

I Keep Forgetting

I keep forgetting
the facts and statistics
and each time
I need to know them

I look up books
these books line
twelve shelves
in my room

I know where to go
to confirm the fact
that in the Warsaw Ghetto
there were 7.2 people per room

and in Lodz
they allocated
5.8 people
to each room

I forget
over and over again
that one third of Warsaw
was Jewish

and in the ghetto
they crammed 500,000 Jews
into 2.4 per cent
of the area of the city

and how many
bodies they were burning
in Auschwitz
at the peak of their production

twelve thousand a day
I have to check
and re-check

and did I dream
that at 4pm on the 19th January
58,000 emaciated inmates
were marched out of Auschwitz

was I right
to remember that in Bergen Belsen
from the 4th-13th of April 1945
28,000 Jews arrived from other camps

I can remember
hundreds and hundreds
of phone numbers

phone numbers
I haven't phoned
for twenty years
are readily accessible

and I can remember
people's conversations
and what someone's wife
said to someone else's husband

what a good memory
you have
people tell me.

Lily Brett

Auschwitz, 1987

and nobody shouts halt,
and nobody fires,
and yet this deathly
silence fills one's ears

and no one slaps your face,
or whips your back, your eyes,
and no one weeps,
nor do the skies cry out

even though we have arrived
at this well known place
with its resonant name:
Auschwitz.

*Adam Zych
(Translated by Hilda Schiff)*

Passion of Ravensbrück

He steps out from the others.

He stands in the square silence.

The prison garb, the convict's skull
blink like a projection.

He is horribly alone.

His pores are visible.

Everything about him is so gigantic,
everything is so tiny.

And this is all.

The rest –

the rest was simply

that he forgot to cry out

before he collapsed.

János Pilinszky

(Translated by Ted Hughes)

Forced March

You're crazy. You fall down, stand up and walk again,
your ankles and your knees move pain that wanders around
but you start again as if you had wings.

The ditch calls you, but it's no use you're afraid to stay,
and if someone asks why, maybe you turn around and say
that a woman and a sane death a better death wait for you.
But you're crazy. For a long time now

only the burned wind spins above the houses at home,
Walls lie on their backs, plum trees are broken
and the angry night is thick with fear.

Oh, if I could believe that everything valuable

is not only inside me now that there's still home to go back to.
If only there were! And just as before bees drone peacefully
on the cool veranda, plum preserves turn cold
and over sleepy gardens quietly, the end of summer bathes in
the sun.

Among the leaves the fruit swing naked

and in front of the rust-brown hedge blonde Fanny waits for me
the morning writes slow shadows -

All this could happen! The moon is so round today!

Don't walk past me, friend. Yell, and I'll stand up again!

September 15, 1944

Miklós Radnóti

(Translated by Steven Polgar, S. Berg & S. J. Marks)

Never Shall I Forget

Never shall I forget that night,
the first night in the camp
which has turned my life into one long night,
seven times cursed and seven times sealed.

Never shall I forget that smoke.
Never shall I forget the little faces of the children
whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke
beneath a silent blue sky.

Never shall I forget those flames
which consumed my faith for ever.
Never shall I forget that nocturnal silence
which deprived me for all eternity of the desire to live.

Never shall I forget those moments
which murdered my God and my soul
and turned my dreams to dust.

Never shall I forget these things,
even if I am condemned to live
as long as God Himself.

Never.

Elie Wiesel