

WASHINGTON AND LEE UNIVERSITY

HISTORY, FICTION, AND MEANING:
A STUDY OF GRAHAM SWIFT'S WATERLAND

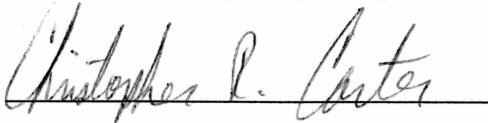
A THESIS SUBMITTED
FOR HONORS IN ENGLISH

BY

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MAY 15, 1987

ON MY HONOR, I HAVE NEITHER GIVEN NOR RECEIVED ANY
UNACKNOWLEDGED AID ON THIS THESIS.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Christopher R. Carter", is written over a horizontal line.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank Professor H. Robert Huntley, director of this project, and Professors I. Taylor Sanders and Jean Dunbar, who served as additional readers, for all their help and suggestions during the several months in which I was engaged in writing. I am also most grateful to Professor Huntley for giving me the opportunity to present nearly all the ideas advanced in this thesis to his Modern British Fiction class by yielding the lectern to me for two days; I am equally grateful to my classmates for putting up with me during those two days and for forcing me to clarify certain issues and ideas presented herein.

Interpretation is free, and I believe that a novel is a different book for every reader.

--Graham Swift

INTRODUCTION

In May of 1985, I was browsing through the Washington and Lee bookstore, looking for something to read during the long drive home to Oklahoma. The special display for that week was a collection of award-winning books for the past year. One book in particular caught my attention, having been nominated for Britain's Booker Award and won the Winifred Holty Prize; Waterland's interesting cover depicting a boy standing in a boat in the middle of a marsh also carried the following caption from The New York Times:

A gothic family saga, a detective story and a philosophical meditation on the nature and uses of history . . . Rich, Ingenious . . . Inspired.

I bought the book and literally gulped it down during the twenty hour drive along Interstates 81 and 40. The following study is a direct result of that browsing trip to the bookstore, for I have yet to cease being fascinated by the richness of Waterland's text, the subtlety of its story.

Waterland was published in 1983 in England and in 1985 in the United States and received extremely favorable reviews in both countries. The various reviewers have compared its author, Graham Swift, to Sterne, Melville, Faulkner, Hardy and Joyce, among other novelists. Set in the Fens of England, Waterland is about Tom Crick, a history teacher whose world has begun to fall apart. His wife having gone mad and the ensuing scandal having caused him to be fired, Tom is trying to determine why things

have happened as they have and whether history itself is a worthwhile study. In re-evaluating his life, Tom focuses on his family's history, on his youth in the Fens--particularly the events surrounding the death of his friend Freddie Parr and the abortion of his future wife Mary--, and on his relationship with a student named Price. What Waterland's reader learns in this reflective novel is that these and other seemingly unrelated events are all intertwined in a way which almost defies separation.

Swift's interest in time and the relationship of past and present is not unique to Waterland; both his earlier novels, The Sweet-shop Owner and Shuttlecock, display this theme, though perhaps less explicitly. Moreover, in both those earlier novels Swift experiments with the disjunctive chronologies and textual manipulations which so dominate Waterland's narration.

Graham Swift was born and schooled in London, attending Dulwich College in the south of London and then Cambridge where he studied English. He says that his wish to be a writer had already been established by the time he went to Cambridge, but that the time spent there reading and thinking was "valuable."¹ With regard to his literary development, Swift claims not to have been a part of any intellectual group at Cambridge and claims no particular authors as having been particularly influential. Although both his first two novels met with moderate success,

¹Graham Swift, letter to Chris Carter, 30 July 1986. Nearly all the biographical information in this study derives from this letter, and I am indebted to Mr. Swift for his gracious response to my initial inquiries. The full text of his letter is provided as the Appendix.

Waterland, although losing the Booker to The Life and Times of Michael K, has clearly established Swift as a writer of note in this generation and one of whom more excellent works may be expected.

As he continues to write and develop as a novelist, the now-empty niche of Swiftian criticism will undoubtedly fill up quite quickly. In determining to write this thesis on an author so recent and therefore so little written-about, I decided it would be more worthwhile to devote myself to one book exclusively in order to establish a complete critical interpretation than to examine less intensively all of Swift's works. Though his three novels and collection of short stories are clearly related and while one could make the case that Swift demonstrates a very definite development, Waterland, it seems to me, is clearly his best work to date and the one in which his previous themes and techniques achieve their fullest and most successful expression.

I have divided the following study into three parts. In the first, I examine Waterland's principal themes and suggest that the novel posits a philosophy of resistance to a naturalistic universe. In the second section, I examine Waterland's structure, style, and point-of-view and discuss the relationship of the narrator to his listener. Finally, in the third section I try to show the way in which the structural and stylistic aspects of the novel reflect its central themes and concerns; in doing this I then develop what I take to be Swift's belief in narration as a creating and ordering action and the keystone of the "resistance" discussed in Part One.

PART ONE:

The Central Themes

When a novel's central character and narrator is a history teacher who spends most of his time reflecting upon his family's past, as well as upon his own, the reader can hardly be surprised that the meaning of history emerges as a central concern in that novel. Tom Crick has spent a lifetime teaching, explaining why events such as the French Revolution happened. He has trained his mind to see all events as chains of causes and effects, endlessly linked one to another. And now, his wife having gone insane and finding himself forcibly retired from his position as Head of History in a London school, Tom is trying to understand how his life has come to its current state of affairs. In doing so, he inevitably addresses the issue of what "History" itself is, what, if any, function it actually serves, and finally, how it is related to other modes of explanation. Swift's narrator Tom addresses the issue in many ways: through his frequent attempts to define history for his students, through setting up tensions between Tom and the other characters of the novel, and through the actual events of the narrative.

The first issue for the reader, therefore, is to determine how Tom and the other characters actually define history, an

issue which must lead to the problem of the difference between history and story-telling. Finally, the conflict between history per se and "natural history," which appears to form a counterweight to the history/story theme, requires close examination and should point out the various implications of these definitions and themes.

I

Definitions of history abound in Waterland; one need read no further than the first of the novel's epigraphs in order to realize history's importance to Swift.

Historia, ae f. 1. inquiry, investigation, learning 2. a) a narrative of past events, history. b) any kind of narrative: account, tale, story.

Each part of this definition of the Latin from which "history" derives applies to Waterland. Tom Crick is inquiring into the meaning of history and his life; he is investigating and narrating past events, and both he and we are learning--presumably--from such inquiry and investigation. Moreover, Waterland itself certainly takes on the form of history in that Swift wants us to read it as it is for Tom: "a narrative of past events." That is, Waterland becomes Tom Crick's account of his own past. And Waterland is still more, for although we outside the novel may not accept, as Tom Crick must, that the events of

the novel qualify as past events, they indubitably qualify equally as "tale, story."

We have then, before ever reading the first sentence, not only the idea that history is important, but also the more important theme that history is not one unchanging constant but perhaps many things to many different people. The term is loose, adapting itself to its use and user, to time and place. To a certain extent, of course, all words have different meanings which prevent absolute definition. But the point here is that Swift is going to be very concerned with these various meanings.

We shall return to this epigraph with which Swift makes such an important statement upon his work, but we should turn now to what Tom Crick and the other characters of the novel have to say about history.

Chapter 10, entitled "About the Question Why," is perhaps the place in which Tom articulates best what he has always understood to be history. After saying that "History begins only at the point where things go wrong," (p. 80) and then likening "the study of history to an inquest" in which the past is a corpse to be dissected, Crick repeats for his class an apparently previously improvised definition of history:

History is that impossible thing: the attempt to give an account, with incomplete knowledge, of actions themselves undertaken with incomplete knowledge. So that it teaches us no short-cuts to salvation, no recipe for a New World, only the dogged and patient art of making do.

(p. 81)

Crick's definition will certainly apply to his own attempts to figure out why his wife is mad and he soon to be unemployed, for Waterland itself begins "at the point where things go wrong." In Chapter One, the reader learns about Freddie Parr's death, and in Chapter Two, that Tom has been retired from his job. What appears to be particularly noteworthy here is the emphasis on inquiry and cognition. Crick defines history not as the dry facts of the past, the schoolboy's lists of interminable dates and battles, but as mental activity--"the attempt to give an account." Moreover, his definition makes an important epistemological statement--that all knowledge is of necessity incomplete. History cannot ever give a complete account of how or why events occurred, and thus it "makes do" as best it can with limited facts and incomplete understandings.

Crick's definition, improvised in mid-lecture though it may have been, is not completely original, as Swift must have known. English philosopher and historian R. G. Collingwood defined history very similarly, albeit more formally and at greater length, some fifty years ago.² Collingwood states first that to a philosopher, the past "is not a series of events but a system of things known," and second, that a philosopher "cannot separate the study of knowing from the study of what is known."³ Collingwood's "system of things known" seems to express much the

²R. G. Collingwood, The Idea of History (1946; New York: Galaxy-Oxford University Press, 1956).

³Collingwood, 3.

same idea as Crick's "attempt to give an account with incomplete knowledge." That is, both statements indicate that knowledge of the historical past cannot be absolute, that it is relative to the historian and his amount of knowledge. Collingwood extends this idea, arguing that no achievement is final and thus every generation must rewrite history, since knowledge has changed and since a new generation may have an entirely different intellectual perspective upon past events.⁴ The historian Crick would no doubt agree with Collingwood's statement. He, after all, still studies and in his teaching re-evaluates such events as the French Revolution, hoping always to augment "incomplete knowledge." Moreover, his musings, in the form of the novel under consideration, are, in effect, a new generation's re-evaluation of past events. Crick is using the knowledge and experience of forty years to try and make a new judgment on the events of his adolescence. This novel will be his system of things known.

Thus, Crick's definition posits one obvious way of approaching Waterland. Recognizing that he can never know all the details, even though they involve him, he is trying to give an account, seemingly to a class full of students, of the actions which led to his being forced to retire. The result, then, is the novel itself which the reader realizes is incomplete and inaccurate. Yet the reader must do what Tom says history teaches--make do with the novel he has before, flawed though it

⁴Collingwood, 248.

of necessity must be, and make a judgment.

Tom speaks often and at length on history, yet certain theoretical principles which Waterland postulates may be seen most clearly when he recounts, while in the pub with Price, his conversation with Lewis about his forced retirement. Lewis, the Headmaster, scoffs at the usefulness of history, calling it a "rag-tag of pointless information" with "no practical relevance to today's real world" (p. 17). Tom disagrees, yet is not so naive as to think that the study of past mistakes helps to prevent future ones. Tom asks Lewis whether he believes that children will "grow up pretty quickly to be like their parents, to make the same mistakes as their parents, that the same old thing will repeat themselves" (p. 181). Asked his own opinion, Tom responds:

`I believe the latter. . . . It's what history tells them: One day you'll be like your parents. But if in becoming like their parents, they struggled not to be like them, if they've tried . . . if they've tried and so prevented things slipping. If they haven't let the world get any worse--?'
(p. 181 emphasis Swift's)

Tom therefore resists the Victorian notion of "Progress," exemplified in the historical account of his ancestors by the brothers George and Alfred Atkinson and their son Arthur. He does not believe, as the later Victorians did, that the world is getting better and better through "that noble and impersonal Idea of Progress" (p. 69). Instead, he believes in a world of cycles in which history inevitably repeats itself and man is doomed

always to repeat his mistakes. Indeed the Atkinson family which he uses as a symbol for the Victorian notion of progress is actually an example of his idea of cycles, for his ancestors rose from obscurity to great power only to lose it all again, so that Tom, an obscure and childless schoolteacher, is the only one left.

As Lewis recognizes in calling Tom's words "the comment of a tired old cynic who's been teaching too long" (p. 182), Tom's is a pessimistic philosophy at best. Although the critic must be careful to avoid identifying the words of fictional characters with those of their author, here Crick is clearly echoing Swift, who says of himself, "Philosophically and intellectually, I am a pessimist and a sceptic. I don't take a rosy view of the future of the world."⁵

The text, both through its narrative events and its symbolic imagery, frequently demonstrates Tom's comments on the cyclical nature of history. There is first the image of the Fens themselves, built of silt

which demolishes as it builds; which is . . .
neither progress nor decay"

.
For consider the equivocal operation of silt.
Just as it raises the land, drives back the
sea and allows peat to mature, so it impedes
the flow of rivers, restricts their outfall,
renders the newly-formed land constantly
liable to flooding and blocks the escape of
floodwater.

(p. 7)

⁵Graham Swift, letter to Chris Carter, 30 July 1986.

We should compare the description of this process to what Crick says in "De la Révolution":

It goes in two directions at once. It goes backwards as it goes forwards. It loops. It takes detours. Do not fall into the illusion that history is a well disciplined and unflagging column marching unswervingly into the future.

.
 We believe we are going forward, towards the oasis of Utopia. But how do we know--only some imaginary figure looking down from the sky (let's call him God) can know--that we are not moving in a great circle?

It cannot be denied, children, that the great, so-called forward movements of civilisation [sic] have invariably brought with them an accompanying regression.

(p. 102)

The texts of these two passages are obviously quite similar. Both use bi-directional imagery which indicate the ultimate impossibility of progress. Crick will use the water image throughout Waterland. At one point he says that his "humble model for progress is the reclamation of land," indicating that just as land can never be fully reclaimed, so progress cannot truly be made. In the chapter which follows "De la Révolution," entitled "About the Ouse," Crick will make the ever-flowing river an image of historical repetition, finally contradicting Heraclitus's famous statement by saying that "we are always stepping into the same river" (p. 110).

The circularity of history fascinates, even obsesses, Tom. For instance, he defines for his students "revolution" in its historical sense (e.g. the French Revolution) in physical terms,

in accordance with its etymology, as "a turning round, a completing of a cycle" (p. 103).

Though the popular notion of revolution is that of categorical change, transformation--a progressive leap into the future--yet almost every revolution contains within it an opposite tendency: the idea of a return. A redemption; a restoration. . . . a return to a new beginning. . .

(p. 103)

The quotations indicating Crick's beliefs in historical circularity could be multiplied at great length, but there is no need for further repetition. What is perhaps more interesting is the way in which the plot, as Crick tells it, supports his own historical beliefs.⁶

We should consider, for example, the repetition of character types. Crick often groups St. Gunnhilda, Sarah Atkinson, and Mary Crick née Metcalf together. St. Gunnhilda, who lived alone in a wattle hut in a marshy island, "resisted the assaults and blandishments of demons," and "heard the voice of God," is clearly a foreshadowing of Mary Metcalf who early in her life "decided to withdraw from the world and devote herself to a life of solitude" and then late in her life "began this love-affair, . . . with God" (p. 31). The comparison is even more obvious when Tom says of his now institutionalized wife,

⁶This point obviously indicates the need for determining the relationship between author Swift and narrator Crick. I shall attempt to explore this problem in Part Two through the examination of the novel's point-of-view.

"In another age, in olden times, they might have called her holy (or else have burned her as a witch). . . They might have allowed her the full scope of her mania: her anchorite's cell, her ascetic's liberties, her visions and ravings" (p. 249).

Again, he depicts Sarah Atkinson as a St. Gunnhilda come-again. For after her husband Thomas has incapacitated her, the townspeople begin to think that Sarah has supernatural prophetic gifts. More importantly, after her sons donated her portrait to the Town Hall,

it was not long before someone asked: did not the gaunt yet angelic features of Sarah bear a striking resemblance to those of St. Gunnhilda . . . to St. Gunnhilda who looked out over the devil-ridden fens and saw visions?

(p. 63)

Sarah Atkinson, too, has visions, for her "fits" in which she screams "`Fire!,' `Smoke!,' `Burning!'" (p. 63) are shown to be prophecies of the brewery's destruction (p. 134). Clearly Crick, who recounts the stories of all three women, considers them to be, in a certain sense, reincarnations, or more accurately, examples of the repetition of history.

In Crick's interpretation of modern world history, however, his non-progressive cyclicism becomes most apparent. Thus, all the "progress" of the Victorian era, symbolized by George, Alfred, and Arthur is lost in the Great War and the subsequent break-up of the British Empire, symbolized in Ernest Atkinson.

For Ernest Richard, my grandfather, was

the first of the brewing Atkinsons to assume his legacy without the assurance of its inevitable expansion Because that last quarter of the nineteenth century . . . which is apt to be seen as a culminating period leading to that mythical long hot Edwardian summer so dear to the collective memory of the English, was, if the truth be known, a period of economic deterioration from which we have never recovered.

(pp. 118-19)

Crick does not deny the advances of the Victorians. The Atkinsons give much money and time to the town of Guildsy, including schools, newspapers, and asylums. Certainly the age itself was marked by the scientific and economic advances which the Atkinsons represent through their growing wealth and influence. Yet Crick shows that such growth is not unending, and, in fact, is sometimes deceptive. For instance, although the Atkinson public lives are thriving, their private lives show signs of decay. Crick points out (p. 66) that the brothers George and Alfred have unsatisfactory sexual lives and are inhibited by their mother. Moreover, Crick describes them as displaying an almost unhealthy and potentially incestuous affection with their daughters, and these two daughters almost certainly have an incestuous lesbian relationship (pp. 69, 76). Not only are such relationships a foreshadowing of Ernest Atkinson's behavior, Crick clearly sees them as private indications of the decay which in Ernest Atkinson become public through the declining profits and subsequent burning of the brewery, his apocalyptic warnings and his final madness and suicide.

Thus, decay, whether financial or biological, inevitably follows growth. Crick's boss Lewis points out, however, as we have already noted above, such a view of the past is not a cheerful one:

Have you [Tom Crick] ever stopped to think that it's the study of your precious subject that inspires such gloom? . . . What we pick up from dwelling on it is a defeatist, jaundiced outlook . . .

(p. 116)

Lewis thinks here that he has just "scored a point" with Crick. Yet Crick already knows that his understanding of history is depressing. In speaking to his class about the rise of the Atkinsons, he asks,

'Why must the zenith never be fixed? . . . Because to fix the zenith is to fix the point at which decline begins. . . . Because if you construct a stage then you must put on a show. Because there must always be--do not deny that there must always be--a future.'

(p. 70)

This is just the point which Price raises in Tom's classes--there must be (or ought to be) a future.

Price says to Tom, who is in the midst of explaining the French Revolution, that "the only important thing about history . . . is that it's got to the point where it's probably about to end" (p. 5). He had already told Tom, who had been demonstrating the circular aspects of revolutions, that he wanted "a future" (p. 106). Price's fears and his antagonism toward Tom can be analyzed in at least three ways. It is, first, an example of the generational conflict which Swift explored at length in his first

two novels. Crick himself makes a few comments on such tensions (p. 180), but in Waterland this theme is generally less conspicuous than in Shuttlecock or Sweet-Shop Owner. On a second level, Price's comments and his Holocaust Club with all its apocalyptic fears reflect a political dimension which is critical of the nuclear build-up. Tom says in Chapter 49 that "Once upon a time people believed in the end of the world. . . . But that, of course, was superstition. . . . then the end of the world came back again, not as an idea or a belief but as something the world had manufactured for itself all the time it was growing up" (p. 253); such a statement would seem to reflect quite clearly Swift's political view-point against the modern nuclear build-up.⁷ But finally, and certainly most importantly, Price's comments represent what Ernest Atkinson represented and what Tom himself fears: that life is finally utterly without meaning.

If water and land reclamation stand as an image of history, then the fens themselves are an image of Tom's conception of the way history affects man--of what he calls "reality" (p. 13). The fens are flat and monotonous with no topographical relief whatsoever. This image corresponds with what Tom says to his students about reality: "Reality is that nothing happens" (p. 30). Tom claims that the fens give their residents an intuitive sense of this "reality" so that they are naturally superstitious because they wish to give meaning to a life which they fear has

⁷cf. Swift's comments "I deplore the present [Conservative and thus pro-nuclear defense] government and political mood in my country," Graham Swift, Letter to Chris Carter, 30 July 1986.

none. While in the pub with Price, Tom tells Price that people have always felt the end of the world was coming:

But the feeling's not new. Saxon hermits felt it. They felt it when they built the pyramids to try to prove it wasn't true. My father felt it in the mud at Ypres. My grandfather felt in and drowned it with suicidal beer. Mary felt it . . . [ellipses Swift's] It's the old, old, feeling, that everything might amount to nothing.

(p. 203)

It is interesting to note that while commenting upon the meaninglessness of this cyclical life, Tom forces Price onto the cycle of those who make his discovery before, like his grandfather Ernest and indicates through the narration itself his belief that nothing can be done for a first time.

Certainly there is no guiding force in Crick's world:

But God doesn't exist any more. . . . He stopped talking long ago . . . He's left us alone to make what we will of the world. . .

God's for simple, backward people in godforsaken places.

(p. 202)

Thus, Tom the historian believes that all events happen as a result of others; there may be natural laws which govern the physical universe, but certainly superstition and supernatural events are the creations of men who wish somehow to add meaning and importance to their lives, for superstition is really no more than the fallacious application of a causal relationship--that is it is an attempt to explain "why."

Much of Waterland, then, discusses the ways in which men

deal with what Tom calls "Reality" which "is uneventfulness, vacancy flatness. Reality is that nothing happens" (p. 30). As Brewer and Tillyard note in the only academic article written thus far upon Waterland, one way which Tom posits of avoiding reality is through alcohol: "drunkenness in the novel is a means of dissolving time and escaping from history."⁸ Freddie Parr's father, Ernest Atkinson, and Lewis are all drinkers. Tom tells his class that people drink "to assuage emptiness. Lifting sunken spirits. Kindling fire and ferment out of watery nothing" (p. 133). Later when he has been drinking with Lewis after being informed of his "retirement," he says of drunkenness: "How it makes the world seem like a toy. How it makes the bad seem not so bad. How it makes reality seem not so really real" (p. 178). Yet as Tom also points out to Price when they are in The Duke's Head, drinking is only a temporary answer to the depression: "It doesn't help, after all, does it, this drunkenness?" (p. 203). Rather, it leads Ernest to suicide and Lewis to ulcers. When discussing phlegm, also an image of non-progressive history (chapter 51), and which Tom says produces a fatalistic temperament, he says "A specific in all cases (though never a permanent or predictable one): the administration of alcohol" (p. 259).

Finally, we should note that none of the characters really achieve happiness. We have already noted that as the wealth and

⁸John Brewer and Stella Tillyard, "History and Telling Stories: Graham Swift's 'Waterland,'" History Today 35 (1985): 49-51.

influence of the Atkinsons increases, their personal problems do so also. Lewis, contemptuous of the past and "doughty captain," "striding the deck" of his "ship bound for the Promised Land," (p. 18), is no longer doughty but is shown to be unhappy and scared, a "figurehead" filled with "worms of worry." And certainly Tom is unhappy, because he thinks that his life has no meaning. Waterland is, of course, Tom's attempt to find meaning in his life since he "is no longer sure what's real and what isn't" (p. 31).

The question which then logically arises is whether Tom finds or can find any meaning. He has been positing, as we have seen, that life is without meaning, but like men who drink or believe in superstitions such as God, he cannot finally accept what he believes to be true. Tom wants desperately to feel that meaning and redemption exist somehow, somewhere.

II

In speaking to one of his classes, Tom addresses specifically the issue of finding meaning:

What do you do when reality is an empty space? You can make things happen--and conjure up, with all the risks, a little token Here and Now; you can drink and be merry and forget what your sober mind tells you. Or, like the Cricks who out of their watery toils could always dredge up a tale or two, you can tell stories.

(p. 46)

"You can tell stories" is perhaps the most significant statement which Tom makes in this significant chapter, entitled "About the Story-telling Animal," in which he explains why he became a history teacher. We discussed above the tension between story and history which Swift created in the first epigraph; here, Crick himself addresses an issue which pervades the book: What is the difference between history and story-telling.

In speaking of his superstitious fenland forebears, Tom says that

when news [of world events] reached them at last, though they never went looking for it, . . . they listened and repeated what they heard with wide-eyed awe, as if such things were not the stuff of fact but the fabric of a wondrous tale.

(p. 14)

It is easy to understand how, to untravelled and uneducated watermen such as the Crick ancestors, the wars and events of faraway places would seem wondrous or even unbelievable. Yet the passage also demonstrates just how difficult is the task of placing a dividing line between fact and fiction.

Just as Swift cited a definition for "historiae" which called it not only "investigation" and "a narrative of past events," but also any type of narrative or tale, so Crick also emphasizes the dual meaning of the word.

Children, my becoming a history teacher can be directly ascribed to the stories which my mother told me as a child, when, like most children, I was afraid of the dark. . . .

My earliest acquaintance with history

was thus, in a form issuing from my mother's lips, inseparable from her other bedtime make-believe--how Alfred burnt the cakes, how Canute commanded the waves, how King Charles hid in an oak tree--as if history were a pleasing invention.

(p. 46, emphasis mine)

The significance of Crick's words should be obvious, namely that history, as a narrative of events is often indistinguishable from fiction. As a child, Tom failed to understand the distinction between the two which his academic training later taught him; each was to him a narrative of events which he found entertaining or "pleasing." Moreover, as the following passage indicates, story and history serve much the same purpose in soothing the frightened child or sceptical man. Still explaining how he became a historian, Crick says that when Freddie died and Mary was aborting her and Tom's child, he realized that history was not just stories and that he had become involved in it.

So I began to demand of history an Explanation. Only to uncover in this dedicated search more mysteries, more fantasticalities, more wonders and grounds for astonishment than I started with, only to conclude forty years later . . . that history is a yarn. And can I deny that what I wanted all along was not some golden nugget that history would at last yield up, but History itself, the Grand Narrative, the filler of vacuums, the dispeller of fears of the dark?

(p. 47, emphasis mine)

Tom had learned, or so he thought, the difference between the stories of his childhood and the history which he made his career. Yet as he admits, the two served the same therapeutic

purpose: to fill up the "vacuum," or to make life meaningful. This again shows how similar and almost interchangeable the two are.

What is just as important as Tom's initial confusion about the difference between the two is that he has once again lost that distinction. History was an "invention" as a child, and now it is a "yarn." Thus, like "history" as a whole, Tom's thoughts about history have gone around in a circle and he is now back where he started. One of the points which Swift seems to be making is that if Tom could think he understood the difference between history and story and could devote his life to the study of one of those, only to find that he has again lost that distinction, then they must be similar not only in terms of form--a narrative account--but also in purpose. That is, the same impulse, to explain or make meaning out of certain events, lies at the heart of both history and story-telling.

Throughout Waterland, Swift depicts the way in which the study of history or of stories gives life meaning. Tom Crick turned to history to dispel his fears, seeking explanations through the study of cause and effect. Yet just as Tom delves into the past to "fill the vacuum" of meaninglessness, so very often the novel's other characters turn to stories for solace.

Tom says that after his mother died, his dad would take him and Dick down to trap eels with him.

And sometimes we pass the whole night while
Dad racks his brains to tell more and more
tales, more and more wise saws and sayings

. . . because he doesn't want to go back to that empty cottage, to that cold bed where Mother isn't.

(p. 185)

It is during one of these nights of story-telling that the novel opens with the story of the stars' being God's withheld blessings. Telling that story, which purports to explain a natural phenomenon and which does make an important comment on human nature, Henry Crick not only avoids thinking of his deceased wife or of going home to miss her, but he also allows himself to believe in a world which has a certain order and meaning to its existence. Henry almost went mad in the trenches of Flanders during the war, where the horrors of his experience made him think, "there is only reality, there are no stories left" (p. 15). In the hospital at Kessling, however, he learned from his wife-to-be to tell stories and thus regained his sanity.

Helen Atkinson, the future Mrs. Henry Crick, says that stories are "a way of bearing what won't go away, a way of making sense of madness" (p. 170). In her work with those who have been mentally disturbed by the events of World War I she says

No, don't forget. Don't erase it. You can't erase it. But make it into a story. Yes, everything's crazy. What's real. All a story. Only a story . . .

(p. 170, ellipses Swift's)

Stories are thus a way of creating meaning, or at least of preventing a feeling of meaninglessness. The idea of erasing pain by turning painful events into a story demonstrates again

how similar history and story-telling are, and in depicting the creative powers of fiction also provides an important insight into Waterland's narrative structure and style, which shall be discussed in Parts Two and Three.

Yet though Tom studies history to escape "the vacuum" and his parents tell stories for the same reason, stories and history are very clearly not the same thing, despite the theme which questions where the distinction arises. In everyday usage one tends to think of history as something which is "true" and consists of facts, while stories are "made-up." "Made-up" is in fact a good phrase, for as Helen Atkinson's advice demonstrates, stories are a way of creating anew; when she makes a story out of a painful event, she is taking that event and making it into something else. That history has no such power of re-creation is the central distinction between history and story and seems to be one of Swift's central concerns. Tom muddies the issue, however, sometimes almost denying any difference between the two, at others, asserting the superiority of story-telling. In part, Tom's confusion lies in the identical impulse but different results of history and story-telling. Or, as Brewer and Tillyard make clear, one can see the problem as the result of two contradictory views of history which Tom seems to espouse.

Crick is torn between a view of history as a matter of hard fact and causal explanation-- history as a sort of science--and history as storytelling.⁹

⁹Brewer and Tillyard, p. 50.

Tom as a historian and a teacher always believed in history as a science, a belief which stresses history's pedagogical powers. Only after he has begun to think that men do not learn from history does Tom begin to "fall back on his childhood conception of history as "telling stories."¹⁰ His comment to Lewis that "Perhaps history is just story-telling" (p. 115, emphasis Swift's) highlights his own apparent confusion on the subject.

It is hard to see a solution to the dilemma Tom poses: story telling is a way of establishing meaning in our existence, but how meaningful can it be if it is "made-up"? Tom himself, cannot give himself completely over to story-telling. While he is indeed telling a story implicitly denying the positivistic principles of history, he cannot cease to analyze the events of his story in terms of cause and effect.¹¹ Brewer and Tillyard criticize Swift's "failure to offer anything more than the positivistic world turned upside down,"¹² and in the sense that no values are explicitly put forth to solve the history/story dilemma, they may be right. But without trying to be too tritely tautological, the dilemma may be its own answer.

We have seen that Crick believes the world to be meaningless because there is no progress. Yet he also seems to indicate that

¹⁰Brewer and Tillyard, p. 50.

¹¹This confusion on Tom's part leads to a mixture of styles and tones within the narration, an issue which will be examined in Parts Two and Three.

¹²Brewer and Tillyard, p. 51.

through telling stories, or studying history, or through superstitions or myths of progress, men create meaning. He depicts man as struggling always against hopelessness, and it is this struggle itself which allows civilization to exist:

I made the discovery that this thing called civilisation [sic], this thing we've been working at for three thousand years . . . is precious.

(p. 181)

If we consider that passage about civilization alongside another which has already been discussed, the possible resolution to the dilemma becomes clearer: "if they've [children] tried and so prevented things [sic] slipping. If they haven't let the world get any worse--?" (p. 181, emphasis Swift's). Crick leaves his sentence unfinished but the obvious intent is that if man can, through history or stories, keep the world from declining, that is itself a good thing which does itself make life meaningful. Just as watermen create land out of swamps knowing water will reclaim it one day, so we try to make the world better, knowing that in itself is pointless but may help to maintain the status quo.

If the struggle for civilization is important, then one can see why story-telling is finally superior to Tom's conception of history. The historian like Crick does indeed become gloomy and pessimistic as Lewis claims. This being the case, he may well give up on the world altogether and simply stop caring about it. The story-teller, on the other hand, through his myths of

progress and controlling deities, may remain optimistic and keep on trying to improve the world, thus preventing it from "slipping."

Thus, Swift is showing in Waterland that story-telling becomes one way of escaping from the endless cycles of history, and from the feeling of helplessness and depression which they cause. Stories give one a sense of control by seeming to provide an explanation because they create meaning. In the same way, Tom as a historian tried to find causes of certain events, thus making sense of, or giving meaning to, them. He thought too that his knowledge of the causes would prevent their recurrence. In this way, he hoped through his studies to resist reality. Thus, Swift shows that stories and history, if not quite the same thing, are similarly inspired and closely related methods of resisting the reality of nothingness. Swift explores this theme even further in the characters of Tom's brother Dick and his wife Mary and their response to crises as serious as Tom's.

III

We have already seen that for Tom history is--or had been--a mental activity which, through the study of causes and effects, tries to explain why certain events should have occurred as they did and thus attempts to resist meaninglessness. Tom has spent forty years using history in order to give his own life purpose and to make some sense out of life in general. The traditional

purpose of history, that man can learn from his mistakes, what Brewer and Tillyard term "the party line which Crick peddles to his pupils,"¹³ gives man an illusion of progress and purpose. As Tom himself says in another of his improvised definitions:

To uncover the mysteries of cause and effect.
 To show that to every action there is a
 reaction. That Y is a consequence because X
 preceded. To shut stable doors, so that next
 time, at least, the horse--To know that what
 we are is what we are because our past has
 determined it. To learn (the history
 teacher's hoary standby) from our mistakes so
 it will be better, in future . . .

(p. 80, ellipses Swift's)

Tom, of course, now doubts this positivistic concept of history since he believes that permanent improvement is impossible. Instead, he has turned to stories for much the same reason. It is important, therefore, to understand this state of mind which causes one to be interested in history--or to make stories.

In Chapter 10, entitled "About the Question Why," Swift makes explicit a very important theme when Tom defines man as "The animal which asks Why" (p. 80). Tom believes it is "human instinct" (p. 82) to seek explanations and causes. Yet as he also says, the "question Why" implies "dissatisfaction, disquiet, a sense that all is not well" (p. 80). One of the consequences, then, which was discussed above, is that asking why can lead to a feeling of helplessness in a deterministic world in which discerning final causes is impossible because of the endless

¹³Brewer and Tillyard, 50.

interconnections of events. Tom therefore wonders whether, rather than asking the eternal questions, as he has done for forty years, he might not be better off without history and the question why.

That incessant question Whywhywhy has become like a siren wailing in our heads and a further question begins to loom: when--where--how do we stop asking why? How far back? When are we satisfied that we possess an Explanation (knowing it is not a complete explanation)? . . . Might it not be better (it can happen in extreme cases--witness my father's one-time replies to inquiries about his Great War experiences) if we could acquire the gift of amnesia? But would not this gift of amnesia only release us from the trap of the question why into the prison of idiocy?¹⁴

(p. 81)

The answer to Tom's first question is "no"; although ceasing to ask questions and simply accepting everything without concern would indeed provide a refuge against the fears and pains of Reality, the refuge could only be temporary. Tom says that it is, in fact, this curiosity which makes life meaningful: "Children be curious. Nothing is worse (I know it) than when curiosity stops . . . People die when curiosity goes" (p. 155). Curiosity causes one to ask questions which may be answered through stories or through the empirical "science" of history; but in either case, one is resisting reality and struggling for

¹⁴Amnesia seems to interest Swift quite a lot. Not only do Mary, Henry Crick, and Sarah Atkinson demonstrate various types of it, but the father of the narrator of Shuttlecock also develops a form of it when faced with a terrible crisis.

meaning. Thus in the chapter in which he describes his early sexual explorations with Mary, he says of curiosity that it "Is a vital force" (p. 38), using that word in its root sense of "life-maintaining" to emphasize that people who are not curious are not fully alive. Two of the characters which Swift employs to demonstrate what happens when one is not curious are Tom's brother Dick and his wife Mary. Both these characters stand in visible and significant contrast to Tom and his philosophy of resistance. Before discussing these two characters and their thematic importance, however, it will be necessary to discuss briefly the important distinction which Tom makes between "Artificial" and "Natural" History.

In Chapter 26, Tom makes a long and interesting--if seemingly irrelevant--digression on the eel. At the end of that chapter, Tom speculates that "perhaps . . . the world is so arranged that when all things are learnt, when curiosity is exhausted (so, long live curiosity) that is when the world shall have come to its end" (p. 154). When his students ask whether Tom's digression is supposed to be a biology lesson, he replies, "No I prefer, in order to point a contrast, to call it Natural History" (p. 155). Tom describes Natural History as that "which perpetually travels back to where it came from" (p. 155). Tillyard and Brewer interpret Swift to mean that which "accepts rather than questions, recognizing--and not resisting--the circularity, the cyclical character of the human and natural

condition."¹⁵ Their interpretation of Tom's Natural History, however, needs the following clarification. Tom, through his years of study recognizes the circularity of the "human condition"--after all it is he who is telling us about it--but this does not mean he "accepts rather than questions." His endless questioning has caused him to recognize the circularity. Tom initially denied the circularity, which elsewhere he calls "reality," and embraced the "artificial history" of causes and effects and progress. This distinction, then, between "Natural" and "Artificial" history is in effect the distinction between Tom's belief in the perpetual repetition of events and the study of them which tends to perceive a false progress. Thus, one can embrace reality, as Tom depicts Dick and Mary doing, or one can deny it as Tom does and through the denial still come to recognize the reality without embracing it. That is, though recognizing reality, Tom never ceases to resist it. The study below of Dick and Mary demonstrates again that this struggle of Tom's is what makes him, and all who struggle as he does, human and finally superior to people such as his wife who refuse to struggle against the meaninglessness.¹⁶ Dick forms, to a certain

¹⁵Brewer and Tillyard, 51.

¹⁶Brewer and Tillyard claim that Swift posits two ways for man to escape the "constricting burden" of the past: returning to nature or through telling stories. I believe they are seriously mistaken here. Swift makes clear quite often that when Dick and Mary are "realistic" and outside of "history," they deny the human experience. I believe that what they call "natural history"--their definition differs, I think, from Swift's--is a "poor third" to fiction and to "artificial history" rather than the equal of fiction and superior to "artificial history."

extent, a sort of bridge between Tom and Mary, initially embracing reality, as she does, but later struggling against it as his brother will.

Throughout the novel, Tom calls his brother Dick, who is the result of incest, a "potato head." Moreover, "Dick himself is a sort of machine--in so far as a machine is something which has no mind of its own" (p. 28), a being who

can give the impression that he looks down from lofty and lucid mindlessness, half in contempt and half in pity at a world blinded by its own glut of imagination.

(p. 28)

Dick's handiness with machines such as his motor-bike, and the dredger reenforces his machine-like, non-cognitive qualities. And because he is a potato-head, Dick has no curiosity, accepting all things without question. It is only after Tom and Mary teach Dick to become curious that he becomes dissatisfied--which, as Tom says, means he has asked why--and finally kills himself.

It is probably not exaggerating to say that, until Mary and Tom aroused him, Dick hardly thought at all. Tom understands history as a mental process; but Dick, a part of natural history in his ready acceptance of reality, is mentally incapable of studying history or telling stories and thereby resisting "Reality." Dick was, then, as Tom's phrase "potato-head" indicates, sub-human. Dick, of course, cannot be blamed for his incestuous parentage, but the fact remains that it prevents his becoming fully human.

Yet after Tom and Mary arouse Dick's sexual desires and curiosity, he changes. When the events of Mary's abortion become known, Dick approaches Tom and asks him who the father of Mary's baby really was. Then he gives Tom the key to his trunk and says, "We go up now and open it. D-Dick want know" (p. 240). Such curiosity, a wish to know why and how things happened, is a very new quality in the former "potato-head." Then, before Dick rushes off to the Rosa II, after Tom has read the letter which Ernest had written to the then unborn Dick, Tom explains to Dick that he is the product of incest. Tom thinks about what must be going through Dick's head:

So he understands? Or understands, at least, what he's already half-guessed. That he's a bungle. Something that shouldn't be. There's been a mix-up somewhere and he's the result.

(p. 243)

At this point, Dick is no longer a part of Natural History. First, he has indicated that he is not content with things as they are--he wants to know the truth. Now, rather than accept his fate as a "bungle," he resists it by jumping into the Ouse and drowning himself: "There'll come no answering gurgling, rescue-me cry. He's on his way. Obeying instinct. Returning. The Ouse flows to the sea . . ." (p. 269, ellipses Swift's). Dick is, as Brewer and Tillyard indicate, returning to nature in the sense that all return to nature upon death through biological decomposition. He is not, however, as Brewer and Tillyard

assert,¹⁷ escaping from history and transcending time so much as he is achieving his full humanity by fighting and resisting his fate. He will not live in a world where he is a bungle, where his father is not his father, and where he may be imprisoned for killing Freddie, so he simply leaves that world altogether. Thus, Dick the potato head becomes, if not the "Savior of the World," at least the savior of his own soul by asserting that that soul exists. Tom can study history and tell stories, but Dick, since he does not have those options, takes the only avenue left open to him for making his life meaningful.

In the character of Mary Crick, however, one sees a very different movement. After her nearly fatal abortion, Mary withdrew from the world for three years. Tom says that perhaps she prayed and had visions during that time; whatever happened, she emerged as someone who no longer resisted the reality of nothingness:

She has no illusions. It's real, this coming of things to their limits, this invasion by Nothing of the fragile islands of life. She's been this way before. And prayers won't help you. And miracles don't happen. She'll become a practical person a realistic person.

(p. 257)

Tom says that "of the two of them [Tom and Mary] she'll always be the stronger" (p. 257). Yet here Tom's observation cannot be trusted. For it is Mary who finally goes mad, not he. He has

¹⁷Brewer and Tillyard, 51.

spent his life, through history, by confronting reality and trying to create order in existence. She merely accepts what happened and then later goes mad, avoiding reality altogether.

Interestingly, Tom describes Dick before his becoming curious and Mary after she has gone mad in rather similar language. Dick looks down on the world in his "lofty mindlessness," and Mary looks out from her window in the asylum "imperiously and knowingly (the common ruse of the inmate: it's they who are mad, not me) at these frail, doomed playground children" (p. 249, emphasis Swift's). Dick came down from his mindlessness in order to fight for his will, but Mary retreated to madness when she could not have her will. Tom always refers to his wife as stronger than he, but we realize that both he and Dick are the strong ones who fight while she merely flees.

Swift's overriding concern, therefore, in Waterland seems to be with how man resists the meaninglessness of repetition and creates his own meaning. Resistance, Swift implies in the characters of Dick and Mary and ultimately in Tom, is what makes one human. It may, indeed almost certainly will, be painful, and probably will not lead the resistor to any permanent happiness, yet as Dick-the-Potato-head so clearly shows, it does lead to humanity, and this, Swift seems to think, is enough. Tom says that "this thing called civlisation" is valuable; this value can only exist when people are trying to create meaning and resist the "reality" of history. If everyone were like Mary-- imprisoned in idiocy-- civilization would not exist at all. Only

someone like Tom, who does care about civilization and about children, who strives to make the world as good as possible, even though he knows that at best he will achieve a zero-sum victory, can finally, if not "win," at least hold his own and keep the valuable civilization going just a little bit longer. And in so doing, Tom does finally make his own life meaningful and therefore transcends reality and achieves his full humanity.

It becomes increasingly apparent by the novel's end that Tom has learned to tell stories, therefore, as a new method of resistance and that the tale of Waterland itself is the result of this new method. Thus, in order to understand fully Swift's intentions for the novel and his belief in the meaningful powers of story-telling, it is necessary to understand the way in which Waterland's story is told and to be aware of the novel's narrative peculiarities.

PART TWO:
The Narration

Reading Waterland for the first time is an unquestionably difficult task. Swift's style takes some getting used to, and the structure of the novel--non-chronological and highly digressive--does not lead to immediate comprehension. Yet Swift has clearly thought long and hard about how he wants his tale told, and he appears to have read and learned from some of the masters of narrative. Although Swift claims no one in particular as having influenced him,¹⁸ the forms and techniques of writers such as Sterne, Faulkner, Joyce, and Ford all seem evident in his works. The following sections will isolate and analyze some of the various aspects of Waterland's style, structure, and point-of-view in order that the relationship between narration and theme may be examined in Part Three. In a novel such as Waterland, form and content almost derive themselves from one another so that understanding their relationship should point toward Swift's understanding of the power of fiction and of man's use of that power as a method of resistance.

¹⁸ "[T]here have been many authors who [sic] I've admired and who have doubtless been an influence. No single one stands out and I think offering names might only prejudice a critical study." Graham Swift, letter to Chris Carter, 30 July 1986.

I

When Waterland opens, Tom is ten years old and his mother has only recently died; Chapter One describes Tom's boyhood home in the Fens and finding the drowned Freddie Parr, thus setting the stage for what appears to be one of the three main plot lines in the novel. Chapter Two, however, does not continue where Chapter One left off, but instead abruptly shifts in style and location to the adult Tom who is addressing his "children" and discussing the recent crises of his life--being fired, losing his wife, and doubting, partially as a result of the questions of his student Price, his own understanding of the meaning and usefulness of history. Chapter Three poses still another change and provides the geological history of the Fens along with an account of Tom's paternal forebears from the Middle Ages up to just after World War I.

These abrupt shifts in setting and plot line continue throughout Waterland. Sometimes there are strong associative properties between the shifts, but at other times, Swift's motivation seems merely to be the creation of suspense or tension. Generally, Waterland can be divided into three "narrative centers" or periods, each established in the first three chapters. First, there is the period of Tom's childhood which centers around his relationship with Mary Metcalf and the death of Freddie. Tom's "present" forms the second center,

specifically from the time that his student Price caused Tom to stop teaching the French Revolution through questioning the purpose of history when there may be no future, to Tom's "retirement." The final center is a large one historically and concerns the history both of Tom's family and of the fens, thus covering eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Because of these three "narrative centers" and of the differing tones which they generally display (fairy-tale versus textbook versus overly dramatized classroom lecture) Waterland could be read as though it were three stories instead of one; indeed some early reviewers focused on and even favored one of the three rather than approaching them as an integrated whole. One reviewer, for example, complimented the "succinct Gothic Romance" of Waterland,¹⁹ while another commented that the historical plot detailing Tom's ancestry was superior to the modern narrative.²⁰ Yet the three narratives are in fact far more unified than such reviewers suggest, if for no other reason than that, as will be shown below, Tom himself narrates all three. Moreover, Part One discussed Tom's beliefs in historical cycles and showed that this belief is "demonstrated" throughout the novel by the events of the various narrative centers. Thus, the central themes are an important unifying factor throughout the novel. Yet just as much as theme, the language which Swift

¹⁹Diane Cole, "A Fen Family's Gothic Saga," rev. of Waterland, The Wall Street Journal 28 March 1984: 30.

²⁰Michael Gorra, "Silt and Sluices," rev. of Waterland, The Nation, 31 March 1984: 392-93.

uses throughout the text draws together the disparate narrative strands in a clearly discernable way, so that he unifies subliminally a novel which he has created to appear fragmented.

II

The third paragraph of Waterland typifies Swift's style in important ways:

For my father, as well as being a superstitious man, had a knack for telling stories. Made-up stories, true stories; soothing stories, warning stories and unbelievable stories; stories which were neither one thing nor the other. It was a knack which ran in his family. But it was a knack which my mother had too--and perhaps he really acquired it from her. Because when I was very small it was my mother who first told me stories, which, unlike my father, she got from books as well as out of her head, to make me sleep at night.

(pp. 2-3)

The conjunction "for" which begins the passage is quite typical of Swift; a very large portion of his sentences begin thus, creating a feeling of forward motion. "For," in particular, in its sense of "because," creates a feeling of cause and effect which one would expect from Tom. As he looks back over his own and his family's past, and tries to create certain patterns and to make sense out of what happened, it seems natural that his language should reflect such patterns. This use of conjunctions, however, is not limited to the historical narratives, for Tom employs it in the "present" sections also. Thus, in Chapter Six,

in which Tom discusses history itself with his class and then applies his comments to his own past, five of the eight paragraphs, and an even larger portion of the total sentences, begin with conjunctions.

Certainly the use of introductory conjunctions is not unique to Swift. And certainly one expects a writer to develop a particular style of diction and syntax. What is important about Swift's syntax here is that he is consistent in using it throughout the book in each of the narrative "centers." Thus, the language itself is one of the devices which Swift employs in order that the novel does not become the disjointed "three-ringed circus" to which one reviewer refers.²¹ The fact that similar language characterizes the different narrative centers is also one of the indications that the sometimes "floating" point-of-view, to be discussed in some detail below, is actually consistent--that is, it indicates that the same person, with the same idiosyncracies of speech (i.e. the adult Tom), is the narrator.

Another stylistic device which Swift employs becomes apparent in the after-school session during which Tom asks Price for an explanation of his disruptive classroom behavior. Price says, "You know what your trouble is, sir? You're hooked on explanation. Explain, explain. Everything's got to have an explanation" (p. 126). Part One discussed Tom's belief in the

²¹William H. Prichard, "The Body in the River Leem," rev. of Waterland, The New York Times Book Review 89 (25 Mar. 1984): 9.

need to ask "why," but Prices's comments here show the extent to which Tom's beliefs are not only apparent to all, including reader, but appear to be an obsession. Tom is indeed "hooked" on explanation, and it is not only the use of the above-mentioned causal language which indicates his addiction. Throughout the novel, in each of the narrative areas, one can see Tom creating patterns of explanation which at times seem absolutely ludicrous.

In Chapter 38, "About the East Wind," the young Tom displays the kind of cause and effect thinking which characterizes the grown-up teacher. When the East Wind came one year, Tom caught the influenza; his recovery occurred at the same time as the wind abated, but when his mother contracted the fever fatally, the wind did not cease, so Tom thought:

And it was because that wind didn't stop, though it did for him, because that wind didn't stop though the fever did, that your history teacher [Tom], without being told and mere child of nine though he was, knew [that his mother would die].

The reader realizes here Tom's heritage as a superstitious fenlander--the East wind's continuing after Helen Crick's fever abated was the merest coincidence. But Tom saw it in causal terms.

Tom's description of his years of married life demonstrate again his unremitting perception of cause and effect. He and Mary took walks together every Sunday, and after his fifty-second birthday they are joined by a golden retriever named Paddy. Of the reasons for this, Tom says that

the official justification (a prod at his stomach) is the inducement to more exercise in sedentary middle age. But brief examination of the fact that when the wife made her sudden decision to leave work it was during the onset of a late and troubled menopause, suggests a different explanation . . .
(p. 93, ellipses Swift's)

Tom cannot accept the obvious and sensible explanation which his wife offers; as Price says, he must probe deeper and arrive at his own conclusions. Throughout the narrative of Waterland, Tom will see patterns of cause and effect in all events, from the purchase of dogs to why Freddie died to why Mary went insane. As one reviewer says, "For Tom there is just not enough accident to go around."²² That is, Tom believes nothing can happen by chance, and so the language which he uses indicates this. This habit of the narrator and its reflection in the text, therefore, is another of Swift's methods of providing intra-textual unification in the book and points to the power of language which Waterland helps Tom to discover.

In the second paragraph of Waterland, Tom says "Fairy-tale words; fairy-tale advice. But we lived in a fairy-tale place" (p. 1). If the language of cause and effect forms one sort of leit motif which unifies the book, then the use of fairy-tale language forms another. The description of superstitions and supernatural events such as the will-o'-the-wisps Henry Crick

²²Michael Wood, "Haunted Places," rev. of Waterland, New York Review of Books 31 (16 Aug. 1984):47.

sees (p. 175) and the rains which come upon Sarah Atkinson's death (p. 73) indicate how certain events give the novel a fairy-tale like quality--almost certainly an effort on Swift's part to express again the difficulty of differentiating between story and history. Yet it is not only events, but also language, which fosters a fairy-tale quality of narration in parts of the novel. The frequent use of introductory conjunctions and parallel sentence structures, coupled with the almost throbbing repetition of the word "children" helps to create a far away, fairy-tale atmosphere which is easily discerned, though less easily analyzed.

One sign of the fairy-tale motif, however, is quite easy to pinpoint. Tom often uses the word "fairy-tale" itself and the formula with which fairy-tales always begin:

"Once upon a time the future Mrs. Crick-- who was then called Metcalf--as a result of certain events which took place while she was still, like some of you, a schoolgirl, decided to withdraw from the world and devote herself to a life of solitude, atonement and (which was only making a virtue of necessity) celibacy.

(p. 31)

Not only does this summary employ the traditional introduction to a fairy-tale, but it shows Tom distancing himself from his wife--calling her the "future Mrs. Crick"--in order to make her a character in this new story he is telling. If he were to use the first person possessive, "my future wife," it would sound rather silly when coupled with the "once upon a time" and would destroy the story-like (as opposed to historical) effect for which he is

striving. Moreover, the intrusive parenthetical remark which Tom addresses to his students gives the passage an important oral quality which is common to fairy-tales. Conrad and Ford, in their respective attempts to create literature which made "an impression," tried to revive the old oral vernacular tradition, and Swift seems to be following that lead, for he will use the formulaic "Once upon a Time" quite often--in Chapter 12, "About the Change of Life," no less than five times. Often, Tom will relate events and then summarize them later in story-language just as he did in the description of Mary's first retreat from the world. Thus, after describing the scene in which the beautiful Helen Atkinson disrupted the soldiers' marching and turned a "big event" into a "shambles," Tom says,

My mother told it different . . .
 "Once upon a time there was a beautiful
 girl at a parade of soldiers, and the
 silly soldiers with their rifles bumped
 into each other and forgot how to march
 because they all wanted to look at the
 beautiful girl. And the general turned
 red, and then he turned purple . . .
 (p. 164, ellipses Swift's)

Tom's linguistic recasting of events into a fairy-tale vernacular was in fact learned from his mother, who counseled her future husband to take painful events and rather than forget them, make stories of them.

Even when Swift is not using fairy-tale language to bridge the gaps between the three narrative centers, a strong oral quality still pervades the whole novel. When Tom begins Chapter

Two with the words "Children. Children, who will inherit the world," he is establishing perhaps the most important narrative tool of the novel.²³ The "children" device accomplishes two important ends. It reminds the reader that Waterland is itself a story which is being told. In one sense, the readers are the children, and the technique of direct address is meant to insure that they are paying attention to what usually is a bit of commentary on the action. Thus, while describing a tipsy Tom's state after being informed of his retirement by Lewis, Tom says,

Children, some brief observations on drunkenness (made whilst in a state of drunkenness). A predominantly adult phenomenon. The very young, by and large, don't. Don't have to. Because children don't need to feel they are once again like children . . . How it makes the world seem like a toy. How it makes the bad seem not so bad.

(p. 178)

These little instructive intrusions abound, but because of their very frequency and the iteration of the noun "children" they provide the same kind of textual consistency which helps the reader overcome any difficulties he may experience from the chronological disjunctions as the cause and effect language which also characterized the book.

²³The specific issue of who or where the children are is obviously crucial to the novel and will be addressed below.

III

Even after the reader has begun to understand the way in which Swift unifies Waterland through language, he may still feel hampered by an apparent lack of narrative unity more difficult to resolve. The first several chapters of the book display first person narration by Tom. Because Tom is a participant in the events which he is relating, the reader should be aware from the beginning that his perspective is limited and may have to be questioned, just as his occasionally fallacious use of causal language was questioned above. Yet there are places where the narration seems to shift from the first to the third person. Sometimes these shifts are brief and serve certain rhetorical purposes in those sections in which the "children" are clearly present.

In Chapter Seven, for instance, entitled "About Holes and Things," Tom says

Yet for a long time, children, even before these hesitant but tell-tale traits broke the surface, your history-teacher-to-be was in love with Mary Metcalf. For a long time the very feelings which drew him towards her placed her also, in his eyes, at an impossible distance, and made him melancholy and mute.

(p. 35)

Such a shift, from "I" to "your teacher" is no shift at all, for one can still "feel" the first-person narrator who is describing

to an audience a set of feelings which he had as a boy. Through Tom's use of the third-person, the reader realizes that Tom is re-analyzing the situation under description. When Tom was first involved with Mary he could not have realized as complex an aspect of his own psychology as the sort of approach/avoidance conflict which he is here describing. He might have felt it, but it is only the mature Tom, who can view the event at some distance, who can make the analysis. If Tom had used the first person and said, "My feelings towards her also placed me at a distance from her," it would be unclear when Tom became aware of this conflict and the reader would lose the ironic tension created by the adult Tom's re-examination of his past. Throughout the novel, Tom will often shift into such a "false" third-person narration when describing the events of his childhood, particularly when he wishes to analyze rather than simply describe. At other times, however, Swift uses a more subtle and more difficult shift in narrative point-of-view.

Because in most of the events narrated Tom is a visible narrator, the narration is mediated. That is, the reader sees things as Tom chooses to present them, not necessarily as they happened nor as Tom perceived them at the time of their occurrence. Thus, when Tom says in the novel's second paragraph, "Fairy-tales words; fairy-tale advice. But we lived in a fairy-tale place," he is describing things as he now perceives them. Obviously he would not have described his father's advice as "fairy-tale" when he was ten, nor would he have described his

home--the only place he knew from first-hand experience--as a "fairy-tale place;" those are the judgments of a fifty-three-year-old who is remembering what the advice and place were like. In this instance, though the point-of-view is first-person, one sees the same kind of tension between older and younger Tom as when the narrative shifted to the "fake" third-person discussed above.

The adult Tom's opinions are similarly present in the following passage:

On the night of the twenty-fifth of September Ernest penned a document to his putative son . . . enjoining him to save the world which was a place in dire need of saving. Possibly he knew, as he wrote this, that he was mad--because inside every madman sits a little sane man saying "You're mad, you're mad." But this made no difference, because by now he was already confirmed in the belief that this world which we like to believe is sane and real is, in truth, absurd and fantastic.

(p. 176)

Although this account has nothing to do with Tom personally and thus cannot indicate the tension between Tom at different ages, it exemplifies how Tom, as narrator, can mediate narrative events. It is Tom who judges Ernest to be mad and who creates the image of a sane man sitting within a madman. When he uses the word "possibly," it indicates that he is in part creating a scene from his imagination--based upon his own beliefs and ideas--of how things happened rather than providing an objective account. Thus, throughout the "historical" sections dealing with

the Atkinsons and the fens, Tom is the narrator, and he chooses carefully what he wants to say and how he says it so that his opinions and personality permeate the narrative--no matter how objective or text-book-like the prose may sound.

In a few sections, however, Swift uses what appears to be an unmediated, dramatic presentation of events in a style reminiscent of Joyce's hellfire sermons in The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. In Waterland's historical sections and in the passages concerning Tom's youth, dialogue is rare; most writing is simple narration of events as interpreted by Tom, and the words of other characters are only reported in indirect quotation, as in the passages discussed above. Chapter 14, however, "De la Révolution," is a prime example of how Swift can seem to switch horses in mid-stream. After several paragraphs in which Tom is supposedly lecturing his students on the French Revolution, a break in the text occurs and the following exchange takes place:

"But Sir!"

It's corpse-pale Price who interrupts. Provocative hand raised. Another of his lesson-sabotaging sallies.

And the teacher feels, through Price's rebellious eyes, the unrest and anticipation of the whole class.

Sir! Hang on a moment! We're not living in the eighteenth century. What about--?

"This nostalgia stuff, sir,"--shifting in his desk with an air of ironic puzzlement-- "how would nostalgia make these workers go on the rampage then?"

Titters and murmurs from the class. (A mob gathering.) Nervous shifting of weight on feet by teacher.

(They've all noticed it: Something just

a bit edgy of late, something just a bit vulnerable about old Cricky.)

"I'm glad you asked that, Price." (How a teacher announces a side-step.) "Because it raises the question of how you define a revolution--sociologically speaking."

(p. 104)

This passage, told in the present tense, and using dialogue and indirect discourse, conveys a feeling of immediacy and objectivity which other sections of the novel lack. Swift does not attribute the sentences of this exchange between teacher and student, which means that the reader becomes like the audience at a drama and has to determine for himself what is going on, rather than having Tom's explanations. In fact, the unquoted sentences describing gestures and attitudes of the participants look and sound much like the stage directions of a play. This passage is, therefore, one of Swift's rare forays into an unmediated narration, since he merely shows what is happening to Tom, rather than letting Tom tell it. Or such appears to be the case.

Between the first two paragraphs in quotation marks are three thoughts which could only be Tom's and which indicate that the scene is in fact being described through Tom's eyes. Only he could use the judgmental adjectives "corpse-like," "provocative," and "lesson-sabatoging," since he has already mentioned that Price wears white make-up and has noticed and mentioned Price's antagonism before. Moreover, a spectator could not state what Tom, "the teacher," feels through Price's eyes. Rather than being Swift's attempt at an objective account, the passage in question is Tom's attempt to do so. Or one might say

that in trying, for the sake of objectivity, to detach himself as narrator from himself as participant, Tom actually shows that the two roles cannot be separated. Thus, the third paragraph, "Sir!, Hang on . . ." is not Price's, nor is it what Tom-the-teacher thought Price would say. It is rather Tom-the-narrator's anticipating his forthcoming announcement on what Price said. This is not to say that this scene never happened; it did happen, but the account which Tom gives is how he perceives it now. Swift uses the present tense here, but it is the present of Tom's imagination while he is recreating what did happen in class with Price, rather than an objective through-the-camera-while-it's-happening present tense.

This device of switching to an apparently dramatic presentation tends to occur in those scenes involving Tom's immediate past. He does not have the distance of time to analyze these events, so he must try to distance himself. Two more examples of the technique follow and show again how careful Swift has been to keep the novel's point-of-view restricted to Tom.

After Tom leaves his meeting with Lewis, he encounters Price in the school playground. After providing the setting and describing himself in the third person, and then making a short digression on the nature of drunkenness, the following exchange takes place. The tense is again present, and the presentation, dramatic:

"I just want to say, sir that we're all--
the whole class--I mean, really sorry about
everything."

"Well that's alright, Price. I'm not getting the sack. I'm being retired."

"And. And these--new lessons you've been giving. Quite something."

Stories, Price. Fairy-tales.

"And we're sorry--about Mrs. Crick."

.

"How is she, sir?"

The teacher doesn't answer.

We reach the school-gates. The teacher stands on swaying legs.

"Look, Price, have you got to go straight home? Will they worry where you've got to? I've just had three cups of scotch. I think I need more. Come and have a drink with me."

(p. 179)

The present tense dialogue gives this passage a clarity and vividness which Tom's normal past tense narration could not achieve. And again the dramatic presentation creates a feeling of objectivity and distance from Tom. Yet the perspective is clearly Tom's; the words "Stories . . . Fairy-tales," since they are not placed in quotation marks, are not part of the verbal exchange, nor again did Tom think them when this conversation actually took place. Rather, as he has been telling the events of the novel the previously discussed problems of stories versus history has become increasingly apparent to him, and he reflects that conflict into this supposedly objective account. Tom "gives himself away" even more, however, when he "slips" by reverting to the first-person plural to describe himself and Price, since in the paragraph preceding the drunkenness digression and in the sentence immediately preceding the pronoun in question, Tom referred to himself as "the teacher" for the sake of objectivity. If he were being consistent in this wish for distance, he should

have said "they reach the school gate."²⁴

Finally, Swift employs this technique in the scenes in which he confronts Mary just after she has stolen the baby:

He steps forward. He deposits the baby on the lowered flap of a rosewood bureau, out of reach of both wife and snapping dog. He sits on the sofa, raising his wife, clasps her, starts to say extraordinary things:

"You're my baby. You're my baby . . . "

Can you imagine, children? Your learned and sagacious Cricky--mouthing such stuff? But look closer children--your Cricky's crying.

He rocks her, this baby of his, this former protectress of his perpetuated schooldays.

(p. 202, ellipses Swift's)

In this case there is little dialogue, but once again Tom is trying to give a distant or objective picture. Moreover he is giving an example of a theme discussed in Part One: this confrontation with Mary is obviously a painful event for Tom to remember. By telling it as if it were a story about someone else, he can in one way remove it from himself and thus ease the pain. Thus, he describes himself in the third person. Yet as soon as he creates the image, he destroys it by intruding to address the children. This intrusion lets the reader know that Tom, as always, is telling the story rather than some other, detached narrator.

²⁴In commenting like this, I do not intend to pass judgment upon Swift. I am perfectly confident that throughout Waterland he knew exactly what he was doing in terms of narrative technique. The point is that he has created a narrator who is not always aware of what he is saying or why.

Thus, although the tense and person or the style of narration appear to vary in the different sections and narrative centers of Waterland, the point-of-view is, in fact, quite consistent. Tom Crick is the narrator of the whole novel, the events of which happened in his past or his family's past. He is re-evaluating all these actions in the attempt to determine how and why his life reached its present state. It is important that the point-of-view be consistent if Swift wants to make a statement on the place of fiction in Tom's philosophy of resistance; obviously, in order to show what effect telling the story of Waterland had on Tom, Swift must make clear that it is indeed Tom who tells that story. One of the most important questions concerning the structure of the novel now arises: to whom is Waterland, the oral qualities of which have already been discussed, being told?

IV

On the most basic level, of course, the events of Waterland are being related to the reader. This, however, is hardly useful information. It is clear that despite the abrupt narrative shifts and the changes in style which are indicated by them, the point-of-view in Waterland is consistent. Tom Crick is narrating the events sometime after his farewell speech, since that is the last event to be described chronologically. The most obvious answer to this question is that Tom is talking to his students,

for his discussions with Lewis and with Price indicate that after Price states that there probably won't be any future, Tom drops the syllabus and begins to talk about the Fens and his childhood. Yet it seems unlikely in the extreme that he would tell his students about the events either from his married life or about the events involving his wife's attempted kidnapping and madness.

At the end of Chapter 2, Tom provides an important clue as to what he is doing structurally:

Children who will inherit the world.
Children to whom, throughout history stories
have been told . . .; whose need of stories is
matched only by the need adults have of
children to tell stories to, . . . of
listening ears on which to unload, bequeath
those most unbelievable yet haunting of fairy-
tales, their own lives; children--they are
going to separate you and me. . . . I do not
expect you to understand that after thirty-two
years I have rolled you all into one and now I
know the agonies of a mother robbed of her
child . . .²⁵ [Swift's ellipses] But listen,
listen. Your history teacher wishes to give
you the complete and final version

And since a fairy-tale must have a
setting . . . let me tell you

. Chapter 3 .

About the Fens

which are a low-lying area of eastern England,
. . . .

(p. 6)

²⁵The ironic ambiguity of this statement is absolutely splendid. Is the "mother" to whom he refers the mother of the Safeways baby or Mary? If Mary, is the robbed child her aborted child fathered by the young Tom, or the Safeways, God-given baby which Tom and the Courts took from her?

This passage perhaps more than any other gives the reader an understanding of what Swift will be trying to do in Waterland. Tom first addresses the "children" and then says that not only do children need to hear stories, but that adults also need to tell them. Thus, Tom had a need to tell this story, this "complete and final version" of his life--one of those "most unbelievable yet haunting of fairy-tales." Waterland, then, all of it, is Tom's story to the "children," whoever they may be. Yet not only does Tom thus tell the reader directly what he is doing, Swift also dramatizes it in the very structure of the text.

The break between Chapters 2 and 3, with its continuous sentence is peculiar, especially since it occurs early in the novel before the reader has begun to understand its structure. The style shifts from the convoluted and chanting "children" passages to a fairly straight-forward textbook-sounding history. Yet the fact that the sentence crosses a chapter break indicates that in fact there is no break, that the people telling and listening to Chapter 2 remain the same in Chapter 3. Moreover, throughout such historical passages, Tom will intrude to make a comment addressed to "Children," as when in the middle of describing the rise of the Atkinsons, he interrupts himself to ask "Children why this seeking for omens?" (p. 70). Thus, given the consistency of point-of-view and Tom's own comments, the logical explanation might be that Waterland is, in effect, a collection of Tom's lectures--except that this makes no sense whatsoever.

Tom has been teaching for thirty-two years and was in fact a candidate for the Headmaster's position but turned it down in order to stay in the classroom (p. 18), so there is no reason to believe that he is anything but professional with his students. Thus it is rather unlikely that Tom would give the details of his conversation with Lewis to a class full of students, even if he does claim to be waiving professional discretion (p. 16). More importantly, the "modern" sequences involving Price and Mary cannot have been told to his class. There is hardly reason to think that Tom would want or need to tell his class about an after-school confrontation with Price or about getting drunk with him at the Duke's Head. Moreover, Chapters 32 through 43 are told within the frame of Tom's and Price's drinking in the pub. But this "frame" itself presents more problems than it might otherwise solve.

First of all, a great deal of the information within that frame concerns the plot of Tom as an adolescent. In particular, it discusses Dick's courtship of Mary and Mary's abortion. At the end of Chapter 2, Tom told the "children" that this was the "complete and final version" but it can hardly be complete for them if Price is the only one of them to hear an important part of it. It is necessary, therefore, to analyze this frame, this discourse between Tom and Price, and to determine what is really taking place.

Certainly it does take place--Price and Tom do drink at the Duke's Head, but those scenes are like the dramatic scenes which

were discussed above. At the end of Chapter 31, after Price and Tom discuss Tom's meeting with Lewis for a while and Tom recounts his speech about not letting things slip, there is a paragraph of Tom's thoughts which almost certainly occurred to him after the fact, upon re-examination of the events:

All right, so it's all a struggle to preserve an artifact. It's all a struggle to make things seem meaningless. It's all a fight against fear. You're scared, Price. No need to start a club about it. Saw it in your face. And what do you think I am right now?
(p. 182)

Tom did not speak these words aloud in the pub, for Swift does use quotation marks whenever he employs dialogue. Instead, this seems to be Tom's description of a scene which has already taken place, so that when he addresses Price at the end of the paragraph, asking whether he doesn't need to go home, he doesn't use quotation marks, because he is simply remembering and not telling exactly what was said. When he says "right now," therefore, he means "as I try after-the-fact to analyze our recent discussion."

An even more telling indication that the "frame" is only part of a larger scheme is the fact that Price appears not to have heard a word of Chapter 32, "About Beauty and the Beast." What seems to be happening in the pub is that Tom explains his ideas that children will grow-up to be like their parents (p. 181), that Price then gets up to get more drinks (p. 182), and

that then Price says his generation cannot grow up to be like his parents' because they (his generation) may not "be around long enough to be parents anyway" (p. 194). In the intervening pages, Tom describes Dick's courtship, the memory of which has somehow been triggered by recounting what he said in the pub. Again, the action in *The Duke's Head* skips from Chapter 33 to 36 and then to 43. All the events of the other chapters appear to be Tom's interruptions of his own account of what took place in the bar. Because of Tom's professionalism, this "frame" sequence cannot be his account to his classes, nor can it be to Price since Price is involved the action and is viewed through Tom.

To whom, then, is Waterland being told? The answer becomes obvious when the following three passages are considered together:

And when he [man] sits . . . in the midst of catastrophe . . . or when he only sits alone because his wife of over thirty years who no longer knows him, nor he her, has been taken away, and because his schoolchildren, his children, who once, ever reminding him of the future, came to his history lessons, are no longer there, he tells--if only to himself, if only to an audience he is forced to imagine--a story.

(p. 47)

Children who will inherit the world . . . I do not expect you to understand that after thirty-two years I have rolled you all into one and now I know the agonies of a mother robbed of her child . . . [ellipses Swift's] But listen, listen. Your history teacher wishes to give you the complete and final version.

(p. 6)

He [Tom referring to himself in the third-person] sits up all night. Reads. Smokes. Works his way down a whisky bottle. Marks essays and piles of notes (the last harvestings of thirty-two years). Drunken red-ink scrawls: More care. Try harder. Good. Fair. Poor. To comfort himself he tells himself stories. He repeats the stories he's told in class. Ah, the contrast of these hollow nights and his well thronged days: classroom chatter, playground bedlam . . . [ellipses Swift's] But not long now before they--

(p. 249)

Tom is indeed narrating a story to someone. That someone is his own imagination--or the audience of school-children which he creates with it.

The first passage above indicates that Tom, feeling the need to tell stories and thus attempt to impose meaning upon his existence, and no longer having students to whom he may lecture, simply conjurs up an audience. And as the second passage indicates, this imaginary audience is composed of all his former students whom he has simply "rolled-into" a single "children." But Tom has told stories of the Fens and of his childhood to his real students. Both Lewis and Price and Tom himself mention the departure which he has made from the syllabus for what Lewis calls "story-telling sessions" (p. 115). But we have already seen that the comments Tom makes to the children--which one would think would have been made in the classroom--cannot have been told there. They are in, fact, comments made to his single imaginary class of "children." Thus, the picture which emerges

is one of Tom, after he has been informed of his "retirement," who sits alone depressed at night and reviews and elaborates upon the stories which he has taken to telling his classes. If this picture is then correct and this is how a unified Waterland is being told, the more interesting question of why it is being told in this peculiar manner of changing perspectives and tones and what the effect of this narration is then arises.

PART THREE:
Narration as Theme

Waterland's stylistic techniques of specialized use of causal and fairy-tale language along with the consistent, though apparently shifting, point-of-view clearly relate to specific themes of the book, namely Tom's belief that all events occur as part of endless causally linked chains and his concerns over the difference between story and history. Yet many of Swift's other narrative devices, specifically certain aspects of the novel's structure, also have important thematic implications, and in fact reflect those themes, thus demonstrating how linked form and content may be. The sections which follow will try to analyze the most important of these and will analyze the thematic implications of two key chapters, thus leading toward a general conclusion on Swift's intentions for his novel and his manipulation of language and of its ability not only to order but even to create existence.

I

In Chapter 3, Swift first uses a technique which pervades Waterland and which should begin to give the reader an idea of his interest in the creative powers of language. At the end of

that chapter Tom spends about three paragraphs mentioning the accomplishments of his maternal ancestors, the Atkinsons. Then in Chapter 9, he spends thirty-four pages discussing the history of that same Atkinson family. Or again, Tom gives in the final paragraph of that same chapter a summary of the events of many later chapters in the book:

But much will happen to Henry Crick. He recovers. He meets his future wife--there indeed is another story. In 1922 he marries. And in the same year Ernest Atkinson brings indirect influence to bear on his future employment. Indirect because the Atkinson word is no longer law . . . Ernest Atkinson has been living like a recluse, and some would say a mad one at that. But in 1922 my father is appointed keeper of the New Atkinson Lock.

(p. 15)

In both these cases, Swift is employing what might be called an iterative technique which he uses throughout the novel and which has important effects.

A similar example of such iteration occurs in Chapter 22, when Tom describes Ernest Atkinson's Coronation Ale, which was to pass no man's lips till the king was crowned:

Though it had already passed, in a form known simply as "Special," my grandfather's lips. And perhaps too the budding lips of Helen Atkinson, my mother.

(p. 129)

In this phrase, Tom provides a brief account of details which will be retold at greater length and with added significance later in the novel. A few pages earlier (p. 122), Tom had said

that Ernest retired, after losing his bid for Parliament, to Kessling Hall to dictate to Helen the method for brewing his new "special." Tom does not return to Ernest and Helen until Chapter 30, when in a rather disjointed fashion, he finally explains, through both his own words and through indirect discourse, his mother's early life and her incestuous relationship with Tom's grandfather.

This structural technique of summarizing or alluding to certain facts and then explaining them in later chapters is not, like some of Swift's techniques, all that complex or confusing. On its most basic level, it creates tension by piquing the reader's curiosity and not satisfying that until later. Yet Swift's technique is not one of mere foreshadowing, although he sometimes uses that technique also. Typically, foreshadowing involves the presentation of events which may seem insignificant when first presented but which prepare the reader for or give meaning to later events. Thus when at the end of Chapter 5, Tom picks an "old-fashioned" beer-bottle out of the Leem, this in itself seems insignificant, but because of its position as the final image of the chapter, the reader should suspect that later in the narrative he will learn of other events which will explain the importance of Tom's act. In the examples of iteration above, however, the details make sense and give the text meaning when first told regardless of the subsequent iteration--the second expanded account, rather than establishing meaning, gives added meaning. When one views this technique in light of Swift's ideas

about history, a potential reason for Swift's employing this narrative method comes to mind.

What seems to be happening here is that the structure of the narrative reflects the meaning of the text itself. Time and time again, Tom expounds upon the circularity of history and explains the events both of world history and of his family's history in terms of such endless cycles. In the same way, he frequently makes brief reference to an event and elaborates upon it later; that is he repeats himself at a later juncture. Just as certain events in history are bound to be repeated (according to Tom's belief), so he will repeat himself in the narration of certain events of the novel. Thus, in a certain sense, this purely structural device becomes an extension of a central theme, or one could say that Swift manipulates Tom's language so that the organization of the words themselves reflects their intention. Obviously, Tom cannot repeat himself endlessly, else the novel should never end, but to the extent to which this device is aesthetically possible, it can further his philosophy considerably.²⁶

Equally important in analyzing Swift's iterative summary and elaboration is his ability to use it as an extension of more than one theme. Quite often when he repeats himself and summarizes or elaborates upon an event which he has already

²⁶That the novel does end is quite important and is another example, which will be discussed later, of the way linguistic structure so often reflects theme in Waterland, and indeed points to the theory of language which Swift seems to espouse.

narrated, he shifts into the already discussed fairy-tale language, thus making the novel's structure also reflect the history/story theme. In Chapter 7, for instance, Tom recounts the story of Mary's life and of his relationship with her. Then in Chapter 12, he tells the story of her pre-marital years once again--but with a significant change in tone:

Children, once upon a time there was a history teacher's wife called Mary, curious eyes and brown hair, who before she was a history teacher's wife was the daughter of a Cambridgeshire farmer. Who lived in a stark, sturdy, sallow-brick farmhouse . . . Who during the years of the Second World War attended the St Gunnhilda (Convent) School for Girls in Guildsey . . . Who was the last person one could imagine imitating the patron saint of our local town and shutting herself up . . . in the autumn of 1943, her curiosity--and much else--having come in that same year (her seventeenth) to a sudden halt.

Many years ago there was a future history teacher's wife who resolved upon a certain drastic course of action.

(p. 88)

The "Once upon a time" and "Many years ago" formulae alone indicate the fairy-tale-like qualities of this passage; the parallel structure of fragments all beginning with "who" further the oral quality for which Swift is so consciously striving. Finally and importantly, one sees Tom distancing himself from the events which he is relating; thus, the "history teacher's wife called Mary" rather than "My wife Mary." Obviously, it must be difficult for Tom, who has now lost Mary altogether, to relive their adolescent joy and the events which led to her withdrawal from the world, and ultimately, of reality. By recasting those

events into the language of a fairy-tale, he can gain perspective and therefore make the pain more bearable.

Such a recapitulation of events the reader already knows, in addition to demonstrating someone's easing pain through storytelling, as Helen Atkinson taught Henry Crick to do, serves an important purpose by emphasizing Tom's concerns about the interchangeability of history and story; although the second version is somewhat condensed, none of the facts change between the two accounts of Mary's childhood--only the method of narration changes. Language therefore becomes an outward sign of inner perception, able actually to create meaning out of the environment rather than merely reflecting it. Thus, there is a certain structural tension between these two accounts which widens the implications beyond the mere events which they narrate. All such iterative instances, therefore, whether they point one to the circularity of history or have even wider implications, draw those implications from the tensions between the two accounts, so that structure and theme, though not necessarily interchangeable, actually draw their meaning from one another.

Swift's frequent use of digression is a technique which is similar on a stylistic level to Swift's iterative narration, and is equivalent to it in terms of displaying the manipulative power of language. In Chapter 7, for example, Tom begins by describing his rendezvous with Mary on the afternoon of the day during which Freddie was discovered drowned in the Leem. Very early in that

chapter, however, after describing Mary leaning against the old mill at Hockwell Lode, Tom begins a lengthy digression about Mary and her relationship with the young Tom. Only eight pages later does he return to the events of his afternoon tryst.

Another example of such a digression occurs in Chapter 11, which opens by presenting dramatically the Coroner's inquisition of Freddie Parr's death,²⁷ but then shifts into a digression, from which it never returns, on Jack Parr's drunkenness. Ostensibly, the purpose of this digression is to explain why Freddie Parr drinks, but the idea of digression itself is also important, for if Waterland's iterative language reflects textually the concept of historical cycles, the digressive narration may be read as a textual symbol of the impossibility of progress. As Tom discusses in "De la Révolution," all man's "great so-called forward movements of civilisation [sic], whether moral or technical, have invariably brought with them an accompanying regression" (p. 102). Thus, when Tom's narration digresses rather than progresses from certain events, he is merely using his text again to reflect--indeed to express--his ideas.

Even in the large overall structure of Waterland, Swift's concepts about history and progress are clearly visible. If the novel can be divided into three "narrative centers," then

²⁷And this is in fact true drama, but we know that Tom, who provides comments before and after the scene, is the one who researched the inquest documents and is thus recreating them for his imaginary "children."

Swift's switches back and forth between these "centers" are, in effect, digressions which move otherwise than the previous chapter might indicate. As he returns intermittently to centers which he had abruptly left before, this again is linguistic manifestation of the theme that man does not always move forward as he thinks but usually moves in circles.

Moreover, the disjunctive chronology which Swift uses symbolizes the complete interrelationship between past and present which Tom envisions. He believes that one cannot escape the past, that it is always with us, and that events of the distant past have an important bearing upon the present. It is therefore consistent with his philosophy that the events of three centuries should all be narrated alongside one another, for to Tom, those past events are in a very real sense affecting, even a part of, the present. Mary's having an abortion at age seventeen, did not merely influence her later life--it caused it to take the direction which she took toward eventual madness, and in so causing it, the events surrounding that abortion become a part of the present and should, therefore, be considered at the same time that the events of "present" are being analyzed. Likewise, Tom is in large part the result of his relationship with his mother whose life was so much determined by her father's, and so on, all the way back to Thomas Atkinson in the eighteenth century. For Tom, these ancestors are a part of his present, and he must narrate their lives as he narrates his own if he is to give the "complete and final version" of which he

speaks.

Thus, through the structure of Tom's narration, Swift is able to emphasize and reiterate nearly all the novel's themes: the circularity of history and the consequent absence of progress in the world, and the extent to which past and present are related and in fact form a single whole in which they are finally inseparable. But what is important here is not that Swift thus demonstrates these various component themes textually, but that he is driving at the much larger issue of the power of fiction such as Waterland itself. That is, in manipulating the text to have these various thematic meanings he demonstrates the very power of language to create meaning and thus resist the nihilism of "reality" in a way that history never can.

II

Just as iteration and digression show Swift's manipulation of the novel's structure and style through language, so the apparently, but only superficially, shifting point-of-view, explored at some length in Part Two, also is evidence of Swift's authorial manipulation of the text and can tell the reader again about Swift's beliefs in fiction. It seems obvious that Swift is too careful a writer to appear to be inconsistent when in fact he is consistent without having a purpose in doing so. Two problems therefore ought to be examined: the reason for the alternating styles which the first three chapters exemplify, and

the less frequent but equally abrupt shifts between mediated and apparently non-mediated narration. For despite the sometimes "floating" feeling which Swift may create through his pseudo-shifts in viewpoint, he is "honest" in his presentation of a first-person narrative--it is only Tom who sometimes changes his style in such a way that the point-of-view seems to change. Here again, the importance will lie not so much in the technical device itself, but in Swift's use of it and the effect which he therefore creates.

The answer to the first problem cited should be readily apparent. As we have seen, Chapter One sets up the events of Tom's adolescent fenland years in a self-consciously fairy-tale-like voice:

Fairy-tale words; fairy-tale advice. But we lived in a fairy-tale place. In a lock-keeper's cottage by a river, in the middle of the Fens. Far away from the wide world. And my father, who was a superstitious man, liked to do things in such a way as would make them seem magical and occult.

(p. 1)

This fairy-tale style, which certainly implies an audience, though an unnamed one, contrasts sharply with the factual language of Chapter Three:

Once the shallow, shifty waters of the Wash did not stop at Boston and King's Lynn but licked southwards as far as Cambridge, Huntingdon, Peterborough and Bedford. What caused them to retreat? The answer can be given in a single syllable: Silt. The Fens were formed by silt.

(p. 6)

Quite obviously, the contrasting styles are a part of the history/story theme which has been explored at some length. What is equally significant is that the language of both the "fairy-tale" example and the historical one imply equally indeterminate audiences. The rhetorical question of the second passage and its answer obviously create a feeling of a classroom lecture just as the first chapter implies a circle of listeners.

Generally, questions of point-of-view involve determining who is telling the story and what that person's relationship is to the events related. Part Two demonstrated that Tom is always the teller and therefore the reader knows the degree of Tom's involvement in the events of his narrative. What makes Waterland interesting is the problem of the audience which the text, in all the narrative centers, seems to suggest. It seems clear upon careful examination that Tom is imagining telling his story to an imaginary class which he has "rolled-up" into a single "children." But such a conclusion does take careful examination, for the children are sometimes much more present than at others, giving the novel that "floating" feeling.²⁰ Because the children "slip" at times, it is easy to think that the children sections are actually interpolations of class lectures which are presented in an unmediated fashion when in fact Tom is remembering them and very definitely mediating the present of that memory.

²⁰Though perhaps inexact, I think the adjective is one which Swift might want us to employ, considering the novel's title and the controlling images of water and marshlands.

In Chapter Two, Tom directly addresses his audience before letting that focusing effect slip again in Chapter Three:

Children. Children, who will inherit the world. Children (for always, even though you were fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, candidates for that appeasing term "young adults", [sic] I addressed you, silently, as "children")-- Children, before whom I have stood for thirty-two years in order to unravel the mysteries of the past, but before whom I am to stand no longer, listen, one last time, to your history teacher.

(p. 4)

There is little question that the events of all the narrative centers and styles are told to the children, but they are clearly (and not too surprisingly) much more present in the chapters where they are addressed as they are above than in the other parts of the book.

Psychologically, what Swift is doing makes intuitive sense; in relating events of the scope and personal importance of those Tom narrates, it is not unlikely that he should get carried away and "forget" his audience. Perhaps then the degree to which the children seem to be present is a reflection of Tom's involvement with what he is narrating, just as whether he refers to himself in the first or third person often serves as an indication of his involvement.

Even more importantly, Swift is certainly manipulating the reader and the extent to which he identifies with the "children," thus making him question, wrongly, the novel's point-of-view in order to create the "floating" quality which so often

characterizes the book. If this is indeed the case, it also has clear thematic implications. The theme of history versus story is easily generalized into a conflict between reality and appearances. The point-of-view seems to shift when in reality it is consistent. The children seem not always to be completely present, when in reality, Tom does sometimes become so involved in his story--which is for him a set of real events--that he forgets about them, though they never cease to exist on the most textual of levels in that the reader should always be aware of the novel's oral qualities and that even if the children get "lost," the text always posits an audience of some sort.

Tom believes that complete explanation is impossible; he thinks that one must always ask questions, the answers to which will not always be clear. One ought not to be surprised then that Swift builds uncertainties into the text which force the reader to question it, for certainly he wants to encourage curiosity. Yet just as when Swift uses iteration and digression to reflect thematic concerns, the interest in his point-of-view manipulations lies equally in the reader's realization that Swift is able to engage in such manipulation of the story in order to address the various intellectual issues. In other words, Swift is showing his concern in yet another way for the creative powers of language.

The technique described above closely resembles what Swift is doing when Tom pretends to engage in non-mediated narration, for there again he shows the power of fiction to create meaning

not only through the narration of events but through the method of narration. In the passage which follows, the point-of-view is clearly Tom's as he attempts to recount objectively, and thus make himself able to interpret, the after-school meeting with Price:

'You know what your trouble is, sir? You're hooked on explanation. Explain, explain. Everything's got to have an explanation.'

A human instinct, Price. A definitive trait. Goes with living.

· · · 'Because explaining's a way of avoiding the facts while you pretend to get near to them--'

Very good, Price. Very profound. One for the Price book of Anarchistical Aphorisms. But that frightened face--?

'And people only explain when things are wrong, don't they, not when they're right? So the more explaining you hear, the more you think things must be pretty bad that they need so much explaining.'

· · · 'Can I go now, sir? It's getting late.'
So, message annunciated, So. Is that why you bothered to come to my little disciplinary rendezvous? To deliver a Challenge. Class-spokesman's manifesto. The Price Explanation of Explanation. Something to make old Cricky think. And he will. He does . . .

(p. 126, final ellipses Swift's)

The very last phrases of this passage are particularly interesting: "he will. He does." The meeting with Price took place at some point in the past before Mary stole the baby from the Safeways, yet non-mediated passages like the one above lend themselves, indeed require, the present tense. Certainly dialogue must be in the present tense and Tom maintains that

present tense in the authorial asides, which not only function as stage directions and indicate that the point-of-view truly is Tom's, but also demonstrate that through retelling this incident he is also reinterpreting it.

Technically, this causes an interesting tension between past and present and between different degrees of understanding in Tom, yet in so doing it also relates to one of the novel's central themes, by showing the interrelationship of past and present, completely in keeping with his belief that the past is always with us and in fact is almost inseparable from the present:

But what is this much-adduced Here and Now? What is this indefinable zone between what is past and what is to come; this free and airy present tense in which we are always longing to take flights into the boundless future?

(p. 45)

Elsewhere, Tom describes history as a burden of baggage which we must always carry around. Thus, when Tom takes a part of his past and turns it into a part of his present through the analysis and narration of that act, he is demonstrating one of his ideas within the structure of the text in the same way that digressive narration elucidated the theme of non-progress, but even more importantly, he is providing yet another example of the meaningful power of language and story-telling to re-order one's existence.

III

If Swift manipulates the language in his account of Tom and the Atkinsons in order to emphasize some of his central concerns, it must be readily apparent that two chapters, "About the Ouse" and "About the Eel," serve purely thematic purposes, since they certainly bear no relationship to any of the plots. That is, the events of these chapters have nothing to do with the events of the novel but serve as metaphors for some of its central concerns. And just as soon as the reader realizes that Swift is creating a metaphor, he should realize that Swift is again indicating his interest in, and ability to manipulate for his own purposes, language.

At the end of "De la Révolution," after Tom has been lecturing upon the twistings, turnings, and circles of history, he makes the transition to the next chapter with a sentence that crosses the chapter break:

So if you're thinking of going somewhere.
If you want you Here and Now. If you're tired
of school and lessons, if you want to be out
there in the real world of today, let me tell
you

. 15 .

About the Ouse

The great Ouse. Ouse. Say it. Ouse.
Slowly. How else can you say it? A sound
which exudes slowness.

(p. 107)

In that chapter, Tom describes at length the geological history of the river. Clearly, the history of channels and tributaries bears little relationship to Tom or his life. Rather, it is his own obvious metaphor for history:

Yet it flows--oozes--on, as every river must, to the sea. And as we all know, the sun and the wind suck up the water from the sea and disperse it on the land, perpetually refeeding the rivers. So that while the Ouse flows to the sea, it flows, in reality, like all rivers, only back to itself, to its own source; and that impression that a river moves only one way is an illusion.

(p. 110)

The real interest of this chapter is not, however, the geology involved, although that is certainly quite interesting and Swift does display a certain flair for being able to narrate this natural history, nor does the interest lie in the metaphor of history; instead it lies in Tom's very ability to make such a scientific account take on near cosmic implications. He makes a story ("Once upon a time there was a river . . .") out of events of the natural world, and because he makes a story, he makes the events of that story correspond to his belief in circular history.

Thus, "About the Ouse," while certainly also about history, is finally about stories and language, the way man creates stories to explain the universe. In Tom's account, the personified river is unmindful of the short-lived men and their tamperings with it in a realism reminiscent of Stephen Crane's "A

Man Said to the Universe." The implication of this chapter for Tom is that he is extracting from an image of nature a world-view which contradicts the positivist Progress in which he believed as a younger man. The implications of this chapter in terms of Swift lie in Tom's using an image of nature to symbolize his world-view, so that he has gone from merely studying the history of an event or thing to telling stories about it which have significance beyond themselves. Such is the power of fiction--to transcend itself--and Waterland itself, of course, is the ultimate example of which "About the Ouse" is only a part. It is merely a story about a man and his personal history, yet it has cosmic implications which indicate Swift's world-view. "About the Ouse," therefore, rather than being something which has nothing to do with anything--as would be easy for one to think on a first reading--is in fact a chapter which indicates how Swift wants the whole novel to be read. Chapter 26, "About the Eel," would appear to and in fact does function similarly.

Structurally, "About the Eel" looks much like "About the Ouse." In the previous chapter, Tom has been talking again about curiosity:

So you're curious. You'd skip the fall
of kings for a little by-the-way Scurrility.
Then let me tell you

. 26 .

About the Eel

Of which the specimen placed by Freddie Parr
in Mary's knickers in July, 1940, was a
healthy representative of the only, if

abundant, freshwater species of Europe--namely
Anguilla anguilla, the European Eel.

(pp. 147-48)

Once again, Swift introduces the chapter with a sentence which crosses the chapter break and proceeds into a lengthy digression, this time discussing the history of scientific inquiry into the life of the eel. And once again this digression is related to the themes rather than to any of the narrative centers of the novel. The efforts of thinkers from Pliny and Aristotle to the twentieth century Johannes Schmidt to determine how the eel reproduces serve as a metaphor for curiosity in general, a quality which Tom has said is a "vital force" (p. 38).

Curiosity will never be content. Even today, when we know so much, curiosity has not unravelled the riddle of the birth and sex life of the eel. Perhaps these are things, like many others, destined never to be learnt before the world comes to its end. Or perhaps--but here I speculate, here my own curiosity leads me by the nose--the world is so arranged that when all things are learnt, when curiosity is exhausted (so, long live curiosity), that is when the world shall have come to its end.

(p. 154)

Thus for centuries men have tried to determine how the eel reproduces, and no one has yet answered the question; Tom believes this is as it should be, for some questions need to be left unanswered. The chapter, therefore, in addition to depicting history's cyclical nature describes man's natural curiosity.

Yet just as in "About the Ouse," the metaphor created is of less interest than the use of it. Once again, Tom has taken a set of facts and given them a significance beyond themselves in their narration. Thus, Swift again shows the power of language and how man can create meaning out of stories. In relating a series of facts to create a metaphor for curiosity, one of the novel's central themes, he emphasizes the equally important theme of the power of fiction, just as "About the Ouse" created a metaphor for Tom's understanding of history while also pointing out the way new meanings can be extrapolated from stories. Thus, both these chapters are related to the iterative and the digressive methods of narration which pervade Waterland in that they show the power of narrative to give meaning outside of the specific events of the narrative. As a novelist, Swift must be concerned with the power and function of fiction, and so it is appropriate that he should explore this issue through the very creation of fiction. Tom has come to realize that fiction--story telling--is one of the principal methods at man's disposal for imposing meaning upon the meaningless circularity of human existence, but Swift, through the narration of Tom, explores the various possibilities which this manipulation of language allows.

IV

Exploring the concept of resolution and closure in Waterland provides the ultimate example of Swift's textual manipulations

and of the consequent philosophy of fiction which may be extracted from it, because the reader's full understanding of the novel, where Swift has been leading him all this while--what some would call the reader's recreation of new textual meaning--only arises upon completing the novel.²⁹ "About the Rosa II" describes how Tom and his father went searching for the fleeing Dick and finally saw him cast himself from the Rosa II, never to be seen again. After ending the story of Dick, Tom never depicts himself again in the present, and there would appear to be no resolution to his existential dilemma. Rather than giving the reader a glimpse of himself despondent with unanswerable questions or triumphant in having achieved a "solution," Tom describes Dick's suicide and says,

Ribbons of mist. Obscurity. On the bank
in the thickening dusk, in the will o' the wisp
dusk, abandoned but vigilant, a motor-cycle.

The "open-ended" novel has become almost a cliché of the twentieth century, and in ending on this note of "Obscurity," Waterland would seem to be a perfect example of such novels. Closer reading, however, will indicate that not only does Swift end his novel exactly where he ought, but also that he does so in accordance with the world-view which Waterland posits and so

²⁹What I mean here is that the reader cannot know how to judge Mary or Tom until the events of the final chapter--Dick's suicide and Tom's attitude toward it--are known. Rather than the conclusion's being the logical resolution to previously understood action, it in fact allows us to understand that previous action.

creates a feeling of completeness.

There are several ways to analyze closure in Waterland. First, one may consider Tom himself, who has narrated the novel. If the reader perceives Dick's suicide as his final gesture of resistance, it is only because Tom narrates the story in such a way as to allow that interpretation. When Henry Crick asks Tom to explain to Sam Booth and the others at the Ferry Inn what Dick is doing, Tom says that "He's gone barmy" (p. 264). Tom-the-narrator then breaks into his account to say.

(Forgive me, Dick. To malign your final gesture, your last recourse, with the taint of madness, to rob it of reality. I, if anyone knew there was reason in your plight. I, your brother. Your brother. Your brother?)
(p. 264)

Tom's words emphasize his belief that Dick achieved full humanity in that final gesture, and that, moreover, it was a conscious decision on Dick's part. Unlike Tom, Dick does not have the mental capabilities to tell stories, but he does resist the meaningless world over which he otherwise has no control in the only ways he knows how.

In understanding Dick's success, Tom has also come to understand why Mary retreated from life into madness. Curiosity in history has kept Tom alive as Mary has not been. If Tom has come to realize Mary's loss and Dick's victory it is then appropriate that he should end where he does, at the point of ultimate resistance. If Tom understands Dick and Mary, he too can resist, can understand that the success of history or

stories, of finding meaning in life, is less important than the effort to do so.

The strange, peaceful qualities of that last chapter, then, with the images of dusk and obscurity, are quite appropriate. The "vigilant" motor-cycle is symbolic of the machine-like nature of acceptance which Dick has so recently thrown off, and the dusk itself may be a symbol of Tom's acceptance that obscurity does in fact characterize all that one can learn about man's existence but that the search for this, symbolized in the novel itself, is meaningful. Read in this way, there is no place else the novel could go--it is perfectly closed and, having helped Tom understand both himself and mankind, is therefore resolved. Moreover, it seems entirely appropriate to end a novel about fiction's power to transcend reality with a series of images, rather than a series of statements, for in this way Swift demonstrates again the evocative power of the metaphor, which obviously interests him so much.

Structurally, also, the novel achieves a symmetry which implies if not requires closure. Both the first and the last chapters are set in the narrative center of Tom's youth in the Fens; in addition, both make use of an important symbol of resurrection and of completion:

"And don't forget," my father would say, . . .
 "Whatever you learn about people, however bad
 they turn out, each one of them has a heart and
 each one of them was once a tiny baby sucking
 his mother's milk . . ."

(p. 1, ellipses Swift's)

In these opening sentences, the nursing baby is clearly a symbol of innocence and goodness, and Henry's point seems to be that evil can never completely succeed because the life cycle always recreates goodness. Thus, Henry accepts the world, recognizing perhaps that the evil of the world prevents its improving but also that it cannot really get any worse. This acceptance of Henry's which begins the book is what Tom spend the entire novel trying to achieve.

Yet not only does Tom's attitude at the novel's end balance his father's at the beginning, the controlling image of the last chapter is also one which provides resolution. The title of the last chapter is the name of Stan Booth's dredger--the Rosa II. Rosa, of course, is Latin for the rose, which is a traditional symbol, not only of perfection and unity, but also a symbol of the mystery and heart of life, and even, sometimes, of death and resurrection.³⁰ Taken alone, one could hardly say that the Rosa II completes and unifies the novel, but when considered alongside the acceptance which Tom seems to achieve and the symmetry that acceptance creates, Swift's using as a name for the final chapter a traditional symbol of unity and of life itself seems hardly to be coincidental. Rather, it seems quite obvious that Waterland is complete and resolved, and that Swift intends the reader to perceive such closure.

That Swift creates such closure is important and provides

³⁰J. C. Cooper, An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols (London: Thames & Hudson, Ltd., 1978), 141-42.

the final commentary upon the power of fiction as he perceives it. Tom has achieved an acceptance of life and a new world view. Swift has supported this through the symmetry of the text: the novel began with the description of Freddie Parr's death one morning, and it ends with the death of Freddie's killer one evening. The language itself, with the image of dusk, creates resolution, and in so doing, Swift shows the power of language to create meaning, to give meaning outside itself to an abandoned motor-cycle or a deepening dusk.

v

If, therefore, Tom does achieve his goal by understanding his past and by telling his "children" the "complete and final version," the exact method of how he achieved this is every bit as important as the achievement itself and should by now be quite apparent. Tom advocates resistance of the endless and repetitive cycles of existence in order to make life meaningful. Tom himself resists and creates meaning by telling a story. Waterland, therefore, is about resistance by fiction and about the power of fiction. Process finally becomes more important than result, just as Tom told Lewis it was more significant that children try to "beat" history and make progress by trying to avoid their parents' mistakes than that they failed in this task. Put another way one might say that in writing a novel in which the narrator has made a story out of his life and in doing so has

actually made his life meaningful, Swift shows that the act of narration is far more important than the acts narrated.

History was for Tom "that impossible thing: the attempt to give an account, with incomplete knowledge, of actions themselves undertaken with incomplete knowledge" (p. 81). Yet Tom does not give up his curiosity as his wife did; rather, when his initial method of explanation fails, he turns to fiction--story-telling--which makes explanations possible, which provides him with a method of making his life meaningful and of thus continuing the battle against Nature and of eventually triumphing. The process of fiction--as Waterland clearly shows--is a painful one which may not lead to happiness. But for Tom--and for Graham Swift--it is only this process of stories and imagination that allows one to become fully human and finally to triumph against the horrifying power of a meaningless universe.

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APPENDIX

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30 July 1986

Chris Carter
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Dear Mr Carter,

Thank you for your letter of 10 July. I am flattered that you intend writing a thesis on 'Waterland' and I wish you every success with the project. I give below some answers to your questions. For reasons of time these are fairly brief, but perhaps more elaborate answers would only impede you in, as you say, doing your own thinking.

1. I was born and spent my early years in south London and attended Dulwich College in south London. I did have a happy childhood. I grew up in the period of fading post-war austerity, in a small family in which I felt loved and secure.

2. At Cambridge I studied English Literature. I had no association with any group at that time. This was primarily a period of intellectual development - I probably read more at Cambridge than I have at any time since. My literary output was then very tentative and small. My literary ambition was already formed and I believe I would still have become a writer had I not attended university, but the time to read and think was valuable. Intellectual matters apart, I remember my last year or so at Cambridge as a particularly happy time.

3. There are books that influence you technically and books that simply inspire you to write. The latter category is the more important, and in terms of unconsciously forming my desire to write, I think the books I read as a child and in my early teens were probably the most influential. I'm thinking simply of adventure stories, historical novels and so on, whose titles and authors I don't remember. Subsequently there have been many authors who I've admired and who have doubtless been an influence. No single one stands out and I think offering names might only prejudice a critical study.

4. I am not, and have never been a practising Anglican. I have no association with any church.

5. Broadly, socialist. I deplore the present Government and political mood in my country. I am not politically active myself and I do not write out of political motives and intentions, but I am aware that fiction has a political dimension. To imagine and empathise with experiences other than your own is essential to fiction and would seem a pre-condition of politics. Unfortunately, precisely this faculty is so often lacking in, or becomes the first casualty of practical politics.

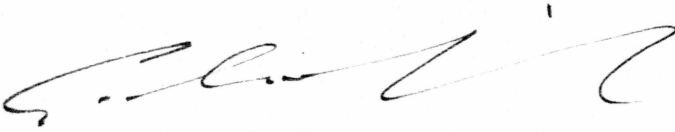
My outlook on life (!). I am a lucky individual. I am doing what I want to do, and few people do that. Philosophically and intellectually, I am a pessimist and sceptic. I don't take a rosy view of the future of the world. This comes from just looking around, and from imagination, since a great deal of the world's suffering is hidden from view.

6. I am not married and have no children.

My own comments on 'Waterland'. I think I'd rather bow out of this. Interpretation is free, and I believe that a novel is a different book for every reader. I ought to be able to speak with authority on my own work but I don't want to fall into the artistically ruinous trap of thinking I know what I'm doing!

Again, with best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Graham Swift', written in a cursive style.

Graham Swift