



**WATER CONTROL AND HUMAN VULNERABILITY:  
BLUE HUMANITIES AND ECO-MATERIALIST STUDY OF  
*ELEGY, SOUTHWEST***

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**Abstract**

Human desire to dominate nature has left significant ecological and emotional impacts, especially in areas that were influenced by the massive hydraulic engineering. This study explores the vulnerability of contemporary water systems like dams, reservoirs, and man-made waterways and the ecological stresses that emerge due to the manipulation of water systems over the long term. This paper discusses how engineered landscapes transform not only the ecosystems but the emotional and bodily experiences of people who inhabit the transformed landscapes through a close textual examination of the novel. Based on the theoretical frameworks of the blue humanities and the eco-materialist theory, the study aims to reveal the overlaps between the environmental decline and embodied vulnerability, showing that grief, illness, emotional breakage, and physical feelings reflect the emptiness and unsteadiness of the broken water systems. This work makes a contribution to the field of environmental humanities and provides a critical perception of how hydrological degradation is material and emotionalized by disclosing these profound entanglements between the ecological and corporeal conditions.

**Keywords:** *Blue Humanities, Control, Dams, Embodiment, Eco-Materialism, Environmental Humanities, Grief, Reservoirs, Water*

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## 1. Introduction

Environmental instability is one of the new realities of the current age when water shortages, pollution, and deteriorating infrastructure are indicators of an expanding ecological crisis (UN-Water, 2023; Latour, 2017). The strains exerted on hydrological systems are not abrupt like sudden disasters, but may be long term through extraction, depletion and artificial manipulation (Nixon, 2011). The blue humanities scholars have noted that water possesses its own histories and ecological periods, which are often not obvious in the mainstream. To Steve Mentz, water bodies do not conform to cultural values of permanence and normality but instead illustrate a state of flux, turbulence and change (Mentz, 2015, 2020).

This susceptibility is directly related to human efforts to control and govern water, a trend woven into human policy, infrastructures and contemporary imaginaries, which are predicated upon stabilizing environments, using artificial means. As shown by Richard White in his work about the engineering of rivers and Donald Worster in his work about hydraulic societies, these kinds of interventions have their basis in ideologies of mastery that transform not only the landscapes, but the communities as well (White, 1995; Worster, 1985). The current hydraulic power is based on an illusion that all things can be managed forever, and the impact of ecological disturbance is hidden until the system starts to break down.

These themes are addressed in the novel in question as it introduces water as a dynamic element which shows the pressure of the past, the failure in the infrastructure and emotional disturbances. The story anticipates the boundaries of human agency and the environmental implications of interventions undertaken over an extended period through the use of images of artificial reservoirs, the receding shoreline, artificial waterways and human experience of water. Based on the blue humanities and the eco-materialist concept, this study will discuss how the novel approaches water with a sense of instability, memory, and ecological instability as well as follow the ways bodies and environment become intertwined based on shared vulnerability.

### 1.1 Research Objectives

1. To analyze *Elegy, Southwest* (2025) as a critique of human efforts to dominate water by building dams, reservoirs and manufactured landscapes, exposing the historical and ecological instability inherent in contemporary hydraulic systems.
2. To examine how the novel exposes the cultural, spiritual and political aspects of slow violence by demonstrating how the rhetoric of modernity of revival masks more intrinsic moral and ecological decay.

### 1.2 Research Questions

1. How the instability and ecological pressure within engineered water systems such as dams, reservoirs and artificial waterways is portrayed in the novel?

2. How does the novel present the connection between bodily vulnerability and hydrological change, and how do this overlap reflect broader ecological conflict?

## 2. Literature Review

Environmental criticism has grown enormously over the last twenty years, past the land-based landscapes it has come to focus on oceans, rivers, and engineered waterscapes as the key locations of ecological investigation. This has been influenced majorly by the rise of the blue humanities, a discipline that prefigures the material, cultural and ecological importance of water.

One of the pioneers of this movement is Steve Mentz. He states that in *Shipwreck Modernity* (2015), the waterscapes contest human mastery narratives with circumstances characterized by uncertainty, drifting and instability. To Mentz, aquatic environments show the boundary of control that the modern societies seek to impose on nature and the dynamic and unpredictable nature of ecological systems. His later composition, *Ocean* (2020), builds up on this stream of thought by suggesting that water is to be perceived as a force that influences culture, memory and ecological consciousness.

A further imperative addition to this discussion is the works by Christina Sharpe whose work *In the Wake* (2016) explores the ocean as a location of historical memory, trauma, and environmental force. Despite basing his arguments on the Black studies, Sharpe has become significant in the blue humanities to demonstrate how water contains histories that cannot be told in a linear manner. The fact that she focuses on the ocean as something that bears remnants of violence in the past makes more sense on the point that water environments are never neutral or vacant. Rather, they are zones of ecological pressures as well as cultural pasts and corporal vulnerabilities.

This direction is reinforced by the scholarship of Stacy Alaimo who focuses on the bodily aspect of environmental relations. She presents an idea of trans-corporeality in *Bodily Natures* (2010) which explains that bodies and environments are linked and connected to one another via common exposures and flows. Water occupies a major role in this structure. Regardless of contamination, immersion or daily interaction, water connects human bodies to greater ecological events, and the instability of the environment is felt in a material way. Her subsequent *Exposed* (2016) carries this argument onward into how toxic materials are transported across frontiers, where it further brings out the permeability between the human and nonhuman worlds. Such conceptions are especially relevant to get acquainted with how hydrological degradation reveals on an ecological and corporeal level.

Eco-materialist turn of ecocriticism builds upon these by stating that matter is also endowed with agency and takes part in the creation of meaning. In *Vibrant Matter* (2010), Jane Bennett suggests that it is the nonhuman substances (water, metals, chemicals and infrastructures, etc.) that exercise power and influence the social worlds. By noting the

role played by materials in the determination of political and ecological results, Bennett dispels anthropocentric assumptions. Her work plays a key role in the analysis of water as a force of action and not as a passive background agent.

The material ecocriticism as formulated by Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann in *Material Ecocriticism* (2014) supports this perspective by stating that matter is storified. The physical surroundings, such as rivers, reservoirs, and so on, carry with them stories in a material form. Such processes as erosion, decay, contamination and flow are the means of expressing these stories, which are indicative of the historical and ecological pressures. According to material ecocriticism, the critique of environmental change would mean listening to the narratives of landscape and substance as such.

In environmental humanities, researchers too discussed how infrastructures can define ecological-cultural relationships. In *The Organic Machine* (1995), Richard White provides his historical narrative of how the Columbia River transformed into a hybrid between natural power and industrial energy with the formation of dams and river engineering. White depicts that hydraulic projects are based on ideologies of mastery and progress, but they produce new ecological stresses and vulnerabilities. Equally, Donald Worster, in *Rivers of Empire* (1985) examines the emergence of what he terms a hydraulic societies in which massive water systems of water management are turned into an instrument of economic and political influence. His work brings out the way the effort to control water in form of dams, canals and irrigation redefine the landscapes as well as social structures.

These ideas are extended by such contemporary infrastructure scholars as Stephanie LeMenager and Christopher F. Jones. In *Living Oil* (2014), LeMenager focuses on cultural and ecological impacts of petro-infrastructure, which, she claims, define how people live their daily lives, both emotionally and materially, through energy and water systems. In *Routes of Power* (2014), Jones explores ways of energy corridors and industrial waterways being cultural systems, transforming environments and unevenly distributing ecological burdens. Through these works, it is possible to observe that the built systems have a huge effect on ecological change and environmental experience.

Rob Nixon also touches upon the idea of slow ecological processes, and the theory of slow violence in *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011) explains why this type of harm is hard to represent, and its consequences may result in decades of damage to the environment. Although Nixon is not presenting only a work on water systems, it highlights the significance of telling a story to transform the slow ecological change into a perceivable cultural and emotional reality. His observations regarding representational issues go in line with the academic opinion that literature is an important arena where environments are expressed in ways that would otherwise be invisible to common society.

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1 Research Approach

This paper uses a hydro critical methodology based on the blue humanities and eco-materialist theory in order to interpret *Elegy, Southwest* (2025) by Madeleine Watts. It is analyzed in terms of how the story is a critique of contemporary efforts to dominate water by building dams, reservoirs and engineered landscapes. The blue humanities, and specifically the works of Steve Mentz (2015, 2020), theorize water as a fluid force which disrupts the discourses of certainty and control. This is in line with the way the novel constantly predicts the instability of water even on the part of human beings. The theory of trans-corporeality as proposed by Stacy Alaimo highlights the fact that the body itself is physically influenced by environmental factors, such as chemicals, drought and exposure (Alaimo, 2010). Coexisting with this, eco-materialist theory lays emphasis on the agency of the matter and infrastructures in the construction of ecological experience. Nonhuman substances are vibrant and influential, and Jane Bennett (2010) claims, whereas Iovino and Oppermann (2014) describe matter as containing embedded narratives in it. These frameworks combined allow the study to subject the novel depiction of the water systems and hydraulic infrastructures as ecological sites of tension, instability and resistance, where the environmental destruction is simultaneously material and cultural in its manifestation

#### 3.2 Blue Humanities: Water, Memory and Instability

Blue humanities build on the ecocriticism approach of putting water at the center of ecological and cultural meaning. Mentz (2015) suggests that conditions of uncertainty and drift that characterize human relations to nature are exposed in aquatic environments. In this perspective, water does not tolerate confinement and shows the boundaries of the developmental control. This method is important to a novel that is about hazardous reservoirs, irrigation politics and drought cycles.

Christina Sharpe (2016) adds to this stream of thoughts, stating that water is used as a medium of memory and history. Water can hold reminiscence of both human and nonhuman experiences over time, such as trauma and displacement, to Sharpe. Repeated mention of the historical flooding, failed water projects/ inherited ecological damage in the novel agrees with such a point of view, and there it is demonstrated that the crises of the present are connected to the exploitation of the past.

Alaimo (2010) goes on to note that bodies and waters are mixed up in the context of exposure, immersion and toxicity. The impact of environmental damage is felt through narrative as an experience and not as remote information. This study can therefore anticipate through the blue humanities how this novel depicts the unstable nature of water, as something historically filled and beyond human control.

### **3.3 Eco-Materialism: Matter, Infrastructure and Environmental Forces**

Eco-materialist ecocriticism extends the environmental analysis through acknowledging the agency of the matter and built systems. Bennett (2010) states that the processes of water, chemicals and infrastructures are involved in the process of forming results and refutes purely anthropocentric explanations of environmental change. Reservoirs and dams are not silent constructions but risk generating forces that create scarcity and collapse as manifested in *Elegy, Southwest*.

Ecocritics Iovino and Oppermann (2014) contend that landscapes and objects are storied, i.e. that various natural and engineered landscapes are carrier of ecological histories, including extraction, drought and contamination. This is the core idea to the reading of hydraulic infrastructures in the novel as the places where the environmental pressure and human desire meet. The political dominance and economic desire of hydraulic development, specifically in settler-colonial areas, is also stated by water infrastructure historians Donald Worster (1985) and Richard White (1995). Their results support the criticism of the novel on the human efforts to subdue water in dry places. This theoretical ground contributes to the interpretation of the novel where matter performs, responds and becomes unstable - disclosing unintentional and protracted ecological effects.

### **3.4 Literature as Environmental Witness**

The scholarship of environmental humanities highlights the capacity of literature to constitute materialized ecological crises that are gradual and distributed across time and space. According to Mentz (2020), the instability and changeability of water systems can be made visible with the help of narrative forms. Alaimo (2010) argues that fiction enables the environmental exposure to be identified as an inherent experience. Narrative also allows the expression of forces, which unravel gradually with time. Nixon (2011) notes that fiction is able to expose environmental damages that cannot be perceived by the spectacle-filled politics, thus the temporal scale and emotional experience into ecological revelation is central in discovery. This makes literature a witness of hydraulic decline, fragility of infrastructure and ecological misery that would otherwise be unnoticed. This paper relies on these theoretical frameworks in exploring how *Elegy, Southwest* has employed storytelling to reflect water as not being a controlled resource but instead, being a volatile agent whose agency reveals the environmental vulnerability and instability of human power.

## **4. Discussion and Analysis**

### **4.1 Hydraulic Control and Environmental Instability**

The novel introduces the human attempts to dominate water as one of the main contradictions that the aspiration to mastery faces fluid, unpredictable reality of hydrological systems. During the story, dams, reservoirs, and man-made waterways are never presented as solutions but rather as tangible manifestations of human fears, dreams

and disappointments. The narrator repeatedly goes back to these structures with a combination of awe, discomfort and critical assessment and reveals how hydraulic projects in the modern world are all shaky constructions made of loose ecological theories.

Her (narrator's) trip to the Hoover Dam is not presented as a sightseeing trip, but is more of an emotional and even spiritual experience. At the beginning of the story, she confesses, "I couldn't say when it was that I got into my head that the Hoover Dam—the entire Colorado River—were sites worthy of a kind of pilgrimage" (Watts, 2025, p. 6). This sentence is a revelation of a significant aspect of the method of the novel: the dam has a symbolic role, it is a place where the individual desire meets the disputed historical accounts and environmental conflicts. The narrator, by referring to it as a pilgrimage, recognizes that there is more than meets the eye here, that she is drawn to a building that is symbolic of a technological promise and a violation of nature.

This admiration and discomfort are made very clear in the scene where she first visits Lake Mead. She tells us how she reacted in very emotional terms: "ahead of us was Lake Mead, and I felt tears in my eyes. The impossible blue wonder of all that water in the middle of all that desert" (Watts, 2025, p. 7). The phrase "impossible blue wonder" is contradictory and reflects the unnatural beauty of the reservoir that is not characteristic of the desert. It is artificial in its brilliance and is supported by a system of extraction which covers the ecological violence under the carpet. The tears which she experiences are not merely the tears which the beauty will generate but rather the complex awareness that the scene itself is awe-inspiring and ecologically dissonant. This emotional instability is an expression of instability inherent in engineered waterscapes.

The novel makes this criticism even more profound by situating hydraulic infrastructure in a historical context. The narrator directly challenges the history of William Mulholland, the man who made Los Angeles to have an early water empire by making a straightforward statement: "So Mulholland stole the river" (Watts, 2025, p. 61). These lines encapsulate a whole history of water stealing and imperialist seizing into a single declarational sentence. The theft is reflected in the notorious line, "He said, There it is. Take it" (Watts, 2025, p. 61). This statement represents the arrogance of hydraulic modernity that states that nature can be seized, diverted, and exploited. But this mythology is quickly complicated in the story through the observation, "Los Angeles just kept growing, and so did the need for water" (Watts, 2025, p. 61). In this case, development turns into a kind of self-reinforcing process, such that it constantly requires further extraction. The unfathomable growth of the city is not presented as a progress, it is the unstoppable consumption that guarantees the crisis of the city itself.

This crisis is further demonstrated when the narrator reveals the assumption of a faulty science that was incorporated into these massive hydraulic projects. She reminds us; "their math had been wrong—the years used as data points were the wettest since the

1400s” (Watts, 2025, p. 77). This sentence reveals the epistemological weakness of the very foundation of the dam. New climatic patterns did not just take over the hydraulic system but the hydraulic system was constructed on inaccurate data in the first place. It was always an illusion of the stable water supply as a misconception of environmental history that created infrastructures bound to fail.

The effects of such miscalculation are visible all over the landscape. Among the most disheartening situations is the one when the narrator sees the ecological disaster at the river delta: “there’s no fresh water from the Colorado flowing into its mouth anymore. It’s hard for anything to survive in all the salt. The vaquita are on the verge of extinction” (Watts, 2025, p. 77). This text highlights the fact that the evils of hydraulic expansion are much wider than the reservoir or the dam itself. Salinity and depletion have not only changed ecosystems but also drove whole species to their death. The gradual extinction of the vaquita is a part of a larger ecological tragedy that is not built up by a catastrophe but rather a gradual decline in the life of a river.

Even in instances where the narrator comes across the official narratives of the dam, she challenges its authority. The visitor center diorama is sure about it: “The only solution to the problem was to construct a dam to eliminate the cycles of flood and drought” (Watts, 2025, p. 9). This assertion portrays the ideology of mastery that forms the basis of hydraulic modernity that thinks that nature can be domesticated using engineering. It is, however, in subtle ways that the skepticism of the narrator comes out. She overhears the tour guide give her the numbers on reservoir capacity, but hears her partner whisper to her: “How current do you think those numbers are? you asked me. I shrugged” (Watts, 2025, p. 9). The shrug is an indication of a break in institutional discourses and real life. What is being introduced as something consistent and eternal is actually old-fashioned, weak, and has already passed across the river of ecological transformation.

The novel underlines this weakness by referring to the phrase of ‘deadpool’, which prophesize the incoming collapse of the whole system: “there was a very real danger the dam would reach deadpool in the next few years—that was the word to describe what will happen when the water sinks below the intakes” (Watts, 2025, p. 154). The term ‘deadpool’ does not merely represent low water, but the stage where the dam is not able to operate. It is the termination of the illusionary control. This concrete that seems to be immovable nature suddenly turns out to be fragile and relies on the natural resource that is fading away.

The ideological discourse of ‘usefulness’ adds to this disclosure of infrastructural vulnerability. The narrator remembers the slogans of the visitor center that said that the dam was constructed “to reclaim the land from flood and drought... to make it useful” (Watts, 2025, p. 10). The term ‘to make it useful’ shows the utilitarian worldview that

influenced the water policy in the West a worldview that simplifies land to productivity and refutes ecological complexity. The fact that the narrator keeps circling the word useful is indicative of her opposition to this reasoning, by which she exposes the level of violence concealed behind the words of utility and enhancement.

This criticism is further supported by the story with its appeal to John Wesley Powell, whose warning, “I tell you gentlemen you are piling up a heritage of conflict and litigation over water rights, for there is not enough water to supply the land” (Watts, 2025, p. 60), is a counter-voice of the triumphalism of hydraulic expansion. It is a painful revelation that Powell makes, but the problem of water scarcity, conflict and mismanagement did not emerge out of thin air but rather it was an inevitable consequence of the extractive system that was being created. His caution throws light at the long-term effects of disregard of ecological boundaries.

Besides, these ecological impacts are also expressed in the narrator’s observations of the river itself. Her simple remarks, “There was not enough water running in the River anymore” (Watts, 2025, p. 8), has a chilling simplicity. It does not just indicate reduced flow, but also acknowledgement that the river has now turned into a ghost of its own. In the next part, when she observes “a small, controlled stretch of river” near Yuma, the word ‘controlled’ highlights the fact that what has been left of the river is not natural anymore but is instead controlled, tamed, and framed within the confines of human activity.

The novel carries this criticism over to the urban terrain of California, speaking of “the streams and creeks and canals, the artificial lakes, the salty blue miracle of the Pacific edging up against so much desert” (Watts, 2025, p. 6). The combination of the words miracle and artificial and desert offers a contrast of the paradox of keeping green, water-consuming surroundings in a dry place. The text shows the precariousness and emotional contradiction of living in a place where water is everywhere and unachievable at the same time. All these moments present a picture of hydraulic modernity as a system of contradiction in the novel. Dams and reservoirs can seem to be the symbols of control, but the reality of their existence displays significant ecological fragility. Monumental buildings that are set to provide stability give shape to the landscape that is threatened by the same environmental pressures they are meant to control.

#### **4.2. Bodily Vulnerability, Grief, and Ecological Strain**

The novel further expands on its discussion of environmental instability by revealing the ways bodies, especially bodies subject to emotional, physical or psychological stress, reflect the vulnerability of damaged hydrological systems. Heat, exhaustion, grief, nightmares, dread are used throughout the narrative, not as a personal experience, but as a somatic reader of environmental change. The text makes a strong hydro-corporeal analogy, by associating the bodily experiences with the ecological stress,

where the body is the continuation of the landscape and its pressures are consumed and reflected in the body.

Perhaps one of the most eloquent demonstrations of this relationship can be seen in the way the narrator is exposed to the desert. She describes the physiological runaway which takes place in extreme heat that we would start to sweat: as our core temperatures would rise, we would sweat even more; as we could not replenish all the fluid we would quickly use up, our core temperatures would only rise further (Watts, 2025, p. 6). This excerpt depicts the way the human body gets set into the process of depletion that resembles hydrological cycles of the desert. The same way a reservoir is emptied quicker than it can be filled is the same way the body is emptied quicker than it can be refilled. The incapacity to replenish is same attribute shared between the environment and the body.

This hydro-corporeal parallel is supported in the narrative through the portrayal of death in the desert. According to the narrator, the remains discovered there had a smell of the putrid green meatiness of death. Dehydration, exposure, and heat influence the decomposition and the irony is that all these factors are directly related to a shortage of water. This is the contribution of the body to the revelation of the violence of the environment, as bleached shoreline and receding lines of reservoir reveal hydrological collapse. The deadly effects of such conditions are reinforced by the warning of Mariana: “Don’t be a tourist in the desert. That’s how people die” (Watts, 2025, p. 35) The line accentuates the ability of the desert to engulf the unprepared body. Death is not treated as an outcome of personal mistake but as a structural consequence of getting into a landscape that is characterized by scarcity, heat and instability. It is not that the body is weak, the environment is hostile and this makes the body vulnerable.

This physical vulnerability to the environmental states carries over as the narrator transitions out of the open desert into the city. Looking at a small stream, she confesses, “I had no idea where that trickle of water was going” (p. 43). The ambiguity of the path of water is similar to the ambiguity of the people in her emotional state. Precarity is left a mark on both the body and water, which move without direction, lose their presence, and cannot maintain themselves completely. The trickle is turned into a metaphor of exhausted emotional stocks and is a reminder of the vulnerability of the urban hydrological system. Her reaction to the practice of irrigation also links bodily consciousness and ecological criticism. She is struck by the sight of “Sprinklers watering a luridly green lawn. In the middle of the day? And with what water?” (p. 43). The question is not rhetorical because it expresses corporal pain. Waste is a physical agitator, repeating her reaction to heat and her fear. Ecological infraction creates a somatic response that supports the argument of the text that the instability of the environment is experienced through the body.

The nightmares of the partner further shedding light on this emotional breakage. According to the narrator, “The only place that the dead exist is in our memories” (Watts, 2025, p. 123). The memory, as a kind of reservoir, is a limited space, which can run dry, spill over or degenerate with time. Grief has been introduced as a form of emotional drought as it is a draining of internal resources which is comparable to the draining of the water systems. The weakness of memory is similar to the weakness of rivers and lakes.

This emotional rupture is further illuminated through the partner’s nightmares. The narrator explains: “You often had screaming nightmares, and many times I shook you out of those dreams” (p. 122). The unnoticeable forces that surface during sleep are similar to the unknown stresses that build up in the hydrological mechanisms. The mind is like a failing reservoir in that it contains tensions and only when a certain point is reached can these tensions manifest themselves. Nightmares are internal drought cracks, which expose the deeper fissures. This identification is solidified by the fact that the narrator admits that he always felt fear: “It makes me feel dread.... I just feel the same dread I did my whole childhood” (Watts, 2025, p. 144). Dread does not refer to the one time experience but the climate; ambient, recurring, atmospheric. The analogy to childhood makes it clear that the cycles of emotional patterns are reproducible just like the droughts of different decades. The environment is unstable and is recalled by the body like the historical water lost by the landscapes.

The element of heat is an invariable factor that connects both bodily and environmental experience. When the narrator recalls that I was nevertheless dripping sweat (p.43), the sweat serves as a kind of microcosmic image of evaporation. The loss of moisture in the body is an involuntary process that resembles reservoirs that lose water in hot weather. The body itself turns into a climatic zone, which is formed by the same forces as the landscape. The most intimate hydro-corporeal metaphor in the novel is the massage scene. The narrator notes: “The waves began in your hips” (p. 70). The flow of the waves in the body is similar to the flow of water in the stressed systems-surges, releases, currents. Sensation turns hydrological. The metaphor brings the healing of body and the ecological instability under the same textual language to show how intertwined two are.

Finally, when writing about death, the narrator writes: “I read what they said had truly happened to her body in dying” (p. 144). This effort of understanding bodily demise resembles efforts of understanding the ecological breakdown. The same way that scientific explanation cannot bring a river to life after it is dried, reading about the last moments of a body cannot bring death back. Both processes do not allow narrative closure, throwing boundaries to human comprehension.

Combining all these experiences of the body together heat, sweat, nightmares, grief, dread, the novel builds a very strong case of how humans and surroundings are permeable to each other. Bodies and landscapes react to the same pressures, are as subject

to the same depletions, and exhibit the same vulnerabilities. The story demonstrates how emotional and physical feelings reveal themselves to be readable signs of ecological stress using these ties to demonstrate a common pattern of exposure and displacement both in human and hydrological systems.

## 5. Conclusion

This study attempts to investigate the ecological instability inherent in the novel world of dams, reservoirs, and engineered landscapes and analyses how such environmental forces converge with the vulnerability of human bodies, memory, and emotional life. Through the perspective of the blue humanities and the eco-materialist theory, the study manages to unveil how the contemporary hydraulic systems that are built to create order to a chaotic force are revealed as precarious systems that are anchored on imperfect assumptions and extractive ideologies. Simultaneously, the condition of bodily weakness, sorrow, and emotional disconnection become highly interwoven with the condition of ecological degradation and demonstrate that environmental instability is not externalized, but somatically and psychologically experienced.

The main focus of this study is critique of hydraulic modernity that is inherent in how the novel describes the Hoover Dam, Lake Mead, and the larger Colorado River system. The text breaks down the myth of mastery because it reveals the construction of these great infrastructures based on faulty information, political ambition, and denial of the environmental constraints. What the narrator thought of as a personal pilgrimage turns into is a confrontation with dwindling reservoirs, versus diminished river flows, versus history and cautionary signs of warnings historically neglected. This paper has revealed that the current crisis is not accidental but a natural result of choices based on conquest and denial.

Another crucial aspect is the continued emphasis on the body as a place of ecological tension in the novel. The body is depicted as permeable, sensitive to external pressure, and scenes of sweating, heat exhaustion, dread, grief, and emotional rupture depict it. The dehydration cycles, the panic caused by the water scarcity, and the revival of the childhood fear depict the ways in which people physically internalize ecological stress. Even memory and grief adhere to the logic of scarcity; it flows, wears, breaks in similar ways as the river in its turn, and they develop similar shapes of depletion.

All in all, these observations show that the novel makes the dual crisis of engineered water systems and embodied vulnerability especially acute. It reveals the ideological background of hydraulic engineering and reveals how the ramifications are reflected back through personal physical and emotional experiences. Finally, the research claims that not only rivers and reservoirs are the sources of ecological instability, but it penetrates the sphere of human life on the level of sensation, memory, and grief. The novel

shows a world where bodies and waters, emotional and hydrological climates are inextricably connected to each other.

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