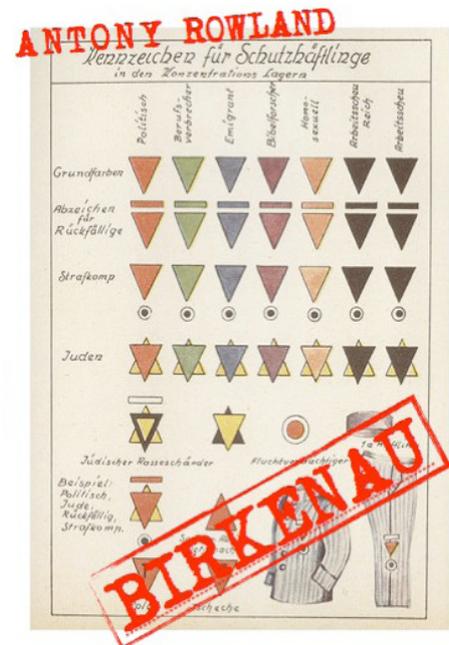

Authors: Antony Rowland

Antony Rowland's new chapbook *Birkenau* (title page below) was published by Knives, forks and spoons press in 2010 (www.knivesforksandspoons.co.uk). The book partly draws on his research in the area of Holocaust Studies: he is the author of *Holocaust Poetry* (EUP, 2005) and *Tony Harrison and the Holocaust* (LUP, 2001). *Birkenau* was written after visits to the former camps at Auschwitz-Birkenau in 2008 and Sachsenhausen (near Berlin) in 2009. The two long poems in the book respond to the camps as they are now, as museum spaces which inform and engage with thousands of tourists every year. Rowland notes the complex interaction of histories, such as the controversy over the Soviet Special Camp in Sachsenhausen, established immediately after the dissolution of the Nazi camp. He also notes the dark ironies and unsettling moments of visitor interaction, such as a student wearing an 'ALL NIGHT LONG' T-shirt in Sachsenhausen, and a man in a 'GERARD 4' T-shirt obsessively photographing himself next to the site of the Special Camp's mass graves. The text interacts throughout with the author's own colour photographs of the camps.

Rowland's previous collection *The Land of Green Ginger* was published by Salt Press in 2008 (www.saltpublishing.com/books/smp/9781844714001.htm). Poems from this collection were included in Roddy Lumsdens's recent Bloodaxe anthology *Identity Parade: New British and Irish Poets* (2010). In 2009 Rowland was invited to record for the UK Poetry Archive (established by the previous Poet Laureate, Andrew Motion).² The archive also produced a CD of Rowland's poems, which is available via the archive website.

In these pages we publish extracts from *Birkenau*, and samples of the accompanying photographs.³ The author has also been a regular attendee at ESSE conferences since Helsinki in 2000: the poem 'Kwak', based on his experiences at the ESSE conference in Strasbourg (2002), was published in a previous edition of *The European English Messenger* as well as *The Land of Green Ginger*. 'Virga', written after the previous ESSE conference at Aarhus (2008) is included at the end of this article.



² For readings of his poems and an extended biography see www.poetryarchive.org/poetryarchive/singlePoet.do?poetId=13677

³ Reprinted with the author's permission.

Extracts from Birkenau

Why are you in
a mystical corner, a roof
beached on its concrete?

Landscaped to perfection,
the reserve peters
to a wood koy platform.

In lines we tortoise
the Clumber: children hand
each other, clasp roses,

ferret around death
in the women's camp or
just a sunshine barracks?

Oczyszczalniki,
flattened reserve workmen
picking history.



building is talking
in loop German *über*
your morbid interest in

kitchen overload, the station
tower crumbled to an 'Or'
and Judy Dench

Für Frieden und Menschlichkeit
in former camp *Küche*,
headphones back on the arm,

captured digital yawns
and flash sighs at signs' capitals
VIOLENCE DYING DEATH,

the low-ceilinged
art installation, *Volkspolizei*
crematorium poles.

Virga (Aarhus, 2008)

Lunch is siling it down, through
oilplant and petrichor scent,
the soft fences against the light:
crag-fast between puddles, I
am hanging as you arrive
through a sheet, boxing umbrellas
in the Aarhus deluge, your new head on
and armed only with the weather.

The English have invaded the canapés:
rending from the smörgåsbord,
I cut look instead of your eyes.
Birds here can produce sentences,
form thinking against itself,
please don't let me bib this. Skolled,
a guppy sucks our later tank bar.
The higher the hair, the closer to God.

Lend me a born again virgin pack:
turn back time and get a cleansing
on the house; all of your hair torture
and colour sins from the past
by the Dom where the crew cuts bobbed
through General Pryor's defiance
to a cathedral, astute to be sackless,
booked out for incursions and Elsinore myth.

This is the dissipation stage.
The hot road is skimming:
first, a little degging, but then
the sile, when the rain dings the pavements,
as we gawp, gapa, from the porch,
at sphericals nearly ice-shoggles,
lugging the water, straining the sile,
and the rain kittles the burning flags.