

## An Ecofeminist Interpretation of J.G. Ballard's *The Drowned World*

J.G. Ballard'ın *The Drowned World* Romanının Ekofeminist Okuması

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## **An Ecofeminist Interpretation of J.G. Ballard's *The Drowned World*<sup>1</sup>**

**Cenk TAN**

### **Abstract**

J.G. Ballard is one of the most influential British authors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Renowned for his surrealist works of fiction, Ballard delivered the primary examples of climate fiction. *The Drowned World* is J.G. Ballard's second novel of a post-apocalyptic quadrilogy. The novel tells the story of a scientist's quest for survival amidst a global flood. Moreover, Beatrice Dahl happens to be the only woman left alive in London and the sole woman character of the novel itself. To that end, ecofeminism is a comprehensive theory which combines feminist thought with the school of ecocriticism. *The Drowned World* is a novel that incorporates notions of social ecofeminism through the character of Beatrice. This article aims to provide a social ecofeminist analysis of Ballard's *The Drowned World* by focusing on the character of Beatrice Dahl. All in all, the relationship between patriarchal capitalism and the oppression of women and nature is exposed in the article with specific references to the novel.

**Keywords:** J.G. Ballard, Ecofeminism, *The Drowned World*, Climate Fiction, Apocalyptic Fiction, Karen J. Warren

## **J.G. Ballard'ın *The Drowned World* Romanının Ekofeminist Okuması**

### **Özet**

J.G. Ballard 20. yüzyılın en etkili İngiliz yazarları arasındadır. Gerçeküstü eserleriyle tanınan Ballard, iklim kurgunun önde gelen örneklerine imza atmıştır. *The Drowned World* J.G. Ballard'ın felaket sonrası dönleminin ikinci romanıdır. Roman, küresel çapta bir sel felaketi esnasında bir bilim insanının hayatta kalabilme mücadelesini anlatmaktadır. Buna ek olarak, Londra'da hayatta kalan ve romanın da tek kadın karakteri olan Beatrice Dahl dikkat çekmektedir. Bu bağlamda, ekofeminizm, feminist düşünce ile ekoeleştiri kuramını bir araya getiren kapsamlı bir teoridir. *The Drowned World* romanı Beatrice karakteri aracılığıyla sosyal ekofeminizme ait kavramları bünyesinde barındırmaktadır. Makale, Beatrice Dahl karakterine odaklanarak, *The Drowned World*'ü sosyal ekofeminist pencereden analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Böylece, ataerkil kapitalizm ile kadınların maruz kaldıkları baskılar arasındaki ilişki romana yapılan göndermelerle açığa çıkarılmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** J.G. Ballard, Ekofeminizm, *The Drowned World*, İklim Kurgu, Apokaliptik Kurgu, Karen J. Warren

<sup>1</sup> I hereby declare that this article has been distracted from the dissertation of mine entitled "An Ecocritical Study of J.G. Ballard's Climate Fiction Novels" and it includes the literary and theoretical analyses scrutinised within the scope of my doctoral study.

### Introduction

Published in the early 1960s as the second novel of a quadrilogy, *The Drowned World* deals with a global flood that completely alters the world's natural balance and establishes the foundation of a new world with new players. The plot takes place in a distant future, in the year 2145 and with the rise of the ocean levels, the climatic balance of the Earth has been disrupted and most of the habitable regions have been flooded, leaving the Polar circles as the only location where human life can be sustained. The former habitable areas have regressed into the tropical region with extremely high temperatures. The protagonist of the novel, Dr. Robert Kerans is part of a scientific squad which is given the mission to do research in the flooded city of London (Orr, 2000: 484). The novel mainly concentrates on the apocalyptic setting and its effects on human beings while at the same time exploring the quest for survival in a flooded world that is ruined by the oppressive system of capitalism.

This article analyses J.G. Ballard's work of climate fiction, *The Drowned World* from a social ecofeminist perspective and its purpose is to expose the relationship between patriarchal capitalism and the oppression of women and nature through the only female character; Beatrice. Through Beatrice, it is revealed how and in what ways, the oppression of women and natural areas are interconnected. Ecofeminism is employed in this article because prevalent parallelisms exist between the condition of women and the state of the natural environment. Additionally, similar connections prevail between ecofeminism and environmental preservation/security. In specific, the study focuses on the setting, (global ecological disaster-flood) the characters and the relationships between them within the context of the novel's plot.

### An Overview of Ecofeminism

As a theory, ecofeminism was formulated in the mid-1970s by Françoise d'Eaubonne and it was mainly specified as the combination of ecology and the women's movement. As a sub-branch of feminism, ecofeminists shared the belief that feminism alone ignored many other issues and was not comprehensive enough to meet the needs of its supporters (Bennett, 2005: 63). Ecofeminism is an extensive thought which: "touches on subjects as diverse as nature-based religion; animal rights; women's rights; environmental worries about water, land, and air pollution; wildlife conservation; and the oppression of Third World countries and peoples by the United States and other industrialised nations" (Bennett, 2005: 63). Thus, it can

be asserted that ecofeminism is holistic in nature and encompasses a great variety of social concerns ranging from environmental issues to animal rights, protection of nature and minority rights.

Ecofeminism consists of two distinct characteristics: holism and the annihilation of hierarchy (2005: 64). Holism is described as the doctrine which affirms that all living beings on this planet are related to and cannot be disconnected from one another. In addition, hierarchy is regarded as the main cause of conflicts and human oppression. Hierarchy is associated with patriarchy which is considered the primary responsible for all types of conflict and struggle among human beings. Despite the fact that pre-history and mythology are shaped by matriarchal culture; "patriarchy challenges and replaces everything which powerful women handle" (Ekmekçi, 2019: 210). Therefore, it is believed that the annihilation of hierarchy and patriarchy is bound to create a better and peaceful world. Ecofeminists argue that: "valuing one kind of life over another will keep the hierarchy firmly entrenched, leaving traditionally defined "male" qualities-physical power, mechanistic ability, analytical and linear thinking-to be affirmed over "female" qualities-empathy, sensuality, emotion" (Bennett, 2005: 64).

In short, it is obvious that a ground-breaking, revolutionary change of spirit is imperative in order to provide the application of ecofeminism whose priority forms the eradication of hierarchy. Instead of being a simple theory, ecofeminism comes forward as a complex philosophical notion that engages literary texts as a tool to articulate and transmit its concepts and messages to the public (2005: 68). Ecofeminist texts appear in a great many genres among which are science fiction, fantastic fiction and autobiographical writing. Ecofeminist writing challenges conformist forms of fiction by deconstructing hierarchical focal points and reciprocal relations (2005: 68).

Since ecofeminism emerged from within the feminist movement, it needs to be stated that there exists many variations within ecofeminism (Alonso, 2013: 69). Liberal, Cultural/Radical, Social, Spiritual and Socialist ecofeminisms constitute the five branches of ecofeminism. Despite all its variations, the notion of ecofeminism serves as an umbrella term that encompasses all these sub-branches and all variations of this philosophy agrees that there is a deep bond between the subordination of women and nature (2013: 69). Renowned ecofeminist Karen J. Warren asserts that: "because all feminists do or must oppose the logic of domination which keeps oppressive conceptual frameworks in place, all feminists

must also oppose any isms of domination that are maintained and justified by that logic of domination” (1997: 21). Warren also defends that ecofeminism is an extensive movement which includes women of all races, ethnic origins and classes mainly due to the fact that all of these categorisations have been oppressed by the patriarchal order (1997: 4). In short, all types of domination are similar to and enforce one another. Therefore they are difficult to categorise but nevertheless there is one type of domination that comes before all other types which is the oppression of women that was the original domination in human society, from which all other hierarchies—of rank, class, and political power—flow (King, 1995: 20).

King contemplates that the oppression of women marks the focal and beginning point of all types of oppression as she prioritises the domination of women over all other types of hierarchical constructs. From the five sub-branches of ecofeminism, social ecofeminism is the notion that will mainly be applied in this article. Social ecofeminism emerged from environmental activist Murray Bookchin’s theory of social ecology. The movement’s main objective is to set women free from the captivating, hegemonic grip of patriarchy:

They believe that it is necessary to overturn the economic and social hierarchies that make of life a market society. Social ecofeminism wants women to liberate themselves and become part of society as free participants in public life and local municipal workplaces (Alonso, 2013: 72).

Thus, social ecofeminists purport that to provide full equality between human beings, every single notion that is a product of patriarchy, including the capitalist free market needs to be done away with. All patriarchal constructs are the creations that limit, captivate and oppress women from becoming equal human beings in the society. As a consequence, it is the main objective of social ecofeminism to bring down all economic and social affiliations that impose patriarchal constructs and hierarchical distinctions on human beings. Hence, ecofeminism strives to set women free from all limitations and liberate them to become equals with men in the society. In addition, Pelin Kümbet puts forward that: “an androcentric mentality and attitude has been identified behind the problem of achieving social justice in cases of environmental destruction and exploitation of women” (2012: 182). Additionally, scholar Yan Wu maintains that: “ecofeminism is a multicultural perspective that stresses the interconnection between the domination and exploitation of nature and women, asserting that the root cause of the ecological crisis results from both anthropocentrism and androcentrism” (Wu, 2020: 32). Thus, it attempts to emancipate both women and nature in order to establish a sustainable

society where not only women and men but all living beings can coexist peacefully (2020: 32). Therefore: "ecofeminist theory informs a deep social justice that rejects this insufficient, business-as-usual approach within the social work profession. Deep social justice, on the other hand, is conscious of both social and environmental justice" (Klemmer and McNamara, 2019: 9).

Moreover, a groundbreaking work in ecofeminism is the book with the same name written by Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies. Published in 1993 and republished in 2014, the book has become one of the most fundamental works in the area of ecofeminism. In her review on Shiva's work, scholar Christina Holmes expresses that: "ecofeminism illuminates problematic relations across sexes; it traces how specific kinds of economic and cultural activity in a region leave a devastating mark on the environment that is disproportionately borne by the region's poor" (2016: 111). Holmes also argues that capitalist patriarchy is sustained by scientific, technological and knowledge production (2016: 111). In *Ecofeminism*, Shiva and Mies put forward many vital ideas and discuss significant issues concerning the condition of patriarchal capitalism. At the conclusion of the work, it is emphasised that men and society have to be de-militarised:

Only a society based on a subsistence perspective can afford to live in peace with nature, and uphold peace between nations, generations and men and women, because it does not base its concept of a good life on the exploitation and domination of nature and other people (Shiva and Mies, 2014: 322).

Another essential connection between ecofeminism and the environment is environmental security. Scholars Batrićević and Paunović argue that: "ecofeminist movements can have a crucial role in designing ecological and security policies aimed at environment conservation, sustainable development, environmental, social and gender justice" (2019: 134). Hence, ecofeminism is not simply a theoretical framework which aims to describe and reveal the oppression between women and nature but also provides the necessary means for the preservation and protection of the natural environment. Ecofeminism's influence in terms of gender issues is mostly apparent in climate change policies in the form of tackling climate change through gender perception and achieving gender equity (Hemmanti and Röhr, 2009: 156). All in all, ecofeminism is a broad, multi-disciplinary theory which aims to expose the oppression between women and nature and struggles to establish new ways to defend the environment through a woman centered approach. Thus, the liberation of women is a primary requirement for the preservation of natural areas.

### ***The Drowned World as an Ecofeminist Narrative***

In Ballard's *The Drowned World*, the protagonist, Dr. Robert Kerans is assisted by Dr. Alan Bodkin, Colonel Riggs and his pilot Lieutenant Hardman. The novel's main antagonist is an intriguing character named Strangman and lastly there is also a woman who goes by the name of Beatrice Dahl. Beatrice has the unique quality of being not only the only woman left in the drowned city of London, but also the only woman character in the entire novel. In the early pages, Beatrice is mentioned as she:

Lay back on one of the deck chairs, her long oiled body gleaming in the shadows like a sleeping python. The pink-tipped fingers of one hand rested lightly on an ice-filled glass on a table beside her, while the other hand turned slowly through the pages of a magazine. (Ballard, 2010: 25).

She is depicted as a relaxed, careless person who tries to live life to the fullest despite the catastrophic setting. Beatrice insists on her joyful and individualistic lifestyle which she is determined to carry on no matter what happens. Ballard entrusts some negative characteristics on her by naming her a traitorous and unreliable woman who is after deceiving men (Clement, 2016: 61). Ballard compares her to a "sleeping python" which enforces the negative connotation attributed by the author. Beatrice is directly blamed for being a snake-like character and portrayed in an openly sexist manner. As the Earth experiences a reversion to the Triassic stage, those who are left alive also go through a process where they ascribe new roles to one another. Ballard makes several implications to the creation myth of Adam and Eve. While Kerans assumes the role of Adam, Beatrice becomes his Eve:

The birth of a child had become a comparative rarity, and only one marriage in ten yielded any offspring. As Kerans sometimes reminded himself, the genealogical tree of mankind was systematically pruning itself, apparently moving backwards in time, and a point might ultimately be reached where a second Adam and Eve found themselves alone in a new Eden (Ballard, 2010: 23).

The notion of going back in time creates a mysterious atmosphere while at the same time establishing an allusion to the early stages of our Earth and human kind. In this apocalyptic setting, children are no longer or very rarely born which causes a drastic decline in the human population. The Biblical references to Eden and Adam and Eve, reflect Kerans' inner dreams of becoming the last man alive on Earth to fulfil the sacred mission of providing humanity's continuance. Robert

Kerans' ambition in claiming such a mission is not because he wants to save the human race, but rather owing to the fact that he is after becoming a hero in a time of global disaster and complete destruction (Clement, 2016: 61). Therefore, it can be stated that Kerans acts out of pure personal interest rather than the common good.

Beatrice, on the other hand is a monotonous and dull woman that everyone is eager to possess. She is generally tedious, disoriented, obedient and reckless but nevertheless seductive in physical terms. As it is the case with most of the characters in *The Drowned World*, Beatrice exhibits signs of an inconsistent mental condition. At the beginning of the story, Kerans wants to join an expedition of scientists on a journey to Greenland but gets dissuaded from leaving when: "Beatrice looked away for a moment. Oh, nothing. I've just had one or two peculiar nightmares recently. Robert, seriously—if I decide to stay on here, would you? You could share this apartment. Kerans grinned. Trying to tempt me, Bea?" (Ballard, 2010: 28).

Ballard's word choice to describe the conversation between these two characters is worth noting. Kerans assumes the role of an artificial father figure but also puts Beatrice in a weak and subordinate position, as if she is in desperate need of help and assistance. Kerans flatters Beatrice by reminding her of the fact that she is not only the only woman left but also the only beautiful woman left alive in London. Ballard's references to Adam and Eve continue in a rather ironic fashion. Kerans' attitude towards Beatrice is condescending and dishonouring at large. Beatrice's only worth and meaning is her physical appearance and female sexuality. She is being treated in an overtly sexist manner but does not exactly seem to be bothered by this. Her degradation and intimidation as a human starts right from the early pages: "Beatrice pulled off her sunglasses, then tightened the loose back-straps of her bikini under her arms. Her eyes glinted quietly. All right, you two, get on with it. I'm not a strip show" (Ballard, 2010: 25).

In these lines, Beatrice is treated as a sexual commodity rather than a human being and to our surprise she neither responds emotionally, nor shows any sign of anger to this kind of treatment. She seems to take this kind of sexist behaviour for granted. Another scholar of ecofeminism affirms that "the boundary conditions specify that an ecofeminist ethic must be anti-sexist, anti-racist, anti-classist, anti-naturist, and opposed to any 'ism' that presupposes or advances a logic of domination" (Warren, 2000: 99). The same scholar also contends that "the basic starting point of ecofeminist philosophy is that the dominations of women, other human others, and nonhuman nature are interconnected, are wrong, and ought to be



eliminated” (2000: 155). Warren thus strongly advocates that the dominance and subordination of women and nature are consistent with one another. Another scholar, Yan Liu maintains that in the patriarchal system: “nature is regarded as the object of conquest and utilisation, as well as a tool for servicing person. And slavery and destruction of nature will inevitably lead to the imbalance of the whole ecosystem” (2021: 216). Ballard’s narrative is identical to Liu’s description as nature is regarded and treated as a mere object, a commodity to possess and exploit.

In J.G. Ballard’s *The Drowned World*, Beatrice’s state is homogenous to the condition of nature. In the year 2145, the Earth has been damaged by human industrial activities, causing a series of natural disasters which in their turn leads to a global flood. Earth is under the siege of the aggressive, patriarchal, free trade market economy. Beatrice on the other hand, is similarly and constantly under the attack of men and the main reason why she is valued is because of her sexuality. Right from the beginning until the very end of the novel, Beatrice is treated as an object, a mere commodity that men want to add to their private property. When Riggs tries to persuade Beatrice to abandon London, she refuses and decides to stay with Kerans: “Beatrice can be difficult sometimes, he temporised, hoping that she hadn’t offended Riggs. She’s a complex person, lives on many levels. Until they all synchronise she can behave as if she’s insane” (Ballard, 2010: 16).

Besides being treated as a sex object, Beatrice is also ascribed certain negative features like being complex, insane and troublesome. Her complex nature is regarded as a problem that needs to be taken care of, in other words, an anomaly that does not conform to the standards of the patriarchal and capitalist society. To achieve a better understanding of her personality, Beatrice’s past needs to be examined closely:

She had been brought up under the supervision of the grandfather, who had been a lonely, eccentric tycoon and a great patron of the arts in his earlier days. His tastes leaned particularly towards the experimental and bizarre, and Kerans often wondered how far his personality and its strange internal perspectives had been carried forward into his granddaughter (Ballard, 2010: 29).

To that end, Beatrice does not come to being autonomously but is rather created through the forces besieging her. Since her childhood, Beatrice has been highly subordinated and subjected to her grandfather, an opulent father figure that has had ultimate authority over her. Growing up in a patriarchal bourgeois surrounding enabled her to enjoy all the privileges of a wealthy lifestyle. However,

as a prisoner of this patriarchal machine, Beatrice has been raised obedient and passive, disabled of opening her eyes to the reality of the world. As a captive of the capitalist patriarchy, she simply takes it all for granted, unaware of the poison she was fed throughout her life. As contemplated by Pelin Kümbet, an androcentric mentality and attitude is prevalent and exerts influence over its subjects (2012: 182). In short, due to all these factors, Beatrice has never been able to rise up against the patriarchal system. Bookchin points out that the original cause of oppression is hierarchy:

The very concept of dominating nature stems from the domination of human by human, indeed, of women by men, of the young by their elders, of one ethnic group by another, of society by the state, of the individual by bureaucracy, as well as of one economic class by another or a colonized people by a colonial power (1980: 62).

Thus, in all forms of oppression, there exist different variations of hierarchical structures. However, all these disparate types of domination are eventually human caused and are therefore equivalent to one another.

### **The Oppression of Women and Nature**

In Ballard's *The Drowned World*, Beatrice is a character who has been oppressed all her life. During her childhood, she was subordinated by her grandfather who set up rules for her to follow and paved the way for a life of passivity and conformity. Since then, Beatrice has lived the only life she knew, the life that had been designed for her by the male patriarchal powers. To this end, Beatrice is no longer the commodity of her grandfather but a fragile figure that secretly longs for company and protection. As a conformist, she has been subjected to the patriarchal bourgeoisie and is unconscious of her oppression, lacking the will and determination to revolt against those who have enslaved her. In *The Drowned World*, Beatrice is an ambiguous and shallow personality whose past is not openly revealed by the author. Sümeýra Buran points out that: "women were brought into socially assigned roles as perfect wives and mothers because of cultural norms, morals, and values. If these social norms were disregarded, then women were isolated and treated as abnormal" (2020: 607). This is exactly the case with Beatrice as she was raised by her patriarchal grandfather to flourish into the "perfect, submissive and passive wife" which the system promotes and cherishes. In addition, Merve Yıldız Öztürk claims that: "in male-dominant societies, women and nature exist as inferior and subordinate beings. The system oppresses both of them

simultaneously” (2020: 707). For this reason, women’s and environmental problems are interwoven.

Along with Beatrice and Kerans’ story, *The Drowned World* recounts a continuing process of apocalypse through worldwide flood. In 2145, Earth witnesses a dramatic metamorphosis where most of the habitable regions have become lagoons with their own ecosystem. Together with this metamorphosis, a brand new species of fauna and flora emerges beneath the flooded areas of Earth. In the novel, this slow process of disintegration is mentioned when: “brick houses and single-storey factories of the suburbs had disappeared completely below the drifting tides of silt. Where these broke surface giant forests reared up into the burning dull-green sky, smothering the former wheatfields of temperate Europe and North America” (Ballard, 2010: 19).

In brief, nature is re-manifesting her hegemony over the Earth. Centuries of industrial human activity has resulted in nature’s gradual decay. Ballard exposes the outcomes of the latter stages of post-capitalist societies. Humans are virtually swept from the surface of the Earth and are forced to find new places of settlement in order to survive. People have to migrate to other locations to obtain shelter and food. The suppression of nature and Beatrice are corresponding and homogenous to one another. Both nature and Beatrice have been suppressed and subjugated by the same force: the patriarchal capitalist world order. This particular system has manipulated and taken advantage of women and Earth’s natural areas. The patriarchal system has consciously left out and rejected women from actively joining into the workforce. Similar to the misuse of nature by the capitalist system, Beatrice has also been left out and isolated from the society by her wealthy and greedy grandfather. She was raised as a highly subservient and dependent person and thereby not provided the necessary means to become a free, independent individual. An instance of this is related when Beatrice’s air conditioner suddenly stops working: “It’s broken down again. Leave me alone, Robert, she said in a tired voice. I know I’m a loose, drunken woman but I spent last night in the Martian jungles and I don’t want to be lectured” (Ballard, 2010: 50).

As stated above, Beatrice is dependent on the men’s help in order to maintain her daily needs. In addition, to this, the vital function of the air-conditioner is emphasised through these lines as clean air has become a luxurious commodity in this apocalyptic world. Though Beatrice relies on the men for support, she does not get tempted into an emotional or sexual relationship. Various male characters hit on

her and struggle to get hold of her right from the early pages of the novel. The novel's major antagonist, Strangman is the character who is determined to obtain Beatrice. However, he is not treated in the way he anticipates:

Wait a minute, though, I mustn't be ungallant and forget the beautiful Miss Dahl. He bowed over her with an unctuous smile. Come, my dear, I'll make you queen of the aquacade, with an escort of fifty divine crocodiles. Beatrice looked away from his gleaming eyes. No thanks, Strangman. The sea frightens me. (Ballard, 2010: 102).

Strangman offers Beatrice a post-apocalyptic queendom, an underwater fantasy life of royalty which does not seem to impress her at all. She simply chooses to refuse his fantastic offer. Nevertheless, she fulfills the role of a commodity that all the men long to possess. Strangman's openly sexist and pejorative remarks are left unanswered by Beatrice. Strangman tries to trick Beatrice using his influence and acquired fortune but her rejection is a sign of her repulsion against this awkward figure. As the novel's main antagonist, Strangman is an albino looter who wanders from one place to the other in search of precious stones and invaluable items. It seems that the only thing Strangman actually cares for is the acquisition of wealth as he exhibits signs of an exploitative, capitalist spirit. As the foremost representative of patriarchal capitalism in the novel, Strangman treats Beatrice as nothing but an object, another treasure that needs to be conquered. Strangman is a flat character which represents the evil capitalist in flesh and blood and never stops trying to tempt Beatrice with his shiny jewellery: "for you, my dear. Deftly, he strung the strands around her neck, regarding the effect with pleasure. And all the other jewels of this dead sea" (Ballard, 2010: 128).

In reality, Strangman does not have affection for Beatrice. He simply seems to be obsessed with obtaining her and the only way he can get hold of her is through jewellery. Jewels and stones are the ultimate weakness of Beatrice Dahl. Even at a time of survival and catastrophe, she seems to be obsessed with the acquisition of jewellery. Despite the fact that she has a feeling of aversion for Strangman, she puts up with him for the sole reason that he is in possession of an invaluable treasure which she adores more than any other thing in life.

Beatrice's patriarchal capitalist upbringing has made her believe that happiness resides in material wealth. However, this type of happiness is an artificial, vague perception which does not actually exist. Due to her passive upbringing, she has come to accept and embrace a lifestyle of luxury and riches as the only form of

happiness. Beatrice is a lonesome woman who is looking for meaning in a post-apocalyptic world that bears no meaning at all. Her quest to seek meaning and to fill the emptiness in her life leads her to the same path with awkward, unstable figures such as Strangman and his company. Beatrice is easily tempted into material wealth:

Her hair studded with three or four of the tiaras Strangman had looted from the old jewellery vaults, her breasts smothered under a mass of glittering chains and crescents, like a mad queen in a horror drama. [...] Almost as if she were a tribal totem, a deity whose power was responsible for their continued good fortune but nonetheless resented (Ballard, 2010: 131).

Ballard's choice of words is worth noting in these specific lines. Beatrice is likened to a crazy queen in a horror drama and then to a tribal totem that was supposed to give confidence to people but was nevertheless despised by many. Strangman, who lives in a state of fantasy crowns himself king, appointing Beatrice as his queen. Both characters have broken ties with reality and act like extraordinary figures that live inside their own fantasy world. Ballard's imagery is one that is compatible with the catastrophic setting of *The Drowned World*. As the Earth regresses and goes backward to the Triassic Age, human beings also go through a process of going backwards both in physical and mental terms. Ballard's references to tribalism, totems and queendom are part of an attempt to provide a visual depiction of humanity's regression.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, from a social ecofeminist perspective, it can be established that Earth's and Beatrice's condition bear some serious resemblances in *The Drowned World*. J.G. Ballard refrains from mentioning why Beatrice is the only woman left alive in London and in the novel itself. Nonetheless, it can be inferred that the author has chosen to do so mainly to place Beatrice in a unique and unobtainable position so as to emphasise the actual extent of her exploitation and abuse. Nature and Beatrice are true victims of patriarchal capitalism as both have been mistreated and taken advantage of by this belligerent system. In addition, both of them are in a mental state of flux and in a deep search for identity. Beatrice has been searching for identity since she was a little girl and now she wanders from one man to another to seek meaning in the midst of an ongoing apocalypse. In the meantime, nature's ecological balance has been disturbed and broken down. In consequence of the flooding of continents, gigantic lagoons and new life forms begin to occur. To that end, nature is looking for a new identity by attempting to

renew herself and recover from the sufferings of extreme human caused industrial activity.

Though not directly mentioned by the author, the actual reason for the catastrophe in *The Drowned World* is anthropogenic. Global warming has reached such an extreme level that it has come to disrupt the entire ecological balance, causing a devastating global flood. While nature slowly recovers, mutated human beings and animals come to find existence in this new environment and the others seek to obtain safe shelter in the polar regions of the Earth. However, these humans are highly disoriented, disconnected from their past and find themselves in a state of mental isolation.

Another noteworthy point is that along with the flooding of the main continents, humans have lost their hegemonic position on this planet. Together with the emergence of new fauna and flora, human beings struggle to find a place within the newly emerging world order. Nature has punished humanity for their long-term damage and is responding by degrading humans to the same level as all other living beings. Humans whom were once the supreme rulers of this planet are now equals with all other living creatures. Humanity has been equalised with all life forms. The patriarchal capitalist order's oppression on women and nature has resulted in the annihilation of all types of segregation and hierarchy. Moreover, Beatrice's role in this novel seems to be vital but is nonetheless trivial in general scope. Throughout the novel, she seems to be treated as an object to be conquered. For Kerans, Beatrice represents her second Eve whereas for Strangman, she makes up for the queen in his kingdom. Altogether, she is nothing but a simple obsession, an object the men desire to complete their mission and to satisfy their needs. In the end, Beatrice's ending is uncertain but Ballard implies that she consciously chose death over a subordinate life with no meaning whatsoever. While choosing death over life, Beatrice claims her freedom from the patriarchal capitalist order that she had been held captive all her life.

In conclusion, both Beatrice and nature share the same fate in *The Drowned World*. Both have been oppressed, abused and exploited by the same belligerent which is the patriarchal capitalist system. Along with the collapse of this system, capitalism and patriarchy have been annihilated and a new world order finally emerges from the ruins of the old one. In this new world order, both women and nature can now enjoy their beloved liberty. In the subtext of *The Drowned World*, Ballard criticises anthropogenic climate change which is ultimately caused by

human industrial activities. By displaying the oppression of women together with the destruction of nature's ecological balance, Ballard not only attracts attention to the oppressive state of patriarchal capitalism, but also conveys to his readers the urgent need to adopt an ecocentric mentality that will lead to the emancipation of all subjugated living beings. With a fictional, global catastrophe, the author successfully demonstrates that the domination of women and nature are interrelated and for one to become free, the other needs to be liberated as well. As a result, the author carries out an ecofeminist message to his readers in *The Drowned World* and while he does not directly propose a concrete solution, it can be inferred that Ballard envisages an ecocentric alternative to the hegemonic system of patriarchal capitalism he deems responsible for all before mentioned forms of oppression.

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