

Prophecy on the Trending Ecological Issues in J.G. Ballard's *The Drowned World*

Dr. G. Kalaivani, Assistant Professor of English, Sourashtra College, Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India.

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Abstract

Climate Fiction, popularly known as Cli-fi, is a fast-growing branch of science fiction. This genre of fictional writing deals with the effects of climate change, especially global warming, on human society. Climate influences nature, and nature in turn is influenced by humans. I mean to elaborate that nature is very much influenced by the activities of man. The man-made (anthropocentric) climate occupies a larger space in the environment we live. It is indeed essential at this point to deliberate on the ecological issues faced globally. Learning Environment, Understanding Environment and Protecting Environment take a major space in education nowadays. We need to feel sorry for having failed to protect the environment, wherein we live in recent years. As a result, people throughout the world face ecological issues and natural disasters like earthquakes, drought, tsunamis, floods, rise in sea level, melting of glaciers, avalanches and others. Having the ecological concern and responsibilities, there emerged many writers who focus on ecology, ecological issues, climate change and Global warming. My paper here aims to throw light on one of the earlier written Cli-fi novels by English writer J.G. Ballard titled "The Drowned World". This novel brings a clear picture of the Post-apocalyptic future in which global warming has caused the majority of the Earth to be uninhabitable. This novel has the setting of unrecognisable London in the year 2145. Man versus nature is a great challenge. Man has become null and the helpless victim of a changing climate as they attempt to adapt to the new landscape. The future of humans on our planet is questionable. Gradually, the change of climate and Global Warming make the earth uninhabitable. The issue has a global spectrum, and in recent days, Climate change and Global Warming have become an important agenda in almost all the conferences of global importance. The Paris agreement of UNFCCC held on 1 April 2016 means a lot here. The then-prophet J.M. Ballard rightly predicted the Post-apocalyptic future in which global warming has caused the majority of the earth to be uninhabitable in his novel "The Drowned World". I would like to concentrate here on the ecological issues and the fear of humans towards ecology and the environment.

Keywords: Anthropocentric, Cli-fi Novels, Paris Agreement, Post-apocalyptic.

Introduction

The literary movement "Cli-Fi" is modelled after the term "Sci-Fi". It refers to any fictional work written about the effects of climate change and global warming. The 1800s scientists have been studying the greenhouse effect. A Swedish chemist named Svanta, in the year 1896, reported that man-made innovations and technology were contributing vastly to the warming of the planet. The term "Global warming" was coined by an oceanographer named Wallace Smith in the year 1975. The most successful new genre of Anglophone fiction is climate fiction. The term "Cli-fi" was first coined and used by journalist Dan Bloom. He used the phrase "The Cli-Fi report" for the very first time on his website. Later in the 2000's the term got its position in his definitive study, "Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change". In the 21st Century, the study of climate has gained

prominence. In a few universities, it has also been included in the part of their curriculum, as it is the need of the hour for the young minds to understand the causes, effects and the consequences of climate change. There are many successful authors of Climate Fiction. The writers like Margaret Atwood, Amitav Ghosh, Lydia Millet, and Kim Stanley Robinson have contributed much to this new genre with their sustained efforts. They have discussed the issues, expressed concern over the drastic changes, elaborated on the causes and dwelt in detail over the overwhelming consequences of global warming in their works.

Critical Analysis

James Graham Ballard, an English novelist, short story writer, and essayist, was the one who got closely associated with the new wave of science fiction, for his post-apocalyptic novels like *The Wind from Nowhere* and *The Drowned World*. J.G. Ballard has proved to be the source of inspiration for this new genre. He published his novel titled “**Drowned World**” in the year 1962, which pictures a post-apocalyptic future, in which global warming has caused the majority of the Earth to become uninhabitable. The later novels of Ballard concentrated on themes like chaotic breakdowns in civilisation, modes of perception, unconscious urges, dominance of mankind over the environment and others. The novel *The Drowned World* has its adaptation from a short story titled “**Science Fiction Adventures**”. It is one of the first works of Cli-Fi novels, which present a prescient warning about global warming and its impact on Earth’s atmosphere and ecosystems.

Brian Baker, a critic, has stated that “Drowned World” is one of the Cli-Fi novels which “explore the deep implications of time, space, psychology, and evolutionary biology to dismantle anthropocentric narratives”. The novel that I have taken for my discussion is “*The Drowned World*” by James Graham Ballard, which has its setting in a future London in the year 2145. The novel presupposes that the city of London gets completely submerged in the ocean due to climate change. A group of scientists get involved in studying the rapidly evolving flora and fauna. Dr. Robert Kerans, the protagonist of this novel, is involved in a mission. He heads a multi-disciplinary scientific survey team to the coral reef. He wants to create a report on the changes in biological activity in the region. When the team arrives in flooded London, they are troubled by unprecedented and terrifying dreams. Hardman, one of the team members, hears that they will be instructed soon to move North along with the army. Without informing them, he escapes and moves towards the South. The team is now involved in finding him out but it ends in vain. Dr. Kerans and two of his colleagues, Beatrice and Dr. Bodkin, remain in London. They all fall into a state of reclusion and philosophical obsession with analysing the environmental regression.

A neo-pirate named Strangman appears in the scene. His crew has set out in flooded London to loot the treasure from its depths. The arrival of Strangman’s crew destabilises Kerans. Strangman’s team installs flood barriers that drain water from London. Bodkin tries to destroy the barriers but in vain. In retribution, Strangman finds and kills Bodkin. Strangman is angry and, as a result, he captures Beatrice and uses her as bait to capture and kill Kerans. Despite all, he flees and reaches South, where he meets the visionless Hardman. They part ways after a short period. Hardman leads north to safety and Kerans south. At the end of the novel, Kerans is mindlessly wandering, lost in the blighted landscapes where humans once lived. The narrator refers to him as “the second Adam” for he searches for the forgotten paradises of the reborn “Sun”. Kerans is bent on discovering that some form of post-human paradise awaits him at the end of the journey.

The Drowned World laments that no such place would be possible for living if climate change continues to play out. Ballard had predicted the future of this universe some

fifty years before. The causes, effects and feelings of global warming were discussed much earlier by Ballard in his *Drowned World*, which in turn has become the hot topic of discussion worldwide nowadays. Many studies and research have proven that the Earth is slowly becoming a place of habitation. The reason is that climate change has affected every country and every continent. It is a sad part that climate change has affected not only the lives of people but also the national economies. It is getting worse dearly today and even more tomorrow. People worldwide are experiencing the significant impacts of climate change, which include changes in weather patterns, a rise in sea level, melting of glaciers, tsunamis, earthquakes and other extreme weather events. The greenhouse gases, the result of human activities, are one of the main reasons that affect the Earth's atmosphere. Global warming and climate change a global challenges that do not respect national borders. Emissions anywhere affect people everywhere. It is an issue that requires solutions that need to be coordinated at the international level, and it requires international cooperation to help developing countries move toward a low-carbon economy.

The Drowned World is written as an alarm to wake the people and make them cautious of the dreadful threat that awaits us. But people are a little worried about that. The man-made nature disturbs the entire ecology. People across the globe are heavily inclined towards modernity. Consequently, they depend much on machines and not on humanity. Martin Amis states that "It is the measure of [Ballard's] creative radicalism that he welcomes these desperate dystopias with every atom of his being," but criticized the novel's perfunctory plotting, stating that "We conclude that Ballard is quite unstipulated by human interaction – unless it takes the form of something inherently weird, like mob atavism or mass hysteria. What excites him is human isolation." Yes, that is very true. Since the isolation of human beings is witnessed at every stage and every age. We can see that people nibbling on electronic gadgets have forgotten what is happening around them. The introverted attitude of everyman makes him think only of his self and nothing beyond that. The increased use of automobiles, electrical and electronic gadgets is the main reason that warms the climate. Every year, the average temperature level exceeds, and as a result, the poorest and the most vulnerable people are being affected on a large scale. Ballard rightly quotes, "What our children have to fear is not the cars on the highways of tomorrow but our pleasure in calculating the most elegant parameters of their deaths". To initiate with the UNO has decided to come up with a proposal for reducing global temperature. Many countries have joined hands to support this noble initiative. We need to have a detailed understanding of what the Paris Agreement is and why there is a need for the implementation of the Paris Agreement. The Paris Agreement is an agreement within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), dealing with greenhouse gas emissions, mitigation, adaptation, and finance, signed in 2016. It is essential for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, and provides a roadmap for climate actions that will reduce emissions and build climate resilience. What does it aim to do? The countries that have signed the Paris Agreement have agreed to limit global temperature rise to well below 2 degrees Celsius. Instead of this, a worldwide program on "Global Warming and Climate Change" was commenced on September 20, 2019. To instruct the young minds on the growing challenges of climate change, lectures, workshops, and demonstrations have been conducted.

It is not just easy to stop using vehicles and electronic gadgets and turn back to the old ages. But there can be certain limitations in usage. To avoid the high use of carbon, some countries have adopted the method of "NO VEHICLE IN A DAY". In connection with this

an affordable, scalable solutions are now available to enable countries to leapfrog to cleaner and more resilient economies. The pace of change is quickening as more people are turning towards renewable energy and a range of other measures that will reduce emissions and increase adaptation efforts. This has well much experimented with the invention of the e-motor facility for transportation. Every citizen must take care of the “pancha poothas” (air, land, water, wind, sky). We can see many projects like tilting land, excavation, high emission of hydrocarbons, polluting air through industries and factories, nuclear bomb explosions and other activities going on in and around our dwelling places that question the longevity of man’s life. The day has come when the entire humankind is facing challenges to live. Unless and until we find a solution to preserve and protect our Earth’s atmosphere, it is going to be a great challenge for humans to live on this Earth. As we stated previously, we are slowly losing space on Earth to live. I am sure if we fail to have ecological concern, then the Earth will not be a place for humans to inhabit.

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