

## 1: History, His Story, and Stories in Graham Swift's Waterland

*Waterland* is a novel by Graham Swift. It won the Guardian Fiction Prize and was shortlisted for the Booker Prize (which Swift won in with *Last Orders*). It is considered the author's premier novel.

Share via Email Wet, but not Waterland I just slip out onto the ring road near my house, pass a couple of roundabouts and then take an old railway line leading north: The track repeatedly crosses the winding river Wensum on old A-frame bridges and bumps over dark drainage ditches. But sometimes, those trees thin out enough to reveal swampy flatlands, or great empty fields that are almost as broad and featureless as the sea that will one day reclaim them. Even the path was wet, when I took it. Worse yet, slicks of snot kept slipping out of my nose and my hands were red and numb in the cold air. These were miserable cycling conditions and I began to feel a clammy East Anglian melancholy entering my soul. Even the phlegm was fitting. Someone also suggested Jonathan Raban to me, selling him convincingly with the following line from *Old Glory*, another account of a Mississippi journey: My mind, made stodgy by too little time outside and too much guilt about my still unfilled tax return whenever I was inside, had been longing to be off into the local countryside. And here, my brain played a trick on me. So I pulled my copy from the shelf. I immersed myself in the slow eel-filled rivers of East Anglia to the exclusion of all others and I remembered again why I like this novel so much. Partly it was the wonderful and discomfiting images Swift conjures so vividly: Mainly, however, it was the descriptions of the Fens: A vast empty place inhabited by willow-the-wisps, potato-heads and a people filled with "phlegm", "mucus" and "slime" by the dank air. My head was full of such descriptions and snot - as I cycled. The foam and driftwood I saw floating on the rivers took on a sinister aspect as I recalled that corpse and the eels. The flat wintry landscape teemed with possibility, mystery and uniquely twisted romance. I began to enjoy myself and went 15 miles before the spell broke and I decided to turn back. Now, the wind was against me and I was spurred on only by the thought of home and hot coffee. But I was content.

### 2: Profile: Graham Swift | Books | The Guardian

*Waterland*, published in 1983, is a semi-postmodern examination of the end of History, the trajectory of the promise of the future. The novel is set in the 1800s, but looks backwards through history, centering around

It is narrated by Tom Crick, a middle-aged history teacher. Tom is facing a personal crisis, since he is about to be laid off from his job and his wife has been admitted to a mental hospital. He is a man who is keenly interested in ideas about the nature and purpose of history. Faced with a class of bored and rebellious students, he scraps the traditional history curriculum and tells them stories of the fens instead. These stories form the substance of the novel, which takes place mainly in two time frames: The traumatic events of his adolescence reach forward in time to influence the present. The structure of the novel, which frequently moves back and forth in time, also suggests the fluidity of the interaction between past and present. It includes a family history going back to the eighteenth century and such lurid topics as murder, suicide, abortion, incest, and madness. The novel also includes digressions on such off-beat topics as the sex life of the eel, the history of land reclamation, the history of the River Ouse, and the nature of phlegm. At once a philosophical meditation on the meaning of history and a gothic family saga, *Waterland* is a tightly interwoven novel that entertains as it provokes. His father was a civil servant. Swift attended Dulwich College, in South London, from 1958 to 1962. From 1962 to 1965 he worked part-time as a teacher of English. It was followed by *Shuttlecock*, which is also an analytical story about the past. In 1966 Swift had a literary breakthrough with his novel *Waterland*. *Waterland* was adapted for film by Peter Prince and released by Palace Pictures in 1992. Like *Waterland*, each of these novels examines the interplay between the past and the present. Plot Summary *Waterland* begins with the narrator Tom Crick describing his childhood growing up in the low-lying fens area of eastern England. His father is a lock-keeper, and they live in a cottage by the River Leem. One day in July, the drowned body of a local boy, Freddie Parr, floats down the river. The story flashes forward to the present. Tom, having spent thirty-two years as a history teacher, is leaving his job because the school is eliminating the history department. The other reason he is leaving is because of a scandal involving his wife, who apparently has stolen a baby. No more details are given. Crick abandons the history syllabus he is supposed to teach, deciding to tell his class stories of the fens instead. He describes the history of the fens and the persistent efforts over the centuries to drain the land. He also describes his ancestors, going back to Jacob Crick, who operated a windmill in the fens in the eighteenth century. The narrator then embarks on one of his many explorations of the nature of history, before flashing back to a time in when Tom and Mary, both fifteen years old, first begin to explore each other sexually. They are careful to meet at times when they will not be discovered either by Freddie or Dick. The narrative then returns to the distant past, as Tom relates the history of the Atkinson family and how they built their fortune through land-reclamation projects and a brewery business. One of the most significant events occurs in 1799, when Thomas Atkinson strikes his wife Sarah in a fit of unreasonable jealousy. She loses her mind as a result of the attack but lives another fifty-four years to become something of a local legend. The Atkinsons continue to prosper as the leading local family, the height of respectability and power. Arthur Atkinson is elected to Parliament in 1832, the same year that a great flood causes devastation throughout the area. It appears she never had her baby. Tom joins the army in 1854 and is stationed in Europe. In 1858 he returns home and he and Mary marry. They move to London, where he becomes a history teacher. For several decades they live a comfortable middle-class life. As the story reaches the present, Tom notices that his wife is becoming secretive. She has also become very religious. Then she announces, at the age of fifty-two, that she is going to have a baby. God has told her so. He debates the issues with his class, which includes a boy named Price, who questions everything Tom says. In the present day, Tom attempts a debate with Lewis Scott over the usefulness of history as a subject of instruction. They cannot agree on an answer. Tom describes the life of his grandfather, Earnest Richard Atkinson, who perfected a special kind of ale and lived in seclusion after a failed bid to win a parliamentary seat. In the celebrations for the coronation of George V, the whole town seems to become intoxicated. But there is a fire at the New Atkinson Brewery, and it burns to the ground. The narrative returns to the present and the exploratory sexual games played by Tom, Mary, and their friends, including Freddie. Dick wins an

underwater swimming contest, and there is sexual tension between him and Mary. He wants to see what Dick will do. Dick secretly returns the bottle to a mysterious locked chest in the attic. Returning to the history of the Atkinsons, Tom describes how Earnest Atkinson becomes a recluse, falls in love with his daughter Helen, and lives with her as husband and wife. The child, Dick, turns out to be mentally retarded. After leaving the letter, Earnest shoots himself. Back in the present, Tom takes his argumentative pupil Price to a pub for a drink, where they discuss history and teaching. The narrative now starts to swing more and more rapidly between time periods. In the early s, Mary takes it upon herself to educate Dick about sexual matters. Tom believes it may be Dick who got Mary pregnant. In the present-day narrative, Tom returns from school to find his wife has snatched a baby from a supermarket. In Mary tries unsuccessfully to abort her own baby, and then she and Tom go to a local woman, Martha Clay, who has a reputation as a witch. Martha performs a grisly abortion. Present-day Tom insists to his wife that they return the stolen baby. They drive back to the supermarket and hand it back. They are both interviewed by the police. Dick goes off on his motorcycle, heading for a dredger on the river. Tom visits his wife in the mental institution. He is distressed and unable to sleep. Finally, the story returns to Tom and his father chase after Dick. With two American servicemen, they take a boat out to the dredger but cannot stop Dick from leaping over the side to his death. In he marries Eliza Harriet Bell, the daughter of a farmer. He and his brother George are extremely successful businessmen. Alfred becomes mayor of Gildsey in In his later years, with his brother, he builds Kessling Hall, a rural family retreat. In he becomes a member of Parliament for Gildsey. Earnest experiments with the process of making beer and comes up with a recipe for a new ale, which he begins manufacturing in A craze for the potent new beer spreads far and wide. Earnest stands for Parliament in for the Liberal Party but fails to win election. After the Atkinson brewery burns down in a fire in , he goes into seclusion. He falls in love with his daughter Helen, who bears a child by him, Dick Crick. In he marries Catherine Anne Goodchild, the daughter of a banker. He becomes mayor of Gildsey in Like his brother Alfred, with whom he partners, he is a highly successful businessman who brings industrial progress to the entire region. He is the first to establish the Atkinson business of selling beer. She is the daughter of a brewer, Matthew Turnbull. When she is thirty-seven, her husband strikes her in the face, and as she falls, she hits her head against a writing table. Although she lives for over fifty more years, her mind is completely gone as a result of the attack. During the long period of her insanity, local legends build up around her, including the idea that she has the gift to see and shape the future. She dies in at the age of ninety-two. He becomes rich from land-reclamation projects, during which time the Cricks first come to work for the Atkinsons. Thomas builds a malting house and furthers the family beer business. He is also a farmer who opens up the River Leem, formerly a swamp, for transportation of his produce. He becomes a prominent citizen known for his good works. He marries Sarah Turnbull, who is much younger than he, but in his later years he develops feelings of jealousy over her, although Sarah did nothing to justify them. In , Thomas strikes Sarah in the face. As a result of an injury sustained in the attack, she loses her mind. Thomas spends the rest of his days in remorse.

### 3: Waterland () - Rotten Tomatoes

*Swift weaves together tales of empire building, land reclamation, brewers and lock-keepers to construct a chronicle that spans three centuries. Waterland is simultaneously a family saga, a novel of provincial life, a social history and a story of adolescent love.*

Waterland is concerned with the nature and importance of history as the primary source of meaning in a narrative. For this reason, it is associated with new historicism. Waterland can also be said to fall under the category of postmodern literature. This is because it contains characteristics associated with postmodern literature, such as a fragmented narrative style, where events are not told in chronological order. An unreliable narrator is also present. Major themes in the novel include storytelling and history, exploring how the past leads to future consequences. Plot summary[ edit ] Tom Crick, fifty-two years old, has been history master for some thirty years in a secondary school in Greenwich , in a sense the place where, in a world that sets its clocks according to Greenwich Mean Time , time begins. Tom has been married to Mary for as long as he has been teaching, but the couple have no children. By doing so, he makes himself a part of the history he is teaching, relating his tales to local history and genealogy. The headmaster, Lewis, tries to entice Tom into taking an early retirement. Tom resists this because his leaving would mean that the History Department would cease to exist and be combined with the broader area of General Studies. The publicity that attends her arrest reflects badly on the school, and Tom is told that he now must retire. In response, he uses his impending forced retirement as an excuse to unfold a story to his students. The pivot of Waterland focuses on both the past in , and the present time thirty years after - all related through the eyes of adolescent Tom. A wide part of the novel is formed by the basis of some three hundred years of local - including family - history, which relates to the broader historical currents of past centuries. Dick asks Mary if he is the father, thinking if he is he will be able to have some control over his strained friendship with Mary, forcing her to devote a part of herself to him. Mary lies to him, telling him that Freddie Parr is the father. Dick, distraught at this information, struggles with a drunken Freddie, who is unable to swim, and pushes him into the river. When Mary fails to provoke a miscarriage, she and Tom - who is the father of the child - go to an old crone, who performs a dangerous abortion that leaves Mary sterile. Her father forces her into seclusion, and for three years she remains isolated. The two fathers finally agree to bring their children together again; unknown to them, Tom, away fighting in World War II, has already written to Mary. Obviously unstable and suffering from a pain that has been festering since her abortion all those years ago, Mary is arrested after the baby is returned. Tom is later informed of her commitment to a mental institute. Dick becomes inebriated with bottles of drink stashed in an old chest from his real father - which also coincidentally held the letters revealing his true parentage - and runs away on his motorbike. Frantic, his family coerce friends into letting them have the use of a boat, and eventually find Dick several miles away, about to jump into the water. Despite pleas that he will finally be valued as a surrogate son and an equal to Tom, Dick throws himself in and never resurfaces - his death haunting Tom for the rest of his life. Film adaptation[ edit ] In , a film version of Waterland was released, directed by Stephen Gyllenhaal and starring Jeremy Irons. The adaptation retained some major plot points but moved the contemporary location to Pittsburgh , and eliminated many of the extensive historical asides.

### 4: Waterland by Graham Swift

*Graham Swift was born in and is the author of ten novels, three collections of short stories, and Making an Elephant, a book of essays, portraits, poetry, and reflections on his life in writing. With Waterland, he won the Guardian Fiction Award, and.*

The ending of the novel suggests that everything, even the entirety of history, "might amount to nothing" Like *Wide Sargasso Sea*, *Waterland* focuses on the ways people damage each other and split apart, and on various forms of human madness, as well as how women are destroyed, and the destruction of lives and loves rather than their creation, unlike the focus of the building of love and lives in the Victorian endings. Describing a series of deaths, Swift comes to illuminate madness and the destruction of the domestic in Fen country. Further, sentences are often incomplete, single words become statements and thoughts drift into ellipses and are never finished. The Ouse flows to the sea. Rather than the optimism and birth of new, solid relationships and beginnings that mark the endings of *Jane Eyre* and *Great Expectations*, *Waterland* ends with the "coming of things to their limits, this invasion by Nothing of the fragile islands of life" There is no need for human beings to change or evolve as there is in the Victorian novels, because the concept of a meaningful future is in limbo. Meaning is sucked out of life rather than infused into it: Mary, traumatized by the abortion she underwent as a young girl, is delusional and desperate, and insists that God has told her to take the child, and that insists the baby is hers Like *Antoinette and Rochester*, this tragic figure presents us with another portrait of modern madness, as well as another way to imagine the coming apart of family and normalcy. As Mary sees it, the baby is a kind of Jesus, "sent by God. Who will save us all" To modern ears, this sounds decidedly like the rant of a crazy woman. When she dies, his mother becomes a Gone woman and Tom, Dick and their father enter into their "terrible January dawn. The final death in *Waterland* -- the final ending of the ending -- occurs at the place where the book begins, on the graceful and mysterious Fens. Dick, somewhat mad and able to communicate more effectively with his motorcycle than with his father or brother, drowns himself in the Fens. His death is finite, as he returns to the waters which are perhaps the only constant in the book. Dick "punctures the water. Like his mother, he becomes another person lost in the book, the final Gone person. As the book concludes, Swift confirms that human action against death, against Nothingness, is entirely useless: Yet another piece of the family is lost. The deaths in *Waterland* are the micro examples of the overarching the notion of perpetual nothingness, and of the inability of people or the world to truly progress. Inevitably, the world slips away from itself, as life slips away from people with madness and death. There is no gift of light for Tom or his father, no scenes of nature symbolizing renewal, no rebuilding of the family, as happens in the Victorian texts. Whereas its Victorian counterpart "looks uphill," *Waterland* looks decidedly downwards. Conclusion The endings of *Jane Eyre* and *Great Expectations* establish the world as a steady place, one ripe with possibilities and new beginnings. Their modern day rewritings, however, establish the world as a void, a place in which lives are undone rather than re built. Rhys and Swift, however, are not so sanguine. Generally, with their tone and language each modern author creates a world where catastrophe reigns. The family, domesticity and indeed the perpetuation of life become impossible. Each set of books takes the crucial, omnipotent concepts of love and family, indeed the meaning of life itself, and come to very different conclusions about the possibility and point of living at all: The Endings of Victorian and Modern Works.

### 5: Waterland | [www.enganchecubano.com](http://www.enganchecubano.com)

*British novelist Graham Swift's Waterland (London, ; New York, ) is a complex tale set in eastern England's low-lying fens region. It is narrated by Tom Crick, a middle-aged history teacher. It is narrated by Tom Crick, a middle-aged history teacher.*

Crick explains some of the theories proposed by those who lived in the Fens after the death of Sarah Atkinson, one admittedly far fetched because it endows the paralyzed matriarch with supernatural powers with which she watched over the Fens quietly. This theory is followed by a less controversial one which says that Sarah was mad and would come back into consciousness every once in while. Crick uses the following transition between these two theories: Whether any of this contains a grain of truth; whether the brothers themselves regarded their mother as oracle, priestess, protectress, or merely allowed these rumours to circulate as a means of securing the favour of the town, no one can tell. Can we believe everything that this narrator says? How does the narrator use sequence throughout the book as a rhetorical device? So, what is history after all? Whywhywhy do we clamor for explanations of origins, possibilities and events? Does history repeat itself? What are the specific relations among post-colonial studies and history? Compare the characters in Waterland who must forget with those who must remember, and then Dick, who does not even ask the whywhywhy. What relationship exists in this novel between superstition and progress aspects of the past and the future, respectively? And how does this interaction, this dynamic, affect the novel seen in its whole form, i. Some passages to consider not by any means all that are possible to look at: For the town, no less than its two young champions [George and Alfred Atkinson], feels, as it enters, indeed, its heyday, this ever-recurring need to begin again, to wipe the slate, erase the past and look to the sparkling landmarks of the future. Why must the zenith never be fixed? Because to fix the zenith is to contemplate decline. Because if you construct a stage then the show must go on. History, if it is to keep on constructing its road into the future, must do so on solid ground. At all costs let us avoid mystery-making and speculation, secrets and idle gossip. And above all, let us not tell stories. Otherwise, how will the future be possible and how will anything get done? How does the detailed narration filled with names, dates, scientific and historical explanations, etc. How does this style of narration compare to the detailed descriptions of the cabinet in Anthills of the Savannah? How could the cyclical nature of History be seen as a central theme in the larger framework of the post-colonial texts we have read? Consider the following quotes from Waterland: Heirs of the future, vessels of hope. Are there considerations here for the newly liberated states, or their authors? A history teacher, Tom revises the rigid academic definition of history to include the events of his childhood and life. He engages with his student Price in an extended debate over the value and substance of "history. The narrator, Tom Crick, often leaves the reader to ponder issues in the narrative and then continues to explain these issues using his expanded knowledge of history. This story-telling technique engages the reader by making the reader feel as though they are in the mind of the narrator, struggling with the same questions and mysteries the narrator confronts. As a curious individual, Tom Crick works to distinguish the history from the stories and as a history teacher, he uses stories to tell history. In a sense, the reader becomes one of his students with a window into his thoughts. What makes Graham Swift such an effective storyteller? Is the layout of his book distracting or compelling? What about his style and his tendency to ramble on about eels and history and other such things? Do these detract or add to the overall effect of Waterland? In Waterland, different forms of mental instability are particularly instrumental in the development of two characters. Dick exemplifies one form: How does the quality of madness and mental instability make these characters function within the novel? Why does Swift make this instability such a crucial element of Waterland? Consider, instead, the slow and arduous process, the interminable and ambiguous process "the process of human siltation" of land reclamation" 10 " Does it show that a nation will constantly be plagued with change and strife diverting that nation away from the goal of liberation? Discuss the structure of Waterland. Is it a circular cyclical historical monologue, like the Ouse flowing into itself, or can it be construed as a viable dialogue between Tom Crick and his students? He then goes on to describe this as "fairy tale words, fairy tale advice. The vagina, specifically "Mary Metcalf, later

Mrs. Discuss how Swift constructs the text of *Waterland* to echo and reflect the non-linear, self-reflexive natures of both history and water as described by narrator Tom Crick. For a novel concerned with the notion of "history", what is the effect of constructing narrative in a clearly non-chronological order? How does this affect our notion of history, historical facts and events in this novel? What "types" of history do we encounter and subsequently, what types of historical "dates"? Swift often uses layers of flashbacks to set up the background for particular passages he wishes to elucidate. For instance, Swift mentions a conversation that Tom Crick had with Mary Metcalf explaining what had caused the early death of Freddie Parr, a few pages later, at the very end of chapter five, he mentions Crick picking up a bottle that washed down river and gives it particular emphasis although it initially seems an insignificant event. Why does Swift do this? Does the use of this type of foreshadowing strengthen the quality of his writing or increase our understanding of what goes on? How would the novel read differently if it was more strictly chronological? In a variety of ways, *Waterland* suggests that progress does not advance in a linear fashion, and perhaps that it does not advance at all. The discussions of siltation, the Ouse, and history certainly point in this direction, and the suggestion gets repeated even in the construction of the novel – the narrative does not quite advance from one chapter to the next, but rather it is repeatedly interrupted, repeatedly discontinuous, and repeatedly turns back on itself. And this strange kind of narrative flow even takes place at the level of the sentence – commas and dashes seem to be everywhere, clauses get tangled in one another, and fragments are allowed to stand. How do these conceptions of progress compare to one another, and why might progress be such a key topic for this kind of literature?

### 6: Waterland - Graham Swift - Google Books

*28 quotes from Waterland: 'Children, be curious. Nothing is worse (I know it) than when curiosity stops. Nothing is more repressive than the repression o.*

Until shortly before the immediate action of the story, she has been working with the elderly in a home. She has given up that job. By doing so, he makes himself a part of the history he is teaching, relating his tales to local history and genealogy. The headmaster tries to entice Tom into taking an early retirement at a decent pension. Tom resists because his leaving would mean that the History Department would cease to exist and history would simply be combined with the broader area of General Studies. She testifies that God told her to do it. The publicity that attends her arrest reflects badly on the school, and Tom is told that he now must go into retirement. He is given no alternative. This is the bare frame of a story that becomes extremely complicated and convoluted. Tom uses his impending forced retirement as an excuse to unfold an extremely interesting story to his students. The bulk of *Waterland* is devoted to this story that, before it is done, covers some three hundred years of local history and relates it to the broader historical currents of those three centuries. Tom even makes occasional brief excursions to Anglo-Saxon times in telling his tales. His wife dies when Tom is eight years old. Mary is also reared by her father because her mother died giving birth to her. He sees that his daughter receives strict religious training and that she attends a good church school. As Mary matures, her interest in men grows, and she and Tom slip into an affair. It is discovered that Mary is pregnant. Mary says that he is not and lies to him, telling him that sixteen-year-old Freddie Parr is the father, although she has not had an affair with Freddie. Dick, distraught at this information, struggles with the drunken Freddie, who cannot swim, and pushes him into the River Leem. Mary tries to provoke a miscarriage but fails, so she and Tom, the father of the child, go to Mary Clay, an old crone, who performs an abortion that leaves Mary sterile. Her father forces her into seclusion, and for three years she remains isolated, engaging largely in prayer and meditation. Tom is away fighting in World War II. Finally the two fathers agree to bring their children together again; unknown to them, Tom has already written to Mary. They live thus for more than thirty years; then Mary gives up her job and becomes actively involved in the church. Obviously demented and obviously suffering from a pain that has been festering since her teenage abortion, Mary is arrested. Tom, as recounted above, is forced into an early retirement as a result of this disgrace. A secondary plot involves the Atkinson family, which has run a brewery for many generations. This subplot is interwoven intricately into the development and resolution of the primary plot.

### 7: Waterland Summary - [www.enganchecubano.com](http://www.enganchecubano.com)

*Last Orders by Graham Swift is a novel that tells the story of four men as they carry out the last wishes of the recently deceased Jack Dodds: that his ashes be scattered into the sea at Margate, a sea his family frequently visited.*

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Dance of detail: Graham Swift Over the past 20 years Graham Swift has made this short trip across Wandsworth Common in south London more times than he cares to remember: If ever inspiration is drying up, it is here he seeks refuge: Like Clapham Common, which featured in *Shuttlecock*, and Greenwich Park, which acted as a counterpart to the unruly Fens in *Waterland*, Wandsworth Common is a perfect study in harmony and simplicity. In the slightly murky duck pond, the pathway running along the railway tracks, the children playing football on a pitch marked out by jumpers, is a quotidian familiarity and a sense of place quintessentially Swiftean: Of course there are times when I hate London, but equally there are times when I can walk round a corner and I really feel that this is my place. Most of his characters are the kinds of people you might find walking their dogs on the common: And when he writes a murder mystery, as in his latest, much-anticipated novel *The Light of Day*, the culprit is revealed in the opening pages and the narrative moves back to the conception of the crime: He goes into that drizzly, unglamorous region of human existence and tries to find there something universal. I think that he looks for the dignity and heroism of very ordinary, drab, almost-defeated lives. For *The Sweet Shop Owner* in he chose a middle-aged protagonist on the verge of death, stricken with angina and waiting for his daughter to return home. His second book, *Shuttlecock*, is a downbeat story of family breakdown in the shadow of a mute sense of history. After the lush anomaly of *Waterland* he has continued to write pared-down, starker books. The resemblance goes down to small details, including the use of first names as chapter headings, the use of a one-sentence chapter, the attribution of one chapter to a dead person, and the organisation of a chapter by enumerated points," Frow wrote. Why should it be any different with Graham? In person, in his jeans and flannel shirt, he is meticulously polite and understated. In fact, to all outward appearances, Swift lives as eminently unadventurous and unremarkable a life as any of his characters. He is very much someone who is engrossed in his writing. All his fiction is powered by pure invention: To use the language that we all use and to make amazing things occur. Why did I become a writer? I was a student and then I knocked around a bit and then I knuckled down to the job of writing and eventually got published and here I am at novel number whatever it is. There is not much more to it. First is the south London district where Graham Colin Swift was born on May 4 - on the borders of Sydenham and Catford, not far removed from Bermondsey, the setting of *Last Orders*. During the war Allen had been a fighter pilot, and though not quite the undercover spy and war hero patriarch in *Shuttlecock*, he was decorated for his services. After the war, again like the father in *Shuttlecock*, he took up a rather mundane job in the National Debt Office, "this Dickensian-sounding place," says Swift. He did not relish his job. But that sort of security was very rare and he was glad to have it. He stuck with it through his life and collected his pension. But my father would have put a parachute in this bag and it might have saved his life. So the second world war, which I never went through, has been my great history lesson. Though he now bashfully dismisses it, he excelled academically and in won a scholarship to Dulwich College, the alma mater of PG Wodehouse, Raymond Chandler and fellow Booker-winner Michael Ondaatje. Swift found the regime restrictive: He also had little interest in sport and was very shy. There was an athletics-based house system, and Graham suffered a little under it. He could also command a range of styles: It proved that Graham could write in almost any way. Though when he dropped out and tuned in he did so with characteristic moderation: But those of us who knew him realised there was something else going on. I did have a sense of him burrowing away into his own territory. He was slightly out of his time. One story, "A Break", dealt with the archetypical Swiftean territory of a stultified, unhappy marriage, though Haughton noted at the time that it was written in a quite tortuous style. After graduating in with a first in English, Swift moved on to do a PhD at York where, he says, he first began to devote himself to the prospect of being a full-time, professional writer. So much so that he almost entirely ignored his PhD thesis, on "The role of the City in 19th-century English literature". That was really when I was teaching myself to write. At the time, the long and unshakeable relationship that has ensued

seemed an unlikely prospect: Another thing was that we both came from the same part of south London. Supporting himself with a variety of stop-gap jobs, ranging from security guard to farm worker, but mostly as a teacher, he threw himself into becoming a writer with renewed vigour. Most of his output during this period was short stories, many published in small literary journals. One regular platform was an eminent, now defunct, publication called the London Magazine, whose editor, Alan Ross, inquired one day whether Swift might be working on anything "more substantial". He had, without telling anyone and barely admitting it to himself, been working on a manuscript that would become his first novel, *The Sweet Shop Owner*. Entirely unlike the usual first autobiographical effort, it recounted in Joycean detail the last excruciating day on earth of Willy Chapman, as he suffers from acute angina while awaiting the arrival of his daughter, the wayward and rebellious Dorry. Employing the intertwined narrative voices that would become his hallmark, Swift uses the backdrop of the war in Europe, and the recurring headline "Peace Bid Fails" to highlight the tortured central relationship. When it appeared in , the reviews were largely favourable: Even so his final walk across the common on a hot summer day, in excruciating pain from angina, is masterly; intercut with the recollection of a mile race he won at school, the experience is both exciting and deeply poignant. This all changed in , when he published a novel unlike any that he had written before or since. The inspiration for *Waterland*, which began with the evocative setting of the Fens - as much a mystery to Swift now as when he was writing the book: I have no idea. But I did and I explored it and it became the territory. One is never sure in the middle of writing, and you never know what you have done, but at the time I thought that *Waterland* was going to be special. The main thrust of the story, however, concerns the difficult pathway through personal history that leads to these events, as told by "Cricky" during highly unorthodox history lessons. Swift decided instead to return to the sparse approach of his earlier work. When his father is killed by the IRA it sends Harry into a decline that almost destroys not only him but his unstable daughter, who is undergoing psychoanalysis in New York. Despite the experimental alternating monologues, a technique that blossomed in *Last Orders*, the book was compared unfavourably by critics to *Waterland*: The plot is deceptively simple: Almost inevitably, the triumph of *Last Orders* and the Booker Prize have raised expectations for the next Graham Swift novel. And, just as after *Waterland*, Swift has kept his public hanging on: When you begin a novel, you never know. It could take six months or six years. There is no book of rules. Swift is in the very early stages of a new book, so one reason for not talking about it "is that it may bear no relationship to what actually emerges," he says. You discover a capacity and a further creative ambition just by doing it. Graham Colin Swift Born: May 4 Education: Far from being defunct, the magazine is alive and well.

## 8: WATERLAND by Graham Swift | Kirkus Reviews

*1. Crick explains some of the theories proposed by those who lived in the Fens after the death of Sarah Atkinson, one admittedly far fetched because it endows the paralyzed matriarch with supernatural powers with which she watched over the Fens quietly.*

In the course of telling his story, their story, he questions why we tell stories to ourselves and our children, how the stories we tell relate to those found in literature and history, and what these stories tell us about ourselves, ourselves. *Waterland* meditates on human fate, responsibility, and historical narrative by pursuing a mystery; so the book, is in part a detective story. It is also the story of two families, of an entire region in England, of England from the industrial revolution to the present, of technology and its effects, and it is, finally, a meditation on stories and story-telling -- a fictional inquiry into fiction, a book that winds back upon itself and asks why we tell stories. In attempting to relate his own story, Tom Crick begins by questioning the purpose, truthfulness, and limitations of stories while at the same time making clear that he believes history to be a form of story-telling. These questionings of narrative within its narrative make *Waterland* a self-reflexive text. The novel has as protagonist a history teacher who is about to be fired because history his stories are no longer considered of sufficient cultural value. He ruminates upon history in terms of the events of his own life, and he quickly runs up against the young, those without interest in the past, those who quite properly want to know why? They want to know, as we do, two things: What is the point of history as a subject; that is, why study the past? The present alone is vital" Until the Here and Now, gripping me by the arm, slapping my face and telling me to take a good look at the mess I was in, informed me that history was no invention but indeed existed -- and I had become a part of it. And you -- you can stuff your past! Price also makes a second appealing attack on history and historiography, namely, that it is a means of avoidance: To be against history is thus for Price anti-explanation, because according to him, both history and explanation evade life in the present -- an attitude based on the assumption that the present is pleasant, nurturing, and not deadly. They do not subvert life, claims Crick, nor do they bear responsibility for keeping us from engaging in important events like revolutions. By relating the events of his life in some sort of an order he makes it into a story. He constructs history -- his story. He constructs himself, and in the course of doing so he recognizes that "Perhaps history is just story-telling" ; "History itself, the Grand Narrative, the filler of vacuums, the dispeller of fears of the dark" Before the murder of Freddie Parr, he and Mary lived outside of time and history, outside that stream of events he is trying to teach to his class. Previously, "Mary was fifteen, and so was I. As Tom explains, "it is precisely these surprise attacks of the Here and Now which, far from launching us into the present tense, which they do, it is true, for a brief and giddy interval, announce that time has taken us prisoner"

This view accords with that of those philosophical anthropologists -- Mircea Eliade and others -- who emphasize that until human beings leave tribal, agricultural existence, they live in an eternal present in which time follows a cyclical pattern of days and seasons. Interest in the novel, the unique, the irreversible appeared only comparatively recently. In tribal society, one becomes individual, one becomes an individual, only by botching a ritual or otherwise departing from some universal pattern. In such societies, one differentiates oneself, becoming an individual, only by sin and failure. The individual therefore is the man or woman who got wrong the planting or fertility ritual, the hunting pattern. Which is why the narrator explains: Therefore, writing history, like writing autobiography, only comes after a fall, for autobiography and other forms of history respond to the question "why," and people only ask that question after something has gone wrong. In a state of perfect contentment there would be no need or room for this irritant little word. History begins only at the point where things go wrong; history is born only with trouble, with perplexity, with regret" But, of course, were it not for trouble, perplexity, and regret we would not have autobiographies, and as the history of Victorian autobiography demonstrates, periods of trouble and perplexity, if not regret, produce self-histories galore, for in such circumstances autobiographers traditionally have offered their experiences, their survival, as exemplary. *Waterland*, in other words, to a large extent embodies the conventional romantic pattern best known, perhaps, from "Tintern Abbey. Tom does, however, come to believe that all such explanatory

narratives, function, however provisionally, as means of ordering our lives and thereby protecting us from chaos and disorder. In fact, Tom Crick argues, story-telling comes with time, with living in time, and story-telling, which distinguishes us from animals, comes with being human. Children, only animals live entirely in the Here and Now. Only nature knows neither memory nor history. Man man -- let me offer you a definition -- is the story-telling animal. Wherever he goes he wants to leave behind not a chaotic wake, not an empty space, but the comforting marker-buoys and trail-signs of stories. He has to go on telling stories. He has to keep on making them up. And, one must note in passing, this fact might cast into doubt all story-telling, particularly that of this novel, since narrative always involves some kind of progress. Natural history, human nature" As Tom makes us realize, natural history is a paradox and an oxymoron -- that is, a jarring placement together of contraries -- because it is history of the antihistorical which has no order or is cyclical nonhistorical without individuating markers. This whole novel, in other words, sets out to examine these ages -- and their literary as well as religious and philosophical foundations -- and finds them wanting. It examines various theories of history, such as that proposed by religion 35 , progress , , and hubris 62 , and canvases a wide range of subjects for history such as political events from the Roman conquerors of Britain to the Bastille and World Wars I and II, the history of technology , , including draining the Fens , the history of places Fens , the history of families Atkinsons and Cricks, 78 , the history of individual people, especially the narrator and Mary , and the history of a bottle, a beer bottle Waterland, which is cast in the form of a fictional autobiography, probes the role of narrative and in so doing raises questions about the means and methods of autobiography. Like much recent theory and criticism, the novel looks skeptically at two aspects of narrative. First, it expresses suspicion of the way human beings gravitate towards folk-tales, myths, and other well-shaped narratives that falsify experience and keep us from encountering the world. Recent studies of nineteenth-century autobiography have pointed out the extent to which authors depend upon such conventional narrative patterns to create what Avrom Fleishman has termed "personal myth" by which to tell their lives. Peterson has pointed out, however, conventional narratives, such as those drawn from scripture, create major problems for many would-be self-historians, particularly women, who find that these narratives distort their stories or do not permit them to tell their stories at all. Waterland questions all narrative based on sequence, and in this it agrees with other novels of its decade. The question is, shall it or shall it not be linear history? Shake the tube and see what comes out. There is no chronology inside my head. I am composed of a myriad Claudias who spin and mix and part like sparks of sunlight on water. The pack of cards I carry around is forever shuffled and re-shuffled; there is no sequence, everything happens at once. Returning to Cairo in her late sixties, Claudia finds it both changed and unchanged. Like Claudia, Tom Crick takes historical, autobiographical narratives whose essence is sequence and spreads them out or weaves them in a nonsequential way. Lively and Swift are hardly the first to suggest that narrative sequence falsifies autobiographical truth. In Memoriam reveals that the poet, who found that brief lyrics best embodied the transitory emotions that buffeted him after his loss, rejected conventional elegy and narrative because both falsify the experience of grief and recovery by mechanically driving the reader through too unified -- and hence too simplified -- a version of these experiences. Creating a poetry of fragments, Tennyson leads the reader of In Memoriam from grief and despair through doubt to hope and faith, but at each step stubborn, contrary emotions intrude, and readers encounter doubt in the midst of faith, pain in the midst of resolution. Like Tennyson and most other nineteenth-century autobiographers, Tom Crick tells his story as a means of explaining his conversion to a particular belief and way of life. Unlike the great Victorian autobiographers, real and fictional, he does not relate the significant details about his life from the vantage point of relative tranquility or even complacency. Mill, Ruskin , and Newman , like the Pip of Great Expectations or the heroine of Jane Eyre, all tell the stories of their lives after everything interesting has already happened to them and they have at last reached some safe haven. In contrast, Tom Crick, unlike Pip and Jane, writes from within a time of crisis, for Tom, like his age, exists in a condition of catastrophe. Even though Newman, Mill , Ruskin, and Tennyson present themselves and their experiences as essentially unique, they nonetheless emphasize the representativeness and therefore relevance of their lives to their readers. They present themselves as living lessons for the rest of us. The approach to autobiography undertaken by Tom Crick, on the other hand, essentially deconstructs the

potentially hopeful aspects of his narrative. Both novels relate the dark results of an adolescent passion, and both are haunted by the presence of an abused older woman, as Sarah Atkinson echoes and completes Miss Havisham -- as do the breweries and flames that associate with each. According to McHale, whereas epistemological concerns define the novels that embody modernism, ontological concerns characterize postmodernist fiction. That is, modernist fiction deploys strategies which engage and foreground questions such as. What is there to be known? Its logic is that of a detective story, the epistemological genre par excellence. In contrast to modernist fiction, which thus centers on questions of knowledge, postmodernist work is informed by ontological questions such as "What is a world? What happens when different kinds of world are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated? The clear parallels between *Waterland* and *Absalom, Absalom!* There is, however, one important difference: In true modernist fashion Quentin Compson and his Harvard roommate attempt to solve a mystery by detection and by imaginative re-creation. In true postmodernist fashion Tom Crick, who knew the identity of the murderer years before he began the story-telling that constitutes *Waterland*, creates a mystery for us where none exists. Presenting Tom Crick as intertwined with so many other tales and selves, Swift presents the self in the manner of many poststructuralist critics and postmodernist novelists as an entity both composed of many texts and dispersed into them. Richard Miller [New York: Hill and Wang], . Therefore, we can say of the self-construction that Tom Crick offers us to read, that "we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one; the codes it mobilizes extend as far as the eye can reach, they are indeterminable" Barthes p. And that is why to record part of himself, Tom must also record so many other histories, for they all intertwine, echo, and reverberate; causes, responsibilities, limits become difficult to locate. In other words, as soon as Crick begins to tell his story he finds necessary expanding that story beyond his biological beginnings. On the one hand, *Waterland* seems a rigorously historicist presentation of selfhood; on the other, its self-conscious examination of the history that historicizes this self makes it appear that these narratives, like the historicism they support, are patently constructed, purely subjective patterns. That is why the Fen lands and Fen waters, which the Atkinsons and other commercial leaders of the Industrial Revolution try to fit into a human story, play such an important part in this novel. And that is why Tom, who explicitly takes draining the Fens to exemplify progressive theories of history, speaks in his imagination to his wife of their "Sunday walks, with which we trod and measured out the tenuous, reclaimed land of our marriage? *Waterland* examines and finds wanting the Neoclassical view of nature that takes it to be divine order, the Romantic one that takes it to be essentially benign and accommodated to our needs, and the Victorian one that takes it to be, however hostile or neutral, something we can shape to our needs and use for the material of a tale of progress. Of course, autobiography and history, like draining the fens, can never achieve more than temporary victories against the natural, for the simple reason that people carry out both these projects within time, and eventually, sooner or later, time wins. Time wears channels in the dykes, rusts machinery, makes a particular autobiographical act obsolete or irrelevant. None of these facts, of course, argue against reclaiming land nor do they argue against undertaking to write history and autobiography. But, as Tom Crick recognizes, they do cut such projects down to size. My humble model for progress is the reclamation of land. Which is repeatedly, never-endingly retrieving what is lost. A dogged and vigilant business. A dull yet valuable business. A hard, inglorious business. Autobiographical acts, then, follow from a basic human need for order and meaning that relates intimately to the need to escape chaos and fear.

### 9: Visiting Graham Swift's Fenland of the mind | Books | The Guardian

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