

Nina Dragičević

Writing Sample in English

From the book (book-length poem) *Ljubav reče greva* (engl. *Lover Says Let's Go*)

i go, go, shoes on clothes on wrap myself up weigh myself down, i go out,
 i go, standing still, going slowly, go to the corner stop step pause turn step stop turn
 becoming *together* squeezing eyelids copulating, more, yet more rubbing against each other
 chafing,
 yet more intensely snuggling creasing tightening in, i look in front
 i step back turn step back turn
 i think *together* and i'm all in disdain,
 carry myself over, i turn, turning around, stepping back take a step turn go home
 i turn go around the town, i don't, something's saying don't, i say to myself don't,
 what's going on,
 i know, i know what it is, when i think about all that could happen,
 and it sure will.

lover texts says *let's go* wants *let's go* all the time,
 when thus haunted and chased, she says *love me fast* walks slowly i walk from and to,
 when *lover* writes i take a cig it drops on the ground i stare i think to myself, should i pick it
 up, outside i surely wouldn't lick the ground, but who knows what i've swallowed thus far,
 but still here i am look at me now, won't and won't wither, someday there'll be a fine war,
 what if i win,
 but when *lover* texts,
 when *lover* calls, i answer because her call means
 she is still alive.

lover says *what are you doing* i say *i'm writing* she says *about what*, *lover* the master of
 impossible questions,
 i say *what should i do* she says *what what should you do* i say *i'm writing what else should i*
do she says *what will you do* i say nothing she says *what can you do* i say *what should i do*
 she says *what you can*, i say nothing, she says *let's go*.
 i'm overly worried if she's alive, when i insist that there is no one, especially no one alive,
 while there are many others as many as you wish, but i don't, but who cares. i postpone to
 whenever, i say *i'm writing about departing, walls, i swear i've seen haushofer, her wall a*
scam, she just has no love for it and neither do i, i do love you.
 i say *i'd go*, writing *i'd go*, pause *but where* i'm dwelling on it, so i go,
 i say i would go, she says *but where* i say i'd like to go she says *with me* i say nothing,
 i'd like to go and can't wait till she comes.
 further i say, thinking out loud, so she wouldn't worry that i'm not alive i sure am,
 i say *how woOLF totally fucked us up, all of us, with that room, she didn't say who had built it,*
and she didn't say how many rooms she had, and she definitely didn't say that she most
definitely wasn't here, let alone now.

when i get carried away, get worried, what am i saying to her when i'm talking i don't know
if she is alive i curb myself, i say *are you even interested in this* she is she sure is, we're
talking only to each other now,
the putsch has done its job, in the morning we go to sleep.

i say *and what are you doing*, and she says *i'm writing, thinking about you, living somehow*,
she really is, i think,
she thinks i am bored, she says *are you even interested in this* of course we are in all of it, but
we are assuming the general anti-interest, we are interested in what we are saying, but
neither of us knows how much longer the other will still be alive,
we're saving time, using it to ask ourselves whether we're interested.

she says *you're writing about leaving this town* i say *yes* she says *i know* says *i'll bring
shepard* says *shepard the cowboy always goes*, *patti smith says cowboy says lover*, *jessica
lange says cowboy says lover*,
we are still here have been sitting here forever we are saying *but where, but where*
she says *come to me* we go to me are sitting by me are lying by me and are asking each other,
where,
she says *come to me* she comes to me.

lover does not ask herself *where to*, she is here playing conciliation,
says *i've done everything i could* drilling into her head suppressing consolation,
and even this she had to carve out on her own to the core clearly on her own clearly says *i'll
bring shepard read shepard went into a car drove off across america slept in motels, shepard
went, shepard went*,
sorry, i feel sorry when listening to *lover* i am looking out at the parking lot, where is
shepard, where is the car, there isn't anything, there isn't, and i'm sorry,
and there isn't, which is why *where possibly* always means *here*.
i will finish her off, my *lover*, one way or another either with a revelation, a recollection over
and over
again, or with silence,
she says *tell me, tell me, i do know you that much* she says,
she knows what i will say, she hopes i will say it, so she will finally say out loud that she
doesn't make a living,
she hopes i won't so that she can say we're happy,
when she says *colette didn't make a living, so friends helped*, i say *ethel didn't make a living,
so friends helped*,
she says *you see* i say *what* she says, when thus comforting, when only much later she says
what a crime.

Translated by Barbara Jurša.

*ljubav*¹ says *there's a deluge outside and we're in here naked*.

I go, go, essentially carrying with me essentially all
that essentially I don't own,
I go like that, lightweight, go and pause and turn step forward and she says *you're barely there*
and thus everything I carry with me is barely there,
I kiss *ljubav* and that's essentially how I go about solving all my problems.

if I were to be placed under the guillotine I lean on
I'd resist, I'd scream and protest and I'd likely
write it down, and that's how it would all proceed proceed in the distance is always *here* I'd
be defiant would
demand would hang myself *at full tilt* I would go
and hang myself,
preferably on *ljubav*.

I exploit our familiarity
or whatever this is or isn't,
definitely dragging up before her all that I, that I remember recall always *here* all the time
echoing detonations of bodies scattered mines, and no map to be found.
this *storm*² is an eternal consequence materialized through the persistence of sonority
this right here is the eternal present an inerasable pogrom amply settled and gently colonizing
but unseen and who cares and that's why it's destruction.
this right *here* is the destruction dragged along
a repository of what's noted inerasable, I think I write I think that
all will pass if I write it down
but it doesn't pass, it doesn't pass, it doesn't
the *here* never and essentially in no way essentially comes to pass, it doesn't pass,
an eternal reverb of *scram* and *piss off*, but where
all permeable I flow into *ljubav* she says *it's nice when we're alone*, but we are not alone, our
here essentially includes all
bound interwoven shrapnel jackals,
we are together though, permeable we surrender to each other dragging all of them here,
blaming them on each other

¹ Translator's note: *Ljubav* is a term of endearment meaning "love" and "lover" in Slovenian and Serbo-Croatian.

² Translator's note: A reference to Croatian "Operation Storm" (*Operacija Oluja*), a 1995 campaign in the Croatian war of independence wherein Croatian forces recaptured most of the territory occupied by the self-proclaimed Republic of Serbian Krajina.

and of course I go I go afraid that everybody else is going too, thinking that I'll never shake them,
ljubav permeates me, and they permeate her,
this here a curse of sound, an intonation of benignity I bare myself *ljubav* throws me agape,
after *ljubav*, the deluge.

ljubav doesn't call, who knows where she is, of course I know where *ljubav* is lost in a maze
a couple of distances from here,
which is only and exclusively *here* she'd find me easily take me away
if I wanted, oh how I want her to take me away, i.e. to want me.
ljubav doesn't call go figure I think, and so I go, I go, I say I think of course that all this has
nothing
to do with me *ljubav* has no idea I think, *ljubav* just grasps pseudo-ties
dragging herself around the circuit,
a short one always, *ljubav* wants herself yesterday and forever *ljubav* insists
of course, *ljubav* the devoted I think I assure myself,
tragically sure I insist that truly love is truly blind
superficial made-up *ma'am*, *there's no such thing in reality*, oh but there is, I think *ljubav*
compliant and impulsive
that's how I assess *ljubav* believing myself oh so much,
so when I say that I of course don't want to, that I of course won't do it any more,
that I in other or still other words never did anyway.
I see her across the city, if in this city one could see anything,
I hear her, hear her rasp, I hear her long 9 as there's a tickle in her throat but wants to when
she wants to sleep
she cloaks herself all limber she is motionlessly wakeful
she recalls how she says *all our lives in front of us*, she believes it, eternal,
but a beginning nowhere to be found.
we totally grasp eternity, distances apart together I see
her slender beautiful emaciated evaporated
in this city scattered all across the city on the ground balancing on a pea
worrying in the middle of a precipice would she to fall would I catch her, *ljubav* doesn't care,
life as a misunderstanding.

Translated by Jernej Županič.

From the poetry book (book-length poem) *To telo, pokončno* (engl. This Body, Standing)

auntie yanya had been slaughtered. they came at the break of dawn

and ploughed into her.

a conflict *a natural process* they thought to themselves

when heading for her

collaterality = the body belonging to the world

and

in case you're wondering

where everyone else had been

[illegible]

if you're wondering where they had been

and to a lesser extent why

where $\tilde{A} = A - \frac{1}{n} \mathbf{1} \mathbf{1}^T$ instead of A

why they had been where everyone else had been

they were on the battlefronts

modern dungeons

that's what they'd say

an abundance of *don't move*

dragging with them their every possession every possession every last of them

their every possession appallingly theirs

so much of everything a heavy burden real battles

their every possession every single one their every possession

except for her

the prize of subjectivation a curse a cyclical character

affiliation repulsion she's gonna be sorry

herself alone alone alone in the presence of starving gazes

the glow of beheading the vaudeville of spurting

except for her

and they keep telling it to this very day

if someone asks them yet it's not spoken about

silence erases evanesces

doesn't it?

say those who prefer not to say it

they can be heard if you're close enough

which i strongly advise against

they say she didn't want to go

that she refused to be taken away

she refused to

can you imagine?

the height of haughtiness

over my dead body

she said

and they said

sure

and they claim to this day

she did want

to go

that she would have to be crazy

to allow them

to leave her behind

that she surely wasn't because

can you imagine

a family a tradition.

this is what claim the prophets of conspiracy

the charlatans of actuality

unlikelihood

=

their grain of truth

while the body murmuring

yet another bare branch

if it goes

it breaks

so be it let her stay let something or at least someone maybe her

stay

the prospect of release: without her less trouble

she'd slow down their withdrawal

to a safer place

a capricious kind they'd say

no reason for us to doubt

while impossible to ask them

should this cross somebody's mind

but it doesn't

since they themselves

who'd passed her to the slaughter

were slaughtered.

then in the melting gravel of the velebit mountains
I come across a shoe a pain dampener an attempt at
a non-escape a wrong decision the only possible one
and a pacifier someone's still there auntie was
eventually burnt down something motionless in the well
in between the watermelons in the cold nothing reeks
an awe burnt down but doesn't reek the agitation
of potentiality these slaughtered women used to love me
i wonder how things would've turned out had they known
my heart would burn for women.

Translated by Andrej Peric.

You

Commissioned by the poet Dejan Koban for his poetry tattoo project; published in his book Pre_več (Goga, 2023)

who are staring too far or
here too close

shame
on you



Translators

Dr Barbara Jurša is a translator, poet, and professor of English at the University of Primorska (Slovenia). Her translations include works by Brane Mozetič, Jana Putrle Srdić, and Yolanda Castano.

Andrej Peric (1979–2024) was an award-winning literary translator from English, French, Slovak, and Slovene poetry into English. He has published more than 20 book-length translations (by British, Australian, French, Slovak, Maltese, and Slovenian authors) and compiled 5 anthologies (poetry and prose). He was a two-time winner of the Lirikon International Award for Best Journal Translations of Slovenian poetry into English. In the US, he has published three books by Slovenian authors. In 2018, he was nominated for the AATSEEL Prize for Best Translation into English.

Jernej Županič (1982) holds degrees in philosophy and comparative literature and works as a translator and proofreader. He has translated the works of Jonathan Franzen, David F. Wallace, Taiye Selasi, Dave Eggers, Lydia Davis, and C.D. Wright. His translations of the latter three brought him the Radojka Vrančič Award for best young literary translator.