

maritima litteraturen som miljöhistoria framstår som ett ypperligt sätt att ta forskningen vidare.

Sammanfattningsvis är *A Poetic History of the Oceans* en ambitiös och innehållsrik bok. Den fungerar som en mycket bra och heltäckande introduktion till såväl maritim litteratur som till blå humaniora och blå ekokritik. Och den ger, inte bara genom sina läsningar och sitt fokus på nordisk litteratur utan framför allt genom sitt långa tidsspänn, en ny förståelse av den västerländska maritima litteraturen i stort.

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Serpil Oppermann, *Blue Humanities: Storied Waterscapes in the Anthropocene*, Cambridge, UK and New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2023, 73 p. and Steve Mentz, *An Introduction to the Blue Humanities*, New York, NY and Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, [2023] 2024, xix, 163 p.

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Serpil Oppermann's and Steve Mentz's introductory volumes to "blue humanities" appeared virtually simultaneously in 2023. Both draw on developments to date in this area of research unfolding over recent decades, with the ambition to sketch potential future directions. Beyond these similarities, Oppermann's *Blue Humanities: Storied Waterscapes in the Anthropocene* and Mentz's *An Introduction to the Blue Humanities* are significantly different. Oppermann's study forms part of the series Cambridge Elements and follows a predetermined short format, resulting in a concise volume. Mentz's book is of more conventional length and consequently offers more depth.

The two books also seem to diverge when it comes to interpreting and defining the nature of blue humanities scholarship. For Oppermann, blue humanities are inherently political, emerging from the proposition "that the political systems mired within the capitalist logic are responsible for the damage inflicted on the planet's major

waterways” (p. 1), from which follows a normative aim to locate stories that “of course” serve to “instill environmental awareness in the mind of its readers” (p. 19). Oppermann is decidedly forward-looking, tasking blue humanities scholars with finding, writing, identifying and analysing aesthetic representations that can “help deconstruct the capitalist, neo-colonialist, and imperialistic practices” that have caused the “oceanic tragedies” of the Anthropocene (p. 9).

Mentz’s approach is different. Turning more towards the past than the future, his take on the blue humanities encourages scholars in literary studies and adjacent fields to re-examine the traditional, Anglophone canon from the point of view of a changing relationship between people and the global ocean, and to expand the field to become less Western-centric and colonial. To further this aim and lead by example, Mentz’s comprehensive study is structured to encompass a wide range of primary texts from an impressive variety of genre, period, and region. Respective chapters are dedicated to the Pacific, Southern, Indian, Atlantic and Arctic oceans and the Mediterranean and Caribbean seas. Each chapter, moreover, includes analyses of a canonical text, with which Mentz is comfortable and familiar, placed alongside works of alternative formats and emerging from other regions. The reasoning behind this strategy, Mentz underscores, is central to the task of the blue humanities, and also signifies its most important development over the past decade: the biggest change “between the 2009 version of blue humanities and the early 2020s version is the increasingly visible effort to move beyond the Atlantic centrism of my own, and Anglophone literary criticism’s, history” (p. 17).

Mentz’s own study reflects this change. The chapters’ sequential survey of oceanic geographies foregrounds the Pacific Ocean as “the world’s true center” and as defined by “the cultures of Oceania” (p. 39). The literary works Mentz engages to consider this Pacific include “the revisionist history” of Epeli Hau’ofa, Christina Thompson’s *Sea People: The Puzzle of Polynesia*, *Once Were Pacific: Māori Connections to Oceania* by Alice Te Punga Somerville, *The Kingdom and the Republic* by Noelani Arista, and Craig Santos Perez’s poetry collection *from unincorporated territory*. These works, Mentz shows, counter colonial Western views of the Pacific as a vast emptiness by

making visible historical, peopled accounts of a “sea of islands” (p. 40). Mentz places his analysis of these contemporary Pacific works alongside representations of the Pacific in Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick*, the foremost “literary testament to the Western conception of the Pacific” (p. 46). Other chapters follow a similar structure, contrasting and combining ocean-centred analyses of well-known Western works with considerations of novels, poetry, music and other artforms from other regions and from authors less familiar to most of Mentz’s expected readers.

While Mentz notes that blue humanities thinking is characterised by “critical, creative, and activist impulses” (p. xviii), Oppermann takes the normative dimension further. Her book includes fewer discussions of individual works and is instead geared towards a theoretical overview of blue humanities approaches – more guide than practice. Chapters are structured according to disciplinary themes, with two marine sections focused on oceanic imaginations and scientific accounts respectively, and one devoted to freshwater themes. These core chapters are framed by introductory and concluding discussions of what it means to “think with water”, a recurring phrase (eg. p. 35, 57). The activist element is maintained throughout, following the introduction’s proposal that blue humanities are founded on a conviction that “the main problems and insecurities in aquatic systems are ineluctably social and cultural”, so “that the possibilities for any hopeful change are socially and culturally situated”. It follows from this, according to Oppermann’s thinking, that “the best way” to address how people impact marine and freshwater ecosystems, “is to change the way they think”, and this may be done through creating “storied seas” that can “denature anthropocentric narrative representations of the seascapes that are ingrained in our mental landscapes determining social behavior” (p. 35).

Oppermann’s study engages marine sciences to a further extent than Mentz’s, though the gap between the disciplines remains significant. Her chapter titled “Troubled seas: scientific accounts” provides an overview of human impacts on the marine environment, including climate change with warming and raised levels of CO₂, leading to acidification and deoxygenation, pollution by plastics, and a brief summary of “other oceanic threats”, which notes overfishing, re-

source extraction, anthropogenic species relocation, and noise and light pollution. The account cites scientific authors, highlighting their “cautionary message” which, Oppermann proposes, “invites transdisciplinary cooperation among scientists and scholars in the humanities and social sciences” (p. 34). An important task for blue humanities scholars, she further suggests, is to provide a “transformative” counternarrative to anthropocentric approaches to the ocean as a resource to be exploited without regard for its non-human inhabitants. Such counternarratives, Mentz reinstates, “invite us to test our habits of mind, our ecological imperatives, our conceptual frameworks, and our epistemologies so that building new oceanic imaginaries, formulating new discursive practices, and abandoning profit-based economic activities can become possible” (p. 35).

Oppermann and Mentz provide in many ways contrasting examples of what blue humanities scholarship may entail, arguably calling into question the need to put this distinct label on such studies which suggests that they do or should share some common premises. Perhaps plurality and diversity are better encouraged by a less field-defining approach. Furthermore, Elizabeth Deloughrey has directly criticised the “blue humanities” term, suggesting that there is an “uncomfortable overlap between the concept of innovation as a driver of the blue economy as well as the blue humanities” (“Mining the seas: speculative fictions and futures”, in Irus Braverman ed. *Laws of the Sea: Interdisciplinary Currents*, Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2022, p. 145). The so-called ‘oceanic turn’, in her view, encompasses “capitalism and scholarship” alike, simply denoting an increased interest in marine matters in a range of areas: “the turn to what is being called the ‘blue humanities,’ while certainly driven by our environmental crisis and the ecological/multispecies turn in scholarship, is also the product of neoliberalization of academia and the rebranding of humanities work in an era of intellectual and economic downsizing” (p. 145–146). This interpretation is especially at odds with Oppermann’s approach, which sees the task of the blue humanities as specifically to counter capitalistic views and uses of the ocean. More generally, it is a troubling association for the blue humanities term, left unmentioned by both Oppermann and Mentz.

Alternative terms for humanities-based ocean studies appear in

both Oppermann's and Mentz's books. 'Critical ocean studies' are specifically marine and treated by both authors as a narrower field, where the blue humanities label signifies, in Oppermann's words, "theoretical, historical, sociocultural, aesthetic, and literary" expansion (p. 54). Deloughrey, as a contrasting example, suggests instead that blue humanities and critical ocean studies "are different strands of scholarship" where the latter extends to the geopolitical while the former is grounded in "literary and Eurocentric" traditions, a characterisation that is simultaneously reaffirmed and challenged in Mentz's consideration of a wide variety of aesthetic ocean representations. Finally, both Mentz and Oppermann also apply the label of Anthropocene ocean studies, in Oppermann's case even in the title. Her use appears straightforwardly descriptive, referring to the state of the ocean "in the Anthropocene" in the sense of a planet thoroughly marked by human environmental impact and degradation. Mentz employs the term in a similar way.

These different labels, and related ones, do not appear essential to Mentz's and Oppermann's respective studies; the quality, range and depth of their respective analyses stand on their own, bringing new insights and reflections on meanings and representations of the ocean, past and present, from the point of view of an increasingly fraught relationship between individuals, communities, the global ocean and regional seas.

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Vera Sundin, *Diktens gyllne dar. Den pastorala koden i svensk litteratur 1753–1876*, Stockholm: Stockholms universitet 2025, 298 s. (diss. Stockholm).

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När Paul Alpers gav ut sin inflytelserika studie *What is Pastoral?* (1996) var han redan känd som en skarp kritiker av alltför inkluderande och impressionistiska beskrivningar av pastoralen. Våren 1982 hade han publicerat en lång artikel med samma namn i *Critical In-*