

■ Ecocriticism, Humanism, Eschatological *Jouissance*: J. G. Ballard and the Ends of the World

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Abstract

Eschatological *jouissance* is defined here as a grim pleasure in the failure of the world. It is a feature of J. G. Ballard's prescient ecological disaster fiction of the 1960s as well as of the sardonic treatment of ecological idealism in his later fiction. Expressions of pleasure in the end of the world can be seen as forming a counter genre to utopia and, in philosophical terms, as a refusal of humanism. Humanism is defined here as the insistence to see the world from a human point of view. Anti-humanism and a concurring openness to eschatological *jouissance* are elements of existentialism and of poststructuralism, together with Marxism the main alternatives to humanism proposed in the twentieth century. Ecocriticism, in some of its strands, is another such replacement of humanism in which eschatological *jouissance* plays a significant role. Humanism may not seem a promising attitude for dealing with the ecological disasters we face, concerned as it is in the first place with the comfort of human beings. Still, it is argued here that humanism includes an awareness of the parochialism of human sympathies and that an appeal to the need to extend its sympathies to non-human sharers of the planet might well be heeded. Eschatological *jouissance*, as a feature of dystopian fiction and imagination, will provide the needed shudder to nudge us into such an extension of our sympathies.

Keywords: humanism, utopia, eschatology, ecocriticism, J. G. Ballard

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Dystopian novels, in their concerns for worlds or civilizations under threat, often are deeply humanistic in outlook: protagonists long for a return to the imperfect human arrangements before the new order, arrangements often very familiar to the reader holding the book as well. The new society is someone else's utopia but it is presented as incompatible with even minimal requirements for human happiness and comfort. In George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, for instance, Winston Smith longs and plots for a return from Oceania's political totalitarianism to the human imperfections of preutopian England. And to Offred, in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, the U.S., date rapes and pornography notwithstanding, seems preferable to Gilead's religious fundamentalism, with its prayvaganzas and ceremonies of procreation. In most classic dystopias, the new order is actually designed by other human beings who manage to be comfortable in it but, in the eyes of the protagonist suffering at their hands and in those of the sympathizing reader, this is exactly what makes them sinister, subhuman, or obtuse. Dystopian protagonists do not apply objective, impassive criteria to weigh the new and old society's comparative virtues but express a very selective human attachment to an accustomed life and culture and to those with whom they share that culture. The utopian master plot is that of the escape from the accustomed cave into the light of truth; dystopias invert that plot into a longing for a return to the dark cave. That such a return is typically blocked in dystopias is part of the stark, monitory nature of the genre.¹

If we can define humanism informally as the human attachment to this dark cave, to this world one has inherited, then humanism is potentially undercut by the ecological degradation of the very cave to which it feels such attachment. Important elements in the humanist spectrum of concerns are the social, political, and religious makeup of the cave, but these concerns come to look secondary with its physical survival itself now in jeopardy. Because humanism never considered the physical platform that sustained its cultural anthropocentrism as an object of particular care or worry, it simply has no purchase on what increasingly comes to look like the most pressing worries that we cave dwellers face. Dystopia's blocked return receives an even starker coloring as ecological worries come to play an ever greater role in dystopian novels: it is not just an abolished political or social system that turns out to be irrecoverable, but the very footing of any system at all.

¹ In his book *The Boundaries of Genre*, Gary Saul Morson quite persuasively describes the utopian plot as a reenactment of the allegory of the cave in the seventh book of Plato's *Republic* (89). We are the cave dwellers, and someone who escaped from the cave has come back to fetch us. That which we took for reality was only shadows, the escaped prisoner tells us, and he knows the way to true reality. What do we do: follow the lead of the one who got away or stay put?

I made humanism, in a very informal definition, a human being's attachment to the world one has inherited. This definition is shorthand for a more formal one, a composite of various dictionary and handbook definitions: "the ethical stance that affirms the dignity and worth of all people based on an appeal to perceived common human abilities, experiences, and rights." Clearly such a broad and general definition does not do adequate justice to the historical and philosophical complexities of the term. I abstract, for instance, from differences within humanism as important as the question of whether or not a God is presumed to underwrite such common dignity and worth. Such historical and philosophical justice (even if I could render it) fortunately is not required for my purposes here; for those purposes the main point to notice is the essential anthropocentrism that characterizes humanism in all its accepted forms.²

In ecological dystopias the end of the world is near and human beings need to be taught humility in order to prevent the collapse of the planet. This humility requires human beings to see themselves in a wider a context of beings—animal, vegetable, and mineral—sharing our planet. There is a transcending, self-effacing movement at work in the assumption of such a wider context, one that makes humanism, in contrast, look rather parochial in its exclusively human apprehension of the world. In many different ways, by the very logic of its inclusive concerns, ecocriticism proposes to break the bounds of humanism because so many non-human presences in the world are objects of ecocritical concern as well. Some strands of ecocriticism exhort humans to abandon humanism as a form of "speciesism" and to counter this by recognizing the dignity and worth, and also a large or equal measure of *rights*, of animal or non-animal fellow planet dwellers. Other versions of ecocriticism remain within humanism but extend humanism's reach by making the *caring* for non-human sharers of the planet part of what defines dignity and worth in human beings.

I favor including more than just human material in one's ethical concerns, but believe that such inclusion requires the necessarily selective sympathy that a humanist stance offers, and that rejections of humanism, examples of which we will get to below, lead to perhaps fascinating but unfruitful stances in life. Bernard Williams makes the point that to "see the world from a human point of view" (as one does in humanism) is "not an absurd thing for human beings to

² The *OED* gives as its second definition of humanism: "The character or quality of being human; devoted to human interests"; its third definition is: "Any system of thought or action which is concerned with merely human interests (as distinguished from divine), or with those of the human race in general (as distinguished from individual); the 'Religion of Humanity.'" Both these definitions emphasize the anthropocentrism of humanism.

do,” and argues that this does not imply regarding “human beings as the most important or valuable creatures in the universe.” To imply this “is to make the mistake of identifying the point of view of the universe and the human point of view. No one should make any claims about the importance of human beings to the universe: the point is about the importance of human beings to human beings” (118). Such claims of human preeminence in the universe aren’t unheard of, and foregoing them is the fruit of cultivation that we can only achieve, Williams points out, “in terms of our understanding of ourselves” (118). Humanism enjoins us human beings to stretch ourselves beyond parochialism by acknowledging our parochialism, thereby acknowledging the claims of non-human (and therefore not fully understood) sharers of the universe to a satisfactory existence. If indeed we exert ourselves to provide such a satisfactory existence for non-human sharers as well, we then show in our actions our understanding of ourselves as dwellers in a universe that was not designed for our exclusive comfort. Our efforts on behalf of non-human sharers of the universe are necessarily limited by our degree of understanding of these others, by our selective human sympathies, and by our degree of power in influencing human and non-human environments. Still, even with these limitations, humanism in its proper modesty contains what I think can be termed a utopian impulse: that of improving the effects of human agency through the cultivation of knowledge and sensibility. As such an embodiment of an ideal, humanism is always open to scorn, and vulnerable to inertia’s bias toward keeping things as they are.

Humanism has a checkered record in upholding human dignity and worth even when it concerned itself exclusively with human beings. Little wonder, therefore, that concerned thinkers of the twentieth century (and the current one) have attempted to dislodge it. Ecocriticism, when it rejects humanism, is humanism’s latest proposed alternative; when it embraces humanism it is an embodiment of humanism’s utopian principle of hope. Historically the prospects of a gain in the world’s virtue by a replacement of humanism do not look good. Humanism’s most prominent intended replacements of the twentieth century—Marxism, existentialism, and poststructuralism—have either dismal or futile records in increasing the world’s goodness. Marxism, which can actually be looked at as an intended version of (secular) humanism rather than a replacement of it, offered, at the turn of the twentieth century, prospects of achieving humanism’s goal of extending human dignity to working class people as well. If one thinks of as inspiring a figure in British Marxism as William Morris then the utopian promise of Marxism as a hopeful “education of desire” is still alive, before Marxism hardened, first, into a theory that rejected utopianism and then into such a failed practice that it needed to expunge all reference to utopian

promise.³ Freedom and responsibility were catchwords of existentialism, the philosophical tidal wave of mid-twentieth-century Europe, but existentialist responsibility was doggedly individualistic and hard to reconcile with notions of community and universal human qualities that crop up in creditable attempts to answer the question of how one should live, even as an individual. Existentialism was far from a monolithic school of thought, but that Sartre's contempt for the supposedly vacuous humanism and moralism of Camus came to look, to most existentialist intellectuals of the time, as a touchstone for the worthier version of existentialism damned that brand of philosophy to the sterility of purity. There is a definite *philosophie noire* fascination to existentialism's tough antiutopian realism, to its bleak assessment of the world, and to its impatience both with forms of idealism and, in its most attractive Camusian forms, with the increasingly mendacious notions of community based on Marxist materialism. But it is too much a reactive, a negative, and an unpromising philosophy to be able to replace humanism as a force that inspires people and works in the world.

Both Marxism and existentialism were, at least in part, responses to periods of crisis in Western history: imperialism and the exploitation of the working class for Marxism; the Second World War and its disillusion (and for Camus, imperialism, still) for existentialism. Poststructuralism, on the other hand, is rooted in that spell of historical leisure time of the late 1960s to 1980s, and this gives it its feeling of exhilarating freedom and *ir*responsibility. Poststructuralism almost completely disregards existentialism (Derrida hardly mentions Sartre anywhere, and vice versa), a matter in part probably of the anxiety of influence since Sartrean existentialism already killed off metaphysics, a dragon poststructuralism also wanted to be seen to slay.⁴ Poststructuralism, for good measure, slew "physics" as well, the idea of physical reality as existing independent of discourse. In poststructuralism's linguistic turn, reality becomes a discursive phenomenon and this makes poststructuralism incompatible with humanism. Humanism assumes human communality on the basis of which human beings can understand human

³ The argument that William Morris was, first of all, a political thinker and, as such, a utopian socialist with ideas rooted in Romanticism's revolutionary impulses and at odds with Engels's "scientific Marxism," is made in E. P. Thompson's eloquent and engrossing *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*. To the revised and shortened edition of his original book, Thompson adds a substantial "Postscript: 1976" in which he deals with critics of his book, and of William Morris. In the postscript, Thompson (who had left the English Communist party after the 1956 Soviet invasion of Hungary) maintains his Marxist outlook exactly because Marxism need not be of the orthodox Soviet kind but also has Morris's utopian strain of the "education of desire" (791) to look back on, a strain of Marxism with which we in 1976, Thompson suggests, would do well to reconnect.

⁴ Steve Martinot attempts to construct the dialogue between Sartre and Derrida that they never directly held in *Forms in the Abyss: A Philosophical Bridge between Sartre and Derrida*.

beings. But if reality, like a language, achieves meaning through differences, then the assumption of such communal essence no longer makes sense. If the stress falls on difference, essentialism cascades to more refined levels of transcendence such as race, class, and gender or, harder to conceptualize but logically more consistent, essentialism is abandoned for a particularism that seeks strategic alliances for specific causes and occasions. For existentialists existence came before essence, with essence as the problem of self-definition that becomes a responsible person's life project in the face of death; for poststructuralists there is no existence given to begin with and no essence to come after. With no existentialist self to define or humanist core to understand, a poststructuralist self is a provisional construct performed in an eternal here and now and therefore "without history, biography, psychology" (as Roland Barthes said about the "scriptor" and reader who become the grammatical placeholders for the humanist Author he removed; 148). Such a self mixes the text of its life, that "multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (146).

I have made irresponsibly large strides through three complex currents of twentieth-century philosophy here: forgive me my freedom. I do so because I want to arrive quickly at my main focus: the relations between humanism, utopia, ecology, and a *jouissance* of a particular quality, that of eschatology. I also know that I have made to look two of those three strands facile, existentialism and, especially, poststructuralism. I think that they are indeed facile, at least now, and that it is their negativity, their radical rejection of utopian desire, that makes them so. This is not to say that they have always been facile in this sense, or that to criticize them for this failing has not now itself become facile—a reason not to press the point too self-righteously. In fact, both existentialism and poststructuralism started out as acts of at the very least an intellectual courage quivering with the trepidation that goes with such acts. Existentialists' foregoing of beauty's *promesse de bonheur* was a way of not being facile themselves, and they were brave in their non-conformity in thought and behavior, in their squarely facing absurdity and ugliness. But non-conformity dwindles into gesture when it becomes successful and then ends up, not a *possibilité de plaisir* but, first, a new orthodoxy and, next, a discarded one.⁵ And to feel the daring of that initial look into the abyss in the case of poststructuralism, we only need to reread a few pages of Derrida's article "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," the

⁵ Stendhal remarked (in *De L'amour*) that beauty contains a "promise of happiness." Marcel Proust, in *La Prisonnière*, suggests that, perhaps, beauty begins in the possibility of pleasure: "On a dit que la beauté est une promesse de bonheur. Inversement la possibilité du plaisir peut être un commencement de beauté" (131).

article that inaugurated poststructuralism. There is a clear utopian yearning in the very radicalism of Derrida's rejection of the "bricolage" with which Lévi-Strauss compromised himself by accepting oppositions he sees undercut in the actual field work that, paradoxically, is made possible by the discounted oppositions. Derrida wants to get rid of such cowardly *bricolage* even without being able to imagine what to put in its place. Derrida's utopia becomes a sublime dream of eschatology, of the end of the world of humanism underwritten by morality, truth, history, God, in short: by metaphysics. At this point in his essay Derrida's own courage to face the unstructured future falters. Turning away from the world of "man and humanism" and the dream of "full presence" (292), Derrida is still among those who "turn their eyes away when faced by the as yet unnamable which is proclaiming itself and which can do so . . . only under the species of a nonspecies, in the formless, mute, infant, and terrifying form of monstrosity" (293). This "species of a nonspecies," this monstrosity resisting all theoretical recuperation Derrida could not yet quite face in 1967. He would learn to do better with what Hegel calls "tarrying with the negative" later, as would, in his slipstream and with increasing ease, two full generations of humanities students.⁶

Eschatology, the study of the end of the world, is utopia's other. Utopia's new world comes at the expense of the old one. Utopia is the genre of worlds meeting their ends, in the double meaning of the word "end": purpose and demise. As a genre of purposeful worlds, it deals with incipient worlds, or reachings, gestures, intuitions, definitions or blueprints of or toward such worlds; as a killing genre it, sometimes implicitly, sometimes polemically, clears away old worlds and makes civilizations collapse. If utopia loses this double movement, it turns into something else. If it creates the new without destroying the old, utopia becomes piecemeal social engineering: a form of wisdom or insignificance, depending on your point of view. If utopia destroys the old without creating the new, utopia raises that terrifying, sublime monstrosity of pure negativity, that "non-species" from which Derrida turned away his eyes. Existentialist negativity could easily be mocked by a hostile contemporary such as Jacques Lacan who characterized existentialism dismissively as passively accepting the impasses of the "concentrational" (i.e., concentration camp-like) quality of post-World War II culture through "a voyeuristic-sadistic idealization of the sexual relation; a per-

⁶ The expression occurs in the Miller translation of Hegel's "Preface" to his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 19. Derrida, I know, did in later years turn to questions of politics and ethics and became a philosopher who worried about responsibility and perhaps about "man and humanism" but, I must confess, I didn't follow him there: the joyful forbearance I felt in reading early Derrida turned to impatience when I attempted to stick with him later.

sonality that realizes itself only in suicide; a consciousness of the other that can be satisfied only by Hegelian murder” (7; the “Hegelian murder” probably refers to Meursault’s killing of an Arab in Camus’s *L’Étranger*). Derrida’s fear is purely rhetorical, his abyss purely conceptual, as is the sublime shudder he reports—how could it not be in a world newly declared to consist entirely of signs unanchored in reality? Derrida finds himself in a world whose existence is no longer metaphysically underwritten, but one that nevertheless marches on pretty much the same as before. So, very quickly, the negative utopia, the awareness of absence, rather than causing dread, has to fight boredom by deriving joy from how the end, like all other traditionally privileged structural moments, participates in the play of substitutions. This is “eschatological *jouissance*,” that grim pleasure in the failure of the world. I cannot claim to have invented this term: it is Fredric Jameson’s, and he uses it to characterize the work of J. G. Ballard, the author I too will turn to now.⁷

Both in their own ways recalcitrant philosophies, it is little wonder that existentialism and poststructuralism each in their own time appealed to a recalcitrant writer such as J. G. Ballard. At any time in his writing career, Ballard has been interested in worlds meeting their ends, civilizations collapsing, animals, people, and ideas dying, and he has a writer’s gratitude for anything that helps him articulate his obsessions. In his early disaster novels there is an existentialist heaviness to this theme, the grim *jouissance* of disengagement (Lacan would call it voyeuristic-sadistic) from the physical world on the part of protagonists who feel that a collapsing world is helpful to them in working through personal psychological traumas. In Ballard’s fascinating first novel *The Drowned World* (1962), violent solar storms destroy the outer layers of the earth’s ionosphere, compromising the earth’s barrier against solar radiation. Temperatures rise and once-temperate zones become tropical, leaving only the poles habitable. Frozen water reserves melt and the cities of Europe and the U.S. drown; mammalian fertility declines drastically and at the time the story takes place (probably somewhere in the twenty-second century) “fewer than five million people are still living on the polar caps” (23). The novel’s protagonist, Kerans, is a biologist, member of a research unit stationed above the drowned city of London. What the researchers see happening around them is the world employed in a process of devolution; as Kerans explains, “in response to the rises in temperature, humidity and radiation levels the flora and fauna of this planet are beginning to assume once again the forms they displayed the last time such conditions were present—

⁷ The term “eschatological *jouissance*” appears on page 199, footnote 32, of Jameson’s “Journey into Fear.”

roughly speaking, the Triassic period" (42). Time's arrow is pointing backward and Kerans and several others in this research outpost are beginning to experience this themselves: they are pulled by a sort of "organic memories" (43) out of human into a reptilian consciousness and are "being plunged back into the archaeopsychic past, uncovering the ancient taboos and drives that have been dormant for epochs" (44). When, under the threat of further rising temperatures and heavy rains, the research mission is called off and the scientists are collected to be transported to the safety and bearable temperatures of Greenland, Kerans and two others decide not to go back. The new Triassic has become a psychological necessity for them, the drowned city a uterine dream. The three are not a group, a community, though, but three loners each adapting to their regressed environment, each sliding without regret out of the world of human concerns, civilization, and sympathy. There is in Kerans no trace of the profound discomfort that protagonists in classic dystopias experience as they feel their new environment slip away from the one to which they are still attached; Kerans simply responds to a bio-psychological need that guides him into adaptation to an unchosen environment. This guidance manifests itself to him in mysterious pulls beyond human language, often in the form of dreams too inarticulate even for recuperation by Freudian reason. *The Drowned World* is mesmerizing in its depiction of this mysterious call and Kerans's response to it. Thus mesmerized by Ballard's cool mysteriousness, the reader witnessing Kerans's psychological metamorphosis toward reptilian sensibility feels none of the humanist outrage that, for instance, Dante effects in his showpiece description of the thieves' physical metamorphosis into snakes in *Inferno* XXV. *The Drowned World* neutralizes disaster by the protagonist's genetic yielding to an environment far beyond human limits; it neutralizes dystopia with its resistances against unfamiliar cultural and environmental arrangements by its slide out of humanism. Kerans muses, "the genealogical tree of mankind was systematically pruning itself, apparently moving backward in time, and a point might ultimately be reached where a second Adam and Eve found themselves alone in a new Eden" (23). This "new Eden" is neither the object of utopian desire nor an object of nostalgia, that longing without hope, but simply the figurative (rather than scientific) endpoint of regression. Ballard is not a master of impeccable endings. In this novel's final sentence Kerans moves south, into heat, jungle, rain, and swamp, "attacked by alligators and giant bats, a second Adam searching for the forgotten paradises of the reborn sun" (175). But if Kerans were indeed to find those "forgotten paradises" it is most likely, by the logic of the novel, that his reptilian nature will then fully have asserted itself, and that he will enter the scene of all beginnings as the snake.

The Drowned World is to do with global warming and rising sea levels, preciently imagined in 1962. Hedging his ecological bets, Ballard's *The Drought* (1965) goes the other way, and tells of the disaster of a rainless decade. Unlike in *The Drowned World*, the disaster here is man-made. The world's oceans are covered by "a thin but resilient mono-molecular film formed from a complex of saturated long-chain polymers, generated within the sea from the vast quantities of industrial wastes" (36). No clouds are generated, and there has been no rain for a decade. "This act of retribution by the sea had always impressed Ransom by its simple justice" (37). Ransom is Dr. Charles Ransom, the novel's protagonist, a man for whom the end of the world would fulfill a certain psychological need because "the only final rest from the persistence of memory would come from his absolution in time" (40). He wishes to erase a personal past, needs to roll back civilization to the level of Caliban rather than Ariel, and desires for a world drained of social time and moral considerations. In the face of the severe drought, society and civilization prove fragile, and human nature feral. Hobbesian communities form, forging temporary pacts and disputing each other access to water and fish stocks, communities of which Ransom never becomes a part. People turn into savage beasts, attacking even store mannequins, "hating even the residuum of human identity in the blurred features of the mannequins" (210). As Ransom moves through a landscape of refuse fires, salt dunes, and derelict cars and buildings, killing a man in a "kind of cold-blooded experiment, to see how detached from everyone else I was" (150; "Hegelian murder," this), it never entirely becomes clear what Ransom wants to exist for, thus keeping the existential question in play. The novel ends (disappointingly, again) with an immense pall of darkness that "lay over the dunes, as if the whole of the exterior world were losing its existence" (232). Existence precedes essence, Ransom (perhaps?) achieves death and therefore, in the final sentence, "failed to notice it had started to rain" (232).

These novels diminish human concerns and the human race with a brutal seriousness inspired by existentialism; Ballard's eschatological imagination here also shows existentialism as a latter-day form of stoicism rather than Romanticism. In both disaster novels, moral, political, and social considerations are completely bypassed for those of the biology and psychology of survival. A reader can choose to read these novels as dark allegories of the ease with which humans can slide into the beastly, but that would be to impose an allopathic humanism onto the novels. Ballard himself pointedly registers the loss of the human in his protagonists without humanist hand wringing. These disaster novels, in other words, are not cast as dystopian novels with their typical mourning of loss; they are, rather, novels of adaptation to environment beyond the good and evil of a human value system.

It is stoic coolness that gives Ballard's disaster novels their stark attractiveness. His later novels, flavored by poststructuralism, are sardonic rather than stark. In *Rushing to Paradise* (1994) Ballard makes fun of ecological highmindedness by uncovering the egomaniacal emptiness underneath the utopian gestures of a group of ecological warriors. Their movement out of humanist boundaries into animal and ecological protection unguided by a consistent ideal ends up in unthinking carnage and destruction, an eschatological *jouissance* that is not only particularly horrific, but also ironic in the sense that it isn't the clueless perpetrators who get to experience that *jouissance* but the story's detached narrator as well as, by narratorial invitation, the book's conspiring reader.

The island of Saint-Esprit becomes the focus of a group of ecological protesters who want to save the albatross and prevent the French government from resuming nuclear testing. They occupy the island and change it into a sanctuary for rare and threatened species the world over. The group is led by the charismatic Dr. Barbara Rafferty, and the novel is narrated from the perspective of 16-year old Neil Dempsey. Neil is fascinated by Dr. Rafferty (as well as by nuclear testing), attracted to her, and immensely useful to her as her movement's mascot after he has been shot in the foot by French soldiers in a raid on the island. Media attention furthers the cause of the ecologists, and brings in no end of supplies and reinforcements.

Ballard's novel is written without any respect for utopian hope. The novel questions utopia's power both to generate the new and to destroy the old. Dr. Barbara lacks any consistent utopian vision and plan, and the world of Saint Esprit, waiting for redemption, is simply a Barthesian "tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture" (146). Ballard shows this in countless sardonic ways. Monique, a former Air France stewardess and part of the group of protesters, for instance, is relentlessly portrayed in whatever she does as simply continuing her original job. Thus, when she is explaining Dr. Barbara's breeding program to a couple of new arrivals on the island, she "was addressing them, an arm around Nihal's shoulders as if demonstrating a life-saving drill that involved the concealed parts of the male anatomy" (207). And the utopian master plot gets turned into a mock-heroic scene when, early in the novel, the ecological protesters storming the French base on the island release "two reluctant basset hounds—regimental mascots that Monique termed 'experimental animals'—from their quiet kennels. Unable to cope with the noise and explosions . . . they returned to their shady dens at the first opportunity" (72). The impossibility of anything new coming from the sanctuary on Saint-Esprit is shown, for instance, by the insistent presence on the island of cameras, press conferences, radio links, and interviews with their feedback loops in which, invariably, explanations are given in terms

of existing categories. Thanks to this publicity, the islanders are also supplied with canned food, water purification installations, kits and cages for breeding and keeping animals and plants. And when Dr. Barbara tells Neil to shove all that into the sea she does not do so out of a longing for an as yet unconceived newness, a disgust for her copied world, but out of a desperate lack of utopian ideals: "We'll make do with what we can grow ourselves. Try to understand, Neil—I want the world to leave Saint-Esprit and forget us. Then we can find who we really are!" (112).

Dr. Barbara is making a category mistake here, confusing a utopian society with a retreat, trying to find out who she is rather than imposing a vision on her world. Utopia, in Ballard's novel, is a form of cluelessness. Ballard sets Dr. Barbara loose in his novel as someone who is lost in her own genre and the novel's narrative voice drips with the icy irony that invites a reader's responding irony so that, together, they kill the strenuous impossibility that utopia spurs us to pursue with a shared and knowing smile at the blindness of the protagonist. The sly way in which the narrator takes over Neil's mode of address of Dr. Rafferty as "Dr. Barbara" turns the young man's mix of reverence and familiarity into pastiche and makes Dr. Rafferty into a satire on talk show psychologists and sexologists. The parade of Dr. Barbara's concerns—ecology, female empowerment, media—is portrayed as relentlessly modern by the feverishly consumerist manner in which she picks up these concerns and then drops them again, and the final suggestion is that modernity as a whole has become unfit for utopian ideals. Dr. Barbara may lack true utopian ideals and a humanist's sense of purpose, but she does have an awareness of such traditional utopian topoi as euthanasia and the position of women, and she does have a utopian delineator's radical bent. This combination is what makes her dangerous, as her questionable history as a GP with a penchant for putting elderly patients to sleep indicates.

Lives on the island are solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short. It emerges that, in Dr. Barbara's mind, the sanctuary's function changes from protecting animals to protecting women. Animals return to their function of serving as human food ("fortunately the world supply of rare and endangered mammals seemed inexhaustible" [181]). As Neil and Dr. Barbara are eating a rare pheasant one evening, sent to them by earnest conservationists, she explains: "Saint-Esprit was a fantasy we invented, a make-believe world we put together from all that animal rights sentimentality" (170). The male sex (along with the albatross) begins to die from mysterious illnesses and Neil sees only his female progeny survive. But the ideal of a "women's republic" (222) is then abandoned again, and the women too are dying. When Neil asks toward the end of the novel, "Why kill the women?" Dr. Barbara answers, "They weren't strong enough. In a sanctuary only

the strong can survive. You and I, Neil. We've earned the right to live" (234). This sanctuary of two finally gets whittled down to a sanctuary of one; the special interest utopia of ecologists, of women, of the strong gives way to a utopia of one, a utopia that is no longer a society. Neil thinks, "The real sanctuary Dr. Barbara had sought had been for herself, and for the cruel and dangerous strengths that no humane order could tolerate" (238). Dr. Barbara had used death as "a secret door through which the threatened and the weary could slip to safety" (237). The utopia becomes a prison for a criminally insane woman, and Neil (who protects Dr. Barbara by declaring to the authorities that she drowned herself) in the final sentence of the novel, dreams of Dr. Barbara surviving on her uninhabited island and of returning to Saint-Esprit, "happy to be embraced again by Dr. Barbara's cruel and generous heart" (239).

A sanctuary for the strong, murder as the realm of safety for the threatened, an inexhaustible supply of rare mammals, dogs refusing their liberty, staged and televised ecological purity, a war of the sexes, a utopia of one: Ballard is clearly throwing up egregious contradictions for his reader to savor in relaxed irony and for his protagonists to miss in blindness. That shared blindness of the protagonists, their unmitigated absence of insight, sabotages the subversive power of utopia by turning it against utopia itself. Every reality in the novel is a private psychic reality in which, typically, contradiction goes unnoticed. In fact, it is in passages of psychological explanation, in which contradiction is brought out, that the novel becomes uninteresting and the writing goes bad. Ballard writes on page 224: "Neil was shocked that he had tolerated her for so long, mesmerized by this strong-willed woman who had played on his childish infatuation with nuclear death and the vacuum in his life left by his depressed and passive mother." Here is a sentence that explains too much; it sounds like a capsule summary for *Rushing to Paradise's* book promotion that ended up by mistake in the novel itself.

Rushing to Paradise declares the power of utopia to be ideologically innovative void, and thus destroys utopia's relevance. The novel ends because everything on Saint-Esprit is burned, eaten, poisoned, killed, or murdered. Ballard's novel registers carnage and monstrosity, and offers a stand-alone eschatological contradiction to a utopian newness that it never admits. Whereas Derrida was taken aback (or at least said he was) by the monstrosity of the unimaginably new, Ballard shows how thoroughly old and familiar monstrosity is, and how being monstrous is the one act of creativity open to human beings. Ballard's delight in disorder is that of knowing the human race, and knowing that it isn't up to much good. The reader is invited to share the grim pleasure of eschatological *jouissance*, a seductive offer as all offers of *jouissance* are, but a pleasure one can only purchase at the

Faustian price of leaving the realm of human values and sharing the monstrosity of Ballard's narrator.

To ecologist (and not only to them), there is little *jouissance* to be had in reading Ballard's sardonic bleakness. Still, there is a secret Ballard in all of us and the idea that it is the human race that spoils paradise by thoughtlessly rushing in and then not knowing what to do there but to exercise its will to freedom is the basis of every ecological awakening. And if *conservation* of what is left of the erstwhile paradise seems too modest a goal in light of how much of it is already spoiled or fatally compromised by the continuing hegemony of *homo sapiens*, then ecologists can begin to develop their own version of eschatological *jouissance*, one in which the world is cleared of the human race and can restore itself to the balanced wilderness it was before we came around. After all, the sun is still young and won't swallow up the earth and inner planets for another 5 billion years: it is too early to give up on earth and invite the deluge. Or should we invite the deluge, and thus reset the world? This line of thought is a version of utopian thinking: it features the world's end, its demise, the eschatological precondition for a newly-conceived end, or purpose, for the world: to become the planet of minerals, vegetation, and animal life forms that it was before human beings evolved. This is a utopian end because it is a sublime, unimaginable vision, a more radical and literal turning away from the world of "man and humanism," from the dream of "full presence" than Derrida's. All humanist and metaphysical notions, morality, history, truth, God, and all human claims of freedom and (ir)responsibility will yield to ecology and natural selection. Human beings, or something like them, like us, might over time emerge again, of course, but a second time around the meek might inherit the earth: peaceful, playful, matriarchal bonobos rather than the nastier chimpanzees might develop into improved versions of ourselves; Yahoos may be replaced by Houyhnhnms.

Journalist Alan Weisman works out this vision of a world reset to the time before us in his recent book *The World without Us*. The book is a thought experiment on "how nature might flourish if granted the chance" of rebalancing itself without let or hindrance of our disturbing species (5). One fascinating aspect of the book is the implicit suggestion that it isn't areas where human conservation efforts attempt to stem landscape and habitat destruction that offer the best chances for nature to reassert itself. It is, rather, the no man's lands, demilitarized zones, and nuclear wastelands that spring back into amazing species variety exactly because no man is there. It is these areas that inspire the thought that if the entire planet were a no man's land, no matter how polluted and depleted, the planet as a whole would find its way back to how it was without us. After all, there is still Africa and "Africa is our most complete bank of living genetic heritage, filled

with entire families and orders of animals that were sacked elsewhere” (71). British-Tanzanian mega fauna zoologist David Western believes that “if there were no people left, Africa, which has been occupied by humans longer than any other place would paradoxically revert to the purest primeval state on Earth” (82).

As Weisman takes you to the Korean DMZ, to Chernobyl, and to Cyprus’s Green Line you find yourself attracted to the promises of destruction. In Cyprus an electrical engineer, asked to repair damage to a hotel in Varosha, steps into an eerie scene, two years after the war. He sees a Toyota dealership with shattered windows, and unmolested 1974 Corollas and Celicas in full view; breakfast dishes in hotels “licked clean by mice were still in place on the table linens” (93); the “honeycombed facades of empty hotels” with their windows shattered “had become giant pigeon roosts” (95) and, apart from the cooing of pigeons and the sougling of the sea, there is not a sound to be heard. Now, over thirty years after the Cyprus conflict, with UN Peacekeepers still keeping Turks and Greeks on different sides of the Green Line, nature is undertaking a huge “reclamation project.” “Flame trees, chinaberries, and thickets of hibiscus, oleander, and passion lilac sprout from nooks where indoors and outdoors now blend. Houses disappear under magenta mounds of bougainvillea. Lizards and whip snakes skitter through strands of wild asparagus, prickly pear, and six-foot grasses. . . . At night, the darkened beachfront, free of moonlight bathers, crawls with nesting loggerhead and green sea turtles” (97). On Cyprus’s north coast, meanwhile, bulldozers clear land for retirement homes for British pensioners.

Weisman has fascinating chapters on how effective, given enough time, natural processes can be in their destruction of humans’ material culture. Just about everything we ever created will be dissolved, pressed, bleached, or harassed into a form that can sustain other existing life forms. And if existing life forms don’t have the wherewithal to deal with that most pernicious of materials, polymers, then life forms that do will evolve. And if not, then there is always geologic time. Weisman quotes polymer science professor Anthony Andrady, who says: “The upheavals and pressure will change it [plastics] into something else. Just like trees buried in bogs a long time ago—the geologic process, not biodegradation, changed them into oil and coal. Maybe high concentrations of plastics will turn into something like that. Eventually, they will change. Change is the hallmark of nature. Nothing remains the same” (128).

This brand of optimism shines through this book as a whole, and it is infectious. It is the infectiousness of utopia, the promise of the new—and who would still want the old? That this optimism is predicated on that small matter of the human race having to disappear is an occasional sobering irruption in the experience of eschatological *jouissance* that reading this book provides. There

are but few people who dare to look that “formless, mute, infant, and terrifying form of monstrosity” of human extinction squarely in the eye. Weisman spends two pages on someone who does, Les Knight, the founder of VHEMT: the Voluntary Human Extinction Movement. Knight, who I don’t think has read Jonathan Swift, displays that necessary characteristic of utopian reformers: the refusal of irony. Those of us who are less radical in temperament can still feel his justified despair over what we humans have done to the planet and might, for all the good that would do, become slightly less half-hearted in living as if there were no tomorrow.⁸

The motto of Knight’s movement is “May we live long and die out,” and its program is simple: stop procreating. Then “in 21 years, there would be, by definition, no juvenile delinquency” (Weisman quoting Knight, 243). Next, resignation will sink in, “spiritual awakening will replace panic” as life gets better, with plentiful food, oceans replenishing, forests, no longer cleared for agriculture, reclaiming the earth, and our taste for war subsiding as we lose our possessiveness. Before our eyes, the earth will already be recovering, thus showing us the purposefulness of our self-sacrifice. As Les Knight puts it: “The last humans could enjoy their final sunsets peacefully, knowing they have returned the planet as close as possible to the Garden of Eden” (243).

The Voluntary Human Extinction Movement is an intriguing mix of existentialism and (I cannot quite tell) either neo-Malthusian antihumanism or a humanism so far overshot that it ends up its counterpart: human self-sacrifice rather than human self-realization. The Movement has the existentialist courage of seeing death as the moment from which a human life derives its significance, and then to choose death. It has the Malthusian concern with population growth and the objective search for solutions to rein in that growth. Weisman quotes Les Knight, going through possible solutions, as saying, “No virus could ever get all 6 billion of us” and to his observation that war doesn’t work either (because “wars encourage both winners and losers to repopulate”) he adds, “Besides, killing is immoral. Mass murder should never be considered a way to improve life on Earth” (242). One is relieved, of course, that Knight thinks so, but it indeed pretty much whittles down the possibilities to *voluntary* human extinction. In its acknowledgment of the parochialism of human sympathies the VMEMT can be regarded as humanist, a parochialism for which it then goes on to overcompensate by sacrificing the original beneficiaries of humanist fellow-feeling: human beings. The extent to which this overcompensatory logic has carried Knight and his Movement away from a humanist understanding (with its emphasis on

⁸ The website of the Voluntary Human Extinction Movement can be found at <www.vhemt.org>.

the importance of human beings to human beings) is brought out by that image of the last humans enjoying, after a long and plentiful life, their final sunsets in Edenic surroundings. Like Gulliver unable in his theoretical enthusiasm to imagine the misery of the lives of the undying Struldbruggs, so Knight too has no conception of the sadness that would engulf a human being in a world in which fellow humans only represent death. All Knight can imagine the last humans as feeling is the relief of freedom from guilt and the enjoyment of the ecological virtue of blamelessness. His eschatological *jouissance* is the pleasure of washing one's hands off the world, and the sacrifice with which this *jouissance* is bought looks like rather a good deal to him: all that humans presently alive are asked to sacrifice are their rights and desires ever to be parents. It could have been war or a crippling virus or mass-euthanasia!

The VHEMT is just one short stop on Allen Weisman's tour of the world, a degraded place wherever human beings failed to do the decent thing and disappear from it. Ballard's disaster novels also bring out that human beings are closer to an enjoyment of world destruction and more willing to court it than is compatible with a peaceful, ecologically balanced world, even when ecology is their stated concern. There is something satisfying in imagining human beings given a deserved dressing down, and fiction and thought experiments (as well as chastising voice-overs in the final seconds of nature documentaries) are needful reminders of our failings in humility. But the eschatological *jouissance* accompanying such clearings of the world of human inhabitants—whether gleeful, cool, glum, or earnest—defeats the purpose of the world as humans, the world's main molders, most readily understand it: to respond to a good number of the needs and desires of ourselves as well as the non-human sharers to whom we extend our care. The real work is the humanist undertaking of extending our sympathies and cultivating our communal wills toward a humility that can save both us and a good bit of the planet.

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生態批評、人文主義、以及末世絕爽： 談巴拉德與其《世界末日》

摘要

在本篇論文中，末世絕爽(eschatological jouissance)的概念即為一種因世界末日的殘酷而帶來的快感。英國作家巴拉德(J. G. Ballard)在1960年代創作了一系列預言生態浩劫的小說，其中，末世絕爽的概念是一大特色，在其後來的創作裡，除了末世絕爽的概念外，巴拉德的小說也出現了對生態理想主義的嘲諷。巴拉德所書寫的因世界末日所產生的快感，可被視為是對烏托邦文學的反動，以哲學詞彙來說，即是對人文主義的揚棄。在此，人文主義被定義為是一種堅持以人為本的世界觀。存在主義、後結構主義以及馬克思主義在二十世紀被視為是能取代人文主義的思潮，而他們的共同要素即是反人文主義以及對末世絕爽的開放態度。在生態批評的分流中，有某些支派即是具備上述兩個得以置換人文主義的要素，而其中，末世絕爽的概念扮演了相當重要的腳色。人文主義無法被視為是現代人面對生態浩劫的解藥，原因在於它終究還是以人能所得到最好的生活方式為優先考量。儘管如此，此篇論文意在辯證有一人文主義對於人類同情心之狹隘實有所覺察，同時呼求人類將同情心延伸到同為地球居民的非人生物上。末世絕爽做為反烏托邦小說的特質與想像，雖令人為之殘酷而顫栗，卻也因此而刺激人類將我們的同情延展至星球上的萬物。

關鍵字：人文主義，烏托邦，末世論，生態批評，巴拉德