
once she got dressed again

having saved the lives of many of us
she hanged herself next day

they carted her away in a wheelbarrow
and her hand made such a fine furrow
that we always stepped over it
on it never

Translated by George and Mari Gömöri
Bundles

That little goy
that small Polish girl
to whom I gave my bundle
knew it held my son

I could tell that she knew
the bundle was a baby
branded with the star of a Jew
that's why I dared in haste

inside his address and name
and a little golden chain
that young girl grasped all
she signalled with her eyes

now do it now
so finally I did I gave her my bundle
and the guard didn't notice
he failed to notice mine

Translated by George and Mari Gömöri
List of translators

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Clive Wilmer
Peter Zollman
Biographies

Miklós Radnóti (1909-1944): born in Budapest; studied Hungarian and French literature at the University of Szeged; first book of poetry appeared in 1930, followed by several others; received the Baumgarten Prize in 1937; lived in Budapest from the mid-1930s; in 1944 was called up to serve in a forced-labour unit in Bor, Yugoslavia; shot dead on a forced march in November 1944 near the village of Abda; when exhumed from the mass grave, his body was identified by the little notebook in his greatcoat pocket containing his last poems. They were published posthumously in the volume Tajtékos ég (Foaming Sky, 1946); numerous editions of his poetry exist in English, including Foamy Sky (1992), translated by Zsuzsanna Ozsváth and Frederick Turner, and Forced March (2003), translated by Clive Wilmer and George Gömöri.

István Vas (1910-1991): born in Budapest; first poems appeared in the 1920s in the avant-garde review Munka; befriended Miklós Radnóti in the 1930s; survived the Holocaust in hiding; worked after World War II for a publishing house translating numerous English poets; received the Kossuth Prize for his poetry and autobiography; a collection of his work in English by various translators is Through the Smoke (1979).

János Pilinszky (1921-1981): born in Budapest; began publishing poetry during World War II; served in the Hungarian Army from 1944; made prisoner of war in Germany, where he witnessed the atrocities of the Nazi regime; this experience is expressed with dramatic intensity in some of his best-known poems; received the Baumgarten Prize (1947) and the Kossuth Prize (1980); publications in English include Selected Poems (1976), translated by Ted Hughes and János Csokits, and Passio (2011), translated by Clive Wilmer and George Gömöri.

Menyhért Lakatos (1926-2007): born in Vésztő, Hungary; studied engineering at the Technical College of Nagykőrös; wrote both prose and poetry; first novel, on the life of Hungarian Gypsies, Füstös képek (Budapest, 1975), was translated into three languages; followed by several collections of fables and poetry; from 1972 President of the Cultural Union of Gypsies; received the Attila József Prize twice (1976, 1993) and the Laurel for Hungarian Literature (1999).

András Mezei (1930-2007): born in Budapest; orphaned in World War II; studied Hungarian at ELTE, University of Budapest, graduating in 1966; from 1958 to 1982 served on the editorial board of the weekly Élet és irodalom; first book of poetry published in 1961; after 1990 published several collections of poetry on Jewish themes,
including Zsidó versek (Jewish poems, 1990) and Adorno. Tényversek (Adorno. Factual poems, 1993); two books of his poems exist in English, Testimony (1995) and Christmas in Auschwitz (2010), translated by Thomas Land; was married to the poet Magda Székely.

Sándor Csoóri (1930- ): born in the village of Zámoly, Hungary; first book of poetry published in 1954; apart from poetry he wrote several volumes of sociological and literary essays; since 1988 editor of the cultural review Hitel (Credit); President of the World Federation of Hungarians for several years; awarded many prizes, including the Herder Prize (1981) and the Kossuth Prize (1990); Barbarian Prayers: Selected Poems, a collection of his poems in English by various translators, was published in Budapest in 1989; other collections in English are Memory of Snow translated by Nicholas Kolumban (1983) and Selected Poems of Sándor Csoóri, translated by Len Roberts (1992).

Ágnes Gergely (1933- ): born in Endrőd, Hungary; father died in the Holocaust; studied Hungarian language and literature at ELTE University of Budapest; since 1963 has published several books of poetry, the latest one, Útérintő, összegyűjtött versek (Touching the Road, collected poems), in 2006; a volume of her poems translated into English Requiem for a Sunbird, (1997) was published by Maecenas Books, Budapest; awarded numerous literary prizes, including the Salvatore Quasimodo Poetry Prize (1995) and the Kossuth Prize (2000).


Magda Székely (1936-2004): born in Budapest; studied Hungarian and Bulgarian at ELTE, University of Budapest; worked for the publishing houses Magvető and Europa; first book of poetry was Kőtábla (Stone Tablet, 1962); collected poems published in 1992; received the Graves Prize (1973) and the Attila József Prize (1984); was married to the poet András Mezei.
Ottó Orbán (1936-2002): born in Budapest; studied Hungarian Literature at ELTE, University of Budapest; first book of poetry published in 1960; strongly influenced later by the American Beat poets; translated English and American poets into Hungarian; received many awards including the Attila József Prize (1973, 1985), the literary prize of the Soros foundation (1990) and the Kossuth Prize (1992); publications in English are *The Blood of the Walsungs, Selected Poems* (edited by George Szirtes, 1993) and *The Journey of Barbarus* (translated by Bruce Berlind, 1997) and *The Witching Time of Night* (translated by Peter Zollman, 2003)

Domokos Szilágyi (1938-1976): born in Transylvania; studied Hungarian and Romanian Literature at the Hungarian-language Bolyai University in Cluj, Romania; first book of poetry published in 1962; poetry characterised by a synthesis of folk-traditions and avant-garde influences; translated Romanian poets, as well as Walt Whitman, into Hungarian; translations of his poems have appeared in American and English anthologies; he committed suicide.


Zoltán Sumonyi (1942- ): born in Szatmárnémeti (now Satu Mare, Romania); has lived in Budapest since 1954; studied Hungarian and Russian literature at ELTE, University of Budapest; from 1970-2007 worked at the Hungarian Radio; first book of poetry published in 1967, followed by numerous others; also writes plays and historical novels; wrote monograph on the poet István Vas (1982); was for a number of years President of the Hungarian PEN Club; winner of several prizes, the most prestigious being the Salvatore Quasimodo Poetry Special Prize (1998).

István Turczi (1957- ): born in Tata, Hungary; studied Hungarian, English and Finnish at ELTE, University of Budapest; first book of poetry published in 1985; founded and has edited the poetry review *Parnasszus* since 1995; edited *At the End of the Broken Bridge* (2005), an anthology of modern Hungarian poetry in English; head of the Poetry Section of the Hungarian Writers' Association; awarded the Attila József Prize (2006) and the Poetic Laurel of the Hungarian Republic (2010).
Zsolt Csanya Szolnoki (1962- ): born in Miskolc, Hungary; lived in the small town of Karcag; the poet Lajos Körmendi took him under his wing, encouraging his early work; has been published in several literary magazines in Budapest (Lyukasóra, Magyar napló) and in the Szolnok-based magazine Eső (Rain).

Szilárd Borbély (1964- ): born at Fehérgyarmat, Hungary; studied Hungarian literature at the Kossuth Lajos University, Debrecen; has been teaching there since graduation (1989); first collection of poetry published in 1988; several books of poetry and prose followed, the latest being A Testhez. Ódák és legendák (To the Body. Odes and Legends, 2010); English collection of his poems, Berlin-Hamlet, published in 2008, translated by Ottilie Mulzet; translations of his poems also appear in New Order. Hungarian Poets of the post-1989 Generation (2010); received the Attila József Prize (2002).

Gábor T. Szántó (1966- ): born in Budapest; studied political science and law at Eötvös Lóránd University in Budapest; editor-in-chief of the Hungarian-Jewish cultural and political monthly Szombat (Shabbat); published two books of poems in the 1990s, a volume of two novellas, and a novel: Keleti pályaudvar, végállomás (Eastern station, last stop, 2002); a short story book Lágermikulás (The Crunch of Empty Boots, 2004) and a volume of poetry, A szabadulás íze (The Taste of Liberation, 2010); his work has been translated into several languages.

Géza Röhrig (1967- ): born in Budapest; studied Hungarian and Polish literature at ELTE, University of Budapest and film-directing at the University of Film and Theatre in Budapest; graduated from the Jewish Theological Seminary (New York) in 2004; first book of poems, hamvasztókönyv (cremationbook, 1995), followed by several other collections, the latest of which is honvágy (homesick, 2010); now resides in the United States.
Sources and acknowledgments

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