

Poetry 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

The Inhumanist (Part II of *The Double Axe*)

Robinson Jeffers

I

*“Winter and summer,” the old man says, “rain
and the drought;
Peace creeps out of war, war out of peace; the stars rise and they set; the
clouds go north
And again they go south, – Why does God hunt in circles? Has he lost
something? Is it possible – himself?
In the darkness between the stars did he lose himself and become godless,
and seeks – himself?”*

II

*Does God exist? – No doubt of that.” The old man says. “The cells of my
old camel of the body,
Because they feel each other and are fitted together, – through nerves and
blood feel each other, – all the little animals
Are the one man: there is not an atom in all universes
But feels every other atom; gravitation, electromagnetism, light, heat, and
the other
Flamings, the nerves in the night’s black flesh, flow them together; the stars,
the winds and the people: one energy,
One existence, one music, one organism, one life, one God: star-fire and
rock-strength, the sea’s cold flow
And man’s dark soul.”*

III

*“Not a tribal nor an anthropoid God.
Not a ridiculous projection of human fears, needs, dreams, justice and
love-lust”.*

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.

IV

"A conscious God? – The question has no importance. But I am conscious:
 where else
 Did this consciousness come from? Nobody that I know of ever poured
 grain from an empty sack.
 And who, I would say, but God, and a conscious one,
 Ended the chief war-makers with their war, so humorously, such accurate
 timing, and such
 Appropriate ends? The man of vanity in vanity,
 Having his portrait painted; the man of violence at violence most dire high
 tide, in the fire and frenzy
 Of Berlin falling"

V

"And nothing," he thought,
 "Is not alive". He had been down to the sea and hooked a rock-cod and was
 riding home: the high still rocks
 Stood in the canyon sea-mouth alert and patient, waiting a sign perhaps,
 the heavy dark stooping hills
 Shouldered the cloud, bearing their woods and streams and green loads of
 time: "I see that all things have soul,
 But only God's is immortal. The hills dissolve and we are liquidated; the stars
 shine themselves dark".

[...]

VIII

"What does God want?"
 The old man was leaning on the dusk edge of dawn, and the beauty of
 things
 Smote him like a fierce wind: the heads of the mountains, the morning star
 over them, the grey clearness, the hawk-swoop
 Fall of the hundred-folded ridges, night in their throats, the deep-coiled
 night dying
 On the dark sea – and all this hushed magnificence violently rushing
 eastward to meet the sunrise: "How earnest he is,
 How naively in earnest; nothing reserved; heavy with destiny. Earnest as the
 grave eyes of a child
 That doubts his mother.

I see he despises happiness; and as for goodness
 he says, What is it? And of evil, What is it?
 And of love and hate, They are equal; they are two spurs,
 For the horse has two flanks. – What does God want? I see here what he
 wants: he wants what man's
 Feeling for beauty wants: – if it were fierce as hunger or hate and deep as
 the grave.

*The beauty of things –
Is in the beholder's brain – the human mind's translation of their
transhuman
Intrinsic value. It is their color in our eyes: as we say blood is red and blood
is the life:
It is the life. Which is like beauty. It is like nobility. It has no name – and
that's lucky, for names
Foul in the mouthing. The human race is bound to defile, I've often
noticed it.
Whatever they can reach or name. They'd shit on the morning star
If they could reach”.*

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CONTEMPORARY POETRY

Various poems

Keats Conley

The God of Pikas

Haying behavior is a chronic tic: 12,000 trips for eight months of food. A straw mountain is meadow's half-eaten headstone. A straw man is an inflated opponent, like carbon dioxide is not a pollutant. (An emissions omission.) What's the weather up there? I heard you couldn't last an hour past 78°, whistle hare. Half-sunny with a chance of oblivion. Mountain tops are eroding islands. Quick, climb these ladder rungs of tumbledown scree. Grab a seat in the sky. Watch your straw mountains become balloons, floating away with disbelief's buoyancy.

The God of Suriname Toads

Pipa is a Portuguese kite and a frog with a back that is meant to be broken. Toes like a natal star, dorsal skin with the pits of pumice stone. Vesicular is the texture of gas fizzing from magma, or toadlings seething from the spine like springing crocus. Seduce through the snapping of hyoid bones. Bear your eggs like goosebumps: an unfamiliar skin. Be one hundred and one bodies and then be just one. This is the sensation of motherhood: holding on to slipping strings, flying while heavier than air.

The God of Chinese Giant Salamanders

*Thirty-four contestants for definition of a species breeds taxonomic anarchy. Even Darwin— frontal lobes steeped in systematics like tea leaves—deemed defining a species undefinable. Here's the posterchild: *Andrias davidianus*, shrouded river lounge long as a queen-size bed, not one but five wild clades. Cryptic lineages signal extinctions of fellow could-be species. Efficiency's axe fells five limbs with one swing. Both you and me, fruiting spurs on this shriveling tree.*

Keats Conley is a research biologist for the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes in Fort Hall, Idaho, where she works on salmon recovery. In addition to publishing scientific manuscripts in the field of marine biology, her recent poems have been published in *Animal Magazine*, *Arkana*, and *The Curlew*.

The God of Vaquitas

Each individual is 3.3% of what's left of a nine-tenths devoured pie. Certainty is 100% a lost cause, yet the chant survives: ¡Viva la vaquita marina! Lifelong swimmers drown in droves, strangled in shallows of a vermillion sea. To live long is to buoy the body with soul. We are haunted by names for a knowingness: to leave the last bite on the plate untouched. In English, we call it mannersbit, "for the sake of good manners." In Spanish, la vergüenza— "the shame."

The God of Saola

In 1992 the world discovered you in pieces. A species resurrected from bric-a-brac in hunters' houses: three sets of long straight horns, two lower jaws, three complete hides salted and tacked to the wall. You were unknown to science. An enigma so enormous they published details of your cranium in Nature, alongside a photo of a stuffed skin: A new species of living bovid from Vietnam. Dental formula is $0033/3133.x 2 = 32$ with elongated premolars and incisors like pegs. They said you may "merit the creation of a new tribe." An invented genus, order: Artiodactyla. Numbers around a hundred, or maybe ten. Are you still considered living if science hasn't seen you alive? I'm sure they'll recognize you by your skull: squint for dentitions in late occlusal wear.

Two poems

Jo Gale

Broad-leaved sedum

*One stone's a ream,
pages of the world's oldest story.*

Everything sings of emergence.

*And where the stones gather,
yellow flares bloom there,
perched, growing with,
belonging to stone.*

*Such an arrangement,
this brightness of sedum,
sitting with the mountain,
hearing every secret,*

tended by its catchment of cloud-breath

The names of this full moon, for Rosebud

*The night before the ash moon
cold winds moon
treacherous moon
my leg startled me awake
with a spasm of tendon and bone*

*What's wrong
my love asked
And I could only say
I am afraid of reality*

*Thoughts burred into me
like clasping seeds*

Jo Gale lives and writes in Seattle, WA, USA. Her poetry has appeared in Mezzo Camminand Pilgrimage, and she has work forthcoming in an anthology of Pacific Northwest poets. She received her MFA in Poetry in 2013, and is currently working on a book of braided essays.

Hunger moon

*My awakened body as light
and sharp as a single bone*

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*We found a bone on the shore
it was bluish gray
smelled of salty rot*

*Perhaps the rib bone
of a sea mammal
gently curved
a tender gesture*

*I think of it now while
I read about Rosebud
the female fin whale rammed
by a ship and washed ashore*

*Scientists hefted her body
onto a boat to sink her back
into the sea*

*They wanted to watch the death
of her death on the ocean floor*

*Her body became microbial glory
all crowded thick
with the colors of decay
And with life too*

*Sleeper sharks and hagfish
gnawed her flesh to bone*

*Bone-eating worms tapestried
her skeleton into
a red writhing fabric*

*Scientists visit her body
in underwater vessels
to see her revelations*

* * * * *

*We live with such losses
that we still cannot name
or map together*

*Quickening moon
bone moon death moon*