**Elegy and Ecology**

In Brigit Pegeen Kelly's poem "Song", a goat's head is hacked off by a group of boys and hung in a tree. Still, the goat's head, as it decays on the edges of the town, sings a song that haunts the lives of the people. "Not a cruel song, no, no, not cruel at all. This song / Is sweet. It is sweet. The heart dies of this sweetness." In this workshop, we will look at poems that mourn, remember, elegise, and haunt. When so much life is threatened around us, how can poetry respond? How can we make music of mourning, and can music help? Using poems by Brigit Pegeen Kelly, Ada Limón, Michael Longley and others, we will explore the idea of the eco-elegy, and write our own songs and poems.

**Song**

Listen: there was a goat's head hanging by ropes in a tree.  
All night it hung there and sang. And those who heard it  
Felt a hurt in their hearts and thought they were hearing  
The song of a night bird. They sat up in their beds, and then  
They lay back down again. In the night wind, the goat's head  
Swayed back and forth, and from far off it shone faintly  
The way the moonlight shone on the train track miles away  
Beside which the goat's headless body lay. Some boys  
Had hacked its head off. It was harder work than they had imagined.  
The goat cried like a man and struggled hard. But they  
Finished the job. They hung the bleeding head by the school  
And then ran off into the darkness that seems to hide everything.  
The head hung in the tree. The body lay by the tracks.  
The head called to the body. The body to the head.  
They missed each other. The missing grew large between them,  
Until it pulled the heart right out of the body, until  
The drawn heart flew toward the head, flew as a bird flies  
Back to its cage and the familiar perch from which it trills.  
Then the heart sang in the head, softly at first and then louder,  
Sang long and low until the morning light came up over  
The school and over the tree, and then the singing stopped....  
The goat had belonged to a small girl. She named  
The goat Broken Thorn Sweet Blackberry, named it after  
The night's bush of stars, because the goat's silky hair  
Was dark as well water, because it had eyes like wild fruit.  
The girl lived near a high railroad track. At night  
She heard the trains passing, the sweet sound of the train's horn  
Pouring softly over her bed, and each morning she woke  
To give the bleating goat his pail of warm milk. She sang  
Him songs about girls with ropes and cooks in boats.  
She brushed him with a stiff brush. She dreamed daily  
That he grew bigger, and he did. She thought her dreaming  
Made it so. But one night the girl didn't hear the train's horn,  
And the next morning she woke to an empty yard. The goat  
Was gone. Everything looked strange. It was as if a storm  
Had passed through while she slept, wind and stones, rain  
Stripping the branches of fruit. She knew that someone  
Had stolen the goat and that he had come to harm. She called  
To him. All morning and into the afternoon, she called  
And called. She walked and walked. In her chest a bad feeling  
Like the feeling of the stones gouging the soft undersides  
Of her bare feet. Then somebody found the goat's body  
By the high tracks, the flies already filling their soft bottles  
At the goat's torn neck. Then somebody found the head  
Hanging in a tree by the school. They hurried to take  
These things away so that the girl would not see them.  
They hurried to raise money to buy the girl another goat.  
They hurried to find the boys who had done this, to hear  
Them say it was a joke, a joke, it was nothing but a joke....  
But listen: here is the point. The boys thought to have  
Their fun and be done with it. It was harder work than they  
Had imagined, this silly sacrifice, but they finished the job,  
Whistling as they washed their large hands in the dark.  
What they didn't know was that the goat's head was already  
Singing behind them in the tree. What they didn't know  
Was that the goat's head would go on singing, just for them,  
Long after the ropes were down, and that they would learn to listen,  
Pail after pail, stroke after patient stroke. They would  
Wake in the night thinking they heard the wind in the trees  
Or a night bird, but their hearts beating harder. There  
Would be a whistle, a hum, a high murmur, and, at last, a song,  
The low song a lost boy sings remembering his mother's call.  
Not a cruel song, no, no, not cruel at all. This song  
Is sweet. It is sweet. The heart dies of this sweetness.

Brigit Pegeen Kelly, *Song* (1995)

A hand holding a book

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Ada Limón, *The Hurting Kind* (Corsair, 2022)

**Primate**

*Rungwecebus kipunji*

Think of being discovered

Among forest shadows,

Leafy lianas that fit

Your fingers and toes,

Over your shoulders

A silvery kimono,

Your soul awaiting

The echo of your name.

Michael Longley, The Slain Birds (Cape, 2022)