

Under Alien Skies by Yossel Birstein

How could my verses tell of wholeness?

Translated by Aaron Rubinstein

How could my verses tell of wholeness?
My thoughts – of sense, my life – of substance?
I lie, along with my ashamed nation,
broken into shards.

My mother's toil and love
were blown away by wind and smoke.
And look – my generation
emerges neglected and forsaken.

Their lips turn from
even the humblest letter of the Yiddish tongue,
and lovely Poetry, its life made bitter,
wanders aimlessly outside.

The precious poem of generations
has cried itself out, screamed itself hoarse.
Am I to be its last keeper?
Do I sing its last melody?

It was poetry I chose
for neighbor to my grief.
Now quietly I read the faith
set down within our holy books.