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, ecopoets 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

To trust authorities

Alexander Pushkin

To trust authorities, to build upon the people –
Why do we care? Leave them alone!... Report
To no-one; serve and please your own;
For power, livery, bend neither spine nor thought:
And, on a whim, stroll anywhere you want
Astounded by nature's wonder world.
And before art's emotional creations
Be drowned in ecstasies of admirations –
Here*'s happiness!* Here *are the rights!*

Translated by VI Postnikov.

CLASSIC

In the Mountains

Ivan Bunin

The poetry is dark. I can't find words to tell
How moved I was by this wild solitary slant.
The empty stony dale, the hills that sheep infest,
The shepherd's smoky fire, the bitterness of scent!

My heart was strangely glad and tortured seeing this,
It said: "Come back, come back, it's there you need to rest!"
The distant smoke puffed sweet into my yearning breast,
With envy and regret, I go past mountain crest.

Poetry's not what the world would call it.
It's in the heritage that I forever hold.
The greater heritage reveals the greater poet.

I tell myself when sensed the dark forgotten trace
Of what my ancestor had known in ancient days:
– All souls are one, and timeless is their pace.

Translated by VI Postnikov.

CLASSIC

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage (excerpts)

Lord Byron

CANTO THREE
69
To fly from, need not be to hate, mankind;
All are not fit with them to stir and toil,
Nor is it discontent to keep the mind
Deep in its fountain, lest it overboil
In one hot throng, where we become the spoil
Of our infection, till too late and long
We may deplore and struggle with the coil,
In wretched interchange of wrong for wrong
Midst a contentious world, striving where none are strong.

72
I live not in myself, but I become
Portion of that around me; and to me,
High mountains are a feeling, but the hum
Of human cities torture: I can see
Nothing to loathe in Nature, save to be
A link reluctant in a fleshly chain,
Classed among creatures, when the soul can flee,
And with the sky, the peak, the heaving plain
Of ocean, or the stars, mingle, and not in vain

73
And thus I am absorbed, and this is life:
I look upon the peopled desert Past,
As on a place of agony and strife,

Where, for some sin, to Sorrow I was cast,
To act and suffer, but remount at last
With a fresh pinion; which I felt to spring,
Though young, yet waxing vigorous as the blast
Which it would cope with, on delighted wing,
Spurning the clay-cold bonds which round our being cling.

83
But this will not endure, nor be endured!
Mankind have felt their strength, and made it felt.
They might have used it better, but, allured
By their new vigour, sternly have they dealt
On one another; Pity ceased to melt
With her once natural charities. But they,
Who in Oppression's darkness caved had dwelt,
They were not eagles, nourished with the day;
What marvel then, at times, if they mistook their prey?

CONTEMPORARY

Stretch marks

Karina Fiorini

Sustainable Development Act, 2012 (Malta)

You are not that blind, I know,
You see them too, wielding power.

Not even a menhir or a catacomb is safe.
Land cleared to stumps, rolled-over rubble and gnarled fig boughs
fold into desert dust – a rampage in the blink of solstice.

Soil erosion unseen
Soil erosion unseen

Think of the Eritrean and Ethiopian lungs, in horseshit stables,
thrown about like wood shavings.
Then think of the new aliens with fresh passports, with fast-tracked openings
in neighbourhood apartments, with empty letterboxes,
yet they never stroll in the carob-coloured streets.

Pleasure funds pleasure
Smog coughs smog

Where are the guardians of future generations – walking on a tightrope?
Philippe Petit would know something about that,
too high above the streets to hear the cries.

The guardian's voice is lost
The guardian's voice is lost

I am the future generation
you are the future generation
amid the sacred and the profane.
Who dares to care, if
a seedling's planted – it's a cinch! –
a forest's uprooted – Lies,
shards of lies. This is getting us nowhere,

as voters hand the rope to those
who are tying the noose

Wildlife stamped out
Farmers wiped out

Think of the growing stretch marks expanding
into fields with less green laurels, less purple sage.

Think of cement blocks – rising on the showboating of talk, talk, talk,
greased palms pledge piecemeal permits – you see it too,
it's about flouze.

The world's out of sand
The world's out of sand

Not even a menhir or a catacomb is safe.
Then think of us pining for daisies, snapdragons,
turtle doves, rock pools. We lay our heads, our lungs, our breasts,
inside the temples' apses – should we hurry, should we?

We can barely sleep.

Note: Flouze is an Arabic and French word meaning money, and from it derives the Maltese word having the same meaning, flus.

CONTEMPORARY

Dead Art of Poetry 2

Mark Murphy

i

Here is Mother Nature, walking in the dark,
disputing the finer points of poetry

as if to cock-a-snook at canon makers
the world over

but there is no poem for her
because she has no need of rhetoric.

Now all the stars are out to lunch,
getting to grips with the war
on words. To commiserate and count Aeons/
Vowels/Alliteration
on the bickering abacus
(blind-sided by the chicken's wishbone).

Choking on the temporal core of truth.

ii

Here is Orion the Hunter, tooling up
before dark, but there is no poem for him
because he has no need of metaphor.

So the blind man (dead set on violence)
summons the dog constellations,
to hunt
women and children

in the best interests of Capital.

iii

Here is the gold coin. Colonisation. Poem
for our Native Land.
Advent of industrial refinement.
Distorting the real

essential power of man
and Nature.

Human and non-human voices
transformed
into imperfection. Abstract notions.

'Verily! Verily! Verily!' They say unto us:
'O bibliographers! O poets!
O indigenous activists! O orphans!' Crying
into their Martini's...

'Unsustainability has become sustainability.'

Confounding & confusing
with horror's in the night garden.

Where vice becomes virtue
and virtue, vice. Appropriating all things
(Nature/Man/Poetry)
into truly ontological affirmations

of being.

CONTEMPORARY

The democracy of trees

Jeevan Bhagwat

Who are we
to tell them where to grow,
and trim their desire
to green this troubled earth?

What authority have we
to revoke their right
to seed the soil
wherever they may choose?

With axe and chainsaw
we impose our human will
to create a world
reflective of our dreams,

when all they wish
is the freedom to flourish,
and remind us of the beauty
that was and still can be.

The messenger

Jeevan Bhagwat

Flash of feathers
fleeting past
the destruction of man
and machines.

An awakening blossoms
from your soliloquy of song,

as my heart recalibrates
its focal point

towards a future of
sustainable green.

About the poets

Ivan Alekseyevich Bunin (1870–1953) was the first Russian poet and writer awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature (1933). The texture of his poems and stories is considered to be one of the richest in the language. His translations (particularly that of HW Longfellow's *Song of Hiawatha*) are regarded as classics.

George Gordon (Lord) Byron (1788–1824) was an English poet and one of the leading figures of the Romantic movement.

Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin (1799–1837) was a Russian poet and novelist of the Romantic era. He is considered by many to be the greatest Russian poet and the founder of modern Russian literature.

Karina Fiorini is a poet and environmentalist of Maltese origin, now based in France.

Mark A Murphy is a neurodivergent, working-class poet, surviving marginalisation in the UK.

Jeevan Bhagwat lives in Scarborough, Ontario, Canada. His work has been published in literary journals across Canada and internationally. In 2003 and 2005, he won The Monica Ladell Prize for Poetry from the Scarborough Arts Council, and in 2015 he was recognized for his outstanding contributions to the community with the Scarborough Urban Hero Award for Arts & Culture.