



In Memoriam

Jacob Glatstein (1896-1971)

Jacob Glatstein, who died in New York on November 19, 1971, aged 75, was prominent both as poet and essayist. As one of the leaders of the group of *In-zikhstn* ("in-zikh" = "within") or "introspectives" he exerted a considerable influence on the development of modern Yiddish poetry in the U.S.A. in the twenties. In recent years he returned to more traditional forms, giving moving expression to the tragedy of Europe and Jewry during the Second World War. Glatstein's poetry ranges from quiet lyricism to harsh rhetorics, of which the following two poems are good examples. He also made effective use of folk-loristic and biblical motifs in quite a unique way.

Silent Unrest

The city lies with half-open eyes
in the broad arms of the day at dusk.
In its eye-balls still hover the shadows
of a tree and a pond, of a roof-top, a man,
and of windows alight with longing,
lit up by the colours of the setting sun.
The diamonds of the tiring pond sparkle
with sleepy songs that are filled with old and cold
wisdom
against the tranquil stretch of sky.
The stamping of man, dog and child gets lost
in the gracefully silent soft sand,
as silent and graceful as the gliding
of black fish in the waters of the pond.
Man, dog, and child move softly
on a carpet of silent unrest,
humming the song of silent passing.
From the cycle "*Fraye Fersen*" ("Free Verse"), 1926.

Translated from the Yiddish by Jacob Sonntag.

Without Jews

Without Jews there will be no Jewish God.
If we should depart from the world in the end,
the light will go out in your tattered tent.
Since Abraham has first discovered you,
you shone in the face of every Jew.
You radiated from Jewish eyes.
We formed your image in that of our own.
Wherever we went, in each country and town,
our Jewish God went, too, a stranger like us.
Each fallen head of a Jewish dead
is a broken vessel empty of sound.
For we were the carriers of your light,
the living sign of your miraculous sight.
Our dead are counted in millions now.
The stars that surround you grow dim and low,
and with them recedes the memory of you.
Soon your kingdom will vanish, too.
That which was planted and sown by Jews
lies burned on the ground.
On dead grass weeps the morning dew.

The Jewish dream and the Jewish truth
are desecrated both
and die together.
Whole congregations,
small children and women,
young and old folk,
even your Pillars and Rocks,
the saintly and nameless "Thirty-Six" -
they all sleep a deadly eternal sleep.

Who will dream you up again?
Who will recall you?
Who will defy you?
Who long for you?
Who will, bridging his pain,
turn away from you, to return again?

The night is eternal for a people that's dead.
Heaven and earth disappear.
The light goes out from your tattered tent,
it flickers away, it's the Jew's last hour.
Jewish God, you'll soon be no more!
From the cycle "*Shtralendike Yidn*" ("Radiant
Jews"), 1946.