

*A Drama of a Philosophy of Senses:  
Jüri Talvet's Poetry*

Jüri Talvet is an Estonian poet. It means, as it does for all poets with this definition, that he writes poetry in Estonian. He was born on the 17<sup>th</sup> of December in 1945 in the Southwestern Estonian seaside city of Pärnu. Since 1974, he has worked at the department of comparative literature of Tartu University, which is Estonia's oldest and most prestigious university. A professor and head of the department since 1992, his activities have included lecturing, supervising and reviewing degree writings, and numerous other academic, and literary, duties. For decades, he has translated a wide range of classic literary works, both verse and prose, poems, fiction and plays, from Western languages, especially Spanish and English, and also such notable minority languages of the Iberian peninsula as Galician and Catalan. Always devoted to outstanding artistic qualities, he has chosen the kind of kernel texts of the particular cultures that would best widen the outlook of his native readers, and with his methods of versification, and syntactic, lexical and stylistic choices, he has always aimed at his translations becoming landmarks of lasting value.

Translating into Estonian, and writing poems in Estonian, is an unrewarding job. The better its quality, the more unrewarding, in material terms and in terms of reception, it is. The author may put his mind's best powers into it, and all he earns, besides moderate payment, is one shortish review in a magazine or paper. He or she is largely ignored even in their own tiny society. Since their language is an undecipherable gibberish everywhere abroad, no one can even potentially appreciate their efforts and achievements there. The best an Estonian poet or translator can do for foreign readers is to mention their works in their CVs. For a lecturer and professor like Talvet, the extra reward lies in the interest and respect of his devoted students, who are mostly the ones in Estonia who form the happy exception to people's ignorance of him.

If the poet and translator can do nothing to broaden the field of reception of their medium of expression, which is their native language, they can enrich the contents of their writings with the poetic treasures and fine wisdom from all around the world. If they, like Talvet, combine the receptivity to works of other searching spirits from other cultures, with recollections, musings, and images particular to their own individual existence, the fruits can by no means called provincial.

Talvet's eight collections of poetry include *Äratused* (*Awakening*, 1981), *Ambur ja karje* (*The Archer and the Cry*, 1986), *Hinge kulg ja kliima üllatused* (*The Soul's Progress and Surprises of Climate*, 1990), *Eesti eeleogia ja teisi luuletusi* (*Estonian Elegy and Other Poems*, 1997), *Kas sul viinamarju ka on?* (*Do You Have Also Grapes?*, 2001), *Unest, lumest* (*From Dreams, from Snow*, 2005), *Silmad peksavad une seinu* (*Eyes Beat the Walls of Sleep*, 2008) and *Isegi vihmal on hing / Oo Hamlet, mu vend!* (*Even the Rain Has a Soul / O Hamlet, My Brother!*, 2010). In addition, there are two English collections: *Estonian Elegy*, 2008, and *Of Snow, of Soul*, 2010, and two Spanish ones: *Elegia estonia y otros poemas*, 2002, and *Del sueño, de la nieve*, 2010.

The poetry of Talvet's youth, in his first two collections, is shyishly passionate and Platonic in imagery. *Awakening* consists of three parts, the first of which, "Puudutused" ("Touches"), comprises nine poems written between 1972 and 1976, and the second, "Puhtused" ("Purities"), written in 1977, includes a single long poem, fully rhymed and in thirteen stanzas. The latter might be seen as the poet's early manifesto, expressing Platonic strivings for an ideal of love and enlightening named *luum*, uniting the meanings of the Latin *lumen*, light, and English *love*, pronounced in the Northern English accent. It is in the third and main part of the book, "Ainsal kevadel" ("An Only Spring"), written in 1978 and 1979, that the reader can extensively learn of the young poet's talents and peculiarities. By and large, the poems divide into two types: long poems with long lines, dense with associative nature imagery, and short poems with short lines, mostly about love and death, also rich in natural references, and employing two-syllable assonance rhymes. In the first type, somewhat irresolute endeavours to follow the bold

paces of Whitman may be detected; but closer to home, they may resemble the long periods in similar poems by the Estonian poet Jaan Kaplinski (born in 1941), in his collection *Tolmust and värvidest* (*From Dust and Colours*, 1967). The assonance rhymes in the second type, used with such scope and deliberation, are a phenomenon almost entirely new in the Estonian poetry of that time. That the writer has grown suspicious of the rhyming potentials of Estonian seems evident even in the first collection. His resorting to assonance rhymes instead certainly has to do with his academic schooling in the Spanish language and literature, whose classic verse methods he was intent on introducing into his native poetry. Even more so, on a more emotional level, the levity of assonance rhymes may have helped his inspiration soar into freer expanses, expressing his devotion to the spirit of the long and proud history of Latin American liberation movements, which was especially wanted in the early 1980s, a period of intellectual lethargy and depression, ethnic and cultural repression, and political stagnation in Estonia. Jaan Kaplinski in his review in the Tartu newspaper *Edasi* suggested that Talvet's spirituality in these poems may be closer even to the early Provençal troubadours, than to Iberian poets (1982: 5) (Kaplinski has translated classic verse from Spanish and French). Quite a few of those early poems leave a poignant impression with their laconicism and the balance of sound and silence in an imagined dialogue.

NO MORE WORDS

In my protective paper gown  
I am following you. Everything is still fine  
but there is a quiet voice behind the spell.

I have no more words.

The eyes turn away.  
A sigh breaks out of the two hearts.  
The eyes meet again.

I have no words any more!

The sheet is torn. Fragile lips.

A bare heart on the verge of breaking.  
The purity is in our eyes now.

No more words are needed.  
(*Awakening* 51, trans. L. Pilter)

The elaborate poetic Platonism, and search for fresh rhymes, continued in *The Archer and the Cry*. It is appropriate to call that collection Talvet's first maturity, as it already shows him the man of learning, exquisitely employing rare potentials of his native language, a master of expressing delicate perception. He already responds to voices from world literature (a motto from J. R. Jiménez, a poem called "Faust"), like García Lorca, he sings of the moon; he writes of the birth of his son and the innocent gaze of his little daughter. The four sonnets in the book, "Towering", "Union", "Departure", and "Sonnet", are Petrarchan in form (with the rhyme scheme *abba abba cdc dcd*) and feeling, and of notable density of palpable thought. The collection was gravely misread and misprized by its only reviewer, Ilse Lehiste in *World Literature Today*, who even doubted if there was enough internal support for the title of the collection (1988: 164). On careful reading one can find that while the Archer probably stands for the classic deity of love with arrows, or any symbolic figure aiming at high goals, the Cry quite evidently is of sexual liberation, understood in the pure sense of a mind and a body being united in the self-enforcement of their timely existence in the universe – a sense of the Latin American interpretation of *telurismo*, a concept also widely relied on in Talvet's theoretical writings.

#### UNREASONABLY AND WITH CERTAINTY

The part of body conquered by reason  
after cruel battles  
with life with a woman with love  
after centuries of asceticism  
and the steel clamps of hours pressed  
into the indivisibly pure flesh of nature  
is called civilisation

(there have been very pure longings  
 blood has been friends with reason  
 the soul with the body and the heaven with the earth  
 as in the first awakening  
 in new love  
 in fragile poetry)

But the blind half of the body is silent  
 from time to time breaking out in the nightly stream of semen  
 overwhelming like an ocean  
 the thought which has overreached its limits  
 the ideal which has pined into a formula or a command  
 a signed piece of paper  
 the whole human revolution  
 which has lost its heart  
 the succession of words and phrases clinking empty  
 waking up a new flesh  
 a dream of love

(self-confident self-deceivers  
 who betray love  
 clinging with their slippery fingers  
 to their soul turned into a dish of meat  
 let them know:  
 there have been very pure longings  
 and the human heart will go on beating  
 by the trees forever)

(*The Archer and the Cry* 36–37, trans. L. Pilter)

With the 1990s, political independence came to Estonia, but the country's literary culture remained almost as marginalised and unrecognised in the world context as earlier. Talvet has tried other solutions besides the viable Spanish-American connections in the spiritual emancipation of an Estonian poet from the invisible shackles that writing in a minor and nearly unaffiliated language imposes on its lyrical talents. Having introduced more consciousness of societal developments in the contemporary era into his *The Soul's Progress and Changes of Climate*, Talvet achieved his full maturity as a poet with the fourth collection, *Estonian Elegy and Other Poems*, in 1997. In it, the spectrum of intercultural allusions has

opened into a spacious spiritual domain. The Irish monks in the first millennium of our era, the first writers in the Latin-dominated Europe who began composing poems in their vernacular, would have been Barbarians for the Greek and the Roman authors. In the renewed voice which Talvet found in the *Estonian Elegy and Other Poems*, he has been writing with a full awareness of the *terra incognita* his native literature, because of the small spread and unfamiliar character of its language, still is for those major, but often blindfolded forces that fix the international public attitude to individual literary accomplishments. Aware that the ethnic and linguistic prejudices, the cultural partiality, the frequent disfavour and the disinterest in voices from minor cultures, may go on for centuries, he at times identifies with the early Celtic bards and scholars whose works, unknown outside narrow circles, persisted throughout the Dark Ages.

### OSSIAN'S SONGS

3

To the nicked handrails in the Amsterdam airport  
 one wished to shout:  
 „Answer! Be alive!  
 The longing at the end of the 20th century to see  
     beautiful people  
 murderously burdens (as AIDS burdensomely  
     murders).  
 What 500-year-old nodule on nosebridge, what  
     furrow  
 between the brows in London's Queensway  
 hides from the eyes of Iseult, Laura, Francesca?  
 A voice at any rate remains communication.  
 Everything is a sign, every branch.  
 Do not expect the crowd to wait for your words,  
 when on the counters every crust of beauty,  
 every smile, every frail ray of memory stands exposed.  
 What do you desire, soul, Ossian?  
 On a high rock, you are no higher than others.  
 Listen then to the inward forest you carry.

There from leaves is freed, from the day's fatigue,  
 at the moment of departure – *come then, stay,*  
*be always* – the voice of Iseult.  
 There from moss, from separation, flow into you,  
 faithful – *yes, everything*  
*is as you say* – Francesca's green eyes.

(*Estonian Elegy* 58 – 59, trans. H. L. Hix)

With the *Estonian Elegy and Other Poems* came a broadening of topics, horizons, and associations, all of which can hardly be included in this essay. The towering achievement of “Estonian Elegy“, the longest of Talvet's poetic works, which introduces the collection, centers on the tragic wreck of the ferry *Estonia* in the Baltic Sea in 1994, that claimed the lives of 852 people aboard. However, alongside with commemorating the dead and the lost joy of Estonia's newly-won independence, the poem also, for the first time in Talvet's works and as a rare phenomenon in the literature of the time, suggests deep shadows of sorrow at the evaporating brevity of life's meaningfulness in general. The grief is both global and rooted in Estonia's particular realities. With motions of soul that may recall scenes from classic ancient epics, Talvet depicts scenes from the tragedy in the stormy sea:

All words bore the zero-sign when  
 an Estonian stretched his hand to a drowning Russian,  
 when a dry Swede from his scraggy breast  
 withdraw warmth to tender it to a freezing Estonian.

(*Estonian Elegy* 16, trans. H. L. Hix)

A distantly related motif, the dragging into seas of Laocoön in the *Aeneid* and in the ancient Greek group of marble statues, may resemble the pathetic and grotesquely distorted human figures from the scenes of Dante's *Inferno*. Talvet's visualisation of a tragedy is rather more placid. His picture of a Hell simply lies in the endeavour of a human contact in tragic circumstances. Even being rooted in Estonia may refer to tragic circumstances. As he writes in “Estonian Elegy“, his native country is “where Europe shakes from herself / the omniscient sludge of evenings / and is a child again!” (19) However,



In the second part of the collection, Talvet included a selection of his earlier poetry, with a few poems that had already appeared in his first book. It is tender love poetry with a touch of impressionist airiness, expressing love to a woman, to his own daughter, and certain romantically significant places. Influences of schools of poetry from the Spanish speaking world are eminent. The free and bold associations may resemble García Lorca. But even in those pieces, echoes of ancient Irish verse may be heard, as it was interpreted and transmitted by W. B. Yeats in his youthful works, with imagery bound in poetic formulas both sincere and ingenious. The relation may seem surprising because Talvet has hinted at the need of detachment of Estonian poets from the tradition of late Symbolism (2010: 6). The explanation may lie in that the late Symbolist in early Yeats, as it often is with the most outstanding representatives of any school, at his best moments trespasses the defining features of his classification.

I'll give my hand to a cloud  
to feel a divine kiss.  
I'll give my feet to the sea  
to perceive the purity of traces.  
I'll give my lips to the sun  
to bear the courage of the lightning.  
I'll give my eyes to you  
when my heart goes mad with love.  
(*Estonian Elegy and Other Poems* 129, trans. L. Pilter)

The second lines of these samples employ assonance in end rhymes, which remain untranslated.

You've taken everything from me,  
I will leave in sadness.

The red dawn of your lips  
is a theft of my blood.

The golden throb of your feet  
is a light from my eyes,

the glowing love in your heart  
is the sign of my wounds!

You've taken everything from me,  
I will leave in sadness.

I will join the wounded soul  
in a pure everglade.

(*Estonian Elegy and Other Poems* 124, trans. L. Pilter)

With the first half of *Estonian Elegy and Other Poems*, and in the collections that have followed, free verse became prevalent in Talvet's lyric meditations. Those poems show him as an international courier between a vast variety of contexts, from dream images of family events and of memorable childhood localities through reflective and introspective travel notes from around the globe to major historical and intercultural discourses. His lines of expression have developed into an intertwining of sensually particularised imagery with ideas of aspirations that should guide humankind. Human failings may evoke satire, but the prevalent tone is of quiet musing. The verses, rich in echoes especially from Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, French, British, and German cultures, nearly always engage in a dialogue with either someone personally close or a distant soul-mate. About five of Talvet's poetic personae, often closely bound together in flowing forms, have evolved: 1) a poet of love, 2) a learned scholar, 3) a world traveller, 4) a satirist, 5) a wanderer in dreams.

Notwithstanding the special qualities of Estonian, Talvet's mature free verse poems include pieces that can be translated into English with a levity of form and gravity of content equal to the original, as the following poem for which he won the prestigious Juhan Liiv Poetry Prize of Estonia in 1997 and which has been translated into seventy languages:

## LOVE

is imperative, Kierkegaard  
thought. Better,  
I think, to love  
without imperative.  
Recognition  
soul to soul,  
correspondence  
blood to blood,  
flying  
up or down,  
without knowing  
the destination.

(*Estonian Elegy* 66, trans. H. L. Hix)

By binding a keenness of mind with a misty softness of contemplation, Talvet has achieved a scrupulous level of what might be called a dramatic possibility of his philosophy of senses. Any philosophy of senses entails a metaphysics, and metaphysics is about what one cannot *know* – what either delineates a self-containing reason or what leads to mysticism. There can also be, however, a reconciliation of the two, a world-view relying on rational knowledge and trust in the explicability of causes, which is only the stronger by admitting its limits, beyond which a mystic void lies. The latter it tries to grasp by intuition, the medium of esthetic choices. Such a world-view may be called an enlightened mysticism. In his latest book, the double collection, *Even the Rain Has a Soul / O Hamlet, My Brother!*, which appeared in Tartu in December 2010, Jüri Talvet has presented a duality of enlightened mysticism which gains force by the intense dynamics of an epistemological drama. The lyrical self of the first half of the dual collection is rather like one knows Talvet the author from his previous collections, even more suave, calmer, engaging mostly in dream conversations with his dead and living friends and family members:

IS IT LAURA'S NIGHTSHIRT, YOU ASKED,  
 Johanna, my old and gentle housemistress,  
 although you had wandered to the land of the dead  
 long before Laura was born.

Somewhere out there, all our deeds  
 are known. Even your worrying  
 about somebody who is coming afterwards –  
 if she has got a nightshirt – kindness –

to pull on to keep warm at night.

*(Even the Rain Has a Soul 31, trans. L. Pilter)*

In poems like these, the author is recalling times past in a dream world, which is truer than the factual present life, a “double-world” in which only, “voices become / eternal and mild” (Rilke 1977: 101).

I'LL MEET YOU AGAIN, JOHANNA,  
 old housemistress, kindly  
 you feed Laura  
 and Marta-Liisa and even me –

with semolina mousse and milk. Then  
 we are joined by a dog, cannot recall  
 its name, but I was there when it died  
 (how it flinched

and I couldn't help crying!).  
 Let it be the same Bobi, who  
 helped grandpa and me find  
 the way out of the woods

when we had lost our cow at Mõisaküla  
 and had got lost ourselves as well.  
*Whether what is is what it is  
 or is not, who cares?*

Under the approving glance  
 of the old lady

I place a plate with semolina mousse  
for Bobi on the floor, my heart

rejoicing because of Bobi's  
and Johanna's glee and for  
us being just what we are  
in the lifedream at that moment.

(*Even the Rain Has a Soul* 32, trans. L. Pilter)

The author's lyrical double in the second constituent of that book, Jüri Perler, on the other hand, is rather a step backward from the calmness of a poet's late maturity. It is indeed as if Shakespeare, after creating Prospero, whose forgiving cleverness Talvet's own voice resembles, had returned to the ethical restlessness of his youth and given a new life to Hamlet in the rash, trenchant, indignant – but also irresistibly funny – outpourings of cynical scepticism in a lot of of the poems attributed to Perler. Talvet's double, like Hamlet, is a man of Renaissance enlightenment outraged and out-sensed by what is unacceptable, because it is incomprehensible, in his ethical universe. His bursting anger has a ring of Rabelaisian laughter to it. He is provocative, and has entered the realm of pure esthetic legitimacy, disregarding the ethical considerations which he thinks he had been faithfully following but had been deprived of, in the confrontation with evil, and a mystical injustice. Since the duality enfolding that new, rather Pessoaan, lyrical character, is dramatically so vigorous and effective, the rest of this essay will be devoted to insights into the recent double collection, with hindsight into the preceding collections of the previous decade, that possess related characteristics.

Perler's diction doubtless resembles *Hamlet*, and also to some extent, certain of Shakespeare's comedies, with its self-conscious witticisms and puns, and leaps from sour, muted mumblings into bright, sensual, often rather frivolous turns of imagery:

Eventually Logos married  
a spinster called  
Scientia.

(Oh the sweet embrace of the thought,

light skipping of legs!)

(Posthumous dedication to Juan José Arreola)

(*O Hamlet, My Brother!* 8, trans. L. Pilter)

Hamlet was a murderer (the killing of Polonius). Perler's words can nearly kill as well. Under his own name, Talvet, like the Prospero of *The Tempest*, is enacting dreams. Dreams do not kill. Prospero has said: "We are such stuff / As dreams are made of, and our little life / Is rounded with a sleep!" (Act 4, Scene 2; Shakespeare 1975: 17). This is how Talvet's collection ends:

Do what only you can do. Do not waste the time  
which is only yours. Gather the beauty  
generously sprinkled over you by many a day.

Only you  
know the answer.

(*Even the Rain Has a Soul* 68, trans. L. Pilter)

A self-containment like this seems to re-echo the oft-quoted passage of Ezra Pound's famous Canto LXXXI:

What thou lovest well remains,  
the rest is dross  
What thou lov'st well shall not be reft from thee  
What thou lov'st well is thy true heritage

(Pound 1975: 179)

However, through the harsh message of the preceding lines, "Some eyes casting at you / bowie knives other tongues spitting lightning-bolts", Talvet's conclusion forms a link with Perler's collection. At times, beauty can be indeed, like Rainer Maria Rilke wrote, "nothing / but the start of terror we can hardly bear" (Rilke 1977: 5). Beauty can be cruel. The initial impulse of Perler's poems frequently appears to come from a raw beauty, a foulness in a fair appearance. From the terror of beauty, Talvet hides into the lap of the night, into the breath of rain, his dreaming lives being a past turned more real

than the everyday present. “The world is a prison without love,” he quotes Calderón (“*Belief in markets vanished!* In November 2008“). “99.99 percent of population are content with their prison lives,” Perler replies in the poem “Hooooome!” Perler can write mocking satires even at what the common sense hardly finds ridiculous – like the fact that after a highly scientific conference, the participants hunger for a roast meal: “Water / dribbling into the mouth, filling it. / One thought of beef and rabbit then. / One thought of other things no more.” (“*Interfacing sciences with humanities*“). The parodied moralisations in poems like “*Zebra-Crossing*“, “*A Germanic Poet*“, “*Zeus*“, also resemble *Hamlet*. “*Supermarket at Spring*” binds a contemporary satire and a serene tradition of the ancient pastoral:

The lass in the supermarket checkout counter,  
 she isn't Jill, they call her Amaryllis.  
 She's looking after it that every head of cattle  
 might get to the shed at night with a full paunch.  
 But herself, freed from the cashier chain,  
 an alert gazelle in the green meadows of Arcadia,  
 is well aware that her entire body  
 becomes the plunder for cruel arrows of love  
 upon every new return of spring.

(*O Hamlet, My Brother!* 36, trans. L. Pilter)

One of the notable peculiarities of Perler's satire is the startling sincerity it expresses alongside with the coarse jests and apparent pretension, which is often also the case with Hamlet's utterances. “*Supermarket at Spring*” is both a parody and a reanimation of the classical pastoral. It requires a person of Talvet's knowledge and appreciation of classical literature to write like that – in Estonia, the poet and scholar Ülar Ploom (born in 1955) stands the closest to him in this respect. While the initial lines really may have a mocking flavour, the conclusion reaches the pure transparency of the pastoral, reminding the readers that even in the age of global urbanisation and supermarkets, the poetry of the human body has essentially remained unchanged.

Direct political satire (even more precisely associated with the context of *Hamlet*) is involved in the poems “*Britain Is Attacked*“,

“The Prime Minister’s Concern“, “Old Story“, “Troubled Times“, “Kim“, and “A Deportee“. The times really seem out of joint, though the author knows there is nothing new in the sensation. Like Hamlet over Yorick’s skull, Perler ironically ponders at people’s skeletons (“*Comme il faut*“, “Whose Bone-Traces He Does Not Ask for“). The five stanzas of the short ballad “Victory Cross“, on the odyssey of factual mishaps of a controversial patriotic monument made of glass and of an imposing size, erected by the right-wing state government in Tallinn in 2008, possess a quality of repressed comic. The unlucky story is narrated by the Victory Cross itself. The words, the structure of phrases are strongly similar to the 19th century Estonian school of mostly patriotic, and rather naïve, verse, technically inspired by the poetry of Heinrich Heine and full of archaic associations for the modern reader:

Hardly a week has passed  
 when spots are again on my skin.  
 Even the pastor does not know  
 if that is a disease or a sin.

(*O Hamlet, My Brother!* 54, trans. L. Pilter)

The original of the poem employs regular assonance rhymes, doing it with natural smoothness. Jaan Kaplinski in the newspaper *Edasi* in 1982 had expressed scepticism as to whether the Hispanic assonance rhymes really could be adopted in Estonian verse and accepted as actual rhymes by the Estonian readers (1982: 5). Against his doubts, the fluency of the device in this mature poem of Talvet testifies to its successful domestication, showing it already an integral part of Estonian poetic culture, and remarkably expanding the rhyming possibilities. There are inklings of Heine in the satire elsewhere (“A Sestina: an Afterlife Confession of a Canonical Poet“). Arrows of satire fly both at Russia and the US (“Kalashnikov“). Poems like “Look What Happened“, with the scathing joke about the Swedish banker Pengar (the name means Money in Swedish), are rather similar to the socially critical poems of Hando Runnel (born in 1938), like “*Propusk and bumaga*” (Russian for “Permission and

Paper“), published in 1982, which ridiculed the Soviet bureaucracy and earned the author the reputation of an anti-Soviet dissident (Talvet 1999: 211–212). The one but last poem in Perler’s collection, “Evolution“, with its bitter humour at the limits of the human spirit, seems related to the witty paradoxes in the Neo-Darwinist vein of the verse of the Welsh poet John Barnie.

The latest, second collection of Talvet’s poetry that has been translated into English, *Of Snow, of Soul*, by Harvey Lee Hix in cooperation with the author, includes selections from the Estonian collections *Do You Have Also Grapes?*, *From Dreams, from Snow*, and *Eyes Beat the Walls of Sleep*. All those three books are unified poetic wholes, which means that the reader of the English selection may not get a full impression of the originals. The following brief characterisation is written with both the selection and the original collections in mind. In *Do You Have Also Grapes?*, tonalities of Talvet’s early satire prevail, mostly aimed at cultural misperfections. It is, however, also a diary of travels in the European cultural space. *From Dreams, from Snow* brings along an equality in the travel observances in the outer and inner landscapes. Through near oxymorons, the plastic imagery at times reaches highly suggestive points of sensuality, as in the poem “Still I Cannot Get Accustomed“: “Under Mozart’s glance / children skate / through the sun,” or in “Red Wine. 2.“: “The rose is dropping / petals in which the blood / rests absorbed in thoughts / down on the desk“. *Eyes Beat the Walls of Sleep* is the most introspective of the three. With a division into three sections, “A Poet in New York“, “Write a Trace on the Wind“, and “Come to My Memory’s Snow“, the direction is from globality towards domesticity, from expanses into depths. One of the most moving works in this collection is the poem 52, “The wind tugs my sleeve“. A personified breeze, like a compassionate acquaintance, meets the speaker who is in a sulky mood, and breaks him joyous news of childlike serenity with the excited youthful mouth of his own daughter. The terseness and laconicism of that poem, similar to the levity of classic East Asian tradition, also resemble the best achievements of the Estonian Juhan Liiv (1864 – 1913). Almost as suggestive, but much less personal, is the poem 49, “Like a big german wolfhound“. The secret uncertainties about one’s

identity in the Estonian soul are profoundly handled in the poem 54, “Rain sticking to my face“. Its final images point at the dangers of possible disintegration of the spiritual tissues of an Estonian upon meeting the Other, a threat of falling off mentally that already even bruised and shaped the diction of Juhan Liiv:

Rain sticking to my face,  
I am looking for a street,  
a direction, once again  
on a foreign soil.  
Evil worms ringing  
in the brain – a Christmas gift from homeland.

In a big lightened hall  
Germans are playing bridge,  
peace in their hearts: all  
the stones in the pavement  
really in their right places.

Under my feet only,  
they crumble apart,  
scatter up quite asunder!

*(Eyes Beat the Walls of Sleep 68, trans. L. Pilter)*

In the whole third cycle of the collection, the poems 39 – 63, one can notice a closer dialogue with nothingness, with the twilight and darkness of the void, than anywhere else in Talvet's poetry. As in “Estonian Elegy“, the shadows of a deep sorrow dominate. The passing away of the poet's mother is central to that. The cycle is like a descent into an underworld, which is not Hell but the beginning and end of everything, a principle *ex nihilo*, a life-giving Nothing. Like beneath the vaults of a cellar, the lyrical voice reaches a deeper timbre and resonance here.

Christopher Marlowe's Doctor Faustus, by selling his soul to diabolical powers, even if he had high spiritual and intellectual interests in mind, still approached the goals as if with earthly lust, thus closing the (vicious) circle in which an intellect sacrifices its

abilities to the moment's pleasure of "licking the dust" (Santayana 1910: 160). Goethe's *Faust* is driven by striving and aspirations for essentially Platonic pure ideals, which warrants his salvation.

Even in Marlowe, but definitely ever since Goethe, the Faustian character has inspired poets and writers more as denoting an incessant thirst for knowledge and pithy experience, rather than a dubious pact with the negative element of life; for an ever aspiring individual, life itself performs its negations (Santayana 1910: 147 – 149).

Shakespeare was a poetic dramatist with a multitude of characters and stories, a rainbow of sensations. Goethe, who at the beginning of the second part of *Faust*, compared the true image of life to a rainbow, "am farbigen Abglanz", or "light in many-hued reflection" (Goethe 2001: 6), in his great drama created a massive grand narrative of the dynamic potentials and outer limits of the human intellect. The Portuguese author Fernando Pessoa was a lyrical poet who in a non-theatrical counterpart of Shakespeare's work created a drama of lyrical poetry, with its various personifications and a "splintered" *Faust* (his works do include a long piece of verse writing by that title), a (re)spectralised *Faust* that can be seen as a middle solution between Shakespeare's multiplicity and Goethe's centralisation of focus. If one were to reconstruct a Goethean drama out of Shakespeare's works, his character of Faust would probably be Hamlet, and the width and range of colours of Goethe's single great stream of vision would be seen represented by the variety of spirits, led by Ariel, who serve Prospero in his forced island exile. To further aspirations inspired by such spirits, mostly the souls of his beloved poets, or the living or the dead loved ones in his family, Talvet is also rising in his recent poems.

TO THE HEIGHTS AND DEPTHS  
of your multiple voices,  
Fernando Pessoa,  
I am flying at a wind speed.  
Towards the fifth empire.

You have to practise  
 the opening accord of the piano concert  
 of the era of world peace,  
 little Marta-Liisa.  
 No time left  
 just for growing up!

(*Even the Rain Has a Soul* 18, trans. L. Pilter)

Among the otherwise heavy satires of Perler's collection, there is a gentle rhymed poem in the sonnet form dedicated to "the Book", whose death the present harsh rule of "hypervirility" (2010: 56) would seem to entail. Perler, however, predicts a revival for the book by the replacement of the Trinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost with a livelier trinity of the Mother, the Child, and Love, "truer than the stern science, truer than business vigour", "more persistent than truth" (56). This divination may be about the fulfilment of the Faustian "ever-feminine" that the wide spectrum of voices, modulated to various personal aspects in Talvet's poetry, and the Faustian Hamlet in the persona of Jüri Perler are striving for.

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