

# The Novel Today: Recent British Fiction

## Lecture 7:

### Experimental Fictions: Looking Forward, Looking Back

- 1) The Future as a Language Game:  
Russell Hoban, *Riddley Walker* (1980)
  
- 2) Re-imagining the Past:  
Jeanette Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry* (1989)

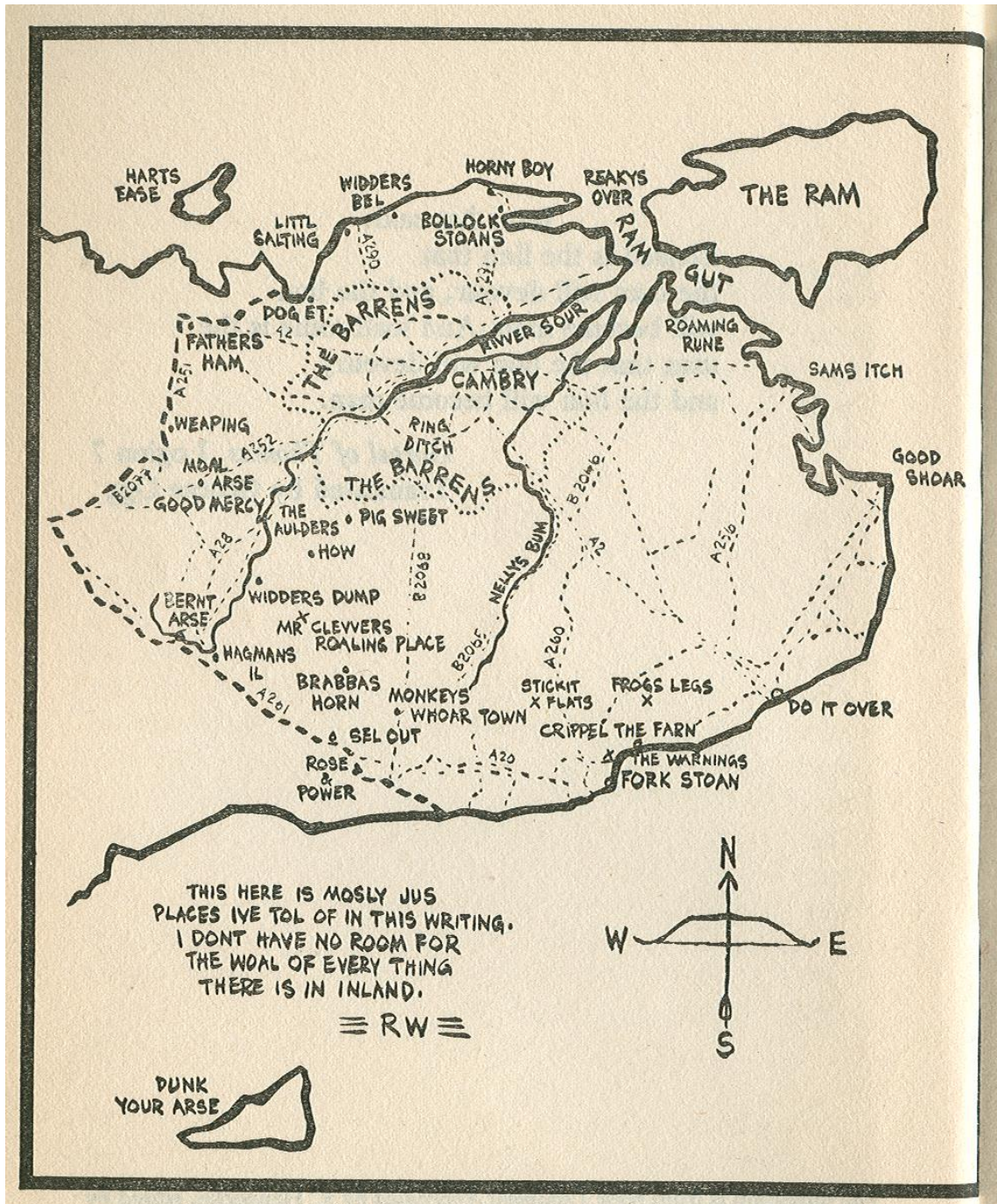
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- 1) The Future as a Language Game:  
Russell Hoban, *Riddley Walker* (1980)

#### The Novels of Russell Hoban (1925-2011):

*The Lion of Boaz-Jachin and Jachin-Boaz* (1973)  
*Kleinzeit* (1974)  
*Turtle Diary* (1975)  
*Riddley Walker* (1980)  
*Pilgermann* (1983)  
*The Medusa Frequency* (1987)  
*Fremder* (1996)  
*Mr Rinjo-Clacton's Offer* (1998)  
*Angelica's Grotto* (1999)  
*Amaryllis Night and Day* (2001)  
*The Bat Tatoo* (2002)  
*Her Name Was Lola* (2003)  
*Come Dance with Me* (2005)  
*Linger Awhile* (2006)  
*My Tango with Barbara Strozzi* (2007)  
*Angelica Lost and Found* (2010)

[+ numerous short stories and children's books]



**Inland** (England) [vs. Outland]

Cambry (Canterbury)

dead towns:

Horny Boy (Herne Bay)  
Widders Bel (Whitstable)  
Fathers Ham (Faversham)  
Fork Stone (Folkstone)  
Do It Over (Dover)  
Sams Itch (Sandwich)

River Sour (Stour)

Ram Gut (Ramsgate)

fentses, forage rotas, jobbing, forms

The Ram > Ram people > the Mincery

**The Eusa Story:**

Eusa > Littl Shynin Man the Addom > 1 Big 1 > Bad Time

Pry Mincer, Wes Mincer/Shadow Mincer > Eusa show

connexion man

[Goodparley] said, 'We don't know jus how far that count ever got becaws Bad Time put an end to it. Theres a stoan in the Power Ring stannings has the year number 1997 cut in to it nor we aint never seen no year number farther on nor that. After Bad Time dint no 1 write down no year count for a long time we don't know how long til the Mincery begun agen. Since we startit countin its come to 2347 O.C. which means Our Count.' I said, 'Dyou mean to tel me them befor us by the time they done 1997 years they had boats in the air and all them things and here we are weve done 2347 years and mor and stil slogging in the mud?'

***Riddley Walker*** (opening):

On my naming day when I come 12 I gone front spear and kilt a wyld boar he parbly ben the las wyld pig on the Bundel Downs any how there handnt ben none for a long time befor him nor I aint looking to see none agen. He dint make the groun shake nor nothing like that when he come on to my spear he wernt all that big plus he lookit poorly. He done the reqwyrnt he ternt and stood and clattert his teef and made his rush and there we wer then. Him on 1 end of the spear kicking his life out and me on the other end watching him dy. I said, 'Your tern now my tern later.' The other spears gone in then and he wer dead and the steam coming up off him in the rain and we all yelt, 'Offert!'

The woal thing fealt jus that littl bit stupid. Us running that boar thru that las little scrump of woodling with the forms all roun. Cows mooing sheap baaing cocks crowing and us foraging out las boar in a thin grey girzel on the day I com a man.

**Narrative Technique:**

- homodiegetic narrator, internal focalization (Riddley)
- story: two weeks after R's 12th birthday  
discourse: another two weeks ('a 14nt') + coda
- little retrospective distance, great immediacy  
(character perspective = narrator perspective)  
but:  
only very early/rudimentary forms of subjectivity/individuality  
(retrospective construction vs. immediate experience)
- embedded exemplary tales which oscillate between fatalism and emancipation

### The Future as Language Game:

- basic rule: sound governs writing (oral culture!)  
e.g. probably > parbly  
grizzle > girzel
- onomatopoetic tendencies  
e.g. [fight, violence] > rumpa  
[death] > arga warga
- influence of older meanings  
e.g. [sex] > juicying, freshen the luck  
[healing] > clinnicking and national healring
- influence of late-20th-century compuspeak:  
'his numbers all gone randem and his program come unstuck'  
'We pult datter and we pirntowt'  
'scatter my datter'  
'blip' ('Its blipful it aint jus only what it seems to be its the syn and foller of  
some thing else')

### Plot:

Riddley gets caught up in Pry Mincer Goodparley's scheme for re-inaugurating  
'teckernological progers':

'I know itwl take tryl narrer and spare the mending but maybe this time wewl do it'

- "language knows things people do not" (Porter 1990, 451)
- Goodparley's reading of the tourist leaflet on 'The Legend of St. Eustace' >  
the re-invention of gunpowder ( '1 littl 1')
- Eusa's responsibility for tearing apart the Littl Shynin Man the Addom is shifted  
to wicked Mr Clevver by Goodparley
- Riddley turns towards art as an independent practice  
(Eusa show/connexions > 'New show': Punch and Judy!)  
which addresses the uneasy relation between the unavoidable 2ness of  
things and the ideal of 1st knowing

### Ending:

Why is Punch crookit? Why will he always kil the babby if he can? Parbly I wont never know its jus on me to think on it.

Riddley Walker ben to show  
Riddley Walker on the go  
Dont go Riddley Walkers track  
Drop Johns ryding on his back

Stil I wunt have no other track.

## 2) Re-imagining the Past: Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* (1989)

### The Novels of Jeanette Winterson:

*Boating for Beginners* (1985)  
*Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985) <>  
*Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal* (2012)  
*The Passion* (1987)  
*Sexing the Cherry* (1989)  
*Written on the Body* (1992)  
*Art and Lies* (1994)  
*Gut Symmetries* (1997)  
*The PowerBook* (2000)  
*Lighthousekeeping* (2004)  
*Weight* (2005)  
*The Stone Gods* (2007)  
*The Daylight Gate* (2012)  
*The Gap of Time* (2015)

*Art Objects: Essays on Ecstasy and Effrontery* (1995)  
[+ short stories and children's books]

### ***Sexing the Cherry* (epigraph):**

The Hopi, an Indian tribe, have a language as sophisticated as ours, but no tenses for past, present and future. The division does not exist. What does this say about time?

Matter, that thing the most solid and well-known, which you are holding in your hands and which makes up your body, is now known to be mostly empty space. Empty space and points of light. What does this say about the reality of the world?

### ***Sexing the Cherry* (opening):**



MY NAME IS Jordan. This is the first thing I saw.

It was night, about a quarter to twelve, the sky divided in halves, one cloudy, the other fair [...]

Then the fog came [...]

The fog came towards me [...] I tried to find the path but all I found were hares with staring eyes, poised in the middle of the field and turned to stone. I began to walk with my hands stretched out in front of me, as do those troubled in sleep, and in this way, for the first time, I traced the lineaments of my own face opposite me.

Every journey conceals another journey within its lines: the path not taken and the forgotten angle. These are journeys I wish to record. Not the ones I made, but the ones I might have made, or perhaps did make in some other place or time. I could tell you the truth as you will find it in diaries and maps and log-books. I could faithfully describe all that I saw and heard and give you a travel book. You could follow it then, tracing those travels with your finger, putting red flag where I went.  
[...]



I discovered that my own life was written invisibly, was squashed between the facts, was flying without me like the Twelve Dancing Princesses who shot from their window every night and returned home every morning with torn dresses and worn-out slippers and remembered nothing.

[...]



I had a name but I have forgotten it.

They call me the Dog-Woman and it will do. I call him Jordan and it will do. He has no other name before or after. What was there to call him, fished as he was from the stinking Thames [...]

Jordan...

I should have named him after a stagnant pond and then I should have kept him, but I named him after a river and in the flood-tide he slipped away.



**Structure:**

**[History]**

<b>past (1630-1666)</b>		<b>present (1980s)</b>	
<b>[parts 1 and 3]</b>		<b>[part 4 'Some Years Later']</b>	
<b>male</b>	<b>female</b>	<b>male</b>	<b>female</b>
	※		※
<b>imagination</b>	<b>reality</b>	<b>imagination</b>	<b>reality</b>

**[Jordan]**



**[Dog-Woman]**



**[Nicholas Jordan] [Woman]**



**[Timelessness]**



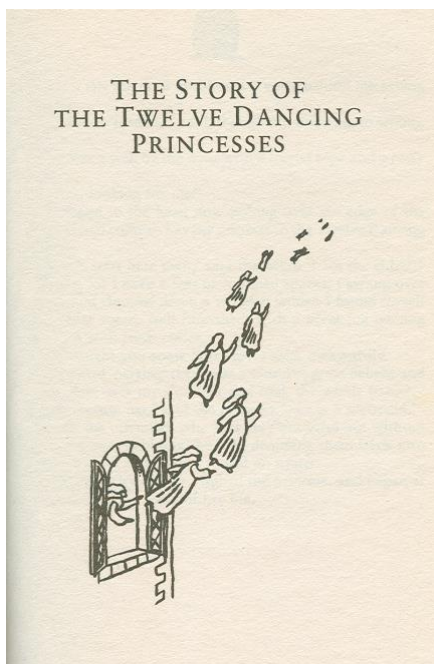
**The Story of the Twelve  
Dancing Princesses**

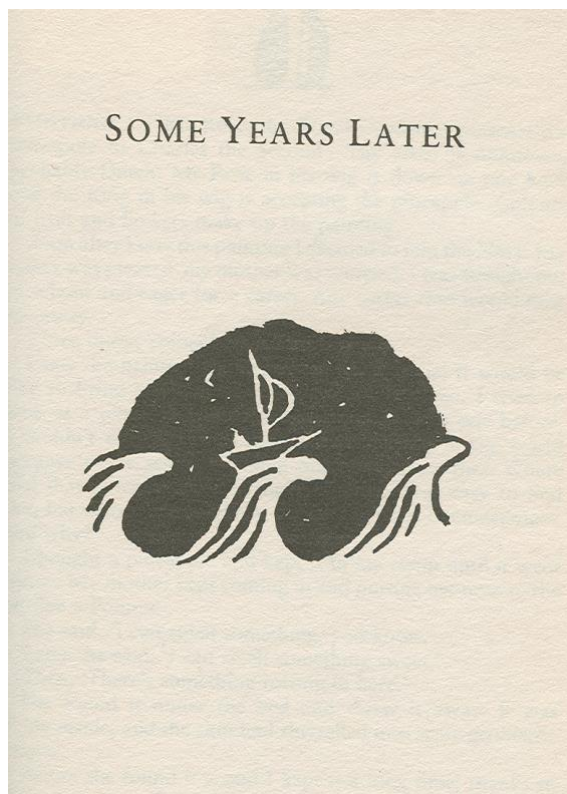
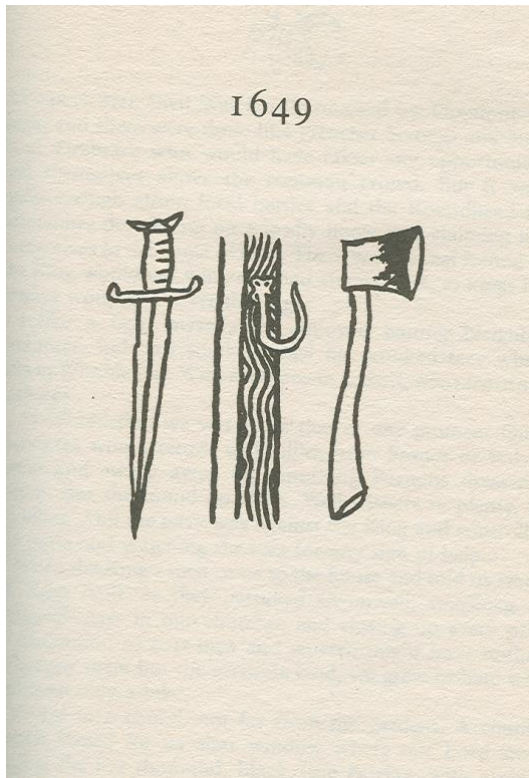
**[part 2]**

**Philosophical Passages →  
about time**



**Paintings**





**Key passage (in the middle of the book!):**

*At a dancing school in a remote place, Fortunata teaches her pupils to become points of light.*

*They begin with her as early as six or seven and some stay for the rest of their lives.*

*Most, she releases like butterflies over a flowering world. Bodies that could have bent double and grown numb she maintains as metal in a fiery furnace, tempering, stretching, forcing sinews into impossible shapes and calling her art nature.*

*She believes that we are fallen creatures who once knew how to fly. She says that light burns in our bodies and threatens to dissolve us at any moment. How else can we account for so many of us who disappear?*

*It is her job to channel the light lying in the solar plexus, along the arms, along the legs, forcing it into the fingertips and feet, forcing it out so that her dancers sweat tongues of flame.*

*To her dancers she says, 'Through the body, the body is conquered.'*

*She asks them to meditate on a five-pointed star in the belly and to watch the points push outwards, the fifth point into the head. She spins them, impaled with light, arms upraised, one leg at a triangle across the other thigh, one foot, on point, on a penny coin, and spins them, until all features are blurred, until the human being most resembles a freed spirit from a darkened jar. One after the other she spins them, like a juggler keeping plates on sticks; one after the other she runs up and down the line as one slows or another threatens to fall from dizziness. And at a single moment, when all are spinning in harmony down the long hall, she hears music escaping from their heads and backs and livers and spleens. Each has a tone like cut glass. The noise is deafening. And it is then that the spinning seems to stop, that the wild gyration of the dancers passes from movement to infinity.*

*Who are they that shine in gold like Apostles in a church window at midday?*

*The polished wooden floor glows with the heat of their bodies, and one by one they crumble over and lie exhausted on the ground.*

*Fortunata refreshes them and the dance begins again.*

### A Map of (Post-)Modern Fiction

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

(cf. Reinfandt 1997, 240)

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