





ARTICLE

What Were We Thinking? A Climate Fiction Beginning and Ending, Told Inside and Outside and Backward and Forward

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Abstract

We resonated with the idea that dreaming is important, and that climate fiction is a way of dreaming with environmental educators. A well of resistance lives in art collaborations around the world which harness the power of the collective to face terrible realities and twist, bend, and dance them into alternative hopeful pasts, presents and futures. Engaging with other people and more-than-human lives, through creative collaborations have led us to understand complex and unfamiliar perspectives in ways that are unreachable alone, regardless of how much academic study we do. This story emerged from online meetings that crossed time zones and oceans: Vancouver to Istanbul. Our climate fiction surfaced from improvised, spontaneous story creation. It was as if the story was waiting for us to find her, if we acted with care and love while facing directly our own dark shadows and fears about climate catastrophe. This story of Cassandra, alongside our interpretations of its emergence, invites the reader to draw from any evoked confusion or other feelings as well as their own learnings to reflect on burdens of knowledge not acted upon. Leaning into confusion is a way to open up to the power of uncertainty for environmental education.

Keywords: Climate fiction; ocean; radical listening; storytelling

Prologue: The beginning of the beginnings

We resonate with the idea that dreaming is important, and Climate Fiction is a way of dreaming with environmental educators. It is a gruelling task to read, teach or investigate climate change while unsuccessfully resisting complicity given the magnitude of power and norms of globalisation. In provoking an acknowledgement and celebration of complexity and ambiguity, i.e., unleashing tricksters, we can create moments of healing with soft jokes which do not leave scars, but offer relief from the relentless demands of the neoliberal. It is in these times of joy and laughter where we naturally breathe deeply thereby engaging our full bodies, allowing us to feel safer with others whose ways of thinking may otherwise scare us. It is an act of resistance to dream and reach for the magic of creation. A well of resistance lives in multiple art collaborations around the world to harness the power of the collective to face terrible realities and transform, twist, bend, and dance them into alternative and hopeful pasts, presents and futures. Engaging with other people and other more-than-human lives, through various creative collaborations have led us to

understand complex and unfamiliar perspectives in ways that are unreachable alone, regardless of how much academic study we do.

Our group writing of climate fiction is a model of tuning to one another, as we follow practices of radical listening to climate and re-cognising the principal character/narrator/artist/ancestor/dancer to be Ocean. This vision draws on the Ocean as our loving ancestor and elder, the Ocean, whose moods (her climate) humans experience, the Ocean as Earth's lungs breathing. We begin from a place where salt moves water, where the Black Sea meets the Mediterranean and the Aegean, a place where, around the 15th Century, the flow of the Bosphorus inspired the birth of oceanography as an area of study. We release ourselves from the bondages of academic disciplines, however.

This story emerged from a series of short online meetings that crossed time zones and oceans. Five human creatures heard various calls - from the ocean, from the sky, from the internet—and drawing from the approaches of slow scholarship (Mountz *et al.*, 2015) and radical listening (cf. Joe Kincheloe, 2011), told a story together. This was the first time these five had formed this specific group, but we had previously collaborated in other art/science collaborations. For example, some of us have been members of the Ocean ArtScience Community of Practice and have participated in various exquisite corpse projects and storytelling clinics. Some have been part of Watering Words, which offers collective online practice Encounters for exploring how our own bodies interact with the watery-essence of other-than-human bodies. Water has been the connecting element for all our collaborations.

Our climate fiction surfaced from improvised, spontaneous story creation. We learned about Cassandra's dilemma when Dwight began telling the story. We took turns filling in the rest: one telling a small part until the muse moved (swam?) to the next teller. It was as if the story was waiting for us to find her, if we acted with care and love while facing directly our own dark shadows and fears about climate catastrophe. We were surprised by Cassandra's sassy, irreverent final words, but these called us to step back from the act of fiction co-creation and reflect on the impact of the story. We reread aloud each part of the transcription and spoke of our kindled emotions and ideas, some referenced to academic text. We present this climate fiction alongside our interpretations of its emergence, inviting the reader to draw from any evoked confusion or other feelings as well as their own learnings to reflect on burdens of knowledge not acted upon. Leaning into the confusion is a way of opening up to the power of uncertainty for environmental education. While we can make educated guesses, we will never truly know the future, for better or worse, and our suggested form of transdisciplinary reading by engaging with our story provides an avenue for engaging with this uncertainty (Knupsky & Caballero, 2022).

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Cassandra remembering and forgetting her burning hair

Julia

This reminds me of the adrienne maree brown quote, “there is such urgency in the multitude of crises we face, it can make it hard to remember that in fact it is urgency thinking (urgent constant unsustainable growth) that got us to this point, and that our potential success lies in doing deep, slow, intentional work” (p. 114, 2017).

Cassandra is saying, *I can't put this out with water because the water right now is part of that problem, it's part of what's already burning.*

There is this interesting link to the big existential crisis of, *oh, my God, everything is burning! And today is a hot day*, which brings us back into the concrete reality of the present.

Małgorzata

It's interesting that you chose the name Cassandra, making the connection that some people think that climate change predictions are made by “crazy fortune tellers” talking about changes that are going to happen, when in fact, the changes are actually happening. There is a seriousness to it. But at the same time, it's kind of funny because of the contradiction that she cannot use water to put the fire out, because her hair is water.

On this particular morning
when Cassandra awoke, it was
so hot. She noticed her hair—
which was water and which
was flowing like waves—her
water hair was on fire. It was
burning and that was not very
comfortable.

She sat up thinking, *How can I
put out the fire in my hair? I
can't use water.* When she
reached up to pat down the fire
on her head, her hands started
burning and she thought, *today
is a really hot day.*

So, she kicked the blanket off with her feet. She pushed it because it was so hot, and the blanket fell on the floor. She rolled out of bed, and as she was rolling, the water was also falling; it started to create a waterfall out of the bed. Then she heard the sound of rain outside.

Dwight

When it started to rain, she heard it but did not see it. Later we learn the rain is falling upward; what is the sound of upward falling rain?

Alison

I think of all the contradictions of her hair being burning water. And now it's raining. It made me wonder if the rain water was also burning.

Małgorzata

My first thought was that she had a dream. So, the opening wasn't a reality. But then she actually wakes up into the current moment because of the rain.

Julia

The blanket made me think of a fire blanket, which you can use to put out a fire. I thought the fire blanket could be used to extinguish the flames.

Dwight

Her feet were tangled up in the blanket and she was falling out of bed. There is a subtext of entrapment and immobility for Cassandra.

Dwight

“The beginnings of the beginnings of the beginnings of the beginnings.” This speaks of pre-time, the primordial moment, which is also everpresent.

Julia

In that moment, Cassandra just became so much older in the story. Up to that point she could be anyone. But now she’s akin to a God-like being. This gives the story a mystical quality; it’s more than just a human story.

Małgorzata

It also brings us back before antiquity, by reminding us that we are all connected with the stars. Somehow each of us also has this connection to the beginning of the beginning. This passage introduces a parallel reality that is maybe the past or maybe the universal.

It reminded her of the
beginning of the beginnings;
of the beginnings of the
stars, and the stars that fell
from the ocean into the sky
reminded her of how much
she loved to be a star, a wet,
wet, waterfall, star, even
though sometimes it was
really, really, difficult.

It was difficult because she constantly felt she was losing part of herself and having to recreate herself at the same time, knowing that each second, she would become a slightly different person. And yet there was something holding it all together, which was only the flow of things flowing through her wet star, waterfall body into the ocean that she wanted to merge into. But she also thought there was something about an entity named Cassandra that felt important to her, something telling her that she should not lose that. And she never did. Years and years turned into millennia. Every little atom that had ever been in her water body had been replaced, but there was something holding it all together, holding her together.

Dwight

In this passage I imagined Cassandra transforming into the ocean, a timeless ocean. I'm also connecting this to the magnetic quality of saltwater, which is a conductor of electricity, and thereby generates its own magnetic field. When sea water moves in a significant way, the result is slightly "charged" water due to Earth's magnetic field.

Julia

For me, what felt important was the idea of how much can change about a person, with them still remaining the same person.

Małgorzata

This reminds me of text I wrote that explores how we relate to a water body with a name that has stayed the same for a really long time, *is it still the same body even though it carries the same name over centuries?* It enables us to relate in the same way to a person. We may ask, *how much of this human water body is actually the same as when you were born or when the water body was just forming?* It contains something else today; everything reconstituted itself. And it's interesting to consider what holds all of these changeable elements together. Is this invisible holding what gathers all of them into one being?

Dwight

"Wet star waterfall body" is a dense cascade of concept-images.

Alison

This reminds me of a presentation I saw in 2016 about queering how we see the world. July Cole combined musical poetry and NASA imagery, and pointed out that the sun's energy is *waste*. Cole asked us to imagine *trashiness* and *waste* as generosity, to question industrial ecology's goal of zero waste as a death sentence for those things that rely on waste.

Alison

Even though you wrote that she began to daydream herself becoming a new earth, I heard it as *she's daydreaming herself into a new earth*, it's an action, daydreaming to manifest a new earth.

Dwight

And she's daydreaming rescue, safety. But it's just a daydream. I really enjoyed the new life forms. And this whole idea of bodies within bodies and many levels of life.

Alison

Cassandra getting scared makes me feel connected to her. She's not just this omnipotent being, she is scared.

Sevgi

When I read whirling, I think of Whirling Dervishes. When the Sufis turn, one of their hands is up, one hand is down, and they whirl infinitely. With this position of their hands, they are taking from the sky and giving it to earth. They are channeling.

Dwight

Wow. We have such a strong earth to sky theme here.

Sevgi

And raining upwards.

Dwight

Maybe these Whirling Dervishes are taking from the earth and giving to the sky?

Sevgi

They are in trance, they are nonself. So, although new life forms are emerging in her, actually, we are living with a bunch of living beings inside of us. We are a crowd, that we call by our individual names, but we are a crowd.

Dwight

A big, big crowd.

There was the gravitational force that kept her wet star body floating and whirling through the universe. She wondered, *if there's so much water inside of me, is there a chance that new life forms could develop within my cells, tissues, and organs, and on the surface of my skin?* She began to daydream herself becoming a new Earth, a refuge, a safe destiny for all the Earthlings needing to migrate from their original home.

Then, all of a sudden, she remembered about the burning fire in her hair, and got scared. The terrifying thought appeared in her mind, *what if all my water would evaporate with that heat?*

So, she continued flowing along with her blankets, which were getting more and more tangled around her feet. She tumbled down the stairs and outside where the rain was falling up. The rain fell upward from the ocean into the sky. When it struck the top of the sky each raindrop was scorched there and started burning. Her eyes were filled with the scorched burning of stars swirling in the sky.

The sky? What was the sky? she thought. Where was it? On my right? On my left? Below my feet?

Alison

I appreciate hearing about the pain of the scorching and the burning, because it broaches the serious aspect of climate change. We're not brushing it aside to be in some mystical thinking.

Dwight

Here, things are upside down and backwards. The rain is falling up, the water is burning. And the blankets are still encumbering; they're all tangled and she can't escape from them.

Małgorzata

It returns us to the mundane situation of the blanket, strengthening the continuity of the story. Alongside the parallel poetic and metaphorical aspect of the story, it's good to keep the story connected from the beginning until the end, by bringing us back to what is actually happening in the moment as she's going through all of these images in parallel.

Sevgi

The rain falling up from the ocean is a different way of saying things. Also, the blanket keeps us warm on cold nights. Not in the summer, it would be very uncomfortable. Sometimes rain is crashing, sometimes it's disturbing, sometimes it's nourishing. But in the end, it's the same rain. I felt blankets can also be seen in both ways, like a veil, like a gale; seeing them as the weather.

Dwight

It's so disorientating. Everything is dissolving and falling apart in different directions, and even directions are losing their directionality.

Julia

The little mechanical things that they made, made me think, great! This is now a disability justice story. I don't know if that was your intention, but I thought it was nice that it's read as a mix of animals and humans with varying prosthetics.

Dwight

This is the second *even though*. Earlier, *even though* it was sometimes really difficult, and this time, *even though* sometimes they seem to have trouble with one another. She's very accepting of these disruptions and complications.

I enjoyed how all these creatures suddenly populated this story.

Dwight

This passage also echoes the themes of creatures within creatures, and the vast community of life, which is constantly changing. I see in here this contrast between flow-change-continuity and hesitation-fear-doubt. There's a flow, then a break, a gap in which her hesitation amplifies into fear again.

Alison

For me, doubt and hesitation are really important because I'm reminded of historical events when some people who control technology or industry have acted on the arrogance of assuming they know how to fix something, and we still have that. This is not to say we shouldn't do anything, but hubris is a huge contributor to our current problems. At the same time, we must recognize it's not everybody that has had this arrogance, but a lot of what controls the world is based on the idea that we can fix it.

And all around her feet were wonderful creatures that she loved so. They had wings and beaks and hands and even little mechanical things they had made, and they always made her laugh. She had to be careful not to step on them, but when she looked down, she could dance with them, and it made her smile when she saw how beautiful they were even when sometimes they seemed to have trouble with one another.

What made them so easy for her to relate to was the way they all contained little pieces of herself. And it was like a little game for her, finding a trace of herself and realizing, *Wow, that was a part of me and now I know it's also different.*

I wouldn't ever recognize it.
 Would I not feel this innate sense
 that it used to belong to me? And
 seeing those creatures now in this
 moment made her feel hopeful.
 She thought maybe, maybe it's
 okay. And she stopped rolling,
 and her hair had stopped burning.
 It was just kind of glimmering—
 some embers glowing. And she
 thought maybe, maybe it's okay.
 And she shook her head a little,
 and the embers glimmered
 stronger.

But then she got scared again,
 looking down at the little
 creatures and up at the sky and
 out over the ocean. She hesitated,
 suddenly overcome by fear.

Dwight

It's the belief of being able to control outcomes,
 while in reality that's not possible because we're
 living within a very chaotic complex system.

Alison

A while ago there was much discussion of wicked
 problems (Rittel & Webber, 1973) that seem to
 recognize the complexity. But nowadays I just
 hear about sustainability and I don't hear anything
 about the wickedness of problems, being complex
 and continually changing.

Sevgi

I'm reading *The Tree* by John Fowles. He writes
 about how humanity has forgotten, because of
 science and fragmentary thinking, to see nature as
 it is, as a chaotic totality. Photography and
 painting looked at nature in parts, trees in
 categories, but we forgot to see it as a totality, a
 wholeness.

Dwight

That wholeness is showing up in this passage,
 along with the chaos.

Małgorzata

Yeah, it's funny because after a lull, this topic of
 fright comes back again. I like this turn of the
 situation, with the fire suddenly going down to
 embers, because we may have expected, that at
 some point in the story the fire would suddenly
 take over everything. But somehow it actually
 went in the opposite direction – the fire is going
 down.

Dwight

This is the passage where she leaves the blankets behind.

Julia

It has an interesting sense of scale for me, like an *Alice in Wonderland* situation. Although we talked about little creatures before, it seems this is the moment where they come together and we have this vision: it's a very big house and a very big Cassandra and then it's little creatures.

Alison

I noticed that the creatures transformed in my brain because I hadn't thought of them with wings. I like how they become more than what I originally imagined.

Dwight

They're migrating.
Where the embers used to glimmer.

Julia

For me, it's a beautiful transformation or maturation. Reminds me of people's hair going silvery. Part of the beauty is in how this passage makes me consider scale, how size and also time are so shifted; time is sped up and size is somehow expanded or warped. Which feels very appropriate in terms of climate change. I had a conversation yesterday with a friend who has a background in Indigenous studies and wants to go more into politics. Explaining he didn't have a natural science background, he asked me how bad things are. *I want you to give me an estimate of where we are in North America and what's happening and how we are with the predictions.* I responded that it's a very big question that I won't be able to answer fully. But I can say that most things are happening much faster than we expected and the scales are very different than we anticipated.

She noticed that the creatures crowded around her feet were gradually dispersing, moving towards the ocean, seemingly ready to migrate. Cassandra thought, *what if I go with them? Would they carry me on their wings?*

She stepped out of her house, leaving the blankets tangled on the floor, with her hair loose and messy, with silver streaks shining where the embers used to glimmer. She stepped out and ran to the shore, and she ran into the water, and the water took her in embrace.

Dwight

This gets back to our conversation about wicked problems and chaotic systems. There are multiple scales of complexity influencing one another and they're not just physical systems. They include all these living creatures with their wings who are migrating.

Julia

I was reading *Pollution is Colonialism* by Max Liboiron, the person. In it there's a long passage that talks about the importance of scale, of addressing things at an appropriate scale. Because they work a lot on marine plastic pollution, they give the obvious example of plastic straws not being on the right scale for addressing this issue. The scale should be very different. But even trying to clean up marine plastic pollution in the Great Pacific Garbage Patch is not the appropriate scale because it's too big to make a real difference, and such efforts could cause potential other harms. So, we should focus on other scales and systemic leverage points.

Dwight

I want to go back to the blankets; what do they represent? For most of the story, they have been an impediment around her feet, she's been kind of stuck in them. Now suddenly she just left them behind. What are they?

Julia

Some outdated value systems that no longer align with her perspective?

Alison

Yeah, or technical fixes?

Julia

Actually, that's even better, technical fixes. When I first heard of the blanket, I imagined it being a fire blanket.

Dwight

In our commentary about the blankets, we noted that you need a blanket to be warm, but when it's the warm season, the blanket just becomes oppressive.

Sevgi

Yes, I'm thinking a lot about sleep. The best sleep requires a certain temperature. When we go to sleep, we want to be warm and cozy, so we hug our blankets. And in the middle of the night, it can be too much, although it's the same blanket. So, we need a certain balance. It depends on the weather. I'm in Istanbul, it's zero degrees, but at one point of the night, the blanket becomes too much, it wakes me up.

Dwight

It's interesting how the blanket itself is prompting us to wake up.

Alison

Speaking of silvery hair, I recently went through menopause. I felt I was burning up; it was like my water hair was burning when I'd sleep at night. It's interesting to think about the connection with stages of people's lives too.

Julia

How old is this Cassandra person, actually?

Sevgi

Cassandra person (laugh)!

Dwight

Is our climate system going through menopause with erratic temperature and mood swings?

Alison

She was running into the water. And now she's falling into the sky, and I just love this morphing into different spaces. It's almost as though you think you're in control because you're running, but then you're actually falling. Even Cassandra is also not in control and sometimes thinks she is.

Julia

I was considering the mix of crying and laughing because I attended an interesting workshop on trauma basics for facilitators last year, where they talked about the different ways we release trauma. It could be laughing, crying, shaking, humming, or any other visceral physical reaction. Your body is letting go of something and something is moving through you. Often, we're surprised how close laughter and crying can be in those very intense moments. I guess Cassandra just went through this kind of traumatic experience of being on fire, so it makes sense that there's some kind of intense release happening. Our story is making space for that, I guess. As in witnessing the impacts that dealing with climate change have and making space for all those emotions to move through.

Dwight

She's completely experiencing all of these emotions without a filter. We have so many contrasts, such as fire and water, tears that are burning, laughter and crying, falling and floating.

Sevgi

It sounds like shadow work. The climate is releasing and accepting all parts of herself that she rejected.

Julia

I've recently been learning about another definition or another flavour of wicked problems called *super wicked problems* (Levin et al., 2012), in which the people that try to solve the issue are also contributing to it. This relates to the shadow work of accepting that even though you're trying to address something you're also contributing to it.

Dwight

And Cassandra is so disoriented, not of her own doing. It's amusing, fun and humorous, while also completely mixed up in all directions.

She felt lost, not knowing
where the sky was
anymore. As she floated,
the creatures were all
around; they nibbled on her
toes, tickling her, causing
her to laugh. In her
laughter and in her fear and
disorientation she began
crying. The tears, these
burning tears coming out
of her eyes were flowing
out in different directions,
creating shimmering
currents. Her eyes turned
red from the salty burning
tears.

And she felt she was
falling.

There were places on earth with creatures that were really cold. They needed covers, jackets, caves, or tree roots to warm themselves. And they felt the fires coming out of Cassandra's tears. They warmed themselves, thanks to these salty tears. There were other places on the living planet with thirsty plants. And these waters reached them very slowly through air. Actually, it was the plants who called the tears. They invited the tears, drank them, and flourished.

Julia

It brings up so many new colours. I felt before that our story was mainly red, gray and blue. And now it's suddenly green.

Dwight

I was also thinking of desert colours, orange and ochre surrounding these thirsty plants that are calling the tears and drinking them. The colourscape is also white with the creatures hibernating in the caves below the snow, under tree roots.

Alison

I have to repeat a bit of what you just said about the plants, they're thirsty. So, it's really looking at plants as entities having their own agency.

Julia

This reminds me about the plants' capacity to hold this pain, which maybe the creatures were not able to. We could get solace from the whole, like bathing in a forest, right? A type of bathing or a type of calming, because there are these entities that are so different. We can connect with them on different timescales, where that slowness can be a much different way of holding the pain. That's what came up for me when the plants invited the tears, because they need the water, but also because they're actually able to handle the pain. It's not too much for them.

Alison

They can handle the salt, even though normally plants struggle with salt, but these plants are inviting it.

Julia

I was going to mention mangroves have a lot of interesting mechanisms to handle salt, to expel it, but I had been imagining a terrestrial forest. However, this passage brings us back to the ocean. So, maybe it is more of a mangrove.

Dwight

To me, this passage talks about renewal. Cassandra has gone through a breakdown and things have been lost and forgotten. Now there's the remembering; it's not a full complete remembering, but somehow the plants hold this knowledge.

Sevgi

And I love the fact that you repeated the word remembering a lot. Re-member, gather the members back together. And there is the feasting.

Dwight

There's sadness for what has been lost and also a kind of solastalgia — nostalgia for what is going to be lost: parties and feasts that used to make the world happen.

Julia

Maybe it's also kind of a guide, right? Like realizing that there are things to return to. Like trusting in Indigenous ways of knowing — and remembering that there are people — and maybe also nonhumans who we can look to for guidance.

Dwight

We should listen to each plant's unique song. I was recently listening to the Audio Book *Radical Hope* by Jonathan Lear. He relates the Crow origin story about a sacred tobacco, which instructed the first leader, *you must plant me in a place where I will flourish*. But they didn't know where that place was. For generations, maybe a hundred years, they were traveling to different places until they finally found their homeland, the place where the sacred tobacco could flourish.

It was such a warm remembering, remembering of how the calls that came from the plants and the fish and the dolphins and the people of this part of the ocean and the people of that part of the ocean, how they used to dance and call and feast and celebrate together, how they used to call and make the world happen. And it was such a warm remembering. It was a bit of sadness too because sometimes some of them had forgotten, but when the warm tears came to them and when they heard the trees, the plants calling, they started to remember. They remembered these songs that they'd call, the songs that they learned from Cassandra, and from the other creatures around.

Cassandra was really grateful for the sadness, for being able to just sit in it. It was quite overwhelming, but it was nice to be able to just feel it all, to know it was okay to be sad in that moment. And that there was a lot of warmth within that sadness, too. She wasn't even sure of all the things that she was sad about, so much had changed, and it seemed like she was grieving everything. A lot of little creatures she used to see, but could no longer see. A lot of places that had changed, in a way that made others move out, in a way that felt constricting, in a way that made her deeply sad. But this, right now, was a different type of sadness she was experiencing. And it felt nice to be able to sit there and cry and know that that's okay, that tears can be nourishing, too.

Sevgi

I love the fact that now we are zooming into her life, to her deep feelings. I think most of the previous text sections were giving a wider picture but this one is really zooming on the nuances of her feelings. I love this.

Dwight

I was just noticing that her fear has gone now, that she has accepted this sadness and she's sitting with the sadness.

Sevgi

Yes, this process of how she made peace with the feelings.

Dwight

Acceptance.

And also, I love the way it ends with the nourishing quality of sadness and tears.

Sevgi

One thing I really enjoy in the whole text is how there are little cycles that connect back, things that reoccur. This references the previous part where the plants drink her tears. We zoom into her feelings as she sits with the sadness and accepts the wholeness of herself and also knows that it's nourishing. It connects back.

Dwight

It's as if the deeper the sadness, the deeper the nourishment.

Sevgi

Like deeper the roots, the higher the branches. The more she can sit with her dark side, or supposedly a difficult part of herself, the more she can be whole and nourishing for others.

Dwight

So, again, the shadow work we referenced to earlier.

Alison

I love how this all turned to energy. The sun energy reminds me that we're all part of this, we're stardust through the tears of dinosaurs.

Sevgi

Wow. The first line starts with her noticing the fire in her heart and it starts to unfold. So maybe unfolding and opening are kinds of acceptance. She made peace with the depth of her heart and then started blossoming and things went on and then you have the sun. A giant sun. So, the fire in her heart at the end turns into a giant sun, which embraces everything. Everything found its place inside this giant sun.

So then from within her sadness, she noticed the fire in her heart was starting to unfold and open. It was her genuine heart of sadness, which started blossoming like an immense multicoloured lotus. The flower opened so wide, the whole universe was invited in. All the plants, all the dolphins, all the creatures nibbling on her toes, even her blankets. Everything found its place inside this immense bloom that finally revealed itself as a giant sun, a burning liquid ocean lotus sun, shining.

The liquid lotus sun was filled with hope, it was seeping, oozing out all over, like a sweet nectar. There was water in the sun, the sun that's made of fire, and Cassandra felt mind blown with this shift of perspective. Suddenly it was clear to her: *If the up and down can shift, if the right can become left, why not the fire could turn into water?* She was witnessing the sun transforming into an ocean.

Dwight

Now her perspective has become so broad that she's able to find resonance between all of these opposites.

Alison

I like the idea of the lotus, from so many other cultures, Buddhists and Yoga practitioners conceive of the lotus as a life-giving flower, it is very special. I often meditate on the opening of the lotus flower. I like how that has come into our story.

Dwight

Part of the metaphor of the lotus is it grows in the very muddy, murky, yucky water, and it's a water plant, right? But then when it unfolds, the blossom is pristine and pure on top of this murkiness. So, it's growing and blooming in this contrast to all of the entanglements and confusion and troubles of our life, but this pristine clarity is still there, still available on top of the water.

It creates an encompassing space that accommodates all the oppositions.

Alison

I really like that her sisters came in, that relations came in, and particularly as I'm thinking lately about truth and reconciliation and trying to be a good ally and a good settler. First Nations in Canada talk about relations, that it's all about having good relations.

Dwight

And the sisters of the sun.

Sevgi

Because we often talk about many things as plurals, whereas anytime we mention the sun it is always singular. Very autocratic. I thought of breaking the one singular source that everything is faced towards. However, everything is a part of the source. So, I played with it. Also, in Latin languages everything has gender, and in Turkish, we don't have gender (he/she).

Dwight

Yeah, and at the end of this passage, we're getting into relativity.

The sun as we know it is one sun, but she had sisters. The sisters she never knew existed. The creatures always thought they're standing in one place and facing one direction. They only appear when we call the day, and they disappear when we call the night. But the creatures discovered the sun's sisters. That it was all relative.

And time also flowed in a funny way. This was tough for the little creatures. It was tough for this mouth to speak about time existing and flowing at once and future and past, but it all existed at the same time. Her tears and the creatures dancing and calling happened before. It happened again and stopped happening before and stopped happening again. And this mouth can barely speak these words because time works differently in the mouth that's speaking right now.

Dwight

For the whole story, we've been focused on Cassandra. Now we have the narrator, or the narrators, who are jumping in to say, *well, this story can't even be spoken*.

Alison

Yeah, that's what I was thinking when I was telling that part. I was also thinking about tricksters and Coyote (Thomas King, 1993).

Dwight

Then again, this echoes the whole cyclical theme throughout our story, as well as things going in different directions at different times all at the same time. It gives us a giant perspective on deep time...and the lives of suns...and the lives of whole communities of suns. The other day, I was looking at a graph of deep time showing the carbon dioxide concentrations going back 70 million years. It first goes back by hundreds of thousands of years, then by millions of years, then by tens of millions of years. It shows a scattering of dots, putting our current day into this giant deep time perspective, where suddenly we've spiked our CO₂ up to the level it was in the Pleistocene, 2-3 million years ago.

Sevgi

I was listening to you. And then I'm moving in the car. And you're talking about deep time. I'm on Zoom in Istanbul.

As you say, it's really interesting that it's like a meta narrative. This passage. That's the mouth that's speaking right now. This mouth can barely speak these words because time works differently. It's suddenly like the actors realizing that it was all a story told by some people. A mouth. Very existential.

Alison

I think that is an interesting thing also with time and what you said about being in the car, you know, you're in the car in Istanbul. And you're almost exactly halfway around the world. I think that's also a compelling aspect of the story and how it's created.

Alison

This also fits the theme of knowing something in our bodies, because our bodies are in different places and may get kicked in and out by technology.

Dwight

We have these little different moments of realization and forgetting. And then realizing again, a few days later or a year later. I love the ending. This passage really brings all of these cycles back, the changes of the air into trees, to rock, to liquid, into other bodies. And this same thing with these cycles of emotions.

These cycles of change in our environment, in our world, in our climate, and the cycle of change in our own feelings toward all of this. We can see this from a broader perspective. And we can give ourselves a break because we may have some realization, but then we probably will forget. And maybe we'll remember again.

Sevgi

Like an ice age. Everything will be covered with ice.

I noticed big cycles of air becoming trees, becoming rock, becoming liquid, on and on. The same way sadness turned into rage, energy, sleep. In the end, it turns into tears. It's tears, but it's actually water, it flows. It's an output of emotion, but it's also something that nourishes.

And even though maybe the mouth can't speak it in a way that makes it really clear what Cassandra was feeling at that moment, something in the bodies of the little creatures still resonated with it. Maybe their mouths could not speak it, but their bodies could feel it. And they remembered that it had been like that before, the big cycles of air becoming trees, becoming rock, becoming liquid, flowing into other bodies. It's the same way the sadness that they sometimes felt turned into rage, turned into energy, turned into sleep, turned into sweetness, turned into tears again.

And Cassandra watched the little creatures having these different moments of realization and then forgetting. And then having the same moment again a few days later or a year later.

And Cassandra was like, *Yeah, man, that's silly. But I also know that's just how it goes.*

Dwight

Yes, and the same thing happened with the elements because they became liquid and they flew into other bodies, as a nourishment.

Alison

It ends with a bit of humour, which I think is important for survival. And acceptance: *well, that's the way it is*. But it's not necessarily accepting the horrible climate change stuff, it's accepting the entire universe and the entirety of existence.

For some reason, it still feels hopeful, even though it's like accepting that that's just the way it goes. The humour makes me feel hopeful.

Dwight

Also, because there's a greater level of wisdom and warmth that somehow makes space for all the little creatures that are re-realizing and forgetting. It's a really wonderful conclusion to the story. It contains all the elements, related by the mouth that can't speak.

Alison

The mouth couldn't speak, but the bodies could feel it. So, emotions and our bodies are more important than our speaking or our thinking.

Sevgi

You were talking not about the words, but the feelings. In the beginning, we were introduced to how Cassandra was feeling at that moment. Something in the bodies of little creatures still resonated, so it's not only Cassandra. It's a vibration.

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Ethical standard. Nothing to note.

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Our networks and other related links Ocean Comm/uni/ty

An online social space developed and hosted by TBA21–Academy for ocean lovers, researchers and practitioners to gather, discover and (un)learn across oceans. <https://community.ocean-archive.org/s>

Ocean Decade Art-Science Networking Group

An open group for artists and scientists from around the world to network, share opportunities, events and best practices. <https://forum.oceandecade.org/topics/35697/home>

Ocean Networks Canada, Ocean Art-Science working group

A shared space for transdisciplinary interactions between ocean art, ocean science and Ocean Memory. <https://community.oceannetworks.ca/spaces/6703071/feed>

Watering Words

Inspired by the concept of hydrofeminism, the project Watering Words is an experiment in the form of a long-term poetic conversation flowing between 3 artists – Joanna Gruntkowska, Małgorzata Suś and Kai Feldhammer, as well as various water bodies. The collective online practice Encounters offers the chance for anyone interested to become part of the project. <https://wateringwords.com>

Educational activity based on the painting Cassandra by Evelyn De Morgan

This activity explains the myth of Cassandra and invites students to consider how she must feel. We found this activity after we created our own story. www.demorgan.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/info-sheet-Cassandra.docx.pdf

Author Biographies

Alison Laurie Neilson is a researcher at the Interdisciplinary Centre for Social Sciences, NOVA University of Lisbon, CICS.NOVA. She works on environmental justice in small-scale fishing communities. She uses narrative and arts to transform the way knowledge, wisdom and politics mix and to transcend boundaries between arts/sciences, academic/non-academic and researcher/researched. She is a dancer.

Sevgi Aka is a conceptual artist and associate professor from Istanbul. Her art practice includes spatial interventions, installations, objects and performances. Her most recent exhibition *Leaking from Sleep* took place in Gallery A, Izmir and the spatial intervention *The Belly of the Whale*, on Bosphorus, Istanbul. She teaches visual arts at Istanbul Topkapı University.

Dwight Owens lives as an uninvited guest in the traditional homelands of the X^wsepsəm/Esquimalt Peoples on Canada's Pacific coast. His career has been largely involved in training, education, science literacy, outreach and capacity development. Since 2008, Dwight has been working for one of the world's major ocean observing facilities, Ocean Networks Canada (ONC). Among other duties, he coordinates ONC's ArtScience fellowship and related fun projects.

Julia Jung (dey/dem) is a PhD student and member of the FEEEd Lab at the University of British Columbia, Okanagan, exploring the potential of polyamorous thinking to support inter- and transdisciplinary collaborations in ocean science and marine conservation. Originally with a background in marine biology, they now use on participatory and art-based methods that embrace the role of emotions and creative expression in rethinking our relationships with the ocean and the other people working and living with the ocean. Originally from Germany, they currently live in the Kelowna on the unceded ancestral territory of the Syilx Okanagan people.

Małgorzata Suś, originally from Poland, since 2016 based in Portugal. Dancer, performer and choreographer working cross-disciplinary with visual arts, sound, poetry and science. Her artistic practice is dedicated to research on connection of the body and movement with nature and the environment. Nourished by ideas of hydrofeminism, environmental humanities and Ocean studies, her works are oriented towards bringing attention and care to other-than-human beings. Co-creator of The Memory of Water, in collaboration with visual artist Vilija Vitkute. Co-founder of Watering Words collective.

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