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POEMS OF LIBERTY

Human Rights Edition




Imprint

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Foreword

Poems. Not a lot of people read them today. For many, they are the boredom in stuffy classrooms, commonplace in tacky celebrations, and the embarrassment of old timey quotes on social media. And yet, undoubtedly, poems affect us greatly. No matter how boring those classes were, we can still recite some of these poems. They even move us still sometimes at the ceremonies, and we still find something to agree with in those old quotes. There is something innately beautiful in poems, which influences us.

Advertisers use rhymes so we remember slogans better, and politicians use music to elicit emotions in a crowd. Poems work! Great orators, such as Churchill used them often, and with immense success. Poems parodied tyrants when no one else dared to, poems forever preserved the memories of heroes, and poems declared love among countless couples. Poems work to convey ideas, emotions and stories, which is why on this International Human Rights Day 2021 the European Dialogue Programme of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom and the Hungarian Free Market Foundation are launching their first edition of "Poems of Liberty". This publication format seeks to present interesting and relevant poems around a topic in a new style. Every poem is accompanied by a brief description of the author and poem's background and dives into the relevance of the issue in the EU today. We want to offer you just enough food for thought, to inspire your own thoughts and conversations on these issues. In addition, for each edition we team up with one of our Animate Europe comic artists, to bring some of these discussions to life.

A surprising number of poets were classical liberal or at least held values that classical liberals share. It is therefore fitting to celebrate the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 with six poems that each explore an aspect or topic of human rights that still holds relevance today. The Declaration was created in the wake of the horrors of World War II, and brought nations together to prevent it from ever happening again. This document was a victory for liberalism. Liberal democracies, peace, prosperity, rule of law and tolerance started spreading as countries began working together and the Iron Curtain fell. However, we do recognise that there is still a lot to do. Slavery in most of Europe and America was abolished in the 19th century, yet millions of people are victims of some form of slavery today. Fuelled by the different national and international crises of the past decade, populism is finding its way into our dinner table conversations and authoritarian governments are infringing on the rule of law and freedom of speech in their country, while fuelling negative sentiments and implementing discriminatory measures against minorities and vulnerable groups. Liberals must not sit back lest their victory becomes hollow. The following poems are a reminder of how far we as humanity come, but also of how far we are yet to go.

We hope you will enjoy reading the following poems while taking inspiration from them, to continue our work for a better future.



Máté Hajba

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Director, Free Market Foundation



Thomas Ilka

Thomas Ilka

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Why I Am A Liberal

Robert Browning

"Why?" Because all I haply can and do,
All that I am now, all I hope to be,--
Whence comes it save from fortune setting free
Body and soul the purpose to pursue,
God traced for both? If fetters, not a few,
Of prejudice, convention, fall from me,
These shall I bid men--each in his degree
Also God-guided--bear, and gayly, too?

But little do or can the best of us:
That little is achieved through Liberty.
Who, then, dares hold, emancipated thus,
His fellow shall continue bound? Not I,
Who live, love, labour freely, nor discuss
A brother's right to freedom. That is "Why."

Robert Browning (7 May 1812 – 12 December 1889) was an English poet. Although his paternal grandfather was a slaveowner, his father opposed slavery. Browning himself campaigned against slavery with his wife, the poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning. He identified as a liberal, and advocated for human rights and freedom as evidenced by his poem "Why I am a liberal". The last four lines of the poem give answer to the title:

"Who then dares hold, emancipated thus,
His fellow shall continue bound? not I,
Who live, love, labour freely, nor discuss
A brother's right to freedom. That is "Why."

Liberalism has a long history of supporting human rights. From the fight to abolish slavery, slave trade and racism, to the support of equal rights, tolerance and freedom of speech today, the idea of liberalism and freedom has been a steady companion on this journey. Liberals believe that every individual, regardless of their background, ethnicity or sexuality, deserves human rights and that it is a government's duty to uphold these. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights clearly reflects these ideas in its very first article: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood." Unfortunately, even though the ideas and provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights have found its way into many international and national legislations over the years, we still witness widespread human rights violations today. These range from the very individual, to state sponsored infringement on some of these rights. In this sense, Browning's poem should serve as a constant reminder of the importance to keep defending and fighting for human rights today.

A Curse For A Nation

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

(Excerpt)

Because ye have broken your own chain
With the strain
Of brave men climbing a Nation's height,
Yet thence bear down with brand and thong
On souls of others, -- for this wrong
This is the curse. Write.

Because yourselves are standing straight
In the state
Of Freedom's foremost acolyte,
Yet keep calm footing all the time
On writhing bond-slaves, -- for this crime
This is the curse. Write.

Because ye prosper in God's name,
With a claim
To honor in the old world's sight,
Yet do the fiend's work perfectly
In strangling martyrs, -- for this lie
This is the curse. Write.

Ye shall watch while kings conspire
Round the people's smouldering fire,
And, warm for your part,
Shall never dare -- O shame!
To utter the thought into flame
Which burns at your heart.
This is the curse. Write.

Ye shall watch while nations strive
With the bloodhounds, die or survive,
Drop faint from their jaws,
Or throttle them backward to death;
And only under your breath
Shall favor the cause.
This is the curse. Write.

Ye shall watch while strong men draw
The nets of feudal law
To strangle the weak;
And, counting the sin for a sin,
Your soul shall be sadder within
Than the word ye shall speak.
This is the curse. Write.

When good men are praying erect
That Christ may avenge His elect
And deliver the earth,
The prayer in your ears, said low,
Shall sound like the tramp of a foe
That's driving you forth.
This is the curse. Write.

When wise men give you their praise,
They shall praise in the heat of the phrase,
As if carried too far.
When ye boast your own charters kept true,
Ye shall blush; for the thing which ye do
Derides what ye are.
This is the curse. Write.

When fools cast taunts at your gate,
Your scorn ye shall somewhat abate
As ye look o'er the wall;
For your conscience, tradition, and name
Explode with a deadlier blame
Than the worst of them all.
This is the curse. Write.

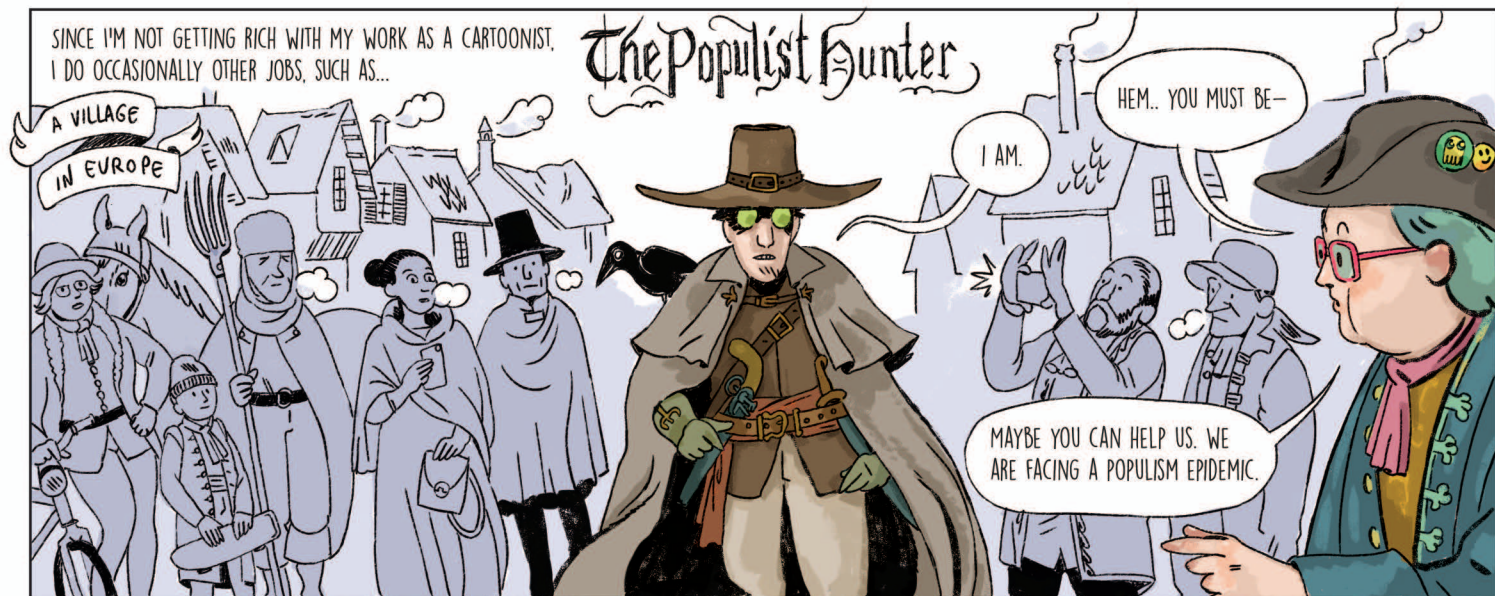
Go, wherever ill deeds shall be done,
Go, plant your flag in the sun
Beside the ill-doers!
And recoil from clenching the curse
Of God's witnessing Universe
With a curse of yours.
This is the curse. Write.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning (6 March 1806 – 29 June 1861), born Elizabeth Moulton-Barrett was an English poet. She composed poetry from an early age and rose to prominence over the years, publishing a vast amount of poems. She married Robert Browning, who reached out to her as he admired her work, in 1844. Barrett Browning was greatly influenced by Mary Wollstonecraft's "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman", an early feminist work which she read at the age of 15 and spurred her to become an avid supporter of human rights. She campaigned for child labour reforms, and her poem "The Cry of Children" helped gain support for laws on the issue. She was also a fierce opponent of slavery, voiced most prominently in her poems "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" and "A Curse for a Nation". These works focus on slavery in the United States of America, where she had also gained popularity. However, it was only in 1833 that slavery was abolished in most parts of the British Empire. Her work on these issues is especially important, as she believed her family to be cursed by benefiting from slavery. Barrett Browning openly expressed her joy over the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833.

According to estimates of the International Labour Organization, more than 40 million people worldwide are trapped in modern day slavery. The forms of slavery that we witness today are manifold and commonly include human trafficking, sex trafficking, domestic servitude, forced labour, bonded labour, child labour, and forced marriage. In addition, this issue disproportionately affects women and girls (71%) and 10 million of the victims are children alone. As if these numbers were not worrying enough, the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated the effects of these types of exploitation, especially in the digital space and among minors. The EU and its Member States have committed to eradicating slavery and forced labour, through the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights and the pursuit of the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goal 8.7, to eradicate modern slavery globally. With its aim to serve as a moral lighthouse in the international community, it is vital that the EU commit to this goal, in Europe and beyond. However, it is a delicate and challenging task for legislators to navigate and enact change in the intersection of business and human rights. While civil society organisations call for more commitment and access to justice for victims, companies and business associations point out the challenges and potential burdens that they would face by implementing due diligence to avoid human rights abuses in their supply chains. We are currently awaiting a European Commission draft for a directive on due diligence in supply chains, which has received overwhelming support by the European Parliament in March but has now been stalled since the originally planned release in the summer. One thing is certain: 2022 will be a decisive year for business and human rights in the EU and liberals will be following the issue attentively, because we support the fight against modern day slavery.

SINCE I'M NOT GETTING RICH WITH MY WORK AS A CARTOONIST, I DO OCCASIONALLY OTHER JOBS, SUCH AS...

The Populist Hunter



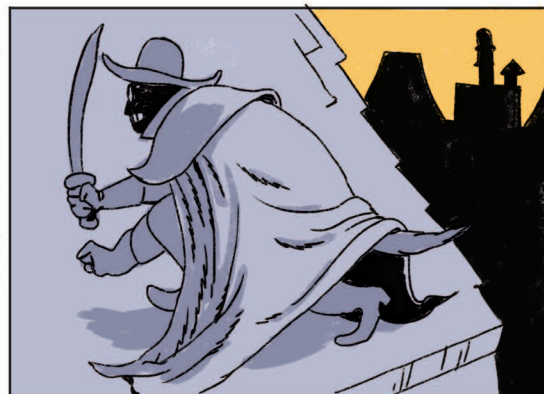
COMMON PEOPLE, CITIZENS, ACQUAINTANCES, RELATIVES HAVE BEGUN TO TRANSFORM. THEIR EARS GET LONGER AND THEY GROW FUR, FANGS, AND CLAWS. THEY POST HORRIBLE THINGS ON THE INTERNET, FUELLED BY UNPRINCIPLED POLITICIANS.



NO! THEIR PUNISHMENT WILL BE HORRIBLE! MAY THEIR COFFEE BE ALWAYS COLD, THEIR INTERNET EXASPERATINGLY SLOW AND THE BATTERY OF THEIR PHONES FOREVER DEAD!



THE HUNT BEGINS!



Don't fear the populism in them.
Fear the populism in you.
A plastic crow.



Nienawiść

Wisława Szymborska

Spójrzcie, jaka wciąż sprawna,
jak dobrze się trzyma
w naszym stuleciu nienawiść.
Jak lekko bierze przeszkody.
Jakie to łatwe dla niej – skoczyć, dopaść.

Nie jest jak inne uczucia.
Starsza i młodsza od nich jednocześnie.
Sama rodzi przyczyny,
które ją budzą do życia.
Jeśli zasypia, to nigdy snem wiecznym.
Bezsensowność nie odbiera jej sił, ale dodaje.

Religia nie religia -
byłe przykłęknąć na starcie.
Ojczyzna nie ojczyzna -
byłe się zerwać do biegu.
Nieźła i sprawiedliwość na początek.
Potem już pędzi sama.
Nienawiść. Nienawiść.
Twarz jej wykrzywia grymas
ekstazy miłosnej.

Ach, te inne uczucia -
cherlawe i ślamazarne.
Od kiedy to braterstwo
może liczyć na tłumy?
Współczucie czy kiedykolwiek
pierwsze dobiło do mety?
Zwątpienie ilu chętnych porywa za sobą?
Porywa tylko ona, która swoje wie.

Zdolna, pojętna, bardzo pracowita.
Czy trzeba mówić ile ułożyła pieśni.
Ile stronic historii ponumerowała.
Ile dywanów z ludzi porozpościerała
na ilu placach, stadionach.

Nie okłamujemy się:
potrafi tworzyć piękno.
Wspaniałe są jej łuny ciemną nocą.
Świetne kłęby wybuchów o różanym świetle.
Trudno odmówić patosu ruinom
i rubasznego humoru
krzepko sterczącej nad nimi kolumnie.

Jest mistrzynią kontrastu
między łoskotem a ciszą,
między czerwoną krwią a białym śniegiem.
A nade wszystko nigdy jej nie nudzi
motyw schludnego oprawcy
nad splugawioną ofiarą.

Do nowych zadań w każdej chwili gotowa.
Jeżeli musi poczekać, poczeka.
Mówią, że ślepa. Ślepa?
Ma bystre oczy snajpera
i śmiało patrzy w przyszłość
- ona jedna.

Hatred

Look how fit she still is,
how well she's holding up
the hatred in our century.
How easily it overcomes obstacles.
How effortless it is for her - to pounce, to track us down.

She is not like the other feelings.
older and younger than them at the same time.
She gives birth to her own causes,
which awaken her to life.
If she falls asleep, it is never with an eternal sleep.
Insomnia does not take away her strength, but adds to it.
Religion, no religion -
to kneel at the starting line.
Fatherland, no fatherland -
just to break into a run.
Even justice will do for the start.
Then she runs on her own.
Hatred. Hatred.
Her face is distorted by the grimace
of ecstatic love.

Ah, those other feelings -
lame and sluggish.
Since when can the brotherhood
count on crowds?
Has compassion ever
ever reached the finish line first?
How many people are captivated by the doubt?
She is the only one who knows her way around.

She is talented, clever, very hard-working.
Need we say how many songs she has composed.
How many pages of history she has numbered.
How many human carpets she spread
on how many squares and stadiums.

Let us not lie to ourselves:
she can create beauty.
Her glows at night are magnificent.
Great are the clouds of bursts at a rosy dawn.
It's hard to deny the pathos of ruins
and the earthy sense of humour
to the column firmly standing above them.

She is a master of contrast
 between noise and silence,
 between red blood and white snow.
 And above all, she is never bored
 the motif of a neat torturer
 over a defiled victim.

She is ready for new tasks at any time.
 If she must wait, she will wait.
 They say she's blind. Blind?
 She has the sharp eyes of a sniper
 And boldly looks to the future
 - as only she can.

Maria Wisława Anna Szymborska (2 July 1923 – 1 February 2012) was a Polish poet and recipient of the 1996 Nobel Prize in Literature. During World War II she was educated in underground university classes, a Polish effort to counter Soviet and German destruction of Polish culture. The classes were also used to prepare people for post-war attempts at rebuilding Poland. Later during the war, she worked as a railway clerk in order to avoid deportation to Germany and be subjected to forced labour. At first, she identified with the socialist regime of post-war Poland, a stance which she later renounced. In the 1980s she contributed to the samizdat literature, which were underground publications providing news and critical views that would have been censored by the regime.

Her poem "Hatred" perfectly describes how easily hatred can sway people and motivate them to follow terrible people and causes. It is an emotion that is commonly used as a tool by populists, which foster hate and division in society to reach their political goals. In his comic, Marco Tabilio also reiterates the danger and appeal of populism, as it can befall even those that think they are above it. The Encyclopedia Britannica defines populism as "political program or movement that champions, or claims to champion, the common person, usually by favourable contrast with a real or perceived elite or establishment." The anti-establishment attitude of populists threatens the integrity of the EU, and although populist like to present themselves as champions of the people against corrupt elites, more often than not they are corrupt themselves.

One thing is clear; populism is neither a thing of the past nor a new trend. It is a challenge that liberal democracies face every day, which has shown to have a relatively solid following over the past decades, and that gains strength with every crisis, every little crack that it finds. Especially throughout the recent pandemic, populists have been promoting disinformation to feed suspicion and distrust, therefore posing a direct threat to democracy and the rule of law. Prominent leaders like Donald

Trump, but also smaller parties that disguise themselves as "worried citizens", like the *German Alternative für Deutschland*, have helped populist narratives, often driven by hate and at the expense of marginalising a certain group of people, find their way into our dinner table conversations and become seemingly more socially acceptable. Fortunately, according to a 2021 YouGov survey, populism seems to be declining across Europe. However, the threat to liberal institutions and democracies is a real one. It is therefore essential for liberal thinking individuals, organisations and parties, to raise awareness on these issues and serve as a platform of open dialogue to address these concerns, so that populists cannot instrumentalise them.

Hetedik ecloga

Miklós Radnóti

Látod-e, esteledik s a szögesdróttal beszegett, vad
tölgykerítés, barakk oly lebegő, felszívja az este.
Rabságunk keretét elereszti a lassu tekintet
és csak az ész, csak az ész, az tudja, a drót feszülését.
Látod-e drága, a képzelet itt, az is így szabadul csak,
megtörtetett testünket az álom, a szép szabadító
oldja fel és a foglyotábor hazaindul ilyenkor.

Rongyosan és kopaszon, horkolva repülnek a foglyok,
Szerbia vak tetejéről bűvő otthoni tájra.
Bűvő otthoni táj! Ó, megvan-e még az az otthon?
Bomba sem érte talán? s van, mint amikor bevonultunk?
És aki jobbra nyöszörg, aki balra hever, hazatér-e?
Mondd, van-e ott haza még, ahol értik e hexametert is?

Ékezetek nélkül, csak sort sor alá tapogatva,
úgy írom itt a homályban a verset, mint ahogy élek,
vaksin, hernyóként araszolgatván a papíron;
zseblámpát, könyvet, mindent elvettek a Lager
őrei s posta se jön, köd száll le csupán barakunkra.

Rémhírek és férgek közt él itt francia, lengyel,
hangos olasz, szakadár szerb, méla zsidó a hegyekben,
szétdarabolt lázas test s mégis egy életet él itt, -
jőhírt vár, szép asszonyi szót, szabad emberi sorsot,
s várja a véget, a sűrű homályba bukót, a csodákat.

Fekszem a deszkán, férgek közt fogoly állat, a bolhák
ostroma meg-megújúl, de a légyserég elnyugodott már.
Este van, egy nappal rövidebb, lásd, újra a fogság
és egy nappal az élet is. Alszik a tábor. A tájra
rásüt a hold s fényében a drótok újra feszülnek,
s látni az ablakon át, hogy a fegyveres őrszemek árnya
lépdél a falra vetődve az éjszaka hangjai közben.

Alszik a tábor, látod-e drága, suhognak az álmok,
horkan a felriadó, megfordul a szűk helyen és már
újra elalszik s fénylik az arca. Csak én ülök ébren,
félígszított cigarettát érzek a számban a csókok
íze helyett és nem jön az álom, az enyhétadó, mert
nem tudok én meghalni se, élni se nélküled immár.

The Seventh Eclogue

See that evening's inhaling the airy barracks
And the barbed wire marred constraints of the rustic oak fence
Lazy gaze lets the limits of our internment go
No strain of the wire is strong for a mind but for reason
See, that's the way dear, imagination is freed,
Dream as the lithe liberator unburdens our broken bodies
That' the prison camp's time to take journeys back home

The captives fly tattered, bold and snoring
From the blind top of Serbia to snuggling scenes of home.
Snuggling scenes of home! Does home still exist?
Has it been bombed or changed since we surrendered our
freedom?
Would they, lying and groaning and dreamin left and right get as
well home?
Tell me, is there a home where they understand my language?

I write without regards for errors, one line after another
just be feeling here in the dark, this is how I live also,
blindly, inching through the paper like a worm
The guards of the camp took torch, book, and everything
No post can come, only fog visits the barracks

French, Poles, vocal Italians, separatist Serbs and broody Jews
live here in the mountain among fearmongering and vermin
A dismembered, feverish body, yet it lives the one life here,
Waiting for good news, nice feminine word, and freedom,
and is waiting for the end, the miracles, plunged into the thick fog.

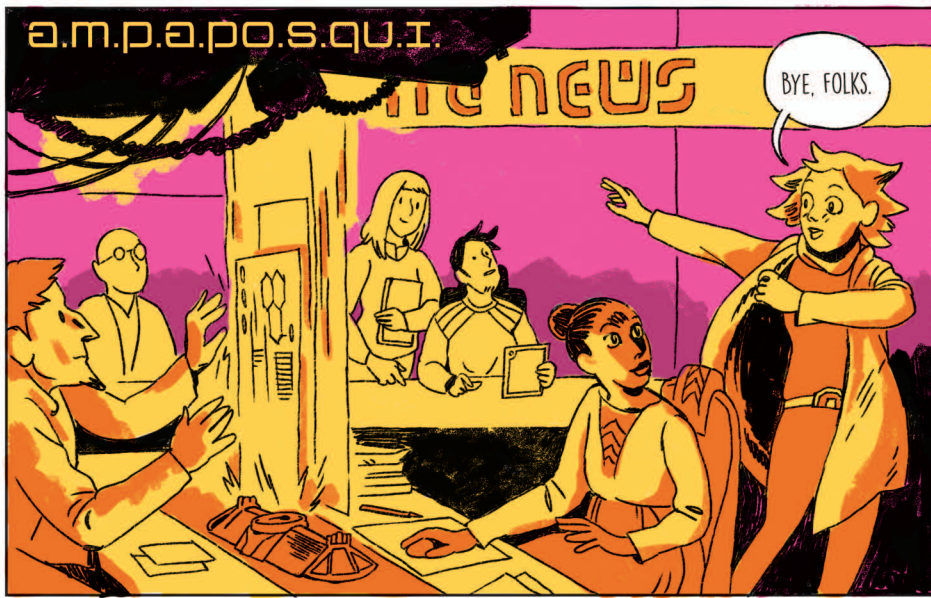
I'm lying on the plank, a captive animal among vermin
With the renewed attack of the fleas as the swarm of flies abate.
It is night-time, the imprisonment shortened by yet another day
as is life. The camp is asleep. The moon shines
on our surroundings and in its light the wires are straining again,
and through the windows the silhouettes of the armed guards
cast their shadows on the walls walking in the sounds of the night

The camp is asleep, can you see dear the whirling of dreams,
One wakes and snores, turns in the narrow place
and falls asleep again with a gleaming face. Only I sit awake,
and feel a scorching cigarette in my mouth instead of your kiss,
and dream will not come, that would give respite,
because I cannot live nor die without you anymore.

Translation: Máté Hajba

Miklós Radnóti (5 May 1909 – November 1944) was a Hungarian poet born into an assimilated Jewish family in Hungary. Even though he came into contact with left wing groups during his student years, he didn't consider himself the activist type. Rather, he expressed his support for the rights and equal treatment of workers through poetry. During World War II, in which Hungary allied with Germany, he was forced to enlist in the labour battalions, which were a form of forced labour service for politically unreliable people and people of Jewish descent. He is best remembered for his poems describing the horrors of the war and forced labour. The seventh eclogue describes how captives like him dream of home, during the horrors of their mandatory service. An eclogue is a bucolic poem, prominently represented by figures like ancient Roman poet Virgil, who influenced Radnóti. The original Hungarian poem is written in hexameter, a form of meter that is seldom compatible with the English language, due to the way the words are stressed. However, it works well in Latin and Hungarian. Many prominent writers and priests were forced into the labour service, where they tried to provide at least some form of entertainment for themselves by writing even amongst the most horrid circumstances. As the Allies were closing in on the fascist forces the captives of the labour camps were constantly relocated in forced marches, which left many dead. Those that were unable to march on, due to exhaustion, were murdered. Radnóti was one of the many that perished this way.

To this day we remember the devastating atrocities of World War II and the impact that they have on our societies today. More than 6 million Jews were killed during the Holocaust and many other minorities, such as Romani people, Jehovah's Witnesses and homosexuals were systematically persecuted and killed by nationalists. In the wake of these atrocities and destruction, world leaders came together to create the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, to stop these horrors from happening ever again. However, what seems like a ghost of the past does still haunt us today. In the face of recent crises, right-wing populists have found fertile soil to spread disinformation and proliferate antisemitic sentiments and fuel them in our societies, leading to increased attacks against Jewish communities, in their places of worship and especially online. In October 2021, the European Commission released a new EU strategy on "combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life", to prevent all forms of antisemitism, protect and foster Jewish life, and promote education, research and Holocaust remembrance. Committing resources on the European level is an important first step in combating antisemitism and the EU Member States are expected to adopt national strategies and/or action plans on the prevention of xenophobia, racism, radicalisation, and violent extremism by the end of 2022.



a.m.p.a.po.s.qu.i

Illustration by Marco Tabilio

Marco Tabilio works as illustrator, comic author and video maker. He received a Bachelor's degree in "Comics and Illustration" from the Accademia di Belle Arti Bologna. During his studies he moved to Hamburg where he focused on Media Information. In 2013 he completed his Master's degree in "Media illustration" at the Accademia di Belle Arti di Bologna. His work has been exhibited near Bologna, in Venice and Hamburg. As a video maker he regularly shows his work online and produced an animation music video for the Italian band Father Murphy.

The protection and promotion of press freedom is an ongoing task for liberals everywhere. Intimidation, arrest, and repressive laws designed to combat alleged false reporting are only a couple of challenges that many European media professionals deal with on a daily basis. In this context, the public health emergency resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic has created a dangerous opportunity for the expansion of authoritarian rule in European countries, where freedom of the media has been sharply deteriorating.

Due to an overwhelming amount of regular new information and government action, the media's role in ensuring quality information became central during this crisis. Journalism needed to provide the public with urgent health-related information and objectively report on the pandemic, to create a basis on which policy responses and their public support could be developed. It was their role to examine government strategies and assess the justification of restrictions on basic rights in the name of protecting public health. Most importantly, the press had to maintain a critical distance, counter government efforts to control the media message and build public trust. Especially governments with authoritarian tendencies like Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria, were quick to exert pressure on the media. They introduced restrictions to access press conferences, legislation to counter "fake news" about the pandemic situation, which was aimed at prosecuting media whose narrative deviated from the official government line, closed media, and jailed journalists.

You can find more information on FNF EU's work on "Media Freedom in the Shadow of Covid-19" at: <https://www.freiheit.org/european-union/media-freedom-shadow-covid-19>

The Ballad of Reading Gaol

Oscar Wilde

(Excerpt)

In Debtors' Yard the stones are hard,
And the dripping wall is high,
So it was there he took the air
Beneath the leaden sky,
And by each side a Warder walked,
For fear the man might die.

Or else he sat with those who watched
His anguish night and day;
Who watched him when he rose to weep,
And when he crouched to pray;
Who watched him lest himself should rob
Their scaffold of its prey.

The Governor was strong upon
The Regulations Act:
The Doctor said that Death was but
A scientific fact:
And twice a day the Chaplain called,
And left a little tract.

And twice a day he smoked his pipe,
And drank his quart of beer:
His soul was resolute, and held
No hiding-place for fear;
He often said that he was glad
The hangman's hands were near.

But why he said so strange a thing
No Warder dared to ask:
For he to whom a watcher's doom
Is given as his task,
Must set a lock upon his lips,
And make his face a mask.

Or else he might be moved, and try
To comfort or console:
And what should Human Pity do
Pent up in Murderer's Hole?
What word of grace in such a place
Could help a brother's soul?

With slouch and swing around the ring
We trod the Fools' Parade!
We did not care: we knew we were
The Devil's Own Brigade:
And shaven head and feet of lead
Make a merry masquerade.

We tore the tarry rope to shreds
With blunt and bleeding nails;
We rubbed the doors, and scrubbed the floors,
And cleaned the shining rails:
And, rank by rank, we soaped the plank,
And clattered with the pails.

We sewed the sacks, we broke the stones,
We turned the dusty drill:
We banged the tins, and bawled the hymns,
And sweated on the mill:
But in the heart of every man
Terror was lying still.

So still it lay that every day
Crawled like a weed-clogged wave:
And we forgot the bitter lot
That waits for fool and knave,
Till once, as we tramped in from work,
We passed an open grave.

With yawning mouth the yellow hole
Gaped for a living thing;
The very mud cried out for blood
To the thirsty asphalte ring:
And we knew that ere one dawn grew fair
Some prisoner had to swing.

Oscar Wilde (16 October 1854 – 30 November 1900) was an Irish born poet, playwright, and author. He was well known for his flamboyant style, dandyism, and wit, as well as his association with the aesthetic and decadent movements. He wrote several well received plays, a novel by the title “The Picture of Dorian Gray”, and several poems. He married Constance Lloyd, with whom he had two children. After the second pregnancy however their marriage started to unravel, and during this time Wilde met Robbie Ross with whom he started a homosexual relationship. Homosexuality was illegal at the time and Wilde was sentenced to two years hard labour. Upon his release, he left England never to return. He spent his remaining three years in exile with Robbie Ross, during which time he wrote “The Ballad of the Reading Gaol”, a long poem about his experience in prison, where a man was executed that had killed his wife. The poem depicts the deep emotions of the prisoners as they saw the man waiting to be executed. Although homosexuality was decriminalised in England and Wales in 1967, Wilde and other convicted homosexuals such as Alan Turing were only pardoned in 2017.

The UN officially recognised human rights violations against LGBT+ people in its 2011 Resolution 17/19 on “Human Rights, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity.” However, people from the LGBT+ community still face wide spread discrimination in Europe every day, which can range from excluding them from blood donations or adoption, to banning them from “LGBT free zones” and active persecution. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted their lived realities, with increased (online) abuse and hate speech, as well as some governments using them as scapegoats, or using the pandemic as a smokescreen to pass discriminatory laws to marginalise them. While LGBT+ rights and openness in society are on the rise in many Member States, governments in countries like Poland and Hungary have been actively countering this development, cracking down on individuals, as well as civil society. In 2020, the European Commission delivered the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 . Overall, the Commission and Parliament have made an open effort to address the breaches of their Member States and promote a more comprehensive and intersectional approach. Nevertheless, to truly better the situation of the LGBT+ community, Member States will have to step up their game, in not only passing relevant laws but also ensuring that they translate into real change.

An die Freude

Friedrich Schiller

Freude, schöner Götterfunken,
Tochter aus Elysium,
Wir betreten feuertrunken,
Himmlische, dein Heiligtum!
Deine Zauber binden wieder
Was die Mode streng geteilt;
Alle Menschen werden Brüder
Wo dein sanfter Flügel weilt.

Wem der große Wurf gelungen
Eines Freundes Freund zu sein;
Wer ein holdes Weib errungen
Mische seinen Jubel ein!
Ja, wer auch nur eine Seele
Sein nennt auf dem Erdenrund!
Und wer's nie gekonnt, der stehle
Weinend sich aus diesem Bund!

Freude trinken alle Wesen
An den Brüsten der Natur;
Alle Guten, alle Bösen
Folgen ihrer Rosenspur.
Küsse gab sie uns und Reben,
Einen Freund, geprüft im Tod;
Wollust ward dem Wurm gegeben
und der Cherub steht vor Gott.

Froh, wie seine Sonnen fliegen
Durch des Himmels prächt'gen Plan
Laufet, Brüder, eure Bahn,
Freudig, wie ein Held zum Siegen.

Seid umschlungen, Millionen!
Diesen Kuß der ganzen Welt!
Brüder, über'm Sternenzelt
Muß ein lieber Vater wohnen.
Ihr stürzt nieder, Millionen?
Ahnest du den Schöpfer, Welt?
Such' ihn über'm Sternenzelt!
Über Sternen muß er wohnen.

Ode to Joy

Joy, beautiful spark of Divinity [or: of gods],
Daughter of Elysium,
We enter, drunk with fire,
Heavenly one, thy sanctuary!
Thy magic binds again
What custom strictly divided;
All people become brothers,
Where thy gentle wing abides.

Whoever has succeeded in the great attempt,
To be a friend's friend,
Whoever has won a lovely wife,
Add his to the jubilation!
Yes, and also whoever has just one soul
To call his own in this world!
And he who never managed it should slink
Weeping from this union!

All creatures drink of joy
At nature's breasts.
All the Just, all the Evil
Follow her trail of roses.
Kisses she gave us and grapevines,
A friend, proven in death.
Ecstasy was given to the worm
And the cherub stands before God.

Gladly, as His suns fly
through the heavens' grand plan
Journey, brothers, on your way,
Joyful, like a hero to victory.

Be embraced, Millions!
This kiss to all the world!
Brothers, above the starry canopy
There must dwell a loving Father.
Are you collapsing, millions?
Do you sense the creator, world?
Seek him above the starry canopy!
Above stars must He dwell.

Johann Christoph Friedrich Schiller (10 November 1759 – 9 May 1805), was a German poet, playwright and philosopher. He was a central figure of the German Sturm und Drang movement, a predecessor of Romanticism. Often considered to be liberal and cosmopolitan, Schiller's philosophical work commonly concerns the freedom of humans, such as in their ability to act against their mere instincts. His most famous poem is the Ode to Joy, which is speculated to be originally titled as Ode to Freedom. In the poem, Schiller depicts a world in which people live in harmony, a paradise mankind should strive for. In it, people can love each other free from the constraints of conventions.

The poem became very popular and Ludwig van Beethoven set it to music with modified lyrics in his Symphony No. 9, often considered one of the best and most well-known pieces in classical music. Beethoven's version was played by the students at Tiananmen Square during the protests, it was played after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and it serves as the anthem of the European Union, with the intention of symbolizing not only the Union but Europe. The fundamental principles of the EU align with those set forth in the poem and Symphony. The EU created a hitherto inexperienced long period of peace between the nations of Europe, created growing prosperity, and protection of human rights in an effort to bring about the ambitious vision of Schiller. As Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union declares: "The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail."

