

The Devastation of War and Dystopia in J G Ballard's *Miracles of Life***Rajanna B**

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Abstract

This paper investigates the war devastation in the natural environment to show the dystopian culture of human against the atmosphere in Shanghai in the autobiographical work of J G Ballard's *Miracles of Life*. It also articulates the historical background of the war in various regions such as Europe, Africa, Asia, North and South of the world. Specifically, this study mainly focuses on the world wars and post-war writings. So, it explores the backdrop of World War I and World War II how several countries have constructed two groups Triple Entity and Triple Alliance to participate in world wars. The paper examines the great loss of people and the natural environment during World War II. At the same time, the writer J G Ballard stays in China, where he experiences much destruction from World War II. Thus, this article attempts to analyze dystopian ambience, ecological destruction, war phobia, food crisis and the tragedy of restless inhabitants from World War II, Japanese war intervention on Shanghai's International Settlement Board, Lunghua Intermittent Camp, Chino-Japanese war and American nuclear attacks on Japan's Hiroshima and Nagasaki cities. Ultimately, it enunciates a great loss from war and autobiographical elements of J G Ballard in the work *Miracles of Life* (2008).

Keywords: Dystopia, Environmental destruction, War devastation, Nature**Introduction:**

Many destructions destroy the world peace and harmony of human beings as well as non-human beings too. Especially, war devastation damages the ecosystem representing the dystopian ecology, the urban, industrial, climate and war destructions spoil the natural world. Several writers have been interpreted about this degradation as Joe Woodward in the article

“The Literature of War” (2005) delineates the war writers Stephen Crane’s *The Red Badge of Courage* in 1895, and Ernest Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms*, examines the writers youthful experience during World War I and Tim O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried* explores the Vietnam War (1). Before World War I and II, few works discuss war interventions from Greek literature to nineteenth-century English literature. The Greek writer Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are the best examples of early writings of war. Eventually, war literature has come into the limelight to portray the sufferings. It inspires to development of the apocalypse and post-apocalyptic writings. In this era, most of the genres have enriched war poetry, fiction, non-fiction and magazines, which have flourished to demonstrate the war desolation. Of course, dystopia and post-apocalyptic are also part of war devastation, they create a great loss for many creatures. The writer Joe Wood attempts to depict the new apocalyptic anthologies have inspired by Neoromantic anarchism and the established writers produce outstanding wartime works such as Evelyn Waugh’s *Put out More Flags* (1942), Henry Green’s *Caught* (1943), James Hanley’s *No Directions* (1943), Patrick Hamilton’s *The Slaves of Solitude* (1947) and Elizabeth Bowen’s *The Heat of the Day* (1949) (1). Even Alun Levis, Sidney Keys, Keith Douglas, T. S Eliot, Ezra Pound, Siegfried Sasson, Rupert Brooke, Wilfred Owen, Ivor Gurney, Edward Thomas, Charles Sorley, David Jones and Isaac Rosenberg try to portray war apocalypse in their writings. But these kinds of works are not new for literature, they have already existed in Greek, Roman and Indian as well as medieval and nineteenth-century British literature, they draw attention to war conflicts between the kingships. In the twentieth century, the literature specifies war literature demonstrating the impacts of World War I and II.

World War I begins with a small issue between Serbia and Austria when Austria's prince visited Serbia and was killed by a boy that spreads remaining countries to participate with two groups of triple alliance and triple entity. These two groups destroy the environment and many people surrounding the battlefields prologue to World War II too. World War I and II collapse the social values, economy, environment, peace and harmony. These epic wars influenced writers to show the tragic circumstances of victims from 1914 to 1945. The war writer J G Ballard depicts his personal experiences to demonstrate this quandary of war movement at the time of World War Second, he is just fifteen years young boy who stays in Shanghai. He shows in his book *Miracles of Life* increasing the death rates and shelterless citizens' life. The British Literature Wiki in the article “The First World War and Literature; The Impact of the First World War: Britain & Literature” excavates a great loss of human beings in World War I as many masses and prisoners gas drifts through the air, hundreds of miles of rats spread to have spoiled food items. It depicts this war unlashes death, loss and suffering as an un-presented scale (1). This condition inspires several writers and war novelists to describe the apocalypse of war devastation and tragedy of people. The world Encyclopedia of literature exemplifies such works on World War II as Harry Brown's *A Walk in the Sun* (1944) tells of little unit combat, John Hersey's *A Bell for Adano* (1944) illustrates the integrity of America outweigh arrogance and cruelty. He also writes reportorial classics *Into the Valley* (1943) and *Hiroshima* (1946) as well as the novels *The Wall* (1950) and *The War Lover* (1959) speak about the Warsaw Ghetto and Freudian tale of bomber respectively (1). These works have been published after the completion of World War II to exhibit the tragic circumstances of war.

During this period 1914-1945, many war writers are born and in the postwar time, they begin to write several works about their war experiences in two world wars. The postwar writer J G Ballard also was born on 15 November 1930 in Shanghai where he has undergone many difficulties from World War II, Shanghai International Settlement Board, Lunghua Intermittent Camp and the Chino-Japanese war. He has written more than a hundred works on science fiction and war devastation. Literature is considered him as a great original writer of England in last few decades. His works intensify to discuss ecology and science to describe dystopia, post-apocalyptic vision, the devastation of war, science and technology. The scholar Nusrullah Mambrol in his article "Analysis of J G Ballard's Novels" (2019) examines J G Ballard's first concern is to depict the environment as natural" and synthetic. He is an appropriate writer about gross environmental changes and artificial environments. His science fiction has helped him to become a writer Sui Generis (1). The above abbreviation delineates J G Ballard mainly focuses on ecological disasters, science and technology.

Dystopian War Devastation in *Miracles of Life*

One of the philosophers of the sixteenth-century renaissance in England Thomas More introduces the term 'utopia' in his masterpiece *Utopia* (1516). Later on the study of 'dystopia' plays a major role against utopian principles. So, at the time of world wars, most of the countries have undergone war destruction. To justify this, J G Ballard shares his experience and tragic effects of World War II, how the ideal society undergoes annihilation of people indicating the imperfection of the Shanghai's nature; "Downtown Shanghai was far too dangerous, as Japanese military vehicles swerved through the streets, knocking rickshaws and cyclists out of their way, and Chinese puppet troops harassed any European who caught their eye" (57). This terrible World War II obliterates cityscapes, streets, and people increasing the death rates. He also describes the beginning of war effects in the streets of Shanghai city; "There were fierce street battles in the 1920s between the Communist and Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang forces, followed in the 1930s by frequent terrorist bombings, barely audible," (5). One of the writers, Robert McCrum in his article "The journey from empire to dystopia" (2008) identifies the children's condition in the war; "Between the ages of 13 and 33, the young Ballard suffered the kind of experience that perhaps only the 20th century could provide. The child of expat parents in Shanghai, he was interned in a Japex-pat prison camp in 1943" (1). The urban atmosphere undergoes empty water, drained areas and polluted natural stipulation. J G Ballard illustrates his argument with an abstract to explore this circumstance; he hears the bombing and gunfire looking at the vast fall of smoke spread over the city. The British residents start to leave Shanghai to migrate to Australia, Canada, Hong Kong and Singapore (26). They feel safeguarded in the designated countries as the above argument indicates this condition not only destroys Shanghai's nature even it distracts the Asian countries' natural environment and people too.

World War II is not only affected human society it also collapses the environment in the battlefields, streets and the entire urban atmosphere. The warriors demolish buildings; destroy the parks and streets of the cities. This war causes to decrease in the economic condition of participating countries. After this conflict also America and Japan continue the confrontation in 1962 in the Pacific Ocean. J G Ballard points out to exhibit this situation as this war begins in the

Pacific Ocean to turn against the Japanese in 1962 by Americans. Japanese navy is caught and Americans attempt to take revenge for the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, great suffering catastrophic defeat in Battles of Midway and the Coral Sea. On another side, "British resistance was stiffening in Burma and Europe, there were the beginnings of what would become the heroic Bomber Command offensive against Germany" (62). Similarly, one of the followers of Ballard, Simon Sellars in the article "More Extracts from Miracles of Life" (2008) argues about the urban environment compared with other writers. He says that J G Ballard focuses in the work *Miracles of Life* people live in the world of cars, offices, highways, airlines and supermarkets in this serious fiction (03). Sellars uses the word 'nobody' to distinguish Virginia Woolf's ever filled the petrol tank of her car. The term nobody roles in Jean-Paul Sartre or Thomas Mann's ever paid for a haircut. The postwar novels of Ernest Hemingway also represent nobody worried about the effects of prolonged exposure to the threat of nuclear war (03). J G Ballard also not signifies completely the death of many aquatic species but he explores the affected worthless crops and children born with disabilities in the nuclear disputed fields. But, he describes around him there is silent terrain of abandoned paddy fields and burial mounds, derelict canals and bridges, ghost villages that have been collapsed and deserted for years. The Japanese soldiers try patrolling on planes and hangers till they agree to cover the war. He crosses wracks of canal boats and tracks are caught in the air attack and bodies of Chinese soldiers filling in the truck (105). These terrible incidents impact on ecological damages previous thirty years of the drained swimming pools, abandoned hotels and nightclubs, deserted runways and flooded rivers are set back to the wartime of Shanghai during World War II (251). Though Ballard is one of the science fiction writers, he observes the landscapes and destroys Shanghai's nature. In Shanghai days, he was just fifteen years young but he has grown up remembering the tragedies from war interventions in China.

The citizens of Shanghai have lost their patience. Many children become orphans; they face food crises and another side the death rates of people have been increased creating a dystopian nature completely. They are afraid to come outside and quarantine them out of war threats as the author emphasizes Shanghai turns to be a large violent city of criminal gangs and murderous political factions (51). Most of the children have lost their parents in this war and separated from them. This reflects even ten years old boys also experience extreme poverty, deaths, disease and orphans leave to Starve in doorways being unsettled for food and shelter (34). Likewise, the writer Simon Sellars in his article "Miracles of Life: Extract & Interviews" discloses the destruction of bombs; "The first American air raids began in the summer of 1944. Squadrons of fighters, Mustangs and Lightnings, attacked nearby Lunghua airfield. Waves of B-29 bombers followed. I spent every spare moment watching the sky" (03). The warriors exploit the bombs, nuclear and gunfire to make people live under the panic atmosphere. People try to escape from these interventions in Shanghai streets. They feel much exhausted and restless in the urban decay. Several Chinese bayonets lay on the ground among their blood-stained rice sacks. That violence impacts J G Ballard's parents and various nannies' attempts to shield him from the brutality (28). Before, many of the immigrants are settled in Shanghai to establish their market system when World War II, Japanese War Intervention on Shanghai International Settlement Board, Lunghua Intermittent Camp and Chino-Japanese wars, the migrated non-locals try to travel from Shanghai to come out of distraction by wars as J G Ballard illustrates in the work;

“By the time I was 14 I had become as fantastic about death, poverty and hunger as the Chinese. I knew that kindness alone would feed few mouths and save no lives” (6). Another side, people search for food, water and shelter. War destroys their mental peace without having food and water. Therefore, Ballard describes his life within the political crisis and war devastation in the middle of the twentieth century. He also discovers the difficulties during World War II in Shanghai along with experience;

Our food supply was a serious problem from the start. Hungry children will eat anything, but my parents must have shuddered at the thought of another day's meals. At no time during the years of internment did we see milk, butter, margarine, egg or sugar. Our meals consisted of rice congee (rice boiled into a liquid pulp), vegetable soup that concealed one or two dice-sized pieces of gristly horse meat, a hard black bread backed from what must have been going down sweepings and filled with bits of rusty wire and stony grit, and grey sweet potatoes, a cattle feed that I adored. (75)

These four years of World War II generates several diseases and the children to born with disabling conditions. The deadly diseases begin to kill them when they are unable to come out from this tumultuous situation. The antibiotics such as waves of cholera, typhoid and smallpox epidemics distract them partly as the ten servants lived on-premises (10). The natural environment and people live peacefully before world wars but World War II makes them lose the confidence to live in the destruction. They involve in the dangerous sickness partying cholera and smallpox (05). It also impacts them to become poor losing their property, residences, food and water. Ronan Farren in the article “*Miracles of Life: An Autobiography J G Ballard*” (2008) recaptures the problems and death effects in Shanghai's booming city with five million Chinese and some 50,000 Europeans. There is a garish, noisy playground and “huge contrast between the way of life of the cushioned rich, with their servants and Buicks and endless gin and tonics”. The young Ballard observes the extreme poverty around the city” (3). Therefore, World War II creates several problems and people struggle to get sufficient materials to survive life. Ballard expresses that he enjoys his days in Lunghua and has many friends compared to his adult life on the whole bayonet and optimistic but when the food rations start to fell zero level skin infections cover his legs, malnutrition prolepses his return and many adults lose their hearts by the effect of war (67-68). World War II spoils innocent people when they are engrossed with diseases.

J G Ballard looks at many dead bodies of people, which scare him to be more anxious. Day by day, the death rates also increase by the interventions. He just observes directly such terrible incidents several citizens die in this catastrophe in Japan and China. People lost their close relatives and their families. He discloses in his work A-bombs throw on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. His parents also have separated from him in Lunghua, America drops many bombs on the cities. This war also looks at the battle for Manila as; “the only large city in the Pacific War fought for by the Americans, where some 10,000 Philippines civilians died” (90). Hiroshima and Nagasaki have undergone losing urban structure, along with dead bodies and several people lost their organs. The children begin to be born with physical disabilities. Simon Sellars in the article “Shanghai/Shepparton” (2008) analyzes the unsatisfactory life of Ballard during the war effects and death rates in Shanghai. He says that Ballard writes his autobiography but emotionally he is

dissatisfied and dispassionate observing the involved participants (02). Even many soldiers have died exploiting nuclear bombs on the battlefields as Ballard interprets one bomb is dropped from Chinese aircraft on struck the Great World Amusement park near the racecourse in the heart of the international settlement board which is filled with several refugees from the outlying districts. Thus, the bomb kills thousands of people at the time of the largest number of casualties ever caused by a single bomb (26). Looking at the corpses, he feels bad and exhausted from the situation. He also discloses that it impressed him when he thinks long and hard-sided back across the river. But the China Printing ferry avoids the dozens of corpses of Chinese whose impoverished relatives are unable to afford a coffin and that launches “them onto the sewage streams from the Nantao outfall” (10). The above argument shows that World War II is not only affected human society, it also destroys the surrounding nature of urban decay.

World War II spreads over the urban areas from the battlefields creating turbulence on urban to destruct and confrontation on many innocent people to die mentally and physically. J G Ballard notices how conflicts annihilate people continuously without showing humanity in his book *Miracles of Life*. Specifically, the inhabitants are tried to flee from the war devastation in the urban vicinity. During this hard state, war destroys the cityscapes which are involved in the warfare. J G Ballard delineates his father as a railway enthusiast who lives in Veranda on the first floor in a room set about thirty feet long is filled with a vast landscape of tunnels, hills, villages and railway lines. It is laid out on a waist-high platform that has fitted trapdoors emerge without warning to make track adjustment (22). Philip Dodd in the article "Marinated in War and violence': Philip Dodd Interviews J.G. Ballard" exhibits the reply of J G Ballard for his question about the urban destruction and diseases from wars in Shanghai city as millions of Chinese and destitute peasants struggle in Shanghai. He says ten thousand people have died in the streets every year with Cholera, Smallpox and Typhoid (03). Throughout the four years of World War II demolishes the urban peace and the warriors attacked the streets of London. This exhausting long term war derelicts England in dark and half-ruined. In Southampton, he keeps down the suitcase and a gangway put bomb during the war; “Large sections of London and the Midlands were vast bomb sites, and most of the buildings still standing were ruined and desolate” (122). J G Ballard discusses the real events in his non-fiction *Miracles of Life* postwar period though he spent time in World War II in Shanghai. After the war, he travels to England to settle down then he explores the urban destructions. He expresses when the dangerous war begins most of the people die and involve in the war phobia in the metropolitan areas of China;

In 1937 the street spectacle that so enthralled a small English boy was bathed in a far more chilling light. Led by its military chiefs, and with the silent blessing of the Emperor, Japan launched a full-scale invasion of China. Its armies seized all the coastal cities, including Shanghai, though they did not enter the International Settlement. For several months there was bitter fighting in the outlying areas of the city, especially the Chapei and Nantao suburbs. Relentless Japanese bombing and naval levelled large areas of Shanghai. For the first time in the launch against Chiang Kai-shek's Chinese armies, who greatly outnumbered the Japanese, but were poorly led by corrupt cronies of Chiang and his wife. (25)

The streets of Shanghai are filled with military groups. Ballard stares at the armies seize the coastal cities including Shanghai. People are unable to enter the International Settlement office. He says there is a fight for several months especially Chapei and Nantao suburbs. That urban atmosphere has undergone much destruction. To discuss this quandary, he focuses mainly on the city environment and dystopian ecology. He elucidates bombs and nuclear are disputed on the enemy countries. He memorizes the first bomb has dropped on Hiroshima but the Japanese are not ready to surrender. Japanese generals in China are still preparing for fighting though they are aware of Japanese principle cities and industrial areas have been collapsed by American Intervention on Japan (102). These areas are filled with ash by the American bombing campaign. Justine Jordan's article "Miracles of Life: Shanghai to Shepperton" (2008) examines the urban destructions as "Shanghai, "cruel and lurid . . . polluted and exciting", is his primal city, and he ventures that "a large part of my fiction has been an attempt to evoke it by means other than memory" (1). There he observes the drained swimming pools, abandoned hotels and nightclubs, deserted runways and flooded rivers have destroyed by conflicts. The building with potential violence increases in Shanghai's International Settlement as well as intermittent camps (02). America attacks China before assaulting Japan then Shanghai struggles to get a better atmosphere for people to stay. But, when it attacks the Japanese cities Hiroshima and Nagasaki with B-29 bombs spread over been neutralized and a four-engine aircraft put a bomb on Shanghai dockyards and railway junctions. This war creates clouds that have vanished and the thunderous curtain of smoke heads towards the sea. The pilot also drives perhaps to ditch his crippled plane near a US warship (98). This US warship makes the Shanghai citizens be panic about the war and die from warfare.

In this regard, J G Ballard experienced catastrophes, war destructions losing the environment and the urban atmosphere in his childhood. The military camps are not ready to stop the conflicts around the city. Here, he is also a victim of war when natural atmosphere turns to catastrophic Ballard's house roof is damaged and opened across the countryside; they look at an endless terrain of paddy fields, small villages, canals and cultivated lands near Lunghua intermittent camp some miles away to south zone (11). Consequently, the writer Tim Martine in the article "Miracles of Life: Shanghai to Shepperton by J G Ballard" (2008) analyzes the catastrophic events from the country's postwar desolation, customs and concealments struck Ballard as alien "As recently as last year's Kingdom Come, he was writing of his fearsome shopping-mall-cum-ecosystem" (2008). This hazardous war collapses nature in provincial and urban areas, which makes that environment to be dirty as much as impure from bombs. Therefore, he observes "their speed and silver fuselages, and the high style in which they were flown, clearly placed them in a more advanced realm than the Japanese Zeros and the Spitfires and Hurricanes of the British Embassy newsreels" (99). This war devastation reaches till pacific, where people struggle to get food. Even the food supply fall and the internee's wealth is eroded by malaria, exhaustion and a generation for further years of war. The American armies reach the island hundreds of miles away. Another side, Japanese armies are ready to defend the emperor in China and the home islands to the last man (95). Furthermore, disputing bombs, nuclear and gunfire the city is filled with several corpses as he points out;

Every morning when I was driven to school I would notice fresh coffins left by the roadside, sometimes miniature coffins decked with paper flowers containing

children of my own age. Bodies lay in the streets of downtown Shanghai, wept over by Chinese peasant women, ignored in the rush of passers-by. (14)

The political destruction makes people restless in wartime. Japan's attacks on Shanghai International Settlement Board, Chino-Japanese Intervention, and the Japan-American wars destroy the peace of people. These issues formulate citizens to live under the threats and war phobia. As a war experienced person, Ballard notices the problems and terrible actions of other countries' people. Subsequently, he talks about humanity in the environment and urban life. For this reason, he looks at "Forty years later I asked my mother why we had not fed this old man at the bottom of our drive, and she replied: if we had fed him, within two hours there would have been fifty beggars there" (16). This war affect the beggars' population increases; they lost their residence, money and their families along with food, shelter, and water. When they are in search of facilities, they turn to the begging profession. The Chinese shows inhumanity without providing food and water for the shelterless people during World War II; "But even Shanghai's wealth could never feed the millions of destitute Chinese driven towards the city by war and famine" (16). He illustrates the semi-autobiographical novel *Empire of the Sun* depicts his growth in Shanghai and after returning to Britain postwar time of World War II. Therefore, he has lost his thirty years wife and inspects him to become a writer. But, he stresses in his book about the tragedy of citizens for food and helplessness in the streets of Shanghai. He reveals Shanghai turns to the cruel and lurid world around him. Many beggars have been wounded, the gangsters and pickpockets live in the streets of Shanghai "Chinese dragon ladies in ankle-length mink coats who terrified me with their stares, the hawkers wok-frying delicious treats which I could never buy because I never carried any money, starving peasant families and thousands of con men and crooks" (29). In Shanghai, war leads people to flee from their native cities to peaceful areas. The continuity of the conflicts attempts to perish the environment as well as people.

This war devastation changes citizens' lifestyles losing hotels, restaurants, lobbies and abandoned houses appear everywhere. Ballard's live example elucidates the situation as the Chinese armies have withdrawn war conflicts against but the Japanese armies have surrounded the city bad they did confront on British, French and Soldiers or they never interfere with their warships in the river Bund; "The Japanese cruiser *Idzumo*, a veteran of the Great War, sat in midstream, but Shanghai's hotels, bars, and nightclubs were as busy as ever" (27). To argue this, Jose Teodoro in the article "The Emperor of Shepperton" (2008) emphasizes the work *Miracles of Life* "Having made his name in science fiction, Ballard is an astonishingly adept forecaster of our collective destiny, yet his imagery is locked upon the dreams of the recent past made manifest in the smoking desolation of our forsaken machines, buildings and recreational spaces" (1). The warriors are never felt badly for human devastation and urban destruction in a peaceful environment. He represents the innocent people are lived at the time of war with having much pain every day. It spreads even to other countries as the fall of Singapore and sinking of the British battleships; "*Repulse* and *Prince of Wales* devastated us all. British prestige plummeted from that moment. The surrender of Singapore, the capture of the Philippines, and the threat to India and Australia sounded the death knell of Western power in the Far East and the end of a

way of life” (56). Therefore, J G Ballard in his work *Miracles of Life* identifies the issues very sensitively to study the urban environment in World War II.

Following the above discussions and arguments, the war literature exists in the writings of Greek, Roman, Chinese, Spanish, Indian, American and English representing such wars between the kingdoms. Here, the study attempts to show the values of the natural environment and human devastation according to J G Ballard's overviews on war and warfare against nature. This non-fiction *Miracles of Life* is written based on his real experiences in Shanghai and Great Britain as autobiographical elements from birth to death illustrating dystopian ecologies, urban destructions, environmental issues, food crises, death effects, war and wartime. It displays World War II and its impacts on the peaceful environment. Many people die, urban landscapes and fields turn to be abandoned of futile properties by the war intervention of China, Japan and America.

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