ලි

Research article

Dominika Oramus*

The Art of Un-Making: Nagasaki, Eniwetok, Mururoa, and J.G. Ballard

https://doi.org/10.1515/culture-2019-0049 Received May 13, 2019; accepted September 25, 2019

Abstract: This paper analyzes one kind of Ballardian landscape, wastelands created by nuclear explosions, and aims at interpreting them as a study of the un-making of the human-made world. Cityscapes of ruins, crumbling concrete concourses and parking lots, abandoned barracks and military stations, radiation and mutations make Nagasaki, Eniwetok and Mururoa wasteland snap-shots of the future. In the minds of the protagonists, the un-made landscape is strangely soothing; they are attracted by the post-nuclear imagery and gladly embrace the upcoming catastrophe. Nagasaki, Eniwetok and Mururoa are the harbingers of a future where one can experience the nirvana of non-being. In this paper, I discuss the Ballardian un-making of the world and, hopefully, point to the subliminal meaning of atomic explosions in his works. To do this, I first discuss the references to the atomic bomb in Ballard's non-fiction (*A User's Guide to the Millennium*, J.G.Ballard Conversations). Then, I isolate and describe the subsequent stages of the un-making of the world using his depictions of Nagasaki (*Empire of the Sun, The Atrocity Exhibition*); Eniwetok (*The Atrocity Exhibition*, *The Terminal Beach*), and Mururoa (*Rushing to Paradise*). Finally, I suggest a hypothesis explaining the subliminal meaning of nuclear bombs with reference to Freud's theories.

Keywords: Nuclear explosions, wastelands, Nagasaki

J.G. Ballard is famous for his idiosyncratic style, created, among other things, by his obsessive repetition of motifs, themes, images and, primarily, landscapes. The iterative settings, the obsessive collage-making and the bizarre vehicles of his frequent similes give his fiction a surreal and lurid appeal. It is his *signature*, to use the term coined by Roger Luckhurst in his classic piece of Ballardian criticism, *The Angle Between the Two Walls*. Ballardian landscapes, cityscapes and mediascapes are meant to be deciphered; the reader must analyse their structure, to isolate and interpret the "quanta" of their logic. Apparently haphazard and random, the images do make sense if properly interpreted; when viewed from the right perspective, they reveal psychological insights about the way people perceive their crumbling civilization. Just as the multinamed protagonist of *The Atrocity Exhibition* stages "alternate" deaths of J.F. Kennedy and Marilyn Monroe, giving the original acts of senseless violence some profound and satisfying sense, so also, the anxiety-inducing landscapes of Ballard's fiction should be re-worked to become meaningful.

This paper analyzes one type of Ballardian landscape—wastelands created by nuclear explosions—and aims at interpreting them as a study in the un-making of the human-made world. Interestingly, in Ballard's fiction, the nuclear explosions in Japan in 1945 are collectively referred to as the Nagasaki bomb. "Hiroshima" is rarely mentioned, if at all, and it appears together with other place names. For instance, in *The Terminal Beach*, the character says goodbye to "Eniwetok. . . Los Alamos. . . Hiroshima, Alamogordo." (Ballard, *The Terminal Beach*, 153). The Nagasaki blaze is what the teenage character of the quasi-autobiographical

^{*}Corresponding author: Dominika Oramus, University of Warsaw, Institute of English Studies, 69 Hoża Street, 00-681 Warsaw, E-mail: dominika.oramus@uw.edu.pl

Empire of the Sun believes he sees in the distance, and this is probably Ballard's real memory transposed into his writing.¹

Significantly, the Nagasaki explosion was more spectacular than the Hiroshima bomb, even though it came after and caused fewer deaths. As Richard Rhodes writes in the Pulitzer-winning *The Making of the Atomic Bomb*, the city of Nagasaki is surrounded by steep hills which confined the larger explosion; instead of expanding, the blaze went up, producing a vertical mushroom – like a gigantic beacon setting the higher strata of the atmosphere ablaze. When the bomber pilot approached Nagasaki, he found the city covered with cloud and only "At the last minute a hole opened in the cloud cover long enough to give the bombardier a twenty-second visual run on a stadium several miles upriver from the origin and aiming point." (741) As a result, instead of turning a large urban area into rubble, this bomb burnt one suburban valley literally to ashes, and thus the nightmarish archetypal wasteland of contaminated deadness was created. Rhodes quotes a letter home from an American officer who visited the city a month after the explosion:

The general impression which transcends those derived from the evidence of our physical senses, is one of deadness, the absolute essence of death in the sense of finality without hope of resurrection. And all this is not localised. It's everywhere, and nothing has escaped its touch. In most ruined cities you can bury the dead, clean up the rubble, rebuild the houses and have a living city again. One feels that is not so here. (742)

For Ballard, this fiat of destruction and display of power is ambiguous. On the one hand, viewed from the perspective of the 1960's, the Nagasaki bomb marked the beginning of the Cold War and, indirectly, led to Vietnam and to the outburst of political violence described in *The Atrocity Exhibition*.² Thus the scientists responsible for the bomb's creation should feel shame and remorse. And yet, according to Ballard, the feeling of guilt of the physicists involved in the production of the bomb was most likely a myth created by authors of popular books about the Manhattan Project:

Robert Oppenheimer, director of the A-bomb project at Los Alamos, was a self – torturing neurotic who flirted with the far left and claimed that the passage from *Bhagavad-Gita* –"Now I am become death the destroyer of worlds –crossed his mind as he gazed at the first atomic explosion in New Mexico. Did it really? It seems just the sort of thing a novelist would invent." (Ballard, *A User's Guide to the Millennium*, 159)

The passage above comes from Ballard's article on modern physics, in which he also writes that he and his family survived World War II only because of the Nagasaki bomb. The spectacular display of American military power when Ballard and his family were prisoners at the Japanese POW camp for Western civilians led the Japanese to abandon the camps, leaving the civilians alive. In *The End of My War*, Ballard remembers that the Japanese military planned to close the camp and march the civilians up country to some remote spot to kill them before facing American landings in the Shanghai area. Ballard concludes, "I find wholly baffling the widespread belief today that the dropping of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs was an immoral act, even possibly a war crime to rank with Nazi genocide." (Ballard, *A User's Guide to the Millennium*, 293)

Ballard's retrospective analysis of what the making of the atomic bomb meant—how the bombing of 1945 affected both scientists involved in the Manhattan project and the late twentieth century Western

¹ In his memoirs, *Miracles of Life*, written towards the end of his life, Ballard remembers August 1945 in the POW camp and the American bombing campaign in "a strange interregnum when we were never wholly certain that the war had ended." (103) 2 For the connection between the Bomb, the Cold War and political aggression in the following decades which indirectly led to Vietnam see Paul Boyer's informative book *By the Bomb's Early Light American Thought and Culture At the Dawn of the Atomic Age*, especially pages 33-47, devoted to the postwar politics of the USA. In the following section "The Atomic Scientists: From Bomb-Makers to Political Sages" Boyer presents the involvement of the Manhattan Project scientists in the discussion concerning the Atomic Age and the newly emergent political situation. Similar points, but focused on the lives of particular physicists are made by Peter Bucky and Allen Weakland in *The Private Albert Einstein* and) Kai Bird and Martin J. Sherwin in American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer...A very thoroughly-researched account of the political rivalry between the Soviet Union And the US commenced by the impact of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings may be found in David Holloway's *Stalin and the Bomb: The Soviet Union and Atomic Energy 1939-1956*.

culture—is highly subjective. His interpretation is a provocative artistic statement, Ballard does not describe the real history of the 1940s and 1950s.

As early as 1948, Oppenheimer's former teacher Professor Patrick M.S. Blackett of Cambridge, published *Fear, War and the Bomb: Military and Political Consequences of Atomic Energy*, in which he criticised the American government for making the scientists produce that deadly weapon. Blackett's book was written in Europe and was harshly critical of the US, which shows how the bomb was perceived on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. Boyer, in the previously mentioned *By the Bomb's Early Light*, alludes to the Promethean myth when writing about the atomic physicists. He also writes about the *cultural fallout*—the confusion of people who felt "two intertwined cultural moods intense fear and somewhat unfocused conviction that the urgent ... Public response was essential." (32)

Memoirs of atomic physicists also help to place Ballard's intellectual provocations in the right historical context. Nearly forty years after leaving New Mexico, Richard Feynman, one of the youngest and brightest physicists in the Manhattan project, tries to explain the strange mixture of emotions the Los Alamos physicists felt in his memories *Surely You're Joking, Mr. Feynman*:

We *started* for a good reason, then you're working very hard to accomplish something and it's a pleasure, it's excitement. And you stop thinking, you know, you just *stop*... I returned to civilisation shortly after [the nuclear explosions] ... And I would go along and I would see people building a bridge, or they'd been making a new road. And I thought, they're *crazy*, they just don't understand, they don't *understand*. Why are they making new things? It's so useless. (136)

The suppressed guilt for having worked on nuclear physics, for having enjoyed it and for not having thought about the application of the results of his research is clearly very traumatic for Feynman. For years he refuses to talk or write about the bomb. And when he does talk in public about science philosophically "how science satisfies curiosity, how it gives you a new world view, how it gives man the ability to do things, how it gives him power – and... in view of the recent development of the atomic bomb, is it a good idea to give man that much power?" (279), he later feels ashamed and calls his propensity for asking such questions "a disease of middle age." (279) He avoids discussing his own involvement in the Manhattan Project and in his memoires he mentions but in passing that in the early sixties, when all the top physicists in the country were still giving advice to the government, he "was having no feeling of social responsibility and resisting, as much as possible, offers to go to Washington, which took a certain amount of courage in those times." (290) The message is clear enough – the government who financed the nuclear physics research and who dropped the bombs on Japan wanted American scientists to go on devising more efficient ways to kill thousands.

Yet Ballard remembers all the atrocities the Japanese committed and refuses to see them as victims of war in Asia, rather than the aggressors. He is enraged by the argument that it is worse to use atomic weapons than, say, rifles because of the genetic damage the fallout causes to future generations. Those killed in a conventional manner, with bullets to their heads, produce no descendants whatsoever and their genes are lost all the same, which is what would have probably happened to the Ballards had the Japanese had time to kill them. For Ballard the appeal and impact of the atomic bombs on the human unconscious is so great that it goes beyond any rationality. Edward Glover in *War*, *Sadism and Pacifism*, risks a hypothesis that ideas of world destruction are latent in the unconscious mind of all people. According to this view, the abundance of disaster movies and the thrill they provoke, as well as the end-of-the-world-fantasies of the clinically insane, show that we all both crave and fear total destruction. For Glover, the spectacular beacon of deadly light at the moment Nagasaki perished serves as a universal symbol of this craving:

The actual and potential destructiveness of the atomic bomb plays right into the hands of the unconscious. The most cursory study of the dream life and fantasies of the insane shows that ideas of world destruction are latent in the unconscious mind... Nagasaki destroyed by the magic of science is the nearest man has yet approached to the realisation of dreams that even during the safe immobility of sleep are accustomed to develop into nightmares of anxiety (qtd. in Ballard, *A User's Guide to the Millennium*, 138)

Ballard read Glover and was deeply moved by his ideas—he quotes the above passage twice, both in The Terminal Beach and in A Reader's Guide the Millennium in a short text reprinted from The Visual Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction, where he ironically claims that Nagasaki is the embodiment of our ultimate fantasies. In his non-fiction – journalism and reviews – Ballard was always very keen on finding echoes of the morbid fascination with the bomb in different sorts of twentieth-century art. His profound admiration for Stanley Kubrick, for instance, is connected to this director's ability to sense not only what we fear but also what we crave, "the sinister glamour and unconscious logic of technological death." (Ballard, A User's Guide to the Millennium, 19) For Ballard, Dr Strangelove; or how I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb is a masterpiece because Kubrick manages to make the audience sympathise with their naked violence, the forbidden bliss of destruction. In the titular essay of the collection, A User's Guide to the Millennium, in which Ballard lists his favourite sci-fi movies released between the 1950s and the 1980s, Kubrick's film is praised for the emotional response it provokes in contemporary spectators. Ballard claims that watching the movie: "We come to admire the magnificent B-52s with their sleek A-bombs and brave if baffled crews; we despise the wimpish president for trying to do a deal with the Kremlin, and we almost welcome the nuclear Armageddon when it comes." (19) Similarly, he praises his favourite painter, Salvador Dalí, for having managed to join the contaminated wastelands of the contemporary unconscious with Christian iconography and with "the cosmogony of the H-bomb." (94) Such a heady mixture makes Dalí's art profoundly disturbing as he appeals to the longings and anxieties that, according to Ballard, we subliminally feel. In an article entitled The Innocent as Paranoid, Ballard gives his own exegesis of Dalí's artistic career; he divides Dali's oeuvre into consecutive phases of growing emotional intensity. The last of the phases is the "Nuclear Phase. Dalí's marriage with the age of physics," (Ballard 1997, 96), during which one can see "the images of atomic physics. . . recruited to represent a pietist icon of a Renaissance Madonna" in the paintings. (94)

The above examples show the extent to which J.G. Ballard's non-fiction, essays and reviews of contemporary art express ambivalence towards the atomic bomb. In his work, the image of a nuclear explosion is a very potent symbol leading straight to our unconscious; once represented in art, atomic blasts become external expositions of latent desires.

Not surprisingly, the Nagasaki bomb appears a number of times in Ballard's own fiction, though the most famous account of the explosion is to be found in *Empire of the Sun*. Having left the Lunghua POW camp, Jim, the protagonist, and his fellow inmates march a full day on their way to Shanghai and spend the night on the football-stadium-turned-scrap-yard near Nantao. The concrete arena had once been the military headquarters for the war zone south of Shanghai. Bomb crates, wrecked cars, damaged army vehicles and concrete tunnels make the cityscape look delirious. It is there that Jim watches as "Uncle Sam threw a piece of the sun at Nagasaki." (Ballard, *Empire of the Sun*, 226) Eerie silence fills the deserted arena just after the flash. In this disaster area, Jim sees the Nagasaki bomb light up the stratosphere:

a flash of light filled the stadium, flaring over the stands in the south-west corner of the football field, as if an immense American bomb had exploded somewhere to the north-east of Shanghai... It faded within a few seconds, but its pale sheen covered everything within the stadium, the looted furniture in the stands, the cars behind the goal posts, the prisoners on the grass. They were sitting on the floor of a furnace heated by a second sun...light was a premonition of his death, the sight of his small soul joining the largest soul of the dying world. (218)

Jim welcomes the light with strange satisfaction; later in life he remembers this moment as witnessing the start of World War III and the final fulfilment of the human unconscious drive to self-destruction. The death-drive that rules Western civilisation pushes us towards desolation and self-inflicted death. What Jim is surrounded by—silence, blazing hot sun, crumbling concrete planes, pieces of military equipment scattered all over concrete concourses—together create an intoxicating scenery, and the external landscape perfectly reflects his inner self. Despite hunger and fatigue, Jim feels elation and profound satisfaction; it seems to him that he has caught a glimpse of the planet's future. Empty, contaminated by the fall-out, iridescent and silent—a landscape that is the embodiment of Nirvana. In other words, it is what the whole earth is going to look just like after the global nuclear disaster that he believes is coming soon: pieces of concrete, ruined cityscapes, heat, and the ultimate end of all life and all suffering.

Ballard's symbolic association of the themes of waste, human-made cityscape and the unconscious have been noted by many critics. Andrzej Gasiorek in *J.G. Ballard* analyses the way Jim's imagination works. In the wasteland full of scattered pieces of equipment, dead bodies and cracked cement Jim "imagines resurrecting the dead so that they can retake their places in the theatre of war," (129) as such an image somehow fills his unconscious need to complete the cycle of violence. Gasiorek also proposes to discuss Ballard's wastelands in relation to his longest story *The Ultimate City*, which "recapitulates the history of a city live from formation descent into civic corruption, social conflict, violence, crime and chaos." (129) Gasiorek very rightly places his reading of the story in the context of Freud's *Civilisation and its Discontents* and discusses how a large cityscape is a manifestation of death-instinct: "the city seems to welcome, perhaps even to encourage, the inscription of violence on its topography in the form of smashed cars, shattered glass and looted shops." (131)

In her illuminative essay "Waste in J.G. Ballard's Urban Disaster Trilogy" Rachelle Dini demonstrates that waste in Ballard's "Crash, Concrete Island, and High-Rise. . . is the catalyst for each narrative, a subject of enquiry in its own right." (132) Wastelands generate stories and, moreover, Ballardian narrators find them strangely comforting. The cityspace filled with industrial waste corresponds to the unconscious : "Ballard's urban disaster posits waste as simultaneously estranging and reassuring . . . the waste objects in these novels prove very useful indeed, providing a means to approach the surreal quality of lived experience in advanced capitalist society." (142) William Viney in "A Fierce and Wayward Beauty" goes a step further for him Empire of the Sun and Ballardian urban catastrophes are symbolically linked by the motif of waste:

In this way, *Empire of the Sun* marks the beginning of the atomic era, inaugurating the possibility that the human race can come to a sudden and violent end. With their shared interest in abrupt and unexpected renegotiations of value, *High Rise*, *Concrete Island* and *Crash* all share this revelation of potential apocalypse. The minute and the enormous, the antique and the everyday, the built environment and the natural, the organic and the inorganic; Ballard allows every aspect of modernity to be transferred into waste. (Viney)

The atom bomb has the surreal potential of turning us all to waste which offers some unconscious satisfaction, Ballard seems to be ironically saying.

The motif of the Nagasaki bomb is quite prominent in *The Atrocity Exhibition*, Ballard's surreal collage of snapshots of the 1960s mediascape. Devoted to American political assassinations in that decade, and the culture of simulacra in the West, the book presents alternate scenarios of the main character's mental breakdown. The character's name changes from chapter to chapter – Travis, Talbot, Traven, Tallis, Trabert, Talbert, Travers – yet its first letter, T, is always retained, and it seems convenient to refer to him as T.3 In the 1960s cityscape of highways, shopping-malls, car parks, concrete concourses and gigantic billboards exhibiting blown-up celebrity faces, T re-enacts the bizarre murders and assassinations of actresses and politicians (J.F. Kennedy, Marilyn Monroe, Robert Kennedy, Lee Harvey Oswald and others). He is striving to rework the violent images of the decade (the Zapruder's film of JF Kennedy's assassination, Vietnam newsreels) in such a way as to make some profound psychological sense of them. In T's mind the psychic event that was Nagasaki is the ultimate source of the late twentieth-century obsession with death and waste. The self-destructive, violent culture of the 1960s re-enacts nuclear explosions: the footage from Vietnam, the pictures of thermonuclear tests, serial deaths of celebrities: violent collages constructed by T suddenly make sense when juxtaposed with the human invention of the atom bomb. The mastery of nuclear power gives the human race the ability to un-make the world. In The Assassination Weapon chapter we see how Ballard gradually suggests this interpretation. Dr Nathan investigates T's case and attempts to rationalise his apparently insane behaviour. He finds and examines "the treasures he has left us—an entry from Oswald's Historic Diary, a much-thumbed reproduction of Magritte's 'Annunciation', and the mass numbers of the first 12 radioactive nuclides." (Ballard, The Atrocity Exhibition, 42) At this moment T is hiding in an apartment of the girl who realises he's obsessed with, "Jackie Kennedy, Oswald and Eniwetok." We learn that, "in the three-days since she had found him on the motorway she had discovered only that

³ I follow in the footsteps of Roger Luckhurst, who, in *The Angle Between the Two Walls*, describes T as one composite character, calling him *T-cell*.

he was a former H-bombed pilot, for some reason carrying World War III in his head." (43-44) The right guess would be that WW III stands for the final transformation into waste, the end of the process initiated in Nagasaki. Yet only towards the end of the chapter Dr Nathan explains T's trauma and his psychotic behaviour: "in the case under consideration the previous career of the patient as a military pilot should be noted, and the unconscious role of thermonuclear weapons in bringing about the total fusion and non-differentiation of all matter." (46) – Ballard seems again ironically celebrate the final nuclear Armageddon, the un-making of the world.

Instead of signifying cruelty and chaos, the re-arranged iconography of political assassinations and war in Asia is intended to constitute a study in the un-making of the contemporary world, images of the approaching end of civilization. Each chapter-story in the book is another attempt by T to escape the nightmarish America of the 1960s into a world of violent but meaningful fantasies. As early as Chapter I, we see him in a military area running across broken concrete among the bunkers. In a paragraph titled Dissociation: Who Laughed at Nagasaki, he meets a bomber pilot and a beautiful young woman with radiation burns; together they set off on a strange mental journey: "At dawn, after driving all night, they reached the suburbs of Hell. The pale flares from the petrochemical plants illuminated the wet cobbles. No one would meet them there." (4) In the following chapters, T is often surrounded by rusty contraptions, crumbling concrete buildings, pieces of vehicles, mannequins and dummies.⁴ Simulacra of life, images of fire-raids and, perhaps, externalised memories of World War II (or the current war in south-east Asia) are used to produce bizarre collages. The readers are encouraged to make their own guesses: perhaps, T himself was a bomber pilot during World War II, and his mental breakdown prompted by the images of Vietnam ultimately stems from suppressed remorse, from unresolved trauma? Is he the one who laughed at Nagasaki? Yet at the bottom of all bloody fantasies featuring "above all, the montage landscapes of war and death; newsreels from the Congo and Vietnam, execution squad instruction films," lie memories of the war in Asia, of the Nagasaki bomb: "of this early period of his life, Travers wrote: Two weeks after the end of World War II my parents and I left Lunghua internment camp and returned to our house in Shanghai, which had been occupied by the Japanese gendarmerie." (112)

Moreover, T used to work in a mental institution, and the titular 'atrocity exhibition' is an annual display of paintings created by patients in their art therapy groups. T describes their works as: "these bizarre images, with their fusion of Eniwetok and Luna Park." (1) Such imagery resonates in his troubled unconscious; T's status at the asylum changes from that of a doctor to that of a patient. The insane instinctively react to the subliminal meaning of the culture of the 1960s – the violent images on TV screens showing the assassination of JFK and Vietnam footage. Their paintings help to anatomise the traumatised contemporary society, to un-make its cityscapes and mediascapes and to isolate quanta of paranoia. The insane paint the island of Anywhere talk the site of the H-bomb nuclear tEniwetok —the site of the H-bomb tests in the Marshall Islands is the second Nagasaki. In the imagination of the insane, Eniwetok is paired with Luna Park, the favourite funfair of the Surrealists. Ballard explains this strange juxtaposition in the commentary to *The Atrocity Exhibition*, which he wrote for the 2001 edition of the book: "the endless newsreel clips of nuclear explosions that we saw on TV in the 1960s (a powerful incitement to the psychotic imagination, sanctioning everything) did have a carnival air, a media phenomenon which Stanley Kubrick caught perfectly in the end of *Dr Strangelove*." (14)

The televised image of an H-bomb exploding would satisfy the cravings for the bizarre and violent that Dalí, Marguerite and Ernst felt. Eniwetok grows to be a symbol more potent than Nagasaki as the island is in the middle of nowhere, a depopulated, empty landscape. Abandoned after the tests were over, Eniwetok becomes a polluted display of the ruins of scientific laboratories and military bases, a picture of what our planet is going to look like after the final war. This plot of the un-made world is a piece of the future, a glimpse of what will happen after the nuclear Armageddon that is waiting in the wings.

⁴ Compare Dini: "the crashed cars, dismembered mannequins, and shattered domestic objects in Ballard's novels are central to this aesthetic credo. These objects activate us with the liveliness that dulls the sheen of the commodities with which we ourselves are surrounded. (Dini 2016, 132)

⁵ The motif of Ballardian collages which serve as a tool to recycle surrealist images is analyzed in detail in Jeanette Baxter's *J.G. Ballard's Surrealist Imagination.*(69)

Eniwetok is a study of the un-making of the world, and stripping it bare of its consequent strata of meanings is the subject of *The Terminal Beach*, whose protagonist, Traven (yet another T), is motivated to visit the island by some strange subliminal compulsion. For him, Eniwetok is covered by strange ciphers: "the heat released by the weapons tests had fused the sand and the double line of fossil imprints, uncovered by the evening air, wound its serpentine way among the hollows like a footfalls of an ancient saurian." (Ballard, *The Terminal Beach*, 136) Traven studies the fused layers of pseudo-geological epochs microseconds in duration of "thermonuclear time," (139) for him, "this island is a state of mind," (37) the I-land of inner space externalised for scrutiny and de-coding. The time of day he cherishes most is "when the sun was at Zenith – on Eniwetok, the thermo-nuclear noon," (137) which uncannily resembles a nuclear blast, and he strives to imagine the sort of inhabitants who should populate "this minimal concrete city." (137) Traven is keen on un-making Eniwetok – first, he notices the historical reversion: ages ago primitive people assimilated elements of the external world to their own psyche; the contemporary Westerners reverse the process. Eniwetok resonates so strongly with Traven's unconscious because of its artificiality; this deteriorating world was produced, not created:

Despite the sand and the few anaemic palms, the entire landscape of the island was synthetic, a man-made artefact with all the associations of a vast system of derelict concrete motor-ways. Since the moratorium on atomic tests, the island had been abandoned by the Atomic Energy Commission, and the wilderness of weapons, aisles, towers and blockhouses ruled out any attempt to return to its natural state. (138)

The abandoned wrecks of planes are "like dead reptile birds," (Ballard 1979, 140) and the inhabitants of the islands resemble thermonuclear shadows "on the grey walls where the faint outlines of human forms in stylised poses, the flash-shadows of the target community burnt into the cement." (144) In the pens at the abandoned scientific stations, strange luminescent fish and plants perpetuate themselves in the remains of contaminated water, producing mutated offspring. Traven feels at ease on Eniwetok, among the half-melted dummies of the target community he attempts to invoke "a repressed premonition of our own deaths." (147) This is the revelation contemporary people try to keep latent. The burning, purging sun, whiteness, emptiness and silence in the ruins feel like a repetition of the Nagasaki blaze. William Viney's discussion of modernity and waste is relevant at this point: "The minute and the enormous, the antique and the everyday, the built environment and the natural, the organic and the inorganic; Ballard allows every aspect of modernity to be transferred into waste. Ballardian waste is so ubiquitous that what we ordinarily view as secret and hidden becomes the abundantly normal, a permanent feature of our lived environment." (Viney) The scientists who finally find Traven guess he is a former World War II pilot, guilt-ridden and devoted to stopping the thermonuclear tests, but the truth eludes them. They fail to notice that Traven is strangely happy, waiting for death from exposure and malnutrition; he knows that the Nirvana of nonbeing lies just ahead of him, while the rest of the human race must wait for it. "For me the hydrogen bomb was a symbol of absolute freedom. I feel it's given me the right—the obligation, even—to do anything I want," he says, and yet we learn that the memories of World War II torment him. Nagasaki and Hiroshima meant the beginning of the end, "he thought of Eatherly: the prototypal Pre-Third Man —dating the Pre-Third from August 6, 1945—carrying a full load of cosmic guilt." (Ballard, The Terminal Beach, 150) The name of the Enola Gay bomber pilot, Eatherly, speaks volumes here.

Thinking about the Cold War, which the moratorium on atomic tests apparently ended, he calls it the Pre-Third. Just like Jim in *Empire of the Sun* is proud of having witnessed the beginning of World War III, Traven in *The Terminal Beach* also longs for this final conflict, knowing that humankind is going to eagerly embrace it. This is why the period preceding it – the (Pre-Third) Cold War – has such a strong subliminal appeal: the explosions of Nagasaki and Eniwetok respectively embody the bliss of the coming disaster. Therefore, at the end of the story we see Traven dying blissfully, the WWII bombers come back to see him off: straight from his traumatized memory: "Waves broke on the distant shore and the burning bombers fell rule through his dreams." (157)

Even long after the end of the Cold War, Gorbachev's *perestroika* and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, atomic explosions continue to have a very strong appeal for Ballard's characters—even though they

live in what is, to all intents and purposes, a safe, post-atomic era. Neil, the teenage protagonist of *Rushing to Paradise*, a novel whose action takes place in the mid-1990s, is thrilled by the sight of an atomic test ground. He finds himself on the island of Saint-Esprit, "the disused nuclear-test island... a junior and more accessible cousin of the sinister Mururoa," (Ballard, *Rushing to Paradise*, 10) which is full of the refuse left by French engineers, "a moraine of abandoned military equipment." (19) Instead of lush vegetation, the empty island is covered by rumbling cement:

The airstrip swept past them, freshly surfaced with pulverised coral, its eerie geometry forming the outlines of an immense white alter among the trees. A camouflaged radio-cabin stood in the undergrowth fifty yards from them, aerials pointing to the empty sky. At its southern limit the airstrip ended in a barrier of dunes, where an army bulldozer sat with its scoop sunk in the sand. (19)

This landscape is strangely reminiscent of the post-apocalyptic fantasies of T: the atoll is empty and desolate and filled with scattered military equipment. Neil, just like Maitland in *Concrete Island* is marooned on the island. Looking around, he thinks of the newsreels of atomic tests and tellingly imagines: "a bomb donated at its apex, releasing a ball of plasma hotter than the sun." (15) By some inherited instinct, this boy born in the late 1970s grasps the symbolic meaning of the island. Despite the relaxed political situation, the island has retained its subliminal meaning: "no bomb had ever exploded on Saint-Esprit, but the atoll, like Eniwetok, Mururoa and Bikini, was a demonstration model of Armageddon, a dream of war and death that lay beyond the reach of any moratorium." (16) Asked why he agreed to go there, the boy explains that Saint-Esprit is a nuclear test site, like Eniwetok and Kwajalein Atoll, and he wanted to see it because it might be where the future begins. According to his mother, the boy's strange craving is in his genes:

Neil secretly admired the French for their determination to maintain a nuclear arsenal, just as he admired the great physicists who had worked on the wartime Manhattan Project. As a young air force radiologist in the 1960s Neil's father had attended the British nuclear trials held at the Maralinga test site in Australia, and his widow now claimed that her husband's cancer could be traced back to these poorly monitored atomic explosions. She often stared at Neil as if wondering whether his father's irradiated genes had helped to produce the same self-contained and wayward youth. (33)

The archetypal search for an absent father motivates Neil to set on his journey, but once he is on the test site, the very images of the nuclear military base excite the boy. He remembers how, still in Britain, he rode out to the cruise missile base at Greenham Commons to experience "the memory of the nuclear weapons in their silos." (33). Thus, although there is no actual nuclear explosion in this novel, only memories of midtwentieth-century ones (and an imagined blast of the future), the teenage protagonist shares Jim's and T's illicit love for the bomb. The book ends with Neil leaving the island but imagining "life among the sand bars in a nuclear shelter," (239) which is what he desperately desires.

In all of the above-mentioned Ballardian fictions, the atomic bomb stands for an ultimate and eagerly anticipated catastrophe. The A-bomb and the H-bomb are harbingers of the un-made world of crumbling artificial cityscapes, bathed in a deadly blaze and surrounded by silence. In *J.G. Ballard's Surrealist Imagination: Spectacular Authorship*, Jeanette Baxter discusses the connection between Ballard's love for Surrealism and his recurrent depictions of the atrocities of modern history.

Baxter claims:

[B]y tracing the visual contents, contexts and intertexts (paintings, photographs, sculptures) of Ballard's surrealist writings, I suggest that the very different historical picture of the author and his work begins to surface. The legacies of World War II, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Auschwitz, Vietnam, the Gulf Wars and 9/11 are sustained historical signatures which repeat endlessly across Ballard's imagination. Following the Surrealists' interest in Freudian psychoanalysis Ballard incorporates visual documents into the body of his written texts, I argue, as the means of assessing the historical unconscious, and of raising difficult yet exigent questions pertaining to historical representation, trauma, and memory. (2)

Asked in an interview why he has the constant propensity for creating such surreal wastelands Ballard explained:

I think the Surrealist formula tapped something within my own experiences in Shanghai and China before and during the Second World War, when Shanghai itself was a kind of Surrealist landscape in which all of the malevolent elements of the unconscious were made manifest in this bizarre city. When I came to England, I set about as a Science-Fiction writer using the techniques of Surrealism to remake contemporary Western Europe (and the United States, by proxy) into something consonant with the landscapes of wartime Shanghai. I assume that explains everything. (Vale, J.G. Ballard. Conversations, 279)

Biographically⁶ and psychologically, this explanation is probably true and may well "explain everything". Ballard has always been keen on saying that World War II is the true spiritual beginning of his output. "I have often thought writers don't necessarily write their books in their real order. *Empire of the Sun* may well be my first novel, which I just happened to write when I was fifty-four." (Self, Junk Mail, 360) This quote is typical for him, as he both comments on his fiction (suggesting that it should be read as springing from the personal experiences described in *Empire of the Sun*) and, at the same time, he self-fashions his literary persona. Thus, he creates a meta-narrative of his life as a story starting with the war and the internment, matters which have had a huge impact on his imagination and the type of fiction he writes. Moreover, the war in Ballard's fiction, in being his own artistic beginning, is also a source of the post-traumatic and violent culture we now live in. In The Empires of J. G. Ballard David Ian Paddy makes a very important claim concerning Ballard's own self-portraiture: he "forever saw himself as a man at odds with his home country of England, at sea in the foreign kingdom." (5) It is from such a detached perspective that he describes atrocities and war.

And yet, intellectually speaking, Ballard's standpoint is slightly more complex than he openly admits. Complimenting Dalí in the already mentioned essay The Innocent as Paranoid Ballard observes: "Dalí's paintings constitute a body of prophecy about ourselves unequalled in accuracy since Freud's Civilisation and its Discontents." (Ballard, A User's Guide to the Millennium, 91) Linking his love for pictorial Surrealism with late Freudian theory, he quite explicitly points to the dominant role in his oeuvre of the death-instinct, which is in its ascendant after World War II. In his conversation with Graeme Revel, Ballard adds:

if you read the grimly wonderful last paragraph of Civilisation and its Discontents which was one of [Freud's] last books written when he managed to get out of Austria and make it to Hampstead in North London for the last year or two of his life, he was more or less saying that human beings now have the power to destroy themselves utterly if they wanted... One senses that the Age of Reason has now begun to fade... The flight of reason leaves people with these partly conscious notions that perhaps they can rely on the *irrational*. Psychopathology offers a better guarantor of their own freedom. (Vale, J.G. Ballard. Conversations, 53)

According to Ballard Freud's psychology marks the end of the Age of Reason. Humans' propensity for projecting their inner feelings and fears onto landscapes, and then considering those outer phenomena to be actual sources of emotions that come from inside is—for Ballard —Freud's most important discovery. Nuclear explosions serve in Ballard's texts as symbolic reversals of this process. The act of un-making the world consists of scraping away consecutive layers of artificial meanings. By destroying the human-made world, nuclear blasts reveal a hidden truth: we long for disaster. The nuclear Armageddon is sure to end all life and thus all pain and suffering. For Ballard, our civilisation has already reached its natural life-span and, subliminally, we want it to end, the invention of nuclear weapons serves this purpose splendidly.

In Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1919), a later essay by Freud to which Ballard's work also frequently makes reference, the psychoanalyst admits that his theory that the pleasure principle and the reality principle co-operate in order to give us maximum satisfaction while at the same time protecting us from the pitiful consequences of immediate gratification fails to explain human behaviour. He also admits that the drive to love, the drive to perpetuate, and the drive to survive are superficial and evolutionally new: underneath there lies something far more archaic. Thus, he claims, we unconsciously still remember being inorganic; on a certain level of microbiological or molecular make-up, we still are. In this blessed state without pain, we have no desire and no frustration. Nagasaki, Eniwetok and Mururoa, the sites of the actual nuclear explosions, as the most violent and morbid of human achievements, are symbols of such a return to inorganic matter. And this is why they have such a strong uncanny appeal for the protagonists of *Empire of the Sun, The Atrocity Exhibition, The Terminal Beach* and *Rushing to Paradise*. The cityscapes of ruins, the crumbling concrete concourses and parking lots, the abandoned barracks and military stations, the radiation and the mutations make the Nagasaki, Eniwetok and Mururoa wastelands snap-shots of the future. In the minds of the protagonists, the un-made landscape is strangely soothing: they are attracted by the post-nuclear imagery and gladly embrace the impending catastrophe. Nagasaki, Eniwetok and Mururoa are the harbingers of the future, places where one can experience the nirvana of non-being.

Works Cited

Ballard, J.G. The Terminal Beach. Penguin Books, 1979.

Ballard, J.G. Empire of the Sun. Book Club Associates, 1985.

Ballard, J.G. Rushing to Paradise. Flamingo, 1995.

Ballard, J.G. A User's Guide to the Millennium. Flamingo, 1997.

Ballard, J.G. The Atrocity Exhibition. Flamingo, 2001.

Ballard, J.G. Miracles of Life. The Fourth Estate, 2008.

Baxter, J. J.G. Ballard's Surrealist Imagination: Spectacular Authorship. Ashgate, 2009.

Bird, Kai and Martin J. Sherwin. American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer. A. A. Knoof, 2005.

Boyer, Paul. By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age. The University of Carolina Press, 1994.

Dini, R. Consumerism, Waste and Re-use in Twentieth-century Fiction: Legacies of the Avant-Garde. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

Dini, R. "The Problem of This Trash Society': Anthropogenic Waste and the Neoliberal City in *Super-Cannes*, *Millennium People* and *Kingdom Come*. *C21 Literature: Journal of 21st-century Writings*, 6(1): 4, pp. 1–26.

Feynman, Richard. Surely You Are Joking Mr. Feynman. Vintage, 1992.

Freud, Sigmund. Beyond the Pleasure Principle. Translated by James Strachev, Bantam Books, 1967.

Gasiorek, A. J.G. Ballard. Manchester University Press, 2005.

Luckhurst, Roger. 'The Angle Between Two Walls'. The Fiction of J.G. Ballard. Liverpool University Press, 1997.

Paddy, David Ian. The Empires of J.G. Ballard: An Imagined Geography. Gylphi, 2015.

Rhodes, Richard. Making of the Atomic Bomb. Simon and Schuster, 1986.

Self, Will. Junk Mail. Penguin Books, 1995.

Vale, V. J.G. Ballard. Conversations. RE/Search Publications, 2005.

Viney, William. "'A fierce and wayward beauty': Waste in the Fiction of J.G. Ballard." Ballardian, 2007, www.ballardian. com/a-fierce-and-wayward-beauty-part-3/.

⁸ Compare the writings of Rachelle Dini who in the already quoted *Waste in J.G. Ballard's Urban Disaster Trilogy* as well as in the article *The Problem of This Trash Society': Anthropogenic Waste and the Neoliberal City in Super-Cannes, Millennium People and Kingdom Come.* analyses the uncanny category of the *liveliness* of waste.