

Slimy Fertility: Lagoons and Climate Change

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Abstract Lagoons breed many things, both in the imagination and in physical reality. Often spaces of horror and death, lagoons are also places of leisure and life. Literary representations of lagoons merit attention because, as climate change continues to melt ice across the planet, new lagoons are being created even as existing ones face increased threats. This article examines several significant literary and actual lagoons to highlight both their complexity and their importance, emphasizing the need to better understand how human behaviors and representations impact these fragile ecosystems.

Keywords Slime. Eco-horror. Ecophobia. Literary lagoons.



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Lagoons breed many things. Even while they burst all rational limits of expectation with the excess of life that they boast, lagoons – with their mosquitoes and threats of disease and death – are a fertile breeding ground of morbid fantasies. To understand better why this is the case, it is necessary to recognize that often at the center of lagoonal horror is slime. In Jack Arnold’s 1954 horror classic *Creature from the Black Lagoon*, there is a monster that is threatening because of its incomprehensibility, and because of its origins in the muck and slime of a lagoon in a distant and therefore threatening foreign landscape. As the world continues to warm, slime is on the increase. We are beginning to recognize that the waters that are frozen will melt and that this will cause sea level rises – hardly a new or debatable idea (notwithstanding the claims of proponents of a “climate change debate”) – and this will result in water diverting from its expected courses and states. The growth of lagoons has long been imagined as a result of climate change.

The first inklings of climate change and global warming began to take shape in the early 1800s, and while rising sea levels was perhaps not initially a part of such discussions, evidence was clearly piling up by the 1960s. In 1962, J.G. Ballard wrote *The Drowned World*, the first book to depict flooding caused by global warming, and although the warming was caused by solar flares rather than by pollution, the book has become a climate change fiction (cli-fi) classic with lessons that continue to have value – albeit, lessons that perhaps were never intended as such. It is these inadvertent lessons that bear scrutiny here.

The Drowned World begins on a couple of bad premises. The first is that nature can adapt quickly (biologically) – quickly enough to be seen in a human generation or two. The second is that humans cannot adapt (behaviorally) quickly enough to survive. The result of these two bad premises is that Ballard produces a novel that is at times laughably ridiculous, one character at one point explaining that

one could simply say that in response to the rises in temperature, humidity, and radiation levels, [that] the flora and fauna of this planet are beginning to assume once again the forms they displayed the last time such conditions were present – roughly speaking, the Triassic period. (Ballard 2014, 42)

Radical and cascading species extinctions resulting in what we now recognize as the sixth major extinction event in history was neither a part of the conversation of *The Drowned World* nor of the era that produced it. The other unsubstantiable premise of the novel is that we are simply unable to change our behaviors – hence the lack of any vision of a survival strategy for us in an age of anthropogenic climate change. Of course, this is an unfair criticism, since the climate

change in the novel is not anthropogenic. The result is that the novel puts humanity into the passive position of victim living in a newly Triassic world – the same kind of passive victim position that the dinosaurs were in when the catastrophic asteroid hit them. The thing is, we know that humanity can live in watery cities. Venice is a good example. We know that humanity can live in places below sea level. The Netherlands and New Orleans are good examples. We know that we can live sustainably. The fact that we did it better before than after the Industrial Revolution is a good example. And we know that we can live in places of extraordinary extremes – of heat and of cold, of dry and of wet, of still and of windy. So, positioning humanity as victim to the environment in the way that *The Drowned World* does seems nothing short of ecophobic: it blames nature for our misfortunes.

Crammed to the gills with sham science, *The Drowned World* nevertheless floats as a plausible narrative (rather than sinking as dead-weight idiocy), in part because of the quasi-science it offers. The discussion of hard-wired fears – important to anyone who dares to examine the parameters of ecophobia –¹ takes fairly accurate form in the novel:

everywhere in nature one sees evidence of innate releasing mechanisms literally millions of years old, which have lain dormant through thousands of generations but retained their power undiminished. (Ballard 2014, 43)

Dr. Bodkin explains, asking further

how else can you explain the universal [...] loathing of the spider [...] or the hatred of snakes and reptiles? Simply because we all carry within us a submerged memory of the time when the giant spiders were lethal, and when reptiles were the planet's dominant form of life. (43)

As a senior biologist and one of the last survivors who have a memory of living in cities now flooded in the novel, Bodkin seeks to understand the genetic encoding of fears that have ensured human survival. The memory, of course, if it is to be called such, is genetic memory – hardwiring, in other words – and is housed in a part of the brain called the amygdala.

1 Ecophobic practices are those that imagine without cause the nonhuman as hostile or threatening to human safety, control, and so on; many fears of nature, however, have a reasonable cause and are, as the Author has explained in *The Ecophobia Hypothesis*, solidly embedded in our genetic material, encoded in our genes, saturated into our heritage – fears that have enabled us to survive. It is these that come under discussion in the novel.

It is the amygdala that houses our genetic heritage of fears that today are otherwise unaccountable – children’s seemingly irrational fear of the dark, most people’s ability to perceive spiders and snakes quicker than keys and wallets, horror at the bees when they transgress proximity limits, and so on. We have good reasons to fear these things, and these reasons are written into our amygdala. In this sense, these fears have a solid basis and are, therefore, not examples of ecophobia. Fears, however, do easily morph into phobias. Evolutionary biologist E.O. Wilson has explained that

people acquire phobias, abrupt and intractable aversions, to the objects and circumstances that threaten humanity in natural environments. (Wilson 1992, 351)

Ecophobia drips in *The Drowned World*, and it is almost always toward water that has gone awry, left its expected states and morphed into something less known, less predictable, less friendly. “The green jelly of the water” (Ballard 2014, 49) hardly inspires cheerful confidence. “The green-ringed lagoons” (52) are not happy green fields. Images of rot fill the pages, the bizarre evolution-defying jungle laying “like an immense putrescent sore” (49). There is “oozing” and “fungus-covered sludge” (53) and all sorts of nastiness that these lagoons breed, and the “huge patches of fungus [...] looked like an over-ripe camembert cheese” (59) – an image that at best evokes disgust but, given the size of it all, is more likely to engender a sense of horror.

Lagoons are a good site for horror. In his classic *The Philosophy of Horror, or Paradoxes of the Heart*, Noël Carroll explains that:

Within the context of the horror narrative, the monsters are identified as impure and unclean. They are putrid or moldering things, or they hail from oozing places, or they are made of dead and rotting flesh, or chemical waste, or are associated with vermin, disease, or crawling things. They are not only quite dangerous but they also make one’s skin creep. Characters regard them not only with fear but with loathing, with a combination of terror and disgust. (Carroll 1990, 23)

Lagoons, like their cousin swamps, promise all of these things. Hiding the murky and the unknown in their mud, lagoons are dangerous. Yet, while throughout history, as Sharon O’Dair has explained, “danger has lurked” in mud, paradoxically “mud is [also] generative, fecund” (O’Dair 2015, 135). Like the slime it often generates, mud involves the agency of nature just beyond control and domestication. It houses the unexpected and the uncontrolled. Out of it grows slime, an outright defiance of the elements, of order, and of safety, an uncanny

convergence of meaning across changing elemental media. Slime, what, Jean-Paul Sartre called “the agony of water” in his 1943 classic *Being and Nothingness* (Sartre 1966, 607), horrifies because it is a site of contradictions with appeals and repulsions. To know the powers of horror is both to know the appeal of the repulsive and to understand the draw of those things Julia Kristeva describes that do “not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (Kristeva 1982, 4). It is an appeal and repulsion not simply of elemental crossings and contradictions but of the very possibility of such agonistic relationships, such possibilities of both degeneration and regeneration embodied in one substance. These dual possibilities evoke responses that Christy Tidwell has insightfully identified as a “tension between fear and hope” (Tidwell 2023, 246). One of the reasons that the sliming of our oceans² horrifies, to be sure, is that it reveals a loss of human control to nonhuman agencies; but lagoons have always been – to varying degrees – the shallow sites of muck and slime.

Perhaps it is the shallowness itself that renders lagoons and swamps such versatile playhouses of horror and disgust. We don’t see the rot and decay that happens among the bottom-feeders twenty thousand leagues under the sea, but we *can* see it as we row our boats across a lagoon on a pleasant, sunny Sunday afternoon. Representations of this are the stuff of horror. Robert Rawdon Wilson has explained that

representations of decay, rot, deliquescence, all things that tend slime-wards, are the basic building blocks in the creation of a horror-world. They occur so often in horror films, even when not necessary to the action, that you can scarcely think about the properties of horror-worlds without beginning with the indications of slime. (Wilson 2002, 225)

Slime and horror are virtually inseparable.

In a narrative such as *Creature from the Black Lagoon*, it is clear that there is nothing innocent – in terms of gender and race – in the conception and representation of Hollywood things that tend slime-wards. Part of the threat of corruption from the slimy monster in this film is that it is foreign, a monster from the shallows of a lagoon in

² As I noted in *Slime: An Elemental Imaginary*, slime is on the rise as our global climate changes: “as the high end of food chains in our global seas disappears, jellyfish proliferate, and there is an increasing presence of oceanic slime” (Estok 2024, 1). Indeed, “global oceans continue to lose diversity and become play houses of slime to such a degree that University of British Columbia marine biologist Daniel Pauly has gone as far to suggest that our era be termed the ‘Myxocene’, the age of slime (Pauly 2010, 61) instead of the Anthropocene” (Estok 2024, 5).

the depths of the Amazon jungle. ‘Gill-man’, as the creature is called, is not from Seattle. He is a monster from abroad, a monster because he bears human form but clearly is not human, a monster because he breathes both in and out of water, a monster – worst of all and most threateningly – because he has his horny little eyes set on a helpless white woman. Playing into a long tradition of sexism and xenophobia, such figures have a long history in legend, myth, art, and literature the world over.³



Figure 1 From Johann Zahn, *Specula physico-mathematico-historica notabilium ac mirabilium sciendorum*. Augsburg, Germany, 1696. Image ID: libr0081, Treasures of the NOAA Library Collection Photographer: Archival Photograph by Mr. Sean Linehan, NOS, NGS National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), USA. <http://www.photolib.noaa.gov/library/libr0081.htm>

3 A quick internet search of “piscine and amphibian humanoids” reveals the entanglements of sexism and xenophobia with slimic (often lagoonal) monsters. See, for instance, https://www.artandpopularculture.com/List_of_piscine_and_amphibian_humanoids.



Figure 2 From *Creature from Black Lagoon* promotional shot, directed by Jack Arnold. Universal Pictures, USA, 1954

Yet, even when it is not so distant as the depths of the Amazon, lagoons threaten rot and degeneration. The lagoons that the floods in London create in *The Drowned World* bring effects whose enormity is only revealed when the waters retreat. There is “black slime oozing down the escalators below the office blocks” (Ballard 2014, 126), and we know that where there is slime, rot cannot be far behind. Indeed, the “cloak of rotting organic forms” (127) makes it seem that “time doesn’t exist here now” (130). Effaced are all boundaries, temporal and physical, and “everything was covered with a fine coating of silt, smothering whatever grace and character had once distinguished the streets”, “a great viscous mass lifting over the rooftops”, with “sluggish pools across the street” (126). Gone is the organization - indeed, the civility - that characterized London pre-flood and pre-lagoon. Of course, the nature of floods is to produce disorder - and lagoons. Indeed, disorder is often the first thing flood narratives represent. There are many, many examples, but for the sake of brevity, Nathaniel Rich’s *Odds Against Tomorrow* offers a sufficient example. In this novel, New York becomes an area of lagoons, and many of the same issues from Ballard appear in this novel. One key difference, of course, is that the floods in *Odds Against Tomorrow* are clearly the result of anthropogenic climate change. Whatever the cause of the flooding, however, the effects are equally staggering.

The recent phenomenal growth of horror as a genre is producing literary lagoons. This phenomenal growth is perhaps an effect of the fact that world itself is becoming more horrific, our corals bleaching and dying, our oceans becoming slime to such an extraordinary extent that University of British Columbia marine biologist Daniel Pauly has proposed “a new name of this new era, the age of slime” instead of the term Anthropocene (Pauly 2010, 61). Whatever the cause of the phenomenal growth of horror as a genre, cities and coastlines are flooding, slime is proliferating, and rivers are swelling. In some ways, representations of swollen rivers share many features with the lagoons that such rivers produce in the popular imagination. Academy Award winner Bong Joon-ho shows these similarities well in his 2006 film *The Host* (괴물, in Korean).

There are a couple of issues that need addressing here: firstly, the film uses or implies slime in the horror that it produces. The Han Gang (Han River) is the source in the film of a genetic mutation that has resulted in a monster, the water having become corrupt because of a shady foreigner urging the dumping of chemicals into the river. Not confined to the river, however, water is pouring down constantly in the film. The characters are soaked, the monster often slipping on unsure footing, the sense of saturation complete. The watery excess magnifies the horror by invoking slime, a staple in the horror genre, as I have been showing. Secondly, water becomes both the great equalizer and the great divider in the story. Water has the effect in this film of bringing into visibility a world unseen yet present before our eyes, both disorienting us and, to borrow a description from Melody Jue’s description of immersion in water, “shaking up the conditions of interpretation” (Jue 2020, 163). The film shows the borderlessness of environmental issues (even in a country riven with divisions) and reveals starkly the continuing disproportionate burden of hydrological injustice carried by communities of the poor. Cecilia Chen, Janine MacLeod, and Astrida Neimanis discuss in their edited collection *Thinking with Water* the borderlessness of “water as a matter of concern shared across our differences” (Chen et al. 2013, 7), and, as Bong shows, those shared differences are not *equally* shared. Anyone who lives in Seoul knows that the Han Gang (Han River) divides the city into Gangnam, the affluent south (popularized globally by the song “Gangnam Style”) and Gangbuk, the less affluent north (where the Author lives and teaches). As a poisoned public waterway in the film, then, the river divides but it also *unites* people through a shared threat of vulnerability.

Bong’s *The Host* seems to be set during *jangma* (Korea’s rainy season), and so the rain is perhaps perfectly plausible; even so, the effect is to create a sense of saturation and sliminess. It is useful to understand saturation in the sense that Melody Jue and Rafico Ruiz use it in their introduction to their edited collection entitled *Saturation: An*

Elemental Politics: “while saturation begins with water and watery metaphors”, they explain,

it is useful beyond water as a heuristic for thinking through co-present agencies, elements, and phenomena that traverse ideological systems and physical substances alike. (Jue, Ruiz 2021, 11)

In *The Host*, the excess of water leads to a sense of saturation that is complete, and this sense of saturation and excess carries with it a sense of slimic rot, a diversion of water from its proper course and state.⁴

An important part of this film has to do with notions about dilution, perhaps even reflecting post-IMF-crisis era anxieties of Korea about cultural dilution, making the dumping scene as much culturally metaphorical as environmental.⁵ Shortly after the old white man urges the dumping of dirty formaldehyde into the public waterways, we see some people fishing and noticing mutations, and soon a monster appears from the river. It quickly becomes evident that something different is going on in this film than in *Creature from the Black Lagoon*. In neither film is there anything innocent (in terms of gender and race) in the conception and representation of filmic things that tend slime-wards; however, if Bong is “writing back” to and resisting colonial impositions, Arnold is playing right into them. The long tradition of the sexism/xenophobia entanglement reveals a trajectory, perhaps, that leads to people like Mr. Trump and his followers. At any rate, Arnold’s foreign monster and Bong’s domestic one (created by the actions of a foreigner) each emerge into the world, covered in slime and slipping on it, creating both a sense of disorientation and of horror and disgust, producing the affect of both disgust and the general disorientation slime evokes – and both of these make us see differently.

To return to lagoons proper and their horrors, it is useful to address some of the implications of *The Life of Pi* by Canadian writer Yann Martel. In this novel, horror appears from – of all places – a

⁴ This paragraph appears in Estok 2024, 45-6.

⁵ The East Asian Financial Crisis of 1997 (what in Korea is called ‘The IMF Crisis’) was a brutal and sudden jolt into severe economic challenges and monetary shortages. One of the results of this period was a new era of foreign direct investment, accepted with reluctance and perceived as a forced condition of the IMF (International Monetary Fund) 58 billion dollar bailout. This foreign direct investment would have substantial cultural impacts. A country long known as ‘the Hermit Kingdom’, Korea was suddenly subject to unprecedented outside influences. Western fast food franchises (and domestic imitations) sprang up everywhere, lower middle class American eateries (such as the Costco food court) became popular among Korea’s fashionable upper middle class, and there was a very real perception that Korean culture was under threat of dilution to Americanization.

lagoon on the island. What I want also to suggest here is that even when slime is absent (that is, even when it is implied), it invokes horror. There is much that could evoke horror in this novel – not the least of which is having to share a lifeboat with a hungry, full-grown 450-pound Bengal tiger. Yet, this charismatic carnivore, with its big sharp teeth, is a kind of slap-stick horror compared to the toothless slime that almost appears on the island where Pi and Richard Parker (the tiger) land. There is something eerie about “the island’s complete desolation”, save for the “shining green algae” (Martel 2001, 300, 301), the meerkats, and the dead fish in the pulsating pond. Eerie, however, is not horror. The horror comes wrapped in oyster slime:

at the heart of a green oyster. A human tooth. A molar, to be exact. The surface stained green and finely pierced with holes. The feeling of horror came slowly. [Pi] had time to pick at the other fruit. Each contained a tooth. One a canine. Another a premolar. Here an incisor. There another molar. Thirty-two teeth. A complete human set. Not one tooth missing. Understanding dawned upon [him]. He] did not scream. [He thought] only in movies is horror vocal. [He] simply shuddered and left the tree. (311)

The slime here is not so toothless after all. The horror here, however, is wrapped in slime that does not actually appear, since the “green oyster” is a metaphor and not truly an oyster. Even so, the first thing most people think of with oysters is either something sexual (that they are an aphrodisiac, with their morphic and aromal evocation of female genitalia) or something about slime – or both. In terms of gender and disgust, there is nothing innocent about Martel’s mention of oysters.

The mention of oysters (oysters with teeth yet) – whether or not Martel intended it – evokes (and cannot fail to) a dangerously misogynistic conflation of disgust and female genitalia that has a very long history with the *vagina dentata* trope. *Vagina dentata*, the vagina with teeth, is a misogynistic fear of loss of masculine control to the sexual volition of women, a profound existential worry that the materiality of the vagina engenders in men (not all, to be sure), a fear that dates back to the ancient Greeks. It is a fear of envelopment, death, and dissolution, a fear that grows out of a kind of myxophobia (fear of slime) and no doubt of cannibalism too (I mean of penises getting eaten – actually eaten – by vaginas).⁶

⁶ Barbara Creed describes *vagina dentata* as “male fears and phantasies about the female genitals as a trap, a black hole which threatens to swallow them up and cut them into pieces” (Creed 1993, 106). Creed explains the deep classical roots of the *vagina dentata* trope and notes that “the notion of the devouring female genitals continues to exist in the modern world; it is apparent in popular derogatory terms such as ‘man-eater’ and ‘castrating bitch’” (106).

Like many literary lagoons, the one in *Life of Pi* breeds danger and horror. Lagoons breed many things. A story such as Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* breeds desire, and for the main character, Gustav von Aschenbach, this desire itself reshapes the image of the lagoon as a space of profound fecundity. After seeing the boy, Aschenbach is in a daze and sees around himself

a tropical swampy region under a vapor-laden sky, damp, luxuriant, and uncanny; it was like the portrait of a primitive world of islands, morasses and silt-laden rivers. From lusty fern clusters, from bottoms in which grew thick, waterlogged plants with outlandish blossoms, he saw hairy palm trunks rising near and far; he saw strangely misshapen trees sinking their roots through the air into the soil, into stagnant waters that reflected the green shade, where amid floating flowers as white as the milk and as large as platters, birds of an exotic species, with hunched shoulders, with monstrous beaks, stood in the shallows and gazed off to the side, motionless; between the knotty, tubular stalks of the bamboo thicket he saw the eyes of a crouching tiger sparkle - and he felt his heart pounding with fright and a puzzling desire. Then the vision receded... (Mann 1955, 3)

Aschenbach, arguably a pedophile, is haunted by desires that grow like the wild and formless flora he imagines in the Venetian lagoons. Aschenbach,

leaning back, with hanging arms, overcome and repeatedly shuddering, [...] whispered the formula of longing - impossible in this case, absurd, perverse, ludicrous, and even here still sacred and respectable: "I love you!". (Mann 1955, 42)

The unchecked growths that happen in this place prove dangerous, and Aschenbach's lagoon experiences, while transformative and mysterious, intense and seemingly beyond his control, are also fatal.

The love that lagoons breed is the topic of many syrupy narratives. Henry De Vere Stacpoole's *The Blue Lagoon*, which has spawned four film versions, is among these syrupy stories. With its idyllic representations of childhood in a place that looks very much like paradise, its depiction of innocent love, dangerous sharks, and poisonous fruit, this is a narrative that hits many of the registers of *Genesis* with its Garden of Eden. The "arita" berries the children in De Vere Stacpoole's story have been told are poisonous, but clearly there is both literal and metaphorical forbidden fruit in this story. These two children (cousins) are marooned on the island, grow up, fall in love, and bear their own child. The child they bear is the issue of incest. Not quite so syrupy anymore. The three of them end up stranded on

a boat in the lagoon, having fought off a shark, lost the oars, and eaten the poison berries, and then, after all those years, rescuers arrive. The final words of the story are deeply ambiguous. The reader knows that family has eaten the fatal berries, but when asked if they are dead, Captain Stannistreet says that “they are sleeping” (De Vere Stacpoole 1996, 114). The lagoon is a playhouse of fecundity, to be sure. It was “perhaps more than a third of a mile broad” (35), and surrounding it was a profound richness of life that lent the forest

a deeper twilight, and all sorts of trees lent their foliage to make the shade. The artu with its delicately diamonded trunk, the great bread fruit tall as a beech, and shadowy as a cave, the aoa, and the eternal cocoa nut palm all grew here like brothers. Great ropes of wild vine twined like the snake of the laocoon from tree to tree, and all sorts of wonderful flowers, from the orchid shaped like a butterfly to the scarlet hibiscus, made beautiful the gloom. (38)

Yet, as in Mann, the lagoon here and the anarchic life and unchecked fecundity that surrounds it offer danger as well as deeply ambiguous beauty. No less is there great ambiguity in Hiromi Goto’s lagoon in her short story “And the Moon Spun Round Like a Top”.

The subtlety of Goto’s representation of Vancouver’s famous Lost Lagoon is perhaps lost on any but the locals – and, indeed, lost on many of the locals too. Lost Lagoon and the adjacent “enchanted forest” are gay cruising areas, a fact to which most straight Vancouverites are perhaps oblivious. There is a finely crafted and incredibly subtle scene in Goto’s story, in which the main character – Bernadette – takes a “walk around Lost Lagoon in Stanley Park” (Goto 2023, 115). The subtlety is in how this walk characterizes Bernadette. She is a presumptive heterosexual – she has only been straight in the past and doesn’t identify as anything else. According to Bernadette’s friend, Glenda, however, “who referred to herself as queer” (119), Bernadette herself is also queer: “even though she might not be gay”, Glenda says, “jeez was she ever queer” (119). The lagoon makes but one appearance in the story, but it is a highly symbolic one – and it is like a code for the queer community of Vancouver’s Lower Mainland.

There is something magical about lagoons, both the real and the fictional ones. Lagoons breed many things, including fantasies of leisure and refreshment. Lost Lagoon has nothing of the horrors commonly associated with slime and degradation and has long been a tourist spot with alluring and spectacularly blue water, friendly raccoons on the shores, ducks, geese, and every manner of waterfowl (the lagoon was proclaimed a bird sanctuary in 1973, before which time row boats could be rented on its shores), and the kind of peace and tranquility that one wouldn’t expect to find at the center of a

bustling metropolis (but it does have homophobic men with baseball bats lurking in its reeds). Like Türkiye's Ölüdeniz (Blue Lagoon), stillness characterizes Lost Lagoon.

The sense of peace lagoons breed is uncanny, unsettling, and sometimes illusory. In a BBC piece on Ölüdeniz, Brad Cohen laments that this once "untouched paradise" with its calm glass-like waters has become "a particularly depressing example of paradise lost. The town is filled with neon lights and English-themed restaurants. The sea is dotted with faux-pirate ships and booze cruises. The beach is marred with drunken, sunburned tourists, and the clear skies are polluted with seemingly infinite paragliders launching from the surrounding green mountains" (Cohen 2022). There is something about the calm that compels us to make waves, something that compels a child to break the calm and throw a rock in. Lagoons breed resistance and change.

Change is central to Nnedi Okorafor's 2014 sci-fi novel *Lagoon*. Out of the waters of Lagos Lagoon in Okorafor's story, aliens emerge shortly after a meteorite strike. With this emergence is change – a lot of change. As one reviewer poignantly explains, what emerges from the lagoon are "themes like disability, coming out, religion, violence, politics, history, race, environmental impacts, and most of all change. This on the surface is simply what the aliens bring as they change the sea and its creatures as well as themselves. There is a plethora of transformations", changes to the "society and [the] environment",⁷ with new creatures appearing suddenly and old and oppressive structures collapsing. No less in Sharanya Manivannan's *Incantations Over Water* is it a sense of freedom that lagoons breed, with a mermaid emerging out of the waters of the lagoons of Mattakalappu, Ilankai (Sri Lanka). From the waters, she sings of peace and freedom for a land riven by war and treachery. Lagoons breed many things, and it is hard not to think of the "gestational milieu" that Astrida Neimanis and Mielle Chandler describe in their chapter in a diverse "blue humanities" collection entitled *Thinking with Water*. Indeed, often what emerges from lagoons defy the kinds of intellectual and material control that so much of the extractive ethics of science and capitalism embodies.

When water goes awry and thrashes in an agony of metamorphosis away from its three natural states, it is the stuff of horror (and nowhere is the agony of water more resplendent than in slime), but it is also the stuff of re-birth, growth, change. Lagoons are complicated, and while they proliferate under the effects of climate change, existing lagoons are also under threat – and not only by climate change

⁷ <https://www.deviantart.com/confusedkangaroo/art/Lagoon-by-Nnedi-Okorafor-A-review-926351613>.

but by our unbridled expansion. We need to pay more attention to them, but the problem is that so doing often results in the destruction of the very thing that we need so desperately to preserve - the hordes of tourists in Venice and Ölüdeniz being examples. Fools rush in where angels fear to paddle, but one thing is certain: we need to paddle carefully, both in how we represent lagoons and how we relate with the real ones. Imagining them as sites of horror hasn't served us well, but neither has selling them in travel guides as pristine sites of calm and beauty.

With the changing of global water cycles, weather patterns, and relationships among atmospheric, terrestrial, and hydrological processes, scholars in what has come to be known as "the Blue Humanities" have stressed the importance of taking what Serpil Oppermann has called "a conceptual plunge into the overlapping salt and freshwater ecologies" (Oppermann 2023, 4) that constitute global hydrologies. The relevance of such a plunge becomes apparent when we consider the increasing preponderance of flood narratives in popular culture that attends both the rise of sea levels and the shifting of freshwater/saline balances. Part of these changing popular narratives relies on a growing fascination with the imagined morbid potentials of lagoons and what they might breed. Even though lagoons may be less permanent and stable than oceans and lakes, how we imagine and therefore interact with them is important: lagoons are ecologically (and socially) important coastal ecosystems that are extremely vulnerable to the effects of climate change and human interference. At this point in our climate change apocalypse, it is not merely enough to pass data and knowledge amongst ourselves; it is critical to change the trajectories of how people think and act in the world. There is something increasingly wrong with how we think and act with lagoons; with how we see them as breeding sites of horror, disease, and death; and with how these ecophobic imaginaries texture and contour our behaviors toward aquatic geographies around us.

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