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JAMES G. BALLARD'S URBAN VIOLENCE QUADRILOGY – AN ECOCRITICAL APPROACH

J. G. Ballard's fiction is a great example of literature that ecocritics find especially interesting and relevant to their work. From his cli-fi novels from the 60s depicting the society's encounter with the eco-apocalypse in progress, to his urban catastrophe novels from the 70s portraying the society in post eco-apocalyptic era, to his latest quadriology [*Cocaine Nights* (1996), *Super-Cannes* (2000), *Millennium People* (2003) and *Kingdom Come* (2006)] focusing on modern horrors such as urban violence that generates social and psychological entropy as the next level of decline the human race has reached on its path to extinction. Ballard seems to provide a history of the systematic degradation of human beings resulting from their mistreatment of nature and obsession with technological progress. The aim of this paper is to show that his latest urban violence quadriology, apart from depicting the human degradation taken to its extremes, offers new social forms that emerge from ecological crisis and eco apocalypse and whose formation points to the necessity for reevaluation of the human and more-than-human relationship. Hence, the quadriology avoids the trap of being trivialised and labelled as is so common in environmental fiction that it loses its ability to incite fear or eco-activism.

Key words: ecocriticism; man and environment; urban landscapes; J. G. Ballard's urban violence novels; new social forms

1. INTRODUCTION

With climate crisis already underway – evident in frequent natural disasters occurring across the world nowadays (i.e. weather extremes, rising of sea levels, acidifying of

oceans, hurricanes and violent storms, flash floods, people and animal's suffocation as a result of severe heat spells, the exponential growth of air and water pollution, raging forest fires) – and the most recent COVID-19 pandemic most likely emerging from transferring the unknown and dangerous pathogens residing in animals to human beings as a result of human activities (i.e. human's encroaching upon natural habitats; deforestation, poaching), there has been an urgent need for addressing the environmental issues locally, nationally and globally. Collective actions regarding environmental protection should be taken in all spheres of society, be it politics, economics, culture, or education. The emergence of ecocriticism within literary theory and literature that addresses environmental topics shed light to numerous literary figures that recognized the importance of raising awareness of environmental issues and the need for inciting activism.

J. G. Ballard's cli-fi novels from the 60s [*The Wind from Nowhere* (1961), *The Drowned World* (1962), and *The Drought* (1964)] point to the inevitability of eco-apocalypse and examine the society's response to the eco-apocalypse in progress, while his novels from the 70s [*The Atrocity Exhibition* (1970), *Crash* (1973), *High Rise* (1975)] portray the urban catastrophe as a result of an eco-apocalypse era and signal the importance of treating urban landscapes as complementary to natural landscapes. These narratives that balance between known facts and an imaginary future are intended as a warning about possible real life developments. They seem to offer two outcomes: the extinction of population as a result of human activities and people's inability to reconcile the urge for economic growth and progress with the need to protect the biosphere (1), and a possibility of survival should humanity manage to curb its destructive impulses and change its attitude towards nature (2). Ballard's latest quadriology [*Cocaine Nights* (1996), *Super-Cannes* (2000), *Millennium People* (2003) and *Kingdom Come* (2006)] created on the foundations of eco-apocalypse displayed in his urban catastrophe novels, not only points to different types of urban violence as the next level of degradation humanity has reached while heading toward its extinction – thus befitting the category of what ecocritics are now referring to 'eco-collapse fiction' (see McFarland, 2021) – but also to the emergence of new social forms as a result of ecological crisis and eco-apocalypse and as such to avoid the trap of being trivialised and labelled as is so common in environmental fiction that they lose their ability to inspire fear or activism.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: ECOCRITICISM

Ecocriticism emerged when literary critics and scholars identified the need to respond to the environmental crisis by making the environment the primal object of study in humanistic disciplines. It was first institutionalised in America in 1992 when The Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) was established. Its aim was to promote the relationship between literature (as well as humanity, culture and society) and nature or physical environment by encouraging human beings to have ethical attitudes towards nature.

Lawrence Buell identified two waves of ecocriticism: early ecocriticism that focused on preserving the biotic community and literary representations of the natural world (the first wave), and later ecocriticism highlighting its social aspects (the second wave) (Buell 2005). Glotfelty & Fromm's anthology *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996) defines ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty 1996: xvii) and is commonly understood to mark the culmination of its first phase. The second wave focused on adopting a socio-centric approach to environmentalism, whereby its scope was broadened from nature-writing and poetry-writing to social aspects (Buell 2005: 137). In addition, the strong bond between science and culture, and nature and social issues was acknowledged.

The wave metaphor used in Buell's discussion concerning the further development of ecocriticism encouraged other scholars to give their contribution to the field. Scott Slovic, the first president of ASLE, broadened the scope of ecocriticism by claiming that 'not a single literary work anywhere utterly defies ecocritical interpretation' (Callicott & Froderman 2009: 225). Slovic and Joni Adamson identified the third wave of ecocriticism that simultaneously acknowledged and went beyond ethnic and nationwide frontiers. It explored "all facets of human experience from an environmental view point" (Adamson & Slovic 2009: 6-7) and gave rise to the concept of 'environmental justice' that focused on how ecocriticism encouraged justice and sustainable development in the so-called Third World" (Reed 2010: 149).

The fourth wave of ecocriticism emerged when a new orientation in contemporary ecocriticism – material ecocriticism – was recognized in the works of Stacey Alaimo and Susan Hekman (*Material Feminism*, 2008) and Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann (*Material Ecocriticism*, 2014). The concept of trans-corporeality denoting the "time and space where human corporeality is inevitably connected to its nature and environment" became a pivotal idea of this wave (Alaimo 2008: 238). Slovic

argues that we might be now experiencing 'a Fifth wave of ecocriticism' that focuses on "information management, the psychology of information processing and on efficacy of various communication strategies", as these concerns coincide with the efforts of ecocritics "to reach beyond our traditional academic audiences by writing op-eds and blog entries, speaking at public meetings, publishing creative writings in addition to scholarship, and using other creative outlets" (Slovic 2019: 514).

With their focus on the social, psychological and physical impacts of apocalypse on humans, Ballard's urban violence novels establish a strong foundation for exploring the main concepts elaborated within the fourth wave of ecocriticism, in particular the idea that human and 'more-than-human' worlds cannot be regarded as separate entities (see Alaimo & Hekman 2008; Alaimo 2010). For instance, in these narratives, culture and human civilizations are depicted as deeply technologized, which points to all of the complex socio-political aspects associated with contemporary society (capitalism, consumerism, neo-fascism, etc.). However, dystopian lethargy and man's surrendering to the blessings of technology in these communities arise not only from man's anthropocentric ideas and his alienation from nature but also from man's failure to acknowledge the idea that humans and nonhumans are entwined.

The absence of nature and/or man's tendency to beat it into submission are indicative of the fact that the world is governed by political decree to control everything, including nature. Nature, however, constantly adapts and defends itself from human devastation and, above all, is independent from all of the political attempts of human civilization to control it. Ballard's urban violence novels bring to mind a rather different perspective that generates similar conclusions. They show that the urban space, like nature, functions as the living organism, or "a world of fleshy beings, with their own needs, claims and actions" (Alaimo 2008: 238) and as such conditions and regulates humans, their attitudes, actions and conducts of behaviour. The author establishes the link between sex and violence and the fact that they are ubiquitous in contemporary culture and entertainment. The stimuli that the urban landscapes produce have an adverse effect on human behaviour, eventually escalating in isolation, loss of moral codes and any spirituality whatsoever.

The idea that the corporeal substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from the "environment" defies the idea that nature serves as a mere resource for human use, "since 'nature' is always as close as one's own skin" (Alaimo 2008: 238). Man's failure to acknowledge the human and 'more-than-human' interconnectedness eventually leads to the complete annihilation of the human race, whose ultimate hopes

to survive the crisis were set on the formation of these dystopian, zero-waste urban Edens where urban violence resides.

3. BALLARD'S URBAN VIOLENCE NOVELS – THE EMERGENCE OF NEW SOCIAL FORMS

In his early novels, Ballard portrays physical catastrophes on a global level, through wind, drought and flood, which represent profound and clandestine aspirations of the human spirit (Stephenson 1991:41). His novels of the first half of the 1960s, originally called 'catastrophe novels', describe cataclysms of planetary proportions and deal with physical aspects of entropy (Petrović 2005: 373). Natural disasters are mostly deployed as an allegory for the collapse of human reason and morality, while most of the protagonists – reconciled with their fate – reject civilization and are resolved to live alone. By using themes such as destruction and disaster, Ballard strived to convey messages for posterity encompassing not only severe criticism against human nature but also to gain insight into irresponsible human behaviour (Tan 2019: 3). The notion of natural apocalypse is here combined with the characters' interaction with one another, so the role of human beings on this planet is being mocked. In his 'urban disaster trilogy', Ballard returns to conventional narrative structures – yet, the social and psychological entropy that now starts to take centre stage as opposed to the physical one dominant in the cli-fi novels, signals his readiness to embrace unconventional techniques in presenting the conventional perception of mental health.

As the advancement of science and technology confirmed Ballard's forebodings in novels about urban disasters – precisely, the fact that our darkest impulses reflect and fill technological and media landscape around us (Petrović 2005: 410) – Ballard's novels from the latest cycle of urban violence reject anthropocentric ideas and represent 'strong, narrowly focused narratives of apocalyptic realism' (Campbell 2008). They signal the emergence of new social forms that Ballard shored on the foundations of his previous novels that depict the natural and urban landscapes and present a society in the process of disintegration as a result of man's alienation from nature and his tendency to treat the environment as something separate from himself, which further escalates social and psychological entropy.

Entropy, defined in Merriam-Webster's dictionary by J. R. Newman as "the tendency towards a state of disorder as more probable than the state of order", or "the general trend of the universe towards death and disorder", in a social sphere denotes "an apocalypse, nonsense, loss of information, absurdity as well as the indication of

the decline of civilization” (Davis 2011: 121). In a given social system, entropy reflects negative behaviours, such as alienation, anomie and deviance with a tendency to instil a disordering effect in a particular social structure (Nisbet 1970: 125). It carries pessimistic visions about the forthcoming future, such as isolation that humans are easily adapted to due to the inevitable advancement of technology, readily embracing the nonsense and collective madness which are a deterrent to reaching any kind of cohesive structure.

These narratives support Ballard’s belief that “the true horrors of our collective future“ shall be found in “very ordinary nowness of highway overpasses, sports stadiums, high rise blocks and closed communities“ (Bradfield 2010). The catastrophes reaching planetary proportions now occupy the personal level. The chaotic man-made landscapes replace the natural landscapes disfigured by natural disasters. Physical entities as essential components of urban landscape – cars, motorways, skyscrapers, business parks, resorts – stand for social and mental estrangement of human beings.

The landscape presented in urban violence novels features gated communities with almost utopian-like characteristics, providing a sense of serenity to their residents by ensuring their indulgence in the world of hedonism. These novels present a different type of dystopia where closed enclaves render their residents’ wide spectrum of bizarre activities aimed at erasing memory and cessation of time, such as craving for early retirement only to be locked behind the gates and placed in front of CCTV and viewing life through the surveillance cameras or the lenses of a pornographic film. By exploring the link between technology, violence and environment and their influence on man, Ballard anticipates apocalyptic variants of futuristic social structures at the core of which is the mental health of a modern man in urban surroundings, where urban violence resides. Such social structures (retirement communities, gated communities) formed within the most diverse urban landscapes (i.e. road networks, car/business parks, high-rise, airport terminals, resorts) emanate from man’s alienation from nature, his obsession with technology, and the acknowledgement that man is constantly being deformed by the urban space.

By portraying apocalyptic realism in its rawest form, Ballard is consistent in his efforts to depict the society subjected to urban modernity and to show the disastrous impact of technological stimuli that, by making man alienated from nature, incites atrocious activities. However, this does not necessarily mean favouring the return to nature over urban modernity but pointing to the idea that it is important to acknowledge that the human and nonhuman worlds are always intermeshed, which

is in accordance with the ideas elaborated within the fourth wave of ecocriticism. In other words, people's exposure to the environment (be it natural or man-made) and vice versa conditions and regulates their physical and mental health as well as their spiritual well-being. Instead of waste dumps and places affected by natural disasters, his urban violence novels are mostly set in 'zero waste' closed communities that reflect perfection but breed social and psychological entropy. For the purpose of showing how these new social forms emerging from the eco-apocalypse evolved with each novel, they are to be examined chronologically, as they appear.

3.1. *Cocaine Nights* – a dystopian resort community

In *Cocaine Nights*, the luxurious residential complex Estrella de Mar – “the affectless realm, where entropic drift calmed the surfaces of a thousand swimming pools” (CN, 32) – is seen as a product of a technologically advanced society whose residents “lying on their sun-loungers” give in to inactivity and lethargy while waiting for “a new prescription” in the form of antidepressants (CN, 212). A dozy pueblo designed for the retired population consisting mainly of French and British expatriates may also be aptly named “the Sleeping Beauty” (CN, 164), as the dystopian lethargy and technological potential prevail, constantly hindering the possibility of reconnecting with nature. The idleness of everyday life is broken at nighttime in order to “unwind”, by throwing lush parties, performing amateur dramatics, playing tennis, and committing serious criminal activities that bind the community.

Upon arrival at Estrella de Mar in order to persuade his brother to withdraw a guilty plea regarding the arson in which five people died, the protagonist Charles immediately remarks that in Estrella de Mar there is “an apparent absence of any social structure; the timelessness of a world beyond boredom, with no past, no future and a diminishing present. Perhaps this was what a leisure-dominated future would resemble?” (CN, 32).

The leisure-dominated communities which embraced leisure time as their predominant lifestyle appear as a reaction to capitalistic societies where such a lifestyle was inconceivable. It is capitalism in the first place that bred immense and omnipresent alienation by forced labour. At first, Charles is enticed by the pleasures this utopian-like resort offers, yet nonetheless his further investigation, which also requires certain adaptations to this community, leads him to uncover that there are pathological motives along with sociopath behaviour beyond the enviable energy of its inhabitants and the perfection of this realm (Bright 1997). A representative of such

a society is Bobby Crawford, a tennis professional at the club Nautico, and a “psychopath as the saint” whose deeds (mostly providing the residents with pure cocaine and heroin) always carry the scent of violence and drugs in the atmosphere of this residential complex. Charles the protagonist and the whole community are lured by Crawford’s ideas and worldviews, where Crawford is the antagonist who preaches unselfishness and who would never “take part in criminal activity for his own gain” (CN, 212). Eventually, the protagonist is taking the role of becoming-Adam by adopting the antagonist’s ideas and acting upon them (Wilson 2017: 152).

The use of antidepressants, CCTV, drug consumption, illicit sex and violence that seem to predominate in this gated community, are seen as a form of escapism that modern age yields. This, in turn, results in isolation of their members, alienation from the natural environment, inability to socialise, and the residents’ moral and spiritual decay. Accordingly, human civilization succumbed to technologized enclaves of violence, which derived from capitalism and consumerist ideology as Neo-fascism, can only give birth to listless, cultureless and immoral zombies strayed from their natural terrain and hostile to their primal home. These ultra-modern communities generate the Anthropocene era by insisting on the fact that human and nonhuman/nature are separate. The natural infrastructure of the planet is transformed into a modernised landscape deprived of natural traces. However, the interrelatedness between man and the environment is once again made clear by stressing the transformation of man as a result of his dependence on what surrounds him.

The community residents’ comfort zone is their reliance on cable TV, watching new pornographic film of their acquaintances, and gaining insight into their own and lives of their fellow citizens through surveillance cameras. Socialising requires putting some effort – it means awakening from narcoma syndrome, leaving the commodity of their villas and entering ‘the outer world’. Yet, when they do step out of their comfort zone, there is a ‘session’ of a rape on the parking lot to be inspected. In addition, socialising breeds superfluous unrest as “friends can be a problem – gates and front doors need to be unlocked, alarm systems disconnected, and someone else is breathing your air. Besides, they bring in uneasy memories of the outside world” (CN, 211).

3.2. *Super-Cannes* – a dystopian high-tech business park

Super-Cannes takes ideas from the previous novel and elaborates on them, as it explores the impacts of man’s alienation from nature and the limits of human behaviour in another closed community, where ‘work is the new leisure’. The novel

is set in a super clean, zero waste high-tech business park in the hills above Cannes called Eden-Olympia. However, it is not 'just another business park' but "ideas laboratory for the new millennium" (*Super-Cannes*, 17). It is a 'terminal zone of capitalism' and an ultra-modern workers' paradise with the technocrats "as the key psychological zone" (*SC*, 18). The technocrats occupying the top positions are incited to play psychopathic games, as they all believe that "the human race [mired in its mediocrity] would never be insane enough for [doctor] Wilder Penrose" (*SC*, 85). As capitalism has penetrated every pore of human existence within communities, any attempt to imagine a different life outside the realm of alienation is unthinkable and unachievable as a "utopian dream" (Gasiorek 2005: 174).

Unlike Estrella de Mar, whose residents are obsessed with crime, Eden-Olympia provides its residents with 'therapeutic activities' from voyeurism to prescriptions of "violent therapies" and prepares them for the better future, "richer, saner, more fulfilled" as "petty criminals, clochards, AIDS riddled whores – they expect to be abused" (*SC*, 84). This business enclave represents a modern society that opts for willed madness and gives priority to denatured ecosystems within which the human body and nature are regarded as separate entities. However, the idea that the environment is "as close as one's own skin" (Alaimo 2010: 2) is supported by the fact that the residents of this gated community are constantly exposed to and thus dependent upon the negative impulses of the urban settings that surround them. Hence, the bizarre statement of one of the characters that "going mad is [their] only way of staying sane" (*SC*, 149).

Although it reached its peak in terms of prosperity and perfection in its creation, Eden-Olympia is an illusory Eden, where morality, religion and sanity are non-existent and where the only option to adhere to is institutionalised madness. Despite its excessively ordered structure within which 'even nature knows its place' and which is adapted to meet the needs of the social elite in terms of providing its residents with its own police force, doctors and psychiatrists, and 'no pinecones to trip you, no bird shit on your car' (*SC*, 83), its residents are unable to lead their lives outside their workplace. The flawless structure of Eden-Olympia bestows its residents with everything, from artificial lakes to lavish sports centres. Yet, they are still unable to relax. Under such circumstances, turning to "supervised madness" (*SC*, 184) seems to be the only viable alternative that the new millennium in which nature "was giving way [...] to the corporate car park" (*SC*, 258) has to offer.

As a result of the fact that "intimacy and neighbourliness were not features of everyday life at Eden-Olympia" (*SC*, 30), its residents became socially exclusive,

hostile to others, afraid of the 'outer world' and unable to engage in any kind of meaningful relationship. Living in such a high-tech business park means 'mechanising' its residents and conditioning their mindset through 'nourishing' their physical and mental health so that it 'matches' its surroundings. The thriving business park is characterized by soaring corruption and permutations of sex, and the whole society is undergoing a process of metamorphosis in lifestyle and moral codes, which eventually lead to despair and *anomie* (Gasiorek 2005: 192). As Gasiorek (175) points out, in such a society on the verge of collapse and where the old revolutionary ways have been abandoned, some sort of different and unconventional system needs to be established, the one that would celebrate 'criminal and psychopathy'. In order to unwind themselves from incessant work, the residents resort to voyeurism, anti-social behaviour and visionary therapies prescribed by doctors. To make the situation even more difficult, the community doctor turns out to be a messianic, megalomaniac psychiatrist, whose deviant psychological practices, just like the urban surroundings themselves, incite extreme forms of anti-social behaviour, foster novel pathologies and propel alienation into a greater form.

3.3. *Millennium People* – a 'new proletariat'

In *Millennium People*, Ballard demonstrated his power of prolepsis once again – a depiction of urban terrorism that begins at Heathrow Airport. In this novel, the social form emerging from man's obsession with consumerism is an alienated middle class in Chelsea Marina residential complex in London. It is a closed community, a 'new proletariat' encumbered by exorbitant housing expenses and parking fees as a new form of oppression. In addition, there is a new form of violence emerging in the novel – terrorist violence that draws its power from the absence of any real motive.

The protagonist of the novel, a psychologist David Markham, follows the same logic as his predecessors in Ballard's previous novels, while striving to uncover who was implicated in the bomb explosion at London's Heathrow Airport, in which his ex-wife was killed. The investigation that he conducts leads him in connection to the protest by members of the middle class – the "new proletariat", "salary slaves whose heads are full of American rubbish" (*MP*, 32), who refuse to be submissive to the system that imposes bad living conditions on them. As the novel develops, Markham becomes so mesmerized by the allure the rebels (a pediatrician Dr. Richard Gould and a former college film studies lecturer Kay Churchill) offer that he totally forgets about his mission and starts to participate in the acts of meaningless terrorism. He

appears to have features of typical Ballardian hero: at first he is successful, comfortable and happily married, then he becomes bored, restless and dissatisfied.

The central motive in the novel is a revolt against the system that spoiled and oppressed its citizens and a rising alienation of the middle class. The rebels that Markham meets are not the members of a certain proletariat, but middle-class managers upset over mortgage rates as they are “in the grip of some bizarre ideas” such as “abolish the 20th century. Ban tourism. Politics, commerce, education – all corrupt” (*MP*, 39). Instead of dealing with their civic responsibilities and adhering to moral and spiritual principles, formerly secure citizens of Chelsea Marina that used to dwell in cosiness, develop a sudden taste for demonstrations and rallies as “being law-abiding has nothing to do with being a good citizen. It means not bothering the police” (*MP*, 29). What appears to be the “new reality” for Ballard’s bourgeois revolutionaries is to take the anomalous and bizarre for rational and normal, yet keeping the sense of orderliness (i.e., after the riot a Volvo is burnt out yet it is being properly parked). Once people are subjected to the urban environment soaked with neoliberalism, their defiance of social norms incited by boredom results in deviant behaviour. The sense that the middle class has been marginalised and the idea that luxury goods are the main tool for their subjugation are reflected in encouraging docility (Sacks 2011). In the modern world, a potential occurrence of existential angst and the intense boredom of being utterly civilised is repelled by the “aphrodisiacal thrill of rebellion” (Sacks 2011). The novel’s antagonist, doctor Gould, advocates the idea that some sense can be found within the acts of meaningless violence by claiming that violence “isn’t a search for nothingness. It’s a search for meaning [...] Blow up the Stock Exchange and you’re rejecting global capitalism” (*MP*, 112).

The enclave of Chelsea Marina, a sort of ‘micronation’, makes an apt ground for experimenting with time, technology and psychopathology. This enclave represents a transformational maze where moral and natural codes are redesigned in order to manipulate false needs, encouraging illusions and everything is done beyond the moral horizon. Millennium people – the new social structure emerging from their constant exposure to this urban landscape – are drawn into inertia, incessant boredom and lethargy that gradually deadens their senses, leaving them devoid of any sense, meaning and life purpose. In order to restore the meaning, they resort to meaningless acts of violence and are being misled due to their own misconceptions, i.e. they wage the war mistaken for the war of liberation: “We have to set people free from all this culture and education. Richard says they’re just ways of trapping the middle class and making them docile” (*MP*, 33). No sense is revealed in the protest advocated by

the novel's "messiah" Dr. Gould, the most psychopathic of the three megalomaniac messianic characters in Ballard's cycle of urban violence novels (Petrović 2007: 41), as it appears to be predominantly metaphysical in nature, reflecting nihilism that manifests itself in the form of millenarian despair resembling vacuum that sucks everything into itself (Gasiorek 2005: 195).

3.4. Kingdom Come – a neo-fascist world in the suburbs

Kingdom Come brings into focus a neo-fascist world set in the English suburbs, where the apocalyptic future is revealed beneath the gloss of consumerism and patriotism. The closed community – now found in sports arenas and shopping malls in the city outskirts – undergoes a similar transformation in terms of losing its moral and spiritual compass while craving material things and incessant purchases as the ones in elite business parks and lavish resorts in the previous novels. The suburbs resemble living organisms and their dark atmosphere reveals the potential for sinister deeds: "The suburbs dream of violence. Asleep in their drowsy villas, sheltered by benevolent shopping malls, they wait patiently for the nightmares that will wake them into a more passionate world" (*KC*, 9).

The protagonist of the novel, Richard Pearson, a typical Ballardian antihero, comes to Brooklands to find the culprit for the assassination of his estranged father, a former airline pilot, that took place in Metro-Centre. In order to uncover the mystery of suburban violence, Pearson gradually sees that it is not the matter of who is causing the violence, but "it's more a matter of who isn't" (Bradfield 2012).

The residents of Brooklands break the triviality of everyday life by resorting to purchase in the Metro-Centre, a shopping mall resembling cathedral with a huge dome, located somewhere off the M25 west of Heathrow Airport, where they attentively absorb promotions and spurs of consumerism. Metro-Centre becomes the central place of all kinds of affairs – from being the main place for satisfying their moral demands through incessant purchases and a place where they can exercise their consumerism to being an ideal spot for organising riots. In addition, the dome of Metro-Centre becomes the shrine where giant bears are worshipped, which is simultaneously absurd and comic, just like consumerism embodies the only religion in this place (Le Guin 2006). It is ludicrous that the residents strive for unreason "which served [them] well in the past" and that "they're keen to enter a new Dark Age" (*KC*, 86).

The people appear to be jovial in their sport dresses, buying anything they can get their hands on, yet in the evening they indulge in a wide variety of mind-numbing activities. The all-encompassing boredom that people experience on a daily basis is temporarily escaped by the residents' attending sports matches and hanging around the indoor pools. Yet, all of these prove to be insufficient in fighting lethargy so they resort to violence, acts incited by racism (beating Asian traders) and even madness. The novel's messiah is David Cruise, "a retail messiah for the age of cable TV" (*KC*, 61) and a charming spokesperson at Metro-Centre, who whips the residents into a frenzy. Ballard has proposed again the indictment of contemporary life, the 'elective psychopathy'.

As in the previous novels of urban violence, the central themes explored here are man's alienation as a result of technologically-oriented environment that incites violent behaviour evident in the apocalyptic disaster coming upon Metro-Centre mall. The novel's protagonist, Richard Pearson shares the opinions and values of his fellow citizens who barely find sense in family values, meaningful relationships or work and are indulged in excessive consumerism and meaningless sex. The novel confirms the author's anticipation that the human race will experience alienation on the familiar terrain, irrespective of its aspirations to explore outer space. As humans have exploited all options available and are heading to narcoma syndrome, the forthcoming future, bearing nothing new, resembles 'a cable TV programme going on for ever' (*KC*, 146). Ballard's urban violence novels seem to suggest that humans should not watch out for zombies or mutant beasts, but for "those mall-walkers" (Bradfield 2012). The forthcoming apocalypse, the annihilation of the Anthropocene era in the core of which is man's alienation from nature (and the environment), seems to be the only alternative for humans in these closed communities, in which "boredom and a secret pleasure in one's own malice" (*KC*, 85) are the greatest danger.

4. FINAL REMARKS

In Ballard's urban violence novels, man's estrangement from nature is expressed through people's obsession with technology and constant search for external stimuli that leads to immense boredom, deadening of the senses, identity crisis, and man's mental, spiritual and emotional paralysis escalating to antisocial behaviour. Unlike his cli-fi novels, where natural disasters predominantly warned against physical entropy globally, appearing as a result of human activities, their exploitation of nature and their indifference to it, Ballard's urban violence novels signal the horrors of other

sorts, highlighting the entropy occurring on the personal level, embodied in the emergence of new social structures that started to assert themselves in zero waste urban areas.

The new world order arising in the form of gated communities demands new approaches in regard with combating social issues that usually include following the deviant practices of the new world's messiah who turns out to be a 'psychopath as the saint' sending out socially unacceptable messages. Simultaneously, in such closed communities, the level of corruption and criminal activities is on the rise. This is highly evident in *Cocaine Nights*, where the gated community of Estrella de Mar offers a wide spectrum of illicit activities to break narcoma syndrome of lethargic residents, whose spirituality and morality are also corrupt. In such a complex there is deviance in all matters, which serves to awaken the residents' synapses so that their 'messiah' can amplify his zest for it.

The adverse impact of technology on man is shown in man's loss of connection with nature within the urban environment. Technology hinders man to return to his primordial state, thus making it impossible for him to regain his purpose in life and reestablish his social bonds. Artificiality and reliance on machines in performing all kinds of tasks contributed to man's alienation, poor social interaction and inability to live in harmony with nature. The facilities in gated communities as key components of urban environment are designed to provide the experience similar to that which people are supposed to have when in contact with the natural environment, thus creating an artificial paradise that breeds artificial emotions (i.e. in *Cocaine Nights*, the resorts are surrounded by the sea, but no villas are overlooking the sea). These motives occur both in *Cocaine Nights* and in *Super-Cannes*, although the feature of artificiality is more prominent in the latter, diminishing and eventually annulling the role of the man in a society and augmenting the existence of alienation. Along with entering the new millennium, a man's alienation and deprivation of meaning and purpose are more emphasised through man's fight and protest against the oppressive regime, as evident in *Millennium People*.

Detachment from nature of a modern man is further supported by man's indulgence in consumerism, his worship of surfaces and a tendency to make everything that is deviant and illicit normal. In *Kingdom Come*, consumerism is a new age religion and the shopping malls are shrines in which their residents bow and worship the imaginary deities, whose altars sparkle with bar codes. When work or earning is not his priority, a modern man directs his thoughts to the new ways of transgressive or merely deviant behaviour to wake him from lethargy.

The consequences of man's estrangement from nature and his ability to blend with urban space are predominantly visible at the level of complexity of urban landscapes people are able to design. The more modern and technologically advanced the gated community is, the more detached from the nature its residents are. Hence, the negative impact of ecological crisis as a result of human activities is now seen in the level of disaster and violence within these zero-waste urban communities. Moreover, the residents' mental, spiritual, and moral paralysis reaches global levels as 'the suburbanization of the soul has overrun our planet like the plague' (SC, 193). Finally, the protagonists' subjection to urban modernity in Ballard's gated communities goes beyond the idea that the roots of the Late Modernity crisis predominantly lie in man's alienation from nature. Namely, it is indicative of the fact that man is conditioned by and dependent on the space (be it natural or urban) that surrounds him, or, in other words, that human corporeality, "in all its material fleshiness, is inseparable from "nature" and 'environment'" (Alaimo 2008: 238).

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TETRALOGIJA O URBANOM NASILJU DŽEJMSA G. BALARDA – EKOKRITIČKI PRISTUP

Sažetak

Fikcija Dž. G. Balarda je sjajan primer književnosti koja se bavi pitanjima od izuzetne važnosti za ekokritičare. Od njegovih romana u domenu ekološke fikcije iz 60-tih godina prošlog veka, a koji opisuju susret društva sa eko-apokalipsom koja je u toku, preko romana o urbanoj katastrofi iz 70-tih godina, koji prikazuju društvo u eri nakon eko-apokalipse, do njegove najnovije tetralogije [*Kokainske noći* (1996), *Kan na brdu* (2000), *Milenijumski ljudi* (2003) i *Carstvo smrti* (2006)], u kojoj je fokus na savremenim užasima kao što je urbano nasilje koje podstiče društvenu i psihološku entropiju i koje predstavlja sledeći nivo degradacije koji je čovečanstvo dostiglo na svom putu izumiranja, čini se da Balard pruža istoriju sistematskog propadanja ljudskih bića kao rezultat njihove otuđenosti od prirode i opsesije tehnološkim napretkom. Cilj ovog rada je da prikaže kako njegovi romani o urbanom nasilju, osim što odslikavaju propadanje ljudske vrste dovedeno do krajnjih granica, generišu nove društvene forme koje proističu iz ekološke krize i eko-apokalipse ukazujući na potrebu revidiranja odnosa čoveka i njegovog okruženja. U tom smislu, Balardova tetralogija odoleva tendenciji da se trivijalizuje i klišetira kao što to obično biva sa većinom dela iz domena ekološke fikcije, koja sve više gube sposobnost da izazovu strah od dolazeće katastrofe ili da postaknu ekološki aktivizam.

Ključne riječi: ekokritika; čovek i njegovo okruženje; urbani pejzaži; Balardovi romani o urbanom nasilju; nove društvene forme

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