

Jozsef Mero-Marmorstein (1946): Oradea, in the Baker's courtyard

Translated by Susan Geroe

I tell you a story
to those who will not be
or perhaps were never before ...
Where the memories
of my childhood take me
to Oradea, in the baker's court.

Age old Oradea,
where countless homes
had Mezuzahs on the door,
the twenty-two folks,
who were Jewish souls,
lived with me in the baker's court.

Of them whispers
My memory,
that's where my mother raised me.
She earned her living, found support
and was liked by all
in Oradea, in the baker's court.

Lots of children played,
together with me they crawled
all day long on the wood piles
and if one or the other fell,
that could happen as well
in Oradea, in the baker's court.

Or if Uncle Kohn, the baker,
showed quietly, half naked in white,
if you liked to carry wood
you already had no doubt...
there will be egg pretzels
for every kid, in the baker's yard.

But on each Friday morn
there were crowds of women
in the yard, bringing baskets
of Challah and breads,
like thousands of Pastry Chefs
To the baker's court.

And when the pastries
are baked and done,
we feed on the sweet raisin aroma...
It feels, on my word,
like the long awaited Sabbath
arrives on Friday in the baker's court.

They crowd in before sundown
carrying, sighing;
bringing the Sholet
in number marked pots;
Filling the yard in colorful dots,
like an anthill coming alive.

The smoke stained stack
is a wonder itself;
its fume is a breathful of soot.
And the oven door,
when dusk has set,
food would no longer accept...

The piety of devotion at night
permeates through the heart;
all turns into a great temple:
Candlelights,
Holiday psalms,
They welcome Sabbath in the baker's yard.

Today every child does right;
I have not even crawled,
my new clothes so nice and bright.
Such was it not long ago,
tonight, only a memento...
In Oradea, in the baker's yard.

All this is dead and gone.
Everyone perished,
the henchmen feasted on us.
And on the famous house there is
but a chipped, mournfully faded wafer,
reminder of: Kohn, the baker.

And where the heart
sometimes recalls me,
today the wind picks up dirt and dust;
Not only the elderly,
but even the scores of children
met their untimely end.

The Friday is quiet,
No candles, no song,
No braided Challah or Sholet today...
Behind a stump of a smokestack,
the devil alone dwells in its resort
In Oradea, in the baker's court