

Harry Klein

## Shoes<sup>1</sup>

*At the Auschwitz death camp, I worked with shoes;  
The SS murderers forced me to sort shoes.  
Frighteningly tall mountains of shoes,  
Countless thousands and thousands of pairs of shoes.*

*Day after day, fresh thousands and thousands of pairs of shoes;  
Day after day, tall mountains of shoes, mountains of shoes.  
To whom do they belong, these thousands of pairs of shoes,  
These tall, blood-curdling, frightening mountains of shoes?*

*These are the shoes of my brethren, my people, the Jews;  
They were worn just yesterday, by children, sisters and brothers;  
By mothers and fathers, by grandmothers and grandfathers –  
And I can affirm all this in detail, as testimony.*

*I recognise whose shoes these are –  
They speak to me in my wakefulness, dreams and tears.  
Each mountain of shoes is a Jewish community;  
I murmur a Kaddish, along with a silent prayer.*

*Tiny, little shoes from windows were hurled;  
The infants were killed, their little heads [bashed] against walls  
By Nazi hands [so] heartless and murderous –  
The blood-spattered walls are the proof thereof.*

*Here lie the shoes of the hunted and persecuted,  
Of those chased into the lime<sup>2</sup> carriages of death,  
In terrifying gas chambers gassed  
And in blazing crematoria burned.*

*Here lie mountains of shoes in blood drenched.  
Courageous, heroic Jewish fighters  
Lost their lives in an embittered war.  
To defeat Nazism was their endeavour.*

*Here lie mountains of shoes of mothers and grandmothers –  
There lie mountains of shoes of fathers and grandfathers.  
Generations have been cut down, without leaving a trace –  
Neither marker nor tomb have remained.*

*At the Auschwitz death camp, I worked with shoes;  
The SS murderers forced me to sort shoes –  
Frighteningly tall mountains of shoes,  
Countless thousands and thousands of pairs of shoes.*

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<sup>1</sup> [TN: This poem was originally published in "Czenstochover Landsmanshaft of Montreal", p. 274.]

<sup>2</sup> [TN: The railway carriages utilised to transport prisoners to the death camps were habitually whitewashed with lime and doused with chlorine, which caused many of the deportees to perish from suffocation.]