

"Introduction to Poetry" by Billy Collins

I ask them to take a poem
and hold it up to the light
like a color slide

or press an ear against its hive.

I say drop a mouse into a poem
and watch him probe his way out,

or walk inside the poem's room
and feel the walls for a light switch.

I want them to water-ski
across the surface of a poem
waving at the author's name on the shore.

But all they want to do
is tie the poem to a chair with rope
and torture a confession out of it.

They begin beating it with a hose
to find out what it really means.

"Sreća" by Desanka Maksimović

Ne merim više vreme na sate,
ni po sunčevom vrelom hodu;
Dan mi je kada njegove se oči vrate,
i noć kad ponovo od mene odu.

Ne merim sreću smehom, ni time
da li je čežnja moja od njegove jača;
Sreća je meni kad bolno ćutim s njime,
i kad nam srca biju ritmom plača.

Nije mi žao što će života vode
odneti i moje grane zelene;
sad neka mladost i sve neka ode,
on je zadivljen stao kraj mene.

"Happiness" by Desanka Maksimović

I don't measure time in hours any more,
not even by the hot walk of the Sun;
Day for me is when his eyes return,
and night when they leave me again.

I don't measure happiness by laughter, nor
whether my longing is stronger than his;
Happiness for me is when I am painfully silent with him,
and when our hearts beat in the rhythm of cry.

I do not regret that life's rivers
will carry my green branches away;
Now let the youth and everything go away,
he stood amazed beside me.

“Solitude” by Anna Akhmatova (1914)

So many stones have been thrown at me,
That I'm not frightened of them anymore,
And the pit has become a solid tower,
Tall among tall towers.
I thank the builders,
May care and sadness pass them by.
From here I'll see the sunrise earlier,
Here the sun's last ray rejoices.
And into the windows of my room
The northern breezes often fly off.
And from my hand the dove eats grains of wheat...
The muse's tawny hand, divinely calm
And delicate, will finish it.

"Icicles" by Janet Frame

Every morning congratulate
the icicles on their severity.
think they have courage, backbone,
their hard hearts will never give way.

Then around ten or half past,
hearing the steady falling of drops of water
I look up at the eaves. I See
the enactment of the same old winter story
-- the icicles weeping away their inborn tears,
and if they only knew it, their identity.

The Wedding by Maria Banus

In the bridal suite there was a black, cosmic cold.

Get undressed, I told him--to warm me.

First he unscrewed his head,
with the grinding of Saturn,
when it wants to escape the grip of the ring
or like a glass stopper,
which grates against the neck of a bottle.
He unscrewed his right arm.
like a pin from a grenade.
He unscrewed his left arm
like a slender metallic rocket.
He unscrewed his artificial limb from his right leg,
he unscrewed his artificial limb from his left leg,
and iron groaned upon iron,
as it does in a boiler room.

I crawled near his heart,
put my head on his chest,
listened to his heart-beat.

It wasn't grinding, or clanging, or exploding,
it was throbbing--

Blades of grass grew, unexpectedly,
the face of a hare appeared from hazel branches,
a milky strip of cloud--and a sky.
Then, finally, we cried.

“Barbara” by Jacques Prevert

Rappelle-toi Barbara
Il pleuvait sans cesse sur Brest ce jour-là
Et tu marchais souriante
Épanouie ravie ruisselante
Sous la pluie
Rappelle-toi Barbara
Il pleuvait sans cesse sur Brest
Et je t'ai croisée rue de Siam
Tu souriais
Et moi je souriais de même
Rappelle-toi Barbara
Toi que je ne connaissais pas
Toi qui ne me connaissais pas
Rappelle-toi
Rappelle-toi quand même ce jour-là
N'oublie pas
Un homme sous un porche s'abritait
Et il a crié ton nom
Barbara
Et tu as couru vers lui sous la pluie
Ruisselante ravie épanouie
Et tu t'es jetée dans ses bras
Rappelle-toi cela Barbara
Et ne m'en veux pas si je te tutoie
Je dis tu à tous ceux que j'aime
Même si je ne les ai vus qu'une seule fois
Je dis tu à tous ceux qui s'aiment
Même si je ne les connais pas
Rappelle-toi Barbara
N'oublie pas
Cette pluie sage et heureuse
Sur ton visage heureux
Sur cette ville heureuse
Cette pluie sur la mer
Sur l'arsenal
Sur le bateau d'Ouessant
Oh Barbara
Quelle connerie la guerre
Qu'es-tu devenue maintenant
Sous cette pluie de fer

Translation by Lawrence Ferlinghetti

Remember Barbara
It rained all day on Brest
that day
And you walked smiling
Flushed enraptured streaming-wet
In the rain
Remember Barbara
It rained all day on Brest that day
And I ran into you in Siam Street
You were smiling
And I smiled too
Remember Barbara
You whom I didn't know
You who didn't know me
Remember
Remember that day still
Don't forget
A man was taking cover on a porch
And he cried your name
Barbara
And you ran to him in the rain
Streaming-wet enraptured flushed
And you threw yourself in his arms
Remember that Barbara
And don't be mad if I speak familiarly
I speak familiarly to everyone I love
Even if I've seen them only once
I speak familiarly to all who are in love
Even if I don't know them
Remember Barbara
Don't forget
That good and happy rain
On your happy face
On that happy town
That rain upon the sea
Upon the arsenal
Upon the Ushant boat
Oh Barbara
What shitstupidity the war
Now what's become of you
Under this iron rain

De feu d'acier de sang
Et celui qui te serrait dans ses bras
Amoureusement
Est-il mort disparu ou bien encore vivant
Oh Barbara
Il pleut sans cesse sur Brest
Comme il pleuvait avant
Mais ce n'est plus pareil et tout est abimé
C'est une pluie de deuil terrible et désolée
Ce n'est même plus l'orage
De fer d'acier de sang
Tout simplement des nuages
Qui crèvent comme des chiens
Des chiens qui disparaissent
Au fil de l'eau sur Brest
Et vont pourrir au loin
Au loin très loin de Brest
Dont il ne reste rien.

Of fire and steel and blood
And he who held you in his arms
Amorously
Is he dead and gone or still so much alive
Oh Barbara
It's rained all day on Brest today
As it was raining before
But it isn't the same anymore
And everything is wrecked
It's a rain of mourning terrible and
desolate
Nor is it still a storm
Of iron and steel and blood
But simply clouds
That die like dogs
Dogs that disappear
In the downpour drowning Brest
And float away to rot
A long way off
A long long way from Brest
Of which there's nothing left.

A Mother in a Refugee Camp

By Chinua Achebe

No Madonna and Child could touch
Her tenderness for a son
She soon would have to forget. . . .
The air was heavy with odors of diarrhea,
Of unwashed children with washed-out ribs
And dried-up bottoms waddling in labored steps
Behind blown-empty bellies. Other mothers there
Had long ceased to care, but not this one:
She held a ghost smile between her teeth,
and in her eyes the memory
Of a mother's pride. . . . She had bathed him
And rubbed him down with bare palms.
She took from their bundle of possessions
A broken comb and combed
The rust-colored hair left on his skull
And then – humming in her eyes – began carefully to part it.
In their former life this was perhaps
A little daily act of no consequence
Before his breakfast and school; now she did it
Like putting flowers on a tiny grave.

Not My Business

By Niyi Osundare

They picked Akanni up one morning
Beat him soft like clay
And stuffed him down the belly
Of a waiting jeep.

What business of mine is it
So long they don't take the yam
From my savouring mouth?

They came one night
Booted the whole house awake
And dragged Danladi out,
Then off to a lengthy absence.

What business of mine is it
So long they don't take the yam
From my savouring mouth?

Chinwe went to work one day
Only to find her job was gone:
No query, no warning, no probe –
Just one neat sack for a stainless record.

What business of mine is it
So long they don't take the yam
From my savouring mouth?

And then one evening
As I sat down to eat my yam
A knock on the door froze my hungry hand.

The jeep was waiting on my bewildered lawn
Waiting, waiting in its usual silence.

One Hundred Love Sonnets: XVII"

by Pablo Neruda (Translated by Stephen Tapscott)

I do not love you as if you were salt-rose, or topaz,
or the arrow of carnations the fire shoots off.

I love you as certain dark things are to be loved,
in secret, between the shadow and the soul.

I love you as the plant that never blooms
but carries in itself the fight of hidden flowers;
thanks to your love a certain solid fragrance,
risen from the earth, lives darkly in my body.

I love you without knowing how, or when, or from where.
I love you straightforwardly, without complexities or pride;
so I love you because I know no other way

than this: where I does not exist, nor you,
so close that your hand on my chest is my hand,
so close that your eyes close as fall asleep.

Beach Burial by Kenneth Slessor

Softly and humbly to the Gulf of Arabs
The convoys of dead sailors come;
At night they sway and wander in the waters far under,
But morning rolls them in the foam.

Between the sob and clubbing of the gunfire
Someone, it seems, has time for this,
To pluck them from the shallows and bury them in burrows
And tread the sand upon their nakedness;

And each cross, the driven stake of tidewood,
Bears the last signature of men,
Written with such perplexity, with such bewildered pity,
The words choke as they begin –

'Unknown seaman' – the ghostly pencil
Wavers and fades, the purple drips,
The breath of the wet season has washed their inscriptions
As blue as drowned men's lips,

Dead seamen, gone in search of the same landfall,
Whether as enemies they fought,
Or fought with us, or neither; the sand joins them together,
Enlisted on the other front.

El Alamein

The Road Not Taken by Robert Frost

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,

And sorry I could not travel both

□And be one traveler, long I stood□

And looked down one as far as I could

To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,

□And having perhaps the better claim;

Because it was grassy and wanted wear,

Though as for that the passing there

Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay

□In leaves no step had trodden black.

Oh, I marked the first for another day!

Yet knowing how way leads on to way,

I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh

Somewhere ages and ages hence:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I,

I took the one less traveled by,

□And that has made all the difference.

Because I could not stop for Death

by Emily Dickinson, 1830-1886

Because I could not stop for Death -
He kindly stopped for me -
The carriage held but Ourselves -
And Immortality.

We slowly drove- He knew no haste
And I had put away
My labor and my leisure too,
For his civility -

We passed the School, where Children strove
At Recess - in the Ring -
We passed the fields of Gazing Grain -
We passed the Setting Sun -

Or rather - He passed us -
The Dews drew quivering and chill -
For only Gossamer, my Gown -
My Tippet - only Tulle-

We paused before a House that seemed
A Swelling of the Ground-
The Roof was scarcely visible -
The Cornice - in the Ground -

Since then - 'tis Centuries - and yet
Feels shorter than the Day
I first surmised the Horses' Heads
Were toward Eternity.

