

JUAN DE PRADO IN AMSTERDAM, 1656

Juan de Prado, a contemporary of Spinoza, was a Marrano who returned to Judaism while still in Spain. He escaped to Amsterdam and tried to adapt to Jewish life there, with difficulty. His friend, Baltasar Orabio, wrote to him: "It is only to you that it so happened, to be a fake Christian and a true Jew where you could not be a Jew, and to be a fake Jew where you could be truly Jewish."

Y. Yovel in "Spinoza and Other Heretics"

On this day the rabbis will have you
repent, in the city of East Indian smells,
foul canals, hawkers of eels and sweets

crowding the alley to the Spanish synagogue.
A smell, of cracked almonds, takes you back
to Alcala de Henares, the boy sent to secure

the shuttered house before mother lit candles
in a cellar. You remember Diego de Oropesa
summoned before the Holy Office for changing

his shirt on the Sabbath, a sign clear enough
to damn a lapsed Marrano. There you learned
the gift of word-husks hiding the spark

of the true word. In the cool North, none
seems to care, Jews are almost as good
as Christians, and you chafe against old

Law to be learned. But there is another,
the lens-grinder with long black hair; gently
he tells you that Augustine, who wrote

"unless you believe you will not understand"
had it the wrong way around. On his ring,
the motto "Be Careful", and so you are,

more than he, you are, out of habit, till
the rabbi sets a student to spy on his teacher,
and you, lulled by the free Dutch wind, tell him

the world was not forged in a week, tell him
the dead are just dead, and the only truth
was taught to you by Torquemada - doubt.