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The Voices of Water: Intermedial Blue Eco-Stories. An Introduction

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1. The Sounds of Intermedial Blue Eco-Stories[1]

Let's begin by conjuring the 'voice' of one of the most stunning human artifacts that employs water to tell stories: Bernini's Fountain of the Four Rivers in Rome. Inaugurated in 1651 to celebrate the end of the Thirty Years' War, the fountain is an "indelible mark on the urban fabric" that places "the city at the centre of an allegorical representation of the entire globe" (Freddolini 2025: 142). Rising from a wide elliptical basin, the marble complex portrays the personification of the rivers that stood for the four continents then known: the Danube (Europe), the Ganges (Asia), the Nile (Africa) and the Rio de la Plata (Americas). The imposing visuality of the group of gigantic male figures immediately recalls the frontispiece of the most famous of the Renaissance atlases, Abrahm Ortelius' *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* (1570), which for the first time anthropomorphized the continents depicting them as human female bodies (Gillies 1994: 74).

If "a map is any kind of model of any spatial image" (54), this fountain is certainly a three-dimensional map that challenges the onlookers to circumnavigate its water filled basin – a sea inhabited by fantastic marine creatures in marble – as if they themselves were explorers discovering the flora and fauna of the minutely sculpted natural environment of each river, as well as the ethnic features of the local population. For those who stand in front of the fountain or walk around its basin, the auditory experience cannot but accompany their visual one. Water gushes directly from the rock

[1] This section is entirely by Maddalena Pennacchia.

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through jets of various shapes and intensities; it splashes, dripples, bubbles: its distinctive sound is a necessary supplement to the stories that the fountain tells in the language of visual arts. Importantly, those stories are mostly inspired by a literary heritage that goes back to the classical myth and its reuse in early modern period literature, when travel narratives described new worlds through the lens of literary archetypes. How many stories does the fountain tell? Are they blue stories? May we venture to say that the fountain is an intermedial story-telling machine? And what is the story of water in relation to the marble narrative?

Before attempting to answer these questions, it could be useful to try and define what we mean, in this issue, by "intermedial blue eco-stories", starting from the adjective "intermedial". Intermediality, as an area of research, focuses on the materiality and mediality of artistic and cultural practices as well as on media crossing and converging; it is therefore interested in those phenomena that take place between (*inter*) media[2]. Such phenomena have always existed within the technologically evolving system of related media and arts, spanning from "intermedial references" (like the ekphrasis), to "media combination" (like the opera) to "medial transposition" (like film adaptation), according to the useful tripartition proposed by Irina O. Rajewsky in a seminal essay on literature and intermediality (2005: 50). However, the consolidation of the digital turn at the beginning of the new millennium brought with it the fast development of a continuous digital media system which substituted the discontinuous analogic system, thus boosting the creation of intermedial cultural products and intermedial stories (Pennacchia 2017).

All the intermedial stories which are referred to in this issue deal with water and have been chosen and analysed within an

[2] Intermediality is a major research field that has greatly developed over the first two decades of the new millennium. Thanks to the prefix 'inter' (between), which aims to highlight the relational nature of all media, the term has often been used to broadly cover concepts such as multimodality, media-convergence, transmediality, remediation and so forth. The first wave of critical debate on intermediality started at the end of the 1990s and has produced a wealth of publications since. I will mention here only two pioneer studies: Werner Wolf (1999) and Lars Elleström (2010) as well as the Canadian journal *Intermédialités/ Intermediality*.

ecocritical framework by the authors of the articles, that is with a specific environmental awareness and ecological sensibility. Discourses of literary ecology that started some thirty years ago with a groundbreaking collection edited by Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, who famously defined the field as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (1996: xviii) have developed immensely since. Many publications have explored and theorized the environmental crisis and its literary and cultural narratives, greatly expanding our understanding of the connection between natural catastrophic events – from typhoons to icecaps melting and the rising of the oceans, to name but a few – and politics. Geology is also political, as Jeremy Davies provocatively invites us to think when – resuming the then already decennial debate on the Anthropocene, a term invented by Crutzen and Stoermer in 2000 – he reads human history through the stratigrapher's lens and against the deep time of the earth. We are called to think of ourselves as 'geological subjects' with a longstanding impact on the planet (2016). In recent years the focus of environmental studies has gradually shifted from land to sea, spinning off yet another critical thread that is "blue ecocriticism", as the title of the famous study by Sidney Dobrin states (2021); if Dobrin's study was mainly interested in "the oceanic imperative", the field further expanded and yet another term was coined, the "blue humanities", which "comprise a current of scholarly and artistic discourses that foreground human relationships with water in all its forms" (Mentz 2024: 17)[3].

Be it a question of land or sea, earth or water, what all the most recent ecocritical theories highlight is the "interconnectedness and codependence of ecosystems that humans as well as nonhumans are a part of" (Bruhn, Salmose 2024: 37). The environmental crisis, that is, needs to be understood holistically, and therefore also intermedially, as this issue contends. Human beings and nonhuman creatures are related not only to each other but also to the environment in

[3] The growing importance of and wealth of critical thinking produced by the blue humanities is witnessed, for example, by international events such as the Conference *Sensory Histories of Water*, convened by Antonio Arnieri (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona), Alexandros Maria Hatzikiriakos (University of St Andrews), Tin Cugelj (International Musicological Society Study Group *Auditory History*) which took place on 2-4 April 2025 at the Museu Marítim de Barcelona (Spain).

which they all exist. All these subjects exert their impact on each other, a kind of agency, in a larger and denser network of reciprocal influences (Latour), which are always also mediated (see Salmose below).

It is interesting to think that the first signs of the environmental crisis can be dated back to the rising of the new science that implied the gradual and unrelenting loss of the relation between macro and microcosm. Such a loss also authorized an increasingly ruthless exploitation of a 'feminine nature', passive and silent, as the site of the supposedly inexhaustible resources necessary for technological capitalism to thrive (see Golinelli below). How can the drive to possess and consume the natural resources of the planet be contained and repurposed in order to save it for future generations? This is the working question posed by Carla Benedetti, among others, in *La letteratura ci salverà dall'estinzione* (2021), where she suggests that before looking for an economic and political solution to the crisis, we must acknowledge our responsibility towards the unborn. In her opinion, a merely scientific understanding of the problem will not be enough to bring effective political change. In order to face the crisis, we need to *feel* our responsibility towards the unborn, human and not human, putting ourselves in the shoes of those who do not exist yet. To succeed, we need to work on the 'muscle' of our imagination, practising our skills to conceive what is not already present in our time and space. Literature and cultural representations help train our imagination and, consequently, strengthen empathy, i.e. the precious ability to share the feeling of those who are not us. There is so much more than 'us' on the earth, as post-humanist theories point out: the planet is an ecosystem and we, human beings, cannot survive if we do not understand our being entangled with each other and with what is 'not human' and yet exists (Haraway).

In telling its many stories through multiple media and arts, the Fountain of the Four Rivers shows such entangled relations between living creatures and the environment, representing them as global thanks to the visual and auditory continuity of the anthropomorphized rivers of the world that are all connected to each other by rock and water. Walking around the fountain, we may empathize with the story of the Rio de la Plata, for example, which is enchained and bears the features of an African man, thus revealing an early awareness in baroque Rome, and perhaps even an exposure,

of the slave trade in America (Freddolini 2025). We may be struck by strange animals and plants, feeling the fascination of the stories told by explorers when they reported of the fauna and flora found in distant continents. We may be intrigued by the stories of purported artistic rivalry, like the one between Bernini and Borromini, to be detected in the dynamic pose of one of the titanic figures protecting himself from the impending fall of the church in front of the fountain. But, above all, we may be enticed into listening to the story of the actual water of the fountain that is told through sounds which are both natural and artificial. The sounds of Bernini's fountain reveal a hydraulic engineering prowess as well as the power of the element itself, whose natural 'voice' travels for miles of manmade pipes to reach the square where it is finally set free from the earth. There is a kind of joy in the sounds of the water when it resurfaces from the depth of the city, reminding those who listen to it how precious and essential it is to all life. Through its movement the water 'speaks' with its own voice, and in so doing it enriches the soundscape of the city and becomes part of a situated auditory culture, which is both ontogenetic and phylogenetic (Schafer, 1994; Kelman, 2010; Kane 2015).

The voice of water resonating through Bernini's masterpiece is an example of how the multiple voices with which water speaks can be heard thanks to the many media and art forms that record their stories. In fact, it is at the very intersection of diverse media and the arts that a space may open for this element to be listened to as a material supplement to human artistic languages. Learning to listen to the sounds of water as we find them in intermedial blue eco-stories can perhaps awaken and train our human capacity to take responsibility for what surrounds us, for all that exists beyond us and notwithstanding our transient being here and now.

2. Genealogies and Gender[4]

Is there a possible genealogy of old and multifaceted eco-stories of water? And if it exists, when did the first forms of ecological awareness appear? Did these forms elaborate values and perspectives that can be worthy of transformation and reintegration

[4] This section is entirely by Gilberta Golinelli.

into today's and tomorrow's societies which are the main focus of our inquiry?

These are some of the questions that have led us to investigate alternative ways of imagining human-water relationships through the exploration of works by artists and writers who have tried to listen to the voices of waters, oceans, rivers and their aquatic environment by bringing "maritime meanings to the surface" (Menzt 2015: xiv). As the time span covered by the essays collected in this volume also confirms, a moment of great change in literary works that contributed to the rise of ecological awareness took place between the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. Indeed, in the last few decades, early modern ecocriticism and eco-studies have demonstrated that our current environmental crisis has its roots in the early modern age, when a vitalist, animistic and holistic view of the world began to be transformed into that of a mechanistic universe, marking the onset of a long process of ecological transformations across the globe. Carolyn Merchant, in one of the first studies that outlined a fruitful dialogue between eco-criticism and ecofeminism, *The Death of Nature* (1980), shows how the "hermetic philosopher" of the pre-modern era who followed the rhythm of a female nature gradually became "an arranger of natural objects" (1989: 110), striving to unveil and exploit the secrets of the natural organic order. "The Renaissance magus as an operator and arranger of natural objects", argues Merchant, became the basis of a new optimism that nature could be altered for human progress (109). It is hard to deny that this view seems to be already announced in *Dr Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe (1594), when the Bad angel not only convinces Faustus to "Go forward, […] in that famous art/Wherein all nature's treasury is contain'd" but also clarifies that "to go forward" mainly implies the dominion over nature: "Be thou on earth as Jove is in the sky,/ Lord and commander of these elements." (1,1, 72-75).

It is however in Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1626), a scientific utopia whose ideas were crucial for the founders of the Royal Society of London (Rossi 1968), that the Renaissance magus turns into an expert who observes, anatomizes, and reproduces nature's parts. Liberated from a relationship with the nonhuman natural world that was based on empathy and respect, and free of those ethical strictures which were associated with the view of nature as a living being, "the fathers" of Salomon's House's approach to the

investigation of the terrestrial environment anticipates a scientific model that would become crucial for the progress and advancement of mankind. "The knowledge of causes and secret motions of things and the enlarging of the bounds of human empire, to the effecting of all things possible" (177) is in fact the aim of Salomon's House's research and experiments. Its members use and produce models of birds and beasts that can be not only manipulated "for view or rareness, but likewise for dissection and trials; that thereby we may take light what may be wrought upon the body of man" (179). They also alter and thus create species of herbs and plants to make them "rise by mixtures of earths without seeds, and likewise to make new plants; and to make one tree or plant turn into another" (179). Bacon imagines a kind of scientific research that would bring with it a set of attitudes about terrestrial environment generating, legitimating, and reinforcing tendencies toward growth and progress inherent in the rise of industrialization and capitalism (see Merchant 1989: 185). Once ignored, such issues as deforestation, rapid urbanization, loss of wetlands are now considered important contexts also for the study of early modern literature and the investigation of what has recently been defined as land ethic (Mentz 2009: xxix) and/or pastoral nostalgia.

Yet, although the great faith in a mechanistic view of nature contributed to manipulate the terrestrial environment by transforming its vital elements into mere passive matter, it was not able to master the secret laws of the aquatic world, of oceans, seas, rivers and their fluid environment.

Early modern views of oceanic space were in fact different from the perception of nature on land (Marykate Earnest 2010: 1), since early modern writers portrayed the ocean as both a nearly inconceivable physical reality and as a force for change and instability that man could not control. It is, however, only recently that blue cultural studies have begun to expand their focus to include the voices of aquatic environments in the cultural representations of the early modern age, when the rise of anthropocentrism and modern science went hand in hand with the improvement of techniques to work with or upon oceanic space. For instance, to awaken twenty-first century readers to impending ecological disaster, Steve Menzt declares the need to hear the different voices of water depicted in Shakespeare's works, reminding us that "We need Shakespeare's

Ocean now, because late-twentieth-century culture has frayed our connections to the sea" (2009: ix).

Shakespeare's aquatic environment is deeply involved in human existence. It contributes to change the course of the individual's life, provides a reservoir of metaphorical material from which to forge meaning, and frequently shapes or transforms characters' lives and moral behaviour. It is therefore not surprising that Solanio, in the very first scene of *The Merchant of Venice*, believes that Antonio's mind "is tossing on the ocean" (1.1.8) and thus that his sadness is generated by the sea, whose power could not be predicted or controlled by human means. Indeed, maritime symbols of the sixteenth and seventeenth century show us that the early modern sea was perceived and depicted as both wealth and loss, influencing and determining people's temper and humour. It was a symbol of chaos and instability, an inversion of the orderly world of land, as well as the place where monsters and hybrid creatures were mainly shaped. Early modern cartography, and those maps and charts representing lands recently discovered, were surrounded by old and new seas populated by sea monsters, monstrous fishes, whales, giant snakes and even mermaids (see Manon Turban 2021 online source). As Wes Williams reminds us, "Early modern natural historians and storytellers found their monsters in all four elements, but the element of choice remained the sea" (51). The sea was also seen as a highway to commercial prosperity and colonialism, a symbol of freedom, but also a vision of God's suffering, a source of moral transformative and generative power and a possibility of reformation of the individual and society (see Jane Hwang Degenhardt 2020). It is only after the storm, a symbol of the uncontrolled power of the sea, and through an emblematic transformation into a fascinating sea creature, that Alonso, King of Naples can start his redemption, as Ariel's song in *The Tempest* suggests: "Of his bones are coral made; Those are pearls that were his eyes: Nothing of him that doth fade, But doth suffer a sea-change. Into something rich and strange" (1.2. 400-405). Chaos and instability are thus a vehicle to achieve an individual transformation and a change of perspective, which can only occur through a modification of the human body into a mixture of pearls, corals, and oceanic elements.

But maritime patterns are also used to create a better society. Oceans, storms, shipwrecks are often necessary to reach the ideal

state that is described in early modern utopian texts. This place is often, and not by chance, discovered, but also conceivable, after a long journey, a shipwreck or, as happens in *New Atlantis*, days spent "in the midst of the greatest wilderness of waters in the world, without victuals" (Bacon 1999: 152).

Particularly emblematic within the reconstruction of a genealogy of old and multifaceted eco-stories of water are the voices of the ocean depicted by women writers.

In *The Blazing World* by Margaret Cavendish (1666), one of the first utopias conceived by a woman and a fictional text added to her lengthy scientific treatise *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, the ocean is still seen as a natural element that resists dominance with its overwhelming force for change and instability. However, Cavendish seems to use the multifaceted voices of water also to contrast the mechanical view at the very core of the new systemic approach to the natural world and its nonhuman environment that was sustained by the great faith in applied knowledge and in those new scientific methods that she rejects in her philosophical and scientific texts[5]. Indeed, within a philosophical context in which animistic and organic assumptions tended to turn into exploitation and control, Cavendish considers humans not separated from, but rather part of the variety of a dynamic natural world. To her, human beings are just one of the infinite parts that compose the natural environment, and their needs and views are as necessary and important as the other parts of the complex natural world itself. In the *Blazing World*, it is the voice of the ocean that not only denounces and punishes patriarchy, gender inequality and violence, but also allows the heroine, and Cavendish herself as a woman, writer, and philosopher, to question what would happen if the environmental world were seen bio-centrically instead of anthropocentrically. Cavendish's heroine is kidnapped by a merchant on a shore while gathering shells. After a beginning in which the sea is exploited and commodified by the merchant, a vindicative ocean interrupts the lady's imprisonment when a powerful storm takes the lives of the merchant and his crew

[5] For a more specific analysis of Cavendish' s approach to nature as well as her role as a natural philosopher, see, amongst the various studies, Eve Keller (1997: 447-471); Lisa Walters (2014); Golinelli (2018).

and carries the ship off course. After a long journey, the lady lands in the Blazing World, an archipelago whose inhabitants live in perfect harmony and great civility despite their many differences. She encounters creatures who treat her with respect despite their bizarre and nonhuman appearance, or, as we would say today, their post-human or multispecies 'being': "But those bear-like creatures, how terrible soever they appeared to her sight, yet were they so far from exercising any cruelty upon her, that rather they showed her all civility and kindness imaginable" (127) declares the lady with great surprise. The inhabitants of the Blazing World, bear-men, fox-men, fish-men, satyrs, and a gallery of zoomorphic creatures or new monsters, live without any wish to control and to adapt the natural environment to their needs, resisting anthropocentrism and any form of binarism. They reside in their own climatic and geographical environment and do jobs that are most fitting for the nature of their species and in perfect combination with the environment, whether land or sea, they inhabit. Moreover, in contrast with a vision of the water environment to be exploited and commanded to colonise other lands, as oceanic studies have demonstrated[6], these creatures respond to a nautically connected world with, as Earnest suggests (2020), innovations that do not harm the environment, "bird-men develop boats resembling nests, and grass-green men have honeycomb-like ships" (128). Cavendish's description shows how their approach, unlike that of the (male) human beings who exploit the ocean to reach new lands to conquer, combines technological ingenuity and organic cooperation with nature and with the variety of its aquatic environment, seeing the nonhuman natural world as dynamic and living rather than an inert receiver of human impulses and necessities. As a woman, excluded from the scientific domain and from those places where research, experiments and decisions are made, Cavendish conceives the ideal society also in ecological terms, since a high level of civility and respect can be reached only when men accept that their knowledge and control of the natural

[6] "Whosoever commands the sea", declared the poet, pirate and colonizer Walter Raleigh in his "A Discourse of the invention of Ships, Anchors, Compasse", "commands the trade; whosoever commands the trade of the world, commands the riches of the world, and consequently the world itself" (Christopher Conney 2010: 686).

environment can be relative. As a perpetually self-moving body, "dividing, composing, changing, forming and transforming her parts by self-corporeal figurative motions", the natural world, and thus the same aquatic environment that Cavendish uses for its symbolic value, is in fact for Cavendish the real "stumbling block to most men, at which they break their heads of understanding, like blind men, that run against several posts or walls" (Cavendish 2001: 85, 99).

3. Time and Nostalgia[7]

The profound symbolism of water, sea, and especially waves has attracted human thought for ages through their associations with both the repetitiveness and passing of time. The waves' notion of change and obfuscation, and their relation to very basic natural elements, made them appropriate both as the title and the essential motif in Woolf's *The Waves*, a novel deeply engaged in the topic of time. In Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* we meet the waves in numerous metaphors and images, one noteworthy example being when Mrs. Ramsay contemplates how the waves alter meaning from being "a measured and soothing tattoo to her thoughts and seemed consolingly to repeat over and over again […] the words of some old cradle song […]" to liken "a ghostly roll of drums [that] remorselessly beat the measure of life […]" (Woolf [1964] [1927]: 19).

The undulating and metaphysical quality of water, in its weaving of awe and horror, brings nostalgia to its perceivers, a proximity to long home or away, to experience potential, change and the melancholy of the fleeting. Water is never still; it is changing and thus performs the logics of ephemerality. Such is the world, or as Karl Marx famously uttered, "all that is solid melts into air" (Marx and Engels 2012: 37). In the novel *Isslottet* [*The Ice Palace*] (2009 [1963]), Norwegian author Tarjei Veesas writes eloquently about this change through the inevitable disintegration of the ice:

> The ice construction rises above them, enigmatic, powerful, its pinnacles disappearing into the darkness and the winter cloud drift. It seems prepared to stand eternally – but time is misleadingly brief, it will fall one day when the floods begin (86).

[7] This section is entirely by Niklas Salmose.

Water then, in all its forms, lends itself perfectly to its highly symbolic and topical value as a mediator of the Anthropocene, an element we all affectionately relate to. Images of water situate an audience in a balanced conceptualization of the relation between humanity and nature, beyond the traditional delightful horror of the Kantian sublime in that the sense of the apocalyptic grants the sublime an immediate existential angst, where diegetic humans are not only observers but also victims. The increased tendency in contemporary art and fiction to react to and comment on the Anthropocene yields a desire to erase the boundary between nature and human where water and ice become central motifs. One profoundly illustrative example of this is when Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson created headlines during the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris 2015 with his artwork *Ice Watch*. For this work he freighted 12 ice blocks from Greenland and positioned them in melting fashion at the Place du Panthéon in a circle resembling the ticking Doomsday Clock.

The climate crisis is real, but this reality is always mediated[8]. In that sense, we can claim that the crisis is media borne. All we know and feel about it is through transformations of scientific facts into media more accessible to us. For affective value, these transformations utilize representations of the crisis, like water and ice. The slow violence by humans on our ecology, as Rob Nixon accentuates the climate emergency (Nixon 2011: 2), provides what Timothy Morton refers to as an impossibility of representation, a "hyperobject" (Morton 2013). Simulations of an altered Gulf Stream, or future visions of dramatic effects of slowly increasing water levels are indeed hard to grasp. The almost clichéd images of starving polar bears, on the other hand, appear to speak against Morton's defeatist contention that the ecological crisis is un-representable or that, in Amitav Ghosh's words, realist depictions of the climate crisis are bound to fail to impact fellow humans (Ghosh 2016). The emotional iconicity of the metonymic polar bear is not only that they are so vulnerable (and soon gone), but that their pads hang onto a rapidly shrinking ice floe. Thus, water, whether it is ice, seas, beaches, islands, or water species, is a strong affective cluster of meanings

[8] For an explicit discussion of how science is transformed into other media forms, see Jørgen Bruhn, Niklas Salmose (2024).

and form, space and time, from which to explore ecological issues from different media perspectives. Plastic in and near water is worse to experience than plastic on land, simply because water is mysteriously pure and innocent, and its pollution feels like the pollution of life itself (since we are all more or less water). This feeling resonates in Thijs Biersteker's interactive kinetic installation *Plastic Reflectic* (2016) where attendees, through interactive technologies, participate in and reflect on their own role and agency in the "plastic soup" as the plastic-polluted water is referred to. Slow violence, thus, can be sped up in art, often, but not only, in narrative forms. We can speculate on future times, beyond the climate apocalypse, as in the film *Waterworld* (1995) where scattered inhabitants of a flooded world (due to the melting of the polar caps) are in constant search of an imaginary green land. Water here becomes the ruin of civilisation, where souvenirs from the past linger in the deep dark waters as beacons of what we once were. Or if we wish to examine the actual cataclysm, we turn to *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), to watch the ice cap melting within minutes of narrative time before the world freezes altogether. In this, and other films, the biblical flood of doom is successfully used as a way of elevating our current global warming to mythical dimensions, but also, simultaneously, rooting them in realistic memories for those of us who experienced the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami.

The potentially disastrous effects of water and ice propel us to speculate on what constitutes a home. Nostalgia specifically offers a broad set of complex emotional registers that either border on or pave the way for the general concept of ecological loss we experience either in reality or through representations of the crisis[9]. Nowhere has this been formulated with such potency as in Glenn Albrecht's concept of *solastalgia*, "a form of homesickness one gets when one is still at 'home'" (2020: 11). Albrecht's own work, grounded in the extreme droughts in Australia, is about *absent* water, which reminds us of the desert world in the 1965 epic novel *Dune* by Frank Herbert, where the importance of water resources is central to the narrative plot.

[9] For an overview of the relationship between nostalgia and ecological issues, see Niklas Salmose, Anna Ishchenko (2024).

Nostalgia, it appears, is no longer about the past (if ever it was), rather it is a critical tool to reinterpret how the past influences our present and future. What are the reasons for our crisis, how do we feel about it now, how do we act now to change the future for the better? Humanity in the rear window thus, moving along with post humanist tendencies, is what is responsible for our current tragedy. Seas polluted as a result of fossil (plastic) and extractive capitalism, poisoned drinking water, acid rain, extinct sea species, red-listed cod. Extreme weather, unpredictable storms, rising waters, droughts, uncontrollable wildfires. It is all linked to water. No surprise then that Cormac McCarthy chose to end his doomsday novel *The Road* (2006) in a stream. "Once there were brook trout in the streams in the mountains" writes McCarthy in the coda of his novel (307). Life starts in water (at least once upon a time) and hope ends in it. Is this a peaceful world without the human subject McCarthy describes, or is it a nostalgic dream reminding us of a total loss? Perhaps this is the most radical human disaster of them all: that we humans already imagine a world without our participation. The lonely trout in the stream is a vision of Earth from a distance. The first photo taken of Earth from the moon, "Earthrise," snapped by astronaut Bill Anders on Christmas Eve 1968 during their moon adventure, shows our blue water planet in all its glory, a small bagatelle in a vast universe. We conquered. And then we corrupted. Earthrise became Earthset. But the trout is still in the stream. For now.

4. Outline of issue

The issue opens with "Alanna Mitchell's *Sea Sick*: The Role of Stories in Environmental Communication" by **Valeria Ferrà** in which the author explores a hybrid narrative that exceeds categorizations and mixes journalistic activism, scientific reporting and autobiography in order to raise ecological awareness. As a result of her participation in an expedition to check the health conditions of the global waters, Mitchell concocts a narrative that, according to Ferrà, "thinks with water". *Sea Sick* assigns narrative rights to the sea, which is seen as a body that has fallen ill, examining its sickness through medical discourses. Ferrà comparatively analyses the play that was commissioned out of the book by Theatre Centre in Toronto, i.e. a long monologue that engages the audience even more directly than

the written page. The arts and literature, Ferrà contends, are crucial for communicating the environmental crisis, as witnessed by this case study, since they supplement with affective engagement the necessary but often not very effective scientific information.

Francesca Forlini's article "'And then the sea came back and told its own story': Water and the Archival Multiverse" offers a rich theoretical survey of sound studies, with a particular focus on the link between ecocriticism and issues such as expanded listening, and the ethics of listening. She realizes this through the concept of an archival multiverse, i.e. archives that are conceived as spaces that host different voices, and where human and nonhuman can coexist and interact. The case study chosen by Forlini is a 17-minute radio piece by Anja Kanngieser and Polly Stanton that records, through the narrative voice of a linguist specialised in geological discourses, the devastating tsunami that happened in 2004 in the Indian Ocean. Opening with nonhuman natural sounds of water mixed with technological sounds of underwater beeps, the radio narrative, Forlini argues, invites us to welcome and confer meaning not only to human voices, but also to nonhuman sounds and, importantly, silence as a way of opening the human ear to non-hierarchical relational and affective listening.

Passionately dedicated to the work of Florence Welch, leader of the British indie band, Florence + The Machine, "The Score of Poetry: Ec(h)ology of Water in Florence Welch's *Useless Magic*" by **Andrea Raso** deals with Welch's book of poetry, published in 2018. The book is part of a larger project and references a number of other works by this eminently intermedial and versatile artist who has explored many artistic languages in multiple media. Her written poetry on water confronts, challenges and is challenged by the non-verbal energy of music as well as the power of her own voice, which she explores and experiments with. Searching for echoes of water in her own vocalization and breathing, Welch creates liquid sound textures that, according to Raso, vibratingly resonate with the hydrofeminist content of her lyrics, thus fostering a sympathetic interaction between human and nonhuman that generates meaning and the bodily understanding of nature.

Carolina Pisapia focuses on a rewriting of *The Little Mermaid* in "The Wordless Modesty of Watery Languages: Marine Creatures, Trans-Species Encounters, and the Little Mermaid's Reversed

Desire". Katherine Vaz's short story "What the Conch Shell Sings When the Body is Gone" (2010), becomes a case study for Pisapia to interact with and reflect on posthuman and ecocritical theories. The author examines the reversal of Andersen's story in Vaz's narrative, highlighting its capacity to make readers vibrate with the protagonist's nostalgic desire for an aquatic soundless world, where communication does not have to rely on speech and where the wordless languages of water teach creatures new ways of respectfully relating to each other.

In "In Deep Water: Catastrophes for Change in *The Contingency Plan*" **Harriet Carnevale** examines the intermedial strategies employed in Steve Waters' two-part play *The Contingency Plan* (2009) to advocate for societal change in response to the climate crisis. By blending fiction with scientific knowledge, the play highlights the consequences of melting glaciers and the urgency of organised counteraction. The narrative focuses on the communication barriers between scientists and government officials and thus engages in the transmediation of science into other discourses. Carnevale examines how the character of Will, a glaciologist, serves as a mediator, emphasizing the climate emergency and the need for action. The play, argues Carnevale, demonstrates the potential of theatre to address environmental issues by combining scientific data with emotional storytelling, aiming to engage audiences and inspire change.

Joseph Conrad's autobiographical work *The Mirror of the Sea* (1906) is read through a blue ecocritical lens by **Mattia De Luca** in "Tides of Change: Conrad's Maritime Reflections in *The Mirror of the Sea*", highlighting its contributions to contemporary environmental discourse. De Luca unpacks how Conrad portrays the sea as a dynamic and transformative force, challenging anthropocentric views of history and progress, and how Conrad's depiction of the sea is in contrast with the land, emphasizing the sea's enduring presence and the transient nature of human endeavours. De Luca stresses the psychological and emotional dimensions of maritime life as it is expressed in *The Mirror of the Sea* through symbols and metaphors to illustrate the deep connection between sailors and the sea. Positioning his study in the era of rapid industrialization and modernization, De Luca displays how *The Mirror of the Sea* reverberates with the shift from sail to steam and the loss of intimacy

with nature and thus reimagines the human-nature relationship, contributing to the "blue" genealogy of thought in ecocritical literature.

Virginia Woolf's seminal novel *The Waves* (1931) is one of the more complex texts within high modernism. In "Relational Water in Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*: An Elemental Reading" **Angelo Monaco** focuses his analysis on the role of water in the novel, highlighting how water in its various states-solid, vaporous, and liquid-serves as a unifying and transformative element that transcends anthropocentric perspectives. Monaco shows how Woolf blends prose and poetry, dissolving formal boundaries and capturing the rhythm of life, both thematically and formally. The analysis addresses the novel's engagement with deep geological time, queer ecological orientations, and the dynamic interplay between human and nonhuman temporalities. *The Waves*, Monaco claims, offers a profound meditation on the interconnectedness of all life forms, using water as a medium to reimagine the human-nature relationship in the context of the Anthropocene.

Whereas Monaco focuses on one novel, **Savina Stevanato** takes a broader perspective on Woolf's multifaceted use of water in her literary works in "'The sea is to be heard all through it': Woolf's Dichotomous Voices of Water", focusing on its symbolic and material significance. Woolf's modernist poetics, Stevanato argues, extensively incorporate water to mimic its rhythm and fluidity, which aligns with the modernist quest for impersonality and intertextual practices. The essay examines Woolf's aqueous imagery, which thematizes fluidity and boundary crossing between genres, genders, human and non-human, and various media. Through a textual analysis of short stories such as "A Simple Melody", "A Woman's College from Outside", "The Fascination of the Pool", and "The Watery Place", the essay highlights the dichotomous significance of water in Woolf's work. Additionally, it explores the connections between these stories and Woolf's last novel, *Between the Acts*, emphasizing the generative power of water in her aesthetic vision. Stevanato argues that Woolf's attraction to water's metamorphic fluidity and boundary-blurring qualities points to an ecological and ethical sense of existence, promoting openness to intermedial exchanges and foreshadowing contemporary forms of aesthetic and ontological fluidity.

The multifaceted voice of the Caribbean Sea is explored by **Simona Corso** in her essay "'This satanic sea': V.S. Naipaul, Jamaica Kincaid and the Caribbean predicament" that focuses on V.S. Naipaul's *The Middle Passage* (1962) and Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place* (1988). According to Corso, both novels show the deep nexus of colonial history, the tourist industry, and ecological violence that has transformed the Caribbean Sea and its islands into a "commodity, an aesthetic object, cosmetically cleansed of its tragic histories". The lands and the sea have been transformed and exploited to accommodate new forms of subjection that come to reproduce old systems of control and relations of power. *The Middle Passage* and *A Small Place* are thus novels characterized by the necessity to give the Caribbean Sea back its true history, a past that has shaped the land, its people, and their relationship with the natural environment. Only in this way, as both novels claim, can the Caribbean Sea regain not only a history that has been silenced until now, but also its true beauty and healing power.

Francesca Mussi's essay interrogates Indigenous water ontologies and Indigenous peoples' struggles for water rights in settler states, in this case in Australia, by focusing on *Madukka the River Serpent* (*Madukka*) by Julie Janson. It explores the twofold purpose of the novel, since *Madukka the River Serpent* does not only challenge anthropocentric views of land and sea but also the ongoing discrimination against Indigenous peoples whose relationship with water is based on reciprocity, respect, and responsibility. Mussi also demonstrates how Julie Janson engages with tropes of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British crime fiction, using the detective fiction genre to highlight Indigenous voices by "reinventing the notion of crime and the role of the detective through an Indigenous lens", and introducing 'Country' as an active character with agency in the story.

In dialogue with recent Blue Ecocriticism trends, **Angelica Vedelago's** essay, "'From Tiber to ThAImes': An Eco-Critical Approach to Literary Rivers from Shakespeare to AI-generated Art", examines early modern works by Shakespeare, John Taylor and Michael Drayton. These works portray rivers in both idealized and realistic terms, displaying a pastoral-apocalypse dichotomy. Rivers play a crucial role in the representation of Eden and are described as "companions for the toils of mankind", adapting

their flow to the human sleep-wake cycle. However, as John Taylor illustrates, they also serve as arteries for the transportation of goods and people and are exploited for human needs. Vedelago argues that these representations can be read as revealing mirrors that exhibit human negligence in "taking care of natural resources", as well as "red flags" that expose the nexus between uncontrolled human exploitation and potential environmental disaster and apocalypse. This is particularly evident in Michael Drayton's *Poly-Olbion*, in which the focus on the relationship between humans and nature, and human responsibility, proves the existence of ecological awareness in the early modern period. Vedelago concludes her essay by discussing the potential of AI as a cutting-edge "cultural space" that could enhance the "ecological agency" of human art.

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