

# Deep water

Peter Reason enjoys the living presence of the river

**T**he underlying theme of my meditations for *Resurgence & Ecologist*, sometimes explicit, more often implicit, is the sense that we live in a reality that is capable of active communication with us, telling something of its nature and its being.

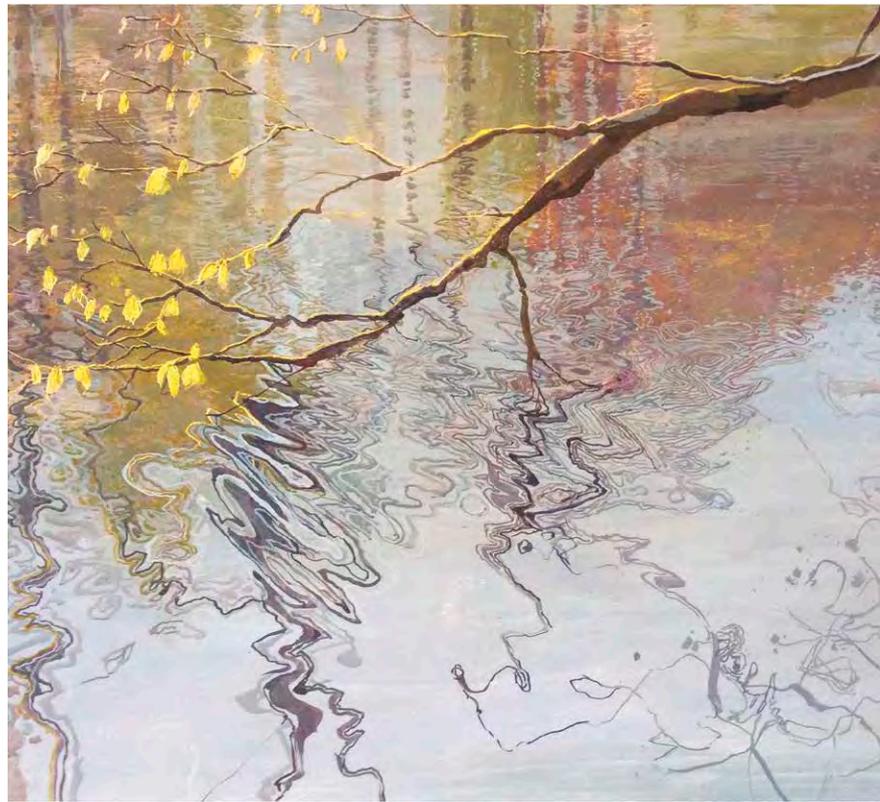
The philosopher Freya Mathews asks us to consider that all things, including the Earth itself, are integral to the fabric of the ‘living cosmos’, all of the same sentient cloth. In this panpsychic perspective, mind is a fundamental aspect of matter just as matter is a fundamental aspect of mind; we are part of a world that has depth as well as structure, meaning as well as form.

In this view, the cosmos is one, a coherent field of mind/matter. The cosmic one differentiates into many self-realising and self-reflexive beings that also reach out in mutual contact with other beings and the one. In Thomas Berry’s words, “the universe is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects.” This is a communicative order, an order of meaning, unfolding alongside the causal, material order. And it is necessarily a ‘poetic’ order, conveying meaning in image and metaphor, taking place not in words or concepts, but through material form in a language of ‘things’.

We humans can be part of this poetic order – if we are open to it. If we conceive the world as a brute object, it will reveal itself as such. But if we invoke a living presence, we may receive a meaningful response, with gestures that demonstrate intimate attunement.

The river Teign sweeps past at my feet. A burbling song rises from the water, grasps my consciousness. I linger alongside, watching and listening. Oily browns and blues roll over each other. Wavelets peak with a touch of white. Where rocks lurk, a smooth torrent pours under a foaming standing wave.

An alder sapling grows out from the bank, suspending branches, twigs and leaves over the water in a delicate lattice. I hold the little tree steady in my gaze; the river rushes behind, on and on without pause. Giddy between stillness and



Bough with Reflections by Ruth Stage  
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movement, I’m like a child playing the whirling game, spinning until everything is a blur, rushing round and round me.

If I give in to the giddiness, I might fall. Perhaps I want to fall; perhaps the river is calling me to fall... to fall into... what? But I gather myself back on the bank, feel my way into the flow. The water rushing past, the trees stirring in the wind, I sing to the river. I sing loudly, beating out the rhythm on my thighs. My eyes relax, I lose focus; water and wind sound in my ears. The river flowing, trees rustling, this human singing on the bank, all draw together into one being. Words disappear, difference disappears. Where do they go?

Then the spell breaks. Maybe I was drawn too deep. I want to stay with oneness, but some inchoate fear pulls me back to my ‘self’. My eyes focus again on the leaves of a low-hanging branch. River, trees, leaves pick up their separate identities. Being at one evaporates like mist. But a faint trace persists in my memory, as a dream image retains a hazy form when I lie still on the pillow on waking.

Once we experience the Earth and her beings as communicative presence, maybe we will stop doing harm. Maybe we will find our beloved again. **R**

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