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"THE DYSTOPIAN FUTURE: AN ANTHROPOCENE READING OF EMMI ITARANTA'S *MEMORY OF WATER*"

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ABSTRACT

In the article entitled "Watching the World" published in Awake Magazine on 8th November 2008, Ban Ki Moon, former UN Secretary General commented, "The challenge of securing safe and plentiful water for all is one of the most daunting challenges faced by the world today...too often where we need water, we find guns". The twenty-first century opens the window with the realization of the importance of blue gold, water.

Despite the denial of traditional politicians and journalists across the globe about the change in climate, there is now a clear unanimity among scientists, environmentalists and people that the present level of increase in greenhouse gas is enough to change the patterns of weather to possible catastrophic outcomes. The truth is that climate change is not just a scientific concern but a problem encompassing all areas such as literature, politics, business, law and importantly health. Bill McKibben has strongly stated in his essay The End of Nature, "for the first time in history human beings [have] become so large that they [have] become so large that they [have] altered everything around us. That we [have] ended nature as an independent force, that our appetites and habits and desires[can] now be read in every cubic meter of air, in every increment of thermometer" (35).

Cli-fi has not only the potential to represent the consequences of climate change, but also the capacity to provide a space in which to address the Anthropocene's emotional,

ethical, and practical concerns. It can be linked to the problem of ecological consciousness that human need to attain. The paper intends to investigate the representation of nature and literary constructions of environmental crisis in the novel Memory of Water by Emmi Itäranta. Ecocritical study of the novel with an emphasis on anthropocene helps to establish the relationship between nature and culture. The approach would be interdisciplinary and would be consulting the scientific matter to understand the post-apocalyptic and scientific views. It is a modest attempt to unearth Emmi Itäranta's contribution to the awakening of modern man towards conservation and preservation of ecosystem. In specific, the study focuses on the setting, characters and relationships between them within the context of the novel's plot.

Keywords: Climate change, dystopian future, Cli-Fi, Anthropocene.

INTRODUCTION

Despite the denial of traditional politicians and journalists across the globe about the change in climate, there is now a clear unanimity among scientists, environmentalists and people that the present level of increase in greenhouse gas is enough to change the patterns of weather to possible catastrophic outcomes. According to the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change), surface temperatures across the world are expected to climb between 0.3 and 4.8 degrees Celsius between 1986 and 2005, with a projected global rise in sea level of 26 to 82 centimetres (Stocker et al.,23). After accounting for the melting of ice and glaciers in the Antarctic and the Greenland, the subsequent study conducted by (NOAA) National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association of US predicts global sea level rises of 30 to 250 centimetres by 2100 (Goodell, 304). Despite all the conferences of climate change conducted by UN between 1995 and 2019, carbon emissions still climb high. The countries are so passive that the IPCC describes their routine as casual business endangering the planet. And as observed the outcomes are evident.

According to the Professor of Ocean Physics at Cambridge, Peter Wadhams, an area of 8 million square kilometres of the Arctic Ocean was covered with sea-ice in the 1970s, but in 2012 the ice had shrunk to an area of 3.4 million square kilometres; and, a record number of 238 ships successfully navigated the impassable North West Passage in 2015. Even though

the science is no longer substantially questioned, it is commonly disregarded. "Everyone knows that exponential growth... will only lead to disaster," Wadhams writes, "yet every finance minister seeks to encourage economic growth" (173).

The truth is that climate change is not just a scientific concern but a problem encompassing all areas such as literature, politics, business, law and importantly health. Bill McKibben has strongly stated in his essay The End of Nature, "for the first time in history human beings [have] become so large that they [have] become so large that they [have] altered everything around us. That we [have] ended nature as an independent force, that our appetites and habits and desires[can] now be read in every cubic meter of air, in every increment of thermometer" (35).

Cli- Fi- The New Imaginative Repertoire

Novelists and short story writers took up the subject of global warming and climate change slow. There was even an article by Robert Macfarlane in *The Guardian* lamenting the lack of literature pointing at problem. "Where are the novels, the plays, the poems, the songs, the libretti, of this massive contemporary anxiety?... [A]n imaginative repertoire is urgently needed by which the causes and consequences of climate change can be debated, sensed and communicated."

But in the recent years, the imaginative repertoire has emerged. And it is because the crisis in climate change became so large and not symbolic that the writers cannot avoid it. So, there is now rising cli-fi works to address this growing anxiety. It depicts a world that is the aftermath of the change in climate. "Many cli-fi novels are the materialization of conservationist and environmentalist fears: a world in which human ubiquity and the loss of wilderness gives way to a fight for survival by the few survivors in a world that has returned to the primitive" (Tuhus-Dubrow, 59).

Climate fiction and studies related to it are nascent and still in the making but it is important as it offers us a broad vision of life and our future. The genre explores the potential and drastic consequences of climate change. The term "cli-fi" was first coined by Dan Bloom in 2003. Since its coinage the term has its high place both in media and literature. According to Caren Irr cli-fi is:

> Characterized most frequently by efforts to imagine the impact of drastic climatological change on human life and perceptions, cli-fi narratives can be set in the past, present, or near future of the planet. The styles and voices used in cli-fi range widely, but these works often pay marked attention to the perspectives of scientists, especially where these deviate from popular ideas about the environment. Setting is of crucial importance for cli-fi; endangered cities, islands, and remote Arctic regions are common locations. Events of the genre often turn on a dramatic transformation in the setting, such as floods or the collapse of the food system. The pacing of these narratives tends to be accelerated and punctuated by crisis. This temporality creates an anxious, fearful mood and a preoccupation with the instability of objects and the permeable boundaries between human and nonhuman lives. Together, these motifs cohere in an apocalyptic sensibility, and differences of opinion about the necessity of apocalyptic patterns of guilt, crisis, and salvation have been an important source of controversy surrounding the genre (1).

The important themes of cli-fi genre include consequences of pollution, rising sea levels and global warming on human civilisation. According to Goodbody and Johns-Putra, the cli-fi not only portrays the aftermath of climate crisis, but it also has the capacity "to provide a space in which to address the Anthropocene's emotional, ethical, and practical concerns" (Goodbody and Johns-Putra, 229).

Memory of Water is the debut novel of Finnish writer Emmi Itäranta. She wrote the work when she was doing an MA in Creative Writing from the University of Kent, UK. She also has an MA in Drama from University of Tampere and is an important theatre critic, dramaturge, scriptwriter and columnist as well.

Memory of water portrays the dystopian future of water itself. Noria Kaitio lives in what she calls the 'present world', somewhere in Scandinavia. The climate change has led the world to a crisis with rising sea levels, inundation of coastal areas and the unavailability of fresh water. The remaining water sources are under the control of military. Water is rationed and the little water they get a week is not able to quench the needs of people. This has resulted in water wars, water crimes and construction of illegal pipelines. Kalevi Jäntti of Literary Prize jury hails *Memory of Water* as:

Memory of Water develops into a mysterious allegory of the dilemmas of truth, freedom and loyalty. Emmi Itäranta's dystopia is a skilful combination of science fiction and age-old utopian tradition that reflects the greatest social and environmental challenges of our time.

Paul Crutzen coined the term "The Anthropocene" to describe the new era where humans are a dangerous "geological force". The humans have endangered the sustainability of life on Earth by becoming a negative force and tampering with the environment. And this does not promise us a better future but a bitter future. It is now one can see how ecocriticsm presents "entanglements of more-than-human forces and substances, merge with the life of our bodies" (Opperman and Iovino, 3) and nature. The occasion to realise the entwinement of nonhuman and humans and their power for agency which is easily observed in the narratives of anthropocene should be understood as "stories" says Oppermann and Iovino. Water stands out as the most appropriate narrator in this regard, as a material entity that is important for the survival of human and as a nonhuman element that embodies the anthropocene's entanglement of nonhuman and human agents. The story of water as a rare natural resource is connected with conventional gender roles, cultural traditions, and environmental justice issues dealing with the equitable distribution of the remaining natural resources as the readers hear the story of water as a scarce natural resource. Water is, thus, at the heart of Itäranta's narrative in many ways.

Itäranta presents the transformed future not in a positive manner but a negatively transformed future. The major crisis is the dearth of resources especially that of fresh-water. The over utilisation in the yester years have damaged nature to an extend that it cannot renew itself. Water which was once a plentiful resource is strictly controlled by the government officials in the modern world. The extend is such that wars are fought over water. "But water doesn't care for human sorrows. It flows without slowing or quickening its pace in the darkness of the earth, where only stones will hear" (01). It is from Noria's father who is a tea master that she learns to become a tea master. It is a position of enormous authority and responsibility. Many tea masters have their own hidden spring, which they have inherited from generation to generation. Noria's father has one as well. Noria's emotional and physical anguish begins when she discovers the secret that her father has kept hidden his entire life.

Clean water is a luxury and keeping its source private is a crime punishable by the highest form of torture and death. When the military uncovers a property that is collecting water in excess of the ration, they have the power to enter the homes and search for hidden water sources. The military desecrate homes and draw a large blue circle on the door front to warn people that they are being watched. The people in those houses are not permitted to leave their home until they die of starvation or are publicly put to death. The military discovers the secret spring after Noria's father dies. Noria is locked in the house after it is circled by the dreaded blue circle. Even though, she does not survive, her stories of water do.

Anthropocentric climate change, according to the novel, is the cause of extreme water shortage, that is also critical for the survival of plant life, animal and human on Earth. The morphological depictions of the globally warmed world in which Noria and her father live highlight the gravity of this environmental ultimatum.

Seasonal variations are no longer sensed in *Memory of Water* in which it is the "The Twilight Century," and people have already lost their recollections of cold, snow or winter. As Noria says, "once, when there were still winters in the world, cold winters, white winters, winters you could wrap yourself in and slip on and come in to warm from, you could have walked on crystallized water that was called ice" (5). Snow, on the other hand, is now only seen in encyclopaedias in the Twilight Century. Noria inquires of her father about the disappearance of snow and ice, and the response of mother acknowledges humanity's part in the rise of global warming, greenhouse gases and altered.

The necessity of water for life's sustainability is becoming more apparent as human climate change and ecological threats grow. For their own benefit, humans attempt harder and utilise more severe methods to regulate water. Nonetheless, Itäranta emphasises throughout the novel that, while water is a critical natural resource for human survival and thus one of the most important natural products consumed by humans, it is and therefore be seen as an independent force of nature that will never surrender to man-made chains.

The tea ceremony that Noria performs finally for herself metaphorically symbolises the rising dearth of fresh-water. "The ceremony is over when there is no more water" (259). This is a warning that life of people on Earth will come to an end if there are no fresh water resources.

Conclusion

The shortage of fresh-water gives on to the establishment of despotic regimes of power and global and local power holders asserting monopolies on already little natural resources, such as water, according to the book *Memory of Water*. Water, like all other natural resources, is under threat from colonisation. However, Itäranta's dystopic description in the story is not too far from current beliefs about the destiny of Earth. Given the declining conditions of environment in the Anthropocene and the growing dearth of planet's natural resources in the twenty-first century, it is not a dystopic assumption to believe that the aim of controlling and sharing the planet's existing freshwater resources will become a sensitive and contentious issue in the near future. Water becomes a more valuable asset in the Anthropocene when these conditions exist and "control of water is inevitably control of life and livelihood" (Ward, 32).

Nonhuman elements, like as water, exhibit agentic and anthropomorphic aspects, such as recollecting, rejecting human control, affecting the any lives they touch in their surroundings, and narrating stories of human exploitation of nature, according to Itäranta's *Memory of Water*. The environmental scholar Astrida Neimanis states, "the waters that we comprise are never neutral; their flows are directed by intensities of power and empowerment" (14). All human activities are remembered by water's metaphorical touch and Neimanis further states "currents of water are also currents of toxicity, queerness, coloniality, sexual difference, global capitalism, imagination, desire, and multispecies community. Water's transits are neither necessarily benevolent, nor are they necessarily dangerous. They a ather material maps of our multivalent forms of marginality and belonging" (14, 15).

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