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## **Empire of the Sun by J.G. Ballard** **Commentary on passage (page 166-168)**

After reading beyond Part II in the Empire of the Sun, we notice quite a few changes in Jim's life. In this chapter (20), Jim has just arrived in Lunghua camp with the rest of the passengers. I am going to comment on a passage from the end of page 166 to the beginning of page 168. Even though this is a small passage, there is a lot to comment on. If we just read it more than once, we see so deep into it, that it is amazing how such little writing can mean and represent so much.

There is quite a lot of imagery in this passage and Ballard uses it in a quite interesting way. He describes everything in a way that we could try and actually see it. As he says at the beginning of the passage, "After crossing the parade ground, the Japanese soldiers disappeared among the lines of ragged washing between the barrack huts. Jim emerged from the damp cavern of the blockhouse." Even in only one sentence at the very beginning, there is so much description and imagery, that we feel as if we are there with Jim, watching this. Ballard goes into such detail that he even describes the dampness of the air and the colors of the sky. It is as if he would do anything to create a perfect image.

Another good example is when Ballard writes about the nostalgia in the camp. Jim sees signs such as "Picadilly", "Regent Street" or "Petticoat Lane" in the camp. This shows how sad the people are there and how they miss their country and want to go back. In this specific part, Ballard describes what Jim sees so well that I felt as if I was walking through the deserted camp and looking at all of these signs. Then he digs even deeper into emotion by mentioning a quote from Rupert Brooke's poem that goes "a foreign field that is forever England..." After this he says "But this was Lunghua camp, not England" and it makes me feel sad because it shows how much he really misses England and his old life. In this small paragraph there is a lot of great imagery and it rather pulls us into the sad world of the camp, but then it suddenly snaps us out of it and back to reality. This happens when Ballard said "...another excuse to sit back when they should have been helping Dr. Ransome to clear the septic tanks." This is rather funny, because after all this imagery about nostalgia, Ballard ends it with this simple sentence, and it totally shuts off our sadness from what we have just read!

The words he uses are very interesting and rather simple. What I mean by simple is while I read this book; it was easy because he uses normal daily words. But even though he used these simple and normal words, he always has other more complicated ones. He used these un-common words when he describes something. This brings out a better image of what he is trying to show us. This, of course, helps us learn new words as well.

Since this is a rather short passage, we do not see a lot of themes. The main theme would probably be his survival. The passage shows how he is one of these people in the camp that are alone and barely surviving. Even though it does not clearly or obviously say in the passage that he is on the line of survival, we can see it in the “background”. What I mean by this is that while Ballard is explaining to us about the nostalgia and describing the situation around Jim, he is kind of “hinting” how bad living in this camp actually is. Because his great imagery we can see how hard it is for the people there to survive.

He mentions the turtle that Kimura gave to Jim. In only a few sentences we see how much Jim is attached to this turtle. This also shows us how Jim is a lonely child without any friends and the turtle is the only thing that keeps him company all the time. We can make out by now that he is probably not the only one with this sad problem. Jim is thinking how if he showed the turtle to Basie, he would eat it for sure. So he did not want to show it to him, because he cares about the turtle-his only friend. One in that camp would think that it is just a turtle and they would eat it as well, but Jim only wants a friend or something of his own. Beyond survival, the people there are alone and lonely.

In this specific passage, there are no dialogues or important characters except Jim himself. The only characters are the Japanese soldiers, Jim and Dr. Ransome being mentioned in the end. As we know from before, Jim likes the Japanese soldiers. In the passage, he is “spying” on them and when they leave he emerged from the blockhouse. But Dr. Ransome is a much bigger part of Jim’s life. Dr. Ransome is a good man and he has done a lot for Jim. He gave Jim his expensive golfing shoes, he gave him rations of water and food, and he basically treated him much better than anyone else in the camp. Dr. Ransome is mentioned in nearly every page, but surely in every chapter. He plays a big role in Jim’s life and Jim is grateful and happy for that. He even teaches Jim Latin and allows him to help with the patients. Dr. Ransome seems like a very good man, but we can never be too sure of that. Maybe he wants something from Jim in return so he is constantly helping him. But maybe he just feels sorry for the boy that was separated from his parents and wants to help him survive. All we can do is read on!

Another short but interesting point I would like to make is the way Ballard describes Jim and what is going on around him. I really like the line “He ran along the cinder path, his tattered shirt flying from his bony shoulders like the tags of washing between the huts.” I think it is a very nice sentence, looking at the description of Jim. This may sound strange, but for me, it creates an image of a quite interesting painting. A painting that shows the horror of the war but a rather calm effect coming from the people-or Jim at least! On this painting I see Jim running with the wind carrying his shirt and his bones showing all over. The camp, the wires, and the horror would all be in the background, behind Jim. This would also show that despite all the sorrow and horrifying events that are happening, Jim is still a child that just wants to play with his planes and enjoy life to the fullest. The running shows this.

While I read through the passage, I did not realize how interesting it actually is and how much it represents. Now I can see how important it is to read carefully and imagine. But when you read from such a good writer like Ballard, you don’t even need to try!