



On Time and Water: How Liquid Worlds Shape Human Lives and Ecological Feelings

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Abstract:

This article examines *On Time and Water: A History of Our Future* (2019) by Icelandic writer Andri Snær Magnason, exploring how water, and human relationships with it, shape emotional responses to the ecological crisis. Magnason's text combines historical references, philosophical reflections, and scientific exploration, while blending memoir with ancestral stories. Its interwoven narratives shed light on the complexity of a warming world and the interconnectedness between human life and water across generations, cultures, and landscapes. Reading *On Time and Water* against the literary genre of nature writing and in the context of the Blue Humanities, this article draws on affect studies and blue ecocriticism as its methodological framework. First, it investigates how Magnason conveys the intergenerational issues of climate change and a range of ecological feelings, such as grief, sadness, and overwhelmingness, that are associated with them. Second, it examines his articulation of the cross-cultural impacts of this crisis and how it explains climate change denial and public apathy towards apparent environmental disasters. This article demonstrates that as *On Time and Water* addresses these colossal problems of our time, evoking all sorts of emotional responses, it urges readers to stop and notice the unprecedented changes on our blue planet and their shared responsibility. In a time of rising sea levels and melting glaciers, Magnason's work serves as a powerful reminder of the need for diverse ecological feelings and perspectives to tackle the multifaceted challenges of climate change, offering lessons from the past to guide future action.

Keywords: New Nature Writing, Nordic literature, Blue Humanities, Anthropocene, Time.

Introduction: Emotional Waters

On Time and Water: A History of Our Future (2019) by internationally acclaimed Icelandic

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writer Andri Snær Magnason opens with an epigraph from Senegalese forestry engineer Baba Dioum: “In the end, we will conserve only what we love, we will love only what we understand and we will understand only what we are taught” (Magnason, 2019, p. 4). Steeped in an array of ecological feelings, from grief, sadness, and fear to apathy, respect, and compassion, it seems that Magnason sets out to replicate this spirit: through stories woven from many perspectives and cultures, he breathes love into our uncertain world and inspires ecological actions to protect it. As Alexa Weik von Mossner (2017, p. 9) remarks, “emotionally powerful renderings of human-nature relationships play an important role in our engagement with environmental narrative”, and “such engagements can have substantial repercussions in the real world”. Coming from Iceland, home to vast ancient glaciers and snow-covered mountains, and having to witness these glaciers facing the threat of what Jeremy Schmidt (2021, p. 282) calls “geologic extinction” in recent years as our planet continues to warm, Magnason addresses one of the direct problem of our time: glacial melting. Despite growing global interest in climate literature, *On Time and Water*—and Nordic literature more generally—has received limited academic attention (Hennig, Jonasson, and Degerman, 2018; Malmio and Kurikka, 2020). Aside from reviews and a couple of scholarly articles (Mose, 2019; Stampino, 2022), which primarily approach Magnason’s work through the lens of ecocriticism, sustained critical engagement remains scarce. Given the urgency of glacial melting around the world, it is important to reexamine Magnason’s work. This article addresses the broader scholarly gap by reading *On Time and Water* through the intersecting frameworks of new nature writing, affect studies, and blue ecocriticism. It investigates how water evokes and demands emotional responses to ongoing ecological crises and what such ecological feelings might mean for readers’ sense of environmental responsibility. What follows outlines the defining features of these theoretical frameworks that serve as the foundation for the analysis.

Emerging alongside the rise of environmental movements in the early 1970s (Zechne, 2021, pp. 169–170; Smith, 2017, p. 4), new nature writing represents an important departure from its predecessor, which took shape in the late eighteenth century when natural history, global exploration, scenic tourism, and Romanticism fuelled its proliferation (Smethurst, 2019, p. 30). Paul Smethurst (2019, p. 30) argues that old nature writing bears the markers of this period, namely, the interest of scientific objectivity and discovery and increasing urbanisation and materialism. These developments position humans at the top of a hierarchical order, portraying them as capable of either protecting or destroying the nonhuman, and simultaneously sentimentalise nature in response to the looming loss of a pastoral world—an approach that further distances the nonhuman from the realm of human experience. On the one hand, new nature writing inherits a rich blend of aesthetics, lyricism, philosophical reflection, and scientific insight—elements that stir both intellectual and emotional awareness, as exemplified in the work of Henry David Thoreau. On the other, it moves away from observing the nonhuman as mere objects of human entertainment and escapism to closely scrutinising the intricate human-nonhuman interaction and relationship. Several scholars observe that, in response to the socio environmental challenges of the Anthropocene, new nature writing has become increasingly critical of the negative human impact on the nonhuman and more attuned to the deep entanglement between humans and planetary ecosystems (Cowley & Wylie, 2008, p. 262; Smethurst, 2019, p. 31; Voie, 2019, p. 199). Although some critics object to the term “new nature writing”, arguing that it fails to confront the problematic universalisation and artificiality of the term “nature” (Smith, 2017, p. 4), others contend that, through its renewed focus on anthropogenic climate change, the genre is actively reexamining and reinterpreting its portrayal of what constitutes “nature” and the human connection to it (Zechne, 2021, p. 170; Smethurst, 2019, p. 37). Despite the shortcomings noted above, new nature writing carries forwards a long literary tradition that, according to Douglas E. Christie (2016, p. 234), expresses deep respect for the complexity of the living world and maintains a cautious stance towards the impulse to simplify or fully explain a reality that ultimately resists explanation.

Casting a critical eye on human activity across the blue planet and embracing an attitude of wonder and care towards the nonhuman, this ever-adaptive form of writing becomes an embodied form of expression. It renders new nature writing well-suited to address the intricate challenges of our turbulent era, enabling writers and readers to attune themselves to nonhuman worlds and to recognise the urgent crises threatening human and nonhuman life. *On Time and Water* stands as a compelling example of this genre as it captures the fragile beauty of a glacial and icy world on the brink of extinction, and through its emotional resonance, seeks to move readers towards meaningful action that may yet alter its fate.

This appeal to ecological feelings evokes Joshua Trey Barnett's framing of rhetoricity in his recently published edited collection *Ecological Feelings: A Rhetorical Compendium* (2025). Barnett (2025, p. x) clarifies his use of "ecological feelings" instead of "ecological emotions" because feelings, having to do with "how we experience, perceive, and interpret the world", are "embodied, psychic, and cognitive" all at once. In other words, as opposed to immediate, unconscious bodily reactions to stimuli that define emotions, ecological feelings involve a more conscious awareness and interpretation of these reactions and are thus grounded in our shared, earthly coexistence with nonhuman others. Addressing rhetoricity, or the process through which these feelings arise, Barnett (2025, pp. xv–xvi) explains that they are "generated, circulated, sustained, intensified, dampened, transformed, and otherwise made more or less possible" by a complex web of material conditions. He follows the work of Sarah Ahmed (2004) and Ann Cvetkovich (2012) to affirm that feelings are public: they are shaped by external forces and circulate through discursive fragments. Although rhetoric does not strictly determine how audiences feel since individual perceptions vary, Barnett argues that we can examine how particular rhetorical texts and phenomena create the conditions—or "rhetorical ecologies" (Jenny Edbauer, 2005)—in which certain feelings become more or less likely. Examining feelings from a rhetorical perspective reveals not only how emotions are formed by social, cultural, and political contexts but also how we might influence our own and others' responses, given the inherently public nature of feelings (Barnett, 2025, p. xx). Likewise, as *On Time and Water* is analysed through this lens, we are able to see how Magnason's rhetorical ecologies—his depictions of glacial melting, and of intergenerational and cross-cultural relationships to water—might reshape our feelings, thoughts, judgments, and actions about the environmental crisis.

At this point, blue ecocriticism proves especially useful in illuminating how human–water relationships are constructed across cultures and throughout history. Also referred to as critical ocean studies, hydro-criticism, or the blue humanities, blue ecocriticism seeks to shift ecocritical focus from its traditionally terrestrial emphasis to one centred on aquatic environments. It addresses the longstanding neglect of urgent issues facing marine life and watery ecologies in the Environmental Humanities. Sidney I. Dobrin (2021, pp. 2–3) asserts that our understanding of water is too often filtered through land-based logics of ownership and territoriality, whereas water defies such frameworks through its fluid, transitional nature. It operates across phases, scales, and temporalities that exceed human comprehension due to its vastness and dynamism. This fluidity and transnationality have prompted a range of cultural theories to explore how water shapes us—and how we, in turn, shape water. For instance, Stacy Alaimo's and Steve Mentz's concepts of "transcorporeality" (2010) and "seep" (2017) respectively, capture how water moves through and across bodies, flowing along unpredictable and multiple paths and articulating the porous, perforated human-nonhuman boundary. In a similar vein that recognises these movements, Serpil Oppermann (2019, p. 453) foregrounds the storied agency of water from a new materialist point of view: like other nonhuman beings, marine entities possess and project narratives through signs, colours, sounds, and coded signals—forms of communication that we may not yet fully understand. However, they involve us and contribute to what it means to be human. These insights into our entanglement with

water help unpack Magnason's portrayal of Icelandic and global cultural ties to glaciers, now threatened by climate change. They also highlight his critique of the greed and unchecked growth that drive these crises, ultimately exposing the disproportionate impacts of global warming and demanding effective and ethical responses towards ecological repair.

The first part of this article explores intergenerational issues as conveyed through Magnason's familial stories, accounts of extinction, and portrayals of the human–water relationship within the Icelandic context. It will show how all these rhetorical ecologies cultivate feelings of love and respect across time while also eliciting sadness, grief, and overwhelmingness, and emphasise the affective power of connections with families and the nonhuman as a source of both responsibility and urgency. The second part turns to the themes of consumerism and capitalist progress in *On Time and Water*, focusing on how the book confronts the uneven effects of climate change and the difficulties of conveying the intricate reality of climate change—challenges that manifest in apathy, paralysis, and suffering. Importantly, this part reflects on Magnason's conversation with the Dalai Lama, where empathy, compassion, and optimism emerge as crucial emotional and rhetorical tools for envisioning more hopeful, collective responses to planetary crisis.

Intergenerational Waters

One of the most profound themes in *On Time and Water* is encapsulated in its subtitle: *A History of Our Future*. The phrase suggests a paradox—the future, though yet to unfold, is already capable of having a history. In the context of Magnason's work, it indicates the “expansive influence [of] every living person” (Brown, 2021, p. 84) across time, creating a powerful convergence between past and future. A particularly illustrative example of this temporal entanglement appears in a conversation between Magnason and his daughter, in which he reflects on the length of time a single individual can span across generations. He tells her after they have done the maths:

Your time is the time of the people you know and love, the time that moulds you. And your time is also the time of the people you will know and love. The time that you will shape. You can touch 262 years with your bare hands. Your grandma taught you, you will teach your great-granddaughter. You can have a direct impact on the future, right up to the year 2186. (Magnason, 2019, p. 19)

While it may be difficult to fully grasp the weight of hundreds of years of potential influence, Magnason's framing renders this abstract span of time deeply personal and accessible. His rhetoric is deliberately simple and grounded in familial ties, allowing any reader to imagine their own capacity to “touch” the future. In doing so, he evokes a profound sense of responsibility, care, and love—especially for the next generations who will inherit the brunt of the climate crisis. This emotional appeal is reinforced when Magnason (2019, p. 154) writes, “Because of climate chaos, an entire generation is being asked not what they want to become but what they need to become”. Here, the injustice is laid bare: a generation that did not cause the ecological crisis is now burdened with the task of solving it. Magnason compels readers to consider the far-reaching consequences of their actions, asking them to reckon with the legacy they leave behind. By inviting us to reflect on the immense reach of a single lifetime, he cultivates a sense of intergenerational accountability, urging us to act not just for the present, but for those we love in the future.

Intergenerational issues in *On Time and Water* are, however, rendered with notable nuance. On one level, Magnason acknowledges that the current generation—beneficiaries of industrialisation and fossil fuel-driven progress—is undeniably compromising the well-being of future generations. On another level, the book honours the stories of past generations,

suggesting that not all inheritances are burdens, and this is where Magnason traces the intersections between human history and Earth's deep time to emphasise both our insignificance and profound relationship with it. In deep conversations with them, he documents the lives of his paternal and maternal grandparents—their intimate knowledge of ice, snow, and glaciers, and their ways of coexisting with them. Amongst these are the remarkable story of his grandmother Hulda, Iceland's first female aviator and glaciologist, who also talks to *huldufólk* (hidden people), blending scientific inquiry with mythic tradition. Being fortunate enough to “have a direct connection to the past” (Magnason, 2019, p. 62) in this way, to simple yet evocative anecdotes, Magnason offers glimpses into twentieth-century Icelandic life, creating moments of calm and nostalgia that stand in quiet contrast to the accelerated pace of contemporary change. These glimpses, which constitute epochal time—specific moments in history—are juxtaposed against the vastness of deep time: the slow, majestic evolution of Earth and its glaciers. Throughout *On Time and Water*, Magnason (2019, p. 8) draws on Iceland's glacial history and deep cultural memory, weaving in ancient texts like the Poetic Edda, which he describes as “the greatest treasure in all of Iceland, perhaps even the whole of Northern Europe”, or recalling creation myths—such as the origin of the world beginning with the cow Audhumla in Nordic mythology, which links to the holy Indian cow Kamadhenu in Hindu lore, who is related to Pritvi (the Earth itself). By situating his grandparents' lives within this long temporal and cultural arc, Magnason underscores both humanity as a microcosm of the Earth and our involvement in, and with, it. Personal narratives are not merely anecdotal; they are embedded within the larger story of planetary change.

Nested within these intimate recollections is, sadly, a strong sense of loss—an emotional register of grief and sadness—that emerges as history dating back hundreds of millennia and the ecosystems sustaining it teeter on the brink of disappearance. *On Time and Water* is steeped in what Barnett (2022, p. 55) describes as phenology: the “entwined practices of witnessing, recording, and archiving” that expose three interconnected kinds of loss—those occurring now, those rooted in the past, and those anticipated in the future. Magnason (2019, p. 90) explains: Glaciers are frozen manuscripts that tell stories just like tree circles and sedimentary deposits; from them, you can gather information and create a picture of the past. Glaciers store histories of volcanic activity. They store pollen, rainwater, and air that reveal the chemical make-up of the atmosphere tens of thousands of years back in time. They are important sources of details about vegetation and precipitation of the past. Smethurst (2019, p. 30) asserts that nature writing functions as both a historical record of the natural world and a reflection of evolving attitudes towards it. In a similar vein, Christian Hummelsund Voie (2019, p. 201) notes that nature writing in the Anthropocene is increasingly defined by its encounters with nonhuman agency. Magnason continues this tradition while drawing on contemporary ecocritical theories—that is, acknowledges glaciers as “storied matter”, how they are, in Oppermann's words, “a storehouse of inexhaustible records of evolutionary histories in which everything is an extension of matter's creative experience and becoming” (Oppermann, 2016, p. 96). Yet due to global warming, these agentic frozen archives are vanishing. For instance, “Okjökull is already gone” (Magnason, 2019, p. 86), and the films his grandfather Árni captured document “a landscape that won't last much longer” (Magnason, 2019, p. 88). Echoing Barnett's understanding of phenology, these portrayals of glacial disappearance indeed “lay the foundation for an ecological grief to come, a grief whose form we can anticipate” (Barnett, 2022, p. 75). What makes this grief especially poignant is Magnason's rendering of glaciers as both scientifically significant and deeply personal. He foregrounds Icelandic glaciers' uniqueness—born from the interplay of fire and ice and “giving rise to jökulhlauks: massive, dangerous glacial outburst floods that can achieve the volume of the Amazon in a short period lying” (Magnason, 2019, p. 85). As these glaciers recede, they take with them not only the natural wonders of Iceland but also the deep, embodied memory of the Earth's evolutionary story. By chronicling both the losses already unfolding and those yet to

come, Magnason invites readers to mourn what is vanishing from the long past, or what they have taken for granted that may not be here tomorrow, and compels them to reckon with the responsibility borne by the present generation—those whose actions are accelerating these future disappearances.

Cross-Cultural Waters

Magnason's *On Time and Water* offers no shortage of condemnation when it comes to human oil dependency and overconsumption. Early in the book, he critiques the longstanding human assumption that "the atmosphere could continually absorb emissions, that oceans could endlessly absorb waste, that soil could constantly renew itself if given more fertiliser, that animal species would keep moving aside as humans colonised more and more space" (Magnason, 2019, p. 7). This unchecked belief in nature's limitless capacity has justified extractive practices—drilling oil, emitting carbon dioxide, commodifying nonhuman life, and exploiting ecosystems as cheaply and efficiently as possible (Patel and Moore, 2018, p. 2) in service of capitalist profit and perpetual growth. One of the most sobering examples Magnason provides involves a reflection by the poet Helgi Valtýsson, who once described the immensity of Vatnajökull as the "all-encompassing silence of God's great expanse", a sight so powerful it could move a person to tears. However, Magnason (2019, p. 85) notes that in the current cultural climate, such a description would be dismissed: Nature needed high enough "ratings." You had to be able to use nature, in some way, even if only as the backdrop for a car commercial. Nothing is allowed to have an undefined purpose; everything must be quantifiable, regardless of whether the metrics match the reality or not. This lament resonates with Barnett's reflections on the politics of care. While care is often valorised, he argues that it is always partial and directed: "Although we may justifiably affirm the value of caring in a general sense, we always care about and for specific beings and ways of being, which means that we always fail to meet the needs of others" (Barnett, 2022, p. 10). In other words, care is selective and often aligned with human-centred interests. Many continue to "care" about their personal comfort, consumer habits, or lifestyles of convenience, at the expense of the Earth that sustains those lives. Throughout the text, Magnason uses powerful analogies and vivid comparisons to expose the absurdity and enormity of human excess, for instance, likening our fossil fuel consumption to volcanic eruptions or calculating the barrels of oil burned for his flight to a poetry festival. These rhetorical strategies help readers grasp the scale of the crisis, but even these tools cannot fully alleviate the ecological feeling of overwhelmingness that arises from being inundated with example after example of human-driven destruction. Magnason's approach thus intensifies a sense of moral urgency at the injustice inflicted upon the planet by collective human action.

Although *On Time and Water* recognises the outsized impacts of human action across space and time—how our species has reshaped geologic forces and ushered in a new planetary epoch—it resists affirming anthropocentric power or superiority. In the same breath that Magnason reveals the scale of human transformation of the Earth, he acknowledges the Earth's overwhelming power to disrupt and even erase human life. The book, as implied above, is filled with accounts of environmental destruction, driven by human apathy and capitalist logic. One such example is Kringilsárrani, a strikingly beautiful island "bounded by a triangle formed of the Brúarárjökull glacier along one end and two untamed, almost impassable glacial rivers that merged on either side" (Magnason, 2019, p. 24), which was sacrificed to build the Kárahnjúkar Dam to provide "subsidised electricity for the Alcoa aluminium smelter in Reyðarfjörður"—a plant that "produces a fraction of the aluminium that Americans throw into landfill" (Magnason, 2019, p. 26). But this is not to showcase human omnipotence. Magnason underscores the vast, impersonal forces of glaciers and water. As he writes, "A glacier distends and thickens, devours everything without conscience, without economic growth, industry, greed, environmental assessments or international conferences. A glacier scrapes everything

away, like an artist who destroys his work as soon as it is fully formed” (Magnason, 2019, p. 130). In this description, water—in the form of glaciers—is far from being a passive backdrop to human ambitions for unsustainable dam-building and hydropower; it becomes, as Oppermann (2023, p. 3) argues, “a symbolic domain marked by the intersecting stories of the Anthropocene seas, social practices, and cultural forces”, and above all, “a geopolitical agency”. Magnason unsettles the illusion of anthropocentrism by making visible the scalar complexity and agentic power of glaciers, which reminds us of Timothy Morton’s concept of hyperobject (2013) used to describe a phenomenon so vast, distributed, and diffused that it eludes complete human comprehension. It would be hard to fathom the immense power of glaciers to obliterate the human race and its infrastructures, themselves hyperobjects. Magnason (2019, p. 6) himself concedes that the only way to write about this is “to go past it, to the side, below it, into the past and the future, to be personal and also scientific and to use mythological language. I need to write about things by not writing about them”. Climate change permeates every aspect of life; its omnipresence renders it difficult to isolate and narrate—hence the need for new, different modes of expression. This is why Magnason (2019, p. 105) understands that “it is easy to slip into hopelessness, irony, apathy”. Nevertheless, he insists on an urgent alternative: action in the face of despair, because the cost of inaction is “Life on Earth—[the] lives [of our children]” (Magnason, 2019, p. 105). With this forceful message, Magnason pierces through the abstraction of climate discourse, calling readers back to what is personal, proximate, and immediate.

On Time and Water’s narrative of overconsumption is clearly not one-dimensional. Alongside his critique of capitalist excess, the commodification of nature, and the overwhelming effects of global warming, Magnason highlights the uneven and often devastating impacts of environmental degradation on the world’s vulnerable humans and nonhumans. This layered portrayal expands the scope of his argument from personal and planetary responsibility to global environmental justice:

Refugee migrations will likely increase from uninhabitable parts of Africa, China, India, and the Middle East; forests in Australia, America, the Amazon, and the Nordic countries will erupt into flame; the Siberian permafrost will thaw and release methane gas, and this will increase the pace of global warming still further. By the end of the century, the situation we see now around the Mediterranean will be minor compared to what happens when hundreds of millions of climate refugees are on the move. That is: war, death, and destruction. (Magnason, 2019, p. 104)

Magnason clarifies that such warnings are not meant to stoke fear. I argue that they function to confront readers with an honest rendering of our current reality. Through the effect of listing ecological impacts and a matter-of-fact tone, he provides and accentuates the unfathomable scale of climate projections across the world, linking the common yet unevenly distributed impacts of environmental disasters. Mossner (2017, p. 8) argues that narrative differs from scientific discourse by cuing recipients “to simulate that sense or feeling in their minds, using their own real-world experiences as models and their own bodies as sounding boards for the simulation.” In this sense, *On Time and Water* not only tells the truth, but it also makes it feel. By grounding planetary trauma in both distant consequences and personal, embodied understanding, Magnason prompts readers to reflect on their everyday lives, choices, and complications. In doing so, he subtly shifts our sense of care from something abstract and selective to something deeply relational, rooted in empathy with the fragile ecosystems we all inhabit.

One of the most vivid and philosophically rich moments in *On Time and Water* that emphasises this shift is Magnason’s interviews with the Dalai Lama—conversations that

resonate deeply through their cross-cultural insights, ecological urgency, and emotional wisdom. Their conversation features a dialogue about cross-cultural mythology—specifically, the ancient Norse cow Auðumbra and the sacred Indian cow Kamadhenu—both life-giving figures that embody nourishment, resilience, and a reverence for nature. This link becomes a meaningful bridge between traditions, suggesting that despite cultural differences, the sacredness of nonhuman entities is a shared human understanding. From there, the discussion moves to the very real, tangible consequences of environmental change. The Dalai Lama describes how Tibetans “have experienced great changes over the last forty to fifty years. In the early period, there was a lot of snow. Now, decade by decade, it gets less and less”, highlighting the accelerating retreat of the glaciers. This is not merely a local issue, he explains, as “Tibetan nature concerns not only the six million people living in Tibet but the billions of people who rely on the water that comes from there” (Magnason, 2019, p. 51). The ice thawing in the Himalayas poses an immense risk not just to a region but to a vast portion of the global population dependent on its water sources. To tackle this transnational issue, the Dalai Lama calls for warm-heartedness: “Real trust comes through compassion and respect. To build trust, you need solidarity, openness, truthfulness, and honesty. All these come from warm-heartedness. Using such logic, we can teach this to other people.” (Magnason, 2019, p. 143). His message resonates with the core of nature writing—a genre that, as Voie (2019, p. 202) observes, is defined by “the openness of bodies, human and nonhuman, to their surroundings”. In writing *On Time and Water* and amplifying the Dalai Lama’s voice, Magnason encourages readers to cultivate those ecological feelings of respect and solidarity not only towards the nonhuman world but also towards fellow humans. Put differently, he asks us to practise what Gavin van Horn (Wisconsin Public Radio, 2022) calls “empathic imagination”, that is, the capacity to imagine what nonhuman beings need and to extend care to them, alongside others in the human community. Only through this broadened sense of relational care, rooted in emotional intelligence and ethical commitment, can we hope to face the planetary crisis with any measure of success. Magnason’s interviews with the Dalai Lama stand as a compelling plea for a more ecologically attuned future and serve as a profound moral and spiritual anchor, offering a perspective that blends compassion, respect, and ecological awareness.

Conclusion: Inspirational Waters

Commenting on language, Magnason (2019, p. 54) writes: Words affect our emotions and our feelings. Words enable us to get a handhold on the state of being and describe what slumbers in our chests. Words can tether actions that were previously invisible, frame them. In Icelandic, we have a word to describe a feeling of sweet yet melancholic nostalgia, the feeling that comes over you when you’re listening to a meaningful, possibly sad song from the past. This word is *angurværd*, which you might directly translate as “tendersadness.” The Faeroese have this concept, too, but their word is *sorgblíðni*, which literally means “gentle-grief”. These sister tongues, Icelandic and Faeroese, have adopted two pairs of synonyms to express the same sentiment: tender/gentle, sadness/grief. This reflection captures the emotional undercurrent that lingers after reading *On Time and Water*: a poignant blend of tender/gentle and sadness/grief. At times, Magnason’s prose is marked by a profound tenderness, as seen in his documentation of his grandparents’ lives or in his lyrical descriptions of glaciers and the human histories entwined with them, both in Iceland and beyond. These moments provide space for stillness and reflection—a brief reprieve that invites the reader to pause, absorb, and find meaning in a world in flux. At the same time, these gentle passages are interwoven with unflinching accounts of ecological destruction, overconsumption, and irreversible loss. The grief arises not only from what has already disappeared—the beauty, memory, and wisdom embedded in the Earth’s natural systems—but also from the anticipated suffering of future generations who will inherit the consequences of a crisis they did not cause.

The stories nestled within—and emerging from—the melting of glaciers in *On Time*

and Water generate a complex array of ecological feelings, illustrating how the multifaceted nature of climate change gives rise to equally multifaceted emotional responses. These feelings, which range from compassion and tenderness to urgency and respect, point to our deep entanglement with the Earth and, more specifically, with water. Because we care about it, and the beings it sustains, we feel so profoundly in response to its loss and transformation. Recalling Barnett's concept of rhetoricity- the idea that discourse creates "rhetorical ecologies" capable of influencing feelings that, in turn, influence actions- Magnason's narrative functions as a powerful catalyst. By also crisscrossing temporal boundaries- reaching into the deep past, confronting the grim possibilities of the future, and pausing in the present to contemplate what is happening, he evokes a rich emotional landscape that invites reflection- and, potentially, transformation. This is because, as Magnason (2019, p. 158) reminds us, "Lessons can be learned from the past." In his tribute to Ok, "the first Icelandic glacier to lose its status as a glacier", Magnason (2019, p. 88) writes: "In the next 200 years, all our glaciers are expected to follow the same path. This monument acknowledges that we know what is happening and what needs to be done. Only you know if we did it." With this stark yet poignant message, he confronts readers with a moral question: what legacy do we wish to leave for our loved ones? Through language steeped in tender sadness and "gentle-grief", Magnason appeals to our emotional core. It is this emotional undercurrent, woven through his reflections on loss, beauty, and responsibility, that seeks to move us not only to mourn but also to act—urgently—to protect the Earth that both gives and takes life.

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Bio-note

Dr Trang completed a PhD in Arts and Humanities from Nottingham Trent University and previously graduated from Oxford Brookes University with a BA and an MA in English Literature. Fully funded by the Vice Chancellor's Studentship scheme, her PhD project focuses on Jeff VanderMeer's eco weird fiction, exploring narratives of dark ecology and co-existence between humans and nonhumans through the lenses of object-oriented philosophy and the Anthropocene discourse. She has published on the topics of animal studies, American contemporary culture, contemporary critical theory on the Anthropocene, and queer ecology.

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