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Jüri Talvet

Poems from:

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

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!



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?

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.



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.

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 nevetherless:

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

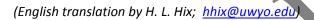
as they earn their bread in Europe's midwinter:

Oh father, oh father, why did you leave us!

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

Where green ends desert begins.

The sea's aching clarity.



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 (Boliva, 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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