

★ **Immemorial: Undelivered Lectures**

Lauren Markham

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In her outstanding book-length essay *Immemorial*, Lauren Markham compares language, memorials, and rituals as strategies for coping with climate anxiety and grief.

Monuments to famous men are passé, the work insists; instead, it is time for symbolic memorials that engender collective catharsis. Two Maya Lin designs are exemplars, one humanist and the other environmental: the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC, and the “Ghost Forest” of hurricane-damaged Atlantic white cedars in Madison Square Park. Yet not every memorial is material, Markham notes: Performance art, ritual acts, and vocabulary can be just as powerful emblems of loss.

“How do we construct something new without forsaking or lampooning the past?” the essay asks. Public responses to historical tragedies serve as models for approaching ecogrief. While teaching in Slovenia, Markham tours a prison turned hostel with cells redesigned by artists. At the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama, empty coffins represent lynching victims. Similar installations marked the deaths of an Icelandic glacier and of coral reefs.

The dichotomies of the physical versus the abstract and the permanent versus the ephemeral are explored; the past, present, and future dance through the text, which depicts writing on the environment as thorny: Words can be lasting or fleeting, and there is much uncertainty surrounding predicted outcomes. With language not changing at the pace of the climate, Markham turns to the “Bureau of Linguistical Reality” for help coining a new term for anticipatory ecological grief. The title is one candidate, “prematation” another. Forthright, wistful, and determined, the book treats grief as a positive, as “fuel” or a “portal.” Hope is not theoretical in this setup, but solidified in action. In Markham’s case, becoming a parent embodied her trust in the future.

Immemorial is an elegant meditation on memory and impermanence in an age of climate crisis.

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