

Editorial Creative Writing and Arts

Sea More Blue

Elizabeth Tavella
The American University of Rome
ecozona.arts@gmail.com

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37536/ECOZONA.2026.17.1.6142>



Our bodies carry an ancestral affinity with water. Regardless of whether we consciously perceive it, we move through the world as porous vessels of circulating fluids, affected by gravitational forces and the tidal rhythms that move water across the planet. Our “wet constitution” (Neimanis 1) resonates with the watery environments from which life first emerged. Standing before an ocean can thus feel strangely familiar, almost like encountering a distant relative. Yet western imaginaries have persistently positioned oceans as alien worlds beyond human comprehension, and this sense of projected otherness has been absorbed into an anthropocentric and speciesist framework that justifies their systemic exploitation.

As sites of anthropogenic harm, bodies of water are not passive containers: they react. Melting glaciers, rising seas, floods, prolonged droughts, and contamination, all testify to the destabilization of planetary hydrological systems, whose consequences fall unequally across bodies, communities, and regions, further highlighting entrenched privileges and dispossessions. But oceans and seas are not only sites of environmental upheaval; they are liquid archives of intergenerational trauma and conduits of imperialist violence. If on one side, as Smallwood writes, the Atlantic’s “saltwater” inscribed the social geography of Black life through “the blurred and bloodied boundaries between captivity, commodification, and diaspora” (8), necropolitical border regimes continue to redraw geographies of disposability, viscerally present in the deadly crossings of migrants in the Mediterranean, where erasure and silencing are sunk to the sea’s depths. Nor does colonial violence stop at human bodies. The seizure of marine beings for aquaria remains rooted in a history of microcosmic assembly and extraction of livelihood (Vandersommers), while seas themselves are weaponized into instruments of siege and geopolitical wars over water sovereignty. Despite being used as medium of violence, oceans and seas also carry currents of hope and liberation, simultaneously surging with resistance, mobility, and solidarity, as maritime interventions such as the Global Flotillas to Gaza remind us.

By thinking *with* water, this special issue invites us to stay wary of this double nature. This means recognizing first that a relational entanglement with waters “is more than a romanticized confluence of bodies” (Chen et al. 12). It means, above all, accounting for the layered, troubling, and multispecies confluences waters hold. Cultivating a seascape epistemology thus entails “splashing alternatives onto the Western-dominant and linear mind-set that has led the world toward realities of mass industrialization and cultural and individual assimilation” (Ingersoll 26), and, in doing so, recognizing water’s plurality and agency. To enter into kinship with water, then, is to attune to aquatic ways of knowing, or as Fackler and Schultersmandl suggest, to embody “practices of nurturing, sustenance, and care” (197) emerging from an awareness of interdependence, collectivity, and kinship with more-than-human watery lifeworlds, taking shape in the face of capitalist depletion and ecological unraveling. To think with water ultimately means, inspired by dolphin relational practices, embracing what Alexis Pauline Gumbs calls “schools of unlearning” (54), that is to let go of inherited supremacist logics and open toward queer, multispecies affiliations across species, lands, and waters.

The creative works gathered in this section come together as a polyphonic hydrology, carrying us into the tides of watery worlds and the depths of deep time. Artistic and narrative practices here go beyond representation by bridging theory and practice, as a gesture towards what Bailey-Charteris names the Hydrocene, “the cultural zeitgeist of art going into the blue, championing hydro-artistic methods that build companionable relationships with water while respecting its power and agency” (9). The contributions move across ocean floors and flowing rivers, liminal swamps and warming waters, sea fossils and the embodied experiences of ocean dwellers, and in the plurality of these perspectives, (salt)waters emerge as interconnected systems rather than isolated bodies. What the collected artworks reveal is that there is no single way to tell the oceans or amplify their histories and memories. Each voice here finds its own creative means, and each watery voice its own lifeway. In solidarity with this plurality, we have chosen collectively to use the plural “fishes” to disrupt the anonymous collectivity that language imposes, which erases the multitude of more-than-human agencies extracted and killed by the ton.

The cover image sets the tone for this journey into underwater landscapes. During her eighth expedition at sea and third dive to the ocean floor, Rebecca Rutstein embarked on an art residency aboard the R/V Atlantis in Mexico’s Gulf of California, collaborating with oceanographers and descending in the Alvin submersible to witness from a porthole the geologic, chemical, and microbial processes happening at 2,000 meters below the surface. *Day 22: Interconnections* is one of thirty paintings, one a day, each documenting a different encounter with the deep. Far from being merely evocative, Rutstein’s canvas makes visible the hidden cycles linking ocean depths to the surface that, as she writes on her [website](#), “connect all of us.” This realization must be taken quite literally, since the balance of the atmosphere and climate depends on abyssal processes without which life on Earth would become intolerable (Scales xiii). To enact the entanglement between the microscopic and the

planetary, color and form dissolve into each other. A diagonal surge of luminous teal and turquoise organic forms sweeps across a field of deep navy, simultaneously evoking microbial networks, coral architectures, and bioluminescent pulses. There is no horizon, no guiding direction. We are meant to float inside the blue. If, as Scales warns, “every living thing needs the deep” (xii), the existential threats of bottom trawling and deep-sea mining demand a new urgency to reckoning with the extractive systems that imperil them (Alaimo ix). In her work, art and science become companion methods of sensing that call for an ecopolitical immersion that refuses the safe distance of the observer and instead enters the deep, inevitably emerging transformed.

The first contribution of the creative writing and arts section opens with a provocation: what does it mean to look at sea life without the mediating apparatus of human classification? Frédéric Ducarme, a researcher in environmental philosophy and marine biology at the Muséum National d’Histoire Naturelle in Paris, as well as a scientific diver and underwater photographer, tackles this epistemic reframing through a photographic series divided into four thematic threads that trace a descent from sunlit surface waters into the darkness, inviting us into what we cannot fully comprehend and perhaps even archetypically fear. The images are purposefully without captions, taxonomic identification, or location to signal a deliberate refusal to comply with a history of scientific nomenclature tied to colonial extraction, thus grounding sea dwellers in a world that knows no human borders, while honoring the individual encountered in the here and now of their own home. Individuals belonging to species normatively considered less charismatic are given center stage, this too a strategy to counter the anthropocentric canons that rank lives by their aesthetic appeal and perceived value. While a photographic snapshot is indeed a form of capture, as Stacy Alaimo suggests, it can go beyond objectification by opening toward “more fluid notions of what it is to see and to know within networks of human knowledge practices and technologies as they interact with nonhuman agencies” (9). Ducarme encourages this shift by subversively proposing that as the marine gaze looks back, the colonial and patriarchal logic of the observing eye is challenged. The photographer, and we with them, act in this diving journey as quiet visitors, maintaining a distant intimacy (Westerlaken) that embodies the most generative approach to oceanic kinship.

Following are three poems by Susan Richardson, a writer, performer and educator from Wales, who translates embodied marine experiences into poetry while bearing witness to the anthropogenic harms that threaten their survival. The selection comes from her fourth collection *Words the Turtle Taught Me* (Cinnamon Press, 2018), commissioned by the Marine Conservation Society to give voice to thirty ocean creatures on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Together, the poems build a composite sensory world that lyrically challenges anthropocentric modes of perception. In *Stench*, the repetition of the verb “imagine” returns like a wave that positions the reader in a state of empathic immersion (*imagine two nasal tracts / undistracted by breathing*). Smell becomes an access door into navigation across

times, from ancestral memories, “the origin of salt,” the “oxygen’s historic drift,” to the present threat of the “creeping acidity of sea” until extinction unfolds through olfaction (*the silted stench / of her last / birthing*). In *Play*, Richardson turns shark joy into language as an act of interspecies imagination that reaches across the gap between human and aquatic ways of being. Neologisms like “frondling” and “gilly tingle” render embodiment through dynamic rhythms, line breaks, and grammatical inventions. The playful tone is suddenly disrupted by a net, and the world turns inside out: *gutgash when they fin we out / in thrash of unsea above*. “Unsea” names the unworlding of a world, the shark hauled from their home, while the pronoun “we” quietly implicates us all in the thrash. Finally, in *Eye*, the halibut’s biological eye migration across their skull becomes a figure for radical perceptual transformation. Throughout the poem, “eye” serves as both organ and pronoun to highlight the inextricable link between sensing and knowing (“I-socket,” “eye-identity”). Blindness haunts the poem as forgetting (*gravel and sand / are also blind*), the eyeless underside of the flatfish no longer sees and thus no longer knows. But the harms of human violence are impossible to forget. The trauma of the “lower jaw of the trawl net” is carried in the flesh: “eye still remember.”

From threatened ocean bodies, Rosanne van der Voet’s contribution carries us into the flows of an urban river. Written in a style that has become her distinctive signature, *Island river breath I* is a hybrid ecological-literary reflection on the Eiland Van Brienoord, a small island in the Meuse river in Rotterdam. Ebbing and flowing between historical narrative, embodied present-tense observation, and speculative multispecies imagination, the piece follows the haunting traces of ecological histories that persist in the present through murmuring absences and residues of silenced lives. The narrative opens in the nineteenth century, when thousands of salmon swam upstream into the delta, and moves to a present described as a dredged, industrialized waterway where “nobody saw the last fish.” The island functions as a contact zone between salt and fresh water, land and river, present-day container ships and past abundance of lively fishes. Their disappearance is named as a direct consequence of slow violence built up over time through resource extraction, trade, and imperial expansion. Drawing on Elizabeth DeLoughrey’s call to attend to nonspectacular ecological violence and more-than-human temporalities, van der Voet develops a “fishy hermeneutics” that sinks beyond the surface for meaning and moves with the drift of sediments. The writing performs this through fragmented stream-of-consciousness prose, interspersed with photographs left to speak without the guidance of captions, giving voice to mud, algae, boulders, brambles, and parakeets alongside humans. “Being here is being metabolised,” van der Voet writes. To inhabit this island is thus to be swallowed by its storied past and its contested rewilding present, absorbed into its tidal shifts, dissolved in the river’s breaths.

With the next contribution, Natan Feltrin drifts us into a hybrid piece on marine rewilding that braids speculative storytelling, philosophical reflection, and blue ecologies. Moving formally like a tide, from first-person sensing through episodes of regenerative practices toward a final awareness that rewilding implies

sitting with the trouble of the undone, the poetic essay pushes against both technocratic cure-talk and the romance of return, recognizing water as a co-thinker and radical medium that holds the means to self-organize after devastation. Water, in the writer's words, does not forget. Its deep flows absorb histories like a multisensorial archive that "carries dissolved oxygen and excess heat, nitrates washed off fields, mercury and microplastics, shipping noise, and broken shells." The piece opens with a perceptual dissonance, "a brackish inlet at low tide, the smell off, the kelp absent," staging extinction as an embodied awareness of balance shift rather than sublime spectacle. From this sensorial threshold, the essay widens its attention towards otters, seagrass, corals and the near-vanished vaquita porpoise who are among those Feltrin names "conceptual partners," each showing what is at stake when immersed in the "politics of who gets to breathe." In this afterworld there is no easy exit nor consolation. Rewilding afterness, for Feltrin, requires staying, staying "with partial recoveries and deep failures" while acknowledging that regeneration does not redeem what has been lost. It is not by chance that kelp returns throughout the piece, first as absent presence, then as agent of regrowth. As Åsberg et al. remind us, "kelp teaches us to abandon the humanist idea of a bounded individual" (8), thus modeling the entangled, more-than-human futures that damaged seas might yet hold.

Following is Alessandro Balzaretti's photographic series attuning to the tenuous movements and vibrations that sustain life in liminal aquatic-terrestrial environments. Framed within ecological psychoanthropology, the project conceives of water as "skin, surface, point of contact," and invites us to slow down into the suspended stillness of freshwater marshes and flooded rice fields. All photographs were taken near Casalvolone in Piedmont, Italy, a landscape the locals poetically call *mare a quadretti* (checkered sea). Rather than focusing on the mirroring reflections for which these landscapes are known, the photographs stay on the opaque encounter between water and other animate forms of life, pausing on the subtle yet vital relations between water, rushes, debris, and lily pads. Sitting at the threshold between water and land, Balzaretti invites us to notice a relational web emerging on the edge of visibility, between floating stems and dense congregations of lily pads enacting a form of creaturely dance. By stripping the aquatic imagery of any trace of color, Balzaretti, as he explains in the methodological note, intends to leave the observer disoriented, from which "a new wonder may arise," not as aesthetic romanticization of nature, but as attunement to the art of noticing (Tsing). The landscape of Vercelli is itself profoundly liminal, since the flooded rice paddies intersect with hundreds of kilometers of canalization works that enable their control and management. It is precisely in this entanglement of natural and artificial, in what might look to the passing eye like a mere flooded field, that we must pause and attend to whole ecosystems thriving in unexpected, compromised, and yet generative territories.

Athane Adrahane slows us down even further into geological time, where remembrance of being sea is echoed in the life of a mountain. A multidisciplinary artist and author, Adrahane weaves autotheoretical ecopoetic prose around an

ammonite fossil, the central interlocutor of the narrative. Found on a dry Provençal mountain, the fossil carries within its spiral the memory of ancient seas, of vanished and vanishing creatures, and of the aqueous cycles that connect all bodies of water across time. Holding the ammonite to her ear as one holds a shell, Adrahane hears both the Earth's infancy (*l'enfance de la Terre*) and the landscapes of her own childhood (*les Terres de l'enfance*). In a single touch, the boundaries between terrestrial and aquatic, past and present, personal memory and planetary time collapse. This moment of attunement encapsulates the practice that Adrahane terms *échopoétiser*, which in her words has the power to change the very fabric of our thinking (*changent la tessiture de nos pensées*). The text's most suggestive evocation is the wordplay lost in translation between *mer* and *mère* (sea and mother), which builds a linguistic bridge across semantic and familial borders. Growing up, the author writes, she was never sure whether the "e" carried an accent. But this was never a true mistake. In refusing to separate sea from mother, Adrahane extends maternity beyond the heteronormative family, forging queer affiliations of kinship with the aquatic, the geological, and the more-than-human, thus anchoring the sea as intimate relative and generative force.

Closing full circle, the last contribution by Pinar Yoldas, a neuroartist, bioarchitect, and researcher at UC San Diego, ventures into the depths of the human unconscious. Her practice, shaped in response to ecological emergency, bridges speculative biology and the entangled systems of art, science, and environmental thought. The creative essay written for *Ecozon@* expands on her installation *Hollow Ocean 2048*, first exhibited at the Venice Architecture Biennale 2021 in response to the theme "How will we live together?", a question that Yoldas extends beyond the human to encompass marine ecosystems on the verge of irreversible loss. The installation comprises six "large-scale aquatic columns," each representing "a chapter in the eco-destruction of the oceans" (Yoldas 88), from extraction of resources to the introduction of pollutants. Accompanied by images from the installation, the written text "From Eco-Conscious to Eco-Unconscious" claims that our collective unconscious is dying in parallel with the oceans. Rooted in Jungian theory, Yoldas argues that oceans represent "the primary cartography of the unconscious" and so, as ocean life empties out, so too does the unconscious attunement that binds human minds to living ecosystems. The recurring refrain "Have you been dreaming?" pulses throughout the essay with growing urgency, alongside guilt dreams surfacing like psychic residues of daily ecological harm, particularly tied to plastic production and consumption. Listening to these dreams thus means trusting a submerged witness to the slow ecocide unfolding in real time. "Perhaps to save the oceans," Yoldas writes, "we must first save our dreams from going extinct." And to save our dreams, we must reclaim dreaming as a practice of worldmaking for aquatic futures beyond the terms of extraction and extinction.

These contributions flow together as multiple streams converging into a sea, ranging across deep ocean floors and liminal surface waters, threatened more-than-human bodies and dreaming minds. To think *with* water, as this section has creatively

experimented, means moving beyond speciesist frameworks of exploitation and toward the humility of letting watery worlds exist on their own terms. As Wadiwel reminds us, “we fundamentally lack the knowledge systems to imagine fish[es] as subjects of violence” (204), and this creative section is, among other things, a contribution toward building them. Collectively, then, these works are moved by an awe toward the lifeways of our ocean kin and by a felt commitment to their sovereignty in worlds ungoverned by the capitalist and colonial systems that exhaust them to extinction.

Works cited

- Alaimo, Stacy. *The Abyss Stares Back: Encounters with Deep-Sea Life*. University of Minnesota Press, 2025.
- Åsberg, Cecilia, et al. “Methodologies of Kelp: On Feminist Posthumanities, Transversal Knowledge Production and Multispecies Ethics in an Age of Entanglement.” *The Kelp Congress*, edited by H. Mehti, N. Cahoon, and A. Wolfsberger, NNKS Press, 2020, pp. 11–23. <https://liu.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1455360&dswid=9686>.
- Bailey-Charteris, Bronwyn. *The Hydrocene: Eco-Aesthetics in the Age of Water*. Routledge, 2024.
- Chen, Cecilia, et al., editors. *Thinking with Water*. McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2013.
- DeLoughrey, Elizabeth. *Allegories of the Anthropocene*. Duke University Press, 2019.
- Fackler, Katharina, and Silvia Schultersmandl. “Kinship as Critical Idiom in Oceanic Studies.” *Atlantic Studies*, vol. 20, no. 2, Apr. 2023, pp. 195–225. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14788810.2022.2079900>.
- Gumbs, Alexis Pauline. *Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals*. AK Press, 2020.
- Ingersoll, Karin E. *Waves of Knowing: A Seascape Epistemology*. Duke University Press, 2016.
- Neimanis, Astrida. *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2017.
- Scales, Helen. *The Brilliant Abyss: True Tales of Exploring the Deep Sea, Discovering Hidden Life and Selling the Seabed*. Bloomsbury, 2021.
- Smallwood, Stephanie E. *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora*. Harvard University Press, 2008.
- Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton University Press, 2021.
- Vandersommers, Daniel. “Opening Aquaria.” *Heterotopia, Radical Imagination, and Shattering Orders: Manifesting a Future of Liberated Animals*, edited by Paula Arcari, Routledge, 2025, pp. 151–167.
- Wadiwel, Dinesh Joseph. “Do Fish Resist?” *Cultural Studies Review*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2016. <https://doi.org/10.5130/csr.v22i1.4363>.

Westerlaken, Michelle. "The Telltale Worlds of the Octopus." *Survivance (e-flux Architecture)*, 2021. <https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/survivance/379308/the-telltale-worlds-of-the-octopus/>.

Yoldas, Pinar. "From an Ecosystem of Excess to Hollow Ocean: Affective Learning in the Service of Ecoactivism." *Plastic Ocean: Art and Science Responses to Marine Pollution*, edited by Ingeborg Reichle, De Gruyter, 2021, pp. 80–100.