The Progress of the Text: The Papers of J. G. Ballard at the British Library

Chris Beckett

‘My real luggage is rarely locked’

The opening scene of Cocaine Nights takes place at the edge of a stretch of no-man’s land, at the border between Gibraltar and Spain. Charles Prentice, travel writer, waits impatiently in a queue of traffic, behind a mud-stained van transporting boxes of ‘pinky naked’ plastic dolls with ‘rocking blue eyes’.

1 He is about to drive along the Spanish coast to the town of Marbella where his brother Frank is being held in custody, on multiple charges of murder, as Prentice will soon learn. A soldier with ‘heavy hands’ from the Guardia Civil fumbles amongst the watching dolls, searching for contraband, before turning his officious attention to the larger prize of a coach of migrant workers from Tangiers. Unsettled, Prentice is eventually waved on and follows the van towards La Linea, its ‘rear doors swinging and the dolls dancing together with their feet in the air’.

2 A ‘virtually innocent traveller’ (despite his profession), Charles Prentice’s only contraband is his ‘daydream’ of rescuing his brother and smuggling him across the border.

3 For all that Ballard conveys the transitory bustle of a border town, and quickly sketches the narrow streets and ‘quaint tea-rooms’ that replicate a corner of an imaginary provincial England, we know from the first paragraph of Cocaine Nights that what is being established as the novel’s ground note is a mood of transgression and guilt. The resonant assertion of the novel’s first sentence – ‘Crossing borders is my profession’ – is quickly qualified by Prentice’s admission that his employment is ‘little more than a masquerade’. Customs officers searching his suitcases always ‘set off a reflex of unease’: ‘I sense them trying to unpack my mind and reveal a contraband of forbidden dreams and memories. And even then there are the special pleasures of being exposed [...]’. My real luggage is rarely locked, its catches eager to be sprung.’

4 Prentice’s mental baggage is also primed, ready to be revealed as soon as its psychological (and narrative) ‘catches’ are triggered. The strips of territorial no-man’s land he regularly crosses in the course of his job are ‘zones of promise’, and the journey on which he is now embarked – investigating the charges on which his brother is being held – is a psychological passage that holds particular promise: it will involve crossing frontiers within himself as he pursues an inexorable journey from a state of virtual innocence to an acceptance of personal guilt.

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Add. MS. 88938, comprising 226 files (1931–2010), is divided into nine Series: 88938/1 Personal and Family Material (including Photographs); 88938/2 Correspondence; 88938/3 Works; 88938/4 Interviews Conducted by Fax; 88938/5 Exhibitions (including Posthumous Events); 88938/6 Bibliographies and Commentaries; 88938/7 Adaptations; 88938/8 Posthumous; 88938/9 Various Material by Others. The catalogue is available at: http://searcharchives.bl.uk. I am grateful to the Estate of J. G. Ballard for permission to publish images of material from the archive in which it holds copyright.


2 Ibid., p. 13.

3 Ibid., p. 14.

4 Ibid., p. 9.

5 The beginnings of Ballard’s novels tend to conform to his observation on Graham Greene’s ‘method of setting out the psychological ground on which his narratives rest. Within the first paragraph of a Graham Greene novel one has an unmistakable feeling for the imaginative and psychological shape of what is to come’, ‘Memories of Greeneland’ (La Magazine littéraire, 1978), reprinted in A User’s Guide to the Millennium: Essays and Reviews (London, 1996), p. 138. Greene is mentioned in the first conversation between Charles and Frank Prentice (Cocaine Nights, p. 25): ‘You used to say your only interests in life were opium and brothels. Pure Graham Greene, but there was always something heroic there. Do you smoke a few pipes?’
Gibraltar’s simulacrum of England fades as Prentice drives along the coast towards Marbella, but not its air of transgression. In a conspicuous (and typically Ballardian) reversal of reader expectation that prepares for the thematic course of the novel, the supposed smuggling and money-laundering conspiracies of Gibraltar strike Prentice as a force for public good and an important source of civic pride. At his first interview with Inspector Cabrera (who has ‘a hundred seminars on the psychology of crime still fresh in his mind’), Prentice is asked if his brother had ‘a special talent for fantasy? Often a troubled childhood can lead to the creation of imaginary worlds’. Prentice replies that, on the contrary, it was he who was the one with the imagination. ‘A useful gift for a travel writer,’ comments the Inspector. ‘But often a handicap for a novelist’. The gift of imagination may help with the promotion of a holiday destination – or, indeed, the ‘memory-erasing’ retirement resort of Estrella de Mar where Frank Prentice had worked (‘Estrella de Mar isn’t anywhere’) – but ‘a special talent for fantasy’ is a hindrance to the faithful social observation of the traditional novelist that Cabrera has in mind (if not to the topography of ‘inner space’ that Ballard’s novels map). But the second part of Cabrera’s remark did not, in fact, appear in the final text of Ballard’s novel, although we can read it today – struck through (fig. 1) – in a late draft of the book (entitled ‘The Dark Side of the Sun’) amongst Ballard’s papers at the British Library. Alert to the seductive risks of aphorism–making – a

![Fig. 1. Detail from the typescript of Cocaine Nights entitled ‘The Dark Side of the Sun’. Add. MS. 88938/19/4/1 (sheet 26).](image)
rhetorical tendency the author greatly favoured – Ballard evidently judged that on this occasion he had overplayed the insight of Inspector Cabrera, and over-elaborated the reflexive texture of *Cocaine Nights*. After all, Prentice is not a novelist, and Prentice is not Ballard, or not exactly. Despite correspondences to the contrary, even Ballard’s fictional characters called ‘Jim’ (*Empire of the Sun*) or ‘Ballard’ (*Crash*) are not an author called Ballard. And yet the narrative pathway of Charles Prentice will be, in common with the psychological course of all Ballard’s leading characters, an inner journey.

Crossed by the flying shadows of other ‘Ballards’, the mannered layers of the author’s later fiction glint with the refracted shards of his earlier works. A Ballard reader cannot fail to recognize a reflexive trope in the description of Prentice’s regular border crossings, and in the dead (or ‘terminal’) zones of ‘promise’ that lie between territorial borders, and even in the throwaway remark that Prentice’s profession as a travel writer is ‘little more than a masquerade’. It is equally impossible to read of the dancing dolls with their legs in the air (especially when viewed through the frame of Prentice’s car windscreen), or to read of the ‘heavy hands’ of the Guardia Civil soldier fumbling like a clumsy lover among the same blue-eyed dolls, without calling to mind, as Ballard had certainly intended, the many surreal, sinister and quirky appearances in his fiction of mannequins, dummies and dolls, not least the faceless collision test dummies that ‘Ballard’ observes at the Road Research Laboratory in *Crash*.

A truncated aphorism is a small example with which to begin an introduction to the textual wealth that is the principal boon of the papers of J. G. Ballard now available at the British Library, although it is the character of textual difference to be instanced by singular examples. Like Prentice’s ‘real luggage’, Ballard’s literary suitcases at the British Library are unlocked – their catches eager to be sprung – but their contents will disappoint the customs officials of biographical research. With a few exceptions, the correspondence in the archive is from the last two decades of Ballard’s life, and the sparkle and clutter of everyday ephemera that will often swell collections of personal papers in enlightening ways is entirely absent from Ballard’s archive. The limited range of personal material that is present – school certificates and reports, some photographs, and a seemingly personal bundle of primary documentation from Lunghua Camp – has not survived because the author treasured such material through the years: copy documents obtained from The Leys School in Cambridge (the school that Ballard attended as a boarder in January 1946 when he came to England from Shanghai) were collected by a diligent reader who visited the Leys and subsequently posted the material he had obtained to Ballard; the few family photographs in the archive

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\[9\] Notable exceptions are two letters (both 1964) from Ballard’s wife, Mary, to his sister, Margaret. The first letter, sent from Dyserth, North Wales (2 April) includes publication references and records that Ballard has received ‘a letter from the writer William Burroughs from Tangier[s].’ (The letter from Burroughs is not amongst Ballard’s papers.) The second letter (dated ‘Tuesday’ only) is written from Alicante, where the Ballard family are enjoying an ill-fated holiday: ‘Lots of drained rivers which Jimmie (senior) loves haunting. As you know his great book is to be set in a drained river bed […] Sounds crazy doesn’t it, but it won’t be when Jimmie has turned it into a book.’ Not long after writing the second letter, Mary Ballard died suddenly of pneumonia (13 September). The ‘great book’ to which the letter refers is puzzling: *The Drought*, to which it might seem to refer, had already been written and was about to be published in America (August 1964) as *The Burning World*. Ballard’s next book, *The Crystal World* (1966) does not match Mary’s description. For both letters, see Add. MS. 88938/1/6. The two letters were added to Ballard’s papers by his sister, Margaret Richardson, at the time the collection was received.

\[10\] The material can be found in Add. MS. 88938/1/2. The papers include a letter from Raymond Tait (1994) who sourced the material, which includes, in addition to school reports (including copy reports from Lunghwa Academy), copy correspondence (1945-47) between Ballard’s father and the Headmaster of The Leys School. In *Miracles of Life* (London, 2008), Ballard commented, p. 127: ‘Life at an English boarding school was part of the continuum of strangeness that made up my adolescence. I once said that the Leys reminded me of Lunghau Camp, though the food was worse. In fact, by the standards prevalent among English public schools, The Leys was liberal and progressive.’
appear to be present because they are the originals of the photographs published in *Miracles of Life*; and the fascinating material about Lunghua Camp – plans of the Camp, details of the construction of the wooden huts, a graph of declining calorie intake over time, notes about malaria, and Minutes of Meetings of the British Residents’ Association – was sent to Ballard in 1996, long after the publication of *Empire of the Sun* (1984), a novel that was not informed – or inhibited – by documentary research but sprang from a fecund admixture of memory and imagination.\(^\text{11}\)

Autobiographical fiction appeared to take the centre ground of Ballard’s writing with the publication of *Empire of the Sun*, an imaginative account of his (liberating)\(^\text{12}\) imprisonment in Lunghua Camp. Its sequel, *The Kindness of Women* (1991), presented the subsequent English progress of ‘Shanghai Jim’. Ballard often remarked on the sense of alienation he experienced when he first arrived in England, and upon his disbelief at the gap between the England of his young imagining and the post-war country that he found: ‘a London that looked like Bucharest with a hangover – heaps of rubble, an exhausted ferret-like people defeated by war and still deluded by Churchillian rhetoric, hobbling around a wasteland of poverty, ration books and grotesque social division.’\(^\text{13}\) First impressions endure, and Ballard’s sense of England as an alien milieu continued to inform his work\(^\text{14}\) as much as his indelible memories of Lunghua Camp. He remarked (once again, crisply, aphoristically) that it had taken him twenty years to forget Lunghua Camp and twenty years to remember it.\(^\text{15}\)

In *The Kindness of Women*, and just within that twenty-year time frame of forgetting, Jim casually says to his wife Miriam that he might one day write about the war, and in order to do so it might help to return there. With the foresight that belongs to the ‘kindness’ of her gender, Miriam tells Jim to forget about returning to Shanghai: ‘If you don’t go back, anything you write will be far more true.’\(^\text{16}\) *Empire of the Sun* and *The Kindness of Women* enjoyed considerable commercial and critical success, bringing Ballard’s work for the first time into the purview of mainstream contemporary fiction.\(^\text{17}\)

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\(^\text{11}\) For the Lunghua Camp material, see Add. MS. 88938/2/1/7. The documents were supplied by Margaret Braidwood from the papers of her husband, William Braidwood, who was Chairman of the British Residents’ Association (Shanghai) before and during Lunghua Camp. (Margaret Braidwood was William Braidwood’s second wife, married 1979.) The papers are mentioned in *Miracles of Life* (pp. 75-6) where Braidwood is referred to as ‘a close friend of my father’, although Ballard has mistakenly recorded that the material was sent to him in ‘the 1980s’. Ballard’s papers also include six letters from Camp internees responding both negatively and positively to the depiction of Lunghua Camp in *Empire of the Sun* – see Add. MS. 88938/2/1/6.

\(^\text{12}\) *Miracles of Life*, p. 80: ‘Lunghua Camp may have been a prison of a kind, but it was a prison where I found freedom.’ *The Kindness of Women* (London, 1991) (London, 2008), p. 48: ‘[Peggy] knew that I was too wedded to Lunghua to want to leave it, that my entire world had been shaped by the camp, and that I had found a special freedom which I had never known in Shanghai […] Far from wanting to escape from the camp, I had been trying to burrow ever more deeply into its heart.’ And *Empire of the Sun* (London, 1984), p. 243: ‘At long last they were beginning to realize the simple truth that Jim had always known, that inside Lunghua they were free.’


\(^\text{14}\) *Miracles of Life*, p. 35: ‘As a writer I’ve treated England as if it were a strange fiction […]’.

\(^\text{15}\) *Miracles of Life*, p. 248.


\(^\text{17}\) *Empire of the Sun* won the Guardian Fiction Prize (1984), the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for Fiction (1984, shared with Angela Carter), and was shortlisted for the Booker Prize (1984).
attention. Popular success prompted reassessment of his work, which had, until *Empire of the Sun*, been associated with the more marginal genres of science fiction, dystopian fantasy, and experimental narrative. Reassuringly set in historical time, and told with a warm if troubled heart, the autobiographical novels exhibited a wide and appealing emotional range. Like a *Bildungsroman* published by instalments, Ballard’s autobiographical novels presented a fallible human journey of maturation, from the deprivations of Lunghua Camp to the redemptive domestic idyll of his Shepperton home. They combined scintillating lyrical moments with a disarming frankness and vulnerability that seemed to guarantee their veracity. Reviewers welcomed the interpretive promise of their candour: the books appeared to supply a biographical route map that signposted the psychological and biographical origins of the author’s more opaque fantasies and dystopias. It was a reductive perspective that Ballard endorsed, in interviews and in the subsequent autobiography *Miracles of Life*: ‘In many ways my entire fiction is the dissection of a deep pathology that I had witnessed in Shanghai and later in the post-war world, from the threat of nuclear war to the assassination of President Kennedy, from the death of my wife to the violence that underpinned the entertainment culture of the last decades of the century’. Ballard’s public profile came to be encapsulated in (and promulgated by) the ringing alliteration ‘from Shanghai to Shepperton’, a snappy sub-title to *Miracles of Life* that memorably suggested an improbable life-journey between two incongruent geographical and cultural poles. If Ballard’s fiction was at once difficult, bizarre and beautiful — and, on occasion, repugnant — its distinctive Ballardian character could be readily explained, so the argument ran, by the traumatata of early experiences that had long remained unarticulated, or had been displaced and reinscribed in a symbolic fictional language, a surreal science fiction of the hallucinatory present attended by the associative logic of a disturbing dreamscape. ‘The memories of Shanghai that I had tried to repress had been knocking at the floorboards under my feet, and had slipped quietly into my fiction.’ And if Ballard’s writing seemed to exhibit ‘the sense of an unresolved past’, his autobiographical fiction not only described something of the unusual road he had travelled to the suburban haven of Shepperton but also offered his readers a series of carefully threaded biographical clues and epiphanal narrative moments that promised illumination of a body of work that was often perceived as perplexing and darkly difficult.

Although, however, the autobiographical novels are invaluable guides to the contextualization of Ballardian iconography, his ‘library of extreme metaphors’ — the over-determined lexical markers of drained swimming pools, concrete bunkers, ruined buildings, billboards, Hollywood, crashed aircraft, crashed cars, and brutalist architecture, amongst

18 Roger Luckhurst, ‘The Angle Between Two Walls’: The Fiction of J. G. Ballard (Liverpool, 1997), pp. 153-68, discusses the reception of both books and the tendency of reviewers to treat Ballard’s science fiction as ‘encrypted autobiographical performance’: ‘The dominant media reception of these works clearly deployed them as autobiographical decoding machines’ (p. 155). The point is remade in Andrzej Gasiorek, J. G. Ballard (Manchester, 2005), p. 19: ‘Some critics have read *Empire of the Sun* and *The Kindness of Women* as source texts for the Ballardian fictional world, treating them as a form of self-analysis that opens up both the writer and his literary works. This is a naïve view that misconstrues the nature of both books, which are subtle and teasing explorations of narrative form as much as they are accounts of the writer’s life.’

19 *Miracles of Life*, p. 145.

20 ‘From Shanghai to Shepperton’ had already been used as the sub-title of the section of autobiographical essays in *A User’s Guide to the Millennium* (1996), and, before that, as a sub-title to the biographical section in *Re/Search: J. G. Ballard*, no. 8/9 (San Francisco, 1984).

21 *Miracles of Life*, p. 251.

22 *The Kindness of Women*, p. 103.

23 *The Kindness of Women*, p. 347: ‘The war had postponed my own childhood, to be rediscovered years later with Henry, Alice and Lucy. The time of desperate stratagems was over, the car crashes and hallucinogens, the deviant sex ransacked like a library of extreme metaphors. Miriam and all the murdered dead of a world war had made their peace.’
other examples – they are demonstrably unreliable guides to the events and people in Ballard’s life. Inasmuch, they are, so to speak, false alibis. Distorted chronology and invented characters (including characters called ‘Jim’ and ‘Ballard’) generate a maze of blind biographical trails that serve to disguise rather than reveal personal history.\textsuperscript{24} “They expose everything but reveal nothing,”\textsuperscript{25} as Ballard once wrote (aphoristically) of the women who are portrayed gazing out from uncurtained windows in the paintings of Edward Hopper, seemingly unaware or uncaring about their exposure. The commercial and critical success of Ballard’s autobiographical novels served to further the invention of an author called Ballard, whose subsequent writing would, as much as it moved on to cross the boundaries of other genres (such as detective fiction, or the pulp thriller, explored with a twist in \textit{Cocaine Nights}, \textit{Super-Cannes}, \textit{Millennium People}, and \textit{Kingdom Come}) continue to reflect back upon previous fiction and upon the author’s public self-construction. At the conclusion of \textit{The Kindness of Women}, Ballard attends the American premiere of Steven Spielberg’s film of \textit{Empire of the Sun}. Spielberg had given Ballard a Hitchcock-like cameo role as a background extra, dressed as John Bull at a Shanghai fancy dress party (fig. 2).\textsuperscript{26} On seeing the film for the first time, Ballard is pleased to discover that he has been largely edited out, surviving only as ‘a brief blur’: ‘But this seemed just, like the faint blur which was all that any of us left across time and space.’\textsuperscript{27} To be permanently framed as a blurred and patriotically-disguised screen presence, standing like ‘an impostor’\textsuperscript{28} in the cinematic background to his own life-story as his younger, and seemingly more authentic, self raced perpetually by – forever running towards a crashed Japanese fighter plane just beyond the manicured back lawn – appealed as much to Ballard’s sense of humour (an element of his work that is sometimes overlooked) as it did to his sense of displacement. Filmed in a ‘quiet corner’ of

\textsuperscript{24} See David Pringle, ‘Fact and Fiction in J. G. Ballard’s \textit{The Kindness of Women}’ (1993), available at: \url{http://www.jgballard.ca/criticism/jgb_pringle_kindness.html}. Pringle’s ‘preliminary reading’ received an immediate endorsement from Ballard (‘you’re pretty well absolutely accurate’), dated 13 October 1993 (the text of Ballard’s reply immediately follows Pringle’s article on-line). However, Pringle’s qualifying term ‘preliminary’, and Ballard’s qualifying response ‘pretty well’ (that is, not exactly), should be heeded. For example, although the character Cleo Churchill is identified by Pringle as Claire Walsh, it is apparent that the episode when the character Sally Mumford nearly drowns on a Brighton beach to emerge from the waves with her ‘torso covered in shreds of seaweed’ (\textit{The Kindness of Women}, pp. 186-8) derives from the occasion of the photographic ‘advertisement’ (of Walsh) entitled ‘Venus Smiles’ that Ballard published on the back cover of \textit{Ambit}, no. 46 (1971). Thus, not only is the identification of characters in \textit{Kindness} problematic, but so is the distribution of ‘real’ events between characters: correspondences between fiction and fact are deliberately jumbled. Ballard’s fictional rescue of Sally from ‘the black foam’ (p. 196) can be read as a recapitulation of another fictional rescue: his father saving the (dead) Petty Officer from the black and oily water by the Bund in \textit{Empire of the Sun} (pp. 32-3).

\textsuperscript{25} “They stand by their open windows as if no one can see them, as if the anonymity of the modern city renders them invisible to the passengers of a passing train. They expose everything but reveal nothing’, ‘In the Voyeur’s Gaze’ (\textit{The Guardian}, 1989), reprinted in \textit{A User’s Guide to the Millennium}, p. 68. Ballard’s article was occasioned by an exhibition of Hopper’s paintings in Marseille. The article refers in passing to the new residential development of Antibes-les-Pins, not dissimilar to the Estrella de Mar of \textit{Cocaine Nights}. As Charles Prentice approaches Estrella de Mar for the first time, he stops to take in the hillside view of ‘residential compounds’ and is momentarily surprised to discover that he is not as alone as he had thought: ‘Almost invisible at first glance, people sat on their terraces and patios, gazing at an unseen horizon like figures in the paintings of Edward Hopper’ (\textit{Cocaine Nights}, p. 34).

\textsuperscript{26} For two photographs of Ballard dressed as John Bull, taken on the set of Spielberg’s film, see Add. MS. 88938/1/12/6.

\textsuperscript{27} \textit{The Kindness of Women}, p. 345: ‘As it happened, my small role had been edited out of the finished film, much to my relief, though I survived as a brief blur seen as the camera followed my younger self playing with his model aircraft.’ Ballard’s fleeting appearance in Steven Spielberg’s \textit{Empire of the Sun} is at 14 min., 25-6 secs.

\textsuperscript{28} \textit{The Kindness of Women}, p. 335.
Fig. 2. Ballard dressed as John Bull, on the set of the film of *Empire of the Sun*. Add. MS. 88938/1/12/6.
Sunningdale, only fifteen minutes’ drive from Shepperton, the scene seemed an apt, and suitably doubling, signification of autobiographical closure, prompting Ballard’s fatalistic comment – part tongue-in-cheek, part matter-of-fact – that: ‘Deep assignments ran through our lives; there were no coincidences.’

**The Ballard archive**

Considerably more than a brief blur, there is nonetheless a self-effacing and reductive character to Ballard’s papers at the British Library: the archive is concentrated upon the successive drafts of his novels in manuscript and in typescript. Unfortunately, the draft material that has survived does not extend to Ballard’s many short stories, the literary form he referred to as fiction’s ‘loose change’, the ‘precious metal’ from which many of his novels were cast. The absence of short fiction in the archive extends to *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1970), the discontinuous narrative – or cluster of interfolded narratives – that for some critics has a greater claim than *Empire of the Sun* to be considered Ballard’s key work. For Will Self, it is ‘the ground zero of his explosive body of work’; for Roger Luckhurst, it ‘problematises the monolithic divide between Modernism and Postmodernism’; and for Andrzej Gasiorek, it is Ballard’s ‘most demanding and most unsettling work’. The collected parts of *The Atrocity Exhibition* were published separately, in several magazines (1966-69) as a series of enigmatic fictions or ‘condensed novels’, a term Ballard used at the time to describe their non-linear and reductive collagist form. A reader daunted or confused should just plunge in, he said: ‘Rather than start at the beginning of each chapter, as in a conventional novel, simply turn the pages until a paragraph catches your eye. If the ideas or images seem interesting, scan the nearby paragraphs for anything that resonates in an intriguing way. Fairly soon, I hope, the fog will clear, and the underlying narrative will reveal itself. In effect, you will be reading the book the way it was written.’

The archive is very helpful in revealing, through its holdings of successive drafts, ‘the way’ that most of Ballard’s books were written, but, of all

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29 Ibid., p. 332.  
30 Ibid., p. 334.  
31 ‘Introduction’ (2001) to *The Complete Short Stories* (London, 2006), p. vii: ‘Short stories are the loose change in the treasury of fiction, easily ignored beside the wealth of novels available; an over-valued currency that often turns out to be counterfeit. At its best, in Borges, Ray Bradbury and Edgar Allen Poe, the short story is coined from precious metal, a glint of gold that will glow for ever in the deep purse of your imagination.’ Switching metaphors, Ballard continues: ‘Almost all my novels were first hinted at in short stories, and readers of *The Crystal World*, *Crash* and *Empire of the Sun* will find their seeds germinating somewhere in this collection.’  
33 In “The Terminal Beach” the elements of the sequential narrative had been almost completely eliminated. It occurred to me that one could carry this to its logical conclusion, and a recent group of stories [from *The Atrocity Exhibition*] show some of the results. Apart from anything else, this new narrative technique seems to show a tremendous gain in the density of ideas and images. In fact, I regard each of them as a complete novel’, ‘Notes from Nowhere: Comments on Work in Progress’, *New Worlds*, no. 167 (1966), pp. 147–51, available at: [http://www.jgballard.ca/non_fiction/jgb_notes_nowhere.html](http://www.jgballard.ca/non_fiction/jgb_notes_nowhere.html).  
34 ‘Author’s Note’ (2001) to *The Atrocity Exhibition* (London, 2006), p. vi. The volume was originally conceived by Ballard as a large format book incorporating ‘a lot of collages, material taken from medical documents and medical photographs, crashing cars and all that sort of iconography’ (*Re/Search*, no. 8/9, p. 124). An illustrated edition of *The Atrocity Exhibition* published by *Re/Search* (1990) is a belated attempt to recapture something of the original conception. For a discussion of the magazine publication of the parts of *The Atrocity Exhibition*, including their integral graphical aspects, see Jeannette Baxter, *J. G. Ballard’s Surrealist Imagination: Spectacular Authorship* (Farnham, 2009), chap. 2, which reproduces (pp. 70–1) an extract from ‘The Summer Cannibals’ as originally published in *New Worlds*, no. 186 (1969), where the text was integrated with photographic material.
his books, it is the process of composition of *The Atrocity Exhibition* that is, arguably, the most intriguing, and in this regard the archive cannot help: Ballard was as careless – or carefree – with this ‘loose change’ as he had been with his other stories. In many respects, it is the generation of the ‘fog’ of confusion rather than its clearing, or the knottedness of the narrative rather than its untangling, which is of interest. The influences upon *The Atrocity Exhibition* were diverse: amongst them, Surrealism, varieties of Pop Art from Richard Hamilton and Eduardo Paolozzi to Andy Warhol, the prose of William Burroughs, French New Wave cinema (*L’Année dernière à Marienbad* comes particularly to mind), and the spatial and object-driven narratives of Alain Robbe-Grillet. The dream-like and deadpan collision of disparate prose registers – the disorientating, and frequently humorous, hallmark of the work – was partially generated by the incorporation of material derived from scientific and medical reports that Ballard plundered, spliced and parodied. But the decisions and the hesitations of composition, now laid bare for Ballard’s novels, remain undisclosed for his most radical work.

In some compensation, however, the archive does include four of the five known experimental textual collages (c. 1958) that were important precursor work to *The Atrocity Exhibition*, and which were eventually published by Michael Moorcock in *New Worlds* in 1978. The source material for the collages was cut and pasted from advertisements

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35 Jeannette Baxter, who views *The Atrocity Exhibition* as a text of ‘shifting fragments within a dissident Surrealist collage’ (op. cit., p. 14), argues a wider case for the influence of Surrealism on Ballard’s work as a whole: ‘Ballard’s project of spectacular authorship is an idiosyncratic Surrealist experiment in rewriting post-war history and culture’ (p. 222).

36 ‘For years, Dr. Christopher Evans, a psychologist in the computer branch of the National Physical Laboratory (whom I visited regularly until his death – his lab was just a ten-minute drive away), literally sent me the contents of his wastebasket. Once a fortnight, a huge envelope arrived filled with scientific reprints and handouts, specialist magazines and reports, all of which I read carefully. Another close friend, Dr. Martin Bax, sends me a lot of similar material’, Interview with Ballard, ‘The Art of Fiction no. 85’, *The Paris Review*, no. 94 (1984), available at: [http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/2929/the-art-of-fiction-no-85-j-g-ballard](http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/2929/the-art-of-fiction-no-85-j-g-ballard).


37 Some insight into Ballard’s approach to composition during this period can be gleaned from several letters he wrote (as prose editor of *Ambit*) to Michael Butterworth, then an aspiring young author, whose work soon began to appear in *New Worlds*. During the course of cataloguing Ballard’s papers, Butterworth donated to the British Library his correspondence with Ballard: this small collection of twenty letters (Add. MS. 88967) is now available to researchers. In Ballard’s letter of 21 January 1967, the longest letter in the collection, he comments in some detail on Butterworth’s ‘Concentrate’ texts (subsequently published in *New Worlds*). Ballard advises against diffuseness, and in favour of concision. Detecting the influence of William Burroughs on Butterworth’s writing, he comments: ‘Burroughs is a tremendously liberating writer, but he’s built his world out of his own blood cells and frayed nerves. He is also extremely American.’ He ends the letter by offering to ‘sub this whole lot down to about 6 great pages – short items, each with a heading’ (i.e. precisely the format of *The Atrocity Exhibition*). In his next letter (29 January 1967), Ballard writes: ‘What I have done is to underline the things I think you should keep, typing straight out as if everything else didn’t exist. The headings, where underlined, should be retained as paragraph headings (rather as in my own new stories) […] If it’s any consolation or encouragement, I know that Burroughs uses a similar method, condensing out his images and narrative from a much greater body of original material.’ For both letters, see Add. MS. 88967/1. Butterworth comments on the correspondence in Mike Holliday, “‘Driven by Anger’: An Interview with Michael Butterworth (the Savoy Interviews Part 1)” (2009), available at: [http://www.ballardian.com/driver-by-anger-butterworth-interview](http://www.ballardian.com/driver-by-anger-butterworth-interview).
The Progress of the Text: The Papers of J. G. Ballard at the British Library

in technical journals such as *Chemical & Engineering News* and *Chemistry & Industry*, from an office at 14-15 Belgrave Square where Ballard was sub-editor of the latter journal during the late 1950s and early 1960s. The collages Ballard produced, now a little yellowed with age, resemble in their eye-catching layout and bold typography the commercial advertisements from which their parts were derived, but the choice of text, Ballard subsequently reflected, was ‘deliberately meaningless’. The collages featured many of the obscure names and technical vocabulary that would reappear several years later in *The Atrocity Exhibition* and other short fiction, including: ‘Kline’, ‘Coma’, and ‘Xero’; ‘Thoracic Drop’, ‘beach fatigue’, ‘neuronics’, ‘lumbar transfer’, ‘pre-uterine’, ‘Terminal Beach’, and ‘Mr F’. The archive includes the well-known photograph of Ballard taken in his Shepperton back garden in 1960, with the collages displayed together behind him, as if erected on a stretched Lilliputian billboard, mimicking their advertisement-driven conception (fig. 3).

The time lag between the preparation of the collages and their subsequent reworking in Ballard’s work in the 1960s should not be a matter for surprise. There are other parallel tracks in Ballard’s work, open seams of attention that were returned to and reworked over time: the continuous composition of the Vermilion Sands stories, for

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example, began with ‘Prima Belladonna’ in 1956; and Ballard’s direct address of his experience of Lunghua Camp was articulated in an extended passage in The Atrocity Exhibition, long before Empire of the Sun and the subsequent chapters in The Kindness of Women and Miracles of Life. What is interesting in terms of the development of the particular seam that leads from the Belgrave Square collages to The Atrocity Exhibition is the semantic turn taken by this strange lexicon that has been garnered: a turn from the avowed meaninglessness of the words as textual collage to the bewildering plenitude of reference and resonance that gives The Atrocity Exhibition its post-modern texture.

There are two exceptions to the absence of short story material in the Ballard archive. The first exception is a folded and fragile cutting of Ballard’s first published story (1951), the Varsity competition-winning entry (Ballard described it as ‘Hemingwaysque’) entitled ‘The Violent Noon’, which has been available for some time online. The second exception is an unpublished Vermilion Sands story in draft, hitherto unknown. Its survival seems to have been accidental, insofar as its untitled parts were discovered ungathered and seemingly unloved: I came upon fifteen of seventeen annotated typescript sheets in the bottom of a box with an assortment of other loose fragments; but the final two sheets were found in another box, re-used as if discarded, folded around other papers. Wondering what the text might be, the name ‘Hardoon’ jumped out, and my immediate thought was that I had found some surviving pages from Ballard’s first novel, The Wind from Nowhere, excluded by the author from his oeuvre (and, not surprisingly, not represented in the archive). In The Wind from Nowhere, the mysterious cigar-smoking Hardoon, a figure reminiscent of a megalomaniacal villain from an Ian Fleming novel – ‘a power-crazy eccentric’ with ‘a private army operating from a secret base somewhere in the Guildford area’ – has constructed a private complex of concrete bunkers in readiness for World War III. More recently, he has built next to the bunkers a concrete pyramid strong enough (he wrongly believes) to withstand the apocalyptic wind – ‘Nature herself in revolt’ – that has begun to circulate the planet like a ‘cosmic carousel’ with deadly and destructive force.

But in alighting upon the name ‘Hardoon’ I was misled by Ballard’s restricted lexicon of character names (repeated names abound in Ballard’s fiction). Reunited, these orphan sheets in the archive quickly proved not to be from Ballard’s first novel at all but were the pages of an abandoned story in draft that clearly belonged to the cluster of stories initiated by ‘Prima Belladonna’ (1956) that were eventually collected under the title Vermilion Sands (1973). The draft story (without title or date) begins in typical fashion with an arresting opening sentence: ‘Last year, for three months during the summer, I was private secretary to a madman’ (fig. 4).

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41 The Atrocity Exhibition, pp. 112-14. The passage, presented as having been written by Travers (who is also, under the alternative name of Tren, the central character in the story ‘The Terminal Beach’), begins: ‘Two weeks after the end of World War II my parents and I left Lunghua internment camp and returned to our house in Shanghai, which had been occupied by the Japanese gendarmerie.’ See also the concluding sections of ‘The Terminal Beach’, in which Tren discovers the corpse of a Japanese man (Yasuda) whom he ties to a chair with rusty wire, ‘arranging the hands so that they rested on the wooden arms giving the moribund figure a posture of calm repose.’ The Complete Short Stories: Volume 2 (2006), p. 50. ‘Travers’ is ‘Traven’ is ‘Travis’, who ‘took refuge in a small suburban house among the reservoirs of Staines and Shepperton’ (The Atrocity Exhibition, p. 8).

42 Miracles of Life, p. 149: Varsity, the student weekly newspaper, staged an annual short story competition, and my entry, a Hemingwaysque effort called ‘The Violent Noon’, won joint first prize in 1951.’ For the cutting, see Add. MS. 88938/3/1. The story was not republished, but is available here: [http://www.jgballard.ca/uncollected_work/violent_noon.html](http://www.jgballard.ca/uncollected_work/violent_noon.html).

43 The Wind from Nowhere (1962) (Harmondsworth, 1967), pp. 152, 151. He is also described (p. 152) as a ‘shipping and hotel magnate’.

44 Ibid., pp. 163-4, 186.

45 Add. MS. 88938/3/2.
Last year, just a few weeks during the summer, I worked as a private secretary to a madman.

I had stayed at the被判 after the season ended, working in the Museum of Abstract Art. One day, I was called to the Museum Library to deliver a book, and once I was there, I heard a noise. It sounded like a whispering.

"You're coming into a negative zone," she told me. "Don't interpret me, but it seems you're losing yourself." Tutting the hint, I went down to the library that afternoon.

“Are you looking for Samuel Hardoon?” the chief librarian Claude asked me. “He needs a private secretary for a month. Two hundred a month, plus board.”

“That's pretty mean,” I commented. “Money means nothing to him,” Claude explained. “He has a huge estate about twenty miles from Vermilion Sands, with a house and stables. You'll probably catalogue his library for him.”

“I've vaguely heard of him,” I said. “What’s his plan?”

“His house is beautiful,” Claude said. “The blue skies, the mountains, the desert. He'll be back at the telephone.”

“I'll be there,” I replied. “Lonely, haunted Venus of Lagoon West and Mount Huxley (the name of a dozen beach marshalls).

“Wait until you see the city. He might be a vampire.” I dimly remembered a dark-eyed girl in a turquoise dress, a couple of purple sand-runes and a mirror over the desk beside her, blocking the traffic in downtown Red Beach a few years ago. There had been something in her eyes under the cloche hat, a trace of humour and contempt that seemed more like a challenge than a gesture of real disdain.

Freebody had sunk back in his chair and was surveying me with steady eyes at the tips of his long white fingers. “Be careful, Caldwell, or she'll swallow you in one bite.”

Three days later Hardoon's chauffeur collected me in Vermilion Sands. As we drove through the desert I was thinking less of Samual Hardoon than of the millionaire himself. Even enquiries had indicated that my six months with him might be more exciting than I had imagined. He had lived on his estate near Vermilion Sands for about twenty-five years, since his wife's death in childbirth, and for a year of that time he had devoted himself.
opulent mansion on the edge of Vermilion Sands. Beyond the labyrinth, he has built an extensive architectural folly, an ‘incredible clutter of pavilions, temples and palaces, in a dozen different architectural styles, sprawling across the sand like a storelot of giant film sets’. Much of the writing has been struck through in red and blue ballpoint pen (a physical clue to the date of revision rather than composition), and there are insertions and occasional comments written in the margin: Ballard reminds himself, for example, that Hardoon ‘looks like a Francis Bacon executive’, calling to mind the tormented and mutilated figures that were often the subjects of Bacon’s disturbing portraits.

The Shanghai origin of both Hardoon characters is, in fact, disclosed in Miracles of Life, although Ballard does not explicitly identify the connection to his fiction (does not, that is, feel the need to point to a discarded story or to an unacknowledged first novel). The real Hardoon that Ballard remembers from his childhood was ‘an Iraqi property tycoon who was told by a fortune-teller that if he ever stopped building he would die, and who then went on constructing elaborate pavilions all over Shanghai, many of them structures with no doors or interiors’. In Ballard’s draft story, Hardoon’s jumbled faux buildings are — like the structures on the Hardoon Estate in the International Settlement of Shanghai — obsessional shells, not real buildings at all, their ‘facades slung on metal superstructures’.

To judge from the drafts that Ballard kept, the achievement of the final text of a novel was an orderly business. We know from the interviews Ballard gave that he maintained a regular writing routine: small numerations at the foot of many of the sheets of a draft typescript of Crash appear to be a daily time log. Typically, Ballard progressed from his initial notes to a very detailed synopsis, and only when each chapter had been clearly outlined was a first draft attempted, which was always hand-written. This first draft, which tended towards simple sentences relatively free from ornament, would then be revised, more often by addition than deletion, before the first of several drafts in typescript was made. Small additions to typescript drafts were made by annotation to the page, but larger insertions were typically written on small notepad sheets that Ballard carefully numbered with a suffix letter, such as ‘120A’ (which might, in turn, be supplemented again, as required, with sheets identified as ‘120A1’ and ‘120A2’, and so on). Many of these additions and insertions (as I shall endeavour to show in the final part of this paper) are the striking turns of phrase, the vivid images, that give Ballard’s prose its memorable and vibrant manner of expression. Whereas The Atrocity Exhibition was a condensed text, stripped free of the conventional linkages of narration that provide the reader with a stable and transparent semantic context, the evidence from the drafts of Ballard’s subsequent novels is that he tended to advance his writing by the opposite tendency, by a compositional principle of enlargement rather than reduction. Every stage of composition is not represented in the archive for every novel – most novels are only represented by drafts in manuscript and typescript – but each stage is sufficiently represented across the archive as a whole to indicate a general habit of composition. The archive includes material in draft form for all of Ballard’s novels, except,

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46 Ibid., sheet 2.
47 Ibid., sheet 5.
48 In Miracles of Life (p. 156), Ballard records attending two Bacon exhibitions: ‘In 1955 there was a modest retrospective of Francis Bacon’s paintings at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, followed in 1962 by a far larger retrospective at the Tate Gallery, which was a revelation to me. I still think of Bacon as the greatest painter of the post-war world.’
49 Miracles of Life, p. 9.
50 Ibid.
as has been noted, *The Wind from Nowhere* and also, anomalously, *The Unlimited Dream Company* (1979).\(^{52}\) The novella-length story ‘The Ultimate City’ is included as an autograph draft manuscript,\(^{53}\) although, in keeping with the absence of short fiction in the archive, the other stories of the collection to which it belongs – *Low-Flying Aircraft and Other Stories* (1975) – are not included. Particular mention must be made of the two typescripts of *Crash* that are in the archive, one of which is a very heavily revised and arresting text that strongly suggests, by the density of its annotation on the recto and verso of almost every sheet of paper, the intensity of the novel’s composition.

Notes and synopses were usually not kept by Ballard, but the archive does provide exceptions: it includes, for example, a detailed synopsis in typescript for *High Rise*,\(^{54}\) which gives a good indication of the extent to which Ballard planned his narrative before attempting a first draft.\(^{55}\) There is also a small spiral-bound notepad containing early draft material for *Millenium People*; the notepad was carefully inserted by Ballard into a single pile of manuscript pages before he tied the bundle with string (fig. 5).\(^{56}\) Several of Ballard’s manuscripts were received as large tied bundles, but the existence of the notepad for *Millenium People*, securely tucked away from view, was an unexpected surprise: it was evidence of a deliberate gathering by the author, in marked contrast to the disunited pages of the unpublished *Vermilion Sands* story. Perhaps the most interesting material in the

\[\text{Fig. 5. Millennium People: tied manuscript bundle, with enclosed notepad revealed. Add. MS. 88938/3/22.} \]

\(^{52}\) Two drafts of *The Unlimited Dream Company* are held at the Harry Ransome Research Center, University of Texas. See [http://www.jgballard.ca/deep_ends/jgb_prelim_inventory.html](http://www.jgballard.ca/deep_ends/jgb_prelim_inventory.html).

\(^{53}\) Add. MS. 88938/3/11.

\(^{54}\) Add. MS. 88938/3/10/1. Typescript, single-spaced, 46 numbered sheets.

\(^{55}\) Ballard’s comments in *The Paris Review* interview (n. 36 above) about the extent and detail of the synopses he prepared for his novels raises the question whether some of the manuscript drafts in the archive (which tend towards a plain style and are revised, on the whole, by insertion and elaboration) are in fact what Ballard is referring to in the interview: ‘By synopsis I don’t mean a rough draft, but a running narrative in the perfect tense with the dialogue in reported speech, and with an absence of reflective passages and editorializing.’

\(^{56}\) For the notepad, see Add. MS. 88938/3/22/1.
collection in note form comes from the very end of Ballard’s life. The archive includes a set of five undated notepads containing outline ideas for a novel that was not to be written, about a world war referred to as ‘WVA’, or ‘World Versus America’. Post-Iraq, a coalition of World forces has reached the end of its diplomatic patience with America’s destabilizing ‘imperial reach’ and initiates global conflict by making a pre-emptive strike. Ballard summarizes: ‘A backstory would describe the US imperial reach & attacks on other countries – its threats, use of force etc. The events that have brought a sense of despair to its last allies, & the decision to attack the US before it is too late.’\(^{57}\) On the inside back cover of one of the notepads, Ballard has written a (Swiftian) working title: ‘An Immodest Proposal or How the World Declared War on America’.\(^{58}\)

For Shanghai Jim, America was the land of abundant food and abundant technology; it was the trajectory of the future. In Chapter 34 of *Empire of the Sun* (‘The Refrigerator in the Sky’), Jim hears the drone of an American bomber approaching. Too weak to move, he waits for its deadly cargo to explode around him, but instead of bombs the sky is filled with brightly coloured parachutes gently descending, carrying silver canisters towards Lunghua Camp. A canister breaks open on impact with the ground, spilling its contents: Spam, powdered milk, coffee, chocolate, cigarettes and pristine copies of *Reader’s Digest* and *Life* magazines. The falling parachutes are to Jim a ‘vision of all the abundance of America’. He devours the food, and then begins ‘his second, and almost more important meal, devouring the six copies of the *Reader’s Digest*.’\(^{59}\) It is ‘the lavish advertisements, the headlines and the slogans’\(^{60}\) – the food of his collagist and prospective imagination – that Jim enjoys ‘devouring’ the most.

### The progress of the text

The annotated drafts of Ballard’s novels at the British Library open to examination the process of composition. They record the development and the modulation of Ballard’s distinctive narrative voice, illuminating equally the many textual connections between his novels and the composition of particular works. We can now visit parts of the library of extreme metaphors as they were under construction.

Many of the pages of Ballard’s oeuvre are, as it were, interleaved: themes and motifs recur, narratives are recapitulated and elaborated, perspectives on Shanghai alternate between third and first person, and repeated images and turns of phrase are strung in self-referencing chains from book to book. This connectedness is enhanced by an elaborate process of fictional autobiographical overlay. Surprisingly, Ballard’s books appear only obliquely in the self-mythologizing sequence of chapter vignettes that comprise *The Kindness of Women*: the writing life recedes into the background, as if it were a secondary matter. For example, the chapter entitled ‘The Exhibition’, which takes its title from Ballard’s exhibition (1970) of crashed cars at the New Arts Laboratory (fig. 6), makes no mention of *Crash* itself – the invisible, radiating centre of the chapter – and yet the unmistakable imaginative world of *Crash* is felt forcefully through the language in which the actions and gestures of the characters in this chapter of *The Kindness of Women* are described, from abstracted sex in cars to the touching of wounds. Like

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58 Ibid., Notepad D.
59 *Empire of the Sun*, p. 226.
60 Ibid., p. 233.
Vaughan from *Crash*, the character David Hunter – in accordance with his surname and the make of his car – hunts the streets: ‘We lay in bed as David’s Jaguar hunted the streets, a beast pursuing its strange courtship’; and Sally, as if she were a self-absorbed character from *Crash*, traces ‘a sign on her breast, the diagram of an undreamed mutilation’. The strange effect of this narrative strategy, in which Ballard’s novels are both marginal to his autobiographical narrative yet integral to its manner of telling, is oddly naturalizing, as if to imply that the charged events of a novel like *Crash* are in some sense a faithful account of the ‘real’ events of Ballard’s life. The conjoined verbal fabric is co-extensive: there is no view of the life that is not mediated by the imagination of the fiction. Seemingly more hierophant than author, Ballard intuits a ‘secret logic’ to his life and times, and interprets cryptic intersections of personal, technological and socio-cultural history.

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*The Kindness of Women*, p. 225. See also (pp. 224–5): ‘When I caressed her thighs, trying to soothe the needle ulcers on her veins, she followed my fingers with her own, searching for the outlines of the wounds’. And (p. 222): ‘Her fingers fiddled with her scarred upper lip, where she had been punched by a casual lover’.

*An exchange of remarks between Ballard and Will Self is apposite: ‘Ballard: “[The Kindness of Women] is autobiographical, yes, but it is my life seen through the mirror of the fiction prompted by that life. It is not just an autobiographical novel; it is an autobiographical novel written with the full awareness of the fiction that that life generated during its three or four decades of adulthood.” Self: “It is retroactively infusing the events with the imagery they occasioned, plugging that imagery back into the *mise-en-scène.*” Ballard: “It is the life reconstituted from the fictional footprints that I left behind me.”’ ‘Conversation’ (1994), Will Self, *Junk Mail* (London, 1995), pp. 360–1.
What traces of this textual connectedness are there in the manuscript draft of *The Kindness of Women*? How were particular passages revised? Roger Luckhurst’s analysis of the book highlights several examples of Ballard’s allusive practice. Two of his examples are drawn from the chapter entitled ‘The Kingdom of Light’ in which Ballard describes his only encounter with the hallucinogen LSD. Distinctive vocabulary (‘coronation armour’ and ‘carapace’) recall memorable passages from *The Crystal World* (1966), a novel that some readers—startled by the novel’s imaginative and lyrical power—had once speculated must have been influenced by familiarity with the drug. Luckhurst suggests that Ballard is playfully recalling such speculation. But there is an even stronger reference to another novel in the repeated phrase ‘coronation armour’: to *Crash*. The phrase occurs only once in *The Crystal World*, but it appears three times in *Crash*, in which LSD features prominently. At Vaughan’s last meeting with ‘Ballard’—‘the climax of a long punitive expedition into my own nervous system’—he gives ‘Ballard’ a sugar cube laced with the drug. What does the manuscript of *The Kindness of Women* tell us? It shows that ‘coronation armour’ was not in the first draft: Ballard revised his manuscript by inserting an additional sentence that pointedly included the phrase (fig. 7). The original manuscript draft at this point is a single sentence: ‘Dressed in light I looked down on the simple headstone that marked the grave of Henry’s Dutch rabbit […]’. On revision, Ballard expands the initial clause ‘dressed in light’ to a full sentence. In doing so, he not only added lyrical flourish and colour to the passage but also emphatically tightened and adjusted the self-referencing verbal chains that linked his autobiographical narrative to prior novels, in this instance to *The Crystal World* and to *Crash*: ‘My arms and legs were dressed in light, sheathes of mother-of-pearl that formed a coronation armour. I looked down at the simple headstone […]’.

In *The Kindness of Women*, Ballard’s arms and legs are ‘dressed in light’; in *Crash*, it is Seagrave’s body that is ‘dressed in its coronation armour of fractured glass, a suit of lights’. There are several other

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63 Ibid., p. 190: ‘Sally was a true child of the 1960s, and my guide to the secret logic that I saw unfolding.’ Ibid., pp. 176-7: ‘I could almost believe that a third World War might have saved Miriam, and that the war to come after that might resurrect her from the grave. A secret logic that I had yet to explore seemed to connect her death with the dead in the Avenue Edward VII, as if the unconscious needs of the human race could only be fulfilled in an obliterating sexual apocalypse, replayed in an infinity of slow-motion photography.’

64 Luckhurst, op. cit., pp. 162-3.

65 In the *Paris Review* interview (n. 36 above), Ballard was quite clear that he took LSD on a single occasion, in 1967, i.e. after *The Crystal World* was published, and shortly before he commenced writing *Crash*: ‘it opened a vent of hell that took years to close’. Ballard’s vivid turn of phrase in interview is self-quotation, from *Crash* (p. 158): ‘This hyper-irritation reminded me of my own long recovery from a bad acid trip some years earlier, when I had felt for months afterwards as if a vent of hell had opened momentarily in my mind, as if the membranes of my brain had been exposed in some appalling crash.’ Michael Moorcock recalls: ‘Although unreliable sources claimed he regularly took LSD, the only tab he ever dropped he obtained from me. I gave him some important advice about how best to take it which, typically, he completely ignored. The subsequent trip was so horrific that he never took another.’ Moorcock, ‘My Friend J. G. Ballard, The Homely Visionary’, *The Times* (25 April 2009), available at: http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/books/article6160194.ece.

66 *Crash*, p. 159.

67 Ibid., p. 160: ‘He lifted his hand to my mouth, and I saw the dented silver cube in his fingers. I unwrapped the foil and placed the sugar cube on my tongue’. For ‘coronation armour’ in *The Crystal World*, see p. 51: ‘This huge jewelled gauntlet, like the coronation armour of a Spanish conquistador, was drying in the sun, its crystals beginning to emit a hard vivid light.’ The same phrase occurs in *Crash* on three occasions: ‘their chromium and cellulosed bodies gleaming like the coronation armour of an archangelic host’ (p. 144); ‘and looked down uncertainly at Seagrave’s body, dressed in its coronation armour of fractured glass, a suit of lights like a dead matador’s’ (p. 153); ‘I would see the cars on the motorway wearing their coronation armour, soaring along the causeways on wings of fire’ (p. 171).

Fig. 7. Autograph manuscript, *The Kindness of Women*. Add. MS. 88938/3/17/4 (sheet 394), showing, at mid-page, Ballard’s revision: ‘My arms and legs were dressed in light, sheathes of onyx and mother of pearl like coronation armour’.
examples of deliberate self-quotation that can be cited from Ballard’s manuscript, including, from Luckhurst’s list, ‘carapace’ and ‘drowned world’, although the phrase ‘jut and rake’ from *The Atrocity Exhibition* and from *Crash* – where it was applied with a uniform geometric relish to both car interiors and the angular human form – was there from the first draft of *The Kindness of Women*. Thematic continuity and textual cross-referencing between novels is a marked feature of Ballard’s work. Remove the name Ransom from the following sentence from *The Drought* (drafted in 1963) and we seem to be (almost) in the fictional world of *Crash*: ‘Ransom pressed hard on the brakes, pulling the car to a halt and throwing Catherine forward against the windshield. He rolled her back onto the seat and searched for the wound on her forehead’.69 In the same early novel, we find traces of Ballard’s (erotic) fascination with physical disability: ‘[Vanessa Johnstone] wore her black hair undressed to her shoulders, the single parting emphasising the oval symmetry of her face. The metal support on her right leg was hidden by her slacks’.70 This theme is readdressed some forty years later in *Millennium People* (2003), by which time, after the unfettered exploration of *Crash*, Ballard’s tone has modulated to self-parody. In *Millennium People*, the narrator’s wife, Sally – another Sally, another recycled name – is handicapped. She drives a car that has been specially adapted for her on the instructions of her husband, David Markham, an industrial psychologist.71 The Markhams are about to fly to Florida for a conference when they learn that their departure from Heathrow has been delayed. The motorway is congested, so they wait at home, relaxing with a drink. But their waiting is soon interrupted by breaking news on the television: there has been a bomb explosion at Heathrow. Markham’s first wife suddenly appears on the screen, injured in the blast. They learn that she has been taken to Ashford Hospital (the hospital near Heathrow that features in *Crash*). Markham suggests that, in view of the traffic, they take his wife’s adapted car: ‘I’ll use the hard shoulder, headlights, plenty of horn’.72 In the end, it is Sally who drives on this emergency mission, like a latter-day Vaughan: ‘She steered the Saab through the dense midday traffic, flashing the headlights at the overworked police on the motorway, fiercely tapping the handicapped driver’s sticker on the windscreen. Seeing the wheelchair on the rear seat, they waved us onto the hard shoulder, a high-speed alley that only a glamorous woman could make her own’.73 Sally’s glamour – another note struck from *Crash* – is emphasized from her first appearance, although the final clause of this passage describing Sally’s (comedy) emergency driving, referring to Sally as a ‘glamorous woman’, does not appear in the manuscript: it is a later, linking addition.74 We learn subsequently that Markham ‘knew they would become lovers’ from...
the moment she took her first unaided steps in the orthopaedic ward: ‘Damp with sweat, her
nightdress clung to her skin, and I could see the muscles coming alive in her thighs, diagrams of
an ambivalent will to walk. We had exchanged confidences during my visits, friendly teasing with
only the slightest hint of flirtation. But at that moment, as she hobbled towards me on her sticks,
wrist white with pain and anger at herself, I had known we would become lovers.’

On that note of amorous certainty – touching upon, in the collocation of ‘thighs’ and ‘diagrams’, the
abstracted and Euclidian eroticism of Crash – the manuscript draft of Chapter 9 ends. However,
at the foot of the page, Ballard has added – at a later stage of composition, and with a different
pen – the final sentence of the chapter as published, a sentence that, in its mathematical turn of
phrase, further strengthens the parodic affinity with Crash: ‘As always, a perverse calculus
refreshed and redefined the world’. During the process of revision, Ballard evidently came
upon the term ‘elective injury’ and decided it fitted exactly Sally’s ‘ambivalent will to walk’: he
wrote it on a yellow post-it note which he placed on the back of sheet 89 of the manuscript.

Finally, I offer some illustrative examples of textual development from a single work. The
autograph manuscript of Empire of the Sun (840 sheets were received tied in a tall bundle) is
as remarkable a document as the heavily annotated typescript of Crash. Written in a flowing
and vigorous hand, it bears out Ballard’s remark that ‘everything fell naturally into place’ as
soon as he decided that he would tell his story from the viewpoint of a young man called
Jim. ‘I was frisking myself of memories that popped out of every pocket’.

Consider, first, Ballard’s revision of a sentence that we have already visited, Jim’s ‘vision’ of
the silver canisters falling from the sky. The published sentence reads: ‘Surrounded by this
vision of all the abundance of America falling from the air, Jim laughed happily to himself.’ Turning to the manuscript draft, we discover that the sentence was originally formulated as:
‘Surrounded by this vision of American plenty, Jim laughed happily to himself’. The sentence
was then immediately revised again, on the same manuscript page: ‘Surrounded by this vision of
all the abundance of the Stars and Stripes falling from the air, Jim laughed happily to himself.’
But neither sentence satisfied Ballard. The final version, which does not appear until the
typescript draft, is an amalgamation of the two. Ballard has found the right grammatical pathway
for his sentence with ‘all the abundance’, but ‘Stars and Stripes falling’ is not quite right: the
phrasing is a little wordy; something is wrong with the rhythm; and even symbolic flags do not
fall from the sky. The sentence settles into its final formulation when Ballard unites ‘all the
abundance’ with ‘America’ (via ‘American’). Read aloud, or heard by the inner ear, the musical
play of assonance and dissonance in the phrase ‘all the abundance of America’ checks the voice
as it enunciates the variable sounding of the vowel ‘a’. The mounting triple rhythm of ‘all the
abundance of America’ skips towards the peak of the sentence – the climactic dactyl of ‘America’ –
which seems to register in the force of its final stress both authority and wonder, before the
sentence itself, like the canisters, falls away.

Such minute attention to language is, of course, more usually associated with the discussion
of poetry. But prose has its prosody too, and there are numerous examples amongst Ballard’s

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75 Add. MS. 88938/3/22/2/1, sheet numbered 89.
76 Ibid., pp. 72-3.
77 Ibid., p. 73. For the manuscript draft, see Add. MS. 88938/3/22/2/3, sheet numbered 256. The manuscript is
written in blue ink, with revisions (including the final sentence) in red. Also on this sheet, ‘as she walked towards
me’ has been revised to the more expressive ‘as she hobbled towards me’.
78 Add. MS. 88938/3/22/2/1, sheet 89. See Millennium People, p. 23. Yellow post-it notes can be found amongst the
draft pages of Millennium People and Kingdom Come. Each note has been left in situ (always on the back of a sheet)
and each sheet on which this occurs has been placed within a polyester sleeve to maintain the physical position of
the note.
79 Miracles of Life, p. 250.
80 Empire of the Sun, p. 226.
81 Add. MS. 88938/3/13/1/7, sheet numbered 676.
drafts of an instinctive command of the powerful effects of sound and rhythm. To give another example from a slightly later episode in the novel, when Jim comes upon a dead Japanese soldier in an irrigation ditch amongst the wild sugar cane, he sees that the soldier’s face is covered with flies: ‘Hundreds of flies devoured his face, enclosing it in a noisy mask.’ 82 Here, Ballard’s economical description allows the reader not only to see the ‘mask’ but to hear it as well: the onomatopoeic repetition of ‘s’ (or ‘z’) sounds in ‘noisy’ and ‘mask’ render the mask – all the more powerfully – as a mobile and audible covering of an inert face. Interestingly, although the manuscript shows that there was considerable revision of the sentence in which the two words sit, the evocative phrase ‘noisy mask’ remained unaltered from its first drafting. 83 Consider, as another example, the arresting use of alliteration in the sentence that describes Jim’s emotional response to the rusted and abandoned Japanese fighter planes at Lunghua Airfield: ‘Dizzied by their derelict beauty, he sat down to rest on the tail of a Hayate fighter.’ 84 In the manuscript text, there are several attempts to draft the sentence, before Ballard settled upon a slightly longer opening: ‘Dizzied by their huge wings and derelict beauty […]’. 85 But it was not until the typescript stage of the composition process that he contracted the opening of the sentence and arrived at the clause that would give his sentence much greater impact, by uniting, through alliteration, the sensation of dizziness with its provocation: ‘Dizzied by their derelict beauty […]’. The cutting of ‘huge wings’ also served to underscore the (typically Ballardian) thematic jointure of dereliction and beauty.

At the level of the sentence, Ballard adopts a number of rhetorical strategies, one of which can be characterized as the sentence pattern with a sting in the tail. After the long march from Lunghua Camp to the Olympic Stadium, Jim finally jettisons the small box of personal effects he has carried with him (his Latin primer, school blazer, an advertisement for the latest Packard car, and a photograph cut from a magazine of two strangers standing in for his parents whose faces he can no longer remember): ‘Pushing the wooden box into the river had been a sentimental but pointless gesture, his first adult act’. 86 Ballard’s original sentence was a simpler statement; it contained the same tail clause although the impact of those final words was much weaker: ‘Pushing the wooden box into the river had been a pointless gesture, his first adult act’. 87 By inserting ‘sentimental’ into the sentence, Ballard supplied a second adjectival co-ordinate to pinpoint more exactly Jim’s awakening conception of the complex motivations of adult actions: adult acts were not (sometimes) simply pointless, they were sentimentally so. Jim reflects that he might have bartered his few possessions for a little food for frail Mr Maxted, but the symbolic and grown-up gesture of releasing his little box into the river (it was ‘time to rid himself of Lunghua and face up squarely to the present’) 88 had exerted the stronger pull.

Sometimes Ballard will play with his reader’s expectations and throw a switch at the end: ‘Jim hoped that his parents were safe and dead.’ 89 We expect to read, of course, that Jim hoped his parents were safe and well, but when we examine the manuscript (fig. 8) we discover, surprisingly, it is the word ‘safe’ that has been inserted. Ballard’s original line of thought, which we can read in the words he has struck through, was Jim’s more simplistic wish for death, not only for the death of his parents but also for the death of Basie, the American merchant seaman and Lunghua Camp spiv, and the death of Dr Ransome (both, in their differing ways, substitute fathers), as well as for his own death: ‘He wanted them all to be dead’, reads the first draft, after

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82 Ibid., p. 263.
83 Add. MS. 88938/3/13/1/9, sheet numbered 795.
84 Empire of the Sun, p. 219.
85 Add. MS. 88938/3/13/1/7, sheet numbered 654.
86 Empire of the Sun, pp. 201-2. The contents of Jim’s wooden box are itemized on p. 188.
87 Add. MS. 88938/3/13/1/7, sheet numbered 594.
88 Empire of the Sun, pp. 198-9.
89 Ibid., p. 122.
Fig. 8. ‘Jim hoped his parents were safe and dead’ (located eight lines up from the bottom of the page). Autograph manuscript, Empire of the Sun. Add. MS. 88938/3/13/1/4 (sheet 333).
which black thoughts Jim runs ‘towards the aircraft’. We can, in fact, trace here a two-stage revision process that considerably deepened the emotional character of the ending of the chapter (which also concludes Part I of the book, and is therefore an important structural moment in the narrative, the building of ‘the runway of bones’). The first stage of the revision process was the insertion of the words ‘safe’ and ‘shelter’. The second stage, taking up the emotional palette suggested by these two key words, is the addition of a final clause to the sentence (a later addition that did not appear until the typescript draft was prepared): ‘he ran towards the shelter of the aircraft, *eager to enfold himself in their wings*.90 Here, the wings of the Japanese fighter planes – machines of death – substitute for the embrace of an absent mother. For all Jim’s love of the aircraft, he cannot nestle cosily in their wings but only *enfold* himself, reflexively, in a self-contained approximation of comfort and security.

Complex images play an important role in structuring – and freighting – Ballard’s narratives. As a final textual example from *Empire of the Sun*, we turn to the moment early in the book when Jim returns to an empty family house, having been separated from his parents in the confusion of the Japanese invasion. His ingenious means of entry is via the kitchen waste chute. The house seems dark, and the air is ‘stale with the smell of a strange sweat.’ He goes immediately to his mother’s bedroom and finds it in disarray: his mother’s clothes are strewn across the bed, and her hairbrushes and scent bottles have been swept from the dressing-table. The parquet floor is covered in spilt talcum powder: ‘There were dozens of footprints in the powder, his mother’s bare feet whirling within the clear images of heavy boots, like the patterns of complicated dances set out in his parent’s foxtrot and tango manuals’.91 Here Ballard presents us with a double image: the footprints that Jim remembers from the dance manuals, choreographing harmonious love in measure, overlay but do not match the furious choreography of struggle on the dance floor. We recall that the violation of house, bedroom and mother was first signalled by the stale smell of ‘strange sweat’. Turning to the manuscript draft, we discover that the dynamic description of his mother’s ‘bare feet whirling’ was another of Ballard’s vivid insertions, even though the sense of vulnerability the phrase conveys occupies the emotional centre of the sentence, and we might suppose that it had been present from the first draft. However, Ballard arrived at this emotional centre incrementally. The original sentence was a flat description of the intruder’s boots: ‘There were dozens of footprints, the clear images of heavy boots’ (fig. 9). As we can see from the manuscript, Ballard then inserted ‘his mother’s small feet’, having found counter-imprints to partner, so to speak, the impression of the heavy boots in this grim parody of a dance. This insertion is then delicately modified by changing ‘small feet’ to ‘bare feet’, enhancing the sense of vulnerability conveyed by the contrast between the two sets of footprints. Finally, as can be seen from the little insertion written at the bottom of the manuscript page, Ballard adds dynamism to the image of his mother’s feet by describing them as ‘whirling within’ the boot prints. In total, the several additions to the manuscript page provide an enlightening graphic record of Ballard’s visual imagination in the act of coming into verbal focus. In fact, the graphic record extends to the verso of the same manuscript sheet (fig. 10), where Ballard added yet another layer to the complexity of the image: ‘Jim stared down at them [the footprints], testing his scuffed leather shoes in the imprints.’ Jim’s ‘testing’ (presumably, his feet take the male lead and follow the steps of his mother’s assailant partner) was held over until the following chapter, when Jim puzzles again over the moment of struggle when his mother had been ‘propelled by an over-eager partner’. The published text reads: ‘Jim tried out the dance steps himself, which seemed far more violent than any tango he had ever seen, and managed to fall and cut his hand on the broken mirror.’92 The image of the broken mirror with which the chapter ends – ‘this

90 Ibid. (my italics).
91 Ibid., p. 44. We learn from *Miracles of Life* (p. 46) that Ballard’s father was ‘a great ballroom dancer and even won a prize in a competition held in the Blackpool Tower ballroom’.
92 Ibid., pp. 45-6.
Fig. 9. “There were dozens of footprints, the clear images of heavy boots’ (located three lines up from the bottom of the page). Autograph manuscript, *Empire of the Sun*. Add. MS. 88938/3/13/1/2 (sheet 109).

Fig. 10. “Jim stared down at them [the footprints], testing his scuffed leather shoes in the imprints.” Autograph manuscript, *Empire of the Sun*. Add. MS. 88938/3/13/1/2 (verso sheet 109).
jewelled icon of a small exploding boy’ – is another instance of the burden of Ballard’s narrative being carried visually, as indeed, we may reflect in retrospect, it had been carried forward by the preceding description of Jim’s entry into the house by the ‘greasy’ waste chute. In the context of Jim’s immediate discovery of a scene of primal violation recorded on the parquet floor of his mother’s bedroom, his canal-like mode of entry into the house seems to represent, in symbolic terms, a moment of dark rebirth into a violated world in which he is changed forever.