

The Novel Today: Recent British Fiction

Lecture 8: Alternative Worlds: Fantasy and the Emergence of Dual Address

1) Some Remarks on Fantasy Fiction

2) Myths of Modernity in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*-Trilogy

3) Mixing Crime and Fantasy: Ben Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London*-Series

1) Some Remarks on Fantasy Fiction

“Is fantasy the dominant mode of English twentieth-century fiction?”

(Booker 2009, 251)

Some Epic Sequences:

Tolkien, J.R.R., *The Lord of the Rings* (3 vols, 1937-49)

Lewis, C.S., *The Narnia Chronicles* (7 vols, 1950-56)

Pratchett, Terry, *Discworld* (41 vols, 1983ff.)

Rowling, J.K., *Harry Potter* (7 vols, 1997-2008)

Pullman, Philip, *His Dark Materials* (3 vols, 1995-2000)

Neil Gaiman, *The Sandman* (comics, 1988-96)

Tad Williams, *Otherland* (4 vols, 1996-2001)

“[T]he one thing that can rarely be said of fantasy is that it has nothing to do with reality.”

(Hunt/Lenz 2001, 2)

Functions of the Fantastic?

- playful exploration of alternatives
- defamiliarization, satirical functions
- escapism/affirmation/containment
vs.
involvement/engagement/critique/subversion
- mythical integration (e.g. cycles/totality, dual address)

- ▶ how exactly is the relation between alternative worlds and the readers' world(s) addressed in the text?

(cf. Reinfandt 2017)

2) Myths of Modernity in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*-Trilogy

Philip Pullman, *Northern Lights* (*His Dark Materials: Book 1*).

[Published in the US as *The Golden Compass*] 1995.

--- *The Subtle Knife* (*His Dark Materials: Book 2*). 1997.

--- *The Amber Spyglass* (*His Dark Materials: Book 3*). 2000.
[Whitbread Award 2000]

Offshoots:

--- *Lyra's Oxford*. 2003.

--- *Once Upon a Time in the North*. 2008.

'Equels':

--- *La Belle Sauvage* (*The Book of Dust: Volume 1*) 2017.

--- *The Secret Commonwealth* (*The Book of Dust: Volume 2*) 2019.

His Dark Materials. BBC Radio Dramatization. Dramatized by Lavinia Murray.

Produced by David Hunter. First broadcast on BBC Radio 4 on 4/11/18 Jan 2003.
6 CDs.

His Dark Materials. Based on the Novels by Philip Pullman. Adapted by Nicholas Wright. London: Nick Hern Books, 2003. 2nd, rev. ed. 2005 [National Theatre Production].

The Golden Compass. Directed by Chris Weitz. Starring Nicole Kidman and Daniel Craig. New Line Cinema, 2007.

(one of New Line's most expensive productions, it met with only middling success)

Highly recommended:

Philip Pullman, *Daemon Voices: Essays on Storytelling*. Oxford: David Fickling, 2017.

Pullman:

HDM is “not really a work of fantasy. It’s as realistic as I could make it.”

Setting:

→ multiple worlds in one universe/multiverse

- Lyra’s world (Vol. 1):
Lyra, the Master of Jordan College, Lord Asriel, Mrs Coulter, Roger, the Gobblers, the Gyptians, Iorek Byrnison, Lee Scoresby, the Witches
(Oxford > the Fens > Bolvangar > Svalbard)
- Will’s world/our world (Vol. 2):
Will, Mary Malone
- the crossroads world of Cittàgazze (Vol. 2)
- the world of the mulefa (Vol. 3)
- an empty world/Lord Asriel’s Republic of Heaven (Vol. 3)
- the World of the Dead (Vol. 3)

→ time frame: 300 years (the emergence of science/modernity)

Three hundred years, the mulefa had said: that was how long the trees had been failing. Given that the shadow particles passed through all the worlds alike, presumably the same thing was happening in her universe, too, and in every other one. Three hundred years ago, the Royal Society was set up: the first true scientific society in her world. Newton was making his discoveries about optics and gravitation. Three hundred years ago in Lyra’s world, someone invented the alethiometer. At the same time in that strange world [Cittàgazze] through which she’d come to get here [the world of the mulefa], the subtle knife was invented. [...]
What had happened three hundred years ago? (AS 326f.)

Ever since Pope John Calvin had moved the seat of the Papacy to Geneva and set up the Consistorial Court of Discipline, the Church's power over every aspect of life had been absolute. The Papacy itself had been abolished after Calvin's death, and a tangle of courts, colleges, and councils, collectively known as the Magisterium, had grown up in its place. These agencies were not always united; sometimes a bitter rivalry grew up between them. For a large part of the previous century, the most powerful had been the College of Bishops, but in recent years the Consistorial Court of Discipline had taken its place as the most active and the most feared of all the Church's bodies. But it was always possible for independent agencies to grow up under the protection of another part of the Magisterium, and the Oblation Board [...] was one of these. (GC 27)

Fantastic Elements:

- a) exclusively in Lyra's world:
 - witches, armoured bears, cliff ghaists, the Gallivespians etc.
 - the alethiometre
- b) in other worlds:
 - specters, the subtle knife (Cittàgazze)
 - the mulefa
 - the harpies in the world of the dead
- c) in all worlds:
 - daemons (?)
 - angels
 - dust

Dust:

- 'Rusakov particles'
- can be made visible with the help of technological instruments (Lord Asriel's photograms, Mary Malone's amber spyglass)
- understanding dust and communicating with it involves more sophisticated instruments (Lyra's alethiometre, Mary's computer) and an open state of mind
- dark matter, shadow particles
- original sin?

“Dust!” [Pantalaimon] said.

“What are you talking about?”

“Dust. He [Asriel] is going to find the source of dust and destroy it, isn’t he?”

“That’s what he said.”

“And the Oblation Board and the Church and Bolvangar and Mrs. Coulter and all, they want to destroy it too, don’t they?”

“Yeah ... Or stop it affecting people ... Why?”

“Because if *they* all think Dust is bad, it must be good [...] We’ve heard them all talk about Dust, and they’re so afraid of it, and you know what? We *believed* them, even though we could see that what they were doing was wicked and evil and wrong. ... We thought Dust must be bad too, because they were grown up and said so. But what if it isn’t? What if it’s –” [...]

“Yeah! What if it’s really *good* ...”

She looked at him and saw his green wildcat eyes ablaze with her own excitement. She felt dizzy, as if the whole world were turning beneath her.

If Dust were a *good* thing ... If it were to be sought and welcomed and cherished ...

“We could look for it too, Pan!” she said.

That was what he wanted to hear. (GC 350, emphases in original)

“The Authority, God, the Creator, the Lord, Yahweh, El, Adonai, the King, the Father, the Almighty – those were the all names he gave himself. He was never the creator. He was an angel like ourselves – the first angel, true, the most powerful, but he was formed of Dust as we are, and Dust is only a name for what happens when matter begins to understand itself. Matter loves matter. It seeks to know more about itself and Dust is formed. The first angels condensed out of Dust, and the Authority was the first of all. He told those who came after him that he had created them, but it was a lie. One of those who came later was wiser than he was, and she found out the truth, so he banished her. We serve her still. And the Authority still reigns in the Kingdom, and Metatron is his Regent.” (AS 28)

Plot:

- a) Lyra's Quest (destiny vs. free will?!)
- saving Roger from the Gobblers
 - helping Lord Asriel against the Magisterium
 - making up for Roger's death/freeing the dead
 - searching for the source of dust
 - saving the world
- b) Will's Quest for his father
- c) The Quest for Power
(the Authority/Metatron;
the Magisterium/Father McPhail;
Marisa Coulter, Lord Asriel)

"Lyra has a part to play in all this, a major one. The irony is that she must do it all without realising what she's doing." (GC 28)

"The witches have talked about this child for centuries past [...] Without this child we shall all die. So the witches say. But she must fulfill this destiny in ignorance of what she is doing, because only in her ignorance can we be saved." (GC 154)

"What work will I have to do, then?" said Will, but went on at once, "No, on second thoughts don't tell me. I shall decide what I do. If you say my work is fighting, or healing, or exploring, or whatever you might say, I'll always be thinking about it. And if I do end up doing that, I'll be resentful because it'll feel as if I didn't have a choice, and if I don't do it, I'll feel guilty because I should. Whatever I do, I will choose it, no one else."

(AS 444, emphasis in original)

“[E]very time anyone made an opening between the worlds, us or the old Guild men, anyone, the knife cut into the emptiness outside [...] We never knew. No one knew, because the edge was too fine to see. But it was quite big enough for Dust to leak out of. It they closed it up again at once, there wasn't time for much to leak out, but there were thousands that they never closed up. So all this time, Dust has been leaking out of the worlds and into nothingness.” (AS 433)

“And if you help everyone else in your worlds to do that, by helping them to learn and understand about themselves and each other and the way everything works, and by showing them how to be kind instead of cruel, and patient instead of hasty, and cheerful instead of surly, and above all how to keep their minds open and free and curious ... Then they will renew enough to replace what is lost through one window.”
(AS 440f.)

Telling Stories as a Central Motif:

- the power of stories > humility, openmindedness
- Lyra's tall stories > telling true stories

Pullman's narrator does not tell us what to think about moral decision making [...] [He] is more like a documentary with very little voice-over: he shows us vignettes that enable us to see more than individual characters see. [...] This technique creates dissonance between characters' and readers' understanding of situations. This dissonant space invites readers – one might say forces readers – into judgements about characters' insufficient, incomplete grasp of a given event. [...] Thus, Pullman's narrator challenges the reader [...] to make moral sense of the story without overt direction, requiring the reader to develop more independent judgements of the moral stakes. (Wood 2001, 244-46)

The Dynamics of Narrative and Structure:

- increasing structural complexity
(linear chronology > simultaneity/cuts;
focus on Lyra in GC > alternating foci on Lyra and Will in SK
+ additional settings in AS; separate dream sequence in italics in AS)
- increasing depth and breadth
(adventure story > metaphysical showdown; a child's worldview > awakening
of sexuality/love)
- increasing presence of intertexts
(epigraphs for each chapter in AS drawing on a wide range of writers)

► in-built development from children's to adult's book

Intertexts:

- Adam and Eve/Eve and Adam (cf. Fasch)
- John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1667/74)
- William Blake, *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (1789/93) and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790-93)
- Heinrich von Kleist, "Über das Marionettentheater" (1810)
- John Keats's concept of 'negative capability' (1819)

3) Mixing Crime and Fantasy: Ben Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London*-Series

Novels:

Rivers of London (2011)
Moon over Soho (2011)
Whispers Underground (2012)
Broken Homes (2013)
Foxglove Summer (2014)
The Hanging Tree (2016)
Lies Sleeping (2018)
False Value (2020)

Novellas:

The Furthest Station (2017)
The October Man (2019)

(+ comics)

Narrator-Protagonist Peter Grant

- has (in vol. 1) just finished his training as a Constable in the London Metropolitan Police and is to become a normal "Bobby"
- after meeting a ghost at Covent Garden he becomes the pupil of Detective Chief Inspector Thomas Nightingale, one of the last surviving wizards in England and the last member of the "Folly", the unofficial police department against criminal magic
- Peter Grant works closely together with his colleague Lesley May (and likes her a lot)

Storylines in Vol. 1 (*Rivers of London*)

- Covent Garden is the centre of the so called "Theatre Land"
- one storyline of the book is about the unsuccessful actor Henry Pyke from the 18th century and his revenge on a more successful actor colleague
- his revenge plot is modelled on an old play and finally takes over a performance of the opera *Billy Budd*, starting the Covent Garden riots
- the other (main?) storyline is about the conflict between Mama and Father Thames and how Peter Grant solves the conflict

When I brokered a peace between the two halves of the River Thames, part of the deal involved an exchange of hostages. All very mediaeval, but the best I could come up with at the time. From the court of Mama Thames, the London contingent, I chose Beverly Brook, she of the dark brown eyes and cheeky face, and in exchange I got Ash, all film-star good looks and the greasy blond charisma of a travelling funfair.

(*Moon over Soho*, p. 88)

> The two storylines are connected because Beverly Brooks helps Peter to solve the case of Henry Pyke.

Style and Plot:

Peter Grant looks back on *Rivers of London* in *Moon over Soho*:

[This time they] wanted my involvement to be low-profile. Given that the Covent Garden riots had put forty people in hospital, had seen the arrests of two hundred more, including most of the cast of *Billy Budd*, had put a deputy assistant commissioner in hospital, and then on disciplinary suspension and [another high-ranking police officer] on medical leave after I'd stuck him with a syringe full of elephant tranquilliser (in my defence he had been trying to hang me at the time)- and that was before the Royal Opera House was trashed and the market burned down – low-profile was fine with me. (p. 84)

Contemporary Fiction:

London is presented as a multicultural city that goes without saying. For example, the fact that Peter Grant is black is never explicitly spelled out, a high-ranking medical scientist working for the police and the 'Folly' has the Arabic name Abdul Haqq Walid and one of the higher-ranking police officers is lesbian. Lesley, on the other hand, is typically English, as is Nightingale.

Cultural Frames of Reference:

<i>Rivers of London</i> :	(18 th -century) theatre
<i>Moon over Soho</i> :	jazz, the London jazz scene
<i>Whispers Underground</i> :	eco-culture
<i>Broken Homes</i> :	architecture
<i>Foxglove Summer</i> :	the myths of the English countryside
<i>The Hanging Tree</i> :	Newton's lost <i>Third Principia</i>
<i>Lies Sleeping</i> :	The Faceless Man

Genre: American cover vs. British cover

American cover: focus on the riots (title: *Midnight Riot*),
race and crime-genre foregrounded

British cover: focus on the river (title: *Rivers of London*)
theatre and fantasy-genre foregrounded

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)

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