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Dialect, Grapholect, and Story: Russell Hoban's "Riddley Walker" as Science Fiction
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Source: *Science Fiction Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Nov., 2000), pp. 391-417
Published by: SF-TH Inc
Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/4240920
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[**Ed. Note**: This article, found among R.D. Mullen's papers after his death in 1998, was written around 1991. Typically, *SFS* solicits expert reports on articles under consideration—reports that usually lead to productive revisions. In the circumstances, such a revision is impossible. But since we judge that the essay, as is, makes an important contribution to the study of Hoban's novel, we have decided to publish it, with the reports of four consultants included as critical supplements. The responses follow the essay, as does an updated selective bibliography on *Riddley Walker*.]

R.D. Mullen

Dialect, Grapholect, and Story: Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker* as Science Fiction

Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker* was widely and favorably reviewed when published in 1980, with its language given special attention. Five American reviews are quoted on the front cover of the Summit 1990 paperback edition and three British on the back cover. According to Anthony Burgess, "This is what literature is meant to be—exploration without fear." More pertinent to our purposes is a comment quoted from the *Sunday Times*: "*Riddley Walker* is told in language that attempts the impossible and achieves it."

The consensus, then, is that *Riddley Walker* is a very good mainstream novel that attempts and achieves marvelous things in language. Since it is set some two thousand years in the future, after a nuclear holocaust has wiped out civilization, it is also a science fiction novel—indeed, it received the 1981 John W. Campbell Jr. Memorial Award. With respect to the language, the sf critic would not be satisfied simply with finding it an artistic success, but would want to know how systematic it is in its deviations from standard and nonstandard present-day usage in writing and speech. It has been discussed briefly by several sf critics to date: David Lake, Kath Filmer, and I.F. Clarke all have high opinions of the novel. Filmer's only comment on Riddley's language is that it "has deteriorated into something resembling an extract from a very backward child's exercise book" (59). Lake, recognizing that Hoban has not really attempted to create a future English, finds Riddley's language ingenious and fascinating. Clarke gives it extravagant praise:

> young Riddley writes in a form of Post Modern English which reflects perfectly the spear and bow culture of a primitive society.... The book is a marvel of lexical inventiveness. Hoban exploits the resources of historical linguistics to create a language that nobody has ever spoken and yet every word adds to the impression of social degradation and vernacular corruption. The medium is in part the message, for Hoban maintains a rigorous control of his language so that he can establish the social geography of his future Inland. Elementary spelling, primitive punctuation, folk etymologies, a simple and often crude vocabulary—these sketch the psychic background of the future

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> people and they reveal the determination and honesty of that seeker-after-truth, Riddley Walker. (209-10)

Norman Spinrad disagrees on both the value of the book and the quality of the language:

> even the journeyman genre writer would not perpetrate some of the howlers that Hoban has committed when it comes to the details of his future society. Here, for example, we have isolated British villagers at a very low technological level forever drinking tea and rolling hash in "rizlas." Hoban would seem never to have considered that the tea and hashish would have to be imported from great distances, and that in such a society paper would be far too rare and expensive to use in rolling joints.... Now admittedly, even though there are numerous examples of such science-fictional gaffes, this would be mere nit-picking if the same lack of extrapolative rigor (indeed, I suspect, the ignorance of the concept of extrapolative rigor itself) did not infect the creation of the central core of the novel, the invented patois in which it is told. Hoban's transmuted and degenerated English is an entirely arbitrary creation in which words are broken into fragments and put back together again for low comic effect, in which the same phoneme may have several alternative spellings, and that all too often comes off like a baggy-pants American comedian rendering British dialects (Hoban is an American residing in Britain). (38)

The truth, as we shall see, lies somewhere between Clarke and Spinrad. Riddley's language is a future English in only one respect, the folk etymologies. There is nothing in its phonology or in its morphology (with one important exception, the past forms of weak verbs) that cannot be found in one or another dialect of present-day English. Although I see no evidence that Hoban resorted to historical linguistics, and certainly none that he exercised "rigorous control" over Riddley's language, Spinrad is wrong in calling it an "entirely arbitrary creation" and in characterizing it as he does.

The weakness of the novel as science fiction lies not in extrapolative "howlers," but in the failure of Hoban to provide explanations for just how things could be as they are depicted. A journeyman sf writer would have avoided the howlers, but a skilled and serious sf writer would have created a world in sufficient detail to make possible everything depicted. Tea can be made from herbs or plants of various kinds, as can hashish-like drugs. Weather can change (England was once a wine-producing land), and technological levels can be mixed. There is in the book no statement that paper is manufactured in Inland, but on the other hand no statement that it is not. Another thing on which we have no adequate information is the nature of Riddley's education—of just how he learned to read and write. If a writer knows his alphabet well enough to associate certain phonemes with each letter but has done very little reading, he will spell some words as he has found them in writing but most words as they sound to him. This is apparently true of the author of *The Eusa Story* (30-36), who lived many centuries before Riddley, and is perhaps true of Riddley.

1. Three Versions of Written English. There are 83,422 words in *Riddley Walker*: 490 in the 1980 spelling of *The Legend of St Eustace* (123-24), 2917 in

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the "old spel" of *The Eusa Story,* and 80,015 in Riddley's own spelling. From an sf point of view, the trouble is that the only thing we know Riddley to have read is that same *Eusa Story*, which he knows by heart, both words and spellings. The 2917 words in *The Eusa Story* yield 418 forms. Examining the listing in Appendix 1, we find that 106 forms are identical in all three orthographies (1980, old spel, new spel), forms which for the most part accurately represent the sounds of the words. (Of the three forms for which the spelling is identical in our spelling and old spel but different in new spel, two—*afeard/afeart, remember/member*—evidently indicate sound change, but the third—*felt/fealt*—probably does not). The other forms in the old-spel list may be said (again for the most part) to represent simplification and regularization: the use of figures for numbers rather than spelled-out words (retained in new spel), the use of *y* to represent the diphthong of *my, mite, might*, the consistent spelling of stressed schwa ("short *u*") with *u*, the use of *e* rather than *y* for the final phoneme of words like *any*, the dropping of the *g* in present participles, and so on. When we compare the respelled words of the old spel with their equivalents in the new spel, what must intrigue us most is the number of instances in which new spel has restored the spellings of 1980.

The ruling classes of Inland live on a mysterious island called the Ram. We are told very little about them, but they are evidently entirely literate, and include men engaged in scientific research. They send representatives, including soldiers of a sort, to the mainland to collect revenues and enforce their decrees. Two of the representatives are called the Pry Mincer and the Wes Mincer; one of their duties is to perform puppet shows (equivalent to church services) recounting the story of Eusa. Riddley is a member of a group that lives partly by foraging and partly by doing day labor at a Ram-managed farm. His father is a "connexion man," a kind of priest, his primary function being to explain the meaning of the puppet shows to the group. He and Riddley are the only literate members of the group. They have paper, ink, and pens, but nothing is said about their having any books or manuscripts other than (evidently) a copy of *The Eusa Story,* which, as a holy work, exists only in the old spel. The father has taught Riddley reading and writing, from what materials other than *Eusa* we are not told. But it is surely necessary to imagine that they have at least one other book—a spelling book, a word list compiled by pedants who believe that correct spellings can only be those that have come down from the time before nuclear war-destroyed civilization and who have therefore restored the *y* of words like *any* and the *g* of *-ing* (whether or not they actually pronounce the suffix in the way indicated) and have also listed many words in spellings that represent the sounds less conveniently than the spellings of the author of *Eusa*. They evidently did not go all the way in their reformation: such spellings as *cud* for our *could* and *wer* for our *were* being perhaps too set in usage to be changed.

Here we must enter two caveats. First, proofreading *Riddley Walker* must have been a terrible task for both publisher and author, and the author himself may well have unintentionally slipped into 1980 spelling on a number of occasions: e.g., there are two instances of *were* (54, 67) as against 1012 of *wer*,

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and we find one instance of *fruit* (137) and one of *frute* (162). Second, author and publisher, either or both, may have pondered the convenience of the reader and decided or decreed that a certain proportion of familiar spellings be allowed. Such a decision may perhaps be seen in the uniqueness of two spellings that cannot be attributed to Riddley or the pedants or the author of *The Eusa Story*. The words *Trubba* and *Addom* for *trouble* and *atom* (each always capitalized) carry perhaps more lexical freight than any others in the book. With respect to phonology, the spellings indicate patterns found in present-day English, the first in non-standard dialects, the second perhaps in all dialects. But the *l* is retained in all other words ending in *-ble*, as is *t* (with one exception) in intervocalic positions. That is to say, Hoban chose to spell such words, in these respects, as they are spelled in 1980 English, whether or not such spellings accurately represent the speech of Inland.

2. Phonology. As every college graduate knows, or ought to know by this time (Kath Filmer apparently does not), regional dialects are not corruptions of standard language; it is rather that standard dialects are polishings and embellishments of a privileged regional dialect. On the other hand, an author creating a nonstandard dialect (rather than writing in one he knows intimately) must begin with the standard and move away from it, especially with respect to orthography. So for our purposes it is not wrong to write as if the differences in *Riddley Walker* between the Standard English and Riddley's language arose from a process of corruptions.

Partly because of the limitations of my word processing software and partly because I suspect that many readers of *SFS* are more familiar with American school-book and dictionary symbols than with those used by linguists, I will use the former for consonants, marking them with braces. For vowels, I will speak simply of "the vowel of *bit*," "the diphthong of *bite*," etc.

Consonants. The consonants may be conveniently divided into four groups, the first and second being the voiceless/voiced correlatives: {p}/{b}, {t}/{d}, {k}/{g}, {f}/{v}, {s}/{z}, {sh}/{zh}, {ch}/{j}, and {th}/{<u>th</u>}. Third, the voiced consonants that have no voiceless correlatives—{m}, {n}, {ng}, and {l}. Fourth, those that appear only prevocalic or intervocalic: {r}, {y}, {w}, and {h}.

Vowels and Diphthongs. This is an "r-dropping" dialect: that is, the {r} of "r-keeping" dialects does not appear as word-final or preceding a consonant. But "r-dropping" is a misnomer in that in such cases the {r} is not simply dropped but is instead replaced by schwa or, in words like *burn*, by a lengthening of the schwa. It is also a dialect with "broad-a" in the "ask-words," so that *father* is identical with *farther* rather than riming with *bother*. Here we are perhaps best served with a chart.

WITH HEAVY OR MEDIUM STRESS

	FRONT	CENTER	BACK
High long	sea, see, cede		moon, tune, dew, do
High short	sit		wood, put
High + schwa	peer		pure, poor
Mid long	bay, bait, bate		boat, note

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Mid short or open	bet	fun, putt	raw, taut, call, moss
Mid + length or schwa	bear, fir, fern, burn		boar, bore
Low	bat	father, farther, mast	pot, bother
Low + schwa	bare		

WITH MINIMUM STRESS

High long	lady, city	
High short	limpid, bucket	
Mid		data, widdow, bidder
Syllabic consonants	battle	sudden

DIPHTHONGS
The diphthong of *my, mite, might;* the diphthong plus schwa of *fire*.
The diphthong of *how, crowd, loud*; the diphthong plus scwha of *flour, flower*.
The diphthong of *boy, void*.

Consonant Clusters Simplified. In many words {nd} > {n}, *foun, unner*, {ld} > {l}, *tol*; {kt} > {k}, *fack*; {st} > {s}, *las, nex*; {nt} > {n}, *gennl* for *gentle, fayn* for *faint;* {ft} > {f}, *shif*; {pt} > {p}, *kep*; {hw} > {h}, *hisper*, or {w}, *wite*. For *whole*, we find {w}, *woal*, rather than {h}, a pronunciation not recorded in *Webster's Third*.

Consonant Shifts. In a few words final {d} > {t}: *limpit, afeart, helt, hynt* for *hind*. Pronouns and determiners with initial *th* (*they, the*, etc.) presumably have {th}, but in almost all other words {th} becomes {v}: *breave* for *breathe, levver* for *leather*. With a few exceptions, {th} > {f}: *filf, earf, mof, froat*. In two words {n} and {m} change places—*emminy* for *enemy* and *naminal* for *animal*—and in one {m} replaces {n}: *bargam* for *bargain*.

Initial {n} Added. *Naminal* is one of four words (the others being *nindicater, nunkel*, and *nylan*) with an added initial {n}. In Riddley's English the indefinite article is *a* before vowels as well as before consonants, so that his *a nother* for *another* is simply an orthographic difference.

R-Shift. An {r}-shift occurs in 16 words: after {p}, *persner, pirnt, parper, parbel, sepert*; after {b}, *birk*; after {t}, *exter, interst, sturgl, insterment*; after {d}, *childer*; after {k}, *kirstel, seakert*; after {g}, *girt, progers*, and after {th}, *tharb*.

Intrusive-r. Two spellings indicate that {r} may intrude between vowels: *acturel* for *actual* and *userel* for *usual*.

Loss of Unstressed Syllable. Some examples: *guvner* for *governor, delkit* for *delicate, dispear* for *disappear, plittical* for *political, mincer* for *minister, regler* for *regular, parrel* for *parallel, member* for *remember*.

Some Special Cases. We find *babby* for *baby, form* for *farm*, and *arp* for the first syllable of our *opposite*, pronunciations not recorded in *Webster's Third*, nor justified by its etymologies. Whether *circel* for *circle* indicates a difference in pronunciation or is merely an aberrant spelling, I cannot say, but if it is the latter, it is the only instance in the book where {k} is represented by *c* before *e* or *i*. Finally, a number of odd words result from a character's misunderstanding the meaning of words found in documents.

3. Orthography. Riddley's rules for distinguishing between single-letter "short vowels" and single-letter "long vowels" are the same as ours. That is, a single

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vowel-letter indicates a short vowel in monosyllables unless marked as long by a silent *e* (*cap* versus *cape*) and generally in the first syllable of a disyllable when followed by two consonant letters (*ladder* versus *lady*). The traditional rules for distinguishing between *u, v,* and *w* are inconsistently ignored, so that we find *rivver* and *Guv*, but not *liv* (the verb and adjective being still homographic), *giv, luv*, or *evry*. *Guv* (common in our own time) is the only word ending in *v* and *thru* the only one ending in *u*. These rules have of course come down to us from pre-typewriter times. We are not told whether Inland handwriting is cursive or imitative of print; if the former, the doubling of *v* would present a problem.

Silent Letters and Double Letters. Silent *e* is dropped in some words where it serves no apparent purpose (*befor, judg, ax, littl*), as well as in some words where it indicates standard pronunciation (*natur, measur*). The *b* of final *mb*, except in *comb*, is dropped (*lam*). In monosyllables there is no doubling of *f* or *l* after *e* or *i* (*clif, wel*). Medial *st* becomes *ss* (*lissen*); *answer* becomes *anser*; and *used to* becomes *use to*.

Oddly enough, *kn* is invariably retained and *wr* almost always (*ren* for *wren* is one exception). According to *Webster's Third*, {wh} is generally absent in southern British, but Riddley writes *whack, whang, what, when, where, which,* and *why*.

Long Vowels and Diphthongs. In words with the vowel of *see*, the *ie/ei* problem is solved by invariably converting both to *ea*. The common spelling *ee* is also frequently replaced with *ea* (*keap, feal, kean*). Since the vowel of *set* is also sometimes spelled *ea* (*dead*), this presents a problem with the frequent words *feal, fealt* for our *feel, felt*. I assume that this respelling represents not a difference in sound but rather an orthographic regularization with *mean, meant, lean, leant,* and *hear, heard* as the model.

For the dipththong of *by* Riddley's most common spelling is *y*, which replaces *i-e* (*shyn* for *shine*) in a few words, and always replaces *i* when not marked as long by silent *e* (*wyld*), final *ie* (*dy, ty*), *ig* in *syn*, and *igh* in *sy* and *hy*. The *igh* sequence, replaced by *i-e* in *nite, lite, tite, brite*, occurs only in *right* and *fight*.

In words with the vowel of *know*, Riddley's most common spelling is *oa*, which in almost all cases replaces both *o-e* (*boan, joak, hoal*) and *o* when not marked by silent *e* (*boath, poast*). The spelling *o* is retained when initial or final (*only, so*) and in a few words where it is neither (*bolt, col, comb, hol, mos*), and it replaces *ou* in two words (*sholder, poltis*). The spelling *ow* occurs only when word-final or stem-final, as in *know*. Two other spellings are retained: *hoe, sew*.

The vowels of *play* and *true* are respelled in only a few words: *bayl, chaymber, playg, strait* (for *straight*), *wayst* (for *waste*), *wayt* (for *weight*), *wayver* for *waiver*; *glew, frute,* and *luce* (for *loose*). The diphthong of *boy* is invaribly spelled *oy, i* giving way to *y* in eight words: *boyl, hoyst, joyn, noys, poynt, poysen, royl, voyce*. The spelling of the diphthong of *how* changes in only three words: *dowt, prowd, trowsers*. A unique spelling is that of *mowlit* for

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mallet; this may be said to recognize that the diphthong and the vowel-consonant sequence are similar if not identical in dialect (and mine).

"Broad-a." The vowel of the "*ask*-words" are for the most part spelled as in present-day English, including British *arse* as opposed to American *ass*. But we find *larf* for *laugh, marse* for *mast*, and *barset* for *bastard*. On the other hand, we find *aint* for the contractions *am not, are not, is not*, whereas in a "broad a" dialect one would expect *ant*, perhaps another example of the author's retaining a familiar spelling.

"Open-o." The same is true of the vowel of *raw, taut, call, moss, broad*. The exceptions eliminate *gh* and favor *w* over *u*: *becaws, cawt, cof, maws, paws* for *pause, thot*.

Syllables Under Minimum Stress. The ending *le* appears in a few unchanged spellings (*apple, cattle*), but otherwise is replaced by *el*, or as indicated above, simply by *l* (*tabel, trickl*). The second vowel in words like *widdow* may be under medium stress in your cultivated speech and mine, but in Riddley's it is always (with one exception) under minimum stress and so is respelled *er*. The second vowel of *data* is respelled and the first vowel marked as short, making the rhyme of "Scatter my datter" visual as well as phonal (48). The spelling *to* is retained for the word under minimum stress with one exception, *ter morrer* for *tomorrow*. There is one spelling that recognizes syllabic {n}: *suddn*. When a final unstressed syllable ends with a consonant, the vowel of the syllable is nearly always spelled with *i* (*stummick, barril, mountin, perchis, buckit*); *randem* is one exception.

Medial {y} and Final {ng}. The spelling *millying* for *million* indicates that *y* has replaced *i* for medial {y}, and together with the spellings *lessing* and *Roaming* for *lesson* and *Roman*, suggests that the *-ing* of Riddley's participles is a traditional rather than a phonetic spelling; i.e., that it represents {n} rather than {ng}. We also find *y* in *seanyer*.

Medial {ch}, {sh}, {zh}. There is some regularization here, but not much: *acturel, connexion, creacher, fraction, mission, nation, seckshin, special, tension, torcher, vencher*. The spellings *figger, picter, mixter* may suggest that the medial consonant of *natur* is simply {t} if not {d}. Spelling *pleasur* and *measur* with *zhe* would have been a nice touch for indicating the operation of analogy.

A Reasonable Correction. The sequence *nce* is regularly respelled in a way that more accurately represents the sound: *nts*, as in *dants, fents, brilyants*.

An Unreasonable Correction. The sequence *qu* appears always as *qw*. One would think that if those responsible for this spelling could recognize that the one phoneme was {w}, they could also have recognized that the other was {k} and so, dropping *q* from their alphabet, would write *kw*, or, as our Old English forebears did before pedants took over, *cw*.

Splits. Many words spelled solid in our own time are split open in Riddley's grapholect, including almost all compounds made up of two full words, so that, e.g., *footprints* becomes *foot prints*. In addition, we find splitting in 125 words in which one of the components is a function word or a bound morpheme. These

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include the indefinites in which *any, every, no, some*, and *ever* combine with *body, how, one, thing, time, what, when, where, which, who* (e.g., *any 1, every thing, no body, some times, who ever*); the reflexive pronouns (*her self, his self, its self, my self, our self[s], ther self[s], your self*); words in which schwa has been split off as *a* (*a bout, a head, a live, a loan, a long, a nother, a nuff, a part, a rive, a roun, a sleap, a wake, a way*), *al-* as *all* (*all mos, all ready, all ways*), *un-* or *en-* as *and* (*and til, and tirely, and to*), *ex-* as *as* (*as cite, as plain*), *be-* as *be* (*be come, be long, be low, be twean*), *in-* or *en-* as *in* (*in joy, in side, in stead, in tack, in to*), *out*-and *-out* as *out* (*out side, look out, try out* as nouns). We also find *cross over* (as noun), *for ever, inner acting, inner fearents, may be, on to, other whys, over hang, unner neath, up side down, to gether, to day,* and (as indicated above) *ter morrer*. There are no hyphens anywhere in the book, so that we may add to our list *fit up* and *groan up*.

In contrast, there are some solid spellings for which a principle could perhaps be found: *acrost, afeart, agen, agenst, amongst, befor, begin, begun, behynt, beleaf, beleave, beside, inlan* (adverb), *Inland, input, inshoar, onwith, oversay, overwent, Outland, outpath, pirntowt, whatfer, without*. The matter is sometimes complicated by lexical or syntactic distinctions. We find *a bout* only when the meaning is spatial: *hang a bout* (76) as opposed to *know about* (passim). The open spelling for *in+side* and *out+side* appears when the sequence is substantive (*on the in side* [9]), but not when it is attributive (*they wer inside looking out* [18]). For *look+out* the plural form is solid, the singular open.

Splittings are reasonable when both parts of the sequence are words in common use. There are instances, however, in which one or both parts appear nowhere in the book outside the sequence (*de vyd, vy brations*).

Finally, there are a number of sequences that might be dealt with in a lexicon, for they include many of Hoban's puns. They may be said to represent misapprehensions of words or phrases (mostly on technical matters) that have come down in speech rather than in writing: *arper sit, axel rate, barren year* (for *barrier*), *catwl twis, come plaining, common nations* (as noun) and *comb the nations* (as verb, "find the combinations"), *comping station, deacon terminations, E qwations, form the nation, gallack seas, goatch the wayt, gready mints, Inner G, judgd men, low cations, many cools, nebyul eye, new clear, O Zoan, party cools, red cord, res and due, revver new, Salt 4, Saul & Peter, sir prize, soar vivers, spare the mending, stablisht men, suching waytion, tack ticks, tecker knowledging, the quipt man, trants mission, tryl narrer, withry spec*.

Compounds. Although Riddley breaks up almost all of our compounds, he has retained a few and made some of his own, especially in proper names: *badstock, fasleg* (verb), *fearbelly, follerme* (noun), *Goodparley, goodshow, Goodvine, Greangood, Greanparley, Greanvine, holfas* (noun), *keepaway* (a bird), *letshow, nitefel* (past participle), *Parleyvine, platform, Rightway, rivverside, Shoarsday, showboard, Skyway, Slymouf, trufax, yellerboy, 6fag, 1stfynd* (a proper name). There is also one abbreviation, *10wts*, for a word

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presumably fully pronounced and one for a word, *14nt*, perhaps not. The substantive/attributive distinction obtains with *yeller+boy*.

We find also a kind of compound in words that might be called rhetoricals, for they tend to affirm a statement rather than to question it: *innit* for *isn't it, dinnee* for *didn't he, dinnit, dunnit*.

4. Morphology. There is no apparent difference between the 1980 system and Riddley's system of forming plurals, possessives, verb singulars, comparatives, superlatives, and adverbs, other than the absence of *t* from the superlative suffix. The verb system, however, is somewhat different, especially in the past forms of weak verbs. (There is one important difference between Riddley's morphology and that of *The Eusa Story*: in *Eusa* the definite article has a distinct plural form: *thay dogs* versus *the dog*.)

4.1. The Affixes. Complex words are made with 25 freely added suffixes and 3 freely added prefixes:

-d. 214. Past tense or past participle; also = *had*, = *did*.
d-. 37. = *do* or *did* in *dyou*.
-er. 653. Comparative or agentive.
-es. 50. Superlative.
-ful. 33. Derives adjectives from nouns.
-ing. 2895. Gerund and present participle.
-ish. 7. In *foolish, greanish, longish, rubbish*.
-it. 630. Past tense and past participle.
-less. 6. Derives adjectives from nouns.
-ly (*-y* when stem ends in *l*). 127. Derives adverbs from adjectives.
-m. 129. = *am*.
-man. 59. Agentive.
-ment. 27. Derives nouns from verbs.
-(e)n. 160. = *than*; also derives verbs from adjectives.
-ness. 79. Derives nouns from adjectives.
-nt. 21. = *not*.
per-. 14 = 1980 *pretty*.
-re (*-are* when stem is *we*). 25. = *are*.
-(e)s {s/z/iz}. 3237. Noun plural and possesive, verb singular; also = *is*, = *has*, = *as*.
-t. 799. Past tense and past participle.
-th. 6. In *4th, 9th, 10th, 12th, 100th*.
-ty. 5. Derives nouns from adjectives.
un-. 13. Negative or reverse.
-ve. 11. = *have*.
-ways. 10. In *crossways, flatways, frontways, sideways*.
-wd. 24. = *wud*.
-wl. 43. = *wil*.
-y. 612. Derives adjectives from nouns.

There are also a number of clearly derived forms with suffixes perhaps not freely added: *backards, terpitation, runnel, somers, pontsery, Hoggem, noatis, greavis, forit* (for *forward*), *piglet, woodling, footling, unnermos, wylst, playsy, truth, frontwards, afterwds, elswys, 9wys*.

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4.2. Verbs. As might be expected, *come* and *give* are added to the list of verbs with no special past form. In full verbs, the *-s* and *-ing* forms are made as in 1980 English, though, as suggested above, the latter may have the phoneme {n} rather than the phoneme {ng}. Where the 1980 stem had a *t* or *d* that has been dropped in Riddley's English, that *t* or *d* may reappear when *-ing* or *-it* is added; e.g., *bus, bustid, busting; soun, soundit, sounding*. We also find *ecko, echowing*. Although there is no orthographic evidence for {r} in such situations, we may assume that it appears when *-ing* is added to *r*-stems, as in *clearing, firing*. Although the stems *offer* and *foller* surely have the same final syllable, the derived forms might differ in having {r} in *offering* and {w} in *follering*.

Auxiliaries. *Be* and *Do* are the only verbs with distinct past participles. Our *was* (Eusa's *wuz*) has disappeared. The auxiliaries otherwise seem to be the same as ours: *be, being, ben, am/are/is, wer; do, doing, done, do/does, did; wil, wud; can, cud; shal, shud; may, myt; nead*—and there is even one instance of *dare* (in the contraction *dessay*) and two of *durst* (in the contraction *dursnt*). The contractions are also the same as ours (see list of suffixes), though *wunt, shunt,* and surely also *cudnt*, have no {d}. Given non-use of the apostrophe, I assume that the spellings *cudnt* and *weare* obtain simply to distinguish the forms from what would be homographs, even though, as said above, *were* appears only as a typo.)

Strong Verbs. There are four verbs in which the past form is derived by vowel change plus suffix: *feal/fealt, hear/heard, lean/lent, mean/meant*. Although a few special forms appear in odd places, there are no regular contrasts, in full verbs as opposed to auxiliaries, between the past-tense form and the past participle: e.g., *gone* serves as both participle and past tense (there are four instances of *went*). Verbs like *grow, know, show* have become weak, though there is one occurrence of *known* (versus 177 of *knowit*) and four of *groan* (three in the sequence *groan up*, presumably for the sake of the pun). On the other hand, with the simplification of consonant clusters, *sleap/slep* and *keap/kep* have become ordinary strong verbs.

Weak Verbs. The voiced phonemes {zh} and {th} do not appear as stem-final. Stems in which the final phoneme is {t}, {d}, {b}, {g}, {v}, {z}, or {j} add *it* in the past form: *paintit, raidit, grabbit, draggit, movit, easit, changit*. There are only three exceptions: *stoand*, *closd,* and *judgd*.

Stems that end with the vowel of *stay* or the diphthong of *try* add {d}: *stayd, tryd*. Those that end with "broad *a*" or schwa or the second vowel of *divvy* add {t}: *bart, cleart, gethert, divvyt*. The *y* of such words is also retained in *bloodyt* and *fantsyt*, but is changed to *i* in *emptit, worrit, marrit, burrit, carrit,* and *hevvit*. (There is one "broad-a" stem to which {d} is added: *chard*.)

Stems ending in a voiceless consonant other than {t}, or in {l}, {m} or {n}, or in a vowel or diphthong other than those named in the preceding paragraph, generally add {t}: *wipet, liket, coft, lucet, beartht, wisht, reacht, callt, seamt, skint, drawt, showt, glewt*. (The *e* of the stems with long vowels may suggest a syllabic suffix, but we also have *stript, pickt, past* to confirm that the *e* is silent.) But in at least some members of this group, {t} and {it} seem to be in free variation, for we find both *stoppt* and *stoppit, knockt* and *knockit*, *callt* and

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callit, drawt and *drawit, showt* and *showit,* and for some stems the past forms appear only with the syllabic suffix: *lookit, liffit, twissit, screachit*. Here too we find one instance of {d}: *showd*. (The letter *p* is unique in being doubled after a short vowel when the suffix is {t}.)

All this, of course, is far from being as systematic as the weak-verb system of Standard English, in which *-ed* can be regarded as a single suffix varying phonetically to fit the stem. But perhaps we can say that we have here a system in transition, one in which the syllabic suffix, already established as whatever is represented by *it*, is gradually replacing both {t} and {d}.

5. Syntax and Punctuation. Riddley's syntax is not much different from ours, at least not much different from what we find in freshman papers. Let us be satisfied with the following sketchy survey.

Commas appear only before direct discourse: "I said, 'Your tern now my tern later"' (1). Colons serve the same purpose for blocked-off songs and stories. There are no semicolons. A period, question mark, or exclamation point marks the closing of a sentence.

Clauses are often joined by conjunctions but also are often merely run on, as in the sentence just quoted. For the progressive aspect the *-ing* forms are sometimes preceded by a form of *be*, but they are often made coordinate with a finite verb: "There come a man and a woman and a chyld out of a berning town they sheltert in the woodlings and foraging the bes they cud" (2). The same sort of thing is true of the perfective aspect, the expected form of *have* being sometimes absent when the participle is *ben* or *done*: "She wer sitting up there in her doss bag she ben smoking she wer hy" (5). Even so, *ben* is generally interchangeable with *wer*, and *done* with *did*.

Which is a conjunction, not a relative: "they wer eating maws and dead leaves which they vomitit them up agen" (2). The neuter relative is regularly *what*: "All this what you jus ben telling be that a tel for me?" (7). The suffix *-(e)n* for *than* is quite common, but the word itself does not appear: *nor* is the conjunction for comparatives.

Sentences are frequently concluded by one of the rhetoricals mentioned above, a practice, if I may judge by British movies, much more common in Britain than in North America: "thats a nother thing agen innit" (2).

6. Lexicon. The words *Truth, Power, Luck,* always capitalized, seem to name elemental forces in nature or the human psyche.

Computerese. During my first reading of the novel, there were moments when I wondered whether it might be a story about robots: "It wer like I jus ben programmit to go there" (77); "his numbers all gone randem and his program come unstuck" (91). But on other occasions *program* seems most often simply the equivalent of *plan:* "he [the leader of a dog pack] cernly had some program he wernt jus randeming" (74); "I tryd to...program what to do nex" (78); "he programmit...." (85); and so on through its 28 appearances in the book. Even so, the human mind seems to be a computer: "I pirntowt we bes not go the straites way" (89); "the pirntowt is 45" (96); "If he pirntowt...." (171); "strapping the lates from what littl datter weve got we pirntow [sic]...." (202);

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"what I pirntow from my unnermos datter" (210). The word *Addom* is said by at least one critic to fuse *atom* and *Adam*, but in the myth there is no Eve, so that this idea leads nowhere.

The words or phrases listed above under splits as misapprehensions are all clear enough in context. Two of them occur in a context in which another word arouses and then dashes expectations. A burial service is opened with a song:

> Pas the sarvering gallack seas and flaming nebyul eye
> Power us beyont the farthes reaches of the sky
> Thine the han what shapit the black
> Guyd us there and guyd us back

But God, the concept, the word itself, has been totally forgotten, and *thine* is a verb. In response to "'Thine hands for Brooder Walker,'" "We all thinet hans then roun the fire..." (22).

Inland is a society with rituals for almost everything and with set language for each ritual. This shows up also in the repetition of phrases, so that, e.g. "the woom of her what has her woom in Cambry" appears six times. The word *offer* has always the meaning of "offer as a sacrifice" and seems always to mean *offer oneself*. A possible exception occurs on page 145—"There ben times nor not too far back nyther when they use to offer to that same and very 1 what has her woom in Cambry"—which may indicate an offering of something other than oneself. The "same and very 1" is another set phrase.

7. The Setting. The setting, some 2500 years in the future, is Inland, the eastern part of what was Kent in 1980, bounded on the north, east, and south by the sea, on the west by Outland. The western border is a line running south along road A251, southwest along B2077, and southeast along A201 (the road-naming signs having apparently somehow survived). This area of some 325 square miles is roughly circular, centering on Cambry, the ruins of Canterbury. There are eight "dead towns" on the perimeter: the ruins of Herne Bay, Whitstable, Faversham, Ashford, Folkestone, Dover, Deal, and Sandwich, now known as Horny Boy, Widders Bel, Fathers Ham, Bernt Arse, Forkt Stone, Do It Over, Good Shoar,[1] and Sams Itch. The 1980 peninsula of North Foreland is now an island known as The Ram (presumably for Ramsgate). Except for horses, all domestic animals seem to have survived, as well as birds and rats (cats are not mentioned). But dogs are no longer domestic: having developed a kind of sixth sense, they live in packs in the dead towns, roam the countryside for forage, and sometimes raid the farms to seize domestic animals.

For the court, city, and country of medieval England, we have in Inland "Ram, form, and fents." The farms and fences are surrounded by palisades, with lookouts always on the high walks, and thus seem to resemble the forts of the Old West that are familiar to us from western movies. We are told nothing about Outland, but it seems to be, not a state, but simply the rest of Great Britain, inhabited by people who have in the past sometimes made raids on Inland communities. Even so, there is no indication that the border is patrolled: the Inland farms and fences fear not Outlanders but each other—and the dogs. Having no horses, Inlanders move about the country afoot. They go always in

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"crowds," for anyone alone would be attacked by the dogs, or perhaps by any strangers encountered on the road. When crowds meet on the road, or approach the gate of a farm or fence, the greeting is "Trubba not," and mingling or passage through the gate takes place only after a ritual affirming peaceful intentions. Though we have few details on the matter, trade seems brisk between the communities. The medium of exchange is sometimes "hash" and sometimes iron; the day labor done by the men of Riddley's How Fents consists in digging up buried machinery or other ironware, which is broken up and melted down. Platoons of "hevvys" are stationed in the dead towns, in touch with the Ram via carrier pigeons. They evidently keep the peace; it seems to have been some time since any community attacked another. But Inland is now feeling the pressure of growing population. Foraging communities like How Fents must give way to the expanding farms, which are controlled by the Ram.

There are no memories of the religions of 1980: the word *God* is not in the language.

8. The Myth: Oedipus at Cambry. When Mr Clevver was Big Man in Inland, it was decided to end all the little wars with 1 Big 1. Eusa was sent to find the Littl Shyning Man the Addom and learn from him the numbers of the Master Chaynjis, which he did by tearing the Littl Man in two like a chicken. With the numbers they made the bombs that won the war, but they dropped so many bombs that they killed as many of their own people as of their enemies and also poisoned the land, the air, and the water, so that people died not just during the war but in the plagues that followed. Pigs ate dead people and died. People killed and ate dogs, and dog packs killed and ate people. In this time of plague and lawlessness, Eusa searched fruitlessly for the wife and sons from whom he had been separated. *The Eusa Story* ends with Eusa's being told by the Littl Shyning Man (who now exists in two pieces) that since he has let the Chaynjis out, he must now go through them.

The myth is continued in two versions. In that of the Eusa folk (mutants believed to be descended from the Puter Leat), the people of Cambry tortured Eusa, stoned him out of Cambry, and drove him round the circle. At each town-gate he was condemned as the one who had done the clever work for Bad Time, and so was tortured again and driven on. At the Ram (which wasn't an island then), the men at the gate demanded of Eusa the numbers of the 1 Big 1 so that they could be strong and safe. Eusa refused, saying that strength was of no avail, that they would do best to stay as they were and to take him in, keep him until his time was out, and show him for a lesson and a learning: he would tell everyone his story so that they would know the road he took was wrong and the harm he did. When Eusa would not yield under torture, they beat him to death, cut off his head, and put it on a pole for telling. The head told them that they had had a chance to do a right thing but had chosen to do a wrong thing and the guilt would be on them henceforth. Then the sea came rushing in, and the Ram was cut off from the rest of Inland.

In another version of the story (the Ram version), Eusa, when the circle was completed at Sams Itch, was driven not to the Ram, but blind and bloody back

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to Cambry, where his own people, the Eusa folk, who now found him fearful, cut off his head and put it on a pole. It told them that the only part of Inland that had kept its hands clean of his ordeal was the Ram, which was the head of Inland, and just as they had cut off his head, so now the body of Inland would be cut off from its head. Then the sea came rushing in. Thrown into the sea, Eusa's head swam against the tide across to the Ram and there instructed the people to make of his story a puppet show for remembrance and for the answers to the questions people would henceforth ask.

The religion of Inland thus demands of individuals an Imitation of Eusa. Everyone in Inland inherits Eusa's guilt, so that this life is necessarily a life of suffering; those who add to their burden of guilt by doing wrong in their personal lives must acknowledge their guilt and pay for it. So the church service begins with an exchange between minister and people (connexion man and crowd):

> —Weare going aint we.
> —Yes weare going.
> —Down that road with Eusa.
> —Time and reqwyrt.
> —Where them Chaynjis take us.
> —He done his time wewl do our time.
> —Hes doing it for us.
> —Weare doing it for him.
> —Keep it going. Chances this time.
> —Chances nex time.
> —New chance every time.
> —New chance every time. (44)

9. The Mutations. Eusa, according to the Eusa folk (of whom there are only 48 adults at any one time), was "crooked"—physically deformed from the effects of the 1 Big 1. He was the first Ardship of Cambry: through his hardship he became the Ardship. Lissener, the present Ardship and the only member of the Eusa folk directly described, has neither eyes nor eyeholes, but with the highly developed sixth sense of the Eusa folk, he is able to cope. The Eusa folk are in constant telepathic communication with each other, though the communication seems to be not one of words but rather of feelings and impressions.

The dogs also have a highly developed sixth sense. When foraging, or when simply going from one place to another, the packs move in military formations and employ "tack ticks." Though enemies to the general run of humans, they seem to be engaged in an endeavor to raise the moral level of humanity so that the old relationship can be restored. Some people are "dog frendy" (including perhaps all the Eusa folk), but it is the dogs that select human friends rather than vice versa. Riddley is among those with whom the dogs ally themselves.

In humans, then, physical deformation and a developed sixth sense are the signs that mark some as mutants. But all the Inlanders are mutants in one way or another. Boys become men on their 12th birthday, but this does not justify the assumption that Inlanders are childish. Riddley is mature physically and mentally (though, as one would expect of a 21-year-old, somewhat naive). If he were said to be 21, if nine years were added to the age of the other characters

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whose ages are given, it would not be necessary to change anything else in the story. The chronological youthfulness of the characters, then, may be said to have resulted merely from a whim of the author—or, considering the story as sf, as indicating that one result of the 1 Big 1 was to speed up physical and mental maturation.

10. Science and Politics. The Ministry at the Ram claims to have been keeping records for 2347 years, but that may be just another myth. "The Legend of St Eustace" and *The Eusa Story* have come down together in the Ministry, each copied and recopied in its original spelling. There is no need here to detail how the latter parallels the former or to speculate on its origin (was its author perhaps an early member of Ministry, and was his purpose simply political?). Nor is there any need to recount the other myths, legends, and stories that collaborate or compete in the formation of the Mind of Inland. On the one hand, the Ministry has (presumably for centuries) carried on the practice of driving (at the end of each 12-year period) the Ardship of Cambry around the Fool's Circle (that is, of reenacting the tormenting of Eusa) in the hope that out of the memories he has inherited from the Puter Leat, he will reveal the numbers that made the 1 Big 1 possible. On the other hand, there are the scientists (or, if you will, the alchemists) who are attempting to recover ancient knowledge through trial-and-error experimentation. In politics, there are those who seek to move Inland frontways through technological development and those who would leave things as they are, in some ways carrying on the ancient debate about whether reform and improvement must begin with the individual or with the social order.

Nor is there any need to recount the moral and intellectual pilgrimage of Riddley Walker as he walks from one fence or farm or dead town to another in search of the Truth about Power (siding now with this political faction and now with that, and becoming involved with the yellow-boy stones that lead to the rediscovery of gunpowder and the 1 Littl 1, with which members of both factions blow themselves up) before finally giving up the quest and sitting down to write his story. There is no need to do this, because the quest leads only to the conclusion that Truth cannot be known.

11. The Not Fully Disciplined Imagination. I once wrote an article with the title "The Undisciplined Imagination: Edgar Rice Burroughs and Lowellian Mars," my purpose being to refute the prevalent idea that Burroughs had based his Martian stories on the works of Percival Lowell (works evidently never actually read by those who extolled Burroughs as an sf author). I sought to demonstrate that:

> Lowell's vision of Mars was far different from Burroughs's, that Burroughs probably knew no more about Lowellian Mars than he could have learned from the casual reading of newspapers and popular magazines, and that Barsoom, the Burroughsian Mars, was almost entirely the product of an undisciplined imagination—that is, that Burroughs made it up as he went and felt free to change it whenever anything he had previously written proved inconvenient for present purposes, or even when it was just hard to remember. (230)

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The same sort of thing, though to much a lesser degree, is true of *Riddley Walker,* both in its vision of the future world and in its elaboration of a spelling system. Setting aside the orthography, the language itself is less to be faulted, though there are minor glitches, such as the expression "on burrow time." (The verb *borrer* is in use [11]; *burrow,* with one exception, the only word in the book in which unstressed *ow* is not rendered as *er*, appears only in this expression: how does this misapprehension make any sense?)

If we judge a novel by the extent to which it fascinates and moves on a first reading, then *Riddley Walker* is a very good book indeed. But in an sf novel we, some of us at least, expect a reasonably consistent intellectual construct. On this basis, *Riddley Walker* fails, though hardly as thoroughly as Norman Spinrad claims.

NOTE

1. The article on Deal in my encyclopedia does not use the expression *Good Shore*, but its description of the coastline in the Deal area as historically famous for the safety ships found there seems to make *Good Shoar* a reasonable post-holocaust name for Deal. Patrick Parrinder tells me the term is ironic, parts of the coast being very treacherous.

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Ten Years After: Four Responses to R.D. Mullen

Kenneth Andrews: The strongest contribution of the Mullen article to our understanding of *Riddley Walker* is its examination of the orthography and sound system of the English language three thousand years after a nuclear war ("how systematic it is in its deviations from standard and nonstandard present-day usage"). Quoting Lake, Mullen makes the point that "Hoban has not really attempted to create a future English." Three thousand years from now, even without natural or man-made disasters, natural language change would make English totally unrecognizable to today's speakers. Think of the changes that have taken place between the language of *Beowulf* (around 750 A.D.) and today:

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without special instruction, today's reader cannot understand it, and only twelve hundred and fifty years have passed since it was recorded. A "real" future English (if we had a way of gaining access to it from the year 2000 A.D.) would be incomprehensible to us. Besides natural language change over long periods of time, natural or man-made disasters (such as the nuclear war that created the future society of *RW*) would likely have accelerated the process: written texts (that tend to stabilize language usage), historical knowledge, and the literate tradition would have been lost.

An interesting example of some of these issues can be seen in features of *The Legend of St Eustace* (123-124) that Mullen does not discuss. A textual fragment has come down from the past that is almost totally incomprehensible to those of Riddley's time. While the reader of the novel understands what the fragment says, the fictional characters of the future do not: they have lost the historical and linguistic knowledge needed to do so. Three examples are enough to illustrate the problems Riddley's society has in understanding this document: *St* is taken to be an abbreviation for *sent*. "'Meaning this bloak Eustace he dint jus tern up he wer sent'" (124). *A.D.* is taken to mean "All Done" (125), and *hamlets* are thought to be "littl pigs" (126).

In addition to acknowledging that Hoban does not create a real future English, Mullen quotes Clarke, who notes that "every word adds to the impression of social degradation and vernacular corruption." Those statements correctly point to Hoban's creative purposes. Mullen is also accurate in discussing dialects ("regional dialects are not corruptions of standard language ... [S]tandard dialects are polishings and embellishments of a privileged regional dialect" [4]). But then, confusingly, Mullen suggests that the reader should view "the differences in *RW* between the Standard English and Riddley's language" as "a process of corruptions" (4). It would be more enlightening to inform the reader that Riddley's spellings are phonetic—he spells words as he hears them without the constraints or guidance of an established literary or orthographic tradition. Mullen does go on to explain very nicely these phonetic spellings and how and why they might arise. In fact, those explanations—Section 2 (Phonology) and Section 3 (Orthography)—are the best part of the article.

Very astutely, Mullen says that "Riddley's language is a future English in only one respect, the folk etymologies" (2). He picks this idea up again on page 8 at the end of the section on Orthography. These folk etymologies are both "Hoban's puns" and "misapprehensions of words or phrases (mostly on technical matters) that have come down in speech rather than in writing" (8). Mullen lists a number of these folk etymologies/puns/technical misapprehensions, although he does not discuss them or their contribution to the themes of the novel. Future analysts can build on this article by expanding and explicating this section.

Mullen also touches upon the connections between language and cognition: "The words *Truth*, *Power*, *Luck*, always capitalized, seem to name elemental forces in nature or the human psyche" (11). He pursues this notion in the immediately following section on "computerese," where he notes that in *RW* "the human mind seems to be a computer" (11). Mullen has identified a topic

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that I hope others will develop further. One of the most interesting topics in the novel is Riddley's cognition, how he views the world and why. At one point he mentions feeling that something else periodically looks out of his eye holes (i.e., he feels in the control of unnamed forces). There are repeated mentions of heads on sticks (Punch, a puppet, but also humans executed or killed accidentally whose heads land on a pole): Riddley envisions the world almost in animist terms—it is alive, outside himself, and somehow controlling or directing his actions. The dogs of the narrative, for example, appear to have achieved human-like intelligence and are telepathic (12). (Perhaps "empathic" is a more accurate term.) Some humans are telepathic; others, like Riddley himself, have a sort of sixth sense. (The Ardship of Cambry is a hereditary diviner [14] who at one point uses the dog packs to direct Riddley on his journey.)

I think that Mullen is too quick to dismiss "the moral and intellectual pilgrimage" of Riddley Walker (14-15)—it is the purpose of the novel—and to conclude that "the quest leads only to the conclusion that Truth cannot be known" (15). Instead, it seems that population growth, the re-emergence of the scientific method, and the re-discovery (or re-emergence) of gunpowder may put Riddley's society on the same path that mankind traveled once before.

Since Mullen's article was written some time ago, it is framed in terms of an earlier debate over the "worth" of the novel. Mullen attempts to come down somewhere in the middle of that dispute, although his "metric" of decision is a comparison to the Mars of Edgar Rice Burroughs ("the product of an undisciplined imagination. ...Burroughs made it up as he went" [15]). He concludes that likewise Hoban's work is fascinating on first reading, but is not "a reasonably consistent intellectual construct" [15]. This article's real strength is examining the language of the novel. But if Mullen is saying that Hoban's future English is not sufficiently "consistent," I would disagree: Mullen himself establishes Hoban's linguistic consistencies. On the other hand, if the remark is directed at the thematic importance of the novel (which Mullen's article only touches on), I would disagree even more strongly. In fact, reading this article, reading the book, and rereading and critiquing the article made the novel more interesting to me from a thematic standpoint. The connections among the themes of the novel and its language remain to be explored.

Deborah D.K. Ruuskanen: Prof. Mullen approaches *Riddley Walker* from the point of view of the language used in the novel, with specific reference to the dialect and the graphology. In particular, he has done a neat little typological study of the dialect, agreeing with *The New York Times Book Review* (quoted on the jacket of the 1982 edition of *Riddley Walker*) that the novel is "composed in an English nobody ever spoke or wrote." Bernard Levin, the *Sunday Times* reviewer quoted on the book jacket, calls it a "hideously plausible picture of what our world would become, language and all, if we went down the nuclear road to the bitter end ... told in a language that attempts the impossible and achieves it."

That this is "an English nobody ever spoke or wrote," Prof. Mullen's typological study of the morphology demonstrates. A written dialect is a more

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difficult task to reproduce than a spoken dialect (which may be conveyed by phonetic symbols). Prof. Mullen points out the difficulty of the task by finding the occasions where neither the author nor the editors or proofreaders have caught the variant spellings. However, students of letters written in sixteenth-century England could point out that variant spellings are nothing new, and a given letter-writer might very well use different variants in different—sometimes even within the same—letters. Just think about the variant spellings of the name of the Bard: Shakespear, Shakespeare, etc.

On the point that Riddley's language is a "hideously plausible picture" of what our language would become two thousand and some years after the "1 Big 1" nuclear war, Prof. Mullen notes, as would any trained linguist or language historian, that in two thousand years with no contact with other speakers, any language will change out of recognition. Latin is the most obvious example: after two thousand years, speakers of the Latin dialect of Italy can no longer communicate with speakers of the Latin dialect of Brittany when they speak Italian and French, present-day "variants" of Latin. Prof. Mullen points out that Hoban has not even tried to write in an English of two thousand years in the future, because to do so would be to write in an "English" that readers would not be able to understand.

The thrust of his argument is that what Hoban *has* tried to do, and done very successfully, is to create an *impression* of a futuristic, primitive society, in which very few people can read or write. This is an important element of the *story* Hoban is telling; and *story* is the third element that Prof. Mullen addresses.

Hoban was not the first nor the last to create a special language to enhance the story he is telling. Orwell's Newspeak and the strange language Burgess put in the mouths of his characters in *A Clockwork Orange* (1962) both predate *Riddley Walker*. Even the use of a particular grapholect is not new to Hoban: Georges Perec's 1969 novel *La Disparition* (A Void) never once uses the letter "e." More recently, Iain M. Banks has used a peculiar grapholect to represent a distinctive character in his novel *Feersum Endjinn* (1995): indeed, the grapholects are an excellent way of keeping track of who is speaking in his novel.

Prof. Mullen allows that Hoban has done a good job with the *story*, but that the novel as a whole fails in spite of the imaginative use of language, because of what he calls the "not fully disciplined imagination" of the author. According to Mullen, the *language* is less to be faulted than the failings of the novel "both in its vision of the future world and in its elaboration of a spelling system." He goes on to say:

> If we judge a novel by the extent to which it fascinates and moves on a first reading, then *Riddley Walker* is a very good book indeed. But in an sf novel we, some of us at least, expect a reasonably consistent intellectual construct. On this basis, *Riddley Walker* fails.

Since it is unlikely that authors will give up the metaphysical conceit of an eccentric dialect and/or orthography, a "grapholect," as Prof. Mullen calls it

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in his study, we are going to need more such studies of the language of sf. There may be a good PhD thesis in this, following along the lines of the example Prof. Mullen has set us.

David Sisk: At the time he wrote this article, R.D. Mullen was one of the first scholars to study the novel. As a linguistic analysis, Mullen's essay remains a useful addition to the scholarship on Hoban's 1980 novel, and it is a pleasure to finally see it in print. So far as I am aware, it is among the most detailed technical descriptions of the novel's invented language. As literary criticism, however, Mullen's article shows its age. Seeking a middle ground between what he calls I.F. Clarke's "extravagant praise" for the novel and Norman Spinrad's overly harsh critique, Mullen painstakingly analyzes Hoban's artificial language—with the goal of refuting Spinrad's charge that the language is "an entirely arbitrary creation." In this effort, Mullen succeeds admirably, at least to my satisfaction. But as he methodically builds the case for Hoban's careful craftsmanship in creating a coherent language, Mullen makes two mistakes: he follows Spinrad by considering the language as the main thrust of the novel; and he works so hard to answer Spinrad's criticisms that he fails to notice their irrelevance. Mullen's analysis of the language of Inland is stronger on technical structure, weaker on the fictive aim and purpose of that language.

He twice defines his touchstone for what constitutes sf, and each time he finds *Riddley Walker* lacking. As he begins his analysis, Mullen argues that the novel's weakness proceeds from "Hoban['s failure] to provide explanations for just how things could be as they are depicted" (2). He concludes by saying that "in an sf novel we, some of us at least, expect a reasonably consistent intellectual construct" (16). Without explicitly challenging Mullen's standard (although it invites debate), applying his criterion to the novel's invented language raises a key problem. As Mullen notes, "the convenience of the reader" mandates that "a certain proportion of familiar spellings be allowed" (3). It is a necessity, not a convenience, to keep the reader in mind when constructing a fictive futuristic language. Whether the invented language "works" depends on its verisimilitude, not on how closely it hews to actual, contemporary linguistic norms. Clearly *Riddley Walker*'s language meets that standard: Mullen's own analysis finds that the language is both creative and not, *pace* Spinrad, arbitrary. But Mullen's argument that "the sf critic would not be satisfied simply with finding [the language] an artistic success" (1) makes sense only if we privilege the language, rather than the novel, as the primary literary construct, and subsequently judge the success of that construct as dependent on its linguistic accuracy.

Mullen's analysis of Riddley's language overlooks the importance of Riddley as a limited first-person narrator who tells the novel in the form of a manuscript he has written. Contextually, it seems clear that Riddley has written this account sometime after he and Erny Orfing perform their first Eusa Show together at Weaping Form. Riddley's wandering around the towns of Fools Circel 9wys is a journey of discovery, in which Riddley himself is striving to understand legends and events that are new to him. It does seem like "mere nitpicking," to

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use Spinrad's term, to fault Hoban for not putting into Riddley's narrative explanations detailing the society in which he lives. Riddley spends significant effort describing the things he does not yet understand, and very little describing those things he takes for granted. Mullen takes partial account of Riddley's limitations by attempting to answer some of Spinrad's specific criticisms—e.g., where Spinrad decries tea-drinking and hashish-smoking as implausible in an insular society without international trade, Mullen responds that "tea can be made from herbs or plants of various kinds, as can hashish-like drugs," while still agreeing that "a skilled and serious sf writer would have created a world in sufficient detail to make possible everything depicted" (2). Is this degree of detail truly necessary in a novel which Mullen is comfortable in labeling "an artistic success" (1)?

Following Spinrad leads Mullen into some other errors as well, including the mistaken statements that "the word *God* is not in the language" (13) and that Riddley has given up his quest to find "the Truth about Power" (15). In the midst of the ruins of Cambry, Riddley experiences a conversion, a liminal moment in which he feels a huge power stirring and wonders if "Spirit of God may be that same what woosht roun the Power Ring time back way back" (158). Again, having determined to wander the world seeking for truth without regard to his own safety, Riddley feels that power moving in him: "looking up in to the black where the goast of Power circelt blyn and oansome like a Drop John roun the los hump of Cambry I larft I yelt, 'SPIRIT OF GOD ROAD WITH ME!'"(197). Far from abandoning the journey, Riddley and Orfing leave Weaping Form with the first few of what promises to grow into a crowd of disciples. Hearing a small boy singing a derisive song about his journeying, Riddley calmly accepts the fling and vows "Stil I wunt have no other track" (220).

When Mullen concludes that "*Riddley Walker* fails, though hardly as thoroughly as Norman Spinrad claims" (16), he does so with an air of finding Spinrad's argument partially justified. I find it unfortunate that Professor Mullen has followed Spinrad's pointlessly literalistic arguments at all, even though he does so with the goal of significantly undercutting them. I like to think that the scholarship on *Riddley Walker* has evolved to the point that, had he to do it over again, Professor Mullen would not feel the need to pay attention to Spinrad's largely irrelevant criticisms, but could instead concentrate on his own thoughtful linguistic analysis. Even so, Mullen deserves the respect due to a scholar studying a new novel: as Riddley remarks when faced with a similar challenge, "*Some* 1s got to happen it" (199).

Timothy Bugler: Consider *Riddley Walker*'s first sentence:

> 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 hadnt ben none for a long time befor him nor I aint looking to see none agen.

At first glance, *Riddley Walker*'s language might seem dense and difficult, but only a slightly less cursory inspection is required to recognize its simplicity. Relative to our modern standard(s), *Riddley* uses a more "phonetic" spelling,

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partially indicative of some sound shifts; a modified vocabulary with apparent folk etymologies and largescale backformation; and markedly reduced punctuation. This idiom conveys the sense of a down-to-earth narrator, places that narrator in a primitive society, constrains the reader's pace to that society's level (see below), and perhaps also conveys the deceptive lucidity of mystical utterance (cf. Lake 160, 167–9; Filmer 21).

The Afterword in the expanded edition adds some insight to Hoban's construction of the language of the book:

> One thing led to another, and the vernacular I ended up with seems entirely plausible to me; language doesn't stand still, and words often carry long-forgotten meanings. Riddleyspeak is only a breaking down and twisting of standard English, so the reader who sounds out the words and uses a little imagination ought to be able to understand it. Technically it works well with the story because it slows the reader down to Riddley's rate of comprehension. (225)

1. The text as text. A comment on *Riddley Walker* as a source document is in order. Though editing and proofreading Hoban's manuscript, as Mullen observes, must have been a diabolical task, the text must be taken as it stands. I regret that I have neither the analytical skills nor the patience to attempt to disentangle possible editorial discrepancies from Riddley's supposed practice as conveyed by Hoban. I choose, therefore, to regard every feature of the main body of the text (i.e., excluding the front matter and end matter) as a feature of Riddley's writing. Hoban's thoughts are not directly relevant: the text expresses Riddley's own views and experiences—though obviously Hoban's views are relevant to generic critique of the text, as discussed in my section 4, below.

The text is composed by Riddley over a fortnight while he and Orfing are hiding in the Cambry outpost (202). The flow of the text implies that he has written as events came to him, without much planning or editing, almost stream-of-consciousness (though the division into chapters suggests some planning before or after he drafted the text).

2. The text as tradition. Mullen notes that the text does not mention written texts apart from *The Eusa Story*. This holy work has been preserved in written and oral form, and presumably was one of the core teaching materials used by Brooder Walker in passing his knowledge on to Riddley. (Literacy is restricted to Eusa show men, connexion men, and Mincery men [9], Riddley and his father having been taught as connexion men.) Mullen also suggests that the Walkers must have access to at least one other work, a spelling book or even just a list that revives some of the twentieth-century spellings not present in *The Eusa Story* (e.g., *-y* in *any*, *-g* in *-ing*, *you* rather than *yu*). A few other features also suggest rather more textual sophistication among the literate elite than might seem to be the case: the use of chapters, italics, quotations, and referencing.

Riddley has broken his text up into episodic, serially-numbered chapters. This is so obvious, and so neatly breaks up the story in a recognisable convention, that today's reader will make little of it. But if *The Eusa Story* is the only written text in an otherwise oral culture, why does Riddley make chapters?

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What sort of work is he actually putting together? The epic poem in the oral tradition usually has chapters forced upon it by the scribes who later write it down for posterity. Where does Riddley get the idea of chapters from? It might be from *The Eusa Story*, which has sections; but Riddley makes a quite different (and to us, more "modern") use of segmentation. Maybe he's been inspired by other written works; or maybe he's just making something new out of his Eusa learning.

The Eusa Story is not the only story Riddley cites. Riddley italicizes the names of other stories, not just for separate citation but within his main text (*Hart of the Wood* appears in both contexts on p. 2). Song titles are also italicized (*Sarvering Gallack Seas*, 22). Titles of such works follow regular maximal capitalization, i.e., the first letter of first word and of all other words except articles, conjunctions and prepositions. (This suggests that *as*, in *The Bloak as Got on Top of Aunty* [90], is analyzed by Riddley as a conjunction, though carrying pronominal force.) This consistent application suggests that Riddley appreciates such a distinction (loosely, between function words and content words) at some level, not necessarily requiring explicit grammatical training but suggesting at least that some attention has been paid to form in his education.

Italics also show emphasis, either emotional or textual. Consider "'Wherewl *we* go?"' (88); "may be it wer the word *connexion*..." (108); and the "salty voyce" of Punch [e.g., 133–9]. Goodparley's exegesis of *The Legend of St Eustace* [124–29; see also 145] uses italics for archaic words. We don't know enough about the actual presentation of *The Eusa Story*, but as given in Riddley's text [30–36], it uses italics for the title and the section numbers, and once for emphasis: "Just say *if* it is" [§27:35]. The numbering of sections could serve as the basis for Riddley's numbering of chapters, and italics for story and song titles might also be imitative of *The Eusa Story* text; but Riddley's extensive use of italics for emphasis seems to me to require more basis than the single word emphasized thus in *The Eusa Story*. This is a very slim point, and it is difficult to decide whether Riddley is following the conventions of an established literature or reinventing them from the position of an intelligent loner. Two other points, on punctuation and referencing, might serve to provide some extra evidence for convention, although this is still very debatable.

Riddley uses a comma to introduce direct speech (as noted by Mullen and by Lake); this reproduces the usage in *The Eusa Story* text. However, Riddley also uses single quotes for direct speech, and even more strikingly (to the warped mind of an editor, at least) uses *double* quotes for direct speech quoted *within* direct speech, for example:

> I said, 'Wel now Im saying, "Wherewl *we* go?" Any where you go its the 2 of us going.' (88)

I defy anyone situated in an oral culture to invent quotation marks *ex nihilo*.

Riddley also makes a single use of that fascinating and ingenious device, the footnote. After his first reference to *The Eusa Story* (2), he coyly marks an asterisk to his note at the bottom of the page: "Iwl write down the *The Eusa*

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Story when I come to it." Again, we don't know what this really indicates in the physical text of Riddley's work. However, Riddley's text (as mentioned above) has apparently been composed in a freeform fashion with minimal editing. His single footnote may reflect some knowledge of such a practice in scholarly referencing, but it could conceivably be the only marginal note he saw fit to add after reading his work.

The Greeks and Romans, even in their highly literate periods, managed well with minimal punctuation and textual segmentation, so the question is: why does Riddley, in a largely oral culture, so often use these devices? Clearly literature is more established in this culture than the content of his story would have us believe.

3. The text as religion. In the main I wholeheartedly agree with Mullen's thoughts on *Riddley Walker*. One point that requires modification, however, is his assertion that "God, the concept, the word itself, has been totally forgotten." The phrase *Spirit of God* appears several times after its introduction in *The Legend of St Eustace* (124). I found no instance of *God* standing alone as a distinct word outside the phrase, so Mullen may be correct in that the word "God" has no meaning in and of itself in Riddley's language. Also, the first appearance of the phrase may not be religious in our sense of the term; Goodparley, trapped in a mechanistic political world-view, interprets it primarily as technological power:

> I said, "Whats the Spirit of God?"
> He said, "Thats chemistery and fizzics and all its what the 1 Big 1 come out of realy theres so many ways of saying it you see..." (145)

But even for Goodparley, the technological is not distinct from the magical: this society raises the achievements of the past to a mythical level and perpetuates its science in an alchemical fashion. Riddley, on the other hand, is certainly capable of reaching a more mystical understanding of the term. "SPIRIT OF GOD," he yells at the outskirts of Canterbury (155); "SPIRIT OF GOD ROAD WITH ME!" (197). Fully capitalized speech indicates some sort of ranting fit, or at least extreme emotion (cf. Lissener's fit, 95), and Riddley clearly feels some religious need here:

> "SPIRIT OF GOD," I yelt. Becaws thats where Goodparleyd said the 1 Big 1 come out of. I dint know nothing about chemistery nor fizzics but I were getting to where I neadit some thing hy to yel at. (155)

And even if the phrase itself has little religious connotation, that does not deny the concept of "God" to Riddley Walker's culture. The people of Inland have things very like gods. "Her what has her woom in Cambry" is clearly a mother goddess; she is (also) the moon, the night, and Death (18, 49, 160). Death also has a rather more vivid personification as Aunty (90-91), and in this form has a sister, Arga Warga (the word-phrase *arga warga* refers to ravenous frenzy, "gobbling up"). Mullen notes that Truth, Power, and Luck are always capitalized and "seem to name elemental forces in nature or the human psyche." (The same could be said of Trubba.) Certainly Inland's pantheism is very

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different from religion as usually practiced today, but equally certainly the inhabitants of the story are capable of religious feeling. Riddley's developing appreciation of an inherent Unity is perhaps what Mullen is looking for in God as a concept, but Riddley is able to attain this concept within his own linguistic framework.

On a distantly related point, the word *Addom* could refer to *atom* and also *Adam* (Lake 1984:166). Mullen rejects *Addom*=*Adam* on the basis that the story has no Eve, but I wonder if her absence might be pertinent to the society of the text. Note the tantalizing (and quite startling) line in *Stoan* (164): "Its jus only stoan men walking unner the groun like that. Women have some thing else." This looks very like a distinction between men's and women's business, from which one could readily imply that at least some of Riddley's other stories, particularly *The Eusa Story*, are men's stories. The reader might at this point remember that Riddley's community has a "tel woman" (Lorna Elswint) as well as a "connexion man" (Brooder and then Riddley). Consider also the "woman dollys," earthmother shapes that "hang over where a womans bearthing" (159). If there are different sets of rituals, organized in parallel or hierarchically, notwithstanding Eve's sublimation into Eusa's wife in the male myth, it is likely that she has a more important role in a female version. It's also worth noting that when Eusa pulls "the Littl Man the Addom" apart, the Addom's cry of duality (section 13, p. 32) includes "I wan tu woman I wan tu man." As a manifestation of divine unity, the figure encompasses both male and female, but may be referred to as Man and Addom simply because this is the male version of the story.

4. The text as science fiction: language change. Lake considers, as Hoban clearly does himself, that the language is essential to the setting and theme of the story. But if we categorize *Riddley Walker* as science fiction, then I agree with Mullen that we must ask whether the language and other elements of the work are scientifically valid or at least plausible constructs. Mullen's answer is no; *Riddley Walker* displays the virtues and the defects of a talented non-genre author.

Mullen has gone to impressive lengths in noting Riddley's usage (although contrary to his phonology notes, I found no instances of *emminy* for *enemy*, though I did find *nemminy*, *nemminys* [e.g., 67, 126, 203]). Some of the changes are odd, and some are inconsistent, but these could be explained by (or at least swept under the carpet of) over two millennia's standing between our time and Riddley's. However, this is a dangerous argument. The most telling point against it, to my mind, is the *lack* of language change. There's simply not enough of it, particularly if the official figure of 2347 years of recorded Ram history (i.e., since the cataclysm at the end of the twentieth century, 125) is anywhere near correct. Lake (162) argues that Riddley is consciously archaizing for the benefit of his literate peers. I find this unconvincing, given a narrator who is clearly recording speech as he hears it and writing in the same idiom.

I would further submit that the invalidity of the overall construct stems from Hoban's lack of linguistic knowledge. Hoban's remarks (225, quoted above)

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demonstrate a mistaken perception of how/why languages change, more clearly demonstrated by the off-hand remark under "Berstin Fyr" in his 1998 glossary:

> Note that the Eusa Story is written in an archaic form of the demotic current in Riddley's time. *This is because language went through a near-total breakdown in a dark age after the destruction of civilisation.* (233, emphasis added)

Perhaps Hoban is oversimplifying here and doesn't really believe this (though he also refers to "language corruption" in a personal communication with Lake, 169 n.3). But to my mind, anyone who can write of language breaking down cannot be taken too seriously as offering linguistic sophistication. To belabor the point, languages *don't* break down, they *change*. Societies and communities break down (though even this could be debated). Languages adapt to the needs of their speakers; the abandonment or re-interpretation of technical vocabulary in Riddley's speech indicates not that his language is inferior but that his society is different from ours.

As an editor and as a student of linguistics, I was variously amused, amazed, and appalled by Hoban's invention. *Riddley Walker* is perhaps not entirely successful as science fiction. However, it is a complex and sophisticated work of literature that uses sf elements. Its elaborate distortion of standard language works to great effect in enriching Hoban's thematic concerns.

[**Ed. Note**: Dale Mullen's essay critiques Hoban's novel specifically as *science fiction*: implicit in his approach is an emphasis on consistency of extrapolation. As the following update of the scholarship suggests, it has been in fact as a slipstream—not specifically as an sf—novel that recent criticism has most often addressed *Riddley Walker*.]

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ABSTRACT

Riddley Walker is a very good mainstream novel that attempts and achieves marvelous things in language. Since it is set some two thousand years in the future, after a nuclear holocaust has wiped out civilization, it is also a science fiction novel. With respect to the language, the sf critic would not be satisfied simply with finding it an artistic success, but would want to know how systematic it is in its deviations from standard and nonstandard present-day usage in writing and speech. This article examines the constructed language ("grapholect") in which Riddley writes, using linguistic analysis to suggest that the extrapolation of language in the novel betrays many inconsistencies. Four comments by linguists follow this article, which was found among R.D. Mullen's papers following his death in 1998.

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