

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.*

*Kneeled 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!

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.