Araştırma Makalesi
Research Article

Gönderim Tarihi/Received Date: 17.07.2025
Kabul Tarihi/Accepted Date: 31.08.2025
Yayın Tarihi/Published Date: 10.09.2025
DOI Number: 10.46250/kulturder.1745072
Kültür Araştırmaları Dergisi, 2025, 26: 295-309

NULLA SALUS: SELF-MADE APOCALYPSE AND APOCALYPTIC BLINDNESS IN HELLO AMERICA AND IN THE COUNTRY OF LAST THINGS

Nulla Salus*: *Hello America* ve *In the Country of Last Things* Romanlarında İnsan Yapımı Kıyamet ve Apokaliptik Körlük

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ABSTRACT

The notion of apocalypse has played a significant role in storytelling throughout history, appearing in mythology, religious texts, and folklore as a reflection of societal fears, ethical concerns, and hopes for renewal. Over time, its eschatological meaning has evolved from a theological construct into a secular framework, now embodying anxieties about nuclear conflict, environmental catastrophe, and technological upheaval. This study explores *Hello America* (1981) by J.G. Ballard and *In the Country of Last Things* (1987) by Paul Auster through the concept of "apocalyptic blindness," a term that describes the unwillingness or inability to recognize signs of imminent collapse due to ideological rigidity, technological overconfidence, or historical amnesia. By first examining the core characteristics of apocalyptic literature, this analysis will then investigate these novels and examine their depictions of societal breakdown. It argues that both works ultimately reject the possibility of redemption or renewal, instead portraying collapse as either unavoidable or met with futile resistance. Through this perspective, *Hello America* and *In the Country of Last Things* present a vision of the apocalypse that focuses on disorder, despair, and the limitations of human agency in the face of systemic failure.

Keywords: apocalyptic blindness, *Hello America*, *In the Country of Last Things*, pessimism, self-made apocalypse.

ÖZ

Kıyamet kavramı, tarih boyunca hikâye anlatımında önemli bir rol oynamış; mitolojide, dini metinlerde ve folklorda, toplumsal korkuların, etik kaygıların ve yenilenme umutlarının bir yansıması olarak kendini göstermiştir. Zamanla, eskatolojik anlamı, teolojik bir yapıdan seküler bir çerçeveye evrilmiş; günümüzde ise nükleer çatışma, çevresel felaket ve teknolojik çalkantı ile bağlantılı endişeleri somut hale getirmiştir.

* "No Salvation" in Latin refers to the phrase "Ecclesiam nulla salus" (No salvation outside the Church).

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This article was checked by Turnitin.

Bu çalışma, J.G. Ballard'ın *Hello America* (1981) ve Paul Auster'ın *In the Country of Last Things* (1987) adlı eserlerini ideolojik katılık, teknolojik aşırı güven veya tarihsel amnezi nedeniyle yaklaşan çöküşün işaretlerini fark edememe veya tanımaya isteksizlik şeklinde tanımlanan bir terim olan "kıyamet körlüğü" kavramı üzerinden incelemektedir. Bu çözümleme, önce kıyamet edebiyatının temel özelliklerini ortaya koyacak, ardından sözü edilen romanları derinlemesine inceleyerek ve toplumsal çöküş tasvirlerini tartışacaktır. Bu çalışma, her iki eserin de nihayetinde kurtuluş veya yenilenme olasılığını reddettiğini; bunun yerine, çöküşü kaçınılmaz veya nafile bir direniş olarak tasvir ettiğini savunmaktadır. Bu bakış açısıyla, *Hello America* ve *In the Country of Last Things* düzensizliğe, umutsuzluğa ve sistemsel başarısızlık karşısında insan faaliyetinin sınırlamalarına odaklanan bir kıyamet ufku sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: apokaliptik körlük, *Hello America*, *In the Country of Last Things*, kötümserlik, insan yapımı kıyamet.

Introduction

The end of the world has long fascinated and captivated the human imagination. Whether in mythological narratives, biblical stories, or folk literature, it is a common motif that the end of the world reflects humanity's anxieties, moral frameworks, and hopes for renewal, often serving both as a warning and a means of exploring existential questions. The eschatological meaning of the apocalypse has been secularized, shifting from a theological perspective of divine judgment and cosmic renewal to a reflection of socio-political anxieties, ecological crises, and technological dystopias. In contemporary literature and culture, apocalyptic narratives no longer emphasize the wrath of a deity but rather focus on the consequences of human actions, such as nuclear war, ecological collapse, pandemics, or artificial intelligence surpassing human control. As Stümer points out, the eschatological meaning and motifs of the apocalypse have been "reinvigorated by secular predicaments to make sense of the terminal condition of our world climate injustice, nuclear politics, or territorial warfare" (Stümer, 2024: 1). This pivotal shift in modern apocalyptic thought emerged with the detonation of the atomic bomb at the close of World War II, marking the first time humanity could envision an end of the world entirely of its own making. No longer tied to divine wrath or supernatural forces, the apocalypse became a tangible, human-engineered possibility. In other words, a godless apocalypse became imaginable for the first time.

This article investigates J.G. Ballard's *Hello America* (1981) and Paul Auster's *In the Country of Last Things* (1987), as both novels offer distinctive

yet complementary perspectives on the apocalyptic imagination of the late twentieth century. Although emerging from different literary traditions, they converge in their rejection of eschatological or redemptive frameworks, instead presenting the apocalypse as an ongoing condition that exposes the fragility of human institutions whether ecological, political, or cultural. Written during a period marked by Cold War nuclear anxiety, environmental degradation, and widespread disillusionment with modernity, these texts examine the human capacity to respond to systemic collapse and consistently highlight the limitations of agency within such contexts. To this end, this study explores *Hello America* and *In the Country of Last Things* through the lens of "apocalyptic blindness" (Anders, 2018: 36) – a term that encapsulates the inability or refusal to recognize the signs of impending collapse, whether due to ideological fixation, technological hubris, or the disintegration of moral and historical consciousness. This study begins by examining the defining characteristics of the apocalypse, then proceeds to analyze the selected novels. It will argue that both novels ultimately fail to provide a strong recuperative resolution, instead depicting an apocalypse devoid of a transformative or redemptive force. Rather than offering a path toward renewal or salvation, *Hello America* and *In the Country of Last Things* present worlds where collapse is either accepted as inevitable or met with futile resistance, highlighting a vision of the apocalypse that is more concerned with destruction and disillusionment than with the possibility of rebirth.

Common Characteristics of Apocalyptic Narratives

There is no absolute consensus when it comes to the common characteristics of apocalyptic literary texts; however, certain core features of the genre can be listed. One of the prevailing traits of these texts is their dualistic nature. On the one hand, the apocalypse is "a transition with decadence" (Bull, 1995: 258), which focuses on destruction, decay, demise, and pessimism; on the other hand, it facilitates hope, renovation, and the opening of a new state of affairs. The dichotomic essence of the apocalypse is also stressed by Hans Magnus Enzensberger as follows: "[the] apocalypse has accompanied utopian thought since its first beginnings, pursuing it like a shadow, like a reverse side that cannot be left behind: without catastrophe, no millennium, without apocalypse, no paradise" (1982: 74).

Another significant feature of the apocalyptic genre is the element of "recurring terror and decadence" (Kermode, 2000: 9). Personal and political conflicts as well as socioeconomic crises give rise to the formation of

terror elements. Violence, a recurring motif in apocalyptic imagination, plays a major role in the occurrence of terror. On the other hand, decadence conjures up all types of social degradation and decay. The ultimate collapse of human civilization is caused not only by physical destruction or annihilation but also by moral degradation or the decline of societal structures.

A third common feature of the apocalyptic genre is the concept of "resistance" against any imperial or tyrannical forms. Violence is used "either to spark revolutionary justice for the subaltern or to rail against an oppressive empire" (Frankfurter, 2007: 121). The ultimate aim is to attain or advocate justice, equality, and hope rather than brutality and vengeance. In many cases, the apocalyptic imagination favors a reversal of the established order and gives hope to people about a possible change. For people who have suffered at the hands of tyrannical power or struggled against corrupt administration, the apocalypse becomes an indispensable aspect of survival.

Another frequently observed feature of the apocalyptic genre is the concept of "immanency". The end is no longer imminent, but it is immanent (Kermode, 2000: 25). To put it differently, the apocalypse is not always about an absolute or total annihilation of life. In modern times, it has permeated into minuscule details of everyday living. In other words, the end is present at every moment of life. This is particularly revealed through crises, which sharply blur the eschatological meaning of absolute mass extinction.

Additionally, apocalyptic texts tend to contain a sense of mystery in which supernatural forces may play a role in the destruction of the world or the salvation of people. It adds a cathartic effect to the narration and gives reassurance to the reader that the change is yet to come. While describing the end, it is possible to encounter the use of symbols drawn from ancient myths. The symbols which represent "the forces of light and goodness ultimately triumph over evil and darkness" (Collins, 1979: 8). Lastly, the end in apocalyptic literature is rarely an absolute end. In other words, something always remains even after the end. This seemingly paradoxical feature is well-illustrated by James Berger as follows:

> The end is never the end. The apocalyptic text announces and describes the end of the world, but then the text does not end, nor does the world represented in the text, and neither does the world itself. In nearly every apocalyptic representation, something remains *after the end*...Something

> is left over, and that world after the world, the post-apocalypse is usually the true object of the apocalyptic writing (1999: 6).

The primary features of the apocalypse that Berger addresses in his work concentrate on the moment of catastrophe and what occurs afterward. To illustrate, the signs predicting the end, the moment of demolition, and its aftermath are brought to the forefront. For him, apocalyptic writing is "a remainder, a symptom, an aftermath of some disorienting catastrophe" (Berger, 1999: 7).

Self-made Apocalypse and Apocalyptic Blindness

A self-made apocalypse can be described as the literal or metaphorical destruction of the world by human-caused reasons. This is also what German philosopher Günther Anders called the "naked apocalypse," which consists of "mere downfall, which doesn't represent the opening of a new, positive state of affairs..." (1997: 1). In his article "Apocalypse without Kingdom," Anders blames humans for manufacturing the end of the planet as a consequence of the production of atomic bombs. He argues that "today's apocalypse would not only be the result of our moral state of affairs, but the result of our actions, our product" (Anders, 1997: 9). The technical possibility and availability of a human-made end became permanent in the 1940s. This can be regarded as a milestone in human history as "living in the time of the end" (Anders, 1997: 10) became permanent for the first time.

This notion of a self-made apocalypse challenges conventional eschatological narratives, which often depict the end as a divinely orchestrated event leading to renewal or salvation. Instead, this perspective strips the apocalypse of any redemptive or transformative potential, reducing it to a purely destructive outcome of human agency. This idea is in parallel with contemporary anxieties surrounding not only nuclear warfare but also ecological collapse, artificial intelligence, and biotechnological risks, all of which emphasize humanity's capacity to bring about its own extinction.

Günther Anders' concept of "Apocalyptic Blindness" refers to humanity's inability to fully grasp or emotionally internalize the catastrophic consequences of its own technological advancements. He argues that the scale of destruction made possible by modern technology, especially nuclear weapons, exceeds human imagination, leading to a dangerous disconnect between knowledge and feeling (Anders, 2018: 36). People may intellectually understand the potential for annihilation, but they struggle to comprehend it on an existential or emotional level. This blindness results in

a paradox: despite living under the permanent shadow of self-destruction, society continues with daily life as if the apocalypse were an abstract or distant possibility rather than an imminent reality.

This idea connects directly to both "Promethean Shame" (Anders, 2018: 36-40) and the notion of a self-made apocalypse. While "Promethean Shame" highlights the feeling of inferiority before human-created technology, "Apocalyptic Blindness" reveals the psychological mechanisms that prevent individuals from fully acknowledging the existential threat posed by that very technology. Together, these concepts explain why the possibility of a self-made apocalypse, first introduced with nuclear weapons and now expanded to include climate change and artificial intelligence, is met with inaction or denial. The inability to emotionally register the magnitude of potential destruction allows the apocalyptic threat to persist, making Anders' warnings about human-made annihilation as relevant today as they were in his time.

Hello America

Hello America is a speculative fiction novel by the British writer J.G. Ballard, first published in 1981. Set in a dystopic future, the story unfolds in a United States that has been largely abandoned and reclaimed by nature after a series of environmental disasters. Wayne, the protagonist, along with a group of scientists and adventurers, embark on an expedition across the deserted continent, experiencing surreal landscapes, mutated wildlife, and the remnants of a society that once thrived. During their journey through this uncanny landscape, Ballard explores themes of isolation, ecological collapse, and the struggle to survive amidst the ruins of civilization. James Berger's suggestion that certain elements persist even after the end resonates strongly with *Hello America*, where remnants of civilization – ruined cities, forgotten infrastructure, and various groups of people, such as natives, Mexicans, nomads, Bedouin etc. –, continue to linger amid a collapsed and abandoned continent. Ballard's depiction of a desolate, sun-scorched America is not devoid of life or meaning; rather, it is a landscape where fragmented signs of the old world provoke both nostalgia and delusion:

> Yet, all of them were strongly affected by the sight of this once powerful nation lying derelict in the dusty sunlight. They rode through the silent suburbs of uptown New York, across the precarious hulk of the Brooklyn Bridge to Long Island, and over the bleached ghost of the Hudson to the Jersey shore. The endless succession of roofless houses, deserted shop-

ping malls and sand-covered parking lots was unsettling enough (Ballard, 2013: 41).

The unsettling atmosphere Ballard creates points to a broader commentary on the collapse of American ideals and the psychological disorientation that follows when the symbols of progress turn into monuments of failure. He focuses on the physical and psychological metamorphosis that takes place as a consequence of ecological catastrophes and illustrates the reactions to these changes (Baker, 2008: 12-13). The interconnectedness of the inner worlds of the characters and the external environment is a central motif in *Hello America*, reflecting how psychological landscapes mirror the physical and political decay around them. As Ballard states in an interview: "What I try to depict in my novels are changes in the external environment that match exactly changes in the internal environment, so there are certain points where these two come together" (Ballard and Hennessy, 1971: 61). This statement encapsulates the essence of his narrative style, where the psychological states of his characters are not merely influenced by their surroundings but are inextricably fused with them.

In a similar vein, Kermode's concept of "recurring terror and decadence" as a hallmark of apocalyptic literature finds clear expression in the novel. As Dominika Oramus describes Ballard's works as a "record of the gradual internal degeneration of Western civilization in the second half of the twentieth century" (2015: 12), *Hello America* portrays atomic bomb explosions, radioactive emissions, scarcity of food and water, the existence of nearly 300 nuclear power plants, clashing gangs, the spread of a deadly virus, the escape of zoo animals, and the violent actions of a mentally unstable US president. These chaotic and grotesque elements characterize Ballard's vision of a ruined America. The recurring motifs of decay and threat do not simply illustrate physical collapse; they also reflect deeper moral and psychological disintegration. In Ballard's world, terror is cyclical and normalized, decadence is not only cultural but also environmental. Rather than offering hope or renewal, the novel immerses the reader in a continuous spiral of destruction, where the boundary between realism and hallucination begins to blur.

In *Hello America*, Ballard also explores the concept of resistance against imperial and tyrannical structures through the figure of President Charles Manson, a combination of celebrity culture, fascist spectacle, and nuclear-era paranoia. Manson epitomizes the grotesque afterlife of tyranny in an apocalyptic setting. Named after the notorious cult leader, Manson

embodies authoritarianism, and is introduced in the novel as the deranged, self-appointed ruler of a ruined Las Vegas, the symbolic capital of illusion and excess. His claim to be both "President of the United States" and "God" reveals his religious zealotry and dictatorial delusion: "He wore a loose red tunic with gold epaulettes, a silver breastplate and scarlet breeches. Across his lap lay a gold sceptre... Behind him on the wall was a gigantic portrait of himself, bare-chested and bearded, one hand raised in a papal benediction" (Ballard, 2013: 146).

This theatrical self-image displays his obsession with power and spectacle. In the novel, he re-enacts presidential ceremonies, stages mock wars, and speaks in prophetic tones, all in this collapsing world. His madness, however, is not without historical continuity. As Wayne suggests: "He's not insane, just the logical end-product of everything America ever stood for" (Ballard, 2013: 151). Towards the end of the narration, he becomes the symbolic residue of a fallen empire, clinging to performance and control in a world that no longer recognizes either.

The component of "a sense of mystery" is epitomized in the novel in several ways, most notably through the decaying landscape of the deserted United States and the figures that inhabit it. America, once visible and omnipresent in global consciousness, is now a vast, unknown territory and a haunted space filled with the remnants of a civilization. The mystery begins with the very premise of the novel: why did America collapse, and what remains of it? Ballard never presents a clear and straightforward chronology of the disaster. Instead, he constructs a narrative that thrives on fragmented memories and mythologized ruins. The American landscape is depicted in surreal and dreamlike terms, evoking both wonder and dread: "They moved through a strange continent of dust and silence, where whole cities lay fossilized beneath dunes, and glass towers jutted like tombstones from the sand" (Ballard, 2013: 34). This imagery not only contributes to the sense of mystery but also obscures the line between the real and the imagined. The desert becomes a psychological space, reflecting the characters' fragmented identities and the erosion of collective memory.

The figure of President Charles Manson, too, contributes to the sense of mystery in the narration. His uncommon rule over Las Vegas and self-absorbed persona prompt more questions than answers: How did he come to power? Who still follows him? Why does he still continue to rule after the collapse of the world? Manson exists like a mythic creature, partly tyrant, partly relic of a bygone media-saturated world. It can be argued that his

presence suggests the mysteries of the post-apocalyptic world are not just about physical survival, but also about the ideological and psychological ruins that linger in the wake of catastrophe.

The concept of "immanency" profoundly resonates with Ballard's novel. In *Hello America*, the apocalypse is not illustrated as a sudden, climactic development but as an ongoing state that continues to unfold and permeates every aspect of life. Wayne's journey is marked by this persistent sense of living within the ruins of modernity, not after them. The ruins are not relics of a completed apocalypse but as living evidence of an end that can still be experienced. As Ballard writes: "The past was not behind them – it stretched ahead like a mirage, reasserting itself at every turn" (2013: 102). This notion of the past reveals how the apocalypse in the novel is not a singular event, but a state of being.

Günther Anders' notion of apocalyptic blindness also finds a powerful echo in Ballard's *Hello America*. This blindness manifests both in the historical fall of the United States and in the dream-like persistence of its myths, ideologies, and self-delusions, even after the world upon which they were built has disintegrated. Throughout the novel, the writer presents characters and institutions that continue to perform the rituals of a deceased civilization, as if unable or unwilling to register its end. The most significant example is the figure of President Charles Manson, who enacts a grotesque simulation of political power long after the collapse of any real governmental structure. His ostentation and delusional authority are not regarded as absurd by his followers, which shows a collective failure to acknowledge the finality of the collapse and the refusal to comprehend the irreversibility of the end.

Ballard's novel also contains a sense of nihilistic despair, although it is often masked by satire, surrealism, and dark humor. The writer presents the apocalypse with a detachment that underscores the futility and absurdity of human efforts in this new world. The group's expedition to rediscover America carries no revolutionary aspiration or utopian goal. It rather seems like a ghostly pilgrimage through capitalist ruins. As one of the characters indicates: "America has become an idea rather than a place" (Ballard, 2013: 53). This suggests that its fall was not just material but also symbolic. This loss of symbolic anchoring leads to a nihilistic atmosphere, where the collapse of external structures mirrors an internal void.

In the Country of the Last Things

Paul Auster's *In the Country of the Last Things*, first published in 1987, is a dystopian novel that is set in an unnamed city in a ruined world. Anna Blume, both the narrator and the protagonist, navigates the desolate urban landscape to find her missing brother, William. During her search, she paints a bleak and grim picture of a society on the verge of collapse, where violence, poverty, and despair define everyday life. Various characters are portrayed as struggling to survive in this chaotic world where the human condition and civilization have become fragile and uncertain.

Berger's suggestion that "even after the end, some things remain" (1999: 6) corresponds to Auster's novel in the sense that some groups of survivors still struggle despite being surrounded by a hostile environment full of risk and danger. Kermode's notion of "recurring terror and decadence" as a defining apocalyptic genre element can also be easily seen in Auster's novel in varying degrees and levels. One dramatic example is hunger and how people fight for food to stay alive: "They prowl the streets at all hours, scavenging for morsels, taking enormous risks for even the smallest crumb" (Auster, 2005: 11). Food theft is a common activity, and "housebreaking" (Auster, 2005: 15) happens frequently. They are so desperate that even human waste is collected by a group of people called "the Fecalists" (Auster, 2005: 35). Furthermore, despair and pessimism help to create a form of decadence that can be observed in the examples of the "assassination clubs" (Auster, 2005: 21), "solitary deaths" (Auster, 2005: 20), and the "runners" (Auster, 2005: 19). Particularly, the "runners" contribute to the gruesome atmosphere of the plot: "...a sect of people who run through the streets as fast as they can, flailing their arms wildly about them, punching the air, screaming at the top of their lungs...never stopping for anything in their path, running and running until they drop from exhaustion" (Auster, 2005: 19).

The terrifying events that cause a feeling of the end do not come from nuclear explosions, collective killings, or full-scale wars, but rather stem from basic, daily struggles for survival. The author illustrates the devastating effects of how people try to stay alive under harsh weather conditions and the fatal consequences as follows: "The cold drove people out of their minds...people would smash up their furniture and burn it for a little warmth, and many of these fires got out of control. Buildings were destroyed almost every day..." (Auster, 2005: 94). References that remind the reader of a possible climate collapse are repetitive throughout the novel.

Extreme weather conditions such as "the Terrible Winter" (Auster, 2005: 94), the cold that continues for most of the year, lack of rain, and fertile lands are some significant indicators of a potential climate breakdown and the deadly consequences of such a catastrophe on the planet. "We have all become monsters" (Auster, 2005: 26) is a critical remark that displays the deadly consequences of living in a deprived world.

Another important example that conjures up the imagery of 'terror and decadence' is the practices of the ruling government. "The labor camps" (Auster, 2005: 36) where people are forced to work in the outer parts of the cities in exile, "the Sea Wall Project" (Auster, 2005: 89) that will be completed against a possible danger of invasion or war, "the Purification Movement" (Auster, 2005: 109) that caused a surge of murdering an unknown number of opposing scientists and writers are some of these appalling practices that create an atmosphere of fear and decay in the novel.

A key feature of the apocalyptic genre is the concept of 'resistance' against any imperial or tyrannical forms and the revolutionary potential it carries for a better world. As Stümer points out, "apocalypse habitually accentuates understandings of disaster, catastrophe, or collapse and, simultaneously, resonates with ideas of opportunity, reformation, and change" (2024: 3). In that sense, it can be argued that there are opposing forces against the established order in Auster's novel. For instance, Anna Blume's search for her missing brother enables her to meet and attend other groups of people. One of them is Samuel Farr who lives in the National Library with more than a hundred people and works on a book that symbolizes hope for a better future: "As long as we kept working on it, I realized, the notion of a possible future would continue to exist for us" (Auster, 2005: 112). The future seems so bleak and hopeless in this world, as "babies don't get born here anymore" (Auster, 2005: 124), until one day Anna becomes pregnant. However, she loses her child while running away from the authorities.

As part of apocalyptic fiction, the component of 'a sense of mystery' is epitomized in several ways. One of them is the main reason for the apocalypse, which is never revealed explicitly in the text. Although there are some indications of climate collapse, the actual causes of such a dystopic world remain implicit. Another example that creates a sense of mystery in the novel is the ruling government, how it comes to power, its legitimacy, and the brutal practices it carries out. Readers never see the governing class's perspective or how they came to power. Finally, the fact that no babies have been born recently helps to create a powerful sense of enigma re-

garding the consequences of human beings as populations continue to decline.

The concept of 'immanency', which suggests the idea that the end is present at every moment, resonates with Auster's novel. First of all, physical threats by the hostile environment such as being murdered, getting hurt, or mugged, and the psychological toll of isolation and despair, as in Anna Blume's case, are considerably representative of the immanent end in the text. Furthermore, the elements of risk and fear, which are profoundly rooted in existential apprehension, permeate every aspect of the protagonist's odyssey. As she navigates through the city streets, she has to confront several dangers or uncertainties: "When you walk through the streets…you must remember to take only one step at a time…Your eyes must be constantly open, looking up, looking down, looking ahead, looking behind, on the watch for other bodies, on your guard against the unforeseeable. To collide with someone can be fatal" (Auster, 2005: 12). In this sense, fear functions as a powerful force in this world. Characters stockpile their belongings, suspicious of everyone around them. Trust and respect do not exist; agony and fear become intertwined, rendering the characters mentally and emotionally numb and detached.

The world Anna Blume experiences in the novel is not the consequence of a divine catastrophe but rather a product of human collapse. Due to economic, political, and social decay, the society has disintegrated, which has led to resource depletion, mass death, and societal breakdown. Technology becomes absent or useless instead of saving people, which reinforces the idea that human progress can paradoxically lead to regression (Anders, 2018: 287). Furthermore, the city where Anna Blume is depicted is in ruins, but no clear cause is given. This might suggest that collapse is not a single event but a slow, inevitable process in modern times. In short, in *In the Country of the Last Things*, the economy, government, society, and the infrastructure collapse not because of an external force, but because of their own internal contradictions, which is a great example of a self-apocalypse.

The concept of apocalyptic blindness also resonates with Auster's novel on several levels. First of all, the city's citizens do not organize resistance or attempt to rebuild. Instead, they choose to adapt to their existing circumstances. Their adjustment to miserable conditions and scavenging for survival is an ideal example of this situation. Furthermore, people fail to question their present conditions. There is no clear historical memory or reflection on what caused this dystopian world. Destruction and decay have

become so normalized that no individual shows any attempt to reverse them. To put it differently, Auster's novel presents no revolutionary hope, no sense of a better future. The characters do not seek any systemic solutions; instead, they adjust to a world that should be unlivable.

The nihilistic despair in the novel is one of its most striking aspects as far as the apocalyptic blindness is concerned. The writer does not provide a dramatic, fiery end-of-the-world. Instead, he illustrates a slow, inevitable decay where meaning, hope, and even basic human connections erode. The despair in the novel is not just about physical survival, it is in relation to the death of purpose itself. It can be argued that there is no glorious rebellion, no heroism, no ultimate goal in Auster's work. Nihilism is often associated with the idea that nothing matters because there is no future. In Auster's novel, this is quite literal: the characters do not believe in rebuilding or improving their world. Love, typically a beacon of hope in dystopian fiction, is temporary and fragile. For instance, Anna's relationships are fleeting, and she remains unable to counteract the surrounding emptiness.

Conclusion

Ballard and Auster were writing in the early-to-mid 1980s, a time saturated with chaos, crisis, and uncertainties. This was a period marked by the ongoing Cold War, fears of nuclear annihilation, and widespread concern over ecological degradation. Both authors respond to a shared cultural climate in which the end of civilization felt not only possible but imminent. Both novels are inseparable from the historical moment of the 1980s. Ballard was explicitly concerned with the ecological consequences of industrial modernity, drawing on growing discourse around global warming, desertification, and environmental collapse. Auster, meanwhile, wrote against the backdrop of urban decline, economic instability, and a broader sense of cultural disillusionment in Reagan-era America. Placing Ballard, a British writer, alongside Auster, an American writer, allows for a comparative exploration of how different literary traditions process similar cultural fears.

Both *Hello America* by J.G. Ballard and *In the Country of Last Things* by Paul Auster offer bleak, unsettling visions of the apocalypse that resist conventional narrative arcs of redemption or transformation. Rather than framing collapse as a moment of moral awakening or revolutionary potential, these novels depict worlds where the end has already arrived and any resistance to it is either futile, delusional, or tragically insufficient. In doing so, they subvert traditional expectations of apocalyptic fiction, shifting the

focus from salvation to survival, from heroic renewal to the disintegration of meaning itself.

Taken together, these two novels reject the apocalyptic trope of catharsis through destruction. They offer no Eden after the fall, no revolution after the collapse. Instead, they present a harrowing image of the apocalypse as a condition already internalized, where disorder and despair are not the beginning of change but the permanent horizon. Both Ballard and Auster foreground the limits of human agency in the face of structural failure, suggesting that the systems we create, be they technological, ecological, or political, carry within them the seeds of their own destruction. Their protagonists do not overcome these systems; rather, they are left to navigate their ruins, haunted by the absence of alternatives.

In conclusion, the concept of *apocalyptic blindness* serves as a powerful diagnostic tool for understanding not just fictional worlds in collapse, but also the psychological and cultural mechanisms that enable real-world catastrophe. As illustrated in both *Hello America* and *In the Country of Last Things*, this blindness is not merely a lack of information; it is a profound failure of perception and imagination, rooted in ideological rigidity, technological hubris, and a collective refusal to learn from history. Characters continue to act out dead rituals, follow broken systems, and cling to delusions of control, even as the world crumbles around them. In this sense, *apocalyptic blindness* becomes a kind of existential condition, one that prevents meaningful resistance or change, and instead ensures that collapse unfolds not with surprise, but with frightening inevitability.

By foregrounding this theme, both novels reveal that the apocalypse is not always a sudden event, but often a slow erosion of awareness, a breakdown of our capacity to see the end even as we live within it. The true danger, then, may not be the collapse itself, but our inability to recognize that it has already begun.

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Author's Note: This article is a revised and expanded version of a paper originally presented at the 19th International Cultural Studies Symposium in İzmir, on 8-10 May 2024.

Ethics Committee Approval: Ethics committee approval is not required for this study.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests: The author has no potential conflict of interest regarding research, authorship or publication of this article.