

CHAPTER –IV

The Kindness of Women- Fantasy and Realism

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The Kindness of Women is a fascinating sequel to *Empire of the Sun*. *The Kindness of Women* is one of the most extraordinary novels which gripped readers with the shock of seeing deep into a man's ~~heart~~^{heart} but inspired psyche, it left the readers weeping in pity for Ballard and marveling at his survival. The account of Ballard's life after Singapore, this is no ordinary narrative autobiography- rather, a series of chapters each of which might stand as a small masterpiece alone, each like the fragment of a smashed mirror reflecting a piece of Ballard's life in microcosm- his wife and her tragic death, his friends, his children, his involvement with the 60s through his crashed car exhibition and his fascination with television. Women provide the linking thread through it all- the ones who Ballard loved, made love to, or in turn loved him- his wife, Miriam, most unforgettable. But the key is an account of a man coming to terms with himself and his violent childhood- in the end what one leaves this book with is a sense of the kindness of Ballard.

The novel opens on August 1937 at Shanghai. The protagonist, Jim, described as "a seven year-old" witnessed the bomb explosion which killed over 1000 people at the Great World Amusement park on the Avenue Edward VII. We are also introduced to Olga Ulianova, Jim's white Russian governess, and to young David Hunter, a friend who lived at the western end of Amherst Avenue.

Neither Olga, the Russian girl who is Jim's governess, nor David Hunter, his young friend, is mentioned in *Empire of the Sun*, so the characters and events of the later novel already seem to be taking on a separate, parallel existence. The governess in the earlier book is called Vera Frankel, and Jim's closest friend is Patrick Maxted; of course, the real Jim might have has several governesses and many friends over the years of his childhood.

The second chapter of this novel is concerned with the escape attempts at Lunghua camp during November 1943. Some youths are trying to escape from the camp. Thirteen year-old Jim has also attempted to raid the food store with the help of broken bayonet..... In effect,

burrowing his way further in to the camp. Characters mentioned, besides David Hunter, include Mr. Hiyashi, who is the camp commandant, Peggy Gardner who is a tall, 14 year-old English girl, Mrs. Dwight, Dr Sinclair, Mr. Sangster, Mrs. Tootle, Mr. Christie, Mariner and the Ralston brothers. This chapter is based on a factual background of daily life in Lunghua, where the real- life Ballard was interned from 1943 to 1945. There are, however passing references of Private Kimura and Sergeant Nagata, the Americans Basie and Demarest, and Mr. and Mrs. Vincent, characters that did appear in *Empire of the Sun* – although none of them plays any significant part in this novel.

The third chapter is concerned with the Japanese soldiers during August 1945 in Lunghua and Shanghai. The guards disappear. Jim leaves the camp and walks back to Shanghai along a railway line. At a station on the way he encounters a group of Japanese soldiers who are slowly strangling a Chinese captive. After reached at home, Jim is reunited with his parents. There are further encounters with Peggy Gardner, David Hunter and Olga Ulianova before Jim set sails for England with his mother aboard the R.M.S. Arawa. As the ship left Woosung he sees a beached tank-landing craft crammed with Japanese prisoners of war, and there is a hint that terrible carnage is about to take place.

The fourth chapter takes place during 1950 at Cambridge. Jim was a medical student, carrying out anatomy- class dissections of a female cadaver. We met Peggy Gardner once again and two important new characters appear: the quick witted school- girl called Miriam which is obviously based on Ballard's wife- to- be, Helen Mary Matthews who is a great-niece of Cecil Rhodes. Soon Jim and Miriam became lovers. Another important character introduced in this chapter is the great psychologist Dr. Richard Sutherland. The character of Sutherland is based on Ballard's friend, the late Dr. Christopher Evans.

The fifth chapter covers the period during 1954, Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan. Jim and David Hunter are trainee pilots in the RAF, stationed in Canada. On a solo flight, Jim spotted a crashed aircraft lying on a lake- bottom, and he suffered a near- crash himself. He and David have also shared in sexual adventures with local prostitutes. The recurring character of David Hunter to be almost completely fictional. It may be

based in small ways on a number of people, but clearly his role in the novel is to act as a dark alter ego of Jim. He represents the wild side of Ballard's own character, the man who goes out and does various things that the narrator fantasizes about.

The sixth chapter focuses the magic world during 1959 at Shepperton. Jim and Miriam have been married for some years, and she is now expecting their third child. A domestic idyll unfolds as Jim plays with his son and daughter, Henry and Alice, and Jim makes love to his wife. The new baby is born who is walking into the deep dream of life, it seemed not young but infinitely old, millions of years entertained in the pharaoh – like smoothness of its cheeks.

The seventh chapter takes place at Costa Brava, Spain during summer 1964. Jim, Miriam and his family are enjoying their holidays in the sun. They lounge on the beach, swim, explore a small island, and make a number of new friends. The new friends include Peter Lykiard who is an English lecturer, and Sally Mumford has come to Europe to meet the Beatles. The chapter ends, shockingly, with Miriam's death after injuring her head in a fall.

The next chapter shows the kindness of women. The chapter covers the period during 1964-65 at Shepperton. In the aftermath of Miriam's death, Jim decides to remain in the same house and to keep the children with him. In one tender scene, he makes love to Miriam's older sister, Dorothy. A year passes, during which he is celibate. This is a moving chapter in this novel. Miriam's sister shows sympathy to Jim and his children.

The ninth chapter is related to crazy people during 1967 at Shepperton and elsewhere. The American girl, Sally Mumford, comes on the scene once again. She is befriending Jim and the children. His children also are happy with her. Around them, swinging London and the 1960s counter-culture are now in full bloom. Jim, his children, Sally and Peter Lykiard attend an open-air pop concert near Briton. Later Jim and Sally make love. He introduces her to Dr. Dick Sutherland who has by now become a television pundit. The next chapter covers the period during June 1967, Shepperton. Dick Sutherland gives Jim some LSD and he experiences a bad trip, feeling the urge to walk on the river. There is

another visit from the motherly Peggy Gardner, and we also meet Jim's new friend Cleo Churchill. Apart from Miriam and Mary, the character of Cleo Churchill is the most transparent in this novel: she is obviously based on Ballard's close friend Claire Churchill.

The eleventh chapter concentrates on the exhibition during 1969, London and Shepperton. Sally Mumford and David Hunter reappear Sally is busy herself in hard drugs and David Hunter including an obsession with road accidents. Jim mounts a four-week exhibition of crashed cars at the Arts Laboratory in London. Driving home after the exhibition's close he suffers a serious car crash and is slightly injured. It might be Ballard's own car accident experience.

The next chapter takes in 1969 at Rio de Janeiro. Jim and Dick Sutherland attend a film festival in Rio, where they have brief meetings with famous people. They also have encounters with local prostitutes. Then Jim visits David Hunter in a mental hospital where he has been institutionalized after a deliberate car-smash. There are further references to the progress through life of Sally Mumford, who is attempting to kick her drug addiction and Richard Sutherland who has succeeded on television. Jim also visits Peggy Gardner in her small Chelsea house and makes love to her for the first time.

In 1978 Shepperton and Norfolk Jim visits Sally Mumford and her new family. Her family is near Norwich. When Jim passes through Cambridge enroute he goes to Sally's house. David Hunter joins them, and they witness the excavation of a Battle-of-Britain Spitfire. Then Dick Sutherland is dying of thyroid cancer and makes his last television documentary which is a study of his own illness and death. But Jim is trying his level best to encourage him with some misgivings.

During 1980 Jim goes to Shepperton and Runnymede. Musing on Dick's death and on the departure of his grown-up children, Jim visits a fun-fair in Shepperton. Later Jim makes love to Cleo, and the two visit Runnymede where they witnessed a near fatal accident by the riverside when a car rolled into the water. The child in the car is revived by a mysterious hiker.

The novel ends during 1987, Surrey and Hollywood. Jim participates in the filming at Sunningdale of a movie based on one of his

novels. Later he and Cleo fly to California for the film's premiere. There, Jim encounters once again Olga, the Russian woman who is his governess in Shanghai, and they make love.

Fantasy in *The Kindness of Women*:

The word fantasy is both a literary and a psychological term. As a literary term a fantasy means any narrative that deals with impossible and imaginary life. Such kind of fantasy we find in many incidents in *The Kindness of Women*. Jim reunited with his parents. Then he was sent back to England. During 1950 he was in the Cambridge as a medical student. There he met Peggy Gardner and Miriam. Many times there was touch of fantasy in the conversation between Miriam and Jim.

“MiriamI squeezed her shoulders reassuringly. ‘Real bodies don’t look like dissecting room cadavers. They look like the living- that is what’s so strange” (Ballard 1994:95)

Jim was not happy in studying medicine but he wanted to lead romantic and imaginary life. In this sense Montrose David has described Jim's life in the essay, *After the Sun Had Set* that Jim wanted to forget the stark reality of life during the World War II at Shanghai and wanted to lead imaginary life in the company of his friends.

“In 1950, Jim is (like Peggy) a medical student at Cambridge, where he meets his future wife, Miriam, and Dick Sutherland, a rising psychology don. But Jim cannot shake off memories of China and apocalyptic fantasies”. (Mantrose 1991:41-42)

As a psychological term fantasy has three meanings- the first meaning is an imaginative construction which in some way or other pleases the person and is mistaken by him for reality. For example, in *The Kindness of Women*, the hero fantasizes his own wife while sexually enjoying with Peggy Gardner and Clio Churchill. In these incidents Jim has mistaken the reality of his wife. Because in summer 1964 Jim and his family were holidaying at Costa Brava, Spain. But there he lost his wife in one fatal accident. While returning to Shepperton he imagined his

marriage day at the same time he imagined nameless Chinese people who had died during the Second World War.

“The past, on which I had turned my back on the day of my marriage..... Miriam’s death joined me once again to all these nameless Chinese who had died during the Second World War..... Images of the bone- white paddy fields came back to me, like the pearly light that lay over Lunghua after the explosion of the atom bomb at Nagasaki”.
(Ballard 1994:164)

As he imagines his marriage day and nameless Chinese who had died in the Second World War, he also imagines his wife’s presence and her love again and again. Jim loved his wife very much. The memories of his wife were dominant in his mind. He saw Miriam in Dorothy and tried to enjoy physically.

“ Dorothy calmly stood in front of me as I undressed her, palms lightly in my chicks, running her fingers into my mouth..... I kissed her labia and then sat her on my knees, caressing her vulva as if I had parted its lips.....” (Ballard 1994:168)

So the above passage shows how Jim makes love to Miriam’s older sister, Dorothy. A year passes, during which he is celibate. One has to assume that most of this moving passage is fundamentally true because Miriam’s sister has shown sympathy to Ballard and his children. In this sense Slavitt David R. describes Jim as a monster in his easy *The Monster He Became*.

“.....When the protagonist, Jim, comes home from Spain, where he has just buried Miriam, his young wife, and makes love with Dorothy, Miriam’s sister, it is beside the point to wonder whether such a thing actually happened to J.G. Ballard (Pronounced But – LARD), whether there was or is a Dorothy, or how she or her family might feel about this revelation. Such questions are interesting but idle.

The more pressing issue is what kind of monster Jim has turned out to be.” (Slavitt 1991: 2)

Jim loved his wife no doubt. He imagined his wife in Dorothy. But he tried to enjoy her physically and that is why he is called a monster. The second type of psychological fantasy is a pleasing imaginative construction entertained incessantly, and to his injury, by the patient, but without the delusion that it is a reality. A waking dream- known to be such by the dreamer of military or erotic triumphs, of power or grandeur, even of mere popularity, is either monotonously reiterated or elaborated year by year. Such type of fantasy is repeatedly used in *Empire of the Sun* but rarely used in *The Kindness of Women*. During November 1943 at Lunghua camp some youths had tried to escape from the camp, 13 year-old Jim had also attempted to raid the food store with the help of a broken bayonet. He had to lead many days half- stomached. And he imagined he would die because of starvation.

“Far more worrying, the food ration had been cut. The sweet potatoes and cracked wheat-a coarse cattle fee- weevils and rusty nails. Peggy and I were hungry all the time.” (Ballard 1994: 37)

The above passage shows the fear of death in the mind of Jim. One more incident in the novel also shows the fear of death when Jim left the camp after August 1945. At a station on the way he encountered a group of Japanese soldiers who were strangling a Chinese captive. Jim also imagines that he will be also killed. Both incidents show the fantasy of death in the mind of Jim.

The third meaning of psychological fantasy is the activity indulged in moderately and briefly a temporary holiday or recreation, duly subordinated to more effective and outgoing activities. It is a kind of normal Castle- building – the Egoistic and the Disinterested. The Egoistic kind of the day-dreamer himself is always the hero and everything is seen through his eyes. In the Disinterested kind of the day-dreamer is not the hero of the day-dream or perhaps no present in it at all. In *Empire of the Sun* and *The Kindness of Women* of J. G. Ballard we find the egoistic kind of the day-dreamer. Because both the novels are autobiographical and the world is seen through the eyes of Jim during the Second World War at

Shanghai. The novel *The Kindness of Women*, which begins at a point in Ballard's life just before the opening of *Empire of the Sun* and proceeds, selectively, through the next half century. The book's biographical blur is careful to describe his life in terms that make it clear that we are, indeed, reading an autobiography: internment in a Japanese prison camp; arrival in England; reading medicine at Cambridge; the RAF and so on. So in this novel the Egoistical kind of day-dreamer we find because the hero is always present and everything is seen through the eyes of Jim.

Jim, the adolescent hero, is obsessed with the bright transforming violence of air war and fantasies of resurrection. Near the end of the year 1943, the Japanese guards attacked on prisoners. Jim was trying to attract Kimura's attention towards him but was looking depressed towards paddy fields. At that moment Jim imagined that he might be thinking his parents. Jim also remembers his parents too because he was also separated from his parents during the years of the war.

“As if depressed by the untended paddy fields, Kimura frowned at the steam that rose from his broad nostrils. I imagined him thinking of his mother and father tending their modest crops in a remote corner of Hokkaido. Neither of us had seen our parents during the years of the war, though in many ways Kimura was more alone than I was.” (Ballard 1994:32)

In my opinion the above incident is good example of the egoistic kind of fantasy because the mental state of Kimura's mind is seen through the eyes of Jim. Jim also day-dreams of his parents. The same point is focused by George Carte in his essay *Sourdough* as “the story is a great look through a child's eyes at the WWII experience in Eastern China for British citizen captured by the Japanese. It goes from pre-war opulence to devastating prison camp existence to liberation” (Carte 2008: 1)

Hero's journey into the past illustrate what may be called the 'Kairotic moment' the opportune and decisive point in time when psychic transformation occurs in almost every story of J.G.Ballard. Usually Kairotic moment is a disaster, or the free choice of a hazardous

alternative, or to “live dangerously” (Philmus and Mullen 91: 57) in such a moment, the hero (or rarely heroine) becomes Nietzsche’s Übermensch, the self-vanquisher, and is reborn. But the story of *The Kindness of Women* is conventional one and it concentrate on the account of Ballard’s life after Singapore. This is no ordinary narrative autobiography- rather, a series of chapters each of which might stand as small masterpiece alone, each like the fragment of a smashed mirror reflecting a piece of Ballard’s life in microcosm- his wife and her tragic death, his friends, his children, his involvement with the 60’s through his crashed car exhibition and his fascination with television. Obviously, this is not a work of science fiction or utopian fiction. There is no clear Kairotic moment. But the novel is not without a certain utopian savor. Jim Graham, the adolescent hero, is obsessed with the bright transforming violence of air war and fantasies of resurrection. Little by little, the prisoners of Lunghua camp form a post- disaster utopia of mutual aid and supported each other and Jim was very happy during 1943.

Jim even fantasizes about returning voluntarily with his parents to its perilous freedom after the war. Jim and David also shared in sexual adventures with local prostitutes. The character of David is a fictional character and a dark alter ego to Jim. The character of David represents the wild side of Ballard’s own character, the man who went out and did various things that the narrator, Jim fantasizes about.

“For reasons clear only to David, we always had sex in the same room- he needed to watch and to be watched. Brigid sat across me, wearing her little slip like a Masonic apron, steering my penis inside her with one hand as she squeezed my testicles with the other. Yvette at last made me come while she lay on her back, breast held to my mouth as she forced her finger into my anus. In turn David liked me to watch him on the adjacent bed.” (Ballard 1994:114)

In my opinion, for Jim the freedom while sexually enjoying with Miriam’s sister Dorothy, Cleo Churchill, Peggy Gardner and many prostitutes is the freedom to live outside the norms and constraints of ordinary bourgeois existence and dare to face the Kairotic moment. And many women provide the linking thread through it all- the ones who

Ballard loved, made love to, or in turn loved him- his wife, Miriam, most unforgettably.

Realism in *The Kindness of Women*:

Realism is, in the broadest sense, simply fidelity to actuality in its representation in literature; a term loosely synonymous with 'verisimilitude'; and in this sense it has been a significant element in almost every school of writing in human history. Realism has been defined as

"The truthful treatment of material" (Thrall, Hibbard and Holman 1960: 397).

In the novel, *The Kindness of Women* Ballard has realistically presented Jim's (author's) real experiences in Shanghai, China during the Second World War and after in England. The novel begins at a point in Ballard's life just before the opening of *Empire of the Sun* and proceeds, selectively through the next half century. The book's biographical blur is careful to describe his life in terms that make it clear that we are reading an autobiography: internment in a Japanese prison camp; arrival in England; reading medicine at Cambridge; the RAF and so on. In this sense Ballard himself has mentioned in his letter, *Reply from J.G. Ballard* to David Pringle in 1993 as

"I have always stressed that both *Empire of the Sun* and *The Kindness of Women* were novels, though based on my own life without which they could never have been written at all. They represent my own life seen through the body of fiction that was prompted by that life." (Ballard 1993: 1)

The social realism is dominant in this novel because the picture of China during the Second World War is portrayed. The novel opens during 1937 in Shanghai. Jim is a 7-year-old who has witnessed the bomb explosion which killed over 1000 people at the Great World Amusement park on the Avenue Edward VII.

"Months of fierce fighting took place around the International Settlement before the Japanese were

able to drive the Chinese from Shanghai, during which tens of thousands of soldiers and civilians were to perish. But the Avenue Edward VII bomb, dropped in error by a Chinese pilot, had a special place in the mythology of war, a potent example of how mass death could now fall from the air.” (Ballard 1994:26)

So the above passage shows the very crucial picture of the Chinese society. In this sense David Pringle has described about the opening of the novel in his essay *Fact and Fiction* in J.G. Ballard’s *The Kindness of Women*

“This fiction is based on a factual background such a bomb did fall on Shanghai; it’s also referred to in *Empire of The Sun* (page 25). However it’s extremely unlikely that the young Ballard actually saw the event with his own eyes” (Pringle Aug 1993).

One more incident in the novel shows the picture of society and children like Jim during war in Shanghai. During 1943 in Lunghua camp, the food was not getting sufficiently. Many old prisoners and children were dying because of starvation. While some youths were trying to escape from the camp.

When Jim was 13 years-old, he had attempted to escape from the camp; at the same time he had tried to raid the food store with the help of a broken bayonet. Jim’s physical condition was very poor and he had to lead many days half-stomached.

“Far more worrying, the food ration had been cut. The sweet potatoes and cracked wheat—a coarse cattle feed—were warehouse scrapings, filled with dead weevils and rusty nails. Peggy and I were hungry all the time.” (Ballard 1994:37).

The above passage shows that the fiction is based on a factual background. This is portrayal of daily life in Lunghua, where the real-life Ballard was interned from 1943 to 1945. The most of the incidents in this novel are actually true. After August 1945 the guards disappeared from

Lunghua and Shanghai. Jim left the camp and walked back to Shanghai along a railway line. At a station on the way he encountered a group of Japanese soldiers who were frustrated and they were mad with rage. This incident in the novel is much factual. The event Jim witnessed at the railway station was clearly traumatic for Ballard.

The chapter *In the Camera Lens* is dealt with a film festival in Rio. It also deals with social life which is affected by war. Jim and Dick Sutherland attended a film festival in Rio during 1969. Everywhere the crowds jammed the movie theatres, and hotel terraces were packed with television crews, starlets and producers. Fleets of limousines and buses ferried the delegates from one lavish embassy party to another, while gangs of prostitutes and their pimps so packed the streets of Copacabana that they squeezed out any hope of finding a customer. Many prostitutes were trying their level best to attract customers towards them so the social life of China during the Second World War was very poor. The children like Jim were leading life half-stomached, beggars were starved and the prostitutes were also starved because there was lacking of customers. It means that in this novel social realism is dominant because the social life during the Second World War in Shanghai is reflected.

The personal realism is also reflected in this novel. It brings his autobiography up to the 1970's. It discusses Jim's departure from China, where he had been born and had been inherited to visit England, other parts of Europe and the U.S.A. Here Ballard is honest, self-deprecating and wildly vivid in laying out the tracks of his adult life. In 1950, Jim was (like Peggy) a medical student at Cambridge, where he met his future wife, Miriam and Dick Sutherland, a rising psychology don. The fourth chapter of this novel is very famous for the love-affair of Jim and Miriam. This love affair at Cambridge between Jim and Miriam is very factual and real.

“He goes every weekend Miriam took my arm pressing her cheek to my leather jacket, as if trying to read the wind in its bruised seams.” (Ballard 1991:96)

The character of Miriam is his beloved and future wife Helen Mary Matthews. And the character of Dick Sutherland is largely based on

Ballard's friend Dr. Christopher Evans. In one more incident Ballard's personal experiences are reflected Jim abandoned medicine during 1954. Jim and David Hunter were trainee pilots in the RAF, stationed in Canada. When Jim was at Shanghai, China as an interned boy, he had seen many air-crafts flying in the sky. At that time in his mind he would become pilot. So he decided to join RAF. The real reason of Jim for joining the RAF was preparing himself in the most practical way for the Third World War which had already begun at Nagasaki and Hiroshima, and whose first installment were the Berlin crisis and the Korean war. Ballard did serve in the RAF, in Canada, but left after a short time. Jim and David also shared in sexual adventures with local prostitutes.

“One of the women was a strong – shouldered blonde, naked except for the silk stockings rolled down to her ankles. The other, kneeling with the grubby soles of her feet towards me, wore a black slip around her waist. It rode over her buttocks, which David parted with his left hand as he fondled the dark hair and pink combs of her vulva.” (Ibid: 113).

This is an appropriate point to state that the recurring character of David Hunter is completely fictional. He may be based in small ways on a number of people, but clearly his role in the novel is to act as a dark alter ego to Jim. He represents the wild side of Ballard's own character, the man who goes out and does various things particularly sexual. So in this incident the writer has presented psychological realism with the help of David Hunter.

Jim's wife Miriam wants to spend their holiday at Costa Brava, Spain. Jim also wants to fulfill the wish of his wife. In summer 1964, Jim, Miriam and their children are holidaying the sun. But unfortunately Miriam dies there after injuring her head in a fall. This incident is also personal and autobiographical. In this sense David Pringle has commented in his essay *Fact and Fiction in J.G. Ballard's The Kindness of Women* as

“Ballard's wife Mary did die in Spain in 1964; however, the cause of her death was an infection, not an injury. Presumably, in the novel he has changed

the circumstances slightly in order to make the event seem more dramatic and sudden.” (Pringle David 1993. Chapter Seven).

An exhibition of crashed cars is also reflects personal touch in this novel. The idea of staging an exhibition of crashed cars came in the mind of Jim during 1969. This idea came in the mind of Jim after the road accident near Fair Oaks airfield. In that accident Sally and David Hunter were involved. But luckily neither of them was hurt in any way. After the exhibition of three months Jim saved from car crash. The crashed cars exhibition really took place, although it did so in April 1970, not a year earlier as seems to be suggested in the novel. In the end of the novel during 1987 at Hollywood Jim participated in the filming at Sunningdale of a movie based on one of his novels. Then Jim and Cleo fly to California for the films premiere. There Jim encounters once again Olga, the Russian women who was his governess in Shanghai and they make love.

“She held my wrist in the same firm grip she had used half a century earlier to steer me towards the bathroom. Standing beside the bed, she closed the wardrobe mirrors so that no reflection of her back would reach my eyes. She began to undress me as if preparing me for a party, her fingers never leaving my skin as they moved around my body.”(Ballard 1994:322).

All the movie business is of course closely based on the filming of Steven Spielberg’s version of *Empire of the Sun*. The Hollywood premiere of which Ballard attended in December 1987. The meeting with Olga is surely fictional and is added to provide the novel with an appropriate feeling of closure.

The Kindness of Women is one of the most extraordinary novels which gripped the readers with the shock of seeing deep into a man’s ~~heart~~ but inspired psyche, it also left the readers weeping in pity for Jim (Ballard) and marveling at his survival. The account of Ballard’s life after Singapore, this is no ordinary narrative autobiography rather, a series of chapters each of which might stand a small masterpiece alone, each like

the fragment of a smashed mirror reflecting a piece of Ballard's life in microcosm- his wife and her tragic death, his friends, his children, his involvement with the 60s through his crashed car exhibition and his fascination with television. Women provide the linking thread through it all- the ones who Ballard made love, made to love, or in turn loved him- his wife, Miriam, most unforgettable. The key is an account of a man coming to terms with himself and his violent childhood- in the end what one leaves this novel with a sense of the kindness of Ballard.

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