

Eco-psychotherapy for the Revitalization of Psyche: Ecopsychological Reading of Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones*

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Abstract

The deep tragedy, that the environmental damages and mental problems have caused for human, led to the development of an interdisciplinary approach -ecopsychology- which is the integration of ecology and psychology to examine above all biophilia and its impact on human psyche. Applying the ecopsychological approach, the present study proposes an innovative reading of *Salvage the Bones* by Jesmyn Ward, the American female novelist. Ward depicts the ecological unconscious of the main characters through delineating mental peace they receive from nature. Moreover, the novel delicately portrays transpersonal ecology resulting in man's transpersonal identification with nature. Jesmyn Ward's work is indicative of key concepts such as ecopsychology, ecotherapy and transpersonal ecology, which were first introduced to the field of ecopsychology by eminent theorists, Theodore Roszak, Linda Buzzel and Warwick Fox. The present research intends to study the positive and negative effects of biophilia and eco-phobia caused mainly by psychological trauma following man's alienation from nature. While demarcating the positive effects of biophilia on human psyche, the researcher substantiates the way psychological trauma comes to be subjected to therapy through man's integration with green nature. Additionally, the research elaborates the importance of transpersonal ecology and identification with nature, by understanding the harmony between man and nature.

Keywords: Ecopsychology, Ecotherapy, Environmental Ethics, Transpersonal Ecology, Trauma

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Introduction

During the past few decades, the earth has faced serious environmental problems at an alarming pace. The recently-emerged environmental crises and man's reaction to such destructive currents have led to the emergence of interdisciplinary studies integrating humanities and fields of science. Ecological challenges have urged environmental activists to raise their voices against all human actions which, in addition to the destruction of the biosphere, have imposed negative effects on human psyche. Environmental crises have led to the formation of new interdisciplinary studies such as ecocriticism, eco-linguistics, and ecofeminism in the field of literature. Ecocriticism focuses on literary works with the aim of employing it to improve our outlooks, feelings and emotions toward nature. Meanwhile, ecopsychology is a newly-emerged fast-developing interdisciplinary field of study which integrates fields as diverse as psychology, sociology, ethics and environmental studies. Ecopsychology has a firm belief in the spiritual and psychological effects of human connection with nature. Ecopsychology is devoted against anthropocentrism and rejects the superiority of man over other species on the green planet.

Ecopsychological reading of ecological literary works uncovers hidden environmental aspects and issues. Ecopsychology depicts the relationship between man and the natural. Ecotherapy, transpersonal ecology and biophilia are the main key concepts in ecopsychology. Ecotherapy or nature therapy considers the physical and mental health of humans in the connection and intimacy with nature. By encouraging people for reconciliation with nature, ecotherapy helps people to achieve their mental and psychological peace. Reconnecting with nature resurrects that humans are part of nature and their separation seems almost impossible. Connecting with nature and joining it provides a sense of unity and integrity for men which leads to transpersonal ecology. Man's attention to nature indicates his concern and responsibility toward it. Identification with nature causes more respect for the environment and procures psychological tranquility. Biophilia is the interaction or close relationship of man with other forms of life. Human beings have an innate tendency to connect with nature and animals. Biophilic experiences reduce stress, enhance creativity and in turn, increase health as well as productivity. While depicting the result of the alienation of man from nature, biophilia promises environmental ethics.

Theodore Roszak (1933-2011), a distinguished American professor, coined the term ecopsychology and introduced the key words such as ecological ego and ecological unconscious, in his prominent book, *The Voice of the Earth* (1999). According to Roszak "The ecological ego matures toward a sense of ethical responsibility with planet that is vividly experienced as our ethical responsibility to other people" (Roszak, 1999, p. 320). He considers the faulty connection between man's ego and the environment as the root of man's problem. In other words, understanding the ecological ego in human beings is a step toward resolving the manifold issues man

encounters in nature. To control and manage harmful attitudes and behaviors, the ego functions as an emotional regulation. Inner thinking and behavior should be controlled with ecopsychological moral values, which include: respect and help nature, not harming it.

Linda Buzzel (b.1957), is a contemporary American physician, who wrote *Ecotherapy: Healing with Nature in Mind* (2009), and published it in collaboration with Craig Chalquist (b.1961). Buzzel coined the concept, ecotherapy. She theorizes that being in nature is effective for strengthening, developing and improving mental health. Buzzel claims that, by establishing our connection with nature, ecotherapy heals our souls entrapped in the industrial world. According to Buzzel, “Ecotherapy, as applied ecopsychology employs many methods in disciplined and systematic attempts to reconnect the psyche and the body with the terrestrial sources of all healing” (Buzzel 2009: 20).

Warwick Fox (b.1954), the leading Australian philosopher, coined the term transpersonal ecology in his phenomenal book, *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology: Developing New Foundations for Environmentalism* (1990). Fox emphasizes a broad sense of the “self” which is achieved through a constant process of self-identification between oneself and the environment. He asserts that such process of identification and its various forms will enhance the position of friendliness with the earth. (Fox 1990: 59).

Jesmyn Ward (b.1977), the African-American novelist, is an associate professor of English, at Tulane University. She has won numerous awards, including the National Book Award for her second remarkable work entitled *Salvage the Bone* (2011), the Alex Award for displaying love and emotional connection between family members affected by Hurricane Katrina, and Fiction Book Award for the novel *Sing, Unburied, Sing* (2017). She is the only African-American woman to be honored with the National Book Award for fiction twice. Ward is a young American novelist whose works are reflections of the beautiful and pleasant voice of the nature, although in many cases, she portrays the angry and unruly voice of the green ecology. Due to the special attachment to her hometown, located in the south of the Mississippi, Ward makes use of this setting in her works of fiction. As a child, she was constantly mocked and insulted by school children because of her African heritage. This inspired her to write and study while taking refuge in nature, which eventually led to the creation of valuable works such as *Where the Line Bleeds* (2008), *Salvage the Bones* (2011), and *Sing, Unburied, Sing* (2017).

Hence, in the literature review section, the researcher confines the study to the few available research studies on ecopsychology as a newly developed theory and Ward as a distinguished author. In the theoretical framework, a new reading of the novel is presented by inspecting the ecopsychological approach and applying its key concepts. The study is an attempt to deal with the relationship between man and nature

as well as to demonstrate the positive effects of closeness and friendship with nature on the soul and psyche of man. Finally, the conclusion examines the findings of the research.

1. Objectives of the Study

The prominent novel, *Salvage the Bones*, encompasses frequent references to friendship and closeness of man to nature, as well as the effect of such closeness on the soul and the psyche of man. The present research aims to express the theoretical foundations of ecopsychological approach by applying its fundamentals on Ward's *Salvage the Bones*. It emphasizes the positive psychological effects that intimacy and connection with nature bestows on humans. Also, the paper provides the ground for reading ecological literary works by using ecopsychology, as a new approach for the first time. Jesmyn Ward is a contemporary novelist, who skillfully addresses closeness with nature to healing psychic trauma resulting from man's alienation from nature.

2. Significance of the Study

The study is an interdisciplinary study that sheds the light on fading psychological pain through interconnectedness of man and nature. The present article intends to study Ward's remarkable novel, *Salvage the Bones* (2011), by applying ecopsychological approach. The primary assumption is that in *Salvage the Bones*, Ward has emphasized the unbreakable bond of the main characters with nature and animals. By choosing Skeetah and Esch as the main characters, Ward conveys how the positive aspect of animals and nature save the protagonists from the dreadful effect of trauma. Her protagonists reach peace and self-realization through refuge in nature. Achieving transpersonal ecology through biophilia is particularly insightful in the novel. The ecopsychological reading of Ward's *Salvage the Bones* and applying the key concepts of the selected theorists for the analysis of literary works are under researched fields in Iran. In this regard, the present study is unprecedented.

3. Research Questions

The research intends to answer the questions raised in this regard under the ecopsychological reading of the novel and a synthesis of Theodore Roszak, Linda Buzzel and Warwick Fox's theories. The main questions are:

1. How Ward has depicted the connection or disconnection between human and nature in *Salvage the Bones*?
2. How does Ward describe the reflection and impact of such affinity on the human soul and psyche?
3. How do ecotherapy and transpersonal ecology bring mental and psy-

chological peace to humans?

4. Literature Review

In the field of psychology, the concepts of ecopsychology and ecotherapy are fairly studied. However, the books and articles in the analysis of these concepts are mainly devoted to clinical case studies. The research studies on Jesmyn Ward are not considerable in terms of numbers and diversity. The outcomes of analytical approaches applied to Ward's works, mostly indicate an investigations carried out from the perspective of black people, disclosing the causation and results of their marginalization. However, despite the abundance of existing analytical materials, no study has investigated the prominent work from the aspect of an ecopsychological approach.

In this section, several research works, carried out will be reviewed. Articles and theses have not examined the novel *Salvage the Bones* (2011), from the perspective of major literary critical approaches. Some are worthy of note. Sushma Jyoti Karn in her MA thesis "Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones* as Apocalyptic Fiction" (2018), studies *Salvage the Bones* from an apocalyptic point of view. She develops the idea that climate change and environmental damages are the result of research and the interventions of scientists and researchers. Karn, believes that natural resources and forests are catastrophically destroyed and diminished. As the result, the human world will, before long, turn into hell. She claims that Scientists create a dystopian apocalyptic society, which is the result of avaricious hope for progress.

Alexandra Cohen in her MA thesis entitled "Reforming as Reclamation: Trauma Theory, African Spiritualism and Ecocriticism in Jesmyn Ward's *Sing, Unburied, Sing*" (2019), by referring to Ward's *Sing, Unburied, Sing* considers the focus and common point of critical analysis of African -American texts dealing with ghosts and haunting to be traumatic. Cohen demonstrates the transmission of trauma across generational lines. Using critical scholarly theories, including those of Kathleen Brogan, the author deals with the distinction between narrative memory and traumatic memory. Cohen also employs Gabriele Schwab's theories and examines transgenerational impacts in both perpetrators the survivors of trauma. Ned Schaumburg in his PhD dissertation entitled *Waterlogged: Narrating Hydroecologies in the Anthropocene* (2018), claims that just as the acceleration of global climate change has converted the dynamics of the planet Earth, the issue of water simultaneously raises ecological and epistemological demands. The researcher believes that human experience of non-human factors is both culturally and ecologically specific and at the same time universal and ancient. The dissertation presents a biological and epistemological method for reading the role of water. It deals with how to meditate on running water and ultimately increases the existing knowledge about these works. The review of the studies conducted on *Salvage the Bones*, indicate that no study has been done on the novel through ecopsychological approach.

The research pioneers a distinct study of the novel by applying ecopsychological approach. Relying on the same approach, an article titled “Eco-psychological Reading of Barbara Kingsolver’s *Animal Dreams*” (2023), has been written by Narges Raoufzadeh, Razieh Eslamieh and Morteza Lak, which has investigated key concepts such as biophilia and ecological unconscious in Kingsolver’s *Animal Dreams*. “Eco-Trauma: Industrial Captivity and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders in Harriett Simpson’s *The Dollmaker*” (2024), is another article applying ecopsychological approach. Narges Raoufzadeh, Razieh Eslamieh and Morteza Lak, have studied industrialization and its impact on man’s psyche in Simpson’s *The Dollmaker*, relying on the key concepts including: eco-trauma, eco-psychotherapy, eco-psychopathology and post-traumatic stress disorder. Meanwhile the current research intends to examine different concepts including: biophilia, ecopsychology, ecotherapy, environmental ethics, transpersonal ecology and trauma. Thus, in the field of literary studies, the presented research is fresh as above all, nature has a special upshot on the human psyche and life.

5. Theoretical Framework

5.1. *Specifying Ecopsychology*

During the past few decades, a field under the title ecopsychology has emerged for studying the relationship between man’s psyche and both nature and environmental crisis. The historian, Theodore Roszak (1933-2011), is credited for coining the term ecopsychology. Roszak argues that “its goal is to bridge our culture’s long-standing, historical gulf between the psychological and the ecological, to see the needs of the planet and the person as a continuum” (Roszak 1991: 115). Ecopsychology deals with how emotional connections to nature are developed and provide feelings of harmony, eternity and stability. This approach examines ancient and modern cultures that have a history of appraising nature such as Buddhism and Hinduism. According to Darlyne G. Nemeth “Ecopsychology: The interaction between psychology and environmental protection is an inspiring concept” (Nemeth 2015: x).

Ecopsychologists believe that the widespread destruction of the environment causes great grief and aggravation. They show how disconnection from the environment is harmful, and believes that the separation of a culture from nature has a negative impact on various aspects of a person’s life. In his remarkable book *Ecopsychology* (2015), Nemeth claims that “As a field of study, ecopsychology combines the science of ecology, which assesses human beings’ relationship to their environment, with the field of psychology, which evaluates and seeks to optimize human behavior” (xi). He believes that to understand environmental protection, we need to recognize our eco-kinetics which means how our changing environment affects us. Some ecologists consider pain, anger and chronic emotional trauma as a result of degrading nature by human beings. They propose various remedies for this human-nature alienation such

as wilderness encounter sessions, ecologically attuned psychotherapy, re-earthing rituals which seek commitment, foster joy and inspiration through reconnection with the Earth (116).

Theodore Roszak theorizes that the relation between psychology and ecology is mutual; psychology needs ecology and ecology needs psychology. In such inter-connection a new approach is born, ecopsychology, which merges the expertise of ecologists with the sensitivity of therapists. Ecopsychology can be considered a continuous and practical program that is recognized as an integration of ecology and psychology. It makes human mental health conditional on the collective health of the planet, nature and its environment. Ecopsychology prioritizes the changing of environmental performance from compulsion, blame and anxiety to sacrifice, joy and love. Ecopsychology is directly related to the natural world, which plays a key role in psychotherapy and personal development. It also fosters ecological thinking while supporting lifestyles which are mentally and environmentally sustainable.

Ecopsychology offers various insights such as a deep and reciprocal relationship between man and nature. In this way, nature is considered as home and family, earth as mother and animals as siblings. Theodore Roszak, in his prominent book *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind* (1995) claims that “Ecopsychology is a research for language to describe the human- nature relationship. It is a tool for a comprehensive understanding of relationships, to diagnose what is wrong with that relationship, and for suggesting paths to healing” (Roszak 45). In such a reconnection of man with nature, an ecopsychological approach integrates psychological and environmental aspects.

5.2. Delineating Ecotherapy

Linda Buzzel, the American psychotherapist, presents the concept of ecotherapy in her prominent work *Ecotherapy: Healing with Nature in Mind* (2009). *Ecotherapy* is a treatment method in the field of ecopsychology which is based on the theory that people are connected to and influenced by their natural environment. Buzzel claims that “As an umbrella term for nature-based methods of physical and psychological healing, ecotherapy represents a new form of psychotherapy that acknowledges the vital role of nature and addresses the human-nature relationship” (Buzzel 19). Man loves to have fun and spend time in nature. Nature of any kind, whether hiking or walking on the beach sand, makes everyone feel good beside.

Today, science analysis the cause of human interest in nature from a scientific perspective and calls it *ecotherapy* or nature therapy which creates a happy mood in human beings. Studies show that people who live in or near nature and green space are less likely to suffer from anxiety and depression and live longer. In general, they bring a healthy cycle to their body. In modern science, connection with nature and reconciliation with nature is of special importance. Buzzel considers communication with the earth to be a major part of ecotherapy. She states that the earth has the power

of self-healing and works through complex systems of integrated balance, so people who adapt themselves to it can experience an improvement in their mental health.

5.3. *Outlining Transpersonal Ecology*

Transpersonal Ecology is a term widely attributed to Warwick Fox (b.1954), the Australian-British philosopher. The term was first coined in Fox's remarkable work entitled, *Toward Transpersonal Ecology*, published in 1995. The book is the result of Fox's relentless efforts to further develop the concept of deep ecology into a philosophy which focuses on relating to nature as a form of spirituality. According to Fox "Transpersonal ecology- the idea of this worldly realization of as expansive a sense of self as possible-refers to a psychologically based approach to ecophilosophical problems" (Fox 1995: 59).

Transpersonal Ecology emphasizes that the earth will not be saved expect through psychology and the analysis of the problem of ecology and the understanding of the high value of identification with nature. Fox defines *Transpersonal Ecology* as "the psychologically based idea of transcendental self-expansion to accommodate the ecosphere" (59). It can be a great help in clarifying the position of human beings in relation to their position on the earth. Identification with nature has a special place and is of great importance in the discussion related to *transpersonal ecology*. Arne Naess (1912-2009) and other transpersonal ecologists emphasize this identification broadly and deeply. Fox observes identification with nature as an experience that is a feeling shared by being, not just a resemblance to it. This means that one can share the sense of existence without coexistence.

6. Discussion

6.1. *Sketching Ecotherapy in Salvage the Bones*

In *Salvage the Bones* (2011), Jesmyn Ward depicts people who live away from the hustle and bustle of the city. They are in the embrace of pristine nature which has not been degraded by industrial and modern society yet. *Salvage the Bones*, is the life story of the Batiste Family, a poor, black family, in their routine settings, twelve days before Hurricane Katrina. A family of five: three sons named Rundle, Skeetah, Junior, one daughter, Esch who is also the narrator of the story, and Claude, the irresponsible and alcoholic father of the family. Claude tries to make a living expenses with the little money he earns from selling scrap metal from cars. The children are left on their own, so that Rundle and Esch have assumed the role of parents in the family. Their mother died when Junior was born and now they are living without her. The story opens with a description of China, Skeetah's favorite dog, a puppy who is pregnant and is about to give birth.

Skeetah and Esch have a special interest in China. They spare no effort in preparing the conditions for her labor. Meanwhile, the other family members lack any special

feelings for China, nature or animals. They do not hate China as much as their father, from time to time, they sympathize with Skeetah who is worried about China. All family members suffer and try to overcome their trauma in different ways. Skeetah is preoccupied with the dogs more than before and Rundle tries his best to join the school team. Esch also gets involved in illicit relationships while she is twelve years old, and has sex with almost all of her brother's friends. The cause of all these incidents is the chaotic situation of the family after the death of their mother. In the wake of this tragedy Skeetah and Esch resort to animals and nature to heal their psychic crises.

Connecting with animals and understanding them is deeply rooted in the human consciousness which enhances mind peace. Buzzel claims that "Animals takes place at deep levels of human consciousness" (Buzzel 78). Apart from the benefits they have for humans, animals are precious gifts in this world which provide psychological peace. The story successively deals with the relationship between Skeetah, Esch and their beloved pet China. Skeetah has been particularly interested in dogs since his childhood and has taken care of many dogs over the years. "Striped dogs, bald, whitish-pink dogs, fat dogs, dogs so skinny their bones looked like a school of fish dating around under their skin (Ward 30). Paying attention to animals and being close to them activates the healing potential. Skeetah and Esch are dealing with their own pain, sadness and stress; therefore, closeness and connection with China reduces their suffering to some extent.

Clinebell claims that, "ecotherapy refers to the healing and growth nurtured by healthy interaction with the earth" (Clinebell 1996: xxi). A healthy correlation with the earth forms an unbreakable bond between humans, nature and all its elements, including animals and plants. Buzzel argues that nature and animal's companionship have a significant role in the psychological and emotional restoration from solitude and stress. The deep bond that Skeetah and Esch have with China and nature is rather healing for their mental, psychological and emotional troubles. To soothe their pain and suffer, Skeetah and Esch take refuge in nature and animals that Buzzel calls ecotherapy. Skeetah has taken refuge in her beloved dog, China. All he cares about is taking care of China and tries his best to earn money for her food.

There is only a dozen or so different kinds of dog food, and I know that Skeetah already knows what kind he wants. He always gets the same kind: the most expensive/ Daddy once bought Skeet a big fifty-pound bag of generic food at the feed store. Skeetah fed China the food and she ate it in gulps, swallowed it down like it was water and shat it out in runny lumps, like sunny-side-up eggs, all over the Pit (Ward 26).

Skeetah spends a month repairing Claude's old lawn mower and goes to the church three days a week to trim the grass there for earning money. He buys the best and most expensive foods for China. Skeetah has devoted his whole life to China and now he has to take care of the skinny and sick puppies of his beloved dog.

Paul Shepherd argues that we depend on animals to feel psychologically human. Animals are mirrors which depict the human society (Shepherd 1996: 10). In *Salvage the Bones*, Jesmyn Ward describes the impact animals have on the main characters of the story. Skeetah's feeling for China's puppies is like a father for his children. He is very happy that China gave birth to five cubs and in the conversation with Esch, Skeetah declares his happiness many times.

"I never thought I'd get five, Esch. With it being her first, I thought I'd get two, maybe. I figured she trample them or that they'd just come out dead. But I never thought she'd let me save so many. You know how you hear daddies on TV talking about seeing birth being a miracle? For all them pigs and mutts and rabbits I seen give birth, I ain't never felt nothing like that. Them puppies is real," he says (Ward 20).

Ralph Metzner declares that "The world of nature, animals, plants, land, water, air, biotic communities- provides interdependence support for the living being (Metzner 1999: 31). China has brought Skeetah a sense of security and peace. Spending time with China makes him stop thinking about his own problems for a while. Skeetah doesn't talk to anyone except China and sometimes his sister Esch. China is the only one with whom he can share his mental concerns.

According to Buzzel, "Ecotherapy attempts to reconnect the psyche and the body with the terrestrial sources of all healing" (Buzzel 19). Connecting with nature, companionship with animals as well as reducing the level of cortisone -a hormone related to stress and anxiety- reduces high blood pressure, which is the main cause of stress. Being close to nature and animals, removes stress by releasing cortisone, which in turn, causes the release of oxytocin, and this plays a very effective role in increasing love and reducing stress. Animals cover up human loneliness and isolation, therefore, being close to China conveys a sense of peace for Skeetah and Esch. Skeetah has been waiting for China's delivery for a week and has been sleeping in the barn for this purpose. This is how Esch describes the incident. "Every time, I found him asleep, his chest to her back. He curled around China like a finger nail around flesh" (Ward 7). Hugging China while sleeping illustrates Skeetah's deep affection for her.

Linda Buzzel stipulates that "In short, animals are prized in and of themselves apart from their usefulness to humans" (Buzzel 79). Playing with the animals and loving them provide a feeling of relaxation by increasing the level of serotonin and dopamine in the person's body which ultimately affects his psyche and leads to mental and emotional peace. forming social and emotional connections, reducing the feeling of loneliness and increasing self-confidence are among the benefits of companionship of human and animals (Buzzel 159). In *Salvage the Bones*, Ward mentions China's presence and the deep emotional connection which has developed between her, Skeetah and Esch. China decreases their stress and reduces their feeling of loneliness. Unconditional love between China, Skeetah and his sister brings them a sense of security, emotional and psychological peace, especially in times of distress and sadness.

Buzzel emphasizes on learning to grow with nature and animals through caring about them. She indicates that “Only by taking responsibility for the earth can we truly reconnect with it-and with ourselves” (30). Understanding the earth and its components, leading to a very deep connection between man and nature, offers him a sense of responsibility. Buzzel believes that the sense of responsibility toward earth, involves animals and the environment. Therefore, the responsible man is looking for the best decisions to prevent the destruction of resources in order to support them (31). In *Salvage the Bones*, Skeetah feels responsible for China and her cubs; therefore, he tries his best to take care of them. Skeetah has devoted his whole life to China and now he has to take care of the skinny and sick puppies of his beloved dog. Skeetah needs to get anti-parasitic medicine, hence, in collaboration with Esch, they break into the white man’s farm to steal the medicine.

The crows ignore Skeetah. He crawls under the other edge of the fence and sprints to the window, he showed me a leaping shadow. His hands move to his face and away again, and I know that he must be taking out the razor. He jumps and pulls himself up onto the window’s ledge, balancing with his feet braced against the wall, and he begins to fiddle with the window (Ward 63).

Man’s sense of responsibility toward animals and nature prompts him to take care of it even more. According to Buzzel “The world also needs us to belong to it, since it is only when we inhabit a place that we care for it and assume responsibility for it (Buzzel 29). Skeetah puts himself in danger to get the anti-parasitic medicine. Such a thing is reminiscent of the fact that the role of animals for humans is more than providing entertainment and food. This is quite evident in the case of Skeetah and Esch. They are fascinated by nature and animals as if they are consoling their soul and healing their sufferings. Linda Buzzel claims that animals, like nature, bring us peace which is clearly observable in *Salvage the Bones*.

Nature plays the role of psychotherapy which leads to psychological peace. Ralph Metzner considers the connection with nature as eco-psychotherapy which affects the psyche and helps to recover its damages. Metzner indicates that “The transmutation of physical and psychic condition of the human being start with oneself” (Metzner 2017: 24). Presence in nature is like a psychedelic for Skeetah and Esch, which causes the healing process while eliminating stress and removing tensions. In the great ecological web of life, interconnectedness with all life forms expands man’s consciousness about nature and its positive effects. Being in the forest and taking refuge in it, while having a direct effect on the mental and psychological conditions of Skeetah and Esch, is a kind of healing for their suffering and trauma.

Buzzel indicates that “Ecotherapy is a practical acknowledgment that health, healing, wholeness, and holy are related not just by linguistic accident but by the fact that they are one and inseparable” (Buzzel 17). In *Salvage the Bones*, animals and nature have a significant effect on the mental and psychological recovery on each and every member. Esch has also sought refuge in China, avoiding the fact that she is pregnant.

Esch, who suffers greatly from her pregnancy and hides the truth from the rest of the family, by watching China and the moment she gives birth to her puppies feels better about the child in her womb. She compares China's situation with her own. With China's pains, she remembers her mother, who died of severe pain and bleeding after giving birth to Junior.

Junior comes out purple and blue as a hydrangea: Mama's last flower. She touched Junior just like that when Daddy held him over her: lightly with her fingerprints, like she was afraid. She'd knock the pollen from him, spoil the bloom. She said she didn't want to go to the hospital. Daddy dragged her from the bed to his truck, trailing her blood, and we never saw her again (Ward 6).

Watching China's puppies reinforces Esch's sense of motherhood and makes her relinquish her sense of hatred for the child. According to Buzzel "We are all intimately connected to the plants and animals, the sun, moon, plants, water and rocks" (Buzzel 48). China's companionship provides significant sense of security and peace of psyche for Esch and Skeetah. The deep bond between Esch, Skeetah and China, while causing a remarkable change, transforms them. Skeetah and Esch's mental and psychological peace is a sign of their association with China. Buzzel also emphasizes the closeness and companionship of animals and their inevitable influence. Connecting on animals, Buzzel explains that "They can be our partners in reestablishing a healing sense of belonging and homecoming" (21). Skeetah loves China passionately and tries his best to keep her healthy. This includes the food and medicine that China should take.

China is hopping on her hind legs. What tore through the gray dog yesterday is now a woman approaching her partner on the floor of the Oaks? China lands on her front paws and pushes back up. Skeet crouches, places one arm around the back of her neck, twining his hand around her jaw, tilting her head up.

"That's my girl," Skeet says (Ward 82).

By strengthening the bond between humans, nature and animals man can reach mental and psychological healing. Buzzel claims that "Human suffering is intimately connected with the destruction of the web of life, and that healing is about making deep changes in the way we live and relates to the world around us (Buzzel 39). Love and the need to be loved are man's basic instincts. China conveys Skeetah the feeling of happiness and health. Skeetah and Esch enjoys spending time with China who has a tremendous impact on their mental and psychological health. China's great love and affection for Skeetah leads him to deal with stress, loneliness, sadness and other negative emotions. Man can touch, hug and talk to animals, which brings psychological peace for him.

Buzzel claims that "As human beings we have a need for place-where we can be connected to a community of people, plants, animals, and the land. Without this, we feel lost, alone, and alienated" (29). According to Buzzel, "Ecotherapy represents a

new form of psychotherapy that acknowledge the vital role of nature and addresses the human-nature relationship” (19). Nature awards man the possibility to overcome his concerns and traumas. According to Metzner eco-psychotherapy looks to nature as a source of healing for the psyche which brings peace. In *Salvage the Bones*, when Ward mentions Esch’s presence in the hen’s nest for collecting eggs, she is referring to eco-psychotherapy which indicates nature as a source of healing for the psyche. Esch enjoys being alone in nature and spending hours without any anxiety. She talks about her experience of collecting eggs and his presence in the forest. Esch says, “I like looking for eggs. I can wander off by myself, move as slow as I want, stare at nothing. Feel like the quiet and the wind” (Ward 21).

In *Ecotherapy: Healing with Nature in Mind* (2009), Buzzel introduces two types of ecotherapy. She declares that “Two ecotherapies that reconnect us with the rest of nature are animal-assisted therapy and horticultural therapy” (Buzzel 78). Buzzel considers the companionship of animals, being in nature, and gardening, as effective ways to get rid of mental pain and loneliness with the help of which a person can calm his mind and gradually ease his pain. In *Salvage the Bones*, Ward mentions both types of therapy by depicting the relationship between Skeetah and Esch with nature and their beloved dog, China. How Skeetah struggles to save China and bravely follows her when the raging flood engulfs her, is a reminder of his endless love for her. China, while healing all the pains of Skeetah and Esch, brings them mental and emotional peace. Being in nature and close to green spaces, animals, plants and colorful flowers, reduces stress, anxiety and depression symptoms. It can be said that Ward has well demonstrated all the mentioned points in her remarkable novel, *Salvage the Bones*.

6.2. Tracing Transpersonal Ecology in *Salvage the Bones*

Literary works explicitly or implicitly create a picture of nature in the minds of beholders, which is basis of the feeling, outlook, behavior and ultimately human performance towards nature. Rereading literary works by applying ecopsychological approach analyzes the intentional or unintentional biases of literary texts toward nature and its elements. The ecopsychological reading of literary works includes a complex set of attitudes and behaviors originating from love, interest, fear or even irrational disgust and hatred toward nature. In *Salvage the Bones*, Ward presents the psychological effects of nature through biophilia and eco-phobia. Biophilia includes affinity and intimacy with nature, while eco-phobia emphasizes on the fear from nature and natural events such as, hurricane, flood and earthquake.

Ward describes a black family who have encountered numerous hardship in isolation and away from other people in the Bay Area. They take different paths to relieve their mental and psychological pains. Randall has focused on playing basketball thus he can pay for his education by joining the school’s top team, in this way be able to reduce the pressure of providing expenses for the family. Skeetah and Esch who are suffering mentally and emotionally, like the others members of the family, have taken

refuge in nature to overcome their anxieties. Skeetah has a special interest in animals, especially his beloved dog. Eventually, to solve the family's financial problems, he tries to raise China's puppies for sale. Esch also refuge in nature to evade her own miserable experiences of unrecalled for pregnancy. Their father, Claude, has turned in to an alcohol to forgo the pains and sufferings of life.

From the opening of the story, Claud warns about Hurricane Katrina. He constantly asks his children to store bottles of water and canned food in the pantry. Although the constant drinking of alcohol has dimmed his influential presence in the family, but according to his experiences, Claude is fully aware of the seriousness of this hurricane. He carefully follows the news on the radio and television and asks his children to stay in the living room for a few days.

Last night, we laid sleeping pallets in the living room, whose windows we'd lined with mismatched wood. Randall and I, side by side, on the floor, and Junior on the couch. We filled the bathtub, the kitchen and the bathroom sinks to the brims with water that we could use for washing and flushing the toilet (Ward 169).

Skeetah who is worried about China and her puppies, brings them home too. They cover the windows with wooden beams and prepare a shelter for the storm. Finally, it starts raining incessantly and the water fills the whole house. Hurricane and the fear of losing each other has gathered the family members. Meanwhile, in addition to Skeetah and Esch, other family members are worried about China and her puppies. Now, they consider China as a member of their family and this highlights the bond between man and nature.

The family takes refuge in the attic, however the water rises up there as well. "The roof is thin; we can hear every fumbling rush of the wind, every torrent of rain. And it is so dark that we cannot see each other, but we hear China barking" (179). For fear of drowning, they desperately swim through the small attic window toward the branches of the trees which are hopelessly submerged in water. Although Skeetah and Esch try their best to save China. The water takes her away.

Skeetah grabs China's head, whispers something to her as she scrabbles against him. Her teeth show and she jerks backward away from him. She writes. Her torso is out of the sling he has made. Skeetah grabs China by the head and pulls and her body comes out and she is scrambling. She flies clear of him, twist in the air to splash belly first in the water. She is already swimming, fighting. China is a white head, spinning away in the relentless water, barking (184).

Fox claims that transpersonal ecology revolves around the idea of dissolving perceptions of boundaries between self and nature. There is a very delicate and flexible boundary between self and nature. The connection between man and nature causes the border between them to fade and disappear, while the disconnection makes the border wider and colorful. Fox believes that man is an inseparable part of nature and

his interest in nature has always been hidden in his unconscious (Fox 67). The interest in nature accompanies man from his birth, which Theodore Roszak refers to as ecological unconscious. In *Salvage the Bones*, the interest and attention of Skeetah and Esch to China, indicates their association and union with nature.

After much struggle, the family reaches mother Lizbeth's house which is submerged in water and only the roof of the house is visible. They sit on the orange gable roof while waiting for the storm to end and the water to recede.

We sat in the open attic until the rain eased to drips. We sat in the open attic until we got cold, and the light wind that blew chilled us. We handled together in mother Lizbeth's attic and tried to rub heat from each other, but couldn't. We were a pile of wet, cold branches, human debris in the middle of all of the rest of it (Ward 186).

Ward brings the Batiste family closer to each other and creates a deep emotional bond between the family members. While referring to Hurricane Katrina, Ward points out to a part of nature that humans cannot control. Storms, earthquakes and floods, all represent the angry nature which destroys and crushes everything in its path. Ward depicts eco-phobia, which is the fear of natural events, through Hurricane Katrina. Representing eco-phobia and drawing the contrast between it and biophilia, Ward points out the psychological effects of nature. Ward depicts the angry of nature through Hurricane Katrina. After the traumatic experience of the Hurricane Katrina, the family is closer than ever and they owe this closeness to the storm. The use of Hurricane Katrina, which is considered one of the unexpected and natural events, enables Ward to strengthen the concern and love between the family members. Storm and being saved marks a new beginning for the family. Hurricane Katrina is a turning point for the family, and has brought them self-identity. This identification includes the awareness that the family has obtain from nature and its impact on their soul.

The central idea in Warwick Fox's combination is an emphasis on the broad sense of self which is achieved through a constant process of self-identification between oneself and the environment. The self-identity which Fox talks about, does not refer to the common concept which is imprinted in minds at the beginning but, a philosophical concept that includes the relationship between man and nature (Fox 197). Ward depicts how the Batiste family attain self-identity through intimacy with nature for the sake of psychological peace. Fox asserts that this process of identification and its various forms will enhance the position of friendliness with the earth. He claims that, "We are intimately bound up with the world" (244). He argues that, as our knowledge increases about the extent to which we are intimately connected with the world, the identification with the world become wider and deeper. He emphasizes the importance of experiencing nature to understand the philosophy of ecology and believes that cosmological or transpersonal identification with nature leads to having a sense of appreciation for it.

Fox claims that “Transpersonal ecologists emphasize the importance of setting personally based identification firmly within the context of ontologically and cosmologically based identification-forms of identification that lead to impartial identification with all entities” (267). According to Fox, transpersonal ecology is an ecological philosophy which strives to understand why humans are not separate from the environment but are part of it. It also revolves around the idea of dissolving perceptions of boundaries between self and nature. The experience of closeness and the feeling of connection with nature, in addition to leading more identification with nature for the Batiste family, respected idea and the desire to take care of it as well as defined it against possible destruction. By appealing to the Batiste family’s different views on nature and animals, Ward depicts their various connections with their surroundings. She uses nature as an effective tool in realizing the transpersonal ecology.

Self-expansion takes place through the identification process, which is made possible by recognizing one’s commonality with everything that exists in nature. Upon attaining such a broad sense of self, one would naturally desire to care for the world and all in it. Fox considers transpersonal ecology essential to self-identification, which is the result of a personal process in which the individual grows to experience the whole world in such a way that they all become an integral part of him or her (266). With her special skill, Ward destroys the boundary that humans set for themselves and nature. Skeetah and Esch’s relationship with nature and animals promises to fade these boundaries. Claud does not constantly drink alcohol as in the past and reaches peace. The family are happy that a new member will soon be added to them. Now Esch is more encouraged to have this child than before and she no longer decides to abort the child, which is a reflection of self-identity and mental peace. In *Salvage the Bones*, Ward provides a pathway through which the main characters of the story can reach a true understanding of nature and its value by achieving transpersonal ecology.

7. Conclusion

Based on the analysis and discussion of the research, a new approach can now be suggested for reading Jesmyn Ward’s remarkable work, *Salvage the Bones*. So far, no study has investigated Jesmyn Ward’s *Salvage the Bones*, through an ecopsychological approach. Moreover, the novel has no yet been studied under the concepts of ecopsychology, ecotherapy and transpersonal ecology, have not, so far, been studied or analyzed in this prominent novel. Thus, the study has innovative aspects, which are inarguably unprecedented. Ecopsychology is a new theoretical model for studying literary works from an environmental point of view, which was formed by integrating theories from the field of psychology and ecology. Ward has depicted the propinquity of characters with nature from a new perspective. The study, in addition to proving the healing potential of contact with nature and its impact on human psyche, reveals the dangers of breaking such a link. The paper effectively delves into the connection

between humans and nature as depicted in the novel, highlighting the impact of such relationship on the character's psyche and emotional well-being.

Shedding light on the novel's ecological themes and characters' engagement with the natural world, the paper has effectively contextualized Ward's *Salvage the Bones*, within the framework of ecopsychology. Relying on the key concepts proposed by Theodore Roszak, Linda Buzzel and Warwick Fox, ecopsychology, ecotherapy and transpersonal ecology, the article looks at the effects of ecotherapy and transpersonal ecology in healing the pains and sufferings of man. The research illustrates the characters' achievement of transpersonal ecology with nature through biophilia in *Salvage the Bones*. By depicting the nature that comforts the pains and sufferings of the characters in her novel, while emphasizing the role of nature as a canvas for psychological treatment, Ward promotes biophilia which heals the soul and psyche of the characters. The main characters are trying to become the optimal version of themselves while they expand their boundaries to adapt to nature and in turn identify with it. The researcher claims that achieving transpersonal ecology is not possible without a complete understanding of the individual and his place in nature.

The paper demonstrates that characters' communication with nature brings them psychological and emotional balance. Skeetah, Esch and Claude, achieve transpersonal ecology which is the result of their self-identity and knowledge about their surroundings. The characters manage to overcome their trauma by taking refuge in nature and animals. Ward uses the harsh face of nature as an ecological offer for the reunion of the family members and developing their environmental ethics. The story conveys rather trauma therapy in the propinquity of human and nature. Through applying key concepts and ideas -ecopsychology, ecotherapy and transpersonal ecology- the paper explores the effect of nature as a psychedelic tool in developing a holistic connection with the Earth. the paper intended to add aspects to the field of eco-psychotherapy by presenting a new reading of Ward's *Salvage the Bones*. The article emphasizes the vital importance of affinity with nature for healing man's psychological tensions. Being in nature and in the companionship with animals is a therapy for trauma and mental disorders. The study promises the emergence of ecological period when man's intimacy with nature is viewed as a therapy for psychic traumas.

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