

Poetry and prose section

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 POETRY

Sign-Post

Robinson Jeffers

*Civilized, crying: how to be human again; this will tell you how.
Turn outward, love things, not men, turn right away from humanity,
Let that doll lie. Consider if you like how the lilies grow,
Lean on the silent rock until you feel its divinity
Make your veins cold; look at the silent stars, let your eyes
Climb the great ladder out of the pit of yourself and man.
Things are so beautiful, your love will follow your eyes;
Things are the God; you will love God and not in vain,
For what we love, we grow to it, we share its nature. At length
You will look back along the star's rays and see that even
The poor doll humanity has a place under heaven.
Its qualities repair their mosaic around you, the chips of strength
And sickness; but now you are free, even to be human,
But born of the rock and the air, not of a woman.*

Source: The editors thank Stanford University Press, sup.org, for permission to publish this poem from *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*, Volume 2. Robinson Jeffers, edited by Tim Hunt; 1938, by Garth and Donnan Jeffers; renewed 1966; all rights reserved. No reproduction, distribution, or any other use of the poems in any way and form is permitted without the publisher's prior permission.

Song of Myself (excerpts)

Walt Whitman

*A child said What is the grass? fetching it to me with full hands;
How could I answer the child? I do not know what it is any more than he.*

I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, out of hopeful green stuff woven.

*Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord,
A scented gift and remembrancer designedly dropt,*

Selected by

Victor Postnikov

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

The poems of Robinson Jeffers are dedicated to wild beauty, rocks and the ocean, trees and creatures, with no humans in sight, and almost devoid of 'normal' human emotions. Yet, the disgust at what humans have inflicted on nature impregnates every poem. He's minimalistic in his poetic expression and the words he uses very much resemble the rocks he loved.

The poems of Walt Whitman offer a stream of words with a spontaneity not unlike that of Zen masters. He expands his free verse into boundless vistas, abandoning all rules and norms. His collection *Leaves of Grass* is an unsurpassable masterpiece of Western ecopoetry.

Bearing the owner's name someway in the corners, that we may see and remark,
and say Whose?

Or I guess the grass is itself a child, the produced babe of the vegetation.

[...]

Has any one supposed it lucky to be born?
I hasten to inform him or her it is just as lucky to die, and I know it.

I pass death with the dying and birth with the new-wash'd babe, and am not contain'd
between my hat and boots [...]

[...]

Copulation is no more rank to me than death is.

I believe in the flesh and the appetites,
Seeing, hearing, feeling, are miracles, and each part and tag of me is a miracle.

Divine am I inside and out, and I make holy whatever I touch or am touch'd from,
The scent of these arm-pits aroma finer than prayer [...]

[...]

I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of the stars,
And the pismire is equally perfect, and a grain of sand, and the egg of the wren,
And the tree-toad is a chef-d'oeuvre for the highest,
And the running blackberry would adorn the parlors of heaven,
And the narrowest hinge in my hand puts to scorn all machinery,
And the cow crunching with depress'd head surpasses any statue,
And a mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions of infidels.

[...]

I think I could turn and live with animals, they are so placid and self-contain'd,
I stand and look at them long and long.

They do not sweat and whine about their condition,
They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins,
They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God,
Not one is dissatisfied, not one is demented with the mania of owning things,
Not one kneels to another, nor to his kind that lived thousands of years ago,
Not one is respectable or unhappy over the whole earth.

[...]

I have said that the soul is not more than the body,
And I have said that the body is not more than the soul,
And nothing, not God, is greater to one than one's self is,
And whoever walks a furlong without sympathy walks to his
own funeral drest in his shroud [...]

[...]

*The spotted hawk swoops by and accuses me, he complains
of my gab and my loitering.
I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable,
I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world.*

[...]

*I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,
If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles.*

*You will hardly know who I am or what I mean,
But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,
And filter and fibre your blood.*

*Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,
Missing me one place search another,
I stop somewhere waiting for you.*

Source: Public domain

Hear the Voice of the Bard

William Blake

*HEAR the voice of the Bard,
Who present, past, and future, sees;
Whose ears have heard
The Holy Word
That walk'd among the ancient trees;*

*Calling the lapsed soul,
And weeping in the evening dew;
That might control
The starry pole,
And fallen, fallen light renew!*

*'O Earth, O Earth, return!
Arise from out the dewy grass!
Night is worn,
And the morn
Rises from the slumbrous mass.*

*'Turn away no more;
Why wilt thou turn away?
The starry floor,
The watery shore,
Is given thee till the break of day.'*

Source: Public domain

The poems of William Blake provide a witty, universal and mystical vision from one of the first voices of anti-industrialism in the Romantic Age.

The poems of Pablo Neruda are famous for their diverse vistas, from unparalleled erotic love-poems, through politically charged manifestos, to profoundly Earth-centred elegies.

Source: This is a translation by Alastair Reid published in *Pablo Neruda: Selected Poems* (Houghton Mifflin, 1990). The original and inheriting publishers of this work were notified of our intentions to re-publish this and asked for permission, and neither objected.

Oh Earth, Wait for Me

Pablo Neruda

*Return me, oh sun,
to my wild destiny,
rain of the ancient wood,
bring me back the aroma and the swords
that fall from the sky,
the solitary peace of pasture and rock,
the damp at the river-margins,
the smell of the larch-tree,
the wind alive like a heart
beating in the crowded restlessness
of towering araucaria.*

*Earth, give me back your pure gifts,
the towers of silence with rose
from the solemnity of their roots.
I want to go back to being what I have not been,
and learn to go back from such deeps
that amongst all natural things
I could live or not live; it does not matter
to be one stone more, the dark stone,
the pure stone which the river bears away.*

CONTEMPORARY PROSE

The Mare

Ray Keenoy

Ray Keenoy is the founder of Boulevard Books, a publisher promoting world literature in translation.

The author writes: "I hope readers enjoy this short piece which is a kind of waking dream of a world freely shared with other creatures – but 100% factual in fact, set in the depopulated Tuscan settlement where I live, a place where wild creatures roam across spaces formerly policed by peasant farmers. If you are intrigued please take a look at our community site sibaris.eu."

In winter there are 'empty days' when the village feels soul-less, although there may be someone keeping deep inside their kitchen, quiet. But I could walk out along the gravel paths with a private face on, openly thinking my own obscure thoughts, could even walk out in slippers or completely nude, unconstrained, as if in dreams.

On such a day I met the white mare, like a haunted creature from Celtic folklore, I encountered the white mare and her child, her foal. She had slipped her fence in some field of the quiet village and was strolling, jolly, showing her son the great world perhaps. I followed her tentatively but fascinated, I was wary of those hard hooves and the paralysing kick a horse can give. She led me up to the garden at the rich man's house, even that fellow was away, his pool with its mad blue blot on the plain green and grey that make the Tuscan uplands over Trabocca Pass, the pool dysfunctional now, filled with leaves.

She wandered about all spirited, sniffing horsily some bush or withered rose while the foal trotted endearing at her broad flank. She turned and looked at me several times, either to question my surveillance or to invite me into her game.

Walking back I found an older villager and told him of this family of equines, loose, unsupervised and uncorralled, so he had sent out the people experienced with these larger animals, still used to haul wood down from the upper clearings in that place.

Unforgettable this moment of company with the other creature and our brief co-proprietorship of the village, of being just two species alone in what felt a great dominion and liberty, in that winter emptiness, there high up on the eastern slopes.

CONTEMPORARY POETRY

Apiary

Gina Marie Bernard

*Field drones sotto voce under the vixen sun
of this bower. Nerding above arboretum,
hovering near posts of pumiced denim,
taunting wire burned raw sienna,*

cluster gathering bees.

*Seduced, they kiss brindled dawn.
Brigands dance upon dappled palettes;
alight airily in the fine-winged breeze;
Canter forth and back to broods,*

pollen saddled thick about their legs.

*Deep within the drumming hive, brewers
construct combed sextets for new mead—
beebread laid in abundant embroidery
before their expectant queen, who laments*

the vanishing quorum of her wagging swarm.

Gina Marie Bernard is an English teacher in Bemidji, MN, USA.

Three Haiku

Patrick Curry

Awakening

*As I lay abed
a lark tipped into my ear
a thin drizzle of joy*

The Key to All Mythologies

*Liquid enough to
fit all locks: the thrush's song at
dawn, outside my door*

Patrick Curry is a writer and scholar based in London, UK. He is Editor-in-Chief of *The Ecological Citizen*.

Aubadette

*Wren's sewing-machine
song binds up dawn's grey garden
in tiny bright stitches*

Desert Sonnet

Rachel White

*Shape-shifting land, ever new
and inexhaustible, the undefinable West
an endless invitation to go now—
leave what you know and get lost,
to wander, explore the coiled empty center
of being, come face to face with self
and understand existence, to enter
from the rim of the world, your heart a glyph
that leads you on, inscrutable, opaque as rock,
to follow the sweeping wind over the edge,
to catch and pin your fluttering thoughts in a book
of simple beauty, of stones piled on a ledge,
some tools, scraps of bones becoming dust,
your own uncertain end a mystery at last.*

Rachel White is a poet based
in Salt Lake City, UT, USA.

This poem was written as a
response to Edward Abbey's
Sonnet for Everett Ruess
(<https://is.gd/eruess>).



Everett Ruess's woodblock
print *Wild Coastline*
is reproduced, with
permission, from the
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Anthropocene

Victor Postnikov

*As the planet waned, the lie was growing.
The governments writhed with unneeded statements,
The media with unneeded shows,
The science with unneeded breakthroughs,
The market with unneeded products.*

*Under these circumstances,
Our neighbours lived quite a normal life –
The birthrate increased,
The lust for accretion got built-in for life,
And everybody lived happily in the suburbs ever after.
Now extinct.*

Victor Postnikov is editor
of this section.

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