

Under Alien Skies by Yossel Birstein

The Arisen

Translated by Jon Levitow (2008)

You arisen – gone – arriving
with arms torn and feet aflame,
I first would need be gassed or hanged myself
for such great pain to rise as truth in song.

I first would have to carry awful sadness on my shoulder,
and no load, no yoke would be too great.
Readily you rose to embrace the Ghetto walls,
and readily would have taken on still more.

A darkness forced itself upon you
and put out God's first word, "Let there be light!"
You found yourselves in darkness and set yourselves alight
to make the most fateful truth shine bright.

From your bodies burst bright flame
And from cut throats – a cry from one door to the next,
So that Death shuddered in the butchers' camps,
making flinch the murderer's breast.

The earth shook and stretched itself
with arms held out to the skies around,
but the heavens down to darkness bent –
you light-bearing righteous ones of our dark time.

You arisen – gone – arriving
with arms torn and feet aflame,
I first would need be gassed or hanged myself
for such great pain to rise as truth in song.