



Environmental Crisis in Urban Areas in J. G. Ballard's Short Stories

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Abstract

This study mainly applies Lawrence Buell's environmental criticism to study the urban environment in J. G. Ballard's short stories from two aspects: the environmental problems and humankind's failed resistances to them. Through studying these aspects, the paper discloses Ballard's reproof of the industrial society's disrespect towards nature and his ecological concerns over the development of both the environment and the human being. The paper will study the status of the urban environment from two angles: the absence of green landscape and the prevalence of pollution. The paper will interpret how the characters attempt to resist the predicaments but end up in failures. Though their attempts do not succeed, seeing from Buell's theory, this kind of pessimistic extremity in Ballard's imagination could also reflect his determination of arousing readers' awe in facing nature and their consciousness of environmental protection. By stressing the environmental predicaments, humankind's crises under the predicaments, and the futile resistances, Ballard's urban short stories express a profound ecological concern with the urban environment and humanity's existential status.

Keywords: Environment, crisis, urban, pollution, resistance.

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J. G. Ballard'ın Öykülerinde Kentsel Alanlardaki Çevre Krizi

Öz

Bu çalışma, Lawrence Buell'in çevreci eleştirisi bağlamında J. G. Ballard'ın kısa öykülerindeki kentsel çevreyi, çevre sorunları ve insanların bu sorunlar karşısındaki başarısız direnişleri açılarından inceleyecektir. Bu açılarından, bu çalışmada Ballard'ın endüstriyel toplumun doğaya karşı olan saygısızlığının eleştirisini, çevrenin ve insanlığın gelişimi konularındaki ekolojik kaygıları vurgulanacaktır. Makale kentsel çevrenin açmazlarını yeşil alanın yokluğu ve kirliliğin yaygınlığı bağlamında ele alırken, karakterlerin bu açmazlara karşı başarısızlıkla sonuçlanan direnişlerini analiz edecektir. Buell'in çevreci eleştirisi bağlamında söylenecek olursa, öykülerdeki karakterlerin direnişleri başarılı olamasa da, Ballard'ın kurgusundaki aşırı karamsarlık okurların doğayla yüzleşme ve çevre koruma bilincine karşı kararlılığı da yansıtabilir. Ballard'ın kentsel öyküleri, çevresel çıkmazları ve bu çıkmazlar içindeki insanlığın krizlerini ve onların beyhude direnişlerini anlatarak, kentsel çevre ve insanlığın varoluşsal durumuyla ilgili derin bir ekolojik kaygıyı ifade eder.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çevre, kriz, kentsel, kirlilik, direniş.

INTRODUCTION

The urban area has always been an important issue in English author J. G. Ballard's short stories in which "*environmentally devastated landscapes caused by technological excess and non-ecological attitudes of humankind*" (Şensoy, 2020, p. 214) are presented. Urban area in this study and Ballard's short stories refers to the area that relates to or constitutes a city or town and opposes the rural area. Ballard's concentration on the urban area permeates a large part of his short stories. This study chooses six of them as the exemplary research subjects, including "The Concentration City," "Billennium," "The Subliminal Man," "Chronopolis," "The Sound-Sweep," and "Deep End." "The Concentration City" is about a boy, Franz M., embarking upon a quest for "free space" in a city of concrete buildings but is thwarted by the infinite nature of it. "Billennium" tells a story of a young man Ward and his friend Rossiter who find an empty and large room in a crowded city where the government allotment of maximum space is four square meters per person. "The Subliminal Man" begins with a vagrant Hathaway who tries to alert the protagonist, Dr. Franklin, about the subliminal advertising of the government in a consumerist city covered mostly with road and market constructions but ends up dead. "Chronopolis" follows a boy Conrad who is morbidly obsessed with time and tries to restore a deserted megapolis where every resident was controlled by the time arrangement of the authority decades ago. "The Sound-Sweep" focuses on a mute boy Mangon, who sweeps the sound detritus of the city, helping the destitute opera singer Madame Gioconda gain a chance of singing once again in the radio program. Lastly, "Deep End" is about a young man Holliday, who lives in the only inhabitable town left on the earth, which is dying because of humankind's resource exploitation. Although these stories are entirely independent entities in their own right, they all have the same concern over the urban environment. They focus intensively on the environment's descriptions and pay attention to the interactions between the characters and their surroundings. Within this context, this study aims to analyze environmental predicaments of the urban areas and the characters' attempted resistances in Ballard's short stories applying Lawrence Buell's environmental criticism.

Buell proposes that the solution to the environmental crisis is partially embedded in humankind's environmental imagination. He claims that "*environmental crisis involves a crisis of the imagination the amelioration of which depends on finding better ways of imaging nature and humanity's relation to it*" (1995, p. 2). He believes that nature is socially constructed in fictional works, including literature and arts and the problem of the environment today is partly because of the current conception of nature which "*requires us to rethink our assumptions about the nature of representation*" (1995, p. 2). A new paradigm for envisioning the relation between humans and nonhumans is needed to solve environmental problems. He repeatedly argues, "*issues of vision, value, culture, and imagination are keys to today's environmental crises at least as fundamental as scientific research, technological know-how, and legislative regulation*" (2005, p. 5). Buell then advances a concept of environmental unconscious based on Fredric Jameson's political unconscious. Jameson believes that literary works imply political unconscious, which, in a certain sense, reflects the ideological prospect or political vision of the upper class. In contrast, Buell claims that "*a text's environmental unconscious is more deeply embedded even than its 'political unconscious*" (2005, p. 44). According to Evan Maina Mwangi, "*Lawrence Buell's term is an ecocritical repositing of Fredrick Jameson's (1981) concept of political unconscious, which proposes that literaru texts symbolically insinuate the political and social problems of the time*" (p. 189). In this sense, environmental unconsciousness refers to "*the necessarily partial realization of one's embeddedness in environment as a condition of personal and social being.*" *Environmental unconscious implies both the potentiality for a fuller coming-to-consciousness and a limit to that potentiality*" (Buell, 2005, p. 142). By reading the literary works with environmental imagination, this embedded environmental unconsciousness would lead readers' consciousness and arise their environmental awareness. So the essential purpose of environmental criticism should be to explore the literature's imaginary capacities of the environment and its relationship with a human, through which

reveals the environmental crisis, conveys the environmental anxiety, and finally invokes the environmental consciousness in readers and their commitment to the environment protection.

Buell also contends to include the urban environment into his theory of environmental imagination. The "environment" studied by ecocriticism undergoes a significant change during its development. Ecocriticism's early connotation of the environment refers to the nature or the wilderness unaffected by human beings. At the same time, later understanding of it focuses more on the urban area that bears deep interaction between nature and humankind for the reasons that "*during the last third of the twentieth century 'the environment' became front-page news*" (Buell, 2005, p. 4). Moreover, there is "*a growing malaise about modern industrial society's inability to manage its unintended environmental consequences*" (Buell, 2005, p. 5). To differentiate the green landscape that centers on the wilderness from pure nature, he designates landscapes affected by human activities like industrialization and urbanization as brown landscape, borrowing from the concept of "brownfields," which loosely means "*anthropogenically degraded landscapes, particularly in urban and industrial zones*" (Buell, 2005, p.135). One of his main purposes, Buell says, "*will be to put 'green' and 'brown' landscapes, the landscapes of exurbia and industrialization, in conversation with one other*" (Buell, 2001, p. 7). He further advocates environmental criticism as the term for the future ecological critic. One of the reasons for this is that "*'environmental' approximates better than 'eco' the hybridity of the subject at issue—all 'environments' in practice involving fusions of 'natural' and 'constructed' elements*" (Buell, 2005, p. viii). Within this context, by reading Ballard's urban environmental imagination, this study will offer a distinctively Ballardian understanding of the relation between humans and the environment.

ENVIRONMENTAL PREDICAMENTS IN URBAN ENVIRONMENT

The urban area is an important setting in literature and plays a significant role in human life. As Lewis Mumford points out, the city is "*where human experience is transformed into viable signs, symbols, patterns of conduct, systems of order. Here is where the issues of civilization are focused; here, too, ritual passes on occasion into the active drama of a fully differentiated and self-conscious society*" (1970, p. 3). Influenced by his lifelong living experiences in cities, human lives in cities have always been J. G. Ballard's concerns in his works. Urban places are not only the geographic settings of his writings but they also function "*as the arena where the urban built environment functions as the frame for social and ecological interactions*" (Schliephake, 2015, p. xviii). His stories are always full of descriptions of the urban environments. With these environments, he tries to show readers cities of the present-day warning them against the possible predicament in such cities by his bold science fiction imagination. This part of the essay will introduce the possible physical predicaments of the postmodern cities, mainly the lack of nature and the prevalence of pollution (here, the study mainly refers to noise pollution and air pollution). By illustrating the physical predicaments of the urban areas, Ballard directly appeals to readers' environmental consciousness.

The absence of nature, or the lack of greenness, is the most distinct feature in Ballard's urban short stories. In Ballardian world, "*urban areas are disproportionately responsible for many of the pressures that more natural ecosystems elsewhere experience*" (Gaston, 2010, p. 2). The environments in Ballard's short stories are primarily brown landscapes, and there is hardly any sight of the greenness within. This skipping of the green nature directly mirrors the imbalance of the urban environment in the real world. The absence of green in Ballard's short stories could be found directly and indirectly in three aspects. The first aspect is the physical dominance of the brown landscapes in Ballard's cities. In the stories, the industrial societies focus blindly on economic development and try to cover the cities with whatever construction that can facilitate consumption and production. For instance, in "The Subliminal Man," the society covers the cities with roads to make it easy for every citizen to go to market places:

Whatever other criticisms might be levelled at the present society, it certainly knew how to build roads. Eight-, ten- and twelve-lane expressways interlaced across the country, plunging from overhead causeways into the giant car parks in the centre of the cities, or dividing into the great suburban arteries with their multi-acre parking aprons around the marketing centres. Together the roadways and car parks covered more than a third of the country's entire area, and in the neighbourhood of the cities the proportion was higher. The old cities were surrounded by the vast motion sculptures of the clover-leaves and flyovers., but even so the congestion was unremitting (Ballard, 2009, p. 414)

And in "Billennium," the once green landscapes are all replaced by the brown landscapes for production: *"The countryside, as such, no longer existed. . . .The one-time fields and meadows of the world were now, in effect, factory floors, as highly mechanized and closed to the public as any industrial area"* (Ballard, 2009, p. 271). The dominance of the brown construction in these cities is so overwhelming that Ballard perceives one of them as the *"jungle of buildings"* (Ballard, 2009, p. 158).

The second aspect is that in Ballard's urban writing, the brown landscapes are the stories' main settings. For example, in "The Subliminal Man", *"where Ballard depicts an urbanized, standardized, manipulated consumerist society of the near future"* (Stephenson, 1991, p. 37), almost all the backgrounds of the events are human-made constructions with no green surroundings. The protagonist Franklin knows about the subliminal advertising warning for the first time from the vagrant Hathaway in the car park outside his workplace. He is, for the first time, conscious of being influenced by the subliminal commands from the newly erected metal signs alongside the roads in *"car marts around the highways"* (Ballard, 2009, p. 417–418). The story of "The Concentration City" narrates precisely the protagonist Franz M.'s movement around the artificial constructions in his city which *"basically has no limits and is isolated from all natural and organic wildlife"* (Tan, 2021, p. 11). Chronically, he begins in the *"chemistry cafeteria"* (Ballard, 2009, p. 25), then enters his university with *"the huge new civil engineering laboratories"* and *"the oldest quarter"* for physics and chemistry libraries (Ballard, 2009, p. 26). Later, he goes to the Coliseum, the construction site at the end of one Street, the Bio-History Museum, a restaurant where he witnesses the collapse of a house, and the police office. All these places he goes to belong to artificial constructions. In both stories, there is not a single sight of nature within vision.

The third aspect is that the brown landscapes occupy almost all the living spaces of the characters. In Ballard's urban writing, the green nature has long disappeared and been supplanted by concrete buildings. Millions of people grow up in the metropolitan milieu and know no other environment than the city streets. The urban inhabitants have to live their lives depending on them. For instance, the character Ward in "Billennium" works all day in library, rests in different cells or cubicles of rooming houses at night, and finishes his meals in the nearby food-bar. Due to the too-large population, and *"the minimum size of the living units"* (Ulav, 2014, p. 30), he is restricted from traveling to any other place. In "The Subliminal Man," Franklin spends most of his time working at the hospital or driving on the roads to the hospital. Similarly, in "Chronopolis," the people in the time city have to commute between multi-level expressways and work in the sky-sheltering office buildings every day following the authority arrangement which demonstrates *"the psychological effects of the built environment on its human inhabitants"* (Baxter and Wymer, 2012, p. 4). The brown landscapes seem to be the center of the characters' urban lives, and they have no choice but to face these cold buildings every day.

The piles of buildings and no refreshment from green nature make the characters feel trapped by the surroundings. They also tend to zoom out the feeling of being fettered by urban life. For instance, centering his life around the concrete buildings, Franklin feels the freedom he possesses is peripheral and unconsciously realizes that he envies others' *"footloose existence"* (Ballard, 2009, p. 414). Ward feels that everyone trapped in the city is *"a meaningless by-product of their own existence"* (Ballard, 2009, p. 275). Franz tries to escape from the city to flee the feeling of being bound and finds an open space

outside. However, his escapement proves what Mumford, says, "*confusion: constriction: costiveness—these are the typical by-products of metropolitan congestion. Those who seek to escape to larger quarters in the suburbs only serve to increase for those who remain the difficulty of getting beyond the spreading confines of the city*" (1970, p. 241). Instead of free space, Franz finds that the city he lives in is a larger prison that he could never escape. This kind of situation of wanting to escape but not escaping might be the common experience the urban physical environment brings for its inhabitants. This kind of situation might also be what people possibly face in their daily lives in the real world.

Ballard's environmental imagination of the absence of the green nature reflects the ecological imbalance in the urban areas. In Buell's view, texts with environmentality are "*refractions of physical environments and human interaction with those environments.*" (Buell, 2005, p. 30). These refractions "*may or may not bear a close resemblance to literal or historical environments*" (Buell, 2005, p. 30). In Ballard's stories, the imbalance of nature is evident. In the time city of "Chronopolis," the only greenness Ballard has ever mentioned is the "*small concrete gardens*" in the "*narrow intervals between the blocks*" (Ballard, 2009, p. 157). Yet, compared with the rest of the environment, it is evident that these small gardens could not change the imbalance of the urban place because of its pervasive brownness. The authority ignores these tinges of greenness and draws the city's color on the map as "*a flat, uncharted grey*" (Ballard, 2009, p. 157) compared to the green annulus outside. In "The Concentration City," nature is absent and "*the only sphere left is that of the city with its unending walls, buildings and massive structures*" (Tan, 2021, p. 11). Although the city is so gigantic that it is of "*roughly 4 x 10's cubic Great-Miles*" (Ballard, 2009, p. 30) comprising of 250 counties, each of which is around one hundred thousand cubic miles with a population of 30 million (Ballard, 2009, p. 30), there is no garden or park, or a single tree in the whole city. The only wild animal, a bird, is not wild anymore because it must be kept in the museum and will lose its wings forever. According to Mumford, the absence of nature is a problem of the modern society as he says, "*nature, except in a surviving landscape park, is scarcely to be found near the metropolis: if at all, one must look overhead, at the clouds, the sun, the moon, when they appear through the jutting towers and building blocks*" (1970, p. 252). In a sense, people in the Ballardian cities are just the reflections of the people in the real world, for they all have to look overhead at the sky sliced by the buildings to find nature.

The polluted environment is another common environmental imagination that Ballard pictures in his short stories, in addition to the brown landscapes. The rapid developments in the early and middle twentieth century not only have built many metropolises that are covered by brown constructions but also have caused devastating pollution events in human history for their lack of reverence for nature. The polluted environment is one of the common writing objects in Ballard's short stories, and it is also one of the crucial issues addressed by Buell's environmental criticism. Buell refers to the pollution, mainly to the environmental pollution that generates and spreads during human industrialization and modernization. He designates the polluted environment as one of the environments that exercise "*a tragically blighting force*" (2001, p. 130) and claims that "*the prospect of a sooner-or-later apocalypse by unintended environmental disaster came to seem likelier than apocalypse by deliberate nuclear machismo*" (2005, p. 4). As he quotes from Beck et al., since the last third of the twentieth century, there has been

a growing malaise about modern industrial society's inability to manage its unintended environmental consequences that Ulrich Beck, the Rachel Carson of contemporary social theory, calls 'reflexive modernization,' meaning, in particular, the fear that even the privileged classes of the world inhabit a global 'risk society' whose hazards cannot be anticipated, calculated, and controlled, much less escaped.
(qtd. in Buell, 2005, p. 5)

Toxic discourse is the result of encountering this fear and literature, as Buell sweepingly defines it as the "*expressed anxiety arising from the perceived threat of environmental hazard due to chemical modification by the human agency*" (2001, p. 31). In a certain sense, the aptest discourse conveys the writer's

meditations over the environmental predicament in reality and practical literary imagination that directly reflects the influences of pollution upon the environment. When it comes to the polluted environment in Ballard's short stories, the discussion of "The Sound-Sweep" is unavoidable. The story happens in a world where all the sound would never disappear but linger around the material constructions, and all types of audible music have been rendered obsolete thanks to advances in ultrasonic music. In this story, the boisterous noises are the toxic pollution in the city. Although the noise does not belong to the chemical pollution, its nature of indelibility and its harmfulness invented by Ballard could earn this story a seat in the toxic discourse. One of the characters cries out for the noise's toxicity, "*noise, noise, noise – the greatest single disease-vector of civilization. The whole world's rotting with it*" (Ballard, 2009, p. 115). The consequences of the daily sound of the city are so harmful that even "*after an audible performance of most symphonic music, walls and furniture throbbed for days with disintegrating residues that made the air seem leaden and tumid, an entire room virtually uninhabitable*" (Ballard, 2009, p. 112). Ballard's description of the lingering noise in the story reflects his sarcasm towards the noise pollution of the real world. For example, he not only titles this story as "The Sound-Sweep," but also names the job of the protagonist Mangon, who "*is a specialized technician working for a sound removal service*" (Kolioulis, 2015, p. 65), as the sound sweeper, a similar job of the garbage collectors in the real world, which indicates his negative attitude towards the noise in the real world. The severe noise pollution in his writing comes from noises the reader is familiar with their daily urban life:

the piercing whistle of jets jockeying at take-off, the ceaseless mind-sapping roar...the howling of cats and dogs...the multi-lunged tumult of cars, express trains, fairgrounds, and aircrafts...voices chattered and whined fretfully, fragments of conversation drifted aimlessly...almost every sound that reflects a rapid developing industrial society (Ballard, 2009, p. 124).

Ballard modifies these noises with adjectives "menacing" and "nightmarish." To make his irony obvious, he even calls them "*the cacophonous concrete of civilization*" (Ballard, 2009, p. 122). According to Buell, toxic discourse expresses the writer's anxiety arising from the perceived threat of environmental hazard (2001, p. 31). Under the irony is Ballard's deep worry over the damages the noise pollution causes to the urban environment as he pessimistically envisions in the text: without proper measures, "*eventually unswept sonic resonances will build up to a critical point where they'll literally start shaking buildings apart. The entire city will come down like Jericho*" (115). This story shows Ballard's criticism towards the noise pollution of the industrial society and his concern for the environment being polluted by it.

Compared to all the cities discussed above, the city in "Deep End" could be seen as Ballard's ultimate image of the city form. The story is set in the future when what Buell calls the "*apocalypse by unintended environmental disaster*" (2005, p. 4) happens. In the story, the frantic mining of the oceans providing oxygen to the atmospheres of the new planets has made a swift and irreversible decline of the oceans. The hydrogen released from the ocean mining has poisoned most of the earth. Because of the pollution from the space industry, the old metropolises in the earth are long deserted, and the old urban system is reduced to one town on the ocean beds. Although the town is the only place that the toxic pollution has not been destroyed, it is at the threat of environmental hazards generated from the combination of pollution and climate changes. Built on a strip of the ocean beds, a place where oxygen-containing air is left in the earth, the town is encircled by the poisonous hydrogen, the salt hills, which moved a little nearer each day, and the encroaching wilderness of mutating kelp, whose genetic shifts are accelerated by the radio-phosphors (Ballard, 2009, p. 237–238). The global temperature has surged to such an intolerable and harmful level that people in town have to sleep under the air-conditioner during the day and build houses with "*metal outer walls*" (Ballard, 2009, p. 235). There is no sight of animals, and the whole zoological class of fish died out ten years ago (Ballard, 2009, p. 240). From time

to time, deserted space platforms are hurling down. Surrounded by this endangered and lifeless environment, the characters could hardly have a normal life. Because this story was written in 1961 and contains space exploration, it is tenable to assume that it reflects Ballard's suspicion of the space race for its lack of concern for the environmental balance. It further portrays his disapproval of the blind development the space industry. Besides, his imagination of the ultimate form of the city may also function to disillusion people's romantic utopian fantasies of the future city.

Environmental imagination, according to Buell, "*may reconnect readers with places they have been and send them where they would otherwise never physically go*" (2001, p. 2). J. G. Ballard's environmental imagination takes readers to alternative urban areas. It shows them the predicaments of these areas, namely, the dominance of the brown construction and the prevalence of pollution. In Ballard's imagination, these two phenomena are the main problems of the urban areas. Loosely speaking, the brown construction could also be regarded as milder environmental pollution. It seems that in Ballard's short stories, the concentration of the brown buildings within a confined place would inevitably cause environmental pollution, like the "*stale and soupy*" (Ballard, 2009, p. 30) air in the "Concentration City" and the amplified human noises in the city of "Billennium" (Ballard, 2009, p. 267). Both pollutions are generated because of the constriction of the concrete buildings. Yet, no matter the brownness or the pollution, they both express Ballard's anxiety about environmental destruction. By depicting the cities covered with human-built landscapes, Ballard tries to provoke readers' urban experiences of being fettered by urban concrete buildings and directs people's attention to the environmental imbalance of the real world. By introducing urban areas being polluted by noises and poisoned because of space exploration, he expresses his ironic attitude towards the noise pollution of the industrial society and his doubt about the space race of his time. In all, he directly shows his biotic concern over the urban environment of the present day.

FAILED RESISTANCE TO CRISIS

The environmental predicaments and the human crises constitute two kinds of societies in Ballard's urban short stories. One is the society where the brown landscapes fetter people and alienate them from themselves. The other is the society where people are threatened by pollution and lose their identities. The urban inhabitants try to get out of these predicaments and crises and make great efforts to resist them. The resistances of the characters include both the efforts dealing with the material environments like escaping from the brown surroundings and saving the wildlife—the attempts coding with the immaterial aspects like destroying the controlled systems. However, despite resistance, the characters fail in one way or another. In the end, every inhabitant of these societies is trapped in predicaments and crises without salvation. Seeing from Lawrence Buell's environmental criticism, Ballard's pessimism about human destiny in the stories indicates his heavy disapproval of human beings' destruction of the environment and his eco-centric determination to "*call to fellow humans to recognize the intractable, like-it-or-not interdependence that subsists between the human and the nonhuman and to tread more lightly on the earth than it is as a practical program*" (Buell, 2005, p. 102). The brown construction enhances the characters' alienation from themselves due to social control. For the characters in the stories, there are at least two ways out of the problems: fundamentally escaping from the surroundings of the concrete buildings or revolting against social control. "The Concentration City" and "Billennium" belong to the former one, and "Chronopolis" and "The Subliminal Man" belong to the latter.

In "The Concentration City," facing the unmitigated surroundings of the concrete buildings, the stressed inhabitants struggle to find ways out of this situation, consciously or otherwise. The radical people choose to be Pyros, trying to burn the buildings out. Although they have occupied at least fifteen percent of the city's population, they are not supported by the majority of the citizens and are

suppressed by the Fire Police. The protagonist, Franz, chooses to escape from the city. The whole idea of escaping first comes from his dream of flying:

I was suspended in the air above a flat stretch of open ground, something like the floor of an enormous arena. My arms were out at my sides, and I was looking down, floating...All around me, there was free space. That was the most important part about it. There were no walls, nothing but emptiness. (Ballard, 2009, p. 24)

Franz's dream of free space derived from his wish to be free from the concentrated city. As Cenk Tan states, "open space has become the ultimate obsession for Franz as he is determined to give up on everything to reach space and fulfill his dream" (2021, p. 11). Inspired by this dream, he begins to search for open ground in the city, the failure of which leaves him with only one option: escapement—finding the free space outside the city. He decides to take one of the high-speed rail coaches in one direction as long as possible. Yet, after ten days' travel, Franz ends up in the same place where he has started. It means that Franz, together with all the other inhabitants, could never escape from this city all their lives. For Franz, who is aware of this stalemate, this city becomes the worst prison compared with other inhabitants who have not found out the truth yet (Ballard, 2009, p. 38). This travel not only aggravates the predicament Franz is in but also reveals that humankind is enmeshed in a web of their spinning. In this sense, Franz's escapement intensifies the sense of the tragedy of the city inhabitant's destiny.

Compared with "The Concentration City," the escapement in "Billennium" is more accidental as the character Ward and his close friend, Rossiter, do not mean to escape from the city in the first place. They happen to discover an empty place and earn their chance of escaping from the oppression of the compact living environment for a while. Different from Franz, Ward and Rossiter have found a free space of their own:

For an hour they exchanged places, wandering silently around the dusty room, stretching their arms out to feel its unconfined emptiness, grasping at the sensation of absolute spatial freedom...this room seemed infinitely larger, its walls huge cliffs that soared upward to the skylight (Ballard, 2009, p. 275).

Escaping from the previous cubicle of "slightly more than four and a half square metres in floor area" (Ballard, 2009, p. 267), Ward begins to appreciate his life. He and Rossiter begin to decorate their room, which they would never do before:

Gradually, they smuggled in a few items of furniture: two armchairs, a table, a lamp fed from the socket in the cubicle. The furniture was heavy and Victorian, the cheapest available, its seize emphasized the emptiness of the room. Pride of place was taken by an enormous mahogany wardrobe, fitted with carved angles and castellated mirrors...Rossiter and himself began to seem the only real inhabitants of the world... (Ballard, 2009, p. 275).

In a certain sense, these pieces of furniture symbolize their regaining of the once lost freedom. However, this freedom does not last long. Rossiter invites two girls to share this room, and these two girls invite three more older people. They have to take those pieces of furniture out one by one, and their partitions become even smaller than Ward's former cubicle. The room gradually is reduced to a miniature of their city. When they finally decided to take out the mahogany wardrobe—the last piece of their furniture—"Ward felt a sudden pang of regret, as he had done as a child when his father, in a moment of exasperation, had taken something away from him and he had known he would never see it again" (Ballard, 2009, p. 278). By taking out all the furniture, they take out their chance of being free. Once again, Ward and Rossiter are back in their fettered situation in which they always want to have a larger room as he says to himself at the end of the story, "It was a beautiful wardrobe, without doubt, but when it was gone it would make the room seem even larger" (Ballard, 2009, p. 278). The lower class and the oppressed in the

advanced industrial society often represent the sober ones under the social control and assume the responsibility of challenging the industrial System. According to Herbert Marcuse, those who live "underneath the conservative popular base" (2007, p. 260) or "those without hope" (2007, p. xxxviii) have the potential to become subjects of revolution against control society:

[...] underneath the conservative popular base is the substratum of the outcasts and outsiders, the exploited and persecuted of other races and other colors, the unemployed and the unemployable. They exist outside the democratic process; their life is the most immediate and the most real need for ending intolerable conditions and institutions. Thus their opposition is revolutionary even if their consciousness is not. (2007, p. 260)

In both "The Subliminal Man" and "Chronopolis," the most oppressed ones stand out and challenge the controlling power of the over-capitalist society. In "The Subliminal Man," Hathaway, the vagrant, is the one who attempts to resist social control. As a social outcast, Hathaway lives a bitter life in this society. He lives in the "grimy cold-water apartment in the shadow and roar of the flyover," (Ballard, 2009, p. 414) suffering from "the endless altercations with the landlord and the supermarket credit manager" (Ballard, 2009, p. 415). Unable to find a job, he could barely support his family. On the one hand, his poverty-stricken life makes him the one who most needs to end this condition. On the other hand, not working twelve hours a day allows him to stay relatively outside social control, as Franklin comments: "Hathaway still retained his freedom intact" (Ballard, 2009, p. 414). With his eagerness and freedom, Hathaway becomes the one who firstly notices the problem of the road signs and the only one who takes action to try to stop the erection of these subliminal signs, which would further strengthen the social control. He endeavors to tell the protagonist, Franklin, the truth of the signs hoping to acquire Franklin's help, and manages to uncover it in front of the public. Hathaway climbs up one of the signs and switches off its blurring effect and realize the government's mental manipulation. In this way, he wishes to destroy the remote control of society and save the inhabitants from the crisis of alienation. In "Chronopolis," it is the white-collar office workers who manage to destroy social control. In the time city, they are the most oppressed ones, as they lived in "tiny so-called modern flat, supporting through credit pyramids, an economic system that denied him all freedom of will or personality, chained chained to a thousand clocks" (Ballard, 2009, p. 162). To end this intolerable condition and institution, the workers started a revolt and managed to overthrow the "Central Time Control," hoping to regain their freedom.

However, the resistances of Hathaway and the white-collar workers fail. Franklin is shot by the police and jumps from the huge sign, ending his riot with his life. His action supposes to attract the public's attention and invoke more resistance, but it does not. Instead, people think he is out of his mind, as Franklin's wife Judith remarks when she knows what Hathaway has done, "Hathaway was in the grip of an obsession" (Ballard, 2009, p. 424). Even though Franklin believes Hathaway was right and does not accept the subliminal living, a single person's power is not enough to overcome the control of society. At the end of the story, the signs brainwash Franklin and make him eager to drive to the supermarket to book a new car. Consumerism in society finally reduces its members into walking corpses. This is what Ballard concludes metaphorically at the end of the story: "The shadows of the signs sweeps over the heads of the people on their way to the supermarket like the blades of enormous scythes" (Ballard, 2009, p. 425). It seems that the white collars' revolution succeeds as the Central Time Control goes off the stage and people move out of the time city in "Chronopolis." However, this revolution could not be labeled as utterly successful. Thirty-seven years later, Conrad, the protagonist, restores previous urban life by resetting the clocks in the time city. Fascinated by the social system of the past, Conrad says to his teacher Stacey that this "highly organized" urban life is "better than the sort of life we lead...I'd rather have the telephone for one hour a day than not at all" (Ballard, 2009, p. 161). He says these even after Stacey informs him about its control over people. Escaping and hiding from the time police and the public for

six months, he resets the great clock, the sounds of which have “*chimed out across the rooftops of the city*” (Ballard, 2009, p. 166) and signifies the eventual failure of the white-collar workers’ revolution. Instantly and inevitably, people are back to the past:

And all through the day, they would pause as the quarter and half hours reached across the miles to them, a voice from their childhoods reminding them of the ordered world of the past. They began to reset their timers by the chimes, at night before they slept they would listen to the long count of midnight, wake to hear them again in the thin clear air of the morning. (Ballard, 2009, p. 166-167)

Although Ballard does not go any further to describe people’s life under the restarted time arrangement, as more and more people are trying to live by their timers, the hope that people could be free from the social control of time is destroyed. Both the resistances of Hathaway and the white-collar workers end up in vain. The urban inhabitants still or will eventually live under the control of the industrial societies.

Confronting the polluted environment and the hazards it caused, the character in “Deep End” tries to save the environment by protecting the wildlife. The protagonist Holliday tries to protect the only fish alive to revive the earth poisoned to death by humankind. Despite the endangered environment, Holliday has the hope that the earth would be inhabitable one day, as he claims, “*I have a hunch that one day they’ll be coming back*” (Ballard, 2009, p. 238). When he and Granger discover the only fish that is still living in the Lake Atlantic, he takes much effort to look after it. Holliday works long to narrow the diameter of the fish-pool from a hundred yards to under sixty to gather the few left diluted waters and find it breadcrumbs for food. He also decides affirmatively to give up the only chance of leaving the earth to take care of the fish. He believes that one fish could change the whole situation as he says to Granger, “*that fish means that there’s still something to be done here. Earth isn’t dead and exhausted after all. We can breed new forms of life, a completely new biological kingdom*” (Ballard, 2009, p. 241). However, the efforts Holliday makes are in vain. The fish is but another evidence for Ballard to stress the anthropogenic nature of the environmental predicament. As Thomas Knowles states, “in imagining the death of the earth, Ballard memorably includes the demise of what may be the last fish on earth” (2018, p. 343). The next evening after Holliday and Granger have discovered the fish, they go back to the Lake Atlantic and find that the young Merryweather brothers, who are ready to leave the earth next week, have killed the fish just for fun. Even after Holliday stops them angrily, they do not realize that they have destroyed the last hope of the earth, as they leave the place, “*yelling and playing catch with each other, mimicking Holliday’s outrage*” (Ballard, 2009, p. 243). Thus, Holliday’s protection does not save the environment but serves to reveal the irresponsible nature of the majority of humankind.

Ballardian characters do not succeed in resisting the environmental predicaments and the crises under the environmental predicaments. In “The Concentration City,” Franz dreams of escaping the city but wakes up to find that he and all the inhabitants of this concentration city are trapped forever by the buildings built by themselves. In “Billennium,” Ward and Rossiter’s discovery of a space does not trade back their freedom but shows the reader a miniature process of how the city they live in is becoming cramped by buildings. In “The Subliminal Man,” Hathaway is not powerful enough to challenge the social system and dies in vain. At the same time, the revolutionary success of the white-collar workers in “Chronopolis” wobbles because of the ignorant Conrad. The only person who entrusts his hope on wildlife protection in “Deep End” meets his failure due to the irresponsibility of the fellow kind. In the end, they hardly change anything, and all have to bear the consequences of the environmental destruction—they are once again driven back into the control of the environment.

Seeing from the perspective of Buell’s criticism, Ballard’s pessimistic disposal of his characters’ resistances, on the one hand, shows his great reproof of humankind’s disrespect to the environment. On

the other hand, it reflects the biocentrism of his environmental imagination. Buell defines biocentrism as “the view that all organisms, including humans, are part of a larger biotic web or network or community whose interests must constrain or direct or govern the human interest” (2005, p. 134). Ballard believes that the tragic end of the characters is not about the problem of pessimism, but about the truth, he finds in his urban life—the truth that humankind is just a part of a larger biotic community. With the characters’ failed resistances, Ballard displaces humanity from an assumed top position in the ecological community and reveals no escapement from the hazards of the environment once nature is ruined, which arises a sense of awe in his readers when facing nature or the environment.

CONCLUSION

This study mainly applies Lawrence Buell’s theory of environmental imagination to explore the theme of environmental predicaments and human resistances within his short stories. In Ballard’s environmental imagination, he mainly delineates two environmental predicaments: the absence of green nature and the prevalence of pollution. The fast and imprudent development of the industrial societies in the stories cover the urban areas with brown landscapes or spread the pollution over them, which in all senses implies the societies’ defiance of the environment. This defiance turns out to be a crisis of human existence. On the one hand, the pervasive brown construction serves as a social apparatus to help the society strengthen its control over its members, turning them into objects of production and consumption and alienating them from themselves. On the other hand, the permeating pollution destroys the places the characters have connections with, erasing their sense of belonging and forcing them to lose their original identities. With this image of the environments and humankind’s crises, Ballard negates society’s imprudent and improvident treatment of nature, revealing his concerns over the environmental changes and the existential status of humankind. In his environmental imagination, Ballard does not provide any solution to these predicaments and crises. The characters facing oppression in the brown and polluted urban areas attempt to resist the predicaments and crises either by escaping for freedom, destroying social control, or trying to revive the poisoned environment. Yet all of these resistances are futile, and the living characters failback to suffer. With these tragic ends of the characters, Ballard shows his pessimism about human destiny under the destructed environment. He also uncovers his conception of biocentrism and determination to reinvoke awe and reverence for nature.

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