

UNTITLED

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1.

if you set most people down
in a town north of munich
with no money or jobs
they would if nothing else
begin to walk freely
across the plains of europe
toward their homes
so there had to be the bent pylons
holding the barbed wire taut
to keep the thousands
there in dachau

and our minds now need the help
of those bent pylons and the wire
and the trip line beyond which
anyone was quickly shot
because if you put a few hundred
tourists each day into a town
north of munich and ask us to think
about brutality and loss
our minds would wander
too freely across europe
we need the machine gun towers
to keep our thoughts from
straying off with some cloud
we need the *arbeit macht frei*
in bold metalwork
over the front gate to keep us
from stepping out too quickly

we need the heat of the crowd
waiting to see the historical film
in the "research" building
to turn our attention inward
to build up the heat inside us
to boil off impurities
to leave at the bottom of the crucible
some pure metal which would refuse
to bend as those pylons bent
or to be formed into barbed wire
or to be beaten into the shape of words

2.

the noble tone fails us
the film clips from the war
taunt us without mercy

there is a signpost tagged "mastery"
and at the end of the road
we found dachau and bergen-belsen

there is an old garden tool
with three fork tines bent down
at the end for scraping in the dirt

speak the word "mastery" or think it
drag the iron tines of that tool
across the surface of a heart

the word so poisoned those places
the barracks at bergen-belsen
that they had to be burned

they burned furiously in the old film
the flames violent at every window
the word survives

we remember the camps
and the films and the numbers
and the words which helped make them

we try to master that history