

# Poetry section

Life far exceeds humans. For millennia, eco-poets 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.

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## CLASSIC POETRY

### The Country of Marriage

#### Part VI

#### Wendell Berry

*What I am learning to give you is my death  
to set you free of me, and me from myself  
into the dark and the new light. Like the water  
of a dark stream, love is always too much. We  
did not make it. Though we drink till we burst  
we cannot have it all, or want it all.  
In its abundance it survives our thirst.  
In the evening we come down to the shore  
to drink our fill, and sleep, while it  
flows through the regions of the dark.  
It does not hold us, except we keep returning  
to its rich waters thirsty. We enter,  
willing to die, into the commonwealth of its joy.*

Reproduced with kind permission of Wendell Berry.

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### Marsh Priestling

#### Aleksander Blok

*On a spring-thawed patch,  
Little Priestling of Marsh  
Is staying  
And saying his prayer.*

*His ragged black frock  
Like a barely seen rock  
Over tussock  
And in tranquility of the reddish light*

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#### Selected by

#### Victor Postnikov

Victor is a poet, essayist and translator based in Kiev, Ukraine.

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The poems of Wendell Berry are deceptively simple, but deeply philosophical (Earth- and-human-centred). Devoid of decoration, every thought is precious.

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The poems of Aleksander Blok are impregnated with eschatological expectations and dedicated to the Eternal Feminine. His verses are also muffled by the voices of Earth. The selected poem is a curious example of his dedication to earthly religion.

*Little devils are out of sight;  
And the evening grace  
Has entwined him with delicate lace...  
And the charms of the twilight,  
And the rustling of space...*

*Quietly he prays,  
And he smiles as he stays,  
Bowing his head to the bog.  
And with medicinal herbs  
He would heal every hurt,  
Every sickened and dying frog.*

*Then he would bless it and say,  
"Now you're free on your way,  
You can go to your native log;  
My heart is pleased  
With every beast  
And every creeper that exists."*

*He resumes his quiet praying,  
For the reed  
That is swaying,  
For a sickened beast's hope,  
For the Roman Pope...*

*Have no fear to be drowned in a bog –  
You'll be saved by his blackened frock.*

Source: Translation by Victor Postnikov

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## CONTEMPORARY POETRY

### Known by Water

#### Julia Travers

*I know you,  
water says  
to everyone,  
holding us when we enter.  
Drink,  
says water,  
when we're thirsty.  
I grow you,  
I flow through,  
I love you,  
water says,  
though we throw trash in its mouth  
and smudge out its round voice,  
though we turn away.  
But water persists,*

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Julia Travers is a writer and artist in Virginia, USA. Her work appears with *OnBeing*, *Earth Island Journal*, *Heron Tree Poetry Journal*, *The Mindfulness Bell* and *NPR*, among other publications.

*in our sky, land and cells,  
weaving our spit and tears  
into the breath of the world,  
insisting:  
I know you.*

## Oceans

### Rebecca R Burrill

#### 1. South West Wind Ocean

*Undulus  
Heavy  
Shore waves  
Minimalist breakwater  
    Like lacy afterthoughts  
Quiet  
Ponderous birthings  
Of continually coming shore waves*

#### 2. NW Wind 35 Mph Moderate Gale

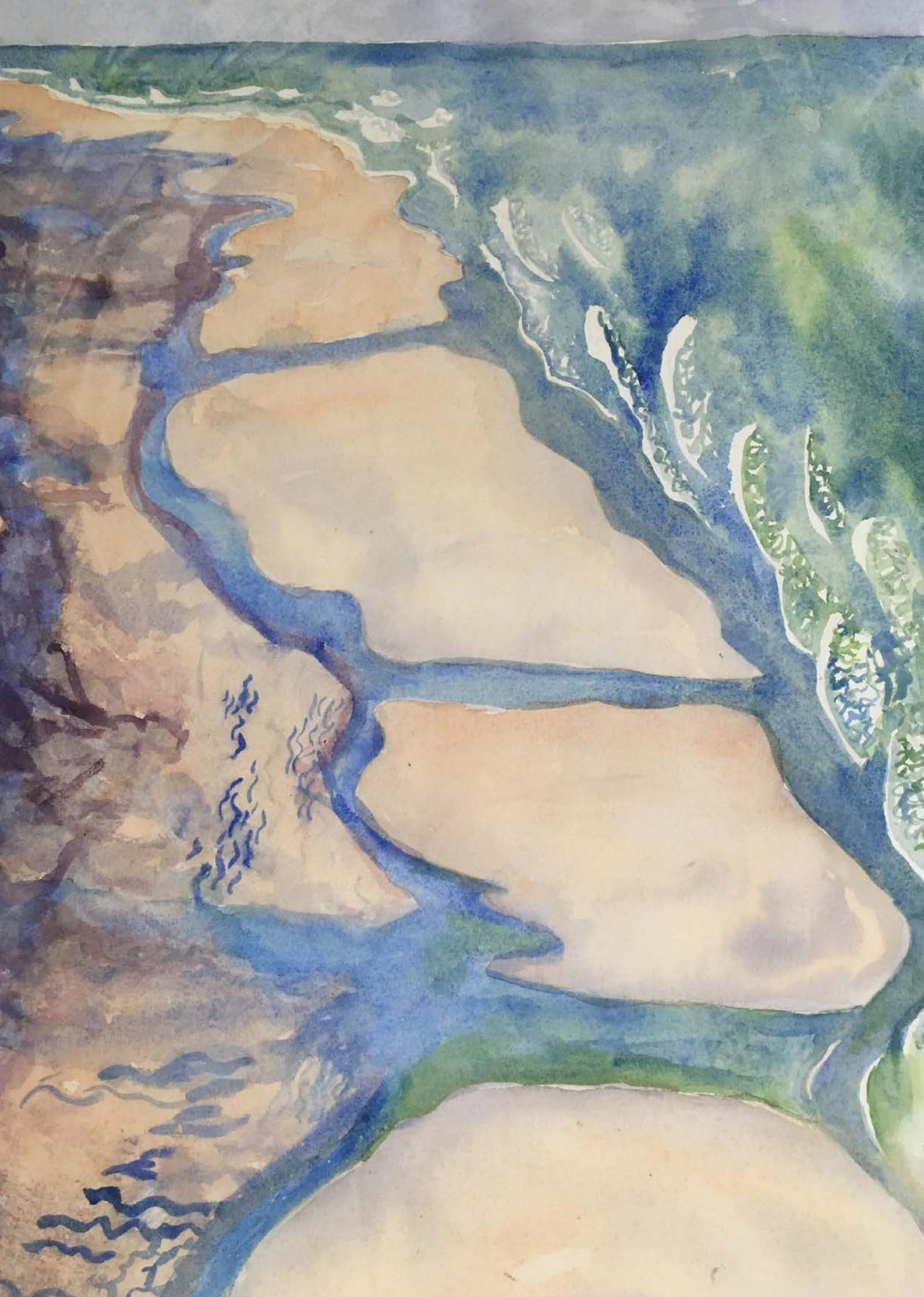
*Ocean Lurching  
Rising up  
Innumerable directions  
Cacophony of directions  
    Bigger waves swallow  
        Smaller waves  
Sharp crests  
Precarious crest  
    Don't know which way to fall crests  
Disappearing re-emerging elsewhere crests*

*Double waves breaking  
    Spreading out on shore  
        Elaborate expression  
        And overlapping and ruffles foaming  
        Antagonisms and clashes  
        Splashes*

*Resting for a bit  
Foaming  
Receding under, clashing with  
    The on-coming wave  
    Playfully ferocious breakers*

*Seals are constant—surfacing along the shore  
    In various choreographies  
    Unconcerned*

Rebecca R Burrill is a regular contributor of artworks to the journal and her latest piece, titled *Ocean from Grandfather's Cliff*, accompanies her poems here.



### 3. NE Wind 28 Mph Strong Breeze

*Ocean*

*Heavy wavering crests*

*Violence is in the ponderous fall*

*To beach*

*And totally given over splash*

*Loose and disembodied*

*Repeating the fall*

*Tons of water pushing water*

*Spreading on shore pulling*

*Pulling*

*Away the sand*

*Cutting*

*Into the beach*

*Swells too heavy to crest*

*Hover*

*Managing a tiny under crest*

*Inelegantly flopping to shore*

*Gargantuan volumes of water*

*Careening*

*Slushing, re-cresting before re-forming as undertow*

*Layers*

*Of coming and going waves*

*The gulls maneuvering in the breakwater*

*With deft split second timing*

*To easefully ride or lift*

*Just above*

*The breaking cruel crests*

### 4. Wind Has Died

*Murky Ocean*

*Beach is smooth and shifted—dropped off edge*

*Seals still bobbing*

*The whole angle of the*

*Sea has shifted from the NE to the NW*

*And aside from a few white caps*

*The flat ponderous*

*Undulating and understated breakers have returned*

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These poems are from a two-week stay in an Outer Cape Cod rustic dune shack in October 2010.

Susan Wardell is a social anthropologist, mother and poet from New Zealand.

## Phloem, xylem

Susan Wardell

*The inside of a tree  
is God's temple*

*Phloem  
give substance  
to light, a drawing down  
of dawn. Claim it,  
amniotic sweet,  
deep greening  
through flesh.  
Newborn.*

*Xylem  
raise water  
to life, your hydrogen  
hallelujah defies. A slow  
ascent through walls  
thick with the souls  
of old cells.  
Arise.*

*I am  
a devotee, wear  
the heart of a tree  
on a black string, swinging  
around my neck – oil it  
with the prayers of  
anxious fingers.*

*Mother Kauri  
pray for me, Manuka,  
Kōwhai, Rātā, filter my  
penitent exhalations through  
the water, light, of your holy  
place, through your  
phloem, xylem,  
the balance  
of grace.*

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## mare oceanum

### Erica Stretton

*pounding, hammering  
a thousand grains of midnight  
she beats you*

*trapped in depths  
waving actiniaria, clinging limpet  
gifts you can't keep*

*buoyed by saline  
cosseted, whispered away  
she lets you fall*

*tantalising coruscate  
raise your cupped hands and drink deep  
she makes you thirst*

*living, a home  
kelp fingers, skittering herring  
she will murder you easy*

*as a lover  
your mother said  
beware*

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Erica Stretton lives in Auckland, New Zealand, and writes poetry and fiction that is heavily influenced by the natural world.

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## Boats Marinating

### Pete Mullineaux

*After a long winter lay-off  
the hulls are sunk into the ocean  
absorbing its essence.  
Here is the paradox: the boards  
cannot be too dry; to survive in water  
you meet your nemesis half way  
become part of what you oppose –  
each vessel a buoyant top note  
in a deeper accord.*

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Pete Mullineaux lives in Galway, Ireland, and works in development education. He's published four poetry collections, most recently *How to Bake a Planet* (Salmon Poetry 2016).

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Statement of Commitment to Ecocentrism: <http://is.gd/ecocentrism>

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Elizabeth Carothers Herron  
writes poetry and articles  
on art and ecology.

## Faye Creek

Elizabeth Carothers Herron

*Under the overhang of green, where the creek  
ripples with weightless water-skates,  
a broidery of light on stones and water  
raddled with reflections, a place endlessly  
receiving itself in the conversation  
of root, leaf and stone, lichen and bark,  
catkin and alder cone, twig and stream violet,  
the perfect prints of doe and fawn follow  
the bank, the doe's track larger, with a slight splay,  
the fawn's delicate points where the tips meet.  
Crouched over their tracks, beside the lit slip  
of stream, I think of the fawn I found on the road  
still warm, her limp neck no bigger than my forearm.  
I think of Wolfgang Laib gathering pollen, sifting it  
through linen into heaps of gold – bees and honey,  
the months the fawn grew, a condensation of light  
in a watery world of breath and heartbeat.  
Steelhead fry flick past, half-disguised by bay leaves  
quivering above the water or soggy and dark  
on the gravel bottom. What silence,  
what tender listening receives us?  
What reverence caught the fawn on the road  
with its last breath – gently as pollen  
collected from a blossom.*



# Mal de mer

by  
**Marina Roy**

Higher-resolution versions:  
<https://is.gd/ecoartwork>

**About the artwork:** Stills from a 40-minute video made in 2017. Over the course of one year, the artist threw a GoPro camera under the Sturdies Bay dock on Galiano Island, BC, Canada. The camera captures a shifting underwater Salish seascape – life forms changing in symbiosis with the seasonal weather, currents, and fluctuations in life cycle of marine organisms. Enhanced by the accompanying soundscape (composed by Graham Meisner), the camera's point of view takes on something akin to a creature swimming through this habitat, even though the perspective

is entirely mechanical (that of the underwater camera). The initial impetus of the work was a meditation on the fragility of the world's oceans in light of anthropogenic change. Without references to how this area looked in the past, the waters appear marvelously abundant in life, although humans' presence is heavy. The original soundscape was dominated by the sound of ferries coming and going, creating much underwater turbulence and noise. What is captured on video is sealife having adapted to human industry – a kind of eco-romantic ruin.

