# SITTING AMONG THE RUINS OF ONE'S LIFE: HOW J.G. BALLARD'S *THE DROUGHT* AND MARGARET ATWOOD'S *THE YEAR OF THE FLOOD* ADDRESS ECOCRITICAL THOUGHT UTILISING EXISTENTIALIST DISCOURSE

Master's Thesis

Literary Studies: English Language and Literature

Leiden University

Thomas Boer

S1447017

30 January 2020

Supervisor: Dr. E.J. van Leeuwen

Second Reader: Dr. S.A. Polak

## Table of Contents

## Introduction

In October 2018, The United Nation's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) announced that the world would probably end in the year 2050. The IPCC put forth their findings: a maximum increase of 1.5°C of earth's global temperature is the threshold for fending off multifarious apocalyptic consequences: coastal cities around the globe will submerge, extreme heat and droughts will turn fertile grounds into wastelands. As a consequence, a variety of pernicious social/economic developments (i.e. rise in poverty, mass migration, etc.) will occur (Watts). This may not have been the first time the end of the world was prophesised to the public, but the UN report was backed by 200+ academics, which lends credence to the dystopian prospects it contains.

As humankind is thrust into this uncertain future, the definition of the "human" in human being and its relationship to nature are in need of reconsideration. Given the planet's current environmental predicament, societal change is a necessity to stave off the dystopian ramifications emphasised in the IPCC-report. However, the IPCC-report was dubiously received by the public, who asked whether it would be possible to regulate earth's temperature to veer off a 1.5°C increase. Cultural Sociologist at the University of Amsterdam, Kobe de Keere, is highly sceptical of our ability to do so. De Keere argues that, due to our current political climate, the 12-year goal set in response to the UN report is unrealistic. Next to that he critiques governments for enforcing a bottom-up policy, placing too much responsibility with the individual subject (De Keere). De Keere's scepticism highlights the public's conflicting reception of the report. Arguing in favour of the report or denying it, de Keere's remark illustrates the current global environmental landscape; scientific consensus on climate change is contradicted by denial, dismissal, or doubt.

In 1999, Conrad P. Kottak asserted that “people won’t act to preserve the environment if they perceive no threats to it” (28). Given the twofold reception of the IPCC-report, there is a gap between the public’s perception of environmental threats and the scientific data available substantiating those threats and calling for action. However, next to the chasm between the public’s perception of and response to scientific environmental data, in “Literature and Ecology,” Louise Westling addresses the chasm between the exact sciences and the humanities. On the one hand, the academic fields became “more and more specialised” (77). On the other hand, she propositions that the twentieth century epitomised a more dominant perspective on the scientific and technological disciplines. Thus, both presenting contradictory arguments that claim their significance and importance in addressing environmental issues, the humanities, “literature, philosophy and the arts,” in relation to the sciences and technology have become alienated from each other, where the scientific consensus is favoured over the humanistic (77). However, in discussing these environmental issues, literature, philosophy, and the arts might prove to be fruitful in changing the public’s perspective on environmental threats, bridging the gap between scientific data and collective action.

The humanities have addressed our current environmental predicament for over half a century. From the pioneering work of Rachel Carlson (1962) and the eco-feminist philosophy of Carolyn Merchant (1980), to the current eco-philosophy of Timothy Morton (2014), climate change has been a growing concern in all academic discourse; but it seems to be that generally, scientific eco-critical theory fails to inform policy change. However, as Ban Ki-Moon stated in addressing the IPCC-report “climate change respects no borders; our actions must transcend all frontiers.” In a literal sense, Ki-moon speaks of the frontiers as nation-states' borders. This thesis will address the

metaphorical borders between the sciences and humanities in the academic community. The vehicle with which these borders can be transcended, I suggest, is *Littérature Engagée*. Instigated by Jean-Paul Sartre in "Introducing *Les Temps modernes*," "*littérature engagée,*" or "committed writing," emphasizes the responsible role of the author in writing not for art's sake but for society's sake – in other words – to produce a literature of social commitment. By engaging with the reader, eco-critical literature opens up environmental discourse: discussing what being human entails through an illustration of the changing world through which the anthropogenic magnitude of the human with nature is substantiated and contested.

Thus, this thesis substantiates that it is not enough to superficially consume scientific information to stave off a climate disaster. In order to radically convey the message of catastrophic climate change, and thus generally induce attitudes towards said environmental issues, authors of environmental dystopian fictions express eco-critical thought; laying out the embodiment of individuals' daily experiences in societies scarred by climate change. Transcending the borders of the scientific community, they speculatively conduct an existentialist quest towards human existence, by redefining the human condition in said dystopian societies.

By conducting a close-reading of J.G. Ballard's *The Drought* (1965) and Margaret Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* (2009), within the context of Sartre's concept of *committed writing*, and other aspects of existential discourse, this thesis shows how these two major literary eco-dystopias utilize the trope of *Littérature Engagée* to express their ecocriticism, conveying a message of climate change by engaging with their readers. In Chapter One, I will address current discourse on ecocriticism and Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism, synthesising key aspects of these theories with Sartre's thoughts on *Littérature Engagée*, which will be utilised to analyse the novels' eco-critical discourse. In Chapter Two and Chapter Three, the proposed sub-questions will be

answered by analysing the novels through the lens of this existentialist theoretical framework. However, given the complex nature of the existentialist philosophy, the sub-questions will be further discussed after the theoretical framework. Finally, I conclude in what manner the novels discussed denote *Littérature Engagée Écocritique*; addressing to what extent they portray elements exemplary of the existentialist philosophy and how they engage with their respective audiences.

## Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework and *Littérature Engagée Écocritique*

### Theoretical Framework

As touched upon in the introduction, both J.G. Ballard and Margaret Atwood have written dystopic novels through which they are ecocritical of their respective times. In order to utilise ecocriticism and existentialism as a critical framework to explore the extent to which the fictions of both authors fall within Sartre's concept *Littérature Engagée*, this chapter will first delineate what ecocriticism entails. Firstly, touching upon various scholars such as Greg Garrard, Timothy Morton, and Bruno Latour, I will address how ecocriticism may help to bridge the gap between the sciences and humanities. Secondly, Sartre's existentialism, as demonstrated in *Existentialism is a Humanism* (2007), will be discussed, focussing on the literary strength of the philosophy for fictional character analysis. Finally, *Littérature Engagée* will be addressed as Sartre's epitome of writing as a social function, illustrating how ecocriticism and the existentialist framework may be constructive in inducing engagement and making the novels epitomes of *Littérature Engagée Écocritique*.

## Ecocriticism

A broad definition of ecocriticism encompasses the interdisciplinary fields of environmental, literary and cultural studies. In *Ecocriticism* (2004), Greg Garrard points out that it "is the study of the relationship of the human and the non-human, … entailing critical analysis of the term 'human' itself" (5). In *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence* (2016), Timothy Morton also addresses the relationship between the human and non-human. He proposes – as its title says – a logic for future co-existence. Making use of nearly all the literary devices available (which makes the dialogue fuzzier than clearer), Morton paints a picture that attests the manner in which current environmental discourse implicates that "[individual] action [does not] have any statistical meaning whatsoever. [But] scaled up to Earth magnitude … the Sixth Mass Extinction Event is precisely what is being caused" (35). Morton argues that ecological awareness has a looping form, and in this looping line of thought one comes to realise the entire human species. In turn, Morton proposes a looping line of thought to open up the manner in which one should and could think about one's role in the predicament to come. According to Morton, the logic behind thought, that empirically proves the existence of "hyperobjects" like "human beings and global warming" (11), prevents the individual from clearly grasping fully one's individual responsibility for the greater picture.

In his opening chapter, Morton touches upon the "weird: a turn or twist or loop, a turn of events" (5). In the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "weird, adj." also emphasises the manner in which causality is predetermined and, yet, an outcome may be unaccounted for, strange, and "uncanny." Morton calls for an emphasis on these looping structures in logic, for they situate the responsible individual in the larger body of thought. They enable us to see the darkness in ecological awareness: "We 'civilized' people, we Mesopotamians, are the narrators of our destiny. Ecological

awareness is that moment at which these narrators find out that they are the tragic criminal" (9). He illustrates this with a metaphor of the individual subject turning the ignition-key of one's car. On a singular level, the individual probably does not even think about harming the planet, but, inevitably, on a larger seven-billion-people scale, one does detrimental harm. On the contrary, the looping structure in logic propagated by Morton and its consequence; the realisation of individual responsibility in constructing the hyperobject global warming, have been the subject of study for years.

In a similar line of reasoning, through the Actor Network Theory (ANT), its scholars have aimed to bring forth concepts that address "the problem of agency … and … the constitution of collective realities" (Muniesa 82). Foremost, the ANT illustrates the weird manner in which particular events are subjected to multifarious forms of agency (action) "which cannot be subsumed under a simple human/nonhuman or intentional/unintentional divide" (83). The ANT addresses that the acting agent in social settings is a constituent of the social sphere, in which many different forms of action originate. Second, ANT addresses the bias originating in "modern reason": that accounts are usually biased to favour a "purified agency": one that affirms the "divide between nature and culture" (83). The ANT does not aim to elucidate what moves an actor but to show why one moves. Similar to Morton's call for emphasis on the role of the subject in being a constituent of the hyperobject, ANT shows its significance in "[reconsidering …] what a 'thing' is and of what it does" (83). Thus, next to individual actors, a form of agency is ascribed to bigger entities like humanity, or global warming, of which all actors are constituents. Both Morton and the ANT foreground the role of the individual agent. Morton proposes the rethinking of the deterministic ontological differentiations between the various of entities that make up existence. ANT theorises that any being is a constituent of a sociality and there is no nature-culture divide.

In *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Co-existence*, Morton aims to illustrate the manner in which subjects and objects are interconnected and he stresses the loop-like structure of logic which enables one to envision such an ecological structure. But, even more so, he critiques the manner in which nature and culture, "the gap between the human and everything else," are divided (17). Further illustrating this academic gap, in *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993), Bruno Latour addresses the construction of hybrid systems in reality. He critiques the manner in which phenomena that originally were fragmented into separate categories (i.e. "science, politics, economy, law, religion, technology, fiction"), now increasingly "weave our world together" (3). Both propose the need for an interdisciplinary perspective on what constitutes the human and non-human. Having been a huge collaborator in advancing the ANT, Latour addresses the manner in which actors construct reality and argues for the growing interconnectedness in phenomena emerging presently. Furthermore, like Morton, Latour proposes that the collective, "the association of humans and nonhumans" (4), is inclusive and that the proliferation of hybridisations must, equally, be considered interdisciplinary.

Next to considering the human in relation to nature, my aim is to investigate in what way Ballard and Atwood have presented their ecocritical hybrid to the reader. As mentioned previously, Louise Westling traces the genealogy of the relationship between the two, "science and the humanities," and argues that the cultural rift between them originated through "lack of understanding" (77). However, she proposes that the humanities may be complementary to the sciences. Where the (exact) sciences quantify and classify the present, Westling substantiates that the humanities may "develop their imagined realities from within the present cultural and scientific understanding of the natural word" (81-2). Where the IPCC-report (2018) has demonstrated what a 1.5ºC increase in sea-temperature will do to the planet we inhabit, the creatives have prophesised

the end of the world due to global warming for quite some time. Westling argues that the manner in which the art is able to "dramatize," "explore ethical dilemmas" and elucidate how "epistemological limitations … can be transferred into literary strategies or philosophical explorations (81-2), illustrates the significance of art as a medium.

Westling's article expands on the argument found in Greg Garrard's *Teaching Ecocriticism and Green Cultural Studies* (2012). Given the scope of this thesis, ecocriticism's academic relevance lies in the translation of eco-conscious knowledge and substantiates the prophesised eco-conscious ideology through engaged literature. Westling argues that "[e]cocritics … are concerned with ethical and ontological consequences and possibilities of the ecological information that science opens for us" (Westling 84). She calls for an exploration of literary texts adhering to an ecological theme for they may be used to illustrate the role of the human as constituent of nature and as actors with nature. Furthermore, in "Literature and Ecology" (2012), Gabriel and Garrard explore the influence of narratives involving climate change on readers, and the roles those writings occupy: "mimetic … or exhortatory" (117). Even more so, they address Carolyn Merchant who argues for the narratives' significance in transposing eco-critical thought: "from stories we absorb our goals in life, our morals and our patterns of behaviour" (qtd. in Gabriel & Garrard 117).

Although climate-change-affected narratives are significant in transposing readers' subjective values, Gabriel and Garrard note that ecocriticism faces a twofold of problems that influence the way in which the narratives are perceived by the public: "Science and scepticism, apocalypse and apathy" (118). They propose that the concrete sciences advocating global warming are consistently contested by a "campaign of misinformation by the anti-environmentalist right" (119), which illustrates that the current scientific field is pressured greatly by both sides. Furthermore, they attest to the fact that many of the ecocritical narratives are contextualised

through apocalyptic rhetoric. They argue that this rhetoric makes environmental narratives "promise privation and restraint, rather than new possibilities of pleasure and freedom" (119). They argue that the tutor may face problems in giving a neutral perspective of both the devastating consequences of an environmental disaster, whilst maintaining a positivist outlook: "one that makes room … for the language of hope, solidarity and sustained work" (119).

Even though I agree with the first problem – the duality with which the sciences confirm or deny environmental problems – I want to challenge the argument voiced when presenting the second problem. Taking into consideration that Gabriel and Garrard aim to inform tutors who intend to inspire students on the significance of ecocriticism, I disagree with the idea that apocalyptic narratives rather enforce privation and restraint than new possibilities. In *Ecocriticism*, Garrard devotes an entire chapter on the "Apocalypse," and, rightfully so, questions the manner in which the apocalypse alludes to environmental issues. He argues that the "[a]pocalypse provides an emotionally charged frame of reference within which complex, long term issues are reduced to monocausal crises involving conflicts between recognisably opposed groups" (105). Because of this reduction, Garrard asserts that the multifaceted problems and issues involving environmental problems "might seem more amenable to solution" (107). He emphasises its prophetic nature and questions the realness of the apocalyptic narratives: "a discursive construct" (107). However, in his opening chapter, Garrard argues that ecocriticism's outset was "'literary' or 'cultural'" analysis of "rhetorical strategies, use of pastoral and apocalyptic imagery and literary allusions" (3). One may begin to doubt the apocalypse genre as a means to an end or agree to the fact that the apocalypse merely contextualises the framework within which the narrative's eco-critical rhetoric is presented to the reader. However, besides advocating despair, privation, and restraint, I claim that the environmentally caused apocalypse presented in dystopic fiction corresponds to what is

known to the reader; the manner in which the reader is informed on the ecological problems by this narrative is not. They illustrate “a fundamental reconceptualization of climate change and the human relationship to – and engagement with – ecosystems” (Gabriel & Garrard 118). They foreground realisation of the human with nature, presenting the audience with an ecocentric perspective – one where humankind has been kicked off its pedestal.

Existentialism

Before enquiring what Sartre's existentialist philosophy epitomises, its relationship to the sociality within which the philosophy is contextualised needs further elucidation. In the 1996 preface to *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Arlette Elkaïm-Sartre puts forward the question "why was the author of *Being and Nothingness* (1943) so determined to convince people of the humanistic nature of his doctrine?" (vii). In turn, the humanistic nature of Existentialism is precisely what needs to be asserted in this chapter, because it foregrounds subjective individual agency in existence in relationship to the Other.

Elkaïm-Sartre touches upon a significant delineation that Sartre aims for in defining humanism. He scorns humanism's original meaning that it is "a theory that takes man as an end and as the supreme value," for he believes that "man" is never the end but always in the process of becoming (Sartre 51-52). Touching upon two important concepts that will be further substantiated – subjectivity and transcendence – Sartre stresses that what constitutes the human being, what entails existence, is outside of the individual. He asserts that: "[M]an is always outside of himself, and it is in projecting and losing himself beyond himself that man is realized; and, on the other hand, it is in pursuing transcendent goals that he is able to exist" (Sartre 52). Sartre opens his 29th October 1945 lecture by elaborating on what existentialism entails. Foremost, that it is a philosophy that dually affirms human life while, simultaneously, ascertaining that the truths the individual values and the actions one partakes on implicate a social environment and, in turn, "human subjectivity" (18). It is precisely this relationship between the individual's actions and values delineated against the social environment through individual subjectivity that make existentialism as a doctrine such a thriving force in the construction of the conscious individual. It

is this underscoring of the individual's consciousness that led Sartre to identify the "Cartesian *cogito*" (40) as the foundational absolute truth of existentialist philosophy.

In utilising the Cartesian "I think" as a cornerstone for the existentialist philosophy, Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* received criticism. Its critics argued a case for the individualistic nature that arises when the doctrine is based solely on pure subjectivism. At first glance, pure subjectivism implies that the conscious individual, in comprehending one's solitary isolation, would abstain from finding solidarity in others, for everything outside of the "self" becomes void in this line of reasoning. If the absolute truth is "I think therefore I am," all other truths occurring outside of one's consciousness (i.e. an apple falling from a tree, or another person) are mere probabilities. For the manner in which one perceives these truths undoubtedly entails that they pass through the individual's consciousness – a subjective consciousness. Sartre contests this shallow notion of pure subjectivism. On the contrary, he argues that it is precisely Descartes' "I think" that underlines existentialism's inherent quality to treat the individual as a subject instead of an object (40). The individual's ability to express solidarity with others emerges out of the duality with which the conscious subject tries to define oneself through defining others. In that moment, the individual "who becomes aware of himself directly in the *cogito* also perceives all others, and he does so as the condition of his own existence" (40). The mirror, exemplified as the Other, is equally held up by the Other. Mediated through the Other, it is the only confirmation of the individual subject and its personal traits. Subjectivity, the Other, and existence are mutual beneficiaries that validate one-another.

Henceforth, when the existential subject is confronted with the realisation of oneself – the only truth being that one exists, subjectively, solely, for oneself and through the Other – Sartre delineates the individual-as-a-subject from the individual-as-an-object. In turn, the distinction he

makes delineates between “existence precedes essence” (20), or whether essence precedes existence. Corroborating this line of reasoning, he puts forth the example of a paper knife. Where “the paper knife is … both an object produced in a certain way … and one that … serves a definite purpose (21), he argues that one would never make the object without knowing its purpose in advance. As such, the paper knife is produced with a specific purpose – a specific essence that exists before the paper knife does.

Through the analogy of the paper knife, Sartre critiques the creationist school of thought, and, additionally, creates an opening for action and responsibility. By taking an atheistic perspective and substantiating that God did not create Adam and Eve to his likeness, one can only conclude that human-beings have not sprung from a preconceived blue-print; no essence that precedes existence. Thus, when taking God out of the equation, the formula that Sartre has left us with is one where existence precedes essence. Sartre depicts man as someone who “first exists: he materializes in the world, encounters himself, and only afterwards defines himself.” (22). It is in emphasising “afterwards defines himself” that the existentialist doctrine sets in motion the practical reach of its virtues. Because one defines oneself only after coming into existence, this implies that preceding to ‘self-definition’ man is nothing and only through consciously projecting oneself into the future will one be able make something of oneself. In this regard, one is always in the process of becoming, never stationary. Even more so, as there is no preconceived essence to uphold one’s actions a– no god taking responsibility for one’s vices – this responsibility lies unmistakeably with the subject. Thus, Sartre argues that the ‘will’ with which one projects oneself in the future is always conscious and, in turn, the conscious decisions with which one leaps into the future are therefore decisions subjected to responsibility.

Thus, "[m]an is nothing other than his own project. He exists only to the extent that he realizes himself, therefore he is nothing more than the sum of his actions … responsible for what he is (23). It is precisely this realisation of man's individual subjectivity and responsibility that Sartre ascribes as the first effect of the existentialist philosophy. However, the consequence of realising the Other whilst concurrently realising that one is solely responsible for one's actions brings about an additional layer of responsibility. One is not solely responsible for one's own actions. In envisioning oneself and acting towards what one wants to be, the individual also imagines what anyone should be. In this regard, with the freedom to choose comes the moral responsibility to others to justify said choice.

This led Sartre to address three stages of being that equally follow the realisation of subjective responsibility: "anguish, abandonment, and despair" (25). These three modes of being illustrate the stages encountered by the individual subject in daily conduct. As discussed previously, Sartre suggests that the individual being is differentiated and defined through the interaction with the Other. However, with the realisation of responsibility for one's own existence comes the realisation that in choosing for oneself, the subject chooses for the entire sociality. This mode of being is what Sartre calls "anguish" (25). Sartre defines anguish as the weight of responsibility that is felt when the free individual realises that one's actions are equally measured as universal actions expressed by others. He proposes to think on the matter: "What would happen if everyone acted that way?" (25). Following this train of thought, one who chooses whilst being of the understanding that if everyone acted like that it would be morally wrong/bad, in turn, lives in "bad faith" (25). Sartre introduction of the concept Bad Faith paves the way for the delineation that followed in trying to define what anguish entails: Bad Faith or Good Faith. Guiding one in anguish,

one's decisions are either one or the Other and this legislative aspect of responsibility entails being in anguish.

Following his explanation on anguish, Sartre goes into detail in substantiating the atheistic ramifications of his philosophy, of which its significance becomes apparent in Atwood's *The Year of the Flood*. However, as previously expanded on, Sartre disregarded God as the architect of human beings, emphasising that existence precedes essence. Furthermore, being of the understanding that God does not exist, likewise, there is no legislator, there are "no values or orders that can legitimize our conduct" and "man is condemned to be free" (29). The responsible subject is in Abandonment in the sense that all decisions and acts performed – eventually – are solely justified by the individual free subject. However, Sartre's explanation of Abandonment solely responds to the critique received previously and is not further substantiated: one is responsible for God does not exist.

Lastly, Sartre expands on the state of being in Despair. At first glance, despair might underline a similar negative state of being, in comparison to the previously discussed Anguish or Abandonment. The subject is alienated from society through one's self-realisation in being responsible for individual existence, through practice, responsible for others, and the sole legislator of one's decisions. Next to Anguish and Abandonment, the subject is also thrust into Despair. Significantly, where, with the other two states of being, the subject gains responsibility and self-realisation of legislative authority, when the subject falls into despair one loses hope. Where Anguish and Despair could potentially weigh heavy on a person's mind, Sartre finalises his findings on Despair on a relatively positive note: "it means that we must limit ourselves to reckoning only with those things that depend on our will, or on the set of probabilities that enable action" (34). One is not be able to influence that which falls outside of the reach of one's will, and

this is where hope resides. Sartre expresses that one should not concern oneself with such trivialities for they fall outside of one's "realm of possibilities" (35). It is in action that one's existence is confirmed and the manner in which one is condemned to be free substantiates the ramifications of these acts in one's project of becoming. The state of being in Anguish and Abandonment, or human beings as the sole legislators, coincides with the freedom that supposes these acts of becoming. It is precisely this subjective consciousness supposing individual freedom that has received backlash, for it inspires the conscious realisation that the misery one is in is, in fact, of one's own making (37). This enables one more clearly to understand Sartre's development of Despair. By supposing that one should act without hope, Sartre illustrates that the condition one is in – though miserable as it may seem – can be overcome if one wills it so. The optimistic outlook with which he presents his existentialist philosophy places emphasis on the silver lining in one's existence. Even though one might aim to veer away responsibility for said condition, the reality is that man should, foremost, take this responsibility. As such, the realisation of being in despair is transposed to the characters portrayed in both novels, respectively. Furthermore, the analysis will emphasise the manner in which each of the protagonists aim to overcome their desperate, dystopic situation – not by hoping for a future but attaining one through subjective authenticity.

Primarily, I have illustrated how Sartre's Existentialist philosophy aims to define consciousness as primary truth for human existence, before elucidating one's condition in understanding said position. Moreover, I have attested how the Other is constructed through subjectivity, but more emphasis can be placed on what constitutes said social role of the conscious individual. Foremost, Sartre aims to illustrate that, in trying to define oneself, one defines the Other. As expanded on previously, one is in a state of anguish if one comes to realise said responsibility

for one's individual project and the implications one's choices have, since through these choices one realises and defines the Other.

In turn, Sartre argues that the subject is cast into the world of "intersubjectivity" (42). Intersubjectivity implicates that, even though the subject may come from a very different background, there is some plane of existence upon which the conscious individual understands the Other. Therefore, Sartre argues that, even though there is no conception of human nature – for there is no blueprint, no essence upon which human nature is exemplified – there is a human condition (42). The human condition is that which *a priori* defines one's situation, that which is given, upon which one constructs one's individual, subjective project. In other words, the human condition is this transcendental element of existence where the individual aims to transcend one's situation: "What never varies is the necessity for [one] to be in the world, to work in it, to live out his life in it among others, and, eventually, to die in it" (42). It is precisely this transcendental element to human existence that, according to Sartre, substantiates the universalistic element of existentialism.

Finally, I want to expand on the last critiques on his philosophy Sartre addresses in finalising his lecture, as exemplified in *Existentialism is a Humanism*. I have illustrated in what manner Sartre's existentialist philosophy elucidates individual existence. There are various individual moments of realisation that constitute one's existential thought in relation to the Other. Foremost, one realises that one is free, responsible for one's own project, and responsible for the existence of Others. Latterly, the last of the critiques discussed by Sartre aimed at the subjective aspect of the philosophy. It is precisely his rebuttal of these practical critiques that pulls Existentialism into the realm of action. Where the former part of this elaboration on Existentialism

aims to explain what Sartre's philosophy entails, the latter will expand on what conscious individual choices aim to underscore for society as a whole.

As shown previously, the humanistic element in Sartre's existentialist philosophy delineates that the responsibility for one's choices leads to a responsibility for universal existence and a responsibility for the existence of the other: both human beings and nature. However, being condemned to subjectivity and freedom has led critics to voice a threefold critique on subjectivity which Sartre expands upon: "You can do whatever you like. … You cannot judge others, … [and,] Since all of your choices are arbitrary, you receive into one hand what you grant with the other" (44). Sartre quickly disposes of the first objection and argues a case for the morality in choice. He stresses that one always has a choice and not choosing equals the choice 'to not choose'. In view of the fact that existence precedes essence, one's choices are equally in process of becoming. Furthermore, one takes a moral stance for there is a responsibility for each of one's choices. As such, the morality with which these choices are justified is – equally – in the process of becoming. He argues that it is impossible to *a priori* decide what one values and, thus, through choice one's values become apparent. With responsibility comes morality.

Sartre also discusses the ability to judge the moral behaviour of others, arguing a case both for and against it. He poses "that whenever man chooses his commitment and his project in a totally sincere and lucid way, it is impossible for him to prefer another" (47). Thus, that which one finds morally wrong is only wrong to the morality of the one who professes them. In this regard, one cannot judge the Other but only on the premise that this is a lucid choice. Therefore, the ability to judge others does not find its origin in the moral good and evil, but whether one recognises that the moral values guiding one's choice are based upon freedom. Sartre proposes that "[o]ne can choose anything, so long as it involves free commitment" (51). For the subject to act in free

commitment, he advocates that the choice itself is not predetermined by any pre-existing values or moralities. If one would base one's choices on these predetermined values, one acts in bad faith. Acting in bad faith, in this regard, encompasses all choices for which the subject bases its commitment on an "error" (47). The error constitutes the denial of this freedom and following up on a pre-determined morality, which implies choice. Therefore, Sartre argues that it is not the moral plane upon which one judges the Other, but one judges those whom are in denial of the human condition; "one of free choice" (47).

Sartre aims to emphasise that, because one is free and responsible, acting in bad faith implies the denial of one's freedom. Moreover, one's actions are judged under the premise that this freedom is a subjective and, even more so, an implied aspect of existence. Moreover, through this elaboration on the denial of freedom and living in bad faith, he illustrates the social responsibility of said choice. The authentic individual is a subject who bases one's commitments on freedom and realises such choices are never bound by any moral constraints. As touched upon previously when introducing the state of being in Anguish, one who realises that the responsibility for one's actions are equally defined through responsibility in the actions of others. Sartre takes the dilemma "what would happen if everyone acted that way" also to illustrate authentic morality. If one denies one's freedom and acts in bad faith, one denies the freedom of others, which is what one may be judged upon.

Sartre defines his critics' final remark as "our values need not be taken very seriously, since we choose them ourselves" (51). He rebuts this remark on the atheistic basis of his philosophy; if there are no pre-existing values due to the absence of God, it is only logical that the meaning given to life and the values that go with said meaning are of the subject's making, for existence precedes essence. Sartre ends his plea by asserting that "existentialism is optimistic. It's a doctrine of action"

(54). Thus, given the eco-crises that humanity faces in our current epoch, it is this optimistic, transcendental view on existence that demonstrates its significance for this literary analysis. In this regard, I have utilised Sartre's *Existentialism as a Humanism* because it is an abridged lecture of his seminal work *Being and Nothingness*. I am aware that the lecture in itself does not do justice to his entire philosophical oeuvre, but it informs the theory on ecocriticism discussed above. Both eco-critical theory and existentialism address the relationship between the individual and the other, whether the Other are human beings or the natural world. Emphasising individual agency and obligation to live an authentic life abstaining from bad faith, existentialism foregrounds the responsibility of the individual to transcend one's facticity and attain a future for all Others. In his article "Existentialism as a Philosophical Movement", David E. Cooper has generalised the Existentialists' thought processes, which – for its convenience – I aim to use to summarise Sartre's Existentialist philosophy, which I have substantiated above: "inspired by the issue of estrangement, from conceptions of the world and human existence, to a doctrine of radical human freedom that leads into an ethics of authenticity and reciprocal freedom" (47-8). Addressing Sartre's definition of the human condition, Cooper emphasises the individual subject – alienated from one's situation as a condition for human existence – who realises one's individual freedom through living authentically and, in turn, realises the freedom of the Other.

*Littérature Engagée Écocritique*

Given the scope of this literary analytical endeavour, Sartre's thoughts on writing and literature as a medium to transpose ideology will be elucidated. In "Introducing *Les Temps modernes*," Sartre addresses the sociality within which authors have been situated. Succumbing to writing "Art for Art's Sake" (249), Sartre argues, authors have seldom recognised the relationship between their works and the income received for their work. As a result, drawing similarities with the arts, writing has not received the position it was due. Having succumbed to writing Art for Art's sake, the authors have (purposefully) neglected their responsibility and the ones that do wonder; "they suffered from a literary bad conscience and are no longer sure whether to write is admirable or grotesque" (250). Sartre argues, the writer is conflicted, torn between seeing workers struggle to make a living, whilst they themselves earn a living from their readers – the bourgeoise – whom they despise.

Sartre continues his plea with a call for action. Whilst speaking to his contemporaries, he stresses that one has only "*this* life to live," and "the writer is *situated* in his time; every word he utters has reverberations. As does his silence" (252). Thus, Sartre attests the importance of one's response to social matters whilst referencing Voltaire, Zola, and Gide who did act, claiming responsibility. Significantly, Sartre asserts that writers "modest[ly]" may be attentive in "preparing the future" (253). But, he continues, imagining a future far removed from the present, or issues that pertain society as a whole, are not of our interest: "it is the future of *our* time that must be the object of our concern" (253). As this thesis will address a variety of issues pertaining 'our future,' one could argue that the each of the novels are concerned with a future too far removed from ours, one that is antithetical to Sartre's ideological goal in *Littérature Engagée*. However, as Sartre himself proclaims: "our intention is to help effect certain changes in the Society that surrounds us"

(255). The end-of-the-wold-theme may be utilised to express what changes are a necessity in this time, whilst prophesising what might occur if we do not act upon the possibly imagined future. Sartre calls this a "professional conscience," which entails that literature has regained its "social function:" one where authors aim to, on the one hand, alter "the social condition of man" and, on the other hand, "the concept he has of himself" (255).

He ends his plea on *Littérature Engagée* with a general conception of what he idealises it to be: "Committed literature dissolves the readers' bad faith and shows them their freedom, so it is the responsibility of the intellectual to be *engagé,* committed to freedom" (Sartre 261). Synthesising the above mentioned, the writer is responsible to write promoting freedom and may guide the individual past one's bad faith. Addressing Sartre's engaged writing, Albert Camus elaborates on a part of Sartre's literary oeuvre:

> A great writer always brings with him his world and his preaching. Sartre's preaching converts us to nothingness, but to lucidity as well. The image he immortalizes through his creations – that of a man sitting among the ruins of his life – expresses … the greatness and truth of this work. (qtd. in Sartre, *Humanism* 4)

In order to see whether Ballard and Atwood, have broken the fourth wall and addressed the reader directly, I have utilised the theories on ecocriticism and existentialism to elucidate the author's critical perspective on the subject's existence with the other, with nature. As a philosophy, Existentialism emphasises individual subjectivity and responsibility for one's life and the lives of others. However, in aiming to substantiate the anthropogenic environmental argument, I argue that existentialism focusses too heavily on the individual subject and individual existence. In this regard, ecocriticism complements existentialist thought by further informing the individual subject's relationship to the Other, to nature. Existentialism is a philosophy of action, and it is

precisely those actions that highlight the human condition and demonstrate the individual's connection to the Other. By utilising ecocritical theory, I am able to put all these different actors into a greater network of existence; an ecocritical existential framework in which human beings are a part of nature.

By adhering to Sartre's existentialist philosophy and the variety of concepts that go with it: "[responsibility, project, freedom, action, individual, solitude]" (Sartre, *Humanism* 10), this literary analysis highlights the manner in which each of the authors have expressed their ecocritical worldview to the reader by answering the following sub-questions. First, by guiding the reader on an existential journey with the protagonist, in what manner have the authors redefined Sartre's idea of the human condition in each of their dystopian futures presented? Second, what literary devices have they utilised to transpose the protagonists formative experience to the reader? Concluding, by comparing the engaged accounts of both authors, I aim to compare in what manner the authors have expressed their ecocritical perspective on society, whilst providing the freedom in acting implicated with it.

## Chapter 2: Existential Journey of the Protagonist

### Introduction

This chapter explores the manner in which Sartre's existentialist philosophy is present in both, J.G. Ballard's *The Drought* and Margaret Atwood's *The Year of the Flood*. Both novels are dystopias portraying environmental collapse due to human meddling. Furthermore, Ballard and Atwood portray their ecocriticism by exploring the relationship between human and nature. As such, this chapter shows in what manner the authors have redefined Sartre's idea of the human condition by taking the reader on a journey towards authenticity with the protagonist in each of their dystopian futures presented. First, Ballard's *The Drought* is discussed, in which the protagonist Ransom goes on an existential journey across the margins of his inner space, offering insight into the relationship between subject and nature. Second, Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* is analysed, in which a variety of narrative voices depict the Waterless Flood as it unfolds to the protagonist and reader equally, portraying Toby and Ren as they come to realise their relationship to the environment they inhabit.

J.G. Ballard – *The Drought*

In "Which Way to Inner Space?" Ballard touches upon what constitutes the Science Fiction (SF) genre: "I'd like to see s-f becoming abstract and 'cool', inventing fresh situations and contexts that illustrate its theme obliquely" (Ballard, *User's Guide* 198). He critiques the genre for being unimaginative and venturing outward, where he deems that the "inner space," the abstract "biological sciences," and not the "physical sciences" should take the foreground (197). Through the contextualisation of Ballard's work within the existentialist movement, I argue that these inner space endeavours that come to the fore make *The Drought* significant for this existentialist analysis.

Furthermore, in "Time, Memory, and Inner Space," Ballard discusses the intersubjective value of the genre as a literary "method of using one's imagination to construct a paradoxical universe where dream and reality become fused together" (*User's Guide* 200). In turn, Ballard fuses the existential reality – in which the free subject is subjugated – with a dream world where environmental collapse forces the subject to take an ethical stance on one's relationship to the other and the environment one inhabits.

Ballard practiced what he preached. His dream-like works are concerned with "dystopian modernity, bleak man-made landscapes, and the psychological effects of technological, social or environmental developments" ("Ballardian, adj."). Accordingly, the Ballardian novel illustrates the human condition set against a speculated dystopian backdrop of the environment described. Contrastingly, in "The Touchstone City," Ballard reviews Melly's *Parris and the Surrealists* (1991) and wonders if the surrealist movement "[could] have fought off the post-war challenge to its authority posed by Sartre and the existentialists" (Ballard, *User's Guide* 89). Noteworthy, Ballard calls for a more experimental science fiction set against the "challenge to authority," which he attributes to the existentialists. On the contrary, his venture into inner space elucidates the

subjective experience in relation to the dystopic reality presented: depicting characters who try to make sense of and give meaning to their lives whilst subjected to a surrealistic change in environment.

These environments are an important trope upon which the characters' inner space is constructed, which will be discussed below. This chapter shows that Ballard's *The Drought* encapsulates and merges, both, the surreal and the existential. In *The Drought*, Ballard dreams up a world so vastly different from ours that it guides the reader on a journey of existence. Accordingly, Ballard has written a symbolic SF novel where, succumbing to dystopic environmental breakdown – the drought, his protagonist is forced to deliberate on his relationship with nature; forced to redefine the human condition. Ballard depicts a protagonist who continuously lives in bad faith and who overcomes the human condition by transcending his dystopic situation by realising his own freedom and the freedom of others.

*The Drought* tells the tale of Dr Charles Ransom whose lifeworld has drastically changed after prolonged spells of drought. Ballard depicts a world in which western industrial consumer culture has been the cause of its own demise: chemical waste dumped into the oceans have resulted in the loss of humankind's most precious resource – water. Ballard structured Ransom's existential journey in three parts, which will be touched upon accordingly: Part one, the onset of complete anarchy, establishes the start of Ransom's journey. On the last stretch of water in a lake near his hometown, Ransom lives in his own private microcosm – a houseboat. As the drought takes its toll on the lake, so is Ransom's private life in a transitional phase: his wife Judith Ransom has left him for another man with whom she is about to move to the coast. Ransom will have to decide whether he wants to leave his former life behind and venture towards the sea, where he hopes to find a solution to the eco-catastrophe unfolding around him. A variety of secondary characters have

equally decided to stay behind, such as Quilter and Mrs. Quilter, Catherine Austen, Philip Jordan, Reverend Johnstone, and Richard and Miranda Lomax who will be discussed accordingly. Part two depicts the bleak reality of the catastrophe: civilisation has crumbled, militias rule the last remaining stretches of shore providing sustenance, and Ransom has been completely isolated from his former life, relations, and self. Part three illustrates the renewed beacon of hope through the symbolic figure of a lion, Ransom travels back to his past location of habit, to find that indeed all was lost.

In part one, Ballard takes his time to paint Ransom's livelihood-after-the-drought. Through each of the opening chapters, the reader is taken through an elaborate account of all the personal connections Ransom upholds at the onset of the apocalypse. Moreover, it is through Ransom's relationships with Catherine Austen, Philip Jordan, Reverend Johnstone, and Richard Lomax, that Ballard illustrates the redefinition of the human condition in the post-apocalyptic world he depicts. On the one hand, Ballard presents the reader with a protagonist who loses touch with – is thrust from – his environment and becomes alienated from the various facets that constitute existence and social-being. On the other hand, the secondary characters, each facing a similar threat and redefinition of the human with nature, live more lucidly than Ransom does.

Throughout the opening chapters, Ballard depicts Ransom as having already accepted his solitary existence: "With the death of the river, so would vanish any contact between those stranded on the drained floor. For the present the need to find some other measure of their relationships would be concealed by the problems of their own physical survival" (8-9). By emphasising the relationship between the environment, the subjective individual and the Other, Ballard emphasises the alienated effect the drought and the death of the river have on each of its subjugated. Being lucidly aware of all the choices he has; the protagonist decides to live in bad faith. Ransom

understands “that the absence of this great moderator, which cast its bridges between all animate and inanimate objects alike, would prove of crucial importance” (9). Instead of offering a solution, he deliberately aims to distance himself from others. Thus, Ballard voices his critique on the alienating aspect of consumerist culture, in which the subject believes his existence to be of highest importance. In existentialist terminology, Ransom’s decision to keep living in the city is in bad faith, for his decision to stay is substantiated by the idea that if he would move away, he would lose his identity/existence. Whereas staying entails that Ransom physically alienates himself from the Other, thus deteriorating his existence to mere physical survival, which will be addressed when discussing Ransom’s complete alienation in Part Two of *The Drought*.

That Ransom is thrust from is environment becomes first apparent in Ballard’s illustration of his past and inner space. In the second chapter, Ballard depicts Ransoms person and inner space through the physical representation of the objects in relation to his houseboat: “the cabin had become, unintentionally, a repository of all the talismans of his life” (11). Books about anatomy, a picture of his “surgeon father,” a picture of his parents and himself before their divorce, and a picture of “*Jours de Lenteur* by Yves Tanguy;” all remnants of his former life are contained within the houseboat (11). By means of illustrating his eventual fall, Ballard has characterised Ransom as synonymous with the houseboat and, thereby, his existential being is isolated from the changing ecological landscape outside the boat. Additionally, by upholding such a synonymous relationship to his outer space – environment – Ransom lives in bad faith.

Ballard further elaborates on this image through Catherine Austen, whom remarks after looking at his boat: “I see you have your own little world here. Everything outside must seem very remote” (18). In “Vacuum Ecology: J.G. Ballard and Jeff VanderMeer” (2018), Edita Jerončić and Brian Willems touch upon this inner-outer world vacuum: “the trope of the vacuum in *The Drought*

represents an absence of time and space in the outer world as well as in Ransom's inner space" (9). Ballard depicts Ransom as synonymous with his vessel. The moment he would leave it and heads for the coast, he suggests that he leaves his existential being. Ballard draws a clear distinction between Ransom's existential being and the existential loss of this being (houseboat) in the dystopian world as it unfolds to Ransom and the reader equally. Ransom defines his existence through the objects he has curated to fit his persona. However, since there should not be an essence that precedes existence, he lives in bad faith. The stationary manner in which Ransom tries to hold on to his being, his boat, represents the denial of freedom and the denial of the ability to transcend one's facticity. By drawing a direct link between Ransom and his environment, Ballard utilises this trope of time and vacuum to illustrate Ransoms transcendental journey, which will be further discussed in the following chapter.

On the contrary, through his interactions with the secondary characters, Ransom becomes more and more lucidly aware of his relationship with his environment and his existential freedom. Ballard depicts Ransom's decline to lucidity and alienation gradually, as each of the secondary characters are held up as mirrors in relation to Ransom's own choices. With the introduction of zookeeper Catherine Austen, Ballard draws the reader closer to the influence of the apocalyptic environment at hand. Previously, when Ransom would call at her as he sailed past, "she never bothered to reply"; presently, for a query involving water, she has come over to chat (15). In prosaic form, Ballard illustrates a sexual transaction of sorts between the two: Catherine asks, "have you any water to spare?" to which Ransom replies "I haven't. Or is that an appeal to sentiment," to which she responds by turning away and fastening her robe (17). Ransom realises Austen's isolation but is yet unaware of his own. As she has already noted, "[w]ater is the least of our problems" (16). Catherine is lucidly aware of the fact that, with the going of the river,

"everything is being drained away, all the memories and stale sentiments" (16). Ballard illustrates moral and ethical deterioration amidst the dystopic environment, through an emphasis on the loss of stale sentiment, illustrated by Catherine offering herself to Ransom.

Furthermore, by addressing the redefined relationship of the characters with their dystopic environment, Ballard proposes a redefinition of the relationships one forms with the Other. Ballard further illustrates Ransom's inner space conflict between his alienation and social involvement through his relationships with Philip Jordan and reverend Johnstone, which illustrate his deliberations with his own existential being. On the one hand, Philip Jordan, a boy whom Ransom supported, asks if he can spare some water to save a swan, to which Ransom bluntly replies: "Philip, I can't spare the water" (23). On the other hand, he gives water to people with whom he has no strong affiliations, like Catherine, who previously did not even bother to show him affection, and the Grady's, a family of travellers from the east who are in desperate need of water to whom Ransom after an argument replies: "Quiet down, I'll give you some water" (30). Ballard depicts Ransom's conflicting nature by intermittently changing between characters who pertain to follow civilisation of the past, and those who strive for a better tomorrow. These ethical choices all evolve around Sartre's concept of authenticity. The authentic protagonist would aim to live in good faith by transcending one's facticity, for one's existence is defined through action. Whereas Ransom, who chooses to live inauthentically, refuses to give water to save a swan, whilst on the other hand giving water to complete strangers on a chivalrous attempt. As Reverend Johnstone argues: "You can't buy off the droughts of this world, you have to fight them … There are too many people now living out their own failures, that's the secret appeal of this drought. I was going to give the fellow some water, Charles, but I wanted him to show more courage first" (30-1). Ballard depiction of Ransom's conflicted nature – solitary alienation or the Other – is a testimony to his living in bad

faith throughout the opening chapters of the novel. The fact that Ballard depicts Ransom as lucidly aware of his options as he "[muses] on this callous but shrewd criticism of his own motives" (32), is testimony to the fact that his decision making is subject to a choice made in bad faith.

The epitome of Ransom's inner conflict unfolds at the end of part one leading into part two depicted by the fall of civilisation. After having travelled to the sea, Ballard highlights Ransom's complete isolation through the dystopic environment as he puts forth the complete deterioration of modern civilisation. Due to a variety of militant groups gunning for members, Ransom deems it necessary to move to the coast. He embarks towards it with a small band of companions (Mrs. Quilter, Austen, Philip, and Mr. Jordan, Philip's adopted father who Philip had selflessly cared for). On their arrival at the shore, thousands of people have gathered, a "vast concourse …, a meaningless replication of identity in which an infinite number of doubles of himself were being generated by a cancerous division of time" (115). Ballard depicts the fall of civilisation two-fold: first, the loss of identity in the masses by diminishing all the people at the beach to faceless identities waiting for life's most precious resource. He illustrates the moment subjective identity is diluted to the primal need for water. Second, Ballard illustrates that "all along the beach there's a double wire fence. The army and police are on [one] side …[and] militia units were shooting at the people trying to cross between the fences" (119). The dystopic reality Ballard created, in which the authorities decide who receive water, delineates the full incarceration of the existentialist subject. In essence, the human condition – one where existence is freedom – is set against the incarceration of all these free individuals at the beach. In existential terms, the people on the beach are alienated from the world and from themselves, for their existential being is diminished to a mere subject, as Herbert tells Ransom: "sit here and wait … Sooner or later they'll break out. My guess is that by the time they reach the water they'll be thinned out enough for Ethel and me to

have all we want." (120). The moment the Other – Herbert – objectifies Ransom and the other people near the shore, by upholding their own freedom to get all the water they want over Ransoms dead body illustrates the complete loss of existential identity: humankind is alienated from each other.

As more and more people move towards the water, Ransom, influenced by Herbert's prophecy, acts in bad faith and tells Catherine "we can't risk leaving here" and go look for Philip and Mr Jordan (123). Ransom consciously decides to live inauthentically by valuing is own freedom by objectifying the Other. Eventually, anarchy erupts as countless people start to run for the water. Ballard depicts Ransom's full alienation the moment he shoots Grady. "Ransom waited. Then, holding the butt of the revolver in both hands, he stood up and shot Grady through the chest" (128). Ransom acts in bad faith for he does not realise that in shooting Grady he robs him from his freedom, whereas he should be promoting the freedom of others. Ransom notes "all along the beach small groups of people were lying in the shallows as the waves splashed across them … Some, unable to drink the water, were already climbing back on to the sand" (129). This final vignette Ballard depicts of humankind's fall illustrates the absurdity with which the venture to the sea was instigated: human beings are indeed unable to drink water from the sea.

Ballard fast-forwards ten-years in the future, when Ransom's existential isolation is indeed complete. In existentialist terms, Ransom's complete alienation unfolds as he himself realises, his being in anguish and being in despair. Drawing on conventions used in the first part of the novel where Ransom's existence is delineated against the contents in his houseboat, Ballard depicts his identity to be almost synonymous with the environment he lives in: Ransom is his environment. Driven back on the salt-flats, which Ballard describes as "land and water submerged in this grey liquid limbo" (133), Ransom's existence is brought down to that of a mere scavenger, living

together with Judith Ransom. Ransom realises that they confirm each other's existence: "the awareness that only with each other could they keep alive some faint shadow of their former personalities, whatever their defects, and arrest the gradual numbing of sense and identity that was the unseen gradient of the dune limbo" (146). Ransom is in a state of anguish, he is fully aware of the predicament he is in and realises that without the Other and without taking responsibility for said predicament he would seize to exist. In a failed attempt to act upon this predicament and take back some of this responsibility, Ransom goes to the settlement of sea "trappers" (138) to be rejected on the mere premise that: "the people have given too much. If you came here they'd drain you away" (157), and identical to Hendry, Vanessa says that "if you come here, Charles, it will be the end for you" (161). He is rejected from the settlement on the basis of his previous occupation as a doctor: "During the early years at the beach he had tended hundreds of sick and wounded, but almost all of them had died. … By now he was regarded as a pariah by the people of the settlement" (167). Ballard critiques contemporary society in which the individual subject is lost in the masses on the mere premise that peoples' occupations serve as markers for one's existence. Ballard leaves the reader with the same dichotomous predicament; how far is Ransom willing to forsake identity for mere existence in the settlement?

Demonstrated by the continuity of deliberations on individual freedom and collective existence that Ransom voices throughout the novel, Ballard's dystopian depiction of the environment and its relationship to Ransom's new realised human condition become significant. In "Reading Climate Change in J.G. Ballard" (2013), Jim Clark touches upon an interview Ballard gave after the publication of his first three books: "All the other characters in my first three books react as most ordinary people would … It's only the central character who sees the system of imaginative possibilities represented by the disaster" (16). Clarke addresses the existential

realisation of freedom with which Ransom redefines his relationship with the environment. Ballard engages with the reader by delineating Ransom's materialistic existence – his occupation – with his existence as authentic human being – one who takes responsibility and one who not merely becomes one of the meaningless replications of doubles in the dune limbo. Where in the first part Ransom's existence is defined by his houseboat, on the dune flats his existence is defined by his pre-apocalyptic occupation. The first part of the novel contains a variety of moments in which the reader is made aware of Ransom's inauthenticity: for instance, when Ransom ventures towards the sea and meets a "solitary traveller. For some reason, his strange figure, detached from the pressing anxieties of the drought and exodus, seemed a compass of all the unstated motives that Ransom had been forced to repress" (Ballard 1965 112-3). Previously substantiated through the image of Lomax and Miranda who stay behind, the solitary traveller illustrates the freedom of the subject in terms of response to the disaster. Contrasted with "the four people with him [who] were becoming more and more shadowy, residues of themselves as notional as the empty river" (112). Consistently, Ballard unites the deteriorating environment with the loss if individual identity, which is exemplified through the various characters found in the first two parts of the novel.

In *Out of the Night and Into the Dream: A Thematic Study of the Fiction of J.G. Ballard* (1992), Gregory Stephenson touches upon the apocalyptic genre and quotes Ballard who says *The Drought* "represents an arraignment of the finite, an attempt to dismantle the formal structure of time and space which the universe wraps around us at the moment we first achieve consciousness" (41). The finite dystopian world continuously presents Ransom and the reader with two choices: either, to go with the deteriorating environment, or to re-establish a relationship with the environment lucidly out of one's own individual convictions by becoming an authentic individual. Therefore, Stephenson argues that the apocalyptic motif utilised in *The Drought* "is thus grounded,

not in a nihilistic wish for extinction, but in the desire for transcendence" (41). Taking into consideration that Ransom, first oblivious to the compulsory choices experienced through the drought, lucidly becomes aware of his freedom. As his name suggests, he himself is the captive, the moment he realises he is the captive the question is how much he is willing to pay as a ransom for existence in this state of responsible, self-inflicted captivity.

Ballard further builds upon the time-vacuum *leitmotif* through less abstract, but more surrealistic imagery in the final part of the novel. Upon encountering a lion, Ransom and Jordan experience a "feeling of immense relief," for the lion epitomises that "there's water between [the coast] and Mount Royal" (170-1). In the previous chapters, Ransom was not allowed to commit himself to the communities on the dune flats whereby he would lose is subjectivity. In the third part, Ballard draws the reader away from Ransom's transcendental development, by giving him hope in retaining his former life. On their return, Ransom takes note of his surroundings, and passes an intersection with cars: "the succession of humps, the barest residue of identity" (188). In the last part of the novel, Ballard's depiction of the perceived static environment and – later – the supportive roles of Lomax and Quilter, illustrates Ransom's realisation of existential freedom and the ability to transcend ones' situation.

Firstly, taking into consideration that Existentialism is a philosophy of action, that which is given upon which the individual transcends one's facticity by aspiring to realise freedom, Ballard illustrates the transcendental aspect to existence. Ballard describes the cars – a succession of humps – found in the city, which he delineates against the cars "excavated from the quarry on the beach," which had "emerged intact" (188). Similar to Ballard's critical depiction of the inauthentic manner in which Ransom tried to repress his identity through the contents of his houseboat, or when he tried to join the communities at the beach by forsaking his existential

freedom, Ballard demonstrates his critique on consumerist culture in being a cause for the drought and that, in hoping for days past, one abstains from taking responsibility for the post-apocalyptic predicament one is in. Thus, Ransom lives inauthentically if he holds on to hope. Furthermore, one should live without hope – in despair – for the human condition is founded on action and transcendence and hoping for something to happen implicates subjective inactivity.

Secondly, the figures of Lomax and Quilter epitomise the characters who live without hope for a future; who each live lives in the present but who both adhere to a past situation and, thus, live in bad faith. Both Lomax and Quilter are foils through which Ballard voices his critique on consumerist culture. Their supportive roles only come to fruition in the last part of the novel, in which Ballard – stylistically – constructs the surreal painting addressed previously, which will be touched upon in the following chapter. On the contrary, what is striking is that both characters draw Ransom away from retaining hope passively for a future that may never happen, and to an absurd life of action in the present. The absurd becomes tangible when Ransom encounters both: Quilter donned in attire "like a grotesque idol bedecked with the unrelated possessions of an entire tribe" (201), and Lomax who "resembled a grotesque pantomime dame, part amiable scoundrel and part transvestite" (214). Through both figures, Ransom comes to understand the insignificance of his ten-year adventure on the shore: "what have you been doing all this time," Lomax remarks (215). Through this remark, Ballard illustrates his critique of blatantly – passively – accepting one's situation but hoping for a better future, in relation to actively acting towards that future and ascertaining one's freedom.

The novel ends with Ransom reminiscing about the completion of "his journey across the margins of the inner landscape he had carried in his mind. … An immense pall of darkness lay over the dunes, as if the whole of the exterior world were losing its existence" (233). Ballard

illustrates how Ransom realises the inner subject above the external vacuum which influenced his decisions and upon which he acted in bad faith. The dichotomous predicament Ballard presented to the reader: forsaking identity for mere existence with the collective is transposed to delineate the distinction between the inner space and outer space. Ballard illustrates that the inner and outer space are not mutually exclusive: one's inner space is one's outer environment – the human with nature. As such, Ransom has come to realise that the two are mutual constituents: one's relationship as a constituent of the environment is realised when one comes to realise individual responsibility for the inner space and environment, accordingly. In summarising Ballard's novels, Clarke suggests that "not through resistance, but through an acceptance of the aesthetic and reconciliatory dimensions of the cataclysm," does one resolve the human condition (Clarke 17). Underlining the literary concept inner space, with which Ballard motivated his writings, the surrealist absurd dream-like images Ballard depicts take the existentialist transcendence to the aesthetical, which will be addressed in the following chapter.

Margaret Atwood – *The Year of the Flood*

Ursula Le Guin has discussed Atwood's works *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* and has stressed the novels' quality in "[extrapolating] imaginatively from current trends and events to a near-future that's half prediction, half satire" (n.p.). Without drawing further attention to the discussion on semantics and whether Atwood's writings fall within the SF-genre or the "speculative fiction" genre, as she herself declares, I do agree that Ursula Le Guin addresses an important element in Atwood novels. *The Year of the Flood* is highly applicable for this thesis, which elucidates elements of existentialist philosophy touched upon in Atwood's ecocritical novel (Atwood, "Ustopia" n.p.). Next to prediction, Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* is a satire and, by drawing the reader into the "ustopia" she has created, she critiques a variety of ecologically engaged problems and trends prominent in current zeitgeist (Atwood, "Ustopia" n.p.). Coining the noun ustopia, Atwood argues that utopias and dystopias "each contains a latent version of the other," which further substantiate Morton's dark ecology; for every positive development there is the implicated possibility of regression. Furthermore, Atwood argues that because ustopias are imagined they are equally "a state of mind" (Atwood, "Ustopia" n.p.). It is this dichotomous relationship between the ustopic environment and ustopic state of mind, which further accentuate Atwood as a writer of *Littérature Engagée*. In "Margaret Atwood and Environmentalism," Shannon Hengen discusses Atwood's engagement with the reader, discussing Atwood's environmentally influenced writing. She argues that "as whole creatures we both affect and are affected by the larger environment in which we evolve, and [Atwood's] work asks us to bear that interconnectedness firmly in mind" (84). Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* exhibits elements that both alter the social condition of man through use of the ustopic environment, whilst addressing the conception one has of oneself through an exploration of the protagonists' story arcs, which

approximates Sartre's thoughts on *Littérature Engagée*. Through the eyes of her two female protagonists, Toby and Ren, next to the overarching feminist element of her novel, she poses "humanist and [post-humanist] concerns, as she questions the very survival of humankind in an era of environmental destruction, excessive consumption, unregulated biotechnological experiments and pandemic viruses" (Brooks Bouson 10). Through her critical stance on the delineation between humanist and post-humanist concerns, Atwood depicts her ustopian world to the reader whilst, simultaneously, proposing a redefinition of Sartre's human condition exemplified through the life stories of the novel's protagonists: Toby and Ren. Within Atwood's novel the existentialist human condition is exemplified by the transcendental aspect to existence that incorporates nature into the livelihood of its subjects.

Before conducting an in-depth character analysis of the novel's two protagonists, a significant element of Atwood's ustopian environment needs further explanation. As the novel further explores the reality created in its sibling novel *Oryx and Crake*, the technocratic, dystopic world Atwood depicts serves as a foundation upon which the existential journeys of both Toby and Ren are established. Brooks Bouson notes that Atwood "centres her story on the pleebland world where the non-affluent masses live, as she tells the intertwined stories of … two pleebland survivors of the pandemic plague and former members of the God's Gardeners, an eco-religious cult and resistance group" (11). Touching upon an important distinction made in Atwood's writing, Bouson suggests that the world Atwood has depicted is segregated through wealth. Subjugating many aspects of social life to the technocratic forces exemplified, the world Atwood has created is ruled by multinational corporations: e.g. HelthWyzer and AnooYoo. Corporations that focus on the subjugation of the individual through capitalist/consumerist tendencies by accommodating longevity and gene-manipulation to the wealthier off. Protected by the CorpSeCorps, a private

corporate security corporation, the totalitarian rule imposed upon its subjects has divided the cityscape in areas delineated by "gated corporation strongholds" (25) and the Pleeblands. "*The year of the Flood* takes place in the space outside such enclaves, at the very bottom of the social heap" (Atwood, "Ustopia" n.p.). As such, Atwood emphasises the subjugation of the free-subject – the non-affluent masses – exhibiting close similarities with Sartre's concerns of the subjugated individual amidst the totalitarian climate post-war period.

In this regard, Atwood has created an ustopia of binary oppositions: the CorpSeCorp communities vs. the Pleeblands and the Exfernal world vs. the God's Gardeners, are the four different social environments upon which Toby and Ren's character arcs unfold. Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* may be approached academically from two critical perspectives: the significance of the female protagonist and Atwood's ecocritical stance, through which she discusses humanist versus post-humanist understandings of the relation between humanity and nature. On the One hand, Brooks Bouson substantiates that "Atwood depicts the generational divide between feminists and postfeminists [epitomised through] the stories of Toby and Ren" (14). Contrastingly, on the use of a female protagonist in *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood notes that the "majority of dystopias … have been written by men, and the point of view has been male" (Atwood, "In Context" 516). She substantiates that "giving a woman a voice and inner life" does not necessarily make the plot feminist, on the contrary, the "despotism I describe is the same as the real ones and most imagined ones" (516). On the other hand, touching upon an ecocritical element in *The Year of the Flood*, Katherine Snyder notes, "Atwood spells out the dire consequences of the feedback loop of supply and demand that connects big science, especially Big Pharma, to consumer culture" (19). Given the scope of this thesis and its aim to elucidate Atwood's ecocriticism through Sartre's existentialism, the humanist and post-humanist elements in Atwood's novel will take primacy as

I will focus on how Toby comes to realise her existential freedom and elaborating on how she transcends her existential being – in adversity of the feminist and postfeminist environments which have formed her being.

Firstly, Toby's character arc will be analysed, through which Atwood critiques consumerist society. Secondly, given the overly apparent significance of the feminist and postfeminist distinction between Toby and Ren, and the importance of the distinction pre-collapse, this feminist distinction will be examined through Ren's character arc. Thirdly, a delineation will be made between the God's Gardeners-sociality and the Exfernal world, which serves as the foundation for Atwood's ecocritical perspective on consumerist society. Finally, an in-depth character analysis of the novel's main focaliser, Toby, sheds light on her existential growth in relationship to the environment she finds herself: The God's gardeners as an eco-theological group and as a possible solution to the dystopic reality to which she is subjected.

Toby's Sociality – Atwood's critique on consumerist society

*The Year of the Flood*'s starts *in medias res*. The reader is introduced to both Toby and Ren, incarcerated in a post-apocalyptic micro-environment. Reminiscing about their previous lives and their days with the Gardeners, Toby and Ren further address what has constituted their being presently by touching upon past experiences: how Ren got to the brothel Scales and Tails and Toby atop the AnooYoo spa, both leading up to their incarceration. Dovetailing Sartre's concept of subjective responsibility, Atwood's *in medias res* opening of both protagonists' incarceration invites the reader into speculating on what the reason is for their incarceration and she urges the reader to wonder what decisions have constituted their being in said situation. In order to emphasise the protagonist's perspectives on their predicament, Atwood quickly covers the

elements that constitute the dystopic world by illustrating their present lifeworld and its collapse in the opening chapter:

> The elevators stopped working some time ago … if she slips … there won't be anyone to pick her up … The abandoned towers are … devoid of life … there is no longer any sound traffic … the Gardeners used to teach … that's where the people fell, the ones who'd been running or staggering across the lawn … There must be someone else left, though; she can't be the only one on the planet. (3-5)

Through these explicit phrases, Atwood addresses Toby's affiliation with the religious cult called God's Gardeners, and she illustrates her micro-environment as stuck on the rooftop of the AnooYoo spa, where Toby used to work at and where women would come for "rest and rejuvenation" (5). By binding elements of Toby's doubtful nature to the teachings of the Gardeners; "Do I still believe this?" (4) and finding "the theology scrambled" (56), Atwood substantiates the finitude of the teachings themselves, and that they – the teachings – did not necessarily survive "the waterless flood" or epitomised a good alternative mode of existence for it (7). In the opening chapters, Atwood creates an ustopia through which she questions what constitutes the human as a part of nature. She addresses a variety of elements that underscore her ecocritical attitude towards said human-nature relationship; a dystopic apocalypse, a religious cult, and an incarcerated protagonist who deliberates on the possible significance of the teachings post-apocalypse.

On the contrary, according to Brooks Bouson, Atwood has created a world where "vulnerable and unprotected women easily become the sexual prey of predatory men" (11). Through Toby's personal history, Atwood elucidates the presence of gender inequalities in *The Year of the Flood*'s society. She demonstrates her critique on consumerist culture by depicting

Toby as a mere commodity. Having lost both her parents, Toby was forced to leave her house and hearth behind. On commenting who would be looking for her, she remarks:

> CorpSeCorps would spread it about that she'd been last seen with a cruising pimp on the lookout for fresh recruits, which is what you'd expect in the case of a young woman like her – a young woman in desperate financial straits … at least she had something of marketable value, namely her young ass, and therefore she wouldn't starve to death, and nobody had to feel guilty. (35)

A bleak background story, cover-ups by the CorpSeCorp, and women selling their body for sustenance are the first impressions Atwood gives of Toby's past. From early in the plot onwards, Toby is existentially alienated, forced to be responsible for her livelihood. Even though Toby realises she is responsible for her individual livelihood, she does not realise her own freedom. Therefore, she lives in-authentically and in bad faith. This all changes the moment she starts working for the SecretBurgers: "preyed upon by the brutal rapist Blanco, who is free not only to make Toby his sexual slave but also, if he wishes, to kill her and to literally turn her into meat" (Brooks Bouson 12). Voicing her critique on consumerist culture, Atwood dehumanizes Toby from an individual to a mere object, relinquishing her freedom. In his account of what is the first condition of existence, Sartre emphasises the realisation of the free subject. In this regard, Toby's fall from subject to object marks her full spiritual alienation. Atwood's utilises the character Blanco, whose name indicates that it could have been anyone who commodified Toby, to emphasise her critique on the commodifying force of consumerist culture. Next to alienating one from oneself, this commodifying force also alienates one from the other – from nature. With their emphasis on individualism, these forces bring about a redefinition of the human condition which

advance a temperament that disaffects us from our peers and nature. These forces advocate the human without nature, and they form the basis of Atwood's eco-criticism.

However, the moment she is saved by Adam One the leader of the Gardeners, who advocates that she "[has] grown a callous and hard shell … which is not [her] true self," marks the start of a journey to a free existential being. Even though Toby kicks Blanco in the head and departs with the Gardeners, she responds hesitantly in accepting Adam One's compliment, for "[she] didn't think she'd made any decision at all" (52). By underscoring Toby's ambivalence to her own freedom, Atwood urges the reader to contemplate what constitutes Toby's existential freedom.

Ren – Postfeminist

Atwood utilises Toby as a metaphorical vehicle to address the negative feedback loop in consumerist culture; the manner in which women are left to the materialistic urges of men is its metaphorical tenor. It is this tenor that criticises the negative feedback loop. Brooks Bouson points out that Toby exemplifies Atwood's critique on the "metaphoric consumption of women in North American culture" (13). On the contrary, Ren epitomises the positive feedback loop, where Ren utilises this consumption of women to her economic benefit. Through this account, Atwood voices critique of postfeminist culture, in which Ren "seemingly chooses, or at least accepts, her own sexual commodification and humiliation" (Brooks Bouson 14). She works for Scales and Tails, a corporate controlled company that employs "the cleaniest dirty girls in town" (8). By addressing this postfeminist element of the sociality, Atwood illustrates the conflicted ethics apparent in the ustopia: CorpSeCorp took control of the "SeksMart," where Ren works at Scales and Tails, the manager did treat them with respect: "he never took freebies from us. He had ethics" (8). From this description of Ren as a sex-worker, Atwood urges readers to reconsider their ethical

perspective on such matters. Portraying the legal circuit: SeksMart and illegal circuit: "Hazardous waste" (9), Atwood draws the futuristic dystopia to the reader's present. She illustrates a disparity between the society in *The Year of the Flood* and contemporary Western society, but also implies thought on non-western societies in which speculation on the existence of sex-work is trivial. Moreover, because Atwood creates a society constructed in part on a dichotomy between legal and illegal sex-work, she satirically speculates on taking sex-work to be the norm. Upon discussing the hazardous waste, Ren remarks that "[she] shouldn't have been so scornful; we should have had compassion. But compassion takes work, and we were young" (9). In this seemingly innocuous remark about other sex workers, Atwood craftily differentiates between the manner in which one ought to be thinking about the body as a commodity and the reality where sex-work is accepted depicted in *The Year of the Flood*. On the one hand, she draws the reader into a reality where Ren, a young protagonist, casually informs the reader of her occupation as a sex worker. Whilst, on the other hand, she satirically illustrates how Ren's work epitomises the commodification of women in our time.

In contrast to the omniscient narrative account of Toby's life, Ren's first-person account draws the reader away from Atwood's eco-critical stance on the corporate totalitarian dystopia and towards the dichotomy between feminist and postfeminist critique. However, it is their relationship to, and affinity with, the God's Gardeners that makes their ethical stance towards the totalitarian state significant for analytical chapter. As Brooks Bouson suggests, Ren seems to accept her sexual commodification and humiliation. In existentialist terminology, Ren has not yet come to realise her subjective freedom; she is a cog succumbed to the system. Taken away from the "Exfernal World to live among the Gardeners" by Lucerne and Zeb, Ren as a character is very much led on by others (71). When she wonders what the Gardeners would think of her if they knew what kind

of business she was in: “it served me right, … I’m a slut, … look at me wisely, … would laugh, … would be mad at Scales … try to rescue me because it would be a challenge” (70), Ren emphasises exactly the reach of her self-conscious endeavour. She reflects on her behaviour through the Other, but she does not act upon it. She addresses Amanda who “doesn’t judge. She says you trade what you have to. You don’t always have choices” (70). This tendency to accept her fate follows her throughout the plot: first, she is taken back “to the HelthWyzer compound” as her mother leaves Zeb and the Gardeners (243). Then she falls in love with Jimmy, even though he dumps her. She remains heartbroken throughout the novel (266). Later, she is stuck in the “Sticky Zone” (380) and has to be saved by Amanda. Afterwards, they are caught by Painballers, “condemned criminals … doing time in the Painball arena,” (117) and she has to be saved by Toby (422-4). Finally, when they sit around the campfire, she is glad they are alive, including the Painballers (512). Ren epitomises the actor in bad faith, deceiving herself of all the possible choices she has: wilfully going with her mother; wilfully abstaining from telling Jimmy she loves him; waiting for Amanda as if it is her only option; being forgiving towards the Painballers who have sexually abused her and Amanda. In the final passage, she does act in good faith when she confesses to Jimmy: “You broke my heart; but anyway, I’m happy you’re alive,” but the comment falls on unresponsive ears. Atwood has created a plot through which Ren’s character development is depicted as that of a character who lives in bad faith, which is illustrative of the objectifying power of contemporary society. Ren characterises the oppressed subject and, faced with a variety of dilemma’s, she takes a third person stance towards the issues illustrated above, only to come to terms with them on a first-person basis, which will be further elaborated on in the following chapter.

Exfernal – God's Gardeners

As touched upon previously, Atwood has created a world in which the Exfernal is denoted against the internal – God's Gardeners – and where Toby signifies the conscious subject deliberating between the two. The critical perspective Atwood takes emphasises the lucidity with which the Other is realised through the teachings of the God's Gardeners. More importantly, the fact that Toby consciously deliberates on joining the Gardeners implicates both her doubts with regards to the "Exfernal" society and the alternative the God's Gardeners community poses. As the plot progresses, "Atwood offers, as a kind of counter-vision and counter-narrative of sweetness and light, her story of the eco-religious sect, the God's Gardeners, a radical fringe group of environmentalists and anti-capitalist revolutionaries" (Brooks Bouson 17). With regards to redefining the human condition exemplified through God's Gardeners, Hannes Bergthaller addresses the "ecological imperative: humans ought to acknowledge (to properly perceive) that they are a part of nature and behave accordingly" (731). The God's Gardeners are exemplar of this redefined human condition, epitomising the human as a part of nature. By having Toby consciously deliberate between the Exfernal and God's Gardeners, Atwood substantiates this ecological imperative: foregrounding the dichotomy between the human outside of nature and the human as a part of nature.

Atwood's coining of the Exfernal World, and its double meaning – external and without ferns – illustrates the foundation of her ecocritical stance on the human condition; that which is perceived in the ustopic Exfernal reality, the human without nature, is set against that which is internally, consciously deliberated with the God's Gardeners, the human with nature. An important annotation needs to be made with regards to existentialism's atheistic foundation. Not to confirm

or deny the existence of god, but, foremost, that one's freedom is of one's own choosing. Thus, responsibility lies with the subject instead of god. Adam One poses that "In some religions, faith precedes action … In ours, action precedes faith. You've been acting as if you believe, dear Toby. *As if* – those two words are very important to us. Continue to live according to them, and belief will follow in time" (201). Atwood diminishes the belief system of God's Gardeners to the mere premise that if one follows the teachings this implies believing in them. Where Sartre's existentialism is based on the premise that existence necessitates action and that existence precedes essence, a logical next step is to conclude that the foundation of the God's Gardeners' faith lies in its members acting out what they deem is part of their faith: action necessitates existence, which precedes essence. Even though the God's Gardeners' belief is based on faith, which is, in a sense, anti-existential, the fact that their belief system foregrounds action mirrors Sartre's existentialism. It is through the eco-critical teachings of the Gardeners that the presence of the Other is emphasised and through which the subject freely chooses to act towards the human with nature.

## Toby's Garden

Taking the God's Gardeners as one possible redefinition of the human condition, Atwood poses an ecocritical alternative to the Exfernal World, which, as she exemplified throughout the novel, is corrupted by the modernist trends and capitalist tendencies, in which the individual is commodified and subjected to the commercialised landscape. Atwood utilises the God's Gardeners as a trope to illustrate being with the Other, through confrontations with the other gardeners in the community. Toby experiences various moments of confrontation with the Other when she is forced to deliberate on dilemmas posed and questions here position within Gardener's sociality. One such moments is when she is asked to become – a full-fledged member – Eve Six. "I can't accept … it

would be hypocritical. … I'm not sure I believe all of it" (200-1). To which Adam One replies that it is not about believing, in as much as it is about acting as if. The "as if" element to the gardeners' teachings emphasises the imaginative aspect of ecocritical thought that Atwood highlights in *The Year of the Flood*. Furthermore, it illustrates, as Berthaller suggests, the imagination necessary for human beings to acknowledge that they are a part of nature. The first moment Atwood has the reader experience such a conscious deliberation is when Toby tells herself: "She'll have to shoot [the pigs], it's self-defence" (22). However, when she does shoot the boar, she speaks to herself in second person: "Toby's hands are shaking. … You've snuffed a life … you've acted rashly and from anger. You ought to feel guilty … [but], she doesn't feel apologetic. Or not apologetic enough" (22). Atwood delineates Toby's subject against her environment with the Gardener's teachings as a moral compass guiding her practice. But given her doubting nature, Toby is in constant consideration whether or not to follow the instructions, thus taking no responsibility for her decisions, only to feel responsible after having done otherwise, illustrating an act of bad faith.

Contrastingly, one could argue that Toby acts in bad faith because she identifies with the God's Gardeners and she practices what they want her to preach. As such, the responsibility for her choices commemorating her authentic existence lie not within subjective consideration but are imposed through the Gardener's teachings. However, Atwood illustrates the teachings of the Gardeners as mere guidelines by which life may be defined – with a strong tendency to the ecological and an emphasis of realisation of existence through the Other. Precisely because the Gardeners' belief system is based on action, the religious, deterministic aspect – constituting a god – is not foregrounded, and there are various instances where Adam One professes the beliefs of the God's Gardeners as a doctrine. First, when Adam One presents reasons to Toby why the CorpSeCorp have "declared them off-limits: … It would be bad for their image to eviscerate

anything with God in its name" (58), which emphasises the advantageous implications of utilising God in their teachings to further their social position. Furthermore, Adam One argues that because God did not know what Adam would call the animals, "the answer can only be that God has given Adam free will" (14). By foregrounding this non-deterministic characteristic in the opening chapters of the novel, Atwood addresses the significance of freedom of action, which is a substantial element of the existentialist philosophy. Thus, when Zeb introduces Toby to the many different ways in which the Gardener's teachings might be interpreted: "I leave the finer points of doctrine to Adam One. I just use what I have to, to get where I need to go" (221), he emphasises the difference between the Gardeners beliefs as a religion and the practical reach of the doctrine. Bergthaller argues that

> the doctrines that Adam One preaches and on which the Gardeners' collective life rests are designed to … a reconciliation of the nature of human beings as evolved biological creatures, with all the frailties and flaws it entails, with their need for an imaginary order that transcends and, as it were, extenuates these biological givens. (739)

These excerpts, the lessons taught in Adam One's sermons, and the underlying messages in the Hymns function as footholds upon which the existential transcendence of the subject may occur through the realisation of the Other – accentuating the human with nature. Thus, following the Gardeners' teachings does not necessarily mean that the characters act in bad faith on the mere premise that God created the world and their livelihood. They do, in fact, act in bad faith when they abstain from realising their existential freedom, and blindly follow the Gardeners' teachings.

Richard Northover sums up the inclinations found through the Gardeners' beliefs and Adam One's sermons: "biblical myths are ecologised; ecological scientists are sanctified" (88). The satirical element in Atwood's depiction of God's Gardeners illustrates the practicalities with

which the teachings may be implemented in one's social being. But, moreover, it drives the discussion away from the authoritative reach of the teachings and towards the satirical utopic vision that delineates the "Edencliff Garden" and its teachings from the Exfernal World (Atwood 6). Northover argues that the satirical manner in which Atwood presents the Gardeners' teachings to the reader "prevent them from becoming Word or dogma" (88). Atwood emphasises the narrative structure of the teachings as a way to convey her ecocritical thought, comprising the human with nature and her critique on consumerism, which will be touched upon in the following chapter.

Substantiating the primary step towards Toby's realisation of her existential freedom, Atwood depicts her alienation on two different levels. Primarily, Atwood depicts Toby as alienated through her physical incarceration in the AnooYoo spa. Secondarily, testimony to her spiritual alienation, Atwood depicts Toby reminiscing about her past and the loss of her parents, her loss of subjective being for commodity instigated by Blanco, and her association with the Gardeners' community and their teachings advocating life with the Other.

As illustrated by the excerpts above, Toby comes to realise her radical human freedom through the Gardeners' teachings. Even more so, she realises her freedom as a consequence of realisation of the Other. Foremost, Atwood's depiction of the individualistic, capitalist, Exfernal society set against the internal Gardeners' community further emphasises her redefinition of the human condition: human with the Other – with nature. Through the confrontations with the Other, there are a variety of instances in which Toby is equally confronted with said freedom, which she denies and acts in bad faith: when Pilar passes on, she asks Toby "Don't forget to tell the bees … [upon which she] went to tell the bees" (215), acting as if she did not have a choice but to follow Pilar's request. However, the moment she is brought away and put in the AnooYoo spa, for her

own safety, she reminisces about "her early desire to leave the Garden, out of boredom and claustrophobia, and the desire for what she used to think of as a life of her own; but now that she was actually going, it felt like an expulsion. … My enemy is forcing me to go" (307). Atwood illustrates instances in which Toby denies her existential freedom, by pertaining to be part of a community and therefore not able to act any other way. But it is also in those moments of deliberation that Toby consciously approaches the possible choices she has, typifying a lucidly aware character in crisis.

Toby's venture outside of the AnooYoo Spa marks the moment she takes full responsibility for her existence, becoming an authentic human being. Illustrated by her feeling of unworthiness – due to her past experiences – her previous decisions were made out of the diminishing of self-worth. At that time, even though she still chose the Other in choosing herself, she was still living authentically because she did not recognise her freedom. This all changes when she decides to shoot the Painballer, takes in Ren, and uses her dexterity as Eve Six to help her. Atwood continually illustrates the worth of the Other in subjective existence. The moment Toby takes the reins of her future illustrates this feat. During her solitary incarceration, Toby is confronted with her alienation and wonders whether "her own language will be gone out of her head," for there is no one to receive it (418). However, the instant Toby is confronted with the Other – with Ren – she realises she has the possibility to "demonstrate unselfishness and sharing and those higher qualities the Gardeners had been so eager to bring out in her," next to realising she can also "put her out of her misery" (428). Choosing the former, Toby is confronted with herself and practices, in existentialist terms, the reciprocal freedom of Ren. "I've been the Ghost," she mutters, as she's come to realise the significance of the Other for her subjective existence (431).

As the plot progresses, Adam One says "let us pray that the outer world is Exfernal no more – that the Waterless Flood has cleansed as well as destroyed, and that all the world is now a new Eden" (414). Taking the Exfernal World as the dystopic realisation of Atwood's ustopia and the Gardener's Edencliff Garden as the utopia, after the waterless flood, Atwood deliberately leaves the reader to wonder whether one or the other is realised. However, she does illustrate how Toby and Ren venture into the world in which radical human freedom and the significance of the Other are prominent. Regressing the multifarious character types before the fall to one of two categories, the reader is left with the antagonistic Painballers and the remainder of the God's Gardeners and "a clutch of one time scientists" (497). Where the Painballers were first categorised in society's periphery, they have become a personification of the late Exfernal society of the corporations. Driven by urges reminiscent of the Exfernal World, the Painballers are "not really human" (434). Atwood utilises the Painballers as a trope to delineate the alien subordinated by one's environment against the radically free subject – Toby and Ren. When Toby and Ren encounter Blanco in the gatehouse, he tells Toby the "Fuckers dumped me here" (456). Blanco has lost his value as a member – commodity – of the Painballers due to his leg going bad. Therefore, he has been cast aside. In a similar manner, the two remaining Painballers "wanted to trade [Amanda] for spraygun cells and Mo'Hair meat" (467). As a "sex toy" she has lost her value to them (500). Further down, after they have passed the Crakers, the Painballers speculate to "go back there, do a trade … they get this one … and we get some of those hot babes of theirs" (501). On the contrary, Toby comes to terms with her past as she relieves Blanco of his pains: "'May his Spirit go in peace,' she says out loud. Such as it is, the fuck-pig" (459). Whilst deliberating that "if there's two bad choices take the lesser evil" (457), she is finally able to transcend her subordinated state under Blanco's influence. Atwood depicts Toby's final realisation of radical

human freedom when she says: “This is not the time … for dwelling on ultimate purposes. I would like us all to forget the past, the worst part of it. Let us be grateful for this food that has been given to us. Amanda. Ren. Jimmy. You, too, if you can manage it” (515). By disregarding the past, Atwood epitomises Toby as the authentic character, realising that her own transcendence from the Exfernal World, may equally result in transcendence for the other characters: illustrated by a choice in good faith.

Atwood’s *The Year of the Flood* is a rich novel. The ustopic reality she has created in many ways leads to a multifaceted redefinition of Sartre’s conception of the human condition. Given the two female protagonists, a distinction is made between the male dominated Exfernal World and the world of the God’s Gardeners in which the Other is accentuated. Significantly, one could substantiate whether Atwood deems the realisation of the Other a quality that is differentiated by gender. She has delineated a variety of critiques on capitalist and consumerist society that have been addressed through the feminist and postfeminist critiques embodied in the accounts of the two main protagonists: Ren and Toby. However, they do not epitomise the full extent of her ecocritical stance, which will be further substantiated in the concluding chapter of this thesis. Atwood utilises a variety of literary devices with which she engages with the reader on a quest to transpose her ecocritical thought, which also will be addressed in the following chapter.

## Conclusion

The novels' plots both guide the reader on an existential journey with their protagonists: Ransom and Toby. Illustrated in a contrasting form and narrative structure, Ballard and Atwood have written dystopic fictions through which they express their ecocriticism, by positioning the protagonists to the environments they inhabit. Ballard's protagonist Ransom experiences a modest transcendental experience: one where he comes to realise his existential freedom and the relationship to the environment he inhabits. Atwood's protagonist, Toby, physically alienated by the Waterless Flood, reminisces about her livelihood before the apocalypse, and comes to realise her existential freedom the moment she acts upon it. On the contrary, as a condition for living authentically, Ballard has Ransom venture into his inner space where he comes to realise his close connection with the Other – with nature. Atwood has created an entire ustopia of binary-oppositions: Corporate Compounds vs. Pleeblands; Exfernal vs. God's Gardeners; and Feminist vs. Post-feminist, through which she illustrates Toby's transcendental experience, having her deliberate at every decision she encounters.

Published almost half a century apart, the most significant difference between the two novels is the theoretical foundation upon which the authors have established the scope of their ecocritical message. Adhering to the surrealist method, Ballard's call for an exploration of the inner space in the SF-genre is very much present in his depiction of Ransom's transcendental experience. Illustrating the human condition set against *The Drought*'s dystopian backdrop, Ransom's existential journey covers three parts: first, he is thrust from his environment; second, he is completely alienated from the Other; and, finally, he comes to realise his existential freedom through acceptance of the outer space and his relationship to it. Ballard's focus lies very much with the surrealist denotation of Ransom's relationship to this outer space. Ransom comes to

encounter environments through which he should realise the Other – environment and nature. Ballard carefully critiques consumerist culture when depicting Ransom as losing his freedom if he joined the bands of settlers on the dune flats and in his surrealist depiction of Lomax and Quilter, whom live lucidly but who's existence is no answer to the dystopic reality presented. The moment Ransom has realised that he is both subjectively responsible for his inner space and environment, accordingly.

Built upon Ballard's legacy of exploring inner space through speculative fiction, Atwood's ecocriticism is further delineated by creating a variety of perspectives on the same apocalyptic event, creating an ustopic world that is both satirically critical of consumerist culture and critical of western humanity's relationship to the environment. Atwood has left the inner space and aims to express the human condition set against the subject's social environments that might attest the manner in which one relates to the environment. Through her depiction of the God's Gardeners, as one possible definition of the human condition – with nature – in relation to the consumerist Exfernal world – without nature – Atwood depicts Toby as consciously deliberating her relationships to the Other and nature. On the contrary, the other protagonist Ren is very much subjugated by the technocratic corporate dystopic world: illustrating the negative feedback loop in consumerist culture. Through this depiction of Ren, who lives in bad faith, and Toby who comes to realise her authenticity, Atwood creates a dystopic reality with the right existential elements upon which Toby's transcendence is built: the moment she realises her freedom, she equally realises the Other, and what being in the apocalyptic world entails.

Both novels exhibit elements of the Existentialist philosophy and take the reader on a journey across the margins of existence. They each depict alienated subjects who come to realise their freedom and through states of anguish, despair, and abandonment, find their existential truth.

The manner in which the novels engage with their reader by transposing the authors ecocriticism is further elucidated below.

## Chapter 3: Literary Devices for Ecocritical Engagement

### Introduction

Chapter Two of this thesis illustrated in what manner the authors created narratives through which the existential transcendental experience of the protagonist is portrayed. However, the manner in which they have structured those narratives, and the literary devices they used to express their ecocriticism, their redefinition of the human condition, elucidates how they have aimed to transpose the protagonists' formative experience to the reader. This chapter critically explores the literary devices used by Ballard and Atwood and the manner in which these literary devices establish a heightened sense of engagement between the novels and the readers, respectively. Given the fact that it is not the aim of this thesis to show whether (or not) the novels have a transformative effect on the reader, I want to further establish the possibility of such an effect through use of the literary devices. First, Ballard's *The Drought* will be analysed: emphasising how Ballard's construction of liminal spaces and a time vacuum demonstrate his delineation between Ransom's outer and inner space, respectively. Furthermore, Ballard's affinity with the surrealist movement and the movement's inherent aim to have a formative effect will be discussed. Second, Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* will be discussed: illustrating how Atwood's use of a triple-narrative structure and contrasting voices engage with the reader. In addition, in creating the ustopic reality, Atwood coins a variety of neologisms: creating both, the consumerist environment upon which the plot unfolds and the dystopic future upon which she bases her critique of consumerist culture. She challenges the reader semantically through the use of novel words of which the meaning cannot directly be derived, underscoring the novel's engagement with its readers.

J. G. Ballard – *The Drought*

Asserted in the previous chapter, Ballard's *The Drought* explores the protagonist Dr. Charles Ransom's inner space. By elucidating the manner in which Ransom comes to realise his subjective responsibility in ascertaining his own existential freedom, Ballard takes the reader on a voyage to delineate the freedom of others in close relationship with the environment. Ballard's depiction of *The Drought*'s dystopic reality is saturated with surrealistic imagery through which he illustrates the novel's ecocritical theme: the unity between humanity and nature.

As touched upon in the opening of the previous chapter, Ballard wondered whether the surrealist movement could have fought off the challenge to its authority posed by Sartre and the existentialists. Ballard discusses "André Breton, surrealism's 'Pope' and one-man think-thank," (*User's Guide* 89) who wrote the Surrealist Manifesto (1924) and is deemed the father of the "international intellectual and political movement" that sprung up after the First World War (Voorhies). The Surrealist movement, "influenced by the psychological theories and dream studies of Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) and the political ideas of Karl Marx (1818–1883), … drew upon the private world of the mind, traditionally restricted by reason and societal limitations" (Voorhies). The Surrealists directed the arts away from the rational and the realistic and, inspired by Freud and Marx, "hoped that the psyche had the power to reveal the contradictions in the everyday world and spur on revolution" (The Art Story Contributors). With regards to Sartre's concept of alienation, both Existentialism and Surrealism foreground the socially oppressed individual. But where Existentialism aims to emphasise the human condition as one of existential freedom, Surrealism is best understood as a representational method in art that aims to elucidate the manner in which the subjugated mind may be liberated by combining the real with the imaginary.

Accordingly, Ballard's affinity with the surrealist movement is maintained by the surrealist method found in *The Drought* and through his exploration of the protagonists' inner space. In "The Coming of the Unconscious," Ballard directly links the inner space to "images of surrealism" and he argues that

> This calculated submission of the impulses and fantasies of our inner lives to the rigours of time and space … produces a heightened or alternate reality beyond that familiar to our sight or senses. What uniquely characterizes this fusion of the outer world of reality and the inner world of the psyche (which I have termed 'inner space') is its redemptive and therapeutic power. (*User's Guide* 84)

Significant for this delineation between the inner space and the perceived outside reality is the redemptive and therapeutic power found in the creation of the artworks, which Ballard attributes to the surrealist movement. Through the Surrealist method, Ballard emphasises the manner in which he aims to engage with the reader, by utilising Surrealism as a literary device to transpose the protagonists formative experience to the reader. Demonstrated through a variety of the novel's motifs; liminal space, the time vacuum, and the surrealist imagery, Ballard's short prosaic writing style conveys the apocalyptic reality through which Ransom redefines his relationship with nature.

Liminal Space – Time Vacuum

Given the fact that this thesis critically explores how aspects of existentialist philosophy may help to assert the significance of the environment in relation to the subject – to both protagonist and reader – the manner in which Ballard redefines Ransom's relationship to the environment is substantiated by his dystopic depiction of the space motif. Addressing the concept of liminal space and the spatial representations found in Ballard's works, Marcin Tereszewski argues "that

[liminality] constitutes an integral point of intersection between surrealism and Ballard's fiction" (346). Considering the novel's title and many of its chapter's titles, of which "The Draining Lake, … The Crying Land, … Dune Limbo, … [and] 'Jours de Lenteur'" (v-vi) will be addressed below, Ballard's affinity with space is found in the construction of these liminal spaces. Ballard utilises the liminality of space as a motif and, as a result, space becomes a trope upon which Ransom's inner space is constructed. In this regard, *The Drought*'s dystopic liminal spaces redefine the dominant social constructs: the society in which the novel's plot is set, challenge the manner in which Ransom is situated in his environment, and redefines his relationship to the other characters. Throughout each of the novel's three parts, Ballard situates Ransom in a liminal environment, whereby the drought alters, or has altered the environment to a such degree that Ransom is thrust from this surreal environment and is confronted with a newfound dream-reality. The reader is equally confronted with three different dystopic realities. Ballard utilises these surrealistic, speculative realities upon which he delineates the transformation of Ransom's inner space: first, the slow deterioration of Western civilisation; second, the post-apocalyptic world; third, Ransom's inner space.

In the first part of the novel, Ballard develops the space motif and fuses the outer reality with the inner space – the physical world with the dream world – as he illustrates Ransom's being in relation to the liminal spaces construed through the drought. In "The Draining Lake," Ballard introduces this conception of liminal space, by depicting the surrealistic decline of the lake:

> The slow transformation of the lake exhilarated Ransom. As the wide sheets of water contracted, first into shallow lagoons and then into a maze of creeks, the wet dunes of the lake bed seemed to emerge from another dimension. On the last morning he woke to find

> the houseboat beached at the end of a small cove. The slopes of mud, covered with the bodies of dead birds and fish, stretched above him like the shores of a dream. (4)

Emphasising the loss of its form and function in this liminal space, Ballard describes the draining of the lake as emerging from another dimension – like the shores of a dream – addressing this fusion of the external reality with the inner psyche of the dream world. Even though Ballard depicts Ransom as exhilarated by the slow changes of the environment, Ballard's illustration of the liminal space is yet to become tangible for Ransom's inner space. On the contrary, Ballard does address Ransom's curiosity with this dream-like world, which is further developed in the novel's following chapter. With the introduction of "'Jour de Lenteur' by Yves Tanguy" (11), Ballard illustrates the "smooth, pebble-like objects, drained of all associations, suspended on a washed tidal floor, this painting had helped to free [Ransom] from the tiresome repetitions of everyday life" (11). Emphasising the prominent role of the surrealist method utilised to set in motion the redefinition of Ransom's inner space, Ballard foreshadows the environmental outcome of *The Drought* in the novel's second chapter, which will be further expanded on below.

Contrastingly, as touched upon in this thesis' first chapter, Ransom pertains his existence to the contents of his houseboat and, thus, lives in bad faith: "The house reflected this domestic and personal vacuum … a spatio-temporal vacuum" (33). Ballard uses the liminality of space in relationship with Ransom's subjective transcendence, by depicting him as static – stuck in a spatio-temporal vacuum – but in a liminal environment that is not. By addressing various constituents that make up Ransom's liminal environment throughout the first part of the novel (life on the river and houseboat, Reverend Johnstone's militia and the Fishermen, and his changing relationships with Catherine, Philip, and Lomax), Ballard addresses the deterioration of civilisation, instigated by the draining of the lake, the coming of the desert, Reverend Johnstone who's church's burns

down, upon which the entire city follows, eventually resulting in the full deterioration of civilisation as the blind masses make a run for the sea.

In the novel's second part, Ballard further paints the post-apocalyptic remnants of civilisation after the run for the sea. Having drawn back on the salt-flats, various communities try to maintain their livelihood by cooking up salt-water to retrieve drinkable water. Ballard first delineates the surreal "Dune Limbo" against the "grey superstructures reflected in the brine-pools" (133-4), before placing Ransom in this environment:

> The salt-dunes ran on for miles. … Nowhere was there a defined margin between the shore and sea, and the endless shallows formed the only dividing zone, land and water submerged in this grey liquid limbo. … The water never seemed to move. … Despite the to and fro movements of the inhabitants of the salt wastes, no traces of their footsteps marked the surface, blurred within a few minutes by the leaking water. (133-4)

Ballard's surrealistic representation of the post-apocalyptic reality Ransom finds himself in, the endless shallows, a grey liquid limbo, highlights the liminal experience that is about to unfold. Where the first part of the novel emphasised the liminal, changing, environment in relation to Ransom's static reception of it, the second part of the novel does the exact opposite. Ballard depicts Ransom in a spatio-temporal vacuum and, as discussed in the previous chapter, utilises this vacuum to signal to the reader that one should abstain from passively undergoing one's faith; one's situation.

By juxtaposing Ransom's surreal limboid situation to the characters therein, Ballard illustrates the loss of the individual subject alienated from his or her situation by the indiscriminating force of the environmental collapse. Whether it is Reverend Johnstone, Judith, or the other characters found in the communities, Ballard shows that even though the drought

indiscriminately subjugates the free subject, one should not take it lying down by relinquishing one's freedom. Ballard depicts the collapse of social norms and values through both Reverend Johnstone and Judith. Reverend Johnston has lost his identity as a free subject, a "demented Lear" bereft of all his freedom: "The confined world of the settlement was limited by his own narrowing vision and sinking into a rigid matriarchy dominated by his two daughters" (160). Contrarily, Judith was cast from the same settlement because "her bodking tongue and unpredictable ways made her intolerable to Johnstone's daughters and the other womenfolk" (146). Ballard illustrates that the community of drifters in the dune limbo settlements support life on the salt flats, but merely on the premise that one loses one's subjective free existence in relation to life in the collective. As touched upon in the previous chapter, both Hendry and Vanessa urge Ransom to abstain from joining the settlement for he should not relinquish his freedom, his identity as a free subject. As such, in relation to the reconstruction of Ransom's psyche and the novel's potential to have a formative effect on the reader alike, Ballard's speculative account of this post-apocalyptic static environment lays emphasis on existential growth by venturing away from the dune flats, back to the city whence they came.

In the third part, Ransom fully experiences the liminal space and his relationship to the reality in which he finds himself. He experiences the immediate effects the drought has had on his personal relationship to the environment: "During the journey from the coast they had relied on one another, but with their arrival at Hamilton, at the very point from which they had set out ten years earlier, he felt that all his obligations to them had been discharged" (198). Bringing the spatio-temporal vacuum motif to a close, Ballard depicts Ransom reassessing the relationships with his former travel companions, Lomax and Quilter. He reassesses his subjective relationship to the environment: the human condition, redefined as part of nature. As touched upon in the

previous chapter, by juxtaposing Ransom to the foil characters Lomax and Quilter, Ballard voices his final critique of modernity and consumerist culture. Epitomised through Ballard's descriptions of Lomax, who's performances with "shout and crackle as [he] let of fireworks" (219) earn him the name "demented Prospero" (223) and Quilter, "the obscene beast! … my Caliban" (222), *The Drought* has various intertextual links with Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. The moment Prospero dies Caliban is absolved and freed (Shakespeare 5.1.290-7); in *The Drought*, Quilter is absolved of Lomax's dominion over him and Ransom too is freed. Ballard depicts Quilter as the oppressed minority, whereas Lomax is portrayed as the oppressor who reigns freely and exerts his influence over the other characters by utilising his vast wealth. Lomax abstains from transcendence by retaining to consumerist culture. In Chapter 36 and Chapter 37, the mirage that is presented to Ransom in the form of an oasis already foreshadows the fatalistic civilisation he is about to encounter. It is only through his realisation that "[t]he timeless world in which quilter lived now formed his own universe, and only the shadow of the broken roof above, adjusting its length and perimeter, reminded him of the progress of the sun" (231), that Ransom comes to understand the liminal space in relation to the transcendental element which is implied in the human condition.

### Surrealist Imagery

Tereszewski explains that "the hidden political project of Surrealism, which was to subvert and destabilize the established societal norms and protocols" (351), which comes to fruition in the final chapter of the novel. Given the novel's overarching theme of environmental change elucidated throughout the narrative, Ballard's "*Jours de Lenteur*" is the surreal conclusion of said hidden political project. Drawing a close intertextual relationship between Tanguy's painting and *The Drought*, Ballard recreates *Jour de Lenteur* (*Figure 1*) as the epitome of liminal space, an analogy

through which Ransom's outer space is illustrated: the dune like landscape and the smooth, rounded objects, devoid of apparent correlations with reality, are portrayed without any definitive essence or purpose. Drawing upon Sartre's existence precedes essence, the objects in Tanguy's composition primarily exist before any essence is granted to them or necessitated by them. By merging the visual with the narrative, the surreal with Ransom's experience, Ballard foregrounds the surrealist method in destabilising the establish relationship with the environment.

Ballard utilises Tanguy's composition to embellish the outer space upon which Ransom's liminal experience is founded and his inner space is constructed. As such, Ransom comes to terms with the change in landscape and, in turn, the transcendental element to existential life in an ever changing, liminal environment:

> Everywhere light and shade crept on slowly. … the dunes around the oasis reflected the heat like banks of ash. … Far out towards the centre of the lake he could see the hull of the river steamer … Nothing remained except the stumps of the chimney … Smoothed by the wind, the white dunes covered the bed like motionless waves. … the sand was smooth and unmarked, gleaming with the bones of untold numbers of fish. …
>
> To his surprise he noticed that he no longer cast any shadow on to the sand, as if he had at last completed his journey across the margins of the inner landscape he had carried in his mind for so many years. The light failed, and the air grew darker. The dust was dull and opaque, the crystals in its surface dead and clouded. An immense pall of darkness lay over the dunes, as if the whole of the exterior world were losing its existence. (231-3)

The excerpt above illustrates Ballard's surrealistic account of the liminal space brought about by the drought: light and shade crept on slowly, the rounded objects, the hull of a container deteriorated to the stump of the chimney, and the smooth, unmarked sand, which highlight the

liminal reality in which Ransom finds himself. Significantly, up until the moment in the narrative that Ransom notices that he no longer cast any shadow, Ballard's description of the liminal environment could have very well been a description of Tanguy's *Jour de Lenteur*. In this regard, the moment Ransom comes to realise he no longer cast a shadow, the moment he realises his outer space, is the moment he has redefined his inner space with his environment. Ballard combines the surrealistic, liminal spaces with his criticism of the changing environment and Ransom's relationship to it. Even more so, Ballard utilises dystopic surrealism to emanate acceptance of the liminal environment through an authentic Ransom, who comes to terms with his environment: "the whole of the exterior world were losing its existence" (233), for the true significance of the external world is found in the inner space.

Ransom's surrealistic journey, through which he has come to terms with the change in environment, is presented in clear cut language and his transformative experience is transposed to the reader by juxtaposing Ransom's character to the variety of characters found in *The Drought*, and the liminal spaces they inhabit. Ballard utilises surreal imagery in combination with the spatio-temporal motif to accentuate Ransom's relationship to the Other – whether that is a character that confirms this free human condition, or the environment upon which this human condition is founded. As such, the real and the surreal, the world and dream-like, are combined so that one may speculate on one's relationship to the post-apocalyptic world presented: by providing a variety of liminal spaces through which one's relationship with the environment is altered and contested.

Margaret Atwood – *The Year of the Flood*

Where the previous chapter illustrated that the plot structure of *The Year of the Flood* was governed by the protagonist's existential journey, it is the literary devices Atwood utilises that characterises her as a writer of *Littérature Engagée*. In the Kersterton Lecture, Atwood asked her audience: "What is a human being?" (qtd. in Hengen 72). Substantiating the novel's ecocritical theme, which equally has been the primary subject of this thesis, Atwood addresses her motivation for creating the ustopic world depicted in *The Year of the Flood*:

> Literature is an uttering … of the human imagination. It lets its shadowy forms of thought and feeling – Heaven, Hell, monsters, angels and all – out into the light, where we can … perhaps come to a better understanding of who we are and what we want, and what the limits to those wants might be … If we can imagine it, we'll be able to do it. (qtd. in 76)

It is precisely the imagination that is foregrounded in Atwood's speculative writing, and her critique on consumerist culture and critique on environmental trends addressed in her ustopia embody her engagement with the reader. As such, the reader's thoughts and feelings, which Atwood aims to affect, are informed by the literary devices she utilises to construct her ustopic near-future.

Given the scope of this thesis, I am not able to go into great detail in elucidating all the literary devices used. Thus, to explore the manner in which the protagonists' formative experiences, with an emphasis on Toby, are transposed to the reader, two of Atwood's literary techniques will be discussed: first, as touched upon in the previous chapter, Atwood's use of a triple-perspective narrative structure, through which the protagonists' existential arcs are asserted, will be addressed. Second, through the coinage of new words, Atwood enriches her ustopic world, by addressing a variety of speculative consumerist trends epitomised through the neologisms voiced.

Narration: voice and structure

Atwood utilises a variety of narrative voices: Adam One, Toby, and Ren. Each articulate a different perspective on *The Year of the Flood*'s plot. Analysing the novel's narrative structure, it is the relationship between these different voices that highlight the manner in which Atwood engages with the reader. First, I will address the significance of a triple-perspective narrative structure, before delving into an in-depth analysis of each of the narrative voices presented, and their relationship to the critique on consumer culture and the ecocriticism Atwood professes, through which the individual subjects are alienated from each other and from their environment.

Each chapter is prefaced by a sermon by Adam One, followed by a hymn from the Gardener's Oral Hymnbook. Starting from year one and chronologically leading up to year twenty-five – the present – Adam One's sermons function as a thread throughout the novel. Through this thread, the reader is informed of the Gardener's present situation and their teachings. On the contrary, Atwood's use of a nonlinear narrative structure informs the reader of the ustopic world she has created through a series of flashbacks where both Toby and Ren are the main voices. Atwood utilises these three narrative voices to express her ecocritical stance towards the human as a part of nature. Significantly, the fact that Toby's arc is written in the form of third-person omniscient narrative, while the sermons by Adam One and Ren's arc are voiced in first-person narration, marks Atwood's writing as engaged literature. By situating the reader amidst three narrative voices, Atwood creates the illusion that all voices are of equal importance. They each represent different perspectives on the ustopian world. Adam One's sermons inform the reader of Atwood's eco-philosophy. The story of Toby and Ren, who live through the Waterless Flood, emphasises her feminist critique and her critique of consumer culture. However, taking into

account that Atwood's writing exhibits elements of Sartre's existentialist philosophy: addressing different (free) subjects who aim to attain authentic lives through their actions, the protagonists' different perspectives function to further develop Atwood's ecocritical discourse. As such, Atwood utilises the third-person narrative voice to discern Toby's account from the others – equally heightening the trustworthiness of Toby as a narrative voice.

By foregrounding Toby's third-person narrative voice from the other first-person narratives, Atwood affects the reader's perception of trustworthiness for the characters. A recent study on trust and empathy for protagonists has shown that "manipulation of narrative perspective did not affect empathy for the character, but did affect trust" (Van Lissa, et al. 43). The research demonstrates that readers do not necessarily exhibit more empathy for a first-person narrative voice. However, characters whose account is written in the third person are deemed more trustworthy. According to Van Lissa, et al., "the increase in trust in third-person narrative depends on the external narrator's authority, which validates the perspective of the protagonist" (43). Ren, the first-person narrator, is continuously shown to be living in bad faith. Toby, a character depicted through a third-person omniscient narration, consciously contemplates the Gardener's teachings, her positionality to the environment she lives in, and the Other she encounters. This emphasises the point Atwood wants to communicate to the reader that humanity is intrinsically part of nature. Thereby, Atwood draws the reader away from Ren's arc and towards Toby's perspective of moving through the ustopia.

Significantly, because the omniscient narrative perspective is deemed more trustworthy, the first-person sermons by Adam One and the manner in which Ren's arc develops further emphasise the trustworthiness of Toby as a character following the Waterless Flood. Toby questions Adam One's teachings, to which he asserts: "'Your doubts reassure me,' said Adam One.

'They show how trustworthy you are'" (201). Discussing people who make her feel secure, Ren remarks: "Toby – she was so tough and hard – but if you're drowning, a soft squashy thing is no good to hold on to" (10). Here Atwood heightens Toby's authority as a trustworthy character and the trustworthiness of her character making the right existential choices. As such, the reader is thrust into an ustopic world in which the novel's two focalisers are delineated from one another: the reader may follow Ren's first-person voice through which Atwood voices her feminist critique, or follow Toby's third-person omniscient narrative, which naturally emanates a trustworthy account of Atwood's critique on consumerist culture and her ecocriticism on Toby's role, and the reader equally, in the dystopic reality illustrated.

Accordingly, the narrative strategy utilised by Atwood to delineate the different voices foregrounds the eco-critique she presents to the reader. Furthermore, on discussing Atwood's dystopian paradigm, Coral Ann Howells notes that through use of the female protagonist, "This narrative strategy reverses the structural relations between public and private worlds of the dystopia, allowing Atwood to reclaim a feminine space of personal emotions and individual identity, which is highlighted by her first-person narrative" (164). When Ren has moved back into the corporate compound, her first-person account portrays what life in a ustopic world would be like, from a wealthier point of view – drawing the reader into the ustopia first-hand. Atwood creates these first-person spaces to deliver a close-up critique on contemporary environmental trends in society. The moment Ren meets Bernice outside the "Happicuppa franchise on campus" (342), Bernice critiques Ren for having reverted back to the Exfernal, consumerist way of living. When Ren offers her water, Bernice remarks "'Bottled water is evil. Don't you know anything?'" (343). Additionally, Bernice comments on her mother who joined the "Known Fruits, who claimed it was a mark of God's favour to be rich because *By their fruits ye shall know them*, and *fruits* meant bank

accounts" (344). Satirically reinterpreting Matthew 7:16-20, Atwood critiques the current trend in "[consumer activism]" (Iperen 2019), through which the individual is held accountable on living environmentally friendly, without considering that only the wealthier are able to live accordingly: "they were really just twisted, fish-crunching, materialistic body-worshippers out there, with facelifts and bimplants and genework and totally warped values" (344). Contrastingly, as Ren's character continuously acts in bad faith, the space of personal emotions and individual identity is further subjugated by the grander narrative of the realisation of the authentic human being through Toby's narrative voice.

Where Ren's first-person narrative voice colours the ustopic reality, and Toby's account substantiates the authentic individual in said reality, Adam One's sermons, and the manner in which Atwood has situated them in the novel's narrative, further substantiate Atwood's ecocritical thought: informing the reader of the eco-theology professed. Northover argues that it prevents them from becoming Word or dogma. Additionally, he addresses that the satirical manner in which Atwood "[opens] the biblical myths up to ecological revision" (88) accentuates the strength of the narratives she presents to the reader. Northover argues that "the truth of the God's Gardeners' faith is not as important as is the fact that their religion confers an evolutionary advantage on them … this gives priority to mythos (narratives) over logos (words or truth)" (90). The sermons express the eco-theology through which Toby consciously deliberates and acts in *The Year of the Flood*'s ustopic reality. Atwood presents the reader with a "scrambled" theology (56) and, like Toby, urges one to consciously deliberate on the practical reach in the current zeitgeist. The sermons and eco-theology serve as a counter-voice to the commercialised world she has coined, which will be addressed below.

Coining engagement

In creating *The Year of the Flood*'s ustopic reality, Atwood has coined a complete vocabulary of brand names and terminology associated with these brands, which draws the reader into the ecocritical narrative she has created. In this regard, Atwood strengthens the foundation of her narrative, by embellishing it with a register that draws the reader's attention as "commentary on the cynical exploitation of human fears of ageing, illness, and death" (Grimbeek 92). According to Marinette Grimbeek, the neologisms coined "form part of [Atwood's] thoroughgoing critique of consumerism (88). The variety of company names that come to pass: "SecretBurger! Because Everyone Loves a Secret" (40), "Happicuppa" (317), "HelthWyzer supplements" (30) and "AnooYoo" (282), are all companies with which Atwood illustrates the commercialised landscape denoting her critique of consumerism. Grimbeek argues that "the names Atwood gives to corporations and their products abound in purposeful misspellings and obvious contradictions" (91). First, the secret in the SecretBurger franchise is that "no one knew what sort of animal protein was actually in them" (40). Second, the Happicuppa company produces "Gen-mod, sun-grown, [beans] sprayed with poisons? [killing birds, and ruining peasants" (221), resulting in the "Happicuppa riots" (317). Third, the HelthWyzer supplements Corp tests medicine by purposefully giving it's subjects the disease the medicine is for, addressed in Pilar's remark: "This kind of illness, coupled with those supplements. No wonder the HelthWyzer people wanted to treat your mother themselves" (125). The AnooYoo clinic's slogan is "*Do it for Yoo… The Noo Yoo*" (282), praying on the vulnerable by promising "a new [you]," Toby proclaims. The AnooYoo Corp does not only sell beauty "[they're] selling hope" (315), hope in retaining a young appearance. Further emphasising Atwood's satire, Grimbeek asserts that the overt misspellings and obvious contradictions serve to lend support for Atwood's critical stance on consumer society through the

subliminal human fears of ageing, illness, and death connoted in the corporations' names and their products.

Grimbeek argues that "coinages are instruments of the novel's pervading satire" (97). Addressing the satire in Atwood's novel. Marta Dvorak emphasises the neologisms as literary tropes in provoking engagement with the reader. She argues that, "[b]y inverting the usual semantic levels, privileging the connoted or latent over what is denoted or announced, Atwood subverts" (Dvorak 120-1). As such, next to the eco-critique expressed through the protagonist's narrative, the novel's satire on consumerist culture is illustrated by the corporations in Atwood's ustopia, but it is not implicated in the neologisms' semantic connotations. Dvorak further substantiates that "[t]o be effective, however, her doubled discourse relies on the reader's ability to decode the clues of a trope grounded in deviousness" (Dvorak 121). Contrastingly, as illustrated above, the neologism brand-names do not necessarily require the reader's ability to decode their connoted semantic intent, for Atwood overtly voices the semantic meaning. Additionally, Grimbeek emphasises the double irony with which the coined corporations are presented to the reader. She argues that they "demand readers' attention through their ostentatiousness, and they all force a type of doublethink that highlights rather than obliterates their internal contradictions" (96). Thus, the manner in which Atwood emphasises her coined brand-names, the variety of products available (e.g. Mo'hair wigs, SecretBurgers, NooSkins, ChickieNobs), and compounds used in the narrative (e.g. Pleeblands, Rakunks, Mo'hair, Liobam), calculatedly situate the conscious reader in the ustopic world she has created. Through use of neologisms to ironically make the reader aware of the possible dystopic future, Atwood speculates the world progresses towards a corporate induced apocalypse, while providing an alternative to the satiric contradictory narrative in Adam One's sermons.

In "Ecocriticism and Narrative Theory: An Introduction," Erin James and Eric Morel assert the significance of narrative form over content in discussing ecocriticism. Within the scope of the novel's narrative form, Atwood utilises a variety of intra-textual literary devices – narrative structure, voice, and coinage practices. These literary devices are used to address her critique on consumerism, her eco-critique, and the existential growth with which Toby's arc informs the reader. James and Morel discuss Markku Lehtimäki, who voices two key questions: "how might an author's concern with a particular kind of ecology motivate the use of specific forms? How can techniques for consciousness presentation … be leveraged to suggest how characters' experiences both shape and are shaped by their engagement with aspects of the natural world?" (359). James and Morrel address these questions through which they foreground the literary structures and devices through which the author may aim to express such an ecocritical perspective. As such, next to the eco-critical content, Atwood's fiction engages with its audience through a conscious presentation of its narrative form.

Highly aware of the (possibly) far richer in-depth narrative analysis of *The Year of the Flood*, I have critically explored the three literary devices, discussed above, to further demonstrate the significance of both, the novels form and content, in engaging with the reader. Where a single omniscient third-person narrator is perceived to be more trustworthy, Atwood engages with the reader through use of a triple-perspective narrative structure. On the one hand, the two first-person accounts highlight the ustopic world and the role of the female (Ren), and emphasise the eco-teachings as a possible manner in which one comes to realise the Other (Adam One). On the other hand, Toby's account foregrounds Atwood's critique of consumerist culture and Toby's omniscient voice further emphasises the existential growth with which she comes to embody Atwood's perspective on ecocriticism. Furthermore, Atwood's coinage of the commercialised

sphere: the variety of companies, products, and compound words utilised to expand on the fears and wants of consumerist culture, further emphasise her critique on consumerist culture in bringing about the waterless flood.

## Conclusion

The real difference between *The Drought* and *The Year of the Flood* and the manner in which the authors aimed to express their ecocriticism lies in the form they adhere to, through which they have presented the protagonist's existential journey to the reader. Taking into consideration that each author voices their ecocriticism – their redefinition of the human condition – through an illustration of critique on contemporary consumerist society, their points of departure differ greatly. The most significant difference between the two is that Ballard turned to the representational techniques of surrealism to construct his eco-dystopia and foreground the existential quest necessary for the character to endure in order to redefine the human as a part of nature, by opening up the inner space as point of discussion. On the contrary, written long after the peak of the surrealist and existentialist movements, Atwood's novel is undoubtedly situated amidst the technological age.

Accordingly, Ballard utilises different motifs: liminal space, time vacuum, and surrealist imagery, to subvert an destabilize the established societal norms and protocols. By positioning Ransom in a liminal environment, Ballard creates the stark contrast of a static character who lives in bad faith, over an environment which is not static. Both the liminal space-motif and the time vacuum-motif are combined in the novel's second part, creating a spatio-temporal vacuum from which Ransom's inner space is alienated: accentuating Ransom's relationship to the Other. Furthermore, by adhering to surrealist imagery throughout the novel, Ballard fuses the external reality with the internal dream-like, and, in turn, he depicts Ransom as his space. Utilising imagery borrowed from Yves Tanguy's *Jour de Lenteur* as the epitome of liminality, Ballard constructed a surrealist outer reality that forms the foundation upon which Ransom's experiences are based. Ballard has created a surrealist external world, through which the relationship between subject and

natural world is contested, in hope of subverting the subject's inner world, both Ransom and reader alike.

On the contrary, Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* engages with the reader through its narrative structure and voice, and coinage of the ustopic reality. Utilising a triple-perspective narrative structure, Atwood enables herself to voice a multi-faceted perspective on being in the ustopic reality. Accordingly, Ren's arc epitomises a first-person account of what constitutes life in said reality. Adam One's first-person account informs the reader of the possible effectiveness of the eco-teachings in creating authentic subjects. However, forming the basis of her ecocriticism, Toby's arc substantiates Atwood's critique on consumerist culture. As a character Toby transcends her being by becoming lucidly aware of herself and the other. Atwood engages with the reader on the basis that the third-person narrative voice is deemed more trustworthy. As such, she emphasises Toby's voice over the other two. Furthermore, Atwood's coinage, which foregrounds the commercialised sphere, emphasising her critique on consumerist culture. The coinages demand the reader's attention as commentary on the cynical exploitation of human fears of ageing, illness, and death. Epitomising Atwood's satire, the overtly apparent misspellings and obvious contradictions enhance her consumerist critique. Focussing on what is connoted instead of denoted, the neologisms force a type of doublethink. Atwood's implicated consumerist critique is very much foreground in her neologisms, but the manner in which she puts forth the coined corporate names, products, and compounds used in everyday speech, ironically substantiate the speculated trend of what she perceives to be the corporate induced apocalypse imminent in this epoch.

Respectively, the contrasting variety of literary devices used by each of the authors further expresses their ecocritical perspective on society. Where Ballard utilised the surrealist method to delineate liminal spaces, creating a time vacuum, in relation to the protagonist, Atwood developed

her narrative through the triple-perspective narrative structure, heightening the trustworthiness of her third-person account. Furthermore, by coining various constituents that make up *The Year of the Flood*'s reality, she voices her critique on consumerist culture, by addressing the human fears of ageing, illness, and death.

## Conclusion: *The Drought* and *The Year of the Flood* as Littérature Engagée Écocritique

"a man sitting among the ruins of his life"

Albert Camus – (qtd. in Sartre, *Humanism* 4)

Where Albert Camus commented on part of Jean-Paul Sartre's literary oeuvre, professing its greatness and truth, this thesis' title: sitting among the ruins of one's life, speculatively illustrates the truth professed in anthropogenic environmental discourse. Next to addressing the dystopic fictions discussed in this thesis, Camus' quote has been adapted in order to discern all protagonists: *The Drought*'s protagonist Ransom and *The Year of the Flood*'s protagonists Toby, Ren, and Adam One. Inspired by the possibility of a sixth mass extinction event, one can only begin to wonder whether human beings will be there to sit among the ruins. Scientific data backing up the anthropogenic claim have yet to cause a ripple large enough for the pond to realise it is responsible and respond accordingly. Polar opposites like Greta Thunberg and Donald Trump, one substantiating anthropogenic contribution to climate change, the other denying it, form the current political/social landscape which attest to the stark contrasting perspectives with which the scientific environmental data is perceived. Given the inability to aspire to environmental change, this thesis has attested to the intricate worth of ecocriticism in aspiring to societal environmental change through existential discourse.

As such, this thesis has substantiated the notion that both, Ballard's *The Drought* and Atwood's *The Year of the Flood*, take the reader on an existential journey, epitomise elements of committed literature, utilised to address their ecocriticism. Thus, this thesis has confirmed that *The Drought* (1965) and *The Year of the Flood* (2009) are major literary eco-dystopias that utilize the

trope of *Littérature Engagée* to express their ecocriticism, conveying a message of climate change by engaging with their readers.

Each writer is critical of contemporary society's pernicious effect on world ecosystems, and each utilises elements of Sartre's existentialist philosophy to transpose the formative experience of the protagonist to the reader. Dissolving the readers' bad faith and showing them their freedom, the dystopic novels redefine the human condition, portraying what being human entails in a changing environment – the human as a part of nature – professing the need for a future of co-existence.

First, in order to corroborate the research statement, I have brought together ecocriticism and Sartre's existentialism, and I conceptualised both within Sartre's theory on *Littérature Engagée*. Second, I interpreted the protagonists' formative experience through use of elements of Sartre's existentialist philosophy: responsibility, project, freedom, both bad faith and good faith, individual, and alienation, elucidating in what manner the authors have redefined Sartre's idea of the human condition. Third, I analysed how the literary devices utilised by the authors allowed them to express their ecological themes in existentialist terms, which demonstrate that the novels are exemplar to be *Littérature Engagée*.

According to Greg Garrard, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship of the human and the non-human. Foremost, it explores the discrepancy found in aiming to understand individual responsibility in the realisation of the "hyperobject" of global warming. Substantiating that the humanities might be exemplary in bridging the gap between the scientific data and the individual subject's understanding of responsibility towards the realisation of such a hyperobject, Westling argues that the significance of the arts lies in the manner in which the medium is able to dramatize, explore ethical dilemmas, and elucidates how epistemological limitations cam be transferred into

literary strategies or philosophical explorations. Considering eco-dystopic fictions, I have discussed the translation of ecocritical thought to its reader and have contested the second of the following concerns: science and scepticism, and apocalypse and apathy. The former attests to the gap between the scientific data present and the subject's perception of the environmental issues, which I understand to be possibly solved by the humanities. The latter addresses apocalyptic narratives and proposes they cause despair, privation, and restraint. However, contesting the above, I claim that apocalyptic fictions speculate on eco-dystopic realities through known environmental issues, but, additionally, they further inform the reader through its narratives. Eco-critical dystopias that contain existentialist discourse subject their audiences to a redefined ecocentric perspective on climate change and the human relationship to, and engagement with, their ecosystems.

Sartre's *Existentialism is a Humanism* emphasises the humanistic element to existentialism. Having received a lot of critique on his seminal work *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre concisely narrates all humanistic elements to his philosophy. The existentialist philosophy is inspired by the issue of estrangement, from conceptions of the world and human existence, to a doctrine of radical human freedom that leads into an ethics of authenticity and reciprocal freedom. Foremost, existentialism is the philosophy that emphasises human subjectivity and responsibility, and through authenticity asserting one's freedom, one realises the freedom of the other. Taking the above as the foundation of his philosophy, Sartre addresses the universal human condition, which is this transcendental element to existence; each individual is able to transcend one's situation and is free to do so.

With its emphasis on individual subjectivity and responsibility, existentialism's scope remains on the individual actor. Given the anthropogenic discourse on climate change, it is not the

individual but the collective that necessitates environmental motivation. Sartre understood this need for societal change and *Littérature Engagée* is his plea to the arts in taking responsibility for their actions, creating art for society's sake (e.g. totalitarian regimes, environmental problems).

However, with its primary focus on the individual subject, I have combined existentialist thought with theory on ecocriticism, in order to further develop my critical gaze towards an existence with the Other. Accordingly, this thesis has shown how two major literary eco-dystopias have utilised the trope of *Littérature Engagée* to express their ecocriticism, conveying a message of climate change and engaging with their readers. This thesis substantiates how Ballard and Atwood have broken the fourth wall – writing for society's sake – creating fictions in which the transformative experience of the protagonist engages with the reader by transposing the ecocritical human condition of a human with nature.

J.G. Ballard – *The Drought*

Ballard's ecocriticism and his critique on consumerist culture is clear cut. In *The Drought*, Ballard gives a variety of reasons for mankind's demise: overuse of resources, technological development and materialism. By delineating the outer reality from the protagonist's inner space, Ballard has written a dystopic environmental account through which he substantiates his ecocriticism: the redefinition of Sartre's human condition which incorporates nature into the livelihood of his protagonist. Ballard depicts an ecocritical narrative through which the protagonist Ransom comes to realise his relationship to the environment he inhabits. Through use of three literary motifs: liminal space, time vacuum, and the surrealist method, Ballard transposes Ransom's formative experience and engages with the reader. Ballard has depicted Ransom's transcendental experience as trifold. First, Ransom is alienated from the environment he inhabits, because he does not realise

his subjective freedom and lives in bad faith. Second, Ransom is subjected to a static environment – a time vacuum – in the dune limbo but does not realise the transcendental element to existence. Third, Ransom is confronted with a liminal space, and through this confrontation with said space and the foils: Lomax and Quilter, that inhabit that space, he comes to realise the liminality to the outer space and his inner space, equally. Ballard critiques consumerist culture through the foils Lomax and Quilter, by addressing the manner in which they act to preserve existence in their temporal vacuum.

Ballard also emphasised surrealism's inherent quality to subvert the subject's inner world. By creating a surrealist external reality, of which the imagery of Yves Tanguy's *Jour de Lenteur* are the epitome, Ballard has created a liminal environment upon which Ransom's experiences are projected. Through this depiction of the surreal external reality, Ballard emphasises Ransom's liminal experience and the transcendental element to existence found in the construction of said inner space, in turn, transposing this experience to the reader.

Margaret Atwood – The Year of the Flood

Atwood's critique on society is multifaceted: feminist and consumerist. Utilising three protagonists that inform the reader of the novel's ustopic reality, she has created a variety of perspectives from which *The Year of the Flood* may be understood. Furthermore, Atwood has developed the narrative by constructing an ustopia of binary-oppositions: Corporate Compounds vs. Pleeblands; Exfernal vs. God's Gardeners; and Feminist vs. Post-feminist. However, in utilising a variety of narrative voices of which two address her ecocriticism, Atwood emphasises the ecological consumerist over her feminist critique. Accordingly, Toby's transcendental experience is presented to the reader through her encounters with the ideology of the God's

Gardeners, and characters living in bad faith, upon which she's depicted as deliberating every decision she encounters.

Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* engages with the reader by presenting Toby's third-person omniscient narrative voice in contrast to the other two narrative voices: the first-person sermons by Adam One and Ren's first-person account through which Atwood illustrates what life in the ustopic world is like. Substantiated by contemporary research, Toby's third-person narrative voice is discerned from the others as deemed more trustworthy over the first-person narrative voice. As such, Toby's character receives a more authoritative position in the novel's plot, and where Toby deliberates the Gardener's teachings and her relationship to the world she inhabits, the reader is informed by her account and compelled equally to deliberate on Atwood's ecocriticism. Furthermore, Atwood's use of coinages to foreground the commercialist sphere draws the reader's attention to her critique on consumerist culture. They demand attention as commentary on the cynical exploitation of human fears of ageing, illness, and death. Epitomising Atwood's satire, the neologisms focus on what is connoted instead of denoted, they force a type of doublethink. The implied consumerist critique that Atwood articulates through the neologisms is very much foregrounded in the novel's narrative. This further emphasises the satire illustrated in *The Year of the Flood*. Through overt ironic expansion on the neologisms utilised, Atwood speculates on the imminence of a corporate induced environmental collapse and that – like a dear stuck in headlights – we are waiting for it to happen.

As exemplified above, the novels epitomise *Écocritique par Littérature Engagée* but they show stark contrast in the manner in which both, Ballard and Atwood express their ecocriticism: posing a redefinition of the human condition with nature. Both critical of contemporary society, they emphasise the reader's engagement with, and their relationship to liminal environment due to

anthropogenic causes. Reconciling the sciences with the humanities, the novels transpose ecocritical ideology in hope of ascertaining a significantly less dystopic future as the novels have speculated on. A future for which both the collective and the individual take responsibility.

Concluding, I would like to address a final thought that, significantly, does not address the research statement. *The Dought* and *The Year of the Flood* were written before and after the coinage of "the term 'global warming' … by environmental scientist Wallace Broeker in 1975" (Clarke 9), respectively. The manner in which the authors position their protagonists in relation to the anthropogenic argument: that human beings cause global warming, discerns the difference in their engagement with the reader. Where Ballard's novel very much aims to liberate the inner space – thought – as subjected to the societal norms rampant in the early sixties post-war period, written after the millennium, Atwood's writing notably expresses her critique on consumerist culture, embedding it in the narrative she professes.

**Works Cited**

Atwood, Margaret. “The Handmaid's Tale and Oryx and Crake ‘In Context.’” *PMLA*, vol. 119, no. 3, 2004, pp. 513–517. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/25486066.

---. *The Year of the Flood*. Virago, 2009.

---. “Margaret Atwood: the road to Ustopia.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 14 Oct. 2011, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/oct/14/margaret-atwood-road-to-ustopia.

Ballard, J.G. *A Users Guide to the Millennium: Essays and Reviews*. HarperCollins Publishers, 1996.

---. *The Drought*. 1965. The Fourth Estate, 2014.

“Ballardian, adj.” *Collins Dictionary: 175 Years of Dictionary Publishing*. 10th ed., HarperCollins Publishers, 2010. p. 126.

Bergthaller, Hannes. “Housebreaking the Human Animal: Humanism and the Problem of Sustainability in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*.” *English Studies*, vol. 91, no. 7, 2010, pp. 728–743.

Brooks Bouson, J. “‘We’re Using Up the Earth. It’s Almost Gone’: A Return to the Post-Apocalyptic Future in Margaret Atwood’s The Year of the Flood.” *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, vol. 46, no. 1, 2011, pp. 9–26.

Carlson, Rachel. *Silent Spring*. Houghton Mifflin, 1962.

Clarke, Jim. "Reading Climate Change in J.G. Ballard." *Critical Survey* 25.2 (2013): 7,21,112. *ProQuest.* Web. 1 Dec. 2019.

Cooper, David. “Existentialism as a Philosophical Movement.” *The Cambridge Companion to Existentialism*. Ed. Steven Crowell. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 25–49. Web.

Dvorak, Marta. “Margaret Atwood’s humor.” *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*, edited by Coral Ann. Howels, Cambridge University, 2006, pp. 114–129.

Gabriel, Hayden, and Greg Garrard. “Reading and Writing Climate Change.” *Teaching Ecocriticism and Green Cultural Studies*, edited by Greg Garrard, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pp. 117–129.

Garrard, Greg. *Ecocriticism*. London: Routledge, 2004. Print.

---. *Teaching Ecocriticism and Green Cultural Studies*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Grimbeek, Marinette. “Wholesale Apocalypse: Brand Names in Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*.” *Names*, vol. 64, no. 2, Feb. 2016, pp. 88–98.

Hengen, Shannon. “Margaret Atwood and Environmentalism.” *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*, edited by Coral Ann. Howels, Cambridge University, 2006, pp. 72–85.

Howels, Coral Ann. “Margaret Atwood’s dystopian visions: *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *Oryx and Crake*.” *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*, edited by Coral Ann. Howels, Cambridge University, 2006, pp. 161–175.

Iperen, Roxane van. “Nee, Een Duurzame Wereld Begint Niet Bij Jezelf. Een Pleidooi Tegen Consumentenactivisme.” *Vrij Nederland*, 10 Dec. 2019, https://www.vn.nl/pleidooi-tegen-consumentenactivisme/.

James, Erin, and Eric Morel. “Ecocriticism and Narrative Theory: An Introduction.” *English Studies*, vol. 99, no. 4, 2018, pp. 355–365.

Jerončić, Edita, and Brian Willems. “Vacuum Ecology: J.G. Ballard and Jeff VanderMeer.” *Acta Neophilologica*, vol. 51, no. 1-2, 2018, pp. 5–15.

Ki-moon, Ban. "Ban Ki-Moon: The U.N. Climate Report Shows Trump's Failings." *Time*, 8 Oct. 2018, time.c om/ 541 67 93/climate-change-ban-ki-moon-trump/.

Keere, Kobe de. “Het IPCC-Rapport Is Een Alarmbel Maar We Blijven Snoozen.” *De Volkskrant*. 10 Oct. 2018, Retrieved 11 October 2018. https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/het-ipcc-rapport-is-een-alarmbel-maar-we-blijven-snoozen~b4104438/?utm_campaign=shared_content&utm_medium=app&utm_source=link&utm_content=free.

Kottak, Conrad P. “The New Ecological Anthropology.” *American Anthropologist*, vol. 101, no. 1, 1999, pp. 23–35., http://www.jstor.org/stable/683339.

Latour, Bruno. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Translated by Catherine Porter, Harvard University Press, 1993.

Le Guin, Ursula K. “The Year of the Flood by Margaret Atwood | Book Review.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 28 Aug. 2009, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/aug/29/margaret-atwood-year-of-flood.

Lissa, Caspar J. van, et al. “Difficult Empathy. The Effect of Narrative Perspective on Readers’ Engagement with a First-Person Narrator.” *DIEGESIS*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2016, pp. 43–63.

Merchant, Carolyn. *The Death of Nature*. Harper & Row, 1980.

Morton, Timothy. *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence*. Harvard UP, 2016.

Muniesa, Fabian. “Actor-Network Theory.” *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, 2015, pp. 80–84., doi:10.1016/b978-0-08-097086-8.85001-1.

Northover, Richard Alan. “Ecological Apocalypse in Margaret Atwood's MaddAddam Trilogy.” *Studia Neophilologica*, vol. 88, no. sup1, 2016, pp. 81–95.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *"What Is Literature?" and Other Essays*. Harvard University Press, 1988.

---. *Jean-Paul Sartre: Basic Writings*. Edited by Stephen Priest, Routledge, 2001.

--. *Existentialism Is a Humanism: Including, A Commentary on the Stranger*. Yale 1JP,2007.

Shakespeare, William. *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Tempest*. Edited by Stephen Orgel, Oxford University Press, 2008.

Snyder, Katherine V. "It's the End of the World As We Know It." *The Women's Review of Books*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2010, pp. 19–20. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/20698291.

Stephenson, Gregory. *Out of the Night and Into the Dream: A Thematic Study of the Fiction of J.G. Ballard*. Greenwood Press, 1992.

"Surrealism." *Britannica Academic*, Encyclopædia Britannica, 18 Dec. 2017. academic.eb.com/levels/collegiate/article/Surrealism/70462. Accessed 18 Dec. 2019.

Tanguy, Yves. *Jour de Lenteur*. 1937. *Centre Pompidou*, https://www.centrepompidou.fr/cpv/resource/cgzzR55/razRBXp#keywords_edit_btn

Tereszewski, Marcin. "Liminal Space in J. G. Ballard's 'Concrete Island.'" Text Matters, vol. 9, no. 9, 2019, pp. 345–355.

The Art Story Contributors. "Surrealism Movement Overview." *The Art Story*, The Art Story Contributors, 21 Dec. 2011, https://www.theartstory.org/movement/surrealism/#.

The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica. "Littérature Engagée." *Encyclopædia Britannica,* Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 20 July 1998, www.britannica.com/art/litterature-engagee.

Voorhies, James. "Surrealism." *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. Oct. 2004, http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/surr/hd_surr.htm. Accessed 18 Dec. 2019.

Watts, Jonathan. "We Have 12 Years to Limit Climate Change Catastrophe, Warns UN." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 8 Oct. 2018.

https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/oct/08/global-warming-must-not-exceed-15c-warns-landmark-un-report.

"weird, adj." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, September 2019, www.oed.com/view/Entry/226916. Accessed 10 November 2019.

Westling, Louise. “Literature and Ecology.” *Teaching Ecocriticism and Green Cultural Studies*, edited by Greg Garrard, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pp. 75–89.

## Appendix A

*Figure 1* – Jour de Lenteur*, Yves Tanguy (1900-1955). 1937.*