

Research Article

## Oceanic Silence, Expansive Consciousness, and Relational Ontology: A Blue Humanities Reading of "Ocean Oneness" by Sri Aurobindo

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the Blue Humanities approach to Sri Aurobindo's poem "Ocean Oneness" by articulating an oceanic epistemology of silence, boundlessness, and metaphysical oneness. By applying the theories of Blue Humanities, ecocriticism, and posthumanism, this study analyzes how this poem reconstructs subjectivity through immersion in oceanic vastness. It proceeds through four interrelated chapters: the ocean as epistemological silence; the ocean as an affective dissolution of the self; the ocean as an ontological matrix; and the ocean facing the ethics of non-anthropocentrism. A close reading of Aurobindo's poetry, with the theoretical embedding of each chapter, brings into light how precociously aware Aurobindo's poetry is of questions of relationality, interdependence, and ecological consciousness, which lie at the core of contemporary environmental humanities. The poem thus enacts a shift from the individual human to the cosmic, and acts as a literary model for thinking life through planetary systems.

**Keywords:** Blue Humanities; Ecocriticism; Oceanic Ontology; Oceanic Consciousness

### Introduction

Blue Humanities has emerged in recent decades as a critical intervention into literary and cultural studies, challenging land-based epistemologies and thinking of the sea as a zone of signification. As Steve Mentz writes, the ocean encourages a cultural poetics which understands human life as a process of fluidity, instability, and relation rather than fixity and mastery (Mentz 997). This oceanic turn invites research that sees water not as a subject, but as a form of epistemology in itself, shaping how knowledge is produced. This is reflected in the "wet ontology" that Philip E. Steinberg and

Kimberley Peters use to describe oceanic space (Steinberg and Peters 247). In these frameworks, the human and the nonhuman, the subject and the environment, are no longer easily distinguishable. As such, the oceanic thinking in Sri Aurobindo's poetry seems almost prophetic. His integral spirituality is based on unity, consciousness, and the oneness of all things. In this respect, the poem "Ocean Oneness" depicts the ocean as a space of silence, vastness, and metaphysical oneness. Calling "Ocean Oneness" a precursor to key Blue Humanities debates, the paper shows how the poem configures the ocean as an affective, epistemological, and ontological space that ultimately dissolves anthropocentric subjectivity. Through a close reading of the poem's visual, structural, and philosophical aspects, the paper shows how the oceanic experience reconfigures humanity as a moment within a more-than-human continuum.

### **Oceanic Silence as Epistemology**

The first line "Silence is round me, wideness ineffable" opens on a soundless tone of overwhelming spaciousness: the silence is not a void, but a positive condition on which experience and language are founded and addressed. In this way, it disrupts the dominance of language and rational cognition, allowing for experiential knowledge. The phrase "wideness ineffable" stresses the limits of every linguistic representation. In keeping with the observations of Blue Humanities scholars about the ocean's refusal to be defined or classified, Ursula Kluwick argues that water disrupts epistemologies of fixity with fluidity and indeterminacy (Kluwick 2). The poem further elaborates this tension with the sea, describing it as a "soundless sea on a voiceless heaven" and representing it as a single space in which sea and sky are merged. The collapse of boundaries is what Hester Blum has described as the engaging quality of oceanic experience, in which knowledge is produced through embodiment rather than distance (Blum 152). More broadly than a mere metonymic effect, silence evokes epistemological humility: the poem erases its familiar sensory signs and demands that readers recognize the limits of human perception. If it is to be explored in line with Blue Humanities, the poem enters a broader discourse of anti-anthropomorphism, demanding that the ocean be approached in its own terms, not in terms of humans. The "white birds ... diving and wandering" allow for a slightly non-static engagement with the world, being halfway between water and air, halfway between one kind of space and another. They also allow a kind of movement consonant with this fluid ontology. Thus, at the opening of the poem, silence is established as a condition of generative possibility, rather than as an absence, and as an articulation of more relational knowledge.

### **Oceanic Affect and the Expansion of Consciousness**

The second stanza uses the image of a body, the speaker's body, 'My spirit widens clasping the universe'. This, as the Blue Humanities would frame it, is an example of oceanic affect, the intersubjective experience of losing oneself in the ocean, of one's identity being assimilated into the oceanic world, and boundaries disappearing between human and oceanic. Oceanic affective experiences challenge anthropocentric models of the self, as Smith and Mentz have noted, through their emphasis on relationality (Smith and Mentz 67). In the poem, the speaker's identification with silence and boundlessness results in a rise in consciousness. At the end, we hear that

"Till all that seemed becomes the Real", with the differences being subsumed by something larger. This echoes posthumanist theorist Stacy Alaimo, who argues in *Trans-Corporealities* that human and nonhuman bodies co-constitute each other (Alaimo 15), and Melody Jue's "thinking through seawater," which argues that immersion in maritime environments reshapes thought (Jue 3). The poem shows this by changing the speaker's idea of who they are. Most importantly, breaking down the sense of being a separate individual is shown as an enlargement, not a loss. Spirit's "widening" hints that through merging with nature, the self grows larger and more embracing. This is consistent with Aurobindo's thought of the gradual development of consciousness towards a state of oneness. "One in a mighty and single vastness" perfectly sums up this change. It portrays unity not as a theory but as a real experience, something one gains by becoming one with the oceanic realm. The poem not only talks about this but also does this, letting readers get the same opening of their awareness.

### **The Ocean as Ontological Matrix**

Towards the end of the poem, in the last stanza, the poem seems to take on a more metaphysical tone when the nameless and bodiless consciousness "Someone broods there nameless and bodiless" is introduced. This nameless and bodiless consciousness can be interpreted in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy as a representation of the Absolute, or the universal consciousness. Another reason the ocean was chosen is that it is a suitable metaphor for consciousness. The ocean is huge, deep, and unified. As Serpil Oppermann writes, the Blue Humanities have been influenced by ecological and metaphysical views of water as a medium of interconnected existence (Oppermann 3). Related to this idea of the ocean as a universalizing space, the poem describes it in lines such as "gathers all things to his heart for ever" as a system in which all beings, both human and nonhuman, are included. This universalization of the ocean is in keeping with Philip E. Steinberg's view that it functions as a space of flows and connections (Steinberg 45). The phrase "still eternal rapture" captures the paradox of oceanic existence: the ocean is both changing and still, limited and limitless, material and spiritual. Laura Winkiel argues that the oceanic paradoxes are at the center of oceanic discourse: the oceanic space is a complex environment (Winkiel 720). Therefore, the poem constructs the ocean as an ontological matrix of existence. It invites a rethinking of being not as discrete, bounded, and isolated, but as relational and interconnected.

### **Temporal and Cosmic Dimensions of Oceanic Thought**

Besides spatial scale, "Ocean Oneness" has a temporal scale. The ocean is understood as a time with no human markers. The temporal scale of "Ocean Oneness" aligns with deep time, planetary scale, and the practices and arguments of deep time in Blue Humanities. The "eternal rapture" of the poem suggests a reference to non-linear time. It gives some sense of permanence, standing in contrast to the transience of human life. Elizabeth DeLoughrey notes that oceanic thinking is often a reorientation towards ecological time (DeLoughrey 12). The movement in the poem from silence to union may also be read as a movement in time, from an individual consciousness to a

collective total. This idea has affinities with Aurobindo's view of spiritual evolution as the gradual manifestation of the principle of unity in diversity. As a spatial and ontological grid, the ocean represents the temporal universe, which situates human existence between the material and the spiritual, between the human and the cosmic.

### **Decentering the Human: Ecological and Ethical Implications**

One of the main features of Blue Humanities scholarship is a critique of anthropocentrism. In "Ocean Oneness," this anthropocentric view is dissolved by the size of the ocean, and the self of the speaker is indistinguishable from the things around them. DeLoughrey shows the environmental humanities as rethinking human-nonhuman relations in terms of connection and responsibility (DeLoughrey 12). The poem explores this idea by placing the self within an ecological frame of reference. In a similar vein, Ian Baucom argues that oceanic spaces disrupt identity and stress relationality (Baucom 305). The poem's stress on unity reflects this view, and, through its portrayal of the ocean, it sets a standard for a harmonious ecological existence. Such a change of focus carries ethical meanings not small in scale. The poem, by comparing the human mind with the enormity of the ocean, invites us to be humble and respect the world beyond humans in a way that surpasses a human-centered view. It points out that, for the preservation of the environment, a shift is needed from overpowering nature to living in harmony with it. Thus, the poem explores modern-day environmental themes and, through its illustration of unity, deprives human-centered views of perspective, opening the way for ethical environmental behavior.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has shown how Sri Aurobindo's poem "Ocean Oneness" can be read within the context of the Blue Humanities. Through the rhetoric of silence, boundlessness, and unity, the poem creates the ideal of the ocean as an affective, epistemological, and ontological space that disrupts anthropocentric modes of oceanic perception. The oceanic affect, relational ontology, and metaphysical oceanic space produced by this poem dissolve the self-world barrier, but they do so in a manner that raises the problem of ethics not through philosophy alone, but through an ecological awareness and relationship to other selves and worlds. The poem thus serves as an exemplary model for literary studies in thinking about human existence in the midst of a more-than-human world. It anticipates much of the intellectual work of the Blue Humanities.

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