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Wymer, R. , 2012. ‘Ballard’s Story of O: “The Voices of Time” and the Quest for (Non)Identity’. In Jeannette Baxter and Rowland Wymer, eds. 2012. *J. G. Ballard: Visions and Revisions*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, ch. 1, pp. 19-34.

Chapter One

Ballard’s Story of O: ‘The Voices of Time’ and the Quest for (Non)Identity

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‘The Voices of Time’ (1960) is the finest of Ballard’s early stories, an enigmatic but indisputable masterpiece which marks the first appearance of a number of favourite Ballard images (a drained swimming-pool, a mandala, a collection of ‘terminal documents’) and prefigures the ‘disaster’ novels in its depiction of a compulsively driven male protagonist searching for identity (or oblivion) within a disturbingly changed environment. Its importance to Ballard himself was confirmed by its appearance in the title of his first collection of short fiction, *The Voices of Time and Other Stories* (1962), and by his later remark that it was the story by which he would most like to be remembered.¹

It was first published in the October 1960 issue of the science fiction magazine *New Worlds* alongside more conventional SF stories by James White, Colin Kapp, E. C. Tubb, and W. T. Webb. This was three-and-a-half years before Michael Moorcock took over the editorship of the magazine and inaugurated the ‘New Wave’ by aggressively promoting self-

consciously experimental forms of speculative fiction. However, his predecessor, E. J. ‘Ted’ Carnell, had worked hard to develop a distinctively British science fiction magazine which could challenge the major American publications and had already published several of Ballard’s early short stories, either in *New Worlds* or in the sister magazine which he edited, *Science Fantasy*. None of these stories would have fully prepared the typical SF reader in 1960 for the ‘modernist’ psychological obscurity and lack of conventional plotting (not to mention the typographical oddities) to be found in ‘The Voices of Time’ and not all readers were appreciative of Carnell’s willingness to push beyond the conventions of genre SF.

On the other hand, the extensive and unapologetic use of scientific terminology and concepts in the story (Ballard was currently working as the deputy editor for the technical journal *Chemistry and Industry*) would have been alienating for many readers of mainstream literary fiction, even if they had been able to encounter the story outside the prejudicial context of its publication in an SF magazine. Charles Nicol, in an eloquent account of the literary value of the story, doubted that,

a mainstream reader can appreciate the subtlety and beauty of such SF works, because his own set of literary values is limited by a tradition that excludes them. It is not the writer but the reader that builds the distinction between science fiction and mainstream fiction into a wall.²

As a piece of modernist SF, ‘The Voices of Time’ risked pleasing nobody in 1960. Since then, of course, Ballard has acquired a large and appreciative mainstream readership but, as Andy Sawyer points out:

Many current readers of Ballard, while hailing him as the significant writer that he is, seem to either overlook his early stories, or suggest that their appearance in sf magazines is some sort of aberration, or ignore the fact that it was *science fiction* rather than any other form of literature that Ballard wanted to reform and invigorate.³

Non-SF readers with a certain amount of literary experience, who refused to be put off by the gestures towards hard SF ('The ribonucleic acid templates which unravel the protein chains in all living organisms are wearing out'),⁴ would have recognized and appreciated the story's direct and indirect allusions to writers like Conrad, Kafka, Blake (the sunflower which 'sees' time) and T. S. Eliot (the dead geranium destroyed by the neurotic chimpanzee) and its modernist recourse to different type faces, page layouts, and linguistic registers to create a sense of fragmentation but also a sense of a potential new ordering through some hidden principle of montage.⁵

They would also have recognized the story's affinity with earlier poetic meditations on time, death, and change, such as Spenser's 'Mutabilitie Cantos', Shakespeare's Sonnets, or Donne's 'An Anatomie of the World, *wherein . . .* the frailty and the decay of this whole World is represented'.⁶ The comparison with Donne is particularly apt since Donne also paradoxically deploys up-to-the-minute scientific knowledge ('new Philosophy') as further support for his very traditional theme of universal degeneration. Ballard, in a way which runs counter to so much genre SF of the 1940s and 1950s, reverts to the standard pre-Enlightenment perspective of Spenser, Shakespeare, Donne (and most early theologians) that, since the Fall, 'all this world is woxen daily worse',⁷ and that as far as humanity is concerned

‘the peak has already been reached, and the pathway now leads downwards to the common biological grave’ (24).

The modern scientific ‘validation’ of this melancholy vision was partly provided, of course, in the nineteenth century by the Second Law of Thermodynamics which states that energy transfers within a closed system (such as the Universe) are always imperfect, resulting in an inevitable increase of entropy (the measure of disorder within a system) and culminating eventually in the ‘heat death of the universe’, when all heat and light have been expended by the stars to become unusable low-level background radiation. From the very beginnings of modern science fiction, this Law acted as a ‘hard science’ counterweight to the myths of progress which underpin a good deal of popular SF. The strings of numbers derived from intergalactic radio transmissions which punctuate Ballard’s story and which reveal a countdown towards the end of the universe were anticipated by the countdown built into the date H. G. Wells chose for his Time Traveller’s first voyage into the future – 802,701. The closing vision in *The Time Machine*, some thirty million years further into the future, of a swollen, cooling sun and the disappearance of all but the most primitive forms of life, uses the fate of the solar system as a synecdoche for the inevitable fate of the whole universe.

The Time Machine’s other scientifically well grounded form of pessimism – the likelihood of human devolution within industrialized societies in the absence of any other mechanism of natural selection – licensed genre SF writers, who were often more interested in dramatizing successful applications of technology, to indulge in more poetic and world-weary fantasies. ‘Twilight’ (1934), the most anthologized short story by John W. Campbell Jr., who as editor of *Astounding Science-Fiction* did more than anyone else since Wells to shape the development of science fiction in the twentieth century by publishing the early stories of Heinlein, Asimov, van Vogt, and Sturgeon, is a memorably elegiac glimpse of a dying human race no longer able to understand the great machines which their ancestors had

built. When one also remembers the vitality of the ‘catastrophe’ tradition in British SF and the big rise in ‘end of the world’ SF stories following the development and use of atomic weapons in 1945 (Ballard’s protagonist Powers refers casually to the prospect of World War IV as if, in spite of the near-future setting, World War III has already occurred) one can see that, despite its avant-garde form, ‘The Voices of Time’ had a distinguished and recognizable ancestry in conventional SF. The consolatory thought which briefly occurs to the doctor treating Powers, whose ever-increasing need to sleep could be read as one of the many symptoms of clinical depression, ‘*I’m sorry, Robert. What can I say – “Even the sun is growing cooler” –?*’ (10), would not have seemed absurd or out-of-place to SF readers.

The link between the fantastic visions of SF and inner psychological states was always an implicit and often unacknowledged part of their appeal, an explanation of why some stories seem to ‘work’ in ways which have little to do with the logic of their plotting or the scientific ideas put into play. Eighteen months before his famous guest editorial for *New Worlds*, ‘Which Way to Inner Space?’, Ballard made the link between psyche and cosmos fully explicit in his picture of a man sliding down ‘the physical and mental gradients’ whilst being presented with evidence that the river of time was also flowing downhill and that ‘*the life of the universe is now virtually over*’ (29). The psychological and figurative use of the idea of entropy was to become a distinctive feature of many *New Worlds* stories to the extent that it could be said to give ‘New Wave SF its coherence as a group project’.⁸ In addition to Ballard and Moorcock, other writers who exploited the concept effectively included Brian Aldiss, John Sladek, Thomas Disch, M. John Harrison, and Pamela Zoline. In Zoline’s ‘The Heat Death of the Universe’ (1967), one of the most important stories ever published during Moorcock’s editorship, the mental breakdown of a Californian housewife is counterpointed by coldly neutral explanations of the Second Law of Thermodynamics culled from reference works. By the story’s climax, the scientific statements no longer occupy separate paragraphs

(marked as ‘inserts’) but have merged with the developing domestic tragedy to form a continuous howl of despair.

The total ENTROPY of the Universe therefore is increasing, tending towards a maximum, corresponding to a complete disorder of the particles in it. She is crying, her mouth is open. She throws a jar of grape jelly and it smashes the window over the sink. Her eyes are blue. She begins to open her mouth. It has been held that the Universe constitutes a thermodynamically closed system, and if this were true it would mean that a time must finally come when the Universe ‘unwinds’ itself, no energy being available for use. This state is referred to as the ‘heat death of the Universe’. Sarah Boyle begins to cry. She throws a jar of strawberry jam against the stove, enamel chips off and the stove begins to bleed.⁹

The connection between the macrocosm and the ‘little world of man’ is as close as in the storm scenes in *King Lear*. As Kaldren says to Powers in Ballard’s story: ‘Think of yourself in a wider context. Every particle in your body, every grain of sand, every galaxy carries the same signature’ (35). It is hard to imagine Zoline’s brilliant fusion of ‘hard’ science with ‘soft’ psychology being produced prior to ‘The Voices of Time’.

The pivotal and Janus-faced position of Ballard’s story, with its recognizable relationship to classic SF and its even closer relationship to the ‘New Wave’ journeys into ‘inner space’ which were shortly to follow, can be demonstrated by the apparent oddity of its inclusion by Kingsley Amis in his misleadingly titled anthology *The Golden Age of Science Fiction* (1981). For Amis, the ‘Golden Age’ of SF was not the early years of John Campbell’s

editorship of *Astounding* (as recorded in most reference works) but the 1950s, 'more precisely the period 1949-62'.¹⁰ In Amis's fascinating and polemical introduction, the 'New Wave' is presented as an unmitigated disaster for SF and he endorses the view of E. C. Tubb (an 'old school' SF writer whose story, 'Memories are Important', appeared alongside 'The Voices of Time') that 'the result of bringing highbrow values into what was an essentially popular form or field would be to ruin it' (18).¹¹ Amis singles out 'The Heat Death of the Universe' as an example of everything he most dislikes about the 'New Wave', claiming that, apart from its title, 'Nothing else about or in the story has anything to do with science fiction however defined' and that, shorn of its technical devices, 'all it amounts to is a women's magazine, day-in-the-life account of a commonplace little woman in Alameda, CA' (24). The close formal and thematic relationship between Zoline's story and Ballard's makes it difficult to see how the one can exemplify all that was wrong with the 'New Wave' while the other can proudly represent the 'Golden Age' of SF. The gendered language ('women's magazine', 'commonplace little woman') may give a partial clue to what is going on here. At any rate, 1960 is specifically singled out by Amis as the year when science fiction began to change for the worse yet he obviously felt Ballard's story had retained a close enough connection with genre SF to continue to be anthologized despite its obviously disastrous influence on the field and the possibility that Ballard 'has never been *in* the genre at all' (28).¹²

Zoline's protagonist Sarah Boyle tries to resist the chaos into which her life is descending by a number of increasingly frantic attempts to impose order:

Sometimes she numbers or letters the things in a room, writing the assigned character on each object. There are 819 separate moveable objects in the living-room, counting books. Sometimes she labels objects with their names, or with false names, thus on

her bureau the hair brush is labelled HAIR BRUSH, the cologne, COLOGNE, the hand cream, CAT. (53)

She ‘writes notes to herself all over the house’ and, whereas over the stove she has written ‘Help, Help, Help, Help, Help’, she has put ‘on the wall by the washing machine’ Yin and Yang signs and mandalas, symbols associated both with Eastern religious philosophies and the psychological theories of Carl Jung.

If entropy was a defining preoccupation of ‘New Wave’ SF, there was also a complementary and compensating interest in Jung’s theories about how to achieve the psychic order and balance which was the goal of individuation. Writers published in *New Worlds* who had a serious interest in Jung included Michael Moorcock, Brian Aldiss, Roger Zelazny, and D. M. Thomas and this interest was shared by a number of other major writers of science fiction and fantasy such as Ursula Le Guin, Philip K. Dick, and Doris Lessing. Ballard himself had begun a degree in medicine with the aim of becoming a psychiatrist and was familiar with the work of both Freud and Jung, whose ideas were then given rather more respectful attention within the academic and professional discipline of psychology than they are now.

The apparent orientation towards death shown by Powers and other protagonists in early Ballard stories and the increased interest in sexual psychopathology in the later stories might suggest that it is Freud who is the crucial influence, and indeed his complete works form part of Kaldren’s collection of ‘terminal documents’. If that were the case, Powers’ decision to submit himself to whole-body irradiation, like the creatures Whitby was experimenting on, and merge himself with the cosmos would be a pathological surrender to the death drive, the instinctual rival to Eros which Freud (influenced by Schopenhauer)

hypothesized in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) and which posited an urge in all living things to return to their former inorganic state of being. Although in apparent opposition to the sexual instincts, the death drive could combine with them to produce compulsively masochistic or sadistic behaviour and can hardly be ignored in any analysis of *Crash* (1973). Freud's highly speculative notion was partly prompted by his investigation of the repetitive nightmares of shell-shocked soldiers, but was also a response to Jung's criticism that Freud's account of the libido was too exclusively sexual and can be seen as part of an unacknowledged move back towards some of Jung's ideas.¹³ Although the Freudian hypothesis that 'the aim of all life is death'¹⁴ has frequently been dismissed, it has recently received some potential support from biologists who believe that the 'default' mode for all living cells is death; in other words, they are programmed to commit suicide unless they receive chemical signals to the contrary.¹⁵ When this system of control breaks down, the result is cancerous tumours, 'totally disorganized growth' like that shown by the irradiated specimens in Whitby's laboratory (22).

The drained swimming pool which appears on the first page of the story has biographical origins in the abandoned pools which Ballard saw in the Shanghai International Settlement as European families began to flee from the Japanese but it also strongly recalls one of Freud's most famous images for the psychoanalytic project: 'It is a work of culture – not unlike the draining of the Zuider Zee.'¹⁶ This was to become the controlling metaphor of Zoline's second short story, 'The Holland of the Mind' (1969) and also appears in a story by Brian Aldiss, 'Danger: Religion!' which was printed alongside 'The Voices of Time' in an anthology called suggestively *The Inner Landscape* (1969):

Almost as far as our vision extended, we could see another dyke extending parallel with ours. The sea was being chopped into polders. In time, as the work of reclamation proceeded, the squares would be drained; the sea would dwindle into puddles; the puddles would become mud; the mud would become soil; the soil would become vegetables . . .¹⁷

When Ballard first saw a drained swimming pool, it struck him at the time as ‘strangely significant in a way I have never fully grasped’ but he later decided that ‘the drained pool represented the unknown’.¹⁸ In Freud’s rhetoric of course, the draining of the Zuider Zee figures a process of enlightenment and clarification: ‘Where id was, there ego shall be’ (112). By contrast, on the floor of Ballard’s drained pool are ‘strange grooves’ cut by the biologist Whitby before his suicide which interlock ‘to form an elaborate ideogram like a Chinese character’, constituting ‘an enigma now past any solution’ (9). This ‘enigma’ is not quite as enigmatic as it appears, since its shape is explicitly described for us a few pages later: ‘It covered almost the entire floor of the pool and at first glance appeared to represent a huge solar disc, with four radiating diamond-shaped arms, a crude Jungian mandala’ (13). In a story which comes close to overwhelming its readers with an informational overload, forcing them to scabble for meaning among ‘a heap of broken images’, Ballard has helpfully, perhaps teasingly, provided a key which promises to explain everything.

The importance of Jung in Ballard’s early work was recognized by a number of critics, including David Pringle, Robin Briggs, Gregory Stephenson, and Patrick Parrinder, who wrote that ‘the main “scientific” background for these stories is not biology, as it was for Wells, but Jungian psychology . . . Ballard’s fiction is a progressive subjugation of every

feature of external reality to the demands of the “collective unconscious”’.¹⁹ The advantages and disadvantages of a broadly Jungian approach are most apparent in Gregory Stephenson’s ‘archetypal’ analysis of the Ballard *corpus* in *Out of the Night and into the Dream* (1991) which has some interesting things to say but is handicapped by its decision to leave Freud out of the picture entirely and to see all of Ballard’s work as enacting the same redemptive ‘quest for an ontological Eden’.²⁰ In his chapter on the early disaster novels, Roger Luckhurst is sharply critical of what he saw (in 1997) as still ‘the dominant critical approach to Ballard’, accusing critics who celebrate a repeated movement towards psychic fulfilment and transcendence in these novels of ‘homogenizing complex frames of reference (psychoanalysis, analytic psychology, existentialism) into an unrigorous mish-mash of mystical religiosity, which is then – and this is the major concern – offered as *the* interpretation which would unlock the entire chain of Ballard’s oeuvre’.²¹

There are many different reasons why a writer or artist might be drawn to Jung, as many were in the 1960s. He gives a much more accurate and sympathetic account of the creative process than does Freud and his notion of a ‘collective unconscious’ seems to validate the idea that a writer who digs deep into his or her own psyche will encounter ‘archetypes’ which are communicable to others in a way which bypasses some of the normal obstacles created by historical and cultural difference, so that ‘we are all accomplices in the dream world of the soul’.²² As far as Ballard’s writings are concerned, much the most important Jungian idea is that of individuation, the process whereby the conscious and unconscious are brought into a closer relationship to form a new unity, or Self, whose centre is not the ego. A version of this idea was also picked up by the dissident ‘existentialist’ psychologist R. D. Laing, who was another important influence on Ballard.

Jung’s own ‘confrontation with the unconscious’ began at the end of 1912 and brought him close to a complete breakdown as his dreams of mass destruction began to

increase in number and intensity during 1913-14. The outbreak of World War I connected the personal with the historical in the same way that World War II and the prospect of World War III form part of the inner landscapes of so many Ballard stories. Although Jung was reassured that it was not only his own mind which was fragmenting, he continued to be subject to disturbing dreams and fantasies which he recorded in his notebooks and later transcribed calligraphically into the famous 'Red Book' (or 'Liber Novus'), accompanied by his own commentaries and paintings. This deeply personal document, beautifully decorated to resemble a medieval manuscript, underpins all his later work (it is described by its editor as 'nothing less than the central book in his oeuvre') but has only recently been made fully available in published form.²³ In it can be found many examples of the intricate combinations of circles with crosses, squares, or other tetradic shapes which he began painting in January 1916 and called 'mandalas' (from the *Sanskrit* word for circle).

In *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (1963), Jung wrote, 'My mandalas were cryptograms concerning the state of the self which were presented to me anew each day. In them I saw the self – that is, my whole being – actively at work . . . It became increasingly plain to me that the mandala is the centre. It is the exponent of all paths. It is the path to the centre, to individuation.'²⁴ Following the example of Whitby, Powers spends most of the story constructing his own giant mandala on the abandoned weapons range out in the desert and, when it is complete, places himself at the centre of it. This makes it easy to see why 'The Voices of Time', like many of the early novels, can be described as a story of 'psychic fulfilment', a successful completion of the process of individuation. The construction of the mandala proceeds in parallel with the lengthening periods of sleep experienced by Powers which are associated with the possibility of psychological development (all the permanent 'sleepers' at the Clinic possess the 'silent pair' of genes and may therefore be 'the forerunners of a massive move up the evolutionary slope' (21)). By contrast, Kaldren, who to

some degree functions as the antagonist or 'shadow' of Powers, has been surgically deprived by him of the need for sleep, an idea first explored by Ballard in 'Manhole 69' (1957). This procedure has added twenty years to Kaldren's active life but left him subject to 'periodic storms which tear him apart' as 'the psyche seems to need sleep for its own private reasons' (26).

Jung took his idea of a progression from a deluded conscious ego towards an essential inner Self from Hindu philosophy, where the true inner Self (*ātman*) is identical with the Absolute Reality (*Brahman*). The Self and the Universe cease to be distinct and participate in the same Reality. As the 'endless river' of time washes Powers away and he feels his body 'gradually dissolving, its physical dimensions melting into the vast continuum of the current' (39), the mandala seems to confirm that he has reached the centre of his own psyche which is also the centre of the cosmos: 'Around him the outlines of the hills and the lake had faded, but the image of the mandala, like a cosmic clock, remained fixed before his eyes, illuminating the broad surface of the stream' (39). This positive sense of fulfilment achieved through a mystic union of the Self and Absolute Reality seems to carry quite different connotations from the Freudian death drive, even though Powers' dead body is found shortly after he reaches this psychological centre and Whitby's completion of his own mandala was followed by his suicide. It is also relevant that the 'sleepers' at the Clinic are referred to as 'terminals' and their sleep appears to be 'dreamless'. As in many Ballard stories, the reader feels like asking at the end: 'were we led all that way for / Birth or Death?'²⁵

The answer is, of course, both/and rather than either/or since the competing Jungian and Freudian interpretations are simply different ways of describing the same phenomenon, as they are in the Hindu and Buddhist traditions which are the ultimate sources of their ideas. The Hindu quest for the *ātman*, or essential Self, which is identical with the underlying reality of the Universe was reformulated in Buddhism as a quest to achieve an understanding

that the Self is as much of an illusion as all other phenomena. The emptiness of *nirvāna* in Buddhist thought is because, within the flow of time, there *is* no stable, essential Self (this is the Buddhist doctrine of *anātman*, or no-self). Freud's notion of an inbuilt drive towards extinction derives from the Buddhist elements in Schopenhauer, whereas Jung's theory of individuation is more closely related to core Hindu beliefs. But if a stable centre to the psyche cannot be achieved *within* time, then the longing for one becomes difficult to distinguish from a longing for extinction and the process of individuation begins to closely resemble the death drive.²⁶

The mandala which Whitby carved on the floor of the swimming pool was almost wholly obscured by 'damp leaves and bits of paper' (13) and the 'mouldering gullies' were 'half-filled with water leaking in from the chlorinator' (9), all this suggesting a ceaseless flow of time which threatens the achievement of a centred Self. The phrase which concludes the story's first paragraph, 'an enigma now past any solution' (9) may carry a barely concealed watery pun in its final word. Although the mandala is one of Jung's most important archetypal images of the Self, along with the Philosopher's Stone and Christ, it does not connote, for either Jung or Ballard, an unambiguous fullness of presence, something which can be firmly grasped. For Jung, 'The archetype in itself is empty and purely formal', a structuring principle which is only partially represented by concrete images.²⁷ When Kaldren's girlfriend, the ironically named Coma, asks Powers what he has been scribbling on a desk blotter, he 'realized he had been unconsciously sketching an elaborate doodle, Whitby's four-armed sun' but what he replies to her is, 'It's nothing' (26). In expressing a doubt that any single hermeneutic key will serve to 'explain' the disaster novels, Roger Luckhurst asks pointedly: 'Could the ciphers which litter Ballard's landscapes merely draw a zero? Could the Jungian mandala, that symbol of wholeness and completeness that Powers

builds in concrete in “The Voices of Time” – could its plenitude of suggested meaning actually be empty?’²⁸

The circular form can signify wholeness, completion and plenitude or, equally, absence, emptiness and nothingness. Unlike the glass which is either half-full or half-empty, depending on point of view, the mandala is both wholly full and wholly empty. The abandoned swimming pool is also both full of meaning and ‘empty’ (9), like the drained pool in T. S. Eliot’s *Burnt Norton*, the first of the *Four Quartets*, which ‘was filled with water out of sunlight . . . Then a cloud passed, and the pool was empty’.²⁹ In another early Ballard story, ‘Zone of Terror’ (1959), the desert setting (not dissimilar to that of ‘The Voices of Time’) had been chosen, we are told, as the location for a ‘re-creational’ centre for tired executives because of its ‘supposed equivalence to psychic zero’ and the psychologist’s internal telephone number, 0, is ‘almost too inviting’ to ring.³⁰ Powers speaks of his own ‘approaching zero’ (14) which he reaches when he places himself at the centre of the mandala he has built on the weapons range.

Ballard was an admirer of the erotic novel *Story of O* by ‘Pauline Réage’ (since identified as Dominique Aury) and, along with Graham Greene, Harold Pinter, and Brian Aldiss, was happy to have his praise of this notorious work included as one of the promotional quotations used by the Corgi paperback edition.³¹ An explicit erotic dimension is largely missing from Ballard’s own story of simultaneous fulfilment and annihilation, though it is present in ‘Track 12’, published two years earlier, in which the central character, ‘his fading identity a small featureless island nearly eroded by the waves beating across it’, drowns to the sound of a massively amplified kiss as the ‘island’ of his identity ‘slipped and slid away into the molten shelf of the sea’.³² Like the mandala, the name of Réage’s character signifies completeness, fullness, and eternity of being and, paradoxically, the ‘nothing’ or ‘zero’ to which her masochistic submission has reduced her:

O is a conventional symbol of eternity, the snake with its tail in its mouth, which has neither beginning nor end. The O of the marriage ring symbolizes everlasting love, a circle that is lifted out of time and mortality. O is the hole, the cunt, female sexuality, which is either the eternal circle or an emptiness – zero – waiting to be filled.³³

It is not far-fetched to suggest that the ‘perverse’ sexual psychology of *Story of O* is very closely related to the simultaneous quest for identity and non-identity which we find in ‘The Voices of Time’, which could perhaps be described as Ballard’s own ‘Story of O’, or rather the first of many such, since the pattern is repeated in so many of his later works, including those with an explicit sexual dimension. In her very influential book on *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, Rosemary Jackson assimilates both erotic and non-erotic forms of fantasy to a bold, psychoanalytically based, general theory. She writes of:

that goal which lies behind all fantastic art, to a greater or lesser degree, the arrival at a point of absolute unity of self and other, subject and object, at a zero point of entropy. Jacques Lacan has identified the longing for this unity as the profoundest desire of the subject, referring to it as an ‘eternal and irreducible human desire . . . an eternal desire for the nonrelationship of zero, where identity is meaningless’.³⁴

This seems implausible as a generalization about all fantastic art and, despite her deployment of the term ‘entropy’ she has little to say specifically about science fiction, where the element of fantasy is both disciplined and apparently validated by an appeal to scientific concepts and

the use of scientific terminology. However, it is an uncannily apt comment upon ‘The Voices of Time’, capturing its longing for a unity of being which can only be completed outside the flow of time and hence only attained in death.

Because the quest for identity takes place within time, because our being is *in* time, we can never reach that ‘still point’, the centre, the Self, represented by the mandala, because the centre cannot hold. The ceaseless Heraclitean flux carries everything away with it, so that falling leaves and running water obscure the mandala’s outlines. It can still be glimpsed, in the way that a religious ikon can be glimpsed on the bed of a flowing stream in Tarkovsky’s film *Stalker*, but it cannot be fully grasped or possessed. This is why the most extreme and mystical of all Ballard’s quests for identity, *The Crystal World* (1966), is predicated upon the idea that time is ‘leaking’ out of the universe, causing matter to replicate itself by crystallization. This confers a kind of immortality on both living things and inanimate objects (the distinction has ceased to be meaningful), and produces a vision of a single atom filling the entire universe ‘from which simultaneously all time has expired, an ultimate macrocosmic zero’.³⁵

The Self which is found in ‘The Voices of Time’ turns out to be a no-Self, as Powers dissolves his identity in the vast ‘endless river’ of cosmic time which flows over him. Except, of course, that the river of time is not ‘endless’. The very entropic forces which prevent full individuation and the achievement of a centred Self will eventually bring about what Jackson called a ‘zero point of entropy’, the reduction of the universe to a state of undifferentiated, changeless, background radiation, the so-called ‘heat death of the universe’. At one level, there is an undoubted sense of pathos in the fact that Powers has merged with the *Brahman* or Absolute Reality of a cosmos which is itself dying and therefore not a stable ground of Being, a pathos captured in the poetry of the ‘mysterious emissaries from Orion’ who spoke of ‘ancient beautiful worlds beneath golden suns in the island galaxies, vanished forever now in

the myriad deaths of the cosmos' (41). On another level, like Spenser in the 'Mutabilitie Cantos', Ballard gives us a vision beyond mutability of 'that same time when no more *Change* shall be' (VIII.2), when the countdowns in the intercepted radio transmissions have all reached zero and Powers will indeed be 'beyond hope but at last at rest' (40), secure in his (non)identity, the circle of his life, his O, as well as that of the universe itself, now complete but also completely empty.

¹Notes

The Best of J. G. Ballard (Futura, 1977).

² Charles Nicol, 'J. G. Ballard and the Limits of Mainstream SF', *Science Fiction Studies* 9 (July 1976) <http://www.depauw.edu/sfs/backissues/9/nicol9art.htm>, p.8.

³ Andy Sawyer, 'Foundation's Favourites: The Voices of Time by J. G. Ballard', *Vector: The Critical Journal of the British Science Fiction Association*, 261 (Autumn 2009), 50-1 (p. 51).

⁴ 'The Voices of Time' in J. G. Ballard, *The Voices of Time* (London: J. M. Dent, 1984 [1974]), p. 24. Subsequent page references are given in the main text. This volume is a reprint of Ballard's first British collection, *The Four-Dimensional Nightmare* (London: Gollancz, 1963), with two stories changed, rather than of *The Voices of Time and Other Stories*, which had been published the year before in America.

⁵ Charles Nicol identifies 'The Waste Land' as the story's most revealing mainstream literary analogue, p. 4.

⁶ John Donne, *Poetical Works*, ed. Herbert J. C. Grierson (London: Oxford University Press, 1971 [1929]), p. 206.

⁷ Edmund Spenser, 'Two Cantos of Mutabilitie', VI.6, in *Poetical Works*, ed. E. De Selincourt (London: Oxford University Press, 1969 [1912]). Psalm 102 says both the earth and the heavens 'shall wax old like a garment' (Authorized Version, verse 26).

⁸ Roger Luckhurst, *Science Fiction* (London: Polity Press, 2005), p. 158. See also Colin Greenland, *The Entropy Exhibition: Michael Moorcock and the British 'New Wave' in Science Fiction* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), ch. 11 'No more, with feeling: entropy and contemporary fiction', pp. 191-206.

⁹ Pamela Zoline, 'The Heat Death of the Universe' (1967), in *Busy About the Tree of Life* (London: The Women's Press, 1988), pp. 50-65 (pp.64-5). The unreferenced scientific statements are in fact taken from *The Penguin Dictionary of Science*.

¹⁰ Kingsley Amis, ed., *The Golden Age of Science Fiction* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983 [1981]), p. 32. The rather precisely chosen dates 1949-1962 correspond to the founding of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* (seen as a positive development by Amis) and Ballard's guest editorial for *New Worlds*, 'Which Way to Inner Space?'. The cover of the Penguin edition features a rock-jawed spaceman wielding a ray gun, a reassuring image for many readers of genre SF but unlikely to attract 'the general reader' (to whom Amis says he was trying to reach out).

¹¹ Nevertheless Tubb continued to have stories published in *New Worlds* after Moorcock had taken over the editorship.

¹² Kingsley Amis had earlier included 'The Voices of Time' in the third volume of the influential *Spectrum* anthologies of SF which he edited with Robert Conquest (London: Gollancz, 1963). Ballard himself reviewed *The Golden Age of Science Fiction* for the *Guardian* and wrote that 'Amis's contempt for post-1960 science fiction seems bound up with his growing hatred of almost everything that has happened in the world since then'. See J. G. Ballard, 'New Means Worse', *A User's Guide to the Millennium: Essays and Reviews* (London: Flamingo, 1997 [1996]), pp. 189-91 (p. 190).

¹³ See note 26.

¹⁴ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis*, trans. James Strachey, *The Pelican Freud Library* vol. 11 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), p. 311.

¹⁵ See, for example, Martin Raff, 'Cell Suicide for Beginners', *Nature* 396:6707 (12.11.1998), 119-22.

- ¹⁶ Sigmund Freud, Lecture 31 'The Dissection of the Psychological Personality', in *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, trans. James Strachey, *The Pelican Freud Library* vol. 2 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 112.
- ¹⁷ Brian W. Aldiss, 'Danger: Religion!', in Mervyn Peake, J. G. Ballard, Brian W. Aldiss, *The Inner Landscape* (London: Corgi, 1970 [1969]), pp. 127-90 (p. 128). The third story is Mervyn Peake's 'Boy in Darkness', which is developed out of the world of the *Gormenghast* novels.
- ¹⁸ J. G. Ballard, *Miracles of Life* (London: Harper Perennial, 2008), pp. 26-7.
- ¹⁹ Patrick Parrinder, 'Science Fiction and the Scientific World-View', in Patrick Parrinder, ed., *Science Fiction: A Critical Guide* (1979), pp. 82-3.
- ²⁰ Gregory Stephenson, *Out of the Night and into the Dream: A Thematic Study of the Fiction of J. G. Ballard* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), p. 148.
- ²¹ Roger Luckhurst, *'The Angle Between Two Walls': The Fiction of J. G. Ballard* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997), Ch. 2 'J. G. Ballard and the Genre of Catastrophe', p. 48.
- ²² Derek Jarman, *Kicking the Pricks* (London: Vintage, 1996), p. 108. This autobiographical work was first published under the title *The Last of England* in the same year (1987) as his film of that name.
- ²³ C. G. Jung, *The Red Book: Liber Novus*, ed. and intro. Sonu Shamdasani, Philemon Series (New York: Norton, 2009), p. 221.
- ²⁴ C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, recorded and ed. Aniela Jaffé, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (London: Flamingo, 1985 [1963]), pp. 221-2.
- ²⁵ T. S. Eliot, 'Journey of the Magi', in *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber, 1974 [1963]), p. 110.

²⁶ It has been argued (by Bruno Bettelheim among others) that the close relationship between the two ideas can be traced back to a more recent source, some speculations by Sabina Spielrein, who was a patient and lover of Jung's before becoming a Freudian analyst. In a 1912 paper she argued 'that the sexual instinct contains both an instinct of destruction and an instinct of transformation', giving us the origin of 'both Freud's dual-instinct theory *and* Jung's theory of individuation!' (Elio J. Frattaroli, 'Me and my anima: through the dark glass of the Jungian/Freudian interface', in Polly Eisendrath and Terence Dawson, eds, *The Cambridge Companion to Jung* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 182). See also Aldo Carotenuto, *A Secret Symmetry: Sabina Spielrein between Jung and Freud*, trans. Arno Pomerans, John Shepley and Krishna Winston (London: Routledge, 1984); Rowland Wymer, 'Freud, Jung, and the "Myth" of Psychoanalysis in *The White Hotel*', *Mosaic* 22:1 (Winter 1989), 55-69; John Kerr, *A Most Dangerous Method: The Story of Jung, Freud, and Sabina Spielrein* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1994).

²⁷ C. G. Jung, 'Psychological Aspects of the Mother Archetype', trans. R. F. C. Hull, in *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, vol.9 part 1 of *The Collected Works* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959), par.155.

²⁸ Luckhurst, *The Angle Between Two Walls*, p. 70.

²⁹ T. S. Eliot, *Burnt Norton*, in *Collected Poems 1909-62*, p. 190.

³⁰ J. G. Ballard, 'Zone of Terror' (1960), in *The Complete Short Stories*, 2 vols, (London: Harper Perennial, 2006 [2001]), vol. 1, pp 184-201 (p. 185).

³¹ Pauline Réage, *Story of O* (London: Corgi, 1976 [1954]). Ballard is quoted on the back cover as saying: 'Here all kinds of terrors await us, but like a baby taking its mother's milk all pains are assuaged. Touched by the magic of love, everything is transformed. STORY OF O is a deeply moral homily.' When Dominique Aury confirmed in 1994 that she was the real author, she also explained that she wrote the book for her lover Jean Paulhan as a way of ensuring his continued sexual interest in her. See Joan Smith, 'Love letter', *Guardian*, 8 August, 1994.

³² J. G. Ballard, 'Track 12' (1958), in *The Complete Short Stories*, vol. 1, p. 95.

³³ Maurice Charney, *Sexual Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1981), p. 69.

³⁴ Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Methuen, 1981),

pp. 76-7. The Lacan quotation is from *The Language of the Self*.

³⁵ J. G. Ballard, *The Crystal World* (London: Triad/Panther, 1978 [1966]), p. 85.