

The Ecology of Return: Trauma, Atmosphere, and the Poetics of Water

Wasantha Samarathunga¹

Abstract

*This article examines the poetic book *The Water That Remembers* as a model of ecological trauma. The text contains no human speaker and no personal narrative. Instead, it presents a cycle of still water, ripple, sound, mist, rain, reflection and return. These movements form a mandala that mirrors the rhythms of rupture and recurrence described in trauma studies. Drawing on environmental humanities, posthuman memory theory and ecological phenomenology, the article argues that trauma can be understood as a disturbance in the field between self and world. Water, atmosphere and light become sites where memory settles and reappears. The analysis shows how ecological forms can model dissociation, intrusion, repetition and recognition. This approach expands trauma studies beyond the human subject and highlights the role of matter in holding traces of experience. The article proposes an ecological mode of remembering that is relational, cyclical and grounded in the poetics of water.*

Keywords: *Ecological Trauma, Environmental Humanities, Posthuman Memory, Phenomenology, Atmospheric Poetics, Mandala Structure.*

Introduction

Trauma studies have long centered on human subjects. The field often assumes that rupture, memory, and recovery occur within a personal psyche. This assumption shapes the language of trauma. It shapes the metaphors used to describe it. It shapes the frameworks used to interpret it. Trauma becomes a wound inside a person. It becomes a break in a personal narrative. It becomes a crisis of individual memory. This common model narrows the field of perception and restricts trauma to the human mind. It overlooks the world that surrounds the mind.

Environmental humanities challenge this assumption. Scholars argue that the world is active. It participates in experience. It holds traces of events. It carries memory in its own way. This view appears in work on material agency [Barad]. It appears in work on embodied perception [Abram]. It appears in work on environmental ethics [Alaimo]. These studies show that matter is responding than inert. Matter remembers and participates in shaping experience.

This shift opens a new way to think about trauma. Trauma may not be limited to the human subject. Trauma may move across ecological systems. Trauma may settle in landscapes. Trauma may circulate through water, air, and light. Trauma may appear in the world as a pattern of disturbance. Trauma may be sensed through atmosphere rather than through narrative. This idea does not deny human suffering. It expands the frame. It allows trauma to be understood as a field phenomenon rather than a private event.

The poetic manuscript *The Water That Remembers* offers a model for this expanded view. The text contains no human speaker. It contains no personal story. It contains no psychological confession. Instead, it presents a sequence of ecological scenes. Water, mist, rain and reflection become the central figures. These elements takes cycles of stillness, disturbance and return. The structure resembles a mandala. The movement is circular. The cycle starts in quiet, then moves through rupture and finally returns to quiet. The return is not a restoration of purity. It is a recognition of what has passed through the field.

This structure aligns with ecological temporality. Ecological time here is not linear. It is cyclical. It moves through patterns of repetition. It returns to earlier states with difference. It holds traces of what has occurred. This form mirrors trauma which does not move in a straight line. It returns. It repeats. It circles

¹ Department of Electrical and Electronics Engineering, National Institute of Technology Kisarazu College, Chiba, Japan.

back. It alters the field each time it appears. The mandala structure captures this movement. It holds trauma without resolving it. It contains rupture without erasing it.

The manuscript also aligns with posthuman memory theory. Posthuman theory argues that memory is not limited to the human mind. Memory can be distributed across matters. Memory can be held in bodies that are not human. Memory can appear in patterns of movement, vibration, and atmosphere [Barad]. Water becomes a medium of memory. Mist becomes a soft erasure. Rain becomes repetition. Reflection becomes unstable identity. These forms echo trauma without relying on a human narrator.

Environmental phenomenology supports this view. Phenomenology describes perception as relational. The world is not separate from the perceiver. The world participates in perception [Merleau Ponty]. Water reflects. Mist obscures. Rain touches. Reflection trembles. These actions shape experience. They shape the sense of self. They shape the sense of time. They shape the sense of memory. The manuscript uses these ecological actions to model trauma. Trauma becomes a shift in the field of perception. Trauma becomes a disturbance in the relation between world and self.

This article reads the manuscript as an eco-trauma mandala. It argues that trauma can be understood as an environmental process. The text shows how memory can be held by the world itself. It offers a nonlinear and non-anthropocentric mode of remembering. It expands the field of trauma studies by presenting trauma as a distributed ecological phenomenon. It contributes to environmental humanities by showing how poetic form can model ecological memory. It contributes to posthuman theory by demonstrating how matter can participate in the work of remembering.

The article proceeds in several steps. The theoretical framework outlines the shift from human centered trauma theory to ecological and posthuman models. The methodology explains the use of close reading and ecological phenomenology. The analysis examines the manuscript chapter by chapter. It shows how still water, ripple, sound, mist, rain, reflection and return model different aspects of trauma. The discussion considers the implications of this model for trauma studies and environmental humanities. The conclusion reflects on the ethical and ecological significance of remembering through the world.

This approach does not claim that trauma is identical in humans and environments. Ecosystems behave in different ways than those of people. It does not claim that water feels pain. Instead, it argues that trauma can be represented through ecological processes. It argues that ecological forms can model the structure of trauma. It argues that the world can hold traces of disturbance. It argues that memory can be understood as a relation between self and environment.

This view opens a path for new forms of scholarship. It invites trauma studies to consider ecological models. It invites environmental humanities to consider trauma as a field phenomenon. It invites literary studies to consider how poetic form can model ecological memory. It challenges cross-cultural poetics to consider how cyclical time and mandala form can be brought to bear on ecological thinking. It challenges philosophy to consider how perception and matter can be seen to contribute to the formation of memory.

The manuscript becomes a site where these fields meet. It becomes a model for eco trauma. It becomes a mandala of environmental memory. It becomes a poetic field in which trauma moves through water, mist, rain and reflection. It becomes a way to think about trauma beyond humans. It becomes a way to think about memory as ecological.

Theoretical Framework

This section outlines the conceptual ground for an eco trauma reading of *The Water That Remembers*. The framework draws from trauma studies, posthuman theory, environmental humanities, and phenomenology. These fields share a concern with memory, perception, and the relation between self and world. They also share an interest in forms of experience that exceed the boundaries of the individual. The manuscript sits at the intersection of these concerns. It offers a poetic model of trauma that is ecological rather than

psychological. It presents memory as a field phenomenon rather than a private event. The theoretical framework clarifies how this model becomes legible.

Trauma Beyond Human

Classical trauma theory focuses on rupture, belatedness, and the difficulty of narration. Caruth describes trauma as an event that returns in delayed form [Caruth]. LaCapra distinguishes between acting out and working through [LaCapra]. Schwab extends trauma into transgenerational memory [Schwab]. These approaches center the human subject and treat trauma as a wound in personal narrative.

Environmental humanities broaden this frame. They argue that the world participates in experience and holds traces of events. Trauma may move across ecological systems and appear as disturbances in the relations between self and environment. This expanded view allows trauma to be understood as ecological rather than solely psychological.

Posthuman Memory and Material Agency

Posthuman theory provides a foundation for ecological trauma. Barad argues that matter is active and participates in the formation of experience [Barad]. Alaimo's concept of transcorporeality shows how bodies exchange material with the world and are shaped by environmental forces [Alaimo]. Morton describes ecological life as a mesh in which disturbances circulate [Morton]. These perspectives suggest that memory can be distributed across matter and that trauma may appear in patterns of movement, atmosphere and relation.

Environmental Phenomenology

Phenomenology describes perception as relational. Merleau Ponty argues that perception arises from the interaction between body and world [Merleau Ponty]. Abram extends this into environmental phenomenology, showing how atmosphere, light, and elemental forces shape experience [Abram]. Ingold describes the world as a field of lines and movements [Ingold]. These ideas support an ecological reading of trauma in which shifts in water, mist, rain, and reflection become shifts in perception itself.

Mandala Poetics and Cyclical Time

The manuscript follows a circular structure that resembles a mandala. It begins in stillness, moves through disturbance, and returns to stillness with difference. This form mirrors ecological temporality, which is rhythmic and repetitive. Tsing describes ecological life as continual return [Tsing]. The mandala structure provides a way to hold rupture without closure and to represent trauma as a cyclical process that alters the field each time it reappears.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative and interpretive approach grounded in close reading, environmental phenomenology, and posthuman theory. The goal is not to diagnose trauma but to understand how ecological forms represent it. Close reading reveals patterns of imagery, rhythm, and movement across the manuscript. Environmental phenomenology highlights how water, mist, rain, and reflection shape perception and create a field in which memory appears. Posthuman theory supports the idea that memory can be distributed across matter and that trauma may emerge through ecological relations.

The methodology treats ecological forms as symbolic rather than literal. It is concerned with representation and the imagination of trauma through a pattern of stillness, disruption, and repetition. The circular form of the manuscript offers a template for understanding trauma as a repetitive process in an ecological system. This approach to understanding trauma is consistent with the limits of text analysis while allowing for new opportunities for connection to the environmental humanities.

Analysis

This section examines the manuscript through its ecological movements. Each chapter presents a shift in atmosphere. Each shift models a different aspect of trauma. The analysis follows the sequence of still water, ripple, sound, mist, rain, reflection, and return. These movements form a cycle. The cycle resembles a mandala. The cycle also resembles the structure of trauma. Trauma moves in patterns. It returns. It repeats. It alters the field. The manuscript uses ecological forms to represent these movements. The analysis reads these forms through environmental humanities, posthuman memory theory, and trauma studies.

Still Water and Suspended Perception

The manuscript begins with still water. The surface is quiet and the field is unbroken. Nothing disturbs the scene. The stillness appears peaceful but it carries tension. Still water is not empty. It holds potential. It holds silence. It holds the possibility of rupture.

This stillness resembles dissociation. Dissociation is a state of suspension. It is a pause in perception. It is a protective withdrawal. Luckhurst described dissociation as a distancing of the self from experience [Luckhurst]. The still water models this distance. It creates a surface that does not respond. It creates a field that holds itself apart

Environmental phenomenology helps interpret this stillness. Merleau Ponty described perception as a relation between body and world [Merleau Ponty]. Still water interrupts this relation. It creates a surface that does not reflect movement. It creates a pause in the exchange between self and world. Abram described such moments as times when the world withdraws from the senses [Abram]. The still water withdraws. It creates a quiet field where memory has not yet appeared.

Posthuman theory also informs this reading. Barad described matter as active [Barad]. Still water is not passive. It holds tension. It holds the potential for change. It holds the possibility of disturbance. The stillness becomes a charged field. It becomes the ground from which trauma will emerge.

Trauma studies describe the moment before rupture as a fragile calm. Caruth described trauma as an event that cannot be fully grasped when it occurs [Caruth]. The still water models this pre event state. It models a field that has not yet been touched by the event. It models a surface that will soon be broken.

The still water also establishes the mandala structure. The mandala begins at the center. The center is quiet. The center holds the cycle. The still water becomes this center. It becomes the point from which movement will emerge. It becomes the point to which the cycle will return.

The still water is not peace. It is suspension. It is the beginning of the trauma cycle.

Ripple and the First Disturbance

The next movement introduces a ripple. The ripple appears without clear cause. It moves outward. It touches the edges of the field. It breaks the stillness. The ripple is small, but it changes the entire surface.

The ripple resembles intrusive memory. Intrusive memory appears suddenly. It appears without warning. It appears without invitation. It breaks the surface of consciousness. Caruth described intrusion as the return of an event that was not fully grasped [Caruth]. The ripple models this return. It models the sudden appearance of disturbance.

Environmental phenomenology helps interpret the ripple. Abram described the world as a field of movement [Abram]. The ripple is a movement that spreads. It touches everything. It creates a pattern. It creates a trace. Ingold described such patterns as lines drawn through the world [Ingold]. The ripple draws a line. It marks the surface. It creates memory.

Posthuman theory also informs this reading. Barad described matter as responsive [Barad]. The ripple is a response. It is the water's reaction to an unseen force. It shows that matter participates in disturbance. It shows that matter carries the trace of the event. It shows that memory can be distributed across the surface.

Trauma studies describe intrusion as a break in the field of experience. LaCapra described acting out as a repetitive return of the event [LaCapra]. The ripple is the first return. It is the first sign that the field cannot remain still. It is the first sign that the cycle has begun.

The ripple also expands the mandala structure. The mandala moves outward from the center. The ripple mirrors this movement. It begins at a point. It spreads. It touches the edges. It creates a circle. The ripple becomes the first movement of the mandala.

The ripple is quiet. It is subtle. But it is a disturbance. It is the beginning of memory.

Sound and the First Emergence of Voice

The next movement introduces sound. The sound is faint. It rises slowly. It tests the field. It asks whether the world can receive it. The sound is hesitant. It is fragile and it is the first sign of voice.

The initial surfacing of sound mirrors the hesitant return to speech that follows traumatic rupture. Felman and Laub describe testimony as inherently fragile. The voice emerges slowly. It emerges with uncertainty. It emerges with hesitation. The sound in the manuscript models this emergence. It models the moment when silence begins to break.

Environmental phenomenology helps interpret this sound. Merleau Ponty described sound as a vibration that connects body and world. Sound is relational. It requires a medium. It requires air. It requires space. The sound in the manuscript reveals the presence of atmosphere. It reveals the presence of relation. It reveals the presence of a world that can carry voice.

Abram described sound as a form of ecological communication [Abram]. The sound in the manuscript becomes such communication. It becomes a signal. It becomes a call. It becomes a sign that the field is beginning to respond.

Posthuman theory also informs this reading. Alaimo described bodies as porous [Alaimo]. Sound passes through bodies. It enters. It leaves. It moves. The sound in the manuscript moves through the field. It touches the water. It touches the air. It touches the edges. It becomes part of the ecological system.

Trauma studies describe the emergence of voice as a turning point. It is not recovery. It is not closure. It is a shift. It is a moment when silence begins to open. The sound in the manuscript models this shift. It models the moment when the field begins to speak.

The sound also expands the mandala structure. The mandala moves from stillness to movement. The sound is a new form of movement. It adds depth. It adds dimension. It adds resonance.

The sound is fragile. It is hesitant. But it is a beginning.

Mist and the Softening of Perception

The next movement introduces mist. The mist softens edges. It blurs forms. It slows perception. It creates a field of uncertainty. The mist is gentle, but it obscures. It hides. It erases.

The mist resembles dissociation. Dissociation is a fog. It blurs memory. It blurs identity. It blurs time. Casey described memory as a field that can become obscured [Casey]. The mist models this obscurity. It models the difficulty of seeing. It models the difficulty of knowing.

Environmental phenomenology helps interpret the mist. Abram described atmosphere as part of perception [Abram]. Mist alters atmosphere. It alters light. It alters distance. It alters relation. The mist in the manuscript changes the field. It changes how the world appears. It changes how the self appears.

Ingold described weather as a form of experience [Ingold]. Mist is weather. It is not an object, but an existing condition. It surrounds. It envelops. It shapes perception. The mist in the manuscript becomes such a condition. It becomes a field of uncertainty.

Posthuman theory also informs this reading. Morton described ecological experience as a mesh [Morton]. Mist thickens the mesh. It creates density. It creates opacity. It creates a field where boundaries dissolve. The mist becomes a symbol of this dissolution.

Trauma studies describe dissociation as a protective fog. It shields the self. It hides the event. It creates distance. The mist in the manuscript models this distance. It models the soft erasure that follows rupture.

The mist also expands the mandala structure. The mandala contains both clarity and obscurity. The mist becomes the obscurity. It becomes the moment when the cycle moves inward. It becomes the moment when perception turns soft.

The mist is gentle. It is quiet. But it hides.

Rain and the Rhythm of Return

The next movement introduces rain. The rain falls in sequence. Each drop repeats the last. The pattern is rhythmic. The pattern is steady. The pattern is soft. The rain creates a field of repetition.

The rain resembles traumatic repetition. Trauma returns. It returns in fragments. It returns in cycles. It returns in patterns. LaCapra described repetition as a central feature of trauma [LaCapra]. The rain models this repetition. It models the steady return of memory.

Environmental phenomenology helps interpret the rain. Abram described rain as a form of contact [Abram]. Rain touches the world. It touches the body. It touches the surface. It creates sound. It creates movement. The rain in the manuscript becomes a form of contact. It becomes a form of relation. It becomes a form of memory.

Ingold described weather as a field of lines [Ingold]. Rain draws lines. It falls in paths. It creates patterns. It creates traces. The rain in the manuscript becomes such a pattern. It becomes a trace of the event.

Posthuman theory also informs this reading. Alaimo described bodies as open to environmental forces [Alaimo]. Rain enters. It soaks. It saturates. It becomes part of the field. The rain in the manuscript becomes part of the ecological system. It becomes part of the memory.

Trauma studies describe repetition as both painful and necessary. It is not healing. It is not closure. It is a cycle. The rain in the manuscript models this cycle. It models the gentle return of the event. It models the soft persistence of memory.

The rain also expands the mandala structure. The mandala moves through repetition. The rain becomes this repetition. It becomes the rhythmic center of the cycle. It becomes the pulse.

The rain is soft. It is steady. But it returns.

Reflection and the Trembling of Identity

The next movement introduces reflection. The reflection appears on the water. It trembles when touched by wind. It shifts. It distorts. It reveals instability. The reflection is not fixed. It is fluid.

The reflection resembles unstable identity. Trauma alters identity. It creates instability. It creates trembling. It creates uncertainty. Caruth described trauma as a break in the self [Caruth]. The reflection models this break. It models the trembling of identity.

Environmental phenomenology helps interpret the reflection. Merleau-Ponty described reflection as a bodily relation with the world, through which the self becomes perceptible. It reveals the world through the self. The trembling reflection in the manuscript reveals the instability of this relation. It reveals the fragility of identity.

Abram described reflection as a form of ecological seeing [Abram]. The reflection in the manuscript becomes such seeing. It becomes a way to understand the self through the world. It becomes a way to understand the world through the self.

Posthuman theory also informs this reading. Barad described identity as relational [Barad]. Identity is not fixed. It is shaped by matter. It is shaped by movement. It is shaped by disturbance. The trembling reflection models this relational identity. It models the instability that follows trauma.

Trauma studies describe the self as altered by rupture. The self becomes uncertain. The self becomes fragmented. The self becomes fluid. The reflection in the manuscript models this fluidity. It models the trembling of the self.

The reflection also expands the mandala structure. The mandala contains both stability and movement. The reflection becomes the movement. It becomes the moment when the cycle reveals its instability. It becomes the moment when the center trembles.

The reflection is fragile. It is shifting. But it reveals.

Return and the Quiet of Recognition

The final movement returns to stillness. The water becomes quiet again. The field becomes calm. The cycle closes. But the stillness is not the same as the beginning. It carries traces, memory and recognition.

The return resembles the final stage of the trauma cycle. It is not recovery. It is not closure. It is recognition. LaCapra described working through as a form of recognition [LaCapra]. It does not erase the event. It acknowledges it. The return in the manuscript models this recognition. It models the moment when the field holds what has occurred.

Environmental phenomenology helps interpret this return. Abram described return as a form of ecological awareness [Abram]. The world becomes familiar again. The senses open. The field becomes clear. The return in the manuscript becomes such awareness. It becomes a moment of clarity.

Ingold described return as a movement along lines [Ingold]. The cycle returns to its center. The return in the manuscript becomes such movement. It becomes the closing of the pattern.

Posthuman theory also informs this reading. Morton described ecological experience as a mesh that holds traces [Morton]. The return holds these traces. It carries the memory. It carries the disturbance. It carries the cycle.

Trauma studies describe recognition as a shift in relation. The self does not return to its original state. The world does not return to its original state. Both are altered. The return in the manuscript models this alteration. It models the new stillness.

The return also completes the mandala structure. The mandala begins at the center. It moves outward. It returns. The return becomes the final movement. It becomes the moment when the cycle closes. It becomes the moment when the field holds the memory.

The return is quiet. It is calm. But it carries everything.

Discussion

From the analysis, it is evident that the manuscript illustrates the concept of trauma as an ecological process. The movement of still water, the ripple, the sound, the mist, the rain, the reflection and the return form a cycle and the cycle is reminiscent of the mandala and the concept of trauma. Trauma moves in patterns. It returns, repeats and alters the field. The manuscript uses ecological forms to represent these movements, offering a model that expands the scope of trauma studies.

A first implication concerns the location of trauma. Traditional trauma theory places trauma inside the human subject, treating it as a wound in memory or narrative. This view narrows the field of perception. The manuscript challenges this limitation by showing trauma appearing in ecological forms and atmospheric shifts. It suggests that trauma can be understood as a field phenomenon sensed through movement, relation, and environment. This does not claim that ecosystems suffer in human terms. Instead, it shows how ecological processes can model the structure of rupture and recurrence.

A second implication concerns matter. Posthuman theory argues that matter is active and participates in experience. The manuscript supports this view through scenes in which ripple, mist, rain, and reflection respond, obscure, repeat, or tremble. These actions show matter carrying traces of disturbance and shaping the field of memory. They challenge the separation between subject and object and suggest that memory can be distributed across relations rather than held solely within the mind.

A third implication concerns perception. Environmental phenomenology describes perception as relational and shaped by the world. The manuscript demonstrates this relationality as still water withdraws, ripple touches, sound enters the air, mist softens edges, rain marks the surface, and reflection reveals instability. These movements show perception as ecological and vulnerable to disturbance. Trauma appears as a shift in this relational field rather than as an internal event.

A final implication concerns time. The manuscript's circular structure mirrors ecological temporality, which is rhythmic and patterned. The return to stillness carries traces of what has passed, echoing the recursive nature of trauma. This circular structure resonates with Tsing's notion of continual return, suggesting that recognition arises through repeated encounters rather than final resolution.

Taken together, these implications demonstrate how ecological form might shed light upon trauma. The manuscript encourages a form of attention that is relational, atmospheric and attentive to the ways in which the world holds trauma. It creates a space for a new form of dialogue between trauma studies, environmental humanities, and posthuman memory theory.

Conclusion

The text in the paper imagines trauma as something that moves through more than a single person's inner world. Its pattern of stillness, disturbance and return illustrates how memory can be seen in the world as

changes in atmosphere, movement and relation. The manuscript does not see ecological forms as literal forms of trauma. Rather, it utilizes water, mist, rain and reflection to illustrate the pattern of disturbance and return within traumatic experience. These forms of ecological movement illustrate how trauma can be seen as a field phenomenon between self and environment.

This ecological approach to trauma studies is an extension of the previous one. It emphasizes the role of matter as a bearer of traces of disturbance and the interplay between perception and the world that is perceived. It also corresponds to the posthuman approach to memory, which emphasizes its distributed nature. The manuscript's mandala structure reinforces this view by portraying trauma as cyclical than linear or isolated.

This mode of reading trauma through ecological form offers promise for environmental humanities, literary studies and phenomenology more broadly. It implies that the world has a role in the process of remembrance and that awareness can be cultivated through the gentle return of atmosphere and movement. The manuscript encourages a form of attention that is relational, patient and sensitive to the ways in which the world bears what has been.

Multilingual Lines from The Water That Remembers

Chapter: 1. Still Water English: The water holds its quiet. Chinese: 水心無聲 Japanese: 水は静けさを抱く	Chapter: 5. Rain English: Rain repeats its gentle pattern. Chinese: 雨落成句 Japanese: 雨は静かな句を繰り返す
Chapter: 2. Ripple English: A single ripple moves outward. Chinese: 微波自心起 Japanese: ひとすじの波が広がる	Chapter: 6. Reflection English: The reflection trembles when touched by wind. Chinese: 影隨風動 Japanese: 影は風に触れて揺れる
Chapter: 3. Sound English: A faint sound rises through the field. Chinese: 微聲上浮 Japanese: かすかな音が立ちのぼる	Chapter: 7. Return English: Stillness returns with memory inside it. Chinese: 靜中有記 Japanese: 静けさは記憶を抱いて戻る
Chapter: 4. Mist English: Mist softens the edges of the world. Chinese: 霧氣柔邊 Japanese: 霧が世界の輪郭をやわらげる	

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