Teaching Climate change: Reading the Symbiosis Between Mankind and Nature in Ballard’s *The Drowned World*
Abstract

The purpose of this essay is to examine J.G. Ballard’s *The Drowned World* to investigate how the relationship between humans and nature affects humanity, and whether humanity is indestructible. By performing an eco-critical reading of *The Drowned World*, the protagonist’s actions and choices on his journey are examined, as well as how they affect his partner, comrades and nature. In this process, the result was that a complete lack of conscious humanity is impossible as the basic human instincts linger. Furthermore, this essay provides didactical approaches to teaching this novel in an upper-secondary school classroom as well as insight into the many aspects of the novel, which are comparable to modern day society on terms of politics, globalism and environmentalism.

Keywords

The Drowned World; Humanity; Nature; Ecocriticism; Didactics; Climate change
Table of Contents

1. Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1
2. Theoretical aspects ....................................................................................................... 2
3. Analysis I ....................................................................................................................... 7
   3.1 Beginnings .................................................................................................................. 7
   3.2 Adam and Eve .......................................................................................................... 8
   3.3 Remaining Behind .................................................................................................... 10
   3.4 The Hunter ............................................................................................................... 12
   3.5 The Dreams .............................................................................................................. 13
4. Analysis II ...................................................................................................................... 15
   4.1 The Dried World ..................................................................................................... 15
   4.2 Leaving Beatrice ..................................................................................................... 16
   4.3 Journeying South ................................................................................................... 18
5. Conclusion .................................................................................................................... 20
Works cited ...................................................................................................................... 22
1. Introduction

When considering the curriculum for EFL in the upper secondary school, I opted to utilise a novel related to the topic of lifestyle, culture and living conditions. According to the curriculum (Skolverket 1), students should learn to evaluate information and be given the chance to expand knowledge on the above-mentioned topics. It is possible to reflect on the lifestyles of people from different societies through literature, but given the recent interest in dystopian literature a classic novel presenting a probable scenario will allow students to reflect on their own lives and their own future. Therefore, I have chosen to interpret J.G. Ballard’s *The Drowned World* and how it could be taught in the modern classroom.

Ballard’s *The Drowned World* is a climate-fiction dystopian novel; it explores the perception of humanity as a concept, counteracted by propelled evolution. In a tropical Britain around the year 2145, cities replaced with lagoons, the main character Kerans struggles as his body and mind start to adapt to the new temperatures and a rapidly changing lifestyle. Taking root in the Anthropocene\(^1\) era, the planet has now succumbed to global warming, resulting in melted icecaps, raised sea levels, rising temperatures and solar radiation posing a threat to all. As it becomes apparent that mutated lizards now thrive in the tropical heat, the characters are unified by a collective unconsciousness\(^2\). As threats emerge, so does the genetic memory of the characters, awakening their instincts and fears from prehistoric eras, which helps them adapt.

The novel was written in 1962 and functions well as a premonition to our modern society in which environmental issues are highly relevant, seeing as climate change has become a globally recognised problem. By applying an eco-critical perspective to the novel, it is possible to better understand the narrative; exploring the failures of the Anthropocene era reveals to us the greatest and most destructive flaws in humanity, our sense of nature being subordinate to us. As the novel progresses, the reader gains access to Kerans’ transformation towards instinct-oriented life. The protagonist’s mind-set is the key to understanding this journey of interconnectedness and collective unconscious, and therefore the novel touches on concepts that could be interpreted with psychoanalytic criticism. However, this essay explores

\(^{1}\) The geological epoch ranging from the industrial revolution of the 18\(^{th}\) century up until now (Webster: Anthropocene).

\(^{2}\) An innate psychic ability to interpret human behaviour/psychology due to different inherited archetypes of typical behaviour (Jung 48)
the relationship between mankind and nature, and how humanity depends on it. Hence, I utilise eco criticism in order to interpret mainly that aspect.

In conclusion, this essay is centred on Ballard’s underlying message in his novel; that the symbiosis between man and nature, in balance, is the key to retaining true humanity. While a bond is sought between the two, there is still an underlying conflict. In The Drowned World, these forces are equal and at war. The main character of the novel is a testament to this relation yet also the representation of mankind, which is conflicting as he successively acts in favour of nature rather than humanity. Therefore, I argue that a dysfunctional relation to nature exhausts our humanity, yet a conscious mind will always cling to human qualities, expressed through basic instincts. This aspect can be interpreted from the ending of the novel where Kerans journeys for the sun and his death while still clinging to the memories of his partner, Beatrice. Hence, this argument is important in light of modern society’s detachment from nature due to contemporary technologies, as it is important to nurture a relation to not just physical nature, but also to one’s human nature.

2. Theoretical aspects

This essay is devoted to the characters’ relations to nature in its ever-changing state, affecting them as they affect it. Mankind’s previous effect on nature results in the imbalanced scenery of the novel, but they still remain in symbiosis. This is where ecocriticism comes into play, as it is a lens widely used to examine the relation between mankind and nature. In ecocriticism, nature is defined as something real as opposed to something abstract or labelled by mankind, which is most often the case in “nature-writing” in which nature is romanticized and personified (Soper 37-38). As such, nature does not exist for the benefit of creatures; instead, nature is a circle in which creatures thrive according to the natural balance. The concept of nature, as an entity with the power to affect, also revolves around altering factors; it affects us and we affect it (39). Nature as a factor to our well-being, romanticised and sought after in this Anthropogenous era, puts nature not in the centre (where humans are), but in the periphery as a right for humans. Seeing as the Anthropocene era has put a gash in nature by polluting, destroying and exploiting, we have managed to alter nature, or rather master it. In the novel, however, it is clear that nature has managed to evolve yet again to the ever
changing conditions. Nature has reclaimed its central position, again being able to affect mankind.

An important change, or rather a systematic evolution, in the novel is the growing need for the characters to immerse themselves in nature. The term *Biophilia*, coined by Erich Fromm, describes this as “…the passionate love of all life and of all that is alive; it is the wish to further growth, whether in a person, a plant, an idea, or a social group” (365). While this was originally used simply as an opposite to the term necrophilia, Wilson has further developed it into an eco-critical perspective by stating that Biophilia is “… The connections that human beings subconsciously seek with the rest of life” (350). His theories coincide with Darwin’s theory on adaptability in that both Biophilia and Ecophobia are connected to genetics, as our genes would carry fears and survival instincts from past epochs, which would explain a natural fear for supposedly dangerous animals etcetera (Wilson 351). This is an important theme in *The Drowned World* as the protagonist (and his entourage) regress towards relying on instincts in order to survive. Simon Estok, in *Material Ecocriticism, Genes, and the Phobia/Philia Spectrum*, expands on the relation between Biophilia and Ecophobia in that they are opposites but relatable. The foundation for this is the *agency* of humans, their sense of being in power and belonging. He states: “Agency is precious to humanity—so precious that the loss of it puts in peril not only our sense of exceptionalism but our very sense of human identity” (299). In this sense, what drives humanity is the perception of power and control, which makes a conscious individual just that. Ridding ourselves of security and materialism is what enables the loss of conscious control, which could be called enlightenment in Kerans’ sense. This is the essay’s foundation for exploring the concept of humanity in J.G. Ballard’s *The Drowned World*.

In order to further investigate the mind-set and ethics, morals and conscience of the protagonist, I chose to use Lawrence Buell’s theory on non-anthropocentric ethics to analyse those features. With ethics comes morals, and in the novel it is possible to perceive moral extension taking place, namely whether choices being made are consciously anthropocentric or non-anthropocentric, i.e. promoting the eco-system or the humans living in/off it, the ethics being how it affects either one negatively (Buell 226-227). The connection between the novel and eco-ethics becomes clearer as the story progresses. It has to do with the regression of humanity and how conscious choices being made by the protagonist affect his surroundings.

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3 A disdain for all things related to nature (Wilson 351)
and who benefits from his actions. It is generally perceived that with education and/or intellect comes environmental conscience and non-anthropocentric ethical views. This is something that is explored in this essay, mainly because unconscious minds tend to be perceived as intellectually weaker (227). However, as the main character regresses in terms of humanity, almost all of his conscious and subconscious choices, emotions and actions are directed towards a non-anthropocentric stance. Many examples of this in the novel revolve around Kerans’ partner, Beatrice, for whom he stays behind in the lagoon etc. Therefore, I want to incorporate some of Soper’s ideas of nature as a feminine force. Mankind has often regarded nature as feminine in the first place, referring to it as mother-earth. While the Anthropocene enabled the ravaging of our planet, so has mankind ravaged and exploited women throughout history, which is a strong simile. The relation between nature and the feminine is mainly the nurturing aspect: we live off of nature just as women are/have been valued as mothers and sisters and considered pillars in society (Soper 122).

The boundaries between animalistic and human behaviour is stretched thin in the novel; morals, ethics and consciousness is limited to humans as an agent although animals might have learned to copy this behaviour for various reasons. What makes us human would strictly be conscious acting rather than the subconscious giving of commands. Timothy Clark argues, in Literature and the Environment, that these features give humans agency to act superior to animals and present ourselves as the dominant species (184-185). When human features falter, observers are challenged in terms of mind-set and comprehension (183). That being said, while a distinction between animal and man is clear, the missing link between them becomes rather vague. In The Drowned World it is an important aspect to make clear, because although Kerans does not physically turn into an animal, he still relies on instinct and intuition in the end, which differentiates him from his entourage or other people observing him. As a conscious mind defines humanity, the opposite has to be an unconscious mind, or not having the ability to produce abstract thoughts. This is something that can be seen in Kerans’ behaviour throughout the latter half of the novel to a certain extent. Hence, I utilise Carl Jung’s Archetypes and the collective unconscious in which primal behaviour is explained. While consciousness lies down the road, there are basically four instincts, which are obligatory for both man and creature: feeding, fighting, fleeing and coupling which are expressed through unconscious archetypes (Jung 47-48). While Kerans does not revert completely to this primal state, it is clear that he reverts to a more basic way of living similar
to the mentioned categories, which can be seen in a shift towards non-materialism; such as abandoning the Ritz hotel for a life on a raft towards the south.

In terms of previous literary research of *The Drowned World*, there are mainly papers investigating the geological changes and symbolism in the novel. One research article that caught my attention is “Allusions in Ballard’s *The Drowned World*” in which Patrick A. McCarthy discusses Ballard’s ambiguous relation to modernist writers as well as his references towards other novels. In a section titled “The Conrad connection”, McCarthy makes distinct connections to Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* as harsh environments promote violence and primal actions. More importantly, both novels feature civilisation as their cornerstones although they refer to it in different ways. Firstly, a system in which violence and primitive behaviour is kept in place. Secondly, as a provocation towards nature, which is hindering and should be averted from. While both novels feature *Deus Ex Machina’s*⁴, it functions as a tool for continuing the plot in *The Drowned World* while it concludes and ends *Lord of the Flies* (McCarthy 303). Another interesting aspect, which McCarthy speaks of, is the “Adam and Eve” connection. While parallels are drawn to a divine (Christian) quest, as in Kerans’ journey towards the sun, he abandons all of the morals and values which society upholds in order to become enlightened (307). This is something that I touch upon in this essay, as the religious similarities are sympathy-inducing factors. These serve mainly the ideal of monogamy, which is seen throughout the novel (308). This is a key element in the novel as much of the plot encircles Beatrice, who is a strong driving force for Kerans’ actions.

This essay also coincides with a research paper by Jim Clarke titled “Reading Climate Change in J.G. Ballard”. The theoretical aspects of ecocriticism that I have mentioned previously mostly deal with mankind’s relation to nature, both abstract and practical. Jim Clarke’s paper examines the anthropogenic blame of society, which can be read in Ballard’s early novels (*The Drowned World* and *The Crystal World*) and how Ballard manages to foretell a probable cataclysm before the term global warming is coined (9-12). The conception of time, which Clarke mentions, in the novels plays an important role in the evolutionary process, which the main characters undergo because time becomes disrupted. As the climate reverts back to the Triassic period, so do Kerans’ genes, which forces him to adapt to the (new) conditions, through a psychological devolution (15). The paper discusses the psychological framework,

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⁴ A divine (or unknown) intervention, which interrupts logical plot-progression, thus solving conflict (Webster: Deus Ex Machina).
which to an extent is connected to the relation to nature, but focuses more on the obliterated timeline in the characters’ minds. This essay differs in the sense that an emphasis is instead put on a chronological analysis of Kerans’ motives and actions from an ecocritical perspective.

Ballard’s novel is open for interpretation in terms of plot and characterisations, which is why I chose to utilise Beach’s discussion on reader interpretation. By enabling the students to form their own opinions about the different characters and their individual actions and stances throughout the novels, there is an opportunity to conduct meaningful discussions in the classroom. Removing the boundaries of analysing the general structure, like the narration and writing style, allows the reader to individually interpret and construct their own meaning without preconceived notions (Beach 138). The general theme of the novel is climate-change, and while there is a clear explanation for the change in the plot, it is also important to unravel how the different characters are positioning themselves to the altered climate, flora and fauna. There are no right or wrongs in the novel, and all key characters act in different ways regarding nature. Moreover, this can be translated to modern society, where progressives and conservatives are debating a similar condition, and that is why the subjective interpretation is important in relation to the novel, as the reader’s personal history and experiences are weighed in.
3. Analysis I

The forthcoming analysis section is set chronologically, mainly because of plot coherence, seeing as *The Drowned World* is known by many, but not read by all. The section consists of impacts in key plot-events. The selected excerpts focus more on events in which the freedom of choice is available, mainly because of the fact that a conscious mind is regarded human; when actions are performed on instinct, they are merely subconscious which any creature could do. As compliments to the plot progression; some didactic approaches to reading, scaffolding and plot-discussion are presented throughout the analysis section so as to make clear, what might otherwise seem a daunting experience, how *The Drowned World* could be taught in a modern classroom. Furthermore, the analysis section is divided into two subsections to promote a more direct approach to teaching the novel throughout the second section. Henceforth, the title of the novel will be abbreviated into “TDW”.

3.1 Beginnings

Soon it would be too hot. Looking out from the hotel balcony shortly after eight o’clock, Kerans watched the sun rise behind the dense groves of giant gymnosperms crowding over the roofs of the abandoned department stores four hundred yards away on the east side of the lagoon. Even through the massive olive-green fronds the relentless power of the sun was plainly tangible. The blunt refracted rays drummed against his bare chest and shoulders, drawing out the first sweat, and he put on a pair of heavy sunglasses to protect his eyes (TDW 7).

This extract from the novel shall serve as an introductory paragraph. The setting is majestic but in many senses neutral as opposed to romantic literature in which nature is most often romanticised and presented as an object for mankind’s desire as well as property. The reader learns instantly of the harsh environment and Kerans’ cool and quiet hotel room at the top of the Ritz hotel in London, one of the few habitable places not yet submerged in water. At this point, it is explained that the middle-aged biologist has ceased to be interested in his project of cataloguing new species since no one at the remote station would bother to read his reports; it all seems pointless. It is in this instant that the reader receives a foreshadowing: it becomes clear that although Kerans is respected in his line of work and performs his research dutifully, the end is still nigh (7). Ballard presents a scene in which humans lack control, which is a
central theme throughout the novel. Agency, as proposed by Estok, is in this case the foundation for the degradation that is happening to the human psyche. The very best is done to accommodate the people in the situation, but still, the environment retains control. This lazy apparition of Kerans’ presented right at the start is a product, even in the beginning, of years of preparatory evolutionary transitioning. Although Kerans gets by and on with his life, no matter how redundant the biological work is, he has still reached a point that marks the beginning of his own psychological transformation.

Introducing this piece of literature to students might seem daunting. The language is advanced and at first it might come off as a slow read to the learners. For the teacher, it might be advantageous to start the module by pre-discussing humanity as a concept and nature while scaffolding the forthcoming reading properly. Aidan Chambers proposes, in Tell me: children, reading & talk. The reading Environment, that learners should keep a reading diary so as to better remember and imprint the read material for future use (40-41). This introductory passage is a jump-start into the novel and is important to comprehend from the very start as Kerans’ journey has already begun at this stage. It is crucial for the teacher to set reading time (or read aloud) and then discuss and reflect instantly, in order for the learners to keep pace. As mentioned, the novel is a hard read and it is important to include all students, as eventual stragglers will have a hard time catching up.

3.2 Adam and Eve

Exploring mankind’s relation to nature also involves the concept of human nature; this destructive but loving force which drives us. One important aspect of the novel is the “Adam and Eve” concept. In the first chapter, the reader is introduced to Colonel Riggs, who implores Kerans to talk sense into his fellow colleague and lover, Beatrice Dahl, who wishes to remain after the military support has left for their base in Greenland (TDW 16). In the second chapter, when Beatrice is properly introduced, she is first seen sunbathing on the patio of a luxury apartment when Kerans and Riggs arrive via boat. She is thoroughly sexualised through Kerans’ mind as the narrator depicts her beauty quite intrusively (29). A metaphor for Adam and Eve is clear; outright said in the novel. Nonetheless, there is an appeal in Beatrice, which affects all men, especially Kerans. This is a factor to his actions throughout the entirety of the novel. What is portrayed here is his human nature; the need for companionship, love and procreation. He is not the only man around, which further strengthens his need to be with her (in the sense of primal instinct). These implications are what persuade him to remain in
the submerged London area. Her immense magnetism is an excellent metaphor for the great force that is nature. As mentioned in the theoretical section, Kate Soper talks of nature as feminine; the nurturing and beautiful attracting force, which can be compared to the powerful growth of nature in the novel. His reasons for staying, albeit obscured, consist of Beatrice, but also nature in the sense that he is reminded of his childhood scenery which happens to be the submerged London-area (30).

Going back a bit to the trio’s initial meeting, Riggs makes an important remark, which will function as both a premonition and a benchmark for the whole novel:

"The temperature is still going up, Miss Dahl, you won't find it easy to stand one hundred and thirty degrees when the fuel for your generator runs out. The big Equatorial rain belts are moving northward, and they'll be here in a couple of months. When they leave, and the cloud cover goes, the water in that pool-" he indicated the tank of steaming, insect-strewn fluid "will damn nearly boil. What with the Type X Anopheles, skin cancers and the iguanas shrieking all night down below, you'll get precious little sleep." Closing his eyes, he added pensively: "That is, assuming that you still want any." At this last remark the girl's mouth fretted slightly. Kerans realised that the quiet ambiguity in Riggs' voice when he asked how the biologist slept had not been directed at his relationship with Beatrice. (TDW 28)

This brings us into the other aspect of the “Adam and Eve” concept, namely the fixed connection that the couple will come to have later, as her dreams are later recognised by Kerans when he also starts having the dreams. These dreams will signify the regression of humanity, which will be investigated in the following sections. However, the resemblance to Genesis is uncanny, seeing as the dreams will act as a common denominator, making the protagonist and the others act in harmful (for others) ways and let their ego’s take over completely. While everyone eventually experiences the dreams in the novel, the first person who gets them is Beatrice; the woman who receives knowledge, the forbidden fruit, and who influences others, similarly to the original Adam and Eve. This is important because she will act as a conduit for every action that Kerans has to justify; everything he does is, practically, because of her. Parallels can also be drawn to the biblical flood as well as the fact that Adam is the one who names the animals in the Garden of Eden, just as Kerans does in the novel.
though his occupation. Knowledge of *Genesis* is therefore important to the reader in the sense that it functions as a foreshadowing as well as helps with understanding the actual plot.

This chapter is somewhat short, but important to proceeding chronologically when teaching the novel. Setting out, it is crucial to structure the chapter according to what it implies and what is directly being told to the reader. There is a focus on the relationship between Kerans and Beatrice, while lieutenant Riggs is included in the conversation. As Beatrice is sexualised in the narration, it is easy to incorporate gender issues into a classroom discussion as well as the connection to religious ideals. The latter is interesting, as a normal and progressive society, though educated in religion, does not practice faith in conventional settings. However, many would argue that the *Old Testament* is filled with stories of morals, teachings and philosophy, which are (sometimes) true to human nature. Therefore, discussing the intertextuality of Ballard’s remarks about Adam and Eve should prove rewarding in the classroom. Also, since this novel was written in the 1960’s, it is important to realise that the balance between men and women has changed quite a bit and that Ballard’s characterisations are a product of his time, which should be brought up in the classroom.

**3.3 Remaining Behind**

In the beginning of chapter three, the reader is introduced to two characters in the midst of an on-going experiment: Doctor Bodkin and Lieutenant Hardman. Both are experiencing dreams and seek to repress them through the use of audio- and temperature treatment (TDW 39-41). The former is a colleague to Kerans, while the latter is employed through the military assistance on location. At this stage, Kerans seems to be the only one not initiated to the dreaming, confirming his still human mind-set. Through conversation with Bodkin, it is apparent that he remains rather sceptical: “To himself he said: Damn the old boy, he's got me up there now with the algae and nautiloids, next he'll be playing his records at me” (TDW 45). What follows this conversation is a breakdown of evolutionary theory provided by Bodkins, stating that the environmental changes will affect not only the animals, for which they have proof, but also humans; not in a physical sense, but psychologically in the sense that mankind’s ancient repressed genes from past periods of time will awaken and affect them (TDW 48).

The following chapter introduces the disappearance of Hardman. There is also a slight change in Kerans’ mind-set as he prepares for the future:
Although he accepted the possibility that he would remain behind, Kerans found himself reluctant to take any systematic precautions. … For the convenience of the stores staff, and to save himself unnecessary journeys to and from the base, Kerans had stockpiled a month's forward supplies of canned food in the suite. Most of this consisted of condensed milk and luncheon meat, virtually inedible unless supplemented by the delicacies stored away in Beatrice's deep freeze. … there was a bare three months’ stock. After that they would have to live off the land, switch their menu to wood soup and steak iguana (TDW 52).

This nonchalant attitude towards further survival signifies that a transition is beginning to happen with the basic capability of thinking ahead; the ability to process time in an abstract manner, which is something that is usually a dividing line between mankind and the animal world. By ridding himself of the need for future plans, he enables himself to draw closer to nature, realising the need for a symbiosis with the evolved flora and fauna. He also vanquishes the protective instincts for Beatrice and focuses instead on survival for the years to come. The hope for future comfort is replaced by a primal attitude in which they will have to fend for themselves, bypassing the fact that they are mates. While relying on instinct, as argued by Jung, is usually linked to primitive behaviour it can also be regarded as a more human way of acting; rescuing those dear to you, fending for your life and surviving in the wild, as opposed to the characters’ previous sombre and dull way of living. Interestingly, his next encounter with Beatrice proves that she is in a much worse condition than he is, suggesting that she’s gone further into the genetic regression:

He went to the thermostat on the bedside table and jerked the tab down from seventy to sixty degrees. "It's broken down again,"… Kerans tried to take the glass from her hands but she steered it away from him. "Leave me alone, Robert," she said in a tired voice. … Kerans scrutinised her closely, smiling to himself in a mixture of affection and despair. "I'll see if I can repair the motor. This bedroom smells as if you've had an entire penal battalion billeted with you. Take a shower, Bea, and try to pull yourself together. Riggs is leaving tomorrow, we'll need our wits about us (TDW 54).
This scene strengthens Kerans’ human features as he takes care of Beatrice. As Kerans’ transformation has just begun, so has Beatrice’s increased. While concern is a natural instinct for humans, it is still relevant to note that her lethargic state does not affect him in the slightest, he still acts human but is mainly practical about it. Riggs enters the scene with his party searching for Hardman; Kerans is convinced to join in. While they search northwards without success, Kerans realises that Hardman has left for the south (TDW 62); connecting the dots subconsciously with a south-pointing compass he found while feeling his own attraction for even warmer climates without realising it. This is a testament to his increasing prowess in instinct; tracking and thinking like the prey.

3.4 The Hunter

When Kerans catches up with Hardman, the reader finally gets a glimpse of, what seems to be, the final stages of the evolutionary metamorphosis:

Averting his eyes, he turned away from the window, with a jolt realised that a tall black-bearded man was standing motionlessly in a doorway behind him. … The big man stood in a slightly stooped but relaxed pose, his heavy arms loosely at his sides. Black mud caked across his wrists and forehead, and clogged his boots and the fabric of his drill trousers, for a moment reminding Kerans of one of the resurrected corpses. … The expression on his face was one of hungry intensity, but he gazed at Kerans with somber detachment, his eyes like heavily banked fires … (TDW 69-70).

The apparition of Kerans’ well-known colleague is described as if alien now, frozen in motion in a stooped pose, signifying a non-human appearance, which is frightening for the protagonist. Add to that, the expression on his face speaks of animal behaviour, as it is intense and hungry while focused yet detached. When Hardman, moments later, pounces on Kerans (70) it may seem like the move of a cornered and/or panicking animal whose intent is to incapacitate the threat or simply escape. Again, Kerans’ response still comes off as human while he retains the sense of agency. Before meeting Hardman, he is certain and controlled but is uprooted from this sense as soon as he is threatened by what could be explained as a natural predator; his friend is large and threatening, therefore he is dangerous. Humans, whether beastly or civilised, are naturally pack animals, and the fact that Kerans is separated from his group when he meets Hardman speaks for his loss of agency. The transformation that
separates Hardman and Kerans mentally speaks for the violence that ensues when civilisation collapses, which is also a factor connected to the human destructiveness; similar to the violent themes in Golding’s Lord of the Flies.

This section, as well as the previous section, deals with the autonomy and dependence of humanity; whether conscious or unconscious, we shall remain an instinct driven species to varying degrees. While these chapters may prove to be the most demanding in the novel, the reader is introduced to a barrage of natural-science jargon. They are still important to the plot of the novel as the explanation for various characters’ odd behaviour can be found here. It would again seem important to lift these aspects in the classroom by posing questions surrounding humanity and human nature such as: What makes a human? What does society prefer in human nature? What is frowned upon? Are we really that distant from Kerans and his group? Questions like these are open for interpretation and should awaken an interest in students currently reading through this deep novel. Aside from that, I believe it to be important to analyse the meeting between Kerans and Hardman, two colleagues who are on different planes of adaptation at this stage, non-empathic yet still human to various degrees. Also, the uncanny in the meeting lies in Hardman’s close proximity to human appearance which can function as a metaphor for societal values concerning cultures, as we tend to be afraid of what we do not understand.

3.5 The Dreams

The weeks following the departure of the military unit provide a sombre and separated existence for the remaining characters, with the inclusion of Doctor Bodkin. This section in the novel is abstract, yet it is also a major foundation for the plot as Kerans finally experiences the evolutionary dreams. They alter his perception of landscapes, while impressions and sensations seem gloomy and distant, signifying further detachment from both civilisation and reality:

At times the circle of water was spectral and vibrant, at others slack and murky, the shore apparently formed of shale, like the dull metallic skin of a reptile. Yet again the soft beaches would glow invitingly with a glossy carmine sheen, the sky warm and limpid, the emptiness of the long stretches of sand total and absolute, filling him with an exquisite and tender anguish (TDW 91-92).
Looking at keywords in this excerpt suggests a longing for nature, in an abstract way but still a longing. Without delving into the chemical process and the significance of love, this so-called longing is close to the theories on Biophilia by Fromm, the love for nature, in this case apathetical yet still excited. As mentioned in the theoretical section, Wilson’s take on Biophilia can be expressed as the subconscious need to connect with nature, to live in symbiosis with it. While I will not do an in-depth analysis of the scientific properties of the dream, there lies value in Kerans experiencing an attraction to nature whilst being horrified: “Beating within him like his own pulse, Kerans felt the powerful mesmeric pull of the baying reptiles … he swam forwards, spreading outwards across the black thudding water” (TDW 77). The significance of Kerans having the dream is that he is losing the final strand of his agency as human. Considering Buell’s aforementioned theories, it means that the loss of authority over the fauna as well as gaining knowledge should guide the protagonist to a more non-anthropocentric lifestyle. This supports his earlier choice to stay behind with his partner in the sense that staying is an unconscious attempt to connect further with nature, albeit also a conscious longing for Beatrice.

I argued earlier that common morals, together with conscience and intellect (or presumptuous behaviour), are attributes generally associated with non-anthropocentric values. This could be considered true, as anthropocentrism in this modern era usually derives from ignorance and/or greed. There is a difference in ethically disrupting nature for the sake of people, and in exploiting nature for gains. However, while the protagonist in the novel gains knowledge via the dreams, it is still a numbing type of knowledge, which makes him sombre and distant. Arguably, this would in a sense make him less intelligent and yet, all his choices so far and up until the end of the novel will prove non-anthropocentric.

I believe that the first half of the novel should be taught with an emphasis on reading and letting the students become immersed in the plot; because, as I mentioned, this novel is a tough read and this particular section more so, as it introduces advanced scientific- and psychoanalytical terms, which could deter the reader. While it is crucial to structure the reading with diaries and/or notation, I find it important to focus on the reading as a process, to let the students form their own opinions about plot and characters. This is mainly so that students will gain more from reading without any preconceived notions, as argued by Beach.
However, by summarising and interpreting together at each new session there is an increased chance for all students to properly understand the plot.

4. Analysis II

This section is dedicated to the second half of the novel, and introduces more concrete methods of teaching, which can be implemented into the classroom. Throughout the concluding chapters of the novel a lot transpires in terms of plot; therefore, I have limited the analysis to key events, which can be connected to an ecocritical aspect.

4.1 The Dried World

In the latter half of the novel, an antagonist emerges; Strangman, an eccentric and intuitive looter. During this section, Kerans becomes more detached and seems to lose physical interest in Beatrice, while the antagonist grows fond of her simultaneously. The following excerpt presents a scene in which Strangman has invited Kerans and his entourage for dinner on his boat, where he manages to drain the lagoon:

"Robert! Stop it! It's horrible!" Kerans felt Beatrice seize his arm, her long blue nails biting through the fabric of his dinner jacket. She gazed out at the emerging city, an expression of revulsion on her tense face …

For a moment Kerans fought to free his mind, grappling with this total inversion of his normal world, unable to accept the logic of the rebirth before him. … beside him he heard Bodkin mutter: "Those pumps are powerful. The water is going down by a good two or three feet a minute. We're not far from the bottom now. The whole thing's fantastic!"

(TDW 132-133)

The reactions in the trio differ quite a lot in this segment, showing that they are all on different levels of neural transformation. Beatrice is panicking even though she is an ecophobia; as her attraction towards nature is more passive, which is shown earlier when she refuses to be submerged in a diving suit by Strangman (TDW 112). As such, it is clear that the reversion of nature affects her in a severely negative way. Bodkin is instead ecstatic, as he might now experience and explore London from his childhood memories, suggesting that he
is oriented towards an anthropocentric viewpoint, much influenced by an egoistic need to commemorate his past. Kerans, on the other hand, is upset by the fact that the flora is suppressed and the former human seat of power that is central London is revealing itself again. Moreover, his awakened genetics speak to him in a calling manner, signifying that he shall not return to his former self. Furthermore, while Beatrice’s and Bodkin’s reactions are strong, they are still passive in terms of neural adaptation when compared with Kerans. Instead of being vocal, he is struggling to comprehend what is happening, as it is too surreal for his mind. This suggests that his mind-set is closer to an enlightened state, which would make him more of a biophilic, in Wilson’s terms, as he is subconsciously connecting to nature at a deeper level, as opposed to his companions. Meanwhile, it is possible that Kerans, in this moment, understands the distinction between them at this point, which can be a factor to the upcoming events, which leave him in solitude as he journeys alone towards the south.

The latter half of the novel allows for further discussion and assignments regarding the novel, as it is possible to revisit previous areas and also give weekly assignments now that the learners are properly immersed in the actual reading. Furthermore, I believe that spending some time analysing characterisation in the classroom is valid when reading through this section of the novel. The event transpiring is important to the plot, but most interesting are the reactions from the characters, seeing as they behave differently and react accordingly. With some imagination, the situation could be likened to a political dilemma affecting all levels of society. As such, there is an opportunity to have the students analyse the reactions of the characters and relate them to real life. For instance, the 21st century has been unstable so far in many countries; war ravages homes and forces people into exile, which invokes fear, stress and terror. Though the events in the novel are fictional, the similarities exist. This poses an opportunity to discuss living conditions, cultural diverseness and politics in the classroom.

4.2 Leaving Beatrice

The final events of the novel unfold: The exploration of a resurfaced London; Bodkin’s realisation of the error in damming the lagoon and him trying to blow it up; Strangman’s distrust towards Kerans and Beatrice, leading to their imprisonment; Strangman trying to break down Kerans by tying him outside and torturing him, leading to Kerans escape, the rescuing of Beatrice and the reappearance of Colonel Riggs saving them all. This large section of the novel is important in terms of plot, but not much of interest for this analysis. Still, it is
important to know that the biologists’ standpoints on the future of the lagoon are set in an anxiousness to be left alone to further pursue their biological destinies. I will present an excerpt, which is a discussion between Kerans and Colonel Riggs concerning the fate of the lagoon:

"When are you going to re-flood the lagoon?" "Re-flood the-?" Riggs repeated … "Robert, you really are out of touch with reality. The sooner you get away from here the better. The last thing I intend to do is re-flood the lagoon. If anybody tries I'll personally blow his head off. … "At present there's nothing for me to stay for-I can't move the station now, but it's a fair loss. Anyway, you and the Dahl girl need a rest. And a brain-lift. Do you realise how lucky she is to be in one piece? Good God!" … "You should be grateful that I came here in time." … "I don't know about that, Colonel. I'm afraid you came too late."

(TDW 171, 174-175)

Coinciding with the previously presented material and analysis, Kerans’ expectations of what is to come are severely warped in comparison with Riggs’ mind-set which is heavily centred around anthropocentrism as he seeks to save the human race. For a clear mind, the situation would not be strange at all; to keep central London drained and to eventually repopulate the area to human benefit. However, for Kerans the timeline is heavily convoluted, like Clarke argues, which results in him being stuck in the Triassic period, whilst the lagoon, and everyone in it, are awakening from the transient dream. This coincidentally causes him to set aim towards the end of the rabbit-hole, as he now realises that he must blow up the dam:

"Robert, you've got to leave! Now, before Riggs brings more of his men! He wants to kill you, I know." Kerans nodded, getting painfully to his feet. "The Sergeant-I didn't realise he was patrolling. Tell Riggs I'm sorry-" He gestured helplessly, then took a last look at the lagoon. … Kerans watched it with a quiet contained pleasure, savouring the fresh tang that the water had brought again to the lagoon. "Darling, where are you going? I'm sorry I can't be with you." "South," Kerans said softly, listening to the roar of the deepening water. "Towards the sun. You'll be with me, Bea." He embraced her, then tore himself from her arms and ran to the rear rail of the terrace, pushing back the heavy fern fronds. (TDW 180-181)
As previously mentioned in chapter 3.2, the relation to Beatrice is the main marker of human nature; the “Adam-and-Eve” syndrome was the result of the basic instinct of love, companionship and a natural instinct of reproducing. Although they drifted apart in the duration of the plot, Kerans still managed to preserve these instincts towards her, enough to perform the rescue at the very least. This would signify his last stand as a human being. However, the choice of letting her go means that he is cutting off the last piece of himself as homo-sapiens, freeing himself to pursue a life in Biophilia and freedom; making this whole novel a reversal of Alighieri’s *The Divine Comedy* in that Dante journeys through the nine circles of hell and beyond in order to rescue his Beatrice. Kerans, on the other hand, seeks to free himself from both comradery and his partner in order to pursue solitude, closer to nature and the sun.

The separation between the characters would prove an interesting discussion in the classroom, because while Kerans needs to leave, Beatrice still has a choice. The learners’ interpretations of this scene will differ quite a lot as the subjective idea determines the result. Therefore, it would be rewarding to perform a debate in the classroom on the topic of why Beatrice made her decision to stay (TDW 181). Another aspect to continue with is the ethics of Kerans exit; while the climate cannot accommodate humans at this point, Kerans leaving signifies the demise of humanity. While he is one of the last living scientists, he has an obligation to continue his research for humanity’s sake. This is a good segue into modern-day climate change, which is a divided debate. By having the learners assess the current situation, read up on news and politics in relation to the scenery in the novel; there is an opportunity to conduct a larger assignment, such as an argumentative paper, a podcast or a presentation with fossil fuel, melting ice caps or politics as the starting point.

### 4.3 Journeying South

The closing chapter of the novel consists of Kerans travelling on the river south and then venturing through the jungle where he meets the broken-down Hardman, his former colleague, who leaves instantaneously after being cured with some penicillin. Moving through the vast jungles with a gun-shot wound on his leg, he pauses and reflects:

*That he had travelled over a hundred and fifty miles southward he could tell from the marked rise in temperature. Again the heat had become*
allpervading, rising to a hundred and forty degrees, and he felt reluctant to leave the lagoon, with its empty beaches and quiet ring of jungle. ... Half asleep, he lay back thinking of the events of the past years that had culminated in their arrival at the central lagoons and launched him upon his neuronic odyssey, ... and, with a deep pang of regret and affection, holding her memory clearly before his mind as long as he could, of Beatrice and her quickening smile (TDW 191).

Kerans’ final reflection highlights a small part of him that is an undying sense of humanity still. His transformation towards the genetic past has become realised in this state, as there is nothing else for him but the sun towards the south. Much like McCarthy’s discussion concerning the biblical ideals of salvation, I would argue that this quest for the sun is indeed, for Kerans, a strictly egocentric rite of passage in which nothing may stand in his way. While he is sure of his death, there is still a longing for the unknown, which he cannot comprehend as it is still subconscious at this point. Still the instinct persists, much like that of a bird subconsciously migrating to warmer climates, based on pure instinct rather than rational thought. In that sense, he could be considered a part of the local fauna, seeing as all of the choices that were made up until this moment have been cogwheels in a process towards transformation. Nevertheless, it is clear that it is impossible to completely lose one’s humanity, no matter how distanced one is from civilisation; there is always a part of you that remains because even though Beatrice is left behind, Kerans had to go in fear of being shot and for her sake as well. After all, he wanted her to come with him which evidentially says a lot about humanity; whether we turn into beasts or not, there are still emotions, instincts and a nature that is relentless, even when perishing.

The final chapter introduces the most difficult paradox of all; continuing towards enlightenment but also death. This abstract thought is perhaps the most important to bring into the classroom, as this conviction can be found in every form of extremism that ever was. In this modern society, extremism (left, right, religious, economic, environmental) is a constant, just as it has been throughout history; which is why it has to be counteracted. Surfacing the question of extremism and discussing it in the classroom is a good way to conclude the novel, as it may function as an eye-opener for the learners; seeing as Kerans is a protagonist who, despite his choices, is an empathy-inducing character yet also one who could be considered evil at the same time.
5. Conclusion

I put emphasis on mankind’s relation to nature and the ethics concerned in the balance that shifts in the novel. As mentioned, Kerans’ neutral stance is conflicting due to his origin as he is drawn to nature, which puts a strain on his group in the end. The mind-set of the protagonist displays a shift towards the climax of the story in which both he and Beatrice experiences stress once the lagoon is drained. Considering their past indifference to local flora and fauna, it becomes a significant shift when they both experience relief once the lagoon is re-flooded. However, the relation to nature becomes clear once the human agency disappears fully, which is rooted in the great force of nature, as well as the dreams, signifying the end for humans as the apex predators. It could also be argued that the agency disappeared long before that when the climate-change began, or when the military aid leaves the trio. Interestingly, it all comes down to subjectivity, in the sense that the protagonist indeed does wield the power of free will throughout the plot but acts on instinct and needs at the same time. This can be explained with the fact that the force of nature keeps drawing Kerans in, while he is torn between his stance on civilisation versus nature and whether he ought to act for either entity.

Consequently, I return to the relation to nature and whether Kerans upholds a strict non-anthropocentric mind-set, because Beatrice could be regarded as a natural force out of an eco-feminist aspect; it could prove an interesting route to pursue in a lengthier essay, which could also be paired up with psychoanalytic criticist theory. While she is the representative of nature, Kerans is the representative of man, and as he acts in benefit of nature he simultaneously does so for mankind; thus Beatrice represents both. The motives remain vague but the fact still stands that he leaves her behind yet thinks of her always. Therefore, my conclusion is that Kerans does indeed abolish his sense of civilised humanity, yet still remains human in other senses to the very end. His displacement from nature in the beginning of the novel paints him as an empty shell, and while the new connection is established, he remains the same in other senses. Yet, it still gives him the quest for enlightenment. Hence, it can be argued that while Kerans is losing his humanity, he is also gaining a motive for actually living, which ironically becomes his demise. Therefore, I found that the detachment from nature found in the beginning of the novel signifies danger in the sense that life becomes worthless without goal and meaning. Nature, in the novel, becomes a metaphor for understanding, passion and enlightenment, which is what I propose about real life as well.
Since technological advancements such as virtual reality and social media, more people have become astray in their everyday lives; detachment from society and isolation are probable causes of declining mental- and physical health. This is why I argued that it is crucial to nurture a relationship with nature, but also equally important to nurture one’s own human nature, which can be equalised with the value of nature in the novel.

Didactically, this novel is a tough read and should therefore be taught at the level of English 7 in upper secondary school. While the experience might prove demanding for the students, there are many aspects of the novel which translate well to modern society, such as religious ideals, symbolism and sexuality which can be explored through the novels many events. There are also possibilities of discussing civilisation through the general setting and the draining/re-flooding of London, as well as norms and philosophical aspects which can be highlighted through characterisation and relations to nature as well as other humans in the novel. Therefore, I argue that the novel is versatile in terms of theme, but I also wish to highlight the importance of having the students form their own opinions of the various topics as to make the discussions (or other assignments) more interesting. There might be resistance when teaching this novel. Hence, I find it important to structure the reading and assignments properly in order to include all students, because it is inevitable that some will struggle with The Drowned World. However, this novel is an excellent piece of literature, with an advanced level of English and an extraordinary plot. Therefore, The Drowned World should to be taught as it is a classic, which has set the bar for many climate- and science fiction novels to come.
Works cited


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