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Ballard, Sexual Landscapes and Nature

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Working on J.G. Ballard can throw into relief a distinction between the approaches of, on the one hand, postmodernists fascinated by the urban and especially media landscapes, mapped out in such works as *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1972) [1] and *Crash* (1973) [2], and on the other, environmentalists, whose interest is often grounded primarily in the 1960s environmental disaster fictions *The Drowned World*, *The Drought* and *The Crystal World*, in which, as Robert Macfarlane puts it Ballard "ruined the world three times",[3] or else, potentially, the dystopian adventure *Rushing to Paradise* (1994)[4] where environmentalism is the central focus.

In *J.G. Ballard: Landscapes of Tomorrow* (2016) [5] the essays mostly focussed on the texts from the early 1970s and several emphasized the media and cultural landscapes that are so important in them. A keyword search of those texts quickly confirms the suspicion that even the word "nature" (which we might take to be a fundamental concept for the environmentalist project) is a comparatively rare occurrence in them. One of the few instances, appears, revealingly, not in the text itself but in Zadie Smith's 2014 introduction to *Crash* where she describes a quoted passage as the "quintessential Ballardian sentence, depicting a **denatured** landscape" (*C* 6). When the word does appear in Ballard's novels, reviews and interviews it can often be in ways that boldly unsettle its conventional associations, such as in the late 1980s around the time of *The Day of Creation* (1987) when several of his comments contest sentimentalised or Disneyfied media portrayals of nature as "cosy, full of bushy-tailed animals". Such ideas pose a challenge for ecological movements, he claims, because "Nature isn't like that". "This the problem facing all the ecological movements – in a sense people don't want raw, uncontaminated nature."[6] "Nature" is famously according to Raymond Williams's *Keywords*

"perhaps the most complex word in the language" and so it should be no surprise to find that it is often not "like that" in Ballard's works which offer complex and disturbing ideas of what has happened to nature, in which perhaps the "postmodern" and "environmentalist" approaches to nature may depend upon each other more than may at first be supposed.

One of the locations in which such concepts of nature frequently appear in the work is in representations of sex and gender, that I aim to consider here, first in those transitional works of the early seventies and then in the second of Ballard's autobiographical fictions *The Kindness of Women* (1991).[7]

1. Sex and Nature in the 1970s

A fascinating articulation of Ballard's thinking about key questions of the natural in contemporary culture in relation to women and sexual desire in the period between *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1970) and *Crash* (1973) can be found in the material from the British Library which has now been published alongside an edition of the typescript of the novel by Chris Beckett.[8] The material derives from the television documentary *Crash!* (broadcast February 1971) on which Ballard himself worked, in a rare creative participation in the medium that so fascinated him, in collaboration with the American documentary filmmaker Harley Cokeliss. As well as his work on the script, the programme featured a performance by Ballard himself, alongside the actress Gabrielle Drake. The British Library material includes versions of the programme script, commentary on it, correspondence and an author's proof of a contemporary interview with Lynn Barber for *Penthouse* magazine in which Ballard developed some of his extraordinary views on the sexual landscape of the time.[9] We can also trace aspects of Ballard's reading from the time to see what light that may throw on his handling of the material.

For the television programme Cokeliss contributed a 9-scene "initial treatment", based on an interview, to which Ballard responded with a more fully scripted 22-scene version which includes a fully marked out role for himself,

fascinating both in itself and as an anticipation of the displaced authorial "Ballard" character who he works into *Crash* and, subsequently, the autobiographical fictions that surface in the next decades. Between the two (on 3rd December 1970) Ballard wrote a letter which listed 10 numbered "basic scenes" of the film that support a short dramatised sequence from *Atrocity Exhibition* and anticipate much of the surreal symbolic context of the "endless landscape of concrete and structural steel", that is described as an "immense motion sculpture" in *Crash* (*C* 40). These scenes include "highway", "interchanges", "car-wash", "multi-storey car-park", "car show room", "breaker's yard with wrecks", "traffic jam", "test-site", "real-life accidents", "car television advertisements" and finally "the dramatised sequence from ATROCITY, the woman getting out of the automobile".[10]

In the novel *Crash* Ballard (the character) thinks: "I realised that the human inhabitants of this technological landscape no longer provided its sharpest pointers, its keys to the border zones of identity" (*C* 40), a perception that seems to be anticipated in the use of the two human figures or "inhabitants" in the television programme landscape: Ballard himself and the figure who is mostly referred to in the letter as "the girl". The tenth of Ballard's numbered "basic scenes" refers to advertising and its glamorisation of the car in which women regularly appeared but the figure of the girl as he imagines her grows into a wider and more interesting role, beginning with the second scene which proposes shots of "[m]assive engineering structures, which can be viewed as sculpture and, if you like, cinematically melded into images of a woman's body."

This expresses, in starkly condensed form, Ballard's interest in a reconfigured relationship between the technological landscape and its human inhabitant. In the context of a discussion of the natural, it may be thought to form a condensed representation of the natural as it survives or struggles to adapt to the newly technological built environment of the modern world. Significant as such a binary opposition may be, it quickly becomes further complicated in Ballard's handling. Disingenuous as the formulation of his own role may appear ("whether driving my

car, following some girl around a multi-storey car-park etc."), it plays self-consciously with the idea of the author and the self portrait of the artist. The role of the girl shows an acute awareness of the ways in which women figured routinely in advertising aimed at male consumers, as objects of masculine desire used to promote desire for the advertised product or service. But in Ballard the role goes beyond that, suggesting in the "cinematic melding" some deeper congruence between the desirability of the woman and the conscious or unconscious impulses that drive the technology and design of the car and the concrete motorised landscape which supports it. The idea that this landscape "may be viewed as a sculpture" critically denaturalises and aestheticises the built environment and makes it meaningful and suggestive. Such meanings are further enhanced because the melding of desires is imagined in terms of a culturally mediated as well as built environment.

"Could have a nude girl inside the car" Ballard proposes for scene two in the "car wash", specifically invoking here a cinematic intertext, that of the shower scene in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960). The girl is to appear not just as a girl but as a "nude", that is, as a genre of artistic representation of the body, and in particular he imagines that artistic representation in terms of the dislocated reality of the surrealist art work: "As I work on the general shape of the scenario, it seems to me that we need an actress who will appear in most of the live material, if only in the background, like an artist's model in the paintings of Delvaux, Ernst etc." A single actress is to play "most of the roles visualised", he suggests. Is this imagined art work to be a documentary television programme or is it a piece of urban architecture, a sculpture, a film, a painting or perhaps an installation which includes elements of all of them? Aspects of cinema, painting and theatre are mixed together and, to add to the layers of self-consciousness, the surreal presence of the artist's model typical of the paintings of Delvaux and Ernst (what art critic Paul Scott calls Delvaux's "surrealizing" of the nude[11]) is a key component of the idea.

With the possible exception of the reference to "clover-leaf" road intersections, the human figures and especially the figure of the girl are the only apparent trace of the natural world as opposed to the built environment in the scenario, though, as Ballard is at pains to point out in his letter, using a girl will not only make it more "interesting" but also "more fictional" for the viewer. This word "fictional" draws on these cultural mediations and intertexts. What he calls in the letter "my obsessions with styling" are founded on associations and analogies between natural physical features of the woman's body and "styled" or "engineered" forms of automobile technology and design in which the assumed distinction between natural and non-natural forms and the acts of looking and desiring that underpin such binary terms are fundamentally destabilised.

The "dramatized sequence from ATROCITY" of "the woman getting out of the automobile" seems to draw most directly upon the condensed mini-narrative from "The Summer Cannibals" section of *The Atrocity Exhibition* which is entitled "Elements of an Orgasm" (*AE* 96-7). This also consists in numbered sections, and in it (at the most literal level) a woman gets out of the passenger seat and into the driving seat of a car. Both especially highlight the analogy between car styling and body form that is the point of the displaced and depersonalized new erotics of the text. In the text of the television documentary Ballard adapts the wording from its form in *Atrocity* in a way that seems to anticipate several scenes from *Crash*. Chris Beckett points to the possible survival of the name of the actress Gabrielle Drake in the naming of the character Gabrielle in *Crash* whose metallised body seems to merge the binaries of natural body and metallic machine, that are still present as binaries in the television film.[12] By the time of the novel the merging becomes the particular focus of the character Ballard's obsessive exploration of "sexual possibilities yet to be created", especially in the visit to the Earls Court Motor Show with Gabrielle in Chapter Nineteen (*C* 174-179). In the documentary *Crash!* the visual analogy is between the textures of skin and those of

the concrete landscape and the built materials of the car. In the novel *Crash* these two have further merged into a new metallic landscape of the body.

Intriguingly archived alongside the material for the programme in the British Library is the author's proof of Lynn Barber's *Penthouse* interview which provides some of the theory to accompany this artistic practice. It is typical of a Ballard interview which, as Simon Sellars has put it, often "explains […] and sometimes extends or even goes beyond" the work itself.[13] Beginning with a familiar explanation of how his work differs from conventional genre sci-fi and the new autobiographical elements which Barber sees as present in *Atrocity,* the interview ranges into McLuhan, advertising and Pop Art and then takes off into an impassioned explanation of the eroticism of the car crash that is at times almost verbatim with the documentary voiceover: "I think the twentieth century reaches just about its highest expression on the highway." In the final section of the interview, which is slightly longer in the author's proof than in the published version, Ballard extends this argument into a set of highly "postmodern" positions about the loss of the real in which sex is denatured. These are a few examples:

> I believe that organic sex, body against body, skin area against skin area, is becoming no longer possible simply because if anything is to have any meaning for us it must take place in terms of the values and experiences of the media landscape, the violent landscape – this sort of Dionysiac landscape of the 1970s. (*EM* 33)
>
> There's a new textbook of psychopathology being written and the old perversions are dead. (*EM* 33)

Ballard's sense of the fictional is voiced:

> If you take something like travelling by aircraft to Paris, it's a very fictional experience. One's actual physical experience of going from London to Paris by air is completely overlaid by advertising and commercial and fashion concepts. (*EM* 33)

In a passage which resonates with Traven's "Imaginary Perversions" in "The Summer Cannibals (*AE* 95), he is particularly interested to map the broader implications of the then new technology of the contraceptive pill:

> I mean this is the thing about the pill […] it removes the orientation provided by the reproductive impulse so that, let's say, there's no longer any reason why intercourse per vagina should be any more satisfying or any more desirable or any more right, morally or organically, than say intercourse per anus, per navel or armpit or anywhere else you care to dream up. (*EM* 34)[14]

Future sex may be genderless:

> In fact women may not be necessary anyway, just as men may not be necessary to women. (*EM* 34)

Ballard invents a distinctive new idea of adolescence which seems to anticipate (and go beyond) aspects of the way the millennial generation now does its dating via the technologies of social media:

> People may well go through a phase of their young lives, say their late teens and early twenties, when their sex lives take place in genital terms and they have children but that will be the adolescent stage. One's real puberty will be reached when one moves into the area of, let's say, conceptualised sex, when sex is between you and a machine, or between you and an idea. (*EM* 34)

Barber responds to this dystopic vision:

> When sex becomes so totally detached from any genital procedure, it surely ceases to be sex and just means pleasure. In those terms food is sex.

Ballard replies:

> Exactly, conventional sex is the first of the new perversions […] Sex won't take place in the bed necessarily – it'll take place in the head. (*EM* 34-5).

Barber, who has herself subsequently published book collections of her interviews and become a popular writer on sexual relationships (her 2009 memoir *A Education* becoming a film scripted by Nick Hornby and starring Carey Mulligan), may well have questioned this extreme account of the disappearance and denaturalisation of sex.[15] Ballard however proceeds to develop the thesis, for example in the neat quotable formula of the 1973 James Goddard interview where he says:

> *Crash* is not so much about the motor car as about technology as a whole, and it is precisely the sinister marriage between sex and technology that is the book's subject. Sex x technology = the future. A disquieting equation but one we have to face. [16]

The formula recurs in interviews at the time, such as that with Jerome Tarshis in the *Evergreen Review* and the 1986 interview with Solveig Nordlund who filmed the 1975 story "Low Flying Aircraft" in 2002,[17] and it is referred to once again by Bea Ballard in an article on Ballard and television in *Deep Ends 2* (2016) which speculates on how her father might have reacted to nudity on TV in the era of such shows as *Naked Attraction*.[18]

Some at least of Ballard's fascination with the denaturalisation of sex may have arisen in the context of the new feminist art history of the time. One book title that appears in the list of "Some Books from Ballard's Library" published by in *Re/Search 8/9: J.G. Ballard* (1984) seems especially relevant in this context.[19] Published a year after the documentary in 1972 and fully illustrated with visual reproductions, *Woman as Sex Object: Studies in Erotic Art 1730-1970,* edited by Thomas Hess and Linda Nochlin,[20] contains twelve essays by academic American art historians (six men, six women) on a variety of topics and artists including Ingres, Fuseli, Degas, Renoir, Courbet, Manet's "Olympia", Picasso, Pop Art and the Pin-Up, variously charting and critiquing the presentation of women in their work. The title boldly addresses the typical contemporary concern that women were treated as "objects" or "sex objects" by men in art works. Nochlin herself

offers a critique of the gender imbalance in the lack of erotic material for women, unsettling assumptions by juxtaposing a depiction of naked women's breasts alongside apples with a picture taken by herself of a man's genital with a banana. Other contributors are more oblique in their approach. The longest essay, for example, by David Kunzle, is on the representation of tight-lacing and corsetry in the eighteenth century, and is more antiquarian than polemical about this form of gender constraint however much it might have enraged critics at the time.[21]

For the current argument it is interesting to note some interest in questions of gender in relation to nature or the natural affections, for example, in the chapter by Robert Rosenblum "Caritas Romana after 1760: Some Romantic Lactations" (glossed on the back cover as "Variations on an edifying theme with perverse overtones") which traces depictions of the classical story of the Roman daughter who nurses her starving imprisoned father at her breast through the renaissance to the eighteenth century. There its original classical settings become complicated by colonialism, and Rousseau-esque ideas of the noble savage in illustrations of the story of the missionary Las Casas who fell ill and was nursed by the wife of a loyal cacique.[22]

It's not clear exactly how, when or why Ballard acquired the book though here, as in the large number of other art historical books in the *Re/Search* listing, we can be struck by his seriousness as a student of the visual arts and by his awareness of contemporary questions of gender in art-critical debate. It is a little surprising that there is not more in the volume on Ballard's favourite art movement, surrealism and its representation of women as natural or otherwise. Still, for the period of *The Atrocity Exhibition,* Hess's concluding essay on Pop Art "Pinup and Icon" is quite relevant with its references to, for example, De Kooning's female figures from the 1950s whose mouths or faces are made from cut out magazine images, and to the evolution of a critical engagement with the portrayal of women in magazine photography, film and the advertising media that informs so much pop art. Hess's choice of Andy Warhol's "Liz" for its play with the image of film

actress Elizabeth Taylor is an example that seems to feed directly into Ballard especially in *Crash* which opens with the spectacular image of Vaughan's death in an attempt to collide with the "limousine of the film actress" leaving her unnervingly posed "a gloved hand to her throat" (*C* 7).[23]

Thomas Hess also discusses Tom Wesselman's *Great American Nude* sequence to which Ballard alludes in a section title for *The Atrocity Exhibition,* where Talbert's sexual obsessions with landscapes and images of celebrity constitute what Nathan calls "Talbert's intention […] to have intercourse with Miss Taylor, though needless to say not in the literal sense of that term" (*AE* 84). In this section of *Atrocity* these obsessions are detailed in relation to a range of contemporary artists. Ballard glosses the chapter title reference to Wesselman in the later annotations as "the running title of a series of paintings by the Pop artist Tom Wesselman, which rework the iconic possibilities of the commercial nude. As with much of Pop Art, the bland surface diffuses the subject, making an unsettling comment on our notions of fame and celebrity" (*AE* 88).

The publication date of the book presents the possibility that there may have been influence either way or else a congruence of shared interest which helps us contextualise the fascination with the image of the nude in *The Atrocity Exhibition* and *Crash* and the figure of the girl in the television documentary and to ideas of sexual desire becoming denaturalised though cultural representation in disturbing ways. Such interests recur throughout his career whether in the fictions or the forays into art criticism. In the article "In the Voyeur's Gaze" from the *Guardian* in Autumn 1989, he offers commentary on an Ed Hopper exhibition in Marseilles, contrasting the nudes by open windows of Hopper's "Morning in a City" (1944) with Degas, whose nudes are observed as it were "through a keyhole". In Hooper he finds the "nude woman standing by an open window, hand to her face in a meditative pose". For Ballard the key to Hopper is the "voyeur's eye bereft of emotion in which all action is suspended, all drama subordinated to the endless moment of the stare" and even the buildings "are the object of a voyeur's gaze."[24]

It is fundamental to the work of such artists, as to the art-historical discourses that analyse them, that neither the nude figure of the woman nor the act of looking are assumed to be natural, that "Nature isn't like that" and that this poses problems and opportunities for representation as much as it may do for "ecological movements". It is also worth noting that widespread assumptions about the nature of the affections are troubled here by the "eye bereft of emotion" that marks what Ballard called in the introduction to the 1974 French edition of *Crash,* "the most terrifying casualty of the [10th] century, the death of affect" .[25]

2. *The Kindness of Women* (1991), *Rushing to Paradise* (1994)

Having found in feminist art-historical theory such an unsettling of the assumed identification between women and nature, we might well proceed to a consideration of both women and nature first in Ballard's fictionalised autobiography *The Kindness of Women* (1991) (which he called in his interview with Will Self "my life seen through the mirror of the fiction prompted by that life", *EM* 314) and then in his environmentalist dystopia, *Rushing to Paradise* (1994). There he offers, as he puts it in the same interview, his "first naturalistic female protagonist" Dr Barbara Rafferty (*EM* 305). As we might expect neither book easily conforms to a generic label nor do their ideas of the natural or even naturalistic conform to conventional expectations.

This is apparent even from the title of *The Kindness of Women* (1991). The word "kindness" occurs in the book, not least in the chapter which also has that title, apparently used in its usual modern sense of affection, benevolence or sympathy, of being nice. Ballard may also have been subliminally aware of older mediaeval senses of the word "kind" meaning nature or natural as in Hamlet's famous punning first words in Act One of Shakespeare's play as "a little more than kith but less than kind" (*Hamlet* itself earns a mention in the book, *KW* 97) or Chaucer's reference to the early mediaeval work about nature by Alan de Lille as

"The Pleynte of Kynde".[26] The kindness shown in the chapter itself concerns specifically the acts of sympathy, familial and sexual generosity shown by various women to the partly autobiographical narrator at the time of his wife's death in the context of a great feeling of estrangement from all women that accompanied it. These include the "relief worker" Mrs Nordlund (*KW* 161), his sister-in-law Dorothy a "kindly woman" (*KW* 168) who helps him clear the bedroom of his dead wife's clothes then helps his sexual rehabilitation (*KW* 167-8), less significantly a "flying club groupie" (*KW* 169), Peggy Gardner (a paediatrician friend of the family he has known since Lunghua but with whom a sexual relationship only develops later), the mother of one of his children's schoolfriends who had separated from her husband (*KW* 177-8) and then, in the next chapter, the colourful sixties figure Sally Mumford, who introduces him to the era of sexual experimentation that had passed him by (*KW* 188-9) and whose "thousand kindnesses towards the children" he acknowledges (*KW* 196) as well as her importance for his recuperation.

Interestingly the word "nature" itself appears in *The Kindness of Women* in its fuller sense denoting the natural world as a whole and at this significantly weighty moment, when the narrator is coming to terms with the recent sudden loss of his wife on holiday and even feels himself accused by one neighbour of complicity in her death (*KW* 162). It is "nature" that has committed the crime we are told in the following passage which recalls the unimaginably difficult return journey home from Spain for the young family of three children without their mother: [27]

> During the drive I could only remember my last moments with Miriam and the burial service at the cemetery. Nature had committed a crime against my young wife and her children, and I felt a deep confused anger not merely at myself for bringing Miriam to Rosas, but at the vine-covered hills, the plane trees and the grazing cattle. (*KW* 163)

The complaint against nature, regularly re-iterated in interviews in the next decades, has a special resonance here, not only for its traumatic context but for its being placed alongside a rare glimpse of a conventionally pastoral landscape of hills, trees and cattle, before the return to car crashes, the media landscape and psychopathology in later chapters.

Nevertheless whilst many contemporary cultural critics in the 80s and 90s were setting out to decouple ideas of woman and nature, *Kindness* (or at least this section of it) does seem to build a less austere affective space in which women's benevolence and sympathy become intrinsically connected in the narrator's account of his trauma and rehabilitation, albeit in a way that remains decidedly Ballardian, not least in the figure of Sally Mumford whose "thousand kindnesses" include both intimacy and "casual disloyalty", steps in his "*un*sentimental education" [italics mine] (*KW* 196) that seem to him to hold the key to "a pornography of science that took its materials not from nature but from the deviant curiosity of the scientist" (*KW* 190). To be without sentimentalised kindness is the form her kindness takes.

One of the strangest moments in the frequently astonishing *Kindness of Women* comes immediately after the abrupt break between the childhood Shanghai sections of the opening (that work to provide something of a sequel to *Empire of the Sun*) and the account of Ballard's adult life in England in Part Two which begins (in biographical terms four years after his arrival) with the bold statement: "Women dominated my years at Cambridge" (*KW* 77) and offers a teasingly ambiguous account of the first and apparently most important of them: "none more so than Dr Elizabeth Grant" (*KW* 77). She turns out to be the corpse which he has dissected as part of his study of anatomy during his study of medicine at King's.

The chapter, operatically entitled "The Queen of the Night", is an extraordinary piece of writing where for all the apparent disingenousness of the

first person narrator, and the dispassionate account of the dissection itself (*KW* 83-4), the reader is kept unsettlingly aware of the fact that this remains the author who has so powerfully destabilised the border between medical science and sexual fantasy in *Atrocity* and *Crash* and has predicted the age of new psychopathologies, the sex-death of media celebrities and the eroticism of crashing cars.

The apparent surety of the opening statement that no women dominated his Cambridge years more than Elizabeth Grant itself unsettles when we realise that the chapter simultaneously tells the story of his meeting and growing intimacy with Miriam (Ballard's own wife was called Mary and much is fictionalised). The live woman and the dead woman are artfully juxtaposed in a new kind of tribute to the juxtaposition of women and skeletons in the paintings of Paul Delvaux. The description of Grant's body as "the solitary woman among the dead men" (*KW* 84) particularly recalls Delvaux and such pairings which are discussed by Jeanette Baxter. [28]

At one point the intimate sexual play is animated by necrophiliac teasing about the dissection:

> 'Tell me, [asks Miriam] is it strange to dissect a woman? You say she's the only one there.'
>
> 'Speak softly, she's the queen of the dead.' [he replies]
>
> 'I know she's my biggest rival. Can you imagine dissecting me? Where would you start?'
>
> Smiling, I turned to face Miriam, drawing back the frayed sheets so that the firelight warmed her broad hips and rib-cage. 'I don't know …in a way dissection is a kind of erotic autopsy. We could start with the cervical triangle, save me having to wring your neck…' I kissed the small mole under Miriam's chin, savouring the taste of her mother's perfume. 'Or a nasal resection, you have been getting a little toffee-nosed…' I pressed my tongue

> into her nostril with its scent of decayed lavender until she snorted with laughter. 'Or what about an augmentation mammoplasty, not really necessary in your case…' (*KW* 91).

The passage, as several contemporary reviewers remarked, is a *tour de force* which manages a remarkably natural sense of an intimate moment as well as carrying so many other associations, for example, with Shakespeare's deceitful seducer Iachimo in *Cymbeline*, who has seen the mole on Imogen's breast, and Ballard's own writing about Mae West's mammoplasty as an unnervingly eroticised medical fetish as an "Appendix" to *Atrocity* (*AE* 181-4).

In Ballard, the natural-seeming intimate moment, clinical procedure and shadow of psychopathology unnervingly co-exist and, in the autobiographical narrative, the joyfulness of this incident darkly foreshadows the death to come. The couple's intimacy builds in erotic intensity but without losing its sense of humour, even when the language acknowledges a trace of the recreational criminality that is presented as a dangerously perverse extension of human nature in later works such as *Cocaine Nights* (1996) and *Super-Cannes* (2000):

> 'Jim…' Miriam paused, a forefinger on my nose. 'What are you thinking about?'
>
> 'It's probably illegal.' (*KW* 92) [he replies].

The autobiographical protagonist's disappointing visit to a Soho strip club in Chapter Eight wittily reprises and exorcises the "erotic autopsy" scene because there "the strippers seemed to parade their sexual possibilities with all the fervour of anatomy demonstrators in a dissecting-room taking their students through the urino-genital system" (*KW* 175) and in the later intimacy with Peggy (*KW* 272).

The opposition that seems to be at work here is not so much between the natural bodily and the architectural-technological landscapes but between the

approaches to the natural represented by the erotic and emotional as opposed to the approaches represented by the objective medical-scientific world view.

In Ballard's environmentalist dystopia *Rushing to Paradise* (1994) it is no doubt in the interests of gender equality that the principal protagonist, the Medean environmentalist and feminist Dr Barbara Rafferty, is quite as mad and destructive a professional psychopathology as are the male protagonists of many of Ballard's other fictions. Two kinds of apocalyptic anxiety are juxtaposed in an island fiction which, typically for Ballard, draws on the paradigms of *Robinson Crusoe* and of William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. The first is Dr Rafferty's exploitation of the environmental fear of species extinction in her ambition to present herself as "defender of the albatross, champion of islands and all-purpose media star" (*RP* 39) and the second is the objection of her sixteen-year-old protegé Neil Dempsey to the use of the Pacific island as a nuclear testing site. In the end it is the darker side of human nature that is a more powerful motivator than either political cause as Dr Barbara's murderous gynocentric plan to exterminate all the males on the island by poisoning gets underway.

The play between these various senses of the word "nature" thoroughly destabilises its conventional Disneyfied associations and this can be seen in a suitably condensed moment when the word itself appears in Chapter Seven "The Rainbow Pirates" (*RP* 95-96). Here at the end of the first phase of the novel, Dr Barbara and her associates have been successful in re-taking the island from its French military occupiers and she plans her environmental "sanctuary" to protect not only the albatrosses threatened by that military occupation but all other endangered species too.

Her academic botanist accomplice Professor Saito glosses this for the media, inspired by a Darwinian vision of "diagrammatic forests of genera and species" into relation to which the rare and endangered species can fit:

But in nature everything fits together, nothing can escape. A blueprint within us is already mapping out the sanctuary. There's an ancient garden inside our heads waiting to greet us. (*RP* 95-6)

The more cynical reporter "gesture[ing] at the sweating journalists, tormented by the flies and mosquitoes" spots the paradox that the human is being expelled to create this natural sanctuary space. "You've left one endangered species out of your sanctuary. Is he banned, and how long for?" (*RP* 96). Saito replies

'I'm sure we'll find room for *Homo sapiens*. At first he'll be on the staff side, and work his way back into the favours of mother nature.' (*RP* 96)

However the "ecology of paradise", as Dr Barbara grandiloquently describes it, turns out to be Darwinian in the less comfortable sense. As the islanders throw out the gifts of supportive well-wishers to free themselves from visitors, soldiers and tourists alike, they turn in upon themselves and become "preoccupied with their own survival" (*RP* 117). Eventually even the threatened animal species brought to the island sanctuary have to be killed and eaten to fuel their dream and she herself becomes a sexual predator and murderous tyrant. In articulating this Ballard returns to his exploration of the theme of kindness. As Dr Barbara moves from her environmental to a darkly anti-masculist agenda where Saint-Esprit can be a sanctuary for the "fire and rage and cruelty" of women's natures that domesticity has forced them to suppress (*RP* 171). He imagines her planning to move on "to another island and another sanctuary free of kindness" (*RP* 143). In some respects Dr Barbara's refusal to court the popular sentimentalised idea of nature in favour of more rigorously principled and even more violent forms of political engagement is an exaggerated replay of Ballard's own stated view. In another sense it is precisely the mysteriously quality of "kindness" that Dr Barbara so signally lacks. The ugly turn of events that brings the novel to its conclusion makes it easy to see the novel as a satire, another of Ballard's "cautionary" tales. Yet the final sentence of the novel returns to Neil's undying obsession with Dr

Barbara and gives the last word to her "cruel and generous heart" by which despite everything he might be "happy to be embraced again." (*RP* 239)

There is much that is complex and troubling in the approach to these questions in Ballard's fiction and, I would argue, deliberately and instructively so. The apparent distinction between "environmentalist" and "postmodernist" approaches to his works, with its tendency to distinguish between the pseudo-geographical landscapes of the 1960s disaster fictions and the cultural or media landscapes of the 1980s and 90s, will, I suggest, become misleading if we don't at least look for the deeper connections that may connect them, however awkward these may sometimes appear. If, as Ballard himself says, part of the "challenge" for the "ecological movements" can be that "nature" is often other than the mediated images of it that people seem to want, then these fictions, as I've tried to show, provide an important service in their mapping of the new and future landscapes of the cultural environment, in their unique and highly unsentimental perspective on the potential trajectories of human nature (including human sexualities) and in their exemplary attention to what "nature", that most troublesome and complex of words, has come or might still come to mean.

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[1] J.G. Ballard, *The Atrocity Exhibition* [1970, 1990], with an introduction by Hari Kunzru (London: Fourth Estate, 2002).

[2] J.G. Ballard, *Crash* [1973], with an introduction by Zadie Smith (London: Fourth Estate, 2008).

[3] Robert Macfarlane, "Introduction" to J.G. Ballard *The Crystal World* [1966] (London: Fourth Estate, 2014).

[4] J.G. Ballard, *Rushing to Paradise* [1994], with an introduction by Rika Galchen (London: Fourth Estate, 2014).

[5] Richard Brown, Christopher Duffy and Elizabeth Stainforth (eds.), *J.G. Ballard: Landscapes of Tomorrow* (Amsterdam: Brill, 2016).

[6] William Shakespeare *Hamlet* edited by Harold Jenkins (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 183; *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, edited by F.N. Robinson (Oxford: OUP, 1970), p. 314.

[7] J.G. Ballard, *The Kindness of Women* [1991], with an introduction by Michael Faber (London: Fourth Estate, 2014).

[8] Chris Beckett (ed.), *J.G. Ballard Crash* (London: Fourth Estate, 2017).

[9] J.G. Ballard, Interviewed by Lynn Barber *Penthouse* (5.5, 1970). This interview is not republished with the Crash material but is reprinted in *Extreme Metaphors* edited by Simon Sellars and Dan O'Hara (London: Fourth Estate, 2012), pp. 22-35. Cited hereafter as *EM*.

[10] *Crash* (2017), pp. 347-8.

[11] David Scott, *Paul Delvaux: Surrealizing the Nude* (London: Reaktion Books, 1992).

[12] *Crash* (2017), pp. 284-5.

[13] *Extreme Metaphors*, p. xiv.

[14] Ballard was also concerned to map the broader impacts of the contraceptive pill on women's lives in the satirical monologue "Side Effects of Ortho-Novin G" sequence from *Ambit* magazine (#50 Spring 1972).

[15] Lynn Barber, *An Education* (London: Penguin Books, 2009).

[16] J.G. Ballard, Interview with James Godard in *Cypher* no. 10 (October 1973), pp. 53-4. [jgballard.ca]

[17] J.G. Ballard, Interview with Jerome Tarshis (*Evergreen Review* Volume 17, Number 96, Spring, 1973), repeated in *J.G. Ballard: Quotes* pp. 277-8. The Solveig Nordlund interview appears in *Extreme Metaphors*, pp. 224-230.

[18] Bea Ballard, "The Greatest TV Show on Earth", in *Deep Ends* 2, edited by Rick McGrath (Toronto: The Terminal Press, 2016), pp. 254-7.

[19] V.Vale (ed.) "Some Books From Ballard's Library", *Re/Search 8/9 J.G. Ballard* (San Francisco: V/Search Publications, 1984), p.171.

[20] Thomas Hess and Linda Nochlin*, Woman as Sex Object. Studies in Erotic Art 1730-1970* (New York: Newsweek, 1972).

[21] *Woman as Sex Object,* pp 9-16 and 101-165 respectively.

[22] *Woman as Sex Object,* pp. 43-63.

[23] *Woman as Sex Object*, pp. 223-237.

[24] J.G. Ballard, "In the Voyeur's Gaze" in *A User's Guide to the Millennium* (London: Flamingo, 1997), p. 67.

[25] *Crash* (2017), p. 359.

[26] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* edition? OED Spenser and Chaucer "*The Plaint of Kinde*."

[27] [m. 1955 he 33 (15/11/1930) ch 1956, 1957/8, 1959]

[28] Jeanette Baxter, *J.G. Ballard: The Surrealist Imagination* (London: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 29-32.