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pro kultura magazin pro culture magazine

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Jüri Talvet

Poems from:

Isegi vihmal on hing / Jüri Perler. Oo Hamlet, mu vend! (Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, 2010)

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HONESTLY – I DON'T UNDERSTAND. YOUR SON
you said had become a famous scientist
in America, but now it appears
that all those years of absence he hasn't
done anything other than catch rats
in the New York subway, for lab cats
who in Descartes' opinion have no soul
(cf Kundera, *The unbearable lightness*

of being, trans. L. Metsar, Monokkel
1992, p 174). As for me, I send a letter
to James Merrill with thanks for “Laboratory
Poem” which I translated in New York,
in drizzle that fell from dawn to dusk.
(Even rain has soul) In the land
of the dead I will always win friends.

OH THOSE YELLOW BUTTERFLIES IN THE GARDEN
in Pärnu at the home of childhood, where summer
lasts twelve months a year!
One lighted on my palm, how bold.
We looked at it with curiosity, I, my
mother and my little daughter – all of us
light-footed, all of the same age,

witnessing with a single heart:

Look, the butterfly has a lion's face!

NE KOPIRATI

AT THE BOUNDARY BETWEEN

Tartu province and Viljandi

a stand of pines offers

from marsh-edge to highway

ten extended arms:

People, why do you not

wait for us –

people?

NEKOPIRATI

APPARENTLY A MIRROR NEURON

in the brain makes a human
even more ape than an ape. It
does not manifest as male
or female. It's good that
dark corners of the neuron
yet remain, to hide
the tiny blind trembling
animal named Aidos.

NEKOPIRATI

For Vanesa

YOU GIVE ME THE GREATEST POET
of your country, Prešeren – in English.

I give you the greatest poet
of my country, Liiv – in English.

The world would never understand
their greatness anyway. It is enough,

if you believe in it and I believe in it
at this moment amid history's wind and dust,

in the quiet shadow of lindens' leaves and poplars',
in Lipica, amid their friendly whispers.

FAITH IN MARKETS LOST! IN NOVEMBER 2008 AMERICAN

salesmen offer luxury cars, two for the price of one. The

walls of banks are of glass, but bankers shuffle in a circle

in closed rooms without windows, they are dizzy, *faith*

in money lost! The chief terrorist "Txapote" calls

their judges fascists. Very young students rush

to bloody themselves against steel helmets,

batons and shields, against laws laid down

in Bologna by ministers' neckties. *Faith lost!* Bankers

and ministers shuffle in a circle in a prison yard.

The world is a prison without love! Calderón knew it

but added nevertheless:

In me love has been my soul.

EL CID'S SWORD STRIKES TO RIGHT
and left at the heads of Moors
and Christians, wins bread for the daughters
of *Campeador*, who now, at the start
of the 21st century, cower between
Puerta del Sol and Gran Vía, lean dark
small Elviras and Sols catch in the net
of their dark glances Christians and Moors –
men – on the right and the left, shivering
as they earn their bread in Europe's midwinter:
Oh father, oh father, why did you leave us!

NEKOPIRATI

THROUGH LINDEN LEAVES THE SUN
sprinkles gold on one's head.

Where green ends
desert begins.

The sea's aching clarity.

(English translation by H. L. Hix; hhix@uwyo.edu)

NE KOPIRATI

Poet, essayist, literary critic, translator, university professor.

Jüri Talvet was born on December 17, 1945 in Pärnu, Estonia. He graduated from the faculty of philology (specializing in English) from the University of Tartu. He received his PhD degree in Western literatures from Leningrad / Saint Petersburg University (1981). Since 1992 he is Chairing Professor (of world literature) at Tartu University.

He made his debut with a book of poems, *Awakenings* (Tallinn: Eesti Raamat, 1981). He has published dozens of essays and articles on world literature, which have appeared in: *A Travel to Spain* (Tallinn: Loomingu Raamatukogu, 1985), *From Spain to America* (Tallinn: Eesti Raamat, 1992), *The Spanish Spirit* (Tartu: Ilmamaa, 1995), *American Notes and Contemplations of Estonia* (Tartu: Ilmamaa, 2000), *Symbiotic Culture* (Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, 2005), *The Irrefutable Border* (Tartu: Ilmamaa, 2005), etc.

He has been awarded for his work a number of prizes and distinctions: Juhan Smuul Annual Prize of Literature (in essay, 1986), Juhan Liiv Poetry Prize (1997), Ivar Ivask Memorial Prize of Essay and Poetry (2002), the Order of Isabel the Catholic (for his activity in Spanish studies, 1992), the White Star Order of Estonian Republic (2001), The Medal of Tartu (2008), etc. In 2011 he became an Active Member of Academia Internationala Orient-Occident (Romania).

He has taken part in important festivals and congresses: the World Congress of P.E.N. in Guadalajara, Mexico (1996), International Poetry Festival Druskininkai Fall (Lithuania, 2006), Barcelona International Poetry Festival (Spain, Catalonia, 2008), Medellín International Poetry Festival (Colombia, 2008), Vilenica International Literature Festival (Slovenia, 2008), Passa Porta Literature Festival (Brussels, 2009), International Poetry Festival in La Paz and Oruro (Bolivia, 2010), International Poetry Festival Curtea de Arges Poetic Nights (Romania, 2010, 2011), Moncayo International Poetry Festival (Spain, Aragon, 2010), etc.

Of his essay books, the following have appeared abroad: *A Call for Cultural Symbiosis* (Toronto, Canada: Guernica, 2005), *Un enfoque simbiótico de la cultura posmoderna* (Granada, Spain: Comares, 2009), *Una crida a la simbiosi cultural* (Valencia, Spain: Institut Alfons el Magnànim, 2009).

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