

The Impossible Resurrection of Grief: A Lamentation over the Environmental Crisis

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Abstract:

Published in the year 2021, *The Impossible Resurrection of Grief* by a New Zealand scientist-author Octavia Cade, in words of Catherine Woulfe, is an “unsettling” novella. The book reminds us about our connection with the natural environment and our responsibility towards it. The work is a lamentation over the collapsing ecosystem and the extinction of various species while throwing light on factors like global warming, changing climate, reckless use of plastics, ecological grief, loss of coral reefs, extinct species etc. In the novella ‘Grief’ has been presented as an inevitable depressive illness which is spreading throughout the world as individuals observe the undesirable changes occurring in the environment. It is the realization of the fact that something closely connected with the entire ecological system is about to disappear forever and nothing can truly replace it. The heroine, a marine biologist Ruby who passionately loves jellyfish and is carrying out a research on jellyfish, constantly resists Grief but her mind is undergoing a conflict regarding her responsibility towards environmental issues prevailing all over the world.

Keywords: Environmental grief, extinction, climate, ecosystem, guilt, loss

The branch of literature which deals with the relationship of humanity with environment or which presents environment as a major character is classified as ecofiction. Ecofiction can play an important role in enhancement of environmental awareness by educating the masses in an amusing manner. Today whole world is facing serious environmental problems and few fiction writers have actively undertaken the responsibility to address these burning issues in their writings. Octavia Cade’s latest work *The Impossible Resurrection of Grief*, depicting a picture of an extinct species of Tasmanian tiger on its cover, clearly falls under the category of ecofiction. Her concern towards environmental problems is conspicuous in *The Impossible Resurrection of Grief* and therefore this work is worth discussion from ecocritical perspective. This book attempts to express that all the components whether it is a bird or an animal or water or land, or any natural object, together constitute environment and if any component is distorted then it naturally disturbs the entire balance of the environment, which will eventually affect the mankind as well. It serves as an eye opener by showing that how human beings have been and continue to cause a massive disruption to the environmental system at an accelerating pace. Through her fictional writings she attempts to reveal the bitter reality through art; bridging two different streams i.e. literature and environment. Cade has been persistently trying to bring attention towards these grave environmental issues through her fictional works.

It is widely known that, global climate change can severely affect the environment. This work majorly focuses on this issue and its adverse effects, like, how warming is altering the geographical ranges of many plant and animal species and their life cycles. It is all about the animals which are facing new challenges for survival and how humans react to such circumstances. The central figure, Ruby is fascinated with jellyfish and she specializes in the study of this species of fish. Luckily, her favourite jellyfish are able to survive in warm water as they can adapt to warming water and other environmental effects caused by human-induced climate change. Her friend Marjorie is not as fortunate as Ruby. Marjorie's chief concern was the Great Barrier Reef, which died due to climate change and is depressed with the fact that she could not do anything to save it. Marjorie "stopped coming to work and set herself up at the derelict public pool with a stack of useless journal articles and a lifetime supply of plastic". (ch.1) Marjorie has become afflicted by a profound melancholia which is referred as Grief and now she is called as the Sea Witch. Not only Marjorie but this disease is spreading all over the world when people face the bitter reality about the deteriorating state of the environment and the extinction of species. The characters in the novella have been portrayed as scientists who suffer from anxiety, hopelessness and despair when they witness the decline of ecosystem. This mental state is commonly termed as environmental grief and in the novella it has been addressed as Grief.

"The skeletal bleaching of the Great Barrier Reef had triggered the Grief of entire communities, and looking back now, I realized that there Marjorie had shown her susceptibility." (ch.1)

And finally the Sea Witch died of Grief as "once it comes it never leaves. The Grief is spiraling down and down into loss that can never be recovered, that will never lack culpability. It's the guilt that makes it so devastating... and so profoundly destructive. The Grief always ends in suicide."(ch.1)

"Can you watch something die and let it die?" emerges as a recurring question throughout the novella which is provocative as well as unsettling, both. If temperature keeps on increasing, will the mankind suffer environmental grief just like the characters in the story? Or, we would simply watch the creatures dying helplessly.

Grief has been presented as a pandemic, and has been explained in the following words in the text: "It's the experience of loss," the psychologists said, but more than that it was a loss underlined by guilt, because that loss had no natural cause; not if you didn't count humans as natural, and I didn't. We weren't thunderstorms, nor did we blunder about, blind as bacteria. We had the capacity for choice, and what we had chosen- what we continued to choose- was death." (ch.1)

Ruby suggests what mistakes humans have been committing for a long time, and what these mistakes or choices would cost? Only humans are responsible for such a disastrous outcome which is absolutely inevitable,

"The shift in climate that we'd ignored for so long, that we'd only given lip service to preventing...when it came it took so many of us with it, took us with floods and droughts. That

was a small thing, really, and we were practiced at looking away, so long as it only happened to other people, in other places. But when it started taking what lived with us- the birds and beasts and creatures that we loved, the green world that grew up around us, well. That was a loss we hadn't prepared for, for all we had allowed it... encouraged it, even through our choices." (ch.1)

Marine animals ingest or are entangled by plastic debris which causes severe injuries and even death. Cade highlights this fact by asserting that how man-made things like plastic threatens life by contributing to global warming. A description where Grief-stricken, Sea Witch is shown making jelly fish from plastic, Ruby says, "You *know* what plastic does! You *know* how dangerous it is to sea life. The remnants of populations that would get caught in it, that would swallow it and starve." (ch.1) In dejection, Sea Witch replies, "We kill everything anyway. It's what we do." (ch.1) It is actually novelist's anger against the inhuman actions of human beings which is expressed through the character Sea Witch. Sea Witch cries from her sense of guilt and the helplessness that she feels for human induced climate change, "We might as well have been voiceless" and "We might as well have given up our tongues. And then she cut hers out, swiftly, brutally, with the comb edge of sharpened plastic, the comb I never knew she had, and her blood and my vomit spattered over the pool floor." (ch.1)

Ruby meets Granny who took the responsibility to resurrect the extinct thylacines also known as Tasmanian tigers. In Granny's own words, "It was us that killed them, Changing climate made them vulnerable, and we did the rest. Hunting and hunting and hunting... Their extinction was deliberate"(ch.2). She calls Ruby unlucky as Grief hasn't come to her yet however she was sure that it would develop one day. According to Ruby, Granny was also afflicted by Grief, "It was the focus and obsession of Grief, and by it these creatures were brought back from the brink, hidden away in an old house in an isolated area. Coddled by a woman who conversed with suicides, and who saw sanity in the actions of self-murder." (ch.2) Granny says that she spent many years trying for the resurrection of thylacines by "Piecing together the DNA, failing again and again."(ch.3)

Ruby meets an artist named Darren whose idea is not resurrection but robotics. Darren's response to Grief is different from Sea Witch or Granny. He designs simulacra of rock wren and organizes the exhibition. But can artificial birds really replace the original ones? For Ruby, "It was hard to forget that the birds were mechanical" (ch.3) and her grief seems to be more intense when she ponders, "In this world, this much grimmer and sadder world, the simulacra, for some species, might have been all that was left." (ch.3) George posed a disturbing question, "Are we going to have a world filled with simulacra now?" (ch.3) Same chapter contains the description of Southern Alps, "a small-town boy who'd gone on school trips to the Southern Alps, to see the fading of the glaciers and the ice in a warming world. The speed of it unsettled him. It had unsettled the Sea Witch, too, when she sailed over the Reef, but that was not a comparison to dwell on." (ch.3)

There is a description in the book where Ruby and George walk around a kettle and Ruby tries to take a quick look in the kettle, but later they discover that it was just a hologram and not water, "If I'd thought to test the water with my fingers first, we both would have got less of a shock. I inched on my belly to the edge and shoved my head under what appeared to be water- and came

up immediately, shrieking, because water should have been wet and this wasn't. There was no water on my face, no water in my eyes, and my hair didn't form loose and floating tentacles. I scrambled back, fast, aided by George's fingers hooked in my waistband as he hovered over me." (ch.4) Disheartened Ruby compares the surface of hologram with "the museum wrensfinely crafted and reflective" (ch.4) which she had seen in Darren's exhibition. Ruby contemplates about the dried kettle and blames human dominion over earth in the following words, "Maybe there'd once been a small kettle here and it had dried up and gone, or been so disturbed by invasion, the influence of farming and warming temperatures, that the vegetation within had been unable to withstand the change and withered as the kettle warmed itself to extinction." (ch.4) This view of hologram or the absence of water shakes her to the core to that extent that she imagines a coffin beneath it.

Cade beautifully interweaves literary elements like depression, loneliness, suicide, horror, etc. with environment and ecology making *The Impossible Resurrection of Grief* as one of the most noteworthy works in ecofiction genre. The characters suffering from Grief try to bring the lost species through different ways like art, holograms, genetics and robotics back, in the story. It is this Grief which leads characters to behave weird and eventually towards their death.

It attempts to explore the impact of climate change and its consequences on the human psyche. It explores the grief of humanity over the environmental destruction in a science fiction setting. Publisher's Weekly reviewed it in the following words: "Cade's strength shines in her beautiful descriptions... This thoughtful work is a reminder of humanity's connection and responsibility to the natural world." The novella predicts future situations considering the present climatic changes that how various species would extinct and what impact it would have on human mental state. In words of Catherine Woulfe this novella presents, "a new kind of psychological devastation that flourishes and evolves as everything else collapses. Called simply "Grief", it is contagious and hard to spot, and it feels like a creature that's already here." The book is really thought provoking as it throws light on both past as well as the present human attitudes towards the environment.

Works Cited:

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