

Remembering Home

HOMESICK

I've lived in the ghetto here more than a year,
In Terezín, in the black town now,
And when I remember my old home so dear,
I can love it more than I did, somehow.

Ah, home, home,
Why did they tear me away?
Here the weak die easy as a feather
And when they die, they die forever.

I'd like to go back home again,
It makes me think of sweet spring flowers.
Before, when I used to live at home,
It never seemed so dear and fair.

I remember now those golden days. . .
But maybe I'll be going there soon again.

People walk along the street,
You see at once on each you meet
There there's a ghetto here,
A place of evil and of fear.
There's little to eat and much to want,
Where bit by bit, it's horror to live.
But no one must give it up!
The world turns and times change.

Yet we all hope the time will come
When we'll go home again.
Now I know how dear it is
And often I remember it. (Anonymous Child, 1943)

People often take their blessings for granted until their blessings are taken away, and suddenly they realize how blessed they really were. In this poem taken from I Never Saw Another Butterfly, a collection of children's poems about life in the concentration camp of Terezin, a child verbalizes the memory of home. The poem begins with the image of the ghetto, Terezin, the "black town." The title the poet gives to the ghetto could have a couple meanings behind it. The first meaning that came to my mind was the idea that black is often associated with evil and sadness; therefore, to live in a black town would be to live in a town of sadness and cruelty. After thinking about the title "black town" even further, I began to wonder if the child used the word "black" in correlation with the view of society. In other words, the child may be saying that although it is a town filled with innocent people, society, specifically the Nazis, view Terezin as a town of barbaric Jews who are worthless. Referring to Terezin as the "black town" may be presenting the atrocious and unfair view of the Nazis toward the Jews. However, either meaning brings a negative image to the reader's mind about where this child lives. In contrast to this image, the child presents the memory of home. Home is remembered fondly, but the child seems to have more appreciation for it now that he or she no longer lives there. The first stanza ends with the phrase, "I can love it more than I did, somehow." "Somehow" indicates that the child is still unsure of why the memory of home is dearer to him now than it ever was. The use of the word "somehow" also leaves an opening to further explanation of emotions on the child's behalf.

The next stanza begins in a more intimate way, as the child reminisces through the phrase, "Ah, home, home," as if he is calling to a paradise in which he once lived. This thought shows just how horrible the ghetto must have been. Many people often take their home for granted, because it is always there and can be given or taken as a family pleases, not by the commands of an authority. Nevertheless, this child longs for his home and asks why he was taken from it, indicating that he would do anything to go back. Once again, the warm concept of home, one that brings memories of family time and holidays and belonging, is contrasted with the cold concept of the ghetto, one that brings feelings of longing, suffering, and fear. The child uses the metaphor "feathers" in reference to the strength of the inhabitants. These people are frail, both physically and emotionally, as they long for stability, love, and their homes. The child describes the death of these people as eternal, "...when they die, they die forever." Society usually honors those who have died by remembering them and saying goodbye with a proper

memorial service and burial. In the ghetto, when people die, they are not honored, and there is no memorial service. So many individuals died that society tends to lump them all into one big death, therefore it is not individuals who are remembered, but instead the event of death.

The next two stanzas are a collection of visions that are linked with the memory of home; they are images of spring, and flowers, and golden days. It is with these images that the child presents a feeling of hope, "Maybe I'll be going there soon again." The child thinks of the future with optimism, but also with uncertainty. He says "maybe," meaning that he does not know for sure. As an inhabitant of the ghetto, he has no idea what the plan of the Nazi's is. Maybe this living situation is temporary. Maybe suffering will end soon. Maybe they will all get to go home, and relive their "golden days." The child then goes on to describe the ghetto even further. He describes people walking along the street with faces that reflect their living situations. One can see their frail bodies, their cheekbones, the dark circles beneath their eyes. These people are deprived of nutrients and of happiness, and it shows. They have nothing, they long for much. The people are a reflection of the ghetto, and this ghetto is a place of horror, of evil, and of fear. But once again the child shows optimism and hope with, "But no one must give up!" The punctuation used to end this sentence is inspiring and motivating. Perhaps this motivation is the only thing that can sustain the child; perhaps it is his only means of survival. He knows that this cannot last forever, and that it too will pass like everything else in the world. The reader does not know if the child gets to return home, but the child's fond memory is certainly very strong. The child has learned just how much home meant to him; he can now see clearly just how pleasant it was. The poem ends with, "Now I know how dear it is/ And I often remember it." He discovers the significance of this memory, and uses this memory to sustain him. The pattern of contrasting ideas of home and the ghetto, of golden days and days of fear, are suggestive of the thought pattern of the child. It may be that whenever this child really feels the horror of the ghetto, he thinks of home. It is almost as if the child thinks that if he believes he will return home strongly enough, and if he remembers it often enough, he will get to go back. This child may have never seen another butterfly, but it was the vivid memory that made the remainder of his life worthwhile.