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## Revisiting A. W. Grimke: Releasing the Stored Energy

Shubhanku Kochar, M.Phil.



Courtesy: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angelina\\_Weld\\_Grimke%C3%A9](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angelina_Weld_Grimke%C3%A9)

### Angelina Weld Grimke

Great writers do not write for their own age, but for all the ages to come. Their creative genius is not curtailed to one century. They have a universal appeal. They even do not write for a particular sect, class, race or gender. Their appeal is to all people in all ages in all places. Any critical theory or any standard of judgement can be applied to evaluate their Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

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works. Their view of human nature is broad. The writers like: Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Tolstoy, Kalidas, and Prem Chand are only a few examples.

Angelina Weld Grimke is also such a writer who can be placed in this unending catalogue. Her writings can be interpreted in more than one way; moreover her appeal is also not limited. Though, she was an Afro-American, but her writings appeal to everyone whether black or white.

### **Focus of This Paper**

This paper is an attempt to analyse Grimke's selected poems, chosen randomly, and a short story from three different perspectives. The paper is divided in three parts. The first part is an attempt to apply the standards set by Langston Hughes in "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" (1926). The second part is an attempt to analyse her writings from the criteria laid down by Carolyn F. Gerald in "The Black Writer and His Role" (1969). The third and final part is devoted to an eco-critical evaluation of her writings because of the utility and the topicality of the environmental issues after 1990s.

### **Langston Hughes**

Langston Hughes in "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" writes that at present, there are many writers who are trying to copy the white life around them. They want to be poet, but not the Negro poet. For them, the white culture provides finest substance for literature. They imitate the ways of the white while their own ways go unnoticed. He gives many examples to prove that how the Negro writers have been ignored so far. The novels of Chesnutt go out of print, without being noticed by any of the race. Dunbar also was not accorded enough respect that he perhaps deserved. The black writers write under severe criticism by their own race and unintentional bribes by the white. He writes:

The Negro artist works against an undertow of sharp criticism and misunderstanding from his own group and unintentional bribes from the whites. "Oh, be respectable, write about nice people, show how good we are," say the Negroes. "Be stereotyped, don't go too far, don't shatter our

illusions about you, don't amuse us too seriously. We will pay you," say the whites. (Hughes 47)

These people might have told Jean Toomer not to write *Cane*. The white did not purchase it. The black did not praise it. The black who read it, hate it because they are afraid of it. Though, the critics gave positive reviews yet the public remained indifferent. For Dubois, *Cane* contains the finest prose ever written by a Negro and like the singing of Robeson, it is racial. Hughes is hopeful that in the coming decade a group of black artist will emerge who will write about their own race without being ashamed. They would not flatter their own people, but be true to their essence. With the force of their art, Hughes desires that the Negro artists should change the hidden aspiration of their people, "I want to be white ... to "Why should I want to be white? I am a Negro-and beautiful!" (Hughes 48).

He concludes the essay with the following famous lines:

We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too. The tom-tom cries and the tom-tom laughs. If colored people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves. (Hughes 48)

### **Angelina's Writings**

Grimke was an Afro-American female writer. Her writings were appearing chiefly in the 1920s when Langston Hughes came out with the above mentioned essay. She, through her poems and a short story, fulfils the criteria laid down by Hughes. She does not go to the white community for material. She is not even ashamed of being a Negro. She gives voice to the cries of her own people. She does not try to flatter them by any means. In her writings, the characters do not crave to be white. They are what they are. They may weep, they may go to

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the heaven for justice, but they never leave their racial heritage. Sometimes, they even want to bury themselves beneath the grass, but this is natural, everyone wants some relief or moment of happiness in one's own life.

For example, in "Little Grey Dreams" (1924), she portrays the disappointment and the disenchantment in the black community through her persona. When blacks were emancipated, there must have been many promises of growth and equality. But, in 1920s, there was practically nothing to cheer the black. In fact, the physical bondage was metamorphosed into the psychological enslavement. The racial stereotypes oppressed and tormented the black like the plantation masters in the past. The frustration and the helplessness in front of the larger white dominant culture is given vent in this small lyric. There is a persona who sits on the bank of a river and lets the dreams go away because, as it seems to her, there is no hope. She writes:

Little grey dreams,

I sit at the ocean's edge,

At the grey ocean's edge,

With you in my lap.

I launch you, one by one,

And one by one,

Little grey dreams,

Under the grey, grey clouds,

Out on the grey, grey sea,

You go sailing away,

From my empty lap,

Little grey dreams.

Sailing! sailing!

Into the black,

At the horizon's edge. (Honey 73)

The agony of being black is skilfully captured in the last two lines of “The Black Finger” (1925). There, the character confuses the tree with the black finger and rhetorically asks, “Why, beautiful still finger, are you black? / And why are you pointing upwards?” (Honey 184).

### **Subject Matter of Angelina**

Angelina selects the subject matter for her poetry from the black community that was still poor and whose condition was still like that of the slaves. After reading her, it seems that she was not in a mood to flatter the white masters for money or fame. She does not betray her essence. Though, she does not speak overtly about the Negroes’ conditions, still the diction and the images hint covertly towards the exploitation of the black. Even if this is a lapse, it can be excused because she is an artist and unlike preachers she can afford to play with words and images. In “Tenebris” (1927), she presents a tree that seems not a tree, but that hand of a slave. She writes:

There is a tree by day  
That at night  
Has a shadow,  
A hand huge and black,  
With fingers long and black.  
All through the dark,  
Against the white man’s house,  
In the little wind,  
The black hand plucks and plucks  
At the bricks.  
The bricks are the color of blood and very small.  
Is it a black hand,  
Or is it a shadow? (Honey 185)

### **Black Is As Black Does**

In the short story, “Black is, As Black Does (A Dream),” she shows the frustration in the black community. Justice was denied to them on the earth, so the alternative selected is that of the heaven. There is a character who falls asleep and wakes up in the heaven. There, she is greeted by the angels, clad in white. There, before the throne of the Almighty, justice is delivered. The black are blessed there and the white are cursed. There is a white person whom God punishes because he did not treat his men well on the earth. His skin was white, but his soul was black. There is a Negro who is blessed by God because he was true and innocent. His skin was black, but his soul was white. This is how she explains his condition:

I saw that he was lame, torn, and bleeding, and quite unrecognizable, for most of his features were gone. I saw him waving his poor stumps of arms, begging for mercy. By these tokens I knew that he came from my country, and that he was one of an oppressed race; for in America, alas! it makes a difference whether a man's *skin* be black or white. Nothing was said, but I perceived that he had been foully murdered. (Grimke 30)

### **Scathing Criticism**

In this way, there runs a scathing criticism of the white and a desire for justice for the black. There must have been countless people at that point of time who after finding that earth was worse than hell might have flown towards the heaven in their dreams for justice and relief. In this way, it can safely be argued that Grimke captures the essence of her people. She presents the reality as she sees it. She does not glorify anything. Like Hughes, she is least bothered whether the white are glad or not. She is what she is and she writes what she chooses irrespective of the fact whether the larger world will acknowledge her or not.

### **Angelina Fulfils the Duties of the Black Writer**

Similarly, her writings can also be said to qualify the criteria set by the black critics in late 1960s. Carolyn F. Gerald (1976) in “The Black Writer and His Role” lays down the duties for the black writer.

The critic points out that how the images are destructive for the self-definition of the people on whom they are imposed. How images control the peoplehood. For Gerald, there are two types of realities: one is the reality itself and the other is the created one. And it is the created one that is pernicious for those on to whom it has been projected. What matters is the way in which the words have been used. A rose can be presented as a flower with fragrance and a flower with thorns. The black also in the white community are destroyed by the zero image. Wherever they go in the larger culture, the images of the white domination and the black subservience destroy their self-definition and lower them in their own estimation.

## **Images**

Images are man-made and man projects his own being, his own self into them. They are anthropomorphic in nature whether positive or negative, the qualities associated with the images are that of man's and those qualities are attached with the objects for such a long time that they seem unquestionably real. That's why, a flower dances, the wind rushes angrily, the sun smiles down on the village and the mother earth provides. Similarly, the negative images that are used to describe the black are man's own. They are his own projections on to the universe. They reveal his own desire to explain the world in his own context, though they have nothing to do with the definition of the black. So, the task for the black writers in late 1960s is clear. They must try to debunk these images and myths. Artist is the guardian of the images. The writer is the myth-maker of his people. The concluding lines of the essay are significant in this context. The critic writes:

These images must be mythically torn down, ritually destroyed. We cannot bury our heads before the existing body of myth, nor before our own Europeanization. Therefore, we cannot return nostalgically to a past heritage and pretend that historical continuity exists in anything but fragmentary form. We cannot block out the black-white struggle for control of image and create a utopianized world of all-black reflections. Our work at this stage is clearly to destroy the zero and the negative image-myths of ourselves by turning them inside out. To do this, we reverse the symbolism, and we use that reverse symbolism as the tool for projecting our own image upon the universe. (Gerald 133)

The critic further argues:

... What is new, I believe, is the deliberate desecration and smashing of idols, the turning inside-out of symbols, to which black writers are now proceeding with a vengeance. Bitterness, which runs through the whole of black literature, is being replaced by wrath; a sense of frustration is giving way before a sense of power. It is the sense of power which proceeds from a mythic consciousness based on a people's positive view of themselves and their destiny. (Gerald 133)

### **Debunking Stereotypes**

Grimke in her writings debunks stereotypes related to the black. Her works present not a static zero image of the black. The black are presented as human beings who shine in glowing colours. She does not make the black as subservient to the white culture. For example, in "I Weep" (1927), she presents a character that is stoic and indomitable in will. She is not a buffoon or a savage. She knows the art of restrain. After reading the poem, one certainly wonders! Is the persona a human being or a super human being? Whatever may be the answer, the persona certainly is not less than a great human being. She looks like as if she is a saint. After reading such a poem, the black must have felt inspired rather than condemned.

The poem must have contributed to their spiritual growth. This is how she presents the black character:

-I weep-  
Not as the young do noisily,  
Not as the aged rustily,  
But quietly.  
Drop by drop, the great tears  
Splash upon my hands,  
And save you saw them shine,  
You would not know  
I wept. (Honey 148)

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## **Response to Nature**

Similarly, towards the end of “At the Spring Dawn” (1923), one meets a persona who is sensitive in her response towards nature. She is a conscious person who is mentally and physically agile to all the happenings in nature. She is not a dull or dumb character who hardly bothers about the surroundings. Such a view of the black was also new in the literary arena. Earlier, the blacks were perceived only as slaves whose task was to provide complete satisfaction to their masters. The Sun rise or the Sun set did not bother them. They were supposed to remain same during birth or death of their relatives. Their first duty was to cater their masters. Such a character who is conscious of the all-around happenings more particularly the happenings in nature tends to debunk the zero image. The persona extends her arms to welcome the spring dawn. She feels alive amidst nature. She feels as if she is part of it. A sense of belonging makes her a true human being. She is happy at the spring dawn. Such a view regarding the black certainly must have contributed to the- if not physical then at least the spiritual growth of the black.

## **Turning the Image Upside Down**

Likewise, in the short story mentioned above, she turns the images upside down. The black are presented in positive colours while the white are presented in dark colours. There is a white person who has perpetrated atrocities on his men, but he is not ashamed. He laughs before the Almighty. When God asks him whether he has treated all his men well, his reply is affirmative. He is a liar. God knows him very well. So, he is condemned. He lacks the strength to confess his sins before God. Earlier in the story, the readers are acquainted with a poor Negro who is lame and tortured severely. God blesses him and gives him a place in the heaven. He not only weeps but confesses before God. When the white man is condemned, the readers are shown another Negro coming forward with a petition for mercy not for his own but for the white men. He prays, “Forgive, oh, forgive my brother, for he knew not what he did” (Grimke 31).

## **Increase in Self-worth**

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Such an image of the black tends to aggrandize the self-worth of the black rather than devaluing it. She uses the same tools earlier used by the white to accomplish her mission. She uses the same heaven with its Garden of Eden as a platform for justice. She does not go to Africa in the lap of her own Gods to pray for justice. She knows it pretty well that even the Christian God with His wonderful Garden of Eden would not condone the deeds of white. Here, one thing should be kept in mind, as Gerald also points out, "Black writers have also attempted to reflect spiritual oneness by writing within a totally black framework. But, white images are implanted at the core of black life, the most obvious example being that of the Church, where God is white" (132).

### **Haunting White Supremacy**

The dominant image of the white supremacy haunted the black wherever they went. And as a result, they also internalise within themselves white as a colour of purity and redemption. In the story, the angels who are blessed and the human beings who receive God's benedictions are presented as clad in white. But, it may be because she was using their own tools to horrify them. The Negroes who go to the heaven and blessed there are also clad in white. Perhaps, she is trying to prove that if you consider white as such a divine hue then one day the black will also attain this, but this happens not in reality but in dream. The over all emphasis as it seems after reading the story is on the act of justice performed by God in favour of the black in the heaven itself. The black are not only allowed an entry in the heaven but are also blessed in the end while white are condemned. Had the story been written by a white author, he might have barred Negroes from entering in the heaven or would have perhaps shown them as even servants in the heaven whose mouth must have watered after seeing the opulence of the white.

### **Emergence of Ecocriticism**

In the late 1990s, an altogether new branch of literary studies named as Ecocriticism came into being. As the world witnessed more and more danger of extinction because of the increasing environmental crisis, the writers and the critics became conscious of their role to

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promote the environmental awareness among the masses to save. The critics like: Cheryll Glotfelty, Harold Fromm, Christopher Manes, Lyne White, Jr., William Rueckert, William Howarth, Scott Slovic, and Randy Malamud came forward with their theories of the relationship between nature and culture.

Before presenting a detailed analysis of Grimke's works, it will be pertinent to first understand the term *ecocriticism*.

Ecocriticism is an effort to read literature along with environment. It is a way of linking nature with culture. It is a desire to save environment by creative use of literary imagination. It is an endeavour to spread the consciousness among the masses (of course those who read and write) about nature and its benedictory influences. It is an attempt to keep the earth as an inhabitable planet as long as possible. In short, it is one effort among many in the society by the responsible citizens of the world, not the rulers of the world, to save the environment. An ecocritic is both a critic and ecologist. In fact, he is a literary ecologist whose prime task is to save nature.

### **Angelina's Poems**

Before a comprehensive critique of her writings is undertaken, it will be in place to draw attention towards some relevant points. First of all, the poems and a short story taken for the analysis are from 1920s and before, a time when environmental concerns did not become explicit at least in the manner as they are today. That was the time when air and water were still pure as compared to the present. However, this fact does not undermine the possibilities of an ecocritical reading of her poems. As science and technology have advanced in recent years so has the artillery of the readers. Today's reader is armed with so many theories and methods of reading that he can do almost anything with the text in hand. Moreover, the nineteen twenties were the time when Imperialism had started declining especially after the First World War. The act of destroying indigenous societies with their natural surroundings had already taken place. Its effects were perhaps beginning to come to the surface slowly and steadily because whether it is progression or regression, it is not an overnight process. Centuries have passed before man acquired his present status of the dominator. So, at that

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point of time when Grimke was writing, the ill effects caused by the destruction of the environment had begun to come to notice.

The second point that should be kept in mind before reading Grimke is that she is a woman; hence she is closer to nature than man because of the reproductive quality that she shares with nature. That's why there is a point in her writings where nature and her gender converge. The third important point is that she is an Afro-American. Her father was an emancipated slave, though her mother was white yet one cannot neglect the racial legacy that she might have inherited from her father. All these influences (of being placed in a certain time, of being a woman, and of being a member of a particular race) converge very subtly in her poems which facilitates an ecocritically remunerative reading.

### **Angelina's View of Nature**

In her poetry, nature is not merely a tool to serve the anthropocentric purpose; it has its own existence. It is not just the presence that enables the poet to express the inner workings of the mind and has its own utility. Nature in some of her poems occupies more space than human beings. It is not a framing device or an objective correlative deployed to convey an abstract idea. Her poetry offers a delicate representation of nature. The smoothness of her verse and the simplicity of diction presents readers with no difficulty whatsoever in grasping the images from nature. She wastes no words to accomplish her mission. She presents nature in its "entirety" untainted by human motives. In short, nature is here not given any task by the creative mind to accomplish. She records it as she sees it. "Dawn" (1923), can be cited as an illustration. She presents an exact picture of the morning seen before the sunrise. In fact, the simplicity of both matter and manner reminds the readers of Wordsworth. She writes:

Grey trees, grey skies, and not a star;  
Grey mist, grey hush;  
And then, frail, exquisite, afar,  
A hermit-thrush. (Honey 180)

Her description of the dusk is also exact and accurate in “Dusk” (1927). This is how she unravels the entire scene:

Twin stars through my purpling pane,  
The shriveling husk  
Of a yellowing moon on the wane,  
And the dusk. (Honey 182)

Similarly, in “At the Spring Dawn,” one comes across the same simplicity of expression and richness of the images from nature. Nature in this poem too is described in its wholeness unmodulated by human vision. She describes the scene of spring dawn as she observes it. The sun, the quietness, the bird singing, whirring, and flying all are presented as she perceives them. This is how she unfolds the entire scene:

I watched the dawn come,  
Watched the spring dawn come.  
And the red sun shouldered his way up  
Through the grey, through the blue,  
Through the lilac mists.  
The quiet of it! The goodness of it!  
And one bird awoke, sang, whirred,  
A blur of moving black against the sun,  
Sang again –afar off. (Honey 179)

In the remaining half of the poem, she presents human response to the entire situation. There is a persona that feels elated at this time. She records how that persona extends her arms to welcome the sun and the spring dawn. She feels as if she is part of it. She is ecstatic to be loved. She feels as if she is alive. She records:

And I stretched my arms to the redness of the sun,  
Stretched to my fingertips,  
And I laughed.  
Ah! It is good to be alive, good to love,

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At the dawn,

At the spring dawn. (Honey 179)

In “Grass Fingers” (1927), she addresses grass to touch her. In fact, she presumes that there is a spirit in nature that can act according to her wishes. She personifies grass and calls it grass fingers. She refers it as “elusive” and “delicate”. The poem begins with an address:

Touch me, touch me,  
Little, cool grass fingers,  
Elusive, delicate grass fingers,  
With your shy brushings;  
Touch my face-  
My naked arms-  
My thighs-  
My feet. (Honey 183)

### **Women and Nature**

As has been mentioned earlier, women feel more affinity with nature because of the exploitation that they both have to face and the power of reproduction. The way she addresses nature proves that she wants to merge in it. In the second stanza of the poem, she points to the fact that after death, man becomes part of the earth and is buried beneath it, so there is no need of behaving like the sole emperor. She asks grass to touch her because after her death, she will go beyond its touch. She maintains:

Is there nothing that is kind?  
You need not fear me.  
Soon I shall be too far beneath you  
For you to reach me, even  
With your tiny, timorous toes. (Honey 183)

The entire poem reminds the readers of Walt Whitman for whom grass was also not a passive object but a reminder of life after death.

The images from nature and the experiences of being black merge in “The Black Finger.” Here, the tree does not remain merely a tree. It becomes a black finger pointing towards the sky. Here, nature is subordinated to human concerns. One should not forget that her race had immense influence on her writings. Her father was an emancipated slave. He was a graduate. After receiving her education, she, herself, became a teacher and a writer. Though, her mother was white and Angelina was born in Boston, a city in the North far from the notorious cities of South. One can presume that Grimke might not have a blissful life.

Her father and her other acquaintances must have told her the horrible tales of slavery. She must herself have witnessed the injustices heaped on the black with her own eyes. In the poem mentioned above, she within a few words captures the agony of being black. She sees a tree and confuses it with a black finger. She writes:

I have just seen a most beautiful thing:  
Slim and still,  
Against a gold, gold sky,  
A straight, black cypress  
Sensitive  
Exquisite  
A black finger  
Pointing upwards. (Honey 184)

The last two lines of the poem are most poignant in their appeal. Here, she seems to be asking questions that she might have asked from herself many a time after witnessing the exploitation of blacks at the hands of whites. Is there any hope for the black in this country? Is there any safe place for the black? And in response, she might have seen a tree that she mixes with the black finger pointing towards the sky. She writes: “Why, beautiful still finger, are you black?-And why are you pointing upwards?” (Honey 184).

## Racial Experience and Nature

Similarly, racial experiences amalgamate with nature in “Tenebris.” In this poem, a tree no longer remains a tree; it becomes the hand of a slave with long fingers. She skilfully captures the times of plantation era with its hard work and cruel punishments. Though, she does not mention them explicitly, but there are slight suggestions in the diction and in the images that she uses. She writes that there is a tree that during the night has a shadow. It is like a hand that has long fingers that in the dark of the night, in the wind, in front of the white man’s house plucks at the bricks whose colour is red. The plucking was an activity that the slaves were required to perform on the plantations. They plucked cotton in the cotton fields. If any slave was discovered slackening in his task, he was given severe beating. So, the clothes moist with blood must have been a common site for the slaves. Within thirteen lines, she gives vent to such an experience with the help of skilfully drawn images from nature. She writes:

There is a tree by day  
That at night  
Has a shadow,  
A hand huge and black,  
With fingers long and black.  
All through the dark,  
Against the white man’s house,  
In the little wind,  
The black hand plucks and plucks  
At the bricks.  
The bricks are the color of blood and very small.  
Is it a black hand,  
Or is it a shadow? (Honey 185)

Angelina’s poetry seems to be presenting a perfect model for a perfect society. Perhaps, she envisaged in her own time that man with his arrogance will one day threaten the existence of nature. A modern reader can certainly derive a conclusion from her poetry that nature and



culture are interrelated. They are the two sides of the same coin. Nature needs culture to act on and to be acted upon. One cannot exist in isolation. For example, there is always some human presence amidst nature in her poetry. It is human perception that gives meaning to the phenomena of nature. In “At Spring Dawn,” a protagonist is required to stretch her arms to welcome the sun. In “Dawn,” the mentioning of “hermit-thrush” imparts human touch amidst inanimate objects of nature. In “Grass Fingers,” a woman craves to be touched by the grass. It is the trauma of being black in the white society that enables a human being to confuse a tree with a black finger in “The Black Finger.” Similarly, in “Tenebris,” a tree becomes the hand of a slave with long fingers. So, the message is clear. Human and nature cannot survive without one another. Looking from the vantage point of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the poems can be seen as a homily for the destroyers of nature.

### **Ecocritical Viewpoints in Angelina’s Short Story**

Likewise, the short story, “Black is, as Black Does (A Dream),” she offers enough substance to read her from an ecocritical viewpoint. First of all, nature is not silent in the text. Christopher Manes remarks in “Nature and Silence” that nature has been systematically silenced by the human subject down the centuries. But, here nature speaks rather it sings. The following lines divulge the objects of nature producing sweet sounds:

Stretched all around was a wide, green, grassy plain. Each little blade of grass sang in the gentle wind, and here and there massive trees spread their branches. The leaves and the birds made music, while the river passing through the meadow sparkled and sang as it sped on its way. Listening, I heard no discord, for all the voices blended with each other, mingling, and swelling, and making one grand sweet song. (Grimke 27)

In this story, Grimke seems to be providing a message. There is an apocalyptic vision inherent in the text. Man is destroying nature in his greed. The animals and the birds are mercilessly slaughtered. When man will go to the heaven, there he will be punished by the Almighty. In the story, God punishes those persons who had not treated the other human

beings well. They are condemned. The entire episode of God communicating with the human can be read from an ecocritical standpoint. This is what God asks from man:

And didst thou treat all my children justly? And I heard the man say: “Yea, yea, O Lord!” and I heard God again: “Whether their skin was black or white?” and the man answered: “Yea, yea, Lord,” and laughed. Then I heard the thunder of God’s voice saying: “I know thee, who thou art; wast thou who didst murder yon man, one of my faithful servants; it wast thou who didst hate and torture him, and who trampled upon and crushed him; but in-as-much as thou didst this wrong unto him, thou didst it unto me. Begone!” And I saw him who was condemned stagger from the bar, and that his hands and his clothes were covered with blood, and that he left behind him footprints tracked in blood; and as I looked at him more closely I saw that his skin was white, but that his son *soul* was black. For it makes a difference in the heaven whether a man’s *soul* be black or white! (Grimke 31)

### **No More a White versus Black Problem – The Threat of Extinction**

This is not about the problem of black and white when viewed from the vantage point of 21<sup>st</sup> century. Now, the world is facing the threat of extinction. Man’s unbridled interference with nature has created more problems grander than the hubris of the ancient times. If man will not cease unleashing his cruelties on the non-human world then God will certainly not forgive him. God has created the entire universe. He loves all things including nature. The entire passage quoted above reminds one of S. T. Coleridge who in “The Rime of Ancient Mariner” sounds the same when he writes:

He prayeth best, who loveth best  
All things both great and small;  
For the dear God who loveth us,  
He made and loveth all. (275)

In the words of W. E. B Du Bois, “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line” (5).

Dubois was referring to the exploitation of the blacks at the hands of the dominant culture in America. His statement was the result of centuries of exploitation that the Afro-Americans had to confront there. But, the twentieth century witnessed not only the exploitation of the blacks, but other minority groups such as the Jews as well. The other agencies which suppressed or terrified man were battles fought in the name of capitalism, democracy etc.

Grimke must have witnessed World War 1 and immense physical and psychological exploitation of the colonised in America and elsewhere. After that, there was Second World War, genocide of the Jews by Hitler, war against Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the entire world was taken aback by the terrorists’ attack on the World Trade Centre. In India, these terrorist attacks are common. The counterpart of the colour line in India is the caste line. For many centuries, the so-called high born people have been oppressing so-called low born in the name of religion. There are constant clashes between Israel and Philistines for many years. The conditions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have worsened so much that the 3<sup>rd</sup> World War seems imminent. The overall result of all this is that the human life is in jeopardy.

## **Indian Scene**

In India, the practice of female foeticide corroborates this fact. By implications, if man is so cruel towards his own counterpart, then one can only imagine how merciless he might be towards nature. Every species on this earth has a right to exist. Everything has its own importance in the larger scheme of things. The smallest worm is as sacrosanct as the most giant mountains. Now is the high time to save human being from becoming an extinct species along with nature. If destruction of man by man does not halt then this possibility will one day become truth. The writings of Grimke offer a recipe to save not only human beings but nature as well. One has to acknowledge the integrity of the other. The distinctions have to disappear between the powerful and the powerless. In her poems, the tree becomes a black finger pointing towards the heaven and the hand of a slave with long fingers. The grass no longer remains grass, but hailed as fingers. Only when the distinctions between the human

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and the vegetation world melt away, there will be some hope. Along with the problem of race, caste, and gender, colour green has also been added to the litany of the problems and if strong actions are not taken to save the environment, then the earth would no longer be a safe place to live.

## **To Conclude**

To conclude, it can safely be asserted that Grimke can be read from as many perspectives as possible. Her writings were relevant in 1920s when they were written. They retained their freshness in late 1960s when the black community was trying to redefine itself both physically and spiritually. And as one heads towards the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the relevance of her works increases because of the eco wisdom that is inherent in it. This write up is not the end of the discussion on Grimke, as human creativity will broaden its canvas; writers like Grimke will be revisited by the scholars in the coming generations and the stored energy in her writings will be released constantly that will keep her alive for ever.

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