

Birdsong

He doesn't know the world at all
 Who stays in his nest and doesn't go out.
 He doesn't know what birds know best
 Nor what I want to sing about,
 That the world is full of loveliness.

When dewdrops sparkle in the grass
 And earth's aflood with morning light,
 A blackbird sings upon a bush
 To greet the dawning after night.
 Then I know how fine it is to live.

Hey, try to open up your heart
 To beauty; go to the woods someday
 And weave a wreath of memory there.
 Then if the tears obscure your way
 You'll know how wonderful it is
 To be alive. *1941 Anonymous*

At Terezin

When a new child comes
 Everything seems strange to him.
 What, on the ground I have to lie?
 Eat black potatoes? No! Not I!
 I've got to stay? It's dirty here!
 The floor – why, look, it's dirt, I fear!
 And I'm supposed to sleep on it?
 I'll get all dirty!

Here the sound of shouting, cries,
 And oh, so many flies.
 Everyone knows flies carry disease.
 Ooh, something bit me! Wasn't that a bedbug?
 Here in Terezin life is hell
 And when I go home again, I can't tell.
Teddy L 410, 1943

Night in the ghetto

Another day has gone for keeps
 Into the bottomless pit of time.
 Again it has wounded a man, held captive by his
 brethren.
 After dusk, he longs for bandages,
 For soft hands to shield the eyes
 From all the horrors that stare by day.
 But in the ghetto, darkness, too, is kind
 To weary eyes that all day long have had to watch.

Dawn crawls again along the ghetto streets
 Embracing all who walk this way.
 Only a car like a greeting from a long-gone world
 Gobbles up the dark with fiery eyes –
 That sweet darkness that falls upon the soul
 And heals those wounds illuminated by the day....
 Along the streets come light and ranks of people
 Like a long black ribbon, loomed with gold.

Anonymous 1943

Fear

Today the ghetto knows a different fear,
 Close in its grip, Death wields an icy scythe.
 An evil sickness spreads a terror in its wake,
 The victims of its shadow, weep and writhe.

Today a father's heartbeat tells his fright
 And mothers bend their heads into their hands.
 Now children choke and die with typhus here,
 A bitter tax is taken from their bands.

My heart still beats inside my breast
 While friends depart for other worlds,
 Perhaps it's better – who can say? –
 Than watching this, to die today?

No, no, my God, we want to live!
 Not watching our numbers melt away.
 We want to have a better world,
 We want to work – we must not die!
Eva Pickova, 12 years old, Nymbur

The Butterfly

The last, the very last,
 So richly, brightly, dazzlingly yellow.
 Perhaps if the sun's tears would sing
 against a white stone....

Such, such a yellow
 Is carried lightly 'way up high.
 It went away I'm sure because it wished to
 Kiss the world goodbye.

For seven weeks I've lived in here,
 Penned up inside this ghetto.
 But I have found what I love here.
 The dandelions call to me
 And the white chestnut branches in the court.
 Only I never saw another butterfly.

That butterfly was the last one.
 Butterflies don't live in here,
 in the ghetto.

4.66.1942 Pavel Friedmann

A Letter To Daddy

Momma told me to write to you today,
but I had no time. New children arrived
with the latest transport, and
I had to play with them.
I didn't notice time pass.

I live better these days.
I sleep on my own mattress on the floor,
so I will not fall down.
At least I don't have much work to fix up my bed,
and in the morning I see the sky from my window.

I was coughing a bit, but I don't want to get sick,
for I am happy when I can run in the courtyard.
Tonight there will be a gathering
like the one's at Scout camp in the summer.
We will sing songs we know,
a girl will play the accordion.

I know you wonder how we fare here,
and you would surely like to be with us now.
And something else, Daddy. Come soon
and have a more cheerful face!
When you are unhappy, Momma is sad,
and then I miss the sparkle in her eyes.

You promised to bring me books
because, truly, I have nothing to read.
So please, come tomorrow, right before dusk.
I will surely be grateful for this.

Now I must stop. Momma sends you her love.
I will rejoice when I hear your footsteps
in the hall. Until you are with us again,
I send you my greetings and kisses.

Your faithful son. *Anonymous.*

Dusk

The dusk flew in on the wings of evening. . .
From whom do you bring me a greeting?
Will you kiss my lips for him?
How I long for the place where I was born!

Perhaps only you, tranquil dusk,
Know of the tears shed in your lap
From eyes that long to see
The shade of palms and olive trees
In the land of Israel.

Perhaps only you will understand
This daughter of Zion,
Who weeps
For her small city on the Elbe
But is afraid ever to return to it.

Anonymous

It all depend on how you look at it

I
Terezin is full of beauty,
It's in your eyes now clear
And through the street the tramp
Of marching feet I hear.

In the ghetto at Terezin,
It looks that way to me,
Is a square kilometre of earth
Cut off from the world that's free.

II
Death, after all, claims everyone.
You find it everywhere.
It catches up with even those
When ear their noses in the air.

The whole, wide world is ruled
With a certain justice, so
That helps perhaps to sweeten
The poor man's pain and woe.

Miroslav Kosek

Homesick

I've lived in the ghetto for more than a year,
In Terezin, in the black town now,
And when I remember my old home so dear,
I can love it more than I did, somehow.

Ah, Home, home.
Why did they tear me away?
Here the weak die easy as a feather
And when they die, they die forever.

I'd like to go back home again,
It makes me think of sweet spring flowers.
Before, when I used to live at home,
It never seemed so dear and fair.
I remember now those golden days. . . .
But maybe I'll be going there soon again,
When we'll go home again.

People walk along the street,
 You see at once on each you meet
 That there's ghetto here,
 A place of evil and of fear.
 There's little to eat and much to want
 Where bit by bit, it's horror to live.
 But no one must give up!
 The world turns and times change.

Yet we all hope the time will come
 When we'll go home again.
 Now I know how dear it is
 And often I remember it.

9.III.1943 Anonymous

Campfire (to Eva Landova)

Here I sit on a rock
 in front of the campfire.
 One branch after another
 is snatched by the fire.
 Into the darkness
 the forest recedes.

Fire makes one reflect . . .
 Terezin is all I think about.
 But now memories gather round me
 like the falling leaves.

Fall is here.
 The leaves turn yellow on the trees,
 the campfire dies out.
 My thoughts are far from here,
 somewhere far,
 where integrity lives.

It lives in my friend.
 Now I think of her.
 Memories gather 'round me
 like the falling leaves. *A Lindtovd*

Birdsong II

The poor thing stands there vainly,
 Vainly he strains his voice.
 Perhaps he'll die. Then can you say
 How beautiful is the world today? *Anonymous*