

Under Alien Skies by Yossel Birstein

An ordinary street.

Translated by Leigh Fetter (2007).

It's an ordinary street. A tough, unblest stillness.
I've accustomed myself to it, as to a foreign tongue.

Here every home and every stone seems quite unreal.
The truth is somewhere else, and this – artificial, imagined.

People, neighbours live here and smile as if content,
their bearings confident, a body clad in wool.

Most here are gentiles, Jews too are present –
Jews, who tell each other fables of long ago.

My grandfather lives in his home, a quiet mourner
keeping within a truth that has pained him long now.

Right from dawn his weary head's been bent
Bowed in sadness like a winter tree in snow.

People, neighbours live here and smile as if content.
People sure of themselves and never miserable.

Most here are gentiles, Jews too are present –
Jews, who tell each other fables of long ago.

I'm not the only one who has always had
oozing out of him such wintry weather.

I come inside to him after a busy day
to dwell in this world, expressionless together.

People, neighbours live here and smile as if content.
Not one though ever appears at our table.

Most here are gentiles, Jews too are present –
Jews, who tell each other fables of long ago.