



Love is a Place

Joan Margarit

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Joan Margarit is one of Spain's major modern writers. Born in 1938, he worked as an architect and first published his work in Spanish, but for the past four decades has become known for his mastery of the Catalan language, and is now, arguably, Spain's most widely acclaimed contemporary poet. The melancholy and candour of his poetry show his affinity with Thomas Hardy, whose work he has translated. In the much praised *Tugs in the Fog: Selected Poems* (Bloodaxe Books, 2006), Joan Margarit evoked the Spanish Civil War and its aftermath, the harshness of life in Barcelona under Franco, and grief at the death of a beloved handicapped daughter, reminding us that it is not death we have to understand but life. In his later collection, *Strangely Happy* (2011), he builds an architecture of the human spirit out of the unpromising materials of self-doubt, despair and death. Now, in *Love Is a Place*, which brings together his three most recent collections, he finds himself face to face with the prospect of his own death, while rediscovering love. 'Death is the final solitude,' he writes in 'On the ground', but the image at the end of the poem is one of hope, of love, and of home, not 'the skeleton with the scythe that Durer engraved' but 'a brightly-lit window in a dark street.' The three collections see him moving from despair to self-knowledge, confronting his old demons with honesty and courage. Love, it seems, is not after all 'hard or far away', nor was the signal lost, because, in the poet's words, 'Love is a place. / It endures beyond everything: from there we come. / And it's the place where life remains.'

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