



## Modern Poetry in Translation Series 3, No. 2: *Diaspora*

Excerpt from *Funeral Oration* by Sandor Marai  
Translated by George Gömöri and Clive Wilmer

'With your very eyes, my brethren, see what in truth we are:  
We are but dust and ashes'  
Like pieces of old cloth our memories fall apart.  
Do you still have St Margaret's Isle by heart?  
It is all odds and ends now, splinters, fusty lumber.  
The dead man's beard has grown, your name is just a number.  
Our language, torn, frays too; the loved words we so trust  
Under the roof of the mouth dry out, turn to dust.  
'Butterfly', 'pearl' and 'heart'; are not what they used to be  
When the poet drew his language from his near family,  
And his song was understood as the nurse's lullaby  
Is by the drowsy child, who's fractious, ready to cry.  
The heartbeat's a secret speech, dreams go the thieves' way,  
You read *Toldi* to your child, who then responds: 'OK'.  
And the priest will mumble in Spanish over your bier:  
'These are the torments of death, and they surround me here!'  
In the Ohio mine your hand slips, the pickaxe  
Thuds down and your name loses its diacritical marks.  
The Tyrrhenian Sea roars, we hear Babits' word and, hark,  
That's Krudy's harp that twangs in the Australasian dark.  
They still communicate in astral voices,  
live In your body's memory like distant relatives.  
You exclaim: *It cannot be that consecrated will...*  
But it can: you know it now... You get no mail  
In the iron-mines of Thuringia. To write they are afraid.  
With no *katorgas* marked, you cannot mourn the dead.  
The Consul's chewing gum. Fed up, he wipes his glasses.  
You can see that he's quite bored with papers, stamps and passes.  
He gets a car and a thousand bucks a month. His child and wife  
Are photos on his desk.