

Poetry section

Edited by **Victor Postnikov**

Victor is a poet, essayist and translator whose home is in Kyiv, Ukraine.

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.

CONTEMPORARY

The African Elephant

Elizabeth J Coleman

The Serengeti Plain, Tanzania, 2010

*The elephant outside our tent,
who carries a cattle egret on her back,
is the gray of a silk ribbon,
the Paynes gray color you might choose
for a watercolor. Her nature
is to love, not with the carelessness
or boredom of a human,
but rather as an orchid adores
the grasslands where it grew.*

CONTEMPORARY

Artificial Urine

Michael Sandler

*It didn't seem possible,
an artificial precipitate
that supposedly took
a live kidney to excrete—*

*Dr. Wöhler's freak find
when trying to alchemize
lead cyanate to gold.
Now his Midas molecule
covers much of Iowa,
allows a farmer to feed
more mouths than Malthus
could count. Sold
in most hardware stores,
piped into IEDs,
propagating into skin creams,
ear wax removers, seeding
a cloud over the Pacific—
who would have predicted
what could rain down on us?*

*Hard to blame the poor doctor
for burning more than oil
in his midnight flasks,
pursuing what he believed
to be pure, if not practical.
Of course, no pursuit is pure—
but outcomes may be as distant
as an armada of microplastics
marauding an open sea,
riddling a fish's innards
for our sake and maguro—
tidbits we google on phones sheathed
in sleek urea polymers.
Flush with amenities,
who still holds in
what our breakthroughs piss away?*

CONTEMPORARY

And yet here I stand
RJ Begiebing

“The one difference between Big Sur and other ‘ideal spots’ is that here you get it quick and get it hard. The result is that you either come to grips with yourself or turn tail and seek out some other spot in which to nourish your illusions.”

— Henry Miller, *Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch*

*And yet here I stand
in high, live-oak grasslands
Lucia Bay to the west*

*Pacific Valley to the southwest
 silent sunlit ocean heaving shades
 of aquamarine, gray, and unfurling white
 three thousand feet below,
 when a Red-tailed Hawk beneath me
 begins to cavort in joyous dips,
 dives
 loops
 and kamikaze feints
 that finally bring him to rest on an oak limb
 as if to admire his own audacity.*

*A hundred yards down-slope
 a pregnant Black-tailed deer now spots me,
 turns, and in a strange stride
 as if in slow motion
 and followed by her brown yearling
 prances downhill
 as two, no three, more doe appear
 and replicate the mother's precipitous dance.*

*I move higher still
 to sit beside a tarn
 eventually contemplating my return
 to the rented two-room cabin below where
 before dinner I'll open a bottle of wine
 listen for the waning moments
 of my neighboring Rufus Hummingbird,
 Pacific Slope Flycatcher, and Pine Siskin
 and watch again from the precarious deck
 the light and colors changing
 over the tops of Ponderosa Pine, Madrone,
 California Bay, Tan Oak, Santa Lucia Fir, and Redwood.
 And watch again the misty sea light
 shifting down in Lucia Bay.*

*It's then I'll think once more of my brother Richard
 whose untamed life killed him young
 and whose ashes we spread along
 local Tan Bark Trail beside a well shaded stream.
 The brother who once lived in Big Sur
 and who thereafter would return briefly
 to revive his soul
 against Miller's warnings that
 this place, as it was for Kerouac,
 might well be the setting for your crack-up*

*rather than your satori, dharma, or gnosis.
No, it was here my brother, like Miller,
came to grips with himself, instead.
It was elsewhere he faltered.*

*From the cabin this evening, I see
the light Richard saw. And Miller too:
“that old, nostalgic hue one sees
in the work of Flemish and Italian masters,
mystical true light—the reality behind reality.
Brush and cones, umbrellas of light—
leaves, boughs, stalks, and trunks
as if etched by the Creator Himself.”*

CONTEMPORARY

Swimming the Duddon

RJ Begiebing

*“For, backward, Duddon, as I cast my eyes,
I see what was, and is, and will abide;
Still glides the Stream, and shall for ever glide;
The Form remains; the Function never dies . . .”*

— William Wordsworth, *After-Thoughts*, Sonnet #34, *River Duddon Sonnet Cycle*

*Beneath the stone arch of Birk’s Bridge
among low cliff and cave,
I swim the Duddon River,
cooling like those heat oppressed cattle
crowding the riverbanks
during Wordsworth’s later-life journey
in memory of youthful excursions
in the Duddon Valley.*

*“A whisper from the heart . . .
of days long-past,” he remembered roving
with “friends and kindred tenderly loved”
to come upon clamoring shepherd boys
gathering their unshorn flock
to wash fleece while sheepdogs barked
and sheep bleated from strange dread.*

*Alder, birch, and hawthorn branches
still offer me spotty shade against
Lake District mid-summer sun.*

*He felt Time's boundaries loosen:
The exploring or fleeing Paleolithic man
the first in his tribe to slake
his thirst from the "pellucid Current";
the Druid Stones sinking
into the "patient earth";
the legend of a forsaken Maid
who ended her life in a hidden pool.*

*He promises the Duddon will, as ever,
become allied to the eternal Thames.*

*My own time-loosed journey is long from done.
Just tomorrow, a second baptism.*

*I will swim
in Grasmere's Rydal Water.
Floating on my back, I'll see
the same two tree-covered islands
the same steep fells
and hear the same
cuckoo's song Wordsworth recalled
"for my dear sister's sake."*

CONTEMPORARY

Over the iron-rippled sea

Alex Beata Clarke

*Swift slapping-feet make haste
Through rustling sheaves of worn turquoise and gold.*

*Twittering commotion
Erupts and hollows and rises again.*

*A triumphant chorus
Of wildfowl
Talking to the misty airs.*

*Murmuring caverns of orchestral sounds
Reverberate along the shores
And under the soles
Where pebble cascades
Join crescendos.*

Under our water-coloured skies.

CONTEMPORARY

Roadkill

Fiona M Jones

Don't look at that.
 Come away. It isn't nice.
*That's why I looked. To see what
 isn't nice. To know what's
 hidden inside of living things.
 The nakedness. The blood.
 The heart and lungs and muscles
 stopped in their tracks. My insides,
 if opened, would look like that.
 Dark, purplish, unbeautiful.
 To live is to hold closed, keep out of sight
 the inner workings. Body and mind.
 Don't say that and People will stare
 if you share your dark and purple
 disordered rush of thoughts
 or admit you have looked at roadkills instead of
 butterflies and flowers. You must
 walk in watchfulness, thick-furred,
 light-footed and sharp-eyed,
 and hope it never happens to you:
 the ill-judged crossing of someone else's path,
 the shock, the spatter, the bite of cold air,
 the sharp grit abrading your openness,
 the Come away, Don't look at that,
 It isn't nice.*

CONTEMPORARY

Carlito Syrichta

Judi Mae "JM" Huck

*My mother, now enjoying her island retirement, could only name
 two endangered animals from her homeland, first the Philippine
 Eagle. Second the Philippine Tarsier, a fist-sized primate endemic
 to the southern islands, surviving in rainforests over 45 million years.*

*They are a shrinking breed, wide eyes witness to unprecedented
 habitat loss from deforestation. Those in captivity or kept as pets
 die fast. Freedom, they know, would be in vain. So in the hush
 of night, caged tarsiers bash soft skulls against metal cages to let
 their souls escape.*

CONTEMPORARY

Manifest Destiny

Judi Mae "JM" Huck

*And the water rises
in the gulf, in the delta*

*rises from the tears
of starfish, of coral reefs*

*rises from the breath
of storms catalyzed by heat*

*rises from the sweat
of sea—to broiling sea*

*rises from the blood
of iceforms and iceworlds*

*rises from the smoke
of summer's ceaseless fire*

*rises from the graves
of fathers, grandfathers, great grandfathers*

*except in California
where the water by the farmlands sinks.*

CONTEMPORARY

Wetlands

Erica Waters

*A cinnamon teal
ripples into animation.
Plumage hues of waterwheel
as his wings pump and strum.
Breastbone his steady keel,
a center to pull from
like shores of pericardium –
protective as a sheath its steel.
Wings beat, beat, beat.
The teal flies higher.
Duck eyes see marsh grasses
swaying with undulations.
Heartbeat, beat, beat.*

*Human eyes see a teal – a duck –
a bird – a throbbing speck
padded by blue.*

CONTEMPORARY

Water

Erica Waters

*cascade
splash
bath
bacteria
saliva
ocean
oil
dye
pesticides
pharmaceuticals
perfumes
permafrost
urine
uranium
calcium
bleach
betrayal
glacier
respect
rain
lake
fountain
fluoride
flood
paint
puddle
plastic
arsenic
hormones
nitrates
lotions
percolate
lymph
sweat
shower
prayer
snow*

ice
life
stream

CONTEMPORARY

Belonged to rains

Purbasha Roy

*Last night belonged to rains.
The radiant ropes of water as
I saw them in the bulb-glow fall
down. They tap at the arid window
of my consciousness. The sounds
too focussed on the wash of its
silence. An offering. The toads
croak seems foolish challenging the
wet sounds of skies meeting earth.
Every now and then, clouds clearing
their throats, their mouths with a rage,
like the moving needle of sewing machine.
I dissolve in the tenderness of time. And
come out thinking about thunder in the
white rhombus of my discernment of the
dilemma. I saw a stuck rainbow at a
raindrop shivering at the zinnia under-
leaf. My mouth moved to utter belongings.*

CONTEMPORARY

One Last Lesson from the Reef Egret

Eric Paul Shaffer

*Every day, at noon, when I cross the bridge on Okinawa
where the Shirahigawa meets the East China Sea,
ashen wings flap, and a sole gray bird
leaps into the air.
What the Reef Egret sees, it flees.*

*The flight of the bird saddens me,
and I admit the truth.*

*I once dreamed in Okinawa
the Reef Egret would someday see me
as familiar as low, rushing, tropical clouds,
as garbage and golf balls in shallow, gray water,*

*as dirty surf, as the muddy, rusted motor-scooter
half-sunk in the silt and stench of the river
where he perches
beneath the concrete and aluminum span of Japan.*

*No more.
This is one more place I do not belong.*

*Forget our silly, wishful dreams, denied by scientists,
that we are not standing in our own way,
that we can watch without an effect,
that what we observe does not observe us,
that daily as I cross the bridge,
I am simply a slim glimmer of shadow in sun
on sand and sediment.*

*The clarity in the vision of the reef egret is rare,
and there is one last lesson for me here:
the lone gray bird feeding on this filthy river
recognizes what I am at once
and flies*

CONTEMPORARY

Hiking the Fire Access Road
Eric Paul Shaffer

*Gravel graces two tracks worn through wildflowers and grass gone seedy,
and all of this is for fire. If this road through the woods leads anywhere,
we'll never use it to get there. Not today. Not tomorrow. We've walked*

*farther than daylight and canteens provide. Silence around us deepens
to its proper hue. In the dark, trees are slow explosions uncoiling from soil.*

*Where the ground is scorched, the walking is easy. The soil is ash,
and the seeds and spores germinating there are something we wish*

*we understood but never will. There's little use trying. Such trails are
promises to the present of which the future makes the most. We trace*

*tracks gouged from the ground while fecundity runs an inexplicable course
around us, through us, beyond us. We know little more of that blind urge
than it terrifies and trivializes us into exaggerations we call fear and hope.*

*The simple impulse to press progeny into existence is a wildfire within
us, whether they like it, or we like it, or not. Surge and spasm is all.*

*Mushrooms rise from the dirt as trees do. Moss blooms. Lichen grows.
Deer mate and die by the hunter's gun and the snapped ankle. We follow
the curve around the hill, a slope of a million years. Bones and limbs litter
the way. The fire in the forest is beyond our control. The stars reclaim*

*the sky, and no matter how bleak or bright the moon, the light draws the eye.
We stumble through a night new to us. Our noisy passage scatters seeds,
and we believe we serve a purpose, but we can never know or choose.*

About the poets

Elizabeth J Coleman is the editor of *Here: Poems for the Planet* (Copper Canyon Press, 2019; with a foreword from His Holiness the Dalai Lama and an activist guide by the Union of Concerned Scientists). She is the author of two poetry collections, and three poetry chapbooks, and is also a poetry translator. Elizabeth's poems have appeared in numerous journals and anthologies, and her new poetry collection was a finalist for several poetry prizes. Elizabeth lives in New York City and in the Catskill Forest Preserve.

Michael Sandler is the author of a poetry collection, *The Lamps of History* (FutureCycle Press 2021). His work has appeared in scores of journals, including recently in *Smartish Pace*, *Sundial Magazine* and *The Ekphrastic Review*. Previously he worked as a lawyer and arbitrator. He reads a lot of history, and many of his poems have historical themes. Michael lives near Seattle.

RJ Begiebing is the author of many articles and stories and ten books, including fiction, criticism, memoir, and collected journalism. His novels represent a historical tetralogy spanning the 1630s to the late 1800s. His fiction writing has been supported by grants from the New Hampshire Council for the Arts and the Lila Wallace Fund.

Fiona M Jones writes short dark-themed fiction and nature-themed creative non-fiction and poetry.

Judi Mae "JM" Huck is an Asian American poet and teaching artist in Las Vegas, Nevada. JM is passionate about community engagement. In 2023 she co-founded WeWrite! to offer generous support for emerging writers to develop their craft. Huck's poetry synthesizes her understanding of culture, history, nature and science.

Poems by **Erica Waters** have appeared in journals like *Weber: The Contemporary West*, *Camas*, *CALYX*, and *Fiddlehead International*. Massage therapist, gardener, and mother of one, Erica lives in Northern Colorado.

Purbasha Roy is a writer from Jharkhand, India. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Logic(s)*, *Romance Writers of America*, *The Archipelago*, *Mascara Literary Review*, *Channel*, *SUSPECT*, *MukoliMag*, *Reckoning Magazine*, *Erbacce Review* and elsewhere.

Eric Paul Shaffer is author of eight poetry volumes, including *Green Leaves: Selected & New Poems*; *Even Further West*; *A Million-Dollar Bill*; and *Lāhaina Noon*. Eric is retired from teaching composition, literature and creative writing at Honolulu Community College.