

Call for Papers:

## Rewritten Water Myths in Times of Global Warming

Organizers: Barbara Barrow and Monika Class

Lund University, Sweden

Symposium, 11-12 June 2026



Still from the movie *Creature from the Black Lagoon*, featuring Gill-man or the Creature (circa 1953).

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In *Serpent, Siren, Maelstrom & Myth* (2023), Gerry Smyth links the importance of sea stories to the 2019 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's special report on the endangerment of the world's oceans. According to Smyth, retelling and interpreting sea myths helps to underline the centrality of the ocean to planetary health.<sup>1</sup> Other contemporary writers, artists, and filmmakers have also remade and reinvented water mythologies both within and beyond the sea as a way of grappling with our current oceanic crises. Guillermo de Toro's *The Shape of Water* (2017) rewrites the 1954 film *Creature from the Black Lagoon* and casts the aquatic creature as the scared amphibian god of Amazonian communities. Jave Yoshimoto's colorful paintings feature figures such as Venus and Godzilla in scenes of coastal disaster. Madeline Miller retells Homeric myth from the perspective of her eponymous heroine in *Circe* (2018), while Alexis Pauline Gumbs's *Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals* (2020) interweaves the Greek Oceanid Clymene with her grandfather's identification as Atlas as she reflects on dolphin hybridity and history and how remembrance can push back against consumer destruction. And in *Gun Island* (2019), Amitav Ghosh revisits a 17th-century Bengali folk epic about a gun merchant who flees the anger of the snake goddess Manasa Devi in a story of contemporary environmental crisis that brings together climate refugeeism, storms in the Sundarbans, flooding in Venice, and the plight of whales and dolphins stranded by dead zones.

These works of literature and film testify to the relationship between myth and environmentalism. Jan A. Kozák's "Climate Change and Myth" (2023) argues that certain now-lost myths about spiritual wisdom point to resilience and more harmonious imaginaries and relationships with nature and among people.<sup>2</sup> Esther Sánchez-Pardo's and María Porras Sánchez's collection *Myth and Environmentalism: Arts of Resilience for a Damaged Planet* (2024) further emphasize that myth remains open to change and transformation and that myth is adaptable to different times.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, many rewritten myths, such as *The Shape of Water*, overlap with recent calls for hopeful stories in sustainability studies. The turn away from doom and collapse promises to stimulate individual and structural action. The film also points to the specific wisdom of myth that de-centers the human and concomitantly draws attention to the slow violence of human exploitation and contamination in the Americas. Yet, current research in the environmental humanities is just starting to think about the relationships between water and myth.

Our symposium aims to bring together scholars across different humanistic fields and disciplines, and take up mythical intertextuality and adaptation studies as well as representations of water, human connectedness with water, time and water cycles, story as flow in and across various media, gender fluidity, aquatic power and aquatic mobility, and last but not least transformed aquatic heroines and heroes, with the goal of examining how rewritten myths can encourage us to think and live with the water in less anthropocentric terms. In this spirit, Dr. Julia Boll, Professor for English Literature and Culture at Paris-Lodron University of Salzburg, will present her keynote lecture entitled "Medea on the Edge: Contemporary Prose Narratives and Cultural Appropriations of the Ocean's Granddaughter."

We invite proposals for presentations at an international, two-day symposium that will explore the relationship between rewritten literary and cultural mythologies and our damaged planetary waters. This event, to be held at the Centre for Languages and Literature at Lund University from 11-12 June 2026, will stimulate a fresh discussion on rewritten myths from the perspective of the blue humanities. We understand the blue humanities, in Serpil Opperman's words, as a field that "critically examines the planet's troubled seas and distressed freshwaters from various sociocultural, literary, historical, aesthetic, ethical, and theoretical perspectives" and that "calls for transdisciplinary cooperation and encourages thinking with water and thinking together beyond the conventions of tentacular anthropocentric thought."<sup>4</sup> Our symposium will explore the affordances of rewritten mythologies for thinking with and through water in our current era of climate crisis.

Topics may include, but are not limited to:

- Blue humanities and myth: What current issues in the blue humanities (cultural and literary study of human relations to water) do rewritten mythologies throw into relief?
- Aquatic nature: What role do waterscapes play in rewritten mythologies?

- Aquatic attachments: To what extent do rewritten mythologies help to reconnect with the ocean, beaches, coastlines, rivers, wetlands and other waterscapes?
- Affinity between water and oral traditions: how do mythological rewritings challenge Western print-dominated cultures?
- Affinity between water and gender fluidity and sexuality: how does rewritten mythology challenge gender norms, heteronormativity, and/or cisnormativity? How can the intersection of myth and blue humanities speak to recent directions in queer theory and transgender studies?
- Myth and transcorporeality: how does myth speak to bodily porousness and affinities between the human and more-than-human world?
- Water cycles and mythologies: How do mythologies connect with water cycles (maritime tides, spring tides)?
- Myth and new materialism: how can myth underline assemblages of matter in the sea, such as waste, plastic, and oil spills?
- Aquatic heroes: How do modern writers transform ancient aquatic heroism?

For individual twenty-minute presentations, please submit your abstract for a presentation (no more than 300 words) and a brief biography (max 100 words) to [rewrittenwatermyths2026@gmail.com](mailto:rewrittenwatermyths2026@gmail.com) by Mon, **2 February 2026**. Panel proposals of 3-4 presentations may also be submitted, along with a panel title and presenter bios. Any questions can be directed to the conference organizers, Barbara Barrow ([barbara.barrow@englund.lu.se](mailto:barbara.barrow@englund.lu.se)) and Monika Class ([monika.class@englund.lu.se](mailto:monika.class@englund.lu.se)).

Lund University is a short train ride across the Øresund Bridge from Kastrup Airport in Copenhagen and a quick walk or bus ride from Lund Central Station in Sweden. The Øresund Region is home to many watery attractions, including the Malmö Technology and Maritime Museum, the beach at Ribersborgstranden, the Blue Planet Danish national aquarium, the canals and harbour at Copenhagen, and the Little Mermaid statue on Langelinie Pier.

We look forward to receiving your proposals!



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## References

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<sup>1</sup> Smyth, G. (2023). *Serpent, Siren, Maelstrom & Myth: Sea Stories & Folktales from Around the World, Retold and Interpreted by Gerry Smyth*. London: The British Library, p.22.

<sup>2</sup> Kozák, J. A. (2023). Climate Change and Myth. In: Pellegrino, G. & Di Paola, M. (eds.) *Handbook of the Philosophy of Climate Change*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp. 489-502, p. 490.

<sup>3</sup> Sánchez-Pardo, E. and M. Porras Sánchez. (2024). *Myth and Environmentalism: Arts of Resilience for a Damaged Planet*. Abingdon, England: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003348535>

<sup>4</sup> Oppermann, S. (2023). *Blue Humanities: Storied Waterscapes in the Anthropocene*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009393300>