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## Psyche in Eco-Apocalypse: A Reading of Ballard's *The Drowned World*

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**ABSTRACT.** Embodiment of apocalyptic imagination has been a major theme in which many writers have pointed it out especially from the midst of twentieth century onwards. Earth today is vulnerable and would be so dangerous for future generation from now on. Although, J. G. Ballard's narrations do not create an ordinary apocalyptic apprehension of human abolition, but he enters the core of the apocalyptic theme by intertwining our world with an altering people's psyche who try to develop a new relationship with nature. This paper examines Ballard's *The Drowned World* (1962) from the view of the human psyche in an apocalyptic setting. It follows and analyzes the characters of Dr. Robert Kerans (a biologist) and his team in which they are transformed in the story – both mentally and physically.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

"Modern technology owes ecology an apology."  
~Alan M. Eddison

Science fiction is all about differences. In this genre, the author asks, what would happen if the world were different in one or many ways? We usually connect science fiction with imaginary technologies, but in comparison with physical part, that kind of mental picture is somewhat poor. There are many science fictions that highlight the psychological aspects more than the physical one and take us on a journey deep into the mind. We can put *The Drowned World* in this category. The technology looks a bit different from that of present Earth. In there, the exterior environment makes a massive global warming due to solar radiation. Earth's equatorial areas are returning to previous condition (Triassic age), and alteration in characters has reached as far north as London both physically and mentally. The main characters are at home among strange countryside regardless of changing in general appearance of natural surroundings.

*The Drowned World* sets over 2145 and is about global warming in which everything is swallowed by nature and a few of human civilization has remained. It is considered as an apocalyptic novel, where cataclysm is accountable for apocalypse. Worldwide temperature has increased due to Polar ice-caps that are melted by solar radiation. People in northern Europe's cities are leaving and America is immersing in tropical lagoons. Ballard uses the post-apocalyptic elements to show the collective unconscious wishes of the key characters. However, in this story, a natural disaster makes a real world into a dream one. Besides, it causes main characters transform mentally. The most prominent part of this book is the description of mood and setting. Ballard also goes down in his characters' minds instantaneously and surveys their motivations.

### 2. APOCALYPSE: REAWAKENING OR COLLAPSING?

*The Drowned World* is all about psychological level in which the writer examines the relationship between inner changes and interrelate them with the natural disaster. Bodkin and Kerans are main characters who are eloquent expressions of these interacts. In Bodkin's point of view, the only

reason for huge plants and species is returning to Triassic environment and emerging of primeval genetic elements.

Just as psychoanalysis reconstructs the original traumatic situation in order to release the repressed material, so we are now being plunged back into the archaeopsychic past, uncovering the ancient taboos and drives that have been dormant for epochs... Each one of us is as old as the entire biological kingdom, and our bloodstreams are tributaries of the great sea of its total memory. (*The Drowned World*, 41)

Bodkin considers humans as creatures who cannot physically become accustomed to a climate in which they never existed although they have ability of thinking. As the novel progresses, main characters don't care about human relationships and conflicts. They stop believing into dreams, go beyond their bodies' cellular recapitulation and not to worry about anything even issues of physical survival. Adorno and Horkheimer argue that "the Enlightenment's production of a duality between externalized nature and internal human nature serves to rationalize human domination of the material world, but also threatens an eventual revolt of nature". (Deckard, p. 2)

*The Drowned World* gives detail of three people's efforts for taking a series of action due to the genetic memory of the Triassic age and finally is approved them by their mammalian ancestors and the similarities grow and develop their brains. It causes extreme dreams in which soon turn into a waking although characters' minds in some ways move backwards to the Triassic period, even while their physical forms remain human. Jared Diamond in "*Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*" argues, "People ask, "What is the single most important environmental/ population problem facing the world today?" flip reply, "The single most important problem is our misguided focus on identifying the single most important problem!" (2005).

Although Ballard believes that through natural disasters an apocalyptic downfall will be happened to our civilization, it leads to have riveting theme in science fiction. Although, in *The Drowned World*, the apocalypse has already happened and Ballard wraps his arms around it, but most writers think that post-apocalyptic landscape reveals the desolation and hardships. The protagonist of the story, Kerans not only does not tend to return to the past but also fight against it. Humanity's ancestries and spiritual rebirth are more important for the author than paying attention to search for food and water. Throughout the novel, JG Ballard shows the negative aspects of post-apocalyptic setting less important to reveal it as a reawakening and returning to humanity rather than the ending of it.

This novel portrays the apocalyptic climate changes are not only result in the end of civilization but also simply push it back to a physiological state and style of living. In Kerans's view, the old society cannot last anymore. He also believes that everyone should alter his/her personality related to the situation and think about living in a primitive conditions otherwise they will die as "the genealogical tree of mankind was systematically pruning itself" (23). He does not look at death as an end of anything and when he tries to kill himself subconsciously in his final moments, he compares the planetarium to a "womb-like image" (108). Such interpretation of death is the novel's reflection in which the extinction of human race is possible and easy to accept.

In another part of the novel, the author tries to portray that the apocalypse could be used as reawakening where humanity changes its way. For instance, Kerans is a lovely person and signifies his need in order to find a new way to live by growing and catching his own food and refolding the lagoon, while Strangman is an unreliable and profligate guy who has a desperate feeling to the past and reveals it by means of saving jewels and artwork. But the author focuses on happiness of residents rather than feeling distress. He also uses a collective unconscious to reveal the apocalypse as a reoccurrence more than a culmination and connect the post-apocalypse setting to the protagonist while ascribing past society to the antagonist.

Ballard changes his vision related to the planet earth and psychosomatic, as well as his wonderful explanations of the changing earth. He holds a surreal stability that boosts *The Drowned World* more than its basic oddness and making it a work of real power. For example, one can feel the heat, see the jungles falling over the roofs of the swamped hotels and apartment buildings, and hear the shrieks of the iguanas and the huge bats. These cruel, mesmerizing pictures have the hardness of something very profoundly comprehended; they grasp the reader's imagination in the same way that the pertaining to devolution dreams grasps the psyches of the book's characters. Maybe it's no coincidence that these characters and their fights look mysterious by judgment to the vivid site that they move. According to Ballard, humankind is impermanent, but time and nature go on.

Each one of us is as old as the entire biological kingdom, and our bloodstream are tributaries of the great sea of its total recapitulates the entire evolutionary past, and its central nervous system is a coded time scale, each nexus of neurons and each spinal level marking a symbolic station, a unit of neuron time. (28)

According to Peter Brigg (1979), "An apocalyptic novel which rising temperatures create a flooded, increasingly tropical Earth and the human struggle to survive is complicated by Psychological changes". Dr. Robert Kerans, the main character observes the unexpected changes of the world where it submerges under water, and turns into unlivable and dense tropical forests. Ballard is not interested in simple apocalyptic worries of how man becomes extinct or finds a way to escape. He goes through the heart of the apocalypse by uniting the transformation of physical universe with the human psyche.

It takes only a moment to realize that a reprieve for Kerans or the drowning world would be entirely false. Neither science nor technology is the victors in *The Drowned World*. A very careful stoicism is at the core of Ballard's position, stoicism strong enough to tolerate a conception of the human race being terminated by the reactions of its genetic materials to the implacable thrust of cosmic forces. (Brigg)

Therefore, a realistic Sci-Fi novel slightly becomes strange, unpleasant and dreamlike combination of inside and outside world of Kerans and the other main characters. Moreover, psychological and biological changes happen in human nature and Kerans is extremely aware of it. He considers that the increasing of loneliness and self-containment of those who are corresponded with the activities of insects prepare themselves to endure metamorphosis. Kerans along with his companions in the intruding jungle where surrounded with sixty-foot-high ferns consist of Colonel Riggs, supposedly responsible for the mission in which the biological testing center is combined with a pseudo-military plan to save anyone who is struggling to live in the enormous marshes and jungles.

### 3. CHARACTER DISINTEGRATION

The Characters in the novel are not science fiction protagonists whom struggle to change the development of nature where it leads to human modification. Responding of human to the modifications happens when he alters the way where he lives to stay alive. Ballard describes the Bodkin's statement as the "archaeopsychic past," personifying the idea which is an announcement of experience from the period before the appearance of humankind. It is not originated from the brain but from the hereditary features form when the brain started the management and getting experience. The first person who yields to this very old inspiration is Hardman, the chopper's pilot on his task. His continuous dreams lastly motivate him to escape the main place where he lives and works and makes him to travel towards the South and the burning sun. Hardman flees from the main place due to his function in the high temperature and blazing sun.

Bodkin and Kerans decide to be abandoned when Hardman flies. So, the rest of mission change the position to north and after that they move, and they leave their dreams to the realities. This outline is wrecked by the coming of Strangman, with his garish companion of pirates and robbers and two

thousand dogs to guard. Now it is the time in which the author goes for territories of a weird surrealism in which the somatic events, whereas effortlessly probable, undertake the features of primeval dreams.

There is a scene in the end of novel that Kerans is succumbing to his internal forces. Kerans' life becomes progressively frightening when Strangman obstructs a pond and drains out Leicester Square. In this case, he finds himself almost covered with the head of a dead crocodile in which Strangman's guys compel him to put it on. After that, he flees from Strangman and explodes the dam and finally heads to the south in which he is taking care of a shot injury in his leg. He progressively sheds all of his incomes in the jungle and find out Hardman who is an almost blind, skinny with darkened husk. He gives Hardman a hand so he moves aimlessly to the south. In the closing chapter of this novel, we see that Kerans moves 150 miles into the jungle where the author obviously points out to the Kerans death in an intolerable journey. In sum, the sense of pressure becomes the key characteristic of the whole narrative as Kerans becomes progressively primitive. This noticeable and powerful psychological foundation makes Ballard to concentrate more on a single character's disintegration and that is the major point which distinguishes this novel from others. Most of the story is talking about the investigations of the characters' psyche. Furthermore, Ballard is worried about the nature of his characters as human, and his story encompasses the strong idea from myth which usually originates from prototype images.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In brief, *The Drowned World* by nature is somewhat enigmatic but Ballard's protagonist is a capable and knowledgeable man who gets involved in a struggle for survival in a remote and far from any technology setting. Moreover, Ballard tries to illustrate environmental themes and explore the nature of humanity through the nature of mind and memory. This novel tries to look at how the rest of people have departure by global warming. It as well has a look at the isolated individual's psyche. Actually, Ballard's psychology is not inconsistent and complicated. Its characters speak in the same tone, and they make the same kinds of observations. He makes an attempt to create a continuous and common psychology for the characters, but it defines the struggle between them. In fact, a most widespread feeling of the disability of technological man has formed by him.

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