


POST-APOCALYPSE AS ECOLOGICAL PALIMPSEST IN KATIE HALE'S *MY NAME IS MONSTER* (2019): FROM COLLAPSE AND ASHES TO RESURGENCE AND CONTINUANCE

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Abstract: This academic paper has sought to delve into Katie Hale's *My name is monster* (2019) as a work of fiction that might be interpreted within the conventions of the post-apocalyptic literary genre. This endeavour, thus, while framed with the formal, thematic and linguistic boundaries of the latter, is meant to study the end of the human civilisation the way the novel has envisioned it in a relevant parallel with the current planetary ecological crises which threaten life in a multitude of ways. There is also appeal, in a significant deflection, to nature's capacity to resurge, at various proportions, back to life after being the subject of anthropogenic despoliation, either minor or major, with the ongoing, pervasive and tangible environmental catastrophes. The theoretical foundations upon which this article has rested, in the first position, encompass a wide range of insights connected to the post-apocalyptic genre borrowed from theorists including Claire P. Curtis, Heather J. Hicks and Mathias Clasen; furthermore, there is a conspicuous reliance, in the second, on C. S. Holling's concept, he has dubbed ecological resilience showcasing that the novel's delineated apocalypse is not perhaps the end, but rather a new beginning. Underpinned by these notions, I argue, that Hale's text has confronted the twenty-first century readers and the author's contemporaries with the ecological calamities humans have engendered on a planetary level while maintaining a positive outlook for the future if environment-oriented practices, modes of action and ways of life, both at individual and community dimensions, are to be fostered and implemented.

Keywords: Ecological resilience; Environmental degradation; Hale's *My name is monster*; Post-apocalyptic literary genre; Struggle for survival

How to cite the article:

Cherifi, A. (2026). Post-apocalypse as Ecological Palimpsest in Katie Hale's *My Name is Monster* (2019): From Collapse and Ashes to Resurgence and Continuance. *Journal of Studies in Language, Culture, and Society (JSLCS)*, 9(1), 183-197.

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1. Introduction

The sense of disillusionment and loss that, often, pervades, on a large scale, the third millennium human being emanates partly —though its roots are multidimensional and might, thus, be traced back to a vast array of intricate reasons— from a pervasive sense of detachment, from one’s natural environment concomitant, by and large, with a Sisyphean effort, with its obsessions and compulsions, towards technical, technological and material prosperity. This mode of life, imbued with increasing tendencies to overexploit natural resources, has engendered within many people, at various proportions, a feeling of incapacity to experience or even imagine that vital connexion of belonging to a single place that might stand in one’s psyche as home. The latter, far from the denotative dictionary meaning, was not only the place “where one belonged [but it also] delimited an ecological self, rich in *internal* relations to what is now called environment”; however, “humanity today suffers from a place-corrosive process” (Naess, 2008, p. 45). This insidious threat, which must not be understated, to the human-nature connexion is quite alarming. Unless one grasps that neither individuals nor societies, from whatever background, are endowed with the capacity to disengage, to the fullest, from the ongoing interplay and dynamic interchanges that unfold between the realm of the human and the non-human, (Bellarsi, 2009, p. 72) there would constantly be the looming danger of humans getting immersed, with full awareness or nor not, in what might be qualified as environment-destructive tendencies.

The wrong turn, humanity has taken, with regards to its immediate surroundings and the extensive ecological havoc wreaked all over our planet has been triggered, the ground evidence suggests, by the massive detrimental-in-essence human activities ranging from the excessive pollution of entire ecosystems under unchecked industrial practices, large-scale industrialisation, unsustainable utilization of ecological reserves, overfishing, over-intensive farming, unrestrained appliance of synthetic chemicals and pesticides to the reliance on nuclear energy and its deployment in manufacturing weapons. The fact, therefore, that “humans have altered nature in profound ways [oftentimes in a deleterious fashion] for [...] years,” (Cassegård & Thörn, 2022, p. 15) through their activities, is at this juncture more than discernible and even inevitable. Besides all the exhaustive practices to the planet’s resources, above charted, the human ties to nature are, moreover, subject today, more than in any other historical era, to potential annihilation since whether through the outbreak of a nuclear war or the insidious diffusion of radioactive materials and nuclear residues, humanity remains exposed to the threats posed by nuclear technologies (Asimov & Pohl, 2018, p. 8). The long and gradual process, of destruction of the human being/nature dichotomy and relationship, which has been compounded with the industrial revolution, yet initiated even earlier, has been, in the course of the three coming centuries, accentuated and accelerated despite the emergence of an increasing ecological awareness. The claim of one ecologist, in this context, that “[t]he ecological crisis, as driven by the modern model of industrial progress and human population growth, threatens the integrity of planetary ecosystems with their accumulated wealth of diverse forms of life, cultures, and worldviews” (Drengson in Naess, 2008, p. 3) is neither devoid of truth, in any fashion whatsoever, nor is it exaggerated by any means.

This ubiquitous environmental calamity, which, if not firmly countered, might lead to the extinction of all forms of life on the once green planet, has spurred into action many politicians, philosophers, ecologists, activists, authors, poets, playwrights and novelists — all have sounded the alarm bells and voiced, thus, their discontent, one way or another, against the ongoing and almost systematic obliteration and despoliation of nature. The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have witnessed, following this thread of argument, an increasing reliance on literature and literary texts, under myriad forms, which have been implemented, as fertile grounds to explore the constant human/nature interplay and also as effective means, to

vehicle and spread ecological purport while raising awareness, among readers, to counter the pernicious human interventions which harm both flora and fauna worldwide. Such literary texts, despite their varieties, might fall within what Buell (1995), has qualified “as study of the relation between literature and environment conducted in the spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis” (p. 430). Part of Buell’s delineation, the post-apocalyptic novels tend to offer a symbolic reckoning, in the confines of the literary realm, with the profound ecological ruptures that have already destabilised earth; they mediate, thereby, our collective fears of environmental ruin, resources depletion and the entire fragility of ecosystems; which is why, they have proliferated at an astounding rate with the pervasive ecological debacle. It has been one of the forefront literary genres that portrayed in a vivid language, compelling characters with their harrowing accounts full of raw scenes, of what is now fictitious, but could be, in the near future, our daily reality; this has brought the end of the world and the extinction of humanity, to readers’ imagination, closer than they might have ever pictured.

The twenty-first century, as such, to borrow Plumwood’s analogy (2002), despite all the technical progress being realised, has “an ecological parallel to the *Titanic* story [since human beings] have reached the stage in the narrative where [they] have received the iceberg warning and have made the remarkable decision to double the engine speed to Full Speed Ahead” (p. 1). In the present-day world, likewise, ecological calamities as—climate change, greenhouse effect, a damaged ozone layer, global warming, deforestation, unprecedented levels of pollution, acid rains, ecological degradation, extinction of several animal and plant species, overreliance on fossil fuels, pervasive genetically modified organisms and near total annihilation of the once symbiotic biodiversity in many areas—are no longer the imaginary and distant threats, to be dismissed, but the pressing daily realities to be pondered and reckoned with. Such environmental tragedies “not only threaten the stability of ecosystems but also pose significant risks to human populations” (Makhlouf et al., 2024, p. 160). Despite all the alarming signs, we continue, in our collective consciousness or perhaps unconsciousness, just like in Plumwood’s above striking analogy, to be nonchalant exploiting ecosystems, heedless of potential danger, at a steady and fast-paced rhythm intensify, that way, our destructive-to-nature interventions. There is in the minds of third millennium contemporaries, under the current circumstances of ongoing ecological debacle, the pending threat of an imminent apocalypse; thus, many people fully share, or might even partially partake, Stephen’s allegation that, “[w]e are arguably at the end of times –or at least the way that we imagine out contemporary civilisation” (2024, p. 426). Post-apocalyptic tales provide, in this sense, a platform to shed light on both the detrimental activities, perpetrated all over the globe, and the environmental effects of human negligence; which is why they have evolved, as a style of writing, into the kind of cautionary stories which are poignant reflections of humanity’s growing ecological anxieties. Texts of the kind, indeed, often entailed within “the new polyform literature and environment studies movement,” (Buell, 2001, p. 3) have brought, with insistence, into the forefront inquiries involving, but not limited to, ethical, social, economic, environmental and ecological issues.

These narratives, that tend to “operate through representational strategies and employ means of realism,” (Cinerari, 2025, p. 116), among which Katie Hale’s *My name is monster* (2019), often ponder in this line of thought the following questions: To what extent would the human beings be accountable for the environmental disintegration that might result in the collapse of civilisation? How would our planet, the now abused and overexploited entity, look like when human beings are no longer in charge? What shape would life assume to those of us, fortunate enough or perhaps unfortunate, who would survive doom? What would it signify to rebuild from the ashes of a human-induced ecological catastrophe? What role would nature foster in the end of times? Would it be a simple backdrop that would turn its back to the

survivors' agonies or would it be a dynamic force that would actively reclaim the control once usurped by humans? Would nature seek vengeance or strive to heal and regenerate itself? I claim, in this study, that Hale's novel, building upon the legacy of its post-apocalyptic predecessors, has contemplated a broad spectrum of these inquiries. To provide answers, at this stage, to these questions, which rest on slippery grounds, is not, by any odds, the novelist's task, though he/she might suggest some, nor is it the critic's; the targeted reader, whose ecological consciousness is addressed, would play, hence, an active role in deciphering the novel's encoded message to be translated later on into sustainable eco-friendly acts that might both preserve our entourage and better, by extension, our world. It might be argued, accordingly, that literature and ecology, two ostensibly divergent and seemingly incompatible spheres, have been intertwined in criticism studies and literary theory the aspect that precipitated, almost in a predictable fashion, with the late twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries, the emergence of the post-apocalyptic literary genre.

This scholarly undertaking strives to both engage with and construe *My name is monster* as a modern-day post-apocalyptic account, where nature is resilient, from an environment-centred lens; it has been devised, since its inception, with the prime objective of probing, with enough textual evidence, into the environmental breakdown, in Hale's futuristic and dystopian scenario, tracing, thenceforth, throughout the remnants of the human race and a once civilised world, the genealogy of an anthropogenically-instigated ecological tragedy from which most non-sentient life-forms might recover with potentially brighter horizons in store. It has to be proclaimed, while not oblivious of this critical perspective, that as far as I am cognisant, and within the confines of the knowledge at my disposal, no research work, under whatever academic guise—be it a full-length study or a journal article—has yet ventured to undertake the specific task this academic paper endeavours to accomplish. The focal point, all along the ensuing analysis, around which the entire claims, I advance, revolve, is the fact that Hale's twenty-first century novel, despite the ambiguity surrounding its apocalypse, which has only been alluded to without further elaboration, has been designed with not only the current ecological crisis, at its centre, but also the wide spectrum of contemporary environmental concerns at its kernel. I argue that unless *My name is monster* is explored and studied within the boundaries of the post-apocalyptic literary genre and guidelines together with nature's capacity to be resistant and resilient, the way Hale has engaged with the contemporary large-scale ecological crisis would never be brought into the surface nor would it be accessible to readers. I have sparked, therefore, my investigation, with this in mind, attempting to unveil, through the few available but intermittent textual cues, the underlying circumstances, though multifaceted and intricate they might be, which all rendered life an arduous undertaking, almost impossible to picture on a regular basis, within the cosy atmosphere of today's civilisation, to the two survivors, Mother and Monster, and culminated, as an intricate mix of factors in setting into motion an escalating environmental disaster, of global magnitude, that resulted in the obliteration of humankind, but in the aftermath of which the natural world would stand a chance to endure, heal, burgeon and even thrive.

2. Theoretical Framework

To bring about the materialisation of my designs, this research, as a matter of fact, with the above aspects at its core, derives its conceptual underpinnings, underlying assumptions and theoretical foundations from the field of critical studies of literary and cultural texts that has been designated, as an umbrella concept, with the key term ecocriticism. The latter, with the wide range of notions it shielded, which brought under microscopic observation the unceasing ecological havoc wrought by human interference with ecosystems, and the roots of which, as a stance, might be traced back to the late twentieth century, has been delineated by Glotfelty and Fromm (1996) as “the study of the relationship between literature and the

physical environment” which “takes an earth-centred approach to literary studies” (p. xviii). Ecocriticism, as an ecology-oriented-lens, is a critical perspective towards literary works which delves into the intricate interplay, though sometimes not obvious, between literary and/or cultural texts, irrespective of the nature of their genre or the form they manifest in, and the surrounding, immediate or not, natural environment with the human beings’ attitudes, towards all ecosystems, put under meticulous scrutiny. This intertwinement of texts and environment might be apparent in post-apocalyptic texts entailing nature’s resistance; here, reference has to be made, in the light of this framework, to the insights of a broad spectrum, though not quite homogenous, of ecology activists and ecocritical theorists encompassing Claire P. Curtis, Heather J. Hicks, Mathias Clasen and C. S. Holling. This vast array of scholars, with their different backgrounds, intricate worldviews and disparate critical stances, towards culture/nature and human/non-human dichotomies and connections, would be deployed, at various stages, and each with his vision relevant, to dissect *My name is monster* in relation to the following notions: Post-apocalyptic literary genre, and ecological resilience. It has to be stated that inquiring into Hale’s novel, a third millennium narrative, with a resolute reliance on these concepts imbedded in environmental, ecological or green studies, is neither a peculiar pursuit nor an unwarranted enterprise.

The first notion, the current scholarly paper has appealed to, is the one labelled post-apocalyptic fiction. Heather J. Hicks’ words when she asserts that her “baseline definition of the latter is material that depicts what might be called “globalized ruin,”” (2016, pp. 6-7) are quite relevant, in this context, to this academic endeavour; her statement, I have to say, despite being very concise, yet accurate, fits, indeed, *My name is monster*, the novel under scrutiny. Clasen, close to Hicks’ worldview, argues that any post-apocalyptic scenario has to “depict the aftermath of a global or near-global disaster,” where the humans’ ugliest nightmares and psychological anxieties are exteriorised (2019, pp. 1-2); such scenarios, accordingly, express the tendency to “function [...] as a mental testing-ground where we can cognitively and emotionally model the experience of living through the worst” (2019, p. 2). The claim of Curtis, herein, when she has maintained that her definition of “post-apocalyptic fiction as any account that takes up how humans start over after the end of life on earth as we understand it,” (2010, p. 5) is not, by any means, irrelevant nor is it peculiar. The works falling within this type of literature, though they display considerable variance and by no means entirely uniform, fictionalise on the kind of petrifying horrors a worldwide calamity, of anthropogenic roots, might induce upon the potential survivors, whose plights, struggles and adjustment endeavours, only begin, in its aftermath with humanity almost extinct.

This genre, especially in recent decades, with the environmental ruin, widespread pollution and irreversible and notorious, to nature, human actions, it often pictures, has been associated and tied, in readers’ and writers’ consciousnesses alike, with the successive ecological crises our planet is enduring. Thus, the impending apocalypse, almost constant as an experienced feeling, under the planetary ecosystems’ dire conditions, as one critic contends, has “summon[ed] everyone,” at one moment, “to incessantly ponder the multiple perils associated with the destruction of nature” (Thaler, 2024, p. 321). Another critic’s assertion, at this point, that post-apocalyptic literary works are useful, or even vital, to “highlighting the significance of human impact on the Earth’s geology and ecosystems [and] play[...] a key role in warning and educating society about climate changes, ecological dangers, risks of technology [and]or social issues,” (Houfková, 2019, p. 60) are not, by any standards, out of context, nor are they devoid of veracity. Nature amidst the widespread collapse of human civilisation, ecological calamity and environmental degradation, post-apocalyptic fiction often displays, is not, in many recent accounts, among which Hale’s, a weak counterpart but rather a strong entity, in itself and for itself, which is, at times, indifferent to humanity’s suffering; it does not, thereby, only survive human despoliation of its ecosystems, but it also reclaims its

full ‘rights’ and spaces in the aftermath of such severe planetary disintegration. This brings into the surface the second concept, I have leaned upon while conducting some of the analysis that would ensue; it is what Holling (1973) has termed ecological resilience which is, in his worldview, a “property [...] that is a measure of the persistence of systems and their ability to absorb change and disturbance” (p. 14). The natural environment, in this sense, with its ecosystems at myriad levels, has a certain potential to act and react, under various mechanisms, towards stressors, of any kind, leading to the containment and mitigation of any ecological shocks, be they of minor or major magnitude; nature, following this perspective, has the power not only to resist, in a passive fashion, but also the ability to heal itself, in an active mode of action, even without any human intervention. The assertions of two scholars, in this direction, that “[t]he [...] postapocalyptic [tropes, stories or texts] are not simply narratives of despair; they can also be narratives latent with hope,” (Tso & Joyce, 2024, p. 383) are not empty of substance nor are they irrelevant to the endeavour beforehand.

3. The Post-apocalyptic Vision of My Name is Monster: Civilization in Ruin

Claire P. Curtis’ perception of the post-apocalyptic fiction, as a literary genre, is of high pertinence, at this stage of progression, to this article’s designs since it draws attention to some of the key features of those literary texts which have been assembled under this umbrella notion. She has argued, in her seminal study (2010) that such a type of fiction might comprise any narrative which holds at its centre the scrutiny of humanity’s efforts to rebuild the bygone life following a cataclysmic event that irrevocably alters, once and for all, the fundamental parameters of existence; such doom, whether due to singular or a series of disruptions, induce a reconfiguration, at a consequential magnitude, of the very fabric of human existence; it is not requisite for such a catastrophe to obliterate the human race, nor to eradicate the matrixes capable of sustaining life (2010, p. 5).

In consonance with Curtis’ conceptual directions, above charted, Hicks (2016, pp. 6-7) and Clasen (2019, pp. 1-2) have delimited, though with slight variations, what scenarios or tales to be subsumed under the integrative genre recognized as post-apocalyptic asserting that any work, literary or cinematographic, has to portray a planetary, or close to, cataclysm with altering and far-reaching repercussions over not only humanity but also the natural world as well. It has to be noted that what might be both intricate and fascinating, at the same time, about the post-apocalyptic literary texts, regardless of their form, is that they envision a post-catastrophic reality assembled from the fragmented vestiges of our present civilisation while issuing a call to the readers to enter a domain that, while outwardly analogous to our own, is stripped of the interpretive frameworks through which our world derives meaning (Stifflemire, 2017, p. ii). With many of these features in mind, Hale’s account —impressive at times, and petrifying at others and in congruity with the three theorists’ lenses— has unleashed a realm, akin to a nightmare, that has gone through global apocalypse, where the entire humanity, but the two heroines, has already tasted doom; these harrowing impacts, among many others, are the aftermath of what has been, an entirely plausible, global nuclear war with a large-scale pandemic, the origins of which are nowhere to be traced. This plot with the inferno it has let loose, though some, if not many, of the events it revolves around, belong to an already remote in time and bygone era, has addressed a variety of issues, before and after the seemingly fated apocalypse; Hale’s work, as such, might resonate with and thereby might be characterized, by virtue of Curtis’, Hicks’ and Clasen’s logic, as nothing, but a post-apocalyptic literary text.

With the end of times and the collapse of civilisation and preceding her encounter with the young girl, the adult heroine, the second remnant of the human race, in *My name is monster*, has had to reckon with a broad spectrum of concerns among which survival that has become a daunting challenge of immense scale. She has had to grapple with not only hunger, thirst, extreme climatic conditions, deficiency in requisite means, and wild beasts but also her worst existential nightmares, prior to all other considerations, in order to have the desire to battle for her life. Curtis (2010) confirms that any hero of what might be a post-apocalyptic narrative has, before anything else, to “reconcile his[/her] immediate survival with his[/her] need to continue to survive” (p. 8). It has been apparent, from the outset, to Mother that there are no other options, looming in the horizon, except fighting, on a daily basis, for her survival; once out of Svalbard taking the direction of what used to be her parents’ home, she has thought, “I have not survived this long only to die on a [...] beach in Scotland” (Hale, 2019, p. 7). The decision to defend, thus, her life against all odds has already been taken despite the doubts she has at intervals experienced especially with the absence of a shelter and a family, the way things used to be in her parents’ house. Though the first part’s narrator has grown to be accustomed to loneliness, long before the impending doom, the aspect which has fortified her against solitude, she has voiced at one point a deep-felt concern over being submerged, disoriented and uprooted.

By the time the war and the pandemic have become a memory, she has articulated these tangible fears as follows, “how can I keep going if there is nowhere I am going to? How can I grow again without any roots?” (Hale, 2019, p. 18) These are some of the most intricate questions, modern-day dilemmas and uneasy-bedfellows Hale’s third millennium readers often wrestle with. There is the inescapable urgency, in this line of thought, to surface the fact that texts grappling with the aftermath of an apocalypse, of whatever origins, often “illuminate the ethical and emotional dimensions of survival and recovery” (Zeghoudi & Zeghoudi, 2025, p. 365). Indeed, the adult female character has, at a future juncture, contemplated, with hard inquiries to resolve, the fact that she has survived a major catastrophe; she has, in one instance, ruminated with a deep existential purport, “[w]hat have I been saved for?” (Hale, 2019, p. 35) Her present predicament has at once impelled her, away from the comforts of the old dead and gone civilised world, to transcend her weaknesses turning herself into the female that would “survive when nobody else can” (Hale, 2019, p. 9); she has had, in this process of endurance, to pare down to the strict minimum her perception of subsistence claiming that, “survival is a matter of necessity, not of joy [...] I cannot invent myself as anything but what I am, waking, eating, [and] sleeping” (Hale, 2019, p. 35). Seen from Mother’s worldview, survival, as a basic instinct, in the middle of all the havoc that has been wreaked, is subject to the determination to fight and struggle no matter what hardships one might encounter. Hicks’ statements (2016), crucial to the matter at hand, are more than needed as she maintains that “[t]he post-apocalyptic genre is entirely contingent on the conceit of survival; the possibility of survival—of survivors—is its bedrock” (p. 171). These quoted words are not out of context as they fit, the textual evidence suggests, Hale’s narrative to a high degree since without Mother and her decision to stand in defiance of the whole adverse circumstances, which have been threat enough to her life, there would not be in any fashion whatsoever a post-apocalyptic story in *My name is monster*.

The moment the ‘old’ world, the way she first hand experienced it, prior to the calamity, is over, Mother has been both ensnared in and constrained to a cyclical life pattern in which her deepest anxieties have stemmed from and revolved around nothing, but the uncertainty pertaining to ensuring access to food, water and other basic needs to stay alive. What she has encountered, accordingly, is a post-apocalyptic realm “where only traces of civilisation and technology are left behind” kneading, in this manner, the whole text’s “main conflict [...]

around [...] fighting for resources” (Erkan, 2024, p. 48) at whatever expense. With water, for instance, be it polluted or potable, not ready at her disposal and at times even nowhere to be found, she has had to take advantage of any quantities to be salvaged no matter in what state they would be; in one occasion of paramount significance, she has fostered “I manage to squeeze a few precious drops from the moss clinging to an old wall,” (Hale, 2019, p. 26) which despite their unpleasant taste, have contributed to the desired outcome, subsistence. This pressure, the heroine has had to cope with, is only one side of the coin since she has had, at the same time, to reckon with other hazards ranging from wild beasts, hostile weather conditions to nuclear radiations, and virus-or-bacteria-contaminated ecosystems.

For example, after no supplies were left to her, in the Seed Vault, the decision to brave the external world has become an inexorable demand she can no longer defer; the coming ideas raced over her mind the instant she inhaled, once out, for the first time the polar air, “it might be radioactive, every molecule I breathe poisoning and mutating my cells, but I don’t think it can be – and even if it is I don’t care” (Hale, 2019, p. 51). This is the nonchalance of someone who has lost everything, or almost; therefore, there is nothing left in the middle of the ruins for which she might care. These hostile conditions have induced in her the firm belief that there is nothing to expect, nor is there anything to hope for apart from the absolute realisation that “[t]here is only survival” (Hale, 2019, p. 32). It might be worth noting that the potential reliance on nuclear and biological weapons together with many other adverse factors, among which large-scale pollution, have all aggravated the scarcity of resources which, in advance, thinned her options to the point of finding nothing better than “to stick to scavenging” (Hale, 2019, p. 37) in the nearby villages and city in the vicinity of which she has ‘settled’ in a farm that has become her asylum.

One is compelled to say, furthermore, that the post-apocalyptic realm, into which the readers of *My name is monster* have been ushered, is full of petrifying horrors encompassing somehow a reversion to a primitive state, without technologies, atrocities of unconceivable magnitude, and destruction all over of not only buildings and monuments of civilisation, but also all forms of organised life, be it political or economic, at whatever dimension. There is, indeed, with the end of times, in Hale’s novel, the collapse of the structures which could have helped human beings out of their predicament. This is a major feature of post-apocalyptic texts, to use Curtis’ words, in which “[t]he apocalyptic end destroys all semblance of organized political life, thus producing the conditions of the state of nature” (Curtis, 2010, p. 18) where all kinds of evils thrive. One might likewise understand, that “there is no functioning government, [and] no functioning economy” (Curtis, 2010, p. 23) at the level of such literary texts and Hale’s is not, in anyway whatsoever, an exception. The targeted finality, to be attained through this manoeuvre consists of “offering ideological responses to the existential question of human nature” which is “[i]f all structures collapse, if law and order dissolve, and life reverts to a pre-technological state in which humans are in pure survival mode, are we more likely to be compassionate or to give in to violent instincts?” (Bampatzimopoulos, 2025, p. 27). This is in fact one single reference in the twenty-first century novel, being studied, to a ‘state’ taking measures to arrange people’s life; that goes back, however, to the years when the war and the pandemic were still raging. All what the readers might encounter, hence, from that moment onwards, with proof enough, is widespread chaos where confusion reigns and survival, as a daily task to be accomplished, is not the privilege of any human being, but the strongest. Now, the first shocking images, once out of the Svalbard Seed Vault, the heroine has seen is those of “half of the distant town [which] is blackened and burned, and the ground around the buildings is snow-free and charred” (Hale, 2019, p. 51). Other unsettling pictures and scenes have been reported, without censorship, by

the narrator through a quick flash back to the war era; the coming passage entails disturbing sights and acts of egregious cruelty,

Walking on broken skin is a reminder of everything that is wrong with the world. With every step, I can picture news footage from the War – the screen wobble as a shockwave rushed towards the camera, the aftermath of Sickness-filled explosives filmed on shaking mobile phones, people on the pavements with empty eyes and a blue tinge spreading from their lips, the slackened jaws and flat expressions [...] With every thought of the Sickness, I remember another person dead. (Hale, 2019, p. 16)

The aftermath of these violent, indiscriminate and large-scale incidents is a post-apocalyptic world where thirst, hunger, distrust, fear, despair and savagery are everywhere to be seen. The heroine's mistrust of other human beings, rooted in what she witnessed in the past years, though not many of them remain, has resulted in carving a specific mode of action to her. The decision, in this regards, to flee the 'relics' of human civilisation and shun altogether humanity, if any of her own kind are still alive, has already been taken as the passage underneath demonstrates,

I will avoid towns and cities. I will avoid their bombed and broken buildings, and their Sickness-ridden bodies lurking like a virus already in the bloodstream. I will leave the roads, clogged with the cars of all those who tried to flee from explosions or infestations, those who had not already been claimed by the War or the Sickness that rose out of it, those who tried to reach the so-called Safe Centres before they shut their gates. Who knows how many shells are lying unexploded on the tarmac? Who knows what kinds of explosives or gases or diseases they might contain? (Hale, 2019, p. 08)

The above statements, besides voicing the main character's concerns, show the kind of post-apocalyptic setting into which the heroine has been stranded with almost nothing but misery, hopeless struggle, wrecked constructions, danger and excessive violence lurking all over. Though not uttered in relation to any doom's aftermath, the claim of Alford (1985) that "nature is [...] a place of thoughtless violence and struggle," (p. 20) are of high pertinence, here, since they seem to have some resonance with and, therefore, fit post-apocalyptic environs, the one above delimited in no manner whatsoever exempt. This is the place and time in which all kinds of threats, the slightest of which never to be underestimated, are more than ready to claim the heroine's life and with it that of all of those who have had the chance or perhaps the mischance to survive the apocalypse.

In addition, the post-apocalyptic traits, not lacking substance, visible all over the scenery and the obliteration of the once prosperous human civilisation, are features that are most apparent in the remnants of the unnamed city, probably London, close to which the central figure has settled. Safety, despite being relative, is the first incentive she has taken into consideration when her decision to settle in that countryside farm has been made; she has realised yet, upon a second thought, the subsistence potential the adjacent city might offer with infinite possibilities to scavenge for food, water, shelter, tools, and all kinds of other amenities perhaps left over in the end's frenzy. The sights of war destruction and pandemic havoc, she has eye-witnessed once there, are, the least to say, harrowing especially in some areas which have been affected by the incidents the most. The narrator, in one of her gradually recurrent visits to the city, for scavenging purposes, has maintained,

Here and there, a street ends in a crater, or in a wide expanse of rubble – legacies of the bombing that marked the escalating War [...] I have already climbed a dozen roadblocks, sectioning off infected areas for quarantine. Some of these roadblocks were clearly official – heavy concrete barricades pasted with reflective strips, barbed wire coiling across their tops. The rest are makeshift, thrown together by panicked civilians using cars and furniture and broken window glass [...] There are overgrown gardens and driveways with rusting cars [...] I keep imagining those people, surrounded by a city of Sickness, quarantined in their suburban houses, not for other people’s good but for their own. (Hale, 2019, p. 34)

This passage, with all the vivid reminders to the apocalyptic events it carries, entails a wide range of references both discernible and underlying to the multifaceted plights human beings have endured with the destruction of the so called human civilisation. The sights of the aftermath of explosions, showing the extent to which humanity has been engaged in self-destructive acts, and the heavy pandemic measures which have been implemented, concomitant with the fear of the unknown, everyone back then has gone through, are denotative, by and large, of post-apocalyptic texts that often fictionalise, under the impact of modern-day ecological crises, about the end of civilisation the way the contemporaries of the third millennium have grown to experience it.

Post-apocalyptic texts, *My name is monster* not exempt, oftentimes entail the presence of other survivors, at least one, who would engross the ranks of humans in a world quite hostile to them; they have moreover the tendency to deal with suicide with one or more characters, major or minor, putting their life to an end due to their inability to cope with the horrifying atrocities in store. There is truth in Curtis’ (2010) argument to begin with as she has stated, that in the process of staying alive, the protagonist of post-apocalyptic accounts, if not always, “stumbles [quite often] upon a companion—usually someone weaker (a child, or a young woman) or sometimes an equal with useful know how (a gardener or a hunter)” (p. 8). Hale’s readers, who are familiar with this literary genre and its plot patterns, might expect, while at the story’s earliest phases, the coming on stage of a figure as such, in a predictable move to keep the tale ongoing. By the time the first part, told by Mother, has drawn to its end, we encounter the tale’s second survivor, “[a] small, ragged creature, hunkering in the corner [...] all angle and bone, skinny body low to the carpet [...] A starved, scrawny human child [...] A girl who somehow survived the War and the Sickness and the Last Fall” (Hale, 2019, p. 43). These words might find echo in Curtis’ above quoted statement since the text’s other survivor is a child who is therefore in post-apocalyptic fiction’s conventions an entity not of equal physical strength, nor of matching significance in mental aptitudes. At the theoretical dimension, thereby, the young heroine is expected to be resilient and malleable enough, though the novel’s second part would prove the opposite, the aspects which might render her a ‘docile’ subject who is more or less susceptible to be fashioned in accordance with Mother’s worldviews.

There is, in the second position, the desire to escape the ‘present’ terrifying circumstances, at whatever expense, which many post-apocalyptic figures, be they masculine or feminine, show; such a world where civilisation has collapsed and which is full of brutality, excesses and unspeakable horrors is to be evaded even if that might cost one of the characters his or her life. Hicks (2016) has claimed, from this standpoint, that “characters commit suicide with some regularity in post-apocalyptic fiction” (p. 170). This act’s symbolism, within the boundaries of such a realm, is glaring with reference to nowadays’ massive environmental calamity and the entire despoliation of various ecosystems; thus, though it is committed by a distressed individual, it “becomes an allegory for the larger, human-made ruin around them” (Hicks, 2016, p. 170). There is a scene, which I deem quite pertinent, where the reader is

taken, with flashbacks, to a distant memory through which the young heroine has recalled a woman, probably her biological mother. The latter has taken her to an area, with a bridge, underneath which there was a river at the level of an unnamed city; it was there that this woman has brought her life to an end, with her daughter contemplating the entire landscape, by jumping from the man-made construction all the way down to the river. The young narrator has asserted, “I knew that she was going to fall off the edge of that high bridge, that she wanted to fall [...] I remember her falling [...] I remember she made a sound as she fell, like a wolf-dog sound, but sadder” (Hale, 2019, pp. 64-65). Through this act, the unnamed woman has perpetrated, in the distant past, she has brought into the surface all kinds of horrors the current post-apocalyptic world might encompass to the point that survival would not be a bearable undertaking; she has made her choice, following this thread, to escape rather than face, or be in a fated fashion confronted with, atrocities of unprecedented scale. I find relevant, in brief, the words of one critic, who has stated that some post-apocalyptic texts’ features “include the occurrence of an apocalyptic event, the portrayal of a post-collapse society, and a narrative structure seamlessly intertwining the pre-apocalyptic past with the post-apocalyptic present,” (Mukherjee, 2024, p. 222) since they are compatible with Hale’s novel under study; hence, despite not pertaining directly to *My name is monster*, the previous citation, with the outlined traits at its kernel, is well suited in many respects to its tale and might, thereby, synthesise a large segment of its account’s post-apocalyptic purport.

4. Ecological Resilience in my Name is Monster and the Planet’s Healing Aptitudes

Amid these deplorable conditions —with humanity on the verge of extinction, their civilisation beyond salvage in its death paroxysms, the high-rate disintegration of most, if not all, matrixes of life, ubiquitous pollution with toxic substances and synthetic compounds all over in the biosphere, the plausibility of ambient radioactive contamination, and the latent but insidious hazard of pathogenic biological agents— one might expect nothing but the irreversible unravelling of earth’s natural environs, extreme destabilisation of flora and fauna, and the annihilation of biodiversity and planetary ecosystems. Against all expectations and all odds, however, nature is not, in many post-apocalyptic narratives, *My name is monster* included, that fragile body devoid of life and which might be easily altered, forever adversely affected, diminished and altogether to the fullest destroyed; it is rather that entity booming with life the attribute which might confer upon it the status of a powerful agent, though with some variations, whose capacity to alleviate and counteract ecological calamities must not be overlooked. There is, as a matter of fact, in some quite recent apocalypse-centred texts, a remarkable tendency to avoid “emphasising the fragility of ecosystems and the need for environmental conservation [because they] showcase[...] nature’s resilience” (Joyce, 2024, p. 454) thanks to which the natural world might be a dynamic force; such texts, among which Hale’s, I argue, seem to endow nature, though sometimes partially, with the capacity for operational autonomy. Due to its agency, nature has the inherent dual abilities to: Cure itself, first of all, in the aftermath of what could be catastrophes of either anthropogenic or natural origins and retrieve, situated second in this sequence, not only its vivid former state, prior to the environmental collapse, but also burgeon and thrive even better after human destruction. Holling (1973, p. 17) has dubbed this quite vital feature ecological resilience which “determines the persistence of relationships within a system,” to borrow his words, “and is a measure of the ability of these systems to absorb changes [...] and still persist” (1973, p. 17). The natural world away from human beings’ harmful anthropocentric and paternalist vision is, in this direction, endowed with the requisite systems and mechanisms, though quite subtle or intricate at times they might be, which contribute to the restoration of balance and equilibrium to many if not entire ecosystems in the wake of ecological crises of whatever magnitude.

There is a substantial body of evidence, throughout *My name is monster*, corroborating the idea that the natural world, despite the recent apocalypse, has been endowed with a certain degree of ecological resilience. Hale's heroine, after leaving Svalbard and later landing somewhere in Scotland, has encountered a terrestrial ecosystem, self-sufficient in itself and for itself, that seems to be undisturbed by the war-torn epoch to the point of even being unaware of humanity's sufferings in the wake of biological and nuclear indiscriminate weapons deployment. The narrator, once shipwrecked on an unknown beach, has described these sights,

To the right, a broad belt of sand stretches for miles, into the mist and sea spray of the horizon. In front, following the line of the beach, a low cliff is dotted with trees and seagulls. The gulls nestle on ledges and wheel overhead, screeching. Every rock is covered, streaked white and grey [...] Beyond the diving gulls [...] is a line of coarse bracken and heather. Like the trees, these plants look hardy and gnarled, gripping onto the rock face with old men's fingers. (Hale, 2019, p. 07)

This realm, herein delineated, denotes an ecosystem characterised by plenitude, diversity, and above all harmony with a broad spectrum of tangible non-human life-forms, including birds, moss, trees, and other plants, each engrossed in its existence. The remnants of the past cataclysmic events, one might argue, are nowhere to be seen and the non-sentient beings above referred to, have almost recovered since they manifest signs of prosperity once left in their state of nature unimpaired by humans. Mother has then settled, after the shipwreck episode, on embarking on a long journey, with all the perils it would entail, travelling by foot all the way back to where she once belonged, her parents' home. This effort, undertaken with no technologies, at her disposal, to provide her with any kind of assistance, has on the other hand enabled her to engage with plains, valleys and hills with each area displaying utterly distinct regional flora; the forest at one point, she came across, "is turning wild. Ferns and saplings sprout from the earth, while weeds inch their way through the hardened dust of the path" (Hale, 2019, p. 12). Once she reached the village, where her parents used to live, she has seen what seemed to her as "the signs of neglect push[ing] themselves forward like boisterous children. Unmown grass along the verges [...] Untended flower beds that were once kept so prim and proper" (Hale, 2019, pp. 22-23). Such evocations in the two previously quoted passages of sprouting, verdant, flourishing botanical life and vegetation in its undisturbed ecological and organic state appear to be inconsistent with the events that brought the apocalypse; in fact, sights as these, seem to be incongruous with what one might expect after the massive destruction and chaos that have been wrought. Those landscapes, not lacking vivacity, cannot be those of an earth that has succumbed to the horrors of war; they are, the textual corpus under scrutiny seems to imply, a reference to our planets potential, albeit in differing degrees, to withstand adversity and undergo the full process of self-restoration. The narrator of the novel's first part, with no other humans around but herself, has qualified the overgrowth of 'wild' flora as "human control succumbing to plant-life" (Hale, 2019, p. 09); nature has not, thereby, only endured in a passive fashion but has also reoccupied its former grounds of authority, proliferated and achieved a state of sustainable growth due to its inherent, active and dynamic mechanisms.

It might be stated, at the present phase of advancement, that *My name is monster*, despite its post-apocalyptic purport, has demonstrated natural systems' capacity to re-establish equilibrium in defiance of prior disruption of unconceivable magnitudes. This aspect of resilience, if seen from the worldview of the post-apocalypse, might underscore the ways "in which [...] 'civilisation [is] under the control of nature'," (Moon, 2014, p. 6) which is an agile entity that has the capacity to heal, regenerate and thrive, in itself and for itself, without humans around. Apart from the two female survivors, the fact that human beings are nowhere

to be found, at least in masses, the way they have been before the end of times, constitutes a major asset for nature's entire ecosystems. It is as if the world has gone through a reset phase through which all the detrimental acts have been absorbed, mitigated and altogether superseded with the 'normal' state of things back as nature is in control. The adult heroine, with all the apocalyptic events of planetary scale and above all in the absence of other humans, has come to this conclusion, "[t]he world feels at home in its rhythm, as though it's glad to get back to it: everything measured, from the rapid beat of a vole's minuscule heart to the orbital path of the Earth" (Hale, 2019, p. 57). In the second part, the young narrator's pregnancy, probably in its final trimester, is in itself denotative of "a fresh start after apocalypse" (Englund, 2024, p. 471) for humanity amid an increasingly burgeoning natural world. The readers might even enjoy, as the story draws to its end, some vibrant spring scenes where nature, careless of what humans have suffered, has continued to thrive exhibiting some, if not all, of its splendour through sights perhaps no survivor of an apocalypse in the literary realm could envision. The young narrator, as the time of her childbirth neared, has affirmed,

I can see the way all the bits of *the world are suddenly brighter* at the same time [...] Every morning, *there are so many birds* outside my bedroom window that I have to hold my pillow tight over my head to not think about the noise. *All the little flowers have appeared at the side of the stream.* Outside the gate, *the long grass is full of colour and flying bugs.* The bigger my belly grows, *the more ground bugs and tiny animals there are,* and the louder the air is. It's like the noise and the plants are all growing with me. (Hale, 2019, p. 97)

This entire passage and particularly the words, italicised on purpose, might show the extent to which the ecological rhythms of both flora and fauna unfold with apparent indifference to humanity's absence. The words of Joyce (2024), I might claim, though not uttered in connection to *My name is monster*, are not only relevant but they also have a high resonance with Hale's novel when he has fostered that, "instead of barren landscapes, we are seeing postapocalyptic worlds that feature lush, vibrant environments teeming with natural life" (p. 442). These traits, of exuberant, flourishing and burgeoning non-sentient life-forms, Joyce has pinpointed in some texts, are in fact part of Hale's narrative despite the apocalyptic events the planet has witnessed. The high ecological resilience potential, to continue in this line, the above block quote vehicles, while in full awareness of the devastating legacies left by the apocalyptic ordeals, might showcase, though at a fictitious dimension, the hypothesis that less human intervention and activities in the natural world might significantly enhance the quality of life to other, be they animal or plant, non-sentient life-forms. The latter might, once this materialises, find enough space, if undisturbed, to prosper independent of anthropogenic influence in their natural habitat with harmony and equilibrium reigning over their respective realms.

5. Conclusion

It might be stated, in the light of the above analysis, that *My name is monster* contains textual evidence enough substantiating my claim that it might be read and construed as a post-apocalyptic literary text where nature has been endowed with both the potential to resurge from its ashes and ultimately regenerate from the detrimental human activities. Hale's work, with the twenty-first ecological concerns at its kernel, has entailed myriad features, whether in terms of plot, characters, narrative techniques or language, which firmly ground it within the post-apocalyptic literary genre. Survival, with all the daily struggles it purports, is a key trait and the two remnants of the human species have been confronted with challenges nowhere to be found but in the wake of large-scale destruction affecting the entire planetary ecosystems. Through *Mother and Monster*, humanity is, therefore, brought face to face with the dire effects of the centuries-long unbridled exploitation of our planet's resources; this has

showcased the nefarious impacts of humans' massive and indiscriminate practices which are, oftentimes, profit-centred rather than ecologically oriented. Daily access to basic biological needs, as water and food, often taken for granted in today's comfort-imbued civilised world, have become a real issue which needs to be pondered, reflected upon and addressed.

The novel's post-apocalyptic setting is, in addition, the propitious matrix of experimentation where nowadays' technological and technical progress have reached a deadlock; the annihilation of civilisation, with the destruction of infrastructure as its visible mark, is a constant reminder of the global mayhem humans have caused; organised life, in societies, the way third millennium readers have known it, is only a distant memory overshadowed by the prevalent distrust, competition and misery of the primitive state into which the human beings have reverted. The readers, in this hostile context, are introduced into the life of the two heroines, with two quite different perspectives, which allowed the author to unveil two visions of the story; this has surfaced the substantial threats humanity might grapple with, perhaps in the near future, if we do not reconsider to more environment-centred patterns our attitudes towards nature. The fact that humanity is almost extinct, has allowed the natural world to reclaim space in many areas and has even represented an opportunity for plant and animal life-forms to thrive undisturbed; this has demonstrated, in a sign of hope, our planet's ecological resilience giving many non-sentient beings in *My name is monster* a chance to not only survive the apocalypse, but also recover, endure and even burgeon afterwards.

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