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Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones* as Apocalyptic Fiction

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Letter of Approval

This thesis, entitled “Jesmyn Ward’s *Salvage the Bones* as Apocalyptic Fiction” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by SushmaJyotiKarna has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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Letter of Recommendation

SushmaJyotiKarna entitled “Jesmyn Ward’s *Salvage the Bones* as Apocalyptic Fiction” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, under my supervision. I recommend her for viva voce.

Mahesh
PaudyalSupervisor

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Abstract

This research looks into the text *Salvage the Bones* by Jesmyn Ward's from the perspective of apocalyptic. This novel, *Salvage the Bones* tells the story of the Batiste family in Bois Sauvage, Mississippi, in the twelve days leading up to Hurricane Katrina. Claude Batiste's wife, mother of Randall, Skeetah (Jason), Esch and Junior, died a few years ago, right after Junior was born. The kids still live with their father, in an area called the Pit. They are a poor, black family, who mainly survive on what Claude can make by salvaging and then selling scrap metal. He is an alcoholic and not much of a presence in the story; the children are left to fend a lot for themselves, with Randall acting as a parent for Junior. At the same time, meteor shower also occurs to add more misfortunes to the already degraded conditions of mankind. Due to the foolhardiness, shortsightedness and over-ambitious plan of a few coterie of researchers and scientists, environment declines disastrously. Soon human world degenerates into living hell. Entire prospect of human survival becomes dystopian as environment continues to decline catastrophically. Thus, this research explores how the hope for scientific progress has turned the world into toxicity leading to apocalyptic dystopia.

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This research project examines the representation of humans and animals in Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones*. In the novel, the sufferings of humans like Esch and the sufferings of animals like China, a dog, go forward in parallel. Esch's pain unfolds in parallel to the pain of the dog china. The unexpected pregnancy of Esch underscores the painful pregnancy and delivery of China. The destruction of the world of the Daddy by hurricane named Katrina is followed by the drowning of China by Daddy. The origin of human misery and havoc in the world of animals are described in the novel in the cause-effect relationship. The narrator in the novel, Esch, is in the habit of witnessing the dog China giving birth to a litter of puppies. China belongs to Skeetah, Esch's 16-year-old brother. Skeetach treasures China like other men treasure the loves of their lives. China gives birth to puppies in the shed. Daddy hammers plywood onto every conceivable surface. He has just learned of a bad hurricane approaching the Gulf Coast. He is fully involved in a preparation for it. Manny, friend of Esch's brother and Esch are involved in passionate yet unromantic sex.

Misery in the world of animals appears throughout the novel as caused by the foolish, egoistic and self-centric activity of men. So they are in such a position that the suffering faced by one could not help affecting the other. Esch is concerned that she might be pregnant with his child. As Manny impregnated Esch, Kilo, the male dog of Manny also impregnates China. There is a sort of parallel between Manny having loveless sexual relation with Esch and Kilo impregnating China. In a fight set up by the owners by Skeetach and Manny, China lashes out by killing the puppy that

most strongly resembled the dog that impregnated her, Kilo. Skeetah pits China against Kilo in the final round of the dogfight. Although Kilo attacks her vulnerable breasts, China summons the anger that Esch imagines she bears towards Kilo and sinks her teeth into his neck, victorious. Along the way, Skeetah tells Daddy that Esch is pregnant. Daddy pushes Esch off the trunk, causing her to drop China's puppies into the flood. Skeetah helps Esch find her way back to the trunk as the family approaches the safe house. But his rescue attempt causes China to come loose from the harness he used to secure the dog to his chest. China floats away, and Skeetah is consumed by grief.

Jesmyn Ward is an award-winning, African-American writer from Mississippi. She is the recipient of several awards, including the National Book Award, for her novels, *Salvage the Bones* (2011) and *Where the Line Bleeds* (2008), and for her memoir, *The Men We Reaped* (2013). Jesmyn Ward was born in 1977 in DeLisle, a small rural community in Mississippi. She developed a love-hate relationship with her hometown after having been bullied at public school by black classmates and subsequently by white students while attending a private school paid for by her mother's employer. When the white owners of the land eventually checked on their possessions, they refused to invite the Wards into their home, claiming they were overcrowded. Tired and traumatized, the family was eventually given shelter by another white family down the road. Ward went on to work at the University of New Orleans, where her daily commute took her through the neighborhoods ravaged by the hurricane. Empathizing with the struggle of the survivors and coming to terms with her own experience during the storm, Ward was unable to write creatively for three years the time it took her to find a publisher for her first novel, *Where the Line Bleeds*.

In Ward's *Salvage the Bones*, the world of humans and the world of animals exist in proximity as far as their sufferings are concerned. In most ways, it is the activities of men like Manny, Daddy and Randall that cause troubles in the world of China. To boost his ego, Manny challenges Skeetach to pit China against Kilo which runs in parallel to his pride of impregnating Esch. Thoughtless actions of mankind bring havoc that comes in the name of Katrina. Cruel acts of Manny and Daddy put an end to the sick puppies of China. Though people like Skeetach and Esch love and sympathetic to China, the hostile acts of Manny and Daddy try to exterminate the world of animals like China.

In this novel, the relation between humans and animals is not consistent and harmonious. Skeetach and Esch go to the extent of curing, nurturing and protecting China and her ill puppies. They are bent on preserving China and her puppies from any risk and threat whereas Manny is aggressive. Even Daddy indulges in a foolish act of getting China drowned in flood. Manny takes delightful sense of pride in dragging Esch in a loveless sex and he puts his male dog, Kilo, in the same position of impregnating China. Even after impregnating Esche, his ego is not quenched. He goes one step forwards and challenges Skeetach to bring China in fight with Kilo. The will to invade nature and the will to consecrate her move forward in the text creating a unique tapestry of representation.

The sole objective of this study is to show how the world of animals and the world of humans interact, invade, assimilate and ostracize each other in the course of disasters. The tendency of love the world of nature and the egoistic desire to conquer nature for one's own benefits dominate the entire narrative. This study has the purpose of looking at this prospect. The so-called progress appears as the dreadful situation of moral degradation. This study is limited in the tracing the failure and embarrassment

resulting from absolute and unrestrained emphasis on the rhetoric of making individual progress at the cost of the world of animals. The alternative search for the progress of humans and the consecration of nature constitute the core dimension of the text. This study is strictly based on this area.

Ward is a popular author who applies the critical mode of rewriting US history from the vantage point of the contemporary dynamics of black-white relation. Her style of dwelling on the lingering impact of institutional evils that once occupied American society in the past is undoubtedly appealing and attractive. The novel, *Salvage the Bone*, portrays the harrowing realism pertaining to Katrina in America.

Ward represents the complicated relationships between the world of animals and the world of humans. Christopher Lloyd challenges the authenticity of the enduring impact of the human compassion to the preservation of nature. He makes the following remarks about the novel:

Salvage the Bones is a vivid portrayal of rural black life in the South.

Ward's characters reside in a symbolic landscape of the socio-economically and racially marginalized, which is an "extension of a twentieth-century tradition of the literature of the American South that deals in figures of waste, trash and dirt". The novel opens as China, a pit bull, is giving birth to puppies. (250-251)

The entire spectrum of rural life in the South is captured in the novel. It is this realism-oriented stylistics that makes the work so popular. Only the concern as to how to manage both society and nature drives every character in the novel.

Abigail G. Manzella, the leading reviewer of Ward, is more interested in the dialogic side of ward's work. Manzella makes the following observation on the stylistic distinctness of Ward:

So I use *Salvage the Bones* as an example of this seemingly oppositional presentation of community and movement even as it continues many of the same discussions about race, gender, and class in the United States found in prior examples, revealing the ongoing nature of these problems. Particularly, the hostile perception of non-evacuators indicates racial and class dimensions surrounding the access to movement that need consideration prior to the next mass migration. (192)

When Manny spurns Esch, she is broken hearted. Yet she does not lose the hope of making the prospect of her life optimistic. There is never a meeting in the middle. There is only a body in a ditch. She already knows that nature is protean and mischievous. Life-affirming and optimistic tone rings the text. This is possible only on the condition that the world of humans and the world of animals enter a sort of harmony and reconciliation.

Trish Crapo, a celebrated reviewer of *Salvage the Bones* holds the view that this work is filled with many strange qualities. Of all the works of Ward, it is unique. Enumerating some unusual features of this play, Crapo makes the following observation:

Esch reacts to this warning by feeling abandoned and culpable but does not start planning for evacuation; in this sense, her experience is parallel to that of actual non-evacuators, who were labeled as “stupid and passive” and therefore at fault if harm came to them by middle-class observers, as a study specifically about Hurricane Katrina showed. The evacuation is the only way to deal with the catastrophic effect of Hurricane. (193)

The novel produces the impression that any representation of nature's challenge can disrupt the normal course of action of the public. The zone affected erratically by hurricane is likely to make inhabitant incredibly energetic and spirited.

Vivian W. Lang, a well-known critic of Ward, brings into light the power of Ward's sense of handling Katrina with a great deal of wisdom. Lang makes the following point as the mildly trenchant nature of Ward's *Salvage the Bone*:

Facts about Katrina changed depending on which TV channel viewers were watching. Photographs captured chaos, and newspapers bestowed titles like “hero” and “villain.” Careers were made by the coverage, and then, the hurricane was no longer a disaster of economic and political implications but merely an engine that propelled reporters like Anderson Cooper into investigative journalism spotlight (9).

Media is largely responsible for the promotion of knowledge about disaster. The case of Hurricane Katrina proves how the prior knowledge about preparation assists victims to take good measure on time. The intervention of investigative journalism provides a sound way to tackle challenge. Due to its help, the victims are up to the challenge.

Although all these critics and reviewers discuss about *Salvage the Bone* and arrived at different findings and conclusions, none of them noticed the issue of the representation of humans and animal. China and her puppies stand for helpless world of animals. Skeetch and Esch are involved to get the illness cured. The sporadic outbreak of Katrina wreaks havoc and cataclysmic doom on the world of humans. Manny's egoistic move on Esch parallels Kilo's sexual assault on China. Both the understanding based on the proximity of nature and humans and aggressive invasion of nature by humans coexist in the entire narrative. Esch embodies the classical hero. She is protector and defender of herself, her brothers and father, her

unborn child, and the memory of her mother. Esch's masks a deeper need to be seen, to be recognized for the woman she is becoming. Specters of maternal death and infanticide haunt *Salvage the Bones*.

With the new theoretical insight regarding ecocriticism, the researcher quotes the ideas of Laerence Buell, Karen J. Renner, Cheryll Glotfelty and other ecocritics. In Cheryll Glotfelty famous book, *The Four Laws of Ecology*, Commoner explains these laws with examples. He argues that everything is connected to everything else. He furthermore says "There is one ecosphere for all living organisms and what affects one, affects all. Humans and other species are connected and dependent on other species. With this in mind it becomes hard to practice anything other than compassion and harmlessness" (12). Similarly he adds "There is no waste in nature, and there is no away to which things can be thrown. Nature knows best. There is no such thing as a free lunch" (Commoner 12) Exploitation of nature will inevitably involve the conversion of resources from useful to useless forms. In nature, both sides of the equation must balance.

Glotfelty argues that "eco-criticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Eco-criticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies" (33). The exclusive concern of eco-criticism is to examine how nature is reflected in the literary works. Eco-critics generally tie their cultural analyses explicitly to a green moral and political agenda. In this respect, eco-criticism is closely related to environmentally oriented developments in philosophy and political theory. In the spectrum of several ordinary activities of human beings, aggressive approach to nature is reflected. From micro level, such aggressive advance towards nature and biased outlook on nature-human relationship should be corrected.

The novel *Salvage the Bones*, a 2011 National Book Award Winner, which depicts the localized story of one family's experience of living through Hurricane Katrina. This is to show the role that literature plays in articulating and shaping a dynamic relationship between human beings and the earth. By focusing upon *Salvage the Bones*, this literary fiction is particularly adept at reimagining and redefining this relationship.

This novel is about how Ward unites a narrative of human beings and nature in one fictional world. This book focuses on how Ward defies the conventions of various literary devices in order to break the nature/society binary. Ward challenges and remakes with meticulous craft in order to give both the persons and the hurricane agency in her text. This research provides a lens through which to look at *Salvage the Bones* and to show how the stories that we tell of ourselves and our world can help us to reimagine and redefine a more sustainable environmental ethic. One way to define a new relationship with the earth is to reconsider the language that we use and to reimagine our questions, rather than to limit ourselves to those that preexist.

The researcher makes use of the tool of environmental apocalypse and ecological insight into the shifting nature of nature-human relation. The root cause of environmental destruction, in the words of William Morris, is the competitive commerce which only focuses on profit. Man gains something in the expense of the other man. Competitive commerce kills the original art and happiness. Man spreads the foolish whim just to get a lot profit. So, Morris names competitive commerce as commercial war. Commercial war does not think the betterment of labor. It kills the cheerfulness and simplicity. It gives birth to mechanical inventions which instead of giving ease to the human labor are oriented just to make profit. To support the verification Morris writes:

And all that mastery over the powers of nature which the last hundred years or less have given us: what has it done for us under this system? In the opinion of John Stuart Mill, it was doubtful if all the mechanical inventions of modern times have done nothing to lighten the toil of labor, to be sure there is his doubt that they were not made for that end, but to make profit. (33)

The above extract clears that the commercial war is against the environment and its progress. The mechanical invention and discoveries are not for strengthening the biosphere but they are for bringing the havoc. Morris states the three main things as due necessities for a good citizens as honorable and fitting work, healthy fitting house and sufficient leisure. But the human beings ignoring the necessities dominate the environment for their benefit. In the name of being enlightened, human beings are changing their life style which invites natural destruction.

The female narrator Esch of this novel, watches her family's dog, China, give birth in her father's shed, alongside her brothers. She accounts of the scrappy pit bull's birthing process with memories of her long-deceased mother and stories of Manny, the boy she likes, from earlier in the day. The following lines show:

What China is doing is nothing like what Mama did when she had my youngest brother, Junior. Mama gave birth in the house she bore all of us in, here in this gap in the woods her father cleared and built on that we now call the Pit. Me, the only girl and the youngest at eight, was of no help, although Daddy said she told him she didn't need any help. Daddy said that...Mama scattered, screamed towards the end. Junior came out purple and blue hydrangea: Mama's last flower. She touched Junior just like that when Daddy held him over her: lightly with her

fingertips, like she was afraid she'd knock the pollen from him, spoil the bloom. She said she didn't want to go to hospital. Daddy dragged her from the bed to his truck, trailing her blood, and we never saw her again. (1)

The above lines show that how the narrator's mother has given birth to the child or her youngest brother Junior. At that time she has faced so miserable condition that is not tolerable. After she gave birth to the child she left the world. The narrator compares China to her mother, who died giving birth to her youngest brother, Junior. Mama, as she calls her, birthed all four of her children in their Mississippi house, which sits on a property called the Pit. Like China and the narrator herself, Mama was a fighter, determined not to go to the hospital even as she hemorrhaged blood after Junior's birth.

The novel does not begin with a street address, a city, or a year. It does not begin with the word "Katrina." Throughout the twelve chapters of the text, which each chronicles a single day in the lives of the characters, the hurricane builds as an "absent presence" unnamed until chapter six and unseen until chapter eleven. The narrative opens with a single family, living on a property set upon the fictional yet distinct landscape of rural Mississippi. Esch Baptiste, 15, lives with her three brothers and her Daddy "in this gap in the woods" her grandfather "cleared and built on that we now call the Pit" (1). The father plays a small role in the story that Esch tells, but it is his voice that introduces and develops the parallel narrative of the growing hurricane in the Gulf: "The storm, it has a name now. Like the worst, she's a woman. Katrina" (124). With bottle in hand, her father has his children filling jugs of water. But they are used to storms and obey the bark of his sporadic orders without any sense of urgency.

The researcher makes use of the tool of environmental apocalypticism. The fear and insecurity felt the survivor of terror is examined in the light of the theoretical insight of eco-dystopia. Lawrence Buell is the leading theorist of ecological apocalypticism. He has given his view on eco-dystopia. His view is cited below:

Today's prairie is tomorrow's metropolis. Just as the American government magisterially quartered the land into rectilinear sections, we can build our own world. But the author also suggests that today's efforts of civilization are tomorrow's (environmental) disasters—not his intended meaning, but an inference that Marsh would have drawn in an instant. To turn utopia into dystopia we need only to deny the environment's malleability. (308)

The above lines cited from "Environmental Apocalypticism" by Lawrence Buell underscore the point that the polity formed out of anthropocentrism remains antagonistic to the sustainable environment. In other works, human centric policy causes damage to the environment that sustains human and non-human species. Instead, the missing center of the family, their deceased mother, governs the memories and the actions of these characters. Throughout the novel, Ward interweaves the narrative of the loss of the biological mother, who died giving birth, with the Hurricane's building force. In the climactic scene of the storm's devastation, Ward collapses the figures of these two mothers, rendering the storm human and the mother a force of destruction and creation. Three tropes—mothering, building, and knowing—provide flesh to the plot and illustrate how Ward crafts a story both of human beings and the natural world.

Lawrence Buell maintains that Toxin discourse is most significant aspect of eco-criticism. He assumes that Toxin brings catastrophic condition. Throwing the spotlight on the harm of toxic, Lawrence Buell writes:

Toxin concern is not new, of course, but it is closely linked to recent events in the history of postindustrial imagination that ensured that the environmental apocalypticism activated by Hiroshima and Nagasaki would out last the cold war. Wendt's won particular version of toxic discourse is both anticipatory and confirmatory, combining repressed fears of nuclear annihilation with post-apocalyptic sounding of the despair and anger that follow on disastrous nuclear events. (56)

The use of toxin leads to the disintegration of environmental integrity and purity. It hastens the outbreak of apocalypticism. The threat of nuclear annihilation contributes to the looming doom of human beings' some of the precious achievement. The nuclear weapons must be dealt with in order to defend the biosphere of the earth.

In the first scene of *Salvage the Bones* the family's pit-bull China establishes the theme of motherhood: she is giving birth in the shed. Esch's family gathers, all together for a rare moment, under a bare burning light bulb on a starless night to watch the dog sweating and barking and becoming a mother. This evokes the death of their own mother who died seven years before while giving birth in their house to Junior, the youngest brother. Esch, the narrator, recounts: "Daddy said that Randall and Skeetah and me came fast, that Mama had all of us in her bed, under her own burning bulb, so when it was time for Junior, she thought she could do the same. It didn't work that way" (2). Under the Pit's "bare bulbs" --a description that renders the family's environment both stark and vibrant, lifeless and alive--this is how motherhood works: with birth comes death. While the dog China is still giving birth,

Esch puts words to the cycle of life: “Now China is giving like she once took away, bestowing where she once stole” (1).

Skeetah asks Esch if she’ll help him with something that involves running in the woods behind their property, which surprises Esch, as Skeetah’s mind is usually on China. Before China gave birth to her litter, she remembers, the only time Skeetah spent apart from China was when China took naps. While she slept, Skeetah would teach himself to “eat,” or suck on, razor blades. When Esch asked him why he did it, he replied, “Why should China be the only one with teeth?” (60.)

Before Esch and Skeetah can embark on their mission, however, Daddy bursts into the house and asks them to help him retrieve boards from the attic wall above, visible from the house’s first floor since the ceiling caved in. He explains that there’s a new hurricane brewing in the Gulf called José that meteorologists predict will hit Mexico. Looking at Daddy, Esch wonders if this is what Medea saw in her own father: a “small-shouldered man” whose bark was bigger than his bite (62). Annoyed, Skeetah tacitly follows orders, using Esch to boost himself up at Daddy’s request and throw down the boards, the last of which hits Daddy. Skeetah apologizes, but then smiles sneakily at Esch.

Finished with that task, Skeetah instructs Esch to change into clothes that will blend into the woods. They are headed towards the eastern edge of the woods behind the Pit. The farm is strange to Esch, as it is on the edge of “the black heart of Bois Sauvage,” where only black families live (67). Although the dog nearly catches Esch and Skeetah several times, all five of the kids reach the Pit property before it does. By the time they arrive, China is ready; she attacks the other dog full-force. Esch pleads with Skeetah to stop China before she kills Twist, and Skeetah finally does. Twist runs back to his owner, blood trailing from his neck along the way.

The loss of her biological mother haunts Esch, as well as each of her brothers. Esch allows her mother to bleed into her present narrative: “Randall crouches down to Junior, and he tells him how Mama taught us to find eggs. Look but don’t look, she said. They’ll find you. You gotta wander and they’ll come. She’d leaned over like me like a dog...Whatever color the mama is, that’s what color the egg is”(199).

As the hurricane grows nearer, the memories of the mother intensify: she becomes a part of everything. With an absent father who does little parenting, each of the siblings assumes a different mothering role in the family. The eldest brother Randall is tall and plays basketball in the Pit with a regular host of neighborhood boys: he washes the clothes and feeds his siblings when his father is drinking. Skeetah, only a few years younger, is fiercer and it is his prized and beloved fighting dog that gives birth to the puppies in the shed: every action is to protect China and the puppies that have been well-bred to win the family much needed funds.

Esch, the only girl, is just as quick and wild as her brothers: however, throughout the plot she contends with motherhood as the shame of her own secret and unwanted pregnancy. When China dies at the end of the novel however, once the hurricane has come and passed, Esch finally accepts and steps into her role, she says: “She will know I am a mother” (258). Junior, the baby of the family, has to tug upon the clothes and limbs of his older siblings just to be noticed and to be fed: he is the only character that does not take on a mothering role. His birth caused her death and he, having never experienced her love, cannot step in to fill this absence in his family.

In the heat of August, Esch and her brothers spend their days outside—they race through the woods surrounding their house to steal cow wormer from a neighbor, hunt squirrels and roast them over a fire pit, swim in the water collected in the hole their grandparents dug out of the soil and “sold for money” (14). The Pit’s landscape

is both fiercely natural and also littered with crumbling man-made things –a “makeshift kennel,” “old disconnected truck Bed,” “rusted over cow bath Daddy had salvaged from the junkyard where he scraps metal,” “the backseats of junk cars,” “the old RV Daddy bought for cheap from some man at the gas stations” (3, 5, 14). The siblings are constantly building up and tearing down these materials. The land, the Pit, is theirs to know and to make use of: as Esch’s father strips down wood from their grandparent’s house to reinforce their own house, Skeetah salvages the same wood to strengthen the shed for his dog China. Whether made from wood or clay however, the hurricane tears apart every aspect of the Pit’s idiosyncratic setting.

In this novel the gathering hurricane gradually overtakes the landscape—there is more wind, more heat—and Ward introduces a variety of analogies involving water and salt. The storm builds slowly in the thickening air, as it does in the sticky sweat of her characters. Knowing is remade into a new way of interacting. Esch and her family know one another primarily through touch rather than words or sight. Esch recalls how her mother used to come wake her and her brothers up for school by touching “us on our backs first”; now her father stands in the hall way and yells at them to wake up: “he wouldn’t touch us” (115).

The growing vulnerability of ecosystem is the widespread problem of the world. The changes that are found in the structure of environment stand for the imminent danger and disaster. Regarding to anxiety arising from degrading environmental condition makes the following view:

Important changes in many species populations, including extinctions, are well known. Inadvertent or deliberate simplifications of ecosystems with a resulting decrease in stability and tolerance of environmental stress have occurred many times. The transfer of natural ecosystems to

monocultural agricultural systems constitutes the best examples of ecosystem simplification which now need continuous management to preserve the desired state. In some cases whole ecosystems have been completely replaced by new ones because of intensive pollution or grazing by domestic animals. (67)

Climate change produces adverse effects on agricultural productivity. These things are of special concern because any factor that tends to decrease the production of food and fiber. Environmental issue must receive a high priority in the monitoring system. As claimed by. To arrive at the optimal combination of exploitation and management of natural resources, program must be developed that provide continuous information on the use of these resources.

Ward harkens back to this first relationship with the mother throughout the novel to describe how Randall touches Junior, how Skeetah touches China, how Esch touches the boys she sleeps with and her own full belly. Esch's relationship with her closest brother, Skeetah, develops a duality between touch and sight. Since Esch started sleeping with Randall's older friends and Skeetah bought China, they have grown apart: "And now I wonder what Skeetah's seen... What does he know about lovers?" (33). Esch never tells Skeetah that she is pregnant with his friend's child, but she is afraid that somehow he has "seen" it: she knows that he knows. Just as the inevitability of Esch's motherhood, the hurricane leaves them no choice and no escape. In the face of this oncoming storm, Ward positions touch and physicality, as knowledge and salvation for her characters, while sight can be denied, can be blind.

Similarly to the way that her characters know one another, Ward shows how the physical experience of their environment informs them of the hurricane. Esch watches the coverage with her father on the TV as a weatherwoman points to a map,

“...but the television is so old and the resolution so bad that the map looks like concrete, and the storm, an oil stain” (135). Esch narrates her father’s concern in the first chapter, “This year’s different,’ Daddy said as he sat on the back of his trunk. For a moment he looked not-drunk. ‘News is right: every week it’s a new storm. Ain’t never been this bad... Makes my bones hurt... I can feel them coming’” (7). Esch’s father knows in his bones that the news is right –his body, rather than the words of weathermen and scientists, informs his opinion that his landscape is threatened.

Ward positions Blood and hands in many different contexts with the words wet and fish. Fingers trail like “fishing line,” hands slide like “a wet fish,” and a hand slaps the door “wetly.” Blood smells like “wet earth” and blood pinked like a “jellyfish.” Ward also puts them together: blood pools “between the knuckles... between the fingers.” And Ward puts them in strange relationships with other words, for example: “the pointer finger of the house.” Is there a connection between hands, blood, fish and wet that the reader should follow? Is Ward intentionally making it impossible to determine one?

Richard Kerridge’s definition in the mainly British *Writing the Environment* (1998) suggests, like Glotfelty’s, a broad cultural ecocriticism:

The ecocritic wants to track environmental ideas and representations wherever they appear, to see more clearly a debate which seems to be taking place, often part-concealed, in a great many cultural spaces.

Most of all, ecocriticism seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis. (5)

We will have reason to question the monolithic conception of ‘environmental crisis’ implied here, and perhaps to resist the evaluation of ‘texts and ideas’ against a seemingly secure ecological yardstick: both as a science and as a socio-political

movement, 'ecology' itself is shifting and contested. However, the emphasis on the moral and political orientation of the ecocritic and the broad specification of the field of study are essential.

Esch, however, seizes on the opportunity to address Manny, telling him that she is pregnant with his child. He cruelly denies it, which flips a switch inside of Esch—"I am on him like China," she says, assaulting Manny full force (203). It reminds Esch of the time she punched a girl who had bullied her for having flat breasts soon after her mother had died.

She makes her fingernails into Manny's face, drawing blood. He swears at her as she screams, "I loved you!" remembering Medea's violence against Jason. Manny accuses her of being promiscuous, alleging that the baby might be Big Henry's. He finally escapes, throwing Esch off of him and running for the road. Esch yells after him and thinks, "Tomorrow...everything will be washed clean" (205). Esch sits in a ditch and uncharacteristically cries aloud. Randall approaches and asks Esch for help. He plans to sneak into the "white people's house" behind the woods and steal supplies (205). She initially refuses but then agrees, partially because Randall has never begged for help before, and partially because she feels it is the only thing she can do. She remembers Daddy telling her to stop crying after her mother died, when she learned how to hide her tears.

As Esch and her brothers prepare to ride out the storm, she recalls her mother explaining to her what a hurricane was for the first time:

When mama first explained to me what a hurricane was, I thought that all the animals ran away, that they fled the storms before they came, that they put their noses to the wind days before and knew. That may

be they stuck their tongues out, pink and warm, to taste, to make sure.

That the deer looked at their companions and leapt. (113)

Esch, Randall, and Junior move their bed linens to the living room and take turns watching TV. In the waning light after dark, Esch reads about Medea and realizes that water will be deadly for both her and the Greek goddess. Esch is also the one to answer the phone when the automated call comes warning the family of the hurricane. It encourages them to evacuate and renounces all responsibility for their lives if they do not.

The notion regarding environmental apocalypticism is the decisive component of the methodological basis of this research. The concept of ecological dystopia is useful to describing the situation of a woman who is forced to dwell in a critical situation. Ecological concern is perceived by Howarth as shock to the connection between man and nature. The researcher states the view of environmentalists. Environmentalists talk about nature and its preservation. Environmentalists concentrate on their study about consuming nature and natural resources. Talking about environmentalist and their principle of study, William Howarth writes:

Environmentalists are those who believe that the degradation of nature may be reversed by a combination of regulation, restraint, less toxic and wasteful mode of production, and various form of technologically engineered-including genetically and bioengineered- intervention. (37)

Environmentalists follow the principle of anthropocentrism. They treat human beings as the centre of their study. Environmentalists maintain that should be managed to benefit human beings by causing less harm on nature. Contrary to this view, eco-criticism gives emphasis to the preservation of nature.

Once the water level is low enough, Skeetah jumps in and begins to look for China, convinced she's waiting for him. Esch watches him until he disappears behind a fallen tree. Later, the family follows suit and revisits their house, searching for food like they had searched for eggs in the yard days earlier. They find canned peas and packages of ramen. Randall decides the family will stay with Big Henry, and they head towards town:

When the water left, the front part of Daddy's truck was sitting on the smashed gas tank. The lower half was on the ground. All the water that had been in the car was out, and it left a muddy slime on the windows...The inside of the house was wet and muddy as daddy's truck. The food we'd gotten had been washed from the shelves, and we hunted for it like we did for egg, finding some silver cans of the peas.

(126)

The houses of Bois Sauvage are in varying states of destruction, and the townspeople gather in the street, each one muttering something about being alive. Big Henry's house has miraculously been spared, the trees having fallen in a fence around the building. Marquise and Big Henry greet Esch and her family; they were just about to come looking for them.

As the storm calms itself, the family cowers in the torn-open attic of Papa Joseph and MamaLizabeth's house. Skeetah is wracked with guilt over losing track of China and promises to look for her once the water level lowers to halfway up the tires on Daddy's tractor. Esch comforts him by squeezing him as hard as she has embraced the boys she's had sex with, trying to keep him in one piece. She notices the entire family is bloodied from the broken glass and debris flying about. Once the water level

is low enough, Skeetah jumps in and begins to look for China, convinced she's waiting for him. Esch watches him until he disappears behind a fallen tree.

Natural destruction is sure due to modern enlightenment philosophy. Stating in 'The Logic of Domination' that the enlightenment is the product of myth, Theodor W Adorno and Max Horkheimer opine that the same enlightenment victimizes the myth. Enlightenment treats the myth and nature as man's extracts how enlightenment victimizes the myth:

Myth turns into enlightenment, and nature into more objectivity. Men pay for the increase of their power with alienation from that over which they exercise their power. Enlightenment behaves towards things as a dictator towards men. He knows them in so far as he can manipulate them. The man of science knows things so far as he can manipulate them. In this way their potentiality is turned to his own end.

(77)

The environment of myth tells that mind is able to understand the world because it is also a part of world. After knowing world men become enlightened. Enlightenment suppresses the environment and explains the environment in terms of man's resource to achieve their target.

Later, the family follows suit and revisits their house, searching for food like they had searched for eggs in the yard days earlier. They find canned peas and packages of ramen. Randall decides the family will stay with Big Henry, and they head towards town. The houses of Bois Sauvage are in varying states of destruction, and the townspeople gather in the street, each one muttering something about being alive. Big Henry's house has miraculously been spared, the trees having fallen in a fence around the building. Marquise and Big Henry greet Esch and her family; they

were just about to come looking for them. Big Henry plays with a machete they were bringing in case they had to “cut through” to find them (242).

Suddenly, Esch spots Manny, who sits in the bed of a pickup truck with Shaliyah. Randall asks Esch if Manny is the father of her child, and she nods. Randall promises to beat up Manny, but Esch replies that she already did. Randall and Junior, who rides piggyback on Randall, comfort Esch as they take shelter in Big Henry’s house. Big Henry’s mother, Ms. Bernadine, tends to Daddy’s hand. Marquise takes his dog to look for Skeetah, who refuses to leave the Pit with him. That night, the family—minus Skeetah—sleeps soundly.

The Green language of Raymond William takes reference of romantic poets and talks about the separation of possession on nature of human beings. Conscious citizen’s we must not learn to control on nature. If men seek to control on land that result the natural destruction. According to Raymond William, man is not the possessor of world but wonderful child. He further talks that there are two principles of nature. First, nature that regulates the human activities and control becomes the principle of order. Second, nature which teaches us the truth of our own sympathetic nature becomes the principles of creation:

This active sympathy is the real change of mind, the new consciousness if only in minority, in the very period in which the willed transformation of nature, not only the land and water but of its raw materials and its essential elements was to enter a new phase, in the process we now call industrial. The agrarian confidence of the eighteenth century had been counterpointed by feeling of loss and melancholy and regret: from the ambivalence of Thomson to the despair of goldsmith. (51)

In the given literary piece, we can clearly see that the principle of creation makes man well known about the nature and active sympathy brings the real change in human consciousness. Then human beings transformed the nature in excessive rate. They use each and every thing of the nature to achieve their goal. Over consumption of nature causes the destruction of the world. In modern era, age of industrialization is introduced for maximum utilization of natural resources.

In the morning, Esch is eavesdropping on Big Henry's uncle, Solly, who tells Ms. Bernadine about the terrible damage near the bayou, when Daddy asks Esch if she's really pregnant. She nods. Daddy apologizes for pushing her and says they'll have to see a doctor to make sure the baby is healthy. Esch daydreams about the past and the future, envisioning her mother on the couch aside Daddy and picturing Junior feeding the baby. She decides to name the baby after her mother if it is a girl, and after Skeetah if it is a boy. Big Henry invites the kids to drive with him to St. Catherine to inspect the damage. When they arrive, they can barely comprehend the scene. Hardly any trees or buildings stand; the elementary school where Randall played basketball and Skeetah fought Rico is leveled. People take shelter under makeshift tents and forage for food and supplies in the wreckage. A toothy woman warns them not to drive any further towards the beach, and then she asks them for food. Esch gives her some ramen, and the woman laughs.

The kids pull over, park, and begin walking. Esch sees a man holding his head and perhaps crying. He is sitting on a sofa next to a black casket, which a dog sniffs at and even urinates on. Still walking, the kids find what remains of the liquor store and happen upon some untouched liquor bottles, which they take for Daddy. Big Henry squats next to Esch and tells her he heard her talking to Daddy about being pregnant. He asks her who the father is, to which she replies, "It don't have a daddy" (254). He

says she's wrong, because the baby has many fathers, including him. He reassures her that she can rely on him. This touches Esch, who is gathering pieces of glass that will serve as souvenirs when she tells her baby about Hurricane Katrina. She imagines hanging them above her bed and telling the baby a mythologized story about the storm, a mother who slaughtered and destroyed the Gulf.

After bathing with a glass of water each and eating for the first time since the storm, Esch, Randall, Junior, and Big Henry return to the Pit to see Skeetah. He has built a fire that burns tall and is still waiting for China. He refuses to leave in case she returns, despite the others' protests. Esch knows that she and her siblings will stay by his side, waiting for China. She knows that China will return, and she pictures Skeetah crying when she comes, melting away to nothing. Esch knows that China will see her and understand that she has fought and protected—that she herself is a mother now.

The noted eco-feminist Val Plumood establishes connection between masculinist human attitude and ecological imperialism. By doing so, he proves that enlightenment culture of European imperialism generate ruinous effect in the biophysical limit of the planet. By the same token, ecological imperialism is environmental racism.

Environmental racism is described as the connection of race and environment. The operation of race is connected to the operation of environment. Environmental racism has positive effect too. Plumwood calls it hegemonic. The following lines show the vision of Plumwood about environmental racism:

Above all else, those environmental racism is an extreme form of what Plumwood calls hegemonic centrism—the self privileging view that she sees as underlying racism, sexism and colonization alike, all of which support and reconfirm each other, and all of which have historically

been conscripted for the purposes of exploiting nature while minimizing non-human claims to a shared earth. (5)

Plumwood's claim of eco-feminizing nature is manifested in the above-cited extract. He holds the view that human is against the natural order. They are under the illusion that they are the best creatures of the cosmos. Specifically, European inhabitants think they are masterminded. But it is illusion only. They only know how to exploit rapaciously natural resources.

Esch builds on the imagery of her brothers and father as strong, metallic, and even sharp, noticing now the ways in which they are growing soft. As Skeetah processes the loss of China at the start of the chapter, Esch likens his body under her embrace to a "school of fish" moving past a rock, noticing the "thin wake" that he leaves as he walks through the water (239-40). At both the start and end of the chapter, Esch imagines Skeetah's coming apart, later comparing his skin to a T-shirt, "like he could pull who he is off and become something else" (257). Esch sees Daddy softening too, imagining a wire that "had seemed to line his bones before the accident, before the hurricane, that made him so tall when he stood next to Mama" becoming string" (248). At the same time, Esch begins to conceive of herself as stronger, imagining that she is the rock around which a school of fish swims. Whereas the men she admires are growing weaker in certain ways after the chaos, Esch uses the disaster to grow stronger, becoming the rock of the family.

As Esch surveys the damage from Hurricane Katrina, she continually likens her environment to the carelessly strewn playthings of a child. Waiting for the storm to calm down, Esch likens the movements of a tree in the wind to a child playing hopscotch, and likens her soggy living room to a messy doll's house. Later, the semi-trucks overturned in St. Catherine remind her of Legos. Even the houses that have

been wrenched from their foundations and thrown into the middle of streets and train tracks appear to Esch like “a steel necklace with wooden beads” (252). Katrina’s arrival functions like a rebirth in this way, ushering Esch’s environment into a new era much like a child does for its family.

The problematical relationship between nature-human relations needs further scrutiny, which is done by using next theoretical insight. For environmental apocalypticism to be of substance as an interdisciplinary field, it needs to realize that “ecology is not a slush fund of fact, value, and metaphor, but a less than fully coherent area with a very checkered past and a fairly uncertain future”(Dana Philip 54). Many theorists of eco-concern would be dismayed to learn that despite ecology’s heroic popular image, it has been characterized as a relatively lightweight science by informed observers “whose criticisms of it cannot be dismissed as mere carping even if those criticisms have sometimes been too harsh, above all when other biologists less taken with fieldwork than ecologists are”(Dana Philips 67). In point of fact, ecology has not enjoyed as great a record of success as the other life sciences have. Nor has it always been entirely in line with the ethos prevailing in those other sciences. The divergence of ecology from what is widely regarded as the scientific norm becomes especially clear when it is compared to other significant disciplines.

Looking at the now-leveled elementary school where Randall played basketball a few days earlier, Esch narrates, “suddenly there is a great split between now and then, and I wonder where the world where that day happened has gone, because we are not in it” (251). Here, Esch positions Katrina as an upheaval that is both destructive and renewing, much like the childbirths that Esch recalls and forecasts throughout the novel. Moreover, her diction, particularly the word “split,” echoes previous imagery describing births as ruptures; in fact, the very first sentence

in the novel characterizes China's childbirth as her body "turning in on itself" (6). In this way, Esch envisions the hurricane as the closing of one chapter and the opening of another, much like her own future as a mother.

Perhaps most importantly, Esch uses Hurricane Katrina's aftermath to opt into a new role as mother and storyteller. Converting tragedy into mythology, she elevates Katrina to the level of epic mythological figure with a "chariot so great and black the Greeks would say it was harnessed to dragons" (255). This harkens back to the start of the chapter, when Esch likened the debris in the yard across which Skeetah swims to find China to a labyrinth, invoking the story of Theseus. In weaving her community's wreckage into a legible, even epic, story, she finds a way to not only survive, but also engage with the tradition of storytelling that already exists in her family; indeed, when she vows to tell her child the story of Katrina, she compares that act of passing down wisdom to the way Skeetah told her about Mama's last words, not to mention the way Mama told Esch about the hurricanes that came before Katrina. This is how Esch's obsession with Medea and mythology comes full circle—she will transcend comparisons to violent mythological characters and instead become a kind of matriarchal storyteller herself, passing down her own history much like the myth-tellers of ancient Greece.

Ultimately, Esch's dependence on anaphora in the closing passage cements this new inheritance as matriarch. Echoing Skeetah's anaphoric chants meant to prepare China for the kill before her dogfight earlier in the novel, Esch's anaphora in the novel's final passage indicates stability, positioning her as the rock to which she compares herself at the start of the chapter. Her last words, "She will know that I am a mother," resound with the maturity and confidence that she will use to usher her family into its next chapter (258).

The day of the hurricane finally arrives, and the family quickly realizes they are totally unprepared for the level of disaster it brings. Their house is flooded, and they must climb and swim through dangerous weather in order to reach a neighbor's house on the hillside, but they lose all of the puppies and China in the process. They take refuge in the attic of the storm, and make their way into town the next morning, except for Skeetah, who returns to wait for China's return, because he is convinced she survived the ordeal. It also comes out during the hurricane that Esche is pregnant, which causes her father to quickly re-evaluate his life. The end of the novel brings hope in the face of a great tragedy.

Thus, it can be concluded that haphazard programs to achieve innovative breakthrough in science and technology does not guarantee the fact that innovative research brings forth beneficial consequences. This research project examines the representation of Humans and Animals in Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones*. In the novel, the sufferings of humans and animal are extremely shown. The reckless and sporadic search for innovation leads to the disintegration of human civilization. Hence, human beings must be sagacious enough to act in conformity with the sacred integrity of animal.

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Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones* as Apocalyptic Fiction

A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University,
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Degree of Master of Arts in English

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Abstract

This research looks into the text *Salvage the Bones* by Jesmyn Ward's from the perspective of apocalyptic. This novel, *Salvage the Bones* tells the story of the Batiste family in Bois Sauvage, Mississippi, in the twelve days leading up to Hurricane Katrina. Claude Batiste's wife, mother of Randall, Skeetah (Jason), Esch and Junior, died a few years ago, right after Junior was born. The kids still live with their father, in an area called the Pit. They are a poor, black family, who mainly survive on what Claude can make by salvaging and then selling scrap metal. He is an alcoholic and not much of a presence in the story; the children are left to fend a lot for themselves, with Randall acting as a parent for Junior. At the same time, meteor shower also occurs to add more misfortunes to the already degraded conditions of mankind. Due to the foolhardiness, shortsightedness and over-ambitious plan of a few coterie of researchers and scientists, environment declines disastrously. Soon human world degenerates into living hell. Entire prospect of human survival becomes dystopian as environment continues to decline catastrophically. Thus, this research explores how the hope for scientific progress has turned the world into toxicity leading to apocalyptic dystopia.

Content

Letter of Approval

Acknowledgements

Abstract

Content

Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones* as Apocalyptic Fiction

Works Cited

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