
Grappling with Looming Ecological Imbalance: An Ecocritical Study of Welby's *Dreamtime*

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Abstract

The current era, owing to human-centric priorities, is facing the worst ecological crises in history, with dire consequences for both human beings and the diverse array of animal and plant species. Regrettably, there exists a notable lack of scholarly engagement in contemporary fiction regarding the environmental implications of anthropocentric behaviors. Recognizing the need of the hour and the scholarly duty therein, the present researcher, employing a qualitative paradigm and adopting an ecocritical perspective provided by Glotfelty and Gosh, undertakes a thorough analysis of Venetia Welby's *Dreamtime* (2021), aiming to unveil the anthropocentric behaviors contributing to ecological imbalance and unravel potential solutions embedded within its narrative. The study highlights that continued adherence to capitalist, colonial, and militaristic paradigms may precipitate ecological catastrophe on a global level. It scrutinizes phenomena such as environmental devastation in war-torn zones, sea-level rise, submersion of islands, pollution, biodiversity loss, ecological injustice, and climate-induced migrations. It calls for greater collaboration among literary writers and stakeholders from diverse disciplines to foster eco-consciousness among the masses, thereby mitigating environmental degradation, restoring the environment to its pristine condition, promoting sustainable consumption practices, conserving natural resources, and ultimately making Earth a safe and serene planet to live on.

Keywords: Venetia Welby, *Dreamtime*, Ecocriticism, Anthropocentrism, Ecological imbalance, Eco-consciousness

Introduction

In the contemporary era, the world confronts an unparalleled ecological quandary characterized by a multitude of crises, ranging from the ominous specter of climate change and global warming to the insidious encroachment of pollution, rising sea levels, and the devastating impacts of

floods, droughts, famines, and epidemics. In this regards, Carrington (2023) warns: “Humanity [is standing] at the climate crossroads: highway to hell or a livable future” (para 1). These challenges, rooted in anthropocentric behaviors such as materialistic pursuits and militaristic endeavors, highlight humanity’s reckless indifference towards the natural environment, posing grave threats not only to delicate ecosystems but also to human welfare at large. Lamenting the inauspicious consequences of these human-induced behaviors, Zakaria (2023) asserts: “Essentially, we are looking at a future where millions of people in all parts of the world would be unable to weather extreme climatic events that they have never witnessed before” (para 2). Consequently, it becomes imperative to delve into ecological themes within the realm of literature, aligning the significance of such exploration with diverse interdisciplinary ecological domains. Through literature, we endeavor to cultivate a heightened environmental consciousness among readers, igniting a resurgence of life’s innate vitality and fostering a deeper understanding of our interconnectedness with the natural world.

Venetia Welby, in the realm of contemporary literature, stands as a luminary figure, her multifaceted talents illuminating the global literary landscape. Hailing from the United Kingdom, her literary prowess extends across continents, reflecting a rich tapestry of experiences garnered from a life lived and stories woven on four continents of the Earth. Renowned as a novelist, journalist, and astute observer of the human condition, her literary oeuvre encompasses a diverse array of forms and themes. Her acclaimed novels, including, the lauded *Mother of Darkness* (2017), and the hauntingly evocative *Dreamtime* (2021), celebrated as an Observer book of the year, bear witness to her narrative finesse and profound insight into the human psyche. Beyond the realm of fiction, her poignant short fiction and thought-provoking essays have graced the pages of esteemed publications such as *The London Magazine* and the *Irish Times*, resonating with readers worldwide. Her contributions to various collections, including *Trauma* and *Garden among Fires*, further accentuate her ability to evoke deep emotion and provoke contemplation through her inspirational words.

Welby (2021) has crafted a remarkable novel, *Dreamtime*, set in 2035, offering a glimpse into a dystopian future tinged with the mystique of ancient Japanese enchantment. Meticulously rendered, extensively researched, and unsettlingly plausible, it serves as both a contemporary love story and a sobering cautionary tale, weaving together elements of darkness, passion, and intrigue. Within the pages of the novel, the authoress presents a chilling portrayal of what may lay ahead, guiding readers on a dizzying journey into uncharted realms. As the world teeters on the brink of apocalypse, Sol, the protagonist emerges from rehabilitation in the Tucson desert with newfound clarity, compelled to confront a lifelong quandary. Against the backdrop of a planet in crisis, she seizes a

final opportunity to reconcile with her absent father, a US Marine stationed in Okinawa, as aviation falters under the weight of climate chaos. Together with her forlorn companion Kit, Sol embarks on a perilous voyage across poisoned seas to the farthest reaches of the Japanese archipelago. Despite the glaring urgency of environmental stewardship, the global stage remains ensnared in a complex web of political, social, and economic discord, perpetuating a disconcerting inertia in the face of an impending ecological cataclysm. In an era marked by looming environmental crises, it beckons us to delve into the depths of ecocriticism, probing the synergetic interplay between human actions and the natural world. Hence, the study endeavors to unveil the verdant wisdom nestled within the pages of *Dreamtime*, offering a nuanced understanding of how literature can illuminate the path towards a greener and more sustainable future.

Literature Review

Amidst the multifaceted ecological challenges that confront our planet, diverse disciplines are diligently endeavoring to address these issues within their respective domains. In the realm of literature, ecocriticism stands as a potent literary tool uniquely positioned to engage with and explore the intricate impending ecological concerns. Buell (1995), in his groundbreaking work, *The Environmental Imagination*, defines ecocriticism as “a study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis” (p. 20). Moreover, he holds that the environmental crisis involves a crisis of imagination and a need to find better ways of imagining “nature and humanity’s relation to it” (Buell, 1995, p. 2). He makes the humankind aware of the emerging threats of environmental catastrophe and views environmental pressures as tending to increase the significance of pastoralism as a literary and cultural force in future. He also shows his deep concerns regarding future of mankind with respect to his/her environment. He announces that “apocalypse is the single most powerful metaphor that the contemporary environmental imagination has at its disposal” (Buell, 1995, p. 93). Furthermore, he , in *Writing for an Endangered World*, observes that “No treatment of environmental imagination can claim to be comprehensive without taking account of the full range of historic landscapes, landscape genres, and environmental(ist) discourse” (Buell, 2001, p. 8).

Referred to by various terms such as Green Studies, Environmental Literary Criticism, Eco-poetics, Pastoralism, and Literary Ecology, ecocriticism embodies an interdisciplinary approach to analyzing literary works in relation to environmental concerns, with a primary focus on protecting and representing the environment. Scholars such as Bertens (2008) holds that ecocriticism, having green agenda, focuses on “the many and widely different ways in which the natural world – wild and domestic

animals, landscape, the wilderness – and our relations with that world are represented in our culture” (p. 207). Similarly, Kerridge and Sammells (1998) argue that ecocriticism aims to evaluate “texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as response to environmental crises” (p. 5). Likewise, Hutchings (2007) highlights the environmental degradation caused by “technological industrialism and capitalist consumerism” (p. 173), while Guha (1989) spotlights ecocriticism’s focus on “the restoration of degraded areas to a more pristine condition” (p. 72). In the same way, Garrard (2004) announces that the ultimate aim of ecocriticism is to restore “nature in a state uncontaminated by civilization” (p. 59).

The development of ecocriticism has led to numerous significant contributions, utilizing various literary genres and critical analyses to heighten awareness of environmental issues. Figures such as Raymond Williams, renowned for his work *The Country and the City* (1973), Joseph Meeker, a pioneer of ecocritical thought with *The Comedy of Survival* (1974), and William Rueckert, famous for his ground-breaking work *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism* (1978), have played pivotal roles in shaping its trajectory. A notable turning point occurred in the mid-1980s when scholars began reassessing literature through an ecocritical lens, leading to its recognition as a distinct genre within the Western Literature Association (WLA). The appointment of Glotfelty as the first Professor of Literature and Environment at the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR) and the establishment of UNR as a center for ecocriticism accentuated its growing significance. Similarly, the rise of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE), both in the USA and internationally, solidified ecocriticism as a global movement.

There is a dearth of scholarly attention devoted to Welby’s novel *Dreamtime*. It implies that there is a vast gap in the existing research literature concerning this particular work of fiction. Consequently, there emerges a compelling imperative for the current researcher to address this lacuna, delving deeper into the novel’s potential to illuminate environmental issues and foster ecological awareness. This uncharted territory promises to unveil fresh perspectives on the novel’s significance, thereby enriching our understanding and advancing the cause of greening wisdom amidst the gray future.

Research Methodology

Research methodology is “a systematic way to solve a problem. It is a science of studying how research is to be carried out” (Pillai & Kaushal, 2019, p. 4). The research methodology for the proposed study is firmly grounded in the realm of pure qualitative inquiry, specifically adopting a descriptive, analytical, and deductive approach. In the context of literary studies, the recognition that the theory itself serves as the methodology is a

foundational aspect of this research. The study is distinctly situated within the domain of ecocriticism, a literary theory that explores the intersection of literature and the environment from an interdisciplinary perspective. The theoretical framework is drawn upon the conceptualizations of great eco-scholars: Glotfelty and Ghosh. The selected contemporary text, *Dreamtime* by Venetia Welby, will serve as primary source for ecocritical analysis. The research aims to decode the impacts of anthropocentrism on the ecological balance and proposed ways to restore global environmental equilibrium encoded in the selected contemporary text. Moreover, to ensure a robust and authentic research basis, secondary sources such as books of criticism, journal articles, newspaper articles, magazines, reviews, theses, and dissertations will be incorporated 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). Moreover, “there is no such thing as ‘pure’ reading: interpretation always involves extra-textual knowledge, some of which is derived from secondary sources” (Belsey, 2005, p. 160). Thus, this comprehensive methodology is designed to provide a thorough exploration of the ecological themes present in the selected literary work within a global and interdisciplinary context.

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework is “the theories expressed by experts in the field into which you plan to research, which you draw upon to provide a theoretical coat hanger for your data analysis and interpretation of results” (Kivunja, 2018, p. 46). The theoretical framework for the present study is firmly anchored in the field of ecocriticism, a literary theory that examines the interplay between literature and the environment through an interdisciplinary lens. The present researcher utilizes the theoretical foundations provided by two prominent eco-critics, Glotfelty and Ghosh, in the field of ecocriticism.

Glotfelty (1996), in *The Ecocriticism Reader*, encapsulates the essence of ecocriticism as a critical lens that examines the interplay between literature and the natural world. She invites scholars to explore the nuanced ways in which the environment influences literary expression and how literature, in turn, can serve as a medium for reflecting on ecological concerns. She contends: “Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and physical environment” (Glotfelty, 1996, p. xviii).

Likewise, Ghosh (2016), in *The Great Derangement*, delves into the intricate relationship between climate change and literary representation. He recognizes that contemporary writers’ struggles with addressing climate change originate in a broader historical context. He foregrounds the dire consequences of impending climate change: “The ongoing changes in climate pose a dire threat also to the interior of the continent, where

millions of lives and livelihoods are already in jeopardy because of droughts, periodic flooding, and extreme weather events” (Ghosh, 2016, p. 89).

Moreover, Glotfelty (1996) encapsulates the core motivations of ecocriticism by addressing the profound environmental awareness of the contemporary era and the responsibility that scholars bear in light of this crisis. She accentuates the central driving force behind ecocritical scholarship – 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). This realization prompts a heightened ecological consciousness and emphasizes the critical need for transformative action. She goes on to warn: “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).

Similarly, 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 argues that this era requires historians to reevaluate their established methodologies and assumptions, as humans have now become agents shaping fundamental Earth processes. This shift in perspective highlights the interconnectedness of human actions and the environment, necessitating a comprehensive reconsideration of historical interpretations. He asserts: “[H]istorians will have to revise many of their fundamental assumptions and procedures in this era of the Anthropocene, in which humans have become geological agents, changing the most basic physical processes of the earth” (Ghosh, 2016, p. 9).

Apart from that, Ghosh (2016) explores culture’s interconnections with imperialism, capitalism, and various modes of cultural expression in the context of climate change. He announces that “culture is, of course, intimately linked with the wider histories of imperialism and capitalism that have shaped the world” (Ghosh, 2016, p. 10). However, he goes on to examine the nuanced interactions between this cultural matrix and different artistic and creative endeavors like poetry, art, architecture, theater, and prose fiction. He says that “Throughout history these branches of culture have responded to war, ecological calamity, and crises of many sorts: why, then, should climate change prove so peculiarly resistant to their practices?” (Ghosh, 2016, p. 10). Furthermore, he probes how historical processes of colonialism, decolonization, and power dynamics have shaped the trajectory of economic growth and its environmental consequences. The intertwining of economic expansion and military power reveals the complexity of historical forces that have led to the present global challenges. He affirms that “carbon emissions were, from very early on, closely co-related to power in all its aspects: this continues to be a major,

although unacknowledged, factor in the politics of contemporary global warming” (Ghosh, 2016, p. 109). He also examines the intersection of biopolitics and the climate crisis, highlighting how modern governments’ very foundations are built upon managing life and population. He affirms that “biopolitics is central to the mission of modern governments” (Ghosh, 2016, p. 143). He emphasizes that the climate crisis disrupts this biopolitical mission, pushing governments to confront unprecedented challenges that cannot be ignored without going against their evolutionary trajectory.

Glotfelty (1996) affirms that the recognition of this human-induced crisis calls for a reevaluation and reform of ethical systems to foster a harmonious relationship between human actions and the environment. Environmental ethics and social ecology offer frameworks to reevaluate “the root causes of environmental degradation and to formulate an alternative view of existence that will provide an ethical and conceptual foundation for right relations with the earth” (Glotfelty, 1996, p. xxi). In addition, 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). She also acknowledges the evolving nature of ecocritical scholarship towards greater inclusivity, international collaboration, and a focus on social justice. By diversifying voices and perspectives, ecocriticism can bridge environmental concerns with social issues, creating a more comprehensive and impactful discourse. She suggests that “environmental problems are now global in scale and their solutions will require worldwide collaboration” (Glotfelty, 1996, p. xxv).

In sum, the selected eco-theorists, Glotfelty and Ghosh, offer a ray of hope arising from the struggle against the looming ecological catastrophe. They envision a generation emerging from this struggle with a clearer worldview, transcending isolation, and rediscovering kinship with all living beings. This vision, both ancient and new, can find expression in revitalized art and literature, reflecting a renewed relationship between humankind and the natural world. They highlight the potential for positive change and emphasize the necessity of holistic and cooperative efforts to address the climate crisis. Keeping in view the present research methodology and theoretical framework, the present researcher is going to deconstruct Welby’s *Dreamtime* (2021) to heighten the role of literature in foregrounding anthropocentric tendencies disrupting ecological balance and unraveling potential ways embedded within the text of the novel.

Analysis and Discussion

Welby (2021), in *Dreamtime*, asserts that in the wake of rampant anthropocentric behaviors characterized by a historical legacy of

colonization, relentless pursuit of militarization, and heedless exploitation of natural resources, our planet stands on the brink of ecological collapse. This apocalyptic trajectory is marked by a cacophony of crises, each a testament to humans' shortsightedness and disregard for the intricate web of life upon which our existence depends. Pollution chokes our skies and poisons our waters, while the earth convulses with the fury of volcanoes and earthquakes, laying bare the consequences of our reckless extraction and manipulation of the planet's geological forces. Biodiversity, once the cornerstone of resilience in our ecosystems, is now dwindling at an alarming rate, leaving ecosystems vulnerable and teetering on the edge of collapse. Islands, once paradises of biodiversity and culture, now face the specter of submersion as sea levels rise, a grim testament to the consequences of our unchecked carbon emissions. Concurrently, our health suffers under the weight of pandemics such as flu and plague, exacerbated by our encroachment into once-wild spaces and our disregard for the delicate balance of nature. Yet amidst the chaos and despair, there emerges a glimmer of hope – a burgeoning greening wisdom among the masses, a collective awakening to the necessity of harmonizing with nature rather than exploiting it. In this gray future lies the potential for redemption as humanity learns to revere and protect the planet that sustains us, lest we succumb to the apocalyptic strains we ourselves have wrought.

Welby (2021) vividly portrays humans' anthropocentric behaviors contributing to global environmental disequilibrium through the lens of Phoenix's ideology. Phoenix and his followers, including Sol, yearn for the Dreamtime as a salvation from the impending collapse of the world. Dreamtime becomes a metaphor for the shared unconscious that humans attempt to access, a realm beyond the isolation of their individual egos. The lifting of barriers to the collective unconscious is portrayed as a response to the breakdown of the physical world, highlighting that environmental disequilibrium is intricately tied to humanity's disconnection from the natural order. Welby (2021) asserts: "All our creations will die with us as humans go extinct, but first they will all become visible: as the world around us breaks down, so the barriers to this other world – our collective unconscious – shall be lifted!" (p. 31).

Welby (2021) also offers a poignant reflection on the consequences of anthropocentric behaviors through Phoenix's narrative of the Golden Age and the commune's pursuit of the Dreamtime. Phoenix laments the loss of a harmonious coexistence with gods, monsters, and the wild when humanity transitioned into urbanization, attributing the separation to the bright lights and civilization that banished mythical creatures: "We lost our humanness! Our connection to the wild" (Welby, 2021, p. 32). The disdain with which he utters the word "*civilization*" highlights the negative impact of anthropocentric advancements on the environment and our essential connection to the natural world (Welby, 2021, p. 32). The authoress warns:

A date for the great ending was set; the Dreamtime they called it, which was a bit confusing as they'd already named so many things that, not least their camp. The day arrived, and the whole commune prepared to leave the earth and live in perpetuity of enlightened consciousness. (Welby, 2021, p. 32)

Boggs (2007) articulates that the exploitation of nonhuman nature is inexorably linked to the corporate imperial structure responsible for perpetuating ecological crises, militaristic endeavors, resource-driven conflicts, widespread poverty, and political subjugation. He contends that "The relentless assault on nonhuman nature is rooted in the same corporate-imperial order responsible for ecological crisis, militarism, resource wars, global poverty, and political repression" (Boggs, 2007, p. 34). Reinforcing this perspective, Welby (2021) asserts that the corporate imperial agenda and military activism are stark illustrations of how purported global powers flouted regulations aimed at safeguarding the environment and biodiversity. She delves into the devastating consequences of anthropocentric behaviors during a period of war and colonization, exposing the toll on both human lives and the environment. She recounts the brutal reality of being thrust onto the front line as an expendable colony during the retaliatory actions following Pearl Harbor: "When the Americans hit back after Pearl Harbor, we were first on the front line: an expendable colony, rolled out to protect the Japanese mainland" (Welby, 2021, p. 59). Similarly, the act of fleeing, living in caves, and surviving on meager resources paints a stark picture of displacement and environmental upheaval caused by human conflict. The authoress mourns: "We fled, dodging the bombs and the large, loud white men. We lived in caves, wandering from one to the next by night, starving, kept alive by potato starch mixed with water. We died in our thousands." (Welby, 2021, p. 59). Moreover, the notion, "colonizers would probably take over the world," accentuates the expansive reach of anthropocentric ambitions and their potential to reshape the geopolitical and environmental order (Welby, 2021, p. 48).

Welby (2021) goes on to affirm that the military presence exacerbates environmental degradation through activities such as land clearing, pollution from military vehicles and equipment, and the destruction of natural habitats, leading to ecosystem disruption and biodiversity loss. The character, Masayo's criticism of the American military presence and the impact of their bases on the Ryukyuan people emphasize the environmental and cultural toll of human-centric decision-making. In the same way, the parallel drawn between the treatment of the Ryukyuan people and the historical injustices faced by Native Americans accentuates the recurrent theme of exploitation and displacement driven by anthropocentrism: "You Americans helped the Japanese do to us what you did to your own native

peoples. You won't stop till we're all gone" (Welby, 2021, p. 113). It exemplifies how human actions, particularly those dictated by political and military interests, perpetuate environmental disequilibrium, adversely affecting local communities and perpetuating a cycle of injustice.

Loewenstein (2015) further underpins this argument and maintains that "wars are often fought for the key reason of liberating new and willing markets – and with the war on terror likely to continue for decades, there will be no shortage of new business to secure" (p. 16). Welby (2021) also reflects on the environmental and cultural consequences of humans' anthropocentric behaviors, specifically focusing on the impact of the American Occupation on Okinawa. The influx of GIS (U.S. military personnel) is described as disruptive, leading to the seizure of land, the construction of military infrastructure, and the imposition of a foreign culture. The narrator laments: "They stole ever more land to bulldoze, built noisy operations of death everywhere: tanks and aircraft, munitions and missiles" (Welby, 2021, p. 119). The authoress accentuates the ecological imbalance caused by military activities, such as the construction of Kadena Airbase. She critiques: "We held protests there, yelled at the low-flying pilots in their B-52 bombers. They used our island to wage war on Vietnam, and American culture moved in for the soldiers' R&R: diners, pizza, bars and brothels" (Welby, 2021, p. 119).

Welby (2021), through Kit's introspection, also invites readers to consider the environmental impact of human activities not only on Earth but also in the broader context of the universe, fostering a sense of responsibility for the delicate equilibrium of our planet and beyond. Kit, under the starry night sky, reflects not only on the vastness of the cosmos but also on humankind's relentless expansion and militarization of space. He critiques: "We have even militarised space. Militarised and robbed but still not colonised. We are doomed to stay put on our own ever bluer planet, just like the island people. The dark sea looks on" (Welby, 2021, p. 210).

Moreover, Welby (2021) announces that the true cost of human activities on the environment is often concealed, with adverse effects only becoming evident through ecological disruptions, such as the sickness of both wildlife and humans. The reference to Ishigaki and Iriomote further emphasizes the localized consequences of global environmental disequilibrium, portraying a somber picture of ecological decline within the Ryukyu Islands:

And it is true, I see it all happening again: ever more military, more bases, more chemicals and waste spreading out across our islands – to stand up to China, or so they claim. America doesn't have to disclose a thing. Even contamination. We're not allowed to check. We can only tell what's going on when the animals start dying. Or we do. On Ishigaki people get sick. On Iriomote people disappear. (Welby, 2021, p. 165)

Welby (2021) also scrutinizes that the intrusion of mainland businesses and the introduction of hazardous materials such as mustard gas, VX, lewisite, and Agent Orange exemplify the exploitative and negligent anthropocentric approach that prioritizes economic gains over environmental and human well-being. The narrator affirms: “They let the Americans bring their poisons to our beautiful island: mustard gas, VX, lewisite, Agent Orange” (Welby, 2021, p. 152). She also critiques the disposal of toxic waste in the oceans, highlighting the shortsightedness and irresponsibility that characterize anthropocentric behaviors, resulting in lasting ecological damage and a pervasive sense of environmental injustice in Okinawa. The narrator asserts: “We were looking at the Pentagon’s toxic arsenal. They dumped tons of that stuff in our poor choking oceans” (Welby, 2021, p. 152). Similarly, “Greed, lack of upkeep, disrepair – the same reasons we have radioactive waste all over the place now” (Welby, 2021, p. 152).

Chomsky & Polk (2013) warns the human race: “There are two problems for our species’ survival – nuclear war and environmental catastrophe” (p. 13). In this context, Welby (2021) divulges a disturbing narrative of environmental exploitation, where the islands are treated as a convenient, distant repository for nuclear waste that may wipe out the inhabitants of the island. For instance, Sol’s revelation of the plan of the American armed forces to use the islands as a nuclear dump and the subsequent earthquake, triggered by human activities like deep-earth bulldozing, and the resulting contamination of the island and its surrounding seas reflect the interconnectedness of ecological systems and the devastating repercussions of manipulating the environment for convenience. Moreover, Sol’s horror mirrors the reader’s realization of the irreversible damage wrought by such practices and prompts contemplation on the ethical implications of treating the Earth as an infinite dumping ground. She warns:

It’s not buried any more. They bulldozed the deep earth for the waste, were digging down as far as they could while they stored the containers up on top. But the digging itself was what caused the landslide when the earth shook. It was probably what caused the earthquake too. A great tsunami rose up and over the land, flooding the loose earth. It damaged the storage system, and the poison leaked all over this island and into the sea around it. (Welby, 2021, p. 233)

Moreover, Welby (2021) mirrors the upheavals caused by anthropocentric actions, including the Virrea-sponsored nuclear experiences described in the selected text. Sol’s acceptance of the greater good, prioritizing safety against nuclear disasters, reflects the complex negotiation between individual concerns and collective well-being. She observes:

At her school every pupil had to undergo a range of Virrea-sponsored nuclear experiences: surviving an atomic bomb, identifying and escaping fallout, the terrors of nuclear winter, holocaust and the total collapse of civilisation. After these no one disagreed that the USA should do everything in its power to safeguard against such disasters. (Welby, 2021, p. 120)

Furthermore, Welby (2021) prompts the human-induced changes to Earth's ecosystems, with the sea symbolizing both the expansive force of nature and the repercussions of human activities that disrupt the delicate balance of the planet. As the character, Kit contemplates the shrinking habitable land and the advancing oceans, there's a palpable sense of the sea's growing dominion over the land. He contends: "Habitable land has been shrinking year by year, you hear it on the news – oceans advance, nations recede" (Welby, 2021, p. 80). Similarly, the character, Hunter's commentary on the marine life surrounding their destination, "the sea being a dead zone, the extinction of marine life" due to human activities provides a stark commentary on the repercussions of anthropocentric behaviors on the environment (Welby, 2021, p. 85).

Welby (2021) also vividly portrays the harsh reality of oceanic degradation, using imagery of oil coating, plastic waste, and pollutant effects to depict the contemporary state of the seas. References to extinct species and mutant radioactive fish underscore the ongoing ecological crisis. There's a sense of disillusionment with the sea's perceived purity, replaced by a grim portrayal of its vengeful and hazardous nature. The authoress evokes a somber acknowledgment of the devastating impacts of human activities on marine ecosystems, emphasizing the urgent need for environmental stewardship and remediation efforts:

The sea might pretend its clarity and innocence, but they all know it is a filthy writhing thing now, vengeful and unsafe. He half expects the pair to crawl out sleek and sticky with gobs of black oil, like the grebes you used to see before they all died out. He expects them to be coated with plastic waste, dyed by chemicals, sent mad by mercury and rendered infertile by fake oestrogens. Or eaten by mutant radioactive fish, their exploding numbers restoring the lost population of the sea. (Welby, 2021, p. 89)

Sidel et al. (2009) warn that the grim toll of war extends far beyond the battlefield, encompassing significant morbidity and mortality, particularly among civilian populations, due to the widespread damage and disruption inflicted upon societal infrastructure. They affirm: "Destruction of infrastructure has led to food shortages and resultant malnutrition, contamination of food and of drinking water and resultant foodborne and waterborne illness, and medical-care and public-health deficiencies and

resultant disease” (Sidel et al., 2009, p. 24). In Welby’s *Dreamtime*, the mention of Ishigaki being partially submerged and experiencing a new disease puts emphasis on the interconnectedness of ecological disruptions and public health, illustrating how environmental disequilibrium can lead to multifaceted crises with far-reaching consequences for both ecosystems and human communities. She asserts:

The news is bleak. Some islands are entirely underwater, reclaimed by the sea.

‘Ha,’ she snorts. As if they weren’t already. You can’t blame the typhoon for everything!

Ishigaki is partially submerged: the description causes Také to start pacing again. Not only is there widescale destruction but also an outbreak of some new disease. (Welby, 2021, p. 192)

Similarly, Sol expresses her fear of these environmental disasters as: “What the fuck is happening? It feels like the world is ending” (Welby, 2021, p. 184). Moreover, the character, Risa’s mention of Ishigaki’s uncertain fate and the devastation wrought upon their own house serves as a poignant reminder of the interconnectedness of human lives and the environment. She laments: “And don’t you know we’re in the middle of a national crisis here? Who knows what has become of Ishigaki – you see what has happened here. Our house is all but ruins!” (Welby, 2021, p. 189). Furthermore, the description of conditions where everyone will be confined within his/her land borders, the sea and sky becoming unnavigable, and energy faltering against the powerful forces of the earth paints a bleak picture of a world on the brink of environmental collapse. The existential question posed evokes a sense of desperation and loss in the face of an impending ecological catastrophe: “What is left in these terrifying conditions, when soon everyone will be static and locked within their land borders, the sea unnavigable, the sky untravellable, energy stuttering to torpor in the face of the electric swells of the earth” (Welby, 2021, p. 191). Welby (2021) also depicts a scene of environmental and humanitarian crisis, with burst sewage pipes and contaminated floodwaters posing immediate dangers. The proximity of Ishigaki to polluted deep-sea mining sites exacerbates the situation, highlighting the interconnectedness of environmental degradation and human suffering. The limited air traffic, restricted to aid deliveries and evacuations, highlights the severity of the crisis. This narrative emphasizes the urgent need for ecological awareness and responsible resource management to mitigate such disasters and protect vulnerable communities. The authoress visualizes:

There are warnings of further disaster from the burst sewage pipes and filthy flood water sloshing about, stagnant. Ishigaki is too close for comfort to the polluted deep-sea mining sites. It’s a humanitarian crisis and there are no flights except for those small

planes taking aid to Ishigaki and evacuating people. (Welby, 2021, p. 192)

In the same way, the desolation portrayed at the ferry terminal, with no signs of human life and a lack of information, reinforces the notion of a world in disarray, as if the island is already experiencing the aftermath of a human-induced apocalypse. Welby (2021) affirms:

It looks like a land after the extinction of the human race, ruled again by terrifying prehistoric creatures, the rightful heirs of the dinosaurs. At least some life's mushrooming on this doomed Earth. 'They can't survive long in water,' says someone. 'They'll drown when the king tides flood the island.' (p. 227)

Welby (2021) also illuminates the destructive impact of anthropocentric behaviors on the biodiversity and ecological balance. The revelation that the foxes "had all died out in recent years; they'd been on the verge of it for decades, like most of the non-terrifying wildlife," highlights the vulnerability of species in the face of human-induced environmental changes (Welby, 2021, p. 22). Similarly, the cries of *Bakekujira* (ghost whale) introduce a symbolic element, representing the haunting consequences of human actions on the natural world. The lifeless skeleton of a whale, poisoned like the passengers, becomes a poignant metaphor for the pervasive environmental contamination caused by anthropocentrism. The authoress laments: "That is just the skeleton of a whale, Hiro. It's no demon. The sea is full of them. Poisoned, like the rest of us. It's not moving, see?" (Welby, 2021, p. 225).

Moreover, Welby (2021) suggests a call for reflection on the interconnectedness of human behavior, environmental health, and the need for a more sustainable and ecologically conscious approach to living. She contends: "Everyone fears these fluey warnings now; robots in America have been programmed to spot them too, the better to enforce an immediate quarantine should yet another mutated virus threaten humanity" (Welby, 2021, p. 196). Moreover, the authoress laments: "'Quarantine while the island sinks, is that it?' 'They're dying, Sol. What good does it do anyone to let them infect the next island?'" (Welby, 2021, p. 214). Similarly, the people's desperation to escape, coupled with the mention of a plague, hints at the compounding impact of both natural and human-induced disasters: "Sol, there's a fuckin' plague, man. We've gotta get out of here any way we can" (Welby, 2021, p. 216).

Welby (2021), in *Dreamtime*, also offers a comprehensive set of embedded suggestions to address the looming ecological apocalypse. She advocates for challenging anthropocentric behaviors, urging humanity to revisit its relationship with the natural world and prioritize ecological harmony over exploitative practices. Harmonizing with nature and the divine is posited as

essential, encouraging individuals to recognize and respect the sacred interconnectedness of all life forms. Moreover, she calls for a cessation of armed conflict, highlighting the imperative of promoting peace as a prerequisite for environmental preservation. International cooperation is deemed indispensable in grappling with global environmental challenges, emphasizing the importance of transcending national interests and fostering a sense of unity as global citizens. Furthermore, she stresses the need for greening politics and promoting sustainable practices at all levels of society, advocating for policies that prioritize environmental conservation and stewardship. She also highlights the importance of facilitating the resettlement and support of ecological refugees, recognizing the interconnectedness of environmental and humanitarian crises and the necessity of compassionate and inclusive responses to those displaced by ecological upheaval. In sum, she, through these suggestions, renders a holistic framework for addressing the ecological apocalypse and fostering a more sustainable and harmonious relationship between humankind and the natural world. The detail of decoded potential solutions is given below to green the gray era and avert the dystopian future:

Firstly, Welby (2021) holds that achieving a sustainable environment necessitates harmonizing with nature, as our interconnectedness with the natural world is fundamental to our well-being and survival. She encourages readers to critically examine the manipulation of nature for commercial interests, foster eco-consciousness by prompting reflection on the authenticity and preservation of natural environments, and emphasize the need for a more sustainable and respectful relationship with the Earth to restore global environmental equilibrium. For instance, the discussion among passengers about a jungle community living in harmony with nature invokes the concept of Nirai Kanai as an untouched land, serving as a symbol of the desire for an unspoiled environment. Welby (2021) contends: “That Nirai Kanai, the unknown faraway land where the Okinawan gods live, is there – a life preserved from American and Japanese invasion, where the fish are still safe to eat and extinct animals flourish” (p. 223).

Secondly, Welby (2021) affirms that returning to nature and recognizing the interconnectedness of all living beings with the divine can serve as a powerful catalyst for the safety and restoration of the environment. She encourages readers to question the established norms, prompting a reevaluation of humanity’s role in environmental crises and proposing alternative paradigms for restoring global environmental equilibrium. She reflects on the disconnection between modern human existence and the natural world, equating the contemporary lifestyle with a form of madness. She critiques the modern life and recommends reconciliation with the Creator and nature. She maintains: ‘True insanity is modern life, how far we have strayed from our gods and from nature. This place won't be safe

for twenty thousand years, yet animals may live here, for a time. If we become animals, we may live here too” (Welby, 2021, p. 235).

Thirdly, Welby (2021) maintains that saying farewell to arms and rejecting militarism present a pivotal opportunity for fostering healing in our degraded environment because “an escalating spiral of warfare and environmental devastation threatens to spin entirely out of control if we are unable to achieve a different way of organizing the world’s affairs” (Tokar, 2014, 44). The vast resources allocated to military endeavors worldwide, from weapon production to maintaining military bases and conducting warfare, represent a significant drain on environmental resources and contribute to widespread ecological destruction. By redirecting these resources away from militaristic pursuits and toward environmentally sustainable practices, societies can mitigate the environmental damage inflicted by militarism. Furthermore, the cessation of armed conflicts and the dismantling of military infrastructure can help restore damaged ecosystems, preserve biodiversity, and mitigate the impacts of pollution and habitat destruction. For instance, the dialogue between Hunter and Kit exposes the tension between military presence and local sentiment, highlighting the consequences of anthropocentric behaviors on both ecological and cultural fronts. Hunter’s assertion that the flight ban might not apply to military operations highlights the prioritization of strategic interests over environmental concerns. Similarly, Kit’s observation of the anti-base sentiment in Naha city, symbolized by slogans like “Go home, marines” and “NO BASE, NO RAPE” introduces a humanitarian dimension to the environmental critique (Welby, 2021, p. 87).

Fourthly, Welby (2021) highlights the universal impact of climate change and suggest that international cooperation is inevitable to cater to the looming environmental crisis. She illustrates how the Americans are unbalancing the environment around the globe, specifically in the Miyako Islands, they along with the Japanese are destroying them. She stresses the need for international collaboration and assistance to mitigate the effects of climate change. In addition, she emphasizes the urgency of taking action to address environmental challenges rather than resigning to apocalyptic scenarios or assigning blame. She mourns:

The Miyako Islands are underwater, a few villages here on this island too. We are all suffering. What can we do? Nothing will ever get done if we all just sit around preparing for the apocalypse, blaming the Japanese, the Americans. We need help from other nations. (Welby, 2021, p. 116)

Fifthly, Welby (2021) contends that greening politics offers a pivotal pathway to avert an eco-dystopian future by prioritizing environmental sustainability and resilience in policymaking. By integrating ecological considerations into political decision-making processes, governments can

foster a transition towards a more sustainable and equitable society. She encourages readers to reflect on the potential for resilience and adaptation, fostering eco-consciousness by urging a collective effort to navigate toward a more sustainable and interconnected global environmental equilibrium. The desire to be on a Ryukyuan island, viewed as a haven beyond networks and politics, reflects a longing for a more harmonious existence with nature, emphasizing the human yearning for a sanctuary untainted by external influences. She maintains:

At least they will be away from marines and bases, seems to be the general consensus – what does it matter where on earth they are? A Ryukyuan island beyond the networks and politics, at one with nature, its own people. (Welby, 2021, p. 223)

Sixthly, Welby (2021) urges humankind to transcend the limitations of national boundaries and unite in a concerted global endeavor to confront impending environmental challenges. The protagonist, Kit challenges prevalent notions of national pride and independence, arguing that these constructs serve merely as excuses that hinder collective action. Instead, he advocates for a profound reevaluation of human identity and behavior, emphasizing the necessity of learning to exist as a species without perpetuating incessant harm to the environment. He critiques the human race: “All this bullshit about national pride and independence. It’s just an excuse. Humans need to pull together as a species, figure out how to be human without causing constant damage. ‘We need to learn how not to be human’” (Welby, 2021, p. 209). This call for a fundamental shift in human consciousness emphasizes the urgent need for a paradigmatic transformation in how individuals interact with their surroundings, stressing harmony, stewardship, and sustainability as guiding principles in mitigating ecological damage and fostering a more harmonious relationship with the natural world.

Seventhly, Welby (2021) promotes sustainable practices and policies to grapple with the looming environmental degradation. For instance, Také’s reflection, “Do not allow them to ruin the Good Land, riot for space, food and water. That is what this ban on flying is about, you know,” highlights the significance of protecting the Earth from exploitation and degradation, signaling a willingness to prioritize ecological preservation over short-term vested interests (Welby, 2021, p. 209). The ban on commercial flights serves as a symbolic gesture towards environmental conservation, indicating authorities’ recognition of the need to implement drastic measures to mitigate the impending eco-crisis. By restricting air travel, ostensibly to reduce resource consumption and environmental harm, policymakers aim to address the root causes of environmental degradation and promote sustainable practices.

Lastly, Welby (2021) asserts that facilitating the transition of ecological migrants is essential for addressing the complex challenges arising from environmental displacement. By providing comprehensive support systems, governments and communities can help mitigate the socio-economic impacts of displacement. She encourages readers to critically examine the far-reaching consequences of geopolitical decisions and military activities on the environment, urging a collective effort to address the environmental impact of political decisions and restore a more balanced and sustainable global equilibrium. For instance, the acknowledgment of America's role in environmental degradation prompts readers to confront the environmental consequences of military activities and the exploitation of territories: "It's military property. Means they can bring rubbish over and dump it anywhere now. Japan calls this place a 'climate refugee camp'" (Welby, 2021, p. 234). The term 'climate refugee camp' exposes the exploitation of vulnerable regions for the disposal of unwanted populations, highlighting the global implications of environmental injustices.

Conclusion

To conclude, the study adopts an environmentalist perspective to examine Venetia Welby's novel, *Dreamtime*, a work that serves as a representative portrayal of the conflict zone in Okinawa and neighboring islands, located between Japan and China. It endeavors to articulate the novel's depiction of the intensifying ecological crisis in Okinawa and surrounding islands, a crisis exacerbated by the pervasive violence and lawlessness stemming from American military presence. The relentless militarization of the region, accompanied by ecological and economic exploitation, disregard for legal protocols, and inadequate infrastructure, has led to the gradual erasure of these traditional islands from collective memory. The consequences of militarization extend beyond human casualties to encompass devastating impacts on the landscape, marine ecosystems, and wildlife. Okinawa and its neighboring islands now face a critical ecological juncture, characterized by the looming threat of island submersion, pollution, outbreaks of fatal diseases, climate-induced migrations, ecological injustice, and the erosion of natural beauty. Importantly, this narrative transcends the confines of Okinawa-cum-neighboring islands and speaks to a broader global reality, where war, violence, and haphazard development imperil the delicate ecological balance essential for sustaining life.

Moreover, Welby's *Dreamtime* serves as a plea to the governments of the United States, Japan, and China, as well as the inhabitants of the region in particular and the peoples of the world in general, urging them to acknowledge and protect the Earth's delicate balance. The study further advocates for the cultivation of ecological wisdom and calls for increased

collaboration among literary figures and stakeholders across various disciplines to nurture environmental consciousness, thereby hindering further environmental degradation, restoring ecological integrity, promoting sustainable practices, conserving natural resources, and ultimately fostering a safe and harmonious global existence, averting the bleak prospects of a dystopian future, and making this planet a safe and serene place to live on.

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