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Ecological Crises and Human Degeneration in J. G. Ballard's *The Wind from Nowhere*

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Abstract:

The present paper deals with the ecological crises reflected in the select novel of J. G. Ballard. The dystopian world created in this novel is the result of the clash between Nature and Culture. The scientific and technological advancements transform earth and earthly civilization into a decoy. The imaginative faculty of the author creates the worst picture of the world by extending the contemporary problems to an extended that lead entire humanity towards the peculiar end. The present paper focuses how J. G. Ballard logically uses the contemporary problems to depict the future destruction. *The Wind from Nowhere* (1961) is an environmental catastrophic dystopian fiction in which Ballard has used fast moving wind as a destructive agent. Furious wind represents dystopian scenario in the novel. The narrator assumes and explores that the change in environment incurred by dystopian aspects which increases the wind speed and destructs the surface of the earth. It is a dystopian story of a crisis from seemingly mild first signs through steadily declining conditions until a resolution is reached. The resolutions of dystopian novels usually involve scientific breakthroughs that are proofs of human resourcefulness and courage against fearful odds. Like other natural dystopian novels of J. G. Ballard, this novel assumes that man cannot conquer simple but unstoppable modifications in natural conditions.

Keywords: dystopian world, catastrophic dystopian fiction, technological advancement.

This novel projects nuisance to shipping and air travel increases and at soil layer found at the Earth's top stripped away, it is depicted as everywhere one can find rotten things and dead bodies of animals as well as human beings, buildings are collapsed and seaboard cities went under the water due to vibrant wind. Ancient monument and other important places like H-bomb shelters are provided necessary security. The threat of wind with the possible scientific explanation is mentioned in the novel:

Recently our monitors have detected unusually high levels of cosmic radiation. All electro-magnetic wave forms have mass – perhaps a vast tangential stream of cosmic radiation exploded from the sun during the solar eclipse a month ago, struck the earth on one exposed hemisphere, and its gravitational drag might have set in motion the huge cyclone revolving round the earth's axis at this moment. (48)

Scientific correlation of cosmic radiation, electro-magnetic waves, solar eclipse, gravitational drag and huge cyclone give hint of manmade dystopian society. It is also notable that the novel speaks about outraged Providence of mankind and its result that is the increased speed of wind. Perfect image of the destructed world is colored with the monstrous speed of wind reflects the image of dystopian society. The dual between nature and man is described with 500 miles per hour speed of wind and it is also pictured how man is helpless when he faces natural disaster. This dystopian vision is reflected with such examples:

The walls are thirty feet thick; they'll carry the impact of a dozen hydrogen bombs. Five hundred miles an hour is a trivial speed. The paper-thin plating of aircraft fuselages withstand it comfortably. (61)

People tried to fight against the wind and tried to overcome the dystopian society, but in vain. Thirty feet thick walls and other preparations are proved trivial at last. The narrator has brilliantly explained the things scientifically and showed human experiments with nature with the help of scientific facts. Human race developed science and scientific theories in order to overcome nature and natural calamities. Human race tried to show their supremacy over the universe with the help of science, but in vain. It is proved at last that one should not break or challenge the rules of nature or should be ready to face nature as a destroyer instead of the survivor. It is proved and seen in the novel, that if someone tries to challenge or break the order of nature, it will revolt against the human world, which is the universal truth. It is suggested in the novel:

Suddenly Hardoon woke out of his trance and stabbed the two buttons. The sound abruptly fell away, and the shutters glided back and locked across the window....For a moment Hardoon stared at the darkened panels. "Its force is incredible," he commented to Maitland. "Nature herself in revolt, in her purest, most elemental form. And where is Man, her prime enemy? For the most part vanquished, utterly defeated, hiding below ground like a terror-stricken mole, or wandering about blindly down dark tunnels." (141)

The novel projects the duel between the character of Hardoon and the wind. According to Hardoon, the cause of the wind seems to be more mysterious than cosmic radiation. Hardoon represents the human race try to conquer nature as well as natural calamities.

Hardoon is the representative of the mankind who has strong belief in technological civilization, Cement Jungles and egoistic anthropocentric assumptions. Ballard has brilliantly personified such supreme examples in this dystopian science fiction. The wind represents a final judgment on the deeds of dystopian society. A society believes in complacent, pleasure seeking and frivolous things. Existing society is such which is driven by vanity and always improvidently exploit natural resources. Hardoon the character of

this novel committed fundamental cultural mistake. He responded to the monstrous wind as if he can defeat it with the help of his aids of science and technology which can be bought with the help of wealth. According to him:

On the whole, people had shown less resourcefulness and flexibility, less foresight, than a wild bird or animal would. Their basic survival instincts had been so dulled, so overlaid by mechanisms designed to serve secondary appetites, that they were totally unable to protect themselves.

He listened to Symington complete the picture. (104)

J. G. Ballard has got distinct features as far as the directions in which he moves in the dystopian Science Fictions. He uses simple devices to understand and enjoy the novel. He never confuses reader by adding complexity. While reading *The Wind from Nowhereno* one bothers to understand the reasons and impacts of calamities. No one takes efforts to ask queries to Ballard for his dystopian vision. While reading novels the reader visualizes future in context of dystopia. Ballard creates the world of mystery with the help of Science Fiction writing technique. Excitement and action are generated by human endeavor to fight for survival. Characters talk about the present conditions in such a way that the reader finds ease while visualizing the conditions while reading the novel:

The captain nodded somberly. "That's just about it. God knows what's going to happen when they decide to close this place. It's cozy down here now, but we're on board a sinking ship. There's only about one week's supply of generator ... At present we're pumping it out at the rate of about a thousand gallons an hour."(145)

Ballard stresses the element of Natural Decay and Decay of Civilization in this novel. It is related to the life of human being in the context of Nature.

The dystopian aspects reflected in this novel are mystically related to the order in nature. Disturbance in the order of nature by mankind leads to the dystopia. Though, it is vaguely explained by solar flares and meteorological conditions, Ballard presented the same idea by the traditional stages of the theology of death and final destiny in progression in order to get the dystopian touch to the novel. Freakish weather and the omnipresent dust is fantastic assumption of the novel. It is due to the wind begins to strip off the soil. At the very beginning of the novel, portents of the coming evils that is the freakish weather came due to conversational of the wind is discussed. The leading characters of the novel are meaningless and memorize predicament of the life. The whole mankind is mere characters controlled by the catastrophe caused by dystopian nature, as it is discussed:

...the great fragment of wall was moving slowly forward into the face of the wind. Maitland pointed at the sky around them. "The air's lighter already! The wind's dying down, you can hear it. It's finally subsiding!"...The sky

itself had lightened, was now an overcast gray, the sweeping pathways across it inclined slightly downward....(225)

The difference between damned and the elect seemed to be theological but in actual sense it is moral. As a poetic license in the novel, fortitude and selflessness are rewarded by survival and evil is punished. Thus, another motif of Ballard's dystopia of natural disaster is to focus the spiritual reality of the universe.

In order to present reality of dystopia, Ballard tries to present egoistic nature of man in relation to the destruction caused by nature itself. The reality of scientific knowledge, discoveries and technological facilities are also proved as of no use. Spirituality is considered as a futile discussion of philosophy and science and technology gains prime importance at the beginning of the novel which proves barren at the end. 'Reason' conquered over 'Imagination and Spirituality' is rightly answered by the unanswered questions of the nature. This becomes clear when meteorological office scientist fails to explain the consequences of the speed of the wind. Doctor in his whim of logic and reason tries to explain:

...its gravitational drag might have set in motion the huge cyclone revolving round the earth's axis at this moment....

Gort pursed his lips, eying Dickinson with dry amusement. "Well, let's sincerely hope not, Doctor. We simply haven't got a big enough budget for that sort of emergency. Summing up, then, it looks as if we were optimistic a week ago when we assumed, quite naturally, that the wind would exhaust itself once it reached hurricane force....(48)

J. G. Ballard uses different metaphors, allusion, myths and stock imagery in order to produce dystopian effect on the novel. He tries to reject a religious justification too. Hardoon is one of the most important symbolic figure is used by J. G. Ballard in *The Wind from Nowhere*. He is a multimillionaire. He holds a vast construction interest with the help of developed scientific technology. He is a shipping magnate as like Maitland's father-in-law. Hardoon is the man of will to master nature. He wishes to subject the natural and human worlds to his own will, pride and ego. He is a man of action. He is the symbolic figure that may appear in various forms throughout the rest of J. G. Ballard's novel. Hardoon constructs the only building, a gigantic pyramid in the midst of the natural cataclysm. He supposes that his enormous pyramid is capable of withstanding the storm reminds the readers someone of Cheops. With the power, wealth and energy he recruits a private fascist army. His army is in black uniforms, black leather boots, signs the negative waves of dystopia. The emblematic white seal of his pyramid on the black boot signifies upcoming death and the doom. Hardoon explains Maitland about his plans and power:

Hardoon bowed his head slightly. “Doctor, you are entirely correct. The wind is, indeed, all I wish to see from here. And at the same time I intend it to see me.” ... I will not--I would do so simply on the basis of my own moral superiority. Only I, in the face of the greatest holocaust ever to strike the earth, have had the moral courage to attempt to outstare nature. (142)

It is very clear that Nature wins over the millionaire. And Hardoon is left “staring upward into the sky like some Wagnerian super-hero in a besieged Valhalla” (156).

The use of myth is another important feature of fantasy. The fantasy literature uses the myths in order to meet their literary motif of contemporary reality. The novel refers to a mythical story of ‘Tower of Babel’ from Bible. In a subplot, the demented millionaire, Hardoon, builds a giant tower, which he believes that it will be able to withstand wind. Hardoon describes his project as an attempt “to challenge the wind, asserting Man’s courage and determination to master Nature” (165). This arrogant pride is punished and the tower is uprooted and then the wind miraculously dies down. The theology of death and final destiny of the natural disaster is complete when it is personified as a supernatural force that causes suffering of man’s vanity and ambition. Through this mythological story Ballard has focused the reality of human nature.

In order to escape from the collapsing structures and wind-driven debris on the surface, the people of the earth are forced to take refuge underground. In older towns and cities, they find sanctuary in deep cellars, basements, underground tunnels, and in the catacombs. In more modern cities they shelter themselves in the subway and underground systems. They are described in the novel as:

Maitland echoed this. After his rescue at Knightsbridge he had been astounded by the efficient organization that existed below street level, a sub-world of dark labyrinthine tunnels and shafts crowded with countless thousands of almost motionless beings, huddled together on the unlit platforms with their drab bundles of possessions, waiting patiently for the wind to subside, like the denizens of some vast gallery of the dead waiting for their resurrection. (122-23)

Although this movement from the surface to the underground is entirely in accordance with and explicable in terms of the nature of the disaster, it seems also to suggest, in symbolic terms, a retreat from the surface level of consciousness, from the world of the ego, and a corresponding rapprochement with the unconsciousness.

At one point in the novel Lanyon recognizes the potential for renewal inherent in the disaster, though in keeping with his conventionally heroic character he equivocates and recants even as he speaks:

“Do you think it – will – die down?”

“Everybody keeps asking me that.” Lanyon hung his head for a moment. “It’s curious, but until I saw Charlesby lying in that ditch I didn’t feel all that concerned. In a way I was almost glad. So much of life in the States--and over here for that matter--could use a strong breath of fresh air. But I realize now that a garbage-disposal job of this size rakes away too much of the good along with the bad.” (42)

In this sense Brian Aldiss in *The Wounded Land*: J. G .Ballard (1965) has described “The Wind from Nowhere is the first of Ballard’s a pot-boiler novel” (122). It is true that the narrative method is straightforward, several adventure stories are interwoven into the apocalypse, and there is not an unhappy ending in which a few of the less unsympathetic characters survive. But in this novel, Ballard for the first time develops many of his characteristic themes and certainly the present novel provides a serious message.

In the novel, fantasy stresses the environmental aspect of modern society to view it in a more meaningful way. Ballard’s apocalyptic vision of reality warns readers that they should not disturb the natural order in this universe and should not boast of controlling nature. If someone tries to overcome nature, it will lead to catastrophe in the world. *The Wind from Nowhere* creates doomed world and it deals with the environmental disaster. It forms a unique fiction and its connection is too obvious because in this fiction mankind perishes from the onslaught of element forces by the wind. It is a doomed world. With the means of fantasy and reality, Ballard has presented vividly apocalyptic world. Thus, by using the fantasy of natural disaster, Ballard has dealt with the themes like ‘resurrection’, ‘conflict between Good and Evil’ and the ‘nature verses man’. The use of mythical stories as a source material is used to deal with the contemporary issues like ‘environmental imbalance’ and the ‘ego-centric’ nature of man. The fantasy used in it is to deal with the reality that the man cannot defeat the nature.

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