

HỮU THỈNH

VIETNAM (1942–)

LANGUAGE: VIETNAMESE

HỎI

Tôi hỏi đất: Đất sống với đất như thế nào?
—Chúng tôi tôn cao nhau.

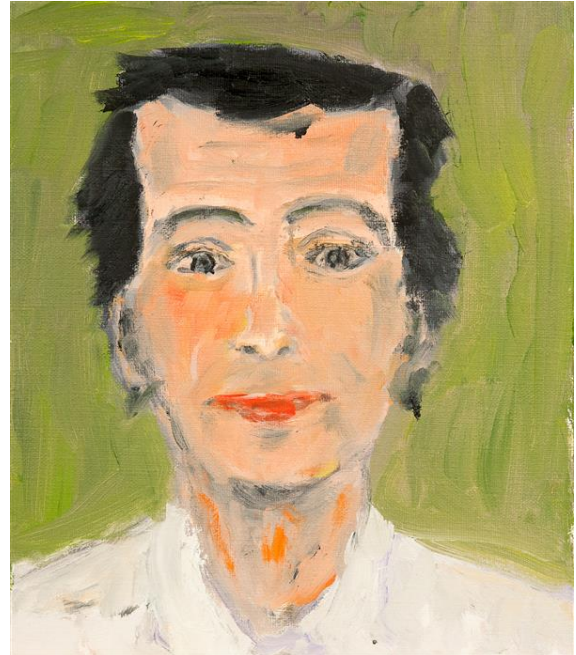
Tôi hỏi nước: Nước sống với nước như thế nào?
—Chúng tôi làm đầy nhau.

Tôi hỏi cỏ: Cỏ sống với cỏ như thế nào?
—Chúng tôi đan vào nhau
Làm nên những chân trời.

Tôi hỏi người:
—Người sống với người như thế nào?

Tôi hỏi người:
—Người sống với người như thế nào?

Tôi hỏi người:
—Người sống với người như thế nào?



Hữu Thỉnh was born on a farm in the Vĩnh Phúc province of northern Vietnam. During the Vietnam War (1955–1975), Thỉnh served as a tank driver and a colonel in the North Vietnamese Army. After the war he became a journalist. Fueled by his experiences in the war, he turned to writing poetry to express his feelings and insights. He prefers writing free-style poetry because it is not bound by the rules that govern other forms of poetry. He uses words to paint vivid and clear pictures of his emotions. Vietnamese American translator Nguyen Qui Duc explains that Thỉnh and other Vietnamese poets wanted “to portray Vietnam as not only a war, but a culture and a people—full of passion and flaws and conflict and love.”*

* Nguyen Qui Duc, *Where the Ashes Are: The Odyssey of a Vietnamese Family* (Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 2009).

TRANSLATOR'S GLOSSARY		
WORD	DEFINITION	POSSIBLE SYNONYMS
chân trời (n.)	the lines at which the earth's surface and the sky appear to meet	horizons, skylines
chúng tôi (pron.)	used by a speaker to refer to himself or herself and one or more other people considered together	we
cỏ (n.)	vegetation consisting of typically short plants with long narrow leaves, growing wild or cultivated on lawns and pasture	grass, grassland, lawn, sod
đan vào (v.)	to join, fasten, or repair using a needle and thread	sew, weave, stitch, intertwine
đất (n.)	the third planet from the sun	earth, planet, land
hỏi (v.)	to seek information; make a request or require something	ask, asking, question, questioning, inquiring
làm đầy (v.)	to put someone or something into a space or container so that it is completely, or almost completely, full	fill, fill up
làm nên (v.)	to form something by putting parts together or combining substances; to construct; to create	to create, to make, to construct, to build
người (n.)	a human being of either gender; a person	person, human, man
nhau (adv.)	in proximity to another thing, person, or people	together, with each other, with one another
như thế nào (adv.)	in what way or manner; by what means	how?, in what way?, to what extent?
những (art.)	denoting one or more people or things already mentioned or assumed to be common knowledge	the
nước (n.)	transparent liquid that forms the seas, lakes, rivers, and rain; the basis of the fluids of living organisms	water
sống với (v. + prep.)	lives with something or someone	lives with, resides with, exists with

WORD	DEFINITION	POSSIBLE SYNONYMS
tôi (pron.)	referring to oneself	I
tôn cao (v.)	to hold someone or something in high regard	honor, respect, admire, revere

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

PHRASE BY PHRASE

Hỏi _____

Tôi hỏi đất: Đất sống với đất như thế nào? _____

—Chúng tôi tôn cao nhau. _____

Tôi hỏi nước: Nước sống với nước như thế nào? _____

—Chúng tôi làm đầy nhau. _____

Tôi hỏi cỏ: Cỏ sống với cỏ như thế nào? _____

—Chúng tôi đan vào nhau _____

Làm nên những chân trời. _____

Tôi hỏi người: _____

—Người sống với người như thế nào? _____

Tôi hỏi người: _____

—Người sống với người như thế nào? _____

Tôi hỏi người: _____

—Người sống với người như thế nào? _____

REFLECTING AND FINDING MEANING

Group Member Names:

Date: _____

Pick a scribe for the group, and work together to answer the questions.

What are the best parts of this translation, and why do you think they are good?

What elements of the original poem did you lose in the translation? What did you manage to keep?

Did you achieve something new with your translation, and if so, does it make sense in the poem or not?
