

# **András Mezei: PRAYERS**

**Translated from the Hungarian**

**& Edited**

**By Thomas Ország-Land**



(1)

Psalm

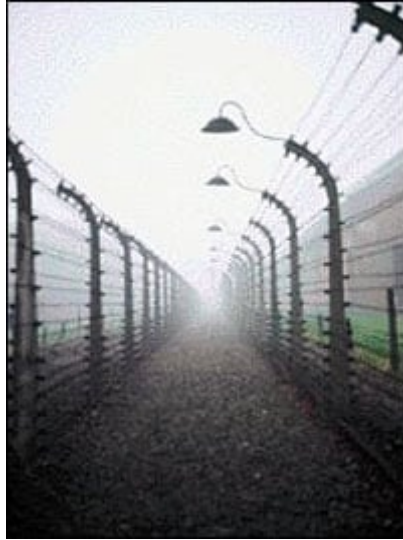
I watch my spade as thrust by thrust  
and spit by spit it shapes my home  
till, like our psalms, my steaming breath  
lifts rising from this cold, deep hole.  
My Eternal God! Your very  
being steels my arms. You know  
that all the time till resurrection  
will pass quickly like the thunder  
of the gun.

(2)

### **The Lists**

They did not need quite 24 hours  
in Győr, nor in Veszprém nor Szombathely,  
in all the small cities throughout the land:  
a register of Jewish residents  
was assembled before the sunrise  
the very day the Germans took over –  
the lists were prepared in a sense of shame  
and helplessness and in heartfelt regret,  
you might say with the greatest of sympathy

and embarrassment. They were surrendered.



(3)

### **Group Portrait**

The cows grazed in freedom beyond the deathcamp  
and the air conveyed their healthy munching  
to the people promised a communal bath,  
yet whose prayer was for gas: relief, at last,  
in the bitter almond fragrance of Zyklon B2 –  
in that passive state of animal existence  
there stood (My God! hallowed be Thy Name)  
a group of women crammed together,  
devoid of hair.

**(4)**

**In the Bomb-pit**

His shovel clanged against the metal body.

He was forced to dig a funnel-shaped pit  
around the unexploded bomb in the ground.

The explosives expert watched from a distance.

And, deep within his megatonnes of history,  
the Jewish prisoner stood in the bomb-pit:

unharmed

as the expert cautiously descended

into that reality of war, in which

Nebuchadnezzar's lions facing Daniel

must grow tame in the sight of the Lord

even within the metal cloaking of the bomb.

**(5)**

**Before my Fall**

Before my fall,

before that great block of stone  
came tumbling upon me,  
before it crushed in my chest,  
before it rushed me  
into the land of shadows –  
in the sight of the Lord  
I had raised up all of Egypt.

**(6)**

### **The Executioners**

Still laughing, that Galician Jew's eyes, still bright  
in the blaze of his beard set on fire by the killer's lighter,  
eternally laughing, beyond even time and the final judgment,  
and in his gaze thick heads of hair and earlocks and beards  
set alight in a waxen white candelabra of bodies –

and the Almighty's face does not flinch in the flames.

**(7)**

## Self-portrait, Treblinka

I fire and I fire while retreating.

My mouth is belching blood, my eyes are smiling.

My strength is sapped, my weapon silent. I'm captured.

My mouth is belching blood. My eyes still smiling.



**András Mezei (1930-2008)**, a poet, journalist and publisher, was a foremost chronicler of the Hungarian Holocaust. His last, posthumous publication in English was *Christmas in Auschwitz* (Smokestack Books, England, 2010). His poetry based on personal experience and professional interviews as well as medical, judicial and historical records, are widely taught and anthologized worldwide but still largely ignored in Hungary.

✘ **Thomas Ország-Land** is an award-winning poet and foreign correspondent who writes for *Iconoclast* from Jerusalem and London as well as his native Budapest. His last book was

*Reading for Rush Hour: A Pamphlet in Praise of Passion*  
(Snakeskin, England, 2016).