

Metaphors in Memory of Water by Emmi Itäranta and Far North: A Novel by Marcel Theroux

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Abstract

This research article analyses the metaphors and thematic elements in Emmi Itäranta's *Memory of Water* and Marcel Theroux's *Far North: A Novel*, focusing on their ecocritical and dystopian frameworks. Both novels depict settings that reflect different world regions, illustrating the profound impact of climate change and human lifestyles on the environment. In *Memory of Water*, water scarcity serves as a powerful metaphor for ecological degradation, highlighting the consequences of humanity's neglect and exploitation of natural resources. The protagonist, Noria Kaiti, embodies the struggle for survival in a world where water has become a precious commodity, symbolising both life and memory. Similarly, *Far North* presents a bleak vision of a post-apocalyptic landscape shaped by environmental collapse, emphasising themes of isolation and resilience in the face of adversity. Through rich imagery and symbolic representation, both authors critique contemporary societal issues while urging readers to reconsider their relationship with nature. This study aims to uncover how these narratives not only reflect environmental crises but also propose pathways for addressing ecological challenges through awareness and conservation efforts.

Keywords: Metaphors, *Memory of Water*, *Far North: A Novel*, water scarcity, ecological degradation, resilience.

Introduction

Emmi Itäranta is a Finnish author and illustrator, best known for her debut novel *Memory of Water* (*Teemestarin kirja* in Finnish), which was published in 2012. The entire text was written by Itaranta in both Finnish and English, and *Teemestarin kirja* was the 2011 winner of the Sci-fi and Fantasy Literary Contest run by Teos, a Finnish publishing house. Itaranta has worked as a columnist, dramaturge, scriptwriter, theatre critic, and press officer in the past. Her award-winning debut novel *Teemestarin kirja* (The Tea Master's Book) was started under the title *Memory of Water* when she was pursuing her MA in Creative Writing at the University of Kent, UK, and her MA in Drama at the University of Tampere. Emmi Itäranta's work has received positive reviews for its lyrical prose and thought-provoking themes. The novel won the Kalevi Jäntti Literary Prize in Finland in 2012 and was nominated for the Philip K. Dick Award in the United States. In addition to her writing, Emmi Itäranta has worked as an illustrator and graphic designer. While *Memory of Water* is her most well-known work, she has also contributed short stories to various anthologies.

Memory of Water, published by HarperCollins in 2014, was translated from the original version written in

Finnish: Teemestarin kirja, *The Tea Master's Book*, is Emmi Itäranta's debut novel, which was also adapted into a film in 2022, directed by Saara Saarela, and starring Saga Sarkola. The Finnish translation of this work was released in 2013 by Toes, a Finnish publishing firm. The Finnish work won the Fantasy and Sci-Fi Literary Fiction contest organized by Teos in 2012 and was later published. In addition, the novel received the Kalevi Jännti Award in 2012 and the Nuori Aleksis Award in 2013. It was also nominated for the Tähtivaeltaja Award in 2013. (The Finnish work won Teos' Fantasy and Sci-Fi Literary Fiction contest in 2012 and was later published.)

Emmi Itaräntä a Finnish novelist, the author of *Memory of Water* explores a future world where water is scarce and tightly controlled by the government. The story follows Noria, a young woman trained by her father to be a tea master and carry on the family tradition of collecting water from a hidden spring. As Noria becomes more aware of the government's oppressive tactics and the dangers facing her community. Itaräntä vividly depicts the beauty and fragility of nature in this dystopian setting while delving into themes of memory, identity, and resistance. Through Noria's journey, readers are confronted with questions about power dynamics, environmental sustainability, and the resilience of the human spirit. The *Memory of Water* is a thought-provoking read that stays with you long after you turn the final page.

Adam Roberts wrote that *Memory of Water* by Emma Itaranta is a poetic and melancholy debut. (The Guardian)

Quoting Robert C. Robinson 'it is a simultaneously a coming-of-age story, a fantastic adventure, and a bold warning about a future that is all too real.' - Portland Book Review

According to Katherine Farmar *Memory of Water* is a Melancholy and yet hopeful; beautiful and yet honest about the reality of ugliness; *Memory of Water* is a carefully crafted, finely observed, and ultimately deeply moving novel.' -Strange Horizons

In Tor.com, Justin Landon said that this novel is 'brilliant, lyrical prose...Itäranta's writing is almost a song, working like a melody that sticks in your head more than a series of words that flow by.'

Nancy Hightower said 'Itäranta's lyrical style makes this dystopian tale a beautiful exploration of environmental ethics and the power of ritual.' -Washington Post Book World.

Quoting Kaisa Kurikka from Turun Sanomat Newspaper 'The reflections on water, freedom and existence unfold as a whole philosophy of life, where the relations between an individual and the community, the present moment and the eternal are re-evaluated... The language flows beautifully and the thoughts are deep. On the whole, *Memory of Water* is a truly terrific debut novel.

In Voima Newspaper Oona Juutinen wrote 'Emmi Itäranta's language is carefully crafted, precise and just right. Lyricism and water-related metaphors ease the reader into the rhythm of the book like into the tea ceremony that is central to the story.'

Quoting Erkki Widenius from Lapin Kansa Newspaper, 'For a debut novelist, Itäranta's writing is surprisingly profound. For instance, reflecting on the crucial connection between human life and water is a good literary insight from her part... Her text reads at times like dark prose poetry.'

Memory of Water is a novel in which many metaphors represent nature's rage and what happens when it is completely out of control.

The sentence from the novel 'Water walks with the moon and embraces the earth, and it isn't afraid to die in fire or live in air. When you step into it, it will be as close as your own skin, but if you hit it too hard, it will shatter you.'(5 Itäranta) can be interpreted as a rich metaphor for environmental issues and ecocriticism through several layers of meaning. The metaphor of water in the phrase illustrates its vital role in nature, symbolising life, fluidity, and interconnectedness within ecosystems. It highlights the

nurturing aspect of water while also reflecting its vulnerability to human actions such as pollution and climate change. The intimate relationship humans share with water highlights our dependence on the environment, yet the warning about its potential to ‘shatter’ is a caution against reckless exploitation. This metaphor encapsulates key themes in ecocriticism, prompting reflection on our relationship with nature and the urgent need for sustainable practices to protect fragile ecosystems.

Itäranta skilfully incorporated death and water which serves as a profound metaphor for environmental issues. ‘Death is water’s close companion. The two cannot be separated, and neither can be separated from us, for they are what we are ultimately made of: the versatility of water, and the closeness of death. Water has no beginning and no end, but has both.’ (5). The phrase ‘Death is water's close companion’ is a metaphor for environmental issues by illustrating the profound interconnectedness between life, water, and death. It emphasises that water, essential for life, also embodies the inevitability of death, highlighting the duality of existence. This relationship reflects how human survival is intricately linked to healthy ecosystems, which are increasingly threatened by pollution and climate change. The cyclical nature of water symbolises resilience, yet its vulnerability to human actions warns of potential ecological collapse. Ultimately, this metaphor urges a recognition of our responsibility to protect the environment to ensure both life and the delicate balance of nature are preserved.

This novel also highlights how environmental degradation—exemplified by contaminated water—can lead to a cycle of sickness and vulnerability, emphasising that the consequences of pollution extend beyond immediate human health risks to affect entire ecosystems. The statement about Minja's illness and the hesitation to use tap water, even after boiling, serves as a powerful metaphor for the broader environmental issues stemming from water contamination. ‘Minja fell sick again last week, and I don’t dare to give her our tap water even if it’s been boiled.’ (18) It illustrates the direct impact of pollution on health, not just for humans but for all living entities reliant on clean water sources. The fear associated with using tainted water reflects a growing awareness of our interconnectedness with nature; when one component of the ecosystem suffers, it reverberates through the web of life, ultimately threatening biodiversity and ecological balance.

The transformation of natural elements into artificial constructs, paralleling the way climate change and human activity alter our planet's ecosystems.

‘She had picked one of her thick and serious looking volumes from a shelf that was too tall for me at the time, shown me the pictures- white, shimmering, round and sharp shapes in strange landscapes, luminous like crystallised light-and told me that they were water that had taken a different form in low temperatures, in circumstances that could only be artificially produced in our world but that had once been a natural part of seasons and people’s lives.’ - 40.

The ‘thick and serious looking volumes’ symbolise the weighty knowledge and history of nature that is often overlooked or inaccessible, while the ‘white, shimmering, round and sharp shapes’ represent the beauty of ice and snow that has become rare due to rising temperatures. The idea that these conditions can only be artificially produced reflects humanity's struggle to recreate or preserve what has been lost in the natural world, highlighting the urgency of addressing environmental degradation and the need to reconnect with the rhythms of nature that have historically shaped life on Earth.

‘Our relations with nature have changed over the centuries with regard to economy, society and culture.... Our interaction with nature has played a vital role in economy, but it has also served as the determining factor for our thinking, emotions behaviour and beliefs, affecting the social and state structures.’ Pg 2 (Dariusz J. Gwiazdowicz, Tadeusz Janicki)

This statement serves as a powerful metaphor for environmental issues by emphasising humanity's role as caretakers rather than owners of natural resources. 'Not everything in the world belongs to people...we are the watchers of water, but first and foremost we are its servants.'- pg 91. The phrase 'watchers of water' suggests a responsibility to observe and protect vital ecosystems, highlighting the interconnectedness of all living beings with the environment. By describing humans as 'servants' of water, it underscores the idea that we must prioritise the health of our planet over exploitation and consumption. This perspective calls for a shift from viewing nature as a commodity to recognising our duty to sustain and nurture it, reflecting the urgent need for stewardship in the face of climate change and environmental degradation.

The inquiry about 'pure, fresh water in the lost Lands' serves as a metaphor for environmental issues by highlighting the scarcity and degradation of vital natural resources due to human impact. 'I asked if there was pure, fresh water in the lost Lands.'- pg 151. The phrase 'lost Lands' evokes a sense of nostalgia for ecosystems that have been irreparably altered or destroyed, suggesting that once-thriving environments are now diminished or inaccessible. This reflects broader concerns about water scarcity, pollution, and climate change, emphasising the urgent need to protect and restore freshwater ecosystems that are essential for life. The search for 'pure, fresh water' symbolises humanity's quest for sustainability and the recognition that clean water is becoming increasingly rare, urging a collective responsibility to safeguard these precious resources for future generations.

The notion that 'people won't be needing water' implies a future where access to this essential resource is severely compromised, reflecting the consequences of climate change, over-extraction, and pollution. 'People won't be needing water. They'll have to risk their lives building illegal water pipes.'- 162. This statement serves as a stark metaphor for environmental issues by illustrating the desperate lengths to which individuals may go in the face of water scarcity and mismanagement. The act of 'building illegal water pipes' symbolises the breakdown of societal structures and governance, where communities are forced to resort to dangerous and unlawful measures to secure basic necessities. This highlights the urgent need for sustainable water management and equitable distribution, underscoring the broader implications of environmental degradation that push people into survival mode, risking their lives for a resource that should be a fundamental right.

The imagery of people drawing 'mud-stained water' from a brook highlights the degradation of freshwater sources, reflecting the impact of pollution and climate change on ecosystems. The act of capturing rainwater in 'skins and buckets' symbolises the lengths to which communities must go to obtain even the most basic necessity for survival, emphasising the vulnerability of those affected by water scarcity. 'I passed a few people who had been drawing mud-stained water the small brook near the edge of the grave. Some of them were trying to catch rain from the sky into their skins and buckets. I passed houses, and saw people letting the water falling from clouds wash over their thirsty faces and bodies and hands.'-217. This passage serves as a poignant metaphor for environmental issues by illustrating the desperate struggle for clean water in a world where natural resources are scarce and polluted. Additionally, the scene of individuals allowing rainwater to wash over their bodies emphasise a deep connection to nature and a yearning for purity in an increasingly compromised environment. This metaphor encapsulates the urgent need for sustainable water management and the broader implications of environmental neglect that leave communities struggling for access to clean, safe water.

The description of water 'burning in fire' or 'fading into the sky' illustrates its adaptability, yet also suggests the precariousness of water resources in the face of climate change and pollution. The imagery

of water ‘shattering against sharp rock’ and ‘drowning into the dark shroud of the earth’ symbolises the destructive forces of environmental degradation, where natural cycles are disrupted, leading to catastrophic consequences like floods and droughts. ‘Water is the most versatile of all elements. It isn’t afraid to burn in fire or fade into the sky, it doesn’t hesitate to shatter against sharp rock in rainfall or drown into the dark shroud of the earth. It exists beyond all beginnings and ends.’-221 This passage metaphorically addresses environmental issues by portraying water as a resilient and transformative element that reflects the complexities of ecological change. By stating that water ‘exists beyond all beginnings and ends,’ it underscores the essential, cyclical nature of water in sustaining life, while also highlighting the urgent need for sustainable management to preserve this vital resource amidst growing environmental challenges.

Emmi Itäranta's novel *Memory of Water* is a compelling example of ecocritical literature. Through its narrative and thematic elements, it addresses urgent environmental issues. Set in a dystopian future where water scarcity has become a critical concern, the novel explores the consequences of climate change, pollution, and societal collapse, making it a poignant reflection on contemporary ecological crises.

This novel is deeply rooted in environmental themes, particularly focusing on water scarcity and pollution caused by waste. ‘When you step into it, it will be as close as your own skin, but if you hit it too hard, it will shatter you. (5 Theroux) The protagonist, Noria Kaitio, navigates a world where the government tightly controls water, and water crimes are punishable. This setting is a stark reminder of the potential future consequences of current environmental neglect and resource mismanagement. The novel illustrates how human activities have led to ecological degradation, emphasising the interconnectedness of various elements within the ecosystem—water, air, and land. Quoting from an article titled *Economics of Water Scarcity and Efficiency* by Barbier, B. Edward and Burgess C. Joanne ‘A simple economic framework of supply and demand can illustrate the complex, real-world problem of water scarcity... If the water demand outstrips supply, the price of water will rise’. (2). The narrative illustrates a future where water is a controlled and scarce resource, mirroring real-world situations where demand often surpasses supply.

This aligns with the quote stating that when water demand exceeds supply, prices rise, highlighting the societal implications of resource management. The story serves as a cautionary tale about the consequences of environmental neglect, where increased demand exacerbates scarcity and inequality. Additionally, it emphasises the interconnectedness of ecosystems—water, air, and land—suggesting that degradation in one area impacts others. This complexity is reflected in economic discussions about water scarcity, where factors such as climate change influence supply and demand dynamics. Ultimately, both the novel's themes and economic principles underscore the need for effective policies to manage water resources sustainably and equitably in the face of growing challenges.

From an ecocritical perspective, *Memory of Water* employs various literary devices to highlight environmental degradation and its societal impacts. The narrative critiques consumerism and commodification, showcasing how different forces contribute to ecological crises. Itäranta's use of symbolism—where water represents life and purity at the same time it also signifies decay—enhances the reader's understanding of the fragile balance between nature and human intervention. ‘Unless there are significant improvements in water productivity in the coming decades, freshwater stress will worsen globally.... The global risk to economies and societies from increasing water scarcity will be exacerbated by population growth, economic development, and climate change.’(12 Barbier, B. Edward and Burgess C. Joanne). The warning about worsening freshwater stress globally is underscored by alarming statistics indicating that between 2-3 billion people currently lack safe drinking water, with projections suggesting

that the urban population facing water scarcity could double by 2050.

This situation is exacerbated by significant factors such as population growth, economic development, and climate change, which are driving demand beyond sustainable limits; for instance, over 50% of the world's population experiences highly water-stressed conditions for at least one month each year (Bonazzi.D, *Imminent risk of a global water crisis, warns the UN World Water Development Report 2023*). Additionally, the economic implications are severe, as water shortages threaten food security and can lead to substantial GDP losses in vulnerable regions, highlighting the urgent need for improved water management practices to mitigate these risks. Without significant advancements in water productivity and cooperative international efforts, the challenges posed by increasing water scarcity will likely escalate, impacting economies and societies worldwide.

As a work of climate fiction (cli-fi), *Memory of Water* not only entertains but also educates readers about environmental issues. Through the protagonist perspective, the author highlighted how to climate changed with tim-In a time when winters still existed, characterized by their cold and white beauty, one could have walked on the solidified water known as ice. While I have seen ice before, it has only been in small, artificial pieces. Throughout my life, I have longed to experience what it would be like to walk on a frozen sea. (5 Theroux). It serves as a cautionary tale that reflects real-world concerns about climate change and resource scarcity. The novel's speculative nature allows it to explore possible futures shaped by today's ecological challenges, urging readers to consider their roles in fostering sustainability. By intertwining personal narratives with broader environmental contexts, Itäranta encourages reflection on the consequences of inaction regarding climate issues.

‘When water is relatively abundant, there is a tendency to assume that plenty of water is available to meet rising demand and at little additional economic cost or environmental damage. Moreover, to support supplying more water as cheaply as possible to meet growing demand, new water infrastructure projects, delivery networks, and treatment systems are often subsidised, and the impacts on the surrounding environment from diverting and depleting water from aquatic ecosystems are ignored. (3.Barbier B. Edward, Burgess C. Joanne.

In Emmi Itäranta's novel, *Memory of Water*, the contrast between the past and present is starkly illustrated through the experiences of Noria Kaitio and her family. Once, during her parents' time, they enjoyed a flourishing garden where flowers thrived effortlessly, symbolising a world abundant in resources. However, as time progressed, the landscape transformed dramatically due to escalating water scarcity and contamination. This shift has rendered it nearly impossible to sustain even the simplest of plants, reflecting a broader crisis where humans struggle to access clean water for their basic needs. The narrative poignantly captures how environmental degradation has not only affected nature but has also deeply impacted human life, leading to a profound sense of loss and urgency in the face of dwindling resources.

In summary, *Memory of Water* can be classified as an ecocritical novel due to its focus on pressing environmental problems and its exploration of human relationships with nature. Through its vivid imagery, symbolic representations, and thought-provoking themes, Itaranta's work not only highlights the dire consequences of ecological neglect but also invites readers to engage with these critical issues on a deeper level. By doing so, it contributes meaningfully to the genre of eco-novels that seek to raise awareness and inspire action against environmental degradation.

Marcel Theroux is a British-American screenwriter, broadcaster, and novelist. Born in Uganda and raised in England, he is the son of celebrated travel writer Paul Theroux and the brother of acclaimed filmmaker Louis Theroux. Marcel has published six novels. His second novel, *The Paperchase*, won the Somerset

Maugham Award. His fourth novel, *Far North* was a finalist for the U.S. National Book Award, the Arthur C Clarke Award, and was awarded the Prix de l'Inaperçu in 2011. A Japanese edition of *Far North* was prepared by acclaimed novelist Haruki Murakami and published in April 2012. His sixth novel, *The Secret Books*, was published by Faber to critical acclaim in 2017. In addition to his books, Marcel has written several original screenplays and presented more than a dozen documentaries about climate change, history, and culture. In 2009, he presented the travel series *In Search of Wabi-sabi* on BBC Four, which was part of the channel's Hidden Japan season of programming. He is also a regular presenter of *Unreported World* on Channel 4.

Marcel Theroux's *Far North* has garnered a range of critical perspectives, highlighting its thematic depth and narrative style. Overall, critics agree that while *Far North* may not fully satisfy genre expectations, it offers a compelling exploration of survival and human connection amidst desolation.

Hartland, Dan wrote 'yet *Far North* is not without its charms. Resource scarcity and the wars engendered by it have diminished the world, leaving Makepeace living as a sheriff in a lawless ghost settlement'.

Quoting from an article titled 'To the ends of the Earth' by Harrison, John M, '*Far North* is a cowboy labour-camp eco-disaster-movie of a novel, in which a woman passes herself off as a man. Every base is touched. It's the future. How far in the future we don't know: while wonders abound, plenty of the world remains familiar. Global warming- which, with a rhetorical gesture as slick as a fiscal instrument, the novel both denies and uses as a rational-has reduced the population: its concomitant wars have poisoned the continents.'

Dubrow. Tuhus, Rebecca in her article 'Cli-Fi: Birth of a Genre' wrote that *Far North* by Marcel Theroux 'we are in the future, or, at any rate, a future. The settlement has collapsed under the pressure of an influx of starving refugees.'

Quoting Farrar, Giroux and Straus review posted in Kurks Review 'He imagines a planet, barely subsisting in the aftermath of global conflict and environmental catastrophe, on which hopeful survivors have received land grants in a frigid wilderness inhabited by indigenous tribes and "ruled" by slaveholding warlords.'

Marcel Theroux's *Far North* serves as a profound exploration of the environmental crisis by depicting a dystopian future characterised by ecological collapse and societal disintegration. The narrative centres on Makepeace Hatfield, the constable of a nearly abandoned settlement in Siberia, who grapples with the harsh realities of a world devastated by resource scarcity and the consequences of humanity's past actions. 'The city is emptier than heaven. But before this, there were times so bad I was almost thankful for a clean killing between consenting adults.' (3, Theroux) As Makepeace embarks on a journey through this desolate landscape, she reflects on the remnants of civilisation that have been lost—technology, community, and culture—all casualties of environmental degradation and societal breakdown. The novel illustrates how the once-thriving communities, including Makepeace's family of Quaker settlers, have succumbed to climate change and conflict pressures, leaving her isolated in a 'broken age.' (17) Throughout her travels, Makepeace encounters not only the physical remnants of her past but also the moral complexities of survival in a lawless world where human nature is tested. 'That you've broken something you don't know how to fix, and you won't be the same again.' (7) The stark setting serves as a backdrop for her internal struggles and longing for connection, ultimately emphasising the urgent need for reflection on our relationship with the environment and each other in an increasingly fragile world.

The quote from *The Effect of Environmental Change on Human Migrations* by Richard Black et al, 'The natural environment is more than simply a backdrop to the social world. Ecosystem services, hazards, and

deep human environment relations affect every important social and cultural phenomenon, from the location of settlements through to attachment to place.’(3) Richard Blackelt resonates deeply with the themes presented in Marcel Theroux’s *Far North*. In the novel, Makepeace Harfields’s experiences illustrate how ecological degradation directly impacts social structures and individual identities. As she navigates a devastated Siberian landscape, the remnants of her once-thriving community are stark reminders of the consequences of humanity’s neglect towards the environment. This aligns with the assertion that ‘ecosystem services, hazards, and deep human-environmental relations affect every important social and cultural phenomenon.’

Makepeace’s journey reflects the profound connection between her environment and her sense of self, emphasising that her isolation in a broken age directly results from ecological collapse. The quote also critiques standard migration theories that overlook environmental factors; similarly, Makepeace’s movement through this desolate world is not merely physical but also a response to the environmental crises that have reshaped her reality. Her reflections on loss and survival highlight the urgent need for a deeper understanding of how human actions intertwine with ecological systems, reinforcing the notion that our relationship with the environment is fundamental to our social existence. Thus, Theroux’s narrative serves as a poignant exploration of these interconnected themes, urging readers to reflect on their environmental responsibilities.

Moving forward, the abandonment of cities and places, as depicted in Marcel Theroux’s *Far North*, can be understood through the interplay of environmental hazards and individual decisions, a theme that resonates with the broader critique of migration models discussed in this quote from Richard Blackelt, which says ‘By focusing on the environmental hazard and individual decisions, however, the conceptual models developed to date underemphasise the role of in- and out-migration as already significant phenomena in many countries as regions with substantial observed environmental stresses and projected future change.’(4) In *Far North*, the reasons for the community’s abandonment are tied to an unspecified chemical disaster or viral outbreak, which leaves the inhabitants vulnerable and ultimately forces them to leave their homes and possessions behind. This scenario illustrates how environmental degradation can precipitate significant social upheaval, leading to migration as individuals seek safer living conditions.

The quote emphasises that existing conceptual models often fail to adequately address the role of in- and out-migration in response to environmental stresses. It suggests that many regions experiencing substantial ecological challenges are not sufficiently recognised in discussions about migration patterns. In the context of *Far North*, Makepeace’s decision to remain in a deteriorating environment reflects a personal struggle against overwhelming external pressures, highlighting how individual choices are influenced by broader environmental realities. Her situation exemplifies how people may cling to their homes despite evident dangers, illustrating the complex relationship between attachment to place and the necessity of migration due to environmental hazards.

Furthermore, Theroux’s narrative underscores the psychological toll of living in a world marked by ecological collapse. Makepeace’s reflections on her abandoned settlement reveal a deep sense of loss and isolation, which is compounded by the societal breakdown around her. This aligns with the critique that migration theories often overlook the emotional and social dimensions of displacement caused by environmental factors. In *Far North*, the abandonment of Makepeace’s town serves as a microcosm for understanding how individual and collective decisions about migration are deeply intertwined with environmental conditions, reinforcing the need for more nuanced models that incorporate these dynamics.

Ultimately, both Theroux's narrative and the critique of migration models highlight a critical truth: environmental hazards not only shape physical landscapes but also profoundly influence human behaviour, relationships, and decisions regarding migration. As Makepeace navigates her desolate world, her experiences serve as a poignant reminder of the urgent need to address how environmental crises compel individuals and communities to adapt or abandon their homes in search of survival. *Far North* vividly depicts an environmental crisis stemming from climate change and resource depletion. The world is characterised by extreme weather conditions and a breakdown of civilisation, suggesting that humanity's attempts to mitigate environmental damage have inadvertently led to further disaster. 'There were a few signs of human settlement along the riverside—a burned-out cabin, a wooden cross on a grave, some tumbledown walls.' (16) For instance, Makepeace reflects on how the cessation of industrial activities, intended to combat pollution, resulted in unintended consequences that exacerbated climate conditions and highlights the complexities and paradoxes inherent in environmental management and human intervention.

Quoting from *The Effect of Environmental Change on Human Migrations*, 'Rapid-onset extreme environmental events such as floods tsunamis, landslides, earthquakes, wildfires and volcanic eruptions are well-known triggers of displacement.' (7 Richard Black elt) This triggers the sense that displacement can be closely related to the themes explored in Marcel Theroux's *Far North*, particularly in its depiction of an environmental crisis driven by climate change and resource depletion. In the novel, the catastrophic consequences of humanity's actions lead to a breakdown of civilisations, mirroring the effects of sudden environmental disasters such as floods or wildfires that force communities to abandon their homes.

In the *Far North*, the world is characterised by extreme weather conditions and societal collapse, suggesting that humanity's attempts to mitigate environmental damage—such as ceasing industrial activities paradoxically resulted in further disaster. The quote highlights how environmental factors are often viewed as direct drivers of migration, emphasising the need to understand these dynamics in the context of broader societal impacts. Furthermore, Theroux's portrayal of Makepeace's desolate landscape, marked by remnants of human settlement—'a burned-out cabin, a wooden cross on a grave, some tumbledown walls—serves as a poignant reminder of the devastation wrought by environmental crises. These images evoke the aftermath of rapid-onset disasters, where communities are left to grapple with loss and displacement. The interplay between individual decisions and environmental hazards highlights how personal choices are often shaped by larger ecological realities, reinforcing the idea that migration is not just a response to immediate threats but also a complex interplay of historical ongoing environmental stresses. Overall, as Makepeace navigates her bleak reality, her experiences reflect a broader truth about humanity's struggle against ecological collapse—a theme that resonates with contemporary discussions about displacement due to environmental change.

In the novel, the setting—a decaying settlement in Siberia—symbolizes the aftermath of significant environmental crises that have forced individuals to abandon their homes. The line, 'This place had promised the first settlers everything. Now what was it? A ghost-town, decaying back into wilderness.' (29) This illustrates how once-thriving communities have been rendered uninhabitable due to ecological degradation and resource scarcity. This bleak environment serves as a backdrop for exploring human behaviour under duress, illustrating how ecological degradation impacts social structures and interpersonal relationships. The quote about displacement being associated with discrete events that challenge safety, security, or livelihoods complements the paragraph discussing the ghost town in the *Far North* by emphasising the involuntary nature of the movement experienced by the inhabitants.

The connection lies in understanding that the abandonment of this settlement is not merely a choice but a forced response to extreme conditions that threaten survival. ‘Displacement is movement associated with discrete events that challenge safety, security or livelihoods. Much displacement is, in effect, involuntary or forced, and sometimes sudden if associated with rapid onset hazards.’ (7 Richard Black elt) The quote highlights that much displacement is involuntary or sudden, akin to the experiences of Makepeace and her community as they confront lawlessness and desperation in their struggle for survival. This aligns with the broader implications of environmental hazards impacting social structures and interpersonal relationships, as seen in Makepeace's role as a sheriff in a lawless environment.

Moreover, the quote ‘The availability and stability of, and access to, ecosystem services are the three primary mechanisms by which livelihood and well-being is manifest in particular localities, most starkly in resource-dependent economic systems dominated by agriculture or fisheries.’ (7 Richard Black elt) reinforces the idea that displacement can stem from gradual yet severe environmental changes rather than just rapid-onset disasters. In *Far North*, Makepeace's reflections on her surroundings reveal how ecological collapse leads to profound social consequences, illustrating that displacement is often a complex interplay of environmental factors and human decisions. Thus, the quote and the paragraph underscore the urgent need to address how ecological crises compel individuals and communities to adapt or flee, highlighting the intricate relationship between ecological degradation and human mobility.

The *Far North* can be classified as an ecocritical novel due to its focus on the relationship between humans and their environment. It critiques the environmental degradation caused by modernity and the philosophical underpinnings of human existence in an ecologically fraught world. ‘There wasn’t a soul left in the whole place save us, I grew surer of it by the day.’ (29) Makepeace's reflections often reveal a deep scepticism about humanity's capacity for goodness in times of crisis. The degradation of ecosystem services not only threatens material well-being but also affects social relations and individual choices, leading to desperation and lawlessness within her community. This reflects the idea that when access to essential resources is diminished, as highlighted in the quote, individuals are forced to confront harsh realities that challenge their values and ethical frameworks.

Moreover, the quote suggests that changes in ecosystem services can lead to significant harm to human well-being. In *Far North*, this harm is evident as Makepeace navigates a landscape stripped of its former vitality, grappling with both physical survival and existential questions about humanity’s role in ecological collapse. Thus, both the quote and the paragraph illustrate a critical understanding of how environmental factors shape human experiences and relationships, reinforcing the interconnectedness between ecosystem health and societal stability.

The quote ‘With the last humans gone, it seemed like nature decided to reclaim everything.’ (30) emphasise environmental change impacting migration directly and indirectly relates closely to the paragraph discussing Theroux’s *Far North*, particularly in how the narrative illustrates the interconnectedness between personal stories and larger ecological themes. Adding to this quote

‘Environmental changes has a clear impact upon the environmental drivers of migration, but also has the potential to affect migration indirectly, both through its influence on the other drivers, and through its influence on personal characteristics and intervening obstacles. Specifically, changing environmental risks affect economic drivers through effects on agricultural productivity and rural livelihoods, and the locations of industry, employment and settlement, and political drivers through influencing conflict and public policy.’ (8 Richard Black elt)

The quote emphasises that environmental risks can affect economic drivers, such as agricultural producti-

vity and rural livelihoods, as well as political factors, including conflict and public policy. This framework is essential for understanding the broader societal failures depicted in the novel. In *Far North*, the consequences of environmental degradation manifest in resource wars, displacement, and the collapse of community structures. The line, 'With the last humans gone, it seemed like nature decided to reclaim everything,' reflects the aftermath of such ecological crises, where human presence has been significantly diminished due to the inability to sustain livelihoods in a deteriorating environment. This aligns with the quote's assertion that environmental changes can lead to forced displacement, as Makepeace and her community grapple with the loss of resources and security.

Moreover, Makepeace's experiences highlight how personal decisions are influenced by these larger environmental and economic pressures. Her interactions with others reveal how desperation can lead to moral compromises, illustrating how individuals navigate their circumstances within an ecological context shaped by broader societal challenges. This mirrors the quote's mention of how changing environmental risks can influence personal characteristics and intervening obstacles that affect migration decisions. Overall, both the quote and Theroux's narrative underscore the complexity of migration as a response to environmental change. They illustrate that personal stories of struggle are deeply intertwined with systemic issues stemming from ecological degradation, thereby emphasising the need for a multifaceted understanding of how environmental factors drive human mobility and societal transformation.

In the end, *Far North* represents an acute awareness of environmental crises through its depiction of a world transformed by ecological neglect and societal breakdown. By intertwining personal narratives with critical reflections on humanity's relationship with nature, Theroux crafts a compelling ecocritical narrative that prompts readers to consider the implications of current environmental practices. The novel ultimately serves as both a cautionary tale and a reflection on human resilience, making it a significant contribution to contemporary eco-literature. Through its stark portrayal of survival in a ravaged landscape, it challenges readers to confront their complicity in environmental degradation and to envision pathways toward restoration and sustainability.

Conclusion

Both *Far North* by Marcel Theroux and *Memory of Water* by Emmi Itäranta serve as profound explorations of environmental themes through their narratives, employing ecocritical and dystopian frameworks to critique humanity's relationship with nature. Marcel Theroux's *Far North* and Emmi Itäranta's *Memory of Water* both engage deeply with ecocritical themes, exploring the intricate relationship between humanity and the environment amidst dire ecological crises. In *Far North*, the narrative presents a stark vision of a future ravaged by environmental collapse, focusing on Makepeace Hatfield, a constable in a desolate Siberian settlement. The novel critiques modernity's role in ecological degradation, illustrating how attempts to manage pollution have led to unintended consequences that exacerbate climate issues. Makepeace's realisation that in trying to do the right thing they have lost the things which they were trying to save. This encapsulates the paradoxes inherent in environmental management and aligns with ecocritical themes that question anthropocentrism and social injustices linked to ecological crises.

Similarly, *Memory of Water* addresses critical environmental issues through the lens of water scarcity and pollution. The metaphor which talks about where water walks with the moon and hold the mother Earth highlight water's vital role in sustaining life while also emphasising its vulnerability to human exploitation. This duality reflects the delicate balance within ecosystems threatened by human actions. Itäranta's narrative portrays the consequences of pollution through Minja's fear of using tap water, symbolising

broader concerns about health risks linked to environmental degradation. This highlights how such degradation affects not only individual health but also biodiversity and ecological balance, advocating for stewardship over ownership—an idea that resonates with Theroux’s critique of humanity’s relationship with nature.

Both novels dive into dystopian elements at some point in time, depicting futures where access to essential resources is severely compromised. In *Far North*, imagery of where the cabins are burned evokes despair and loss, reinforcing the critique of humanity’s past actions that led to this desolate state. The lawlessness faced by Makepeace illustrates how ecological crises can lead to moral compromises, highlighting dystopian themes of human behaviour under extreme duress. The haunting realization that where there is no human settlement and nature begins to rejuvenate emphasizes nature’s reclamation in a world where human presence has dwindled. Ultimately, this interplay between desolation and regeneration serves as a poignant reminder of the fragility of human existence and the enduring power of the natural world.

In *Memory of Water*, phrases like ‘pure, fresh water in the lost Lands’ evoke nostalgia for ecosystems altered by climate change, reflecting themes of resource scarcity resulting from human impact. The imagery of drawing “mud-stained water” from polluted sources exemplifies the struggles faced by communities impacted by environmental degradation. Itäranta emphasizes the transformation of natural elements into artificial constructs, symbolizing humanity’s struggle to preserve what has been lost due to climate change. This transformation serves as an urgent call to reconnect with nature’s rhythms that have historically shaped life on Earth.

Together, these works illustrate a profound exploration of how environmental degradation shapes human experiences and societal structures. They highlight the interconnectedness between personal stories and larger ecological themes, emphasizing humanity’s resilience and vulnerability within an increasingly fragile world. As both authors critique modernity’s role in exacerbating ecological crises, they advocate for a deeper understanding of our relationship with nature and underscore the urgent need for sustainable stewardship in an era marked by environmental uncertainty.

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