

Chapter – III

Beasts of the Southern Wild:

America's Magic Realism

Beasts of the Southern Wild is a 2012, American film, directed by Benh Zeitlin, listed under the category of magic realist films by Wikipedia. The film has been globally acknowledged and acclaimed as a magic realist film. It has won several awards at famous international film festivals like *The Sundance* and *The Cannes* film festivals. It won four *Academy Awards* and the Camera De Plame' award at *Cannes Film Festival*. The film is inspired by the play titled *Juicy and Delicious* by Lucy Alibar who has jointly written the screenplay with Benh Zeitlin. It is important to point out that the location, premise, aim and even a few characters have been drastically changed for the film. For example, the location was changed from Georgia to Louisiana and the protagonist Hushpuppy who was a boy of 9-10 years has been turned into a girl who is only 6years old. It was done to suit the character of the 5-year-old actress Quvenzhané Wallis, who had impressed the production team.

Scholar Kevin Stoda asserts “many films which regard adult issues utilises the magic realist form to deal with the darker side of childhood, where the child is powerless in the adult dominated world, whose rules do not make any kind of sense to them...films like *The Butcher Boy*, *The Mighty*, *The Tin Drum* and *Pan's Labyrinths* well as *Beasts of the Southern Wild* fall into this category” (Kevin Stoda n.p). The universal message the film tries convey to the world the “a unique perspective and self-sufficient things that should be fought for and preserved” (*366wierdmovies.com* Behn Zeitlin n.p.).

The Bathtub Teacher Ms. Bathsheba tells her class the story of the fierce pre historic creatures called the aurochs who ate babies of the cavemen. She also tells them the reality of the food chain, reinforcing the fact that the humans as well as the animals are nothing but meat, this fact the humans had forgotten and started thinking of themselves as being at the top of the food chain. But the fact remains that humans cannot win against nature; nothing can defeat the forces of nature like the storm that happens in the film.

These monsters of the prehistoric past combine with the various lessons that encircle in the mind of the young girl, Hushpuppy who is just starting to make sense of the world around her. She is able to predict the catastrophe which the present actions of the humans can cause; she in her innocence is able to link their present decadent actions and lack of concern for their environment with the resulting global warming and its adverse effects. She is able to understand that such damage to the environment is irreversible, as she comments in the film “sometimes one piece is broken so bad that nothing can fix it” (*Beasts of the Southern Wild* n.p). While the teacher is warning the children and telling them to wake up to reality by preparing themselves to survive, the aurochs are thawing out their frozen abode, moving southwards towards hushpuppy. Hushpuppy imagines them coming soon while the warning of Ms. Bathsheba echoes in her mind “... the fabric of universe is coming to unravel...y’all better learn to survive”. It seems like the echo of the environmentalists warning to the mankind (*Beasts of the Southern Wild* n.p).

“The aurochs based on the cattle like pre historic creature...[in] the cave paintings seen in Lascaux, Pech Merle. The film brings alive these extinct creatures entwining their real existence with the mythic tales of Ms. Bathsheba.” (Benh Zeitlin interviewed by Jeremy Berlin n.p.). This makes the foreboding of the storm and its devastating effects look more frightening, specially viewed from the point of view of a child. Magic realist films which interlink real events with

myths, traditions and fantasy elements, forming a story which is rich and layered yet rooted in reality. Benh Zeitlin points out that Hushpuppy is presented as the last of her kind, where her community is at the brink of extinction. This fact draws a parallel between her and the aurochs, especially in the scene where she faced them head on and seems to be conversing with them. The scene ends with an assumed understanding struck between Hushpuppy and the aurochs, acknowledging her as someone who they can relate to. Behn Zeitlin adds that Hushpuppy seems to link her situation to the cavemen Ms. Bathsheba had told them about, she like the cavemen needs to protect her community. She wants to leave behind evidence of her existence like the cave paintings, by which we understand how the cavemen lived. The aurochs coming to destroy her and her community maybe a fantasy or her imagination but it's never clear in the film. The lines between what is fantasy and what is happening in reality is blurred; another characteristic of magic realist films.

Michael Gottwald, the producer of the film, proposes that the myth of the aurochs, frames the film's tale of being on the brink of extinction and its devastation. The film forms its own internal myth and shows the teacher as a representation of a wise person passing down knowledge to the future generation. Benh Zeitlin states that the meaning the aurochs hold changes as the film progresses. In the beginning Hushpuppy understands the cycle of nature as eating and being eaten by something that's greater, more powerful than you and that she is tiny in comparison to the force of nature. She realises that everything that has created her is going to be overtaken by something more powerful, her father is dying of an unknown illness, her house has been submerged in water due to the storm and the aurochs are coming. But as the film progresses she evolves and comes to understand that nature is a flowing cycle where everything has its own right place and function, of which she is also a part. She acknowledges this cycle of life and death by coming to terms with

her father's death and gains peace and determination to move forward in her life. Michael Gottwald observes that the aurochs represent the devastation and turmoil of Hushpuppy's life which she must face and cope up with in order to move on with her life. The smooth flowing life of hushpuppy is suddenly turned upside down by the devastating storm which damaged property, loss of vegetation and even lives, along with her father's terminal illness. Without a home and without a parent, Hushpuppy is left helpless in the world. She learns from her experiences, the teachings of Ms. Bathsheba and her father, gaining confidence to face the adversities of the adult world.

The scene of Hushpuppy coming face to face with these beasts is intense whose intensity is heightened by the triumphant music played in the background and the fearlessness facial expression on Hushpuppy's face clearly shows her unshaken determination, now and for all the adversities that may come her way in the future. The moment before the aurochs' growl at her is filled with pregnant silence. Silence alone could heighten the intensity of the scene. Such utilization of silences, pauses and gaps is a feature of magic realist films, here the real meanings and mystery of life lies. Hushpuppy confronts the aurochs with resilience and determination is very significant. The scene condenses the message that rings throughout the film. The scene shows the aurochs as being gigantic, larger than life almost supernatural having the aura of indefeatability. It is shown via the view point of Hushpuppy, the camera is at her height, the aura of innocence and unable to capture the whole mass of the aurochs in one look. It is important to note that the message the film wants to give out to the audience about reality can only be impressively given out though such a fantastical scene. The scene is intense, showing the two nature created animals, the auroch and Hushpuppy, on the brink of extinction, where one is supposed to devour the other. That is the rule of the animal kingdom but these two wise animals at the end have understood that, the greatest sin which one can commit toward s nature is to kill the last of its kind. Humanity is reminded of

the extinction of so many species of animals and plants due to their not caring about this fact, from this film. The film ultimately shows that nature functions on a balance of things, as Hushpuppy tells us “the whole universe depends on everything fitting together just right. If one piece busts, even the smallest piece, the whole universe will bust.” (*Beast of the Southern Wild* n.p.). One must remember that we must allow each other to grow and survive.

The characters and locations of this film like any magic realist film are real locations, not fictional. Though the name of the town and the character’s names are fictional but the description of such people are real. The events depicted in the film are also real, though presented in fantastical way. Hushpuppy is as critic A.O. Scotts claims “a force of nature” but she is also a little girl who is losing her father and facing a major natural disaster. The bunch of orphaned kids in the film represents the children who have lost their families and their homes in the major nature disasters like the storm in the film. Benh Zeitlin claims that he wanted to show the after effects of the hurricane Katrina that happened 2005, and its effects on the Louisiana bayou that damaged the people physically and mentally. The director wished to show how the people of the bayou coped up with a storm like the hurricane Katerina physically and emotionally which happened in that area. Hushpuppy reflects the genuine sincerity, loveliness of children and the toughness which we hope to inspire in children when faced with challenges. the character’s cores are based on real people and their real feeling for instance when Benh Zeitlin asked actress Quvenzane Wallis, who plays Hushpuppy that when faced with such a situation what will she do? She replied that she would brush her teeth and listen to her parents. That’s the core of Hushpuppy she is a good and obedient child. In her imaginary conversation her mother asks her if she is being good and she replies yes. Hushpuppy’s good and responsible behaviour towards her family and her environment is how Benh Zeitlin feels natural balance can be restored.

Hushpuppy as a child is very observant and sharp. Though Wink (her father), lacks parenting skills, is mostly drunk and disappears for periods of time leaving her alone. Yet she understands that he truly loves her and is trying to teach her to survive in this world through his own harsh but effective way. She understands that the bayou is very important to Wink and she too feels it to be an essential part of her own identity. When she along with the bayou people are captured in the shelter, although they have better facilities and healthcare, she feels out of place. The shelter she says is like a fish tank without water. They feel trapped and realises that the bayou is where they truly belong. The dim and dull lighting of the medical shelter conveys these 'civilised' people's intentions. The film does not show the doctors of the shelter behaving badly but the mood and lighting of the scenes convey how they do not really care for them. The warmth and care with which Ms. Bathsheba cares for the children is lacking here. Therefore, they escape on the first opportunity they get. The city and its institutions are shown to be uncompassionate and insensitive of such people. In the scene where the doctor discusses the bad news about Wink's health in front of his little daughter who is unaware of his terminal illness. Magic realist films subtly point at the issue, never directly showing or criticising it the viewers to decipher the message and contemplate on it. Such a treatment of the bayou people by the city people could also be because they 'live on the wrong side of the levee' (*Beasts of the Southern Wild* n.p.). The film also points subtly to issues of lousy treatment the economically lower strata of society gets from the higher classes. The rich are not concerned about the condition of the poor and only give sympathetic donations, without empathy. Despite their poor living conditions, the bayou people make the most of it. They live happily the Bathtub and where there are no divisions of class, race or religion; everyone is given equal share in the catch and treated equally. They are living in the lap of nature, living of the land and for them this is the prettiest place on earth. Unlike the city

filled with their oil processing plants and factories, where there are no trees or rivers and where people eat packaged fish.

Wink may use abusive language and quite hard on Hushpuppy but the audience understands, what he does he does out of love. He tries to make Hushpuppy tough and independent enough to survive alone. When he learns he was dying, he behaves like any frustrated man would but soon he realises that he has to toughen Hushpuppy up even if it means being rough to her. He loves her and acknowledges that she is his responsibility, while protecting her from the storm he says “I am your daddy and you do what I tell you to do. It is my responsibility to keep you from dying...” (*Beasts of the Southern Wild*). He never abandons her and encourages her to stand up to the adversities of life. Wink acts as any dying father would, telling their child to stay strong and not to cry. Hushpuppy behaviours like any child would whose parent is dying, she feels helpless but tries her best saying “when you are small, you gotta fix what you can” (*Beasts of the Southern Wild* n.p.).

The performance of these two main characters are quite real as both Wink played by Dwight Henry and Hushpuppy played by Quvenzhané Wallis are first time actors. It is Quvenzhané Wallis debut film and Dwight Henry is actually a baker in New Orleans who was convinced by the director to play the part. The director and the crew lived in the area on which they based the fictional Bathtub bayou on, for eight months and they discussed the casting and details in the bakery owned by Dwight Henry. While conversing with them Henry read out the lines for them once and it kind of fit. Henry feels that his own personal experience of the hurricane Katrina and the hurricane Betsy while living in the area helped him act out the role effectively. “I was in hurricane Katrina in neck high water...have an inside understanding for what’s the movie about...in a flood or faced with losing everything ...I was two years old when hurricane Betsy hit

New Orleans and my parents put me on the roof of the house. An outsider could not bring the passion I brought to the role..." (Dwight Henry interviewed by Scott Marks n.p). Both of them are amateur actors making them ideal for a film about the about unconventional people. It's an intimate, grassroots level film as the non-professional actors bring their experience with life to the screen and the crew and props for the set is procured locally.

The character of Hushpuppy represents the spirit of a survivor of a major disaster. Her courage, wisdom and fortitude make her one of the most poetic heroines which graced the screen. Her character becomes relatable and unforgettable because such a situation can occur in anyone's life in reality. She inspires people to have courage in case of such a situation arises. She is very observant and she does not run from the truth she accepts things the way they are without hoping for some external help to come to make it better which happens in fantasies where some fairy comes and makes it better. She has to cope up with the challenges and make it better herself. She realises that the working of the universe is made up of many little visible and invisible pieces which includes her as well. She recognises her place and function within the universe.

Magic realism is used to create the absent character of hushpuppy's mother Marietta. She exists in the fantasy of Hushpuppy, functioning like an imaginary friend, invisible to all except her. But this is layered with the awareness of her mother not being there in reality, as she looks at the beacon of light coming from far away and asks "is that you mamma?" (*Beasts of the Southern Wild* n.p.), the mother's presence although invisible is a source of strength and confidence for her. It's a manifestation of her conscience which keeps reminding her to be good, obedient, sharp and responsible in lieu of her crazy, irresponsible and heartbroken father. When faced with the devastating news of her father's impending death she embarks on a quest to search for her mother. When cook of the catfish shack tells her that everyone has to take care of themselves she becomes

determined and confident enough to stand by her father and her community to the point of facing the aurochs fearlessly. The mother and her presence works as a mythic heroine from which the future generations gain confidence, strength and her legend of being upright and fearless woman, who can shoot an alligator about to attack.

The angry moment, where Hushpuppy frustrated and fed up with her circumstances, and the rough behaviour of her father punches him on the heart. Caught up in the moment she wishes he was dead but when he falls down with pain which is accompanied by the ominous sounds of nature deteriorating and ice caps falling; she realises that she has done something very wrong. She says “I broke something” (*Beasts of the Southern Wild* n.p.), she feels that what she did something against the laws of nature. The film presents her personal wrong committed as linked to the greater wrong humanity is committing against nature. It is something that has broken the regenerative cycle of nature so bad that it cannot be fixed. The natural crisis that comes brings Hushpuppy and Wink closer in the film. It reflects the filmmakers desire for humanity to come together, forgetting their internal differences and help each other to care for what is left of nature now. Hushpuppy’s favourite activity seems to be listening to the heartbeat of the animals, seems to remind the audience that even though it is food, still they are an important part of the universe we inhabit. They are living and must be given that respect of being a valuable part of the natural cycle. To the outsiders view the natural, happy world of Hushpuppy is one of poverty, deprivation and ruin. But in her view the world is a spectacular place where every being is a living breathing effective part of the universe. Nature is a much greater force than us, Wink fails to realise this when he decides to ride out the storm than evacuate to a safer place. Regardless of the devastating result the film ends at a positive, optimistic note where the coming generation understands the functioning of nature’s cycle and their own place in it.

Drew Mcweeny observes that uses the form of magic realism is very effective when telling a story about a child as it's the way a child views the real world. They are optimistic and their worldview comprises of magic. Portrayal of real events from a magical real point of view inspires the optimism that we have lost, somewhere while living our regular lives. Children are open to new ideas and believe in the power of nature. The scenes in the film that seem fantastical serve as an allusion to real events and states of consciousness of normal people. The film's choice of the protagonist makes it even more magical realist, most of the film is viewed from the point of view of Hushpuppy and the audience seems to understand what Hushpuppy understands. In some scenes the point of view shifts to Wink but it is to enhance and elaborate Hushpuppy's point of view. The smooth transition and unique of viewpoints shows the different yet similar aspects of the reality we are living. The scene where the aurochs are tailing Hushpuppy and Wink looks at her getting surrounded. Hushpuppy and Wink look at each other, the view point shifts from Hushpuppy's to Wink's for some moments, but both depict the same message; to face the aurochs/ adversities head on with determination. Stephen Selmon says that magic realism reflects speech and cognition within the social postcolonial culture. The scene has no conversation, no voiceover; the silence is enough to communicate their feelings to the audience. Magic realism brings out the drama that exists between the gaps, hesitations and silences in life. It helps the protagonist transcend dualities and hybridity's and convey a common human spirit.

Beasts of the Southern Wild not only shows a 6yr old child's worldview but also shows her sensibilities and the understandings. The protagonist is at an age where we start to understand the difference between reality and fantasy but also believe in the secret workings of the universe where each heartbeat of being living being beats with the heart of the earth itself. She acknowledges these workings and tries to understand it by listening to the heart beat of each being, the chick, the crab

and her father. The magic realist aspect of this film connects this fact with the exceptional existence of Hushpuppy as the last of her kind. The strange behaviour and lifestyle of the people of Bathtub is not strange to her but to us as we are aware the conventional way of life. Though she may not have anything to compare it with but the ugly scenes of the city of the city filled with smoke releasing factory chimneys. The film shows bayou people's viewpoint not the city people's, the city viewed with a mix of hatred and fear of encroachment. The fear of destruction by a force greater than herself most probably will manifest in form of a monster of whom a child has heard frightening tales. The magic realism of this film combines the mythic tales with the rich imagination of a child to manifest the present danger into huge, fierce and monstrous aurochs.

The visual features of the location the story and the use of these settings in the context of specific scenes is an important part of magic realist films. Since the lighting, setting and sounds combined together with the actions and conversations bring out an aspect of the scene which is impressive and unexpected for audience. Magic realist films which are mostly independent films portray a combination of the traditional scenes in a modern way. The understanding the audience gains by viewing such scenes grants them a new perspective to reality. The audience come to know that the bathtub which was formally the Isle de Charles Doucet, formed when the city constructed a levee to separate themselves from the bayou and its people. The city does not care about the people of the bayou until they encroach upon their territory by blowing up the levee. City people do not realise the plight of the bayou people they only stick them in shelters rather than help the bayou people re-establish their lives. The audience comes to understand the difference in their basic values that the city people are self-centred and are not concerned about "caring for people smaller and sweeter than you..." (*Beasts of the Southern Wild* n.p.). The director tries to show that the poor have their own ways of taking care of their families and go about their lives. He tries to

challenge the audience's preconceived notions about people living in poverty, it's not necessary that all of them are drunk, violent and irresponsible about themselves and their families. They have their own system and their own things that they value, which may not be money or material possessions. The director wants the audience to recognise the poverty and the percentage of people living in squalor without health care in developed country like America. Magic realism shows this through the wondrous imagination of a child making it impressive, attractive and unforgettable.

The fictional bayou, Bathtub is inspired by the real area in southern Louisiana, called Isle De Jean Charles. Benh Zeitlin initially thought to shoot the film abroad but in 2006, when he visited New Orleans he felt the city's post Katrina period was the site the movie aimed to capture. Pat Forbes, Executive Director of the Louisiana Community Development states that the area is located on the frontline of the Louisiana coastal land loss area and the risk loss of their ancestral home is very apparent and they are trying to rebuild and resettle their community while facing extreme coastal land loss. It's similar to the Bathtub community rebuilding a settlement after the first storm, storing plants and animals till the flood recedes. These scenes reflect the Isle de Jean Charles effort of resettlement which includes green building practices, sustainable economic development, an indigenously developed food market, a community which teaches and learns to adapt itself to the natural adversities and preserves their own culture. Benh Zeitlin and Lucy Alibar point out that the aim of the film was not to simply capture the land loss and the damage caused by the hurricane but to show the whole experience of loss.

The Bathtub shows an alternate world different from the conventional American way of life but this does not mean that such a way of life does not exist in the world. The city, Louisiana on which Bathtub is based is a place where the mood is always celebratory. The Louisiana bayou is inhabited by many fishing communities whose way of life surrounds the sea and its produce.

They feel the same attachment to the land, the bayou people feel and value. The triumphant, celebratory music score produced by Dan Romer adds to the feel of the location. Bathtub, the strange but beautiful wetland has a high risk of flood as it's located below the levee wall. It's a place consciously forgotten about by the government. The fearlessness, freedom and acceptability of the Bathtub people may come from the attitude the Southern Louisiana bayou inhabitants have towards life, living so close to the destructive forces of nature. The world the film shows is not a post-apocalyptic world nor is it a dystopic world like in *The Hunger Games* 2012. Such a world may come up if the government continues to ignore the state of the poor. The Bathtub is a self-sufficient place; they depend on the land for their settlement and subsistence.

Magic realist movies are acknowledged for accurately depicting the essence of a community's existence and it's not escapist in nature because even in its humorous scenes, it tries to convey alternative perspectives to reality. Magic realist films engage and explore reality and are not merely for amusement and entertainment. Magic realism imbues ordinary things with significance, which indirectly shows the people values, lifestyle and behaviours to the audience in a unique way. In this film food is one of those things. Critic Anne L. Bower states "food is often used to convey the character's emotions, their personal and cultural identities and philosophies in a film" (Anne L. Bower 1). She adds that food is universal, displayed on screen for global consumption. Sidney Mintz claims "food that's eaten have a certain historical background, with regard to people who eat it and the techniques of cooking and eating it" (Sidney Mintz 7). Critic Diane Negra claims that food is culturally relative and its consumption has cultural meanings behind it. "In the postmodern world, food becomes the most non-threatening way one can experience the other's culture." (Diane Negra 71)

The people of the Louisiana bayou are living off the water, for their livelihood and subsistence. Food is entwined with their culture in the most basic level, “the food they eat; the way they eat it defines the community itself...It is interwoven with all aspects of their lives, their approach to food, how they eat it and what it means to them is different from other communities.” (Elena N. Kelly n.p.). For instance, in the scene when someone shows Hushpuppy how to break the shell of the crab with a knife and eat it, Wink says that’s not the way to eat it. One needs to break it with their bare hands, touch their food and eat it with their hands and the bayou people agree with him. Producer Josh Penn points out that the food scenes in the film link to the characters drive to survive and to fend for themselves; it shows Hushpuppy’s coming of age and evolution. Only when we learn to take care of ourselves can we start to take care of others who are smaller and sweeter than ourselves. In the earlier scenes when she is unable to cook for herself and searches for her father at the “feeding time” (*Beasts of the Southern Wild* n.p.), shows her helplessness but later when she procures those nuggets, shows her independence and growth. The feast scenes in the film does not glamorize food in order to encourage hunger but to show the evolution and journey of the character and their relationship with the land and its resources. Josh Penn claims that food is a universal part of one’s life and how they approach it shows their lifestyle and societal background. Magic realism of the film uses food to trigger nostalgia, the scene of Marietta frying gator nuggets in dust particles suspended in the sunlight parallels to the fantasy like scenes on the catfish shack where the cook, cooks the same dish for Hushpuppy in a surreal lighting like her mother. This makes the audience wonder if these events were merely in Hushpuppy’s imagination.

The film creates a richly layered, imagined universe which is rooted in actual locations, events and people. The young protagonist is trying to make sense of the mysteries around her. The film can be seen as an allegory of hurricane Katrina and its aftermath, focusing on the feelings of

such a disaster struck community and its hope of resettlement. Their way of life comments A.O Scott of *New York Times* is both harsh and idyllic which is threatened by the authority of the city dwellers and more importantly by a greater force of nature, the storm. The multicultural community that lives there are based on the value of ethnic solidarity and inclusion. Critic Tom Shone states that maybe myth and magic is the form through which America should look at reality on the screen, making magic realism film genre of America now. Film critic Phil Hoad observes the shift from realism to magic realism in America in films and literature. He questions if “American audiences feel the use of magical realism is an effective way to contemplate on America as a nation or [if] America is retreating into the recesses of magical realism” (Phil Hoad n.p.) to avoid confronting the harsh realism. Regardless of the defining features a magic realist film, American movies show a trend to move towards magic realism in films rather than the conventional realism. This film seems like children’s parable warning adults of the adverse effects of destroying nature without thinking of the future. The end part of the film is the most conventional and realistic, ironically portrayed fantastically. Wink and Hushpuppy are captured by the city dwellers and put in a shelter. It seems unnatural when they are included in the civilisation, Wink is hospitalised and Hushpuppy is dressed as a conventional little girl in a dress. In a realistic film this would be the end where the child gets into foster care and the father dies. Magic realism of the film combines this real event with the myth of the aurochs and the nostalgic presence of the mother to give it maybe not a happy but a hopeful end.

The ending like most magic realist films is ambiguous and open ended. Hushpuppy seems to gain the determination and confidence of surviving and protecting her community, opening multiple possibilities of how the story could end. The worlds of fantasy and reality seem to coexist in the ending scenes. The scenes of Hushpuppy in the catfish shack/brothel are confusing and

ambiguous, it's impossible to know if it's real or just an imaginary wish fulfilment of these orphaned children. The film seems suspended in the space between what's inside her head and what's outside. The storm, her trailer home and the fictional bayou's existence is questionable. What really exist are the emotions and the relationship. Wink and Hushpuppy are father-daughter. He fulfils his duty of making Hushpuppy self-reliant and able to fend for herself, by imparting core values of the community to her. Ultimately the film seems to be a tale of survival, defiance and strength giving love which maybe imperfect unlike the pure and perfect loves in fantasy movies.

Critic Slipa Kovvali claims that the film may seem an American Indie film at first but it depicts how people's worldview is linked to where they come from. It forces the audience to expand their worldview and observe such people by abandoning their pre-conceived prejudices. Generally, Hollywood films present the poverty in America as bleak and hopeless but the director tries to show that it may not be that hopeless after all. The film hopes to appeal to open minded viewers who would understand that complicated histories of a country can make the common public distrust government institutes like the shelter hospital in the film, which is conventionally and universally seen as good. Being a magic realist film it targets the sophisticated portion of the population, who demand to be intellectually stimulated by what they watch although "some of the magical realism imagery may not work for everyone" (Christy Lemire n.p.). But most film critics accept the magic realism in the film as the inherent magic that is a part of the reality a six-year-old lives, this helps the director achieve the ultimately hopeful end despite the bleak reality of the situation. The director asserts, the film is not supposed to be interpreted literally or scientifically. The whole story is allegorical and symbolic of real contemporary. The storm was a retelling of 2005 hurricane Katrina in the area of southern Louisiana and the film depicted the after effects of the hurricane and how the communities dealt with it. Thomas Hackett notes the film

“turned the tables on the conventions of Hollywood aesthetics and storyline” (Thomas Hackett n.p.). He adds that the film may not win the Oscar but has earned a respectable spot in the international film festivals and won cultural, humanistic prizes as it observes the nuances of human life in meaningful way. The film does not push the harsh realities and the plight of these people in the audiences faces rather skims over them, making the audience feel guilty, virtuous and indifferent all at once. The film allows the viewers the critical distance from the characters and observes them simultaneously making the audience feel that they have witnessed such things in reality.

The film lacks the regional realist feature of the American Indie films instead the magic realism points to the threatened enjoyment, where their subsistence and livelihood depends on the land and water itself. The B.P (British Petroleum) oil spill 2010, affected the Southern Louisiana bayou where the shooting of the film was happening. The real event became a part of the myth of the story. The message that the film tries to convey of being a part of the whole universe and achieving fearlessness comes from acceptance of such happenings. The importance of being self-reliant and facing an adversity as a collective, cultural community was actually happening when the residents of the southern Louisiana bayou were facing the real risk of closing fishing, their sole livelihood for several years. The Deepwater Horizon Oil Rig exploded spilling almost 4.9 million barrels of crude oil in the sea, causing a major destruction to the marine environment. The risk of damage caused to the people and the bayou was huge. “The story’s actually happening...I was rewriting the scenes...based on the moments we were experiencing with this sort of dread.” (Behn Zeitlin interviewed by Rachel Arons n.p.).

The film shows the independence and power of a subculture, reflects what America truly stands for: freedom, utopia and rootedness. The internal struggle is uniquely depicted in the

external world with a childlike inventiveness. The story has a progressive plot being a mainstream Hollywood film but its scenes stand out separately, seems glued together as a part of one progressive story, forming a visionary tale of a community collectively trying to survive and sustain itself. “At times the film looks like a global natural disaster happening in the future and at other times it seems to be a shabby re-enactment of the biblical flood.” (Peter Bradshaw n.p.). The devastation of storm and its aftermath is similar to a war zone, stressing on community survival. The film is therapeutic and poetic, giving the message of surviving against all odds. It shows that the victims of disaster do not want others charity but respect and empathy as such events can happen to anyone. Being an allegory on the hurricane Katrina the film is inspires a mix of sadness and happiness, gives insight into the lives of a collective community who live off the land and are directly affected by the changing climatic conditions. The film renews the debate of the sustainability of such areas. The film questions the duty and responsibility towards your family and your home when there is the risk of losing it.

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