bruegel's two monkeys (translation of dwie małpy bruegla)

this is my great adulthood examination dream: 
there are two monkeys, chained in the window 
beyond the window the sky flies 
and the sea bathes.

i answer questions from human history. 
I stutter and and I wade.

a monkey, eyes fixed on me, listens ironically, 
the other pretends to be dozing -- 
and when there's silence unordained -- after a question, 
it prompts me, covertly, 
discreetly chiming its chain.

Wislawa Szymborska 
Ponand

translated from Polish 
by Marek Lugowski and Joanna Trzeciak 
Dallas, 1989
for friends *(translation of przyjaciolom)*

well versed in spaces
from earth to stars,
we get lost in the space
from earth to head.

it is so interplanetary
from sorrow to tears.
on the way from lies to truth
you lose youth.

the jets look funny to us,
that crevice of silence
between flight and sound
-- a world record.

there were speedier departures
their belated echoes
jar us from sleep
only years after.

now a call can be heard:
we are innocent!
who is calling? we're up and running,
opening windows.

the voice abruptly breaks off.
outside the windows stars
fall, just like after a salvo
paint falls off the wall.

Wislawa Szymborska
Poland

translated from Polish
by Marek Lugowski and Joanna Trzeciak
Dallas, 1989
hania (translation of hania)

see, this is hania, a good maid.
and these are not saucepans but nimbi.
and this knight with a dragon is a holy picture.
and this dragon here that's wretchedness
of our tear-stained earth.

and these are not beads, they're hania's rosaries.
and these shoes have tips worn out from kneeling.
and this is her scarf, black as a nighttime vigil,
when the bell in the steeple sounds the first call.

she saw the devil, when dusting the mirror:
he was all pale, father, and was striped pale yellow
and he looked at me wickedly, and he made a face,
what's going to happen to me, if he wrote me in his book?

which is why she will give to the monks and for the holy mass,
and she will purchase a tiny heart with a silver flame.
ever since they started on the new priory,
all the devils jumped up in price at once.

it takes a lot to lead a soul from temptation,
and the old age is only older and bone knocks on bone.

hania is so gaunt, she has so very little,
she just may get lost in the Eye of the Needle.

may, give back your colors, be like december nondescript.
green twig, be ashamed of yourself.
sun, mourn your shining. flagellate yourselves, clouds.
spring, wrap yourself in snow, for you will bloom in heaven!

i did not hear her laughing, or crying.
schooled in meekness, she wants nothing of life.
hers companion is her shadow -- the mourning of her body,
and her scarf, somewhat shredded, laments in the wind.

Wisława Szymborska
Poland

translated from Polish
by Marek Lugowski and Joanna Trzeciak
Dallas, 1989
still life with a balloon (translation of martwa natura z balonikiem)

instead of the return of memories
at the time of dying
i would like to order for me the return
of misplaced things.

through the windows, doors
i'd welcome umbrellas,
a suitcase, gloves and a coat,
so that i may say:
 i don't need this stuff.

safety pins, this hairbrush and that,
a paper rose, a piece of string, a knife,
so that i may say:
 i miss nothing.

wherever you are, my dear old key,
please try to arrive in time,
so that i may say:
rust, my dear, it's only rust.

it will rain certificates,
visas and questionaries,
so that i may say:
my little sun is setting.

dear wristwatch, please float out of the river,
and let yourself be taken into hand,
so that i may say:
you're faking the time.

and, a tiny balloon will reappear
long hijacked by wind,
so that i may say:
there is no children here.

fly away through the open window,
fly away into the world, wide,
so that someone may exclaim: o!
so that i may cry.

Wislaw Szymborska
Poland

translated from Polish
by Marek Lugowski and Joanna Trzeciak
Dallas, 1989
the tortured

i am beginning to love
like a woman
when i saw
the tortured
the left crippled
i thought
if i were a beautiful woman
i would find him beautiful
i would ache
to lie with him
love his anguished
body
love his wilted
limbs
love his
will
love his
suffering
love him
as only a woman
can love
a man
i would find him irresistible
i would aspire
to elicit his
desire and love

when i saw the tortured
i thought i'd wince
i thought i'd yearn
to look away

when i saw the tortured
i willed
to be a beautiful
woman

Marek Wojciech Lugowski
Dallas
22 October 1988
Yo, Dog!
(majored into Rap
by Marek "The Dreaming" Lugowski)

Yo, dog!
Your crib a slammer
And it ain't jit.
So get dap.
Bust out
Of this camp
And don't be wack.
Feed, dude, feed
(Clement rap: succeed!)
If you don't eat
Real bad
T. Jones gonna
Real mad
And you gonna lose
Your sparticular
Attitude
For the hoop.
Whoop joy!
Be that Rapper say
Word
Unto thee.
You never lose with me.
And may all be sparks
in hoop, alleys and parks.
—Aye, Your Alienness! Listen and attend ... There are legends, as you know, that speak of a race of paleface, who concocted robotkind out of a test tube, though anyone with a grain of sense knows this to be a foul lie. ... For in the Beginning there was naught but Formless Darkness, and in the Darkness, Magneticity, which moved the atoms, and whirling atom struck atom, and Current was thus created, and the First Light ... from which the stars were kindled, and then the planets cooled, and in their cores the breath of Sacred Statisticality gave rise to microscopic Protomechanoans, which begat Proteromechanoids, which begat the Primitive Mechanisms. These could not yet calculate, nor scarcely put two and two together, but thanks to Evolution and Natural Subtraction they soon multiplied and produced Omnistats, which gave birth to the Servostat, the Missing Clink, and from it came our progenitor, Automatus Sapiens ... 

—Stanisław Lem, The Cyberiad
The Circus Animals
translation of Zwierzeta cyrkowe

The bears stomp to the beat,
the lion spans flaming hoops,
the yellow tunic-clad monkey
rides a bike,
the whip crackles, the music swarms like flies,
the whip crackles, swaying the animals' eyes,
the elephant carries around a water goblet
on its head,
the dogs are dancing,
cautiously measuring each step.
I am very ashamed—I, a human.
No one had a good time that day:
The cheers rolled thickly from the grandstand.
A hand augmented by a whip
cast harsh shadows upon the sand.

Wislawa Szymborska
Translated from the Polish by
Marek Lugowski and Joanna Trzeciak
Water
*translation of Woda*

A rain droplet fell on my hand
drawn from Ganges and the Nile,
from the enruptured frost on a seal’s whiskers
from the broken pots of Ys and Tyre.
Upon my index finger
the Caspian Sea is an open sea
and the Pacific flows meekly into the Rudawa,
the same that flew in a cloud over Paris
in the year Seventeen Sixty Four
on the Seventh of May at three in the morning.

There are not enough lips to pronounce
your incidental names, O Water.
I would have had to call you in all tongues
pronouncing all the vowels simultaneously
at once keeping silent—for the sake of a lake
that never did receive a name,
and no longer is on earth—as there isn’t a star
that bathed in it in the heavens.

Someone was drowning, someone was pleading
for you, dying. It was so long ago and it was
yesterday.

You extinguished homes, you swept away houses
like trees, forests like cities.

You were in baptisteries and in
the bathtubs of courtesans,
in kisses, in the funeral cloth,
biting stone, feeding rainbows,
in the sweat and dew of pyramids, and lilac.

How utterly light all this is
in the droplets of rain.
How delicately the world touches me.
Whatever whenever wherever happened
is written on the water babel.

Wislawa Szymborska
Translated from the Polish by
Marek Lugowski and Joanna Trzeciak
The Dream of an Old Tortoise
translation of Sen starego zółwia

The tortoise dreamed of a leaf of lettuce
and near the leaf—the Emperor himself suddenly
appeared alive, just so—like one-hundred-something years ago.
The tortoise does not even realize what a big deal this is.

The Emperor, in truth, did not appear in his entirety,
but with the sun reflecting in his black shoes with small buckles,
and above them, his two calves, fairly fit, in white stockings.
The tortoise does not even realize how earthshaking this is.

Those two legs—a roadstop on the way from Austerlitz to Jena,
and above them, a fog, from which a rattle of laughter scatters.
Now, you may doubt the authenticity of this scene
and of the empirical nature of the small buckle-fit shoes.

It is difficult to establish an identity from fragments:
the right foot or the left foot.
The tortoise does not remember that much from its childhood.
The tortoise does not even realize whom he just dreamed up.

Emperor or no. Does this fact in any way cast aspersions on
the phenomenon of tortoise dreaming? Somebody, identity unknown,
has managed to slip unnoticed from the confines of nonexistence,
slinking through the world! All of him: from his very heels
to his very knees.

Wislawa Szymborska
Translated from the Polish by
Marek Lugowski and Joanna Trzeciak
Cathedral by Justo Gallego Martinez

Mike Brehm

The Island I, II

Nina Marks

Spot

Mike Brehm

Mitzi Mitten

Gail Shilke

Hipster

Mike Brehm

Ice

Joe Peterson

Suffer Baby Suffer

Ed Rath

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Wisława Szymborska
Wybór wierszy

Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy 1973

Biblioteka Literatury XXX-lecia
The Tombstone (*translation of Nagrobek*)

Here lies, old fashioned as a comma,
a she-author of a verse or two,
eternal rest extended by kind earth,
though the cadaver did not endeavor
to belong to any literary group.
Thus, there's nothing on her tomb
but these lines, those weeds
and a solitary owl.
O passerby, take up your laptop electronic brain
and upon the fate of Szymborska
sustain a passing vigil.

Wislawa Szymborska
Poland

translated from Polish
by Marek Lugowski / Joanna Trzeciak
Dallas, 1989
The Key (translation of Klucz)

Once there was a key and
suddenly it's not there.
How are we to get in?
Maybe someone will find it
and look at it -- and what good
will it do them?
And they'll toy with it
like a rusty paper clip.

With the love i bear for you
if the same had happened to us,
it would not only be us: the entire world
would lose that love of ours.
Picked up by a stranger's hand
it would not unlock
any house;
it would be but a form, nothing more,
so why not let it rust.

Not in the cards, not in the stars, not of peacock's cries
are such horoscopes.

Wisława Szymborska
Poland

translated from Polish
by Marek Lugowski / Joanna Trzeciak
Dallas, 1989
Four in the Morning (translation of Czwarta nad ranem)

The hour tossing night to day.
The hour turning from one side to the other.
The hour for thirty-year-olds.

The hour cleared for roosters' calls.
The hour when the earth denies us.
The hour when it blows cold from darkened stars.
the hour of will-anything-lasting-remain-of-us.

The empty hour.
Deaf and dumb.
The hour at the bottom of all the other hours.

No one likes it at four in the morning.
If the ants like it at four in the morning,
well -- let's congratulate the ants. As for us, let's wait 'til five arrives
if we are to keep on living.

Wislawa Szymborska
Poland

translated from Polish
by Marek Lugowski / Joanna Trzeciak
Dallas, 1989
The Circus Animals (*translation of Zwierzetacyrkowe*)

The bears stomp to the beat,
the lion spans flaming hoops,
the yellow tunic-clad monkey
rides a bike,
the whip crackles, the music swarms like flies,
the whip crackles swaying the animals' eyes,
the elephant carries around a water goblet
on its head,
the dogs are dancing,
cautiously measuring each step.

I am very ashamed -- I, a human.

No one had a good time that day:
The cheers rolled thickly from the grandstand.
A hand augmented by a whip
cast harsh shadows upon the sand.

Wislawa Szymborska
Poland

translated from Polish
by Marek Lugowski / Joanna Trzeciak
Dallas, 1989
biting stone, feeding rainbows,
in the sweat and dew of pyramids, and lilac.

How utterly light all this is
in the droplets of rain.
How delicately the world touches me.

Whatever whenever wherever happened
is written on the water babyl.

Wislawa Szymborska
Poland

translated from Polish
by Marek Lugowski / Joanna Trzeciak
Dallas, 1989
Water (translation of Woda)

A water droplet fell on my hand
drawn from Ganges and the Nile,

from the enruptured frost on a seal's whiskers
from the broken pots of Ys and Tyre.

Upon my index finger
the Caspian Sea is an open sea

and the Pacific flows meekly into Rudawa,
the same that flew in a cloud over Paris

in the year seventeen sixty four
on the seventh of may at three in the morning.

There is not enough lips to pronounce
your incidental names, o water.

I would have had to call you in all tongues
pronouncing all the vowels simultaneously

at once keeping silent -- for the sake of a lake
that never did receive a name,

and no longer is on earth -- as there isn't a star
that bathed in it in the heavens.

Someone was drowning, somewhene was pleading
for you, dying. It was so long ago and it was
yesterday.

You extinguished homes, you swept away houses
like trees, forests like cities.

You were in baptisteries and in
the bathtubs of courtesans,
in kisses, in the funeral cloth,
Rubens' Women (translation of Kobiety Rubensa)

Girl-goliaths, feminine fauna.  
Naked as the crash of barrels.  
They’re swarming in stampeded beds.  
They sleep with mouths still open from bird cries.  
Their pupils have run inward,  
penetrating to the very glands  
from which their yeast taints their blood.

Daughters of the baroque. The dough rises, clothed.  
The baths are steaming, the wines are blushing.  
The piglets of clouds are dashing through the sky.  
Meanwhile, the horns are blasting in physical alarm.

O bloated, o oversized,  
O doubled by your unveiling,  
O trippled by your violent pose,  
fat carnal courses.

Their skinny sisters got up earlier,  
before it dawned within the painting,  
and no one saw how they filed in a row  
onto the unpainted side of the canvas.

Exiles of style. Ribs all counted.  
Birdlike feet, birdlike hands.  
They will try to fly on gaunt shoulderblades.

The 13th century would have given them  
a gold backdrop,  
the 20th, a silver screen.  
This 17th has nothing for the flatchested,

for even the sky curves in relief.  
Relieved angels, a relieved god --  
a moustached Apollo astride a sweaty steed  
enters solo into a teeming alcove.

Wislawa Szymborska  
Poland

translated from Polish  
by Marok Luszczewski / Joanna Targosik
A Poem in Honor of (translation of Wiersz ku czci)

Once upon a time there was one
who invented zero.
In some uncertain country. Under a star
possibly already dark now. Between dates
vouched by no one. Without any name,
let alone a disputed name. Having left
to his zero not one golden thought
on what life's like. No legend about
how one day he picked a rose
and gave it a zero, thus arranging
it all into a magnificent bouquet.
About how, when preparing to die of old age,
he rode off into the sand on a hundred-humped
camel. Or, about how he napped
in the shade of primacy.
Or, about how he'll awake when all is counted
to the last grain of sand. What a man.
Slipping into the crack between fact and fiction
he escapes our attention. Immune
to all fate. He sheds each identity i give him.
Silence herself fused shut above him,
leaving no scar of voice.
Nonpresence spreads wide like a horizon.
Zero writes itself.

Wislawa Szymborska
Poland

translated from Polish
by Marek Lugowski / Joanna Trzeciak
Dallas, 1989
An Attempt (translation of Próba)

O little song, surely you're mocking me,
for even had I gone the high road,
I would not have come up roses.
Only roses come up roses and no one else. You know that.

I attempted to have leaves. I tried to turn into a bush.
With held breath -- to make it happen faster --
I yearned for my enclosure in rose petals.

O little song that has no pity on me:
I have a single body, immutable
I am an annual -- to the marrow of my bone.

Wisława Szymborska
Poland

translated from Polish
by Marek Lugowski / Joanna Trzeciak
Dallas, 1989
shredded, without receipts.

FOR THE PROMISES of my husband
who tempted you with colors
of the populated world, with its crowd noise,
a song by the window, a dog from next door:
that you will never, ever be alone
in the dark, in silence, devoid of breath
— i cannot answer.
signed: The Night, Widow of Day.

Wislawa Szymborska
Poland

translated from Polish
by Marek Lugowski / Joanna Trzeciak
Dallas, 1989
The Classifieds (translation of Drobne Ogloszenia)

WHOEVER knows where compassion dwells
( imagination of the heart)
-- do let me know! do let me know!
and Sing out loud
and dance like a fool
making merry under a frail birch tree
that's ever on the verge of crying.

I TEACH how to keep silent
in all languages
through the art of staring
at the starry sky
at the jowls of australopithecus
at the grasshopper's leap
at a newborn's nails
at plankton
at the tiny sails
of snowflakes

I RETURN to love
Attention! Special!
High upon last year's sun
now sticking in your throat, in fair
golden grass you lie and
the wind just dances
( just like last year,
playing leading man
to your dancing coat
of hair)
Respond to: A Dream

NEEDED: a person
to lament the old
who are dying in nursing homes. Please
apply without birth certificates
or written applications.
Any paper matter will be promptly
An Attempt (translation of Próba)

O little song, surely you're mocking me,
for even had I gone the high road,
I would not have come up roses.
Only roses come up roses and no one else. You know that.

I attempted to have leaves. I tried to turn into a bush.
With held breath -- to make it happen faster --
I yearned for my enclosure in rose petals.

O little song that has no pity on me:
I have a single body, immutable
I am an annual -- to the marrow of my bone.

Wisława Szymborska
Poland

translated from Polish
by Marek Lugowski / Joanna Trzeciak
Dallas, 1989
The Returns (translation of Powroty)

He came back. Said nothing.
But it was clear that something happened.
He lay down in his clothes,
slipped his head under a blanket,
and curled up in a ball.
He's fortysomething, but not at present.
He exists, only in his mother's womb,
beneath the seven dermi, in the protective custody
of darkness.
Tomorrow
he's giving a talk
on homeostasis in metagalactic cosmology,
but right now he's a ball, fast asleep.

Wisława Szymborska
Poland

translated from Polish
by Marek Lugowski / Joanna Trzeciak
Dallas, 1989
The Walk of the Arisen (translation of Spacer Wskrzeszonego)

The professor has died now thrice.
After the first death, he was asked to turn his head.
After the second death, he was asked to sit up.
After the third, they even put him on his feet, braced by a fat round nanny:
Let us take a little walk, professor.

After the trauma, this deeply damaged brain...
but, look, watch it go and not too slow:
Left right, bright dark, tree grass, hurts to eat.

Two plus two, professor?
Two, says the professor.
It's an answer better than any given before.

Hurts, grass, to sit, a bench.
and, at the end of the promenade again, old as dust
pale, unamused, thrice now excused
apparently a genuine nanny.

The professor wants her bad.
Again, he tries to break out towards her.

Wislawa Szymborska
Poland

translated from Polish
by Marek Lugowski / Joanna Trzeciak
Dallas, 1989
Selected Poems of Wisława Szymborska

translated from Polish to English

by Marek Ługowski / Joanna Trzeciak

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The Rehabilitation (translation of Rehabilitacja)

I use the oldest law of imagination.
For the first time in my life, I call on the dead.
I seek their faces, I listen for their footsteps,
Though I know that whoever dies, dies completely.

It's time to take my own head in hand
and say: Poor Yorrick, where's that ignorance of yours,
and where is that blind faith, where is that innocence,
that Things-Will-Work-Outness, that even-keeled spirit
balancing truths that came true with those that didn't?

I believed they treasoned, thus forfeiting their names
from the time the weeds poked fun at their unknown tombs,
the ravens taunted them, and the snow storms sneered at them
-- but these were all, my dear Yorrick, false witnesses.

The immortality of the dead
lasts so long as we pay them in memory.
Weak currency. There goes not a day
without someone losing their forever.

Now I know more about forever:
We can bestow it and we can take it away.
Whomever we call traitor -- he and
his name are fated to die together.

This power of ours over the dead
requires an impartial judgment
for the court not to last into the night
with the judge presiding all naked.

The earth is boiling -- and it is them who are earth,
they're rising, clump after clump, fistful to fistful,
returning from silent omissions to names,
to the nation's conscience, to new garlands and cheers.
Where is my command of words?
Words have sunk into tears,
words, words no good for bringing people back to life,
description dead as a photograph frozen-flashed.
I cannot awake them for even half a breath,
I, a Sysyphus assigned to the hell of verse.

They're coming. And sharp as diamond
-- at chic displays, with polished fronts
at tiny windows of sweet homes
at rose-colored glasses, glassy
minds, hearts -- stealth-quietly, they cut.

Wisława Szymborska
Poland

translated from Polish
by Marek Lugowski / Joanna Trzeciak
Dallas / New York, 1989
Hey, where do you think you're going,  
it's all flame and smoke in there!

There's four kids to get out of there,  
and I'm going for them!

How come?  
How can one get so far away from oneself?  
the order of night and day?  
next year's snowfalls?  
the red of apples?  
the longing for love,  
love, of which there's never enough?

Not bidding farewell, not bid farewell to,  
she rushes to help the children,  
now, look, she brings them out in armfuls,  
sinking to her knees in flames,  
now there's a blaze in her crazy hair.

And she wanted to buy a ticket,  
to leave for a short while,  
write a letter,  
open a window after a storm,  
blaze a trail in the woods,  
look in wonder at the ants,  
perceive the lake slitting its eye  
on account of the wind.  
A minute for the dead  
can run well past the midnight hour.

I am an eyewitness  
to the flight of clouds and birds,  
I hear the grass grow,
and I know what to name it,  
I have read millions  
of printed marks,  
and I have traced with a telescope  
all kinds of weird stars,  
only, no one has called on me  
for help  
and what if I begrudge  
a leaf, a dress, a verse --

We know about ourselves  
only what we've been tested.  
I tell you this  
straight from the bottom of my unknown heart.

Wislawa Szymborska  
Poland  

translated from Polish  
by Marek Lugowski / Joanna Trzeciak  
Dallas / New York, 1989
They took the skull out of clay,  
and put it in the marble.  
Ho, ho, ho, dig them medals,  
on satin pillows, medals.  
They took the skull out of clay.  

They read aloud from a note:  
a) He was a regular guy.  
b) Now, let's strike up the band.  
c) Dang, wasn't immortal.  
They read aloud from a note.  

So, nation, you be the judge,  
and so cherish this treasure,  
that someone born only once  
may well end up with two graves.  
So, nation, you be the judge.  

And, sure there was a parade,  
for a thousand of trombones  
and cops for the promenade,  
and ringing for all that tolls.  
And, sure there was a parade.  

Their eyes would dart to and fro,  
from the ground, to the heavens,  
detecting deadly pigeons  
tendering bombs in their beaks.  
Their eyes would dart to and fro.  

Between them and the people  
there were to be only trees,  
only that which sulks and sings  
in silence and songs of leaves.  
Between them and the people.  

But here we see drawn bridges,
and here a canyon of stone,
with bottom hardened for tanks,
with echo to rumble low.
But here we see drawn bridges.

Flushed with its own slushing blood,
the crowd retires with hope,
still ignorant of knowledge
that's graying the steeple cords.

Flushed with its own slushing blood.

Wislawa Szymborska
Poland

translated from Polish
by Marek Lugowski / Joanna Trzeciak
Dallas / New York, 1989