The Novel Today: Recent British Fiction

Lecture 10: The Present in Perspective: Where We Are and Where We Are Heading

1) A Day in the Life: Ian McEwan, Saturday (2005)

2) Writing the World: Adam Thirlwell, Kapow! (2012)

3) Brave New World Revisited: Kazuo Ishiguro,

Never Let Me Go (2005)

1) A Day in the Life: Ian McEwan, Saturday (2005)

The Novels of Ian McEwan:

The Cement Garden (1978) The Comfort of Strangers (1981) The Child in Time (1987) The Innocent (1990) Black Dogs (1992) The Daydreamer (1994) Enduring Love (1997) Amsterdam (1998) Atonement (2001) Saturday (2005) On Chesil Beach (2007) Solar (2010) Sweet Tooth (2012) The Children Act (2014) Nutshell (2016) Machines Like Me (2019) The Cockroach (2019, novella)

[+ short stories]

> "England's national author" (*New Yorker* 2009)

Saturday (2005):

I wanted to capture the present, to get what would be in the mind of a reasonably educated person in early 2003. So it's 9/11, it's Iraq, but it's also a game of squash, making fish stew. If this novel were to be read in 300 years' time, if there's anyone left to do anything, they would have a sense of a slice of existence. (McEwan in http://living.scotsman.com/index.cfm?id=108202005)

15th February 2003,

a day in the life of London-based neurosurgeon Henry Perowne

- waking up early and witnessing a burning plane going down
- making love to his wife, the attractive and clever newspaper lawyer Rosalind
- talking to his son Theo, a brilliant blues musician
- being caught up in the anti-Blair/Bush-demonstration and the resulting minor car crash with Baxter
- the regular Saturday morning squash match with a colleague
- buying the ingredients for a fish stew to welcome back his beloved daughter Daisy in the evening
- visiting his mother in an old people's home
- preparing the stew and quarrelling with Daisy while the family is gathering
- Baxter's attack
- saving Baxter
- making love to his wife
- sleep

Famous Forerunners:

- James Joyce, *Ulysses* (1922)
- Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (1925)

but

figural narrative situation/stream of consciousness has been replaced by a refined interiorized mode of authorial narration in present tense (continuous text in five parts)

The Aesthetic Challenge:

'Happiness writes white.'

The Moral Challenge:

the unpredictability and contingency of 21st century life with its gaps between the public and the private

Beginning:

Some hours before dawn Henry Perowne, a neurosurgeon, wakes to find himself already in motion, pushing back the covers from a sitting position, and then rising to his feet. It's not clear to him when exactly he became conscious, nor does it seem relevant. He's never done such a thing before, but he isn't alarmed or even faintly surprised, for the movement is easy, and pleasurable in his limbs, and his back and legs feel unusually strong. He stands there, naked by the bed – he always sleeps naked – feeling his full height, aware of his wife's patient breathing and of the wintry bedroom air on his skin. That too is a pleasurable sensation. His bedside clock shows three forty. He has no idea what he's doing out of bed: he has no need to relieve himself, nor is he disturbed by a dream or some element of the day before, or even by the state of the world. It's as if, standing there in the darkness, he's materialised out of nothing, fully formed, unencumbered. [...]

Ending:

Quietly, he lowers the window. The morning is still dark, and it's the coldest time now. The dawn won't come until after seven. Three nurses are walking across the square, talking cheerfully, heading in the direction of his hospital to start their morning shift. He closes the shutters on them, then goes towards the bed and lets the dressing gown fall towards his feet as he gets in. Rosalind lies facing away from him with her knees crooked. He closes his eyes. This time there'll be no trouble falling towards oblivion, there's nothing can stop him now. Sleep's no longer a concept, it's a material thing, an ancient means of transport, a softly moving belt, conveying him into Sunday. He fits himself around her, her silk pyjamas, her scent, her warmth, her beloved form, and draws closer to her. Blindly, he kisses her nape. There's always this, is one of his remaining thoughts. And then: there's only this. And at last, faintly, falling: this day's over.

2) Writing the World: Adam Thirlwell, *Kapow!* (2012)

The Novels of Adam Thirlwell:

Politics (2003) The Escape (2007) Kapow! (2012) Lurid and Cute (2015)

Metanovel (?):

The Delighted States: A Book of Novels, Romances & their Unknown Translators, Containing Ten Languages, Set on Four Continents, & Accompanied by Maps, Portraits, Squiggles, Illustrations and a Variety of Helpful Indexes (2008) (dt. Der multiple Roman 2013)

Also of interest: *Multiples: 12 Stories in 18 Languages by 61 Authors*, edited by Adam Thirlwell

Kapow! > Cover Design Beginning:

or Kapow! It sometimes scared me. Because you might want fustice, or you might also more want peacefulness. But then again, maybe you can't have true peacefulness if you also don't have justice. All of which might mean, I was simply thinking, that it might not be obvious how revolutionary you wanted yourself to be. You might not know where a revolution began. Or if you did, then where it ended.

The member, for instance, this tale of an ordinary guy called tustam. Rustam! Who became a revolutionary not because level thought about it lovingly - since Rustam was just a uiet man. He didn't enter the revolution *directly*, but in a didestep, while doing nothing on an autoroute. Rustam was cab driver. And one night he was driving down the corniche n his taxi. His only desire was to be home before the curew. He didn't want a detour. But I suppose no one wants the letour, the detour is im-"14819 4000 and the sub triving down the corniche n'h taxi. His only desire was to be home before the curew. He didn't want a detour. But I suppose no one wants the letour, the detour is im-"14819 4000 and the sub triving down the corniche ni mpromptu commuf medics and property of those starving on pass 18000 gavroches in thado no time in of the perpetually open driver's window. I say open but easly mean empty. His taxi was black with white patches a mechanical chessboard. Its window-frames contained no dass, its meter was in Cyrillic. Inside. Rustam gazed at the lark smog on the bright river. He picked a cassette, titled in ed felt-tip, from a pile beside the gear-stick, and blew into asch spoked wheel before slotting it happily ino its slit. Yet reveral uncertain seconds, the voice of Khaled became us gertornic as his car allowed. You need to keep on lookng? Rustam wore a baseball cap stitched with a Big Apple

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He wore a taupe polo neck, which in the language of the glossies was unforgiving, tucked into khaki chinos with ironed in pleating at the crotch, like a curtain. Below the raised hem of these trousers, which didn't reach his shoes, two sports socks were visible. These socks came in trios, three identical roll-mops, tightly in a plastic wrapper. He bought them from a kiosk downtown, which arranged its surplus wares neatly on an ironing board. Behind him, on the fuzzy back-ledge of his taxi, were three miniature rub-ber dogs, with dislocated and nodding heads - a bulldog, a terrier, and a (miniature) miniature Schnauzer.

And then Rustam's world turned upside-down. In a driveway round the back of a formerly grand hotel, he saw a man way found the back of a formerry granu noter, he saw a man with his arms stretched wide, like he was trying very hyster-ically to welcome Rustam j to his bosom. What made this unrealistic was that j the man was lying on the floor. Now the curfew, Rus-fast approaching. This sit: a uation overall made Rustam scared. Can I also add that while the curfew was one scared. Can I also add that while the curfew was one scared. Can I also add that reason why he was hurry ing because of low? I think te ted video of *The Philadel* wife Nigora, for their anni-clouded plastic box, on the But it wasn't right, he thouing home, he was also hurry-I can. A dubbed and imporphia Story - a present for his versary - lay clipped inside a passenger seat beside him. But it wasn't right, he thou-under a dark sky. **|**

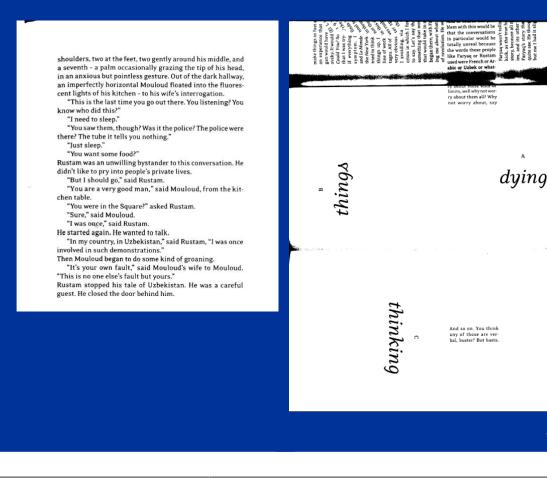
So Rustam very awk-nes, and parked his warm So Rustam very awk-nes, and parked his warm an and looked. The put the a smear, above the neck of the formation of the stood above the asmear, above the neck of the formation of the stood above the bis chest hair was visible, a smear, above the neck of the formation of the stood above the his chest hair was visible, his chest hair was visible, the stood above the his chest hair was visible, puddle. It wasn't obvious to Rustam if this man was the other are likely that he was looking the at a corpse. He looked arou-nd. Some security market ware stiting at the hotel's arou-ter the stood above the his chest hair was the other arou-ter the stood above the his chest hair was visible arou-ter the stood above the his chest hair was visible. The stood above the stood above the his chest hair was visible arou-ter the stood above the his chest hair was visible arou-ter the stood above the stood above the his chest hair was visible arou-ter the stood above the stood above the his chest hair was visible arou-ter the stood above the stood above the his chest hair arouter the stood above the stood above the his chest hair arouter the stood above the his chest hair arouter the nd. Some security guards were sitting at the hotel's exit, slouched in mismatched plastic chairs - attending an invisible barbecue. They didn't seem to care. Patting him down, a patient detective, Rustam located the man's wallet. An ID card portrayed a bedraggled photo of a bedraggled

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ght, to leave a man alone, wardly cut across three laMouloud, and a description of Mouloud's address. Rustam looked at the photo, then looked at Mouloud. He looked at Mouloud, and then at the photo again. The look looked like looking, but really he was thinking. The usual thing, he knew, was to take a dead or dying man to hospital. But he'd also heard the rumours about the hospitals – about the hos-pitals and the secret police. And for reasons which are not quite relevant at this early stage in my story. Rustam sided with those who didn't side with the secret police. So, instead of taking Moulout to the hospital, he decided to drive him of taking Mouloud to the hospital, he decided to drive him home. He began the heavy task of dragging the body of Mouloud onto the back seat of his taxi. The metal pole, this he left behind. And then - a miracle! - Mouloud began to stir. As he slumped on the torn and imitation leather of Rustam's taxi, he opened his eyes, slowly, then closed them again. With this blinking cargo, Rustam forced his taxi to scurry through the enveloping city, out to the suburbs, to the apart-ment block where Mouloud's wife was hysterically waiting.

By the time they arrived, Mouloud had again lost conscious-ness. In the hallway, with borrowed scissors, Rustam slit Mouloud's t-shirt, whose a time the time halves slumped apart - an impromptu figure the slumped science of the slow slite the slumped apart - an impromptu an administered some the slow slite the slumped apart - an impromptu figure the slumped science of the slow slite the floor of the elevator, his a time to be so that his body would fit. But as so often in this to be so that his body would fit. But as so often in this to be so that his body would fit. But as so often in this to be so that his body would fit. But as so often in this to be so that his body would fit. But as so often in this to be so that his body would fit. But as so often in this to be so that his body would fit. But as so often in this to be so that his body would fit. But as so often in this to be so that his body would fit. But as so often in this to be so that his body would fit. But as so often in this to be so the body would fit. But as so often in this to be so the body would fit. But as so often in this to be so the body would have were weat to have the the body would often the body would have so weat to have the so the electrics in the hallway, but had not. This pallet had soon been abandoned. Mouloud By the time they arrived, Mouloud had again lost consciousbut had not. This pallet had soon been abandoned. Mouloud was instead carried upstairs by seven people: two at the

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3) Brave New World Revisited: Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go* (2005)

The Novels of Kazuo Ishiguro:

A Pale View of Hills (1982) An Artist of the Floating World (1986) The Remains of the Day (1989) The Unconsoled (1995) When We Were Orphans (2000) Never Let Me Go (2005) Nocturnes: Five Stories of Music and Nightfall (2009) The Buried Giant (2015)

Nobel Prize for Literature 2017 > England's global author (cf. Walkowitz 2006, 2015; Wong 2015)

Designation of Setting in Never Let Me Go: "England, late 1990s"

Beginning:

My name is Kathy H. I'm thirty-one years old, and I've been a carer now for over eleven years. That sounds long enough, I know, but actually they want me to go on for another eight months, until the end of this year. That'll make it almost exactly twelve years. Now I know my being a carer so long isn't necessarily because they think I am fantastic at what I do. There are some really good carers who've been told to stop after just two or three years. And I can think of one carer at least who went on for all of fourteen years despite being a complete waste of space. So I am not trying to boast. But then I do know for a fact that they've been pleased with my work, and by and large, I have too. My donors have always tended to do much better than expected. Their recovery times have been impressive, and hardly any of them have been classified as 'agitated', even before fourth donation. Okay, maybe I *am* boasting now. But it means a lot to me, being able to do my work well [...]

Narrative Technique:

- first-person narration \rightarrow Kathy H. looking back on her life
- the question of (un-)reliability: there seems to be something hidden behind her reasonable, calm discourse
- Kathy provides access to a triangle of protagonists which she forms together with Tommy and Ruth

I try not to make a nuisance of myself, but I've figured out how to get my voice heard when I have to. And when things go badly, of course I'm upset, but at least I can feel I've done all I could and keep things in perspective. (204)

The Contours of a Shadow World of Donors and Carers:

- Hailsham (Madame, Miss Emily, Miss Lucy, guardians) (→ creativity/art; sex → "Never Let Me Go")
- the Cottages (Keffers)
- carers \rightarrow donors \rightarrow completion
- the possibility of 'deferral' through art/love
- unreliability as an effect of the boundaries of one's world

Ending:

The only indulgent thing I did, just once, was a couple of weeks after I heard Tommy had completed, when I drove up to Norfolk, even though I had no real need to. I wasn't after anything in particular, and I didn't go up as far as the coast. Maybe I just felt like looking at all those flat fields of nothing and the huge grey skies [...] Then at last I spotted a few trees in the distance, not far from the roadside, so I drove up to them, stopped, and got out.

[...]

That was the only time, as I stood there, looking at that strange rubbish, feeling the wind coming across the empty fields, that I started to imagine just a little fantasy thing, because this was Norfolk after all, and it was only a couple of weeks since I'd lost him. I was thinking about the rubbish, the flapping plastic in the branches, the shore-line of odd stuff caught along the fencing, and I half-closed my eyes and imagined this was the spot where everything I'd ever lost since my childhood had washed up, and I was now standing here in front of it, and if I waited long enough, a tiny figure would appear on the horizon across the field, and gradually get larger until I'd see it was Tommy, and he'd wave, maybe even call. The fantasy never got beyond that - I didn't let it - and though the tears rolled down my face, I wasn't sobbing or out of control. I just waited a bit, then turned back to the car, to drive off to wherever it was I was supposed to be.

Modes:	Documentary	Realist	Revisionist	Implicit	Explicit
	Fiction	Fiction	Fiction	Metafiction	Metafiction
Scales:	external/environ- mental reference illusion 'real' comm./ character comm.	<	>	internal/sys- temic ref.	auto-referentiality anti-illusion lit. comm./ narr. comm.
'Programs':	(Avantgarde)	Realism	Romanticism →	Modernism	← Aestheticism
Orientations of Meaning:	obj.	obj.	(obj.)	(obj.)	[(obj.)]
	(subj.)	subj.	<u>subj</u> .	subj.	(subj.)
	[(lit.)]	(lit.)	lit.	lit.→ <u>lit</u> .	lit.

A Map of (Post-)Modern Fiction

(cf. Reinfandt 1997, 240)

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