

András Mezei: PRAYERS

Translated from the Hungarian

& Edited

By Thomas Ország-Land



(1)

Psalm

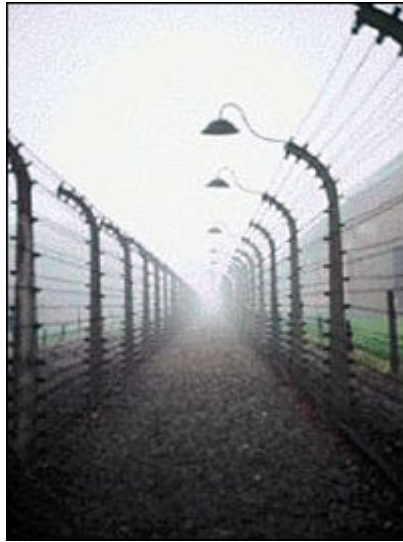
I watch my spade as thrust by thrust
and spit by spit it shapes my home
till, like our psalms, my steaming breath
lifts rising from this cold, deep hole.
My Eternal God! Your very
being steels my arms. You know
that all the time till resurrection
will pass quickly like the thunder
of the gun.

(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)

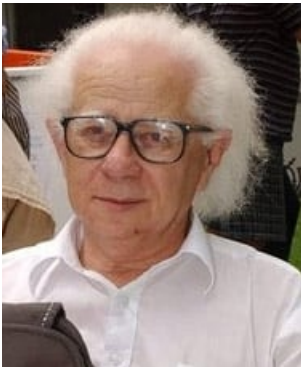
Self-portrait, Treblinka

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).