

The Novel Today: Recent British Fiction

Lecture 5:

Condition of England, Condition of Europe: Realism at the End of the 20th Century

1) Between Metaphysics and Metafiction:
William Golding, *Darkness Visible* (1979)

2) Postmodernist Realism:
Julian Barnes, *The Porcupine* (1992)

1) Between Metaphysics and Metafiction:
William Golding, *Darkness Visible* (1979)

The Novels of William Golding (1911-1993):

Lord of the Flies (1954)

The Inheritors (1955)

Pincher Martin (1956)

Free Fall (1959)

The Spire (1964)

The Pyramid (1967)

The Scorpion God: Three Short Novels (1971):

“The Scorpion God” / “Clonk Clonk” / “Envoy Extraordinary” (1956)

Darkness Visible (1979)

Rites of Passage (1980) > Booker Prize / Nobel Prize 1983

The Paper Men (1984)

Close Quarters (1987)

Fire Down Below (1989)

[*To the Ends of the Earth* (1991)]

The Double Tongue (1995)

***Darkness Visible* (opening):**

There was an area east of the Isle of Dogs in London which was an unusual mixture even for those surroundings. Among the walled-off rectangles of water, the warehouses, railway lines and travelling cranes, were two streets of mean houses with two pubs and two shops among them. The bulks of tramp steamers hung over the houses where there had been as many languages spoken as families that lived there. But just now not much was being said, for the whole area had been evacuated officially and even a ship that was hit and set on fire had few spectators near it. There was a kind of tent in the sky over London, which was composed of the faint white beams of searchlights, with barrage balloons dotted here and there. The barrage balloons were all that the searchlights discovered in the sky, and the bombs came down, it seemed, mysteriously out of emptiness. They fell in or round the great fire.

The men at the edge of the fire could only watch it burn, out of control. The water mains were broken and the only hindrance in the way of the fire was the occurrence of firebreaks here and there where fire had consumed everything on other nights.

Somewhere on the northern edge of the great fire a group of men stood by their wrecked machine and stared into what, even to men of their experience, was a new sight. Under the tent of searchlights a structure had built itself up in the air. It was less sharply defined than the beams of light but it was far brighter. It was a glare, a burning bush through or beyond which the thin beams were sketched more faintly [...]

The men who stood by their wrecked machine [...] had about them the anonymity of uniform silence and motionlessness [...] They were staring straight down the road into the bush, the furnace. [...]

So there they were, listening to the drone of the departing bombers, estimable men who were beginning to feel that though everything was indescribably awful they would live for another day. They stared together down the shuddering street and the bookseller, who suffered from a romantic view of the classical world, was thinking that the dock area would look like Pompeii [...] The bookseller found himself thinking that after the war if there ever was an after the war they would have to reduce the admission fee to the ruins of Pompeii since so many countries would have their own brand-new exhibitions of the broken business of living. [...]

At the end of the street or where now, humanly speaking, the street was no longer part of the habitable world – at that point where the world had become an open stove – [...] right there, where the flinty street was turned into light, something moved. [...]

“Good God!” [...]

What had seemed impossible and therefore unreal was now a fact and clear to them all. A figure had condensed out of the shuddering backdrop of the glare. [...]

The figure was a child, drawing nearer. As they picked their way past the new crater they saw him plain. He was naked and the miles of light lit him variously. A child's stride is quick; but this child walked down the middle of the street in a kind of ritual gait that in an adult would have been called solemn. The captain could see – and now, with a positive explosion of human feeling – why this particular child walked as it did. The brightness on his left side was not an effect of light. The burn was even more visible on the left side of his head. All his hair was gone on that side, and on the other, shrivelled to peppercorn dots. His face was so swollen he could only glimpse where he was going through the merest of slits. It was perhaps something animal that was directing him away from the place where the world was being consumed. Perhaps it was luck, good or bad, that kept him pacing in the one direction where he might survive.

Narrative Technique and Structure:

Part I: Matty (ch. 1-7)

- heterodiegetic narrator (covert), zero focalisation
- ↓ [increasing dominance of Matty's perspective as he grows up]
- ch. 7: homodiegetic narrator, internal focalisation (Matty's journal)

▶ Matty's life, WWII-1967

Part II: Sophy (ch. 8-11)

- heterodiegetic narrator (covert), zero focalisation with a strong tendency towards internal focalisation (Sophy)

▶ Sophy's (and Toni's) life, 1967 (aged 10) – 1978 + flashbacks

Part III: One Is One (ch. 12-16)

- heterodiegetic narrator (covert), zero focalisation centring around the perspective of the bookseller Sim Goodchild
- + Matty's last journal entries
- + Sophy's violent fantasies

▶ Sophy vs. Matty as observed by Sim Goodchild and others

The Structure of *Darkness Visible* (cf. Redpath 1986):

MATTY | SOPHY [setting: Greenfield]
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 | 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



1	Fire of Blitz		Fire at Wandicott School
2	Death of Henderson		Sophy's imaginative killing of boy
3	Matty's uncertainty (Who am I?/What am I? What am I for?)		Sophy's certainty in decision to kidnap child and commit 'outrage'
4	Matty rejects "daughters of men"		Sophy finds sexual partner
5	Matty goes to Australia		Sophy works at Runways Travel
6	Matty's baptism		Sophy struck by tidal wave
7	Spirits tell Matty what he must do		Sophy discovers law of 'of course'
8	Matty sees twins go into shop		Twins go into shop

Patternings and Incongruencies:

Redpath 1986:

- exact chronological scheme counterbalanced by inaccuracies
- the motifs of fire and water

Tiger 1990:

- namings:

Matty < Matthew ('Gift of God'), Septimus < 'Number Seven', Windrove (Windup, Windrave, Windrow, Windgraff, Windy, Wildwave, Winsome, Woodrave, Wildwort, Wheelwright, Wandgrave, Windrap, Windwood, Windgrove)
Sophy ('Wisdom') Stanhope
Sim Goodchild
Mr. Pedigree

- numberings:

- 7: Christian symbolism (holy trinity + earthly four, St. John's Book of Revelation);
Matty's journal: ch. 7 and 14, first entry on May 17th 1967, last one on June 17th 1978; Mr Hanrahan has 7 daughters; Matty spends 7 days stacking matchboxes; Matty finally dances to Beethoven's 7th symphony; DV Golding's 7th novel
- 6: Matty expects apocalypse on 6/6/66
- 3: triadic structure of the novel (thesis/antithesis/synthesis); Matty receives his calling when he gazes into the skyring glass in the window of Sim Goodchild's bookshop in ch. 3; in Australia he passes 3 houses, 3 trees, presses the starter of his car 3 times and on leaving the continent shakes the dust off his feet 3 times
- 2: binarity/doublings are integral to the novel (Matty/Sophy; darkness/light; two sides of Matty (literally); twins; Edwin/Edwina Bell)
- 1: Mr Pedigree

Effect: radical ambiguity, oscillating between

- psychological plausibility and allegory
- social realism and spirituality
- relativism and moral vision
- immanent and transcendent horizons of meaning
- (implicit) metafiction and metaphysics

► the reader will have to make up his or her mind

► the last stand of an older tradition of morally inclined novel writing that came to an end in the 1970s

(cf. Reinfandt 1997 and 2017)

2) Postmodernist Realism: Julian Barnes, *The Porcupine* (1992)

The Novels of Julian Barnes:

Metroland (1980)
Before She Met Me (1982)
Flaubert's Parrot (1984)
Staring at the Sun (1986)
A History of the World in 10 and ½ Chapters (1989)
Talking It Over (1991)
The Porcupine (1992)
England, England (1998)
Love, etc. (2000)
Arthur & George (2005)
The Sense of an Ending (2011) > Booker Prize
The Noise of Time (2016)
The Only Story (2018)

as Dan Kavanagh:

Duffy (1980), *Fiddle City* (1981), *Putting the Boot In* (1985), *Going to the Dogs* (1987)

+ memoirs, essays, short fiction

***The Porcupine* (opening):**

The old man stood as close to the sixth-floor window as the soldier would allow. Outside, the city was abnormally dark; inside, the low wattage of the desk lamp slid thinly from the metal rim of his heavy spectacles. He was less spruce than the militiaman had expected: the suit had corrugations at the back, and what remained of his sandy hair lurched up in tufts. But his posture was confident; there was even belligerence in the way his left foot was planted firmly on the painted line. With head slightly cocked, the old man listened as the women's protest wound through the tight centre of the capital he had bossed for so long. He smiled to himself.

Narrative Technique and Structure:

- heterodiegetic narrator (covert), zero focalisation
- scenic presentation/descriptive 'snapshots' of reality/character perspectives
+ occasional omniscient flashbacks
- settings of scenes:
 - 1) Stoyo Petkanov's prison cell (cf. opening)
 - Petkanov's world-view (f.i.d.)
 - dialogues SP ↔ Peter Solinsky (PS!)
 - 2) Solinsky's flat (→ Solinsky's private existence, the failure of his marriage)
 - 3) Solinsky's office (→ preparing the case against SP in co-operation with
Special Investigatory Office under Lieutenant-General
Ganin)
 - 4) the courtroom (→ the unfolding of the case as seen on TV)
 - 5) private homes/café (→ students Vera, Atanas, Stefan and Dimiter watching
TV and reacting to it vs. S's granny in denial)

- ▶ a collage of scenes (which include flashbacks and passages of internal focalisation) linked by the case against SP
- ▶ free indirect discourse: SP, Maria Solinska, Stefan's granny
vs.
embedded indirect discourse: PS, the students
- ▶ passages dominated by narrator:
 - a) Peter Solinsky's inner life (35-39)
 - b) the historical changes of 1989 (42-44)
 - c) the closing scene (138)

a)

But then such people saw only Solinsky's outer life, and tended to assume that his inner existence must be equally well ordered. In fact, he oscillated constantly between different levels of anxiety [...]

But in the background lay feelings [Solinsky] did not care to inspect very closely. They were to do with cleanliness, personal rather than symbolic; with the knowledge that his father was dying; and with the desire to force upon himself a maturity which mere time was failing to supply.

If nations can behave like individuals, he was an *individual* who behaved like a nation: enduring decades of edgy submissiveness, then bursting into revolt, eager for fresh rhetoric and a renewed image of himself.

b)

Great movements [...] seemed to provoke an equal and opposite force. So people talked cautiously of the Changes, and this slight evasion made them feel a little safer: it was difficult to imagine something called the Counter-Changes or the Anti-Changes, and therefore such a reality might be avoidable too.

Occasionally an intruder with hammer and chisel would climb one of the shorter monuments and attempt to chip off a souvenir half-moustache; but drunk or the inadequacy of the chisel always brought failure.

c)

Evening and rain fell softly together. On a low hill to the north of the city stood a concrete pedestal, sullen and aimless. The bronze panels round its sides gleamed dully in the damp. Without Alyosha to lead them into the future, the machine gunners now found themselves fighting a different battle: irrelevant, local, silent.

On the piece of waste ground [...] rain gave a gentle sweat to Lenin and Stalin, to Brezhnev, to the First Leader, and to Stoyo Petkanov. Spring was coming [...] But argument had ceased in this posthumous Politburo; the stiff giants had fallen silent.

In front of the vacant Mausoleum of the First Leader an old woman stood alone [...] In outstretched fists she held a small framed print of V.I. Lenin [...] Occasionally, a committed drunk of some chattering thrush of a student would shout across at the old woman [...] But whatever the words, she stood her ground, and she remained silent.

Groups of Characters:

- 1) committed socialists
(SP, Stefan's granny → beginning and ending of the novel! static characters, certainty)
- 2) the Prosecutor General (PS → individualized, dynamic character, doubt)
- 3) onlookers
(Maria Solinsky → focus on private existence, stability, rejection of public/political engagement;
Vera → pragmatic idealism,
Atanas → 'student of languages, drinker, poet': cynical scepticism, rigorism, frivolity.
Stefan → engineer, the practical side of things.
Dimitar → 'everyman'.)

Plot:

PS fails to penetrate SP's static world view ("his story ran on tramlines" 67) entrenched in 40 years of institutionalized power. In the end he acknowledges an unbridgable divide between old norms ("What was judged politically necessary was, by definition, legal" 38) and resorts to his opponent's means in order to obtain a suitable sentence:

If Petkanov hadn't signed that memorandum, he must have signed something like it. We are only putting into concrete form an order he must have given over the telephone. Or with a handshake, a nod, a pertinent failure to disapprove. The document is true, even if it is a forgery. Even if it isn't true, it is necessary. (113)

Character. Perhaps that had been his mistake, his ... yes, his bourgeois-liberal error. The naive hope of 'getting to know' Petkanov. [...] We have moved into an era when 'character' is a misleading concept. Character has been replaced by ego, and the exercise of authority as a reflection of character has been replaced by the psychopathic retention of power by all possible means and in mockery of all implausibilities [...] welcome to the modern world. (106)

Prominent Motifs:

- words vs. reality (“He could remould anything with words” 112)
- the media vs. reality (TV, Ganin and the protesters)
- the porcupine (→ SP/the socialist view of the world)

→ reality in general:

“Many [of the protesting women] went inside [the cathedral] first and lit candles [...]: thin, yellow candles which had a tendency, either from poor manufacture or the heat of the surrounding flames, to bend at the waist as they burned [...] Many of the women now reached for stouter, whiter candles. To save every match but the first, each new candle was lit from the flame of another.” (1f.)

“The sturdy wrought-iron candle-stand, with its bristling spikes and soft curlicues, was a theatre of light.” (137)

(cf. Reinfandt 1997b, 2000)

A Map of (Post-)Modern Fiction

Modes:	Documentary Fiction	Realist Fiction	Revisionist Fiction	Implicit Metafiction	Explicit Metafiction
Scales:	external/enviromental 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. (subj.) [[lit.]]	obj. subj. (lit.)	(obj.) subj. lit.	(obj.) subj. lit.→lit.	[(obj.)] (subj.) lit.

(cf. Reinfandt 1997, 240)

Bibliography Lecture 5:

- Childs, Peter, *Julian Barnes*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2011.
- Guignery, Vanessa, *The Fiction of Julian Barnes*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.
- Gregor, Ian, Mark Kinkead-Weekes, *William Golding: A Critical Study of the Novels*. 3rd ed. London: Faber, 2002.
- Homes, Frederick M., *Julian Barnes*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Moseley, Merritt, *Understanding Julian Barnes*. Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 1997.
- Pateman, Matthew, *Julian Barnes*. Tavistock: Northcote House, 2002.
- Redpath, Philip, "Tricks of the Light: William Golding's *Darkness Visible*." *Ariel* 17.1 (1986): 3-16.
- Reinfandt, Christoph, *Der Sinn der fiktionalen Wirklichkeiten*. Heidelberg: Winter, 1997.
- Reinfandt, Christoph, "Zwischen Metaphysik und Metafiktion: William Golding, *Darkness Visible* (1979)." In: Reinfandt 1997, 282-308 (= 1997a).
- Reinfandt, Christoph, "'Postmoderner' Realismus: Julian Barnes, *The Porcupine* (1992)." In: Reinfandt 1997, 255-281 (= 1997b)
- Reinfandt, Christoph (with Marcus Noll), "Das Stachelschwein im Klassenraum: Gegenwartsliteratur im Englischunterricht der Oberstufe - Ein Vorschlag zur Behandlung von Julian Barnes' Roman *The Porcupine*." *Literatur in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 33.2 (2000): 159-179.
- Reinfandt, Christoph, "William Golding, *Darkness Visible* (1979)." In: C.R., ed., *Handbook of the English Novel ...* Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2017: 365-383.
- Tiger, Virginia, "William Golding's *Darkness Visible*: Namings, Numberings and Narrative Strategies." *Style* 24.2 (1990): 284-301.
- Tiger, Virginia, *William Golding: The Unmoving Target*. London: Boyars, 2003.