

Roma Literary Dinner – July 7, 2015.

During our European Summer School on “Prejudice, Genocide, Remembrance”, we organised a literary dinner at Auróra Community Centre in Budapest, where participants had the chance to get acquainted with Hungarian Romani literature through an introduction delivered by literary critic Teri Szűcs, and readings by contemporary Romani writers. All the presented literary works were translated by Owen Good.

Teri Szűcs is an independent researcher, critic, literary historian, and translator. She received her PhD in Aesthetics from the Eötvös Lóránd University of Sciences in 2009. Her monograph on the Hungarian literature of the Holocaust (*The History of Forgetting – The Witness of the Holocaust in Literary Works*) was published in 2011. She is a regular contributor to *Beszélő*, *Jelenkor*, *Kalligram*, *Vigilia* and other literary journals. Ms. Szűcs is the editor of and contributor to the collection of papers titled *Representations of Jewish Identities in 20th Century Hungarian Literature*.

In her presentation, Teri Szűcs talked about two historical novels written by Hungarian Romani authors that bear witness to the fate of a community: Menyhért Lakatos's *The Color of Smoke*, and Béla Osztojkán's *There Is Nobody to Pay Jóska Átyin*. As narratives of remembrance, these novels convey memories that have received little attention and little

acknowledgement, if at all. Lakatos's and Osztojkán's novels reflect on the relationship between the known and the unknown, and on the fundamental need of an individual and group enduring historical cataclysms to own their historical narratives and understand what they have been going through and why. After Szűcs's presentation, Romani poet Éva Klára Galyas read out two of her poems.



THERE WILL

be days
hesitant paralysing heat
the number tattooed on your arm
the weight of impunity
trousers in a heap
blood-stained scummy, scummy locks of
hair,
entombing fence
There will be days...

/Éva Klára Galyas/



TATÁRSZENTGYÖRGY

people
extinguished the flames on a child's
heart.

they stamped a blossom of life into the
ice-cold snow,
that searching eyes might traipse over
its orphan bones
treading on its rare flower.
You're a water-lily touched by autumn
you bloomed like no other
in that village
where people are clutched in fear and
killing hands rummage through their
filth.

Your hands don't know
how the orphan souls weep in the world
above.
Your names are called through the pits
of hell,

that you might feel the torture of
tortures.
You murderers!
The truth is on your doorstep, rapping
on your door!
There's nowhere left to run!
Cry out Weeping Mothers
you mourners

The hand moves among us never tiring.
The scythe swings above our heads,
no time for violins no time for play
may the bears tread softly too!
Stars fade and fall to earth, the black
night weeps!

/Éva Klára Galyas/

In 2005 Éva Klára Galyas worked as an intern with Roma Magazin, a Roma TV broadcast. Later she worked at Rádió C, a Roma radio station in Budapest. She moved to Toronto, Canada and worked as an anchor for the Hungarian TV station of Canada. Following a short stay in the US in 2011 she moved back home to Hungary and established a family. She started writing poems at the age of 11.

After listening to the poems of Éva Klára Galyas, participants listened to a short story by Tamás Jónás, read out in English by literary translator Owen Good.

THE HEADMISTRESS WAS SCOLDING MUM IN THE STAFF ROOM. I could hear the degrading words through the closed, padded door. Dad had beaten mum badly the day before. He'd

Tamás Jónás is a Hungarian writer and poet. He was born in 1973 in Ózd, Hungary. His poems have been published since he was 16. He received the Aegon Award in 2009 and the Herder Scholarship in 2002. He published poetry and short stories in Hungarian and in German. One of his short stories, *Jesus in Csermely*, was adapted into a film.

pressed her into the corner, first he poured the *pörkölt* over her head, we'd only just managed to cadge all the stew's ingredients, and we couldn't eat any until our dad got home. The brown-coloured broth trickled slowly down mum's face, her neck, onto her breasts. She cried, powerless, staring at the ground. Not saying a word. As though she was

being interrogated. 'You're no mother! The boots on this child have holes in them. Holes so big you wouldn't leave them unpatched on a shirt. Your husband works, doesn't he? He does. I was sitting in the hallway, now and again I looked up at the secretary, she was staring at me irately, though, I'd thought she would sympathise with me, she's a grownup. Mum had been blackmailing dad as long as I could remember. With sex. She was a beautiful, thin woman, her skin was surprisingly white, but her face was the standard swarthy colour. She was never sick. Once. Yes once. And she died of it. Maybe it wasn't even the disease, maybe it was the prolonged shame, that she was a ruin, incapable of begging for her children. We'd never had any money and we didn't value it. 'He wins math competitions, he's so talented, I've never met anyone like him. If you don't take proper care of him I'll be forced to call the social services. And not because you're gypsies! It's neglect.' How was it neglect? We had no food, no toilet, no bathroom. What would the headmistress, that shrill-voiced princess, know about living without? My father worked Monday through Sunday. He barely drank, though he was an alcoholic. Mum would do the rounds asking everyone we knew for bread, coffee, fags, vegetables, meat. She even sought out Árpí's sweethearts, so she could complain about our poverty to their parents. I hated the headmistress! If she insulted mum, she insulted me. And





she'd sat me there so I'd hear the whole injustice. Red tie! I was trembling with rage, I scrunched the disgusting thing up in my hands. Consciously, rebelling, I undid the knot, let the secretary see I'm disobedient, I'm a gypsy, I'm smarter than her, fat hag. When Mum came out of the headmistress' office her face was as white as a sheet, without saying a word she took my hand, and we continued the whole

way home in silence. I looked up at her face two or three times, it was blank. The next day, when I came home from school, I had to sit on the ground, I was so disappointed, so terrified, my every faith had left me. These aren't my parents, I thought to myself. Mum took a pair of jeans and a new pair of boots out of the wardrobe. 'How did you pay for it?' I asked in a faltering voice, we hadn't eaten for days. I started to cry. Is Mum actually neglectful, and the only reason she's paying me any mind is because she had an argument with the headmistress? After I don't know what happened. Mum started crying too.

Owen Good is a literary translator who lives and works in Budapest. Originally from Northern Ireland, he began translating Hungarian fiction and poetry while completing his BA in Language and Culture at the University College London, where he majored in Hungarian studies in 2011. Good currently teaches English and drama in Budapest. He regularly participates in Eötvös Loránd University seminars and independent workshops on literature in translation, such as the Attila Jozsef Circle Literary Translation Camp (JAK Műfordító Tábor).

/Tamás Jónás/