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Themed Issue: Aquatic Absence-Presence in World Literatures

Editorial

Water occupies a distinctive place in literary representation. It is at once material and symbolic, a geographical space and a medium through which histories, memories, identities, and forms of knowledge cumulate, sometimes changed, and are transmitted through narratives. Yet literary and critical approaches to water have often privileged its presence as landscape, setting, or metaphor. The eight essays collected in this themed issue of *Critical Language and Literary Studies*, "Aquatic Absence-Presence in World Literatures," examine water from a range of literary, historical, geographical, and theoretical perspectives.

Several contributions examine the relationship between water, mobility, and the organization of space. Pourya Asl's essay on Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* demonstrates how aquatic spaces complicate apparently stable distinctions between land and water, while Shirkhani's examination of Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* reveals the connections between water, mobility, displacement, and structures of power. Water in these readings is not merely a setting in which human action takes place; rather, it appears as an agent that actively shapes the movement of people, the organization of space, and their relations with one another. Other contributions focus more directly on the relationship between water, embodiment, and the nonhuman life. Tavasoli's reading of David Foster Wallace's "Consider the Lobster" assays the significance of habitat and the relationship between aquatic and human life, while Emamipour's discussion of Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* draws on trans-corporeality and the Blue Humanities to examine the permeability of boundaries between human bodies and their environments. These approaches foreground the materiality of water and challenge readings in which the natural world remains merely a background to human experience.

Water also emerges in the issue as a site of memory and historical knowledge. Def's analysis of Zoulfa Katouh's *The Ocean Would Paint Me Blue* investigates the relationship between the ocean, displacement, trauma, and intergenerational memory. And Shabanpour's exploration of Mahmoud Dowlatabadi's *Missing Soluch* connects the disappearance of water with the destruction of the qanat system and the loss of indigenous hydrological knowledge. In their critique of Anita Heiss's *River of Dreams*, Aghaverdizadeh, Moradi and Masiha study the river as a source of indigenous knowledge in relation to colonial forms of mis-recognition. In these studies, the question of aquatic absence is therefore also a question of what histories and forms of knowledge become absent, suppressed, or overlooked. And finally, Taheri's contribution on Margaret Wrinkle's *Wash* further develops this concern by examining water in relation to slavery, the Middle Passage, African American memory, and ancestral identity. Drawing on terraqueous

ecocriticism and Blue Humanities scholarship, her article challenges the predominantly terrestrial orientation of readings of slave narratives, and considers water as a material archive of trauma and cultural memory, as well as a medium of resistance and continuity.

Taken together, the essays in this issue demonstrate that aquatic presence and absence cannot be understood simply as opposing conditions. Water may be physically present while the histories, memories, and knowledge associated with it remain absent from dominant narratives; conversely, its apparent absence continues to take the contours of memories, identities, and cultural experiences. The contributions gathered here invite renewed attention to the literary significance of water and to the ways in which aquatic spaces participate in the production of worlds, histories, and relations.

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Editor