

FREE

On the day the guards ran, and
the shelling grew louder, the man
from Cernauti emptied the barrack
slop pail and went looking for blood.

He found men clumsy at butchering
a cow. They pushed him off, but
when he said it was only blood
he wanted, they let him catch it

spurting from the neck. The man
lifted a board, took out his clay
figures. He set them in a circle
in the dirt, a woman and child

in the middle, then walked around,
his hand dipping to the elbow
in the bucket, throwing blood
at the feet of the clay people.

And when they didn't move, the man
from Cernauti called their names,
one by one, and sang the Shma
backwards, and desperate, smeared

more blood on their poorly formed
faces, knocking them over, and
in the end, cursed God hoarsely
in both Yiddish and Romanian.