WYE BECOMES HOW: The Politics of Narration and the Political Narrative in Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker*

by

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B.A., University of Victoria, 1986

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of English

ACCEPTED

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ABSTRACT

Russell Hoban's post-nuclear dystopia, *Riddley Walker* (1980), has not received a major critical study, despite numerous academic articles. This thesis attempts to fill this gap. The focus of this study is the political nature of narrative discourse in *Riddley Walker*. "Political," in this thesis, means any human action which affects, directly or indirectly, the power structure of a particular culture.

Myth, history, narrative discourse, and politics are recurring thematic concerns in the novel. Myth, in *Riddley Walker*, seems to function as both an historical record and a symbolic representation. Myth draws on history but is not history; myth discusses not only past events but also current ones. The way in which a particular myth is created and interpreted depends on the political bias of the teller. Each story in the novel has political implications. Riddley, as narrator, makes choices about which stories and events to include; he also decides to *write* his discourse in a predominantly oral society.

This thesis examines "Hart of the Wood," "Why the Dog Wont Show Its Eyes," and "The Eusa Story" (including its apocryphal endings, told by Lissener and Goodparley). In addition, the thesis analyzes the *Punch and Judy* show and the legend of St Eustace as influences on the Eusa show.

The first three stories in *Riddley Walker* explain the origins of Riddley's culture. All three stories show that a disregard for nature leads to disaster; Riddley's culture is a product of that disaster. By telling these

stories to the reader, Riddley is reinforcing his own theme of harmony with nature through a rejection of "Power" struggles.

"The Eusa Story" has apocryphal endings told by Lissener and Goodparley. The structure in both stories is similar, with the notable exception of Eusa's final destination: in Lissener's version, Eusa arrives at the Ram, whereas in Goodparley's he arrives at Cambry. Each teller implicitly blames the other for Eusa's death. In both cases the story is used as a political tool to sway the audience's opinion of the teller. The story with the greater circulation has the greater political power. This analysis suggests that narrative discourse can be appropriated and used for political ends.

The *Punch and Judy* show is similarly appropriated in *Riddley Walker*. The Eusa show is loosely based on the present day *Punch and Judy* show. Punch, the protagonist, violently rebels against all institutions and laws. Historically, *Punch and Judy* was a product of the working classes, but by now its subversive qualities have been lessened. In our own time, *Punch and Judy* has been relegated to children's theatre, where much of its subversion is lost. In the novel, Riddley rediscovers *Punch and Judy* and presents a show in place of the official Eusa show. Thus, Riddley revives the subversive element of *Punch and Judy* and makes the show political.

The novel questions the stability of texts by implicitly discussing oral and written discourse as well as myth and history. Hence, the novel also questions the validity of our own world view, which is based primarily on texts.

This thesis is the first major study of *Riddley Walker*. Although it deals with some of the stories in the novel, certainly other areas of the novel are worthy of further study. Generally, this thesis uses the stories in *Riddley Walker* to suggest the political implications of history, myth, and narrative. The various narratives which one encounters may be examined for the ideological assumptions behind them. Some stories might seem innocent, but on closer inspection they might also carry cultural, political, and ideological biases.

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Acknowledgements

I did not write this thesis in a vacuum; it was made possible by people exerting certain forces on me. Without these people, I am sure, this thesis would not be what it is.

First of all, I would like to extend a warm, enormous, energetic thanks to Monica M. C. Schraefel. Thanks, dude! Monica sorted out lots of things with me, through conversation and consultation. She made this experience as pleasant and painless as possible.

Second, I heartily thank Colleen Donnelly, without whose stupendous patience, speed, expertise, compassion, consideration, selflessness, hard work, and general good nature this thesis would not exist in its present form. At extremely short notice, Colleen kindly agreed to type my major revisions (from my handwriting, no less). She also helped me through the bureaucratic maze of forms and formalities. Bless you, Colleen, and may you forever reap good karma and be protected from evil.

I also thank, in a deliberately random order, those people who helped in their own ways (some completely unaware of their influence):

My raisins (Ewen and Isobel), Neil Stubbs, Jane McAslan, Stephen Scobie, Bob Dylan, Peter Maides, Jonathan McAslan, Trevor Williams, Randy Anderson, Daniel Stewart, Louise Blight, Lionel Adey, George Forbes, John, Mint and Peter, Morris Berman, Kim Anderson, Gurpreet, Peter Stephenson, the Dhaliwals, Mary Barron, Maureen Niwa, Russell Hoban, the Sandhu family, the Jack of Hearts, Trevor's classes, Hector, Chris Rideout, Terry Sherwood, John Tucker, Samuel Beckett, Evelyn

Cobley, and many more. If, by chance, I have omitted anyone, I grovel for forgiveness.

I acknowledge the guy with the black thing who just got up.

Last, but never least, I thank ranjeet dhaliwal for not typing or proofreading or being patient or making cups of tea or any of that sort of thing. What a relief. I thank her for being ranjeet and for not needing words to thank her for all the things she makes possible.

To

Tin Cat

who is everywhere,

all the time

Introduction

Riddley Walker, published in 1980, met with generally favourable reviews in both Britain and North America. *The New York Times Book Review* called the novel "extraordinary":

> Set in a remote future and composed in an English nobody ever spoke or wrote, this short, swiftly paced tale juxtaposes preliterate fable and Beckettian wit, Boschian monstrosities and a hero with Huck Finn's heart and charm, lighting by El Greco and jokes by Punch and Judy. It is a wrenchingly vivid report on the texture of life after Doomsday. (Demott 1)

Although most reviewers shared this enthusiasm, not all critics applauded *Riddley Walker*. The *Times Literary Supplement*, found "the repetitious circling becomes increasingly indulgent and out of control" (Uglow 122). The circling, however, is a key theme in the novel and one which represents the circularity of human history and the difficulty of breaking free from the pattern.

Although, according to Edward Myers in his 1984 interview, Russell Hoban "seems restless when identified too exclusively with his most popular work [and] clearly wishes to be considered more than just 'the author of *Riddley Walker*'" (6), this is the only one of Hoban's novels to have achieved such widespread critical attention, perhaps because of the language of the novel as well as the way in which stories are interpolated in the text.

Several articles on *Riddley Walker* have appeared in journals, and recently chapters in books have been devoted to the novel. The first scholarly criticism on *Riddley Walker* appeared in 1984; since then there have been several more articles on Hoban and this novel. In 1989 the

quantity of articles increased. Clearly, with interest in the book growing, *Riddley Walker* is getting more attention and respect as time goes on.

The language of *Riddley Walker* has provided interest for a number of critics.[1] Maynor and Patteson comment that the prose style "is, finally, what lingers longest in the reader's imagination" (18), but their analysis of the language in the novel relies too heavily on what they consider "child-like phonology and syntax" (20), without taking into consideration the influence of Cockney English on the novel. Maynor and Patteson see a distinction between "the political and religious implications of *Riddley Walker*" (19) and the language in the novel, when one of the major concerns of this novel is the relationship between language and history, narrative, and politics. Maynor and Patteson also equate the so-called "literalness" of the language in *Riddley Walker* with "both the mental processes of children and the speech habits of the lower classes in society" (20); such views are ignorant and patronising. (That these critics find the language "literal" is surprising, for expressions such as "hart of the wood hart of the stoan," "1st knowing," and "the girt dants of every thing" are very abstract.) They list six "phonological processes in young children" (21) recurring in *Riddley*

[1] David Lake, "Making the Two One: Language and Mysticism in *Riddley Walker*," *Extrapolation* 25. 2 (1984): 157-70; Natalie Maynor and Richard F. Patteson, "Language as Protagonist in Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker*," *Critique* 26. 1 (1984): 18-25; and John W. Schwetman, "Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker* and the Language of the Future," *Extrapolation* 26. 3 (1985): 212-219. The length and focus of this thesis do not permit an analysis of the language of *Riddley Walker*.

Walker.[2] However, all these phonological and syntactical examples appear every day in Cockney English, especially "*teef* for *teeth*."[3]

Language is not the only aspect of *Riddley Walker* which has attracted critical interest. Several other critical approaches to *Riddley Walker* have been taken. The notion of a forgotten past, whether Freudian or Jungian, has interested several critics.[4] *Riddley Walker* has also been compared to two other post-nuclear dystopias: Aldous Huxley's *Ape and Essence* (1948) and Walter M. Miller Jr.'s *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959).[5] Thomas J. Morrissey discusses the problems of writing a post-nuclear novel, explaining that Russell Hoban was "tempting fate" to write this book,

[2] These six processes are:

> (1) reduction of consonant clusters (*dint* for *didn't*, *hisper* for *whisper*), (2) deletion of final consonants (*less* for *least*, *trubba* for *trouble*), (3) devoicing of final consonants (*behynt* for *behind*, *ternt* for *turned*), (4) substitution of stops for fricatives (*diffrents* for *difference*), (5) fronting of consonants (*teef* for *teeth*), (6) phonological assimilation (*minim* for *minute*). (21)

[3] See William Matthews, *Cockney Past and Present: A Short History of the Dialect of London* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972).

[4] Ronald Granofsky, "Holocaust as Symbol in *Riddley Walker* and *The White Hotel*," *Modern Language Studies* 16. 3 (1986): 172-82; David Holt, "Riddley Walker and Greenham Common: Further Thoughts on Alchemy, Christianity and the Work Against Nature," *Harvest* 29 (1983): 29-54; and Daniel C. Noel, "The Nuclear Horror and the Hounding of Nature: Listening to Images," *Soundings* 70. 3-4 (1987): 298-308.

[5] Thomas J. Morrissey, "Armageddon from Huxley to Hoban," *Extrapolation* 25. 3 (1984): 197-213. I will also examine both of these novels in Part II of this introduction. By "dystopia" I refer to the *Oxford English Dictionary*'s definition of "an imaginary place or condition in which everything is as bad as possible" (Supplement 894). Although the word "Utopia," originally coined by Thomas More, means "nowhere," it has through common usage come to mean "imaginary place with perfect social and political system" (*OED*). "Dystopia," then, is the opposite of this.

considering that "[g]enerally . . . the 1970s were lean years for atomic aftermath novels—few were written and many dropped from sight" (Morrissey 198). The article is not so much an essay on *Riddley Walker* as one on post-nuclear dystopias in general, Hoban's novel being one example of many attempts "to express the seemingly inexpressible" (Morrissey 197). Just as Morrissey sets this novel in the context of post-nuclear dystopias, so Jack Branscomb places it in the context of Hoban's other adult novels: *The Lion of Boaz-Jachin and Jachin-Boaz* (1973), *Kleinzeit* (1974), and *Pilgermann* (1982).[6] Nancy Dew Taylor sees *Riddley Walker* as an optimistic novel.[7] Taylor's optimism stems partly from her view that Riddley prevents "a repetition of history" (29). This novel is, to Taylor, "an example of the individual's refusal to knuckle under to Fate without a fight" (31).

Some critics have discussed the use of history and myth in the novel.[8] Mustazza uses Mircea Eliade as his authority on myth, and tries to distinguish clearly between myth and history. Mustazza believes that

[6] Jack Branscomb, "The Quest for Wholeness in the Fiction of Russell Hoban," *Critique* 28. 1 (1986): 29-38. Like Holt and Noel, Branscomb recognises Jungian aspects in *Riddley Walker*. His survey of Hoban's novels is incomplete: he omits *Turtle Diary* (1975) for no apparent reason (he does not even mention it by name).

[7] Nancy Dew Taylor, "'. . . you bes go ballsy': *Riddley Walker*'s Prescription for the Future," *Critique* 31. 1 (1989): 27-39.

[8] David Cowart, *History and the Contemporary Novel* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois U P, 1989); Marie Maclean, "The Signifier as Token: The Textual Riddles of Russell Hoban," *AUMLA: Journal of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association* 70 (1988): 211-219; Leonard Mustazza, "Myth and History in Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker*," *Critique* 31. 1 (1989): 17-26.

"Riddley comes to the possibility that the [Eusa] myth itself may not be fixed and inviolable" (22). However, the distinction which Mustazza attempts to make between history and myth is often difficult to make. Mustazza sees that one of the themes of this novel is the way in which history is rewritten by those in power in order to maintain the *status quo*.

David Cowart examines the roles history and myth play in *Riddley Walker*; however, unlike Mustazza, Cowart tries to link myth with history, rather than to distinguish them. He sees the "historical component of the Eusa myth" (Cowart 93) as an example of how "history became myth" (94). Many of these ideas about history and myth will be explored at length in this thesis.

Marie Maclean indirectly deals with the idea of history. Her reading of the novel involves a recognition of the instability of texts and is similar to my own ideas concerning the instability of the narrative of history. She examines the ways in which *Riddley Walker* "exploits the notion that the memory of the signifier may be completely separate and evolve in completely different ways from the memory of the signified" (215). Maclean's ideas about signifiers and signifieds can be applied to the relationship between history and myth, which will be examined later in the thesis.

Of the many articles written on this novel, David Dowling's is the only one which deals to any important extent with narrative structure.[9]

[9] David Dowling, "Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker*: Doing the Connections," *Critique* 29. 3 (1988): 179-87. Although the idea of narrative is implicitly discussed in several of the articles mentioned here, it is only Dowling's which deals with the individual stories in *Riddley Walker*. Dowling lists nine stories in the novel:

Dowling says it is "Riddley's conception of 'story,' rather than the machinations of the various gunpowder seekers, which forms the true narrative line" (183-84). This view makes the novel seem much more metafictional[10] than it is. To say that the narrative is concerned only with story is an exaggeration, despite many metafictional references in the novel.

Dowling correctly identifies the power and importance of the stories in the novel, especially their inability, finally, to "provide meaningful answers" (Dowling 184). He also recognises Riddley's disenchantment with "received meaning and encoded connection" (184), leading to "an extreme epistemological scepticism" (185). However, it seems to me preferable to examine the stories for a more politically radical reading of the text, rather than settling for Dowling's notion that the novel "turn[s] the act of reading into a game" (186).

In *Fictions of Nuclear Disaster*, Dowling again examines *Riddley Walker*, but in the context of other post-nuclear novels.[11] The section in

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"Hart of the Wud" [sic] (2)
"Why the dog wont show its eyes" [sic] (17)
"The Eusa Story" (30)
"The Lissener and the other voyce out of the worl" [sic] (85)
"The Bloak as got on top of Aunty" [sic] (90)
"The legend of St Eustace" [sic] (123)
"Punch and Judy" (133)
"Stoan" (163)
"Punch and Judy" (215) (184)

[10] "Metafiction," for those unfamiliar with current literary studies, means fiction "that plays with the nature and process of fiction" (*The Harper Handbook to Literature* 282).

[11] David Dowling, *Fictions of Nuclear Disaster* (London: MacMillan, 1987). Dowling has read widely in this field and he traces the development

Dowling's book which deals with *Riddley Walker* also discusses Walter Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. Dowling says that *Riddley Walker* has "a texture almost as rich as that of *Finnegans Wake*" (201). In discussing the stories of *Riddley Walker* Dowling notes that the "art of telling stories becomes the main form of power for the tribe, and can be used politically" (201). Dowling sees that in the "Hart of the Wood" story "the concerns of the book are established: the pursuit of knowledge and its perils, the attractions of power" (202). In an "illiterate" society, he argues, "the people communicate through image and symbol" and "[e]verything must be interpreted" (206). However, this is true of literate societies as well, except that the images and symbols are different. The interpreters in both cases are the ones who hold the power.

As this brief survey of critics demonstrates, *Riddley Walker* raises questions, not only about language, history and myth, but also about the nature of interpretation itself.

II

In order to discuss *Riddley Walker* as a post-holocaust dystopia, it is helpful to survey other post-nuclear novels. Although an extended analysis

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of "fictions of nuclear disaster." The book is an excellent study of a very wide topic, and anyone interested in a more detailed account of post-nuclear fiction than I am able to provide in my introduction should certainly refer to Dowling's book.

of each novel is impossible, a brief description of each one, placing it in its time frame, will suffice to provide the background to *Riddley Walker*.[12]

The novels I have selected from the vast number of post-nuclear fictions are: Aldous Huxley's *Ape and Essence* (1948); John Wyndham's *The Chrysalids* (1955); Nevil Shute's *On the Beach* (1957); Walter M. Miller Jr.'s *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959); Angela Carter's *Heroes and Villains* (1969); and John Crowley's *Engine Summer* (1979). Several thematic similarities exist between these books and *Riddley Walker*, as well as distinct differences.

The difficulties and complexities involved in writing post-nuclear fictions are manifold. Thomas Morrissey says about the idea of nuclear holocaust:

> Incredibility is both a practical and an aesthetic problem. As a concept, full scale atomic war is a bit hard to take. Like the biblical Armageddon it is somehow distant, beyond our ken. It combines real potential with mythic improbability. Until actualized, it can easily slip into the realm of metaphor.... Clearly a prime challenge facing humankind today is the need to keep the real threat from becoming too mythic, too metaphorical. A challenge posed to authors is that they must transcend the cliché, break through the apathy, and make their fictive holocausts eminently plausible and possible. (200)

Some writers use the nuclear holocaust as an excuse for a remote setting, others use it as a vehicle for their themes, while others, like Russell Hoban, make it very much a part of the theme. Some of the novels set in a post-nuclear future could as easily be set in any remote future time and place (like *Engine Summer*); the actual nuclear war is ultimately irrelevant to

[12] For a more complete analysis of post-nuclear dystopias, please refer to David Dowling's *Fictions of Nuclear Disaster* (1987).

the novel. However, as with *Riddley Walker* and several others, sometimes the novel would lose much of its meaning if the post-nuclear element were removed from the general dystopia.

Ape and Essence is written in two parts. The first is set in Hollywood in the late 1940's and narrated by a Hollywood writer; the second is written in the form of a film script (which the narrator has found). The second part, which takes up most of the novel, involves an expedition of the Royal Society of New Zealand to North America, many years after the bomb, or "the Thing," has been dropped. The protagonist, Dr. Alfred Poole, separated from the rest of the team of scientists, is captured by the inhabitants of what used to be Los Angeles. In this new society, Satan, held responsible for the "Thing," is worshipped with the same fervour as God used to be. Sexual activity is forbidden except during one festival, Belial Day, which includes an orgy and human sacrifice. People who experience sexual desire at any other time are called "Hots." Poole falls in love with a young woman named Loola, eventually escaping with her across the Mojave desert in the direction of Fresno, which is "'[e]ighty-five per cent Hot'" (Huxley 103).

As this very brief summary indicates, *Ape and Essence* deals with, among other things, the power of religion over the general populace. The religion in *Ape and Essence* is an inverted Christianity; at the Belial Day orgies, perhaps a satire on the Catholic mass, human blood is drunk. The nuclear holocaust, *per se*, is not dealt with in this novel, except to provide a dystopian world and reflect humankind's potential for self-destruction.

Like *Riddley Walker*, *Ape and Essence* draws attention to the power of ritual and its propagandistic qualities. By providing the people with ritual, the government manages to maintain order. The ritual exists only to reinforce the government's power. The people in post-Thing Los Angeles are as controlled by the religion of Belial as the inhabitants of Inland are controlled by theirs. In both cases the government and the church are united as one entity, using religion as a justification and explanation for their actions. *Ape and Essence* does not explore the possibility of subverting the present power structure: the existing power structure remains undisturbed at the end of the novel.

In *The Chrysalids* John Wyndham also deals with the perversion of organised religion and the power it has over the people. In the world of post-nuclear Labrador, which resembles the wild west of pioneer days, most of the citizens are extremely religious. David Strorm, the protagonist and narrator, has the ability to communicate telepathically with a few other adolescents in the surrounding area, including his cousin Rosalind. David has a strange dream in which there is a city with "carts running with no horses to pull them; and . . . things in the sky, shiny fish shaped things that certainly were not birds" (Wyndham 1). The ability to communicate telepathically must be kept secret because all defects are forbidden: "KEEP PURE THE STOCK OF THE LORD" (Wyndham 18). David befriends Sophie, who has six toes. Eventually, after the community discovers her deformity, she escapes with her family into the "Fringes," where all the people are mutants. David and his friends discover that his newly born sister has a remarkable capacity for telepathy. When she is six they begin to train her

in this skill. Because her telepathic powers are stronger than the others', Petra (David's sister) communicates with a woman in "Sealand" (New Zealand). Meanwhile, one of the telepathic group marries and attempts to expose the others; she later commits suicide. The telepathic friends, in fear of discovery, head for the Fringes, pursued by a posse sent out after them. The woman from Sealand, meanwhile, is coming to save the young adults. After a battle between a rather large posse (including David's puritanical father) and the inhabitants of the Fringes, the woman from Sealand arrives in a helicopter, taking David and his friends back to New Zealand where David recognises the city from his dreams. Everyone in Sealand is telepathic because, according to the Sealand woman, the human species has evolved.

There appear to be several similarities between *The Chrysalids* and *Riddley Walker*. Both novels deal with the notion of marginalised groups (the Fringes people and the Eusa folk) and the efforts made to keep the stock pure. Both deal with religious fanaticism and a rewritten history; both novels are set in the far-distant nuclear future where life is rural and simple. The narrator, in both cases, is a young male.

However, the "rescue" at the end of *The Chrysalids* seems to undermine the questioning of authority which has been going on elsewhere in the novel. The woman from Sealand, definitely a figure of authority, represents an elitist world. Just as the people of Labrador had rejected defects or abnormalities, physical or otherwise, so too do the Sealanders reject anyone who is not telepathic; they merely reverse hierarchies. Riddley, on the other hand, rejects the power struggles of his society by

forming his own rules. *Riddley Walker* calls for a rethinking of the world of our "boats in the air and picters on the wind"; *The Chrysalids* seems to make those boats in the air the end of the pilgrimage.

Nevil Shute's *On the Beach*, set in Australia in the very near future, deals directly with nuclear war. Dwight Towers, an American naval officer, has by chance been stationed in Australia, thus escaping the nuclear war which has occurred in North America and Europe. Radiation is slowly creeping down the globe, so it is only a matter of time before Australians also die from radiation sickness. The novel chronicles the lives of several people as they deal with their last few months alive. Eventually, everyone commits suicide by taking cyanide pills provided by the government.

On the Beach examines the moral and political implications of nuclear war on a personal level. The people in the novel, for the most part, know nothing about the effects of radiation, or even about the nature of the war itself. One of the effects of nuclear war on the general populace is an increased religious interest: "'You've got a mighty fine congregation,' [Dwight] observe[s]. 'There wasn't a seat vacant.' 'It wasn't always like that,' [Mary says] drily" (Shute 46). Organised religion, in all its forms, enjoys success in several post-nuclear dystopias, including *Riddley Walker*. *On the Beach* is ultimately an optimistic novel compared to other post-nuclear fictions in that the entire human population simply dies; there are no survivors who have to deal with life in a post-nuclear hell. There are no examples of an altered society such as one finds in other post-nuclear

dystopias. Shute's novel has little to say about the technological side of nuclear war.

Another novel which deals with the role of religion in a post-nuclear world is Walter M. Miller Jr.'s *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, which has been compared to *Riddley Walker*.[13] Both novels deal with a "misinterpreted" manuscript: in *Leibowitz* an engineering blueprint discovered in a fall-out shelter many hundreds of years after the nuclear war leads to the posthumous beatification and canonisation of Isaac Leibowitz, its designer; in *Riddley Walker* the manuscript of the St Eustace legend is (mis)interpreted. In *Leibowitz* this misinterpretation is a minor event, whereas in *Riddley Walker* it is crucial to the novel.

A Canticle for Leibowitz is written in three parts, each representing an age of human history: the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the modern day (Morrissey 205). No single protagonist exists throughout, except, perhaps, the church. The novel chronicles the Order of St. Leibowitz and the monks' dealings with the politics of the religious and secular worlds. In the end, when technology has again reached its late twentieth century state, the world undergoes yet another nuclear holocaust. This is similar to the rediscovery of gunpowder in *Riddley Walker*. However, the differences between the two novels far outweigh the similarities. At the end of *Leibowitz*, monks leave the earth in a spaceship, while nuclear war rages below—an example of the supposed transcendence of religion over "earthly" matters; *A Canticle for Leibowitz*

[13] See Morrissey, "Armageddon from Huxley to Hoban" 209-212, and Dowling, *Fictions of Nuclear Disaster* 193-209.

seems to suggest that one should turn to Catholicism in the face of whatever political problems exist.

History is the major theme in both *Riddley Walker* and *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. In *Leibowitz*, Marcus Apollo discusses the idea of history with Thon Taddeo: "'You reject all history, then, as myth?' [asks Marcus Apollo]. 'Not "reject." But it must be questioned. Who wrote your histories?' [replies Thon Taddeo]" (Miller 128). Thon Taddeo also remarks that "'[d]oubt is a powerful tool, and it should be applied to history'" (Miller 129). *Leibowitz* also deals with the instability of historical documents, especially the interpretation of the blueprint. Official versions of history are not necessarily "true" or accurate: "'. . . there are several versions. They differ in minor detail. . . . I doubt if a single *completely* accurate account of the Flame Deluge exists anywhere'" (Miller 181-82). Both novels deal with the circularity and instability of history, but Miller's novel relies on the notion of salvation through organized religion whereas Hoban's stresses salvation through individual thought and action.

Angela Carter's *Heroes and Villains* deals to a certain extent with marginalised groups. Like the Hots of *Ape and Essence*, the Fringes people of *The Chrysalids*, and the Eusa folk of *Riddley Walker*, the Barbarians in this novel are outcasts from the elite world of "Professors." Marianne, the protagonist, is literally trapped inside the Community: "She was not allowed to go outside the outer wire fence away from the community" (Carter 2). Her father is an historian who "reconstruct[s] the past; that [is] his profession" (Carter 8). Eventually, after a raid by Barbarians, Marianne is willingly taken away by Jewel, a young Barbarian, to the world

beyond the fence of the community. Here she lives with a community of Barbarians who revere Dr. Donally, a renegade professor who twists religion to fit his own plans. Donally creates the religion for the Barbarians to follow. Jewel and Marianne are married, against Marianne's wishes. The Barbarians walk in fear of yet another set of outsiders, Out People. These people are mutants reminiscent of *Riddley Walker*'s Eusa folk: "One man had furled ears . . . . [a]nother was scaled all over, with webbed hands and feet. Few had the conventional complement of limbs or features and most bore marks of nameless diseases" (Carter 110). Donally is the leader of the group of Barbarians, but Marianne exposes his charlatanry. She encourages Jewel to kill Donally in order to assume leadership. Jewel reluctantly drives Donally out without killing him, but, in a trap laid by Donally, Jewel is ambushed and killed.

Heroes and Villains is a very complex novel containing many superficial similarities to *Riddley Walker*. The equivalent of Riddley's "Bad Luck go a way syn" is the gesture against the "evil eye"—"'They used to call that the sign of the cross. . . . It must be handed down among the Old Believers'" (Carter 148). A hunting of wild pigs (112) is among many rituals concocted by Donally to maintain control of the tribe. Also, Professor women are believed to "'sprout sharp teeth in their private parts, to bite off the genitalia of young men'" (Carter 49), much like *Riddley Walker*'s Aunty. Donally, like Goodparley, is interested in molding society to his own desires. He creates a religion for the people to follow, one that includes a large number of rituals. Donally, who "'believes religion is a social necessity'" (Carter 29), says that if the Barbarians "won't take to the snake

for a symbol, we'll think of something else suitable, in time. . . . Religion is a device for instituting the sense of a privileged group'" (Carter 63). He draws mainly from the Church of England because he finds its forms "'infinitely adaptable'" (Carter 63).

Like Riddley's desire to leave his society, Marianne desires to leave the insular world of the Professors for the marginalised world beyond. Both books attempt to make the reader seriously rethink the world. *Heroes and Villains*, by focusing on marginalised groups, examines the notion of marginality and the role which women are forced to play in our society. Feminist theory sees women in our society as outsiders whose very marginality is essential to the maintenance of the patriarchy; women, who are both inside and outside the system at the same time, are coerced into participating in the patriarchal power structures. Marianne, by allowing herself to be "kidnapped" by Jewel, rejects the patriarchy of the Professors, but she enters the male-dominated world of the Barbarians. Even here she is marginalised. It seems that women are always marginalised in male-dominated societies. Like *Heroes and Villains*, *Riddley Walker* also offers a new way of thinking about the world by calling for a rethinking of male-dominated power struggles and structures.

John Crowley's *Engine Summer*, set in post-nuclear California, does not really offer a new consciousness about the world. Atomic warfare seems unimportant to the novel which uses the nuclear holocaust as an excuse to set the novel in a remote time. The "Angels" had killed themselves many years before the now existing little self-sufficient communities of the Truthful Speakers. Rush that Speaks, the narrator,

eventually leaves his small world in search of the woman he loves who had left the previous year. The only similarity between *Engine Summer* and *Riddley Walker* is the importance given to stories and storytelling. Gossips, women who tell stories and know the history of the Truthful Speakers, have great prestige in the community, as has Lorna, the "tel woman" in *Riddley Walker*. The narrator says at one point: "That's all I am now, isn't it: my story" (Crowley 3). The "saints," revered by the people of this community, were people whose adventures are remembered in stories: "'They're saints not because of what they did, especially, but because in the telling of it, what they did became transparent, and your own life could be seen through it, illuminated" (Crowley 60).

On the whole, *Engine Summer* uses nuclear war not for any thematic purpose but to provide a convenient setting for a fantasy novel. The only reference to atomic war in the novel is "the Storm" which killed the Angels (Crowley 81).

Some of the novels surveyed here deal with issues which are raised in *Riddley Walker*, such as the political use of religion, the instability of historical documents and knowledge, the notion of marginalised groups and power structures, and stories and storytelling. In *Riddley Walker* all these ideas are mingled together in a cohesive manner with a new language in order to provide a clearly radical departure from conventional post-nuclear dystopias. In linking together history, religion, politics, and narrative (fictional and otherwise), *Riddley Walker* questions the ideas which are the foundations of our present society and which may lead to an atomic war or other environmentally catastrophic action. *Riddley Walker*

not only examines the effects of nuclear war on the world, but also examines the basic epistemology and consciousness which make such a possibility exist.

Chapter One

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the political uses of narrative in *Riddley Walker*. By "political" I mean any human action that affects, directly or indirectly, the governing social and economic systems of a particular culture. Thus, a particular narrative, told in a certain way, can influence a governing ideology for good or ill. This novel deals with historical, mythical, and fictional narratives; I will examine how the first three stories, including the derivative versions of "The Eusa Story," function politically in the text and how the act of interpretation is crucial to the themes in the novel. In addition, this thesis will examine how the *Punch and Judy* show and the legend of St Eustace are used in the novel to show the transformation of history to myth.

"Narrative" is a difficult term to define. The field of literary theory called "narratology" or "narrative theory" sets out to define, *inter alia*, narrative. Gerard Genette, in his *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, differentiates between "histoire" (story) and "discours" (discourse). The story is "the signified or narrative content" and the discourse is "the signifier. . . or narrative text itself."[14] Seymour Chatman elaborates on this distinction in his *Story and Discourse*:

> each narrative has two parts: a story (*histoire*), the content or chain of events (actions, happenings), plus what may be called existents (characters, items of setting); and a discourse (*discours*), that is, the expression, the means by which the

[14] Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, New York: Cornell U P, 1987) 27.

> content is communicated. In simple terms, the story is the *what* in a narrative that is depicted, discourse the *how*.[15]

Although both Genette and Chatman apply narrative theory to fiction, it is not limited to fiction. As Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan notes, "Newspaper reports, history books, novels, films, comic strips, pantomime, dance, gossip, psychoanalytic sessions are only some of the narratives which permeate our lives."[16] Roland Barthes points out that narrative is present in all human activities: "it is present at all times, in all places, in all societies; indeed narrative starts with the very history of mankind. . . . Like life itself, it is there, international, transhistorical, transcultural."[17] In order to differentiate between the continuous stream of uninterpreted events and those which are selected by a narrator, I will refer to the former as "narrative" and the latter as "discourse.". Thus, the actual events without imposed order or selection I will term "narrative" and the selected events arranged by a narrator I will term "discourse." In addition, the tales which Riddley tells throughout his discourse I will call "stories."

The definition of "history" is linked to "narrative." The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines history as "a continuous methodical record of important or public events; study of past events, esp. human affairs; aggregate of past events, course of human affairs; whole train of events connected with nation, person, thing, etc." The etymological root of

[15] Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell U P, 1988) 19.

[16] Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Methuen, 1983) 1.

[17] Roland Barthes, "An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative," *New Literary History* 6. 2 (1975): 237.

"history" is the Greek (*via* Latin) *historia*, which means "finding out, narrative, history" (*OED*). Narrative and history are linked by their etymology; indeed, the notion that history is a narrative without any innate meaning except in its interpretation through discourse has been the focus of several thinkers. Michel Foucault, in his *The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, examines history as a narrative structure. Foucault, leaving aside "the old questions of traditional analysis,"[18] is interested in the rupture or "discontinuity" of events which previously it "was the historian's task to remove from history" (8). Those events which do not fit the scheme and which disrupt the historian's conception of a sensible history are the very events which should be the subject of analysis, according to Foucault. Because history is a narrative, it is important to examine the forms of its discourse.

Hayden White, in his *Metahistory*, discusses the idea of the narrative and discourse of history. Historians, according to White, choose certain ways to present certain facts; he calls these methods of discourse "explanation by implotment": "If, in the course of narrating his story, the historian provides it with the plot structure of a Tragedy, he has 'explained' it in one way; if he has structured it as a Comedy, he has explained it another way."[19] This way of treating history as a narrative, as something which can be arranged in a certain way in order to produce certain meanings, has definite political implications. As White says,

[18] Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972) 3.

[19] Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U P, 1973) 7.

> the historical consciousness on which Western man has prided himself . . . may be little more than a theoretical basis for the ideological position from which Western civilization views its relationship not only to cultures and civilizations preceding it but also those contemporary with it in time and contiguous with it in space. In short, it is possible to view historical consciousness as a specifically Western prejudice by which the presumed superiority of modern, industrial society can be retroactively substantiated. (2)

White, by imposing certain structuralist formulas on history, is also creating his own conception of history. Because one can only learn about history through discourse, the way in which a particular discourse is structured affects the way one perceives history.

In the narrative of history there is no predetermined cause and effect relationship between events, yet in the discourse of history one imposes order on chance events by selecting what to tell from the narrative. There is a definite strategy implicit in the study of history. Never is everything told, so it is important to examine why certain things are not told and why others are repeatedly told. In this respect, history is similar to fiction.

Some philosophers and theorists question the distinction between history and fiction. Fiction can be defined as "an imagined creation in verse, drama, or prose. Fiction is a thing made, an invention."[20] Rimmon-Kenan notes that "[i]nstead of distinguishing between narrative fiction and other types of narrative . . ., deconstruction is interested precisely in the elements shared by . . . cultural products traditionally classified as non-verbal, non-fictional, or non-narrative" (130-31). This reappraisal of the role and position of fiction is not restricted to deconstruction; this idea also

[20] Northrop Frye et al, *The Harper Handbook to Literature* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985) 190.

appears in recent Marxist theory. Terry Eagleton, in *The Function of Criticism*, points out that "'English Literature' is now an inherited label for a field within which many diverse preoccupations congregate: semiotics, psychoanalysis, film studies, cultural theory, the representation of gender, popular writing, and of course the conventionally valued writings of the past."[21] A clear distinction cannot be drawn between history and fiction because both areas overlap: "All historians have been aware that the narrating of a historical sequence in one way or another involves a constructive, interpretive, fictive act," according to J. Hillis Miller.[22] Furthermore, as David Cowart points out, history "deals in story and myth. The historian presents not the past but a version of the past, for history, like imaginative writing, involves a selection of detail, a determination of emphasis, a narrational shaping" (17).

The link between history and myth is important. There seems, in the case of *Riddley Walker* in particular, no way to distinguish easily between history and myth. Edmund Leach, in his discussion of Claude Levi-Strauss, says:

> Myth is an ill-defined category. . . . [T]he special quality of myth is not that it is false but that it is divinely true for those who believe but fairy tale for those who do not. The distinction that history is true and myth is false is quite arbitrary. . . . The Christian New Testament purports to be history from one point of view and myth from another, and he is a rash man who seeks to draw a sharp line between the two.[23]

[21] Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism* (London: Verso, 1987) 123-24.

[22] J. Hillis Miller, "Narrative and History," *E.L.H.* 41 (1974): 461.

[23] Edmund Leach, *Claude Levi-Strauss* (New York: Viking, 1970) 54.

The definition and function of myth are nearly always controversial; as Lauri Honko says, "myths are multidimensional."[24] They can be used for a number of different reasons. Th. P. van Baaren says that all myths, "perhaps without exception, are aetiological myths."[25] Claude Levi-Strauss notes that although individual myths vary in content and style, they all have an underlying structural similarity. This universal structure is timeless; "it explains the present and the past as well as the future."[26]

Mircea Eliade notes that, through myth, "to a certain extent, we witness the metamorphosis of a historical figure into a mythic hero."[27] In this sense, history becomes fictionalized, drawn from the narrative of history into the discourse of myth. However, in this thesis "myth" will mean more than a mere fictionalizing of history; in *Riddley Walker* it seems to be a re-creation of history. History becomes, through myth, both "fact" and "fiction"; myth is the discourse through which the larger narrative of history is filtered. As Roland Barthes says, "mythology can only have an historical foundation, for myth is a type of speech chosen by

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[24] Lauri Honko, "The Problem of Defining Myth," *Sacred Narrative: Readings in the Theory of Myth*, ed. Alan Dundes (Berkeley: U of California P, 1984) 46.

[25] Th. P. van Baaren, "The Flexibility of Myth," *Sacred Narrative: Readings in the Theory of Myth*, ed. Alan Dundes (Berkeley: U of California P, 1984), 222.

[26] Claude Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grandfest Schoepf (New York: Basic Books, 1963) 209.

[27] Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, trans. William R. Trask (New York: Harper and Row, 1959) 41.

history."[28] In *Riddley Walker*, Eusa's transformation from being the U.S.A. (the creator of the "1 Big 1"—the atomic bomb) and St Eustace into a mythic combination of the two quite distinct histories (the legend of St. Eustace already being a myth[29]) matches Eliade's observations on the nature of myth-making:

> The historical event in itself, however important, does not remain in the popular memory, nor does its recollection kindle the poetic imagination save insofar as the particular historical event closely approaches a mythic model. (42)

The "historical event" in *Riddley Walker* is the discovery and use of nuclear power, leading to the manufacture and use of nuclear weapons. Historically, the United States of America (U.S.A., or EUSA) first developed the technology to manufacture a bomb using atomic energy, and also was the first to use the bomb against another country, in 1945. In the novel, the U.S.A. has presumably used the bomb on a fullscale level. However, all of these important historical events have become, by Riddley's time, mythified. The U.S.A. has become Eusa and the actual activities of scientific discovery have also become mythified. What remains are the rudimentary truths about the irresponsibility of nuclear research, although these have been stripped of their original meaning. However, the myth is, to Riddley's people, just as true as our history is to us.

[28] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (London: Jonathan Cape, 1974) 109.

[29] Sometimes "legend" is differentiated from "myth" because a legend seems to have more historical truth. However, legend itself is part of the mythifying process; as such, it is a kind of myth.

This discussion of myth presupposes an understanding that although myth exists in a particular form in the real world, when it appears in a novel it must be treated as an aspect of the novel, not of real life (although the two are firmly linked). The way our history functions as an explanation for our existence is analogous to the way that myth in Riddley's society explains phenomena and origins. Myth exists in *Riddley Walker* as history, explanation, entertainment, and as a political tool.

Myth, history, narrative, discourse, and politics are all related in *Riddley Walker*. This thesis will examine how the stories in the novel function politically both within the text of the novel and through critical interpretation. Riddley's own discourse is written in an oral society, thus raising several questions about the relationship of speech to writing. These questions, which will be examined in the next chapter, indicate the extent to which the form of Riddley's own *writing* has political implications.

Chapter Two

One of the problems inherent in the study of *Riddley Walker* is the distinction between written and oral texts. That Riddley *writes* his discourse in an oral culture is important; the novel seems to deal with the contemporary debate on literacy and orality. *Riddley Walker* also seems to examine the stability and instability of written and oral discourse, as well as the power of words themselves.

Riddley, as narrator, draws attention to the act of writing throughout the novel:

> Iwl write down the Eusa story when I come to it. (2)[30]
>
> Thats why I finely come to writing all this down. Thinking on what the idear of us myt be. (7)
>
> This is stil the same day Im writing down here. (16/17)
>
> . . . I bes write out the *Eusa Story* the same as it ben wrote out 1st and past on down to us. (29/28)
>
> Wel Im telling Truth here aint I. Thats the woal idear of this writing. (117/121)

Clearly, he is conscious of the act of writing, and he understands its importance. Riddley is also aware that illiteracy is widespread but that an elite of literate people exists:

> You wunt have seen the woal thing [the Eusa Story] wrote out without you ben a Eusa show man or connexion man or in the

[30] The editions used for this thesis are the first edition and the most popular reprint: Russell Hoban, *Riddley Walker* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1980); and *Riddley Walker* (London: Pan/Picador, 1982). When referring to page numbers I will cite the first edition first, and the reprint second. There is, incidentally, a misprint in the first line of the first edition, which has been corrected in the 1985 Cape edition and all other editions.

> Mincery. No 1 else is allowit to have it wrote down the same which that dont make no odds becaws no 1 else knows how to read. (29/28)

Riddley is a member of the intellectual elite, yet by rejecting the "stupid" rituals (1) of this society, he becomes an outlaw of sorts. Despite his outlaw status, Riddley still uses the elite technology of writing; he writes his memoirs, or at least a small portion of his life, for others to read. If he has rejected the society in which he was born, raised, and educated, why does he *write* his story? For whom is Riddley writing and why? Before these questions can be answered, the relationship between speech and writing must be examined.

Riddley continually draws attention to the written word on the page and his role as storyteller, but the society of which he writes is primarily an oral one. If Riddley has rejected his culture by the end of the novel, in favour of a new way and a "new show"—and it certainly seems that way—what are his motives for recording his experience? Riddley, against many odds, creates a new system of belief, after rejecting what has been offered to him during his life in his culture. Certainly part of Riddley's rejection of the belief system revolves around tradition and ritual which seem "jus that littl bit stupid" (1). One of the rituals, in which Riddley is directly involved, is the "connexions" which are made after the presentation of a Eusa show. In these "connexions," a local priest presents an interpretation of each Eusa show the night after it has been performed.[31] Riddley transcends the usual way of interpreting, by going into a trance, arriving at the conclusion

[31] The word "connexion" in *Riddley Walker* also applies to anyone's interpretation of the correlation of events, as in the "connexion" between a wild dog offering itself to Riddley, Riddley's father dying, and a baby being born dead (13).

that "EUSAS HEAD IS DREAMING US" (62/59). Because going into a trance is unconventional, Riddley begins to be seen as slightly different. Later, when Riddley literally jumps the "fents" (fence), he becomes an outlaw, having rejected his society and its "cow shit diggings" (74/71). Surely, then, he would not want to revert to the old ways when new ones have been created. However, writing, one of the elite activities directly related to the Mincery and the Ram, implicitly refuses a democratic understanding. If the majority of the people cannot read or write, Riddley cannot be addressing them; he must be writing for a literate minority. However, this situation is not as clear as it could be, owing to a number of difficulties associated with the notion of writing.

To deal with the question of oral and written literature means also dealing with the theoretical background to the question. In recent years both literary and anthropological theories have turned their attention to the relationship of speech and writing, questioning whether a distinction can be made between them. A debate exists between those who think that speech is a purer form of communication than writing and those who think that speech is already a form of writing.[32] Some theorists question the difference between oral and literate discourse. C. Jan Swearingen argues that although spoken and written literatures are quite different from one another, the "transcription of oral discourse, regardless of its precision and faithfulness to the original, creates a text—'something written to be read'—

[32] See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U P, 1976) and Christopher Norris, *Derrida* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U P, 1987).

out of what is not a text."[33] Richard Bauman, in his *Story, Performance, and Event*, transcribes oral stories and analyses them structurally, thus transforming the oral to the written. As Swearingen says, "At issue in the debate is the validity of the literate-oral distinction itself" (148).

The debate on speech and writing is not easily resolvable, nor is it the intention of this thesis to discuss these ideas at any great length. However, the debate reveals how the distinction between written and oral literature is problematic. *Riddley Walker* seems to address these ideas about differences between forms of communication.

Many expressions in *Riddley Walker* depend upon the difference between the written word—what one sees—and the spoken word—what one hears. The spelling of the word conveys one idea, and the sound of the word another. For instance, the written expression "deacon terminations" (141/136) conveys the image of a deacon ("member of third order of ministry, below bishop and priest" (*OED*)) who either brings things to an end or is himself "terminated"; when spoken, the word becomes "decontaminations." The word combines scientific terminology with religious implications. It is the juxtaposition of the two readings which makes this possible. Interestingly, the word "deacon" and "termination" have further resonances: "deacon," as a verb, means to "read aloud each line of (hymn etc.) before it is sung" (*OED*); "termination" means "word's final syllable or letter(s) esp. as element in inflexion or derivation" (*OED*). In turn, "inflexion" means "ending of (word) to express grammatical relation" or

[33] C. Jan Swearingen, "Oral Hermeneutics During the Transition to Literacy: The Contemporary Debate," *Cultural Anthropology* 1. 2 (1986): 138.

"modulation of voice" (*OED*); "derivation" means "formation of word from word or root, tracing or statement of this" (*OED*). Here, then, the expression "deacon terminations" not only mixes religious and scientific terminology but also implies oral and written concepts: reading aloud, the word's final syllable (if *spoken*) or letters (if *written*), and the modulation of voice; it also implies the tracing of roots of words, of searching for origins, of searching for a lost past. These are some of the concerns of *Riddley Walker* as well. The text, even down to its individual words, invites an exploration not only of written and oral words but also of the roots and meanings of words themselves.[34]

The power of words themselves, whether spoken or written, is also a concern in the novel. When Granser is mixing the "greedy mints" to make gunpowder, he forbids Riddley to stay:

> Granser said, "Now comes the las of the mixing which Ive got to say the words."
>
> I said, "Wel go on and say them then."
>
> He said, "O no I aint saying them words wylst youre lissening thems the fissional seakerts of the act aint they. You bes go off a littl way."
>
> I said, "All right then" which I gone out of the rivverside gate and walking by the water I dint want to sit by Goodparley I dint want him to weary me with why wernt I watching Granser.
>
> I just begun to roal up a smoak when WHAP! . . . (193/188)

Granser's desire for secrecy indicates that he is aware of the power of words; indeed, words are the "las of the mixing," the final touch. The ingredients are not fully mixed until the words have been said. As

[34] Interestingly, Goodparley and Lissener have names suggestive of oral culture (Goodspeaker and Listener); Riddley's name suggests writing (see p. 99).

Goodparley says earlier, "'Words! Theywl move things you know theywl do things. Theywl fetch. Put a name to some thing and youre beckoning'" (122/118). Words, here as elsewhere in the novel, do move things, do make things happen: words "create" the gunpowder.

Riddley Walker draws attention not only to words in both oral and written literature but also to the stability of texts. According to Th. P. van Baaren, in "non-literate societies changes in myth are easier to make [than in literate ones] because oral traditions are easier to manipulate than those which are fixed in writing."[35] He also says that "the invention of writing has wrought havoc, because this invention has made it possible to fix the text of a myth more or less permanently" (223). In *Riddley Walker*, after Lorna tells the story of "Why the Dog Wont Show Its Eyes," Riddley wonders whether or not there has been a "strait story past down among the tel women" (20/19); Lorna informs him that

> There bint no tel women time back way back. Nor there aint never ben no strait story I ever heard. Bint no writing for 100s and 100s of years til it begun agen nor you wunt never get a strait story past down by mouf over that long. Onlyes writing I know of is the *Eusa Story* which that aint nothing strait but at leas its stayd the same. All them other stories tol by mouf they ben put to and took from and changit so much thru the years theyre all bits and blips and all mixt up. (20)

Lorna recognises the presumed instability of spoken texts, noting that even the Eusa story "aint nothing strait but at leas its stayd the same." This implies that the oral tradition tends to be more susceptible to change than written literature because writing acts as a stabilising force; on the other

[35] Th. P. van Baaren, "The Flexibility of Myth," *Sacred Narrative: Readings in the Theory of Myth*, ed. Alan Dundes (Berkeley: U of California P, 1984) 221.

hand, perhaps people are more likely to remember spoken words in an oral culture than in a literate one. The stability or instability of oral stories depends upon many circumstances: the teller, the audience, the context, and other determining factors. Richard Bauman's study shows how some storytellers embellish certain tales over the years while at the same time retaining the basic story line. It is not possible to say with certainty that oral literature is more susceptible to change than written texts, despite van Baaren's comment on the invention of writing. Written texts also undergo change, for several reasons: scribal errors, typographical errors, editorial misreadings, editing, bowdlerising, and reader interpretation. Oral stories are generally stable but flexible, with changes made by individual tellers:

> The models provided by generic convention and prior renditions of "traditional" items stand available to participants as a set of conventional expectations and associations, but these may themselves be used as resources for creative manipulation, shaping the emergent text to the unique circumstances at hand.[36]

This seems to be part of what *Riddley Walker* deals with; indeed, Riddley's substitution of the Eusa show by the *Punch and Judy* show depends upon the previous cultural associations of puppet shows. Riddley's new show is politically radical in that it questions the stability of the Eusa myth. Also, in *Riddley Walker* the idea of a stable written text is undermined by Goodparley's interpretation of "The Legend of St Eustace."

As narrator, Riddley is the ultimate storyteller in the novel; he not only relates the important historical/religious document of Inland (the "Eusa Story") and the numerous other legends, myths, and stories told to

[36] Richard Bauman, *Story, Performance, and Event* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1986) 4.

him but he also manages to incorporate all these stories into his own discourse of what happened to him. Just as one cannot readily distinguish between Riddley's story of his life and the "story" of his society, so one cannot distinguish between the novel *Riddley Walker* and the society out of which it comes; the two are inextricably bound up together. Stories and storytelling in *Riddley Walker* involve not just particular tales but reveal how discourse determines societal structures which in turn mold the ways in which we view the world. Riddley is aware how difficult it is to tell a tale honestly, and he also realises that he controls his readers as much as the original narrators of Riddley's stories controlled him.

Riddley, striving to "tel Truth," is attempting to discover not only what happened "time back way back" but also his own political role in his present world. As a narrator himself, Riddley uses the stories to prove his points or to provide general background information. Riddley's notion of history depends on these stories, for these are the only records which his society has managed to retain of what happened to bring about its present predicament. However, Riddley is often unable to distinguish between historical "facts" and fiction. Myth, as the previous chapter discussed, functions as both fact and fiction.

Fact and fiction overlap each other easily in *Riddley Walker*. Riddley says that the reason he is writing is that he "ben all ways thinking on that thing in us what thinks us but it dont think like us. . . . Thinking on what the idear of it myt be" (7). He also says, "Wel Im telling Truth here aint I. Thats the woal idear of this writing" (117/112). When Riddley writes "Truth" he interpolates many fictions, some of which have come to be seen

as fact. What once began as allegory has become accepted truth. Riddley's method of recording Truth is, paradoxically, one of fiction. Truth, like history, must manifest itself in discourse; truth is also a mixture of fact and fiction.

Although one of the ideas behind Riddley's writing is "Truth," there are several places in the novel where information is withheld by not being written down. One of these incidents occurs at Brooder Walker's funeral when Riddley is supposed to do the "wording" for his father: "I had las wording only I dint say nothing I kep my words for him inside me" (23/21-22). The reader is denied access to Riddley's thoughts (Riddley does not even record the words he kept inside). The narrator (Riddley) is manipulating the reader. The account tells the reader *what happened* (i.e. Riddley's words for his father were not spoken), but all the information is not supplied. Goodparley advises a cautious approach to writing information down: "'Iwl write a message if I have to but I wunt word moren that on paper'" (122/118); later, Riddley comments on the difficulty of narration and writing: "I dont have nothing only words to put on paper. Its so hard. Some times theres mor in the emty paper nor there is when you get the writing down on it. You try to word the big things and they tern ther backs on you" (161/156). The implication of these statements is that the silences of the text—any text, whether fictional, historical, or otherwise—have just as much, and perhaps more, importance than the words which do appear on the page. Also, these statements imply that sometimes "Truth" cannot be recorded in writing; interestingly, Riddley's attempt to write "Truth" forms the basis of a novel—a fiction, a lie.

In *Riddley Walker*, as in any text, there are gaps in the discourse. Indeed, the mixing of the "greedy mints" to make gunpowder, as mentioned earlier, is not actually recorded because Riddley is not present. Riddley, like the reader, is not allowed to see and hear everything. When Granser forbids Riddley to stay, he is perhaps aware of Riddley's ability to remember things; Riddley's memory is so accurate that he can recall exact events, discussions, and stories apparently word for word. This can be explained by Riddley's training for the Mincery in which he must remember and be able to recite, word for word, the "Eusa Story." In addition, Riddley says earlier, "I have noats" (185/180). However, despite his note-taking and memorisation, Riddley still selects what to include in his discourse. The various gaps in *Riddley Walker* draw attention to how the reader, like Riddley, is denied access to particular events.

Riddley does not pretend to be able to record all the events correctly. Like the map which introduces the novel, on which Riddley writes "I DONT HAVE NO ROOM FOR THE WOAL OF EVERY THING THERE IS IN INLAND," the discourse does not have room for everything to be told. Also, like the map, the discourse is framed; limits are set. Just as Inland is a microcosm, so the text of *Riddley Walker* is a miniature of a greater narrative. In *Riddley Walker*, as in the discourse of history, there is never room for "the woal of every thing." One is always selecting what to tell and what not to tell. One is also selecting *how* to tell.

Riddley decides to write his discourse. As mentioned earlier, he is writing in an oral society. There are many possible reasons for this. Perhaps he is attempting to subvert the power structures by using their

technology (writing) against them. Goodparley does not record his views; he finds writing dangerous. Riddley, on the other hand, does write, proving that he has not been blinded or killed (at least at the time of writing). Perhaps Riddley writes down his experiences to clarify his ideas about the world. He is writing for someone in his future; writing is an act of hope in itself in that it implies that there will be a future. Ultimately, however, Riddley's writing is a technical device of Russell Hoban. There is not a clear answer to why Riddley writes, but the novel draws attention to the problems involved in the oral/literate distinction.

Riddley, as listener, storyteller, and writer, guides the reader's thoughts. He selects what to tell, when to tell it, and how to tell it. By writing, he is adding his discourse to the two other written texts of Inland, the "Eusa Story" and "The Legend of St Eustace," while also incorporating them into his text. His written words also take oral stories and make them literate texts, in much the same way that Richard Bauman does in his study of storytellers. In Riddley's case, however, the oral/literate stories become oral once more when the reader reads them aloud to understand them. From his society's point of view, Riddley Walker's text is the next "Eusa Story" because it is a written text. Riddley has not only created a new show and gained a following but he has also written down his ideas; his writing has become another political tool. Riddley also blurs the distinction between oral and written literature. Riddley shapes his discourse in a particular way. Nobody is able to see all of a narrative whether it is of history or of fiction, but what one chooses to tell affects the manner in which our world functions.

Chapter Three

To examine fully the implications of narrative in *Riddley Walker* it is necessary to look closely at the stories within the novel. In addition to David Dowling's list of stories, I have identified several other stories in the discourse of *Riddley Walker*. Riddley presents some, complete with titles, but others emerge from the general discourse. My amended list of stories in *Riddley Walker* is as follows:

"Hart of the Wood" (2-4)

"Why the Dog Wont Show Its Eyes" (17-20/16-19)

"The Eusa Story" (30-36/28-34)

The performed Eusa show (45-53/42-50)

The remembered Eusa show (57-59/53-56)

Lissener's version of Eusa (81-83/77-79)

"The Lissener and the Other Voyce Owl of the Worl" (85-86/82-83)

"The Bloak as Got on Top of Aunty" (90-93/87-89)

Goodparley's version of Eusa (121-22/116-17)

"The Legend of St Eustace" (123-24/118-19)

Goodparley's story (130-32/126-27)

Goodparley's *Punch and Judy* (132-40/128-35)

Riddley's essay on "Stoan" (163-64/158-59)

Riddley's Punch and Greanvine show (172/166-67)

Riddley and Orfing's *Punch and Judy* (215-19/209-13)

In addition to these stories, various rhymes appear throughout the novel to provide background information. Also, a rhyming couplet indicates that each proper "story" is finished. The length of this thesis does not permit an extended analysis of all the stories, so I have chosen the first three as examples of how narrative is politicised. "Hart of the Wood," "Why the Dog Wont Show Its Eyes," and "The Eusa Story" all draw attention to the problems of stories and storytelling. It is important to examine who tells each story and for what purpose it is told. The interpretation of these stories is crucial to their political power, as it is with any interpretation of any text. Each story is told to Riddley by a particular person at a particular time, then related to the reader at a particular point in the discourse. Most readers will interpret not only the individual stories but also the implications of their positions in the novel. Each interpretation gives each story its "meaning." This chapter will examine, not only how each story is used by the teller (if any) and by Riddley, but also how the reader's interpretation of these stories can be politically subversive.

The earliest story in the novel, "Hart of the Wood," is introduced abruptly: "Theres a story callit *Hart of the Wood* this is it" (2). Its first line calls attention to another story, "The Eusa Story," of which Riddley writes in a footnote, "Iwl write down the *Eusa Story* when I come to it" (2). The reader is made aware of the idea of stories; this suggests the interdependency of all texts: "Hart of the Wood" is connected to "The Eusa Story" which is connected to "The Legend of St Eustace" and the Eusa show. No text is isolated. The implication here is also that there are many more stories that Riddley has heard, but he chooses to tell only certain ones.

In "Hart of the Wood" the reader first learns that the novel is set in the future: "Every 1 knows about Bad Time and what come after. Bad Time 1st and bad times after. Not many come thru it a live" (2). Although the actual nature of "Bad Time" is not yet made clear, it is apparent that the story deals with the aftermath of a disaster of some kind; *Riddley Walker* itself is a novel of aftermath, of the consequences of past actions. In this respect, the story is a microcosm of the novel. The human race in "Hart of the Wood" is represented by "a man a woman and a chyld" (2) who meet a "clevver looking bloak" in the story's desolate landscape: "Snow on the groun and a grey sky overing and the black trees rubbing ther branches in the wind. . . . The man the woman and the chyld digging thru the snow they wer eating maws and dead leaves which they vomitit them up agen" (20). Over this landscape, as over all Inland, hangs a perpetually grey sky.

The first question of the novel is asked in this first story. The man and the woman ask the "clevver looking bloak," "Do you know how to make fire?" (3). This is a crucial question in the novel because it is similar to Goodparley's quest to find out *how* to make the "1 Big 1." The question "Do you know how to make fire?" expresses the archetypal human search for knowledge and, more importantly, how to use the natural world for human progress. In this case it is a simple matter of *needing* the fire to stay alive—a primal necessity. However, the desire to stay alive ultimately has its price; the child is killed so that the parents may live: "The man and the woman thot: 2 out of 3 a live is bettern 3 dead" (3). The logic of this argument is faulty. Two out of three alive is not better than three dead because eventually all three will be dead anyway. The child, like the wild

boar at the beginning of the novel, is sacrificed, or "offert." The beginning of the novel is full of death.

The man and the woman strike a bargain with the "clevver looking bloak." When they ask him to make them a fire, he replies, "'That for you and what for me?'" (3). The only thing which the parents have to offer as "whatfers" is their child. This incident shows the commodification or reification endemic to the capitalist society that led to "Bad Time," the residues of which still exist in Riddley's time.[37] This objectification of life, human or otherwise, has led to the destruction of the planet. In *Riddley Walker* the conditions which the inhabitants of Inland must endure have been caused, I would argue, from evidence in "Hart of the Wood," by the concept that "2 out of 3 a live is bettern 3 dead" and the exchange system which arises from that notion. *Riddley Walker* is a novel which deals not only with the future but also with our present. The situation in which Riddley finds himself parallels the present human condition; the novel is a criticism of our present way of thinking. The relationship between human beings and the planet, and between ourselves, is based on exploitation. This comes from objectifying either people or various lifeforms on earth; our

[37] Although there is no explicit description of the economic structure of Inland, it can be inferred from the commodity status of iron that it depends upon notions of capitalism. Marx says that the "circulation of commodities is the starting point of capital" (*Capital, Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford U P, 1977) 445); iron in *Riddley Walker* has value ascribed to it, thus becoming, in Marxist terms, a commodity. Its use as "comping station" (compensation) also reveals the extent to which it has become a commodity. Marx distinguishes between the "use-value" and "exchange-value" of commodities. The child in "Hart of the Wood" has no use-value to the parents, from their point of view, but it does have an exchange-value: the child equals fire. Therefore, the child becomes a commodity.

natural "resources," such as water, oil, petroleum, trees, animals, and so on, are not there for human use only, yet it is common to view natural life as expendable in the interests of humanity. This lesson, taught in "Hart of the Wood," shows that the consequences of such shortsightedness are disastrous. Riddley tells this tale presumably because people still have not learned the lesson; by placing the story first, Riddley emphasises it.

Despite their bargain to stay alive, the man and woman are ultimately consumed by the very fire which cooked their child. At the end of the story "2 out of 3 a live" is clearly not "bettern 3 dead": all three are dead, the man and woman no better off than if they had all died together.

The "clevver looking bloak" not only makes the fire for the parents but he also passes on the knowledge of fire-making: "The clevver looking bloak said, 'Iwl show you how to make fire plus Iwl give you flint and steal and makings nor you dont have to share me nothing of the meat only the hart'" (3). But that fire-making destroys the man and woman: "They fel a sleep by ther fire and the fire biggering on it et them up they bernt to death" (4).

This story draws attention to the idea of a "chyld," which is a central concern in *Riddley Walker*; the novel is, after all, narrated by a twelve year old.[38] In our society he would be considered a child, in his a man. The children in the novel—the ones who are referred to as "childer" (4) or "kids" (5)—introduce the major song of the novel, "Fools Circel 9wys":

> Horny Boy rung Widders Bel
> Stoal his Fathers Ham as wel
> Bernt his Arse and Forkt a Stoan
> Done it Over broak a boan

[38] It is interesting to note that Jesus Christ was twelve years old when he questioned the elders in the Temple (Luke 2: 41-52).

> Out of Good Shoar vackt his wayt
> Scratcht Sams Itch for No. 8
> Gone to senter nex to see
> Cambry coming 3 times 3
> Sharna pax and get the poal
> When the Ardship of Cambry comes out of the hoal (5)

This is, at first glance, a child's rhyme to go with a child's game. The players in the game take turns, apparently, at "being the Ardship" and "going round the circel til it come chopping time" and then escape (5). Riddley says, "I use to be good at that I all ways rathert be the Ardship nor 1 of the circel I liket the busting out part" (5). Later on in the novel Goodparley explains that the "kid game" is more than that; it is prophetic. Riddley has gone through all the actions described in the rhyme. When Goodparley reveals this to him, Riddley says:

> "How can you work all that out of a kid rime? *Fools Circel 9wys* is a kid rime for a kid game."
> [Goodparley says,] "O Riddley you know bettern that you know the same as I do. What ben makes tracks for what wil be. Words in the air pirnt foot steps on the groun for us to put our feet in to. May be a nother 100 years and kids wil sing a rime of Riddley Walker and Abel Goodparley with ther circel game." (121/116)

Riddley has two songs sung about him in his own time. The first is after his "trants reveal" of "'EUSAS HEAD IS DREAMING US'" (62/59):

> "Riddley Walker wernt no talker
> Dint know what to say
> Put his head up on a poal
> And then it tol all day" (63/60)

This rhyme is sung by "Littl Nimbel Potter and that lot" (63/60). Riddley says, "Wel you know 1ce the kids start singing at you thats a cern kynd of track youre on nor there aint too much you can do about it. Making the kids stop singing wont help its too late by then youve jus got to clinch your teef

and get on with it" (63/60). The other song sung about Riddley is at the end of the novel:

> When we gone out thru the gate there wer a kid up on the hy walk sames I use to be up there all times of nite when I wer a kid. 7 or 8 he wer may be. Sharp littl face liting and shaddering in the shimmying of the gate house torches. Sharp littl face and he begun to sing:
>
> > "Riddley Walkers ben to show
> > Riddley Walkers on the go
> > Dont go Riddley Walkers track
> > Drop Johns riding on his back"
>
> Now whered that kid ever hear of Drop John and what put it in his mind to sing that of me? (219/214)

The children with their rhymes seem to have the ability to determine the course of events. Riddley does not have to wait "100 years" before songs are sung about him. The children both make up songs of their own and sing songs of forgotten origin (such as "Fools Circel 9wys"). The childrens' songs seem to parallel and imitate the adult political world in much the same way that the myths in *Riddley Walker* draw on history. The songs popularise, amongst the children, ideas about certain individuals and the adult world in general. Riddley becomes an outcast, not only through his own actions, but also because of the children's views of him: "'Dont go Riddley Walkers track.'" However, in "Hart of the Wood," the child is not given an opportunity to voice its opinion about the parents' decision.

The "chyld" in "Hart of the Wood," the first child mentioned in the novel, is the second life killed (the first being the "wyld boar"). The relationship of the adult world to the world of children is brought into question here. The adults are destructive and the children their victims. Indeed, part of the initiation ceremony of "coming a man" involves

murdering an animal. This not only teaches young adults that they must kill but also suggests parallels between the treatment of children and animals by adults in the novel. Children and animals both have important ideas to express, but the adults generally ignore them. Eusa ignores the dogs in "The Eusa Story," and the childrens' rhymes are dismissed; both children and animals are the hapless victims of adult political decisions, in both *Riddley Walker* and our own society: they are voiceless.

The child in "Hart of the Wood" says only one thing: "'O Im so col Im afeart Im going to dy. If only we had a littl fire to get warm at'" (2). The child is more concerned about warmth than about food. The parents first ask the "clevver looking bloak": "'Wud you make a fire then weare freezing of the col'" (30); they mention nothing of hunger until the "clevver looking bloak" says, "'Iwl share you my fire and my cook pot if youwl share me what to put in the pot'" (3). It is the "clevver looking bloak" who mentions food. By this point, the child has become voiceless; there is no reported dialogue of the child. The child and its parents eventually get fire; the child is cooked in it, and the parents are burned to death by it. What began as a request for a "littl fire" becomes, literally, a holocaust in which the whole family is burnt.

This is not only a story of a nuclear family but is also a parable about humankind's greed beyond need. The family needs a little fire, but the parents become obsessed with its power, in much the same way that each nuclear weapon which is manufactured has greater destructive force than

the one preceding it.[39] The parents do not consciously build up their fire, but parallels exist between their fire and our nuclear arsenals. Both are based on power and greed. There is no real need to increase nuclear arsenals, just as there is no need for the parents to cook their child or build a huge fire. With fire comes power: power to destroy and power to control nature. The fire-building parallels the arms race in that both are used as deterrents (the fire deters the night from moving in on the parents); however, both are ultimately careless and dangerous.

The position of "Hart of the Wood" in the general narrative of *Riddley Walker* is interesting. The story is told by Riddley after he has just finished killing "parbly . . . the las wyld pig on the Bundel Downs" (1). Dowling's assertion that Riddley moves from being "a listener to being a teller to being a performer" ("Connections" 184) is not entirely correct, because it is not clear who tells "Hart of the Wood." Riddley introduces it ("Theres a story callit *Hart of the Wood* this is it"), but he does not say who told it to him. One can only assume the story to be a myth passed down, but Riddley still *chooses* to tell it to the reader, presumably as a warning.

On one level, this story serves to explain the shape of charcoal. As David Cowart notes:

> Charcoal is produced by burning wood without air; in primitive times a stack of wood would be fired after being

[39] Nuclear bombs are measured in both "megatons" and "Hiroshimas." The bomb which hit Hiroshima killed approximately 100,000 people and wrought irreparable damage to the survivors, the city, and the planet. One Hiroshima is no longer enough; we seek bigger and more powerful weapons. It is interesting to note that the bomb which landed on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945 was called "Little Boy."

> partially covered with earth. What remained after the fire smouldered out would be charcoal. The people of Riddley's time have come to think that the earthen and wooden lumps on the earth somehow resemble hearts.[40]

The story explains how this happens:

> There is the hart of the wood where they bern the chard coal. . . . Berning the chard coal in the hart of the wood. Thats what they call the stack of wood you see. The stack of wood in the shape they do it for the chard coal berning. Why do they call it the hart tho? Thats what this here story tels of. (2)

The story not only explains the shape of charcoal (while also telling a short history of human life following nuclear war), but points out the negative aspects of technology. Riddley, as narrator, uses it to explain the situation of Inland and to warn against the excesses of technology. The novel as a whole also shows how technology, when it becomes uncontrollable, can lead to disastrous ends; one must always be aware of the implications of the simple question, "Do you know how to make fire?"

As this reading of "Hart of the Wood" suggests, each story in *Riddley Walker* can be read closely, yielding explanations which parallel the concerns of the novel as a whole. Because one can make the stories highly political by reading them in a certain way, the novel itself invites a political interpretation.

Riddley is "implotting" his discourse of history (to use Hayden White's term) in order to convince his readers about the evils of "sturgling for Power" (197/191). This narrative structuring relies heavily on the stories Riddley selects to tell. It is evident that Riddley makes definite choices about what he wants to hear and wants to retell. At one point Goodparley

[40] David Cowart, *History of the Contemporary Novel* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois U P, 1989) 95.

says, "'You ever hear the story of why the crow is black and curses all the time?'", but Riddley does not want to "hear no storys about crows" (125/121). At this point in the narrative discourse Riddley is too anxious to know what is happening to Lissener to spend his time listening to a story when he could be "moving" and "happening." On another level, this refusal to hear Goodparley's story suggests Riddley's awareness of the political nature of stories and the possibility that the story about the crow will be a rationalisation for Goodparley's actions. Also, Riddley might not want to hear a story about crows because, on a purely personal level, it was a crow which "caused" (or cawsed) his father's death by yelling "'Fall! Fall! Fall!'" (10); Riddley does not want to be reminded of his father's death.

Although thematically similar to "Hart of the Wood," "Why the Dog Wont Show Its Eyes," the second story, covers a much wider historical perspective, extending all the way to "Time back way way back" (17/16)—a distant past.[41] In this story "a man and a woman sqwatting by ther littl fire" (17) are, like the family in the first story, representative of humankind. The story tells of humans' corruption by technology; it begins "before people got clevver," when they "had the 1st knowing" (17).[42] "1st knowing" is

[41] There are several expressions for different historical times in *Riddley Walker*: *time back* (93/89), recent history, usually within one's lifetime, similar to "years ago"; *time back way back*, the time of the nuclear war and the ensuing disasters, as well as our own time of "boats in the air and picters in the wind"; *time back way way back* (17/16), our distant past, Riddley's distant distant past, "before peopl got clevver." These differentiations between time frames are used consistently throughout the novel.

[42] As there is no satisfactory synonym for "1st knowing," I will use this term throughout.

similar to intuition—a non-intellectual, emotional and psychical response to the natural world:

> Every thing has a shape and so does the nite only you cant see the shape of nite nor you cant think it. If you put yourself right you can know it. Not with the knowing in your head but with the 1st knowing. (17)

People, however, "los [the 1st knowing] when they got clevverness and now clevverness is gone as wel" (17). "Why the Dog Wont Show Its Eyes" tells of human dealings with the natural world and the universal spirit.

The man and woman lose the "1st knowing" when they begin "to think on it a littl" and wonder, "'If the 1st knowing is this good what myt the 2nd knowing and 3rd be and so on?'" (18). This parallels our present predicament. This question asked by the people generates more and more so-called "progress":

> They gethert weat and barly they had bread and beer then they wernt moving on the lan no mor they startit in to form it. . . . Every morning they wer counting every thing to see if any thing ben took off in the nite . . . . Counting counting they wer all the time. (18-19/18)

This counting and obsession with personal property eventually leads them to comment, "'What good is nite its only dark time it aint good for nothing only them as want to sly and sneak and take our parpety a way'" (19/18-19). They decide to make day last forever and so create the "Master Chaynjis":

> They had the Nos. of the sun and moon all fractiont out and fed to the machines. They said, "Wewl put all the Nos. in to 1 Big 1 and that wil be the No. of the Master Chaynjis." They bilt the Power Ring thats where you see the Ring Ditch now. They put in the 1 Big 1 and woosht it roun there come a flash of lite then bigger nor the woal worl and it ternt the nite to day. (19)

As a result of the "Master Chaynjis"—nuclear war—the man and woman now "go afeart by nite afeart by day. . . . [The dog] wont show its eyes no mor

it wont show the man and woman no 1st knowing" (20/19). They had already lost the "1st knowing" when they began to farm rather than forage. Now "[t]he nite jus lookit dark to them they dint see nothing else to it no more. They los out of memberment the shapes of nite. . . . They los out of memberment who nite wer" (18-19).

This loss stems directly from the question: "'If the 1st knowing is this good what myt the 2nd knowing and the 3rd be and so on?'" (18); it is a question similar in intention to the first question in *Riddley Walker*, in "Hart of the Wood": "'Do you know how to make fire?'"; it expresses a desire for progress. However, in the case of the couple in "Hart of the Wood," their situation is that of starvation and near-death; in the second story the couple's situation is perfect: "Dint have no mor fear in the nite they put ther self right day and nite that wer good time" (18).

Although Riddley narrates "Hart of the Wood" first, it deals with post-nuclear holocaust events, whereas the "Dog" story, narrated later, explains events leading up to that nuclear war, and describes in broad generalities the texture of life afterwards. Although both stories are allegories, "Hart of the Wood" has more particular and specific events than the general descriptions which the "Dog" story offers. The description of post-war survival is similar in both stories:

> Every 1 knows about Bad Time and what come after. Bad Time 1st and bad times after. Not many come thru it a live.
>
> 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. Starveling wer what they wer doing. . . . digging thru the snow they wer eating maws and dead leaves which they vomitit them up agen. ("Hart of the Wood" 2)

> . . . there come a flash of lite then bigger nor the woal worl and it ternt the nite to day. Then every thing gone black. Nothing only nite for years on end. Playgs kilt peopl off and naminals nor ther wernt nothing growit in the groun. Man and woman starveling in the blackness looking for the dog to eat it and the dog looking to eat them the same. Finely there come day agen then nite and day regler but never like it ben before. Day bearth crookit out of crookit nite and sickness in them boath. ("Why the Dog Wont Show Its Eyes" 19)

The quality of life in both stories is very poor, causing people to make drastic decisions. Starvation leads the family in the first story to eat "maws and dead leaves" and finally the child; in the second story famine causes the man and woman to want to eat the dog, and the dog them. In both stories there is a fear of the dark, of night, which is fended off with fire: ". . . it wer black nite all roun them they made ther fire bigger and bigger trying to keep the black from moving in on them" ("Hart of the Wood" 4); "They had iron then and big fire they had towns of parpety" ("Why the Dog Wont Show Its Eyes" 19/18). In each case the miserable outcome is caused by people asking questions about "progress." In "Why the Dog . . ." the man and woman have no real need to find out what "the 2nd knowing and 3rd . . . and so on" are like; in "Hart of the Wood" the request for fire seems at first innocuous, but later, through greed, becomes threatening. The implication is that human nature is innately destructive: in "Hart of the Wood" the question is asked in a post-nuclear setting, and in the "Dog" story the question is asked well before the Bomb and well before "boats in the air and picters on the wind" (19/118), or even farming. Goodparley's search for the key to "progress" is a mixture of both "Why shud we be foraging the woal time?" (18) and "Do you know how to make fire?" (3). Until we examine the implications of these kinds of questions and pose other questions, the trend will continue.

"Why the Dog Wont Show Its Eyes" is told to Riddley by Lorna who, as a "tel woman," represents intuitive consciousness. Lorna attempts to engender this consciousness in Riddley, partly through this story and partly through the attention she gives him. After Riddley does his "trants reveal" Lorna "hang[s] over [Riddley] in a special way" (63-4/60). Lorna uses the story not only as an example of humankind's folly, but also as an attempt to question the present values. Riddley's society considers dogs to be dangerous; people who are "dog frendy," or who have any connection with dogs, are regarded with suspicion, hostility, and fear. However, Lorna's story reveals how crucial the relationship between human beings and animals really is. By telling the story to Riddley at a time when rumours have been started about the dog which Riddley killed "'fetch[ing] some 1 over to the dog peopl'" (16), Lorna (whether she knows it or not) is questioning the idea of dogs as negative beings.

Her story deals with, among other things, how the search for power is ultimately misguided; as such, the story is subversive in that it undermines Goodparley's ideas about progress which occur later in the novel. Riddley, in choosing to retell this particular tale to the reader, is emphasising the foolishness of struggling for power over the natural world. The novel shows that such a struggle is pointless and harmful: Granser and Goodparley are literally killed when they (re)invent gunpowder. By telling this tale in addition to "Hart of the Wood," Riddley is providing the reader with two stories with the same theme. Riddley "implots" his own narrative discourse as a parable of human greed and folly; the discourse of *Riddley Walker* is not much different, thematically, from "Hart of the

Wood" and "Why the Dog Wont Show Its Eyes." These first two stories are aetiological myths, showing that the cause of the characters' plight is a disregard for the natural world.

"Why the Dog Wont Show Its Eyes" also functions as an example of the unstable "text" of history, and its relationship to myth, as discussed in Chapter One. Lorna, as mentioned before, is aware of the instability of historical documentation in story form. She explains after telling the "Dog" story: "'Mosly they aint strait storys any how'" (20/19). Even "The Eusa Story," the religious text of Inland, "aint nothing strait" even though it is written down. Lorna seems to have no problems accepting the notion of an unstable and ultimately unknowable history. Riddley, however, wants to write "Truth"; he wants historical facts, not "blipful" myths.

"The Eusa Story," perhaps the most important story for the people of Inland, is the only written document in the canon of stories known to the populace. Riddley's introduction sets it in context:

> . . . I bes write out the *Eusa Story* the same as it ben wrote out 1st and past on down to us. Its all ways wrote down in the old spel. Every body knows bits and peaces of it but the connexion men and the Eusa show men they all have the woal thing wrote down the same and they have to know all of it by hart. You wunt have seen the woal thing wrote out without you ben a Eusa show man or connexion man or in the Mincery. No 1 else is allowit to have it wrote down the same which that dont make no odds becaws no 1 else knows how to read. (29/28)

The "Eusa Story" is a text of the elite, whether Church or government. A religion which uses a written text has a certain kind of power over the people who follow it. Jack Goody notes that "[i]n the beginning was the

Book, but it was the priest who read and explained it"[43]; he also explains that

> [l]iterate religions . . . are generally religions of conversion, not simply religions of birth. You can spread them, like jam. . . . In fact the written word, the use of a new method of communication, may itself sometimes provide its own incentive for conversion, irrespective of the specific content of the Book; for those religions are not only seen as "higher" because their priests are literate and can read as well as hear God's word, but they may provide the congregation with the possibility of becoming literate themselves. (5)

However, the written "Eusa Story" must compete in Riddley's society with other versions of Eusa's adventures; it must compete with folk interpretations, and ultimately it cannot win. Despite being written down and passed on, it is also appropriated by the general public and transformed into something else. This is not to say that the "Eusa Story" (or the Eusa show, as I will later examine) does not have a profound power over the people; it certainly does, and that power lies precisely in its presentation.

The similarities between the "Eusa Story" and the Christian Bible are numerous. The "Eusa Story" is "all ways wrote down in the old spel" in much the same way that the Bible is frequently written in the King James Version, with antiquated spelling and syntax. Both the "Eusa Story" and the Bible are open to interpretation. Goodparley and Orfing have a disagreement on how the "Littl Shyning Man" should be read; Goodparley sees him as literal whereas Orfing sees him as "'nothing you can dig up like old iron he wernt never meant to be that. . . . What the Littl Shyning

[43] Jack Goody, *The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1986) 16-17.

Man is hes jus what ever cant never be put together. There aint no moren that to it nor you cant make it be mor'" (41/39). Goodparley comments that "'weare coming to the curse roads of it Erny weare getting down to terpitation'" (41/39). The same is true of "terpitations" of the Bible; some see it as literal whereas others see it as symbolic or representational. The Bible is used to validate many political actions, just as the "Eusa Story" is used by Goodparley to "get things moving" and by the Ram to keep people in line.

Like the King James Bible, the "Eusa Story" is divided into sections; these sections are referred to as *"Eusa 31," "Eusa 7," "Eusa 5,"* and so on, in much the same way that one hears "Luke 14:34" or "Matt. 5:13." The "Eusa Story" is divided into thirty-three chapters; Brooder Walker "wer 33 when he dyd" (15)—so was Jesus Christ. These are some of the similarities between the "Eusa Story" and the Bible.

The "Eusa Story" and its "cult" is, according to David Cowart, "more a piece of government propaganda than an authentic religion [and] exists as a convenient tool of the Ram" (Cowart 89). Cowart says that "Goodparley, that would-be Big Brother, attempts to justify his new aspirations by reshaping the Eusa Story. He seeks, thereby, to rewrite history" (89). History, however, is constantly being rewritten, consciously and unconsciously. Goodparley tries to rewrite history; Riddley succeeds. Riddley Walker "reshapes" the Eusa Story in a radical sense by departing entirely from it and presenting a "new show" (Riddley "liket the busting out part" of "Fools Circel 9wys). Riddley reshapes history all the more by literally writing it down.

The "Eusa Story," like "Hart of the Wood" and "Why the Dog Wont Show Its Eyes," is an allegorical rendering of what happened "time back way back"; this version, however, is official, concerned more with the scientific particulars of nuclear weaponry than abstract descriptions. International tension, presumably between the United States and the Soviet Union (those two being the prime candidates for mutual mistrust), is summarised as "thayr cum enemes aul roun and maykin Warr" (30/28). The protagonist of the story is Eusa, whose name could be derived from U.S.A., as most critics have noticed.[44] He is a scientist: "Eusa wuz a noing man he noet how tu bigger the smaul & he noet how to smauler the big" (30/29). He is "werkin for Mr Clevver," the "Big Man uv Inland." When war breaks out, Eusa says to Mr Clevver:

> Now wewl nead masheans uv Warr. Wewl nead boats that go on the water & boats that go in the ayr as wel & wewl nead Berstin Fyr. (30/28)

Mr Clevver, however, believes that "thayr are tu menne agenst us this tym we must du betteren that. We keap fytin aul thees Warrs wy doan we jus du 1 Big 1" (30/29). Eusa is then sent on a quest for that "1 Big 1." The story of his quest involves both scientific and religious explanations for nuclear warfare. When Eusa "smaulert his self down tu it [the doar uv the stoan]" and when he "gon in tu particklers uv it" (30/29) he could be seen as using a microscope to examine the particles of carbon; the "wud in the hart uv the stoan" is carbon.

[44] Branscomb 33, Dowling *Fictions* 202, Maynor and Patteson 19, Noel 293. Maynor and Patteson ludicrously suggest that Eusa is derived from St. Augustine: "Eusa is said to have been the '1st Ardship of Cambry' (80); hence, EUSA may have been extracted from AUGUSTINE" (19).

Just as there is a dog in "Why the Dog Wont Show Its Eyes," there are also dogs in this story. Eusa takes these dogs, Folleree and Folleroo, with him into the stone to help find the "Littl Shynin Man the Addom" who "runs in the wud" (30/29). The dogs attempt to warn Eusa about searching for the Littl Shynin Man: "Thay dogs stud up on thear hyn legs & taukin lyk men. Folleree sed, Lukin for the 1 yu wil aul ways fyn thay 2. Folleroo sed, Thay 2 is 2ce as bad as the 1" (31/29). However, Eusa is not impressed by their behaviour and he rejects their advice: "Eusa sed, I woan be tol by amminals. He beat thay dogs & on thay gon" (31/29). Like the couple in "Why the Dog Wont Show Its Eyes" Eusa turns away from the "1st knowing"; he won't be told by animals. Recalling the fate of the man and the woman who wanted to go beyond the "1st knowing," the reader is alerted to potential disaster for Eusa. Eusa is defying the natural world and acting irresponsibly, assuming that human knowledge is more important than what the dogs have to tell him.

Eusa finally discovers the Littl Shynin Man the Addom standing on the head of the "Hart uv the Wud . . . the Stag uv the Wud . . . the 12 Poynt Stag" (31/29), between the horns. His arms are "owt stretcht & each han holdin tu a horn" (31/30). Eusa becomes angry because the Addom does not protect himself from Eusa's "shutin weppn." Eusa says to the Stag, while holding the weapon, "Wy doan yu run? Yu no wut I am goin tu du" (31/30). The stag offers a harsh message: "Eusa yu ar talkin tu the Hart uv the Wud. Nuthing wil run frum yu enne mor but tym tu cum & yu wil run from evere thing" (31/30). However, Eusa, disregarding the Stag's message, kills the Stag just as he had beaten Folleree and Folleroo for their

advice. Eusa then grabs the Littl Man by his arms and holds him "lyk twichin for water with a hayzel" (31/30), while interrogating him about the "No. uv the 1 Big 1." The Littl Man says that Eusa knows the number: "Eusa its in yu the saym as its in me" (31-2/30). However, because Eusa has lost the "1st knowing" and his connection with the natural world, he cannot understand; he begins to pull the man apart while demanding more information. Finally the Littl Shynin Man says, "I wan tu aul I wan tu nuthing" (32/30); this is the "No." which Eusa is seeking. However, the Addom is dead, "[p]ult in 2 lyk he wuz a chikken" (32/30). By splitting the atom/Addom, Eusa releases the "Master Chaynjis" and quickly writes down the "Nos. uv them." He has invented nuclear power and, by extension, nuclear warfare: the split Addom exudes "shyningnes in wayvs in spredin circels. Wivverin & wayverin & humin with a hy soun" (32/31). When a strong wind rises, Folleree and Folleroo stand up again to talk. They warn Eusa "uv tym tu cum. . . . The lan wil dy & thay peapl wil eat 1 a nuther. The water wil be poysen & the peapl wil drink blud" (32/31). Eusa's reaction to this is violent: he "kilt boath dogs he shot them ded" (32/31). In doing so, he "kills" any connection he may have with the natural world. His killing stems from a refusal to listen to the natural world.

After Eusa leaves "the hart uv the wud hart uv the stoan" he puts the "1 Big 1 in barms" and, with Mr Clevver, drops so many bombs that "thay kilt as menne uv thear oan as thay kilt enemes" (33/31). Mr Clevver does not care that the world has been destroyed—"it wuz aul the saym tu him poyzen wuz meat & drink tu him he wuz that hard" (33/31)—but Eusa goes off with his "wyf & 2 littl suns . . . lukin for a nuther plays tu liv" (33/31).

This first part of the "Eusa Story" comprises eighteen sections or chapters, telling of Eusa's dealings with the natural world. Eusa, having lost the "1st knowing," treats the animal world as well as the entire natural world, including physical phenomena such as particles, atoms, wood, stone, and so on, as subservient to himself. Eusa represents here the scientific human mind and the mentality of all humans who have lost touch with what it means to live on this planet. Eusa does not act reciprocally with other life forms but rather uses them to get what he wants: he uses the dogs to help him find the Littl Shynin Man, but when the dogs try to warn him he first beats them and later kills them; he uses the Littl Shynin Man the Addom (atom) to derive the numbers of the "1 Big 1," but when the Littl Man has served his purpose he is forgotten. The name "Eusa," then, might also mean "user." Eusa's actions are violent, rash, and egocentric; in this way he best represents contemporary Western humankind. Throughout his quest in "the hart uv the wud hart uv the stoan" Eusa never stops to think about where his actions will lead; he cuts himself off from the world around him and blocks out any information coming to him from the natural world. Like most people in the industrialised world, Eusa thinks of himself as somehow superior to all other life forms.

The next part of the "Eusa Story" deals with the consequences of Eusa's actions. He is separated from his wife (who is taken from him) and later his sons (who are also taken from him). Just as he isolated himself from the natural world when he went searching for the Littl Shynin Man, so he is now isolated from the human world.

The fabric of life after the "1 Big 1" is here portrayed much as it is in "Hart of the Wood" and "Why the Dog Wont Show Its Eyes"; the imagery and language, however, are much starker: "Evere thing wuz blak & rottin. Ded peapl & pigs eatin them & thay pigs dyd. Dog paks after peapl & peapl after dogs tu eat them the saym. Smoak goin up frum bernin evere wayr" (33/31). After some "hevve men" take Eusa's wife on a ship, leaving Eusa behind with his two sons, there is another description of "Bad Tym":

> Bad Tym it wuz then. Peapl din no if thay wud be alyv 1 day tu the nex. Din even no if thayd be alyv 1 min tu the nex. Sum stuk tu gether sum din. Sum tyms thay dru lots. Sum got et so uthers cud liv. Cudn be shur uv nuthing din no wut wuz sayf tu eat or drink & tryin tu keap wyd uv uther forajers & dogs it wuz onle Luck if enne 1 stayd alyv. (33/32)

This is a very stark, even emotionless, account of the hardships endured after the nuclear holocaust. The situation of the child in "Hart of the Wood" is summed up in seven words here: "Sum got et so uthers cud liv." The mutual desire of human and dogs to eat the other is presented in a much starker manner than in "Why the Dog Wont Show Its Eyes": "Dog paks after peapl & peapl after dogs tu eat them the saym." Certainly the description of post-holocaust existence is far from detailed, yet it is exactly this lack of detail which makes the description so effective. The language is simple and direct, with no extraneous material, as if words themselves are as scarce as food. Conditions and events are related in point form; the rest of the "Eusa Story" is a detailed account of Eusa's misadventures. The implication is that the reason behind the nuclear war (the "1 Big 1" and the "Master Chaynjis") is more important than what happened as a result of it. It is an attempt to explain *why* the people of Inland are in their present situation.

Throughout the next few sections of the "Eusa Story," after losing his wife, Eusa is further separated. His two sons leave him when the two halves of the Littl Shyning Man along with Folleree and Folleroo take them away. Eusa follows them but eventually faints beside the river; he opens his eyes later to see the Littl Shynin Man in one piece. Eusa and the Littl Shynin Man discuss the "idear" of Eusa and the Addom. The Addom tells Eusa, "Yu ar lukin at the idear uv me and I am it" (34/33). The Littl Shynin Man also reminds Eusa that the latter "let thay Nos. uv the Master Chaynjis owt" (35/33), and Eusa repents: "I no I dun wut I dun & I wish I hadn but Im thru with aul that now I jus wan tu liv qwyet" (35/34). However, the Littl Shynin Man informs Eusa that he cannot "liv qwyet": he must go through all the "Master Chaynjis"; one must always be responsible for one's actions and must bear the consequences. Eusa asks, "How Menne Chaynjis ar thayr?" (he has lost the numbers he wrote down), to which the Littl Shynin Man replies, "As menne as reqwyrd," leading to a never ending paradox:

> Eusa sed, Reqwyrd by wut? The Littl Man sed, Reqwyrd by the idear uv yu. Eusa sed, Wut is the idear uv me? The Littl Man sed, That we doan no til yuv gon thru aul yur Chaynjis. (36/34)

The "Eusa Story" is, as Dowling puts it, a parable of "our fall from grace through the invention of nuclear power" ("Connections" 184), but it also deals with our fall from grace through any kind of technology which disregards the planet. Riddley does not hear the story from a specific narrator (as, for example, "Why the Dog Wont Show Its Eyes," told by Lorna); presumably, like the first two oral tales of the novel, the story was originally meant as an explanation and a warning. However, over time,

and through interpretation and manipulation, the "Eusa Story" is used by both the Ram and the Mincery in order to keep control over the citizens of Inland. Goodparley uses the story not as an explanation of why things are the way they are, but rather as a key to *how* to rebuild technological power. This shows how the "Eusa Story" has become a political tool, its subsequent interpretation being just as important as its original "message." This is true of all the stories in ***Riddley Walker***, as well as every text one encounters. One must always be aware that no text is isolated; one must always question not only who is telling a particular story (of any kind, fictional or historical) but why.

Chapter Four

The story of Eusa does not end with the "Eusa Story"; Lissener's and Goodparley's versions of Eusa's life are part of the text of Eusa's story. These versions are not in the official "Eusa Story"; it is important to take into consideration who is telling them and why: Lissener and Goodparley have "clear political ambitions" (Mustazza 24). Riddley's choice to include both versions is important because it is in doing so that he comes close to telling "Truth." His discourse does not take sides on the issue; the reader is left to decide which version is "true." Possibly neither version is true, a possibility that reflects the degree to which any story can be appropriated and reinterpreted to fit whatever aims the teller seeks. No definitive version of any story exists, I would argue, either historical or fictional. As this chapter will examine, the Eusa myth is used by both Goodparley and Lissener as a justification for their respective actions.[45] What is important is not the veracity of the tales but the use to which they are put and the political message contained in each one. The act of storytelling itself serves as a political tool. Not only is story *telling* subversive, but interpretation can also be subversive, as Brooder and Riddley demonstrate by reading against the "intentions" of the text of the Eusa show.

Lissener's version of Eusa's life is told to Riddley shortly after the two meet. Much to Riddley's amazement, Lissener introduces himself as "the Ardship of Cambry" (79/75). By asking several questions, Riddley manages

[45] Leonard Mustazza makes a similar point in "Myth and History in Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker*."

to extract from the Ardship information concerning the political reality of Inland. For every question which Riddley asks, Lissener has an answer:

> I said to him, "Whyd they have you in that hoal?
> He said, "Doing the askings bint we . . ."
> I said, "Who ben doing the askings? What ben they asking? . . ."
> He said, "Goodparley's ben doing it bint he? . . ."
> I said, "Where's Goodparley right now and whats he doing?"
> He said, "I tol you dint I hes in Bernt Arse . . ."
> I said, "Do you know how many hevvys hes got with him?"
> He said, "Its 50 the same as he all ways roads with I heard Keaper say that. Plus the out poasts all ways have 6 on regler." (78/74)

Riddley is being a riddler, a questioner; as he says to Lissener, "'Trubba not I have to keap asking becaws theres things I nead to know'" (83/80). Riddley accepts at face value the information which Lissener provides; Lissener in turn provides that information without much prompting. They both participate voluntarily. This can be contrasted with Goodparley's method of interrogating Lissener ("'I cud feal his [Goodparley's] eyes like trying to dril in to my skul . . .'" (84/81)), or even Belnot Phist, who is strung up with his arms "owt stretcht [and] his hans tyd behynt his back" (146/142), and eventually dies. Goodparley cannot extract any information from him and is shocked when Phist dies: "'Who cud tel he wer that delkit? I never wantit him dead'" (147/142). Goodparley's method of acquiring information is similar to Eusa's when dealing with the Littl Shyning Man the Addom. Lorna has told Riddley earlier in the novel that "'theres mor to life nor asking and telling'" (5), but the political activity in *Riddley Walker* seems to belie this notion; perhaps asking and telling are the most important actions not only in the fictional world of this novel but even in our own world.

Riddley is told Lissener's version of the Eusa story at a time when he is liable to believe everything he is told. Everything at this point is new to Riddley because he has been exposed to a world previously inaccessible to him. In the span of a few minutes he has learned that there is a real Ardship, that Goodparley has been "doing the askings," that there are such things as "Eusa folk," and so on. Although Riddley knows the "Eusa Story" by heart he does not know that Eusa "wer crookit" (81/77). He says to Lissener, "'You bes tel me about Eusa as wel I parbly never heard the woal of it'" (81/77). Here Riddley seems to be especially aware of his own ignorance. The information Lissener provides is Riddley's only key to this new world; as such, there is no reason for Riddley to doubt its validity.

Lissener's story, an explanation of sorts of the Eusa show, is cast in mythic terms. Eusa, having helped create the "1 Big 1" and the "Master Chaynjis" (but later realising his mistake), has become "crookit," with "'playg soars on him'" (81/77). This physical deformity is an outward manifestation of his corrupted inner self, as well as a symbol of the physical destruction and genetic mutation of the world around him, caused by the numerous atomic explosions and ensuing radiation. Eusa, in Lissener's story, runs from the "bernings," eventually seeking shelter at "the Ram" (the Isle of Thanet); "'The Ram wernt sepert from the res of Inland then it wernt a nylan'" (81/77-78).[46] The people at the fortified Ram, afraid of Eusa, ask him, "'"If you want in why dont you say Trubba not?" Eusa [says], "I

[46] The present day Isle of Thanet is no longer an island. The marshland that now surrounds the Thanet district in Kent was once water. By the time of *Riddley Walker* global warming (caused by nuclear war, among other things) will presumably have caused the water level to rise, making the Isle of Thanet once more an island.

cant say that"" (81/78). Eusa knows that he brings trouble. The people at the Ram, however, do not really care about Eusa's plight; all they want is Eusa's ""clevverness so [they] can make the 1 Big 1 befor some 1 else does"" (81/78). Eusa lectures them not only on the foolishness of first strike capability but also on the arms race in general: ""I ben with the las lot it dint help them nothing all ther strongness"" (81/78). He suggests that the best thing to do is to take him in and ""keap [him] til [his] times out"" (81/78). He says, ""Show me for a lessing and a lerning Iwl tel every 1 my story so theywl know what road I took wrong and what harm I done"" (81/78). However, just as in the "Eusa Story" Eusa, not listening to the dogs' advice, had beaten and eventually killed them, so do "them at the Ram" beat Eusa "'to death with col iron'" because he refuses to tell them how to make the "1 Big 1." This attempt to extract information is also similar to Eusa's dealings in the "hart uv the stoan" with the Littl Shyning Man whom he pulls apart in search of the "No. uv the 1 Big 1." In a similar way Goodparley kills Belnot Phist while trying to extract information; Phist is more like the Littl Shyning Man than Eusa is because his "owt stretcht arms" bring back the same image from the "Eusa Story."

Next in Lissener's story, the people at the Ram cut off Eusa's head and "'put it on a poal for telling'" (82/78). Eusa's head, in Lissener's story, tells the people at the Ram, ""You had a chance to do a right thing but you done a wrong thing. Youve took my head youve took it on your self itwl be with you from now on"" (82/78). The head does no more talking and a "'jynt wave'" comes "'acrost the lan right thru Reakys Over down to Roaming Rune'" (82/78), separating the Ram from Inland, thus creating an island.

The people then become afraid of the power of the head and decide that they must "'show Eusa for a lessing and a lerning'" even though he is already dead. They create the Eusa show: "'Trying to do like Eusa tol them which they wer going to show him. Show the idear of him any how'" (82/78).

The reaction to Eusa's head suggests that heads and decapitation are important elements, not only in Lissener's story, but also in *Riddley Walker*. The head of the "wyld boar" which Riddley kills at the beginning of the novel is put "on the poal up on top of the gate house" (4); Lorna then "get[s] the tel of the head" (5). The relationship between heads and telling is crucial to the novel. Riddley's earlier connexion of "EUSAS HEAD IS DREAMING US" draws attention to the association between heads and power. "Eusas head" is the controlling force of people's lives; the Ram is also a "head" in that it is not only the seat of government but is also decapitated—separated geographically from the rest of Inland. The phrase "Eusas head" also seems to echo "Medusa's head"; in 1922 Sigmund Freud wrote an article called "Medusa's Head" in which he notes that "To decapitate=to castrate."[47] He also says that "a multiplication of penis symbols signifies castration" (105). I am not attempting here to explain "Eusas head is dreaming us" or *Riddley Walker* through Freudian analysis; rather, I am using this particular article by Freud to show how power seems to be connected to heads and penis symbols. In *Riddley Walker* there are many phallic symbols: the boar on a pole; the spears;

[47] Sigmund Freud, "Medusa's Head," *Collected Papers* vol. 5, ed. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 1959) 105.

and, as Dowling says, "[t]here [is] . . . something over-reaching and phallic in nuclear missiles and towering spires" ("Connections" 185). The story of Eusa's decapitation and the ensuing "decapitation" of the Ram from the rest of Inland is told by Lissener at a time when he is trying to realise his own political ambitions.

The story of decapitation (castration) also underlines the sterile world in which the action takes place. Even Lorna, the only major female character in the novel, does not seem capable of reproduction: "She wer the oldes in our crowd" (5). Moreover, a great deal of homosexual activity tends to predominate in the novel, notably the relationship between Goodparley and Granser. Also, much later in the novel, when Riddley comes in contact with "Power" in Cambry, he says:

> I fealt like that Power wer a Big Old Father I wantit it to do me like Granser done Goodparley I wantit it to come in to me hard and strong long and strong. Let me be your boy, I thot. . . . Fealt like it wer the han of Power clampt on the back of my neck fealt the Big Old Father spread me and take me. Fealt the Power in me I fealt strong with it and weak with it boath. (159/153)

This is such a man's world that there is no real place for women. The phallic symbols which appear in the novel show just how "castrated" this male power really is.

Riddley, however, despite Fister Crunchman's earlier advice to "'[l]eave the telling to the women and connect with a mans doing'" (65/61), rejects the phallocentric power struggles and, having "1st knowing," turns to "telling" or narrating. He creates a unity from a previous division: male and female attributes are unified in Riddley Walker.

Lissener's story also deals with the political problems of the Eusa folk, the descendants of Eusa who are believed to know collectively how to make the "1 Big 1." Eusa "wuz a noing man" says the "Eusa Story": he was a scientist. The Eusa folk, members of what used to be called the "Puter Leat" (78/74) (computer elite) and "Power Leat," are genetically mutated:

> Faces like bad dreams. Faces with 3 eyes and no nose. Faces with 1 eye and a snout. Humps on backs and hans growing out of sholders wer the leas of it they had every kind of crookitness . . . (174/169)

The Eusa folk are kept "for a lessing and a lerning," although nobody outside the government knows of their existence. Clearly the keeping of the Eusa folk is politically motivated, having nothing to do with the use of them as an example. The government is convinced that at some time the right question will be asked: "'They jus keap hoaping some time some Goodparley wil ask the right asking and some Ardship wil say an anser whatwl break them thru the barren year'" (84/80). The story Lissener tells indicates the brutal nature of the Ram and its desire for knowledge and power at all costs: "'When he wunt tel them [how to make the 1 Big 1] they beat him to death with col iron'" (81/78).

The political relationship between Goodparley and Lissener is important to outline here. As Lissener, the Ardship of Cambry, says, each "Pry Mincer" must "do the askings" every twelve years. That is, the Ram believes the Ardship knows how to make the 1 Big 1, so it is the Pry Mincer's duty to take the Ardship around Inland every twelve years, stopping in the various towns: "'1 day in 1 and 2 in 2 and 3 in 3'" (78/74). According to tradition, the Pry Mincer must interrogate the Ardship for one day in Horny Boy, for two days in Widders Bel, for three days in Fathers

Ham, and so on, until reaching the "senter," Cambry. If the Ardship has not yet given the appropriate answer, the Pry Mincer then gathers the Eusa folk together in Cambry where they have a "some poasyum" (symposium) in which the Eusa folk all go into a trance and speak in tongues. If no useful information has been provided by the end of this, the Pry Mincer beheads the Ardship: "Sharna pax and get the poal." Lissener, the Ardship in *Riddley Walker*, does not want to continue this tradition. Instead, he wants to be the one who gets the "Power": "'Iwl channel the Senter Power my self where theres all the many and no end to me'" (78/74). Riddley, by letting the Ardship out of the hole, triggers a chain of events which leads to a rebellion by the Eusa folk. Clearly, Lissener's story is part of this political battle between Lissener and Goodparley.

Goodparley, like Lissener, tells an apocryphal Eusa story to Riddley; he prefaces it with a reference to Lissener: "'Dint Lissener tel you who ben the 1st Ardship then?'" (121/116). When Riddley says that Lissener told him it was Eusa, Goodparley then launches into his story: "'Dint he tel you how the Eusa folk stoand Eusa out of Cambry for what he done? How they crowdit him roun the circel of Inland 1 town to a nother?'" (121/116). By beginning his story with these questions, Goodparley gives the impression that Lissener should have told these things. However, Goodparley's version of the story is both similar to and different from Lissener's. In Goodparley's version not only is Eusa covered in "playg soars" but he is "'torchert,'" eventually becoming "'blyn and bloody not a man no mor he ben cut off'" (121/116). His blinding and castration are a literal and symbolic loss of power. In Goodparley's version Eusa arrives at Cambry, not at the

Ram as in Lissener's.[48] Eusa's final destination in these stories reflects the political bias of each teller: Lissener blames the Ram for Eusa's death, while Goodparley blames Cambry.

In this version the people at Cambry—"'Them on the gate'"—say to Eusa, "'"Why dont you say Trubba not if you want in?"'" to which Eusa replies, "'"I cant say that"'" (121/117). This is almost the same wording as Lissener's version. Goodparley also says that the people at Cambry "'beat him [Eusa] to death with col iron becaws it ben col iron he done Inland to death with'" (121/117). Goodparley makes no mention of the attempt to extract the recipe for the "1 Big 1," nor does he mention Eusa's pacifist lecture.

As in Lissener's story, Eusa's head is cut off and "'put on a poal for telling'" (121/117). However, what the head says is quite different from Lissener's story:

> Eusas head tol them, "Onlyes part of Inland kep ther hans clean of this ben the Ram which is the head of Inland. You cut my head off my body now the body of Inland wil be cut off from the head." (121/117)

This is different from the blame which Eusa lays on the Ram in the other version. In Goodparley's story the separation of the Ram from the rest of Inland is not only seen as positive, reflecting the superiority of the Ram, but also serves as a justification for the Ram's activities.

The only point where both Goodparley's and Lissener's stories correspond exactly is directly after Eusa's head has spoken:

[48] The maps in Figures 1 and 2 on p. 72 show the journey taken by Eusa in Lissener's and Goodparley's versions.

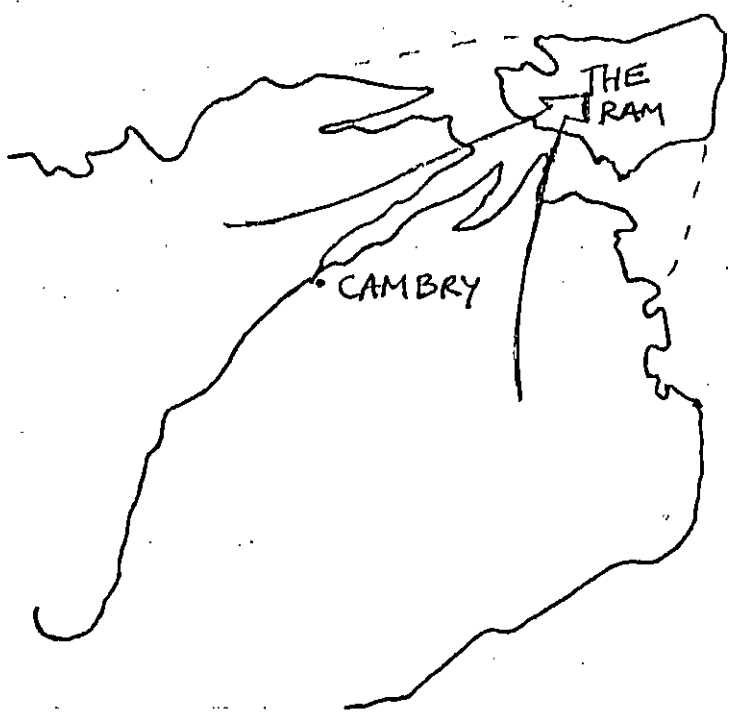

Fig. 1. Lissener's version of Eusa's final destination. His journey ends at the Ram after a general flight from the "bernings." (This flight might include a circuit of Inland but this is not specified in Lissener's story.)

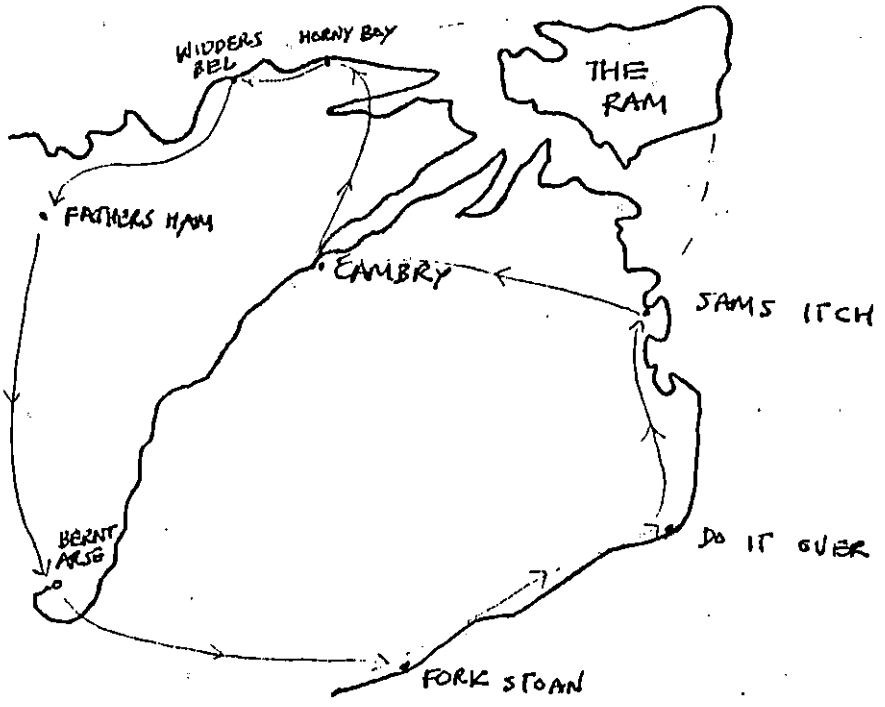

Fig. 2. Goodparley's version of Eusa's journey; it begins and ends in Cambry after going through seven towns in between.

> ". . . there come a jynt wave it wer a wall of water hyer nor a mountin. Dint it come tho. It come rushing it come roaring it come roaling down it cut acrost the lan right thru from Reakys Over down to Roaming Rune. It cut the Ram off sepert from the res of Inland that wer the day the Ram be come a nylan." (82/78; 121/117)

That the stories correspond exactly at this one point attests to there having been, perhaps, an original story from which both versions are derived. The story has been passed down by word of mouth through both the Mincery and the Eusa folk. Neither Lissener nor Goodparley seems to have invented the basic structure of their respective stories. Perhaps, however, there is no original story, but both Lissener and Goodparley subvert the other's story; it is impossible to determine which story was told first and which a subversion of the "original." What matters is the use to which they are put.

Each teller uses Eusa as a political tool against the other. In Goodparley's version Eusa's head is thrown out to sea and taken in by the people "on the Ram"; the head tells them, ""Make a show of me for memberment and for the ansers to your askings"" (121/117). Eusa's head goes on to explain that the Eusa folk must be kept alive "" in memberment of the hardship they brung on"" (122/117), thus justifying the Ram's control of Inland. In Lissener's version Eusa's head says nothing about putting on a show; in fact, because "them at the Ram" (and not Inland) killed him, the blame is on them, so they create the Eusa show in order to expiate their guilt. Certainly, as Lissener points out in his story, the keeping of the Eusa folk for a "lessing and a lerning" does not seem to make sense: "'Nor the Ram musnt want no 1 to have that lessing and lerning only ther selfs becaws they ben keaping us [the Eusa folk] hid long a nuff aint they'" (82/79).

Lissener's version, then, makes the Ram responsible for Eusa's death, whereas Goodparley's makes "them at Cambry" responsible. A political battle for power exists between the Ram and the Eusa folk. Even though the Eusa folk are imprisoned at Cambry, they are not prevented from becoming involved in a political struggle. Lissener, by telling Riddley his story, establishes contact with the outside world. Because the Eusa folk's story has never been told publicly, Lissener is finally voicing a previously silenced story. In doing so he is creating the possibility of obtaining outside help. Goodparley's version of the story is used to undermine any confidence built between Riddley and Lissener. This is an example of narrative used for political ends; all narrative discourses are political in some way, by either bolstering the *status quo* or subverting it. In this sense, Eusa's head *is* dreaming us, that is, the discourse that comes from the head determines the activity and consciousness of those that hear it. Riddley's discourse also is "a lessing and a lerning," and, like the stories of Eusa, is dreaming us: our consciousness is being altered and re-created by the text; in order to read *Riddley Walker* one must constantly be involved in rethinking the ways in which we see the world. The language demands a rethinking of how we communicate; the interpolated stories demand a rethinking of the role of fiction in society; and the treatment of history demands a rethinking of the historical foundations upon which our society is built. Riddley manages to rethink his way out of his society by thinking in a radically different way; readers of *Riddley Walker* are called upon to rethink the present values and structures of our own society.

It is interesting to note that Rightway Flinter, the leader of Weaping Form, is acquainted with Goodparley's version of the story: "'When Eusa came back to Cambry he wer blyn and bloody he stood outside the gate and the dogs licking his soars . . .'" (208/203). Lissener's version of the Eusa story has not managed to become popular because the Eusa folk are isolated and cannot establish contact with the communities of Inland; Goodparley, on the other hand, has every opportunity to travel and convey the propaganda of the state. By telling Riddley the story, Lissener is breaking through the social barrier in an attempt to turn Riddley against Goodparley.

The story of Eusa does not end even with the apocryphal versions of Goodparley and Lissener; it continues in the Eusa show, the propagandistic puppet show presented by the "Pry Mincer" and the "Wes Mincer." Based loosely on the present day *Punch and Judy* shows, the Eusa show keeps the population of Inland controlled. The Eusa show is both entertaining and instructive, the "connexion man" who interprets each show being responsible for the "message" which is contained in the show. The Eusa show is clearly meant as an organ of propaganda for the government; however, because each interpretation of the show is different and controlled by the connexion man, the government really has no power over the intentions of its shows. The interpretation, in some cases, undermines the government's attempts to control the thinking of the people.

Riddley's father, Brooder, is a thinker (as his name suggests). He is also a man of few, but well chosen, words. His finest "connexion," recalled by Riddley, directly undermines the propaganda provided by the Eusa show;

Brooder "ben prowd of his reveal for that 1 moren mos he done becaws for 1ce the crowd movit on his words" (59/56). That particular Eusa show deals with the topical event of Littl Salting being "largent in by Dog Et Form" (56/53):

> Dog Et tol some cow shit story of a Outland raid from over water they said thats how Littl Salting got ther Big Man kilt plus 8 mor dead and the res of the crowd sparsit out to who ever wud take them in. In that woal story Dog Et tol there bint a word of Truth only how many dead. Every body knowit Dog Et said, "Les largen in to gether" and Littl Salting said "No" which it wer arga warga for them. (56/53)

This Eusa show is an attempt to justify Dog Et Form's incorporation of Littl Salting; the government would have more control over a unified Inland than one in which the communities are spread out, so Goodparley and Orfing in their show are trying to encourage a union of communities. This Eusa show stars Mr Clevver, Eusa, and a "salting bloak" who represents Littl Salting. The action revolves around the protection of property against invaders. While the "salting bloak" worries about his "peace of shoar" (57/54) being taken by Eusa, a "hevvy bloak" comes behind him and knocks him out, taking his salt. Eusa's cow is also taken by the "hevvy bloak." Eusa and the "salting bloak" decide to "'largen in to gether itwl be the safes thing for boath of [them]'" (59/56).

Brooder Walker, instead of interpreting the show as a message encouraging unification, decides to engage in a resistant reading of this particular "text"; he says, "'Wel you know there it is. A littl salting and no saver'" (60/57). The next day the crowd acts upon his "reveal" and "pul[s] out of Crippel the Farn and come[s] up to How Fents which ben stanning

emty" (60/57). The neighbouring community, Hoggem Form, had "the same look in ther eye as Dog Et had befor they swallert Littl Salting" (60/57).

Several issues are being dealt with here. This is an example of how the myth of Eusa is being used as a political tool. The invention of the Eusa show enables the government to create any story about Eusa in order to explain or justify its actions. The actual "Eusa Story," no matter how sacred, is irrelevant to the Eusa show, but serves as a basis upon which to form subsequent "texts" of Eusa stories. It also shows that the Eusa show, despite its propagandist intention, can be subverted through interpretation. The government wants the amalgamation of Littl Salting and Dog Et to be interpreted as a positive event; however, Brooder interprets the show very differently. The Eusa show, partly because of its performative nature but mostly because it is just another text, has indeterminate meaning; it relies on interpretation, as all texts do. The notion of texts and interpretation in *Riddley Walker* reveals the instability of our epistemological frameworks.

Another Eusa show related in the novel is the one which Riddley himself "connects." It is presented by Goodparley and Orfing the day after Riddley's father is killed at Widders Dump. During the day, before the show, Belnot Phist "from the Mincery" arrives at the digging site and upon seeing "the girt big thing what kilt [Riddley's] Dad" (26/25) orders that it should be broken up to be melted down. According to Phist, the iron "'aint Eusas head it aint no good to us'" (27/26). This angers Riddley because the previous order from the Mincery had been to bring out the iron intact; it was in attempting to do this that Brooder Walker was killed. Now the order has been reversed and Riddley is furious, although he says nothing aloud:

"All the time busting up that big thing I wer thinking how my dad dyd so that littl nothing bloak [Phist] cud look at it and say he dint want it becaws it wernt Eusas head" (27/26). Riddley also says, "I dint have no idear what he meant by 'Eusas head'" (27/26).

The show presented that night deals with "Eusas head"; the cast includes Eusa, Mr Clevver, and the Littl Shyning Man. Eusa invents and uses a computer, feeding information from his head into the computer. Mr Clevver sees him doing this, so he knows how to drain Eusa's head. He empties Eusa's head of any information by feeding it into the computer. Then Mr Clevver leaves with the box ("Eusas head"); Eusa is left, literally, mindless. He cannot remember any information at all, including his own name. The Littl Shyning Man descends, informing Eusa that "Good Time" can only occur if Eusa gets his head back from Mr Clevver.

The show appears to end at this point, with Eusa descending from view. However, Orfing will not let the show stop. He demands an explanation for Eusa's rewriting of the "Eusa Story": "'. . . you put the 1 Big 1 in barms dint you. It says [so] in *Eusa 18*. . . . Yet now in this here show youre telling us it bint like that'" (51/48-9). The implication of the new version is that the responsibility does not lie with Eusa but with Mr Clevver: "'Youre saying he took your knowing and he done it all'" (51/49). What really irritates Orfing is the manipulation of the "Eusa Story": "All this long time we ben beleaving it like you tol it in the *Eusa Story* and now you come on telling it woaly diffrent. What in the worl makes you think weare going to beleave a new story now?'" (51/49). Eusa claims that the story is "trufax." Orfing wonders why Eusa chooses now to change the story,

stressing that although the Eusa shows constantly change and each one is different, the original Eusa Story "'ben wrote time back way back nor you cant change it no 1 never ever changit the story befor this. That storys got to stay the same what ever it is and nothing changit'" (52/49).

One must bear in mind that it is Goodparley who is controlling the puppet of Eusa, literally putting words in his mouth. Although Orfing is distressed by the rewriting of the Eusa story by Eusa (Goodparley), this incident is not isolated or unusual; every performance of the Eusa show is an implicit rewriting of the "Eusa Story." Goodparley is eager to get "'every body moving [frontways]'" (41/39), so he attempts to exonerate Eusa from the guilt which has been associated with his name. By setting the action "time back way back" Goodparley is depending upon the cultural associations which the audience will make with the well-known "Eusa Story," which also takes place "time back way back"; Goodparley retells the myth by returning to the past and making Eusa claim that the story is "trufax." However, despite this effort to portray Eusa as a victim of circumstances, Goodparley is met by opposition from Orfing.

Later, when Riddley does his connexion for the show, instead of saying, "'The man as got the hevvyness took off him wer ready to take on some mor'" (61/58), as he had planned, he says, "'EUSAS HEAD IS DREAMING US.'" (62/59). His reveal is a mystical one which transcends the mundane world. Eusa's head is the controller, while the people are the ones controlled, or dreamt. This is similar to Lorna's notion that "'theres some thing in us it dont have no name. . . . It thinks us but it dont think *like* us'" (6-7), and Riddley's subsequent musing: "Our woal life is a idear we

dint think of nor we dont know what it is. What a way to live" (7). Riddley's writing is an attempt to deal with "that thing whats in us lorn and loan and oansome" (7). Furthermore, when Riddley is watching the Eusa show which he will later have to connect, he feels as though he is seeing Eusa for the first time; the "way he kep terning his head it made me think on that thing with no name looking out thru our eye hoals" (46/43). The reveal of "Eusa's head is dreaming us" seems to undermine Goodparley's attempt to portray an innocent Eusa; Eusa is in all of us, dictating our lives while we remain ignorant of it. This is similar to "original sin," in which state, according to orthodox Christian beliefs, all humans are born. But Riddley's reveal is more complex than this: it implies that "Eusas head," a mixture of both human nature and whatever prevailing ideology exists, controls us, creating the potential for evil in all of us; we are socially constructed as well as being innately evil. However, as Riddley demonstrates by jumping the "fents" and turning away from the struggle for power, one can attempt to escape this control.

Riddley's interpretation of the text of the Eusa show undermines Goodparley's intentions in much the same way that Brooder had done in his reveal. However, Riddley's mystical revelation is far beyond the comprehension of the crowd, whereas Brooder's was practical and easily understood. In both cases, though, it is the art of interpretation which proves to be politically powerful. The notion that a connexion man is needed to "reveal" to the crowd the message of the show indicates that the crowd cannot analyse texts for themselves. The interpretation is as much a part of the propaganda as the show itself but, as with Brooder and Riddley,

sometimes it can undermine the puppeteer's intention. In the same way Lissener's and Goodparley's stories of Eusa are "interpretations" of events; their stories, however, can be interpreted again by whoever hears it. Not only is all narrative discourse political, but all interpretation is also.

Chapter Five

It is necessary at this point in the analysis to examine the story which influenced the "Eusa Story," the legend of St Eustace. It is also necessary to examine the influence of *Punch and Judy* on the Eusa show; all these texts are interrelated, demonstrating how interpretation and adaptation are crucial elements in the political use of narrative. It is important to note the ways in which the Eusa show draws upon, yet alters, the *Punch and Judy* show; Riddley's version of *Punch and Judy* differs from Goodparley's, becoming a politically subversive one rather than a "fun show."

Although there is a version of the legend of St Eustace in *Riddley Walker*, it is important to point out the main features of that legend, showing how they have been used in the novel. St Eustace has parallels not only with Eusa but also with Riddley. An excellent hunter, St Eustace became the patron saint of hunting. In *Riddley Walker* there is a great deal of hunting, on many levels. The novel opens with a wild boar hunt, with Riddley himself going "front spear." Also, Eustace was a convert to a new religion; after refusing to participate in the pagan rites of sacrifice when ordered by Hadrian, he and his family were martyred. Although this does not show up in the "Eusa Story," Riddley could be seen as finding a new way of viewing the world; although not martryed, Riddley is self-exiled. St Eustace was recognised by a scar on his neck, despite his attempt to conceal his identity. The initiate priesthood of Inland similarly identify themselves with the "Eusa stroaks":  , representing an "E." This scar on the belly

comprises "3 stroaks for Eusa" (43/41). There is no vertical line on the "E" so "[w]hich ever way you pirnt it on its never backards" (43/41).

The closest relationship between the legend of St Eustace and the "Eusa Story" is the fact that both Eustace and Eusa meet a stag which has a tiny Christ between its horns. In the "Eusa Story" Christ has become both the new Adam and the atom; he is Christ/Adam/Atom. This is clearly seen in the spelling of the word "Addom." The St Eustace legend not only influences the "Eusa Story," but the themes in it pervade the text of *Riddley Walker* as a whole and, combined with *Punch and Judy*, provide much of the "explanation" of life in Inland. It is a very good example of how stories are appropriated, manipulated, and re-presented in order to fit the ideals of the governing ideology.

Perhaps it seems an odd choice to base the novel on an interpretation of St Eustace when there are a great many other saints to choose from; however, not only is St Eustace the patron saint of hunting, but there is also a connection between this saint and Kent, apart from the wall painting in Canterbury Cathedral. Alan Everitt notes that there is a St. Eustace's Well at Withersdane in Wye, although most of the holy wells in Kent "are no longer remembered."[49] However, a "few holy wells . . . have been venerated until quite recent generations" (Everitt 296). The water in St. Eustace's Well was believed to be a panacea (Everitt 298).

No other critic has noted that St. Eustace's Well is located in Withersdane, Wye. The digging which occurs in the novel takes place at

[49] Alan Everitt, *Continuity and Colonization: The Evolution of Kentish Settlement* (Leicester: Leicester U P, 1986) 296.

Widders Dump (Withersdane) near How (Wye). The reason for the digging is never explicitly stated, but it would appear that it is done as a ritualistic attempt to recover (or uncover) the technology of the past which has been, literally, buried. The alteration of the place name Wye into How is extremely important, for it is in this interrogative that the sentiments of Goodparley and Lissener are expressed. They are searching for *how* to make the "1 Big 1," how to have Power and control; they never ask *why* (Wye).[50] This change in emphasis is the source of the problems of modern Western civilisation, which, according to Morris Berman, stem from "the identification of truth with utility [which is] closely allied to the Galilean program of nonparticipating consciousness and the shift from 'why' to 'how.'"[51] "Nonparticipating consciousness" is a term coined by Berman, meaning a

> [s]tate of mind in which the knower or subject "in here," sees himself as radically disparate from the object he confronts, which he sees as being "out there." In this view, the phenomena of the world remain the same whether or not we are present to observe them, and knowledge is acquired by recognizing a distance between ourselves and nature. Also called subject/object dichotomy. (355)

This is the opposite of "participating consciousness" in which "the subject/object dichotomy breaks down and the person feels identified with what he or she is perceiving" (Berman 355). This split between subject and object enables Eusa to venture into the "hart uv the stoan" to extract

[50] This is related to the questions asked in "Hart of the Wood" and "Why the Dog Wont Show Its Eyes."

[51] Morris Berman, *The Reenchantment of the World* (New York: Bantam, 1989) 27.

information from the Littl Shyning Man without qualms. Riddley, on the other hand, has got the "1st knowing" (which might very loosely be called participating consciousness) in which he identifies with the natural world, rejecting the "sturgling for Power" in favour of "the not sturgling for Power thats where the Power is. Its in jus letting your self be where it is. Its tuning in to the worl its leaving your self behynt" (197/191). This is not to suggest that ignoring political events is the road to take, but rather that the consciousness which produces such Power struggles is misguided. Far from being apolitical, Riddley is, in fact, being highly politically subversive. He rejects the entire way of thinking which distinguishes between subject and object, human and animal, "in here" and "out there," the civilised world and the natural world. Riddley is more concerned with the why of things than the how.

The origin of the St Eustace legend is obscure and ultimately unknowable; it has gone through many transformations which produce derivative or co-existing versions. Gordon Gerould, in his "Forerunners, Cogeners, and Derivatives of the Eustace legend," has taken the story as an example of how an "ecclesiastical legend is seen to have given rise to a . . . number of folk narratives, that is, has furnished the materials from which they were fashioned."[52] He also believes that the "great story-telling church of the Middle Ages" appropriated effectively whatever stories they encountered in folk tradition to create propaganda from them (447), thus creating a consciousness in the general populace:

[52] Gordon Hall Gerould, "Forerunners, Cogeners, and Derivatives of the Eustace Legend," *P.M.L.A.* 19 (1904): 335-448.

> the people have always been in constant communication with their spiritual overlords and . . . in the old days, at least, they were indebted to them for a considerable portion of their ideas. (Gerould 447)

The church, then, "brainwashed" the people through propaganda created from folktales. *Riddley Walker* shows this brainwashing of the people through narrative in the government's use of the "Eusa Story" and Eusa show, as well as in Riddley's own choice of stories to tell the reader. Whether or not Riddley is intending to brainwash or manipulate the reader is debatable, but that any narrative has a bias is clear. Riddley's story is one of warning, as evidenced by the recording of "Hart of the Wood" and "Why the Dog Wont Show Its Eyes." The stories which Riddley chooses to tell within his own story, as well as the information which he chooses to conceal, implot his narrative in a particular way.

One of the "stories" in *Riddley Walker* is the *Punch and Judy* show. Its relationship to both the Eusa show and St Eustace is interesting: as mentioned before, Widders Dump (Withersdane) is the location of the historical St. Eustace's Well and the fictional digging in *Riddley Walker*. It is also here that Riddley discovers the dead hand with the Punch figure on it. At the site of St. Eustace's Well Riddley has uncovered the panacea for the world's ills: the Punch figure, or, by extension, the subversive element of the creative arts.

The action of a traditional *Punch and Judy* show involves the protagonist, Punch, encountering various characters throughout the play. The figure of Punch is best described in *Riddley Walker*:

> This here figger . . . wernt like no other figger I ever seen. It wer crookit. Had a hump on its back and parper sewt there in the clof. . . . It wer a hump and it wer meant to be a hump. . . . The face had a big nose what hookit down and a big chin what

> hookit up and a smyling mouf. Some kynd of littl poynty hat on the head it curvit over with a wagger on the end of it. (72-3/69)

Punch also uses a stick to beat his adversaries with.

Two significant studies of *Punch and Judy* provide much of the information on this popular show. George Speaight's *Punch and Judy: A History* traces the development of Punch through the history of puppet shows in general; Robert Leach's *The Punch and Judy Show: History, Tradition and Meaning* draws on Speaight's study but also offers additional insight into *Punch and Judy*. The precise origin of the Punch show is obscure, but it is probably related to the Italian Pulcinello. The parallels between early puppet shows and the Eusa show are important and interesting.

In the culture described in *Riddley Walker*, even though "'the Mincery never has allowit no show of figgers only Eusa nor they wunt allow no 1 only Eusa show men to carry a fit up'" (132/127-8), the *Punch and Judy* show has been passed down. However, in this future setting the Eusa show is the one which changes in each performance and the *Punch and Judy* show stays the same: "'It aint like a Eusa show its meant to stay the same all the time'" (132/128).

Speaight distinguishes between glove puppets and marionettes, noting that the marionette was enjoyed more by the gentry and the glove puppet more by the common people. The early puppet shows in Europe evolved out of Mystery plays; however, both religious and secular shows existed: "Side by side with . . . these secular puppet shows there were puppets used for religious exposition. Sometimes these were no more than a moving figure on a crucifix [or] a Christ riding on an ass drawn round

the church" (Speaight 31). The Elizabethan puppet show appeared at fairs, drawing its "subject matter from the chronicles of history, its characters from heroes of the past, all jumbled together with no attempt at historical accuracy, and spiced with topical allusions" (Speaight 32). The Eusa shows resemble these early puppet shows, although in these shows there is not Punch yet.

The puppet shows, especially the glove puppet ones, were a product of the working classes and lacked, for want of a better word, "sophistication." This lack of sophistication should not be read as a negative attribute but rather as a matter of fact. It was precisely this unpretentious quality which enabled the show to survive. The material in these performances was the product of "an unlettered and conservative class of the people to whom the Biblical and moral dramas of the old religion were still a living memory" (Speaight 34). The Mystery plays had vanished from the human stage but were "still preserved by the puppets" (Speaight 34). The literary traditions are preserved, albeit in an altered form, by the lower classes. These preserved ideas which create myth make possible the Eusa Story and the show: "we cannot doubt that the puppet shows played some part in preserving the stories and legends of our tradition" (Speaight 34).

The similarities between Hoban's depiction of the Eusa show and the historical "reality" of the puppet shows are manifold. The puppet show reflected a great deal of the current political situation: "any startling contemporary event was chronicled by the puppets" (Speaight 34). Even now *Punch and Judy* reflects contemporary social events; Robert Leach's study includes a photograph of a Punch showman, Guy Higgins, with

"Punch and J.R." in 1980, "J.R." being the character played by Larry Hagman in the popular television programme, *Dallas*.[53] This shows the extent to which *Punch and Judy* depends upon topical events, and how those events shape the show. Certainly a nuclear war could be considered a "startling event"; it is likely that it would be, if possible, incorporated into the show. In *Riddley Walker* the nuclear holocaust has been "chronicled" by the Eusa show, but the chronicle has, through time, become mythified.

Another similarity between the Eusa show and puppet shows lies in the Elizabethan puppet shows. According to Speaight, an "essential feature of the Elizabethan puppet show was the 'interpreter', or man who stood in front of the stage to describe what was going on and to backchat with the puppets" (35). In *Riddley Walker* Erny Orfing does this. The interpreter has evolved to become today what is known as the "bottler": a trusted assistant whose duties include providing "patter" for Punch, as well as collecting donations. In *Riddley Walker* the showmen who present the Eusa show always operate together; "Orfing the littl 1 he carrit the fit up and Goodparley the big 1 he carrit the weapons the same as regler Eusa show partners" (28/27).

There are two remaining important similarities between the *Punch and Judy* show and the Eusa show depicted in *Riddley Walker*. Speaight says that in Restoration England the "travelling showmen had their regular circuits, like judges" (42). Part of the ritual of the Eusa show lies in its political power; the duty of the Eusa showmen, members of the Mincery,

[53] Robert Leach, *The Punch and Judy Show: History, Tradition and Meaning* (Athens, Georgia: U of Georgia P, 1985) 165.

is to take the show around Inland, from "form" to "fents," spreading the latest propaganda as they go; they have regular circuits and, like judges, have political power. The other similarity between *Punch and Judy* and the Eusa show is the way in which its arrival is announced. In the nineteenth century "the show was announced by sounding a trumpet, as it had been for centuries before" (Speaight 119); in *Riddley Walker* a horn is used to announce the show: "Persoon I heard the horn blow 'Eusa show'" (37/35); "we blowit the horn from a littl way off . . ." (208/202).

Punch and Judy began as a street show which appealed to all classes, but which was run by the working classes. When the theatres were closed in 1642, *Punch and Judy* continued illicitly; it was, and still is, a subversive drama. During the Victorian era it was appropriated by the upper classes and it entered the parlours of the rich; it was, in a sense, tamed. The bawdy humour was excised, and Punch's victory over the devil was transformed into a defeat, since the content of the show had to be morally acceptable if it were to be allowed into the establishment. Gradually, by the turn of the century, *Punch and Judy* became primarily a children's show, as it is now, although many elements of the original subversive qualities still exist; it is anti-establishment in that Punch defeats all his opponents and disregards all laws. Also, by sometimes alluding to present political events, the Punch show manages to transcend its position as "merely" a children's show, becoming a politically charged theatre. Because of its oral and itinerant nature, the *Punch and Judy* show is difficult to censor. Many ideas are expressed in Punch shows which would be impossible to express in either print or television (Leach 110). Due to its

unsurpassed popular appeal and accessibility, it is not really surprising that the *Punch and Judy* show has survived (despite alterations) into the future of *Riddley Walker*.

A partial explanation for the survival of *Punch and Judy* in the present day is its ability to change with the times. When the upper classes abandoned *Punch and Judy* in the late eighteenth century for the more refined marionette shows,

> the puppeteers of the fairgrounds and streets, bereft of upper class support, showed unexpected resource. For audiences of the poor and exploited, they diversified their entertainment [and] aligned their shows with the lower class experience of life. (Leach 29)

The strength of the *Punch and Judy* show lies in its marginalisation; that it is not part of the respectable upper class universe, and is, in fact, understandable primarily to the working classes, is precisely why it is politically dangerous to the establishment. Therefore it is banished to the realms of "children's" theatre, where it is not taken so seriously.

That Punch has survived the many thousands of years after the "1 Big 1" is not really surprising, considering the popularity and adaptability of the show. As George Speaight says,

> The details of the show may change in the future, as they have changed in the past, but there seems no reason for it to disappear. . . . His features appear on hundreds of different articles—chocolates, match-boxes, tooth-paste, socks, playing-cards, notepaper, transfers, Easter eggs, Christmas cards, and cigars. He will live long into the future.[54]

[54] George Speaight, *Punch and Judy: A History* (London: Studio Vista, 1970) 128.

The two scripts transcribed in *Riddley Walker* are not as extraordinary as they might appear to someone without an understanding of *Punch and Judy*. Although the name Judy has been changed to Pooty, and she has become a sow, the show stays close to a typical Punch show.[55] The present day Punch, however, does not usually eat the baby (which is, incidentally, sometimes referred to as the "babby" (Speaight 147)), but he does mistreat it, eventually throwing it into the audience. The present day *Punch and Judy* is perhaps not as bawdy as the shows in *Riddley Walker*, but, as the history of the show suggests, such bawdiness was originally part of the show.

In *Riddley Walker* the *Punch and Judy* show itself is used subversively by Riddley; it becomes dangerous. Orfing thinks that *Punch and Judy* is a "fun show," although he says that Goodparley "'cudnt run a fun show to save [his] life'" (179/174), implying that Goodparley would make the show political. Goodparley's response is, "'Wel Erny are you afeart Iwl do a better show nor Eusa are you afeart Iwl bring down your Mincery with Punch?'" (180/175). This draws attention to the political power of *Punch and*

[55] Judy has been turned into a pig, Pooty; pigs and boars abound in this novel, from Riddley's killing of the "wyld boar" in the first sentence, to Lorna asking Riddley to be the "Big Boar" while she plays the "Moon Sow" (5), to "Ded peapl & pigs eatin them & thay pigs dyd" in the "Eusa Story" (33/31), and the place names of "Hogmans Kil" (93/89) and "Hoggem Form" (60/57). The presence of swine was not unusual in ancient Kent; in fact, as Alan Everitt points out in *Continuity and Colonization*, "the wild boar [survived] until the sixteenth century [because] a wooded countryside provides an area of refuge" (32). Swine are evident in place names today, "like Swanley, Swinford, and at least six Swantons, or 'swineherds farms'" (Everitt 33); the high population of swine was due to the heavily wooded countryside of Kent.

Judy; indeed, as Riddley later demonstrates, the *Punch and Judy* show can be subversive.

Although the show is sanctioned by Orfing, this does not mean that it does not pose a threat to the official Eusa show. Orfing realises that in Goodparley's hands any show has political overtones, yet he still allows Goodparley to show *Punch and Judy*. Perhaps he believes at this point that the Eusa show is more politically stable than *Punch*. However, the events of *Riddley Walker* show otherwise.

When Riddley Walker and Erny Orfing present their "new show" at Weaping Form it is controversial. Riddley and Orfing have a great deal of trouble obtaining permission to show, and when they finally present the show, the people greet it with suspicion and mistrust. Fortunately, the "Big Man" of Weaping Form, Rightway Flinter, is a freethinker who not only allows the show to be presented but also comes to the aid of Riddley when Easyer knocks over the "fit up" in a rage. The reaction of the crowd at Weaping Form is mixed; initially there is vocal disapproval:

> Soons [Punch] comes in site you cud hear some breaf took in sharp you cud hear a littl silents. . . . This crowd . . . wer giving words a nuff and syns in plenny. A womans voyce said, "You know theres women here and carrying." (215/209)

Once the shock wears off, the audience begins to participate in the show: "Theres plenny of voyces in the crowd then speaking up theyre saying, 'Dont you worry Pooty wewl keap a eye on him'" (217/211). This demonstrates the subversive power of the *Punch and Judy* show: some people's minds have been changed. Rightway Flinter resigns as leader of the form, choosing to go with Riddley and Orfing instead. Along with Rightway go his brother, both their wives, and their children. Although

Riddley's show had met heavy resistance from Easyer, it has managed to create a new consciousness in the leader. *Punch and Judy*, once it ceases to be mere "fun," becomes political. The appeal of the show to Rightway is perhaps not only that it is a new show, different from the Eusa show, but also that it is capable of disturbing the community. The *Punch and Judy* show, as used in *Riddley Walker*, shows how closely art is connected to politics.

Perhaps the most interesting element of the transposition of *Punch and Judy* from the present day to the projected future is the way in which the show permeates the entire novel and informs much of the action. The notion of puppetry is crucial to *Riddley Walker*. A puppet is a figure controlled by a person; Punch is a glove puppet, so he fits perfectly onto a hand. Puppets appear to be actors but are, in fact, merely inanimate objects controlled by unseen hands. The puppeteer makes the puppets speak and act. A person can also figuratively be a "puppet," under someone else's control. The idea of puppetry extends into the field of world politics, in the form of "puppet states." A puppet state is one which appears to be autonomous but is in fact, controlled by another government. Inland is a puppet state in several senses: first, it is controlled by the government at the Ram (which is, literally, separated from Inland); second, the religious rituals which perpetuate the *status quo* are based on puppet plays.

The evolution of *Punch and Judy* is not unreasonable given the popular appeal of *Punch and Judy*. In *Riddley Walker* the format of the play—the fit up, the figures, the interpreter, the travelling nature of the showmen, and so on—remains the same, but the message is changed.

Punch has been adopted by the government to coincide with the misadventures of Eusa. Eusa, in turn, is a distortion of both St Eustace and U.S.A. Riddley not only subverts the Eusa show by presenting *Punch and Judy*, but he also subverts Goodparley's idea of a stable Punch text. The way in which *Punch and Judy* has been "interpreted" to become the Eusa show is political; Riddley's own reinterpretation of the show is also political: what was once a "fun show" has become highly political.

Chapter Six

As this examination of Riddley Walker shows, the notion of narrative is bound up with history and myth. When history becomes mythified, those myths created carry with them great political implications. The mythification of history, then, is extremely political.

History is a narrative which is, like all texts, unstable. Marie Maclean outlines the ways in which history can lose its "meaning":

> over the centuries a text gradually becomes a token, the metonym of another world. Such links may even lose any semblance of the meaning or purpose they originally had, and come to function as texts independent of their original context and artefacts magical in their own right.[56]

Since history is based on documents—texts—then ultimately there is every possibility that those texts are, or have been, misinterpreted, just as Goodparley (mis)interprets "The Legend of St Eustace" from his own perspective. Goodparley interprets this legend as a recipe for gunpowder because he has a vested interest in this reading. Goodparley is trying to legitimize his ideas about power and progress; his reading of this particular text bolsters his position. It is important how we choose to interpret texts, for it is interpretation of texts—of events, of history, of stories—which governs the way our world functions. How we see things and why we see them that way are directly related to the ideology which surrounds us.

One of the functions of myth, according to Lauri Honko, is a "*legitimation of social institutions*" in which myths "sustain institutions:

[56] Marie Maclean, "The Signifier as Token: The Textual Riddles of Russell Hoban" 213.

together with ritual they give expression to common religious values and consolidate them" (47). It would appear that this is the function of both the "Eusa Story" and the Eusa show in *Riddley Walker*: the "Eusa Story" is the myth, the show the ritual, and together they serve as "legitimation of social institutions." Eusa, then, is a mythified hero, and the show which emerges from this myth is a ritual which reinforces the story. However, as with all discourses, fictional or not, myths are "'put to and took from and changit so much thru the years theyre all bits and blips and all mixt up,'" as Lorna says (Hoban 20).

The Legend of St Eustace, the splitting of the atom, and the subsequent catastrophe unleashed in the form of nuclear warfare are all mixed together into a coherent (for Riddley's society) myth. Myths, rather than being static, are more often "flexible," and adapted to meet the needs of the people who tell them. As Jan Vansina says:

> A number of myths are exclusively aimed at providing an explanation of the world and of society as it exists, and their function is to justify the existing political structure. An eloquent proof of this is provided by myths found in many parts of Africa explaining the arrival of a European administration. (Qtd. in van Baaren 220)

When a myth is altered, it is not necessarily a sign that it is becoming meaningless; "changes in myth occur as a rule to prevent loss of function or total disappearance by changing it in such a way that it can be maintained" (van Baaren 218). In *Riddley Walker* the changes to the various myths occur on many levels: the alteration of St Eustace to Eusa; the alteration of U.S.A. to Eusa; the Eusa show as an extension of the myth (a continual updating); Goodparley's and Lissener's apocryphal Eusa

stories; and Riddley's *Punch and Judy* show presented in the same fashion as a Eusa show. In every case the change made has been political.

Riddley Walker deals with the notions of an unstable history and the problems inherent in interpretation. It also shows the extent to which interpretation is ultimately highly political. It seems that it is impossible to avoid a mythification of history; it also seems that a stable "truth" or origin is difficult to determine. However, despite these obstacles, it is important that each individual make a conscious choice of which myth and which history to believe in; it is in these choices of interpretation that the fate of the world lies. Since the Cartesian revolution, people seem to have been making irresponsible and ignorant choices, if making choices at all. The governing ideology, as evidenced in *Riddley Walker*, exercises great control over the consciousness of individuals. According to Marx, in his Preface to *A Critique of Politic Economy*, "[i]t is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness" (*Selected Writings* 389). We are socially constructed, our lives being determined by the social conditions in which we live. This being the case, it is very easy to become "brainwashed" by the *status quo*. As Morris Berman points out in *The Reenchantment of the World*:

> According to modern science, the further back in time we go, the more erroneous are men's conceptions of the world. . . . Modern consciousness thus regards the thinking of previous ages not simply as other legitimate forms of consciousness, but as misguided world views that we have happily outgrown. It holds that men and women of those times *thought* they understood nature, but without our scientific sophistication their beliefs could not help but be childish and animistic. The "maturation" of the human intellect over the ages, particularly

> in this century, has (so the argument goes) almost completely corrected this accretion of superstition and muddled thinking. (57-8)

Berman rightly calls this attitude "misguided"; it stems, "in part, from our inability to enter into the world view of premodern man" (58). This is partly what *Riddley Walker* is dealing with: an attempt to think in a different way from the prevailing *Zeitgeist* in order to create a different world. Riddley finds his boar hunt "jus that littl bit stupid" (1). He begins questioning his society; so, too, must the reader question our world view. For *Riddley Walker* is, after all, a contemporary novel dealing with the problems of our own time, such as power struggles, the threat of nuclear war, attitudes to children, violence, the relationship of humans to nature, and so on. We must allow ourselves to realise that there is always a different way of looking at the world; we must be able, as Berman says, to enter into a different consciousness. The novel is similar to a Eusa show in that it presents a problem in a stylised manner and calls upon the reader for a "connexion" or interpretation. The novel calls for a radical shift in thinking; we must act on that connexion.

The very title, *Riddley Walker*, draws attention to reading, writing, and interpretation. "Riddle" and "read" are etymologically related; the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines riddle as "to speak in riddles, or enigmatically . . . To interpret or solve. . . . To be a riddle (to a person)." Read is defined as "To have an idea (obs) . . . To make out or discover the meaning or significance (of a dream, a riddle, etc.) . . . To foresee, foretell, predict. . . . To inspect and interpret in thought (any signs which represent words or discourse)." To read is to interpret, to solve the riddle. The book is the riddle, the reader the solver. Riddley is at one and the same time both

the riddler and the solver; as he writes he reads (riddles), and the reader re-writes, re-reads, and re-riddles the writing, the reading, and the riddling. As *Riddley Walker* shows, writing, reading and interpretation are inseparable.

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Title of Thesis: WYE BECOMES HOW: The Politics of Narration and the Political Narrative in Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker*

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May 9, 1990