



some poetry about the Holocaust

by: Jonathan Barlow Gee

“Arbeit Macht Frei”

(some poetry about the Holocaust)

by: Jon Gee

these poems were written from July to August, 1997.
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:: author’s introduction to the poems ::

Over the Summer of 1997, I attended a class about the Holocaust taught at the local Hebrew school, Temple Israel, by Jack Silverman, the son of a Holocaust survivor. The class began with the division of the Third Reich into area sectors, followed by the division of labour in these regarding those, mainly Socialist sympathisers, who would be gassed first, in trucks, and the use of, specifically, the Yiddish Hebrew ghettos to build the concentration camps. The class concluded by examining the number of prisoners executed at these death camps, and compared and contrasted it statistically to the number of those killed by the Nazis by truck-exhaust gassing and during the construction of the death camps. My own conclusion is that the Nazis intended the Holocaust as a “burnt-offering,” which, according to Semitic mythological custom, was a ritual meant to be saved aside and performed only on the “Day of Atonement” during the “End of Days.”

- Jonathan Gee (*age 31, 2009*)

"Unter Das Aufladung" (1934)

by: Viktor Tsarfield Guttenberg (age 33)

the Uebermenschen Cabarét
feet like champagne pistons
pound Berlin cobblestones dancing
the cigarette misty crisp chill of night
we stumble across the street outside
the sultry café of quick swing
sawing violins still ringing in our ears
and dizzying demon faces drift by
she sighs and stumbles into my
close, hot embrace her eyes
roll up toward mine
murky with glittering, golden drink
her lips tingle effervescent
steaming breath
we topple back into the luxurious ruffles
of German calm's ample lap
I am in love with a Deutschland Nationalist
in blue Danube moonlight
I watch her softly sleeping
where is Hitler's dogma now?
1933, a polka.
Seig Heil. It's only just beginning.
Yellow hair, bright morning over eggs over easy
"us" screaming neighbors weep
I can't grasp her. She won't be reached;
she smokes three I'd rolled out on the balcony
overlooking another Aryan morning
On other, rainy days she complains
it drips like the swollen nose of a Jew
like my nose she complains
I never make the first move.
She tells me she prefers the appearance
of chains draped across pale naked flesh
harsh abrasions, her skin's separation
bloody lines, loss of precious breath
does she ever behind that far off gaze
fixed on the distant crags of the Rhineland
fantasize about being beaten being
beneath the boot of the fatherland,
crying on his soldier uniform's shoulder?
How can I please her without
doing petrifying things?
How can I be worthy of her but yet
not realize my own worst fears?
How can I ever say "I love you" again without
hating myself for meaning it...
Soothing tunes float on the radio barge
in drizzling Reichsdeutsche afternoon
an artificial harmony broadcast across
the face of a nation too tense not to laugh
cackling crash of brittle glass
kristalnacht

~ ~ ~

"They came for Breakfast" (1936)

by: Joshua Guttenberg (age 14)

"Allegro ma non troppo, un poco maestoso..."

"What does it mean, mother?" I ask,

"I don't know; hush now, my darling one,
they're coming."

boots, heavy, heavy, leather

boots pounding up the stairs,

and in the stairwell, opera...

"Molto Vivace" on a phonograph machine.

well then, I for one am climbing out the window;

and why should anybody care?

if they kill a few Russians in Germany;

they kill a few more in our mother land.

I am falling down the side of our apartment building

where we live above cobblestone streets

the "good," "old world"

I am twisting my ankle

and from above there echoes stormy laughter;

the abandonment of G-d, like my own father.

I hear a gunshot, then

a dozen gunshots

return from the faces of the buildings around the square.

pale faces in wide dark portals

ghostly ashen faces with their lipless charcoal mouths

half dressed in the morning

awakened to screaming and

boots on the stairs

to no. 9 in D major, to Op. 125

to a hundred gunshots washing around

the quarter-hole where I have now fallen. While

I look up to the laughter of the German spirit above

and I see my mother

half dressed as she was

protruding like a swollen, severed tongue

through the window high above

and fall.

I try to move on

fiery tendons

but as I turn myself away

she lands right in front of me;

her eyes

with the dark open pupils

silently screaming into mine.

I shriek

in terror at my own mother

as rivulets of her garnet blood

pool in the wretched street

between the cobblestones.

I am falling backward, I tell myself,
as I roll over and lie there
patiently waiting for them. I am
living in the sky above the
half dressed clouds the
storm clouds knotted in heaven like
coagulating garnet clots of blood
"I am living," I keep repeating ...

storm and thunder above
the empty quarter square
and all the silence,
hollow inside
vacant dark portals,
adagio molto e cantabile

~ ~ ~
"My so-called Ode to Joy" (1938)
by: Joshua "Gutterbug" G. (age 16)

I am living ...

below,
in a slum
amongst rats,
a bourgeois high rise
behind a freshly built wall
crowned with barbed wire

and there is no sunlight here
in this shadow of that high-rise
so, "it is to the south," I say
once or twenty times a day
as I hug tight my own thin body
my sinewy arms
my tattered jacket
and shiver. I can only either
wipe my aching nose
or cover up my throbbing ears
so I don't hear the sound of
darkly thundering laughter.

I lean against that wall sometimes
in the darkest violet part of its shadow
in the windiest corner
for I want to suffer
for my body to erode into those bricks,
for both to be forever altered by these days
and nights these weeks and months here
for the memory of this unforgivable injustice

to live on in them beyond my flesh.

There, sometimes, leaned against the wall
I listen to the residents of that high-rise talking
words dressed in French fashions, fine tuxedos with tails
words that sip champagne until they have the
courage to speak up, and, apologising for being “too liberal”
“but,” they “must just” say, “war is so absurd.”
Then they return to laughing at their lovers.

I grit my teeth and wish
I was a Goddamned Communist.
I wish I had done something wrong,
before being put here, to deserve it.
I wish I had hated my bourgeoisie captors as much
before as I do now
and never admired them;
looking at the backs of their heads in classrooms
and smiling at their pretty sneers,
living in their frigid shadow ...

for now I know Presto:
the "Ode to Joy,"
and its desperate attempt to run away from
its own opposite buried within itself
behind walls crowned with barbed wire;
for Strength is the denial of weakness
homogeny of purpose as
beautiful as a sneer, ironic as
liberal bourgeoisie and
national
socialists

~ ~ ~
“Study of Decay in Still-Life” (1940)
by: Josh Guttenberg (age 18)

We are waiting in a line again,
the ghosts of Munch’s dreams
haunted by the Harpies of Wagner, who are
possessed by the spiritual cruelty of Nietzsche.
Who should apologize
when the father brutalizes his own child?
It is the way that nature loves mankind;
and yes we are all still wild
even inside our ornate and delicate cages
just shuffled packs of savage beasts;
the ghetto zodiac.
We have been revolving here in line
in the house of a god who is not our own
shifting our weight from one sore foot to the other
they took away our shoes
my ankle gnarled like old tree roots, I hide it
it seems the primal thing to do

Intestines made of steel and wood
carrying chyme
along the line. The frozen night
blurs hurriedly fast outside;
the countryside bustling to pass us by,
eager to turn its back toward us,
its rejected, as we are rushed
toward the destiny unique to us,
the lumpen volken, to all our kind
in the wind as cold as a scythe.
Leaning against the rumbling, lumber ribs
new milled, smell of fresh chemical treatments.
This boxcar was only just recently built;
made specifically for the purpose
of moving us in rapid closeness
towards vacant hope
for a release: the Final Flush.

In the vapid German dawn
(for even the sunlight has nationality),
it looks so much different here in this
jagged and uncut land than it did
above the flat wastes of Siberian tundra,
when it was the sun of Russia;
as I am Russia's son,
or was ...

the train is stopped and we are choking on
the smell of German Jewish piss and all of
these emaciated, yet kind-eyed, cowards
have diarrhea from the rattling of the cabins.
Patriarchs and teachers;
mothers and fathers;
grandmothers and grandfathers;
great grandmothers and great grandfathers;
their little children try to talk to me while three
generations trade their turns squatting in corners to
squeeze and wince.
I nod my head in inner angst,
talking about the weather in Germany,
wondering to them where we're going -
cruelly pretending I don't already know
to spare the little ones their innocence,
already so sullied with tears and filth - until
their scolding elders come near and
lead the young ones away, so harshly,
squeezing both their pale, little hands into one withered, dirty palm.

"We are going to the furnace at Aushwitz," I want to yell,
under the pale, German sun like a cold, indifferent eye
under which all the sneering blonde girls sip champagne
with all the laughing bourgeoisie boys while we
are moving towards the fall

of it all, all so civilized.
we are just society's shameful waste, afterall,
just a regretfully necessary byproduct that must be expelled,
in secret all so secret ...
except for that ghastly smell

~ ~ ~
"Hollow Cost" (1944)
by: J. Guttenberg, #1593148 (age 22)

The smoke!
The smoke.
The smoke ...

clouds of ever-erupting ash
comprised of combusted human flesh

settles on the freshly constructed camp; death's
denizens we make no new friends,
for we all know we'll lose them soon.
We hide inside our shrinking skins,
and in our daily standing exercise,
then in our bare wooden coffin-sized cots.
The ashes, like the dust of the ages,
make it easier for us, I guess.

I disdain the broken, who yet talk with hope,
as though it were before them, like an angel -
invisible to all but them;
like the insane talking to
themselves - living in a dream, like ghosts; so blind
they cannot see how foolish they look,
how disgraceful. Milky, wide, childish eyes -
wrapped up tight in vertical stripes - behind bars.
Truly, such people do not recognize
where they are and, like slaving idiots,
must imagine themselves taken by the hand and
shepherded by the prince of peace into an emerald pasture.
How long it has been since I have seen green.
I even dream in black and white now;
the gray clouds of ash settling on my numb brain,
choking out my heart, clenching it up against itself.
"They deserve to be here," I tell myself,
once or twenty times a day. "I, alone, do not,"
trying to recall my father's stern voice
but always sounding instead like
Adolf Hitler.

Every hour I see some fresh slaughter.
How modern this industry is;
the latest lugers and steel-tipped boots;
they've shaved our heads and I expect
that that will be, for the entire world,
the fashion of the future.

I have forgotten the sound of the Choral by now,
as I have forgotten the sound of my own name.
I only remember the darkening pupils of my dying mother's eyes
and the name of the base commander. It sticks in my mouth like glue.

He has eyes like a bird of prey and I can see quite clearly
how he could be loved by his whole entire harem of women
and loyally admired by all of his lesser ranking soldiers.
Is he not the Ubermensch long ago foretold?
the messiah of the common man?
and must we not worship him where he stands?
In a puddle of bloody mud, above
a fresh, new corpse whom he was just talking to;
suddenly killed by the lead might of his will,
so suddenly set free from this sorrowful existence.
Are we not singing a love song to Hitler,
here as we succumb by the thousands, the millions,
raising our voices up to heaven, to the gates of G-d,
as ashes, as soot, as smoke, as smog?
It is the only way we can hope to escape;
We are all going to die here.

~ ~ ~
"A Cake Walk" (1955)
by: Joshua Benjamin Gutenberg (age 33)

My friend ...

he is my friend ... I remind myself daily.
We walk together in the green glowing park,
feeding faded gray pigeons
by the burbling blue Danube.
They flock madly; madly swarming,
coming from everywhere, from nowhere, out of the clear,
crisp air; overwhelming,
smothering each other for a few crumbs
I watch my friend's face while he laughs at that ...
it wrinkles, reddens ...
he is alive
I try to forgive him for reminding me that
I am too.

We get older....

My friend tells me that
while we ("you Jews") were in ... ("those places")
people on the outside
did not forget about us.
My friend fought in the resistance army,
killing little blonde haired boys,
who used to smile bright white smiles,
straight-edged teeth shown proud
at the sight of a kicked dog.

He saw them fall over clutching smoking red holes
he poked into their living skin with the
cold little bullets he fired from
the trench-sweeper hot in his hands.
My friend says ...

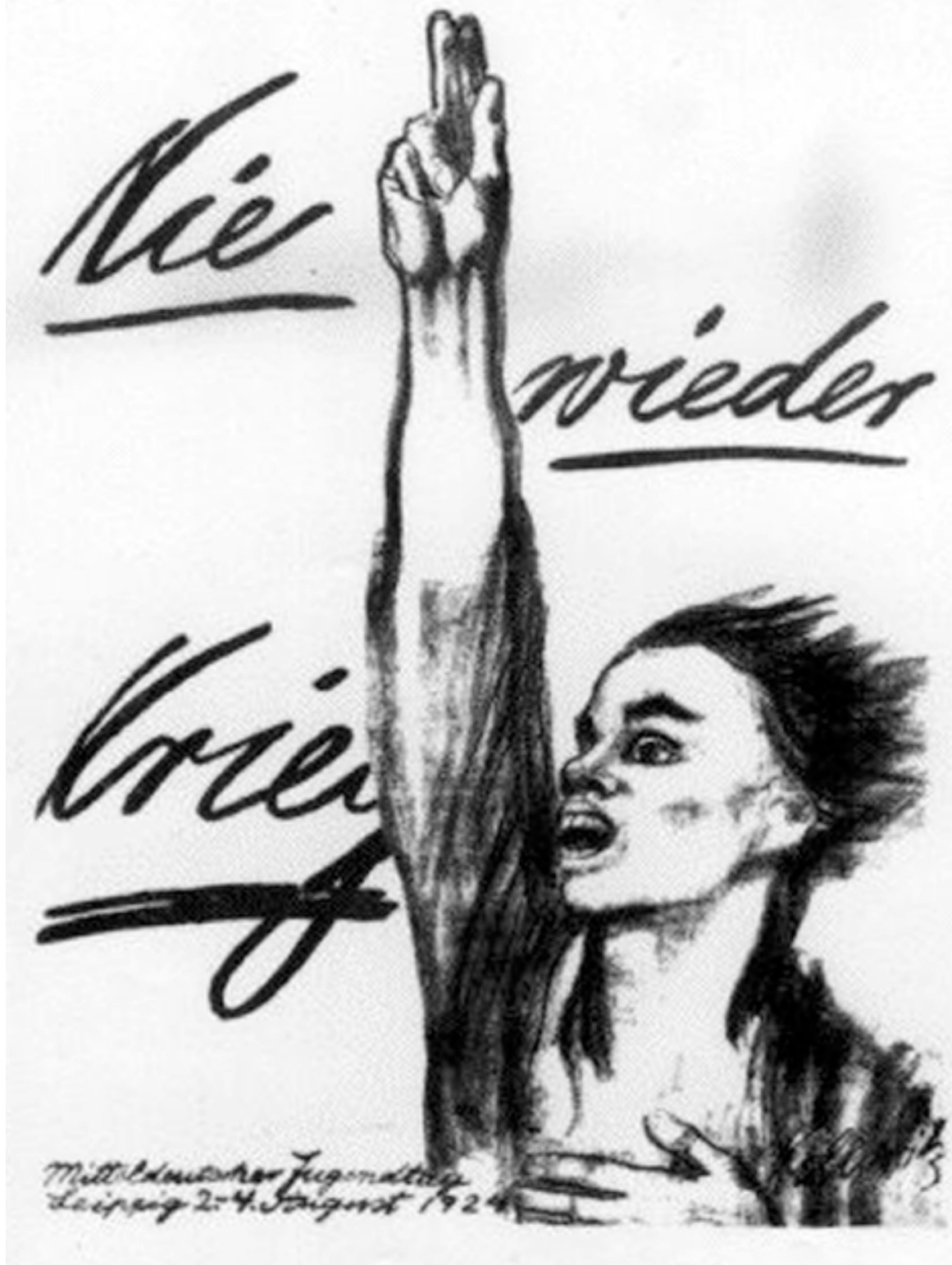
"the people would have resisted more if they had known ...
and the Jews too, inside.
Most people would have fought, ...
and died, ...
and killed, like I, ...
if they'd known"
but I know better... my gaze blurs out across the hazy, sparkling river...

perhaps I am just being cynical, as my friend tells me I sometimes can be,
but I think to myself so, so gently,
"being in a forced labor camp can do that to a person."

I think the Nazis only gave the people what they really wanted all along.
a hero, alive ... a bloody flag, a blood-line based spirit of national unity;
just look how popular they were.
During the trials
I could hear people crying through the walls of my high-rise
when the verdicts came down across the radio.
Nobody cheered; just
the shedding of tears
followed by heavy
silence.

That last of the Nuremberg nights
my friend came over with a bottle of Vicci champagne, which he had
already started, which he offered to let me finish for him; instead
we embraced, for a long time together; and then
we, too, wept.
It was over we said, for the sake of the dead,
but a few stale crumbs fit only for vermin
will not be enough, for any of us, ever again.

War Poster Against Kathe Kollwitz, 1924. (Captioned: educational drawing) (1924)



"Never Again War" sketch by: Kathe Kollwitz (1924)