

THE GHOSTS OF TEREZIN

By William A. Cook

I saw the pictures children drew at Terezin
As they clustered in the attic's closing darkness, --
Pictures of the sun beyond the rain,
Of Mothers muffled in scarves and solemn dress,
Of Fathers proud beneath their yarmulkas, --
All waiting patiently the promised day
When they would board the silver train
And flee to the Holy City.

And I wept at their plight,
The silent, unknown, gnawing fright
That burned within their Ghetto of sin,
This Terezin.

And then before my eyes there came
Another scene, so strange, as if incarnate in the first
That burst untimely before my weeping heart;
A scene more ravaged than Terezin,
Of streets and alleys swamped in sewage and despair
Where children breathed the fetid air of hate
That smoldered like steaming ashes there.

Suddenly appeared above the graves, the ghosts of Terezin,
Arising like mist around the crematorium;
Fathers and Mothers, in their promised land at last,
Grasping children to their breasts.
Silent as sentinels they stood,
And there they wept as they watched in vain
The wardens wander through the camps
Like Gestapo agents of old,
Stark, cold, indifferent to the pain
Of those who huddled beneath the tin roofs,
Encased like the dead in cement boxes
As the acrid stench of lingering sewage
Flowed through the alleys and the homes.

They saw the tanks rattle through the streets
With ranks of soldiers scurrying behind,
Seeking the vermin that infested this place, --
Homeless, nameless, without a face, --
Sneaking through this ghetto in the dark of night
To drive the children from this transport town,
This resurrected refugee camp, this new Terezin,

Where the new Jew wanders the world
Like the Jews of Terezin,
Joined in their loneliness and despair
As they watch their children there
Become the walls of Terezin!

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