

"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.

IN TRANSLATION

“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.

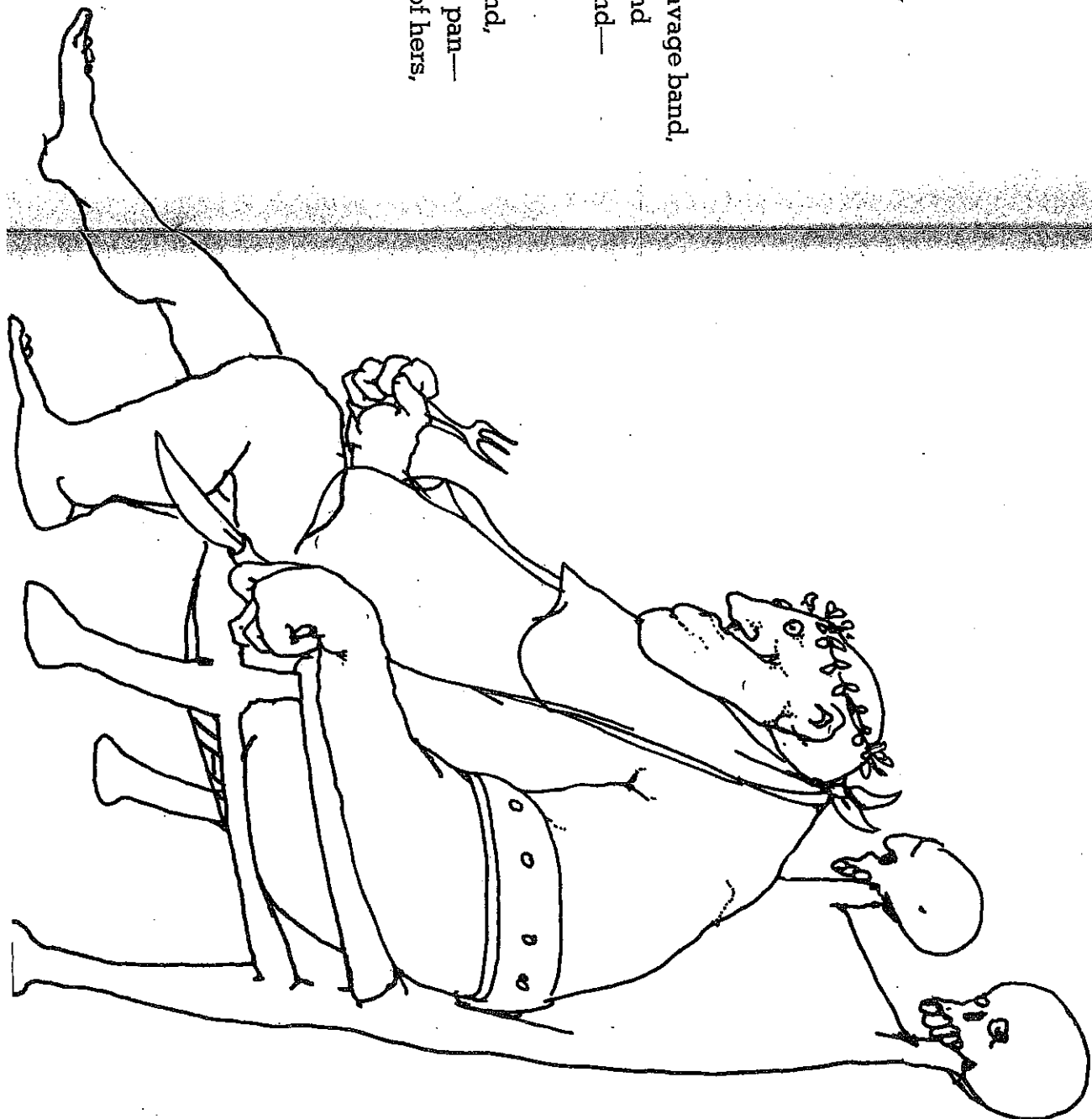
I don't measure happiness by laughter, nor
whether my longing is stronger than his;
Happiness for me is when I am painfully silent with him,
and when our hearts beat in the rhythm of cry.

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.

LADIES FIRST

Pamela Purse yelled, "Ladies first,"
Pushing in front of the ice cream line.
Pamela Purse yelled, "Ladies first,"
Grabbing the ketchup at dinnertime.
Climbing on the morning bus
She'd shove right by all of us
And there'd be a tiff or a fuss
When Pamela Purse yelled, "Ladies first."

Pamela Purse screamed, "Ladies first,"
When we went off on our jungle trip.
Pamela Purse said her thirst was worse
And guzzled our water, every sip.
And when we got grabbed by that wild savage band,
Who tied us together and made us all stand
In a long line in front of the King of the land—
A cannibal known as Fry-'Em-Up Dan,
Who sat on his throne in a bib so grand
With a lick on his lips and a fork in his hand,
As he tried to decide who'd be first in the pan—
From back of the line, in that shrill voice of hers,
Pamela Purse yelled, "Ladies first."



SICK

"I cannot go to school today,"
Said little Peggy Ann McKay.

"I have the measles and the mumps,

A gash, a rash and purple bumps.

My mouth is wet, my throat is dry,

I'm going blind in my right eye.

My tonsils are as big as rocks,

I've counted sixteen chicken pox

And there's one more—that's seventeen,

And don't you think my face looks green?

My leg is cut, my eyes are blue—

It might be instamatic flu.

I cough and sneeze and gasp and choke,

I'm sure that my left leg is broke—

My hip hurts when I move my chin,

My belly button's caving in,

My back is wrenched, my ankle's sprained,

My 'pendix pains each time it rains.

My nose is cold, my toes are numb,

I have a sliver in my thumb.

My neck is stiff, my voice is weak,

I hardly whisper when I speak.

My tongue is filling up my mouth,

I think my hair is falling out.

My elbow's bent, my spine ain't straight,

My temperature is one-o-eight.

My brain is shrunk, I cannot hear,

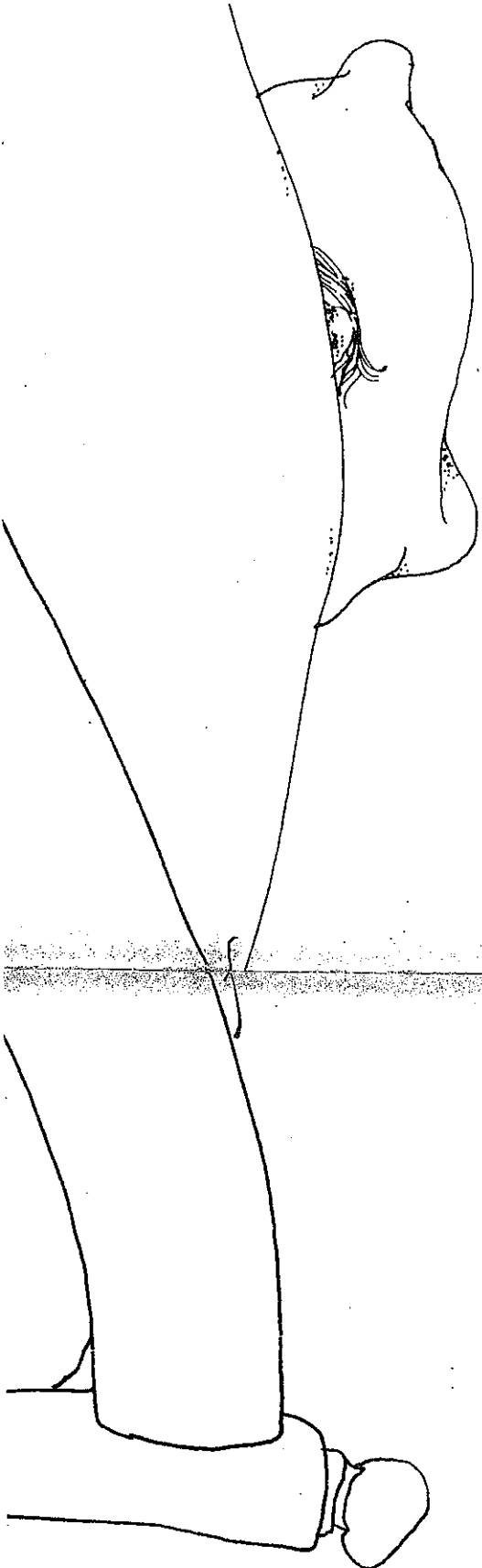
There is a hole inside my ear.

I have a hangnail, and my heart is—what?

What's that? What's that you say?

You say today is . . . Saturday?

G'bye, I'm going out to play!"



“L’homme qui te ressemble”
by Rene Philombe

J’ai frappé à ta porte
J’ai frappé à ton coeur
Pour avoir un bon lit
Pour avoir un bon feu
Pourquoi me repousser?
Ouvre-moi mon frère !...

Pourquoi me demander
Si je suis d’Afrique
Si je suis d’Amérique
Si je suis d’Asie
Si je suis d’Europe ?
Ouvre moi mon frère !..

Pourquoi me demander
La longueur de mon nez
L’épaisseur de ma bouche
La couleur de ma peau
Et le nom de mes dieux,
Ouvre-moi mon frère !...

Je ne suis pas un noir
Je ne suis pas un rouge
Je ne suis pas un jaune
Je ne suis pas un blanc
Mais je ne suis qu’un homme
Ouvre-moi mon frère !...

Ouvre-moi ta porte
Ouvre-moi ton coeur
Car je suis un homme
L’homme de tous les temps
L’homme de tous les cieux
L’homme qui te ressemble !...

In Translation:
“A Man Like You”

I knocked at your door
I knocked at your heart
So that I may have a good bed,
So that I may have a warm fire
Why do you refuse me?
Let me in brother!

Why do you ask
If I am African
If I am American
If I am Asian
If I am European?
Let me in brother!

Why do you ask
The length of my nose
The thickness of my mouth
The color of my skin
And the name of my gods?
Let me in brother!

I am not black
I am not red
I am not white
But I am only a man
Let me in brother!

Let me in your door
Let me into your heart
Because I am a man
The man of all times
the man of all the heavens
the man who resembles you

"Solitude" by Anna Akhmatova

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.
And from my hand a dove eats grains of wheat...
As for my unfinished page,
The Muse's tawny hand, divinely calm
And delicate, will finish it.

"Icicles" by Janet Frame

Every morning I congratulate
the icicles on their severity.
I 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.

"MARRIED" by Jack Gilbert

I came back from the funeral and crawled
around the apartment, crying hard,
searching for my wife's hair.

For two months got them from the drain,
from the vacuum cleaner, under the refrigerator,
and off the clothes in the closet.

But after other Japanese women came,
there was no way to be sure which were
hers, and I stopped. A year later,
repotting Michiko's avocado, I find
a long black hair tangled in the dirt.

"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 light 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 I fall asleep.

"Hatred" by Wislawa Szymborska

See how efficient it still is,
how it keeps itself in shape—
our century's hatred.

How easily it vaults the tallest obstacles.
How rapidly it pounces, tracks us down.

It's not like other feelings.

At once both older and younger.

It gives birth itself to the reasons
that give it life.

When it sleeps, it's never eternal rest.

And sleeplessness won't sap its strength; it feeds it.

One religion or another—

whatever gets it ready, in position.

One fatherland or another—

whatever helps it get a running start.

Justice also works well at the outset

until hate gets its own momentum going.

Hatred. Hatred.

Its face twisted in a grimace

of erotic ecstasy.

Oh these other feelings,

listless weaklings.

Since when does brotherhood

draw crowds?

Has compassion

ever finished first?

Does doubt ever really rouse the rabble?

Only hatred has just what it takes.

Gifted, diligent, hardworking.

Need we mention all the songs it has composed?

All the pages it has added to our history books?

All the human carpets it has spread
over countless city squares and football fields?

Let's face it:

it knows how to make beauty.

The splendid fire—glow in midnight skies.

Magnificent bursting bombs in rosy dawns.

You can't deny the inspiring pathos of ruins
and a certain bawdy humor to be found
in the sturdy column jutting from their midst.

Hatred is a master of contrast—

between explosions and dead quiet,

red blood and white snow.

Above all, it never tires

of its leitmotif—the impeccable executioner
towering over its soiled victim.

It's always ready for new challenges.

If it has to wait awhile, it will.

They say it's blind. Blind?

It has a sniper's keen sight
and gazes unflinchingly at the future
as only it can.