



A Word on Statistics

BY WISŁAWA SZYMBORSKA

Out of every hundred people

those who always know better:
fifty-two.

Unsure of every step:
almost all the rest.

Ready to help,
if it doesn't take long:
forty-nine.

Always good,
because they cannot be otherwise:
four—well, maybe five.

Able to admire without envy:
eighteen.

Led to error
by youth (which passes):
sixty, plus or minus.

Those not to be messed with:
forty and four.

Living in constant fear
of someone or something:
seventy-seven.

Capable of happiness:
twenty-some-odd at most.

Harmless alone,
turning savage in crowds:

more than half, for sure.

Cruel
when forced by circumstances:
it's better not to know,
not even approximately.

Wise in hindsight:
not many more
than wise in foresight.

Getting nothing out of life except things:
thirty
(though I would like to be wrong).

Doubled over in pain
and without a flashlight in the dark:
eighty-three, sooner or later.

Those who are just:
quite a few at thirty-five.

But if it takes effort to understand:
three.

Worthy of empathy:
ninety-nine.

Mortal:
one hundred out of one hundred—
a figure that has never varied yet.

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