



Photo: Petra Rolinac

A POETICS OF INQUIRY

A Reading and Conversation with

TJAWANGWA DEMA

Thursday, February 25, 2021

ECO-STORIES: POETRY, SCI-FI, AND STORYTELLING

Workshops with

TJAWANGWA DEMA and KIRK SIDES

Friday, February 26, 2021

Live via Zoom

University of Southern California

WHAT TO KNOW

- Tjawangwa Dema / TJ Dema is an internationally acclaimed Motswana poet who has lived in Botswana, the United States, and England.
- She is the author of *The Careless Seamstress* and *Mandible*.
- Kirk Sides is a groundbreaking eco-critical scholar and a professor of world literatures at the University of Bristol.
- Dema and Sides have collaborated on a project called “Anthropocene Storytelling: Ecological Writing and Pedagogies of Planetary Change,” which “thinks about how environmental damage, climate change, and planetary precarity relate to how we tell stories of ourselves as a human species.”

“I have no exact expectations of the poems I write or recite only that when I read a ‘good’ poem I know that I want my poems to do that to/with/for some reader. To resonate or rattle, to sweep around some cobwebbed thing while toppling another, to work with the listener to shift something.”—Tjawangwa Dema in an interview for *Africa in Dialogue*

TJAWANGWA DEMA

Tjawangwa Dema / TJ Dema is an honorary senior research associate in the Department of English at the University of Bristol. She is a poet, arts administrator, and teaching artist whose work has appeared in *New Orleans Review*, *Kalahari Review*, *Cordite Poetry Review*, and elsewhere. Her poems have been translated into Spanish, German, Chinese, and Swedish, reworked by bands into lyrics, used for theatre and dance collaborations, recorded as videos, and dropped from a helicopter over London.

KIRK SIDES

Kirk Sides is a professor of world literatures in the Department of English at the University of Bristol. His work focuses on African literature and the environment, histories of ecological thinking, and how climate change is currently being imagined in African writing and film. He has lived, taught, and researched in the United States, France, South Africa, Botswana, and the United Kingdom.

THE ANTHROPOCENE

Kirk Sides’s workshop will reflect on what it means to do academic and cultural work in the Anthropocene.

“The Anthropocene” is an unofficial, proposed term for the time period we are living in. While geologists say we are officially in the Holocene epoch, which began 11,700 years ago, the idea of “the Anthropocene” asserts that we are actually in a new epoch—one defined by the ways humans have significantly impacted the earth, including human-caused climate change.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- Is there a poem—or even a phrase or an image from a poem—from this event that really moved you? What was it? Why do you think it resonated with you?
- Tjawangwa Dema told *Africa in Dialogue*, “To me, the poet is not a historian or journalist. They are fabulists, happily unreliable narrators who trade in any combination of the real, the fictive as well as unverifiable facts.” What do you think of this idea of the poet as a “happily unreliable narrator”?
- How do eco-poetry and sci-fi help us understand or think about the present era?

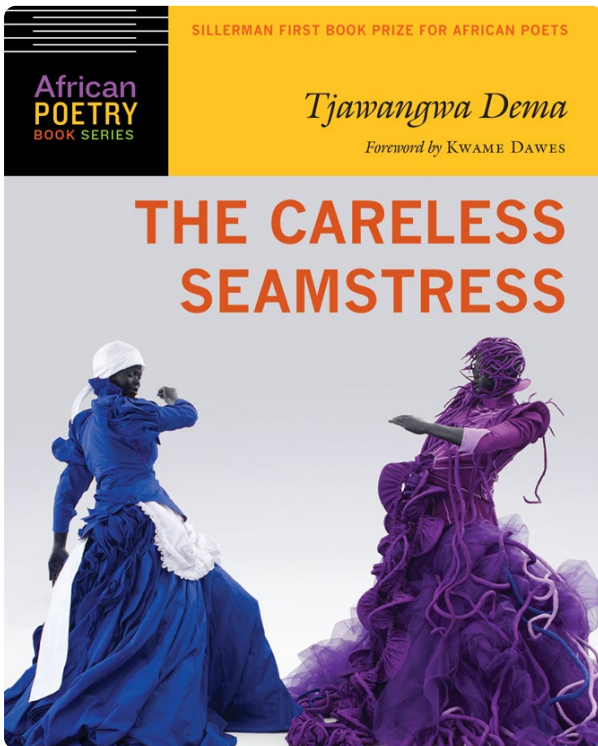
ECO-POETRY

Eco-poetry is poetry that deals with ecology or the environment. Some say it is distinct from nature poetry, which has been written for millennia, in that eco-poetry is being created specifically in the current time of climate change, and often highlights the impact of humans on the environment. Like many things, “eco-poetry” is defined differently by different users of the term. For example:

- “[E]copoetics rose out of the late 20th-century awareness of ecology and concerns over environmental disaster. A multidisciplinary approach that includes thinking and writing on poetics, science, and theory as well as emphasizing innovative approaches common to conceptual poetry, ecopoetics is not quite nature poetry.”—The Poetry Foundation
- “What is ecopoetics? The term is used more than it is discussed. For some readers, ecopoetics is the making and study of pastoral poetry, or poetry of wilderness and deep ecology. Or poetry that explores the human capacity for becoming animal, as well as humanity’s ethically challenged relation to other animals. For others, it is poetry that confronts disasters and environmental injustices, including the difficulties and opportunities of urban environments. For yet others, ecopoetics is not a matter of theme, but of how certain poetic methods model ecological processes like complexity, non-linearity, feedback loops, and recycling. Or how ‘slow poetry’ can join in the same kind of push for a sustainable, regional economy that ‘eating locally’ does. Or how poetic experimentation complements scientific methods in extending a more reciprocal relation to alterity—ecopoetics as a ‘poethics.’ Or even how translation can diversify the ‘monocrop’ of a hegemonic language like English . . .”—Jonathan Skinner, former editor of the journal *ecopoetics*
- “Ecopoetry generally refers to poetry about ecology, ecosystems, environmental injustice, animals, agriculture, climate change, water, and even food. It emerged in the 1990s as poets questioned the naturalness of ‘nature poetry,’ especially since nature itself was rapidly changing due to global warming and environmental destruction.”—indigenous Chamoru poet and professor Craig Santos Perez



Seven New Generation African Poets



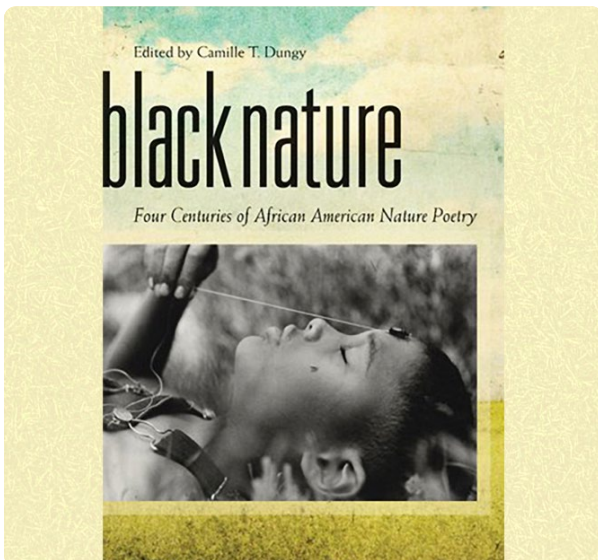
SILLERMAN FIRST BOOK PRIZE FOR AFRICAN POETS

African
POETRY
BOOK SERIES

Tjawangwa Dema

Foreword by KWAME DAWES

THE CARELESS SEAMSTRESS



Edited by Camille T. Dungy

black nature

Four Centuries of African American Nature Poetry

IF YOU LIKED THIS EVENT, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT:

- Online Poetry Workshops at Beyond Baroque beyondbaroque.org
- Online Events at the Nuyorican Poets Café nuyorican.org
- Cave Canem cavecanempoets.org
- Communities for a Better Environment cbecal.org

DISCOVER MORE AT THE USC LIBRARIES

STACY WILLIAMS of the USC Libraries selected the following resources to help you learn more about this evening's event. Electronic resources are accessible through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at libraries.usc.edu but may require the user to log in using their USC credentials.

BOOKS

- J. Scott Bryson, *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction* (Salt Lake City: Univ. of Utah Press, 2002).
- Kwame Dawes and Chris Abani, eds., *Seven New Generation African Poets* (Sleepy Hollow, NY: Slapering Hol Press, 2014).
- Tjawangwa Dema, *The Careless Seamstress* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2019).
- Camille T. Dungy, *Black Nature: Four Centuries of African American Nature Poetry* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 2009).
- O. B. Hardison, Alex Preminger, and Frank J. Warnke, *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2015).

ARTICLE

- Nathan Suhr-Sytsma, "Theories of African Poetry," *New Literary History* 50, no. 4 (2019): 581-607.

JOURNAL

- [Research in African Literatures](#)

DATABASES

- [ProQuest Research Library](#)
- [Project Muse](#)
- [African Writers Series](#)
- [Black Women Writers](#)