

**CONCRETE ISLAND: J.G. BALLARD AND THE PARADOX  
OF MEMORY**

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I've always thought of the whole  
of life as a kind of disaster area.

J.G. Ballard, *The Drought* (1965)

1. According to Ballard, the world in which we are immersed is a great and grandiose mechanism of deception which hides the essence of things —our hermeneutical paths no longer lead to reality but to a universe dominated by *simulacra* which epistemologically negate the existence of everything that they do not pretend to represent:

Nous vivons à l'intérieur d'un énorme roman. Il devient de moins en moins nécessaire pour l'écrivain de donner un contenu fictif à son oeuvre. La fiction est déjà là. Le travail du romancier est d'inventer la réalité<sup>1</sup>.

Not only is reality ignored and negated, but when some of its fragments succeed, in some way, to cross the threshold of total simulation, they are so tiny and semantically barren that they cannot be distinguished from the great Babel of fictional languages.

It is from this extreme premise that Ballard writes *Concrete Island* (1974), which, undoubtedly, among the innumerable islands in English literature, is distinguished for its paradoxical nature. The ultimate paradox is Ballard's conviction that reality can only be reached or ascertained through the written word. This point of view creates the necessity of inventing situations in which our imagination can be freed to emphasize the signs and shapes of our interior landscapes— "le peu de réalité qui nous reste est ancré dans notre cerveau"<sup>2</sup>. In this sense, the

concrete island, just outside London, resulting from the intersection of three major arterial motorways, is chiefly understood as a mental space—that is, a fragment of *reality*—in which to dramatize what in *The Drowned World* (1962) is defined as “a total re-orientation of the self”<sup>3</sup>. As Lorenz J. Firsching rightly pointed out, in Ballard’s fiction, “environmental change mysteriously triggers psychic change”<sup>4</sup>. In *Concrete Island*, Robert Maitland, the protagonist, sees the modification of the external landscape realize itself on account of a flat tyre of his Jaguar, which, after the skid, comes to a stop in a small abandoned space, whose major characteristic is to be full of automobile carcasses, scrap iron, and various other refuse<sup>5</sup>. But the real environmental change is in the fact that the space in which Maitland finds himself, is an island from which, on first impression, there is no escape:

Clearly there was no exit from the island other than the embankments [...] the island was sealed off from the world around it by the high embankments on two sides and the wire-mesh fence on its third<sup>6</sup>.

On closer examination, the paradoxical aspect of this space lies in the fact that it, as far as the external world is concerned, *does not exist*, or, to be more precise, has a semantic valency of zero degree. Yet, it is from this same quality of *not existing for others* that its exploding force emerges, making the protagonist begin a journey of self-discovery. Thus, we have a paradox once again: the voice of the island is heard in its silence, sense is found in non-sense, life is only in its own death.

2. As far as the themes of his narrative are concerned, Ballard has been very explicit: “My fiction is all about one person, all about one man coming to terms with various forms of isolation”<sup>7</sup>. In *Concrete Island*, the protagonist cannot help but notice his isolation, if it is true that the few metres that separate the asphalt pavement from the place of his “shipwreck” indicate a deep and radical spatial-temporal split: not only does one pass from the precise geometry of the three giant motorways to the shaggy and irregular landscape dominated by nettles and wild grass, but also from the post-technological present to a prehistoric era in which the only thing that matters is the struggle for survival. This contrast represents a passage from the standardized universe of pretence and simulation to the solitude of a new Robinson Crusoe. And, like Defoe’s hero, Robert Maitland finds himself hurled in a world which is not his—crude, elemental, made of signs that he does not understand. This world is a storehouse of archeo-psychical fragments with which he must come to terms.

His first movements seem to be characterized by a regression to infancy paralleling the regression of the island itself<sup>8</sup>. The union with that wild space —“triangular in shape” (p. 11)— is symbolically sanctioned by a kind of branding that Maitland undergoes as soon as he oversteps its boundaries: “A triangle bruise like the blade of a trowel marked his right” (pp. 8-9). It should also be noticed, how Ballard, using the triangular form, underlines the protagonist’s struggle to survive:

Too tired to move, and trying to decide where he could spend the night, Maitland lowered his eyes. Ten feet away from him was the white triangle of the discarded sandwich. Maitland stared at it, the pain in his injured leg forgotten.

Without thinking, he crawled towards the sandwich. He had not eaten for thirty-six hours, and found it difficult to focus his mind. He looked down at the two slices of bread [...]

Seizing the sandwich, Maitland devoured it. Intoxicated by the taste of animal fat and the moist texture of buttered bread, he made no effort to remove the grains of dirt (p. 55).

It is also true that the sandwich becomes the symbol of the contrast between the external world (that is, pseudo-reality) and the internal world where food and the struggle to acquire it become real once again. Also, the detailed description of how the sandwich, thrown out of a car window by a driver who apparently wasn’t hungry, penetrates Maitland’s universe, underlines the drastic contrast in experiencing the real in a changed environment. Apart from the fact that he swallows the buttered bread without worrying about hygiene —just like a famished new born baby, ignorant of cultural conditioning of the external world—, Maitland discovers the visceral pleasure of contact with the earth; the primitiveness and the essentiality of the language associated with the earth seem to give him an opening toward new interpretative and autointerpretative horizons. On more than one occasion the text thematizes this regression to a slithering animal:

Moving like a crab on his feet and forearms, he climbed the more shallow soil [...] (p. 16).

[...] he tried to drag himself up the slope, scooping armfuls of the soft earth from his path, forcing himself across the crumbling surface like a wounded snake (p. 25).

The area around the cars soon became a quagmire in which he slid about like a scarecrow in his mud-spattered dinner-jacket. (p. 48).

Giving up for the time being, Maitland crawled back to the car. As he clambered into the rear seat he knew that he was showing the first signs of fever (p. 49).

With the earth's fertile embrace, Maitland also learns the language of the grass that covers the island: "The resilience of this coarse grass was a model of behaviour and survival" (p. 58). Like an enormous green shroud, the grass covers everything—the rusting hulls of shabby wrecks, garbage of every type dumped abusively, the remains of road maintenance equipment, the various mounds of old tyres and untreated metal refuse—everything, in other words, must submit to the silent assaults of the weeds. In many aspects, we see that for Maitland this experience is a discovery of Nature, which means, above all, the search for a channel of communication through which he can possess the secret of the concrete island. We can say with Gaston Bachelard that it represents for Maitland "la localisation dans les espaces de [son] intimité"<sup>9</sup>, and for this reason he tries to establish a perfect and euphoric relationship of identification between the space of his body and that of the island. In a crucial scene of the novel, Maitland, adopting the strategy of initiation, celebrates the rite that sanctions this bond:

Identifying the island with himself, he gazed at the cars in the breaker's yard, at the wire-mesh fence, and the concrete caisson behind him. These places of pain and ordeal were now confused with pieces of the island so that he could leave these sections of himself where they belonged. He would leave his right leg at the point of his crash, his bruised hands impaled upon the steel fence. He would place his chest where he had set against the concrete wall. At each point a small ritual would signify the transfer of obligation from himself to the island.

He spoke aloud, a priest officiating at the eucharist of his own body.

"I am the island".

The air shed its light (pp. 70-71).

With the loss of his own body, with the immaterialization of himself, the protagonist is finally able to penetrate the mystery of the island, and, in so doing, he succeeds in localizing his own *true self*. We are dealing, as mentioned above, with a journey towards the rediscovery of one's self and of one's own relationship with the world—the tenacious resistance of the abandoned space against the aggressions coming from the outside becomes for Maitland a rich ontological metaphor: "More and more, the island was becoming an exact model of his head" (p. 69). For this reason he is convinced that the discovery of one's inner space is only possible through the discovery of the occult dimension, of the soul hidden in that unknown territory, in that impenetrable topology.

3. Parody, in *Concrete Island*, is shown in an explicit reference to

Robinson Crusoe. Maitland seems to identify himself and his “shipwreck” with his silver Jaguar to Defoe’s hero:

Deliberately, he turned his back to the motorway and for the first time began to inspect the island.

“Maitland, poor man, you’re marooned here like Crusoe —If you don’t look out you’ll be beached here for ever...”

He had spoken no more than the truth. This patch of abandoned ground left over at the junction of three motorway routes was literally a deserted island. Angry with himself, Maitland lifted the crutch to strike this meaningless soil (p. 32).

Apparently, just like Robinson Crusoe, Maitland is a solitary man in search of shelter and food, but it is clear that he can only offer a parodic version of the Robinsonian myth. This is not so much due to the different diegetic context<sup>10</sup> but to the different epistemic connotations of the two characters: if Robinson is, for the most part, the archetype of *homo oeconomicus*, Maitland is exactly the opposite, an anti-Robinson (or, if one likes, a pseudo-Robinson) whose “ideological” prospect is no longer to raise “a monument to an earlier age of Western culture”<sup>11</sup>, but to knock it down, in order to show how mercantile civilization which Defoe so admired has lead man to the loss of his interior dimension, to the death of the soul.

In addition, Maitland’s imagination transforms the triangular space into a island in the middle of the sea —the grass and weeds which obstiantely resist, and day after day seem to diffuse themselves more and more, have the same function as waves of the ocean: “The surface of the island was markedly uneven. Covering everything in its mantle, the grass rose and fell like the waves of a brisk sea” (p. 40). The protagonist communicates and tries to come to terms with this sea of grass:

As he crossed the island the grass weaved and turned behind him, moving in endless waves. Its corridors opened and closed as if admitting a large and watchful creature to its green preserve (p. 42).

There are some moments in which he actually feels the presence of the sea, and is convinced of its vertical dimension as well: at the height of his febrile deliriums only the idea of being at the bottom of a sea cavern can give him a few moments of respite:

[...] he could almost believe that he was lying at the bottom of a calm and peaceful sea, through which a few bars of faint light penetrated the pelagic quiet. This silence and the reassuring organic smell of decaying vegetation soothed his fever (pp. 74-75).

A psycho-physical contraction takes place in the protagonist (he loses his excess weight) which culminates in his abandoning the idea of fleeing from the island of which he begins to feel owner and spokesman. This journey into the discovery of our origins activates an attitude of rejection and scorn towards the external world in which a labyrinthine movement without any sense seems to reign:

Gazing up at the maze of concrete causeways illuminated in the night air, he realized how much he loathed all these drivers and their vehicles (p. 20).

Beyond the flux of night traffic, the metropolitan landscape unfolds like a great fresco marked by cold and petrifying angularity: this is the place where his wife Catherine and his mistress Helen Fairfax live, both actresses in that deceitful game of tacit tolerance and frigid indifference that had removed him from the real. There are no messages of hope, nor saving anchors coming from this world; in other words, nobody cares about him. Because of the “once-so-convenient division between his wife and Dr Helen Fairfax” (p. 43), neither of them becomes suspicious of his prolonged absence. The indifference of the two women is not really different from the indifference of the drivers who look at him through their car windows—for them, Maitland is only a poor vagabond living at the margins of society. From the protagonist’s point of view, the flux of vehicles that nightly re-enter into the bowels of the metropolis, are not worthy of his attention. That attention is now totally absorbed by the island that is gradually becoming the true place of consciousness—the model on which to pattern one’s life:

Almost carried by the grass, Maitland climbed on the roof of an abandoned air-raid shelter. Resting here, he inspected the island more carefully. Comparing it with the motorway system, he saw that it was far older than the surrounding terrain, as if this triangular patch of waste ground had survived by the exercise of a unique guile and persistence, and would continue to survive, unknown and disregarded, long after the motorways had collapsed into dust (pp. 68-69).

Parodying the gesture of Robinson Crusoe, who from the summit of a hill discovers with great discouragement that the island is deserted<sup>12</sup>, Robert Maitland from the roof of an air-raid shelter makes his first survey. From this survey emerges, contrary to the Robinson island (a neutral object without identity which seems to facilitate the efforts of the shipwrecked sailor), a personality that is completely attached to the semic field of guile and persistence. It follows that the island possesses not only a

machiavellian intelligence but also an essential ontological project —it seems to aspire metaphorically towards eternity. In the fervid imagination of the protagonist this space becomes the privileged refuge against the precariousness and the elusiveness of the external world. When the metropolis is reduced to ashes, when the bold and daring geometry of the motorways cuts no longer across the sky, when, in short, this civilization ceases to be, this triangle of terrain will continue to live and teach man a lesson of survival. All this fascinates Maitland, who like a courageous explorer, begins to wander away from his dwelling-place in the car in order to find out what is beyond the apparently “monological”, flat, concrete island.

Apart from the group of air-raid shelters stationed exactly in the middle of that space, Maitland, with great surprise, discovers the ruins of a cinema<sup>13</sup>:

Around the ruin of a former pay-box, Maitland identified the ground-plan of a post-war cinema, a narrow single-storey flea-pit built from cement blocks and galvanized iron. Ten feet away, partly screened by a bank of nettles, steps ran down to a basement.

Looking at the shuttered pay-box, Maitland thought unclearly of his own childhood visits to the local cinema with its endless programmes of vampire and horror movies (p. 69).

Similar to archeo-psychical remains, traces of the past human presence begin to come to the surface —the few decades that divide the present from the period in which that cinema house was still functional seem to contain millennia of human history. Like fossils from the collective unconscious of tribes that are now extinct, the ruins of the cinema present the “spelaeologist” Maitland with uneasy questions. Painfully, just like the sequences of an old film, the memories, frustrations and anxieties of childhood, which he had tried to erase from his inner landscape, begin to make themselves felt once again:

His infantile anger as he shouted aloud for Catherine reminded him of how, as a child, he had one bellowed unwearyingly for his mother while she nursed his younger sister in the next room. For some reason, which he had always resented, she had never come to pacify him, but had let him climb from the empty bath himself, hoarse with anger and surprise (p. 70).

Very quickly the island reveals itself to be a hard shell that preserves stratigraphically the vestiges left behind by succeeding generations of men —a cycle that, through the ruins, seems to remind Maitland of the senselessness and empty vanity of everything. In one area, he discovers the

ruins of a stucco Victorian house and the remains of what once was a garden path. And, not very distant from that place, the outlines of building foundations of Edwardian terraced houses once again see the light of day—the various epochs follow one another, but the final result is always the same: objects made by man are nothing but dust. To crown this negative vision is the casual discovery of an abandoned cemetery:

The crutch rang out against a metal object underfoot, an iron plaque set into a fallen gravestone. He was standing in an abandoned churchyard. A pile of worn headstones lay to one side. A series of shallow gullies marked the rows of graves, and Maitland assumed that the bones had been removed to an ossuary (p. 41).

At this point, it is evident that the guile of the island, more than in the strategy of survival, reveals itself in the ways in which it tries to conceal all the signs that reflect man's finite nature and the ontological inconsistency of the "monuments" that man leaves behind. Nothing that is ever produced by mankind can conquer the silence of centuries—at the end, death and destruction always prevail. It is clear that Maitland cannot help but feel that he is in a trap caught in "the dead centre of a maze" (p. 63), incapable of believing in the meaning of his research because his exploration has given him more mnemonic material than his psyche can handle. Apart from the subtle gothic streak of the scene, it is interesting to notice how the empty tombs persist, after decades or even centuries, in reducing everything to ashes like infernal furnaces.

4. Structurally, *Concrete Island* is articulated in three clearly distinguished phases. After landing on the island and the beginning of the regressive metamorphosis (first phase), Maitland discovers the soul of that space on which he projects, more or less consciously, the need for a re-definition of himself (second phase). The last segment of the story is represented by a new discovery—that triangle of abandoned land, not only has a precise diachronic identity, but it is also inhabited by two eccentric characters, a man and a woman, who attack Maitland and knock him out. Jane Sheppard drags the unconscious protagonist into her shelter and begins to recite the part of the thoughtful and maternal helper—the scene is part of the overall picture presenting the infantile regression of the protagonist:

Lit by the paraffin lamp behind her, her red hair glowed like a wild sun in the shabby room, shafts of light cutting through the home-set waves that rose above her high forehead. She was about twenty, with an angular, sharp-witted face and strong jaw. She was good-looking in an almost wilfully tatty way. Her manner towards



Maitland, as she fed the soft chocolate to him, each square finger-printed by her thumb, was brusque and deferential at the same time (p. 81).

In Maitland's confused mind, the girl seems to be an agent of "some terminal delusion" (p. 83), the logical conclusion of a nightmare that, begun with the invocation of his wife's name, is now continuing with the presence of this girl who embodies all the women in Maitland's imagination —mother, sister, wife, mistress, prostitute, virgin.

But the girl is not alone —with her lives Proctor, a grotesque figure of an idiot, who, with his masses of disordinate muscles, spends his time doing acrobatic exercises. In his mental deficiency he believes himself to be important to Jane Sheppard and for this reason, like a docile animal, he silently obeys her orders: "The man was about fifty years old, plainly a mental defective of some kind, his low forehead blunted by a lifetime of uncertainty" (p. 86). Maitland, Jane and Proctor form a triangle —a sort of human replica of the shape of the island— at whose apex is the girl who uses her companion to keep the "shipwrecked" at bay. She is the queen of the territory —only she knows the secret of the island, considering that she comes and goes whenever she pleases without giving Maitland any indication of the secret pathway. But this is not all, the girl is also able, at least at certain times, to dominate Maitland psychologically as well. She is able to penetrate his distorted psyche:

"Your fever's gone. We were worried about you last night. You're the sort of man who has to test himself all the time. Do you think you crashed on to this traffic island deliberately?" When Maitland regarded her patiently she went on, "I'm not joking —believe me, self-destruction is something I know all about. My mother pumped herself so full of barbiturates before she died that she turned blue" (p. 96).

Contrasting the animal simplicity of Proctor is the acuteness of Jane, who realizes that Maitland's is not a simple traffic accident; behind his incapacity to flee from the island is his unconscious desire to test himself even to the point of putting his own life on the line. The girl perceives this desire for self-destruction, a drive towards death (the Freudian *Todestriebe*) inculcated in every living being, a return to a prior state, that is in the condition of inorganic stability. At the same time, talking about the way she lived the experience of self-destruction in her family, Jane reveals how the ghost of a schizophrenic mother influences her protective attitude towards Maitland —a vain attempt to redeem the maternal figure. The girl treats Maitland as her mother should have treated her (the stories of their childhood seem to coincide):

Her attitude towards him varied from tenderness and good humour to a sudden vengeful anger, almost as if he represented two different people for her. After hanging her clothes she lit the stove and made Maitland a drink of condensed milk and hot water. She held his head in her arm, crooning reassuringly as he drank from the plastic cup, halfworking her plump breast against his forehead as if feeding her own baby (p. 114).

It is clear that, through Maitland (in his double role of husband and son) Jane tries to explore "some failure in her own past" (p. 117). This is the principal motive why Jane keeps Maitlands as though he were a hostage. She wants to understand herself through him and thus gain psychological "currency" in order to pay her debt to the shadows of her past. It is in this context that the scene in which Jane and Maitland are engaged in the sexual act, assuming the roles of prostitute and customer, is to be understood. Before they begin, she pretends payment for her services — "[...] First, I want some money. Come on, money for sex" (p. 141)—, not only because she doesn't want to get psychologically involved, but also and above all, because she wants to experience the polarity of her roles: that of mother and prostitute. Apart from the fact that after the "put-on" she gives him back his five pounds, Maitland on his part reflects upon his relationship with women. They were always "emotionally loaded transactions" (p. 142). They would have been more tolerable and less demanding on his psyche "if he had been able to pay for them in some neutral currency" (*Ibid.*).

Ironically, even his relationship with Jane is emotionally loaded. Psychologically, the place in which he is kept configures a return to the womb — a prelude to the inorganic stability: "The quilted floor merged into the walls, as if the liar had been designed to blunt and muffle all evidence of the world outside" (p. 122). In the dark and claustrophobic cavern, the protagonist is forced to become aware of the true motives that bind him to the girl that until that moment he did not want to consider: "[...] his need to be freed from his past, from his childhood, his wife and friends, with all their affections and demands, and to rove for ever within the empty city of his own mind" (p. 142). But this introspection suddenly comes to an end in the precise moment in which Maitland, the prisoner, feels that his strength has come back — a sort of rebellion of the body against the soul. Having exhausted his wanderings in the labyrinthine topology of his mind, Maitland projects his desire towards the external world. In this way, he breaks away from his period of passivity as well as captivity. Once he has refused the roles given to him by Jane, the protagonist begins to recuperate his aggressiveness— now he can impose his mental supremacy on the others.

5. The only obstacle that stands in the way of the protagonist is Proctor, who has put his own strength at Jane's disposition because she convinced him that he was the ruler of the concrete island. Forced to live in this space to escape the police, Proctor leads an existence which is similar to that of a wary, caged animal:

The tramp moved through the grass in a low crouch, like some wary beast, his scarred hands parting the blades [...]

Moving on all fours, Proctor circled Maitland cautiously (p. 108).

[...] Proctor moved about his den like a hard-working and insecure animal (p. 121).

[...] Proctor was crouching like a nervous animal, unsure whether to assert his dominion over the island (p. 111).

The odour of Proctor's sweet sweat rose through the still air, like that of a well-groomed domestic animal (p. 143).

Maitland knows that the only way to bend Proctor is to reproduce the same trauma that makes him fear the external world. After getting him drunk, Maitland, just like some policemen had done many years before, urinates on Proctor, who passively accepts this humiliating punishment. Once he has established his dominion over the idiot, Maitland can easily deal with the girl: "His new-found aggressive role, although completely calculated, had subdued the young woman" (p. 137). Now the protagonist is the one and only lord. Riding on Proctor's back like a monarch patrolling his kingdom, he tours around without a precise itinerary:

Exhausted now, his will fading, Maitland clung to Proctor's shoulders as they moved back and forth across the island. Bent beast and pale rider, they wandered through the seething grass (p. 155).

With his aggressiveness, the protagonist also re-acquires his impelling desire to leave the island and for this reason he begins to search for "[Jane's] secret route" (p. 156) which, in his imagination still psychologically conditioned by his experience, is the only route to safety. Having regained his physical health, and able to deal once again with the demands of the external world, Maitland finds it necessary to destroy the triangular model. This destruction takes place when Proctor, while doing his exercises on the guy-ropes attached to the winch on a municipal repair truck, is accidentally garotted by a workman, who, unknowingly, begins to operate the machine.

Fearing the arrival of the police, Jane leaves immediately. She brings with her the memory of a pseudo-Tarzan who, grotesquely dressed in a

ragged leotard, dies with the illusion of being lord of a jungle full of lianas on which to perform his most dangerous acrobatic feats. For Maitland, it means a return to the beginning: between him and the island the illusion of a dialogue becomes once again possible. This is why he wants to be the one to decide when to leave: "I'll leave the island, but in my own time" (p. 174), he tells himself. But even the return to the beginning is an illusion—the days lived in the concrete island, in that triangle of cement, have not passed without leaving a sign, if it is true that from his interior life images of anger and sadness time and time again invade his consciousness. Maitland decides to terminate his adventure precisely because he wants to be spared from the assault coming from the depths of his unconscious:

In a few hours it would be dusk. Maitland thought of Catherine and his son. He would be seeing them soon. When he had eaten it would be time to rest, and to plan his escape from the island (p. 176).

With the same confident security which characterized his former life before landing on the island, Maitland readies himself to re-enter the world of the "real". He acts as though nothing had happened, confident that no one at home will ask him troublesome questions with regards to his prolonged absence. He is also convinced that once he has left that space, the great mechanism of simulation and deception will welcome him back giving him adequate reassurance that it knows to cure the breakdowns and the wounds of the interior landscape— a brand new, shining Jaguar, perfectly smooth motorways, the multi-coloured lights of the metropolis at night, the embrace of the wife, the phone call from the mistress, and everything will be as before.

But it is very clear that the last sentences of the novel, even though they propose the conventional happy ending, convey a very different message—and it is not very reassuring. The image of the protagonist being a prisoner of his solitude, in delaying his leave from that bleak space, is laying bare a simple truth: it is no longer possible to begin from where he left off, as though nothing had happened.

## Notes

1. J.G. Ballard, *Crash!* (Paris: Calmann Levy, 1974), "Préface à l'édition française", p. 10. See Jean Baudrillard who, referring explicitly to Ballard's declaration, writes: "Reality could have overcome fiction: it was the surest sign of the imaginative ascendancy. But the real cannot transcend its model being only its alibi. The imaginary was the alibi of the real, in a world dominated by the reality principle. Today it is the real that has become the alibi of the model in a universe sustained by the principle of simulation. And paradoxically, it is the real that has become, today, our real utopia — but it is a utopia that does not belong to the order of the possible, because one cannot help but dream as a lost dimension". (J. Baudrillard, "Simulacri e fantascienza", *La fantascienza e la critica*, edited by Luigi Russo, Milan: Feltrinelli, 1980, p. 53).
2. J.G. Ballard, *Crash!* "Préface", cit., p. 11.
3. J.G. Ballard, *The Drowned World* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), p. 43.
4. Lorenz J. Firsching, "J.G. Ballard's Ambiguous Apocalypse", *Science-Fiction Studies*, Vol. 12, 3 (November 1985), p. 302.
5. Cf. Colin Greenland, *The Entropy Exhibition* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), pp. 92-93. The English scholar underlines how Ballard prefers to set his novels in "places of dereliction and decay".
6. J.G. Ballard, *Concrete Island* (St. Albans: Granada/Panther, 1976), p. 13. All subsequent quotations are from this edition.
7. James Goddard and David Pringle (eds.), *J.G. Ballard, The First Twenty Years* (Hayes, Middlesex: Bran's Head Books, 1976), "An Interview with J.G. Ballard", p. 32. See also the following declaration: "All my fiction is in a sense about isolation and how to cope with isolation", quoted by Martin Hayman, "Future Perfect —the Crystalline World of J.G. Ballard", *Street Life*, n.º 8 (February 1976), p. 16.
8. Cf. Hélène Auffret, "Science-Fiction bien tempérée ou l'art de la fugue", *Études anglaises*, n.º 2-3 (Avril-sept, 1983), pp. 190-191. On the thematics of regression see also Francesco Marroni, "High-Rise: interior adventure and fictional space. Topology as a metalanguage in J.G. Ballard's fiction", *Revista canaria de estudios ingleses*, 10 (Abril 1985), pp. 82-93.
9. Gaston Bachelard, *La poétique de l'espace* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1983), p. 28.
10. Apart from the obvious differences between the two novels and their respective world-views, one may say that *Robinson Crusoe* and *Concrete Island* have the same point of departure. If in Defoe's novel we have a shipwrecked sailor on a desert island, in Ballard's text we are presented with a driver on a desert concrete island.
11. Angus Ross, "Introduction", *The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 21.
12. It is very significant to find an analogy in the two narratives. See Robinson's words: "I took out one of the fowling pieces, and one of the pistols, and an horn of powder, and thus armed I travelled for discovery up to the top of that hill, where after I had with great labour and difficulty got to the top, I saw my fate to my great affliction, viz. that I was in an island environed every way with the sea, no land to be seen, except some rocks which lay a great way off, and two small islands less than this, which lay about three leagues to the west" (*Robinson Crusoe*, cit., p. 71).
13. Perhaps it is worthwhile to note how the imaginative constructs of *Concrete Island* (the scenes of childhood, war, the air-raid shelters, the cinema, etc.) have more than one point of contact with *Empire of the Sun* (1984).