



ECOLOGICAL ECHOES: THE ENVIRONMENTAL NARRATIVE IN RICHARD POWERS' *BEWILDERMENT*

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Abstract

The earth, as the foundation of all forms of life, provides essential resources such as air, water, food, and shelter etc. However, the anthropogenic activities are badly devastating it and leading to severe environmental degradation, climate change, and biodiversity loss. Hence, the current study is a wake-up call for the inhabitants of the earth. It, employing a qualitative research paradigm that is analytical, interpretive, and deductive, intends to unpack the environmental narrative in Richard Powers' *Bewilderment*. Grounded in the ecocritical frameworks of Glotfelty and Ghosh, the findings highlight how the anthropocentric behaviors exacerbate environmental crises, including global warming, pollution, biodiversity crisis, ecological injustice, climate-related health diseases, and ecological displacement. The study advocates for confronting these anthropocentric behaviors by fostering sustainable practices. Key recommendations include rejecting militarism and violence, utilizing art for environment's sake, reforming education to instill an eco-centric worldview, advancing environmental scientific research, restructuring socio-economic and political systems, implementing legal protections for non-human rights, holding committers of environmental crimes accountable, and establishing eco-friendly policies and diplomacy. The study is a crucial resource for future researchers and policymakers dedicated to safeguarding the earth from further devastation and restoring it to its pristine condition.

Keywords: *Anthropocentrism, Bewilderment, Ecocriticism, Environmental Degradation, Remedies, Richard Powers*

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1. Introduction

Allah Almighty has bestowed on the planet Earth a fascinating array of natural wonders: attractive landscapes, freshwater streams and lakes, vast seas and oceans brimming with rich marine life, lush green plains, a variety of plants and trees bearing fruits of diverse shapes and tastes, snow-capped mountains, expansive deserts, biologically rich forests, and enchanting animal and bird species etc. These natural wonders not only offer the world breathtaking scenic beauty but also form the very foundations for the existence of human and nonhuman beings, providing food, water, air, shelter, etc. However, unfortunately, the natural world is confronting an existential threat due to human-centric priorities. Therefore, we, as stewards of the Earth, must revisit our behaviors and take urgent steps to hinder environmental degradation because if the existing trends continue, environmental issues including “climate change, desertification, deforestation, ozone depletion, biodiversity loss, short-ages of fresh water, depleted fisheries, persistent organic pollutants, hazardous and solid wastes, and air pollution, [can] bring us to the brink of ecological disasters” (Chasek, 2004, p. 427).

Earth has been facing severe climatic changes since the end of the last major glacial epoch 11,700 years ago, known as the Holocene and sometimes as the Anthropocene or the “Age of Man” (Waggoner, 1996, para. 2). This period is characterized by significant human influence on the environment, resulting in global warming and the mass extinction of numerous plant and animal species. Humanity’s activities, particularly industrialization and deforestation, have drastically altered natural processes, intensifying climate change. Thus, the Holocene has been a time of profound environmental change and significant advancements in human knowledge and technology, highlighting the dual impact of human progress on the planet.

Similarly, over 500 years, the former colonial powers imposed a Euro-centric capitalist model of modern development on their colonies, often to the detriment of these regions. The rise of modern industrial economies in Europe and America led to extensive environmental degradation and social disruption. The long-term outcomes of this imposed global capitalist system are now evident in climate change, which affects the entire planet. In this context, Wood (2015) asserts that as their previous colonies will face the brunt of negative consequences in future, these colonial powers must fulfill their obligations through actions aimed at creating “a more sustainable global system” (p. 69).

To deal with environmental concerns, literature instills eco-consciousness in the minds of individuals. Resultantly, environmentally conscious individuals admire the graceful movements of tree branches and perceive the hidden repercussions of cutting twigs. They do not just celebrate the melodious songs of birds; they discern the sorrowful strains of endangered avian species. Similarly, while enjoying the enchanting vistas of lush green landscapes, they also lament the desolation of arid, water-starved deserts. Likewise, their appreciation of the fragrant air is balanced by their recognition of the noxious smog and polluted atmosphere. In the same way, their awe of the celestial beauty of the moon and stars is tempered by an understanding of the sorrow carried in the tears of the ozone-depleted sky, manifested as rainfall. They find comfort in the gentle embrace of clouds and respect the power and fury within thunderous, lightning-laden clouds. Also, their admiration of the vast array of marine life coexists with a critical eye on the plight of aquatic creatures struggling on the polluted shores of seas and oceans. An ecologically conscious person can derive genuine enjoyment from the environment and actively participate in the safety, preservation, restoration, beautification, and responsible utilization of the environment.

Richard Powers, an acclaimed American novelist, is known for his significant contributions to literature, earning him a MacArthur Fellowship and the National Book Award. Among his other celebrated works, *The Overstory* (2019) has won the Pulitzer Prize in Fiction and becoming a #1 New York Times best-seller. His novel, *Bewilderment* (2021), is a deeply moving and intimate story that continues to showcase his talent for intertwining human emotion with broader environmental and scientific themes. It captures the essence of a father's unwavering love for his son amidst the backdrop of scientific inquiry and environmental awareness. It centers on Theo Byrne, an astrobiologist who searches for life across the universe while grappling with the challenges of single parenthood. After the death of his beloved wife, he has to raise his nine-year-old son, Robin. Robin is a uniquely sensitive child. He is deeply affected by the plight of endangered animals, which he often depicts in his paintings. His profound awareness and concern for nonhuman species drive him to satirize the socio-political system of America. His sensitivity leads to difficulties in his social interactions. As his behavior becomes more challenging, Theo is determined to avoid placing him on psychoactive drugs. Instead, he explores an innovative neuro-feedback treatment designed to enhance Robin's emotional regulation by training him with the recorded brain patterns of his late mother, Alyssa. Through its vivid storytelling and emotional depth, the author invites readers to reflect on the intricate connections between humanity, nature, and the cosmos.

2. Literature Review

For literary researchers, ecocriticism is a tool to deal with environmental concerns. Buell (1995) defines ecocriticism, in his groundbreaking and one of the founding works of ecocriticism, *The Environmental Imagination*, as “a study of the

relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis” (p. 20). It is “the environmentally oriented study of literature and (less often) the arts more generally, and to the theories that underlie such critical practice” (Buell, 2005, p. 138). The term ecocriticism is coined by William Rueckert (1978) in his essay, “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism.” His essay invites readers to study literature and the environment from an interdisciplinary viewpoint. In his essay, he asserts that he will experiment with applying ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature because ecology has the most significant relevance to the present and future of our world.

Too much has been written on ecocriticism to develop eco-consciousness using different genres of literature and critical articles. Raymond Williams, a famous critic, contributed in this regard through *The Country and the City* (1973). Joseph Meeker, another precursor of ecocritical writing, contributed to this field through “The Comedy of Survival” (1974). In the mid-1980s, ecocriticism witnessed a transition. The scholars reevaluated the literary works from the ecocritical perspective and tried to set it as a genre with the help of the Western Literature Association. For the first time in the history of ecocriticism, Glotfelty became the Professor of Literature and Environment. She and Fromm published *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), which is still considered a hallmark in the field of ecocriticism.

Similarly, Lawrence Buell, one of the founding fathers of ecocriticism, contributed much in this regard. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing and the Formation of American Culture* (1995), *Writing for an Endangered World* (2001) and *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (2005) were his significant contributions to explain the diverse expressions of environmental awareness that connect human and nonhuman. The organization UNR became the intellectual home of ecocriticism. Similarly, ASLE flourished in the USA, and its branches were established in various countries worldwide. Thus, ecocriticism became a tenacious movement and is now widely popular worldwide.

Stewart (2022) highlights the distinctive narrative style of Richard Powers, characterized by intricate and interconnected plots. The researcher emphasizes that even before Powers’ Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Overstory* (2018), known for its complex ecocritical themes, and *Bewilderment* (2021), which intertwines astrobiological bedtime stories with environmentalist and family drama, Powers had already ventured into this multi-plot narrative style with his earlier work, *Plowing the Dark* (2000). The researcher argues that *Plowing the Dark* remains Powers’ most ambitious exploration of what the article terms the ‘open-circuit structure’ in his narratives. This structure involves weaving multiple plotlines together in a way that remains open-ended and interconnected, allowing for a dynamic and layered storytelling approach.

Murray (2023) employs the theoretical framework of critical animal studies to examine and critique the language and terminology used in selected contemporary climate fiction novels. The novels analyzed include *My Days of Dark Green Euphoria* (2022) by Copenhaver, *Bewilderment* (2021) by Powers, and *Stay and Fight* (2019) by Ffitch. The researcher highlights the challenges and ambiguities (termed ‘terminological slipperiness’) that arise when trying to discuss and imagine animals in ways that are respectful and mindful of their autonomy. These linguistic and conceptual challenges point to more than just the limitations of our scholarly language. They expose deeply ingrained epistemological and ontological assumptions about animals and our ethical responsibilities toward them. Ultimately, the study reveals how these novels navigate and sometimes struggle with the complex task of representing animals in a manner that honors their intrinsic value and agency.

To sum up, the comprehensive overview of critical publications presented above highlights a notable research gap in the field of ecocritical studies. Specifically, the selected novel has not been thoroughly examined from an ecocritical perspective. This clear absence of research offers a valuable opportunity to contribute significantly to the scholarly discourse. By undertaking this study, the researchers aim to bridge the existing gap and shed new light on the environmental themes and perspectives within the selected fiction. Through this endeavor, it is hoped that a deeper understanding of the ecological implications of literature will be fostered, ultimately enriching the realm of ecocriticism and expanding the body of knowledge concerning global environmental issues.

3. Research Methodology

Research methodology is the study of methods by which knowledge is gained. Its aim is “to give the work plan of research” (Pillai & Kaushal, 2019, p. 4). The present study is grounded in the realm of qualitative inquiry, adopting an analytical, interpretive, and deductive approach. It is distinctly situated within the domain of ecocriticism, a literary theory that explores the interconnection of literature and the environment from an interdisciplinary perspective. It employs theoretical framework based on the ecocritical insights of Glotfelty and Ghosh, who highlight the urgent need to address the environmental crisis and challenge the anthropocene through literature. It primarily relies on the textual analysis of Richard Powers’ *Bewilderment*. To conduct the research on authentic basis, the secondary data has been collected through various sources such as books of criticism, journal articles, newspaper articles, magazines, reviews, theses, and dissertations, because they provide “well-informed, coherent and rhetorically persuasive arguments, which can leave the researcher convinced that whatever can be said has been said already” (Belsey, 2005, p. 160). Ultimately, this comprehensive methodology is designed to provide an in-depth exploration of the environmental concerns and their possible solutions depicted in the selected work.

4. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework is a structured foundation derived from previously tested and published knowledge, synthesizing key concepts and theories to set a theoretical background for “data analysis and interpretation of the meaning contained in your research data” (Kivunja, 2018, p. 46). The present theoretical framework is grounded in ecocriticism, drawing upon the seminal conceptualizations presented by Glotfelty in *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996) and Ghosh in *The Great Derangement* (2016). To bolster these perspectives, it also incorporates viewpoints from other influential writers and critics. The following detailed exposition of the theoretical framework will provide an in-depth exploration of the ecological dimensions inherent in the selected literary work.

Glotfelty (1996) defines ecocriticism as a critical lens through which to examine “the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (p. xviii). She encourages scholars to investigate how ecological contexts shape literary expression and how literature, in turn, reflects environmental concerns. She emphasizes that ecocriticism is not limited to nature itself but encompasses a wide range of topics including “the frontier, animals, cities, specific geographical regions, rivers, mountains, deserts, Indigenous peoples, technology, garbage, and the body” (Glotfelty, 1996, p. xix). In doing so, she positions ecocriticism as a multidimensional approach to understanding environmental themes in literature.

Moreover, Glotfelty (1996) emphasizes the deep interconnection between human culture, the physical world, and the artifacts of language and literature, setting ecocriticism as a discipline that bridges the divide between human and nonhuman realms. She underlines a foundational concept within ecocriticism: the intrinsic connection between human culture and the environment. This relationship is depicted as a two-way interaction where human culture is “connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it” (Glotfelty, 1996, p. xix). This ecological perspective does away with traditional divide between human societies and the natural environment, highlighting their interdependence. She argues that as a critical stance, ecocriticism has “one foot in literature and the other on land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman” (Glotfelty, 1996, p. xix).

Furthermore, Glotfelty (1996) provides a vivid account of the environmental crises captured in newspaper headlines, presenting an extensive overview of the ecological challenges that marked the late twentieth century. She catalogs issues such as “oil spills, lead and asbestos poisoning, toxic waste contamination, extinction of species at an unprecedented rate, battles over public land use, protests over nuclear waste dumps, a growing hole in the ozone layer, and predictions of global warming” (p. xvi). These examples accentuate the complex, interconnected web of environmental threats, from local to global scales. She accentuates that the central driving force behind ecocritical

scholarship is the recognition that humanity has entered an epoch defined by environmental limits and “the consequences of human actions are damaging the planet’s basic life support systems” (Glotfelty, 1996, p. xx). She warns: “Either we change our ways or we face global catastrophe, destroying much beauty and exterminating countless fellow species in our headlong race to apocalypse” (Glotfelty, 1996, p. xx). This awareness fuels a heightened ecological consciousness and emphasizes the need for transformative action.

In addition, Glotfelty (1996) argues that current environmental crises stem from humanity’s unchecked self-interest and cultural desires. She admits that “if we’re not part of the solution, we’re part of the problem,” capturing the ethical challenge scholars face in addressing these issues (Glotfelty, 1996, p. xxi). She further condemns humanity’s role, asserting that “current environmental problems are largely of our own making ... in other words, a by-product of culture” (Glotfelty, 1996, p. xxi). She also aims to “trace the connections among environmental conditions, economic modes of production, and cultural ideas through time” (Glotfelty, 1996, p. xxi).

Ghosh (2016) calls the contemporary age as the era of Anthropocene – a geological epoch where human activities significantly influence the Earth’s natural processes. He posits that the implications of the Anthropocene extend beyond the arts and humanities to encompass “commonsense understandings and ... contemporary culture in general” (p. 9). Nahrung (2019) echoes this perspective, noting that “the Earth has unofficially entered a new epoch in which human activity is causing dramatic and potentially catastrophic changes to the global ecosystem” (p. 1). Together, these insights reflect a growing recognition of humanity’s transformative and potentially hazardous impact on the planet.

Moreover, Ghosh (2016) examines the complex intersection of politics and climate change, critiquing how political leaders often prioritize personal interests and individual expression over collective, nonhuman concerns essential to addressing global crises. He argues that “politicians will really represent their interests and implement their demands” (Ghosh, 2016, p. 130). He points to a political landscape increasingly shaped by corporate influence, contributing to policy gridlock and hindering effective public response to climate change. Ghosh (2016) further posits that “climate change is not a danger in itself” but rather a “threat multiplier” that exacerbates existing social divisions and intensifies a range of conflicts (p. 143). This perspective accentuates the need for a collaborative approach that transcends individual and corporate interests to address climate change’s far-reaching impacts.

Furthermore, Ghosh (2016) reflects on how individuals in a transformed world might engage with the art and literature of their time, searching for traces of their altered legacy. He remarks that our age, despite its self-awareness, may come to be known as “the time of the Great Derangement,” a period defined by a collective failure to confront

the profound challenges of climate change (Ghosh, 2016, p. 11). He notes the shift in political and social involvement among intellectuals over recent decades, facilitated by digital media, yet observes a concerning gap in their engagement with the climate crisis. Despite increased activism and vocal expression on a variety of social issues, climate change remains conspicuously absent from much public discourse. He critiques the tendency of literature to prioritize themes of identity and individual moral pursuits, while largely ignoring “the issue that concerns our collective survival” (Ghosh, 2016, pp. 126–127). Thus, he challenges contemporary art and literature to address the urgent realities of environmental degradation and collective responsibility.

Similarly, Glotfelty (1996) highlights the pivotal role of literary scholars in advancing environmental thought, noting their unique expertise in exploring value, meaning, and language. This expertise enables them to critically analyze narratives that influence human relationships with nature. She argues that “the environmental crisis has been exacerbated by our fragmented, compartmentalized, and overly specialized way of knowing the world,” leading humanities scholars to increasingly adopt interdisciplinary approaches and engage with scientific knowledge (Glotfelty, 1996, p. xxii). She further encapsulates ecocriticism’s mission to heighten awareness and inspire meaningful change within the literary field and beyond. To her, Ecocriticism seeks to reshape literature, curriculum, and societal values through an ecological lens, fostering a perspective that encourages critical thinking about environmental issues. She highlights the crucial role of ecocriticism in generating awareness and thought about environmental concerns. She argues that “Consciousness raising is its most important task. For how can we solve environmental problems unless we start thinking about them?” (Glotfelty, 1996, p. xxiv). Thus, ecocriticism emerges as a crucial framework for cultivating environmental awareness and advocacy within and beyond academia.

In summation, the present theoretical framework renders a pivotal role in fostering sustainability and contributing to environmental restoration. It offers a clear understanding of the application, laying the groundwork for an in-depth exploration of ecological concerns within the selected literary work.

5. Analysis and Discussion

Richard Powers’ *Bewilderment* unfolds in a dystopian future besieged by climate crises, relentless conflicts, and political upheavals. The narrative draws readers into Theo and Robin’s transformative journey, inviting them to explore the weight of their challenges and their profound efforts to drive change. With a tone that is inspirational and urgent, it examines their relentless pursuit of hope and their determination to spark change in a world on the brink of ecological collapse. The title of the novel, *Bewilderment*, itself aptly captures a world in constant flux, echoing humanity’s struggle to respond to the mounting environmental crisis. Through Robin’s perspective, the author poignantly addresses the confusion and frustration over society’s inadequate

response to urgent environmental threats. Robin's bewilderment and disappointment are expressed through a series of stark observations: the loss of habitats for migratory birds, amphibians mutating from agricultural pollutants, water contamination from human pharmaceuticals, and the creation of "thousands of square miles of dead zones" in the oceans (Powers, 2021, p. 182). Robin's outrage over these issues highlights their gravity and the glaring absence of decisive action to address them.

Powers (2021) asserts that humanity often places its own needs and desires above the well-being of the planet, leading to widespread ecological imbalance. He argues that humans frequently view themselves as nature's ultimate arbiters, driven to shape and control the environment to suit their preferences. Theo captures this notion, stating, "life is something we need to stop correcting" (Powers, 2021, p. 5). A poster on the wall, depicting a tree-lined beach, reinforces this idea, reading, "The surface of the Earth is soft and impressible by the feet of men; and so with the paths which the mind travels" (Powers, 2021, p. 100). In prioritizing human desires, the society is "living in the middle of a vaster catastrophe" (Powers, 2021, p. 129). Recognizing the weight of this responsibility, Robin raises a banner declaring, "LET'S HEAL WHAT WE HURT," adorned with drawings of injured animals (Powers, 2021, p. 212). This message is a call to action and a reminder of the urgent need to address ecological crises. Robin wishes: "MAY ALL BEINGS BE FREE FROM SUFFERING" (Powers, 2021, p. 212). Through this narrative, the author urges a shift from dominance to stewardship, emphasizing the importance of preserving the natural world.

Powers (2021) also examines the destabilizing effects of humanity's anthropocentric behaviors on the environment. He reveals the hypocrisy in humanity's reluctance to accept its role as the chief driver of ecological collapse. Through Robin's candid discussion with Dee, he expresses frustration over the human disregard for nature, stating, "We're breaking the whole planet? We're breaking it. And pretending we aren't... Everybody knows what's happening. But we all look away" (Powers, 2021, p. 193). The author further emphasizes this through Robin's viral videos, bundled under the title "The World is Ending Again. What Now?" which draws attention to society's growing awareness of environmental issues (Powers, 2021, p. 195). While environmental concerns are increasingly visible, they are often consumed passively, with few concrete steps taken to address the core drivers of the ecological crisis. Through this narrative, the author calls for a shift from passive awareness to active stewardship, urging readers to address the root causes of eco-crises.

Powers (2021) also portrays the destructive outcomes of anthropocentrism on environmental stability, particularly through the spread of catastrophic diseases in agriculture and ecosystems. The stem rust disease devastating wheat crops from China to Nebraska and the freshwater disruptions caused by Arctic ice melt demonstrate the widespread and often unforeseen impacts of human activities. The author intensifies this imagery by describing a "hideous infection... hitting cattle feedlots in Texas" (Powers,

2021, p. 246). He paints a grim picture of diseased, demented cattle as a result of industrial practices. Resultantly, Robin's visceral reaction – banging his head against the wall – mirrors the deep emotional toll that environmental crises inflict on individuals, emphasizing the profound interconnectedness between human-induced ecological degradation and psychological distress. Through these traumatic depictions, the author emphasizes the need to reconsider anthropocentric worldviews, advocating for a more compassionate approach to sustain both planetary and human well-being.

Powers (2021) presents a stark warning about the destructive consequences of human-centered priorities on society and the planet. From contaminated drinking water and intensifying heat waves to rampant wildfires and escalating violence, he illustrates a world unraveling under the weight of anthropocentric attitudes. He spotlights water pollution – caused by agricultural runoff, pharmaceutical waste, and other toxic effluents – as a major contributor to environmental degradation. A pivotal conversation between Theo and Robin centers on the Mississippi River whose “whole underwater scenes [are] replete with toxic aquatics” (Powers, 2021, p. 181). These contaminants harm fish, water quality, and other species. Robin's frustration mounts as he questions why no action is taken to address the damage. Theo responds that “thirty years ago, it was a different river” (Powers, 2021, p. 181). The response highlights how quickly human activity has transformed natural ecosystems.

Powers (2021) also examines the health impacts of environmental toxins, as seen in Robin's diagnosis with syndromes “linked to the billion pounds of toxins sprayed on the country's food supply each year” (Powers, 2021, p. 5). This theme is echoed in the news of a toxic chemical spill in the Ruhr Valley, where “Nineteen people had died and hundreds were hospitalized,” reinforcing the cycle of human-induced ecological crises (Powers, 2021, p. 227). Through these scenes, the author implores readers to confront the toll of unchecked anthropocentrism and review humanity's role in safeguarding the planet.

Moreover, Powers (2021) elucidates how seemingly harmless human actions like stacking cairns along riverbanks can disrupt ecosystems and contribute to ecological imbalance. Theo's commitment to sit by the river for as long as it takes to “figure out the human race” reflects his profound contemplation on humanity's impact on nature (Powers, 2021, p. 263). The stacked cairns serve as a powerful metaphor for human activities that intrude upon and damage natural habitats. Theo explains: “Those were your mother's worst nightmare. They destroy the homes of everything in the river” (Powers, 2021, p. 265). He furthers: “His eyes darted, searching out the chub and shiners and trout and salamanders and algae and crayfish and waterborne larvae and the endangered madtoms and hellbenders, all sacrificed to this turf-marking art” (Powers, 2021, p. 265). As Theo and his son dismantle the cairns, the act becomes symbolic of their desire to make amends, a small yet meaningful gesture toward restoring ecological balance.

Furthermore, Powers (2021) critiques how political power dynamics exacerbate ecological imbalance, as conflicting national interests and unequal influence obstruct unified and effective environmental policy. Theo's assistant, Jinjing, condemns the president and scientific elites, stating, "Apparently God had made life on one planet only, and only one country of that planet's dominant species needed to manage it" (Powers, 2021, p. 134). Similarly, the scene of Theo's arrest during the protest at the Capitol where the image captured by the engineer's cell phone camera, showing "A boy, his father, the dying birds and beasts, the insects apocalypse along the banner's bottom, the background mosaic of sandstone, limestone, and marble dedicated to freedom and built by slaves" serves as a poignant reminder of the paradoxical relationship humans have with the planet (Powers, 2021, p. 221). Though Robin's painting resonates with the hope of Earth's restoration, society remains hesitant to confront the urgency of the crisis, merely questioning "how we could re-inhabit planet Earth" without a deeper commitment to action (Powers, 2021, p. 222). Theo's arrest, charged with "encouraging a small boy to take issue with the destruction of life on Earth," unveils society's reluctance to disrupt the status quo, even in the face of existential threats (Powers, 2021, p. 223). The narrative highlights how humanity's unilateral control over Earth's ecosystems disregards the global consequences of its actions, ultimately portraying Theo as a 'criminal' simply for supporting his son's advocacy for a threatened planet: "It's kind of a sad time to be alive... If the insects die, we won't be able to grow food" (Powers, 2021, p. 224).

Powers (2021) also uncovers the severe environmental and ethical consequences of humanity's anthropocentric behaviors, particularly within the livestock industry. The spread of a devastating brain disease among cattle highlights the unsustainable, profit-driven practices that characterize this sector, often disregarding animal welfare. At the sight of suffering animals, Robin's visceral reaction – "Stop! Enough! Stop! ... That's enough. Stop, Stop!" – reflects the profound moral dilemmas posed by these human-centered attitudes (Powers, 2021, p. 248). His questioning of the mistreatment and relentless transportation of animals highlights the disregard toward other species' well-being in the pursuit of human interests. His somber wish – "May all life get free from us" – speaks to the urgent need for humanity to reexamine its approach to other life forms and the natural world (Powers, 2021, p. 249).

Powers (2021) not only depicts the environmental devastations and their severe consequences but also proposes a range of solutions to address these pressing issues. Through his characters' actions and reflections, he fosters environmental consciousness among the readers. The narrative serves as both a cautionary tale and a call to action, inspiring hope for meaningful change in the face of environmental crisis. The following discussion is a detailed exploration of solutions to hinder the impending environmental degradation:

First, Powers (2021) contends that developing empathy for nature is essential to restoring Earth's health. He suggests that using brain scans to foster empathy for animals, along with implementing universal neural feedback training, could significantly enhance humans' connection to the natural world and accelerate ecological restoration. He illustrates this through Robin's innovative idea of using brain scans to understand animals' experiences. Robin recommends: "Scan his brain while he was really excited. Then people could train on his patterns, and we'd learn what it felt like to be a dog" (Powers, 2021, p. 166). He offers an unconventional approach to cultivating empathy across species. By advocating for training that allows people to experience perspectives beyond their own, the author motivates readers to recognize the transformative potential of empathy for all living beings as a foundation for ecological stewardship.

Second, Powers (2021) proposes that harnessing social media to foster eco-consciousness can be an influential tool for conserving and restoring the environment. Robin's viral video is a poignant example of how environmental issues resonate widely, drawing attention to the environmental crisis and highlighting the power of technology in amplifying awareness. The prevalence of digital communication emphasizes both society's interconnectedness and the environmental impact of anthropocentrism. Critiquing humanity's approach to Earth's degradation, Currier remarks, "We could learn to live here, on Earth, without fear" (Powers, 2021, p. 203). Through this perspective, the author emphasizes social media's crucial role in inspiring widespread eco-consciousness for fostering collective action toward environmental conservation and restoration.

Third, Powers (2021) asserts that portraying the natural world and environmental issues through art can contribute to ecological restoration by raising awareness, inspiring action, and fostering a stronger emotional connection to nature. He cultivates eco-consciousness by highlighting Robin's interest in painting diverse elements of the natural world in his artwork. Robin chooses not only charismatic subjects like "birds and fish and fungi" but also often-overlooked creatures such as "snails and bivalves" (Powers, 2021, p. 101). He takes these paintings to school, aiming to sell them to support endangered species, stating, "thousands of creatures are going extinct every year. And so far I've raised zero dollars and zero cents to help them" (Powers, 2021, p. 118). His determination to paint every endangered species in America and sell the artwork at the farmers' market reflects a deepening sense of responsibility toward conservation, inspired by his late mother, Alyssa. Through Robin's commitment to painting and fundraising for his mother's environmental cause, the author urges readers to revisit their own roles in environmental sustainability.

Fourth, Powers (2021) highlights the important role of environmental campaigns in protecting endangered species and restoring ecological balance. Through Inga Alder, a 14-year-old environmentalist, he highlights humanity's anthropocentric behaviors that contribute to environmental decline. Inga, who has launched a campaign encouraging

children to bike from Zurich to Brussels to “shame the Council of the European Union into meeting the emissions reductions they had long ago promised” (Powers, 2021, p. 121). Her campaign is a compelling example of youth-led activism. Robin’s admiration for Inga reflects his identification with her, as both share a connection through autism and a dedication to environmental advocacy. Inga’s statement, “my house is burning down. Do you want me to wait until the school bell rings before I rush home to put it out?” powerfully conveys the urgency of the crisis (Powers, 2021, p. 121). Addressing the UN, she warns leaders about how “history would remember them if there was a history” (Powers, 2021, p. 122). Similarly, Theo remarks that Inga, once deeply depressed, found her purpose in protecting “this living planet” (Powers, 2021, p. 121). Through this narrative, the author highlights the critical impact of environmental campaigns in driving action toward ecological restoration and biodiversity conservation.

Fifth, Powers (2021) emphasizes the vital impact of widespread protests in confronting environmental negligence and advocating for a more balanced relationship between humanity and the natural world. Robin’s initial surprise at the lack of mass protest shows society’s frequent complacency toward urgent ecological issues. In response, he creates a poster reading, “Help me. I’m dying,” surrounded by a cartoon bestiary of “soon-to-vanish plants and animals” (Powers, 2021, p. 125). His choice to protest alone with his poster demonstrates the influence of individual voices in championing environmental causes, countering the notion that social norms stifle such expressions. His handout listing “twenty-three species threatened or endangered in the state of Wisconsin, including the Canada lynx, gray wolf, piping plover, and Karner blue butterfly,” powerfully highlights the destructive impact of human-centered actions on local ecosystems (Powers, 2021, p. 126). The shared resolve of Theo and Robin to “stop the killing” marks a shift toward eco-centric advocacy as they confront the human-driven causes of global environmental imbalance (Powers, 2021, p. 126). Thus, the author accentuates the critical role of collective and individual protests in awakening stakeholders to their environmental responsibilities and advancing the restoration of ecological balance.

Sixth, Powers (2021) stresses the significance of enacting legislation to safeguard nonhuman rights as a means to preserve biodiversity and restore ecological balance. Alyssa reflects on the harmful consequences of human-centered actions, advocating for a shift toward an ecologically sustainable future. She critiques: “what was really happening on this planet, the systems of invisible suffering on unimaginable scales. Human appetite’s final solution” (Powers, 2021, p. 130). She affirms that relentless pursuit of economic and personal gain overshadows the well-being of nonhuman life and the planet. To address this, she calls for “nonhuman rights that she planned to promote throughout the Upper Midwest”, aiming to appeal to the empathy of lawmakers in “ten different states” (Powers, 2021, p. 131). Through Alyssa’s vision, the author advocates for legal measures as essential to protecting nonhuman life and reestablishing ecological stability.

Seventh, Powers (2021) argues that adopting an ethical stance against consuming animals can play a significant role in protecting endangered species and restoring environmental equilibrium. He illustrates how Robin's firm commitment to refraining from animal products fosters a deeper environmental awareness. During Thanksgiving, Robin's outcry, "I don't eat animals. I don't eat animals! Don't make me eat animals!" highlights the ethical dimensions of eco-consciousness (Powers, 2021, p. 103). His vehement refusal to partake in animal consumption challenges cultural norms and emphasizes the ethical dilemmas linked to animal agriculture and its ecological impact. Through this, the author invites readers to reflect on the connections between dietary choices, environmental sustainability, and ethical values.

Eighth, Powers (2021) proposes that embracing spiritual teachings that honor the sanctity of nature can significantly bolster efforts to protect the environment. Alyssa carves her own spiritual path, guided by Buddhist principles like the 'Four Immeasurables': "There are four good things worth practicing. Being kind toward everything alive. Staying level and steady. Feeling happy for any creature anywhere that is happy. And remembering that any suffering is also yours" (Powers, 2021, p. 24). This perspective illuminates the potential of human-environment interconnectedness to inspire belief systems that prioritize harmony with the natural world.

Ninth, Powers (2021) advocates for reforming the education system to promote an eco-centric worldview, aiming to cultivate a generation dedicated to environmental stewardship. Robin's choice to be homeschooled, driven by his dissatisfaction with the traditional school system, highlights how anthropogenic approaches in education can undermine environmental awareness. He remarks that "school should teach me how to survive the world ten years from now" (Powers, 2021, p. 162). He holds that conventional education often overlooks urgent ecological issues shaped by human-centered perspectives. His statement, "Life wanted something from us. And time was running out. Critically endangered. Possibly extinct," highlights the societal challenges arising from an educational approach rooted in anthropocentrism (Powers, 2021, p. 163). His ambition to become an ornithologist, fueled by a profound connection with nature, signals a shift towards an education that values ecological consciousness. Through Robin's experiences, the author emphasizes the importance of integrating environmental awareness into education to foster a future that prioritizes the natural world.

Tenth, Powers (2021) recommends that choosing eco-friendly career paths is essential in combating ecological degradation. Alyssa and Theo's first meeting, when she thanks him for "saving her from failing her course on animal law" in a university computer lab, introduces their shared commitment to animal welfare (Powers, 2021, p. 49). This alignment of values elucidates how shared environmental commitments can influence personal and professional paths. Alyssa's decision to work for an animal rights NGO and Theo's scientific collaboration with Stryker highlight their dedication to environmental preservation, as their careers are purposefully aligned with their

commitment to safeguarding the natural world. Thus, the author emphasizes the impact that eco-conscious career choices can have on both personal fulfillment and broader ecological sustainability.

Eleventh, Powers (2021) maintains that terraforming space and advancing environmental scientific research are important for restoring a pristine Earth. Theo's mission to Washington to "help save the search for life in the universe" highlights the inherent connection between exploring the cosmos and deepening humans' understanding of its own planet (Powers, 2021, p. 207). He strives to "save the telescope from the ax of the Appropriations subcommittee, and make a world be able, in a few more years, to tool into nearby space and see life" (Powers, 2021, pp. 207-208). He highlights the potential of these discoveries to transform perspectives on life and humanity's role within the universe. His work on the Byrne Alien Field Guide, cataloging "spectroscopic signatures collated to the stages and types of possible extraterrestrial life," reflects his dedication to viewing Earth from an extraterrestrial perspective as a means to test and refine ecological models (Powers, 2021, p. 172). The advanced technology, like the Earthlike Planet Seeker, emphasizes the value of scientific progress in both cosmic and environmental understanding. Through this narrative, the author asserts that space exploration and environmental science are instrumental in achieving ecological balance, offering transformative insights and innovations for global conservation efforts.

Twelfth, Powers (2021) holds that exposing the superficial efforts of international organizations and holding them accountable for neglecting environmental protection is crucial for promoting effective conservation. Theo recalls Alyssa's frustration with these organizations, describing how "she once damned humanity to hell while throwing a UN report about habitat destruction across the room" (Powers, 2021, p. 94). This depiction invites national and international organizations to reassess their role in protecting Earth's ecosystems through meaningful action and accountability.

Thirteenth, Powers (2021) emphasizes the need for efficient mechanisms, ensuring that raised funds are effectively channeled into impactful environmental actions. The letter from a conservation organization exposes the anthropocentric tendencies within environmental funding, showing that while the organization aims to protect endangered species and slow habitat destruction, much of the funding is absorbed by administrative and indirect costs. It notes that "almost seventy cents on every dollar went directly or indirectly toward slowing the rate of habitat destruction in ten different countries" (Powers, 2021, p. 124). Robin feels frustrated at realizing that "only seven hundred of my dollars go to the animals? Species are dying, Dad. Thousands!" (Powers, 2021, p. 124). He shows his awareness of the urgent need to prioritize direct action over bureaucratic expenditures. Through Robin's distress, the author spotlights the pressing impact of human-centered practices on ecological balance and advocates for a shift towards more effective allocation of resources to drive meaningful change.

Last but not least, Powers (2021) emphasizes the importance of urging individuals to recognize their responsibility as stewards of the Earth, holding them accountable for the planet's well-being and encouraging the adoption of sustainable practices before it is too late to reverse the damage. For example, Robin's nighttime mission to "dismantle cairns [and turn] the river back into a safe home" represents his deep commitment to protecting the natural world (Powers, 2021, p. 273). His injury while cleaning the river, followed by his ultimate sacrifice for the Earth's betterment, emphasizes the urgency of addressing environmental crises. Additionally, global disasters like "Two million people in Shanghai lost their homes. Phoenix ran out of water. Bovine viral encephalopathy jumped from cattle to people," highlight how environmental catastrophes often go unnoticed when humanity is collectively indifferent (Powers, 2021, p. 276). Despite this looming crisis, Theo's optimism, "The universe is a living thing, and my son wants to take me for a quick look around while there's still time," symbolizes the pressing need to awaken ecological awareness before it is too late (Powers, 2021, p. 278).

After giving a scholarly tour of his ground-breaking novel, the author strives to make people aware of the impending environmental challenges and urges them to recognize their role as stewards of the Earth and change their ways before it is too late to mend. He ultimately leaves readers with a sense of responsibility and "high hopes" that they can contribute to restoring global ecological balance (Powers, 2021, p. 228).

6. Conclusion

To conclude, Powers (2021) expertly weaves the environmental narrative that highlights the pressing need for individual responsibility and collective action in addressing the impending ecological imbalance. He illustrates the ecological challenges of contaminated drinking water, global warming, wildfires, habitat destruction, biodiversity loss, armed militias, bio-political indifference, research funding issues, environmental injustice, environment-induced diseases and environmental displacement. Through various characters, such as Robin, Theo, and Alyssa, he highlights multiple facets of ecological consciousness – ranging from empathy toward nonhuman life to the ethical, political, and spiritual obligations required to restore ecological balance of the Earth. He advocates for a profound shift in both personal and societal values, urging individuals to recognize their stewardship over the Earth and adopt sustainable practices that prioritize the preservation of nature. By exploring themes such as the importance of eco-centric education, choosing eco-friendly professions and the necessity of legislative action, he emphasizes that the path to a sustainable future can be paved with both grassroots activism and systemic reforms. He also draws attention to the limitations of traditional environmental efforts, critiquing the insufficient and superficial role of international organizations and the often-misguided allocation of conservation funds. He suggests that the key to meaningful change lies not only in raising awareness but also in cultivating deeper emotional connections to the natural world, whether through social

media, science, technology, art, education, or spiritual practices. The urgency of environmental stewardship is evident in Robin's actions, which symbolize the commitment required to restore ecological balance of a deteriorating planet. He also urges the developed countries, including the USA, to recognize their significant role in this crisis, as they have power, resources and influence in the international organizations. This acknowledgement is essential for fostering a more equitable and sustainable future. Ultimately, Powers' environmental narrative in *Bewilderment* (2021) compelling serves as a wake-up call, urging readers to not only reflect on the current state of the world but to actively engage in efforts to heal and preserve the environment for future generations.

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