Brueghel’s Two Monkeys
(Trans. Barańczak & Cavanagh, 1993)

by Wislawa Szymborska

This is what I see in my dreams about final exams:
two monkeys, chained to the floor, sit on the windowsill,
the sky behind them flutters,
the sea is taking its bath.

The exam is History of Mankind.
I stammer and hedge.

One monkey stares and listens with mocking disdain,
the other seems to be dreaming away--
but when it’s clear I don’t know what to say
he prompts me with a gentle
clinking of his chain.

Two Monkeys by Brueghel
(trans. from the Polish by Magnus Kryski)

Wislawa Szymborska

I keep dreaming of my graduation exam:
in a window sit two chained monkeys,
beyond the window floats the sky,
and the sea splashes.

I am taking an exam on the history of mankind:
I stammer and flounder.

One monkey, eyes fixed upon me, listens ironically,
the other seems to be dozing--
and when silence follows a question,
he prompts me
with a soft jingling of the chain.