

# A Monody for Josef Burghauser

by [Jeffrey Burghauser](#) (June 2024)



Execution (Sketch for Shootings, No. 33) –Andrzej Wróblewski, 1949

*Born: 15 March 1877, Czernowitz (Austro-Hungarian Empire)*

*Settled in Vienna: Date Unknown*

*Baptized: 2 September 1920*

*Renounced Baptism: Sometime in 1924*

*Murdered: 6 June 1942, Maly Trostenets (Nazi-Occupied Belarus)\**

Though Josef was already middle-aged,  
He was apprenticed to a tailor near  
The Viennese apartment where he staged

His humble life. On Poverty's frontier,  
He wondered, at the age of forty-three,  
Accepting Jesus Christ into his heart.  
To what unwieldy lock was this the key?—  
To what internal shock, the counterpart?

The Synagogue reclaimed him only four  
Years later. He extolled the Jewish God  
Until his deportation to the gore  
That thickened underneath a firing squad.

Or rather, Josef didn't *not* extol  
The Jewish God, the otherworldly Whence,  
To whom his father sacrificed his soul  
With such immediate obedience.

*Dear Josef:* during your severely black,  
Smudged Pentateuch of days inside the beast  
Advancing down the seasoned railroad track  
Toward your final nightmare in the East,  
Retracing in reverse the hopeful route  
Your body took to meet your weakened mind  
That had, so long ago, quite destitute,  
Renounced the hometown Destiny assigned...

*Dear Josef:* peering through the gnarled space  
Between the timbers, witnessing the flit  
Of each secluded building's eastern face,  
Where, years ago, you'd seen the opposite...

*Dear Josef:* Having been cascaded from  
The fœtid cattle car's disjointed hatch  
To where the fact of troubles overcome  
And self-respect mutually detach...

*Dear Josef:* made to trudge (while knowing why)  
To where there was, beyond the meadow's crust,

The source of all that Mauser smoke & lye,  
Lament & bullet-animated dust,  
With each exhausted step descending to  
A denser intermixing with the mud  
Of bullet casings, harrowingly new  
Fistfuls of women's hair, rosettes of blood...

*Dear Uncle Josef*, how would you define  
The "I" that knelt upon the trench's edge?  
Your wraith approaches, mean as iodine.  
"Just wait; you'll know," its eyes forlornly pledge.

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\* "During 1942, Jews from Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Austria, and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia were brought by train to be killed in Maly Trostinets. Most of the victims were lined up in front of large pits and shot. Tractors then flattened the pits out." –Shoah Resource Center, Yad Vashem.

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Jeffrey Burghauer is a teacher in Columbus, Ohio. He was educated at SUNY-Buffalo and the University of Leeds. He currently studies the five-string banjo with a focus on pre-WWII picking styles. A former artist-in-residence at the Arad Arts Project (Israel), his poems have appeared (or are forthcoming) in *Appalachian Journal*, *Fearsome Critters*, *Iceview*, *Lehrhaus*, and *New English Review*. Jeffrey's book-length collections are available on [Amazon](#), and his website is [www.jeffreyburghauer.com](http://www.jeffreyburghauer.com).

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