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MANIFESTATIONS OF ‘NEW AGE’ RELIGIONS IN GATED COMMUNITIES OF J. G. BALLARD’S *COCAINE NIGHTS* AND *KINGDOM COME* – AN ECOCRITICAL APPROACH

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to identify different manifestations of ‘new age’ religions within the gated communities of James G. Ballard’s urban violence novels *Cocaine Nights* (1996) and *Kingdom Come* (2006), using an ecocritical approach elaborated within the works of Stacy Alaimo, and to show that the entwining of the human body and the ‘more-than-human’ world also pertains to that of the human mind and soul and the environment. In other words, one’s mental, religious and spiritual tendencies are also shaped and transformed within the environment; man’s ability to go beyond the limitations of anthropocentrism make the binary oppositions of the body and mind/soul, like that of body and nature, fluid and as such suitable to be considered in a different light.

Keywords: *ecocriticism; human and more-than-human; body/soul and nature; urban environment; new age religions.*

1. Introduction

J. G. Ballard’s unique perspective of modernity, his use of bizarre settings and an uncanny tone earned him a status among the most significant and influential British authors of the late 20th century. His opus, consisting of 20 novels and more than 100 short stories, ranges from climate to psychological fiction and post-colonial narratives (Tan, 2019, p. 1). Ballard’s early novels dealing with natural disasters are regarded as pioneers of a new sub-genre in science fiction titled ‘cli-fi’ fiction, where the climate change resulting from aggressive human activities threatens to destroy the human race. Natural landscapes are here seen as a metaphor of physical entropy, as well as human transgressions regarding the environment and human alienation from nature or more-than-human world. His later novels, dealing with urban disasters and urban violence, bring into focus urban landscapes as a symbol of social and psychological entropy. Since they offer no positive

outcomes such as the possibility of human survival and social rebirth indicating a happy ending, they properly fit into the category of ‘ecocollapse fiction’ (see McFarland, 2021). Their plot deploys and intertwines the motive of ecocollapse in the futuristic enclaves in which the residents need to uncover what it would mean to be human in an anthropogenic “climate-changed world [...] when there is no redemptive ending” (McFarland, 2021, p. 7).

Human endeavour to ‘cultivate’ and ‘civilize’ the environment through creating zero-waste ultra-modern gated communities paradoxically results in their residents’ havoc on personal level embodied in the eruption of different forms of violence, anti-social behaviour and bizarre activities. In these novels, the anthropocentric attitude to nature has been severely attacked, as ‘denatured ecosystems’ reflected in these urban closed communities represent the world that “cannot sustain the human futures symbolized by new births” (McFarland, 2021, p. 14). The relationship between human and more-than-human world has been reestablished through placing man within the centre of his urban surroundings, thus acknowledging the idea that man and environment are on no account separate entities. In other words, “the environment is not located somewhere out there, but is always the very substance of ourselves“ (Alaimo, 2010, p. 4).

The urban settings of Ballard’s urban violence novels traumatize the characters to such an extent that it poses an injury to people’s mental health and their spiritual well-being. The aim of this paper is to identify religious implications within *Cocaine Nights* (1996) and *Kingdom Come* (2006), the first and the last novel from Ballard’s urban violence quadrilogy, through the lenses of the fourth wave of ecocriticism elaborated within the works of Stacy Alaimo and the concept of ‘trans-corporeality’, and to show that both body and mind of a human are in constant negotiation with the ‘more-than-human’ world, and as such should be granted the equal status of importance. Likewise, the ‘soul’ should be regarded in this new light, as one’s religious and spiritual tendencies are also transformed and acknowledged in accordance with the human-nature relationship and the extent to which one is able to go beyond the limitations of anthropocentrism.

2. Ecocriticism

Although the term ‘ecocriticism’, as a sort of disciplinary intersection of ecology and literature, was first created in 1978 by William Rueckert in his essay “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism” to imply “the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature” (Glotfelty, 2009, xix), a tendency to trace proto-ecocriticism in the form of ‘nature themes’ in literature had been present long before him (see Mazel, 2001). Rueckert’s contribution to the development of the field of ecocriticism lies in the fact that he has been an inspiration for later generations of environmental humanities scholars, i.e. Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, who adopted the term to describe an entire discipline by employing it in the title of *The Ecocriticism Reader*, a book published in 1996 that became a touchstone for the study of ecocriticism, as it ‘put the entire field on the scholarly map’ (Slovic, 2017, p. 356). In the introduction to the book, Glotfelty associated ecocriticism with “the study of the relationship between literature and

the physical environment” (Glotfelty, 1996, xvii). Scott Slovic, the first president of the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE) defines it as the study of “explicitly environmental texts from any scholarly approach, or, conversely, the scrutiny of ecological implications and human-nature relationships in any literary texts” (Slovic, 2000, p. 160).

Lawrence Buell initiated a wave-oriented historiography in the field of ecocriticism after his discussion of the first-second wave distinction in *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (see Buell, 2005, p. 17). Wave 1 (1980 – present) puts emphasis on “nature writing”, preservation of the biotic community (wilderness) and disruption of hierarchy between human beings and nature. It was more oriented towards American and British literature, and “discursive ecofeminism”. Wave 2 (mid-1990s – present) marked a transition from nature-writing and poetry-writing to social aspects combined with ecology (Buell, 2005, p. 137), as the borderline between science and culture amalgamated. Its multicultural aspect is reflected in its sensitivity towards local literatures around the world and the concept of environmental justice ecocriticism. Wave 3 (2000 – present) is an extension of the second wave and it “recognizes ethnic and national particularities and yet transcends ethnic and national boundaries” (Adamson & Slovic, 2009, pp. 6-7). In other words, it focuses on the minorities, the poor and disadvantaged people and the way how environmental degradation affects them.

Simultaneously with this movement, emerged Wave 4 (2008s – present), which is often associated with material ecocriticism and discussions focusing on material feminism, trans-corporeality, and the new call to human-nature co-extensiveness. This new direction in contemporary ecocriticism has been launched by Stacy Alaimo’s notion of ‘trans-corporeality’ (Slovic, 2012, p. 443) and was further developed by introducing the concept of material ecocriticism developed by Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann in *Material Ecocriticism* (2014), which focuses on the idea that story and agency are inherent in all phenomena, not only in a human being.

Alaimo’s idea of “trans-corporeality” acknowledges the intertwining of the human body and the more-than-human world (Alaimo, 2008, p. 238). She argues that human corporeality well corresponds to the term of ‘trans-corporeality’ in which “the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world”, thus underlying the fact that ‘the corporeal substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from ‘the environment’” (Alaimo, 2008, p. 238). The bond between human and non-human entities is undeniably recognized as the notion of agency is assigned to environment. In other words, nature is not an “inert, empty space or as a resource for human use,” but a living organism, “a world of fleshy beings with their own needs, claims, and actions” (Alaimo, 2010, p. 2). As Ballard’s urban violence novels focus on human psychological, spiritual and physical impacts of apocalypse, they are likely to be examined through the lenses of the fourth wave of ecocriticism, in particular, the concept of trans-corporeality closely associated with the notion of public and environmental health. As humans are “very stuff of material, emergent world”, knowing oneself means doing scientific research of the “constitution of our coextensive environments” (Alaimo, 2010, p. 20).

The analysis of the selected urban violence novels will show how the concept of trans-corporeal space may be traced in the form of environmental illness affecting Ballard's urban settings, which becomes analogous to the characters' mental and spiritual degradation. At first glance, it appears that the new social structures found within the gated communities are eco-friendly – their residents live in zero-waste, ultra-modern urban environments. However, as the novels develop, it becomes clear that 'physical utopia' breeds multilayered disorder: extreme forms of violence, anti-social behaviour and bizarre activities of their residents that spoil the physical beauty of the urban landscape. The residents are in constant – physical, mental and spiritual– interchange with their urban environments. The turmoil within their bodies and souls seems to be encouraged by the urban settings. Likewise, the environment itself seems to be transformed (and disfigured) by its human inhabitants.

2.1. Ecocriticism and religion

Should we change our understanding of the human-nature relationship, that is, if we acknowledge that human body is always entwined with more-than-human world, all the dualisms (human/nature, culture/nature, man/woman, body/mind, body/soul) prove to be unsustainable. Namely, the notion of trans-corporeality that embodies the idea of interrelatedness of human and more-than-human world, that is, of human bodies and environment/nature, can also be applied in regard with our understanding of the relationship between the environment/nature and the human mind and soul, respectively. In other words, one's mental and spiritual health is likely to match the health of what surrounds him/her. Hence, the contributions made by the religious studies researchers in the environmental humanities should not be overlooked when considering the prospects for the more sustainable world.

Given that ethical dimension occupies the central position in our understanding the ecosystem and human-nonhuman relationship, the role of religion or any form of religiosity and spirituality of people within each community should not pass unnoticed. Studies in religion and ecology are crucial component of the environmental humanities, since religion informs the environmental views, values, relations, and behaviour of the majority of people around the world (Rigby, 2017, p. 273). Also, 'scholars of religion and ecology help people to think critically about how religion has been shaped by the natural environment and can be shaped by environmental degradation' (Baumann et al. 2011, p. 8) and observe how specific religious perspectives and practices may affect the world's sustainability.

The Ur-text regarding the study of religion and ecology which also incorporates a proto-ecocritical dimension is Lynn White Jr's article in *Science* from 1967, "The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis" included in Glotfelty and Fromm's *The Ecocriticism Reader*. White (1996, p. 9) argues that the dominant Western religious traditions played an important part in shaping the people's attitude to the environment as "human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny – that is, by religion". Also, the blend of science and technology and industrial development initiated within these developed societies of the West

(primarily Christian) has played a crucial role in the current environmental crisis. According to White (pp. 9-10), Christianity is “the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen”, as it established a dualism of man and nature while insisting that “it is God’s will that man exploit nature for his proper ends”. The impacts of the application of innovative technology in the lives of the medieval European farmers supported the interpretation that ‘man and nature are two things, and man is master’ (White, 1996, p. 9). This further triggered interpretations of the Bible regarding man’s ‘dominion’ over other creatures and his ‘right’ to ‘subdue the earth’ (Gen. 1.26–1.28).

Kate Rigby sheds light on the other aspect of White’s essay that goes beyond its initial criticism of Christianity. Rigby (2017, p. 277) emphasizes the importance of White’s view that religion is “underlying driver of environmental change” and the fact that it “also gave impetus to the quest among many environmentally concerned Westerners for ecospiritual alternatives to Christianity”. Namely, Western environmental philosophy’s reliance of some aspects of Eastern thought and spirituality opened the issues arising from the industry capitalist mastery of nature, such as the exploitation of human labour and the ‘other’: women, animals, the body and people of lower socio-economic status, African Americans, children, subsistence farmers, and Indigenous peoples (Rigby, 2017, p. 279).

White’s identification of duality of man and nature and anthropocentrism as integral dimension of people’s mentality is of vital importance regarding our understanding of the relationship between human and ‘more-than-human’ world elaborated in this paper: Just as man uses the natural environment and transforms it into urban settings, the environment (urban landscape) shapes, remodels and disfigures the human body (its mind and soul, as the body’s integral components, respectively). If we acknowledge man’s deep relationship with the ‘more-than-human’ world (supported in the genesis that man ‘have dominion’, but is also entitled to ‘till and to keep’ (Gen. 2.15)), we might easily dispose of the duality of body and nature, body and mind, body and soul, and eventually, soul and nature. This may be in accord with White’s proposal for the deep greening of Christianity that can be virtually applied to all faith traditions, as they “all require some degree of re-interpreting and re-imagining” (Rigby, 2017, p. 281) in order to shape a strong environmental ethic that relies on a holistic vision of man-within-environment.

Ballard’s urban violence novels *Cocaine Nights* and *Kingdom Come* depict Western societies whose members’ alienation from nature is replaced by their closeness to urban environment in which ‘new age’ religion is dictated by market mechanisms that established themselves as a norm.

3. *Cocaine Nights* and *Kingdom Come*

Ballard’s urban violence novels introduce the world of gated communities which reflect the zones of incessant ennui being the product of the culture they inhabit (Wilson, 2017, p. 157). In these futuristic communities, the attitude towards nature is indifferent, just like Ballard’s postmillennial subjects are deprived of any

affect, and in such cultural matrix aggression and transgression are prioritized along with consumerism and violence (Wilson, 2017, p. 157). Cinematography, as part of popular culture, is frequently deployed in Ballard's urban violence novels. His characters are constantly striving to decipher the reality resembling the film sets. They act as film characters and their vision of reality is blurred, as technological and media influence dominates the cultural anthropology in the core of which lies consumer-capitalist credo. In addition, violence is trivialized and as such embedded in the culture, and the only feasible instrument and primal reaction of his 'film-driven' characters are that of aggression and antisocial behaviour.

The novel *Cocaine Nights* reveals the gated, leisure-dominated paradise, whose idle residents savour their lethargic lifestyle that dominates most part of their daily lives, as well as their taste for violence and the thrill that emerges from it. This appears to be a retirement oasis, with the buzzing nightlife, while daily activities – if dormant parts of their brains are awakened – include amateur dramatics, occasional arsons, lavish parties, tennis competitions and pornographic films. It is a retirement haven with facilities that meet their residents' false needs and caprices and make them refrain from leaving the complex. At first glance, a reader might get the impression that nature also plays an important role here, yet what the residents need is only 'that part of the external world that was distilled from the sky by their satellite dishes' (CN, 1996, p. 166). In the world of variety of material goods and transgressive distractions and pursuits, the residents enjoy being sealed in their capsules equipped with a variety of activities to maintain their inertia. Consequently, innovative social and cultural environments do not put nature in the very nucleus of life anymore, as they are cultivating disruptive social and cultural development in which transgression and bizarre take the central stage. As Wilson contends, "innovation is always destructive if only because it is disruptive" (Wilson, 2017, p. 158). Hence, it further means putting nature behind, out of focus and alternating man's primal purpose and interaction with the natural world with technology. In other words, it means making nature *more Anthropocene* by harming it with technological potential in order to reach dream worlds.

The ultramodern complex with numerous handsome villas whose white facades were like 'blocks of time that had crystallized' (CN, p. 57) and spotless swimming pools that are 'blue kidneys of undisturbed water' (CN, p. 164) illustrates physical objects as a compensation for the non-residing natural features. The villas are vacant for the most part as their residents do nothing all day. This is the reason, above all, why Costasol complex 'was designed for' (CN, p. 164). Yet, what breaks the serene atmosphere of this dozy pueblo is the arson at the Hollinger villa, in which five people died, while all the other people literally stood and did nothing, enjoying the prospect. The novel's protagonist, Charles Prentice, is initially enticed by the torpid pleasures and the enviable atmosphere of the complex and lured into the web of pathological spurs and sociopath behaviour of its residents. His further investigation of the complex and the case of the Hollinger fire reassures him that under the mirage of serenity and delusory realm are transgressive activities to fulfill all their spiritual needs.

Unlike the dozy zombies in *Cocaine Nights*, Ballard's next novel *Kingdom Come* presents us with residents all astir with violent activities that occupy the time between sports and shopping. The opening chapter of the novel provides an overture to the atmosphere of London suburbs which 'dream of violence', 'asleep in their drowsy villas' while "wait[ing] patiently for the nightmares that will wake them into a more passionate world" (*Kingdom Come*, 2006, p. 9). The small city of Brooklands, somewhere off the road M25, depicts a landscape of cultureless local population, rendering almost satirical indictment of contemporary life in which communities have reached an 'end state of consumerism' (Baker, 2006). As the novel uncovers, this was actually a place where it would be strange 'to borrow a book, attend a concert, say a prayer, consult a parish or give to a charity' (*KC*, p. 12). It is a sad prospect, but the residents of Brooklands seem content with the constant purchasing in their microcosms of bar codes, and the whole town is redesigned as a retail space, including the health centre.

The protagonist of the novel, the advertising executive Richard Pearson, comes to Brooklands with the aim of investigating the allegedly random murder of his father. His father, retired pilot Stuart Person, was among those hit in a gunfire by a mental patient on day release using semi-automatic weapon in a shopping mall (Baker, 2006). Everything seems to be covered in a veil of mystery, starting from the random killing to why the shopping mall Metro Centre has such great effect on these cultureless residents who start fancying sports and who find diversion in burning down Asian businesses (Baker, 2006).

The whole community life in these novels, as a living organism, has been transformed: sports clubs are converted into clubs where only beating people up is exercised; there is an emergence of violence in shopping malls; churches are empty. A lack of human interaction has turned this urban landscape into 'a nightmare terrain of police cameras and security dogs, an uncentred realm devoid of civic tradition and human values' (*KC*, p. 84). The town of Brooklands is a world unto itself, bereft of any religious, family, or social traditions which help its residents to maintain human primordial values about oneself and the others; it is a zone destitute of any social activities that bind the community together, like going to church on Sundays or visiting the book clubs. The only joint activity the community conducts is the organization of sports matches, where the thrill for violence can be freely practiced and where incessant purchases to fulfill moral and spiritual desolation of its members can take place. The residents of Brooklands are strayed; they succumb to innovative cultural pathologies that make the whole territory of Brooklands the terrain of hostility, violence and illusory consumerist satisfaction that substitutes social interaction.

3.1. Religion and spirituality in the gated communities of Estrella de Mar and London suburbs of Brooklands

"This isn't just a shopping mall. It's more like..."

"A religious experience?"

"Exactly! It's like going to church..." (*Kingdom Come*, p. 36)

Ballard's high-tech urban surroundings portraying Britain of patios, barcodes, CCTV and stores, embody an idea of modern reality with decreased human engagement (Baker, 2006) that only triggers those pervert tendencies that 'wait 'inside us, ready to come out when we need it' (*KC*, p. 85). Here, religion comes down to needing 'a psychopathic god' as 'people are desperate to believe in something or someone. Ironically, they can only reach God through psychopathology' (*KC*, p. 86). Biblical allusions are to be found in comparing these gated enclaves to the garden of Eden and their residents - messianic megalomaniacs - to the main biblical figures. In *Cocaine Nights*, particularly, the psychiatrist Sanger, equipped with 'special talents, special needs' 'can play God, Adam and the serpent without having to change his fig-leaf' (*CN*, p. 205). Moreover, the novel's antagonist, Bobby Crawford, is seen as a serpent luring Charles the protagonist by imposing upon him his own ideas, worldviews and desires, so his 'object of interest' eventually "slip[s] into the role of becoming-Adam" (Wilson, 2017, p. 152). Charles is tempted and thus eager to transcend by succumbing to the luring urban environment and the community life within it. However, the garden of Eden kept and tilled by Bobby Crawford and those similar to him will eventually lead to Charles' ruin and damnation. Hence, the urban landscape embodied in this spotless Eden is 'a zoo fit for psychopaths' (*KC*, p. 84). This is a transcendence of the modern era in which no moral standards, no social gatherings, civil authorities, or long-lasting friendships are needed. Urban people lead 'instant life', as they need instant stimuli to break free from long-lasting emotions of boredom and inertia stemming from modernized denatured surroundings; they are thrilled to be the citizens of CCTV and shopping malls; they are accustomed to bizarre civil order and unmitigated violence. Finally, their individual worlds of isolation derive from nature succumbing to cultural pervasion and destruction.

With the petty crimes and violence on the rise, the lack of moral codes is evident, as well as the lack of proper mental health which is diminished because of people's obsession with crime and CCTV, their alienation from nature, the lack of social interaction and lethargy. Certainly, there is no evidence of any religious trace here; yet, there are 'psychopaths as the saints' with their thrill of vice and the self-proclaimed vocation of leading people and awakening them from 'narcoma' syndrome, adding the scent of violence and providing pure cocaine. Those 'neighbourhood evangelists' (*CN*, p. 187) preach sermons of violence that enrich the atmosphere of the community and provide the citizens with the enviable energy since 'nothing [like crime] binds community together... it's a strange paradox' (*CN*, p. 217). Bobby Crawford, the 'messiah' in the self-sufficient community of *Cocaine Nights*, 'totally transformed the place' (*CN*, p. 34). He is described as 'a little maniac sometimes but with enough boyish charm' to give the dozy community the vitality it lacked (*CN*, p. 69).

As in the residential complex Estrella de Mar of *Cocaine Nights*, in London suburbs of *Kingdom Come* vicious boredom encourages their residents to play sports and socialize in sports arenas. In the meantime, Asian shops are being vandalized and plastered with St. George's stickers. Besides, racism "tempered

by loyalty cards and PIN numbers” is on the rise (*KC*, p. 15). Incessant boredom of its residents is escaped by vicious strain of racism and violence they practice. Racism along with newly emerged religion – shopping at the Metro Center, whose dome emulates a shrine – points to the residents’ lack of interest in the traditional religious emanation. Hence, consumerism is turned into fascism and the ‘fourth reich’ that worships a ‘mathematical symbol’ (*KC*, p. 166) and advocates willed madness is established.

The whole megacosm of Brooklands is designed with stores, with the shopping windows arranged with ware resembling an altar. One of them contains a framed photograph of David Cruise surrounded by candles. Cruise is another messianic megalomaniac figure who, with his votive voice and almost religious aura, drives shoppers of Metro Centre into frenzy. A private CCTV channel of Metro Centre is continually watched, which is an indication of an indelible mark of a new social order. The narrative of the novel renders us with lucid and impressive illustration of the societies resembling the Middle East or the U.S., which are labelled as sick societies and on the way to become even sicker: “People are never more dangerous than when they have nothing left to believe in except God” (*KC*, p. 86). In this regard, religion is seen as impotent to apply its ascetic ethos in the broadest sense of the word and to settle the consumerist passions of modern developed societies. Religion is subjected to market mechanisms that give a new meaning to money and consumption. God of Ballard’s closed communities is consumerism and the religious sphere is regulated by the same principles as economic relations.

In both novels, religion is regarded as something that should be suppressed as it is seen as simply unsustainable. The residents seem rather resolute in the fact that, in the contemporary landscape of psyche and physicality, religion is futile. As such, it has nothing new to offer and seems to be useless. Instead, as this is the era of instantaneous and rapid changes, old ways of reaching people lose their value. At present, value is expected to be found in believing in madness. Religion, like nature, has been evicted by occurrence of consumerism, and there is ‘no more interplay between the two’ (Wilson, 2017, p. 153). What has actually led to gradual diminishing of significance and existence of religion in these marginalised societies on the verge of spiritual and moral collapse? Perhaps the answer lies within the fact that no one attends the church here as it cannot offer what the residents need: “Why bother? They find spiritual fulfillment at the New Age centre” (*KC*, p. 30).

In such imprisoned enclaves, religions and faith beliefs are unable to incite enough thrill, as their residents rejoice and embrace the apocalypse willingly. The words such as ‘atrocious’, ‘terminal’ or ‘catastrophe’ do not necessarily have negative connotation, as it might always be worse (Bradfield, 2012). The fact that the ‘worse’ has already come is suggested in the mere title of the novel *Kingdom Come*. The imminent apocalypse of the society in which nothing happens or will happen is reasonable to anticipate, as such a society worships giant bears, prefers purchases in shopping malls to church-going and validates things depending on whether they come with the barcode. In addition, the religious, natural and moral

anatomy of these communities might even feel ‘disoriented by the calamitous impacts of anthropocentric climate change’ (Rigby, 2017, p. 289). Although nature has its own place within these ultramodern and highly-ordered communities, it has been predominantly adjusted to meet the residents’ needs. All these human activities that include violations of natural laws and distortions of primal human needs result in the creation of denatured ecosystems that would inevitably lead to a collapse of the anthropocentric world.

The society takes a desperate “attitude to escape from a rational world” (KC, 2006, p. 105) and possesses a pervasive tendency to aestheticise and trivialise violence in order to develop taste for brutality and other forms of human atrocities. While trying to escape from natural space and any form of religiosity, man is heading towards immense estrangement and the atrophy of the rational reality. Ballard’s subjects are continually trying to search for psychological utopias despite their entrapment within the urban landscape with dystopian features.

Ballard depicted his characters as unaware of the fact that humans are entwined with nature, or more-than-human world. They express apathy towards any form of religiosity and spiritual fulfillment. The only objects worthy of being worshipped are the domes of the shopping malls and the psychopaths who pose as ‘messiahs’ of new age religions. Through these novels we gain insight into the past simulacrum of religions and the fact that there used to be sporadic permutations in that sphere as well (i.e. during the II World War). However, in this advanced and contemporary world these permutations seem to be even more malicious. The problem is that, with the mitigation of religions as the principal basis for social cohesion, it might not be easy to preserve the socio-ecological interrelatedness. Just like any other human institution, religious organizations may also ‘generate their own systems of oppression’ by hiding their corrupt practices that oppose their own doctrine (Rigby, 2017, p. 274). For instance, in Ballard’s novels, megalomaniac ‘messiahs’ preach their new psychopathic sermons, violate a set of traditional and basic religious rules proposed to guide people on living their lives accordingly and drive their fellow citizens into frenzy.

Just as natural space shapes some basic principles of religions and faith beliefs, particular religious perspectives directly affect the ways in which social and ecological issues are tackled. In Ballard’s denatured communities, religions and faith beliefs in their traditional sense are futile and non-existent and they are substituted by ‘new age’ religions dictated by market mechanisms oblivious of nature and natural laws. The anomalous manifestation of religion affects everything else - social bonds, moral codes and nature in particular - as the whole phenomenon is anthropocentric in nature. Furthermore, relying upon anthropocentric stances is ‘ecologically problematic’ as it should encompass all creatures, among living organisms, mountains and rocks as well. It appears that the goal of the modern societies is to cultivate affectless, blasé zombies in which the nostalgia for nature and religion is repelled as it gave precedence to anomalous pursuits and is eventually stifled with a lack of time on the part of their ‘disciples’.

In Ballard’s urban Edens, where absolute liberty discourages ethics and encourages sociopathic behaviours, anything that proclaims certain rules of

behaviour is no longer deemed attractive. The urban sprawl seems to induce violence, crime and alienation. It propels novel values, not excluding religious practices entirely, but rendering various manifestations and replicas which emulate religion only in terms of preaching new ideology by enthusiastic preachers with vicious intentions. Just like nature is capable of inciting pure emotions and serenity, so is the urban space capable of inducing social, psychological, moral, and spiritual disintegration.

Here, alienation takes central stage, hence, consumerism becomes pervasive. It stretches further to yield 'preachers' with the menacing messages. In *Kingdom Come*, Metro-Center shopping mall is an ersatz of a church where giant bears are worshipped, being 'a malaise deeper than shopping' (*KC*, p. 16). What happens to be the main 'culprit' for repressing religion is that human obsession with technology and perverted pursuits are at the center of attention now, as the old religious beliefs and politics cannot reach the public interest any longer. New, revolutionary ways were devised, the ways that celebrate criminal and psychopathology, something so bizarre and perverted to stimulate the dormant nervous system to activity in the society that is already on the verge of collapse (Gasiorek, 2005, p. 175). In other words, it is natural and cyclical for everything that life encompasses to undergo certain changes and reshaping. This also applies to both natural and urban landscapes, as well as the 'architecture' of people's inner spaces, which is bound to alternate to match the landscape by which it is defined. Such a metamorphosis may not necessarily be convenient and rational for nature or humans, but the postapocalyptic future is prone to rapid and instant changes that may affect the very core of human nature, human conduct and the moral codes. The issue may lie in the fact that we, as humans, are willing to enthusiastically embrace the spurs for reform, without questioning the nature and the outcome of it. It is even more distressing that we have the tendency to overly accept and banalise the novelties that may be, in their essence, deviant and perverted, as we see them as the only spur to action and the only means to awaken our temporarily dormant awareness of self and the outer world.

4. Final observations

The characters in Ballard's urban violence novels are no longer concerned and preoccupied with reasoning and rumination – they resemble a living organism that experiences brain death and numbness of emotions, as lethargy occupies their daily routines, making their memory and parts of brain dormant. Urban spaces that embody consumerist Edens, technologically-dominated communities and the technocracy that promotes the ultimate governance may only instigate artificial human responses and anomalous behaviours and activities, forcing man to lose his primeval and pristine role that God and nature have defined. Yet, the only pristine prospects are the spotless residential enclaves, such as Estrella de Mar or London suburbs which cherish the existence of the following consumerist credo: "Consumerism is the one thing that gives us our sense of values. Consumerism is honest, and teaches us that everything good has a barcode" (*KC*, p. 84).

Estrella de Mar and Brooklands are the antithesis of a community which is grounded on fostering social bonds, nourishing healthy relationships and acting in compliance with religious principles. In these two communities, violence is the only thing that binds their residents together. What Ballard seems to propel is that the novel manifestations of religiosity are consumerism and mass tourism, crime, and psychopathology, as religions that used to ‘set up symbols that people took literally’ cannot rule the world anymore. In other words, they became “as dead as a line of totem poles” (CN, p. 189). These societies seem to hold the views of the majority of people ‘caught in the crisis situations of Late Modernity, especially its political and economic elites’ (Bogomilova, 2019). In the context of Ballardian urban societies, the crisis particularly refers to the fact that the ethical messages and religious values are no longer sustainable forms of regulation of spiritual and practical attitudes of their members.

The continual and persistent development that affects our imminent and wider environment led to the eradication of the epoch 12,000, prior known as Holocene. Human enthusiasm in the form of consumerist ideology that does not find sense and identity in spiritual beauty of the world gave rise to this current era called ‘the Anthropocene’, in which “human species are controlling the world” (Tucker, Grim, 2017, p. 4). In Ballardian urban communities, the residents tend to beat nature into submission and are prone to identify happiness with material goods. Once we adopt the fact that human body and/or mind and ‘more-than-human’ world are interrelated, the question of duality - whether humans are to serve nature – ceases to be relevant, as the limits of humans utilizing natural potential are erased.

Rapid changes that we are experiencing are closing life systems on the planet, leading eventually to the end of the era, whereas those changes are surpassing the capacity of religions, ethics and spirituality to tackle these complex challenges. The question that arises is whether religions can provoke a transformation of consciousness for Earth and “inspiration for guiding mutually enhancing Human-Earth relations” (Tucker, Grim, 2017, p. 6). However, as Tucker and Grim claim, we might be at the point where no regulations or legislation may incite social transformations, hence the world religions might give their contribution. Namely, even though religions for the most part kept their traditional manner, they still managed to incite certain social changes in the form of emergence of certain progressive movements. Also, despite the fact that they were not so hasty in their tendency to respond to current environmental crisis, they may be apt to instigate a change in practices by shifting focus on broadening of their ethical perspectives. Yet, a disjunction between principles and practices is being more frequent. This is particularly evident in these two urban violence novels, whose self-regulated communities do not necessitate any further contributions from a religious, spiritual or moral paradigm. As aforementioned, this breeds indocile citizenry which refuses to welcome the fact that the human entity is an integral part of the ‘more-than-human’ world. Hence, Ballard’s characters struggle to reintegrate their religious, moral or spiritual components, as they identify themselves outside the place of nature/environment itself, utterly disregarding the entwinement of the two.

By pointing to the man's blending with his urban settings, Ballardian sterile urban landscapes resist the oppressive attitude of duality of human and more-than-human world. The unhealthiness of man's urban environment is indicative of the void in all human matters, including the characters' alienation from nature, their lack of social interaction, and eventually, their mental, spiritual and emotional paralysis. The necessity to reject anthropocentric ideas is made clear, as man is not made to act on his own, but in accordance with his acknowledgment that he has been in constant negotiation with his environment.

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