

Bohdan Wojdowski

Bread for the Dead: Chronicle of a Single Courtyard

I. (3-39) Biblical-Patriarchal Frame

Ancient tongue; voices, lips, music, their fatherland—the road
Jewish Gymnasium
Where did the trains go? (nightmare)
Mordechai Sukiennik
No gods left for David to worship
Constitution Day as ironic foil
Family name: Fremde
Dr. Baum
Now he knew who he was = building the wall
Polyphony of the beggars (28-19)
Purim Party (18-39)
Loaf of rationed bread in front of grandfather
Grandfather impersonates God (31-35)
German rips up the mezuzah (novel ends w/same mezuzah)
1st use of unmerged German
Aunt Chava arrested for her act of protest
Ends w/terrible raid/pogrom in their own home
Complete desecration/sacrilege

II. (41-62) Building the Wall

Father closes up his upholstery shop forever
Children find 1st corpse
Cries of the bricklayers
Differentiated response of his parents
Father's failed attempt to smuggle food
Anatomy of hunger; **reverie of bread (47)**
Nathan Lerch selling his rations door-to-door
Wearing the armband: brilliant anatomy (49)
Howling of the loudspeakers
Bloody Hands
Father davening
SMUGGLING
View from the Bridge
The Polonized lawyer who reverts to being Szwarc
View from the Bridge (will be destroyed @ end)
Voice of Buba the street vendor
Germans inspecting the wall – Czerniakow
Reb Yitskhok forced to do punitive exercises
Crescendo of shouts & cries (61)
Ends w/Father telling him not to speak or breathe

III. (63-87)

Barukh Ok's gang
Flashback to Sukkes
Yankiel the Tailor comes pleading for carbide = narrative frame
Refugees tell of the Final Solution
Elijah the madman from Leszno
Father's **refrain**: Shh, shh. . .
Forced relocation to the Small Ghetto
Excursus on time (77-78)
Father's mobilization & escape from labor camp
Last prewar walk with father to the ZOO
The rubber tubing on father's rickshaw
Ends w/David's nightmare about bread/lice

IV. (89-110)

Mordechai the COACHMAN
REFRAIN: Mordechai, toss it here (the horse speaking!)
Children's curses
Count Grandi: Before/After; abandons Malka after her typhus
2nd refrain: I buy crusts & stale bread
David conjures up a meadow for Leibush's benefit
Watery soup vs. Manna in desert
3rd refrain: Rakhmunes, rakhmunes
David's chronicle of the courtyard
Children's games
Leibush the visual artist. Comes down w/typhus
Old Zelda
"Regina, Regina, add water!"
Tailor pleads w/David to read letters

V. (111-130) The Three Holy Men: **Mock-covenantal**

Biblical lamentations, prophecies
Elijah the Corpse Man
David's gang
Beggar trying to steal holy man's alms
Mordarski the Merchant
Leibush recovers
Mock **refrain**: It will be counted
Incantation of Bread (126)
Estusia the Whore (=Esther?)
Janitor goes mad when daughter dies; hacks Mordechai's horse to pieces
Devoured by the yard
Ends w/proleptic passage about Great Deportation

VI. (131-55) **Sukkes**; almost-lyrical

Tailor's daughter writing from sunny Palestine vs. plight of the refugees
Terrifying figure of Long Yitskhok
Dr. Obuchowski, the selfless doctor, inspects their festering wounds
You celebrate sukkes all year long
David trading Madagascar stamp
Malka the Whore before/After
Mother's soliloquy on makeshift **sukkot**
Father's naïve faith vs. mother's ironic sensibility
Their comic joint reverie
Long Yitskhok steals from everyone; gang steals from the weak
Voices of the beggar market
Killing cats for food; pursued by Long Yitskhok
Ends w/boys on the bridge

VII. (157-89) David smuggles fresh bread from Aryan Side

Fist fight between Avrum / David
Haskiel the Janitor & Riva
Remorseful David mourns for the dead past & present (162)
Collective German monologue filtered thru David's consciousness
Chaim shot dead
David trying to conquer his fear
Zyga, master smuggler
Mock **Akedah** (168-69)
His Jewish nose / discovers his uncle Shmuel on Aryan Side
Caught by Bloody Hands
Ghetto lore vs. German songs

* **Mezuzah-as-talisman for smuggling**

VIII (191-210) Lessons w/Dr. Baum

Photo of simkhes Torah
Dr. Baum's heaven & Hell = pure astronomy; where freedom reigns
Hell = Scorpio
David steals bread for himself; terror of the gendarmes
Covenantal world collapses in face of Baum's scientific approach (199)
Last Letter = the Final Solution (203)
Crematorium / gas chamber = pillar of fire & pillar of cloud (204)
David's Existential angst
Hunger-as-metaphor-for his art (208-9)
Hunger consumes him as he falls asleep

IX. (211-40) Patriarchal Narrative Redux; **JONAH**

Schwarz tries unsuccessfully to bribe Father
Grandfather as center of consciousness

Discussion w/Dr. Baum

Grandfather to David: live in order to run away (231); have a heart of stone

Assumes mantle of prophecy himself (231-32) *A blessing or a curse HC 1339*

Semi-wakeful nightmare of being caught

Ends w/confession of Long Yitskhok stealing his bread

David falls asleep

X. (241-70) Warsaw as Nineveh

David returning home from other side

Natan Lerch the violinist

Warsaw as Nineveh = City of Debauchery

Ends w/mass fornication

Halka the Whore as center of consciousness

Becoming a Writer = Learning to Survive on Aryan Side (254-56)

Learning to distinguish each/every person

Learning to be completely self-reliant

Be moved by their human effort but remain apart

Bravery = desire for life = struggle for food (257)

Elijah the Grave Digger picks up Long Yitskhok's corpse

Malka will be next

XI (271-93) Hallucinatory Chapter

David contracts typhus

Refrain: Stone on stone (children's game)

Jacob's ladder

Passover

Find **dead Grandfather** in rat-infested apt.

Aunt Chava goes mad & disappears

XII (295-321) Stealing gold teeth & silver bridges from the dead; the deal that goes awry

Old Jew's extended **Kaddish** over the open grave

REFRAIN: German chatter & ridicule & curiosity

Photograph the child grave robbers

Ernst murdered by the fence

Opposite rhythms from earlier chapter

XIII (323- 44) **The Great Deportation** begins

1st mention of Umschalplatz (325)

Easier for rats for no one has proclaimed Rattenrein

Boisterous procession of the street gangs to their death

Mordarski's family shot dead; Sura the street vendor too

Bloody hands comes into his own

Rojzele dressed up for the journey; Haskiel Ajzen too

murder of all patients & doctors

Count Grandi, now a Jewish policeman, aiding the roundup
Shot for refusing to execute his father
Janitor's family walks off
Lewin's refusal to give a bribe = act of protest
Mordarski's demonic commandment (339)
Nahum Szafran
Mother rounded up
Prof. Baum, too

XIV (345-61)

Holfe's speeches of a Judenrein world = Communist rhetoric of 1968
Jews run the world (355)
Orchestration of voices going to their deaths
lone voices calling for armed revolt
Reb Yitskhok = KH
Bloody hands rounds up all the black coats (=kapotes)

XV (363-402) The Last Hideout; Liquidation of Little Ghetto

Father leaves; will never be reunited
Pillar of Fire in Hebrew (374)
Mordarski: Money replaces bread as currency of survival
Nahum Szafran, the stoolpigeon flushes out remaining Jews
Proleptic passage on Zelda's death @ hands of Bloody Hands
Kalman killed
✱Use of **mezuzah** as pass secret message that Yehudah had crossed over
Landscape of absolute extremity (389)
Uri makes it across
2 versions of Mordarski's death
Estusia goes mad
Ingesting the images like inhaling oxygen
Wearing a number he joins a shop
Seeing his home for last time
Shop becomes a KL
Ends w/David going off to forced labor as last stragglers are rounded up

MYTHIC underpinning = Biblical and countercovenantal
Writing a New Bible, as Primo Levi commanded
Vast orchestration of voices, until they are all silenced
Unity of Place

I-VI: Genesis to Exodus; Patriarchal Narrative
VII-XII: David, the Smuggler; Jonah
XIII-XV: Apocalypse