

SAMPLE
TRANSLATION

UROŠ ZUPAN
SELECTED POEMS

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Uroš Zupan: Selected Poems

Puddles

At 8.10 in the morning I was exactly
43 years old. Long blots of sunlight
are broken off by sharpened shadows. The clouds

are crammed, grey pancakes flattened
by a rolling pin which don't move anywhere.
The leaves in the trees gently tremble

as if they started to feel cold; they don't know
it's my birthday. Steel birds whizz
past the apartment building and bow down on

the nearby runway; they don't know it's
my birthday. My son imitates a familiar
sleeping position. He's breathing as if

he wasn't breathing and doesn't know it's my birthday.
Bugs Bunny has lain motionless for two days
in the bed frame and doesn't know

it's my birthday. I will be congratulated by
about ten people. Some sooner. Some

later. For now, I just feel

well-rested and extremely unambitious,
though I'm writing something that could be
a poem. On this day in 1744, Herder was

born. On this day in 1900, Nietzsche
died. I don't know what to think of that
so will think nothing.

The weather report isn't coming true. Everything
is bright and grey-blue and blue
and doesn't know it's my birthday.

Puddles are evaporating as if they rode
a quick and invisible elevator into the sky.

Atlantis

I constantly dream about the old apartment building.
I enter and unlock the mailbox.
Inside, I find trash and unpaid bills;
betrayals and concealed loves – important
packages I should have received
decades ago and which have never found an addressee.

When I call the elevator, the door opens,
but it's impossible to step in;
it pulls away, sways above emptiness,
stands still between the floors,
or suddenly ducks into the abyss
as if Atlantis were submerging.

I meet strangers on the stairway
and in front of the door where we once lived
I see this is no longer our apartment –
that my parents have moved away,
that they have travelled from youth to old age
so far that the apartment building is just a fragile dream
that once pushed from the land some grass and trees.

Tonight I dreamt I was in the courtyard
with my friends. It was summer, a day as if
it didn't belong to this season; the clouds
above us immobile apparitions
and the grass beneath our feet a dark
green carpet talking to warm soles
in dark hours.

Everyone except me had their childhood faces
and their childhood clothes, and their parents were alive
and called them to dinner by their names,

reminding them that they're alive and that children
have to come home when it gets dark.

What has been lost forever?

And what returns in a distorted version

for years and decades, as if it wanted

to exist again, separated from reality, and

be the only true reality? Is home a place where

in the evening the voices of grown-ups call us by our names

which we will lose in time?

Or is it just a place about which people ask?

Every day someone dies and sometimes this is just a beginning.

I am now alone in the courtyard.

I've moved alone through my dreams

which were my dreams only.

The old betrayals and untold loves

breathed in the mailboxes.

In Atlantis, Captain Nemo's crew

restlessly slide their forefingers along wrinkled maps.

Tonight and always. Always and tonight.

Tonight.

Naomi, Linda, Tatjana, Cindy (revisited)

The proud lovers of classics, who were disappearing
from the university corridors directly into *the bookish dark*.

The inscrutable princesses with ice cubes in their glasses.

Queens of Sheba – Naomi, Linda, Tatjana, Cindy –,
your names were even more unreal than theirs.

In discos, on Thursdays and Fridays, cigarette
smoke dragged itself like a lazy cat about the room.

While you, like the sun, collected admirers
around you; planets, remote satellites,
who were trying to get lost in your orbit.

You were handing out warmth like alms – an imitation
of a smile here, a spark out of an invisible eye corner there –
the hieroglyphics and cuneiform of elegant gestures
which no Egyptologist could decipher.

Two decades have passed in a snap of one's fingers.

Like a snake shedding its skin,
I have stripped off my previous life. I can barely
recall it. It visits me like images
that you look at through the water. Was that another
name? Another place? Another person?

But sometimes I see you again –

tourist guides, stewardesses, employees
behind the counters, storekeepers, weary
waitresses in better restaurants, still emanating
a certain air of aloofness that they carefully
carry through the years so it doesn't spill over the edge
and isn't scratched by time. Their fear and weakness
are now just slightly less well-hidden.
That's when I feel like a victor.
Then, that too passes.

It is bitter to sing in praise of the mind.

There are things and events that no
art can replace,
and they only multiply.

(2001–2011)

Capriccio

Form is what remains;
the glimmer of divine shapes,
light, colors, odors and tastes,
dreams after Coleridge's pipe –

not merely illusion; human moments,
an endless scenery – an epic –

arranges everything that was
and will be without the confusion of our emotions.

Content is shifting –
flowing from a life to a life
first quiet, then screaming,

in the end, wrapped in melancholy.

Time doesn't worship language, it just demands an image –