

# Poetry section

Edited by **Victor Postnikov**

Victor is a poet, essayist and translator based in Kiev, Ukraine.

**Special note:** The poetry section for this issue has been produced under extraordinarily challenging conditions by Victor Postnikov, from a temporary residence in Krakow, Poland. The editorial collective of *The Ecological Citizen* wholeheartedly salute his courage and thank him for his dedication.

Life far exceeds humans. For millennia, eco-poets have understood it as a far greater enterprise. In their poetry, we can hear the voices of those who came before us and those who live alongside us. Now, however, they face extinction and die in silence, deafened by the roar of civilization. The time has come to renew the old understanding that all life, including humanity, speaks a common language. Thus, the mission of ecocentric poetry, or ecopoetry, is to help us empathize with non-human entities, be they a whale, a tree or a mountain. For we are all kin. Through metaphor and imagery, it speaks directly to our hearts and genes. We begin to realize that we have evolved together and share a common fate.

CLASSIC

War

(Excerpt from *Ways of Cain*)

Maximilian Voloshin

1.

*Peace lasted long. The nations prospered  
And were extremely satisfied.  
Yet, now and then,  
After exchanging glances,  
They'd pounce upon the weakest  
And devoured;  
Then moved back, growling.  
Overall,  
The world was rolling normal:  
The trillions of wheels rotated hammers,  
Guns being machined;  
The chemists worked to get more toxic matter;  
The scientists were busy with machines  
Of mass destruction;  
Politicians crept*

*Over maps for colonizing markets;  
The thinkers praised eternal peace on Earth,  
While women swayed in pliant tangos  
Displaying powdered flesh; it seemed,  
The cultural manometer attained  
Its apogee.*

2.  
*Then, from the space,  
A voice was heard, proclaiming:  
“Time to sharpen out the hatred  
Of the war!  
Because men mounted the thrones,  
Empowered demons,  
Released the hidden fire to the world;  
Because men bridled the neutrality of heavens,  
Because the freedom of the air was spoiled,  
Because the greediness was turned into the profit,  
I free the demons from obedience to men,  
And chaos of the substance –  
From the music!  
I order them to be the masters of the world  
Until the people conquer them again,  
By overcoming arrogance and hatred...”*

3.  
*Now Demon scorned and laughed  
And Babylon damnation  
Disaffirmed,  
So languages cohered into a common,  
But hopelessly distorted speech,  
The meaning was confused.  
The war was chosen as the means  
To cope with cruelty;  
The martyrs multiplied  
The lie with their truths;  
And Wisdom, shamefully undressed,  
Like whore, caressed the soldiers.  
Reason swam in blood,  
So nothing left to do for men  
But kill.*

4.  
*I saw it all: the heaven’s door unleashed  
In Lion constellation,  
And the demons*

*Rushed to the Earth,  
Forsaking their homes;  
The people crowded the river valleys,  
Depicting States.  
They dug the trenches for the snakes,  
They pastured monsters,  
Being at a time,  
The pastors and the meal.*

5.  
*Time seemed to topple over,  
As the world  
Sank into dark  
Oblivion of the Past;  
Huge vermins crept from slime,  
The iron spiders swarmed,  
The serpents swallowed lightings,  
And dragons  
Belched the shafts of fire;  
In the seas, the fish  
Was spawning deadly roe;  
While in the sky,  
The feathered lizards  
Blocked the shining sun,  
The monstrous bugs  
Left larva in men's bodies:  
The hordes of devil's fiends  
Equipped with hatred, anger,  
Derived from men,  
Stung, clawed and chewed;  
While cities spun,  
And milled selected grains of firstings  
For Demon's meal;  
And nations danced in ruins -  
World has never seen such frenzied  
Dance of Death.*

6.  
*More! More! All seemed to crave for more...  
Then new call was proclaimed:  
"Down with the war of tribes, the armies and the fronts:  
Long live the civic war!"  
And armies mixed their ranks, and kissed  
The enemies; then rushed  
Onto civilians whom they chopped,  
Beat, shot, hung, tortured, took the scalps,*

*Carved belts, polluted churches,  
Ruined the stocks,  
Spoiled ploughs, cattle, and the wheat,  
Deserted villages and ate  
The flesh of children hunger-stricken.  
The plague arrived at last...*

7.  
*The sightless times began.  
Earth seemed a wide and spacious place,  
But yet there was no room  
For people in the deserts;  
They were conspiring new machines  
To start a war again;  
Thus nothing had been learned  
From massacres  
Of passing generations.*

Translated by VI Postnikov.

**Note:** The epic poem *Ways of Cain*, from which the above is excerpted, was written in the 1920s during the Russian Civil War.

CLASSIC

### A hut

Taras Shevchenko

*She would not pray for me,  
She did not bow;  
My mother simply  
Sang:  
“Let him be good,  
Let him be grown!”  
And I have grown  
sufficient  
to pray God  
But not to prosper  
On my own.  
It would be better  
Not to live  
Or just be drown –  
I wouldn’t’ve had to curse God  
On my own.*

*While I was humble,  
asking God for almost naught:  
a forest hut,  
two poplars*

*nearby,  
 and my poor girl  
 Oksanochka to hug,  
 To sit together on a hill  
 And watch the Dnieper wide  
 and meadows' golden light,  
 And high raised graves, –  
 To see and contemplate:  
 When they were ever dug?  
 And who was buried there ?  
 To quietly sing – the two of us –  
 A sad and ancient tune  
 About the hetman-knight.  
 And then descend  
 Into the night  
 Till dark  
 enfolds us  
 And the world's asleep,  
 And crescent rises bright.  
 We'd watch all this, and pray  
 And talk and silently  
 Go to our hut.*

*You God give gardens  
 to the rich  
 and palaces on high;  
 The rich, being ravenous and fat,  
 Spit on your paradise  
 While we crave for a hut.*

*I prayed for just a tiny hut  
 In your paradise,  
 I prayed and prayed for only this:  
 To die o'er Dnieper on a hill,  
 In a tiny little hut.*

Translated by VI Postnikov.

**Note:** This poem was written in 1850.

CONTEMPORARY

### A Death

Patrick Curry

*A snipe, surprisingly large  
 and alive, crouching in the harsh  
 electric glare of the King's Road, this  
 cold November night.*

*It (he? She?) is bleeding from the bill,  
in startingly red globs. Its eyes  
are clear, but uncomprehending.  
It is dying.*

*Soon it lays its head on one side,  
and the eyes start to close.  
What is this bird, so wild  
and free, doing here?*

*The long, elegant bill, for probing mud;  
the barred brown and beige feathers  
for hiding in grass or reeds;  
the dark liquid eyes*

*Which didn't see the car or bus or building.  
This is what I cannot bear:  
the slaughter of the innocents,  
and our ignorant cruelty.*

CONTEMPORARY

**Pok-A-Tok as an Augury of Escapism and Extinction**  
(After Judy Chicago's *The End: A Meditation on Death and Extinction*)

Tim Fab-Eme

*You're quick to quip we can't stop the Sun  
from scarring our skins when we stay out long.  
I say it's the need we wreath in greed  
that's nauseating us with nemesis now; I say it's  
the wrong way we make our brief stay here,  
digging our living room to fill up a playground.*

*Elon Musk woke from a nightmare and his physician,  
unwilling to call him silly and risk her job,  
prescribed a placebo of sex in Mars to vex  
those unskilled in the phenomenal art of stripping Earth.*

*The Arctic Ocean and its stretched arm of ice  
floe is shrinking fast against the slow polar bear  
straining to leap ahead of our extending warming range;  
every extinction first begins as a meditation on self-love  
and it's not strange that Abu Dhabi is drunk*

*with the wetness of her laps to tow icebergs.  
I love watching the pious play pok-a-tok to placate  
a faraway god with the blood of their kin,  
I love watching the rich raise pyramids to etch*

*their names into the horizons of life beyond here;  
they always dig living rooms to fill up playgrounds.*

CONTEMPORARY

**Reflections in the Eyes of a Dying Waterbird**  
(After Susan Schuppli's *Nature Represents Itself*)

Tim Fab-Eme

*Memorial days always come to us as rainfall,  
each drizzle scribbling the names of extinct species  
in the menstrual overflows of crude oil giants.*

*Earth's festering fast in my fist like an A-bomb;  
now a minute's silence for the forgotten and cli-summits  
of all drum and no dance aren't active anymore*

*in shrouding the gloom of doom in the eyes  
of the suffocating shoebill stork nesting in my soul,  
its call a cenotaph for the 100,000 birds 10,000,000  
fish 10,000 sea turtles and the other unnamed casualties*

*of the Deepwater Horizon spill in the Gulf of Mexico.  
BP can camouflage his crimson logo like a cuttlefish  
however he wants, and wangle Washington with a wild  
range of radar and satellite images of the slick,  
it won't stop nature from representing herself as omens.*

CONTEMPORARY

**In Exchange**

Dee Allen

*I feel for the antediluvian forests  
Being systemically cut for  
American lumber building  
Spreading more civilisation,  
European biomass for burning  
As factory-made fuel, new  
Means to spoil the air—  
Critters of the trees, of wings and paws,  
Forced to fly and crawl to new lives  
Of displacement—  
Their original homes in exchange  
For uncertainty—*

**Note:** This poem was written in response to the poem *Immigrants* by Rupi Kaur.

CONTEMPORARY

### Married to Nature

Priya Chouhan

*A long life, loaded with jubilant remembrances,  
married to nature, the wood reminding dreadful pain as  
I sat on a bench.*

*Stagnant etiquette dictating, this routine unwelcomed,  
stale hopes, naked aspirations, chattering home shunned.*

*Leaves feeding on my intense heat (anger),  
cold fingers, exasperation sleeps.*

*Resurgence in the old world, devoid of allegations,  
husband taught me to breathe, sorrow liberated.*

*Drizzle of green glitter adorned my hand,  
agony of wood calmed down.*

*Hesitant to the drastic change,  
leaf touched my ached skin.*

*A long life ..... on a bench!*

CONTEMPORARY

### A Murmuring Wind

Priya Chouhan

*Swallowed by the mystic nature,  
reborn as a woman, different from earlier.*

*A murmuring wind ruffled my dark hair,  
clouds scattered, the rainbow has finally appeared.*

*Valuable shield, often goes unperceived,  
devastating to disregard a part of me.*

*The power of its various aspects hushed me,  
shut my eyes, the hidden beauty revealed.*

*Many left my hands, grass hugged me,  
flowers absorbed my tears, I dozed off.*

*Stood up, welcomed the gust of wind,  
presence of drops felt, the nature winked.*

*A murmuring ..... appeared!*



CONTEMPORARY

### Nightingale's Melody

Priya Chouhan

*City lights turned off, roads emptied,  
flash of moon glow illuminated the eyes.*

*Stream of honey flowed in her throat,  
in the darkest hour, heard an irresistible  
nightingale's melody.*

*Kneeling by my wounded heart, feathers caressed  
sunken cheeks,  
was comatose for years, thoughts drifting  
towards a bleak landscape.*

*Euphonious sound in the midst of a suffering,  
repaired my dead cells, the melody was comforting.*

*Slept on her lap, provided me enough warmth,  
love re-birthed me, trauma crept away,  
the song continued.*

*The night is leaving, day knocked at my door,  
a harmonious voice, the nightingale is gone.*

*Stream of ..... nightingale's melody!*

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### About the poets

**Maximilian Alexandrovich Kirienko-Voloshin** (1877–1932) was a Russian poet and water colour painter.

**Taras Hryhorovych Shevchenko** (1814–61) was a Ukrainian poet, writer and artist.

**Patrick Curry** is Editor-in-Chief of *The Ecological Citizen*.

**Tim Fab-Eme** experiments with poetic forms on the themes of environmental, racial and social justice. He studied engineering at the Niger Delta University.

**Dee Allen** is an African-Italian performance poet based in Oakland, CA, USA. Dee has been active in creative writing and spoken word since the early 1990s.

**Priya Chouhan** is in her final year studying Economics at St Xavier's College, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India.