

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 fætid 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.

* "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 Burghauser 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.jeffreyburghauser.com.

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