



# Liquidation, Malady, Post-existence in Steve Toltz's *Here Goes Nothing*

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**Abstract**— *Here Goes Nothing* is a combination of love, fear, and after-life. In this story, the author has tried to combine fiction and humour elements. The entire story has been told by a dead man called Angus Mooney. The book is the continuation of parts of his other two books, *A Fraction of the Whole* (2008) and *Quicksand* (2015). All of his books are written with a purpose, such as the fear of death and the fear of life in his previous books, and the fear of criticism from others in *Here Goes Nothing*. Thus, this is also known to be a dark comedy that represents the scenario of the afterlife. The book has been criticized by a good number of people, and as the book has shown the elements of the afterlife, it has also established a fictional aspect. Henceforth, the book has been presented with different outlooks, and as the story has been narrated by an angry, aesthetic murdered man, it has been criticized by a lot of people.

**Keywords**— *life after death, pandemic, comic drama, immortality, black humour*

## I. INTRODUCTION

*Here Goes Nothing* is a recently published book by the Man Booker shortlisted author, Steve Toltz, of Australian nationality. In this novel, he has shown the mixture of love, the afterlife, and mortality. The story has been narrated by a murdered man, Angus Mooney. The storyline of the novel is very fictitious. The story starts with the murder of the narrator, who has been looking forward to having his first child. Unfortunately, he has been murdered by a person, Owen, who has been in love with his wife Gracie. Moreover, the author has portrayed the character of Angus Mooney with so many prodigies. In his life, he has never trusted in the aspects of heaven, hell, or something like delusion, but he has died in a tragic spectrum. After death, he has been standing in front of a bunch of questions regarding his beloved wife. Similarly, as an atheist, the author has also not shown any kind of fiery elements or any kind of supernatural aspects unnecessarily, like the seething lakes rounded with fire or any kind of heavenly rewards, etc. Moreover, he has portrayed the afterlife as another life that is different from the living one. The suffering of Mooney has been

portrayed fantastically. In the novel, the pandemic (COVID-19) has also been added as a suffering element. When Mooney is reflecting on his unwelcoming culture after death and grappling with a dilemma that he faced at the time of his death, another site depicts Gracie, who is still alive, as suffering from an unexpected pregnancy as well as the impact of the pandemic, which has been creating obstacles for Gracie to reach the Australian shores.

Thus, it can also be said that the author has also added some imaginative elements and has correlated them with the existing disaster (the pandemic, which has been spinning around the world since the beginning of 2020). Apart from this, the author has placed Mooney in the isolation of the afterlife, where he has been thinking of the social upheavals and also the potential extinction, along with the oppressive restrictions. Here, the author has connected the real-life scenario with that of the after-death that Mooney has been facing. Apart from this, in several places in the novel, some facts have been stated to be arbitrary. Most of the scenarios have been presented with a verge of imaginative perspective, so the authentication of

the concept has been lacking. Apart from this, the sufferings of Mooney in the afterlife that have been depicted by the author have not occurred due to any kind of cosmic justice, as the afterlife has been connected with the heavenly reward or cosmic judgment, so a kind of dissatisfied irony has taken place in the novel. Here, the afterlife has been depicted as just merely the beginning of another life.

The following research will deal with the critical analysis of the novel so that the actual perspectives along with the deformities can be checked. Moreover, the research will also be diversified with the addition of a different set of views by various scholars so that all the elements of the novel can be specified at the end of the research. The research will also have a methodology that will help to make the research more relevant and informative. Apart from this, the sufferings of Mooney in the afterlife that have been depicted by the author have not occurred due to any kind of cosmic justice, as the afterlife has been connected with the heavenly reward or cosmic judgment, so a kind of dissatisfied irony has taken place in the novel.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

While reviewing the entire novel, a wide range of secondary data can also be added to the research scenario. As a good number of people have shown their perspectives on the outcome of the novel, it will be perfect justice to the research in adding those reviews of the critics in the following research.

According to James Walton, the plot of the novel has been portrayed as baroque and the storyline of the novel has also been connected with the real-life scenario, so he has also stated that Steve has also added all the important elements of wisdom correlating to an aspect of self-obsession. Moreover, he has also asserted that Steve has made us aware of the mess which we face in our lives, but by depicting the real-life mess, the author has also added several punchlines which will make the readers burst out in laughter even between the seriousness of the topic. Apart from this, he has also specified a flaw in the novel. He has stated that readers may become confused about whether the author has used his entire inventory concerning Homo sapiens or if he has simply flown away with the highly imaginative aspects at some point in the novel, but despite the flaws, a reader can enjoy every bit of it while reading the entire novel. Driscoll has given his optimistic review regarding the novel. According to him, Toltz has used irony in depicting the sceptic's overview of the afterlife. A few ideas have also been added to the novel to better depict the character of Mooney. He has also added that an aspect of the societal cataclysm has also been added in the

novel to highlight his grief for Mooney in seeing his beloved wife in a relationship with his murderer, and fear has also been working in his mind that everything will be fine and Mooney will not be able to enjoy the ecstasy of life. It's a connection with the real world, where people never get satisfied with their existing belongings and always ask for more. Here also, Mooney has been regretting after his death that he will not enjoy the life that his wife will enjoy with his new lover.

In contradicting the aspect of Driscoll, Gilmartin has stated that Toltz has made all the aspects of today's world wrong and has created an innovative outlook in describing life after death. Here, the author wants to show the immortality of life. By using various elements from different perspectives, a bit of confusion has been created by the author. An irony over the comic sense needed to be pruned while depicting the storyline's zips, including the twists. Apart from this, she has also added some positive views that the entire novel is very funny and also infused with slick dialogues and one-liners. She has also added that despite its lack of concreteness, the novel is full of information-obsessed characters, along with the addition of the war-mongers, who have given the novel another level. Apart from this, the novel has also shown the pandemic-riddled globe, so the essence of the book can also be found in the aspect of the several dangers in life in which people are living. To make the novel more digestible, the author has also used a bit of humour as medicine so that the readers cannot get bored while reading the entire book.

Correlating to the review of Connie Ogle, it can also be said that the entire story has been depicted in an over-imaginative way that has made the novel a most hilarious one. According to Ogle, Toltz has used the stubbornness of human nature as a parody to show the uneasy relationship with the aspect of mortality. He has also added that, with the lack of opportunities to reach the heavens or divine, the novel has created a difference from the Divine Comedy of modern times. Thus, the novel has been lacking in several factors that have made it dark-twisted and over-imaginative.

Kristin Allen-Vogel has pointed out a similar view to Connie Ogle's. According to Vogel, due to having a deep and dark comedy, the novel has been infused with a vision that specifies the near future and the afterlife as surreal, and the entire aspect has been portrayed as the funniest one. Due to having so much comedic satire, somewhere, the novel has lost its realism in terms of specifying the motive of the novel. Moreover, he has also stated that in depicting the storyline in a jockey way, the author has shown his immense creativity; it has made the novel livelier and more enjoyable for all age groups in society.

According to Vogel, while reading the novel, he did not even realise that he had completed the first 400 pages of the novel. Thus, he has stated the combined (positive and negative) reviews of the novel *Here Goes Nothing*.

### III. RESEARCH QUESTION

While pursuing the research questions have been raised -

- How are murder, disease, and the afterlife portrayed in pandemic fiction?
- What is the difference between the normal view regarding murder, disease, and the afterlife and the vision during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- How does Toltz use comic satire in his novel?
- How is the aspect of immortality established in the segment of the afterlife by the author?
- How does the author correlate the pandemic aspect with that of the suffering of Mooney in another life?
- How has the over-imaginative aspect impacted the novel by Steve Toltz?
- How well has the pandemic fear been depicted in the novel by Toltz?
- How is the murder of Mooney portrayed in the novel?
- What aspects of love does the author show to his readers through the story?
- How well has the relationship between Mooney and Gracie been depicted in the novel?
- How does the author show the feelings of Mooney while watching Gracie coexist with his murderer?
- How does the novel establish the tricky elements in the novel to bring out the realism?

Thus, the following research is going to be different from the perspectives of other critics that have already been depicted in the previous section of this chapter. As the critics have stated, numerous mix-and-match perspectives over the outcome of the novel, and most of them have talked about the optimistic aspects, but the following research will be going to highlight the pessimistic views that the novel has been lacking. Moreover, the research will also have several different perspectives that have not been stated by the critics. Here, the intention of the author in writing the novel after seven years of writing his previous novel, *Quicksand* (2015), will also be stated. Thus, to let the readers know the other perspectives, the

motive and the reason behind the failure of the novel in some places will be discussed with the valid reasons.

### IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this segment, a proper methodology that has been developed in finding the critical aspects of things like pandemic fiction, murder, disease, and life after death that the author has used in his recent novel will be analyzed. A detailed analysis will take place to dig out the essence of these factors from the novel, which has helped in portraying the different perspectives of the novel. Here, again, the review of the secondary data will take place in terms of establishing the secondary aspect of the methodology so that the qualitative aspect can be specified in this segment.

Correlating the previously done literature review, it has been already specified that Mooney has recently been deceased and he has been murdered by Owen Fogel who is a dying doctor and has convinced the Mooneys to let him stay at their house during the pandemic. The author has shown the tragedy of Mooney in this segment where he has tried to show that after death, Mooney has found that his loving wife Gracie has been living with that dying doctor (the murderer of Mooney) and Mooney has also been regretting not being alive to spend his life with his wife. With a touch of comic satire and excessive imagination, the author has depicted that Mooney has been suffering from the anxiety with the non-welcoming culture that he has faced in his afterlife and here in this aspect, Toltz has also shown that the sufferings of the people have also been connected due to the ongoing pandemic. As the pandemic has been spinning over the entire world so Gracie and other people are not the exceptional ones. Here also, the social upheaval has been depicted in the following segment. In living under the wave of the epidemic, a wide range of restrictions also need to follow by the people so that the contamination risk can get diminished but, in another aspect, Mooney also has been facing several restrictions as he has entered into different life scenarios (after death). Having the power of immortality Mooney has not been able to connect with his wife Gracie. Thus, in both aspects, the individuals are suffering in their way. Correlating the structure and storyline of the novel it can be stated that the author has used satiric aspects with the help of several comic versions and one-liners so that the readers can easily understand the motive of the author but in some aspects, the excessive imagination has also made entire topic vague. Correlating another perspective, it can be stated that the novel has been proved as the most disappointing one as the author has talked about life after death and has not

shown any kind of trace of heavenly reward or the other elements related to the concept of hell. Thus, in this aspect, the author has not fulfilled the wish list of his readers.

Furthermore, no such elements of the cosmic energy of divinity have been adopted by the author. Thus, a lack has been specified over setting the irony of the topic and as a result, the portrayed life of Mooney has been depicted as merely another life. Correlating this aspect, another novel by Lara Feigel, *Look! We Have Come Through! Living with D. H. Lawrence* also can be added to the following research so both aspects of presenting the COVID scenario can be differentiated. Feigel has shown the pandemic aspect in two different views, one is the suffering that has been revolving around the world and another is the leveraging spark of imaginative speculation. Both aspects have depicted the change of life after getting impacted by the disastrous impact of the pandemic. From another perspective, it also can be specified that the satiric aspect stated by Toltz has also been complying with the aspect of the Australians in depicting the leveraging attempts of isolation due to the excessiveness of the COVID-19 virus, and in another aspect, Mooney has also been portrayed in dwelling with the refugee crisis due to having the increased number of deceased that have newly arrived and along with the brutal as well as the repressive measures that have been making Mooney suffering a lot similarly the Australians in the real-life scenario.

According to various critics, the portrayal of the characters by Toltz has been magnificently ordinary. After the death of Mooney, the author has shown him in an adrift and muddy terrain in the aspect of semi-derelict towns and villages that are administered by the harried, and in those places, the author has also shown the touch of bureaucracy and that a conflict has also been highlighted between the governments and the rebel guerrillas. Apart from this, the author has also shown the mode of entertainment with the aspect of the theatre without the Wi-Fi connection. Thus, the transformation has not been depicted by the author from the living being to immortality. The author just has portrayed another verge of life for Mooney. There is no such excitement in it. It has been making the readers bored. Here, the author has only tried to state that life after death has been specified to be less interesting with a handful of entertainment compared the real-life scenarios. Moreover, he has reminiscent of another concept from the novel, *How the Dead Live* (2000) by Will Shelf. Thus, here, in this segment, a lack of originality has also been stated in Toltz's novel.

*Here Goes Nothing* has been written after seven years of Toltz's other novel, *Quicksand*. In his previous novels, the author has shown his extraordinary talent and has also

been nominated for the Man Booker Prize. Thus, quite naturally, the expectations of the author have been increased, but at the same time, the author has made his readers dissatisfied as they wanted another innovative work. Here, the author has skipped several parts in depicting the transformation of Mooney, like the fact that he has not shown the orientation session of Mooney. According to several critics, instead of portraying Mooney with a detailed perspective, Toltz has shown his interest in overviewing the aspects of the protagonists and their reactions to the disappointment in the novel.

Correlating the aspect of the death of Mooney, Toltz has specified the conflict between Mooney and Owen that has represented the difference between life and death. Here, the author has shown the unfairness and the inexplicability while contrasting both the characters. In one aspect, Mooney has been portrayed as an abandoned child who has been raised in a foster care system full of negligence. In another aspect, Owen has been portrayed as a hilarious misanthrope and he has also been enjoying the condition of Mooney along with that, he has also been believed in the custom and behavior of society. Thus, both men are different in characteristics. In terms of Gracie, the author has shown the similarities between them. Gracie has shown the purpose and meaning in life. Here, in this aspect, it will be better to take Mooney's side as Owen has murdered Mooney due to the increasing rivalry. Thus, a dilemma has been created over the character of Owen because, in one aspect, the author has portrayed the character of Owen as full of disciplinary manners believing the customs and, in another aspect; he has killed Mooney by Owen. As a result, the entire concept has become much more complicated for the readers. After death, Mooney has been specified to reconnect with Gracie and the author has also highlighted the selfish attempts in reconnecting beyond his grave in another aspect, Owen has been again portrayed as a caring and loving man who has shown sympathy to his wife and children of Mooney but here, in this aspect, the author has forgotten that cynical attempt of Owen by killing Mooney. Thus, the unfair attitude of Toltz can be specified in depicting the entire novel.

Correlating the aspect of Gracie, it can be specified that the author has portrayed the character of Gracie as the centre attraction of the novel, along with the lives of both the men, Owen and Mooney. According to the author, Gracie has been described as a character of bleakness concerning the aspect of existence, and in another aspect, she has also been highlighted as a famous personality on social media as she can speak the language of marriage celebrant. Both the male characters have been portrayed as orbital characters, so a dilemma has been stated from the



perspective of Gracie. Thus, there has been a lack of optimism shown by the author while portraying the character of Gracie. Since the beginning, she has been dwelling on the sorrow of loss and grief along with her pregnancy. This has been impacted as a negative aspect by the book's readers.

As a result, despite the use of plenty of humour and comic punchlines, sorrow and grief fail to highlight the comic sense throughout the novel. Thus, the novel "Here Goes Nothing" is a combination of flaws and pleasure, and the discussion that follows has depicted each aspect of the novel.

## V. CONCLUSION

To conclude the research, it can be said that the study has covered all the needed aspects in critically reviewing the novel, *Here Goes Nothing* by Steve Toltz. The following study has been specified with a wide range of critical views by eminent personalities so that the outcome of the novel has been specified. Correlating the critical view, it can be specified that the novel has highlighted the recent pandemic and the pandemic has complied with the tragedy of the narrator, Angus Mooney. According to the critics, the novel has portrayed in an over-imaginative way where Mooney has placed in a village after death. His life has shown full tragic aspects. The author has shown that he has been murdered by a person, Owen and his beloved wife has been living with his murderer. Moreover, this tragic incident has been making Mooney suffer and Mooney's suffering has cooperated with the suffering of the real world where people are getting into a hazardous situation with the gigantic and unending effect of the pandemic (COVID-19). The following research has shown that Toltz has used a comic vision that has given the novel a different aspect but the over-imaginative and exaggerated aspects have made the novel so much more ordinary and that has also made all the comic sense of humor null and void. Moreover, the study has also shown that absurdness has been drawn in the novel and the novel has not fulfilled the expectations of the readers. With his previous success, the expectations of his readers have been leveraged but his latest novel has made his readers upset.

As the author has tried to show the pandemic fiction with the aspect of murder, disease, and life after death, confusion has been created over the characteristics of the characters in the following novel. Moreover, as the readers have expected that the author would show the fiery lake along with the heavenly reward and also the cynical calculations, etc but nothing has been portrayed by the author and the author has shown the afterlife of Mooney just as the beginning of another life along with less

comfort and fewer opportunities for a better life. In the afterlife, Mooney has remained in the isolation as in real-life scenarios most people have been getting into the aspect of isolation due to the COVID wave. Thus, a perfect connection has been portrayed by the author. Henceforth, the aspect of the fiction of the pandemic along with the suffering has been successfully depicted in the novel. In terms of the disease, it can be said that as the entire world has been impacted by the effect of the pandemic and a fearful aspect has been created so all the people have been suffering from the disease, and the procession of death has also been taking place. Here, in this scenario, the author has been shown that Owen who is also suffering from the disease and also has been standing at the death bed wants to spend some time with Mooney's family and Mooney has also been accepted and shown his gratefulness while allowing Owen at his house but Owen has been proved to be the most ungrateful one and has killed Mooney. Thus, here, in this aspect, a contradiction has been created over morality. The author has shown that kind of aspect in which there has been no reward for the gratefulness and despite showing gratitude Owen has stabbed Mooney at his back. Thus, there is a negative prospect has been highlighted by the author. There has been no such optimistic aspect through which the readers will get motivation. Thus, again, the novel has been proved to be the most futile one.

In another aspect, the love and tragic relationship between Gracie and Mooney have also been portrayed in the following novel. The author has shown the departure of Mooney and Gracie. Here, the author has also used a prodigy, as Gracie has been famous for her marriage celebrant, and in another aspect, she has departed from her husband and has also been dwelling with two men (Mooney and Owen). By seeing Gracie with Owen, Mooney has been suffering in the afterlife prospect and has been trying to connect with Gracie as he wanted to stay with her beloved wife and child. Gracie has been portrayed as the center of attraction in the novel but here also the author has shown his lack because the character of Gracie has not been brightened up much in the novel and her choice has been put in question as she has been dwelling between both the men. Apart from this, the study has also shown that Toltz has portrayed the character of Owen as the most caring and benevolent one as he has been taking care of Mooney's family but despite murdering someone (Mooney), the author has highlighted Owen as a great hero and has also been imaged him as the most loyal one who always loves to envy the customs of the society and this has been created the novel as the vague one. Moreover, correlating the critical aspect, the aspect of similarities with other writings from different people has also been put

into the limelight in the following study. In the previous section of the study, all the similarities have been highlighted along with the name of the novels. Thus, this is the most worsening aspect of Toltz with which he has been accused. Despite having negative aspects, the novel has also been highlighted with an optimistic outlook. As the novel has been infused with a wide range of comic satire and one-liners, the readers have enjoyed it a lot with bursting laughter and have not realised that they have finished more than 400 pages. Moreover, a good number of people have also preferred to read out the book again and again as the entire topic of the book has made the readers much more interesting.

In the previous discussion, the novel has been portrayed as a dark-twisted novel, and due to having several absurdities over imaging the characters, Toltz has shown his failure in making the novel a successful one. According to some critics, Toltz has used the stubbornness of human nature as a parody to show the uneasy relationship with the aspect of mortality. He has also added that, with the lack of opportunities to reach the heaven or divine, the novel has created a difference from the *Divine Comedy* of modern days. Thus, the novel has been lacking in several factors that have made the novel dark-twisted and over-imaginative.

Thus, the novel has been infused with mixed reviews and the readers have shown both perspectives (pessimistic and optimistic aspects). Apart from this, the following study has also fulfilled all the research questions that have been started at the beginning of the novel.

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