



Wet Ontologies and Transoceanic Trauma: A Mentzian Reading of Tara Menon's *Under Water*

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ABSTRACT

Using the hydro-critical framework of Blue Humanities, this research analyses Tara Menon's *Under Water* (2026), specifically referencing Steve Mentz's ideas of wet ontology, oceanic nonhuman agency, and the poetics of planetary water. The study fills a crucial gap in modern literary studies by situating itself within the larger "oceanic turn" in ecocriticism: the deliberate use of sophisticated hydro-critical frameworks to post-2020 cli-fi and transoceanic apocalyptic narratives. This work shifts the analytical attention to the water as an active agent, whereas previous research has mostly used anthropocentric trauma theory and postcolonial paradigms to read such writings. Using a qualitative research approach, the study carries out a thorough textual analysis of the novel's narrative structure, imagery, temporality, and spatial logic using Erin James's econarratological technique. By creating a "wet ontology" in which reality is fluid, immersive, and unstable rather than fixed and land-bound, the results show how *Under Water* methodically undermines terrestrial stability. Additionally, human-centered interpretations are displaced by the ocean's emergence as a key nonhuman agent that actively creates and builds climate trauma, exposing an unequal power dynamic between natural force and human vulnerability. The research also emphasizes the novel's transoceanic narrative structure, which enacts a "poetics of planetary water" by weaving together Hurricane Sandy (2012) and the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. The text reflects the systemic aspect of ecological disasters in the Anthropocene by presenting global water systems as interrelated through temporal compression, geographical collapse, and repeating imagery. In the end, this study contends that *Under Water* formally reconfigures narrative and ontology to conform to hydro-critical realities in addition to representing environmental disaster. By showing how Mentz's approach is applicable to current climate fiction, it advances the field of Blue Humanities.

1. Introduction

Since eco-criticism was formalized as a discipline in the mid-1990s, the literary portrayal of ecological crisis has become a major preoccupation in the humanities. Early environmental forms of literature owed many foundations to the pastoral traditions of the Romantic poets and American nature-writing. The scholarship long privileged terrestrial landscapes i.e forests, agrarian plains and wilderness as the primary sites of ecological imagination (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996). However, the material realities of the Anthropocene started to transform the shores and culture within the cultural anxiety. The land-centered bathymetry

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began to be progressively insufficient in view of the planet being essentially dominated by water. The ocean, which is over seventy percent of the earth's surface, is an active, volatile, historically saturated environment that literature is yet to address in its own material terms. This phenomenon produced the conceptual reorientation that followed. It is now called "oceanic turn". This changed maritime space position up as a living archive register documenting human violence, work, and ecological catastrophe (Blum, 2010). This shift gives rise to what Steve Mentz (2009) terms "blue cultural studies". It is a methodology to consider entirely the literary and material aspects of the ocean. It has developed into the wider interdisciplinary project of the Blue Humanities.

In the fast-growing field of Blue Humanities, a number of important terms have emerged which are directly informative of the study of contemporary climate fiction. Chief contributors among them are Mentz's (2015) concept of "shipwreck modernity". It is the proposition that the defining condition of the present global is the perpetual survival of beings amidst the ashes of ecological wreckage. The related spatial concept of "wet ontologies" has been developed by Steinberg and Peters (2015). This concept theorizes oceanic space as a three-dimensional. It is a turbulent materiality. Parallel to all of these theoretical developments, the field of climate fiction has also started to struggle with the representational problem of using a medium that is legible in the narrative form to depict catastrophic environmental events. In this regard, Nixon (2011) famously identifies the problem of the "slow violence,". It is the gradual, lethargic and dispersed destruction that defies conventional dramatic structure. In *The Great Derangement* (2016), Ghosh suggests that the realism novel is structurally inadequate for addressing the mystery of such phenomena. Trexler (2015) goes further, demonstrating that modern authors of contemporary fiction still attempt to domesticate "hyperobjects." According to Timothy Morton (2013) "hyperobjects" are the entities of such vast temporal and spatial scale, like climate change itself, that no single narrative can contain them. These important interventions establish the conceptual field within which this research falls. The study is located at the intersection between Blue Humanities theory, transoceanic trauma, as well as formal difficulties of climate fiction in the post-2020 literary landscape.

Despite this proliferation of the pertinent scholarship, a significant methodological lacuna still persists in the field of the existing critical literature. Today's hydro-critical studies are still largely retrospective. They connect Mentz's framework of 2009 with the early modern maritime literature and classic texts of the nineteenth century (Blum, 2010; Brayton, 2012). Meanwhile, transoceanic disaster narratives, particularly those that engage with the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and the related field of Anthropocene fiction, continue to be read predominantly through the lenses of the conventional trauma theory and the postcolonial displacement (Craps, 2013). This, the bias of the earth, makes the ocean appear as a passive, destructive backdrop. It does not acknowledge the ocean as an active nonhuman agent which possesses its own narrative logic. Crucially, Mentz brings together the Blue Humanities in his endeavor *An Introduction to the Blue Humanities* (2023). In the book, he formally advances the "poetics of planetary water" as the transoceanic methodology. Since the publication of the book, few substantial scholarly studies have applied this mature framework to a contemporary work of fiction. The framework incorporates the aquatic catastrophe in different ocean basins. It is, precisely at this theoretical impasse, that the current research aims to intervene successfully.

Menon's novel, *Under Water* (2026) becomes an unusually apt subject for this critical intervention. Menon is a Harvard trained scholar, and bases her academic work on the traditions of the realist novel (Harvard University, Department of English, 2025). She brings to her debut fiction a formal self-consciousness that is stubbornly inseparable from its thematic preoccupations. The novel is structured around two oceanic catastrophes which are separated by eight years and two hemispheres. First catastrophe is the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami off the coast of Thailand. The second catastrophe is the 2012 landfall of Hurricane Sandy in the New York City. In his text, Menon (2026) formally links two different disasters that occur across the transoceanic divide. Essentially she seems to embody what would be described by Mentz (2023) as the "poetics of planetary water". It is the sensibility of narrative that will not consider oceans as separate things. This sensibility depicts the interlaced and unsettled materiality of a world of water. The structure of the novel is praised by Kirkus Reviews (2026) as the "stunning temporal structure". It recognizes that its dominant non-linear form expertly mirrors the trauma the work documents. Penguin Random House (2026) takes a review of the novel, placing it squarely into the modern-day world of climate fiction. It adds that the novel refuses to put its own grief in subservient relation to political didacticism. The dual timelines of the novel as located in the Andaman Sea and on the hinges of the Atlantic seaboard demand to analyze it according to the trans-oceanic framework suggested by Mentz (2023). This endeavor will make it a formally ambitious work of literary art and a theoretically productive place of the inquiry.

Current study proceeds through James' (2015) Econarratological research method which is informed by the theoretical apparatus of the Blue Humanities, with Mentz's (2023) hydro-critical framework. Specifically the concepts of wet ontologies, shipwreck modernity, and the poetics of planetary water serve as the primary analytical lens of the research. The research has been guided by three inter-related objectives. The first research goal is to examine narrative strategies in the selected novel that attack terrestrial safety and create Mentzian wet ontology. Second objective is to evaluate the role of oceanic nonhuman

agency in the processing of climate trauma of the selected text and third objective examines how the transoceanic formal structure of the novel executes Mentz's (2023) poetics of planetary water. As far as the Methodology is concerned, the analysis attends closely to the diction, imagery, temporal architecture and spatial logic of the novel. These formal elements have been seen as examples of the theoretical claims that are being critically scrutinized. The study does not aim at subjecting the text to the theory, nor does it try to level the theory down to a mere taxonomic grid superimposed upon the fiction. The study, truly, pursues the productive dialogue in the context of hydro-critical perspective.

In the end, Menon's *Under Water* (2026) is narrated by Marissa. She is a woman of South Asian descent. She grows up on a small, tiny and protected island in the Andaman Sea, the daughter of conservationists which are embedded in the fragile ecology of the Thai archipelago. The novel is written in alternating time periods. One scenario is in New York City on October 28, 2012, the eve of the landfall of Hurricane Sandy. One strand is New York City on October 28, 2012, the eve of Hurricane Sandy's landfall. It is here where Marissa works as an editorial assistant at a luxury travel magazine. The second strand is Thailand on December 25, 2004. It is the day the Indian Ocean tsunami strikes. The past timeline follows a childhood and young adulthood of extraordinary intimacy between Marissa and Arielle. She is her half-Thai, half-French best friend. Their friendship develops on the beaches, in the kayaks and in the shallow waters of the island that is theirs. The present timeline tracks Marissa's life in New York eight years after the happening of the tsunami. She spends a life that is shaped at every point by unresolved grief. She suffers bodily trauma that can be evidenced in her scars. She also faces a persistent disorientation in the face of another approaching ocean storm. As Sandy closes in, Marissa's memories take her repeatedly back to the Andaman Sea. The novel then compresses the distance in time/space as the hydro-critical architecture requires in terms of the oceans. What comes to appear here is a bare examination of how the sea unwantedly, violently, continually reshapes the beings.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Although scholarship on the Blue Humanities has established robust hydro-critical frameworks to read the oceanic catastrophe yet the applications to the post-2020 cli-fi remain absent. This practice leaves the transoceanic disaster narratives trapped within paradigms of the anthropocentric trauma. Consequently, the ocean is turned into a passive backdrop due to this practice. Therefore, this study is dedicated to covering this existing gap using Mentz's (2023) hydro-critical framework to Menon's *Under Water* (2026).

1.3. Research Objectives

1. To analyze the narrative mechanisms in Menon's *Under Water* that dismantle terrestrial safety to construct a Mentzian 'wet ontology' driven by oceanic nonhuman agency.
2. To evaluate the centrality of the Mentzian oceanic nonhuman agency in the processing of the climate trauma within the selected text.
3. To examine the formal execution of Mentz's "poetics of planetary water" through the transoceanic structure of the selected text.

1.4. Research Questions

1. What narrative mechanisms in Menon's *Under Water* dismantle terrestrial safety to construct a Mentzian 'wet ontology' driven by oceanic nonhuman agency?
2. Why is Mentzian oceanic nonhuman agency central to processing climate trauma in the selected text?
3. How does the transoceanic structure of the selected text formally execute Mentz's "poetics of planetary water"?

1.5. Scope and Significance of the Study

This research is limited to a textual and structural analysis of Menon's novel *Under Water* (2026). It only explores from Mentz's hydro-critical lens of Blue Humanities (2023). Thematically and geographically, the study confines its parameters to the transoceanic trauma that was generated by the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and the 2012 Hurricane Sandy. It intentionally bypasses traditional and land-based postcolonial theories to focus squarely on the nonhuman aquatic agency. The reason to define this clear scope is to make an urgent methodological contribution to environmental literary studies. Through application of Mentz's (2023) notions of "wet ontologies" and "planetary water" in 21st-century and in the trans-hemispheric fictions, the study draws cross-links between the existing scholarship on the ocean in the past and the scholarship on a changing ocean in climate fiction today. Ultimately, this study is highly significant because it provides the academic research environment with an updated critical apparatus. It functions as a window into proving the fact that modern anthropocentric literature

structurally mutates beyond the terrestrial mournings to accurately reflect and process the interconnected and fluid reality of the global ecological collapse.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Literature Review of the Theory

2.2. The Blue Humanities

Glotfelty and Fromm (1996) argue that the genesis of environmental literary studies has been historically circumscribed by a terrestrial bias. This bias has strong roots in land-based ecocriticism with its emphasis on pastoral ecology and its agrarian rootedness (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996). However, the ontological realities of global climate change have led to a rethinking of spatial realities, urging scholars to break the landistic paradigm. Mentz (2009) points out that the critical trajectory has moved towards the maritime environments since the late 2000s. This shift initiates a specialized methodology for the analysis of the cultural and literary production that concerns aquatic spaces (Mentz, 2009). This reorientation is formalized in under the title of the "oceanic turn". It emphasizes that the sea is a vital and material space of human labor and literary imagination (Blum, 2010). Concurrently, intersectional frameworks inside the framework of feminist materialism explode the rigid philosophical boundaries. These boundaries exist traditionally between human bodies and aqueous environment. In this regard, Alaimo (2010) introduces the concept of "trans-corporeality". This idea establishes that environmental toxicity inevitably permeates the human subject. It puts the illusion of an isolated and dry human body into question.

Based on these ground-working changes, the mid 2010's saw rapid accumulation in the hydro-critical vocabulary. Scholars extended the discourse beyond early modern literature of the sea (Brayton, 2012) to the needs of the present; of globalizing the context. Mentz (2015) articulates the concept of "shipwreck modernity." He posits the contemporary subject as one that lives in an ongoing survival of ecological junking. This theory provides a good fit with human geography. The human geography is converged by Steinberg and Peters (2015) in their theorization of the "wet ontologies." They (2015) argue for a spatial reconceptualization that perceives the ocean as the three-dimensional entity and as the turbulent materiality that directly challenges the colonial perception of the sea as the flat expanse that is designated merely for the transit purposes.

In the later parts of 2010s, the conceptual parameters of water in literature start to expand to accommodate the specific anxieties of the Anthropocene. Phenomenological studies of post-human feminism further the argument that human biology is fundamentally a hydro-logical process. It is intimately entangled with the planetary water cycles (Neimanis, 2017). Simultaneously, the postcolonial scholars commence to examine the submarine futures of global oceanic spaces. The scholars begin to link submerged histories of the empires to the contemporary sea-level rise (DeLoughrey, 2017). As the decade of 2010 concludes, researchers emphasize the urgent necessity of applying this hydro-criticism across the world literature so that the comprehension for global ecological crises is developed (Campbell & Paye, 2020). The diverse methodologies of the aquatic are summed up and condensed in Mentz's book *An Introduction to the Blue Humanities* (2023). In this text, Mentz formalises the "poetics of planetary water." He advocates a transoceanic method connecting various ocean basins using intellectual approach. This framework advocates for modern-day storeys that have to shift away from romanticized conceptions of the ocean. It argues that contemporary accounts should approach water as a volatile being, a nonhuman, and one which can archive 'life' as the narrative of traumas associated by the destruction to the environment.

2.3. Climate Trauma in the Transoceanic Fiction

As the Blue Humanities developed theoretically, modern day literature has become more concerned with the issues of representation. This crisis is provoked by the climate catastrophe. Scholars observe a conflict within environmental writing. The tension arises between depicting the "slow violence" of the incremental degradation and the sudden devastation of the acute environmental disasters (Nixon, 2011). The 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami is the topic of this literary challenge. It produces the acute trauma narratives. These narratives face the challenge of language in attempting to describe the appalling demise of aquatic life (Deraniyagala, 2013). As a result, critics question the ways that works of the Anthropocene era attempt to make hyperobjects - such as global climate instability - concrete in the confines of conventional storytelling (Trexler, 2015). According to Ghosh (2016), the modern realist novel is, thus, ill-prepared to depict such disastrous natural events. The modern novel is characterised by this failure as contemporary literature's "great derangement." Moreover, the studies about the acute disasters of the water bodies show long lasting psychological impacts that linger after an unprecedented violence over the water bodies in the oceans (Parry, 2017).

2.4. Literature Review of the Selected Novel

Against this critical backdrop as discussed above, Menon's *Under Water* (2026) emerges as an important intervention, making the volatility of water inherent in the very structure of the work. It operates on the massive geographic scale. The novel alternates between the 2004 tsunami that hit a Thai island resort and the 2012 landfall of Hurricane Sandy in New York City. Penguin Random House (2026) has placed the novel squarely in modern times within the genre of climate fiction. The House (2026) talks about the success of the novel for weaving together the threat of rising seas with personal stories.

Critics focus on the complex use of time in the novel and its refusal to have a neat narrative conclusion. Kirkus Reviews (2026) describes the temporal structure of it as stunning. It recognizes the mechanism through which the narrative loops of the past disaster bring it into the present dread. The novel points the finger on how disaster has become normalized in late capitalism. It does so by mirroring the buildup of the Hurricane Sandy with the historical weight of the Tsunami (Kirkus Reviews, 2026). Furthermore, the text explores the South Asian diaspora. This exploration introduces profound postcolonial layers. The writer interrogates the tourist economies and the gendered vulnerability. She challenges idealistic resort images. She also connects colonial legacies with the modern-day disaster capitalism (Penguin Random House, 2026). The novel combines some of the imagery of the ocean with moralistic questions of survival and remembrance (Penguin Random House Library Marketing, 2026). Ultimately, the novel is an intimate cli-fi that shows the greater and ongoing non-linear force of grief.

2.5. Research Gap in the Existing Literature

The proliferation of Anthropocene scholarship has successfully identified that the representational crises is inherent in contemporary climate fiction (Trexler, 2015). Nonetheless, there exists a profound methodological lacuna that keeps on persisting regarding the structural and phenomenological analysis of the aquatic trauma. Currently, the dominant critical approach to the literature that is concerned with extreme oceanic catastrophes, particularly the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, remains deeply entrenched in terrestrial and anthropocentric frameworks. Scholars continue to approach these crisis narratives across the transoceanic as primarily in terms of traditional trauma theory and the notion of postcolonial spatial displacement (Craps, 2013; Bracke, 2017). This traditional form of approach unintentionally impairs the discussion of ecology. It does so by treating the ocean as a non-entities and a place where human psychological drama can only be destroyed. Furthermore, while Mentz's (2023) consolidation of the Blue Humanities offers the radical critical reconceptualization through the ideas of "planetary water" and "wet ontologies," the application of this specific framework remains largely retrospective within the academic research settings. Current hydrocritical scholarship is removed from current marine historiography across much of which Mentz's frames are linked to early modern marine literature and canonical nineteenth century (Blum, 2010; Brayton, 2012). As a result, academic discussion is not agile enough to analyze how new works, such as Menon's *Under Water* (2026), change forms and structures to respond to modern catastrophes of the oceans. Therefore, this study intervenes precisely at this theoretical impasse. The present literature attempts to skip much of the Mentzian oceanic agency in favour of the trans-hemispheric narrative structures of post-2020 fiction. Using Mentz's (2023) hydro critical framework to analyse the trans-oceanic architecture of Menon's (2026) novel creates a pathway that bounces out of the critical theoretical impasse. It demonstrates that Menon's *Under Water* (2026) moves beyond the traditional and land-based literature of mourning. It uses Mentz's (2023) hydro-critical frameworks to demonstrate the need for modern subjects to adapt, survive and process trauma in an increasingly volatile planetary ocean.

3. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design. It is a choice that is followed directly from its object of inquiry and its analytical ambitions. Qualitative methodology is the appropriate paradigm whenever a study seeks to interpret the meaning. These meanings are embedded in the language, the form, and the symbol (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The primary concern of this research is the manner in which the selected novel constructs, embodies, and complicates the theoretical concepts of wet ontology, shipwreck modernity and the poetics of planetary water. Therefore, the evidence is necessarily textual. It definitely exists in the diction, imagery, temporal structure, spatial logic, and narrative voice of the selected text. The researcher applies a qualitative design so that nuances, contradictions, and the richness of the literary language are in focus. The text has been read as the structured site of the meaning-making because it requires the sustained interpretive engagement. This methodological commitment has been supported further by James (2015) who argues that literary narratives themselves are qualitative cognitive maps. They shape readers' environmental perceptions through the specific formal choices which are embedded in their manner of telling the story. The qualitative paradigm, thus, aligns with the literary objects under the study and the theoretical framework through which it has been analyzed.

3.1. Data and Method

3.1.1 Data

The primary data for this study is the complete text of Menon's *Under Water* (2026). Secondary data is the relevant critical and theoretical literature. The main sources are the works of Mentz (2009, 2015, and 2023), Steinberg and Peters (2015), James (2015), and Neimanis (2017). It is drawn from the peer-reviewed journals, academic monographs and verifiable online scholarly sources. It is acquired through the institutional library access and academic databases including the JSTOR, the Project MUSE, and the Google Scholar.

3.1.2. Research Method: James' (2015) Econarratological Method

The method through which the data has been engaged is econarratological reading. The method is theorized by Erin James in his work *The Storyworld Accord: Econarratology and Postcolonial Narratives* (2015). According to James (2015), narrative form principally determines the way literature creates, mediates, and challenges readers cognitive and ethical orientations towards their nonhuman environments. Econarratology does not replace Mentz's theoretical framework. It provides the formal-analytical vocabulary through which that framework has been applied to the literary text. Mentz (2023) educates the readers on their need to look for a wet ontology and planetary water connectivity. James examines (2015) the where and addresses how to discover these elements through the text's story-world construction, sensory environmental descriptions, narrative focalization, and cognitive mapping of space throughout the text. This ensures that the interpretive findings of the study have been anchored in the own narrative choices of the novel.

3.2. Data Analysis

Data analysis, in the current research, has been carried out through the interpretive textual analysis. It will be informed by research method of econarratology (James, 2015) and it has been structured by Mentz's (2023) hydro-critical framework. The research proceeds in the three sequential stages. In the first stage, the researcher read the whole novel without interruption for analysis. This gives the chance to understand the structure of the story as a whole, the emotional tone, the structure of a dual timeline, and the cumulative effect of the oceanic images in the text. Annotations have been made at this stage, to mark passages where water is used as a decisive force. They are made where ocean acts upon the characters, tries to structure the narrative time, or strives to displace the human subject from the centrality. In the second stage, the annotated passages have been revisited through the systematic Econarratological reading of James (2015). Each passage has been examined for the specific narrative mechanisms such as the focalization, the narrative temporality, the storyworld construction, and the use of the figurative language. These are the sites that James (2015) identifies as the primary sites where environmental meaning is produced. This stage serves as the analytical core of the study. In the third stage, the findings from the econarratological reading have been mapped onto the three research objectives. It has been drawn on Mentz's (2023) theoretical vocabulary to name and interpret the hydro-critical significance of what the narrative analysis reveals. Neither any software such as NVivo nor corpus concordance tools have been employed because the interest of the study lies in the qualitative depth of the interpretation instead of analyzing the frequency of the patterns across the large text corpus.

3.3. Theoretical Framework: Mentz's (2023) Hydro-critical Blue Humanities

To adequately address the objectives of the study, the research anchors in the theoretical framework of the "Blue Humanities". It explicitly utilizes the hydro-critical toolbox that is formalized by Mentz (2023). This framework is ideally suited to do what it is designed to do because it directly addresses the terrestrial bias in traditional literary studies. It offers a specialized vocabulary to understand the way modern subjects interact with the volatile aquatic environments.

3.3.1 Wet Ontology

The framework provides three core theoretical ideas that perfectly align with the research questions. The first concept is "wet ontology," which has been mobilized to fulfill the first objective by proving that the reality of the novel is fundamentally fluid and three-dimensional. It renders the land-based safety nothing more than an illusion.

3.3.2. Oceanic Nonhuman Agency

The second concept is "oceanic nonhuman agency". According to the Mentzian principle of 2023, the sea is a very powerful and active ecological force. This idea directly answers the second objective of the research. It establishes the ocean as the central

catalyst for the climate trauma of the characters of the selected text.

3.3.3. Poetics of Planetary Water

The final concept is that of 'poetics of planetary water' (Mentz, 2023). Mentz believes that all bodies of water around the world are intimately linked. This concept is instrumental in achieving the third objective of the current research. It allows the researcher to evaluate the transoceanic structure of the novel as an architectural manifestation of global climate collapse.

3.4. Delimitations

In order to ensure that the research remains focused, rigorous and manageable, there are clearly drawn theoretical and methodological limits. Theoretically, the study intentionally delimits its scope to Mentz's (2023) Blue Humanities. It deliberately leaves aside land-based ecocriticism, such as Lawrence Buell's 1995 founding model, and anthropocentric trauma theories such as those advanced by Cathy Caruth in 1996. While these alternative theories are valuable but applying them would dilute the specific focus of the study on aquatic trauma and nonhuman oceanic agency. Methodologically, the research will be strictly delimited to a qualitative and econarratological textual analysis of the single primary source. The primary source will be Menon's *Under Water* (2026). Therefore, such studies of literary genres as empirical reader-response surveys, historical biographical critiques of the author, and comparative studies with other works of climate fiction will be purposefully left out of this study herein.

4. Analysis Results and Findings

4.1. Overview of the Section

In this section of the paper a sustained econarratological study of *Under Water* (2026) is going to be provided in consideration of the hydro-critical prism of the Blue Humanities. The analyses proceed along three interrelated lines: the dismantling of terrestrial stability and the construction of a "wet ontology," the centrality of oceanic nonhuman agency in structuring climate trauma the formal realization of a transoceanic "poetics of planetary water." The novel's dual temporal and spatial structures, which cover the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and Hurricane Sandy, provide a strong basis for the study of how oceanic environments transform narrative, subjectivity memory. The researcher will be examining the novel's engagement with catastrophe representation, but it is more than that. It is the reframing of ontological and epistemological assumptions that positioned land as a given, stable, bounded human-centric. The *Under Water* (2026) is disruptive. It is argued throughout this section that this novel does not appear to be in an environmental crisis but engages a hydro-critical reconfiguration to reflect that water is the primary condition of being, knowing narrating.

4.2. Wet Ontology and the Dismantling of Terrestrial Stability

The new Wet Ontology project destabilizes the reliability of Earth's terrestrials. Perceptual disturbance begins with no spectacle, with the line "Something's wrong... Something's wrong." (p. 147). The line suggests a breakdown of analytical frameworks employed to make sense of the environment. The coastline, the region of geographical equilibrium, is now the region of epistemic uncertainty. The narrator's "The sea tugs hard at my feet." (p. 148) also exemplifies a disturbance, where the sea is the one intruding into land. The further disturbance, "We have never seen the ocean behave like this." (p. 150) suggests the disturbances have been a collective experience.

The sea retreating from the land alters the state of being and what one should expect. The sea is revealing "Meters and meters of sand." (p. 151); shows the unsettling visual and material boundary changes between land and water. The time disruption is also present when the sea is described as drained in "In seconds, the bay is almost entirely drained," (p. 152) indicating the abrupt change of previously considered stable environments, the sea. An unsettling ecological inversion is described when "The sea has left so quickly it has forgotten the fish." (p. 152). "Hundreds of them are flapping on the sand" (152) as sea creatures are now in land's terrestrial, further merging the confused categoricals and showing the collapsed boundaries of environments.

The final axis of all this destabilization is the change of the ocean into a vertical force: "The sea on the horizon lifts into the sky and slingshots back towards us as a black wall." (p. 153). This description ignores the horizontal logic that dominates the way we relate to the land and replaces it with a vertical all-consuming force. This wave is not just a phenomenon, it is a restructuring of the spatial order to close all distances and make escape utterly impossible. The drowning of the protagonist finalizes the shift from land to sea being. The narrator states, "The wave overtakes me. I am plunged into darkness." (p. 210) and this indicates the absence of all visual and spatial reference points.

Within the water the bodily orientation disintegrates entirely. The description of the writer: “The water corkscrews my body. I spin like a top.” (p. 211), conveys the rotational disorientation. This disorientation eliminates any stable sense of the direction. This is intensified by the tactile assault: “It feels like a thousand nails are hitting me from every angle” (p. 211), which transforms the ocean into a pervasive and penetrating force. The environment ceases to be the external and it becomes an all-encompassing medium in which the body is suspended and manipulated. The repeated submersion: “The ocean drags me under again, deeper this time.” (p. 213) further erodes any residual sense of control or stability.

The narrator’s eventual surrender, “I stop struggling and let the water have its way with me.” (p. 212), signals an important ontological change. There is an abdication of agency the subject is made subject to the fluid dynamics of the sea. This change is in line with the conceptualization of wet ontology, where in being is not defined by some grounded stability, but instead being is defined by immersion in some precarious medium. The statement “The waves have taken possession of everything in their path.” (p. 214) also extends this condition from the individual to the totality of the environment. Possession, in this context, is physical and ontological, as it signifies that the ocean reconfigures the existence.

Even the moment of seeming emergence does not bring back any terrestrial certainty. The narrator says, “The water spits me out to the surface.” (p. 212), a phrase that is more about expulsion than about any kind of redemption. The subject remains in a position determined by the sea, without ever being able to re-establish complete autonomy or stability. This is the case with the persistent condition of instability where it is said, “The sea swallow them both.” (p. 154). The totalizing power of the ocean, in this case, subsumes identity. The water has a body. Subsumption has to a large degree defined the terrestrial existence.

The novel describes a world where land cannot be considered a secure foundation. Land is replaced with water and existence is described as fluid and contingent. The way the novel removes terrestrial stability is not only a theme. It restructures the spatial logic of the narrative and the reader's sense of environment and agency. In this way, *Under Water* (2026) articulates a sophisticated wet ontology, offering a critical perspective on the human- nonhuman relations.

4.3. Oceanic Nonhuman Agency and Climate Trauma

The novel describes trauma and the ability the ocean has to influence and control the situation. Instead of seeing the ocean as an unchanging scene, the ocean in the narrative is seen as a strong, uncontrollable entity. This is shown in the quote: “The Ocean is angry, vengeful, imperious.” (p. 212) is quickly followed by “I am at its mercy.” (p. 212). With these quote, it shows that in the system, it is the ocean that has the control while the humans are the ones that are controlled. Most of all, this control is unavoidably physical as shown in the protagonist's experiences.

The quote, “The Ocean is not scared of me. I am scared of its sound.” (p. 125) points out the discrepancy between what lies in the depths of the ocean and what lies on the surface of humanity. Fear is an emotion that is not reciprocated, which demonstrates the disparity that exists in the quote. This type of disparity is one of the defining characteristics of trauma, where the subject becomes engulfed by a force that is out of their control in a way, is incomprehensible. The experiences of physical domination that are so repetitive (“The water surges again and returns me to the dark.” (p. 211) and “The next wave lifts me, dumps me...” (p. 211) are a testament to the persistence of traumatic memory.

Trauma isn't an isolated event. It spans from the past to the present to the future due to the intricacies of psychological entrapment. The author states, “I feel submerged. I can't find my way to the surface.” (p. 95). Physical drowning in the ocean can closely represent mental entrapment. This ocean imagery demonstrates entrapment. The event of Hurricane Sandy, depicted as “The Hudson and the East River rise... sweep the streets.” (p. 180) and “The water... devouring everything in sight.” (p. 180) serves to emphasize the danger of having one's perception of the ocean so closely tied to the vast and peripheral threats that come with it.

The novel also invites the reader to challenge and move beyond anthropocentrism as it grapples with human adaptability in the face of overwhelming nonhuman forces. The quote “Not a single animal... lost its life that day.” (p. 240) and “Animals moved themselves to safety.” (p. 240) demonstrates the vast difference in a nonhuman adaptation. The quote “As humans walked towards the retreating ocean...” (p. 240) suggests that human frameworks of thought and action are not only poorly designed, but are also reckless. This theory posits humans as maladaptive in an otherwise functional system that is ruled by an oceanic logic.

The aesthetic dimension of catastrophe plays a role in complicating the emotional processing of the trauma. The quote “The ocean that day was spectacular... destruction is quiet.” (p. 220) contrasts visual pleasure with destructive forces that defy moral commonplace. The statement “Sometimes, it is even rather beautiful.” (p. 231) suggests an ambiguity that is located in a description of catastrophe that is not wholly negative. Trauma is compounded by the presence of beauty and violence through a gap in resulting consequences and perception.

The assertion “The earth... refused to mourn with us.” (p. 230) articulates the gap between human mourning and environmental indifference. The absence of this emotional connection suggests how the presence of nonhuman entities isolates the experience of grief. The ocean, by further reinforcing its autonomy and by not allowing for a loss to be recognized in human terms, contributes to the further collapse of anthropocentric perspectives. The novel, through this representation, advocates for the centrality of oceanic agency in the experience and understanding of climate trauma and redefines the nature of the relationship between humans and their environments.

4.4. Transoceanic Structure and Poetics of Planetary Water

The formal structure of *Under Water* (2026) embodies a transoceanic interconnectedness that corresponds to the theory of planetary water. The protagonist’s active involvement in global crises connects events that are geographically far apart. The admission, “Since that day, I have become obsessed with these disasters.” (p. 111) illustrates a pattern of repeated compulsive fixation this further explains the statement, “Whenever the earth revolts, I can’t stop thinking about her.” (p. 110) where the memory of a single event becomes the memory of many.

The tsunami and Hurricane Sandy are explicitly linked in the novel. The protagonist points out, “This week, I have been devouring the news... Sandy.” (p. 112), indicating engagement with events in real time. The warning, “The storm... it’s heading straight for you.” (p. 113) presents the looming threat in the same context as the previously described disaster. The extent to which this linkage is internalised is expressed by the narrator who states, “I want it to come in all its fury.” (p. 100) and “I want to be where the earth convulses again.” (p. 100).

The simultaneous representation of concurrent environmental processes further compresses spatial limits: “I see the earthquake here... then the water comes rushing.” (p. 180) and “The water comes from all sides.” (p. 180). These accounts indicate the oceans’ interdependent relationships. The modified vantage point, “I feel myself floating, looking down on the chaos.” (p. 181) particularly underscores the shift from a local to a global perspective corresponds with a global view of environmental systems.

This sense of interconnectivity is enhanced by the repetition of descriptive patterns. The account “It was a beautiful day.” (p. 182) combined with “The sky was blue, the sun was out.” (p. 182) is present in both disaster accounts, pointing to a common structural framework. This repetition is reflected in the corresponding statements, “The ocean that day was spectacular.” (p. 220) and “The storm tonight might be spectacular.” (p. 220), which span across time and space.

Fictional accounts of the future presented in this draft attempt to erase spatial boundaries the persistence of representation destabilizes the temporal boundaries: “Articles about that day always include” (p. 182), meaning the past is alive in the present through the movement of the narrative. The text describes what the images look like with such permanence, e.g. “The water is as high as the top of the palm trees.” (p. 221); “The first wave is in the background.” (p. 221); “He is fleeing the water; terrified.” (p. 221). These images recur and travel through multiple iterations as transoceanic motifs.

The phrase “Destruction is quiet,” (p. 220) summarizes a world in which the apocalypse is a routine part of everyday life. This world is alive and not empty of events; there are not oceanic singular anomalies, but a world, a system, a life. With its collapsing of spatial and temporal boundaries, the novel enacts a poetics of planetary water and brings the world’s oceans together as a network in complex and interdependent ways, shaping and structuring life and experience in a myriad of ways across the world.

This analysis has shown that *Under Water* (2026) holds a consistently applied hydro-critical logic that considers all three of ontology, agency form. By actively dismantling terrestrial stability, it produces a new wet ontology, where fluidity, rather than solidity, supplants all other conditions of existence. The drowning of existence as an ontological and ontological condition, along with the dominance of a nonhuman oceanic agency, which has control of the experience of catastrophe and the trauma that comes as a result of the catastrophe, serves to reinforce the shift. The ocean is not merely a background that exists as an environment, rather is a foreground that actively controls, alters and changes the way humans think and the way humans exist. The novel’s structure is transoceanic; it creates a watery poetry of the planet, internally linking disparate events that are not only separated by geography, but also by time. The repetition of imagery, ensconced within a memory that resists closure undifferentiated space are all components of a story that reflects the realities of the Anthropocene. Therefore, *Under Water* (2026) is properly situated as a text that is of high calibre formal sophistication and not simply depicting an environmental crisis, but as an idea of the hydro-critical reorientation that is arguably necessary.

4.5. Findings

This paper aims to discuss the novel *Under Water* (2026) using a hydro-critical approach situated in Blue Humanities, differentiated in three parts: (1) the narrative strategies that liquidate terrestrial safety to assemble a wet ontology, (2), oceanic

nonhuman agency and its role in the assimilation of climate trauma (3) how the novel's transoceanic disposition functions to enact a poetics of planetary water. The results indicate that the novel not only responds to these concerns but actively engages with them in terms of narrative, spatial affective modalities.

In response to the first research question, the analysis demonstrates that the novel systematically disassembles terrestrial stability through a series of escalated narrative techniques that transmute the environment from a stable backdrop to a volatile, immersive one. The first is perceptual disruption, where environmental cues become unreliable. The constant recognition that something is "off" begins a cognitive disintegration, illustrating that terrestrial knowledge systems are incapable of adequately responding to impending oceanic systems. Following this is spatial inversion, particularly in the case of the receding sea, which lays bare the sea floor and obliterates the land/water boundary. The abrupt emergence of terrestrial organisms from the previously concealed aquatic environment shocks the ecological order and creates a strange environment in which the previously distinct domains collapse.

The second key mechanism is temporal compression. This is when rapid environmental changes happen beyond the threshold of what can be considered gradual. The speed at which the bay drains and the subsequent wave return collapses the temporal buffer that exists in most situations, allowing time for a human reaction. This compression erodes predictability and contributes to the loss of control over the ocean. The most important mechanism is what I term 'embodied submersion.' Here, the narrative moves from the external, observing, to the internal, submersed in the water. Orientation, direction control are all forfeited in the turbulent water. The locus of wet ontology in the body is situated wherever submerged. The destabilization of the body reflects a 'suspended ontology' that exists no longer in a stable, grounded reality, but in a fluid and dynamic three-dimensional medium. The total environmental possession mechanism is the final and most advanced of all the stated mechanisms. The ocean's ability to submerge, displace rearrange all components of the environment proves that our sense of security on land is not only threatened but rendered void. The new ontology is therefore a 'wet ontology,' where fluidity, instability immersion, rather than negativity, permanence detachment, define the conditions of existence.

As for the second research question, the findings suggest that the oceanic nonhuman agency is not a matter of interpretive overlay. Rather, it is the primary structuring dimension of trauma in the narrative. The ocean is described by the narrative as possessing a kind of autonomous agency that is intentional, powerful indifferent. The agency described is not an anthropomorphic formulation in a simplistic way. It is not a simplistic formulation in an anthropomorphic way. Rather, it emerges from the relentless way in which the ocean is represented as acting upon bodies, environments time. One of the most important findings is that trauma is manufactured through an imbalanced power dynamic between human actor and oceanic force. The protagonist has repeatedly experienced the sensations of being overwhelmed, displaced controlled by water. Such experiences in the narrative create a dynamic in which human agency is rendered insignificant. This imbalance is especially important in that it prevents the domestication of catastrophe into narratives of resilience or recovery that center on humans. To the contrary, trauma is presented as an encounter with a force that is fundamentally ungovernable and opaque.

A further finding relates to the temporal persistence of oceanic agency. The ocean's influence reaches beyond the moment of disaster into the protagonist's ongoing psychological state. The trauma of the disaster is experienced as a kind of further submersion. This is a more complex persistence that deals with past events that remain active in the present. This persistence defies the trauma models that rely on a linear temporality and a resolution. The novel presents trauma as cyclical and repetitive and embedded structurally in the subject's perception. The study also identifies a significant decentering of the human through an ecological contrast. The juxtaposition between the survival of nonhuman animals and the human being vulnerable demonstrates that the ocean works in a way that is not governed by human perception and pragmatics. It is consistent with the argument that trauma is not only caused by destruction but more by the recognition of the anomaly of a human connection in the larger environmental system.

The study emphasizes the role of aesthetic ambiguity in augmenting trauma. The event of beauty and destruction occurring simultaneously makes unrefined and murky emotional responses, resulting in a lack of clear moral or affective resolution. The ocean's ability to be visually beautiful but materially horrible creates a tension that augments the psychological impact of the event. In this regard, oceanic agency is central to trauma not only in creating destruction but in disrupting and destabilizing the understanding of destruction and how to process it.

As observed from the analysis, the structure of the novel is pioneering transoceanic, demonstrating the innovative ability to structure a disorganized conglomerate to construct a unified narrative system of the disorganized interconnectedness of the global water system. The primary means to achieve this is by means of temporal interweaving, where the past (the tsunami) and the present (Hurricane Sandy), are not regarded as separate, but as a set of interrelated experiences. The protagonist's memories are a result of this temporal interweaving. The collapsing of the temporal boundaries of one event informs and reconstitutes the perception of the other. The use of repetitive imagery and narrative mirroring is a second key finding.

Environmental descriptions, visual scenes emotional reactions recur across different regions this repetition serves as a formal means to suggest that all the events are not separate, but are a part of a large interconnected system.

The study recognizes spatial collapse as one of the main aspects of the novel's construction. The narrative lacks clear markers when switching sites, resulting in the feeling that spatial positioning is barely relevant compared to the relationships created through the ocean. The Indian and Atlantic world oceans are treated as one system in the planetary sense not as separate worlds. Another important finding is the analysis of disaster through global communication systems, particularly the news. The protagonist's interest in faraway disaster reports expands trauma's reach beyond the immediate and creates a transoceanic consciousness that allows one to view disparate events as related. This incident awareness emphasizes the planetary water's poetry by subsuming local realities to a global one.

The desensitization of disaster in diverse settings creates a perception of a planetary crisis of the environment. The third-world destruction that is manifested in various other societies indicates that the catastrophe is not an isolated instance, but a reflection of systemic disarray. The construction of the novel, therefore, portrays the poetics of planetary water and represents a system of oceans that are interrelated.

5. Conclusion

This study firmly places *Under Water* (2026) as a work of literary art that showcases high level of form Innovation and a work that exemplifies and extends the emerging theoretical work of the Blue Humanities. For Research Question 1, the novel 'wets' the ontology of the narrative by using narrative techniques that break down the stabilities of the terrestrial and configure being as fluid, contingent immersive. For Research Question 2, the novel conceptualizes oceanic nonhuman agency as being critical to the generation and sustenance of climate trauma, thereby displacing the anthropocentric paradigm of interpretation, equally, the (analytically) symmetrical view of the relationship between humanity and the rest of the world. For Research Question 3, the novel articulates a poetics of planetary water through a transoceanic form that collapses time and space in order to present water bodies as systems that shape the global experience. All these findings collectively point to the central conclusion of this study that the novel demonstrates that the main theme of the novel, environmental collapse, calls, at the level of form and perception, for a hydro-critical or water, shift. The ocean is, therefore, the central organizing element that restructures narrative logic, subjectivity trauma experience. In combination, *Under Water* (2026) presents a sophisticated and complex template of the emerging climate fiction of the Anthropocene as such, presents a clear and direct contribution to the field by demonstrating the versatility of Mentz's hydro-critical lens for reading literary texts post-2020, therefore addressing a clear and pinpointed gap in the scholarship to advance Blue Humanities in multiple dimensions.

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