Veteran poet Thomas Carper of Cornish is an emeritus professor of English at the University of Southern Maine. His remarkable sonnets combine a scrupulous attention to form with the urgency of life experience. In this example he writes about a Nazi extermination camp in occupied Poland during World War II.

Nobody at Treblinka
by Thomas Carper

Sie waren nicht ein kleiner Mann.
—Film director Claude Lanzmann to a former Nazi official

But keep the scale in mind. What single man Could undertake that kind of enterprise When each day trains from half of Europe ran Into the camp? The prisoners swarmed like flies Onto the platforms. Hundreds did their jobs Of keeping books, processing and selecting, Or guarding work brigades, or moving mobs Into the chambers...cleaning...disinfecting. You see, with those large numbers, no one said, “X is responsible.” We were a team Handling the hordes—the living, and the dead. Mine was a minor function. Do I seem Like someone who would cause such sufferings? I was a nobody. Nobody does those things.