



[Bread<sup>2</sup>]



Benjamin Orenstein

*At daybreak, before the shining rays in the sky appear,  
There is, in the HASAG-Pelcery camp, a tempestuous tumult.  
The trumpet cuts sleep short, calling, commanding  
the starving, tortured Jews to the rollcall.  
In rows, in groups and in teams lined up,  
They are by the SS tyrants and watchmen tallied.*

*Enslaved all day and to the machine bound,  
The heart tormented by piercing pain, suffering and wounds.  
The conscience of the world, of mankind, is blind, deaf and without a  
tongue –  
It sees not and hears not how millions of lives are being extinguished.  
On pyres and in crematoria they are being burned;  
They are being shot, tortured and hanged up by their hands.*

*With bitter perspiration, we worked from morning to late at night,  
Returning to the barrack broken and lost in thought.  
We lay on hard wood wool<sup>1</sup> and paper sacks of straw,  
Tossing and turning and lying awake,  
Thinking of revenge, freedom, hope and bread,  
Of destroying slavery, oppression, hunger and want.  
I did not fall asleep but kept my eyes closed,  
My fantasy working, dreaming and thinking.  
In place of the fallen heroes and martyrs  
Will awake their tortured heirs in the camp,  
To the battle for freedom and rights, without dread or fear,  
For bright, sunny days and nights serene.*

*Bodies lie unconscious due to hunger and want;  
How do we find them something to eat – soup or bread –  
To strengthen their weak limbs and encourage their spirits,  
And bring them a ray of hope, courage, faith and comfort?  
[We must] gather everyone under the flag of the fight for freedom,  
For a world of rights, fulfilled ambitions and equality.*

<sup>1</sup> [TN: A mass of fine, soft wood shavings, typically used as packing material.]

<sup>2</sup> [TN: A revised and abridged version of this same poem was published in the "Poetry & Literature" section of the book "Czenstochover Landsmanshaft of Montreal", which differs considerably from this one.]

*Ach, where are you, two-kilo, round breads?  
They can be long, white breads, covered with poppy seeds.  
I sense the aroma of the bygone freshly-baked bread,  
As it lay comfortably in the baskets – Ach, bread!  
Bread, bread, bread!  
Enough we have starved – let there be bread for all,  
To placate the painful hunger, suffering and bitter dearth.*

*A wonder occurred: I saw baskets with bread –  
White, long, rounded, delicious poppy seed bread.  
I roused my neighbours and showed them the bread.  
The Bender brothers, upon seeing the large bread,  
Cried out, “Bread, bread! Ach, how we yearn for bread!  
Bread, bread, bread! Life in dearth is worse than death!”  
Everyone awoke upon sensing the aroma of the bread.  
They chewed, eating and eating in the middle of the night.  
I thought to myself – let them eat their fill of this bread,  
To dispel the painful spectre of starvation and dearth.  
The permanently exhausted Gerson also caught a whiff of the bread;  
He called out, “Bread, bread, bread, bread! Bread for me too!”*

*Mot! Jablonkiewicz shouts out loud, “Hey, our friend the poet!  
There must be organisation – be our judge of the people.  
To alleviate the hunger and want that has until now been,  
Let this delicious bread be shared out equally amongst all...”  
Fogel snatched two breads, like on Peisach the Afikoimen<sup>3</sup>,  
And he hid them up high, in the barrack’s “boidem” [Yid., attic].  
I opened up my tired, half-asleep eyes;  
Like a dream it all vanished – a dream flown-away.  
Was this a fantasy, just a sweet dream?  
Yes, [but] this must actually happen in reality, too.  
I call out, “No!”.  
This was no fantasy, nor was it a dream.  
This is my vision, and it will surely come to pass.*

*Hey! My fellow HASAG brothers, figures [so] tragic –  
The War is to end, peace will govern the globe.  
Hunger and want will vanish and you will not lack any bread;  
You will also not be tormented by lack of food and clothes.  
The Western Meteor is soon to go under,  
And in the Near East will rise the sun and the flag*

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The poem *Bread* was written in December 1943 in the HASAG-Pelcery camp in Częstochowa. The “Western Meteor” is a reference to Nazism. The poem is built upon thirteen sounds [assonances?]. Due to this poem’s historical significance, it has been printed without any changes, [exactly] as it was written. It was read for the first time, by the author, in Barrack №7 in the HASAG-Pelcery camp on 31<sup>st</sup> December 1943 (New Year’s Eve) and, for the second time on 20<sup>th</sup> October 1946 in Landsberg, at the memorial service of the *Częstochower Landsmannschaft* in the American Zone in Germany.

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<sup>3</sup> [TN: Mishnaic Heb., originally from Greek; name given to a half matzo that the head of the household ostensibly “guards fiercely” to be eaten at the very end of the Passover Seider, and which the children, in a bid to keep them awake to the end of the Seider, are traditionally encouraged to “steal” and then “ransom back” – thus, the “Afikoimen” is something which small children are very keen to snatch.]