CHAPTER 10

Fascisms and the Politics of Nowhere in Kingdom Come

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Abstract

Focussing on Kingdom Come, this chapter explores how Ballard takes up the Surrealist “nowhere” motif in order to interrogate the survival of fascisms in contemporary history, politics and culture. With reference to Giorgio De Chirico’s “The Disquieting Muses” and his little-known novel, Hebdomeros, I trace the aesthetic and political significances of De Chirico’s enigmatic “nowhere” landscapes and his counter-political art of analogy for Ballard before interrogating how fascisms return in modified forms in Ballard’s contemporary nowhere, from the soft-totalitarianism forged by the illusion of consumerist choice, to the neo-fascist communities that commit racially-motivated acts of violence against displaced, immigrant workers.

Keywords


Ballard’s achievement is not to have staked out any kind of political position

JOHN GRAY, “Modernity and its Discontents.”

John Gray’s take on the political nature of Ballard’s writing is a useful starting point for this discussion. Just as Ballard’s novels and short stories offer determined resistance to official narratives of post-war history and culture, so they challenge totalizing political narratives with their prescriptive models of progress and change. The Atrocity Exhibition (1970) is probably the most sustained example of this. Across its fifteen disjointed texts, fragments of real-world political ideologies and systems are brought into chaotic relation with one another: European fascisms; National Socialism; American post-war and Cold War liberalism; Marxism and Communism; Environmentalism; U.S.
Conservatism; Anarchism; Socialism; and Political Capitalism (to name just a few). Far from being apolitical, as some early critics such as Finkelstein, Franklin and Stephenson maintained, Ballard’s writings are better understood as counter-political in impulse; that is, they expose the inevitable limitations of totalizing political narratives whilst interrogating the complex structures and dynamics that shape and energize them.

Here, I explore the counter-political nature of Ballard’s final novel *Kingdom Come* (2006), focusing specifically on its interrogation of fascisms in post-millennial culture and society. *Kingdom Come* is a valuable and timely counter-political text for at least two related reasons. Firstly, it challenges conventional understandings of fascism as a totalizing political ideology that was overcome at the end of the Second World War. In this respect, Ballard’s thinking chimes with that of contemporary historians and political scientists who insist that fascism should not be regarded from a safe historical distance, or as “an event that can ever be reduced to a discrete time period or state, society and culture” (Evans and Reid 2). As I will go on to show, *Kingdom Come* makes a disquieting case for the persistence of fascisms and, in so doing, it raises important questions about the interpenetration of power, violence and desire across contemporary political and cultural landscapes.

Secondly, *Kingdom Come* is alive to the mutable nature of fascisms across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. As Roger Griffin puts it, fascisms are constantly on the move, transforming in nature and appearance as they adapt “to the unfolding conditions of modernity” (1). *Kingdom Come* keeps an extremely close eye to new manifestations of fascism, I suggest, tracking and interrogating at least five different models. They are: historical fascism, which denotes inter-war European fascisms in Italy, Germany and Great Britain; neo-fascism, which refers to post-war and contemporary fascist groups, such as the National Front, British National Party, and English Defence League; consumer fascism (or soft fascism), which is, for Ballard, the idea that consumerism is a form of fascism; “fascism,” which speaks to the cultural production of fascism in literature, film and television; and micro-fascism, a model that turns away from an understanding of fascism as a historical regime or ideology in order to suggest that fascism is elementary not just to political life, but to everyday life itself. As Michel Foucault observed in his unnerving Preface to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*: “Fascism is in us all, in our heads, and in our everyday behaviour” (xvii).

Throughout *Kingdom Come*, these five models of fascism co-exist in complex and dynamic ways, resisting any straightforward explanation or response. I therefore want to organize my discussion around Ballard’s appropriation of the Surrealist motif of “nowhere.” The Surrealist imagination has long