

# Conrad Gessner in Verse: Renaissance Natural History and the Swiss Reformation

By Anja-Silvia Goeing

## Notes on the Translation

Transcription (AG) of the 1566 poem.

“Theodori Bezae Vezelii carmen επίμικτον

Te cælo mutante solum, Gesnere, volucres  
    Quæcunque pennis aëra permeant,  
    Repleuère modis omnia tristibus,  
    Migrantem amicum extrema suprâ sydera,  
    Omnes cum gemitu graui insequutæ.  
Te cælo mutante solum, Gesnere, feroces  
    Gemunt in antris Beluæ,  
    Et stabuli pecudes oblitæ:  
        Sibilis colubri te feri gemunt lugubribus,  
    Imisque quotquot sub cauernis  
    Occulta terrarum colunt:  
        Et flaccidum plantæ virentes,  
    Et pallidum flores nitentes.  
    Et flaccidum arbores comantes.  
Regna te per humida,  
    Et beluosus qua ferit vndique  
    Reboantia littora pontus,  
    Planctu sonoro deflet Amphytrite:  
    Et liquidis sub aquis pisces natantes mutitant.  
Natura te omnis denique vt suorum fidum antistitem  
    Plorat sacrorum, muta  
    Futura deinceps, ni loquaris mortuus.  
Hæc inter tibi turbatus, Gesnere, parentat  
    Beza tuus, vati vates, et amicus amico,  
        His incompositis in numeris numeris.

D. CONRADO GESNERO  
TIGVRINO PIETATE DVCE, VIR=  
TVTIBVS RELIQVIS COMITIBVS,  
OMNIA NATVRAE ARCANA PER=  
SCRVTATO, AC INDE FELICITER  
IN COELVM VSQVE TRANSGRES=  
SO, THEODORVS BEZA VEZE=  
LIVS MOERENS POSVIT.”

Theodore Delwiche translated Beza's 1566 poem from Latin to English for this blog post. In his [1569](#) and [1580](#) editions of the poem, Beza introduced a couple of slight changes for stylistic reasons: he changed "coelo" into "caelo;" "oblitae" into "relictis;" and "flaccidum arbores" into "marcidum arbores." Also, Beza did not publish the dedicatory sentences at the end of the poem. (I thank Theodore Delwiche for the comparison of both editions.)

The meaning of *mutitant* here remains unclear, since the word is very rarely used. It has only been [found](#) in Aulus Gellius. In his translation of the [1580 version of the poem](#) in Beza's [\*Icones ... verae imagines virorum ... illustrium\*](#) (1580), E. J. Hutchinson [interprets](#) "mutitant" (interchange) as "muttitant" (mutter). Nonetheless, we believe that Beza has shared the common belief at the time that fish were mute. And we think it possible that fish swam and changed places to show their perturbation. *In dubio pro reo*, we stay with the original wording "mutitant."