

In The Barracks

at the end of the RR tracks,
uniformed men with dobermen dogs,
pistols and black nightsticks,
are dividing the inmates
into groups of workers, infirm
and aging who have just been
prodded down gangplanks off
boxcars, given a cake of yellow
soap and ordered naked, shamefully
single file, old men and sick women,
down a bare concrete corridor
to the cyanide showers, leaving
behind a clothes pile steaming
sweat like bloodless viscera,
and after the steel door is
clanged shut behind them, alone
with their unheard screams,
the cleanup crew comes in,
with their pliers and small saws,
to yank out gold teeth and
hack wedding bands off stiff
fingers, all the while outside
the sun passes overhead as if
nothing but the change of seasons
is happening, predicting the sky
will soon break out into smiles.

-Arthur Gottlieb