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WATER AS WITNESS: ECOPOETIC READINGS OF WATER SCARCITY IN ARABIC POETRY AND SDG 6

Khawlah Abdullah Alammam

Department of English Language and Literature, College of Languages and Translation, Imam Mohammad
Ibn Saud Islamic University, IMSIU, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, kalammar@imamu.edu.sa
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Corresponding Author: Khawlah Abdullah Alammam

ABSTRACT

This article argues that water in the Arabic poetic tradition does not function as image or metaphor alone but as a witnessing agent: a material force that speaks, remembers, warns, and mourns across centuries of verse. Drawing on Blue Humanities theory, vital materialism, and Islamic water ethics, the study reads Arabic poetry from the Jahili period to the contemporary Saudi moment as a longitudinal archive of ecological knowledge about water scarcity. The corpus spans Imru' al-Qays's rain-scene in the Mu'allafa, Abbasid elegies of the Euphrates, the modern water elegies of Mahmoud Darwish and Nizar Qabbani, and contemporary Saudi poetry responding to the Kingdom's acute groundwater crisis. The article contends that this poetic archive encodes what hydrology reports and policy frameworks cannot: the affective, moral, and civilisational stakes of water loss. It situates this argument within Saudi Arabia's National Water Strategy 2030 and Sustainable Development Goal 6, demonstrating how literary testimony can enrich the governance of water and humanise the urgency of conservation. To the best of the author's knowledge, this article offers the first application of Blue Humanities methodology to the full span of the Arabic poetic tradition and positions that tradition as a non-Western resource for global water humanities scholarship.

KEYWORDS: Blue Humanities; Hydro-Poetics; Arabic Ecopoetry; Water Scarcity; SDG 6; Vital Materialism; Islamic Water Ethics; Saudi Arabia; Jahili Poetry; Water Governance.

1. INTRODUCTION: THE WORLD'S DRIEST CIVILISATION AND ITS WETTEST ARCHIVE

There is a paradox at the heart of Arabic literary history. The Arabian Peninsula is among the most water-scarce environments on Earth. In the Wadi Fatima alone, 354 of 360 natural springs have dried up over the last century, and the national groundwater abstraction rate stands at 321 percent of renewable volume (Al-Ibrahim, 1991; UN Water, 2015). Saudi Arabia's non-renewable aquifers, filled during the last Ice Age and irreplaceable on any human timescale, are being drawn down faster than any technology of substitution can compensate. And yet the poetic tradition born in this same desert is one of the most water-haunted in world literature. Rain, river, spring, and flood recur across the Arabic canon with a frequency and intensity that would astonish a reader of the arid poetry of the American Southwest. The question this article asks is not a decorative one: why does the driest civilisation produce the wettest archive, and what has that archive been trying to say?

This article proposes an answer rooted in Blue Humanities theory. The Blue Humanities, developed over the past two decades by scholars including Steve Mentz, John Gillis, and Serpil Oppermann, defines itself as a transdisciplinary inquiry into human-water interactions across socio-cultural, literary, historical, ethical, and ecological registers (Mentz, 2023; Oppermann, 2022). Its governing claim is that water is not a passive backdrop to human life but an active, vibrantly material force that shapes culture, consciousness, and civilisation (Bennett, 2010). For the Blue Humanities, the literary imagination of water is not secondary to the scientific management of water; it is a form of knowledge that captures what hydrology measures and what it cannot. That claim has been elaborated in studies of English maritime writing, Pacific Islander water cultures, Australian desert rivers, and South Asian monsoon poetics. It has not yet been brought to bear on the centuries-long archive of Arabic poetry. This article begins that work.

The stakes of beginning it now are urgent. Saudi Arabia's National Water Strategy 2030, aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 6 on clean water and sanitation, aims to reduce water consumption by 43 percent and increase treated wastewater reuse to 70 percent by 2030 (Al-Rashid, 2022). These are engineering targets, and they are necessary. Yet the strategy's own framing acknowledges that technology alone cannot secure water: public consciousness, ethical commitment, and cultural imagination must be enlisted alongside desalination

plants and irrigation reform (UNDP, 2025). Literature has always been one of the primary media through which cultures form that consciousness. This article argues that Arabic poetry, read through Blue Humanities and Islamic water ethics, is not a historical curiosity but a living resource for the governance challenge of the twenty-first century.

Recent ecocritical scholarship has confirmed that Arabic literary studies remain at an early stage of engagement with environmental humanities methodology (Mohsen et al., 2022). Existing work on water in Arabic poetry has been valuable but methodologically limited. Alardawe's exhaustive phenomenological study of water imagery in Jahili and Andalusian verse applies Bachelard's elemental imagination rather than the ecological or governance frameworks that would link those images to contemporary water crises (Alardawe, 2016). Studies of water symbolism in Umayyad and Abbasid poetry have similarly remained within the bounds of classical Arabic literary criticism, attentive to rhetoric and imagery but not to the material or policy stakes of the waters being described (Ahmed and Mohamed Karim, 2022). The present article does not replace that work. It extends it by asking a new question: what would it mean to read this poetry not as a cultural monument to a vanished landscape but as testimony, delivered across centuries, to the moral and ecological stakes of water?

The argument proceeds in six stages. After establishing the theoretical framework, the article reads Imru' al-Qays's Mu'allāqa as the founding act of Arabic water testimony. It then turns to the Abbasid poets, for whom the great rivers of Mesopotamia became witnesses to imperial grandeur and its erosion. From there it moves to the modern water elegies of Darwish and Qabbani, in which water becomes the medium of dispossession and longing. The fourth analytical movement addresses contemporary Saudi poetry, where the spring has literally disappeared and the poem must mourn what no photograph can adequately capture. The article concludes by placing this poetic testimony in dialogue with SDG 6 and the National Water Strategy 2030, asking what literature knows about water that governance frameworks do not.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: BLUE HUMANITIES, VITAL MATERIALISM, ISLAMIC WATER ETHICS, AND ECOPOETICS

The theoretical architecture of this article rests on four interlocking frameworks, each addressing a distinct dimension of the claim that water witnesses.

Taken together, they enable a reading of Arabic water poetry that is simultaneously ecocritical, materialist, culturally specific, and directly connected to the sustainability discourse in which SDG 6 operates.

The first framework is the Blue Humanities. Steve Mentz, who coined the term 'blue cultural studies' in his 2009 essay 'Toward a Blue Cultural Studies,' and whose framework was further consolidated under the 'Blue Humanities' label, notably by John R. Gillis (2013) and Serpil Oppermann (2022), has argued that the aims of watery literary criticism include both 'describing the complex workings of water in our environment and imagining ways to change our relationships to it' (Mentz, 2023, p. 1). This dual aim, one descriptive and one transformative, distinguishes the Blue Humanities from purely aesthetic approaches to water in literature. It insists that what poets say about water matters for how societies relate to, and are obligated toward, the waters that sustain them. In its more recent formulations, the Blue Humanities has expanded from its original focus on ocean and maritime cultures to encompass freshwater systems, desert hydrology, and the full spectrum of what Oppermann calls 'aquatic troubles in the Anthropocene' (Oppermann, 2022). It is this expanded Blue Humanities, attentive to scarcity as much as to abundance, that the present article applies to the Arabic tradition.

The second framework is Jane Bennett's vital materialism, developed most fully in *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010). Bennett argues that nonhuman matter, including water, possesses what she terms 'thing-power': a lively, recalcitrant agency that resists reduction to mere resource or backdrop (Bennett, 2010, p. viii). Vital materialism refuses to treat nature as inert raw material awaiting human use; it insists on recognising the distributed, entangled agency through which human and nonhuman forces produce events and conditions together. Applied to water, this framework allows the recurrent animation of water in Arabic poetry to be read not as ornamental personification but as a culturally encoded acknowledgment of water's genuine vitality and agency. The way water speaks, judges, remembers, and refuses to be commanded in Arabic verse registers something that vital materialism would recognise as the indifference of matter to human narratives of possession and permanence.

The third framework is Islamic water ethics, centred on the Quranic principles of *Khilafah*

(stewardship) and *Adl* (justice). In Islamic theology, the earth and its resources belong to God; humanity holds them as a trust, an *amanah*, and is accountable for how it exercises that stewardship (Quran, 2:30; 6:165). Water occupies a position of special sanctity within this ethical system. The Prophet Muhammad's injunction, 'Do not waste water, even if you were at the banks of a flowing river' (Sahih, Ibn Majah/Ahmad), establishes conservation not as a policy choice but as a spiritual obligation. This obligation recognises scarcity as the default condition of the created world, not as its failure (Al-Rashid, 2022; Islamic Environmental Ethics, 2025). Transmitted through hadith and encoded in *fiqh* traditions that regulated irrigation, well-sharing, and communal water rights across the Islamic world, this prophetic water ethic constitutes a pre-modern framework for sustainable water governance that anticipates SDG 6 by many centuries (Muslim Heritage, 2024). The Arabic poetic archive, shaped by this ethical culture, can be read as a literary expression and extension of Islamic water ethics, bringing its obligations into the register of feeling, image, and memory.

The fourth framework, and the one that most directly connects literary analysis to sustainability discourse, is *ecopoetics*. *Ecopoetics*, as theorised by Jonathan Skinner, Scott Slovic, and others working at the intersection of literary studies and environmental humanities, examines how poetic form, language, and imagination encode ecological relationships and environmental knowledge (Skinner, 2001; Slovic, 2010). Where *ecocriticism* analyses literature's representation of the environment, *ecopoetics* asks a more precise question: how does the formal structure of a poem, its rhythm, its imagery, its grammar, its silences, constitute a mode of ecological knowing? *Ecopoetics* treats the poem not as a reflection of nature but as a site where human and nonhuman agencies meet and where the costs of environmental loss become legible to feeling as well as to reason. Applied to water scarcity, *ecopoetics* reveals how Arabic poetry encodes hydrological knowledge, ethical obligation, and civilisational memory in ways that statistics and policy reports cannot replicate. This is the analytical method that gives the concept of the water witness its critical substance: it is through *ecopoetic* reading that the poem's testimony becomes available for governance discourse and for the cultural grounding of SDG 6.

These four frameworks work together to enable a reading that avoids two opposing reductions. The first is the reduction of Arabic water imagery to mere symbolism with no referential stake in actual water.

The second is the reduction of contemporary water governance to mere technical management with no need for cultural or ethical grounding. The concept of the water witness names the intersection of these frameworks: water in Arabic poetry is vibrantly material (vital materialism), actively and morally engaged (Islamic water ethics), formally and ecologically knowing (ecopoetics), and critically legible for the governance challenges of our moment (Blue Humanities).

3. THE WITNESSING RAIN: IMRU' AL-QAYS AND THE JAHILI WATER EPISTEMOLOGY

The foundational text of the Arabic poetic canon is also, not coincidentally, a text about water. Imru' al-Qays ibn Hujr al-Kindi's *Mu'allafa*, composed in approximately the mid-sixth century CE and recognised as the first of the seven great suspended odes, culminates in one of the most sustained and precise rain-scenes in world poetry (Imru' al-Qays, trans. Jones, 2011). The poem moves through the scenes of the abandoned encampment, the erotic memory, the night of despair, and the magnificent horse before arriving, finally, at the rain and the torrent. It is this final movement that concerns us here. The rain does not arrive as background weather. It arrives as an event with moral weight, a force that redistributes the landscape, fills the empty wadis, and makes the world habitable again. The poet names the specific places that receive its water: Qatayn, Wadi al-Bady, al-Arid. These are not decorative toponyms; they are testimony to the rain's local, witnessed action in a specific geography (Alardawe, 2016).

What is epistemologically distinctive about Imru' al-Qays's rain is that it constitutes knowledge. The Jahili poet, living in a world without meteorology or hydrology, was his community's primary instrument for recording, transmitting, and interpreting the behaviour of water in an arid landscape. The poem's enumeration of the rain's path, tracing how water moves through the terrain, where it floods, where it drains, which valley fills and which remains dry, is not only beautiful; it is ecologically informative (Mentz, 2023). It preserves, in the medium of verse, the kind of granular knowledge about water movement in a specific landscape that modern hydrological surveys now attempt to capture in numerical data. The difference is that the poem also encodes feeling: the terror of the torrent that strips the trees, the gratitude for the filled wadi, the sense that rain is both gift and judgment. That fusion of ecological information with ethical and affective

register is what Blue Humanities theory identifies as the distinctive contribution of literature to water knowledge, and it is what ecopoetics makes analytically available for governance discourse. Read through vital materialism, the rain in Imru' al-Qays's *Mu'allafa* is not the rain of romantic nature poetry, a benevolent backdrop for human emotion. It is water in its full thing-power: violent, indifferent to human plans, capable of devastation and of restoration in the same moment (Bennett, 2010). The torrent that the poem describes carries away the possessions of the wolf and the ibex alongside human structures; it neither punishes nor rewards, but it redistributes. This redistribution is witnessed, and that witnessing is itself a form of accountability. The poem records what happened to a specific place in a specific season, and in doing so it creates a precedent, a memory, a standard against which the present state of those same places can be measured. When Saudi water managers today note that the springs of Wadi Fatima have dried up (Al-Ibrahim, 1991), they are reporting a failure against a standard that the Jahili poets were already maintaining, in their way, long before the concept of a water crisis was formulated in any policy language.

4. RIVERS OF EMPIRE AND ELEGY: ABBASID POETS AND THE TESTIMONY OF THE EUPHRATES

If the Jahili poets witnessed rain and torrent in a landscape of scarcity, the Abbasid poets of the eighth and ninth centuries wrote in a landscape of apparent abundance. The great rivers of Mesopotamia, the Euphrates and the Tigris, were the hydraulic infrastructure of the Islamic Empire. They fed the irrigation systems that made Baghdad the most populous city on Earth, and they shaped the culture, the economy, and the imagination of the classical Arabic world (Muslim Heritage, 2024; Ibn Khaldun, trans. Rosenthal, 1958). Abu Nuwas, Abu Tammam, and al-Buhturi composed verses in which rivers appear as interlocutors, as repositories of civilisational memory, as witnesses to the rise and fall of empires. When al-Buhturi writes of the Euphrates at the ruins of Ctesiphon, the river is not the setting of the lament; it is its subject, a surviving witness to what human power could build and what time could undo.

This elegiac mode constitutes what the article

terms a river testimony. The Abbasid river poem does not use the river as a symbol of time's passage; it addresses the river as an entity that was present, that saw, and that persists when everything else is gone (Ahmed and Mohamed Karim, 2022). This is vital materialism in practice, centuries before the term existed: the river's thing-power lies in its duration, its continuity across human timescales, its capacity to outlast the cities and empires that drew from it. The river holds a knowledge the archivist does not. It was there when the palace was built and it remains now that the palace is rubble. This epistemic privilege of water over human memory is not an accident of Arabic literary convention but a culturally grounded recognition of what water's temporal scale means for human civilisation.

The Abbasid tradition also encodes a warning that connects directly to the SDG 6 problematic. The rivers that Abu Nuwas celebrates and al-Buhturi mourns were over-exploited in their own time. The irrigation networks that fed the empire eventually contributed to the progressive salinisation of agricultural land and the long-term degradation of Mesopotamian agricultural productivity in the centuries following the height of the Abbasid caliphate, a process documented in modern historical and archaeological scholarship as well as noted by Ibn Khaldun (Ibn Khaldun, trans. Rosenthal, 1958).

Ibn Khaldun, writing in the fourteenth century, understood the relation between water management, agricultural prosperity, and civilisational vitality as one of the fundamental laws of history (Ibn Khaldun, trans. Rosenthal, 1958). The Abbasid river poem, read in retrospect, is testimony to a water-civilisation relation that the poets perceived as inexhaustible but that history would prove finite. Its elegiac register, its address to the river as a survivor of human failures, is a form of knowledge about that finitude that no economic indicator of the time could have produced.

5. WATER AND THE WOUND: QABBANI, DARWISH, AND THE MODERN ARABIC WATER ELEGY

The twentieth century transformed the ecological stakes of Arabic water poetry into political ones, and then into something that resists clean separation into either category. Nizar Qabbani's water imagery condenses into a few extraordinary lines a relationship between water, memory, and language that goes to the heart of what the article means by water as witness. In his poem 'I Wrote on the Wind,' Qabbani writes: 'I wrote on the water / the name of the one I love / I did not know the water / could not remember names' (Qabbani, trans. Foreman, 2009).

Water here refuses the human desire to inscribe, to memorialise, to make permanent. It shows no hospitality to human naming. This refusal is not a failure of water but a truth about it: water's memory is not human memory, and the poem's speaker learns, too late, that he has been writing his love-story on the wrong surface. The ecological resonance is direct and grave. The great aquifers of the Arabian Peninsula do not remember the civilisations that drew from them; they are gone. The springs of Wadi Fatima did not preserve the record of their own disappearance. Water's indifference to human inscription is not poetic melancholy; it is a material fact with policy consequences.

In 'Letter from Under the Sea,' Qabbani pushes the figure further. The speaker is drowning: 'I am breathing under water / I am drowning, / drowning, / drowning' (Qabbani, trans. Mezyed, 2013). Water here has passed from indifferent surface to consuming element. The submersion is simultaneously erotic, existential, and ecological: a figure for the condition of a culture that has lost its relationship to water as a gift and entered a relationship to water as a medium of disappearance. Mentz's Blue Humanities concept of the 'submersion of the hero,' in which the encounter with water dismantles the fantasy of human mastery and control, resonates powerfully with Qabbani's drowned speaker (Mentz, 2024). The poem enacts, in lyric form, what Saudi Arabia is now confronting in hydrological fact: the realisation that the water which seemed inexhaustible has its own timetable, and that timetable does not accommodate human plans.

Mahmoud Darwish approaches water from the angle of territorial loss and exile. The Mediterranean Sea, for Darwish, is the medium of forced departure; the river is the boundary of the homeland; water is what lies between the self and the place that made the self (Jonsson, 2024; Talukder and Ali, 2025). In poem after poem, Darwish gives water a witnessing function: the sea saw the departure, the river marks the border, the rain falls on a landscape that no longer recognises its occupant. The most sustained ecocritical study of Darwish's work reads his natural imagery as 'eco-resistance,' a refusal, through the testimony of a still-present landscape, to accept the erasure of Palestinian habitation and memory (Talukder and Ali, 2025). Water, in Darwish's poetics, is the most reliable witness because it cannot be expelled. It crosses borders without permission, and it accumulates in the aquifer regardless of who claims title to the land above. Its testimony is therefore both ecological and political: a ground-level refutation of the claim that absence means non-existence.

Together, Qabbani and Darwish establish a modern Arabic poetics of water in which the element has moved from abundance to scarcity, from gift to wound, from celebration to elegy. This transition is not a literary one alone; it corresponds to the actual hydrological trajectory of the Arab world in the twentieth century, a trajectory shaped by population growth, agricultural intensification, oil-economy transformations of land use, and the progressive depletion of the fossil aquifers that had underwritten the region's water security. The modern Arabic water elegy is, in this reading, a form of cultural early warning: a literary record of loss that preceded, or ran parallel to, the scientific documentation of that same loss.

6. THE SCARCITY SUBLIME: CONTEMPORARY SAUDI POETRY AND THE DISAPPEARING SPRING

Contemporary Saudi poetry engages the water crisis at the point where the metaphorical and the literal are no longer distinguishable. The landscape that Imru' al-Qays described, the wadis that filled with rain, the springs that gave a name to a valley, the specific topography of water's passage through the Peninsula, is now a landscape of documented disappearance. Saudi Arabia's 2023 water accounts show that non-renewable groundwater abstraction, though declining, still supplies 62 percent of the national water from natural resources, while renewable groundwater represents only 21 percent (GASTAT, 2023). Per-capita household water consumption stands at 102.1 liters per day, below the regional average but still dependent on a resource being drawn down irreversibly (GASTAT, 2023). Desalinated seawater production has risen by 31 percent and now constitutes 50 percent of the distributed water supply, signalling a civilisational transition: the Kingdom is shifting from the water that fell in its own geology to water manufactured by energy-intensive technology (GASTAT, 2023). This transformation is profound, and the Kingdom's poetry has begun to register it.

Among the most significant Saudi voices engaging this transformation is the poet Ibrahim al-Husain, whose collection *Ghayth al-Sahra* (Rain of the Desert) meditates on the vanishing of the seasonal rains that once defined the rhythms of life in the Najd. In poem after poem, al-Husain records not the rain itself but its absence: the dried wadi-bed, the cracked earth, the name of a spring that no longer flows. Similarly, the poet Hissa Hilal, known internationally for her performances at the Million's

Poet contest, has written of the springs of her ancestral region as moral presences whose drying-up constitutes a form of civilisational testimony. For both poets, the spring that has disappeared does not simply represent water scarcity; it embodies a broken covenant between the community and the landscape that sustained it. This elegiac mode connects directly to the scarcity sublime discussed below.

The Saudi poetic response to water scarcity can be characterised as a scarcity sublime: an aesthetic mode in which the thing that once inspired awe through its power, the flood, the torrent, the spring, now inspires awe through its absence. The disappeared spring creates a particular kind of lyric space: the poem must describe what is no longer there, using a language shaped by centuries of describing what was. The Jahili qasida begins at the abandoned encampment, the *atlat*, the ruins of the beloved's dwelling. The contemporary Saudi water poem begins, in a structural rhyme with that tradition, at the abandoned spring, the place where water was and is not. This formal echo is epistemological rather than nostalgic. The *atlat* convention in classical Arabic poetry is not a lament for the past alone but a method of reading the present through the traces of the past, of making visible, through absence, what was once present and what its loss means. Contemporary Saudi poets who engage with water scarcity inherit this method and give it a new and urgent object.

This poetic engagement with scarcity also activates the Islamic water ethics embedded in the tradition. The prophetic injunction against water waste, already embedded in the culture's deepest formation, takes on a retroactive force when read against the statistics of aquifer depletion: the waste has been committed, not in the daily ritual of ablution but in the structural decisions of agricultural policy and economic development. The Quranic question, 'Is it you who brought it down from the clouds, or is it We who bring it down?' (Quran 56:68-70), acquires a new register in a world where the Kingdom's drinking water comes from desalination plants rather than from rain or spring. The poem that meditates on this shift is not expressing personal grief alone; it is registering a civilisational accountability, a reckoning with what it means to have drawn an aquifer to exhaustion in a few decades that it took the Ice Age to fill.

7. WATER AS POLICY WITNESS: SDG 6

AND WHAT POETRY KNOWS

Sustainable Development Goal 6 calls for universal access to safe water and sanitation, substantially increased water-use efficiency, and improved water-quality management by 2030 (UN General Assembly, 2015). Saudi Arabia's National Water Strategy 2030 translates these global targets into national ones: a 43-percent reduction in water consumption, a 70-percent rate of treated wastewater reuse, reduced dependence on non-renewable groundwater, and expanded desalination infrastructure (Al-Rashid, 2022; UNDP, 2025). These are measurable, technical, and necessary goals. What this article has been arguing is that they are insufficient, not in engineering terms, but in civilisational ones. A society that commits to water conservation only because its policy frameworks require it is more fragile than one that commits to it because its deepest cultural formations, its poetry, its religious ethics, its collective memory, regard water as a trust, a witness, and a moral obligation.

The contribution of Arabic poetry to this civilisational grounding is specific and practical. The Blue Humanities has argued that literary water knowledge operates on registers that scientific and policy frameworks cannot easily access: the affective register of what water loss feels like, the ethical register of what it means, the temporal register of how long it has been happening (Mentz, 2023; Oppermann, 2022). Qabbani's drowning speaker, Darwish's witnessing river, Imru' al-Qays's rain-chronicle: each of these encodes a form of knowledge about the relationship between humans and water that a water accounts publication cannot. The groundwater depletion statistic tells us that 354 of 360 springs in Wadi Fatima have dried up; the Jahili poem tells us what those springs meant, what their presence enabled, and what it cost to lose them. Both forms of knowledge are needed. Policy without cultural grounding tends toward short-term compliance rather than long-term commitment; culture without a policy framework tends toward beautiful lamentation without structural change. The concept of the water witness insists on holding both together.

This article therefore proposes that the integration of ecopoetic literacy into water education and water governance discourse, in Saudi Arabia and the broader Arab world, is not an aesthetic recommendation but a strategic one. The National Water Strategy 2030's own acknowledgment of the need for public consciousness and cultural imagination points toward this integration (UNDP, 2025). Reading Imru' al-Qays's rain-scene not only as

a literary monument but as an ecological archive, teaching Qabbani's water elegies not only as love poems but as records of a civilisational relationship to a finite resource, using Darwish's witnessing rivers in curricula about environmental humanities and SDG 6: these are acts of humanistic water governance. They draw on a resource that is, remarkably, inexhaustible, namely the centuries-long testimony of a poetic tradition that has been attending to water, in all its vitality and all its precariousness, since long before the concept of a water crisis was formulated in any policy language.

8. CONCLUSIONS: THE POEM AT THE EMPTY SPRING

This article has argued that Arabic poetry, read through the converging lenses of Blue Humanities theory, vital materialism, Islamic water ethics, and ecopoetics, constitutes a uniquely valuable archive of ecological knowledge about water scarcity. It is an archive that spans fourteen centuries, traverses the full range of water's affective, ethical, and material meanings, and is rooted in one of the world's most acute hydrological environments. The figure of the water witness, developed through readings of Imru' al-Qays, the Abbasid river elegists, Nizar Qabbani, Mahmoud Darwish, and the contemporary Saudi poetic engagement with disappearing springs, names what this archive has been doing all along: bearing testimony, in the medium of verse, to the vitality, the indifference, the generosity, and the finitude of water.

The methodological contribution of the article is twofold. First, it extends the Blue Humanities into the Arabic tradition for the first time, demonstrating that the methodology's core claims about the agency of water, the ecological knowledge embedded in literary form, and the transformative potential of water-centred criticism are not culture-specific but genuinely planetary (Mentz, 2023; Oppermann, 2022). The Arabic tradition brings to this planetary project something that Euro-American Blue Humanities lacks: an ancient, continuous, and culturally specific ethics of water rooted in Islamic stewardship theology, one that connects the individual poem to centuries-long discourse of water as divine trust and human responsibility. Second, the article establishes a model for what it calls ecopoetic governance literacy: the integration of literary water knowledge into the cultural grounding of policy frameworks such as SDG 6 and the National Water Strategy 2030. This model does not subordinate poetry to policy; it argues that each domain holds knowledge the other cannot fully access, and that the

most durable water governance is one that draws on both.

The image that closes this article is taken from the tradition itself. The poem that begins at the *atlatl*, the ruins of the beloved's dwelling, does not end there. It moves through loss toward the question of what persists, what survives absence, and what remains when everything that was present is gone. The Arabic water poem asks that question of the spring.

The spring may be gone from Wadi Fatima, from the wadis of Najd, from the riverbeds of a changing Arabian Peninsula. But the poem remains, and in remaining it holds the spring's testimony open: here was water, here was life, here is what it cost to lose them, and here is the obligation that loss imposes on everyone who reads. That is what it means, finally, for water to be a witness.

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