

Appraisal of an Eco-Critical Study J.G. Ballard's *The Crystal World*

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Abstract

James Graham Ballard is a twentieth-century novelist and his main concern is about the effect of the environment, both natural and synthetic upon the psyche. The present paper "Representing an Eco-Critical Study J.G. Ballard's *The Crystal World*" portrays how Ballard represents the window of Eco critical theory and how his novel *The Crystal World* exemplifies the contemporary disaster of climate change. It also presents environmental reality as a serious sign of contemporary society. In this novel, Ballard finds human deeds are the major cause of the natural disaster and human innumerable suffering. Deforestation is the assumption of national decay due to the radical development of science and technology. The novel *The Crystal World* revolves around the forest and its natural resources. The land is the ultimate entity being exploited without any mercy. However, in the central position of the land, all characters easily disregard land and its non-human living beings because humans conduct all their activities with the sole purpose of taking possession of earth's precious commodities. At the end of the novel, humans face an apocalypse delivered by none other than that which they came to possess. Thus, the apocalypse is also brought forward by the land in Ballard's uncanny narrative. The ecological conscience established a basis for land ethics.

Keywords: Eco-Critical, forest, natural resources, science, technology, apocalypse, climate change, natural disaster.

Introduction:

James Graham Ballard (1930–2009) was a contemporary British novelist, short story writer, essayist, and satirist. He is also considered by his readers as a science fiction writer, catastrophist, literary provocateur, war writer, and diagnostician of twentieth and twenty-first-century consumer society. Ballard was born in a British family in Shanghai, he experienced at childhood, growing up with a British identity in China. During the Japanese invasion of China, Ballard and his family were held captive for one year in a Japanese internment camp. It is often said that this had a great influence on his future writing career. While Ballard's novels appeal to a wide variety of topic and subject matter, it can be asserted that most of his works share bleak, gloomy and deeply psychological ambience. Ballard's writings consist of a wide variety of subject matter ranging from climate to psychological fiction and post-colonial narratives. His climate fiction novels of the 1960s in light of Eco- Critical literary theory in general and social Ecology in specific. Ballard's early novel represent the portrayal of catastrophes through wind, flood, and drought all stand for the most profound and clandestine aspirations of the human spirit.

Ballard's novels are largely taken up with their characters' attempts to adapt psychologically to radically altered environments that they seem to half perceive, half create. His fictions take place in 'inner space,' which has raised interesting problems for readers and critics alike. Ballard wrote of the symbols of inner space that they are 'time sculptures of terrifying ambiguity. The novel *The Crystal World* throws the quest of Edward Sanders, a medical doctor treating patients' leprosy in Cameroon, western Africa. While on duty, Sanders and his tea men counter bizarre phenomenon where jungles begin to crystallise together with their living population due to unknown reasons. Due to the lack of a land ethic and ecological conscience, humans tend to regard nature only for its exchange value rather than its actual intrinsic value. Only through the establishment of a land ethic may humans accept and acknowledge an ecological conscience that will lead to a better relationship between humans and the land. In *The Crystal World*, however, characters display a pragmatic and highly materialistic relationship with the land, disregarding and ignoring all components of the ecosystem and treating them as goods that ought to be taken in possession.

Review of Literature:

Cenk Tan.(2021) in his article "Land Ethic and Anthropocentrism in J. G. Ballard's *The Crystal World*" portrays how Ballard's *The Crystal World* narrates the unusual story of the protagonist Dr Edward Sanders, a medical doctor treating leprosy patients in Cameroon. He together with his friends encounters a strange phenomenon in the African jungle that slowly turns everything into the crystal. This study aims to interpret Ballard's *The Crystal World* through the view point of Aldo Leopold's land ethic and the notion of anthropocentrism. The theoretical section of this article gives a detailed account of Aldo Leopold's land ethic referring to various texts and sources. The land ethic proposes a formulation for the preservation of land from the perspective of environmental ethics whereas anthropocentrism insists on the central position of humans in the universe. This article also argues that through the allegorical narrative, Ballard deconstructs anthropocentric thought and reveals the immediate necessity for a land ethic by revealing the exploitation of land and

the exaltation of human speciesism. The article examines how Ballard deconstructs anthropocentrism in *The Crystal World* and exposes the necessity for a land ethic, combined with an ecological conscience.

Taylor, Jesse Oak (2018) in her article "The Novel After Nature, Nature After the Novel" highlights a broadening of the period of consideration for cli-fi to include four novels. Eco-critical studies of Ballard have thus far largely been concerned to demonstrate his place in the history of cli-fi, and his first four novels have been included in recent surveys of the burgeoning genre. These novels are contemporaneous with seminal works of environmental writing, most famously Rachel Carson's paean to the soon-to-be-DDT-exterminated birds in *The Silent Spring* (1962). Ballard's eco-disaster novels may seem far from a call to action. David Ian Paddy has noted that with their distinct lack of derring-do they subvert the stories of imperial adventure that Ballard was raised upon but, they are a call to a kind of radical *inaction*, combined with apocalyptic aesthetic attention. Jim Clarke has noted that to label these novels as cli-fi may be anachronistic. Such an ascription risks misrepresenting Ballard's major concerns during this period. The eco-critical focus on the first four novels does potentially elide the fundamental environmental concern of Ballard's entire oeuvre while also skewing the history of a genre/mode that was, in the first half of the 1960s, yet to be born. Nevertheless, it is difficult to argue with the climatological nature of these novels, and much may depend upon what exactly we mean by cli-fi, as well as how we choose to read the material causes for climatic change in these novels.

Baker, Brian. (2008) in his article 'The Geometry of the Space Age: J. G. Ballard's Short Fiction and Science Fiction of the 1960s' argues that *The Crystal World* explores the historical and imagined collapse of European imperialism in Africa following World War II. The swift nationalist uprising in Africa after World War II resulted in the independence of Cameroon from France in 1960, and twelve former British colonies became independent African republics between 1960 and 1966. The notions of colonialism/imperialism are not only discriminatory, racist and politically incorrect in many aspects, but also anthropocentric. As a consequence of imperialist activities, colonisers inflicted serious harm to the land and all non-human living beings as the sole purpose of colonialism was to grab the natural resources of colonised lands to make use of them in industry and for other purposes.

Lawrence Buell (1996) in his book, *The Future of Environmental Criticism* argues that two waves of Eco criticism. He asserts that Eco-Criticism has gone through a certain development by moving on from the first wave to the second. This progress neither caused nor a succession of the initial movement, nor a nullification of the preceding. The distinction between the first and second waves of Eco –criticism remains vague; the first wave of Eco-criticism is often defined to be descriptive and generally dealt with the relationship between literary texts and the natural environment. The first wave is said to begin with American nature writing. Thus, the first wave of Eco-criticism was more limited in both its scope and practice. The movement concentrated on several genres of writing, namely, "nature writing, nature poetry and wilderness fiction. The first wave generally advocated a philosophy of organism that would break down the hierarchical separations between human beings and other elements of the natural world. Thus, environmental awareness and taking action to preserve nature were the main priorities of the first wave of Eco-Criticism.

Discussion and Findings:

The term Eco-Criticism is derived from Greek with *Oikos* and *kritis* which translates to "house hold judge" in English to our astonishment. The term ecology was first formulated by German Zoologist Ernst Haeckel. After that, the Ecological Society of America was founded in 1920. Then, Ecological awareness flourished in the United States. In the Twentieth century, a new perception emerged and it implied that human development could ruin the environment, but this implication soon gave rise to a new form of consciousness for holding onto nature. The word Ecology represented a transition from *oikonomia* to *oikologia*, house mastery to house study. This was a vital change which affected the human perspective towards nature. Humanity assumed the role of dominator and now became an equal constituent of nature. Ecology is one of the main and basic principles of Eco-Criticism. It has a vital affiliation with the ancient verbal tradition mainly since for many centuries, natural sciences were strictly confined to vernacular roots. It became an acknowledged science in the Midwestern states of America. The Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 provided enormous fields of cultivation and with it came educational institutions for farming. This act supported agricultural activities in the Midwest and aimed at benefiting from the region's healing biodiversity. The pioneers of modern ecology were scientists from Wisconsin, Michigan and Illinois who were studying and wrote articles related to healing areas where plants and animals created biotic groups.

The developments in Eco-fiction are the results of the Ecology critical writings and the conscious knowledge that comes out with the impending disaster. In Ecological writings, the main aim is to evoke a love toward nature which is devalued or ignored a long time ago by industrialization, modern science, religion, and philosophy. Ecology is a kind of serious responsibility taken by writers and researchers. People as the most consuming creature on earth need to have limits and consciousness while benefitting from the limited sources of the generous earth. However, the competitions in consumption make human forget the existence of other creatures in nature. The duty of Eco-fiction writers' main aim is to raise awareness and remind humanity's role in the cycle, needs to be taken seriously. Local unawareness is not evaluated as a crucial issue; the disasters caused by local consuming communities affect the global environment. The solution is hidden in the local struggle which will be able to help global healing. As a result, Ecology writing ought to be global; it needs to be universal to be able to create a concurrent collaboration against blind consumers.

Eco-Criticism and Eco-Fiction are the main objects of the social awareness of nature. These fields of study can be handled as scientific fields, but their language is different from scientific writing as the language of science is dull and does not affect its reader emotionally. On the other hand, the representation of nature and impending disaster in Eco-fiction is more effective on the emotions of the reader. Although Eco-criticism made progress in industrialization, it has not had a real influence on the academic area. Some master programs provide lectures on Ecological issues. The destruction caused by humans and the resources manipulated by power holders is handled critically both in Eco-criticism and Eco-fiction. Eco-writing reveals the destructive power of mankind while providing new solutions for a better future. One of the main aims of Eco-writing is to demonstrate the deep relationship between humans and nature and create a longing for home through novels and stories based

on green. Therefore, the elements of Eco-fiction are the character and setting are determined. In this regard, four figures playing an important role in fiction including humans, nature, time, and place can be handled and hence a general view can be created.

Eco-apocalyptic literature evolves with the fluctuating and technological advancement of society. There is a marked transition from climate fiction written in the twentieth Century to environmental post-apocalyptic narratives in the twenty-first Century. The twentieth century faced quite different challenges, conflicts, and changes than the twenty-first Century faces. Despite the Clean Air Act passing in 1963 and the Clean Water in 1972, the climate change movement did not truly gain momentum until the 1990s, when some corporations and non-governmental organizations involved themselves in the blooming worldwide discussion on global warming. Most of the population had little understanding of climate change and its accompanying impacts and consequences. Contemporary society has more pressing issues to which to dedicate time, money, and technological advances. The twentieth-century writers have focused on events and issues like The Great Depression, World War II, the Vietnam War, and advancing atomic technology. Consequently, disaster narratives written in the twentieth century focused on socio-economic or nuclear apocalypse rather than an environmental or climate-driven apocalypse.

In *The Crystal World*, the catastrophe is not related to climatic causes but rather focuses on supernatural motives. The story takes place in the African continent where a mysterious phenomenon crystallizes all plant and animal life. An environment time itself comes to halt; this novel has a unique story of surrealist dystopian mayhem. The characters including Dr Sanders, exhibit ironical conduct throughout the narrative. In the novel, Dr Sanders is the protagonist of the novel, He questions his presence in Africa, he is there to treat patients, and the doctor virtually becomes a part of the exploitative system. The characters' longing for crystals and their mysterious attraction to the phenomenon of crystallisation is a symbolic metaphor referring to the author's criticism of humanity, those embracing modernity. The people head to the forests not to grab some crystals or stones but to become crystals. This is the case for some leper patients, the ill and the dying people that seem to rejoice from this phenomenon. In the end, father Balthus is seen playing his organ in the crystallising church: "In this forest, we see the final celebration of the Eucharist of Christ's body. Here everything is transfigured and illuminated, joined together in the last marriage of space and time" (TCW194). The novel ends and Sanders finds out that one-third of the world's surface will be covered in crystal shortly. He decides to face his destiny and returns to the forest. In addition, there are also several references to the notions of holism and wilderness in the novel. The crystallisation process spreads to other parts of the world, an emphasis on the holism of land is made in the novel. However, human colonisers especially spoil the wilderness, disrupting the harmony of nature and providing permanent damage to the ecosystem.

In *The Crystal World*, the force inevitably advancing is not the mass of oppressed people but some mysterious process that transmutes all organic matter into crystals. These crystals reflect in the chapter "The Garden of Time," drain light and motion, congeal time, and "deliquesce" in sparkling beauty when removed from their sustaining jungle environment. They are on their way to taking over and transforming the planet; no force will be able to stop them. The protagonist, Dr Edward Sanders, leaves his position as head of a

leprosarium, representing a selfless dedication to help fellow human beings, to become eventually a devotee of the crystal world. Sanders in the process of his conversion:

...there is an immense reward to be found in that frozen forest. There the transfiguration of all living and inanimate forms occurs before our eyes, the gift of immortality a direct consequence of the surrender by each of us of our own physical and temporal identities. However apostate we may be in this world, there perforce we become apostles of the prismatic sun. (TCW 154)

All this may seem exactly the opposite of the historical movement of "The Garden of Time." But then we need to take a close look at the historical and geographical setting for *The Crystal World*.

The story of the novel is set very neatly on the equator and at the vernal equinox. This place and time have large symbolic significance in Ballard's cosmological yearnings. The place is Africa, and the time is during the rising tide of the wars of national liberation sweeping across the continent. At the end of the second World War, the vast lands of Africa were almost owned by a handful of tiny European countries -- England, France, Belgium, Spain, and Portugal. Both England and France possessed over two-thirds of the continent. Most of the countries of Africa had attained their independence, and liberation struggles were spreading rapidly in the others. The empire of Ballard's nation was crumbling almost week by week. In the nine years preceding the book, thirteen of Britain's African possessions broke loose from the empire. Although England purported to be "giving" these lands their freedom voluntarily, it was bowing to the rising rebellions of the African peoples themselves, spearheaded by the armed struggle of the Mau Mau in Kenya and inspired by the Pan-African socialist ideology of leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah and Julius Nyerere. In 1966, several of these newly independent nations, including Nigeria, Ghana, and Tanzania, were helping to provide worldwide leadership for the emerging non-aligned African-Asian-Latin American bloc in their accelerating attacks against British, European, and U.S. imperialism. These facts are hardly irrelevant to Ballard's story or its symbolic content since he introduces into *The Crystal World* the subjects of imperialism in Africa, including the role of European mining companies and the rebellions against the European empires.

The novel is set explicitly in the Cameroon Republic, though Ballard has changed the country to suit his symbolism. Dr Sanders is arriving in the fictional Port Matarre on a steamer from Libreville, not the Cameroons that sits astride the equator. Ballard's fictional Cameroon Republic is still under French military control, though in actuality the country had become politically independent in 1960. The main industry is diamond mining, under the control of European corporations, though the Cameroon Republic has, in fact, virtually no mining for jewels. Diamond mining has something to do with Ballard's main theme and main symbols. There are: "the French-owned mining settlements, with their overzealous security men" (TCW 17), and there: are "warehouses bearing the names of the mining companies" (TCW 55). "...the diamond companies don't intend to let anything get in their way" (TCW 81). The rain forests begin to crystallize, huge jewels are smuggled out, causing the mining companies: "share prices on the Paris Bourse" to soar "to fantastic heights" (TCW 58). When a man is sent to investigate, the "vested interests" see to it that he ends up in the river. The "natives" smuggle out fantastically jewelled leaves and branches and sell them as commodities in the town marketplace. Two explicit themes are the self-destructing search for

El Dorado and the myth of Midas. In the face of man's frantic efforts to rip up the earth in the search for wealth in the form of crystals, nature seems to respond by crystallizing all of it including man. It is: "time with the Midas touch" (TCW 75). People are at first responding by converting the products of this fabulous process into commodities and cash as they do ordinarily with gems.

Ballard relates these symbols directly to the African liberation movements -- in opposition to them. In the novel, the crystal plants have a function very close to those in the chapter "The Garden of Time." Dr Sanders' new-found lover, a Frenchwoman, darkly tells him "some kind of humiliation" she had experienced in the Congo: "during the revolt against the central government after independence, when she and several other journalists had been caught in the rebel province of Katanga by mutinous gendarmerie" (TCW 36). The Katanga revolt was of course financed by the European mining companies. The same "mutinous gendarmerie" was to become an anti-imperialist force, fighting in Angola, first against Portugal and then against the C.I.A.-supported invaders from Zaire and South Africa, returning later to Zaire as revolutionary socialists.

In Ballard's imagination revolutionaries exist only as some dark, sinister force committing unmentionable acts on lone white women. The anti-imperialist forces in Ballard's semi-imaginary Cameroons may actually, and at least symbolically, have triggered the crystallization process that freezes time and history. The process had begun upriver, at the emerald and diamond mines around the symbolically named settlement of Mont-Royal. Shortly before, the rebel forces had occupied precisely these locations. When Sanders arrives, he finds: "this isolated corner of the Cameroon Republic was still recovering from an abortive coup ten years earlier, when a handful of rebels had seized the emerald and diamond mines at Mont Royal, fifty miles up the Matarre River" (TCW 10). This "inner landscape" is a projection of historical, as well as psychological events. This is: "a landscape without time" (TCW 14), the fond hope of Count Axel and all others seeking to freeze history. At first, when Count Axel plucks his crystal flowers from his garden of time. He can make the "concourse of labouring humanity," that advancing vulgar "mob" and "rabble," actually disappear. As Dr Sanders, the agent of Ballard's odyssey, succeeds in losing himself in the crystal forest of a mythical Africa, Ballard can make the liberation movements of the twentieth century, fitly represented by the African anti-colonial forces, actually disappear at least in his fiction. Sanders want to stop time, so he plunges into the time-congealed crystal world.

The novelist Ballard shows in the chapter "The Garden of Time" the inner meaning of the desire to stop time is to stop history. He also shows in the story that the inner meaning of the desire to stop history is to stop the revolution to preserve archaic privilege and order. Ballard also directly presents his images of the people in revolt in our century, the people dismembering his empire and leaving many British intellectuals, including himself, with the deepest convictions that the apocalypse has come and the whole world is dying. These images are so disgustingly racist that they might embellish a Ku Klux Klan rally. J.G. Ballard seems terrified by the image of the unleashing of the non-white masses, just as Count Axel is horrified by the thought of the unleashing of the labouring masses.

In the chapter "Mulatto on the catwalks" the readers speak of the unspeakable outrages of the Katangan gendarmerie, Dr. Sanders is for the first time attacked by a murderous

mulatto, who moves: "with the speed of a snake" (TCW41). This "giant mulatto" (TCW 83), reappears with another assassin, a knife-wielding "Negro" with a "bony pointed face," to ambush Sanders in a maze of images reflected in the mirrors of an elegant European mansion out in the crystallized rain forest. Later in the chapter entitled "Duel with a crocodile" highlights a crystallizing crocodile sidles clumsily toward Sanders. He almost fails to note the gun barrel between the jewelled teeth. The bejewelled crocodile is merely the latest disguise for the treacherous mulatto hidden inside. Sanders kill him, and pauses briefly over the body with its glistening "black skin." The only civilized Black person in *The Crystal World* turns out to be one of the treacherous accomplices in this attack on Sanders, and he too must be disposed of by a shot from a white man.

Conclusion:

In *The Crystal World*, the deconstruction of anthropocentrism occurs in two ways: with the colonisation of the lands and through the unknown phenomenon of crystallisation. The exploitation of the lands deconstructs the anthropocentric human spirit within the context of the white presence in Africa and forms a means for the deconstruction of anthropocentrism. The actual reason for their presence is implied by the author several times in the story through the words like mining, gold, jewels, diamonds, and rubies. Hence, precious stones and natural resources constitute the most significant motive for the white man's presence in Africa. At the end of the novel, Sanders fully comprehends and comes up with the actual reason for his questing Africa. He is a mere collaborator in the systematic abuse of western Africa's natural sources.

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