

SAMPLE  
TRANSLATION

KATJA PERAT  
SELECTED POEMS

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## Katja Perat: Selected Poems

### GENTLENESS

Reconciliation

with a world shaken by uncertainty,  
always comes as the same image:

as someone looking after —  
not necessarily me —  
but something for sure  
that all sensitive beings share;  
(certain types of recognition,  
shifts across certain faces,  
twilight traversing a mountain)  
what is beautiful  
and can't be reduced to a footnote—

So that someone with their gentleness  
is taking care of reality.

## LOVE

This poem has two extremes.

The first tells you

that you are a stranger in a foreign land,

a guest at someone else's party,

that you don't understand a thing & nothing is yours as of right,

and the other is love.

Stepping into a room,

a discerning person knows

he is alone.

He knows that people

cut off heads and break limbs,

shackle with ropes, chains and contracts,

lock people up in cellars and attics of tall towers.

A discerning person is afraid of the other

but more than that

he is afraid of himself.

When he steps into the room,

he steps into a dark, impenetrable

forest.

With love it is no different,

but at times it seems

that someone who

by mischance looked our way,

saw.

Love is the shifting of light and you know

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it will not last.

There is nothing

that could hold fear at bay.

As you catch your reflection

in the glass casing, you see

how from a well-kempt face a wild animal

cautiously stares back.

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## MASTERPIECE

I'm sad because I know this poem will never be a masterpiece,  
though it understands  
how powerless we are at the hands of fate,  
that the West is magnificent because it's collapsing,  
that all talk is an exercise in lying,  
that with an arrogant and ineradicable gesture people  
summon small things to help us with their handiness,  
and call on parks to show subservience to urban planners,  
that we build homes in an inhospitable world,  
carry our sadness like expensive jewellery,  
and that in love we choose badly and die young.

With this poem it's like  
telling someone who's beautiful and smart and who's close to your heart,  
though you couldn't really live with him,  
and after exhausting all energies  
and explaining everything that can be explained,  
that really you loved him, it just wasn't the right moment.

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## A FAREWELL TO ARMS

Slowly, gently and without regrets  
I am losing contact with language.

In places where I am balanced back by things  
that are impossible to discuss  
without being scratched  
(the border of an island on a coloured-in sky,  
grand illusions about people's benevolence,  
a hand which knows where the body will respond the most),  
in a silence without witnesses  
I practice archiving my memories.

Slowly, gently and without regrets  
I disavow misunderstandings that arise  
whenever I redraw reality into what  
people for whom gentleness presents an unheard-of effort  
read as taunting derision  
and what people for whom gentleness represents social capital,  
read as metaphor  
and so they throw things out of the fragile balance  
for which day in & day out billions of insects, tropical plants,  
customs officers and people very much in love are fighting.

Slowly, gently and without regrets  
I am abandoning literature, for as even Milan Kučan knows,  
only exceptionally are dreams allowed,  
but the new day needs to be fought over  
with unimaginable exactness.

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## INVITATION TO A DANCE

For sure there must be great literature  
capable of balancing science, politics  
music and the fine arts,  
public and private,  
despondence and enthusiasm,  
that fulfills its inner criteria  
and serves outwardly,  
that it doubts and hopes  
and with everything it enunciates,  
contributes to history.

For sure there must be a wonderful metaphor  
that's blessed with the discrete charm of what is silenced,  
with economic elegance,  
and that can portray the beauty of an event in one stroke,  
as also its inevitable impermanence,  
that is capable of describing how sad it is  
that in a world of chance nothing is  
certain or predictable,  
and at the same time can console and ensure,  
that everything, including pain  
is fit and just.

For sure there must be someone  
prepared to fight for it,  
prepared to shake up everyday word combinations  
and confront adjectives with fresh nouns,  
someone who will be able to protect language and himself

from lies and generalizations  
someone to whom Slovene will curtsy deeply  
sated after a century-long wait.

No need to despair,  
just don't count on me.

Every work of art manages  
only as much as the artist manages,  
therefore there's nothing grand in this poem.  
It's April, possibly the beginning of May,  
evening time.

People walking by  
are dressed somewhat more carefully  
in the manner of real people,  
even the light is somewhat adjusted,  
I used the blue filter  
I normally use when taking photographs.  
It's nice and it is sad.

A girl  
(probably it's me, but I can't say that)  
takes someone by the hand,  
and they embrace and dance.  
In this poem someone is happy  
and everything else  
seems completely redundant.