



A Comparative Study of Solastalgia in Contemporary Post-Disaster Fiction

Daniel Tia^{1*} & Dechi Reste Dechi¹

¹Department of English, American Studies, University of Felix Houphouët-Boigny, Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire

ORCID (D. Tia): 0000-0002-2928-3257

Corresponding Author Email: yawejanet@yahoo.com

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36892/ijlls.v8i5.2801>

APA Citation: Tia, D., & Dechi, D. R. (2026). A Comparative Study of Solastalgia in Contemporary Post-Disaster Fiction. *International Journal of Language and Literary Studies*, 8(5).455-472. <https://doi.org/10.36892/ijlls.v8i5.2801>

Received:

01/07/2026

Accepted:

02/08/2026

Keywords:

Anthropocene,
Isotopy,
Liminality,
Rupture,
Phenomenology

Abstract

The contemporary semiotic landscape exposes a high-tension dynamic between the progressive degradation of a habitat-milieu and the systemic deconstruction of identity structures. By investigating the isotopies of ruin across Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones* (2011) and Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2013), this exegesis interrogates the mutation of actants confronted with the profound erosion of spatiotemporal frameworks in distinct environments of collapse: hurricane-ravaged coastal Mississippi and war-torn Iraq. The study addresses a central research problem: How does spatial fragmentation in these narratives force a psychological and somatic reconstruction of the subject, turning bodily and mental anguish into the primary means of reclaiming a desolate world? To resolve this interrogation, the analytical approach deploys a rigorous methodological synergy, combining psychoanalysis and tensive semiotics with the comparative framework of trauma studies. The comparative finding reveals that Ward frames environmental trauma through the bio-somatic vulnerability of the rural American South. Saadawi, conversely, articulates it through necro-political landscapes where human debris forms a grotesque body politic. Despite these differences, both authors use bodily fragmentation as a signifying anchor when traditional spatial referents collapse. Structurally, the inquiry unfolds along two major axes: Phenomenology of Loss and the Corporeal Landscape, which examines how bodily endurance mirrors environmental devastation, and Necro-Politics and the Aesthetics of Salvage, which investigates the systemic commodification of life and the makeshift recovery of identity from rubble. This investigation offers an innovative theoretical paradigm, bridging ecocriticism and trauma theory to decode how localized catastrophes generate universal semiotic languages of survival amid terminal planetary decay today.

Introduction

The Anthropocene epoch, defined by the systemic dissolution of traditional ecological and geopolitical paradigms, has precipitated an acute existential malaise. Glenn Albrecht conceptualized this as solastalgia. This affective orientation, defined as the profound distress incised by the involuntary transmutation of one's home environment, far exceeds simple nostalgic lamentation. Rather, it signifies a radical fracturing of the semiotic contract binding the subject to its spatial anchor. In Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones* (2011) and Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2013), this collapse operates not as a superficial external disruption, but as an ontological crisis. Ward's evocation of the Mississippi Gulf Coast on the eve of Hurricane Katrina and Saadawi's portrayal of a pulverized, post-occupation Baghdad

function as heterotopias. Here, the normative coordinates of domesticity and stability are eviscerated, thrusting the subject into a state of abject survivance.

This intellectual genealogy of environmental malaise finds its foundational roots in Harold Searles's *The Nonhuman Environment in Normal Development and in Schizophrenia* (1960). Searles boldly postulated that the human psyche remains inextricably intertwined with the nonhuman sphere. This premise was subsequently amplified by the radical ecological ethics of Arne Naess. Naess formulated biospherical egalitarianism in *The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement* (1973), which reoriented philosophical discourse. While Naess supplied the normative imperative, Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination* (1995) catalyzed literary application by uncovering the environmental unconscious. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm complemented this in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996), which formalized nature as a distinct literary actant.

As the late-twentieth-century humanities pivoted toward the lexicon of historical trauma, the psychoanalytic frameworks governing catastrophe were forged by Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992). Cathy Caruth reinforced this in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996). These texts provide an indispensable vocabulary for articulating the unrepresentable dimensions of the crises depicted by Ward and Saadawi. These clinical insights are structurally reinforced by the methodologies of Algirdas Julien Greimas's *Structural Semantics: An Attempt at a Method* (1983) and Jacques Fontanille's *Sémiotique du Discours* (1998). Together, they furnish the technical grid required to extract meaning from the structural debris of a devastated world.

Moving into the twenty-first century, scholarly discourse gravitated toward the intersection of spatiality and existential deprivation. Glenn A. Albrecht's seminal formulation of solastalgia in 2005 provided crucial nomenclature for the endemic distress experienced by those remaining in situ. Tina Amorok refined this concept in 2007 to bridge environmental degradation and psychic rehabilitation. Roger Luckhurst's *The Trauma Question* (2008) subsequently issued vital methodological caveats against the universalizing tendencies of trauma studies. This provided a critical nuance for a comparative appraisal of Gulf Coast meteorological devastation and Iraqi sectarian warfare. Rob Nixon critically mapped the structural-political dimensions in *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011). His insights illuminate the precarious margins inhabited by Ward's and Saadawi's subjects. Furthermore, contemporary climate psychoanalysis, anchored by Cosimo Schinaia's *Psychoanalysis and Ecology: The Unconscious and the Environment* (2022), illuminates unconscious defense mechanisms, psychic splitting, and indigenous modalities of resilience deployed against ecological volatility. Meanwhile, Walter Benjamin's iconic figure of the "Angel of History" (1969) remains the touchstone for interpreting the wreckage of Baghdad.

Building upon this theoretical matrix, contemporary criticism of Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones* has increasingly interrogated the material and visceral contours of catastrophe. It chronologically traces the evolution of these disasters through diverse methodological lenses. Early interventions like Myrto Charvalia's "Waking up the Ghosts: Trauma Resurgence as a Possibility in Jesmyn Ward's *Sing, Unburied, Sing* (2017)" (2025) establish the baseline for intergenerational ghost-work. Katerina Psilopoulou followed closely with "Writing the Grotesque in Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones*" (2021), which examines the grotesque intersections of maternal embodiment and meteorological peril. This analytical trajectory deepens with Vicent Cucarella Ramon's "Reading Toni Morrison's *Beloved* in Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones* and *Sing, Unburied, Sing*" (2022) and Zsuzsanna Lénárt-Muszká's "The Weather and the Wake: Maternal Embodiment and Peril in Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones*" (2023). Both interrogate how vulnerable flesh mirrors environmental degradation through historical hauntings and maternal peril. Moving further into recent scholarship, Sarah Hopkinson's "Talking Trash: Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones* and the Timescape of Disaster" (2024) brilliantly maps the temporal dimensions of refuse. It showcases how disaster

is lived as an enduring condition rather than a momentary event. The contemporary critical arc culminates in Rashika and Rashmi Bajaj's "Survival and Resilience in Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones*" (2025) and Karla Rohová's "The Pit as a Sacrifice Zone: Environmental Injustice in Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones*" (2026). Together, they underscore endurance and demonstrate how institutional neglect transforms the coastal landscape into a sacrificial geography.

Parallel critical trajectories in Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* dismantle the biopolitical wreckage of contemporary conflict. They sequentially map the evolution of the monstrous body politic. Sinéad Murphy first interrogated the ontological boundaries of humanity within the ruins in "*Frankenstein in Baghdad: Human Conditions, or Conditions of Being Human*" (2018). Dominic Davies expanded this foundation in "Concrete Stories, Decomposing Fictions: Body Parts and Body Politics in Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad*" (2020), offering exceptional material analyses investigating the poetics of bodily assembly. Subsequently, Raad Kareem Abd-Aun and Ameer Abd Hadi's "The Poetics of Adaptation in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*" (2021) and Marwa Essam Eldin Fahmy Alkhayat's pioneering study, "Gothic Politics in Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad*" (2022), map how state-sanctioned terror infects domestic spaces through gothic frameworks. They demonstrate how physical disassembly mirrors geopolitical dissolution. Finally, Ahmed Saad Aziz's "Reanimating Horror: Gothic Critique of Violence and Fragmentation in Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad*" (2026) brings the chronological trajectory full circle. It harnesses comparative gothic theory to expose the structural violence underwriting contemporary dismemberment.

Despite the breadth of this existing scholarship, a persistent critical blind spot remains. Critical paradigms frequently treat ecological disintegration as a phenomenon distinct from the structural act of textual and material assembly. To bridge this theoretical lacuna, this exegesis synthesizes the tensive semiotic rigor of the Greimasian school with the psychoanalytical topology of the fragment. This shifts the analytical paradigm from a mere inventory of ecological effects to a formal theory of salvage as meaning-production. Accordingly, this study is driven by a central inquiry: How do Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones* and Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* transform ecological and geopolitical wreckage into an aesthetic of salvage that repairs the fractured symbolic order of their subjects? Through what formal mechanics do characters navigate the transition from solastalgia to the active reclamation of agency using material and bodily debris?

In pursuit of these inquiries, the objective of this research transcends conventional thematic comparison. It strives instead to construct a formal model of solastalgic re-signification. From that point of view, this analysis examines how the aestheticization of debris functions as a defensive psychic maneuver. This is manifested in the literal scraps populating the Batiste household or the composite human fragments constituting Saadawi's monstrous entity. It operates as a fetishistic endeavor to suture the foundational void within the symbolic order. Grounded in a comparative approach, this study utilizes a methodological framework that bridges Lacanian psychoanalysis and tensive semiotics. Within this matrix, tensive semiotics measures the micro-dynamics of intensity governing the flux between subject and world. It establishes a robust framework for charting the descent from equilibrium to collapse. Concurrently, Lacanian psychoanalysis complements this approach. It offers an interpretive lexicon for the objet petit a, the discarded relic, the bone, and the corpse, which simultaneously destabilizes and grounds the narrative architecture. Nevertheless, while this theoretical synthesis offers exceptional analytical precision, it is tempered by the inherent challenge of translating the fluid, affective registers of trauma into structural formalization. This guards against the peril of reducing agonizing human experience to a sterile taxonomy.

In alignment with these methodological commitments, the analysis unfolds across two major axes. First, "Phenomenology of Loss and Corporeal Landscape," investigates how external topographies are internalized as somatic spaces. It shows how Esch's gestational body

and the composite anatomy of the Frankenstein figure serve as mirrors for a collapsing environment. Second, “Necro-politics and the Aesthetics of Salvage” delineates the act of assembly as a subversive matrix of resistance. It explores how the scavenging of objects, biological refuse, and fragmented memories generates a desperate idiom within a post-catastrophic reality.

Phenomenology of Loss and Corporeal Landscape

The investigation of this axis mandates an ontological excavation of the solastalgic condition, wherein the environmental *milieu*, once a guarantor of the subject’s existential continuity, undergoes a radical semiotic liquefaction.

In both Ward’s and Saadawi’s novels, the collapse of the ecological and urban referent constitutes an epistemic rupture. Here, the interest is to establish that solastalgia is not a peripheral anxiety, but a central force of absence that constrains the human subject to reconfigure their internal architecture to accommodate the encroaching, unrepresentable real of the catastrophe. The initial conceptual movement addresses the collapse of the lived-space, a notion fundamentally destabilized in the era of late-capitalist environmental attrition. Gaston Bachelard, in *The Poetics of Space*, posits that the house is the topocosm of the human soul, the primary locus of oneiric security that shelters daydreaming and protects the dreamer. Bachelard argues:

This being the case, if I were asked to name the chief benefit of the house, I should say: the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace. Thought and experience are not the only things that sanction human values. The values that belong to daydreaming mark humanity in its depths. Daydreaming even has a privilege of autovalorization. It derives direct pleasure from its own being. Therefore, the places in which we have experienced daydreaming reconstitute themselves in a new daydream, and it is because our memories of former dwelling-places are relived as daydreams that these dwelling-places of the past remain in us for all time. Now my aim is clear: I must show that the house is one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind. The binding principle in this integration is the daydream. Past, present and future give the house different dynamisms, which often interfere, at times opposing, at others, stimulating one another. (Bachelard, 1994, p. 6)

Notably, because this domestic space acts as a semiotic container that binds the subject to the world through the binding principle of daydreaming, its structural integrity remains an absolute prerequisite for the subject’s own psychic integrity. When this container, whether manifested as the climate-vulnerable Gulf Coast home in Jesmyn Ward’s fiction or the sectarian-torn urban landscape of Baghdad in Ahmed Saadawi’s novelistic universe, is rendered porous, fractured, or entirely uninhabitable, the subject experiences a severe rupture in integration, precipitating profound psychic decentering. However, the Bachelardian house presupposes a stable correspondence between the signifier (structure) and the signified (sense of self).

In the novels under consideration, this correspondence is shattered. In Ward’s *STB*, the home is not a sanctuary, but a temporary membrane waiting to be shredded by the hurricane. The loss of the Bachelardian nook of security transforms the subject from an inhabitant of a protected space into a scavenger of ruins, forcing an adaptation where the self becomes a fluctuating process of salvage rather than a static identity. This turbulent reality is explicitly mirrored in the textual fabric of Ward’s novel, where Esch Batiste navigates an environment that has turned hostile and invasive. As she moves through the dense woods under the oppressive atmospheric weight of an impending hurricane, she observes:

Down here, the air is thick and hot. The trees are so dense that there’s only a little undergrowth, and the bushes fight for their bright spots on the hard-packed, shadowy

earth. There are birds, like yesterday, but these are small and brown, so small that they could fit in the middle of my hand or in the maw of China's mouth. They are following us. As we walk through the wood on an unseen trail, the tiny birds fly from tree to tree, chattering sharply with each other, keeping pace with us. In the dense air, the oaks stand apart from the piney clusters: solemn, immovable. Spanish moss hangs from their arms, gray as an old king's beard. Skeetah grabs my hand, and I almost jump away from him, surprised at the feel of it around mine, his fingers hard, the small calluses on his palm from China's leash now dry and scratchy as old bread. He pulls and we run through a corridor of pines, oaks, birch, birds. I can't help it. I lean back against his pull, and I laugh. We fall into a pace. My face feels tight and hot, and the air coming into my nose feels like water. I am swimming through the air. My body does what it was made to do: it moves. Skeetah cannot leave me. I am his equal. Skeetah sprints a little faster, and when the slack in my arm is still there because I am still at his side, he looks back at me quickly and smiles widely. There, silver. He has a razor in his cheek. (Ward, 2011, p. 182)

The above passage underscores the shift from a nurturing environment to a suffocating one. The dense atmosphere and the pressing landscape cease to function as a neutral backdrop, transforming instead into an active, menacing participant in the narrative. Esch's somatic reality, characterized by air that "feels like water" and the sensation of "swimming through the air" acts as an experiential vessel for the environment's degradation. Her pregnancy functions as an involuntary, biological proliferation against an encroaching backdrop of non-being, mirroring the solastalgic pressure she carries within. The semiotic intensity here reveals an environment that is no longer a given sanctuary, but a force that subtracts the space necessary for human endurance, rendering the simple act of standing on the earth a profound act of defiance against a landscape reclaiming its entropy.

Similarly, in Saadawi's *FIB*, the city operates as a perforated text where the domestic sphere is stripped of its Bachelardian sanctuary and reduced to a site of potential interment. Baghdad becomes an urban grid of absolute porosity, where sectarian violence and infrastructure collapse breach the threshold of the home, transforming domestic interiors into volatile holding pens. In this pulverized topocosm, characters do not inhabit secure dwellings; rather, they occupy provisional ruins where the boundary separating the living space from the morgue dissolves entirely. As the boundaries of the domestic sphere disintegrate completely under the relentless pressure of urban violence, the characters find themselves confronting a landscape where survival is reduced to an agonizing, fragmented witness, as demonstrated below:

Then he looked at Mahmoud and made a dramatic revelation: 'In fact, Brigadier Majid doesn't pursue weird crimes. He's employed by the Americans' Coalition Provisional Authority to lead an assassination squad.' 'Assassination squad?' 'Yes, for a year or more he's been carrying out the policy of the American ambassador to create an equilibrium of violence on the streets between the Sunni and Shiite militias, so there'll be a balance later at the negotiating table to make new political arrangements in Iraq. The American army is unable or unwilling to stop the violence, so at least a balance or an equivalence of violence has to be created. Without it, there won't be a successful political process.' 'Why don't you tell your political friends about this?' asked Mahmoud. 'They all know, but no one has definitive proof. Or they look at the Tracking and Pursuit Department that Brigadier Majid heads as if they're looking at a text -each party interprets it according to its own interests.' (Saadawi, 2013, p. 170)

This quotation escalates the theoretical framework from architectural vulnerability to structural geopolitics, framing urban destruction as a deliberate, administered cartography. The revelation that state-sponsored violence orchestrates an "equilibrium of violence" exposes how the city's physical fragmentation is mirrored by a complete breakdown of political and ethical

legibility. When Brigadier Majid's assassination squad and the resulting carnage are described as a "text" that each political faction "interprets... according to its own interests," the narrative confirms that Baghdad has become a hyper-semiotized space of terror. The human body and the ruined street are no longer merely collateral damage; they are converted into institutionalized signs, an engineered syntax of occupation and sectarian partition where survival depends on decoding a landscape designed to consume its inhabitants.

Proceeding to a psychoanalytic hermeneutic, the critic must engage with Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject to understand how political violence registers on the somatic level, transforming the human subject into a site of internal collapse. In her work *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Kristeva maps how the breakdown of the symbolic order, and the loss of the stabilizing paternal or structural agency, unleashes drives without objects, threatening the integrity of the subject and precipitating a descent into psychosis:

This is easy enough to understand if one takes the word object in its strongest acceptation -as the correlative of a subject in a symbolic chain. The paternal agency alone, to the extent that it introduces the symbolic dimension between 'subject' (child) and 'object' (mother), can generate such a strict object relation. Otherwise, what is called 'narcissism,' without always or necessarily being conservative, becomes the unleashing of drive as such, without object, threatening all identity, including that of the subject itself. We are then in the presence of psychosis. The 'Object' of Phobic Desire: Signs The point, however, of the hallucinatory metaphor of the phobic is precisely that, while displaying the victory of 'the forces that were opposed to sexuality,' it finds a certain 'object.' Which one? Not the object of sexual drive; the mother, or her parts, or her representatives; no more than some neutral referent or other, but symbolic activity something to be scared of itself. (Kristeva, 1982, p. 44)

According to this framework, the abject emerges precisely where the clean distinction between subject and object, or self and world, completely dissolves. When the state-sanctioned equilibrium of violence reduces citizens to fragments, the corpse becomes the ultimate emblem of this abjection, a stark materiality that forces the living to confront their own imminent reduction to waste. This psychological disintegration forms the cornerstone of Saadawi's Baghdad, a city converted into a vast, sprawling site of abjection where the boundaries between interior psyche and external rubble are permanently erased.

In other words, Saadawi's novel functions precisely at the threshold of this abject reality. The "What's-Its-Name," assembled from the body parts of diverse victims of sectarian carnage, is a walking crystallization of the city's unmourned trauma. This is a composite signifier that disrupts the symbolic order, possessing no single history, no singular identity, and no place in the official, sanitized narrative of the war. Its existence is an affront to the living, a physical, walking reminder that the city is composed of the very corpses it attempts to repress. The monster is the city's repressed collective consciousness made manifest. In Saadawi's text, this ontological fluidity and pervasive fragmentation are evidenced when the narrative reflects upon the creature's precarious existence alongside the bureaucratic mechanisms tracking the city's continuous disasters:

Tomorrow the One Who Has No Name, he mused, might become He Who Has No Identity, and then He Who Has No Body, and then He Who Can't Be Caught and Thrown in Jail. But today he could ignore this criminal who didn't have a name, because the disaster on the bridge had turned out to be a big one, and he would have to prepare a report on his department's monitoring of the Imams Bridge, in case the Americans or the Iraqi government asked for one, so he called together the officers on his team. One of the junior officers mentioned an important piece of information that had been picked up two hours before the meeting: these figures hovering over the bridge were ghosts that lived in people's bodies. They slept and rested in those bodies without the people being aware of

them, or they could wake up and break free for a little and wander around outside the people's bodies but only when the people were frightened. (Saadawi, 2013, pp. 107-108)

More significantly, the monster's self-conception is defined by its material origin; it is not merely an inhabitant of the city, but a manifestation of its literal debris. The rubble is not external to the monster; it is the very environment he carries within his stitched-together flesh. The bridge stands as a potent metaphor connecting the living to the dead, the present to the past, yet it is consumed by the very fragments it attempts to hold together. This reinforces the premise that the solastalgic subject in Saadawi's work has lost the ability to separate the "I" from the ruin, as the environment permeates the subject's own body to operate as a permanent, mobile monument to environmental erasure.

To map the tensive flux of this bodily and architectural rupture, it is essential to consider the Greimasian square and the concept of tensive semiotics developed by Claude Zilberberg in his essay *Précis de grammaire tensive* (2002). According to the Zilberbergian approach, the production of meaning resides in the continuous fluctuation between intensity and extensity, wherein phenomena are comprehended through the magnitude of their presence and the depth of their emotional resonance. Across both novels, this tensive balance collapses; the environment reaches a state of maximal intensity, manifested as an incoming hurricane or a lethal urban explosion, coupled with an absolute contraction of extensity, shrinking the habitable horizon down to the restricted, claustrophobic bounds of the ruined home or neighborhood. Consequently, characters and monsters alike are forced to operate within a heightened, volatile tensive field where every movement is governed by an immediate, unresolvable existential crisis. Demonstrating this theoretical paradigm, Zilberberg underscores how these extreme structural fluctuations directly impact the stability of axiological systems, noting:

The inverse assertion -the one that places mixture far above sorting, mixing mixtures while admitting the plausibility of a class of classes - leads to the praise of diffuse and transitive universal values. Each of these axiological directions conceals its own secret ill: the profession of absolute values has as its limit the 'nothing, the 'void,' the flawless negativity of negative indefinite pronouns: none, no one, nobody, and some whispering: not even God ... whereas the profession of universal values, by pushing the diffusion of valences ever further, unwittingly annuls distinction, the constitutive reserve of meaning -in a word, the tension inherent in any paradigm. (2002, pp. 137-138; Translation mine)

This excerpt provides the exact theoretical architecture required to articulate how disaster-ravaged environments neutralize meaning. By framing the collapse of significance through the twin perils of absolute values and universal values, Zilberberg exposes the semiotic crisis at the core of both Ward's and Saadawi's texts. In *STB* and *FIB*, the characters are violently hurled out of stable paradigms into a catastrophic middle-ground where binaries fail. When absolute values are pulverized by total environmental or urban collapse, the resulting ideological and physical vacuum yields only the 'flawless negativity' of the void, a literal and existential nothingness populated by unmourned corpses, discarded body parts, and anonymous victims whose identities are erased by systemic violence.

Conversely, the push toward diffuse, universal values, such as the bureaucratized, engineered 'equilibrium of violence' managed by occupying forces, widens the diffusion of valences until distinction itself is annulled. In this state of perpetual carnage, every atrocity becomes equivalent, and the 'constitutive reserve of meaning' is entirely spent. The monsters, scavengers, and survivors of these narratives are thus trapped within a tensive impasse, navigating a ruined landscape where the tension inherent in any paradigm has been flattened and neither absolute truth nor universal order can be recovered. This structural coherence relies entirely on the persistence of a pervasive semiotic thread that binds disparate instances of trauma, decay, and environmental degradation into a unified reading experience. To explain

how this semantic continuity functions to sustain the thematic integrity of disaster literature, Greimas asserts:

The possibilities offered for the exploration of the semantic universe by the isotopic character of the text (that is, the work) and by its tendency to close upon itself” allows for the ‘observed particularity of the continued text: by being extended, the text becomes not only more and more redundant and introduces less and less information, but, because of the redundancy of the preferential structures, it develops an autonomous subcode at the same time. (Greimas, 1983, p. xxviii)

Plainly, both Ward and Saadawi generate an enclosed, suffocating semiotic universe where catastrophe ceases to be an isolated event and becomes the very grammar of the text. As the narratives unfold, the relentless accumulation of structural failures, decaying bodies, and environmental violence produces a high degree of redundancy that hardens into an autonomous subcode. In *STB*, the repetitive rhythms of rural poverty, approaching storm pressure, and bodily vulnerability form an isotopic chain of impending erasure. Likewise, in *FIB*, the endless cycles of bombings, bureaucratic indifference, and corporeal reassembly establish an unyielding semiotic grid. Within this closed loop, every element communicates a singular message: the total collapse of the habitable order. The characters remain trapped not only within physical ruins, but within an inescapable semantic redundancy that dictates the terms of their survival. Across both novels, this isotopy indexes the terminal velocity of dissolution, forming the structural foundation of the solastalgic experience where the subject lives inside an unremitting countdown. This reality is profoundly visible in the Batiste family’s methodical, almost ritualistic preparations for the storm. Every action, securing the dogs, gathering scrap, the tense, quiet interactions between the siblings, is saturated with the knowledge of the impending void. Ward captures this in the rhythm of her prose:

I grabbed two of the nearest jugs and brought them to the faucet. I turned the knob and the water that burst out of the spigot was hot as boiling water. One of the jugs was caked with mud on the inside, so I let the water run through the top. When the water bubbled up at the rim, I shook the jugs to clear them. (Ward, 2011, p. 182)

As depicted here, the landscape is a medicalized, bruised entity, and the characters live on the skin of that infection. The bruise suggests both the history of the land’s trauma and the current, active swelling of the threat. The characters do not attempt to change the outcome; they attempt to manage their presence within the catastrophe. The deliberate weight of the horizon signifies an environmental agency that dwarfs the human, reducing the family to figures of profound, quiet fragility. The semiotic mapping of the bruise unifies the internal emotional state of the characters, their deep, unvoiced pain, with the external, visible decay of the landscape. They are one and the same; the environment has become the external projection of their internalized, unhealed history. Bridging this semiotic collapse into an existential inquiry, it is relevant to address the Heideggerian notion of *Dasein* and authentic dwelling in a world of decay, where Martin Heidegger asserts:

Thus dwelling would in any case be the end that presides over all building. Dwelling and building are related as end and means. However, as long as this is all we have in mind, we take dwelling and building as two separate activities, an idea that has something correct in it. Yet at the same time by the means-end schema we block our view of the essential relations. For building is not merely a means and a way toward dwelling -to build is in itself already to dwell. (Heidegger, 1971, p. 146)

Dwelling is the fundamental mode by which humanity preserves the earth, embodying a sacred topology that honors the harmonious interplay of the fourfold: earth, sky, gods, and mortals. Heidegger’s profound critique of modernity demonstrates that contemporary systems have severed this capacity, substituting authentic habitation with a technological enframing

that reduces the living world to a mere standing reserve of extractable resources. Within the universes of Ward and Saadawi, this philosophical alienation manifests as a literal and ontological eviction, wherein the characters are stripped of their ability to dwell and are cast out into an unshielded state of exposure. They are rendered fundamentally homeless, not simply because their physical walls have collapsed, but because the architectural and political structures around them can no longer anchor them within a meaningful world. Their survival transforms into a desperate, improvisational attempt to forge a new mode of existence amidst landscapes reduced entirely to debris, ultimately exposing both the agonizing depth of their displacement and the radical, stubborn resilience of the human subject facing total annihilation.

Having disclosed how the landscape is internalized as a somatic space, a bruise, a monster, a haunted container, the subsequent axis investigates how the necro-aesthetic of salvage serves as an ethical response to the void. Gathering the fragments of a shattered world operates, in itself, as a form of foundational resistance against the total, silent erasure of history.

Necro-Politics and the Aesthetics of Salvage

The current axis requires an ontological shift from the internal somatization of trauma to the active, material restructuring of the world through the remnant. If solastalgia is the mourning of a lost totality, then the act of salvaging is the paradoxical attempt to construct meaning within that void.

This involves a move from the pathos of the bruised landscape to the logos of the debris, where the characters of Ward's *STB* and Saadawi's *FIB* engage in a desperate language-game of assembly. In this context, the fragment becomes not a sign of failure, but the only authentic material available for the performance of a new, albeit fractured, subjectivity. To illuminate this material reclamation, the critic must first engage with Walter Benjamin's conceptualization of history and the fragment. In his essay "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Benjamin presents the "Angel of History" whose gaze is fixed on the piling wreckage of the past:

This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. (Benjamin, 1989, p. 258)

Benjamin's dialectical image of the ruin functions not as a static object of contemplation, but as an active, aggressive force of history that demands immediate critical reading. The escalating pile of wreckage epitomizes the suppressed, uncounted histories and casualties that the triumphalist march of late-capitalist and imperialist progress systematically seeks to erase from the record. For the characters navigating Ward's storm-ravaged Gulf Coast and Saadawi's occupied Baghdad, history is violently stripped of its teleological promise; it is experienced instead as a recursive, compounding descent into an environment of raw debris that must be painfully and perpetually negotiated.

In this light, the Benjaminian ruin provides the foundational ontological condition for the solastalgic subject. The characters do not merely inhabit a ruined landscape; they are constituted by it, forced to scavenge among the remnants of systemic collapse just as the Angel of History is propelled backward into the future by the storm of progress. This relentless accumulation of wreckage strips away illusions of permanence, transforming the body and the domestic sphere into archival repositories of violence. Accordingly, the act of survival becomes an archaeological excavation of the present, where assembling fragments, whether patching together a temporary shelter before a hurricane or stitching together mismatched limbs into a

monstrous body, becomes the sole remaining method for articulating a fractured, enduring human agency against the totalizing sweep of catastrophe.

In *STB*, the progress of the hurricane exposes the foundational poverty of the Mississippi Gulf Coast, disclosing the wreckage of systemic neglect that preceded the storm, whereas in *FIB*, the wreckage is literal: the city is a necropolis. The characters in both novels are akin to Benjamin's ragpicker, who collects the discarded remnants of a civilization to find hidden truths. Benjamin's insight is crucial because it redefines salvage as an act of political witnessing; to gather the scraps of a dying world is to acknowledge that the world was already dying, and that the catastrophe is merely a moment of transparency where the hidden truth of the environment is finally revealed. In Ward's novel, this dynamic of desperate preservation is concretely dramatized through Skeetah's obsessive, fierce devotion to his prize pit bull, China, even as the lethal storm closes in:

China grips him and arches her back, digs in as her whole body jerks toward the other dog. It looks like she is giving birth again. Twist's scream turns to a squeal. She has him by the neck. Skeetah is smiling. 'Skeet!' I yell. I slap him on the back, his muscle like dinner plates between the flat plane of his shoulder blades. He looks at me, surprised, the smile startled from him. 'What?' 'She's going to kill him.' He looks back to China, who is curved in two, a fang, and is jerking moans out of the other dog, who is in fits against her, bleeding. 'Stop it,' I say. Skeetah puts his hands in his pockets, fingers what I now see are shapes there, big as curled fists. The cow wormer. 'He's going to hear it hollering, and he's going to follow it here,' I say over the grunting and the squealing. Twist is rolling like a tornado. 'Stop!' Skeetah barks and lunges toward China. 'China!' He yells, Hold! (Ward, 2011, p. 68)

Explicitly, this intense claim to ownership transcends mere property relations, operating instead as a defiant act of preservation in an ecosystem engineered to dissolve life. Skeetah preserves a vital, living fragment of endurance against the encroaching brown bruise of the storm. His total obsession with China, her training, her feeding, her protection, functions as a rigorous semiotic ritual. In a landscape that promises total annihilation, the animal becomes the sole text he can meaningfully edit and master. By constructing an unbreakable bond with a creature dismissed by society as a mere instrument of violence, Skeetah engages in a radical act of meaning-production. He sutures his own fractured sense of self to a creature embodying the hard, calcified resilience required to survive the hurricane, rendering the dog his ultimate salvaged bone and the structural bedrock of his humanity in a world attempting to pulverize him into dust.

As far as Saadawi's characters are concerned, the act of salvage shifts from the biological and animal realm into the horrifyingly literal labor of bodily reassembly. While Skeetah sutures his humanity to the fierce vitality of a pit bull against the impending natural storm, the characters in *FIB* must piece together the human itself from the anonymous debris of sectarian violence. The scavenger here is embodied by figures navigating the ruined urban grid, where survival demands treating the dead as raw material and where state power and opportunistic civilians alike manage the carnage as an administrative routine. This transactional, desensitized relationship with the city's violence is starkly demonstrated in the immediate aftermath of a violent encounter on the street:

The American didn't like that there were so many onlookers. With a wave of his hand he urged the Iraqi policemen to speed things up. They took Faraj's phone number and asked him to drop in at the Saadoun police station if he came across any information about the crime or found any witnesses. Faraj breathed a sigh of relief and started to stroke his thick beard. He took out his prayer beads, plucked up his courage to move closer to the beggars' corpses, and looked at them with disdain. Some of the policemen put on white rubber gloves and started to unlock the hands gripping the necks. They carried the bodies quickly

to one of the vehicles, and then they all left. People suddenly poured into the lane and gathered around Faraj to ask him about the incident. He dismissed them with a wave, hit some of the boys with his long string of black prayer beads, and walked away. (Saadawi, 2013, pp. 166-167)

This bureaucratic clearing of human wreckage underscores how bodies are treated as disposable refuse under occupation. In response, characters like the junk dealer Elisha bin Taha counter this erasure by collecting scattered, unclaimable body parts from the bombed streets to construct the “*What’s-Its-Name*,” a composite corpse intended to receive a full soul and compel the government to recognize the unmourned dead. Just as Skeetah uses China to anchor his survival against environmental dissolution, these characters assemble the discarded fragments of war to force a blind nation to confront its own atrocities. The body parts gathered from gutters and alleys cease to be mere organic waste, transforming instead into a living archive of systemic failure that materializes the Benjaminian ruin into a walking, breathing indictment of catastrophe.

Moving to the political dimension of assembly, the critic must integrate the thought of Giorgio Agamben. In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1995), Agamben discusses the state of exception, a condition where the law is suspended and human life is reduced to bare life, existence stripped of political or legal protection. This is the precise condition of the inhabitants of Bois Sauvage and the citizens of post-occupation Baghdad, who function as *homo sacer*, beings who can be killed without that killing constituting homicide. Their survival, therefore, is an urgent act of reclaiming their own political existence from a state that has rendered them invisible. Agamben’s theory explains why salvaging in these novels is essentially a political counter-offensive. When Hadi and Elisha collect body parts in Saadawi’s novel to construct the “*What’s-Its-Name*,” they do not merely assemble a monster; they engineer a witness. They take the discarded bare life of the unmourned victims and forge a monstrous form that demands structural recognition, forcing the re-entry of the disposable victim into the public sphere:

The sovereign sphere is the sphere in which it is permitted to kill without committing homicide and without celebrating a sacrifice, and sacred life -that is, life that may be killed but not sacrificed -is the life that has been captured in this sphere. It is therefore possible to give a first answer to the question we put to ourselves when we delineated the formal structure of the exception. What is captured in the sovereign ban is a human victim who may be killed but not sacrificed: *homo sacer*. If we give the name bare life or sacred life to the life that constitutes the first content of sovereign power, then we may also arrive at an answer to the Benjaminian query concerning ‘the origin of the dogma of the sacredness of life.’ The life caught in the sovereign ban is the life that is originally sacred - that is, that may be killed but not sacrificed - and, in this sense, the production of bare life is the originary activity of sovereignty. The sacredness of life, which is invoked today as an absolutely fundamental right in opposition to sovereign power, in fact originally expresses precisely both life’s subjection to a power over death and life’s irreparable exposure in the relation of abandonment. (Agamben, 1998, p. 83)

This conceptualization unmasks how the sovereign authorities in both Ward’s and Saadawi’s universes, whether through the systemic governmental neglect of poor Gulf Coast communities or the occupying military apparatus in Baghdad, rely on the production of bare life as their foundational operational logic. The citizens and monsters alike inhabit a permanent state of exception where legal protections are evacuated, leaving bodies perpetually exposed to the elements, explosions, and state-sanctioned violence. Yet, by stitching together the fragments of those who have been legally and physically abandoned, the characters weaponize their very exposure. The composite monster and the defended domestic sphere cease to be passive victims of sovereign power; instead, they materialize as an active, terrifying political

disruption that throws the lethal architecture of the state back into its own face. By making the monster, Hadi forces the state to confront the sacrifice it failed to acknowledge. This is overtly rendered when Hadi's sub-plot intersects with the esoteric dimensions of the city's hidden networks:

At the same time, his young disciple was about to finish his secret experiment. He was trying to make contact with the spirit of the One Who Has No Name. While his superior was interested in knowing what the criminal's face looked like, the junior astrologer was interested in his soul. Over the past weeks he had managed to contact the family of Hasib Mohamed Jaafar, the guard who was killed at the Sadeer Novotel and whose soul settled in the body that Hadi had assembled in his shed. The junior astrologer succeeded that night in making a connection with the spirit of the monster. There were mobile phone vibrations between him and the monster, through which he transferred something into the monster's brain that made him stop moving for a minute. If the senior astrologer had been there, he would have seen in his playing cards that the monster really did stop. He was leaning against the wall of a tall building on a dark street lined with car repair shops and looking at the wall of an abandoned secondary school somewhere in the southern suburbs of Baghdad. The junior astrologer now felt he was superior to his superior. (Saadawi, 2013, p. 112)

Obviously, the moment of technological-spiritual mediation, where cellular vibrations interrupt the physical trajectory of a corpse stitched together from sectarian rubble, lays bare the profound interconnectedness of modern urban warfare and transcendent grief. The fact that the monster's consciousness is anchored by Hasib Mohamed Jaafar, an ordinary working-class guard killed at a corporate hotel, underscores how the creature is not merely a supernatural threat, but a localized archive of working-class trauma. Through the mobile phone link, the state's infrastructure of surveillance and communication is subverted into an instrument for spiritual and somatic communication with the discarded dead. The monster freezes against the wall of an abandoned secondary school, a site where the educational and institutional future of the nation has been arrested, embodying a moment of collective pause in a city hurtling toward self-destruction.

More importantly, Hadi constructs a collective subject out of the city's discarded parts. The monster operates as a living memory-device, a prosthetic of the city's soul preventing the total administrative erasure of the victims. Each piece of the body, a nose from one neighborhood, an arm from another, an eye from a site of sectarian carnage, constitutes a physical fragment of the city's repressed history refusing to stay buried. The monster's erratic existence becomes a constant, shifting challenge to official war narratives, asserting that the bare life of the poor carries the unbearable weight of an un-silenced history. Notably, the monster's struggle is a physical manifestation of the necropolitics of salvage, perfectly mirrored by how the state bureaucracy frantically attempts to catalog and defang these haunting realities:

Tomorrow the One Who Has No Name, he mused, might become He Who Has No Identity, and then He Who Has No Body, and then He Who Can't Be Caught and Thrown in Jail. But today he could ignore this criminal who didn't have a name, because the disaster on the bridge had turned out to be a big one, and he would have to prepare a report on his department's monitoring of the Imams Bridge, in case the Americans or the Iraqi government asked for one, so he called together the officers on his team. One of the junior officers mentioned an important piece of information that had been picked up two hours before the meeting: these figures hovering over the bridge were ghosts that lived in people's bodies. They slept and rested in those bodies without the people being aware of them, or they could wake up and break free for a little and wander around outside the people's bodies but only when the people were frightened. According to the astrologers, these ghosts were called sawabie al-khouf, the 'familiar of fear'. The team of assistants

finished preparing the report, then placed it in a pink envelope on Brigadier Majid's desk. (Saadawi, 2013, pp. 107-108)

Apparently, the institutional containment of catastrophe, where state officials translate the collective terror of the Imams Bridge disaster into bureaucratic data points and occult *sawabie al-khouf* filed away in a pink envelope, lays bare the chilling mechanism by which sovereign power neutralizes trauma. Yet, despite the state's efforts to categorize and dismiss the monster's composite existence, the creature itself articulates the ultimate cost of its creation. It stands as a bridge spanning the abyss between the living and the dead, though the sheer weight of that collective responsibility continually tears its stitched limbs apart. It is never a stable entity, but a fragile, decomposing assembly of municipal wreckage. Its existence operates as an act of raw defiance, even as it remains a prisoner of the very destruction it exposes, perfectly embodying solastalgic distress, the agonizing condition of being conscious within a world that has already processed your body as debris. To map this spatial and bodily entrapment further, critics must engage with the semiotic theories of Jacques Fontanille, particularly his work in *The Semiotics of Discourse* on the body-schema and the space of existence. Fontanille argues that human movement through space is dictated by a projective schema that allows human beings to inhabit and master the world. Within the novels under study, that projectivity is severely stunted; characters operate within a retractive space where the horizon inevitably closes in, turning the domestic and urban spheres into closing traps. Their desperate acts of salvaging, therefore, function as a semiotic counter-offensive, an attempt to reverse this spatial retraction and expand their agency through the radical appropriation of the remnant.

According to Fontanille's approach, the body-proper acts as a mobile point of meaning. When the environment is destroyed, the body-proper must become a collector of meanings, turning salvage into a prosthetic extension of the self. This composite nature is the only way to endure tensive flux. As Fontanille maintains,

To these two elements, the body that takes position and the depth of the field of presence, correspond respectively the somatic and the perspective codes of passion. Moreover, the field of presence is traversed by the flux of the figures that appear in it and disappear from it. This flux thus sets out arrangements of figures, whose appearances, disappearances, and changes in form obey a rhythm, a tempo, in retention and in protention: these two properties correspond respectively to figurative codes and rhythmic codes. (Fontanille, 2006, p. 142)

As shown above, the semiotic framework contributes to illuminating how characters like Skeetah and Hadi map their trauma onto physical spaces and physical forms when standard world-building has collapsed. Because the "field of presence" is constantly violated by the violent influx and sudden disappearance of bodies, debris, and structural wreckage, the body-proper cannot rely on a stable horizon; instead, it is forced to synchronize with the erratic rhythm of catastrophe. Retention and protention, memory and anticipation, become distorted by the perpetual state of exception, trapping the subject in a temporal loop where the future is merely a repetition of the ruinous past. By gathering remnants, whether it is Skeetah holding fast to his pit bull or Hadi stitching together a composite corpse, these characters actively manipulate the figurative and rhythmic codes of their environment. They establish a somatic foothold within a crumbling reality, proving that if the phenomenal world is left in ruins, the subject's entire architecture of meaning-production must similarly be sewn from its debris.

In Ward's *STB*, this semiotic mapping of survival is powerfully illustrated by the children's desperate domestic preparations for the oncoming hurricane. Faced with an incapacitated patriarch and an environment sliding into dissolution, their collection of emergency supplies, water, food, and tools transforms into a vital semiotic language of endurance. This breakdown is starkly mirrored in the physical degradation of their father, whose injured body becomes yet

another fragment of household ruin that the children must navigate as they struggle to hold their collapsing world together:

Daddy's hand wrapped up to the wrist in gauze and tape so that it looked like a webworm moth nest wound tight in a pecan tree... Only Daddy's hand would not emerge whole and quivering. Daddy's hand would be not the moths but the bare branches, like bones, left under the husk. Now Daddy sleeps. He hasn't slept this late since the week after Mama died, when I found him at the table, on the sofa, beside the sink in the bathroom, in the hallway, his torso over the threshold, his legs out. Cans and bottles, mostly beer, lay about him like smaller versions of himself wherever he was. (Ward, 2011, p. 100)

The above description captures the total evacuation of paternal authority and domestic shelter, reducing the father to a skeletal relic akin to the bare, stripped branches left beneath a webworm's husk. The family home ceases to function as a Heideggerian dwelling, a safe space of authentic being, and instead degrades into an empty shell stripped of its living soul, surrounded by the literal trash of addiction and despair. Yet, within this domestic wasteland, the physical tools left behind take on monumental significance. Their meticulous preservation and handling by the children operate as a desperate act of salvaging the father's vanishing legacy, maintaining the fragile isotopy of their home even as its physical and psychological structure disintegrates. Laboring with these instruments becomes a sacred, performative ritual that bridges the chasm left by their deceased mother and incapacitated father, holding the crumbling household together through sheer memory, sweat, and collective grit rather than physical walls.

This brings the critic to the ethical necessity of the remnant, aligning directly with the deferred, attritional catastrophes mapped by Rob Nixon in *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. While media coverage and political power structures are conditioned to respond only to the sudden spectacle of a hurricane landfall or a Baghdad car bombing, the true crisis lies in the long-term, systemic rot that precedes and outlives these explosions, the unrecorded erosion of marginalized lives under environmental and imperial neglect:

By slow violence I mean a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all. Violence is customarily conceived as an event or action that is immediate in time, explosive and spectacular in space, and as erupting into instant sensational visibility. We need, I believe, to engage a different kind of violence, a violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales. In so doing, we also need to engage the representational, narrative, and strategic challenges posed by the relative invisibility of slow violence. Climate change, the thawing cryosphere, toxic drift, biomagnification, deforestation, the radioactive aftermaths of wars, acidifying oceans, and a host of other slowly unfolding environmental catastrophes present formidable representational obstacles that can hinder our efforts to mobilize and act decisively. (Nixon, 2011, p. 2)

More overtly, the salvage act violently interrupts this invisibility, dragging the attritional accumulation of systemic decay out into the open through raw material evidence. The scavenged animal bone on the Gulf Coast or the sutured limb from a Baghdad gutter functions as an aggressive material witness that refuses to let the state sanitize its history of abandonment. Through this radical mobilization of necro-politics, Ward's and Saadawi's characters execute a decolonial act of memory, constructing an insurgent counter-narrative to disposability that asserts human and ecological value precisely through its brokenness. Salvage ceases to be a sign of defeat and instead becomes the ultimate structural prerequisite for reclaiming existence from the catastrophic pile of wreckage hurled at humanity's feet.

Shortly, the study of solastalgia and survival in the ruins of the contemporary world is the study of this stubborn act of assembly: how the human subject, standing precisely at the end of the world, chooses to piece together a resistant truth using only the sharp, jagged shards of what remains.

Conclusion

This analytical inquiry examined the semiotic and psychoanalytic contours of solastalgia in Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones* and Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad*. By investigating environmental degradation across the pulverized Mississippi Gulf Coast and post-occupation Baghdad, this study demonstrated how human subjects navigate the profound rupture between a lost domestic totality and an entropic landscape. The investigation tracked the subject's mutation from a spatial inhabitant into an architect of salvage, revealing that solastalgia operates not as a passive paralysis of mourning, but as a dynamic, necro-aesthetic threshold for meaning-making.

The analytical trajectory unfolded across two primary structural axes. The first axis showed how external topographies undergo somatic internalization, turning the environment into a biological mirror of trauma where the body-proper collapses into an extension of the ruined milieu. Through Esch Batiste's mythic corporeality and Saadawi's composite monstrous entity, environmental ruin acts as a generative force of absence that forces a radical structural reconfiguration of the psyche. This somatic crisis leads directly into the second axis, where the physical assembly of debris emerges as the ultimate authentic mode of existence after catastrophe. Gathering scattered fragments, ranging from domestic scrap to disparate human remains, functions as a prosthetic reclamation of history, a desperate yet profound language-game that actively resists the total erasure of the subject by state-sanctioned violence and ecological collapse.

These findings rely on a rigorous methodology wedding Greimasian tensive semiotics with Lacanian and Kristevan psychoanalysis. Operating at the intersection of close reading and macro-structural critique, this methodological framework bridges literary aesthetics and socio-political analysis with remarkable heuristic flexibility. By refusing the traditional binary between text and context, it decodes the pathemic and symbolic valences of textual micro-objects without sacrificing narrative density, treating minor motifs as active archives of ecological anxiety. Simultaneously, the approach exposes the hidden mechanics of structural state violence by tracing how institutional decisions manifest as physical degradation and bodily harm, seamlessly connecting intimate psychic collapse to vast, planetary destruction.

Comparing the texts under consideration discloses distinct catalysts alongside striking thematic similarities. While Ward's novel addresses a natural disaster intensified by systemic neglect during Hurricane Katrina, Saadawi's narrative pivots on man-made geopolitical violence and state collapse in post-invasion Baghdad. Despite these differing catalysts, both deploy vivid corporeal and material responses. Esch's vulnerable, pregnant body mirrors the tempestuous vulnerability of the approaching storm, just as Saadawi's "What-its-name" monster is physically constructed from mismatched human scraps to embody collective social trauma. Furthermore, the gathering of domestic scraps and protection of dog litters in *Salvage the Bones* parallels the desperate stitching together of human remains in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, forcing society to reckon with the victims of structural violence.

This exegesis contributes a rigorous methodological bridge between structural semiotics and psychoanalysis, providing a robust diagnostic tool for contemporary ecological and geopolitical trauma that repositions landscape as an active participant in psychological formation rather than a mere passive backdrop. However, critical rigor requires recognizing the inherent limitations of this analytical grid. These limitations include the perpetual friction between the structural rigidity of semiotic formalization and the fluid, ineffable registers of ecological grief. The endeavor to translate the tensive flux of affect onto taxonomic diagrams

risks, in its pursuit of absolute precision, eliding the visceral silence residing at the core of the solastalgic experience, while occasionally tending to subsume the contingency of material geopolitics under universal psychoanalytic categories.

Future scholarship must venture beyond Western frameworks to engage with decolonial and indigenous ontologies of place-making. By centering indigenous epistemologies that reject the Cartesian subject-object binary, researchers can dismantle the very premise of solastalgia, which fundamentally relies on a severed relationship between a proprietary self and an alienated territory. Recognizing land as an active ancestor rather than a disposable resource offers alternative paradigms of healing that refuse the inevitability of ecological desolation. Building upon these foundational insights, this analytical model must also adapt to the shifting contours of contemporary trauma by examining the emerging phenomenon of digital solastalgia.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Competing interests: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Informed Consent: Obtained.

References

- Abd-Aun, R. K., & Abd Hadi, A. (2021). The Poetics of Adaptation in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*. *Journal of Psychology and Education*, 58(2), 114-121.
<https://doi.org/10.17762/pae.v58i2.2332>
- Agamben, G. (1998). *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford University Press.
- Albrecht, G. (2005). Solastalgia: A New Concept in Human Health and Identity. *Philosophy Activism Nature*, (3), 44-59. <https://doi.org/10.26180/4311905>
- Alkhayat, M. E. E. F. (2022). Gothic Politics in Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2013). *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 44(2), 45-67.
<https://doi.org/10.13169/arabstudquar.44.2.0045>
- Amorok, T. (2007). *Eco-Being, Eco-Trauma, and Eco-Recovery*. University of Alberta Press.
- Aziz, A. S. (2026). Reanimating Horror: Gothic Critique of Violence and Fragmentation in Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad*. *Research Journal in Advanced Humanities*, 6(4), 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.58256/y5zzb052>
- Bachelard, G. (1994). *The Poetics of Space* (M. Jolas, Trans.). Beacon Press
- Benjamin, W. (1989). Theses on the Philosophy of History. In S. E. Bronner & D. M. Kellner (Eds.), *Critical Theory and Society: A Reader* (pp. 255-263). Routledge.
- Buell, L. (1995). *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*. Harvard University Press.
- Caruth, C. (1996). *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Charvalia, M. (2025). Waking up the Ghosts: Trauma Resurgence as a Possibility in Jesmyn Ward's *Sing, Unburied, Sing* (2017). *Représentations dans le Monde Anglophone*, (29). <https://dx.doi.org/10.35562/rma.1701>
- Cucarella Ramon, V. (2022). Reading Toni Morrison's *Beloved* in Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones* and *Sing, Unburied, Sing*. *Feminismo/s*, (40), 79-100.

<https://doi.org/10.14198/fem.2022.40.04>

- Davies, D. (2020). Concrete Stories, Decomposing Fictions: Body Parts and Body Politics in Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad*. *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 23(6), 992-940. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2020.1816851>
- Felman, S., & Laub, D. (1992). *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. Routledge.
- Fontanille, J. (1998). *Sémiotique du discours*. Université de Limoges.
- Fontanille, J. (2006). *The Semiotics of Discourse* (H. Bostic, Trans.). Peter Lang.
- Glotfelty, C., & Fromm, H. (Eds.). (1996). *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. University of Georgia Press.
- Greimas, A. J. (1983). *Structural Semantics: An Attempt at a Method* (D. McDowell, R. Schleifer, & A. Velie, Trans.). University of Nebraska Press.
- Heidegger, M. (1971). Building, Dwelling, Thinking. In A. Hofstadter (Ed.), *Poetry, Language and Thought* (pp. 143-162). Harper & Row.
- Hopkinson, S. (2024). Talking Trash: Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones* and the Timescape of Disaster. *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 31(1), 26-45. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isle/isac044>
- Kristeva, J. (1982). *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (L. S. Roudiez, Trans.). Columbia University Press.
- Lacan, J. (1966). *Écrits*. Éditions du Seuil.
- Lénárt-Muszka, Z. (2023). The Weather and the Wake: Maternal Embodiment and Peril in Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones*. In S. M. Harrison, A. Keeble, & M. E. Torres-Quevedo (Eds.), *Jesmyn Ward: New Critical Essays* (pp. 125-140). Edinburgh University Press.
- Luckhurst, R. (2008). *The Trauma Question*. Routledge.
- Murphy, S. (2018). *Frankenstein in Baghdad: Human Conditions, or Conditions of Being Human*. *Science Fiction Studies*, 45(2), 273-288. <https://doi.org/10.5621/sciefictstud.45.2.0273>
- Naess, A. (1973). The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement: A Summary. *Inquiry*, 16(1-4), 95-100. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00201747308601682>
- Nixon, R. (2011). *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Harvard University Press.
- Psilopoulou, K. (2021). Writing the Grotesque in Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones*. *REDEN. Revista Española De Estudios Norteamericanos*, 3(1), 65-78. <https://doi.org/10.37536/reden.2021.3.1424>
- Rashika, & Bajaj, R. (2025). Survival and Resilience in Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones*. *International Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Studies*, 7(2), 650-652. <https://doi.org/10.33545/26648652.2025.v7.i2h.430>
- Rohová, K. (2026). The Pit as a Sacrifice Zone: Environmental Injustice in Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones*. *American and British Studies Annual*, 19, 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.46585/absa.2026.19.2814>

Solastalgia in Contemporary Post-Disaster Fiction

- Schinaia, C. (2022). *Psychoanalysis and Ecology: The Unconscious and the Environment*. Routledge.
- Searles, H. F. (1960). *The Nonhuman Environment in Normal Development and in Schizophrenia*. International Universities Press.
- Zilberberg, C. (2002). Précis de grammaire tensive. *Tangence*, (70), 111-143. <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/008488ar>

About the Authors

Daniel Tia holds a degree from the University of Felix Houphouët-Boigny, where he completed his doctoral dissertation on Paule Marshall's fictional works. His research focuses on postmodern/postcolonial issues, identity construction, gender, immigration, subjective space, and transgression. He teaches American literature at the aforementioned institution and is a member of the African Studies Associations (ASA). He has recently published "Unsubmissive Self: Identity Quest and African Feminine Resilience" (Summer 2026).

Dechi Reste Dechi is pursuing a Master's degree in American Civilization, dedicating his research to contemporary African American literature. His work analyzes the strategies of metafiction in Percival Everett's writing. He explores how postmodern writing subverts traditional canons and interrogates the sociopolitical structures of the United States.