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THE STUDY OF ECOLOGY IN JAMES GRAHAM BALLARD'S *THE DROUGHT*

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Abstract: James Graham Ballard (1930-2009) is a prolific English writer. He has written eighteen novels, one novella, and about hundred short stories. Besides the fictional writing, he is also well known as an essayist, and critic. Ballard's novels are divided into four phases and the present novel, *The Drought* belongs to the first phase. He poses the problems of water pollution and the unpredictable nature in the contemporary period. In *The Drought* Ballard depicts the world where human being is living under the threat of environmental degradation and its effect on human being. It is an environmental catastrophe which deals with the contemporary problem of water pollution. The basic assumption in this novel is that water pollution causes a global disaster of draught. In this novel, fantasy stresses and manifests the problem of water pollution due to industrial wastes in the present society to create the world of environmental catastrophe. Millions of tons of highly reactive industrial wastes, unwanted petroleum fractions, contaminants, catalysts and solvents are vented into the sea, where they mingle with the wastes of atomic power stations and sewage schemes. Because of these wasted materials, the sea has constructed a thick layer which prevents evaporation of water. The present paper focuses on the fantasy of natural disaster, the impact of environmental degradation and problems of livelihood in the world of science and technology. In this novel fantasy extrapolates and stresses the ecological aspect of modern society to view it in a more meaningful way. Ballard's apocalyptic vision of reality warns readers to avert catastrophe.

Key words: Ecology, James Graham Ballard, *The Drought*, natural disaster,

Introduction: James Graham Ballard (1930-2009) is a prolific English writer. He has written eighteen novels, one novella, and about hundred short stories. Besides the fictional writing he is also well known as an essayist, and critic. Ballard's novels are divided into four phases and the present novel, *The Drought* belongs to the first phase. He poses the problems of water pollution and the unpredictable nature in the contemporary period. In *The Drought* Ballard depicts the world where human being is living under the threat of environmental degradation and its effect

on human being. It is an environmental catastrophe which deals with the contemporary problem of water pollution. The basic assumption in this novel is that water pollution causes a global disaster of draught. In this novel, fantasy stresses and manifests the problem of water pollution due to industrial wastes in the present society to create the world of environmental catastrophe. Millions of tons of highly reactive industrial wastes, unwanted petroleum fractions, contaminants, catalysts and solvents are vented into the sea, where they mingle with the wastes of atomic power stations and sewage schemes. Because of these wasted materials the sea has constructed a thick layer which prevents evaporation and leading to world-wide aridity. The present paper will focus on the fantasy of natural disaster, the impact of environmental degradation and problems of livelihood in the world of science and technology. In this novel fantasy extrapolates and stresses the ecological aspect of modern society to view it in a more meaningful way. Ballard's apocalyptic vision of reality warns readers to avert catastrophe.

The Study of Ecology in James Graham Ballard's *The Drought*:

The Drought is an environmental disaster novel which intellectually set drought in a near future because nuclear and industrial wastes have covered the oceans, preventing evaporation and leading to world-wide aridity. The novel describes it as:

The mechanism of formation of these polymers remained obscure, but millions of tons of highly reactive industrial wastes-unwanted petroleum fractions, contaminated, catalysts and solvents- were still being vented into the sea, where they mingle with the wastes of atomic power stations and sewage schemas. Out of this brew the sea had constructed a skin no thicker than a few atoms, but sufficiently strong to devastate the lands it once irrigated. (37)

Here Ballard focuses the scientific reality of drought in the world. He also shows that human being is responsible for the disasters and imbalance in environment. The World wide drought is the culmination of a series of extended droughts that have taken place with increasing frequency all over the globe. In this fiction the protagonist describes the cause of drought as:

Covering the off-shore waters of the World's oceans, to a distance of about a thousand miles from the coast, was a thin but resilient mono-molecular film formed a complex of saturated long- chain polymers, generated within the sea from the vast quantities of industrial wastes discharged into the ocean basins during the previous fifty years. This tough, oxygen permeable membrane plays on

the air water interface and prevented almost all evaporation of surface water into the air space above. (36)

The above description reveals that the reason of water pollution and its adverse effects on rainfall. The problem of water scarcity is prevalent everywhere and it culminates into the world-wide drought. The drought has severely affected the agriculture sector. A critical shortage of World food-stuffs has occurred when the seasonal rainfall expected in a number of important agricultural areas has failed to materialize. A survey by United Nation Food and Agriculture Organization shows that everywhere river level and water level is decreasing day by day. The two and half million square miles drained by the Amazon has shrunk to less than half this area. Aerial surveys discover that the much of the former rain forest is already dry and petrified. Dr. Charles Ransom, protagonist of the novel surveys the drought affected areas and observes the corpses of hundred of fishes, voles and water fowl among the weeds. It means that the water pollution has not only affected agriculture and forest but also living things on the earth and in the water.

One more incident in this fiction shows that water has much importance because Negro avoids going with Ransom. When Ransom encounters old Negro and asks him to come with him, he says:

The Negro smiled, his great domed head veined like a teak globe of the earth. 'I (Negro) shall be a great burden to you, doctor. I would rather stay here than left by the roadside later. May I ask you to be honest with yourself?' (104)

The words of the Negro reveal that humanitarian considerations are becoming irrelevant in the catastrophic world. Everyone becomes self centered and selfish as Lomax. Everyone trying to get water and is trying for survival in parched world. Later on the old Negro dies because of scarcity of water. Many people died because of scarcity of water and Negro is representative of common people like him. There are no signs of movement of the wharfs and riverside streets but the roads are deserted. As Mount Royal and Hamilton are burnt, the habitants left them. Ransom thinks of the whole world as a kind of disaster area.

In the world of history the wars are fought for wealth or power but in this novel the author has shown or given warning to the people that in future there will be war for water. In the catastrophic world, struggle for existence and livelihood prevails due to shortage of water. When

Ransom reaches the sea coast, Grady claims for his priority for water. In the present novel the narrator describes the condition as:

The scattered shooting resumed, the soldiers firing over the heads of the hundreds of people moving straight towards the sea. Taking Catherine by the arm, Ransom pulled her towards the opening in the inner fence. Behind them, more bodies lay among the dunes, tumbled awkwardly in the coarse grass. (128)

The above incident reveals that people are trying their level best for getting water. They come out from the huts and follow the empty creeks for the water. As they bend down, rest before their final dash to the sea, man stands up in the blunt grass ten feet above them. With a raised pistol he begins to fire across the dunes, shooting straight at the people and drive back by the soldiers. The competition for the water becomes acute when it makes the soldiers murderous:

Looking up at him, Ransom recognized the stocky shoulders and pugnacious face. ‘Grady!’ he called. ‘Hold off, man!’ As they stumbled from their hiding – place Grady turned and searched the darkness below him. He leveled his pistol at them. He seemed to recognize Ransom, but gestured at him with the weapon. ‘Go back!’ he shouted hoarsely. ‘Keep off, we came here first!’(128)

People travel from one place to another for water and they fight for water. They not only fight for water but also steal water. Because of Grady’s arrogance, Ransom turns serious and shoots him. Besides Grady, Lomax putting on a show of dignity and warns Ransom not to steal water:

He (Ransom) looked up to find Lomax grimacing over him, silver topped cane in one hand. ‘Ransom...!’ He hissed. ‘Get out...!’ His suit was puffed up, the lapels flaring like the gills of an angry fish. ‘You’re stealing my water! Get Out!’ (223)

It indicates that there is competition for water and exploitation of common people like Old Negro. Lomax is stunned by the horror of this island infested by nightmares. The scenes of the novel reveals that water become a medium of exploitation, suppression and controlling power which is rightly described by Lorenz J. Firsching in his essay, *J.G. Ballard’s Ambiguous Apocalypse* (1985) as:

In sea side communities, water is a medium of exchange . . . and thus the instrument of exploitation. On the banks of the dying river (which Ransom has temporarily abandoned) Lomax (. . .) controls the remaining water as a means of

controlling those around him: so that water here becomes a medium or instrument for exercising political or economical power. (304)

In the novel *Ballard* by using the fantasy of natural catastrophe like draught, a result of man's obsession for the technological development, has focused the universal reality that in the catastrophic world the human actions are futile and of human relations are meaningless. The fantastic images of the desert wastes and the detritus of civilization are explored while focusing on the ecological stupidity of the modern man. Unlike many other contemporary fantasy fiction writers, Ballard is not only concerning his writing with the changes in the physical world but on the greater scale he deals with the psyche of the man in the decaying civilization. In the novel, the cultural conducts, religious codes and the emotional ties become meaningless in the face of the death. The novel emphasizes that how a man exists alone in the environment as civilization disappears, leaving him without the apparatus normally used to fill time with activity. Commenting on the environmental catastrophe in *The Drought*, Gopman in his *James Graham Ballard's Shattered World* (1982) describes:

Not only the physical constant of the human environment is destroyed, but also the constant which, in Ballard's view, connects the physical world with the mental. There is the destruction of Ransom's psyche, the burnt out world about him, and in addition the feeling that time has stopped, broken off. (386)

In this way Ballard correlates inner landscape with external landscape, the tragedy of perishing world keeps pace with psychological catastrophe of the personages, and herein stresses the greatness of novel. Thus the fantasy of the devastated landscapes is aimed to point out the metaphorical reflections of man's inner landscape.

Conclusions: It is man's fundamental attitude that he always tries to control Nature by adopting the scientific principles and the technological creations, but the history of human being shows that it is beyond his capacity. This novel reveals the degradation of environment and problems of livelihood created because of this in the modern world. In the novel this duel between the man and undefeated nature is explored by reflecting that how man's efforts are futile in the grip of the global drought. Despite world-wide attempts at cloud-seeding, the amount of rainfall continues to diminish. The seeding operations finally end when it is obvious that there is no rain and there are no clouds. At that point attention switches on to the ultimate source of rainfall-ocean surface, but efforts are feeble to save human race from water scarcity. Ballard has attributed the

psychological dimension to this fiction. He has employed fantasy as a mode to create apocalyptic world which embodies the elements of present society. In the present novel fantasy stresses and magnifies reality to view it in a more meaningful way. Fantasy is not turning away from reality but it is a powerful weapon to apprehend reality.

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