

**From Storytelling to Historia:
The Fiction of Graham Swift**

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ABSTRACT

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Graham Swift, a major contemporary British novelist, is concerned in his fiction, one short story collection and six novels to date, with narratives of trauma. To each of these seven books the present thesis devotes one chapter of critical analysis. As the title suggests, this dissertation traces the development of themes and techniques related to storytelling, as a recuperative process, and its relationship to Historia, a paradoxical term combining narrative, inquiry and history as a record of events. Swift connects individual lives to a broader canvas by interrelating family stories to events in history, especially the two world wars.

Swift's faith in the novel as a genre that can incorporate the complexity of human consciousness as well as the dilemmas haunting people's lives allows him to combine the moral imperatives of nineteenth-century realism with fragmented tales of alienation typical of modernism and the questioning of representation characteristic of contemporary fiction. The complex psychology of Swift's characters is conveyed through non-linear juxtaposition of memories; narrative techniques that favour polyphony; shifts in style, tone and focus within first-person narratives; embedded texts, intertextuality and metafictional awareness; symbolic settings; and the reworking of classic plots and mythological motifs.

Swift's mostly middle-aged protagonists resort to confession, seeking to accommodate guilt which stems from failure in their roles as sons, fathers and husbands. Childless or estranged from their children, they are unable to reconcile themselves to time and move into the future as long as they remain prisoners of their past. Overwhelmed by memories reconstructed through telling, Swift's narrators are unwilling, hesitant and frequently unreliable storytellers. Seeking through story to encounter, comprehend, even manipulate history, they feel persecuted by sociopolitical and natural forces, accidents and their own choices. In his fiction Swift self-consciously pays homage to tradition, constantly reinforcing his belief in storytelling as a fundamental human instinct and a therapeutic ritual.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations of the titles of Graham Swift's books are used in parenthetical citations:

<u>Learning to Swim</u>	<u>LS</u>
<u>The Sweet-Shop Owner</u>	<u>SO</u>
<u>Shuttlecock</u>	<u>S</u>
<u>Waterland</u>	<u>W</u>
<u>Out Of This World</u>	<u>OW</u>
<u>Ever After</u>	<u>EA</u>
<u>Last Orders</u>	<u>LO</u>

Introduction

Graham Swift, Storyteller: “In the Business of Empathy”

Revealing truth ... is not the primary
function of fiction. ... Fiction is about
compassion.

Graham Swift
(Bernard and Menegaldo 13)

The story is the heart of the matter. ...
The meaning is the story.

Graham Swift
(Bernard 230-231)

I just like telling stories.

Graham Swift
(Walsh “Telling” 23)

“There is never a moment in life, perhaps, when we should underestimate the latent repercussions,” notes Graham Swift in the conclusion of “Fishing, Writing and Ted: an Appreciation” (1999). The hidden potential of any moment in a person’s life to explode into a major crisis constitutes the basic tenet of Swift’s oeuvre to date. This observation, which could have been spoken by any of Swift’s protagonists, appears in one of Swift’s rare non-fiction essays, written to commemorate Ted Hughes. In this five-page eulogy on the late poet laureate (and their common obsession with words as well as fishing), Swift reveals that he “still remember[s]” his English teacher “reading out [Hughes’s poem] ‘Pike.’” Even as a “young teenager in the early Sixties,” Swift acknowledges being “smitten by the power of words,” nursing “the secret dream of one day being a writer” (“Fishing” 347).

Forty years, six novels and one short story collection later, Graham Swift is a major contemporary British novelist whose faith in the human need for storytelling, concern for the interrelatedness between the individual and history, and experimentation with first-person narratives and polyphony render his fiction an amalgam of novelistic traditions. In his 1995 essay “No End of History” Del Ivan Janik recognises that Swift’s fiction “transcends categories” (161) as it includes elements from realism (“rounded characters, complex and often unpredictable plots” 162) and modernism (“multiple point-of-view, time shift, myth, open endings” 162). Paying homage to tradition while producing fiction that is recognisably contemporary, Swift, as this analysis of his work will demonstrate, records the quest for identity in the context of history and reveals the uneasy coexistence between duty and desire as well as

choice and accident by exploring the human instinct for narrative through traumatised, hesitant, even unreliable storytellers.

Graham Swift's career began very quietly in 1976 with the publication of a short story, "The Recreation Ground," in London Magazine. Until 1980, when his first novel, The Sweet-Shop Owner, was published, Swift remained virtually unknown. The publication of three novels and several stories within three years (1980-1983) and the short-listing of the critically acclaimed Waterland for the Booker prize in 1983 transformed Swift, almost overnight, into a prominent contemporary novelist. The success of Waterland has turned this novel into standard reading for critics of contemporary fiction as well as college students. Since 1983 major publications, both scholarly and popular, have devoted space for Swift's fiction to be discussed through critical essays, reviews, and interviews, although Swift has never been as conspicuous in the media or in the academy as Salman Rushdie or Martin Amis. Last Orders, Swift's latest novel to date, won the Booker prize in 1996, securing his reputation, according to the Dictionary of Literary Biography, as a "spellbinding storyteller" (Tredell 262).

Born in London in 1949, the same year as Martin Amis and Peter Ackroyd, Swift belongs to a post-war generation of male writers who began their literary careers in the 1970s, acquired critical and popular approval in the 1980s, and, since the 1990s, are considered "mainstream" (Bradbury Modern 542): apart from Swift, major representatives of this generation are Julian Barnes (b. 1946); Salman Rushdie (b. 1947); Ian McEwan (b. 1948); Kazuo Ishiguro (b. 1954) as well as the aforementioned Amis and Ackroyd. In 1983, along with Amis, Barnes, Ishiguro, Rushdie and McEwan, Swift was included in a list of twenty authors advocated by Granta as the "Best of Young British Novelists," a list which proved to be remarkably discerning. Unlike his peers, Swift has become established but has not been the subject of much critical analysis: monographs on Swift have not been written in English as yet, although European critics, such as Catherine Bernard, Susana Onega, Tamás Bényei and Ansgar Nünning, in books and essays written in French, Spanish, Hungarian and German, have pointed out the similarities in themes and techniques between Swift and his contemporaries.¹ Despite a broad

¹ European scholars have published work on Swift as well as other British writers not only in their native languages but also in English. In this dissertation I use material available in English; essays and books in other languages have not been consulted.

variety of critical essays published on Waterland, Swift is the only major British novelist who awaits extended critical analysis.

Swift acknowledges his friendships with several fellow writers—whom he interviews (Ishiguro in 1989, Caryl Philips in 1991), supports (Rushdie) or visits abroad (Michael Ondaatje)—but denies that they were “ever a group” (Lanham) and resists categorisation. Still, in the 1988 article “Throwing Off Our Inhibitions,” Swift praises “the bravura, exhibitionist work” in novels such as Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children, Barnes’s Flaubert’s Parrot or Ackroyd’s Hawksmoor as paradigmatic of a new boldness in British fiction writing of the 1980s (20). In the same essay Swift reveals that his own desire to write “something ambitious, adventurous and energetic” produced Waterland and admits his admiration for the diverse traditions that influenced his early fiction: the “colour” in Dickens, the “humour” in Beckett, and the “exhibitionism” of Marquez and Borges (20). Humanism and nihilism; the grotesque and the absurd; fabulation and magic realism: elements from the British, European and Latin American traditions unite in the work of an author whose meticulous recreation of the local evokes the universal and the archetypal.

Swift’s background and profile bear similarities with his contemporaries more significant than age or personal relations. Like most of his fellow writers, Swift has received formal training in literature: having completed his schooling at Dulwich College, a prestigious public school, in 1966, Swift went on to read English at the Universities of Cambridge (Queens’ College, BA 1970, MA 1975) and York (1970-1973 as a doctoral candidate), for a period of almost ten years. Swift relishes his student years for providing him with the opportunity to read substantially and accomplish his desire to teach himself—through “trial and error” (Lanham)—how to write (Gossmann 158). Abandoning a doctoral thesis on Dickens in 1973 and eschewing a scholarly career, Swift spent a year in Greece where he devoted himself to writing (“Nineteen Seventy-four”). A decade later, in 1983, the publication of Waterland constituted proof of the arrival of another major author in a decade teeming with powerful new voices.

Swift credits his vocation to his upbringing, not to his education: as he tells Lewis Frumkes, “in our home, there was no TV, so reading was one form of entertainment. I grew up with a sense of the word.” While his parents were not creative—his father, Lionel Alan, was a civil servant at the National Debt Office, and his mother, Sheila Irene, held part-time clerical jobs (Walsh)—Swift considers his “strongest influences”

to have been his “first encounters with tales . . . reading and listening to stories in childhood” (Hartung-Brückner 471). Swift’s parents, to whom he dedicated Ever After, must have been storytellers, who instilled in him that “magic element in narrative” (Hartung-Brückner 471) which he seeks to emulate in his fiction: “I became captivated by this magic that writers achieve within the covers of a book” (Frumkes). Born in Catford, Swift has lived in south-east London all his life—he has made Wandsworth his home in the last two decades—and he has set the action of almost all his novels in familiar territory: in his first two novels the exact location of the characters’ South London abode remains vague, but in Waterland it is Greenwich and Bermondsey in Last Orders; in Ever After Swift returns to the haunts of his student days, making an unnamed Cambridge college Bill Unwin’s terrain.

When the success of Waterland made Swift well known, the author’s background was erroneously linked to the Fens. The authenticity of the setting led both reviewers and readers to conclude that there must be “great swatches of autobiography” in the book (Champlin 1). Swift has repeatedly emphasised that “the imagination makes its own territory” (“Hale” L22) and “unfamiliarity with a place can be an advantage” (Digilio 2). Even in 1988, in the article “Hale and Hardy: Graham Swift’s Wandsworth,” Swift had to repeat “I have no personal connection with the setting of [Waterland]” (L22). Like Hardy’s Wessex and Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha County, Swift’s fenland belongs equally to the real and the surreal; existing in another time-space continuum, the setting is recognisable as well as new, characteristic of the manner of its creation: “I have taken a map of the Fens and made a hole in it and put my fictional world into it” (Lashku 37). Ray’s Bermondsey in Last Orders and Bill’s Paris in Ever After are other such fictional worlds, reflecting the Swiftian protagonist’s yearning for a place of rest from memory and desire.

“The Magic of Writing”

Swift is one of the less prolific, more low-key representatives of his literary group by comparison with Amis, Barnes or Ackroyd, who produce, through reviewing or journalism, almost as much non-fictional as fictional prose. Before the publication of Waterland in 1983, instead of subsidising his income through reviewing, Swift worked part-time as a teacher at colleges of further education for almost a decade, preferring to reserve his creative energies for fiction. Denying knowledge of the jargon of literary criticism, Swift declares, “I don’t try to write in a fashionable way; I don’t anticipate academic criticism” (Lashku 39). Similarly, he focuses on the writing of novels—he has even forgone writing short stories, the genre that helped him

launch his career—believing that “diversification doesn’t work with art” and that a writer should “concentrate,” not “dissipate,” his talent (Rosenberg). Although asked, Swift refused to write the screenplays for his two novels, Waterland and Last Orders, which have been made into films, claiming, in January 2002, that there is a “great benefit in keeping the creative vision undivided” (“Canterbury”). The only exception to fiction writing Swift has made so far has been to edit, with his fellow writer and angler David Profumo, an “Anthology of Fishing in Literature” entitled The Magic Wheel (1985), combining angling, his favourite recreational activity, with his love for literature through chronologically arranged selections that run the gamut from Homer and the Bible to Virginia Woolf and Seamus Heaney.

The breadth of the selections in The Magic Wheel represents the diversity of Swift’s reading background. In his fiction Swift constantly reveals his awareness of the entire canon of Western literature: the themes of suffering and knowledge in ancient tragedy; the romantic preoccupations with love and war in epic poetry; the tormenting foibles of human nature in Shakespeare; the Chaucerian rituals of storytelling and pilgrimage; all are intertexts in Swift’s fiction which, along with the allusions to Dickens, Beckett, T. S. Eliot, Faulkner, and magic realism, unite the novelistic traditions of the last two centuries (realism, modernism and fabulation) into a recognisably contemporary blend. Since becoming an established author, Swift has stopped referring to his contemporaries or admitting that he reads new fiction: “I tend not to read really contemporary writers; my reading would be preferably classic reading, or non-fiction,” he declared in 1997 (Gossmann 158), although in 1986 he had spoken to Patrick McGrath of his admiration for Russell Hoban, Kazuo Ishiguro and Timothy Mo (47).

Whenever he has a new novel published, Swift engages in promotional tours, interviews and public readings, eager to reach new audiences and communicate, through “the magic of writing” with booklovers (“Throwing” 20). Not an author who takes fame lightly, Swift responded to the Booker prize victory of Last Orders in October 1996 with enthusiasm, thanking his readers more profusely than he thanked the literary establishment. Swift regards all the prizes he has won as opportunities to acquire a wider readership, aware that the sheer volume of published fiction requires that even an established writer must court publicity, agreeing with his friend Salman Rushdie that “the novel is not dead. It’s just buried” (quoted in Bradbury Modern 507). Between books Swift emerges infrequently: to pay tribute to a friend (through a letter of commemoration, for instance, about the

late Malcolm Bradbury in December 2000); to participate in festivals in Britain and abroad (such as the 1997 Bath Literature Festival and the 2001 Kilkenny Arts Festival); to advocate human rights (through the Granta essay "Looking for Jiří Wolf," 1990, or by supporting a friend's plight in The Rushdie Letters, 1993); to contribute a brief statement to the TLS (nominating Montaigne's Essays as his "book of the millennium"); to supply a playful comment on, for example, "What I'd Be If I Were Not a Writer" (usually at the request of a friend, in this case Linda Spalding, editor of Brick, a literary journal); to provide a foreword (to Writers' Awards 2001); more rarely, to defend himself against accusations of plagiarism (through letters and interviews in March 1997) or charges of being, in Lisa Jardine's words, "parochial" (letter in response "to a slur" in 1997).

Considered a "modest, diffident, reclusive, and slightly old-fashioned" practitioner (McCrum), Swift is such rare fodder for the press that the literary gossip columns pay inordinate attention when the occasion arises. This happened most recently in March 2002 when Swift auctioned his new novel, The Light of Day, to the highest bidder—which proved to be Hamish Hamilton for an undisclosed sum reportedly close to half a million pounds—instead of taking it to Picador, his "loyal and long-standing" publisher (McCrum). Swift had not really been in the news since the spring of 1997 when accusations of "inert borrowing" by Australian academic John Frow led to cries of plagiarism which Swift angrily rebutted and patiently overcame. Less publicised but equally surprising was Swift's decision to "refuse absolutely" to allow A. S. Byatt to quote extensively from his novels in discussing his work in On Histories and Stories, her 2000 collection of critical essays (7).

Fiercely defensive of his work, Swift appears dismissive of negative criticism: "I have every faith that, in time, every one of my books will get the recognition it deserves," he told John Walsh in 1996. Although he does not hesitate to address comments that he finds personally offensive, such as Jardine's deprecation of the British novelistic establishment to which he now belongs, Swift demonstrates his continuing need for communication through writing by proudly referring to the many languages into which his work has been translated (Millet) and always praising his latest book as his "best" so far, as he insists about Last Orders in December 2001 (Kleftoyianni). Not surprising from an artist who believes in "inspiration," defines writing as "a thing of passion" (Smith 44), wants his books to provide readers with "an experience" (McGrath 45) and advises novices to trust the imagination, to "write

about what you don't know about! How else will you bring your imagination into play?" ("Throwing" 20, emphasis in original text).

Swift's beliefs, as these have been expressed in interviews since 1983, the ideas presented in the essay "Throwing Off Our Inhibitions" (1988), and the fundamental themes throughout his fiction reveal him as an artist who has served his vision with remarkable consistency from the beginning of his career. The essay "Throwing Off Our Inhibitions," which includes the aforementioned advice to new writers, conveys not only Swift's assessment of the dominant characteristics of British fiction in the 1980s but also the gist of his beliefs about the purpose of writing and reading literature. The closest this author has come to producing a theory of fiction, this essay posits empathy as the main concern for writers and readers alike: "the fundamental task of literature is to enable us to enter, imaginatively, experiences other than our own" ("Throwing" 20). Identifying literature as "the confessional of society," this author declares his faith in "the power of sheer, fictive invention" the imagination has to "make us arrive at knowledge we did not possess...and thought we had no right to possess" ("Throwing" 20). Although Swift claims not to understand this power, he defines it as "the magic of writing" and "of reading," revealing the intimate link he believes exists between the artist and the audience.

Swift concludes this essay by describing the paradox of writing and highlighting his moral commitment to communication: "the writer has to be, at the same time and all the time, someone who looks out in order to look in and someone who looks in in order to look out" ("Throwing" 20). Unlike some of the protagonists of his novels who eschew confession and cannot find their place in history, Swift engages in storytelling that reminds us of our basic human traits as these have been defined since antiquity; otherwise, he argues, "what hope do we have as the social, political and cultural animals we claim to be?" ("Throwing" 20). In several interviews Swift insists that novels "fulfil a highly moral function" (Bernard Interview 224) and emphasises the writer's participation in the characters' quest: "if as a novelist you are not in the business of empathy, then what are you doing?" (Bernard Interview 225) As the following chapters will demonstrate, by juxtaposing story and history, Swift engages the reader through empathy, proving in his fiction that "literature voices things which cannot be voiced" and has done so "since the days of Sophocles" ("Throwing" 20).

Admitting to a “paradoxical outlook” (McGrath 45), Swift is comfortable with the juxtaposition of opposites present in his work: the fragmentation, nihilism and alienation characteristic of modernism coexist with the moral concerns, humanism and engaging storytelling of realism. This combination—which appears in the works of others of his contemporaries, such as Ishiguro and Barnes, as well—is apparent in his description of the components of a novel: Swift believes that “novels should be this mixture of the intensely concrete and the world of ideas” (McGrath 47). Swift depicts the genesis of his novels as a mystical process initiated when “some kind of image just lodges in your consciousness in an incidental way and is suggestive of something bigger” (Dickson 7.6). In 1983 Swift described the birth of Waterland thus: “it all started from a single landscape. ... I just saw all that flat, wet, depressing, utterly unpromising landscape through a train window one day, with a field and a lock—and imagined a body floating in it, without having any idea where it might have come from” (Walsh “Telling” 22).

The mystery of the body in the river constitutes the basic premise of the plot in Waterland, but in two other novels the images Swift credits as the initial *données* are fundamental to the protagonist’s psychology, not the plot. In 1988 Swift tells David Profumo that Out Of This World “began with a singular visual image of Harry Beech, the son, discovering a photograph of the mother he never knew” (G9), a scene described almost at the end of the book and revelatory of the origins of Harry’s fascination with vision. In Ever After the “fragmentary, incidental” image—that of a boy watching ballerinas practise through a window (Begley)—occurs early in the novel and constitutes evidence of Bill Unwin’s attraction to icons of beauty and romance. Of Last Orders Swift refuses to disclose the “nugget” that produced it, claiming, “I can’t think of what that is,” insisting that writing is “a leap into the unknown” with the “rope of the imagination to hang on to” (Rosenberg). A poetic writer with a penchant for metaphor, Swift denies the various deaths—of the Author, the Novel, the Word—that criticism has customarily mourned in the second half of the twentieth century: he finds stories “everywhere, even in the most unlikely and unpromising situations” and declares his faith in the novel as a form and in storytelling “as a way of coming to terms with the world and what we experience” (Crane Interview 8). As this analysis of his fiction will show, Swift explores how his protagonists come to terms (or not) with the world and how they use confession (or not) to define themselves, find their place in history and alleviate trauma.

Critical Debates and Swift's Fiction

A thorough education in English literature has provided Swift with, in his words, "a very strong sense of tradition," allowing him to find "comfort" and "strength" through continuity and connection to the "literary blood still flowing" (Bernard 223). In his fiction, Swift, whom Peter Widdowson considers a "sophisticated, self-conscious novelist" ("Novels" 211), uses as much as he rejects the conventions associated with the English novel. Several critics, notably Del Ivan Janik, Catherine Bernard, and David Leon Higdon, find that Swift shares thematic concerns as well as the desire to subvert literary tradition with the generation of writers who became prominent in the nineteen-eighties.² In fact, the majority of critics view the novels of Graham Swift—as well as works by other contemporary British authors, such as Julian Barnes, Peter Ackroyd and Salman Rushdie—as "historiographic metafiction," a term first coined by Linda Hutcheon in 1984. In A Poetics of Postmodernism (1988) Linda Hutcheon uses the term "historiographic metafiction" to describe the kind of novel that "works within conventions in order to subvert them" (5), engaging in a "reworking" of "mimetic novelistic tradition" (quoted in Alison Lee 36). As Susana Onega explains,

historiographic metafiction strikingly combines, on the one hand, the intensely parodic, realism-undermining self-reflexivity of metafiction, inherited from modernism, with, on the other, the historical element, suffused by the relish in storytelling, in the construction of well-made plots, carefully delineated characters and realism-enhancing narrative techniques characteristic of classic realism. (7)

In the 1993 essay "Dismembering/Remembering Mimesis," the French critic Catherine Bernard applies Linda Hutcheon's principles of historiographic metafiction in her analysis of Swift's work but observes a "paradoxical human concern" (121) in his novels and concludes that Swift "reaffirms the necessity for fiction to shoulder reality" (122). The author of Graham Swift: La Parole Chronique (1991), Bernard describes Swift's fiction as a "dissident form of realistic representation" (Foreword 218). Recognising "Swift's skill with chronological scrambling, his ability to shift about in time while holding the attention of the reader by means of the ongoing narrative voice and the curiosity aroused by withheld information," Nicolas Tredell characterises Swift's technique as "a domestication of modernism" ("Feelgood

² In their discussion of Swift's novels critics term his fiction 'postmodernist' to distinguish it from a more conventional, representational mode of narrative. In a 1998 interview David Lodge considers 'postmodern' as an "elastic term" which requires definition each time it is used (Ahrens 16). To avoid entering an ongoing semantic and philosophical debate concerning the definition and relevance of 'postmodernism' to contemporary British fiction, I refrain from use of the term 'postmodern' and its derivatives throughout my analysis of Swift's fiction.

Fiction” 37). Similarly, Pamela Cooper argues that Swift might be termed “more accurately” a “neo-modernist” rather than a “postmodernist” (Last 18).

My examination of Swift’s fiction argues in favour of continuity: Swift fuses the tradition of realistic narration with modernist experimentation, exhibiting a strong historical consciousness. While Swift adopts dominant features of the English novel, he also subverts and exposes the genre conventions to produce what David Lodge in his essay “The Novelist Today: Still at the Crossroads?” (1996) terms “‘crossover’ fiction” (9). As Lodge observes (in a reassessment of his famous earlier argument), in the 1990s a writer is no longer at the crossroads of experimentation but combines realism with fabulation, metafiction or intertextuality in a “startling, deliberately disjunctive way” (9). Lodge’s current position on the juxtaposition of tradition and experimentation in contemporary British fiction—that a novelist now breaks the “constraints of realism” with “self-conscious acknowledgement” (Ahrens 13)—is fully applicable to Swift’s fiction. The use of multiple narrative modes and plot strands; the narrators’ preoccupation with alternative versions of the past; the questionable reliability of the narrative voices; the pseudo-realism of autobiography; the subtle moments of reflexivity; the use of natural elements, particularly bodies of water and animals, as metaphors and symbols: Swift’s techniques, analysed in detail in the following chapters, reveal the author’s preoccupation with modes of telling that engage as well as challenge the reader but maintain the humanity of characters and illustrate the universality of their plight.

Employing an amalgam of realist and modernist techniques in his novels, Swift is interested in the accurate portrayal of a psychological crisis, not in disrupting the narrative in the fundamental and obvious manner of other authors. The observation Amy Elias makes about Waterland, that it blurs the “boundaries between postmodern ‘experiment’ and ‘Realism’” (9), relates to all of Swift’s novels. Although Swift experiments in his novels with contemporary notions of fictional discourse, he also uses traditional narrative methods to engage readers in the stories of traumatised men who seek refuge in confession. As Adrian Poole suggests, “Swift’s novels look back, through all sorts of modernist and postmodernist lenses, to some great nineteenth-century predecessors” (“Mourning After” 165). Swift’s fiction blends traditional and non-traditional elements to produce a subdued version of experimentation that Ulrich Broich terms “muted postmodernism” (38). While the reader is made conscious of departures from realism through metafictional irony and self-conscious paradox in the confessions of (frequently unreliable) narrators who

teeter on the verge of a mental breakdown, the storytelling remains as engaging and morally committed as in any tale by Dickens, Hardy or George Eliot. As this analysis of Swift's fiction will demonstrate, the conventions of narrative voice are modified to record the anxieties of contemporary voices while investigating universal themes related with knowledge and suffering through the juxtaposition of individual stories to the broader frame of history.

Like Lodge, Malcolm Bradbury finds "post-modern experiment frequently mixing and merging with traditional narrative" in contemporary British fiction (Modern 405). Arguing against "the myth of the unadventurousness of mainstream British fiction" ("Presence" 104), Richard Todd concludes in 1988 that contemporary fiction, which "on the surface" looks "conventional," questions conventions while maintaining "a strong sense of its past" ("Confrontation" 124). As the analysis in the following chapters will show, Swift's experimentation is never flamboyant, seeking to serve the psychological needs of the protagonists, not the author's agenda. As a storyteller, Swift aims predominantly at communicating a tale, not dazzling or puzzling his reader. Swift's fiction lacks the more extravagant characteristics found in contemporary British fiction: no authorial surrogates or doubles appear in the text as in John Fowles's The French Lieutenant's Woman (1969) or in Martin Amis's Money (1984) and London Fields (1989); no historical figures are transformed into *dramatis personae* in Swift's novels as in Peter Ackroyd's Hawksmoor (1985) and Chatterton (1987); no plea for the reader's trust in the narrator is made as openly as in Jeanette Winterson's The Passion (1987), in which the motif "Trust me, I'm telling you stories" is repeated five times; no character is named Graham as the narrator of Winterson's Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit (1985) is called Jeanette; no alternative endings are offered as in The French Lieutenant's Woman.

In a 1985 interview Swift appeared sceptical—"I have some reservations"—of the effectiveness of Fowles's ending and of the extent and purpose of the parody of Victorian realism in The French Lieutenant's Woman: "the historical recreation is possibly a little too overdone and a little too self-conscious. And I am not very happy with the ending of that book," Swift declared in a rare instance of self-disclosure (Crane 10), revealing his dislike of "clever" but "defensive" writing that draws attention towards the author and away from the story (Bernard Interview 229). Combining realist narrative with metafictional elements, The French Lieutenant's Woman, a historical novel which mapped new territory through its juxtaposition of the Victorian spiritual crisis with post-atomic-age angst, is considered the archetypal

paradigm of the struggle with authorial omniscience in the contemporary novel; Fowles's book constitutes a landmark and continues to exert tremendous influence despite Swift's disapproval of the author's self-conscious unmasking, disruptive as it is of the storytelling process and irrelevant to the characters' psychology. Swift describes himself as an "undefensive" and "vulnerable" writer who encourages the readers' participation in the story and their identification with the protagonist's predicament: Swift insists that "storiness" is "what makes the reader read" although he recognises that in the contemporary literary scene this is "not a very fashionable view of fiction" (Bernard Interview 230-1). As this analysis of his works illustrates, fashionable fiction has never been a concern for Swift, whose insistence on the life-essential, healing potential of tale-sharing is as old as the legend of Scheherazade.

"Getting Into Other Lives"

In Swift's works, which Bernard terms "novels of crisis" ("Dismembering" 127), understanding the story involves grasping the troubled psychology of each narrator, who constitutes, so this thesis argues, the principal force in the narrative. Swift replaces linear chronology with the circular temporality of memory to allow the narrators' crises to emerge as the inevitable culmination of important events from the past. Malcolm Bradbury in The Modern British Novel (1994) finds Swift's fiction populated by characters who "always live in the 'aftermath,' in the shadow of some suspect or corrupted history" (433). Actions reported in an earlier chapter are revisited later not only for details to be added but more significantly for the elucidation of the narrator's motives to be provided. As information in subsequent chapters enriches the reader's understanding of the narrator, we are encouraged to reconsider an event in order to recognise the structural patterns that provide cohesion. The multiple endings—a pattern Swift consistently employs in his novels—help the author, as Higdon notes in his 1991 essay "Double Closures," maintain "a perpetually unresolved tension" (95) and allow the narrators to escape into memory if not to reconcile themselves with the past.

All of Swift's narrators engage in contradictory behaviour, then leave such tensions unresolved, illustrating the paradoxical stance of the protagonists in his/story. Considering the narrators' views as representative of the author's ideology, some critics object to what The Oxford Companion to English Literature terms the "didactic strain" in Swift's novels (985). The tendency of the Swiftian narrator towards preaching is seen as evidence of Swift's conservative sociopolitical outlook, which seeks to retain the patriarchal status quo through the "reassurance" offered, in

Tredell's view, by "feelgood fiction" (41). Swift's protagonists and their world—male, fixed and quietly disappearing—are indeed "oblivious" to the shifting sexual and social politics of contemporary British society, as Widdowson also notes ("Novels" 220). Relics of the past, Swift's narrators appear suspended in time and unaware of the changes occurring around their traumatised microcosms.

In the 1993 essay "Dismembering/Remembering Mimesis," Bernard claims that Swift's narrators are "unreliable voices" with "ambiguous identities . . . dispossessed of their own authority over their own work . . . who do not meet the requirements of the function ascribed to them" (124), suggesting that, through their biased and unenlightened views, Swift explores and exposes the protagonists' weaknesses. Bernard argues that Swift undermines the "coherence and the integrity of the narrative voice," aiming at the "questioning of representation at large" ("Dismembering" 126). Although the fusion of story and history is a basic tenet in recent theories of historiography and constitutes one of the characteristics of the "questioning of representation" to which Bernard refers, Swift allows his protagonists to wrestle with history to demonstrate how they confront or evade their pasts. The first-person narrator frequently abandons the "I" to assume the role of observer and transform himself into a "he," such distancing demonstrates the fragmentation of the self and reveals the trauma of the narrator while also subverting narrative credibility and intensifying the subjectivity of each telling.

In Swift's novels the complexity of structural and narrative techniques does not interfere with clarity. By considering the structure as well as the thematic concerns of the various plot strands in their totality, by "getting into the lives of other characters," as the author suggests (Frumkes), the reader discovers the unifying principles. The plot in a Swift novel is barely more than a pretext, allowing his men and women to tell their stories of past woe. Hardly any event of significance occurs in the fictional present: the narrative always focuses on the aftermath of a past event. Through the disclosure of their virtues and their vices, the characters in Swift's fiction are treated with compassion, whether the author exposes jealousy, betrayal, and cowardice, or celebrates dignity, endurance and forgiveness. Swift's "empathy" for his characters, as the author terms his feelings towards his creations (Bernard 225), suggests a deeply ingrained moral humanism, which prompts Wendy Wheeler in The Literary Encyclopedia to describe Swift as "a religious writer in secular clothes."

Swift places emphasis on recuperation through confession even when some of his narrators, such as Tom Crick in Waterland and Bill Unwin in Ever After, are beyond salvation; they are allowed to indulge in nostalgic yearnings and encouraged to resort to storytelling. In "Postscriptive Therapy," a 1993 essay which explores the relationship between telling and the teller, Swift clarifies an essential paradox that dominates his view of stories. Contrary to the traditional belief in the didactic power of parables and tales as vehicles of wisdom, Swift emphasises the value of storytelling as a means of post-traumatic therapy, not prevention: "I do not believe that stories can be prescriptive, that they can tell us in any direct way how to live, but they can be positively, benignly 'postscriptive.' By recovering our lost or damaged pasts we also, simply, recover. We strengthen, we go on" (24). Whether Swift's protagonists are able to recover or not, and irrespective of their ability to endure their post-crisis desperation, the necessity of engaging in the storytelling ritual lies at the core of every one of Swift's works and becomes the central principle to be examined in the following chapters.

In the Beginning

Swift's first publication in April 1976, "The Recreation Ground," was a twenty-page story in London Magazine, which he later chose not to include in the collection Learning to Swim. Narrated in the first person, this bleak tale illustrates Swift's preoccupation with tormenting father figures within an urban landscape which symbolically reflects the narrator's angst. The unnamed adolescent protagonist strives to liberate himself from a traumatic upbringing: an overbearing, violent, sadistic father and a manipulative, neurotic, masochistic mother. Alienated in the family environment, he identifies in childhood with the enigmatic strangers—figures out of Beckett—who aimlessly haunt the "flat and featureless grounds" across from the paternal home, wandering "of their own accord," like "slaves," "prisoners" or "inmates" (62). The narrator of "The Recreation Ground," like all of Swift's protagonists in the novels and stories prior to Waterland, seeks escape, not therapy; he rejects his mother's fairytales as well as the potential of fatherhood or love: "she would tell me stories, my mother, clutching me to her, rinsing me with her tears . . . of Pinocchio, Sinbad, and others. I did not care for her stories" (70). At the end of the tale the narrator remains in awe of "Dad" and imprisoned by the past: "there is nowhere to go. Nothing to do" (85). Although the parents as well as the other two characters in the story—the housekeeper and a prostitute, both of whom become the narrator's lovers and mother-substitutes—represent symbols of the protagonist's psychological needs, the narrator's phobias and his tormented struggle for

acceptance in an alien environment are fully realised in this first sample of Swift's early fiction, which constitutes a version of Prentis's predicament in Shuttlecock: "[Dad] was an emblem, a mark, a fixed point amidst so much that was errant or void. . . . I could have borrowed his part, entered his role, hidden inside his costume" (68).

The themes and techniques characteristic of Swift's early fiction are apparent not only in "The Recreation Ground" but also in another uncollected story published in 1977. The six-page "Drew" concerns the sudden death of a twenty-eight-year-old man at the end of football practice, narrated by an anonymous colleague and team player. Relating through the communal "we" the absurdity of Drew's loss, the middle-aged narrator records the guilt (and relief) of having escaped death as these contradictory emotions mingle with universal questions about mortality: "it ought to have been one of us, with our excess fat and our hardening arteries, taking to the sports field after twenty years on our backsides, to have been singled out like that. . . . We felt we should have stood by our team-mate's tomb, carried his coffin to the grave. . . . We were glad not to go" (36). Focusing, like all of Swift's fiction, on the interrelatedness between life and time, this story exhibits the author's fascination with age and ageing protagonists who become troubled by the passing of the years and can provide a historical perspective: "being old or young isn't the important thing, but seeing how one does or does not belong to time" (32). This sentiment will be echoed again and again by Swiftian narrators who, in their agonising search for peace of mind, are haunted by remorse.

"We Belong to History"

Focusing on the human quest for identity and connectedness, Swift's fiction constitutes a re-visitation of the terrain of the psychological novel. Compelled to recover their past and overcome their tortured inability to progress into the future, Swift's characters are failed fathers and sons exhibiting symptoms of twentieth-century malaise: alienation, emotional paralysis, loss of faith, and disillusionment are ailments that plague the post-World-War-II generations in his novels. Introduced in Waterland, "Historia" is a term which promotes an all-encompassing definition of history as inquiry, myth, and fabrication, providing the context, in all of Swift's novels, for a discussion of human relationships that emphasises the necessity of communication and supports the therapeutic value of storytelling. Although Swift denies his protagonists the comfort of allowing accident to be seen as the only cause of their predicament, he also suggests that forces beyond the characters' control influence human actions. Through the fragmented presentation of their

traumas, Swift's *Everymen* display an awareness of ambiguity, suffer from guilt and seek absolution. Still, despite subjecting his protagonists to terminal crises—loss, estrangement, death and disease—that devastate them, Swift advocates endurance and demonstrates the existence of meaning in disaster: accepting trauma and confessing failure become liberating and comforting for Swift's *Hollow Men*.

Time and history are always the background against which Swift's narrators tell their stories. A metaphor of the human struggle to come to terms with *Historia*, contested relationships between generations always occupy the foreground in Swift's novels. Swift's recurring concern with plots that reconstruct family histories is grounded in the human longing for continuity and communication across generations, even when such connections are possible only through a leap of the imagination. As Swift explains in a 1991 interview, relationships that "go across generations" are "one way in which a historical process can be personalised" (Bernard and Menegaldo 11). In the same interview the author jokes that he does "not know how you could tell a story about the future" (Bernard and Menegaldo 16).

In his fiction Swift associates time, place and human actions, examining causality in the light of natural and historical forces, floods or wars, which forge relationships as strongly as bonds of blood. In all his novels Swift focuses on more than one generation of the same family, creating a perspective that spans the twentieth century: the men who fought in World War II (Willy Chapman's brothers-in-law, Prentis senior and Quinn, Tom Crick, Harry Beech, Colonel Unwin, Jack Dodds and his three mates, Ray, Vic and Lenny) as well as their fathers who fought in the Great War (Henry Crick and Robert Beech) and their sons (Prentis, Bill Unwin and Vince Dodds). As the fundamental troubles of these generations are explored through the wars and conflicts experienced, the therapeutic value of storytelling is emphasised. Swift questions the nature of "accidents" through the lives of men and their families brought together by circumstances of geography, age, and social class: five of Swift's protagonists have fathers injured and traumatised by their participation in a World War. The most significant "accident" of all, World War II, the "catastrophic events" of which, as Peter Widdowson remarks, "still determine the destinies of ordinary lives" in all of Swift's works (214), becomes symbolic of the need for Swift's protagonists to reconcile themselves to the generation past (that of their fathers) as well as the generation future (that of their offspring), to accept and be accepted.

In such a context personal histories become linked with national and international events: in The Sweet-Shop Owner on the day that Willy Chapman hopes his reconciled daughter will come back to him the newspaper headlines declare, "Peace Bid Fails" (SO 17); in Waterland Tom Crick notes that a "new kind of geese," made of "aluminium and steel," crosses the fenland sky in the direction of Hamburg and Berlin (W 299) while Mary Crick is having an abortion and again when Dick Crick commits suicide; in Ever After the birthday of the protagonist's mother falls on 5 August, coinciding "with the anniversary of the last pre-atomic day" (EA 229). Although the crisis in the Middle East, the devastating bombing of Germany during World War II and the dropping of the Bomb in Hiroshima in 1945 are historical events occurring on the periphery of the lives described in the novels, the overlaying of the global on the personal transforms, through ironic juxtaposition, history into story, randomness into design. Not only in his fiction but also in his personal account of the significance for his writing career of the year he spent overseas, Swift connects the major political events that occurred in Greece in 1974 with his own experiences in the country: "nineteen seventy-four was the year I failed to write my first novel. It was also the year that the military dictatorship in Greece collapsed almost overnight. The two events are not unconnected," Swift notes in the beginning of the brief essay entitled "Nineteen Seventy-four" (21); he concludes that "events [in Greece] had only crowned [his] own lease of bliss" (25), emphasising the interrelatedness of history and story in the same unique manner as in his fiction.

The mingling of the personal and the national appeals to Graham Swift, who believes that "the older we get, the more we know that we belong to history" (Gossmann 159). In more than one of Swift's novels April is the "cruellest month," its mixture of memory and desire causing the Swiftian characters inordinate suffering. Prentis' narrative begins on "a warm evening at the end of April" (S 13); on an "April day in 1915" Ernest Atkinson "fell in love with his daughter" (W 219); Bill Unwin's father commits suicide in Paris in April 1946 (EA 20); and the Bermondsey-to-Margate pilgrimage in Last Orders takes place on 2 April 1990—as 2 April signals the beginning of the Falklands conflict in 1982, a war that constitutes the fictional present in Out of This World. Like T. S. Eliot, Swift believes that April, linked in Christian myth with the resurrection and the slaying of the dragon, is the quintessential English month, the apt symbolic setting for tales of long-awaited miracles and long-remembered woe. Out of This World is not only set in April 1982 but has Robert Beech assassinated on St George's Day, thus identifying this paragon of Victorian success with an entire country caught in a patriotic frenzy

reminiscent of glorious Empire days. Is Swift suggesting that England, caught between the myth of the past and the failure to acknowledge its diminishing global importance, will self-destruct, like Robert Beech who manufactured the explosives utilised to blow him up? Through the subversion of the myth of St George—from “holy saint” to “chain-mailed thug jamming a spear down the throat of a writhing beast” (OW 156)—Swift’s fiction questions the characters’ ability to draw hope from established religious or political mythology.

In his fiction as well as in interviews, Swift describes the individual as “the story-telling animal” (W 62), a definition which constitutes the cornerstone of his beliefs and the premise of this analysis of his work: storytelling is “the greatest faculty of being human” (Walsh “Telling” 23) since it “allows us to come to terms with the past” (Bernard and Menegaldo 14). Swift’s many-layered fiction is grounded in *Historia*, the relationship between history and story, as well as in the need to reconnect with the past through ties of love and reclaim trauma through confession. In a world devoid of faith and replenishment, which threatens to self-destruct, Swift’s protagonists—desperate, lonely, unloved—seek to redeem themselves through confession and turn nostalgically to the past, to myths of romance, so as to ease their guilty conscience. Whether they succeed or not, Swift’s damaged narrators are struggling to fuse the personal, the familial and the global in order to construct a his/story that will provide escape or absolution.

Since 1976, with each successive story or novel, Graham Swift has built a body of work which has established him as a compassionate and honest storyteller devoted to the exploration of the human psyche. Using first-person narratives that reveal the characters’ traumas, employing anachronic structure and polyphony, weaving stories and histories that expose complexities and ambiguities in family relations, Swift transforms in his fiction the temporal and the local into the eternal and the universal. As the following chapters will demonstrate, whether the agony of existence belongs to a Chapman (The Sweet-Shop Owner), a Prentis (Shuttlecock) or an Unwin (Ever After), whether the confession is signed by any Tom (Waterland), Ray (Last Orders) or Harry (Out of This World), the fiction of Graham Swift portrays archetypal suffering, proposes restitution rituals, and celebrates the storytelling instinct, recording the rhythm and nuances not only of speech but also of the heart.

Chapter I

“Iss Full History” and Deferred Confessions: The Genesis of Paradox in Graham Swift’s Fiction

But remember always, as I told you at first, that this is all a fairy tale, and only fun and pretence: and, therefore, you are not to believe a word of it, even if it is true.

Charles Kingsley The Water Babies (Ch. 8)

We are all, like Scheherazade, under sentence of death, and we all think of our lives as narratives.

A. S. Byatt “The Greatest Story Ever Told” (166)

Learning to Swim and Other Stories, a collection of eleven prose pieces of varying length published in Britain in 1982 and three years later in North America, relates the repercussions of past moments in the lives of an assortment of characters ranging from a successful middle-class doctor to a near-immortal family of clockmakers. Like Swift’s novels, these stories revolve around families and are concerned with issues which constantly recur in his fiction: contested parent-child relationships, torturing husbands and unfaithful wives, betrayed siblings. Disillusionment, guilt and frustration as well as the need for escape and absolution are states of being frequently experienced by characters in Swift’s early fiction. Furthermore, these first-person narratives, which focus on the need to come to terms with a past crisis and alleviate present guilt, are exercises in preparation for the traumas of the novels’ protagonists. In the stories, as in the novels, landscapes and cityscapes are dominated by water: the pond in “Chemistry,” the stream in “Hotel” as well as the sea in “Cliffedge,” are elements of nature invested with symbolic nuances that resonate with the narrators’ desperation and emotional sterility. Through richly evoked settings and structurally complex plots, these stories reveal the importance and the power of storytelling and suggest that ambiguity and paradox are inherent in daily existence.

With the exception of “The Tunnel,” all the other stories in Learning to Swim had already been published in various British periodicals and anthologies of new writing between 1977 and 1982. The stories, which, as one American reviewer noted, “vary in quality” (Clemons 74), represent, in Swift’s words, “very early work” (Hartung-Brückner “Question” 469) since most of them were written and published before The Sweet-Shop Owner (Crane “Interview” 9). Although Swift acknowledges that his

secret desire to become an author dates from his early teens (“Fishing” 347), he did not begin writing until he “left Cambridge” in 1970 (Lashku 36). Then, during three years spent at York University “posing as a Ph.D. candidate,” Swift began his “apprenticeship as a writer” (“Nineteen Seventy-four” 21) by composing short stories. The writing of short pieces does not seem to have been an option for this young apprentice but a necessity: “at that early stage it had to be stories,” Swift claims, since he confesses to have had “no conception of how to write a novel” at the time (Hartung-Brückner “Question” 469). During the apprenticeship years Swift acted as his “own toughest critic,” destroying most of the stories he produced (“Nineteen Seventy-four” 22). By the autumn of 1974, after spending a year abroad as well as producing and discarding an unfinished novel, Swift was certain of his literary vocation (“Nineteen Seventy-four” 27).

Most of the stories in Learning to Swim are of undeniable merit¹ and pose a conscious challenge to the norms and conventions governing the short story genre,² which Malcolm Bradbury considers “the most difficult of all the prose forms of fiction” (“Introduction” 11). But Swift seems not to have been interested in carving a niche for himself as a short story writer.³ For a perceptive reader familiar with Swift’s fiction like Hilary Mantel, the stories in Learning to Swim “reach out beyond their own confines, as if they were trying to become novels” (23). Indeed, these vignettes of existential crisis often deal with events that are barely contained or analysed in

¹ In The Penguin Book of Modern British Short Stories, the thirty-four story collection Malcolm Bradbury edited for Penguin in 1987, he included one of Swift’s stories, “Seraglio,” as representative of the work of an “outstanding young literary generation” (“Introduction” 14). In this collection, fewer than a fourth of the stories were published in the 1980s and only a handful of the representatives of (what was still then) the “young” generation was not connected to the staff of the English department of the University of East Anglia or were not former students of the creative writing programme Bradbury had helped to establish at UEA in the 1970s. Therefore, the inclusion of a Swift story in a collection that remains, even fifteen years later, representative of “modern British short stories” attests to Swift’s talent in short fiction.

² Admittedly, the conventions of any genre are becoming increasingly difficult to define. According to The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms (1990) a short story “will normally concentrate on a single event with only one or two characters” (204). The traditional short story, as A. S. Byatt defines it in her “Introduction” to The Oxford Book of English Short Stories (1998), requires “unity of form . . . that only one thing should happen, that an episode or incident should be developed, or an emotion caught, with no space for digression, or change of direction or tone” (xvi). Swift’s stories do not follow such norms. Instead, his stories seem to belong to a category that Byatt terms “the great English story” which is “shocking,” “hard to categorise” and which breaks “all the rules of unity of tone and narrative” (xvi).

³ Although he published thirteen stories between 1976 and 1982, Swift did not continue to build a body of short fiction, dedicating himself solely to the writing of novels. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is not to examine Swift’s stories within the context of the genre but to trace the development of themes and techniques familiar to all of Swift’s fiction as these first appeared in his early work.

the text. In a 1996 interview Swift acknowledges that his mind “works in a novelist’s way” since he seeks to narrate tales that, unlike short stories, will “sustain” his creative energy “for a length of time” (Hartung-Brückner “Question” 469). The thematic preoccupations and structural development of the stories bear enough similarities to Swift’s novels for the stories to constitute evidence of the work done, as the Washington Post reviewer remarked, in “the laboratory of the novelist” (Penner 8). Juxtaposed with the novels, the stories in Learning to Swim reveal Swift’s preoccupations with the function and modes of narrative, the relationship between the individual and history as well as familial oppression and self-induced guilt.

The critical reception of Learning to Swim was more favourable in Britain than in America. In the TLS Alan Hollinghurst, an early champion of Swift’s work, praised the author’s “meticulous” manner of analysis, comparing Swift’s techniques to those of Henry James (“Falling” 920). The Times reviewer called the stories “admirable” and “impressive” (Evans 6) while the Sunday Times asserted that Swift “has an imagination quite his own” (French 32). However, when Learning to Swim appeared in the US market in 1985, American reviewers found the stories to be of “thoroughly mixed merit” (Penner 8), “pleasant reading but no more” (Gorra “When Life” 11), lacking the “lyricism and overwhelming sweep” of Waterland (Rose 2L) and resembling a collection of “prototypes” (Daynard 56). In Britain the appeal of these stories did not diminish over time: when the collection was reissued in 1993, the TLS welcomed the republication of this work by an “accomplished writer at his best” (“Fiction” 22).

Deferred Confessions

Most of the stories in Learning to Swim constitute veritable enigmas narrated by men who look back at moments of crisis (as young as eight or nine at the time of these events or as old as sixty-three) but are unable or unwilling to make a full confession: they imply rather than state the cause of their guilt. By evading responsibility for the very catastrophes which bring them to a point of heightened awareness of their own past and present actions, these narrators fail, as Adam Krepski, the dying protagonist of the story “The Watch,” acknowledges, to “make their pact with history” (LS 99). Due to their inability to succumb to the healing powers of story-telling, these narrators haunt the scenes of past crimes and become haunted, literally or metaphorically, by ghosts as well as visions and dreams related to dead relatives. In “The Watch,” at the moment he has to make the most crucial decision of his life, Adam is visited by three generations of his ancestors who come

“out of the bowels of Nature” (LS 111); in “Chemistry” the young narrator first dreams of being visited by the ghost of his dead father and then, at the end of the story, the apparition of his ageing grandfather, who has killed himself, seeks to restore his grandson’s faith in familial bonds; in “The Hypochondriac” an insensitive doctor has a nervous breakdown after he mistakes a patient for the ghost of an ailing young man who died as a consequence of the narrator’s refusal to treat him; in “Cliffedge” the narrator, who is burdened by his brother’s suicide, returns to the seaside resort where his brother killed himself hoping to “hear Neil murmur in his sleep” (LS 120).

Although he is tortured by the knowledge of his own actions, the unnamed thirty-five year old narrator of “Cliffedge” defers confession of his guilt by focusing on details of a life dedicated to the safekeeping of his mentally unstable younger brother, Neil, who seems to refuse to “grow up” (LS 114). When their parents are killed in a car accident, the brothers, eighteen and sixteen years old at the time, find themselves alone and inter-dependent in a world neither one of them is ready to enter. Neil’s subsequent suicide attempts and long periods of hospitalisation are interrupted only by prescribed visits to the seaside resort where they had been taken as children every August. By assisting his brother to prolong his childhood, the narrator progressively transforms himself into a paternal substitute to be obeyed as much as defied: “I was doing my duty, like a father towards a bastard child” (LS 118). The animosity the narrator begins to feel towards “this alien creature” (LS 118), who lives in a perpetual state of suspension from the reality of ageing and adulthood, makes the narrator feel increasingly like a prisoner rather than a guard, a slave to Neil’s defiance of time and propriety. Simultaneously, the narrator, a man who avoids “purposeless risks” (LS 119), cannot help but envy his brother’s abandon: Neil’s spontaneous risk-taking, bred of a lack of fear of natural elements such as water or heights, underlines the narrator’s self-conscious withdrawal from life. Yet, Neil’s pathology renders Neil more human than his older brother who leads a life of careful but emotionally sterile normality.

As in Shuttlecock, evasion and self-blame coexist in “Cliffedge” since the information both Prentis and Neil’s brother withhold and imply becomes more significant than the details provided. These narrators’ near-confessions juxtapose the human desire to escape pain and guilt and the inability to accept the futility of such a wish. The narrator of “Cliffedge,” like Prentis, invites the reader to seek out and fill in the gaps in the story as he systematically avoids relating the exact circumstances of his

brother's suicide. Instead, the narrator focuses on his own actions and motives: "that last time... I was as vigilant as ever, as dutiful as ever," he insists (LS 119). Yet, in the next sentence he admits that "perhaps for one moment I relaxed my guard," revealing that he was secretly willing his brother's death by fantasising about the effects on the "sprawling crowds on the beach" of the news of a "death plunge" (LS 119). Then the narrator adds almost nonchalantly: "perhaps I shouldn't have said to him, 'Don't you know how much you owe to me? Don't you?'" (LS 119, emphasis in original text). Neil's reactions to his brother's confrontational stance are neither described nor implied. Instead, the narrator emphasises that "the inquest cleared [him] of suspicion" (LS 120), but continues to suffer remorse due to his awareness of his complicity in his brother's death.

The tortured relationship between this brotherly duo finds a mirror in Waterland: Tom Crick also feels responsible for causing his retarded brother's suicide, but unlike the narrator of "Cliffedge," Tom confesses his guilt and provides a complete account of Dick's "death plunge," a dive similar to Neil's jump off the cliffs. Both Waterland and "Cliffedge" end with a watery death followed by a symbolic transformation—Dick turns into an eel while Neil becomes a fish—reminiscent of the allegory in the Victorian tale The Water Babies, a story Mr. Singleton reads to his son, Paul, in "Learning to Swim." While Tom Crick finds comfort in his brother's symbolic metamorphosis by imagining Dick swimming out to the sea and beginning a new life, the narrator of "Cliffedge" suffers from unresolved self-blame evident in his recurring dream of striving unsuccessfully to fish Neil out of the "depths" of the sea. Alone on a fishing boat with a "storm brewing" and "waves rising up," he pulls on an "endless line" (LS 120), hoping to restore Neil's memory in his conscience. In Waterland Tom Crick attempts to accommodate his guilt through confession and to spin a restorative yarn out of past traumas; this process is unavailable to the narrator of "Cliffedge" who is rendered mute by his unconfessed guilt. While the former uses his storytelling skills to come to terms with the past, the latter becomes a haunted shadow who remains remorseful and afraid of water.

The inability to belong lies at the heart of the trauma shared by most Swiftian narrators; it is linked to these men's distrust of the storytelling process as an act of cleansing. Although these narrators acknowledge along with the husband in "Seraglio" that "stories buy the reprieve, or the stay of execution" (LS 9), they accept stories as time-trading currency, not a restorative mechanism. Like Scheherazade's narratives, like the tales told by Prentis or Bill Unwin, the stories narrated by the

various husbands, sons or fathers in Learning to Swim are not therapeutic rituals but means of passing time so as not to “meet the waiting blade” (LS 9). In Swift’s early fiction, characters obey their survival instincts by seeking to prolong life, not come to terms with mortality and “make their pact with history” (LS 99). Until stories become true confessions through narrators like Tom Crick in Waterland and Ray Johnson in Last Orders, guilt is evaded and thus sustained, not expiated.

In Swift’s stories, as in the novels, family life is paradoxical: the intimacy of spouses breeds torture and suffering; sons antagonise and dethrone their fathers; and mothers neglect or smother their sons. The narrator of “The Son” does not speak to his son of his adoption until it is too late to stop unwelcome revelations; the husband in “Seraglio” communicates with his traumatised wife through veiled threats, unable to engage in honest discourse and accept a past miscarriage that has left them childless; in “Learning to Swim” a lesson in watery survival given by Mr Singleton to his six-year-old son exposes a tug-of-war between spouses as well as their inability to abandon a failed relationship. All the stories in this collection concern to some extent a married couple and suggest the impossibility of marital happiness. The only difference between the stories concerns the degree of antagonism exhibited and the variety of pain-inducing strategies each story describes, since all the couples in Swift’s stories appear to stay together in order to “conceal their feelings” (LS 117), as the narrator of “Cliffedge” suggests, not to seek emotional fulfilment.

This pattern of marital unhappiness, which the short stories explore in all possible variations, recurs in the novels. The beautiful wives of “Seraglio” and “Learning to Swim” who maintain “inviolable zones that mustn’t be trespassed” (LS 7) are models of Irene Chapman in The Sweet-Shop Owner and Mary Crick in Waterland. The compliant, tortured women in “The Son” and “Hoffmeier’s Antelope” who suffer silently resemble Prentis’s wife in Shuttlecock. The seducing, adulterous wives of “Cliffedge” and “The Hypochondriac” betray their spouses like Anna Beech in Out of This World and Bill Unwin’s mother in Ever After. As for the women who abandon their husbands in “Hotel” and “The Watch,” they are prototypes for Carol Johnson in Last Orders. Similarly, the husbands in Learning to Swim share vital characteristics with the protagonists in the novels: fear of intimacy, the inability to trust, suspicion of infidelity. As Alan Hollinghurst notes, “in the mouths” of Swift’s narrators in the stories “‘my wife’ is perhaps the most sinisterly mundane phrase, conveying a chilling blend of fear, patronage and disgust” (“Falling” 920). With or without children, Swift’s husbands and wives fail to communicate sincerely through words or

actions, engaging instead in sadomasochistic rituals that allow them to experience “the tenderness of successively opened and reopened wounds” (LS 138).

“Full History” and War Traumas

In Learning to Swim, as in the novels, paternity is mostly denied to husbands or they are forced to raise other men’s children through adoption or due to adultery. While these men are tortured and torturing husbands, as fathers they seek to establish authority and force their beliefs on their sons. The eleven-year-old Roger and the six-year-old Paul, the sons in the stories “Gabor” and “Learning to Swim” respectively, reject paternal beliefs and seek to run or swim “away from [their] father[s]” (LS 146) as most Swiftian sons in the novels do: Prentis and his son, Martin, as well as Tom Crick, Harry Beech, and Vince Dodds. In Learning to Swim the two stories that focus predominantly on a father-son relationship, namely “Gabor” and “The Son,” are also the ones most obviously concerned with the conflict between the microcosm of the family and the macrocosm of history by making a father’s experiences in World War II a significant factor affecting parent-child interaction. Historical events and especially wars feature heavily in the Swiftian oeuvre: the protagonists’ fragmented his/stories result from the juxtaposition of the disasters in Grand Narratives to the traumas of ordinary lives.

In “The Son” the narrator’s life appears to have been governed exclusively by accidents of war. Born to Greek parents in Asia Minor, Kostas Alexopoulos flees the burning city of Smyrna as a baby; as a young man in Athens he survives the German occupation, famine and the civil war by engaging in atrocities for which he cannot forgive himself: “all my life I’ve felt guilty because I chopped off my mother’s fingers” (LS 61). Despite his Mediterranean temperament, Kostas is as remorseful as all of Swift’s sons and fathers. Orphaned and impoverished in a war-ravaged country with a wife and another orphan in his care—his adopted son, Adonis—Kostas has no option than to emigrate west once again. As he struggles to set up an eventually successful restaurant business in Camden, this narrator must come to terms not only with exile but also with the knowledge that Adonis is the only son he will ever have: a genetic defect Anna may have inherited does not allow them to risk having children. Kostas seeks to control his son’s future since he is unable to change or come to terms with his own past. Thus, he puts off the disclosure of his son’s origins and begins to “kid” himself that his son “isn’t anybody else’s” (LS 54).

Swift's fictional sons, from Prentis in Shuttlecock to Vince Dodds in Last Orders, always participate in the Oedipal quest for identity, and Adonis is no exception. In "The Son" the question of identity—Kostas's "who are we?" (LS 61), which echoes more than once through the story and haunts the narrator until the end—is further complicated by the forces of war and history. War constitutes an unspoken narrative which, unless shared, cannot be comprehended: Kostas opts not to narrate to his son the story of his origins, which, as a story of war, is also history. By not engaging in this therapeutic and connecting ritual, the narrator removes himself from history and suspends himself from time. Unnourished by stories and brought up by a father who feeds him lies, Adonis grows up "stunted:" he does not live up to his parents' expectations and is "a rebel to his name" (LS 54). Eventually, when this son belatedly engages in a primal quest for identity, he seeks to re-enter the route of history, by learning the story of his birth. However, his journey to Greece unearths more than either son or father expected, revealing that Kostas's lies and withdrawal from history are only the re-enactment of an existing motif. Not only Adonis in 1944 but also Kostas in 1922 was a war orphan rescued by neighbours and raised by adoptive parents who never shared with him the true story of his lineage. In Ever After a similar revelation forces Bill Unwin to come to terms with the fact that he will never know who his real father was. Consequently, the three characters in "The Son"—a woman who cannot have children and two men who have lost their biological link to their past—see themselves as "ghosts" who "are going to carry on just as before ... pretending [to be] people [they] are not" (LS 61).

"The Son" is narrated by a father unable to enter the stream of history, uprooted as he is from his biological and geographical origins. In Last Orders one of the principal narrators, Vince Dodds, is another war orphan who learns the story of his birth at an earlier age than Adonis yet also learns of a retarded sister his father has forsaken, a sister much like the one Adonis could have had. Another rootless war orphan in Learning to Swim is the ten-year-old Hungarian refugee Gabor, a "child of suffering" (LS 83), assigned for possible adoption to a middle-class English family, the Everetts, in 1957. But Gabor's story is not narrated by Mr Everett, a World War II veteran, who, having discovered that "the contentments of fatherhood were equivocal," is looking for the "ideal foster-child" (LS 81). The narrator is the son, Roger Everett, who recreates, through the consciousness of his eleven-year-old self, a world of childhood games which gradually gives way to adolescent preoccupations and awakenings. Perhaps the most optimistic story in the collection, "Gabor" features the least dysfunctional of all nuclear families in Learning to Swim

and manages to translate trauma into therapy by allowing the children to engage in “imaginary battles” and bond into brotherhood (LS 82).

Roger’s knowledge of warfare derives from “cinema heroes,” not from his father’s experience—which he “had only heard about vaguely” (LS 82). When he compares his father to cinematic soldiers, the narrator finds that “he lacked their sunburned cragginess” (LS 82). In fact the protagonist, like Prentis in *Shuttlecock*, doubts his father’s hero status: “I suspected that his real exploits in the war... were lies” (LS 82). “Gabor” touches upon ideas related to substitution and representation which become major concerns in the novels. The power of the camera to represent history, either through photography or through moving pictures, and the fleeting nature of reality, especially in relation to war, are themes analysed in *Out of This World*, while in *Ever After* the protagonist is preoccupied with substitutes and the futile quest for the ‘real thing.’ In “Gabor” the healing potential of storytelling is emphasised along with the realisation that choice is allowed in life and “tears [are] only one response” (LS 86) to human suffering. For once Swift’s sons choose laughter.

Through the war games of two boys, who share neither language nor culture but possess the imaginative power that breeds compassion, history is turned into story in “Gabor.” Warfare waged by two ten-year-olds becomes a never-ending sequence of victorious battles reenacted in open fields against imaginary enemies: “we would pretend we were being blown up; after each grisly death our bodies would be miraculously reconstituted” (LS 84). Unlike real war, the children’s tales enable them to confront death and be restored to life. In their games history and story are equated: playground myths and imaginary soldiers are as enjoyable as “Life Guards riding like toys down the Mall” and bomb-sites around St Paul’s, “with yellow herb sprouting in the rubble” (LS 87). Despite the loss of his parents in World War II and the suffering he has endured, Gabor is able to share the narrator’s mimetic instincts and play the soldier, turning his trauma from history into story. At the end of the short story Gabor’s declaration of enjoyment of his trip to London because the city “iss full history” may ring ironic in the context of this orphan’s past but it is also indicative of Swift’s faith in the healing powers of the imagination and storytelling.

Roger and Gabor are not the only characters in *Learning to Swim* who invent and participate in games through which therapeutic narratives emerge in the form of dumb show: in “Chemistry” the narrator and his grandfather bond through the making and sailing of a toy boat as well as by conducting chemical experiments; in

“Cliffedge” the adult Neil never stops “playing his dangerous games” on the cliffs (LS 114), seeking to prolong the inviolability of childhood; and in “The Tunnel” the title refers to an elaborate digging project that a group of boys invent in the playground of a soon-to-be-demolished school building and execute with “ingenuity” and “determination” (LS 28) in order to liberate themselves from the institutionalisation of student life. By pretending to be escaped prisoners or heroic soldiers, the children in Swift’s stories rehearse through improvised dramatisations the traumas of his/stories adults cannot share or confess in their own narratives.

Family Traumas and Symbolic Landscapes

Children and adolescents seem to embody in Swift’s fiction an almost mystical promise of regeneration; their absence (through loss or inability to procreate) leads most unfulfilled parents to adoption or substitution: as the narrator of “Seraglio” declares, “because we could have no children we made up for it in other ways” (LS 5). The childless zookeeper’s obsession with Hoffmeier’s miniature antelopes; Dr Collins’ young bride, who is “still a child,” in “the Hypochondriac” (LS 68); the pampered guests in “Hotel” as well as the restaurant patrons entertained in “The Son;” even the “keen” attendance of artistic events and the “frequent and expensive holidays” in which the couple in “Seraglio” indulges (LS 5): this variety of substitutes allows Swift’s would-be parents to channel their emotion but does not encourage them to come to terms with past traumas. Through substitution they fill the void of childlessness but not the gaps in their own life stories.

In Swift’s early fiction the characters’ inability to engage in healthy and fulfilling relationships stems from their unwillingness to comprehend how the past shapes the present and to accept their own place in history. Like the Krepsskis, masterful clockmakers in “The Watch” who gain infinity at the expense of happiness through a magical timepiece of their own creation, most of the protagonists remove themselves from the flow of time by denying communication and reality. In “The Tunnel” the teenage narrator considers himself “a random, alien intruder” in the upper-class world of his girlfriend’s “elegant Regency house by the park in Greenwich” (LS 11). Their elopement and subsequent cohabitation in an “old grey-brick tenement block” about to be demolished in Bermondsey (LS 10) is meant to isolate them from the real world in which they cannot co-exist. As Swift acknowledges in a 1991 interview, in “The Tunnel” as in other stories in Learning to Swim “there are very enclosed situations, houses, buildings, in which little worlds exist, sometimes quite separate from the world outside” (Bernard and Menegaldo

10). Denying reality and indulging in fantasies of “Gauguin’s South Sea paradise” (LS 12), these teenagers are only temporarily shielded from the problems and the frictions their incarceration eventually causes. Although they struggle to be “good Tahitians” (LS 12) and the narrator even paints “Polynesian scenes on the wall” (LS 18), they grow “quite apart” and become “wrapped in themselves” (LS 29). At the end of the story the narrator realises that only if they abandon their willed isolation from the world and achieve communication with each other, will they be able to reenter time and salvage their relationship: “let’s go out and get a train to somewhere in the country, and talk” (LS 30). The light at the end of “The Tunnel” lies in the promise of storytelling.

Another story promised—“Darling. Please, I’ll explain”—but withheld—“she never did explain” (LS 129)—concerns “Chemistry.” The trio of characters in this story, a widowed grandfather, his widowed daughter and her ten-year-old son, the story’s narrator, constitute a study in the consequences of deferred mourning. The failure of this father and daughter to come to terms with the loss of their beloved spouses causes their withdrawal from life and affects irrevocably the narrator’s childhood. Instead of making an effort to accept mortality and mourn their loved ones, both father and daughter seek through each other to substitute the living for the dead and forget their loss. The narrator implies the dire consequences of this memory lapse: “We forgot we were three generations. Grandfather bought Mother bracelets and ear-rings. Mother called me her ‘little man’. We lived for each other and for a whole year we were really quite happy” (LS 124). By collapsing three generations into one, this family in “Chemistry” removes itself from time and reality and does not engage in the therapeutic process of mourning.

The need to maintain a fake but stable sense of happiness through pretence has catastrophic effects: the gradual intrusion of reality—in the guise of Ralph, Mother’s new husband-to-be—leads the narrator to cast himself in the role of Hamlet and plot Ralph’s destruction; more importantly, it drives the grandfather to suicide. The boy’s guilt turns into blame leveled against his mother: “all the things that should have been explained—or confessed—she never did explain” (LS 129). The narrator’s inability to forgive himself, which mirrors his mother’s inability, is compounded by the ghosts of the boy’s father and grandfather that visit him to strengthen his commitment to the past without allowing him to attend to the future. Unlike “The Tunnel,” which ends with the narrator’s wish for communication, the end of “Chemistry,” like “Cliffedge” and “The Watch,” finds the narrator alone, in the

company of the dead, desperately seeking to unburden his guilt and reestablish his connection with time.

Intergenerational strife is a staple in Swift's fiction. A trio similar to the one in "Chemistry" exists in Out of This World, in which two widowed men, Robert Beech and his son, Harry, compete for the affections of Sophie, the son's daughter. As in "Chemistry," a special affinity is created between grandfather and child, thus the orphaned girl rejects her father. However, the novel allows the potential of reconciliation since Harry and Sophie seem willing to reestablish communication, unlike the narrator's mother in "Chemistry" who never explains. At the end of this story the narrator of "Chemistry" feels that he has "nowhere to go" (LS 130), like Bill Unwin in Ever After, another Hamlet type in Swift's fiction. At such desperate moments, Swift's protagonists, like the narrator of "Chemistry," instinctively gravitate towards water: "I went down to the park and stood by the pond" (LS 130). Before Waterland became this writer's most celebrated exploration of the interplay between solid and liquid, body and spirit, Swift's stories in Learning to Swim betray his fascination with the symbolic significance of water. Whether it is an aspect of the landscape, like the Bosphorus in "Seraglio" and the Aegean in "The Son," or of the weather, such as torrential rain in "The Watch" and a summer storm in "Cliffedge," water as an image is omnipresent in the stories to suggest that primal element in which life and death, sin and purification, guilt and forgiveness coexist.

In Learning to Swim the paradoxical coexistence of opposites is uniquely symbolised through a swimming lesson in the title story, which captures, through the portrait of a nuclear family, the Singletons, the human need for emotional dependence and the resentment the acknowledgement of this need breeds. Mr Singleton, an engineer and builder of bridges, is more interested in water than land: only when he swims, does he "feel quite by himself, quite sufficient" (LS 136). In his daily life he delves in solid material but in his dreams he becomes a water baby: he moves effortlessly "through vast expanses of water," going "for long distances under water" without having to "bother about breathing" (LS 136). He constantly reads to his son from The Water Babies, the one tale that may transform Paul into the amphibious child this father desires. In his infrequent erotic encounters with his wife, Mr Singleton desires to "swim through her;" he feels that his wife's physical being gets "in the way" of another world where he can be alone and whole (LS 137).

Mr Singleton, as his name suggests, resents the physical and emotional demands of married life and has considered leaving his wife for a life of "Spartan purity" (LS 136). His denial of the body sharply contrasts with the pleasure Mrs Singleton takes in sensual indulgence. She imagines her body to have been carved out of stone; as she lies on the sand in Cornwall, willing herself to become "part of the beach," she lets "the sun make love" to her (LS 132). Mrs Singleton's sensual, solid form keeps her husband from liberating himself into liquidity. Caught in this archetypal, elemental struggle between water and land, the sea and the rocks, male and female, the six-year-old Paul is pushed to choose between his parents' conflicting, and to him terrifying, desires: his father's impotent fight against dependence and his mother's suffocating demand for allegiance. While Mrs Singleton entices Paul out of the water with promises of ice cream and kisses, Mr Singleton keeps him in the sea in the hope that his son will choose to be a water-baby, not a land-child. Ultimately, Paul takes an instinctive decision: he breaks away from his parents' self-torturing cycle of emotional sterility, and, trusting his body to the sea, he swims towards newfound independence in a "strange new element that seemed all his own" (LS 146).

Water is a versatile element in Swift's stories, acquiring symbolic meaning from the characters' needs and fears as well as from the connections the narrators make between desires and guilt. In "Seraglio," when "a curtain of rain" which "veils Asia from Europe" becomes an apt metaphor for the emotional separateness of the narrator and his wife, he feels that he is "to blame for the weather" (LS 8), revealing his addiction to remorse. In "Hotel" the narrator projects his own need for absolution onto the patrons of his establishment when he comments that "people like to be near water. It gives them a feeling of being cleansed, of being purified" (LS 35). Similarly, the narrator's desperation in "Chemistry" transforms rain into a deluge so that it feels that the "house were plunging under water" (LS 129). Even the leisurely games of a fine day by the sea and the "careless sounds of the seaside" in "Learning to Swim" make Mrs Singleton think "it is the sort of day on which someone suddenly shouts, 'Someone is drowning'" (LS 140), an image which recurs in The Sweet-Shop Owner as well as in Out of This World and foreshadows familial discord.

Subverted Narratives and Reluctant Narrators

In Swift's stories people are caught off balance between their desire for harmony and their inability to belong. In "Hoffmeier's Antelope" a zookeeper in charge of the

last surviving pair of endangered miniature antelopes progressively abandons his place in a world that he views as artificial and escapes, with the female Hoffmeier's antelope, to nature. As with most of the stories in Learning to Swim, the title seems designed to deflect attention away from the protagonist or the narrator towards an aspect of the plot not germane to the story's themes. Narrated by the zookeeper's nephew, Derek, a young graduate in mathematics who becomes a tenant in his Uncle Walter's house in Finchley, this story, like several of Swift's works, uses an observer as narrator, undermining narrative reliability and producing unresolved enigmas.

Like the narrators of "The Son" or "Cliffedge," Derek presents himself as peripheral to the story, creating the illusion that the protagonist is Uncle Walter and this portrayal of his uncle is objective. According to the narrator's description, Uncle Walter is "pop-eyed," with "tobacco stains" on his fingers and teeth, and a mouth "apt to twitch and to generate more spittle than it was capable of holding" (LS 40). Throughout the story the uncle emerges as a genuine eccentric, a man who prefers animal to human company, another Gulliver in the land of the Yahoos. Gradually, the reader realises that the narrator antagonises his uncle, who seeks to provide moral instruction on the topic of nature and functions as a father figure. In the eyes of the narrator, Uncle Walter has the "serene, linear looks of a Byzantine saint" (LS 40) who must be de-sanctified.

Recently widowed, Uncle Walter is childless yet he has been entrusted with the task of encouraging the endangered antelopes to procreate and save the species from extinction. Ironically, this man, who confesses to being a squeamish lover unable to "approach 'without qualms' what he calls his wife's 'secret regions'" (LS 47), is entrusted with a delicate mission which tests not only his love for animals but also his loyalty to his friend Hoffmeier, the zoologist who discovered this pigmy species. The latter's immortality depends on Uncle Walter's success in keeping the species alive. This mission is crowned with so little success that Uncle Walter seems to be left with no choice but to kidnap and return the female to the jungle. Yet, as the story unfolds, the narrator's commentary hints at another plot which seeks to undermine Uncle Walter's saintly mission and implies a dark secret in Hoffmeier's and Uncle Walter's common past.

Early in the story the narrator wonders about the friendship between Hoffmeier and Uncle Walter, implying that such a relationship would have been highly improbable:

“it was by no means a common thing, then, for a serious and gifted zoologist to befriend a zealous but unscholarly animal keeper” (LS 42). At times the nephew even questions the scientist’s existence in Uncle Walter’s past: “I began to doubt the reality of Hoffmeier . . . I asked myself: did Hoffmeier exist?” (LS 47). When Uncle Walter talks about “my friend Hoffmeier” (LS 43) and remembers the “many times” the scientist “ate at that table” and “sat at that armchair” and even “slept—”(LS 48), the narrator comments on how his Aunt Mary would “hastily” change the subject. Eventually the narrator argues that he has come to “see the chink” in his Uncle’s “none too well fitting armour” (LS 43); he even blurts out this realisation to Uncle Walter, accusing him of being “jealous of Hoffmeier” (LS 46). The reader is subtly led to suspect that, as Uncle Walter’s final act seems to confirm, Aunt Mary had been the cause of Hoffmeier’s visits: at the end of the story the narrator finds Uncle Walter’s abandoned room full of “shredded photos of his wife” (LS 51). Uncle Walter is “gone” but the enigma remains: will he save or destroy his friend’s discovery? Is his mission benign or malevolent? By allowing the antelope to escape from the zoo at the end of the story, does Uncle Walter seek vindication as a conscientious zookeeper or revenge as a cuckolded husband?

But the more important question relates to the motivation of the narrator who portrays his uncle as flawed. Like Prentis in Shuttlecock, Derek rejects the heroic status of the father figure so as to usurp his symbolic place in the world. At the end of both story and novel a younger man has been empowered through his ability to subvert the narrative and emerge as the protagonist in the place of an older man. Swift’s sons rarely have any qualms about slaying their fathers. As story after story in Learning to Swim demonstrates—often through the use of a narrator, son or father, who is ignorant of the facts or unwilling to express the truth—Swift’s male narrators are at pains to promote their own versions of events but seem unable to hide their awareness that they do not fully control the narrative. As Alan Hollinghurst suggests, Swift’s narrators “can be neurotically unstable and therefore calculated and posturing” (“Falling” 920).

With the exception of “Learning to Swim,” which uses a third-person point of view, all the stories in this collection are narrated in the first person by characters who seem reluctant to tell their tales.⁴ This reluctance stems either from knowledge they do not

⁴ In his 1991 essay “Unconfessed Confessions” David Leon Higdon uses the term ‘reluctant’ to characterise the narrators in Swift’s first three novels, namely Willy Chapman in The Sweet-Shop Owner, Prentis in Shuttlecock, and Tom Crick in Waterland. Higdon’s definition

wish to impart to the reader or from a growing awareness of their ignorance. Whether these narrators feel they have committed a sin they do not want to publicise or realise that their certainty in life was based upon false premises, they all feel equally guilty and unwilling to confess with sincerity. Yet, their systematic attempts at concealment expose the very aspects of their past they seek to hide. For instance, the narrator's disillusionment and subsequent collapse in "Hotel" relates to his unspoken guilt over the secret that explains his mother's death; in "Seraglio" the husband's guilt over his infidelity masks his inability to come to terms with his wife's miscarriage and turns him into an anti-detective who "pretend[s] to want to know" the truth he eschews (LS 7); similarly, the doctor's remorse over the death of a patient in "The Hypochondriac" stems from his fear of the uncontrollable and his inability to accept his limitations. These three stories exemplify equally not only Swift's concern with the nature of guilt and fear but also his fascination with enigmatic narrators and open-ended stories.

The anonymous narrator of "Hotel" believes in care: after a period of hospitalisation in his youth, he decides to be "one of those who cares for others rather than one of those whom others care for" (LS 31). In fact, he makes it his business—first a café, then a country guest-house—to "know [his] customers" and provide a "haven" (LS 35), a "hotel of happiness" (LS 34). This elaborate dream world collapses when the presence of an incestuous pair at his hotel, a father and his fifteen-year-old daughter, reveals the hypocrisy of the other guests who demand of the narrator that he expose the scandal and remove the perpetrators. Forced to confront his own past and his own lies, the narrator collapses when he recognises that "deep beneath [the] desperate surface" of the girl's "guilty" and "terrified" face lies "happiness" (LS 39).

The narrator of "Hotel" is a mental patient constantly on the verge of a breakdown. Throughout the narrative his voice has the distinctive tone of the incurably abused; he is a patient who has learnt to admire his doctors and has become addicted to therapy. When he is discharged from the hospital, he craves to reproduce his institutionalisation and sets out to emulate Dr. Azim, his psychiatrist. Having spent

("a new type of narrator, the reluctant narrator, who is reliable... learned and perceptive" 174, emphasis in original text) applies more to Tom Crick than any other of Swift's protagonists in the novels or the stories. As the discussion on narrative modes in the chapters that follow will demonstrate, the degree of reliability assigned to Swift's reluctant narrators remains debatable. Nevertheless, the term 'reluctant' in its ordinary denotation can be applied to the narrators of the stories who are early models of Prentis and Crick.

his time in analysis befriending the staff and learning how to trick his therapist, the narrator believes he has become “bigger and taller” than the “dwarf people” around him (LS 31). What he confesses to his doctors—the desire to kill his mother and the guilt he felt at having been granted his wish when his mother dies in a road accident—is only a part of the truth. The narrator’s collapse at the end of the story is not caused only by disillusionment, by the forced acknowledgement that his false categorisation of people into ‘doctors’ and ‘patients’ derives from his need for self-protection. Before shutting himself off in his office in order to cry—a reaction identical to his “sessions of weeping inconsolably” after his mother’s death (LS 32)—the narrator’s initial response is a violent one: “just for one moment I thought I could put my hands on that girl’s neck and throttle her” (LS 39).

In “Hotel” the narrator’s desire to kill the girl, like his desire to kill his mother, is never explained in the narrative. The narrator admits that, when he was hospitalised, he “never” told the doctors “exactly why” he felt such murderous impulses towards his mother (LS 32). He also admits that he “didn’t tell them” that he was “rather glad that Father had gone” because the narrator and his mother “were happy” together (LS 32). When the doctors inquire whether he loved his mother, the narrator feels that he cannot make such a confession since he realises “how this could trap” him (LS 32). Furthermore, the narrator does not explain how he gradually became afraid of his mother and began to desire her death. Any question which delves too deeply into his psyche turns him mute: “I didn’t answer that” (LS 32). The narrator’s realisation that “guilt is always the sign of some forbidden happiness” (LS 33) achieves its full meaning only when it is applied to the most fundamental of sexual taboos, incest, and explains the narrator’s breakdowns which, though several decades apart, are both related to the same “problem” he cannot bring himself to confess. What else but incest could drive a son to madness and a mother under the wheels of a car that “was hardly going at any speed” (LS 32)?

As in “Hotel,” the paradoxical relationship between guilt and happiness in “Seraglio” is conveyed implicitly through the psychology of the characters. “Seraglio” is set in Istanbul, a setting of exotic allure and unique geography, a city in which “cruelty seems ignored” (LS 2) and the randomness of accident governs daily life. The story revolves around a couple who cannot come to terms with their “misfortune”—the inability to have children—but need to “blame” each other in order to remain together (LS 5). The narrator feels responsible for his wife’s miscarriage: he believes it was “an extreme and unfair means of revenge” against him for having an affair (LS

5), although he is highly uncertain whether his wife became aware of his infidelity which did not last longer than a few months. By continually moving through this cycle of remorse and recompense—"I blamed my wife because I myself felt to blame for what had happened and if I blamed my wife, unjustly, she could then accuse me, and I would feel guilty" (LS 5)—the narrator avoids having to accept the arbitrariness of chance. As Ulrich Broich argues, as long as the couple's relationship retains its "autopoietic closure," they are spared having to confront the "truth" (37).

During a vacation in Istanbul, however, this husband and wife are confronted with ambiguous incidents which force them to consider the pervasiveness of chaos in human life and the meaninglessness of seeking, through the establishment of patterns, to evade randomness. First, they witness a taxi hitting a pedestrian and find themselves "unprepared" for the casualness of the responses (LS 2), for the un-western readiness with which both victim and perpetrator as well as the street crowd seem prepared to accept *kismet* without having to blame each other. Then, the wife complains she has been sexually harassed by one of the hotel employees, a "rather melancholic-looking young Turk" (LS 6). The details of the assault ("he came up to me – and touched me" LS 6) are never pursued since neither spouse is genuinely interested in knowing "what actually happened" (LS 7). Like the street incident, the arbitrariness and ambiguity of this encounter serve to accentuate the constant presence of accident in life and underline the subjectivity of guilt. The narrator is not prepared to abandon the elaborate construction of blame that holds the marriage together as he is not ready to forgive himself or his wife for the miscarriage: "the story had to go on. ... This, like all stories, kept us from pain as well as boredom" (LS 6). By refusing to accept the loss of his unborn child as a random occurrence rather than deserved punishment, the narrator cannot escape the vicious cycle of guilt and blame and cannot engage in the therapeutic process of mourning.

Narratives of Evasion

In "Hotel" the narrator unexpectedly finds himself having to confront his unconfessed past precisely when he thought he had succeeded in his lifelong dream of belonging to the care-givers and providing forgiveness for the unspoken passions he cannot forgive in himself. His meticulously executed escape from the past appears to be only a self-deluding interval, a holiday from memory and desire. Similarly, in "Seraglio" a couple's vacation in search of an exotic sanatorium, an "Arabian Nights mirage" (LS 8) which promises escape from an exhausting cycle of blame, evolves into a "labyrinth" (LS 9) since they evade confession and reject the central position

of accident and chance in human life. In “The Tunnel” a group of boys spend their summer vacation digging a passage under the schoolyard wall, “trying to escape from a place they had entered—and could leave—at their own free will” (LS 27), engaging in a symbolic reenactment of the rituals Swift’s characters invent to flee situations they seem to have freely chosen. In most of the stories in Learning to Swim guilt-ridden husbands and wives (in “Hoffmeier’s Antelope” and the title story), tormented sons and grandsons (in “Chemistry,” “Cliffedge” and “The Son”) remove themselves from the context of their lives and go on vacation in the hope that, like the schoolboys, they will emerge triumphant from the symbolic tunnel they have felt compelled to dig: “if it wasn’t a game, it was absurd” (LS 27). But, unlike the children’s successful games, these desperate flights, which rarely produce the desired effect, serve only to expose the flaws that produce the characters’ vicious cycles. Such ironies are central to Swift’s fiction: along with the unresolved mystery of any story (“so actually nothing happened?” LS 8) comes the inevitable awakening to the limits of human knowledge and the ambiguity of human motives.

In “The Hypochondriac” these limits and the fears that keep the narrator from accepting his human nature concern a forty-eight-year-old doctor, Alan Collins. Like the narrators of “Hotel” and “Seraglio,” Collins arrives at a realisation—“I know very little” (LS 79)—at the end of the story after years of professional success that have assured him that he knows people and can manipulate their physical and emotional reactions. However, two events in his life which occur and develop simultaneously—the dubious paternity of the child his wife is carrying and the mysterious ailments that cause the death of a patient Collins dismisses as a hypochondriac—dispel his certainties and cause his breakdown. The narrator’s decision to become a doctor is not based on altruistic motives: his suspicion that life is uncontrollable forces him to seek out the means to repress his fear. His Uncle Laurie, a surgeon of renowned expertise, assures him that “there is nothing to worry about when you know what is there and you know how it works” by performing an autopsy on the family’s dead cat (LS 78). In the beginning of Shuttlecock Prentis makes a passing reference to a similar desire to “find out what his father was made of” but he assigns this need to a case he read about in one of the police files concerning an eleven-year-old boy who “systematically disfigured and mutilated” his dead father’s body (S 24).

Determined to find out the functions of the body, as if therein lies the key to human motives and emotion, in order to stay his fears, Collins becomes a doctor who “disregards disease” and has “no time for the mystique of suffering” (LS 65). Without

compassion for pain or understanding of emotional distress, he treats his wife, Barbara, and his mysterious patient, M., as children who must be humoured but dismissed, allowed to “have [their] experience” but not indulged (LS 69). Confronted with Barbara’s infidelity and M.’s demise, events which Collins is unable to comprehend or control, he collapses under the forced realisation that his fears have always been with him and that his life, like his Uncle Laurie’s, has been “empty” (LS 79). Whether he is a scientist or a caterer, the Swiftian narrator is in a constant struggle to hide the “gaps” in his heart as well as in his narrative. Omissions and subjectivity place the narrators in “Hoffmeier’s Antelope” and “Cliffedge” under suspicion of unreliability, or reveal their blindness and folly in “The Son” and “The Watch.”

Whether frightening or pathetic, Swift’s narrators acquire a distance from the narrative by telling their stories, like the narrators of the novels, at the end of a crisis and sometimes with several years of distance between the events they narrate and their present state. This restructuring emphasises the artificiality of the narrative act, especially when the narrators appear to manipulate chronological order in favour of an impressionistic presentation which underlines their own need for absolution. Such is the case with “The Watch,” at twenty-five pages the longest of the stories in Learning to Swim. The narrative spans almost three centuries, meandering between the fictional present (1977) and significant incidents in the past of male members of four generations of the Krepski family. Narrated through constant flashbacks by the dying Adam Krepski, the story is a meditation on the nature of time which borrows as much from Borges and magic realism⁵ as from satire and Gulliver’s Travels. Having invented in 1809 a watch that requires no winding, the Krepskis find themselves in the dubious position of becoming both masters and slaves of time: they do not grow older but neither do they grow wiser or happier. Without the pressures of mortality, their lives, comprising “countless monotonous evenings” and days of “mechanical and unvarying routine” (LS 92), gradually become insufferable.

Adam Krepski’s transition from miserly immortal to a generous giver of time—trading the watch and his own life for the survival of an infant—is aided by the story’s

⁵ In his 1988 essay “Throwing Off Our Inhibitions” Swift refers to reading Borges and Marquez when he was “a bare novice of a writer” and being “awestruck” by these writers’ expertise but mostly by their stylistic “exhibitionism” (20). His admiration at the time seems unconditional: “I am sure I was not the only apprentice writer in England to read these authors and feel somehow silly for being English” (20).

structure which mocks the linearity of time by moving freely backwards and forwards. Like Prentis and Bill Unwin, Adam is a self-conscious narrator: he addresses the reader as “you” (“think of the clock which is ticking now, behind you, above you, peeping from your cuff” LS 88) and reveals his participation in the process of composition (“I write now in the 1970s” LS 89). Adam’s conscious manipulation of the narrative along with his friendly and compassionate tone render his tale of magic believable and his request for absolution sincere. Like all of Swift’s protagonists in these stories and in the novels, he is another guilt-ridden husband and disloyal son. Only after he denies marital bliss and drives his wife away—revealing his great secret thus betraying his ancestors as well—does the narrator recognise his inability to enjoy life without the “urgency” mortality confers (LS 91). Ultimately, Adam chooses life over immortality when he assists in the birth of a child and forces the Krepski timepiece to stop. By seeking to enter the stream of time through the symbolic fathering of a newborn, Adam, like his archetypal namesake, abandons paradise and seeks absolution for his earlier denial of life.

At the end of “The Watch” the narrator’s life is ebbing away as he lies on a hospital bed; he has become one of the many patients who populate Swift’s early fiction. At the end of “The Hypochondriac” Dr Collins also finds himself a housebound patient recovering from a breakdown and unable to practice medicine; and in “Hotel” the narrator is a relapsing mental patient burdened with the knowledge of unconfessed guilt. Hospitals and Homes feature consistently throughout Swift’s oeuvre as symbols of disease inexorably connected to characters’ psychology and their inability to overcome trauma. The vulnerability of the body is emphasised every time an incident that produces uncontrollable stress sends Swift’s characters to a Home for visits of varying length. After a period of hospitalisation Irene Chapman in The Sweet-Shop Owner gradually turns herself into an invalid in an effort to control her body as well as her life; she chooses to become a patient as the narrator of “Hotel” chooses to play the healer. In Shuttlecock Prentis is tortured by his Dad’s aphasia which, in the narrator’s mind, constitutes not illness but a willing withdrawal from life, just as the narrator of “Cliffedge” thinks that Neil’s prolonged childhood is his brother’s choice. Tom and Mary Crick in Waterland never come to terms with barrenness or with guilt over their aborted child, much like the couple in “Seraglio” who talk around but not about the miscarriage. In Out of This World Sophie Beech undergoes psychoanalysis to help herself endure the stress of memory, recognising, like the narrator of “The Tunnel,” the benefits of talk and communication. Bill Unwin in Ever After and Adam Krepski in “The Watch” are self-declared dead men who

surrender their lives in the hope of relief from remorse. Adam also resembles cancer patient Jack Dodds in Last Orders: both men die on hospital beds, struck by “an internal blow” (LS 112). In the end Jack and Adam are forced to review their lives and come to terms with guilt stemming from abandoned wives and children: the son this Krepski never had, the daughter Jack Dodds sought to forget and replace.

In Learning to Swim, as in his novels, Swift explores again and again how cosmic accident and human choice conspire to produce incidents of such devastating potency—a miscarriage or abortion, suicide or incest, a secret adoption or forced childlessness—that his characters have to spend the rest of their lives trapped in the aftermath of the past. The inescapability of history and the pervasiveness of guilt are constant concerns in Swift’s fiction. In the stories the talking cure is mostly implied through the narrators’ inability to engage in communication and confession. Unlike the four men united by the bonds of brotherhood at the end of Last Orders, the protagonists of the short stories in Learning to Swim remain alone and unconsolated, locked in their struggle with memory and remorse.

Unable to accept mortality, trapped by phobias, paralysed by an awareness of the limits of human knowledge, the characters in Swift’s short stories are disturbed by the fundamental place of paradox and ambiguity in the universe. In Swift’s early fiction his narrators pose questions but fear the answers and find few solutions; instead, they lament their state of being and declare their dissatisfaction with life: “Tell me, who are we? What’s important, what isn’t?” wonders Kostas in “The Son,” in order to conclude, “I don’t like the way the world’s going” (LS 61). As the chapters that follow will demonstrate, when every Tom, Bill and Harry in the novels of Graham Swift reluctantly begins his apologia, each shares Kostas’s existential numbness and echoes his puzzlement.

Chapter II

Dissolving History: The Stillness of Patterns in The Sweet-Shop Owner

Alack, what heinous sin is it in me
To be ashamed to be my father's child!
But though I am a daughter to his blood,
I am not to his manners.
The Merchant of Venice, II, iii, 15-18 (433)

She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!
John Keats "Ode on a Grecian Urn" (288)

In The Sweet-Shop Owner (1980), Graham Swift's well-received first novel,¹ family life in suburbia is viewed through the eyes of Willy Chapman, a dying man, whose attachment to place and meticulous attention to detail derive from an overwhelming concern for pattern and a crippling inability to connect. Like Swift's short stories, The Sweet-Shop Owner encapsulates thematic concerns that have become a staple of Swift's later work. Exposing lives devoted to observation, not participation, the novel laments the loss of familial and communal bonds that render the passage of time meaningful and broaden the scope of human life. Swift's darkest portrait to date of the spiritual inertia typical, in his works, of the English middle class, The Sweet-Shop Owner is a "tale of dereliction and deception" (Bernard "Foreword" 217). In terms of structure and technique this novel borrows equally from realism and modernism, blending third-person, character-driven narrative with fragments of interior monologues, scrambled chronology and extensive use of symbolism. In The Sweet-Shop Owner, more explicitly than in Swift's later works, Dickens and Hardy meet Joyce and T. S. Eliot. Still, however conscious Graham Swift seems to be of the literary heritage of the English novel, his first work proves distinctly contemporary as this new author transcends influences and carves his own niche.

¹ In a text entitled "Nineteen Seventy-four," Swift reveals making an attempt at writing a novel before The Sweet-Shop Owner. Discussing the title year in which the author claims to have "failed to write [his] first novel" (21), Swift refers to a "voluminous, if unfinished, manuscript" he produced during the time he spent in Ano Volos, Greece, employed as a teacher of English (Fall 1973-Summer 1974). Although Swift seems to have abandoned that manuscript eventually, having realised after his return to England that the text was "irredeemably awful" (25), he credits this failure as having assured him, "contrary to the evidence," that he "would be a writer" (27).

In The Sweet-Shop Owner Willy Chapman's last day becomes a journey through memory documenting with increasing urgency the frustrated expectations of the protagonist and the emotional devastation that leads him to suicide. Narrated predominantly through a third-person point-of-view, the novel does not take the form of a confession as Swift's future novels will. Even when he speaks directly to his daughter Dorothy in the first person, Willy opines, questions, remembers, but he does not confess. Although he is bitter, he is not regretful: Willy seeks Dorothy's understanding for having lived his life torn between his love for her and his undiminished devotion to her mother. Through the interior monologues dominating the second half of the novel (sections twenty-one to thirty-three), Willy defends his views while simultaneously acknowledging the price his choices have exacted.

Swift had finished writing The Sweet-Shop Owner "at least three years" prior to its publication (Crane "Interview" 9).² If London Magazine Editions, a small but eclectic publishing house managed by Alan Ross, had not "ran out of funds" (Smith 43), Swift might have appeared on the literary scene as early as 1977.³ Yet, Swift did not spend the time between the novel's completion and its publication revising it: as he has stated, he "just went on working on other things" (Clemons 74), namely, various short stories (eventually collected in Learning to Swim in 1982) and a second novel, Shuttlecock, published in 1981. Furthermore, Swift continued to support himself financially by working part-time, "mainly teaching" (Swift "Foreword" 7), until 1983, when the overwhelming literary and commercial success of Waterland catapulted him into the limelight.

As a first novel by a young author, The Sweet-Shop Owner was not reviewed as extensively as Swift's future works would be but all the reviewers praised the novel. Alan Hollinghurst called it "marvellous" ("Elapsing" 631), the Spectator reviewer

² A slight contradiction among sources makes it difficult to determine whether Swift completed the writing of The Sweet-Shop Owner in 1976 or in 1977. In a 1985 Newsweek feature Swift quotes "1976" as the year his "first novel was finished" (Clemons 74). In a 1988 interview, Swift states that an interval of "at least three years" occurred "between completion and publication" of his first novel (Crane 9). A 1992 Publisher's Weekly interview, which relates in great detail Swift's association with various publishing houses on both sides of the Atlantic, posits "1977" as the completion year (Smith 43).

³ Like other contemporary authors, Swift credits the "late-great" Alan Ross (1922-2001) as having been his "champion" at the beginning of his literary career (Writers' Awards 8). In a 1988 interview Swift acknowledges Ross's encouragement in finishing The Sweet-Shop Owner (Crane 8) as well as Ross's continuing efforts to ensure its publication: "he swore he would find me another publisher some day" (Smith 43). Eventually, Ross kept his promise when he "became fiction consultant to Allen Lane" (Smith 43), the company that published The Sweet-Shop Owner in 1980.

found it “impressive” (Rudman 24), and the Times termed it “excellent” and “beautifully balanced” (Evans 10). When The Sweet-Shop Owner was first published in America in 1985 (along with Shuttlecock and Learning to Swim in the post-Waterland demand for more of Swift’s works), it was again received favourably despite the inevitable comparisons critics made between Waterland and the earlier works. Michael Gorra in the New York Times Book Review called the novel “superb” (“When Life” 11), while Newsweek characterised it as “accomplished” and a “very talented writer’s first move towards mastery” (Clemons 74).

Narrative Technique and Chronology

The Sweet-Shop Owner is an “intricate first novel” (Gorra “When Life” 11) as well as a “moving” one (Hollinghurst “Silence” 15). Through Willy, a man who, according to Malcolm Bradbury, “feels himself to be a feeble, powerless witness to the larger dramas of wartime, love, and modern history” (Modern 432), the daily life of a quietly disappearing generation of small-business owners emerges. Events of the past, mirrored within and juxtaposed to the present, weave a tale of loss and disillusionment deriving from an unreflective existence. Recording the events during a single day in the protagonist’s life, the plot comprises two intertwining narrative strands: one moves forward in the narrative present (from early morning till the evening of a Friday in June 1974) while the other constantly darts back to significant moments in the previous four decades (from the 1930s onwards to the 1970s). Swift’s narrative is fractured not only chronologically; within the novel’s thirty-nine sections, the point-of-view oscillates between the third person and the first person while the focus shifts occasionally from the protagonist to three other characters (see Appendix I). Thus, the reader acquires a perspective that is as ironically distanced as it is intimate, allowing both comprehension and compassion. While the protagonist’s limitations are exposed and castigated, his suffering is equally emphasised.

Judgement coexists with empathy in all of Swift’s works since this author believes that “writing is all about compassion” (Dickson 7.6). In the same 1992 interview Swift declares his “love” for all his characters, “good or bad” (Dickson 7.6). Swift’s love and compassion become apparent when the author disappears by employing the first-person point of view. In The Sweet-Shop Owner the most memorable sections are the ones where the protagonist and his wife voice their inhibitions through interior monologues. These seven sections of interior monologue are few compared with the rest of the novel, which is narrated either exclusively in the third person or

predominantly in the third person with occasional first-person intrusions of the characters' thoughts or Willy's asides to his daughter. Yet, the intensity of suffering communicated through these monologues is unquestionable. In all his future novels Swift will abandon the third person in favour of the first-person point of view since his interest in demonstrating the human need for confession necessitates that characters double as narrators. Furthermore, Swift's belief in the healing powers of story-telling will lead to increased polyphony in the later works: from two voices heard occasionally in The Sweet-Shop Owner to four narrators in Out of This World and as many as seven voices in Last Orders.

In Swift's novels, the dead hold extraordinary power over the living and their voices are heard not only through memory but also directly. In The Sweet-Shop Owner Willy's deceased wife, Irene, is allowed a lengthy monologue (section seven) and her voice haunts the novel with secrets and confessions she never communicates to her husband. While in Out of This World and Last Orders the voices of the dead (Anna Beech and Jack Dodds respectively) emerge quite late in those narratives, Irene's revelations expose the protagonist's ignorance early and underline his fallibility. Moreover, by allowing Irene to be the one to narrate her fears and traumas, the novel ironically highlights the significance of communication and storytelling since her monologue, which addresses her sleeping husband, is heard only by the reader. Similarly, Willy's brief asides or silent monologues, directed towards his daughter, prove that the character's intense suffering is a result of his inability to speak out loud. Unlike the protagonist of Waterland, Willy Chapman lacks the ability to confess as well as the belief in "curiosity" which "weds us to the world" (W 206).

In The Sweet-Shop Owner narrative technique and chronology are used to create a layering effect which gradually fuses past and present. While the majority of sections in the novel are devoted either to the present (as, for example, sections four or eleven) or to the past (like sections five or eight), the constant time shifts—many sections in present time are followed by sections referring to the past and vice versa—create the impression that all of Willy's past days fit into his last one. Moreover, the occasional intermingling of narrative strands and chronological strata within one section heightens this impression. This coexistence of present and past with third-person and first-person narratives is apparent from the beginning. In the novel's first section the present-time, chronologically-forward, third-person point of view is interrupted twice; first, by a memory (the birth of Willy's daughter in 1969), and then by Willy's voice addressing his daughter: "and today, Dorry, is your

birthday" (SO 11). Past and present as well as third-person and first-person narrative modes intermingle to create an intricate mode of representation. Partly traditional and partly experimental, The Sweet-Shop Owner applies Swift's favourite method of melting past and present, outward and inner action into one organic whole. This coexistence of narrative variations and chronological shifts within the same section occurs eight times in The Sweet-Shop Owner: in sections one, fifteen, seventeen, twenty-nine, thirty, thirty-one, thirty-two and thirty-three (see Appendix I). The effect created, especially in sections twenty-nine to thirty-three which present Willy's long afternoon walk between his shops, is one of mounting tension, demonstrating how Willy succeeds in inducing a heart attack not only through physical exertion but mainly through remembrance of all the hurtful events that led to his daughter's estrangement.

Another distinguishing characteristic of the third-person narrative in The Sweet-Shop Owner is the occasional shift of focus from Willy to his two shop assistants. By allowing Sandra's and Mrs Cooper's thoughts to be heard, the novel succeeds in engaging these minor characters in action that would otherwise concern only the protagonist, as well as in exposing needs and aspirations that render these women important to the plot. In Mrs Cooper and Sandra, his "surrogate sweet-shop family" (Higdon "Unconfessed" 182), Willy could have found wife and daughter substitutes but he rejects such a possibility by refusing to abandon the formality of the shop-owner role in order to create a more congenial atmosphere. After sixteen years he does not call Mrs Cooper by her first name or accept her multiple offers of help, misjudging the desperation of this deserted, homely woman for the advances of "an ageing bird of prey" (SO 35). Similarly, Sandra's need to be "liked," to "challenge" him, is "noticed" but Willy remains "unmoved" by her advances (SO 106). Willy acknowledges that he hired Sandra as "a sort of cheap replacement" after his daughter had left him (SO 94) so he often stares at her "as if he expected her to be something she wasn't" (SO 170). Despite their many differences, both of these minor female characters feel abandoned and long to be rescued from a dull and miserable routine. Ironically, their desires are directed towards Willy, who declines to comply with their wishes—much as his own wife and daughter refused to return his love. In Swift's fiction what the characters want and what they are allowed to have rarely coincide.

Shopkeeper's Luck

In The Sweet-Shop Owner Swift demonstrates that “the suppression of the emotion,” as he himself has termed, in a 1988 article, “that characteristically English malaise” (“Throwing Off” 20), is as much a social characteristic, which plagues the bourgeoisie predominantly, as it is an element of personality rooted in human psychology. When circumstance and social class unite with temperament, as in the case of Irene Harrison, then coldness and detachment become a permanent state of being. In Willy’s case predisposition turns into habit at his wife’s request and he learns to subsist on scraps of emotion and the convoluted notion that evidence of affection exists in the very absence of expression: “if the word love is never spoken, does it mean there isn’t any love?” (SO 116). This is not a rhetorical question for Willy, who is eager to interpret Irene’s need to keep him occupied and away from home as an idiosyncratic form of caring. Ultimately, Willy’s inhibitions and Irene’s withdrawal damage their relationship with their daughter, who rejects her parents as a result of their inability to meet her emotional needs. In The Sweet-Shop Owner the father-daughter juxtaposition is presented more believably than in Out of This World. Although lacking the panoramas, both historical and geographical, characteristic of all the novels published after Waterland, The Sweet-Shop Owner generates a depressing aura akin to the suburban claustrophobia of Shuttlecock. Similarly, the misguided romanticism of the protagonist of Ever After is a trait dominant in Willy Chapman, too. In Last Orders Swift will revisit with equal compassion The Sweet-Shop Owner’s mercantile world but the later novel will be characterised by more humour and optimism since the ageing men of the 1996 novel are more self-aware than Willy Chapman and therefore more deserving of redemption.

Like Ray or Lenny in Last Orders, Willy is witness to the changes occurring in the neighbourhood where he has spent all his life: “the same and not the same” (SO 174). First, a world emerging from the Great War only to become enmeshed in another; then, the austerity of the post-World-War-II years, followed by prosperity and increased consumerism: a society losing its traditional characteristics in a frenzy of “arrogance and temerity” (SO 142). Willy himself takes no part in shaping history but feels shaped by its forces, or, in the words of Heike Hartung-Brückner, by history’s “fossilising aspects” (“Uses”). Believing that the future has solidified before even arriving, Willy craves “stillness”: “and while he waited, hands resting on the mornings headlines,” the news he sells but never reads, “he laughed inwardly” (SO 138), certain that the newspapers can never tell him more than he already knows from observing the patterns of their print.

Willy's fatalism and the sentimentality accompanying his belief in "pattern" and "stillness" suggest to him that his acquaintance with Irene—she visits the shop where he works as an assistant and then he chances upon her three days later on the common—is not the result of accident but an event "that had the feel about it of something meant to be" (SO 26). Willy feels he has been selected: not only by Irene ("he knew he was hers" SO 27), but by cosmic forces, by a "predictable formula" (SO 28) in which he is the missing ingredient. Long before Bill Unwin in *Ever After* feels blessed for having a beautiful as well as loving wife and Ray 'Lucky' Johnson places an improbably successful bet in *Last Orders*, Swift portrays through Willy Chapman the first of his male protagonists who view themselves as fortunate. With a dazzling young wife and a "fortune duly made over" (SO 28), Willy considers himself lucky without questioning the demands his "reward" will make on him (SO 30). Even when during World War II as an army store clerk he becomes the butt of cruel banter since his limp keeps him safely away from active duty, Willy is encouraged by his wife to "count [his] blessings" (SO 59). Like Irene, he believes that fortune keeps him out of harm's way and preserves him for a life of routine and pattern he must ungrudgingly serve to the end. For over three decades this consummate shopkeeper surrounds himself, literally and metaphorically, with wares he never samples, becoming a keeper, not a consumer: newspapers he does not read, sweets he does not taste, a wife he is rarely allowed to touch and with whom he cannot communicate. Willy's belief in luck is an illusion which safeguards him from questioning his choices in life and acknowledging the deleterious effects of his faith in his own fortune.

From 1938 until 1974 from his shop on the High Street Willy Chapman watches human traffic, documenting loss and gain in commerce and in life: shopkeepers go out of business or die and are replaced by their assistants; customers indulge themselves in the ephemera that render their routines bearable; new establishments open, while others are renamed; and new clothing styles, new appliances, new habits emerge. Willy catalogues his days by adding up an endless array of details characteristic of neighbourhood activity: fresh fruit and vegetable displays prepared daily by the greengrocer; empty beer glasses left in the sun outside the pub after lunchbreak on a hot summer day; pictures of property for sale advertised on the windows of the estate agency. From a young man of twenty-five who hopes that he may hear some words of love, Willy gradually turns into a "cut out figure" standing behind the counter every day of the week (SO 132), an "effigy" (SO 214), as unchanging as his shop's schedule and his five-suit wardrobe.

Skittles and Distance Running

Willy Chapman, the sixty-one year old owner of two profitable small shops in an unnamed South London suburb,⁴ regards the items he sells—tobacco, sweets and newspapers—as “useless” (SO 98). The novel follows the protagonist during his last day at the shop as well as in his life: a Friday in June 1974, which is also his daughter’s twenty-fifth birthday. As in all of Swift’s novels, the plot of The Sweet-Shop Owner creates an opportunity for the writer to discuss his favourite themes—the relationship between the individual and the forces of history as well as the need for participation and redemption through the ritual of storytelling—while recording the protagonist’s growing sense of alienation in a fast-changing world. Willy’s endlessly rehearsed daily routine is meticulously documented through numerous flashbacks that begin in the early 1930s when he was a grammar school student.

These anachronic memory flashes gradually compose a comprehensive record of a “profoundly uneventful life” (Evans 10): marked only by success in distance running at school events, Willy’s adolescence is spent daydreaming; his first job at a printing shop encourages his fascination with “regularity” and “layout” (SO 24); Willy’s marriage to Irene in June 1937 occurs shortly after they meet; the acquisition of the shop and Willy’s fall off a ladder, resulting in a permanent limp, are the major events of 1938; the war years are spent behind an army supplies counter, ensuring that others are equipped for battle; Dorothy’s birth in June 1949 adds new duties to Willy’s prescribed daily routine; during the next two decades Willy inhabits three roles—shopkeeper, husband and father—with controlled detachment, driving his daughter, emotionally and physically, away from home; in 1971, despite Irene’s weakening physical condition, another shop is bought at her request; finally, in July 1973 Irene dies and the disinherited Dorry makes a last visit to the family house to remove valuables in May 1974.

In his first novel Swift investigates familial traumas already explored in several of his short stories: unfulfilling marriage; lack of communication between generations manifest through contested parent-child relationships; a façade of peace and respectability maintained by sacrificing honesty and genuine feeling; and a

⁴ Although all the street names in the novel are invented, Sydenham Hill, the location of the residence of one of the novel’s minor characters, the estate agent Frank Hancock, exists in South London. Swift, who was born in Catford (Quinn), attended Dulwich College (Walsh), and has been living near Wandsworth Common (“Hale” 22) for the past two decades, has set The Sweet-Shop Owner in territory familiar to him since childhood.

protagonist haunted by the certainty of impending doom, trapped by overpowering fatalism: “if you win, you lose” (SO 197). Compared to the later novels, The Sweet-Shop Owner is a simpler, more straightforward discussion of such thematic preoccupations; in this family drama, character flaws are unequivocally exposed, thus becoming easier to castigate. The ambiguities that characterise the pursuit of knowledge in all the other novels and some of Swift’s short stories, as well as the paradoxical nature of people’s relationship to time and place, are found only in embryonic form in this first novel. Swift’s trademark combination of the sublime and the ridiculous—glimpsed in a story like “The Watch” or in his second novel, Shuttlecock, but dominant in Waterland and all the later works—is not to be found in The Sweet-Shop Owner since Willy Chapman, unlike Adam Krepski, Tom Crick or Bill Unwin, is not blessed with double vision: the self-torturing ability of the Swiftian male to be both participant and observer.

Willy is only a viewer, an inactive player on the world stage, a “powerless skittle” pursued by the “invisible ball” of History (SO 222). Recently widowed and suffering from angina, Willy mourns the loss of two women who provided him with his daily patterns, the Eliotian ‘coffee spoons’ with which he willingly measures his life: Irene, his wife of thirty-six years, and his estranged daughter, Dorry. Prufrockian by temperament as well as by choice, Willy sees life as a long-distance race to be endured, not as a sprint: “plenty of time. Time to think as well as act; time to watch as well as take part” (SO 193). Willy learns to fulfil the demands of marriage and fatherhood in the same way he manages his business: by dressing the part, going through the motions and keeping his books neatly balanced at the end of each day. Irene does not encourage Willy to express his emotions towards her or his child, who comes to resent her mother’s aloofness and her father’s weakness. In the Chapman home demonstrations of love, through words or actions, are silently discouraged; even a reference to world events is too sensational a topic for the dinner table.

Irene’s dread of intimacy and Willy’s deference to his wife’s judgement at the expense of his daughter’s emotional needs complicate the inter-generational struggle and provide the adolescent Dorothy with a multitude of reasons to escape, through books, a miserly life. As parents, the Chapmans do not engage in storytelling: unlike Tom Crick, Dorry is not brought up on fairy-tales, so literature becomes a substitute for all the stories she has never heard. Willy does not understand the books his daughter studies; and he does not discover the subtle

ironies inherent in Dorry's preference for the role of Jessica, not Portia, in the annual school performance or her focus on poetry and the Romantics. When his shop assistant is puzzled about Dorry's educational choice—"English? I mean, what's it for?" (SO 163)—Willy is equally unsure, never having explored language as a means of communication.

For over thirty years Willy works seven days a week, staying away from the house the greater part of the day and making money the family does not really need. This pattern is established by his wife who chooses to marry Willy for his "rag-doll" qualities (SO 25) and buys him a shop to establish a routine that will allow her to avoid living. Irene Harrison is beautiful, intelligent and rich, but "cracked" (SO 55): raped in late adolescence by her first suitor, Frank Hancock, one of her brothers' friends who is seen by her family as a prospective husband, she withdraws into frigidity and hatred of life. Irene suffers psychosomatically: she develops asthma and has a nervous breakdown which necessitates spending some time in "a Home in Surrey" (SO 53). By the time she marries Willy at the age of twenty-four, Irene is a traumatised neurotic seeking to escape a claustrophobic family environment.

History, Patterns and Stillness

An early model of Waterland's Atkinsons, the Harrison family represents materialism and exhibits faith in progress. Twentieth-century historical forces ensure that their rise and fall occurs within two generations: first Irene's father and then her brother, Paul, are forced into self-humiliation and destruction through their inability to "make some connection" (SO 80), to comprehend their place in history. Irene's father makes his fortune "on the promise of whiteness" (SO 23): the Harrison "little laundries" are built with the money Irene's mother inherits from her three brothers killed in World War I. While the consequences of one war enable Mr Harrison to invest some of the inherited funds in laundries, the onslaught of another war destroys both his business and his family. Irene believes that the laundry business is built with tainted money she will not touch: after her death, she passes it on to Willy, not their daughter. When Irene's brother, Jack, is killed in action and the laundries bombed, history seems to be reclaiming its own. The paterfamilias dies on Victory Day; Paul is unable to save the business or recover financially after the war, since Irene refuses to lend him any of the money she inherits. Irene sees the men in her family as cruel and hardened manipulators and blames them for wanting to use her beauty as a symbol of their commercial enterprise, reducing her to a commodity. She will not forgive or forget: she does not assist them when they are alive and does

not exhibit any emotion at their funerals. Due to the “readiness for conversion into history” that the Harrison brothers demonstrate (Poole “So Far” 111), they prove greedy and ignorant slaves of forces beyond their comprehension.

When Willy makes Irene Harrison’s acquaintance, he is a type-setter who likes “daily routine, the taking of orders” and spending the day “making patterns” (SO 25). Dazzled by her beauty and aura of command, he does not see Irene, the invalid, but the haughty and “sad princess in the story” (SO 32), the incarnation of his life’s purpose, “something meant to be” (SO 26). The shop Irene buys for Willy stands across the street from Hancock’s estate agency, but Irene never confides in her husband the reason she is “not all [she] should be” (SO 30). The menacing proximity and constant presence of Frank Hancock in the Chapmans’ lives—patronising Willy’s shop, inviting himself to Dorry’s baptism, taking Paul Harrison as a business partner—serves as an ironic reminder of the secrets in Irene’s past that will never be confided in Willy. Irene marries Willy, not because she seeks intimacy and affection, but because Willy’s malleable personality and his fervent admiration for her suggest she can control him and safeguard her remoteness. Having experienced the “wolves that prowl,” Irene opts for a “pet dog” which can be “lead on a lead” and will “run” when she calls (SO 29-30). Furthermore, Frank Hancock serves as Willy’s foil: his hypocritical and violent personality emphasises Willy’s good-natured naiveté and his honest transactions with his employees. While Hancock schemes against his business partners and beats his neglected wife into submission, Willy emerges by contrast as a hard-working shopkeeper and a devoted, loving husband.

Unlike Hancock—a sinister philistine, always aggressive and cruel, who has no redeeming qualities—Willy is a victim of his own inability to break out of a life of pattern. The juxtaposition between the protagonist and this minor character underlines Willy’s passivity in acquiescing in his wife’s demands. While Hancock never abandons sexual innuendo during his infrequent encounters with Irene, striving to remind her of their past relationship with flirtatious as well as malicious intent, Willy accepts Irene’s withdrawal and assists her in maintaining the traumas and phobias she brings to their marriage. Willy enables Irene to erect walls he will never succeed in demolishing. Even on his final day, after a lifetime in the service of a woman who cannot tolerate any demonstration or declaration of love, Willy adheres with silent devotion to the code of behaviour she had dictated. When he dies alone on his daughter’s birthday, secretly wishing that Dorry will come to him “one last time” to forgive him his allegiance to her mother, he is sitting in Irene’s

favourite armchair, looking out into the garden as she always did (SO 221). On his last day Willy removes his shopkeeper persona, exits his actor's life by the stage door, but remains convinced that he has done his duty as a husband and deserves to be redeemed as a father, too.

Willy Chapman dies alone, like his wife before him, even in death following the pattern she has set for him. He hopes for a "miracle"—"she would come" (SO 217, 222)—but it will not happen because he has done nothing to deserve it, taken no risks to prove, even on his last day, that he knows the error of his ways. He does not seek his daughter's forgiveness; instead, he sends the money she requests (fifteen thousand pounds) paying her off as if he could buy her love by placing an order and advancing funds. In similar manner Irene bought him an occupation many years ago to secure his silence and taught him to use the language of numbers: "'5520 helmets,' meaning 'I love you'" (SO 65). On that final pay day all of Willy's employees receive a secret bribe, a token of his inability to share in words or actions his feelings for each one of them: one pound fifty for each of the five paper boys; twenty-five pounds for the seventeen-year-old Sandra; one hundred pounds for the twenty-year-old Miss Fox, the assistant at the second shop; and five hundred pounds each for Mrs Cooper and Bryant, the trusted, ageing assistants at the two shops. Money and material goods constantly replace emotion in Willy's life: the artificial taking the place of the "real thing," an expression repeated several times throughout The Sweet-Shop Owner (pages 45, 59, 128, 184, 197, 213, and 221) before it becomes a central thematic motif in Ever After.

Willy's inability to recognise the error of his ways and abandon his destructive faith in patterns constitutes Swift's first portrait of a series of male protagonists all of whom debate the same fundamental questions regarding existence and their relationship to family and history. The least loved and fulfilled of Swift's abandoned men, Willy Chapman finds an equal only in Lenny Tate, another failed athlete and the only one of four men who has no future prospects at the end of Last Orders. Tom Crick and Ray Johnson, Swift's more aware male characters, find some solace in the bitter recognition of their own mistakes; Bill Unwin feeds off his faith in romance and memories of marital happiness; through the promise of a new beginning in life Harry Beech is allowed some degree of forgiveness; and Prentis learns to manipulate historical records, usurping the power of the past. Willy Chapman is the only Swiftian male who is allowed to meet his death unreconciled

with his daughter and his past: as passive and pathetic on his final day as he has been throughout his life.

Willy's sterility and lack of participation condemn him not only to loneliness and alienation but also to ignorance. The question that taunts him at the beginning of the novel—"what did she mean in the end he would see?" (SO 9)—is not one Willy can ever answer because even at the end he does not "see." In his long-distance race through life, Willy runs blindly to his death as he ran blindly through each day. His talent may be in endurance but, without understanding or vision, running against time becomes meaningless exercise. Willy's self-induced heart attack stemming from his view of the body as a "motor" trivialises death by transforming a human entity into a "machine" (SO 194). Furthermore, the ill-chosen date of his death, Dorry's birthday, emphasises, in melodramatic fashion, Willy's need to escape self-blame and remain convinced of his victim status. Seeking to invest a day of happy memories with morbid significance and force a pattern of equation of life to death, Willy renders his suicide symptomatic of his failure to "establish his proper paternal and symbolic relation to history" (Wheeler "Melancholic" 67). Until the end Willy remains confident that, "after all" his daughter has "put him through" (SO 9), he is owed a visit. Dorothy's response, "I should have thought you'd be glad to be finished with me at last" (SO 9), in the letter that Willy carries with him all day and clutches in his hand at the moment of his death, provides ample proof that history will not "dissolve" and a "miracle" will not happen (SO 217). Willy Chapman makes a pointless sacrifice at the end of a pointless life. Denied reunion with his daughter, having found little reward in the patterns he has served all his life, and acknowledging the meaninglessness of the roles he has played, he drowns in a "submerged, aqueous world in which the past was embedded" (SO 217-8). He is already a "ghost," wandering through "this deserted monument of a house" (SO 219), unaware that preservation does not replace communication and ignorant of the ironies inherent in his final thoughts.

In The Sweet-Shop Owner domestic wars feature more prominently than the macrocosm of history. Although several chapters in the first part of this novel focus on the development of Willy's routine during World War II, the significance of this historical event leaves Willy almost untouched. Every other protagonist of Swift's future works is gravely influenced, directly or indirectly, by the war that Adrian Poole calls "the last great collective ending the English have known" ("Mourning" 157, emphasis in original text). Willy's sense of the past is limited by his inability to relate

his own life to the broader events in history: "what was the connection? What war? What action?" (SO 79). As Del Ivan Janik suggests, for Willy war remains "an abstraction" ("History" 77). Unlike Prentis or Harry Beech, Willy has no war hero for a father: Mr. Hill, the games master at Willy's grammar school, and Irene's three dead uncles served in the Great War, yet Willy's father is not mentioned in this context. During World War II Willy does not think of lives lost or endangered but of "history drawing up its inventory" (SO 79): uniforms and helmets and ration books. He becomes history's shopkeeper, not a soldier. Willy is involved in the machinery of war but sees no action, preferring not to think that many of the soldiers he fits out for battle will never return. Even when he sees the "ravaged, bomb-scarred streets of London," he cannot understand the connection (SO 79) but prefers to escape into his little world of "not acting" (SO 77). Throughout his life he keeps vigil at a shop counter but does not sample his wares: in wartime he provides soldiers with weapons but he does not use them; in peacetime he erects a "memorial of trifles" through his High Street shop so he can "vanish safely" (SO 222).

Unconfessed and Unforgiven

In all of Swift's works characters tend to be given names that signify their nature and their significance. In The Sweet-Shop Owner names create an ironic context that emphasises characters' lost potential and undermines each name's idealistic connotations. For instance, Irene constantly seeks the peace of mind her name promises but is tortured instead by the demands life and her daughter make on her. While Irene hopes that Dorry would be the trade-off for peace, her "side of the bargain" fulfilled (SO 102), this daughter is an unwanted gift from God ('Dorothea'). Uncomfortable with her identity, just as her mother was before her, Dorry stands in ironic contrast to her name's potential since she is as tortured as she is gifted, trapped between the silent demands her father makes on her affections and her knowledge of Willy's emotional impotence. Dorothy realises that, despite his name, her father does not have the will to change the patterns that govern his life and affected her upbringing.

Like his more famous literary counterpart, Arthur Miller's Willy Loman, another small life swallowed up by pattern, another salesman who meets his death in a desperate attempt to do his duty and earn respect, Willy Chapman is an unheroic Everyman, neither Will nor William, neither prince nor conqueror. Although he entertains romantic notions ("the Prince William, they named it after me" SO 174), and believes that he is chosen by a fair maiden to whom he "owed eternal service" (SO 31), "like

a knight laying down arms" (SO 26), he is too timid, too un-will-ing to be more than a "toy in its box," a "puppet" (SO 11). Even when, as a newlywed, he feels the urge to "sweep aside the tea cups, to catch her like some wild thing" (SO 42), Irene's forbidding look is enough to subdue him. Immobilised like a figure on a Grecian urn, Willy will never 'have his bliss' but worship Irene eternally and in vain. As for his one moment of triumph in life, the winning of the 1931 mile race, Willy reduces even that into a pattern in his mind. He is "expected to win" (SO 192), therefore he plays a prescribed role "carried by something that wasn't part of him" (SO 194). Although Willy admires Jack Harrison's effort during the race to contest his own supremacy and sees that Jack, not himself, has the physique of the "eternal champion" (SO 195), he dismisses the possibility that the race (or life) can be "the real thing": "they think it's a battle but it's only a performance. They think it's action but it's only a pattern" (SO 197). Willy is a chap, not a champ, will-ing himself through a life restricted by his devotion to Irene's beauty but not truth, motion but not movement. At the end of each day of his life as well as at the end of his final day, he knows that "there would be a victory, but not his" (SO 222). He is not William, the Conqueror, but Willy, the conquered.

Willy Chapman is pitied but he is not forgiven for his inability to engage in life-affirming rituals and abandon an endless cycle of meaningless patterns. Not once but twice, he is offered the opportunity to establish genuine communication in his family by assisting Irene to escape the tormenting effects of emotional estrangement and physical deterioration. In both instances Willy's refusal to confess, his resistance to therapy, stems from a mistaken sense of duty, undiminished faith in Irene's demands and his own belief in patterns. The first lifeline is thrown at Willy in 1958 when Doctor Cunningham informs him that Irene's asthma has its cause in "emotional distress;" Willy should help the doctors "know more" about his wife's past (SO 125). Although the doctor urges him to reveal his knowledge of any "pattern" and to "talk it over" with Irene since this interaction would be in her "best interest," Willy doubts the doctor's expertise—"How do you know what is in Irene's best interest?" (SO 126)—but not his wife's decision to choose invalidism and silence over health and communication. Willy cannot abandon his end of the "bargain," which consists of everything Irene has offered him—his home, his shop, his daughter—for a dubious victory: "so that she would be cured and possess the thing it already pleased her to renounce? Restored to him: the bargain broken?" (SO 127).

Willy's second chance at confession occurs a dozen years later, in 1970, when severe heart problems necessitate Irene's prolonged hospitalisation. Willy's fear of losing his wife lends such urgency to a lengthy discussion he holds with his daughter that in his mind the evening's exchange becomes "the only time [they] ever really talked" (SO 149). Yet, Willy's defences are so strong and his denial so ingrained that even Dorry's need to know the family history is met with caution and left mostly unattended: "so many questions, Dorry, about the past" (SO 168). Failing to acknowledge his daughter's right to comprehend the motives behind parental actions, Willy is not interested in confession. Instead, he asks his daughter for absolution, first on behalf of Irene—"You will forgive her, won't you?" (SO 169)—and then for himself: "Forgive me too" (SO 170). Believing that patterns imposed on him lie beyond his control, Willy seeks redemption without participating in the therapeutic rituals of communication and without acknowledging lost opportunities.

Stasis and Escape

Willy's fatalism is established long before he meets Irene. As a young man, he sees life as a "wild adventure" to be avoided at all costs: "nothing touches you, you touch nothing" becomes his motto (SO 44). While his fellow students are "greedy for something to happen, for the real thing," he is content to "let them go to meet history" since he is convinced that, even without exerting any effort, "history would come anyway" (SO 45). Unlike Price in *Waterland*, who challenges his teacher by implying that the imminent end of the world has made a mockery of the traditional myth of history as a record of progress, Willy as a student prefers to look out of the window in his history class convinced that his path in life has been predetermined, the "race about to be run [has] already [been] decided" (SO 192). All he has to do is "keep up the performance" (SO 196) and endure by keeping his eyes "on what is fixed" (SO 197).

Willy's notion of the future as predetermined betrays both fear and desperation. Life, in Willy's mind, becomes a pattern to be endured, and history is an amorphous series of fixed points disguised as challenges. If he does not aspire to action, if he does not seek change, if he does not question the status quo, then Willy can exist safely on the periphery of history. Without discovering T. S. Eliot's "pattern of timeless moments" ("Little Gidding" 197) which makes Tom Crick question the Heraclitean flux, Willy can only experience the sterility of existence as a Hollow Man. While Willy ignores history in the hope he may live his life unnoticed, Irene wishes to control history by learning to predict it accurately. Neither Willy nor his wife believes

in the existence of any real news; Willy ignores the newspapers he sells but Irene reads the news every day to learn how to remain untouched, how to find “refuge” in history (Janik “History” 77). Irene is apprehensive not of war but of “bright moments,” of the unpredictability of emotion that demands to be reciprocated, and of spontaneous human actions which prove “we do not belong to history” (SO 60). For Dorry her parents represent the past and exemplify history as static and irrelevant to real life. Dorry becomes a student of history and literature, trying to comprehend through her studies the forces that her mother controls, her father obeys and both her parents fear. She delves into the classics to acquaint herself with the notions of tragedy and fate, then studies Shakespeare and Keats to learn of “silence and slow time” and how a father could prefer his ducats to his daughter. She tries to write a thesis on “Romantic Poetry and the Sense of History” and chooses a historian for a partner. Like her parents, she uses history as a means of escape but fails as miserably as they do: “no freer” than Willy or Irene (SO 217), Dorry is imprisoned by greed as well as resentment.

Dorothy’s inability to forgive her parents and to reject the money—“converted history” (SO 217)—that has been left untouched by two generations of unhappy Harrison women—her grandmother and her mother—implies that she, too, is held captive by the past. Only if Dorry could engage with the present, not by looting the parental home and finding value in the objects that had replaced human warmth in this museum of a house but through discussion and demonstration of emotion, could history “dissolve” (SO 217) and faith in unspoken love be restored. This is the “miracle” Willy awaits till the end; but he does nothing to make it happen since his faith has atrophied along with his emotion. Willy remains as ignorant as Dorry and Irene of the answer to the last question that races through his head as his heart gives way: “can you capture the moment without it capturing you?” (SO 222). All of Swift’s future protagonists will have to engage with history. Wrestling with the moment, the Here and Now that brings understanding along with pain and desperation into human life, Tom Crick, Harry Beech and the others will discover modes of existence that may provide some peace of mind. But in this first novel Swift poses questions his protagonist is not equipped to answer.

In his final moments Willy recalls two similar athletic events that become metaphoric of his struggle with life as much as with death: his daughter’s well-executed dive at a swimming competition and his own victory at the 1931 mile race. Both events have already been related in earlier sections of the novel: Dorry’s dive has been

described in section twenty-two and the 1931 race has been narrated in detail in the whole of section thirty-four. Through these references the reader recognises that Willy's current race is drawing to its close. Yet, these two symbolic athletic events reveal a significant difference in attitude this father and his daughter hold towards life. Dorry is not afraid of water: she emerges from the pool "with a laugh" to win second prize (SO 147). She is "poised on the edge" (SO 222) but there seems to be no pattern for her to follow; her performance conveys no anxiety, danger or pain. On the contrary, Willy's race is fraught with stress, the need to live up to people's expectations and fulfil the role of the winner, all the while ignoring the physical discomfort in his legs and chest. Unlike his daughter, he does not seem to experience any satisfaction or get any pleasure out of competition. Hence the 1931 race becomes symbolic of Willy's life as well as his death.

The finality and morbidity of this book's closure is unprecedented in Swift's fiction. Although David Leon Higdon argues that "suspended closure" typical of "postmodern British fiction" can be found at the end of The Sweet-Shop Owner ("Double" 93), the novel's first chapter foreshadows the death of the protagonist and the structure of the entire work points to the inevitability of its climax. Throughout the day Willy 'wills' himself to die in exactly the same way he 'willed' himself to win the mile race in 1931: by knowing how to control his body's rhythms and following a pattern. "Not now," "not yet," he repeats throughout his last day just as he did during the 1931 race; then, towards the end of the mile race, he signals to himself with the phrase "all right—now" that the appropriate moment has arrived. When Willy repeats these words at the end of the novel, their significance is apparent. The actual end of the race as well as Willy's death are events so inevitable they do not need to be described. These "suspended" moments are not "unresolved" (Higdon "Double" 93) since hardly a doubt exists in the reader's mind about the outcome of the race or the heart attack.

Echoes of Death

Before Willy utters "all right—now" at the end of chapters thirty-four and thirty-nine (SO 198, 222) this phrase has already echoed through the novel many times, becoming a negative motif associated with violence and death. The phrase occurs for the first time in chapter seven when Irene remembers Frank Hancock saying "all right, now" as he pulls at her clothes and she struggles with him (SO 52). The use of variations of this phrase throughout the novel effectively relates sexuality to violation. For instance, after the wedding Willy's initial attempt at physical intimacy is

rebuffed by Irene's "not now" (SO 28). Conversely, when Irene acquiesces, she says, "suddenly, spreading her legs: 'all right'" (SO 88). Irene experiences violation not only in terms of sexual matters but also in relation to her family's, particularly her father's, expectation that she will remain the beautiful, loving daughter who will allow them to keep up the pretence of the happy family.

In section nine, a 1940 gathering of the Harrisons is commemorated with the taking of family photographs in the garden, a ritual Irene refuses to validate with her participation, using her asthma as an excuse to remain indoors. In Swift's fiction photographs are synonymous with lies and death—this theme, already shaping in The Sweet-Shop Owner, will be extensively discussed in Out of This World. When Irene is finally cajoled into taking part in a scene fraught with symbolism, she comes out into the garden saying, "All right. Where do you want me?" (SO 69), using the vocabulary she reserves for occasions she associates with violence. Irene seems uncannily aware that the photographs taken that day are a record of death: neither her father nor her brother Jack will survive the war. Her forced smile in the few photos in which she appears is almost vindictive. The tug of war within the Harrison family is all the more emphasised by their posturing in front of the camera, the "discomposure" under the "composure," but "so long as the picture was good . . . the moment was vindicated" (SO 71). The occasion is charged with so much understated violence threatening to become real that when, at the end of the same chapter, Willy utters the memorable phrase again, the words become symbolic of pain and death.

Willy prepares to photograph Paul and Jack, this time at Irene's request. The moment is fraught with "awkwardness and hostility" (Poole "Mourning" 159): for once in his life, Willy, the outsider, is in charge, holding 'captive' his brothers-in-law who openly consider him inferior. He is holding their camera, he is in their garden, and, by marrying their sister, he has been living off their fortune: they stare "aloofly through him" as he prepares to take the photograph, and that makes him "wince" (SO 74). Perhaps Jack also remembers the event Willy never forgets (though the reader is told of it much later in the novel): Willy had been the winner of the mile race in 1931, depriving Jack of the "Victor Ludorum" and the chance to bring "honour to the family" (SO 197). When, after preparing the shot, Willy finally says, "All right. Now!" he is simultaneously the victim as well as the perpetrator of the camera's violation, both captive and captor. In The Sweet-Shop Owner photography is not used to question the nature of reality and representation as in Out of This

World; instead, photographs and mental pictures become a metaphor of imprisonment. Willy struggles to capture the moment but not get caught: he does not want to engage in action, he does not want to be the photographer or the one being photographed. By the end of chapter nine the phrase “all right, now” has acquired such negative connotations that all future uses of it in the novel suggest finality and death.

In the last part of the novel, as the pain in his chest is already becoming intense, Willy, walking by his school, thinks of his student days not with nostalgia but with the satisfaction that even in adolescence he already knew that “life was set out like a map” (SO 189). Willy does not recall the 1931 race to relish his triumph; instead, he uses the memory to ensure that in his current race he will again be the victor, although he is running towards the Harrisons this time, not against them. Willy’s success at bringing about his own death is an ironic victory: by investing his death with symbolic value none of the other characters—including his daughter—will ever recognise, Willy only proves that he is, as Mrs Cooper believes, “a fool” (SO 173). The only true victor apparent in Swift’s novels is a man who does not race against death but comes to terms with mortality by learning to live in the company of the dead as well as the living: Vic Tucker, the undertaker in Last Orders. Thus, when Willy thinks, “All right. Now,” at the end of section thirty-four, the phrase signals a hollow victory and foreshadows Willy’s imminent death.

Had Willy’s death been meant to denote triumph, The Sweet-Shop Owner has “one perfect picture” (SO 175) that could have been the ideal memory to save for the end, as Bill Unwin does when he remembers his first erotic encounter with Ruth in the last chapter of Ever After. Willy’s “one perfect evening” occurs shortly before his accident in 1938 when he “instructs” his wife to allow him one romantic date in the beer garden of the Prince William. This rendezvous is meant to feed his fantasies that Irene may care for him after all: “she sipped the Pimms I bought her; she smiled across the wooden table, and even laughed at my joke, because she knew this was expected of her and it wouldn’t happen again” (SO 175). But this “mental photograph,” which Willy still “keep[s]” in his memory although Irene “is gone” (SO 175), is recalled at the end of section twenty-nine and no further allusions are made to it. In the novel’s final section Willy refers to Irene many times, feeling her presence in the house in his last moments, but he thinks mostly of the asthmatic invalid who looked at the world behind the security of drawn curtains, not of the beautiful woman in the garden of his youth.

In the final section of The Sweet-Shop Owner, instead of “suspended” closure, all the images, metaphors and symbols created throughout the novel are collected in order to bring past and present together in the moment of Willy’s death. As Willy visits again all the parts of the house and remembers the routine he followed on his return from the shop every day, as he abandons the charade of normality and gives in to pain, Willy is not elevated to the status of a tragic hero. Willy’s last visual impression before he dies resembles that of the prisoner who takes a final look at a familiar view which has grown reassuring: “the garden framed in the window was like a photograph” (SO 222). Drawing his final breaths, Willy is haunted by photographs and frames, by the natural world he strives to capture without getting caught, by the patterns he seeks to impose. Even at the end nobility escapes him, along with knowledge and a sense of history: this is a wasted life, not “an oddly poetic one” (Gorra “When Life” 12). Although Willy is aware of the sacrifices he has made to conform to his wife’s lack of emotion, he does not renounce his choices or question his actions. Whether he has been a ‘prince’ or a ‘fool,’ he does not feel he was the one that made the choice: he was only selected to play the part.

Throughout The Sweet-Shop Owner patterns are used to replace with empty repetition any possibility of finding meaning in life. Just as Harry Beech in Out of This World takes photographs to reduce the complexity of life into a series of isolated moments that seem more comprehensible, Willy Chapman reduces existence to a series of patterns and trades emotion for commodities. Irene’s beauty, Dorry’s innocence, Mrs Cooper’s desire for communication, Sandra’s need for protection—all these are qualities he recognises but is not able to appreciate in a manner that would liberate him from himself. As a businessman, Willy needs to pursue profit in order to please his wife: he keeps himself occupied and reduces each day to a money-making enterprise. By following a routine so set that it is prescribed even in its tiniest details, Irene and Willy succeed in rendering even potentially meaningful gestures, such as a kiss or a warm greeting, empty and mechanical. Eager to please his wife, Willy embraces his role as successful shop owner so completely that in his daughter’s eyes he turns into Shylock and she becomes Jessica, the daughter who despises a miserly father.

And We Drown

Like the long-distance runner that he is, Willy fixes his eyes on Irene as on a prize, follows the pattern of the race throughout his life and shuns ‘the real thing,’ never realising what he could have had. Even his daughter’s demands for affection when

she is growing up remain unfulfilled. Although a part of Willy is proud of his daughter, proud even of her rebellion, her lack of fear of water, he expects from Dorry recognition and love, not defiance. But Dorothy is as exacting as Irene in her demands—and equally unforgiving when he “falls.” The estranged father-daughter theme will be revisited in Out of This World but the outcome of the struggle in the later novel will be more hopeful. After seeing himself through his daughter’s eyes, Harry Beech recognises his weaknesses, gives up his career and does penance for ten years. Willy Chapman holds on to the shop routine until the end, desperately seeking to perpetuate a lie. By failing to do his duty towards the living—sell the shop as his daughter hysterically demands on her last visit: “why don’t you shut that bloody shop for good!” (SO 200)—Willy cannot be redeemed.

In all his later novels, especially in Last Orders, Swift revisits the same world inhabited by ageing fathers aching to come to terms with loss. At the end of Last Orders, even if their wives and daughters have abandoned them, the men have each other and find solace in brotherhood. Since the undertaker is their friend, death assumes a familiar face for these pilgrims who begin to come to terms with mortality. On Margate pier the wind, the rain, the sea and the ashes of the dead are one with the bodies of the living, denoting the ability of the men to unite with nature’s forces and be at peace with the world. In The Sweet-Shop Owner, on the contrary, Willy and Irene exist in an artificial world of commodities where a Grecian urn is as valuable as a set of toy monkeys: made of plastic or exquisite Wedgwood china, the wares in their shop and their home are meant to protect them from history and life, beauty and truth. Unable to reach his wife, emotionally or physically, and draw her out of herself in order to establish a meaningful relationship between them, Willy learns to share her angst.

During their honeymoon by the sea in 1937 Willy has a nightmare, which foreshadows this couple’s failure to inhabit both the physical world and the world of the spirit. In a “vision,” which will haunt him throughout his life, Willy witnesses first himself and then his wife drowning: he is “flailing in the current—even in that smooth and molten sea which spread beneath them like a tribute of silk. Unless it was she that he saw—struggling in the gold water, beating her arms to be free of it. ...He couldn’t save her. He owed her eternal service, for he couldn’t save her...” (SO 31). Unreconciled with the natural world and the people around them, the sweet-shop owner and his wife withdraw behind closed doors and erect their mausoleums long before their weak hearts give out. Graham Swift has never told a sadder tale or

Painted a more desolate picture of small lives lost since his first novel, The Sweet-Shop Owner.

Chapter III

“How Am I to Know What’s True?”

The Subterranean Quest for Enlightenment in Shuttlecock

And why? For what purpose? To point what lesson?
. . . It is all a darkness.

Ford Madox Ford The Good Soldier (18)

After all, what can we ever gain in forever looking
back and blaming ourselves if our lives have not
turned out quite as we might have wished?

Kazuo Ishiguro The Remains of the Day (256-257)

A narrator who is not in some way suspect,
who is not in some way subject to ironic scrutiny
is what the modern temper finds least bearable.

Scholes and Kellogg The Nature of Narrative (277)

In Graham Swift’s stories, collected in Learning to Swim, as well as in his first novel, The Sweet-Shop Owner, the storytelling process is undertaken in a grave and hesitant manner by tormented and remorseful men. In Swift’s second novel, Shuttlecock (1981), the self-conscious protagonist, Prentis, is eager to tell his tale and share with the reader his frustrations in his quest for enlightenment. Much younger than Willy Chapman and more angst-ridden than any other Swiftian character, Prentis forcefully pleads for our sympathy in his struggle for self-definition. In the lightness of the feathered-ball world of this novel, the reader’s quest may yield other answers than the ones the narrator meticulously provides. Prentis’s personality and lack of distancing constitute complications which force the reader to undertake, along with the protagonist, a search for “what’s true and what isn’t” (§ 85). A first-person narrative which demonstrates this author’s self-acknowledged fondness for “ambiguities” and “complication” (Crane “Interview” 12), Shuttlecock constructs a nightmarish version of urban life through the eyes of a highly agitated, obsessed narrator.

Shuttlecock combines the tradition of realistic narration with experimentation and exhibits a strong historical consciousness. In this “bleak and schematic little book” (Byatt On Histories 26), the conflict between the major character’s physical well-being and his mental state is starkly revealed in his agonised effort to construct, through storytelling, a persuasive lie. Unlike Tom Crick in Waterland, Harry Beech in Out of This World, or Bill Unwin in Ever After, who tell their stories in the aftermath of a crisis, Prentis, the narrator of Shuttlecock, records events while experiencing

the upheaval caused by the demands the past makes on the present. Whereas Swift's other protagonists colour their post-crisis narratives with the bitterness of their losses and whatever wisdom they have gained from experience, Prentis is trapped in a maze of self-doubt, desire for justification and nervous dilemmas.

As in Swift's first novel, the plot of Shuttlecock, which focuses on a parent-child conflict, is forward-moving, incorporating occasional flashbacks (see Appendix II). Yet, the predominantly realistic third-person narration of The Sweet-Shop Owner, which is infrequently interrupted by Willy's weakening voice, does not prepare the reader for the narrative quicksand of Shuttlecock. Swift's "technically adroit second novel" (Poole "Swift So Far" 111) incorporates different texts within the first-person diary account of Prentis, a defective detective, who is known only by his last name. Unlike a traditional investigator, Prentis seeks evidence in order to destroy it; he craves power in order to avoid action; and he struggles to discover the culprit in order to ensure that no one else will ever make the same discovery. Sifting through Prentis's self-promoting narrative, the reader must come to terms, as Alan Hollinghurst recognises, with the "sinister disjunction of manner and matter" ("Silence" 15) indicative of an unreliable narrator. By constructing his/story, Prentis invents a past that will allow him to quell his "fears about being unlovable" (Poole "Swift So Far" 111) and continue comfortably into the future. The reader's hermeneutic endeavours in Shuttlecock are systematically and ironically undermined by narrative unreliability, self-reflexivity and the subjectivity of historical inquiry.

Shuttlecock is the first of Swift's novels to earn wide critical acclaim: in 1981 it was "seriously considered" for the Booker prize shortlist, as Malcolm Bradbury, who chaired the Booker judges panel that year, reveals in The Modern British Novel: 1878-2001 (464); and in 1983 the novel won the biannual Geoffrey Faber Memorial Award for fiction. Upon publication Shuttlecock received mostly positive reviews: John Mellors saw the book as an "entertaining psychological mystery-thriller" (89); Alan Hollinghurst thought it "an excellent, profound and very odd second novel" ("Silence" 15); E. Hutchison praised it as a "compelling study of human behaviour under stress" (81); John Coleman considered the novel to have a serious content and called it an "astonishing study of forms of guilt" (41). In 1988 Adrian Poole concluded that Shuttlecock is "an unadorned and upbeat version of a tale that Swift tells more elaborately elsewhere" ("Swift So Far" 111) and in 1999 Poole characterised Shuttlecock as "the least ambitious of the six novels so far"

("Mourning After" 155). This variety of critical responses reveals the novel's deceptively simple façade. Prentis is not *Everyman* and the novel resembles, in the words of *Times* reviewer Mary Cosh, "a set of Chinese boxes" (8). This apt metaphor describes the intricacy of actions and motives which gradually reveal the novel's essential ambiguities: "each seemingly plausible explanation opening on to more complex alternatives" (Cosh 8). As one reviewer recognises, *Shuttlecock* "is more concerned with the psychology of guilt and the corruption of power ... than with telling an unambiguous tale" (Basu).

The Apprentice and a Malicious Plot

The beginning of this chronologically-forward narrative is set in April 1977. The thirty-two-year-old Prentis is a low-ranking bureaucrat, a "specialised clerk" for the unsolved crimes department of the Metropolitan Police (§ 14). He works in central London—"five minutes' walk from Charing Cross Underground" (§ 14)—in a "claustrophobic, subterranean" office: Swift uses these adjectives to describe the novel's office setting in a 1991 interview (Bernard and Menegaldo 10). Prentis has learnt "to forgo the thrill of detection" and is wearied by "mundane chores like cataloguing and indexing" (§ 23). After eight years as a senior assistant to an ageing supervisor, Prentis is aching for a promotion which will invest his daily routine with a new sense of importance. Prentis seems to be a typical middle-class specimen: he is married to his adolescent sweetheart, Marian, they have two sons, Martin and Peter, and they live in a South London suburb.

The details of Prentis's professional and private life—lunch breaks at the pub, weekend outings with the family, weekly visits to an ailing parent—constitute an ordinary, unremarkable existence. Yet, this view is constantly subverted by the narrator's knack for distortion. Prentis feels hunted and haunted, so his daily routine is transformed, through the language of his narrative, into nightmarish persecution. Two enigmatic men dominate Prentis's daily existence: Quinn and Dad. Prentis is convinced that he is the victim of a malicious plot, but he is unwilling to confront the perpetrators, his boss and his father: on the one hand, he is reluctant to undermine his chance for a promotion, on the other, he is afraid to shock his father who resides in a mental hospital after a breakdown. As his name suggests, Prentis is in a transitional period, so his narrative documents his effort to graduate from his apprentice status. In order to succeed he must confront his fears and come to terms with the potent ghosts of the past.

Although unwilling, Prentis is forced to turn into a detective to solve the puzzles which challenge his daily life. On the family front he must find a way to assert his authority, while at work he needs to outsmart the mysterious boss. Both endeavours appear linked in his mind to his father's institutional confinement: for two years a bizarre aphasia keeps Dad conscious but silent. For Dad's voice Prentis turns to his father's war adventures as a spy in occupied France, chronicled in a memoir entitled Shuttlecock: The Story of a Secret Agent and published in 1957. As the protagonist moves in routine circles from home to work to the mental hospital and from text (Dad's spy story) to text (his own diary), unexpected ties develop, uniting loose ends. Eventually, events of World War II, dead crimes and misdemeanours, espionage and family life, all create a canvas where doubt, suspicion and sadism transform an individual life into a universal confrontation between story and history.

Prentis is another of Swift's sons who must challenge parental authority and carve his own niche in the world, as Harry Beech and Vince Dodds will do in future novels. Tormented by envy for his father's World War II hero status but "born too late for heroism" (Byatt On Histories 27), Prentis is equally frustrated over the causes of Dad's current catatonic silence. Prentis constantly puzzles over his father's war memoir, seeking Dad's motives for omitting pertinent information from the narrative. In the meantime, his superior, Quinn, becomes a convenient paternal substitute: Prentis turns to Quinn for guidance as often as he rebels against Quinn's authority. At work he becomes increasingly frustrated, having to report on cases he is unable to piece together due to evidence missing from the files. The anguish caused by professional and filial insecurity also undermines Prentis's relationships in his own family. At home he is a tyrannical father and a sadistic husband: his increasing aggression forces his wife and children to distance themselves emotionally. In subconscious self-defence, Prentis's eleven-year-old son, Martin, begins to challenge his father's authority and devotion to "Grandpa Loony" (§ 65).

Eventually, Prentis conveys to his supervisor his frustration over the missing files and relates the increasing difficulty he is experiencing when he tries to create coherent reports out of fragmentary clues. Quinn invites Prentis to his Richmond home to explain and effectively provides Prentis with the information the young man needs to dispel his fears as well as the awe inspired by father figures. A gross abuse of authority is revealed: Quinn has been systematically conducting his own probes into people's lives and destroying evidence of embarrassing secrets—a task he expects Prentis to continue, if he is to become the new boss. This climactic

confrontation spreads to thirty-four pages, constituting the longest of the novel's thirty-five sections. In the course of one evening Prentis earns his promotion: as Quinn connects the missing File E of case C9 with Prentis's Dad and speculates that Dad is a fake hero who gave in to Gestapo torture and betrayed his fellow agents, Prentis is transformed. Although Quinn emphasises that the incriminating evidence stems from an unreliable source and Prentis never verifies the contents of File E but agrees to destroy it instead, the possibility of Dad's treason is enough to liberate Prentis from the burden of paternal achievements. That same evening Quinn also discloses his own cowardly behaviour in Caen in 1944, confessing "I ran for my life" (S 191, emphasis in original text). Like Robert Beech in Out Of This World, who loses an arm in the Great War in unheroic circumstances, Quinn, who has his "right foot blown off" (S 192), is a father-figure who reveals himself to be an "ordinary, natural human being" (S 190). Quinn's confirmed weakness and the potential of his father's betrayal allow Prentis to "cast off the whole tangle" and find "salvation" (Byatt On Histories 27).

Quinn finds in Prentis a convenient apostle ready to continue his work not as keeper of secrets but as destroyer of information and custodian of reputations: a god of sorts who, unbeknown to the masses, protects them from what they do not know exists. Quinn takes advantage not only of files which concern Prentis's Dad but also of Prentis's "lurid imagination" (S 30) to beguile the senior clerk into accepting what Quinn himself calls a "hypothesis" (S 187): that Dad's memoir is not a record of the truth but a cover-up of treason and that Dad's linguistic aphasia is an escape into silence. For months the boss watches Prentis's increasing vulnerability and prepares the ground for the great revelation of File E. When he finally offers Prentis the file, Dad's reputation is no longer the issue at stake but whether Prentis can fit into Quinn's shoes. Once promoted, Prentis proves a worthy disciple: he matches his predecessor in tormenting his subordinates, destroying evidence, playing god; he even develops "the hint of a limp" (S 207). By replacing an impossibly heroic father with a substitute paternal figure who is cut down to Prentis's size, the protagonist of Shuttlecock embodies the rebel-son/dutiful-son dilemma encountered in most of Swift's works. At the end of the novel Prentis describes his post-crisis situation in a remarkably favourable light for a detective who prefers ignorance to knowledge: he has taken over Quinn's job, his pride and self-worth have been restored, his family has been reunited. The reader who accepts such an excessively happy ending will agree with Gita May that "the novel ends on a lyrical

note of joyous affirmation of the perpetually renewed value of the simple, sensual pleasures of life” (431).

Is it possible that Prentis’s credo—“knowledge is dangerous and breeds unhappiness . . . only ignorance enables us to enjoy life” (Mellors 89)—constitutes the novel’s theme? Should we acquiesce in the secret crusade of a power-thirsty archivist and not reject his paranoia? Or should the reader follow Martin’s lead and view Prentis through the eyes of his son, who, even at the end, still sees “the same old weakling” who deserves “the same disrespect, the same edge of contempt” (§ 210)? Could Swift be suggesting that one may opt for ignorance and live happily ever after? For Prentis, knowledge equals power, not moral responsibility as it does for Tom Crick, who suffers the disastrous effects of pretending to be ignorant. In actuality, Prentis’s half-hearted quest for identity ends when he invents a convenient answer to every riddle: “‘I don’t know,’ I said, resolutely. It seemed to me this was an answer I would give, boldly, over and over again for the rest of my life” (§ 200). Although the “purgation of discovery about the past frees Prentis” (Hollinghurst “Silence” 15), he also chooses to end the quest exactly where it began. Shuttlecock concludes with the narrator’s creation of a fake paradise, not “a glint of hope,” as the Times reviewer suggests (Cosh 8). By the end of the novel Prentis becomes the anti-detective: one who creates mystery, believes that ignorance is bliss, and guards knowledge so it will not be accessible to the public.

The paradoxically liberating choice of willed ignorance that Prentis makes at the novel’s climax and his subsequent behaviour are not the product of an epiphany but an escape from the demands of the past. Although Prentis’s “desire not to know brings the freedom we usually associate with the enlightenment brought about in moments of recognition” (Higdon “Unconfessed” 186), epiphany is anathema to an investigator determined to “inquire no further” (§ 214). The novel’s ending suggests that a discrepancy exists between the credo Prentis promotes and the reality he inhabits. In the Kafkaesque basement, which constitutes Prentis’s playground, reality is reduced to locked files and the creation of new riddles. Prentis is content to reign in this absurd netherworld where he can control the past through the manipulation of records.

Evading History

Invention of the past: is this the definition of story or history? Thematically, like the entire Swiftian oeuvre, Shuttlecock is preoccupied with the nature of historical

inquiry. Prentis is cast in the role of novice historian who discovers the inevitable frustration accompanying any investigation into the past. In the 1995 essay “No End of History,” Del Ivan Janik suggests that in Shuttlecock “Swift highlights both the ambivalence and the power of historical evidence” (178). Is the historical evidence in Prentis’s account trustworthy? This narrator considers his father’s war record as “some made-up adventure story” (§ 52). While accusing his father of inventing history—“[Dad’s] book which is all fact seems to me like fiction” (§ 52)—Prentis exercises the same prerogative in his own documentation by freely mixing in his/story events from his daily life with wishful thinking, what-happens-to-him with what-should-be-happening. As Prentis loses control over his identity, his sense of the real begins to waver as well. “How am I to know what’s true and what isn’t,” he wonders (§ 85), interpreting a dead-end investigation at the office as a conspiratorial design conceived and executed by his boss.

The origins of Prentis’s quest are neither historical nor social; this narrator’s motivation is intensely personal. As in all of Swift’s novels, Prentis is locked in an intergenerational battle for dominance, respect and approval. The novel’s action is motivated by Prentis’s struggle to assert his authority at home and to earn his promotion at work. He pursues both goals with obsessive candour by devoting his energy to a third quest, which he considers to be his major mission: understanding his father’s past and present by constantly rereading Shuttlecock: The Story of a Secret Agent. By exorcising the ghost of Dad’s past, Prentis believes that he can earn his proper place at work and at home and become a self-confident department head, a loving husband to Marian and a forgiving father to his own boys. Exposing the flaws of his father becomes for Prentis an Oedipal quest for identity; for the reader Prentis’s paranoia, insecurities and relentless self-promotion constitute symptoms of a case ripe for psychoanalysis.

The world that Prentis creates through his narrative provides multiple conflicting answers to every query. Gradually, the reader begins to suspect that this narrator has psychotic tendencies: strangers are watching him in the train, his father’s aphasia is only pretence, Quinn plots against him so he cannot do his job, even television action heroes, like the ‘Bionic Man,’ exist to undermine his parental authority. Prentis responds violently, sadistically, irrationally. Quinn’s occasional tough-boss persona nurtures Prentis’s paranoid suspicion that Quinn is the arch-villain who plays at being paternal. Unnerved, Prentis creates a massive conspiracy theory that turns case C9 into the answer to his life’s riddle: his survival depends

upon the destruction of the missing documents in File E, which Prentis eventually burns in Quinn's garden incinerator. This funeral rite liberates Prentis by eliminating the ghosts of the past but it does not make him wiser. By eschewing suffering and his ties with history, Prentis rejects knowledge and moral responsibility.

Prentis's mistrust of reality transforms him into a highly suspicious historian: Dad's documentation of his escape from the Château Martine must be fiction because the "style of Dad's writing becomes . . . more imaginative, more literary" and the "philosophic tone is always there" (§ 107). In Prentis's naïve definition history is a stereotype: a record of fact untainted by the imagination, in a style and tone that cannot be confused with literature. Prentis's deconstruction of Dad's book aims at simplification, not interpretation: "With so much of Dad's book I have to struggle to make it real, to wrest it out of the story-book realm into the realm of fact" (§ 146). This process—from fairytale to fact—constitutes the opposite of the merging of story and history in Waterland and the definition of man as the "story-telling animal." While Tom Crick turns confession into his/story in a belated effort to come to terms with his guilt, the narrator of Shuttlecock evades remorse by transforming his/story into official record. Prentis seeks to objectify his experience, so he can comfortably record it in an abstraction he calls history.

As a novice historian, Prentis will never graduate to master status: true to his name, he will remain an apprentice. Prentis cannot come to terms with the complexities of historical inquiry because he still inhabits the one-dimensional world of childhood where questions have answers and parents are authorial figures who know-it-all and wield tremendous power. Prentis repeatedly portrays himself emotionally as a child: not only his father's accomplishments, but also his eleven-year-old son's endurance inspire him equally with awe. The monsters in Prentis's world include even his children's favourite television hero, the 'Bionic Man,' who, transformed from human being into an artificial entity, exists outside history and promises immortality. The themes of substitution and man's fascination with machines will be major concerns for Swift in future novels, namely in Ever After and Last Orders respectively. In Shuttlecock Prentis's sons turn to television for a steady supply of the stories their father denies them. Unlike Tom Crick's parents, Prentis has no fairytales for his children, since he still struggles to comprehend the narratives which compose his own life story. Prentis's engagement with his/story, however, is destructive: he fabricates a tale in his diary in order to deconstruct his father's narrative and undermine parental status. Prentis openly admits that he prefers not to know, he

prefers Dad as a human vegetable, a father that he can torment with questions, to an eloquent, knowledgeable, intimidating adult: "Sometimes I wonder what I am more afraid of: of Dad never breaking his silence, or of his suddenly speaking.... It is easy to frame questions when you know there will be no answers" (§ 108-9). In Shuttlecock, history, as embodied by Dad, the agent-turned-historian, is mute and institutionalised; having withdrawn from time, Prentis senior appears incapable of providing answers or maintaining a meaningful role in the eyes of his son, the representative of the post-world-war generation.

Texts and Intertexts

In Shuttlecock Swift adopts dominant features of the psychological thriller, but he also subverts and exposes these generic conventions to produce what David Lodge in his essay "The Novelist Today" terms "'crossover' fiction" (9). Whereas traditional detective stories present enigmas to be solved by the brainiest and bravest Oedipus the Sphinx has ever met, Shuttlecock contradicts tradition from within. Swift's protagonist begins as Oedipus but gradually transforms himself into the Sphinx. Despite efforts to unravel several mysteries, Prentis consistently fails to provide satisfactory answers. Prentis is an enigmatic figure who frustrates the reader's efforts to solve the novel's riddles: Is Dad a heroic secret agent or a treacherous double spy? Is Dad an aphasiac or a silent pretender? Is Prentis's boss a villain or an old man looking forward to retirement? Like the feathered ball of the book's title, the reader is tossed back and forth between texts (Prentis's diary and his Dad's memoir), settings (London in 1977 and the Château Martine in 1944), and choices (ignorance and knowledge) by a narrator who cultivates confusion.

The coexistence of separate narratives in Shuttlecock depends upon a collage of styles: not only is Prentis's confessional diary an autobiographical fiction with an implied audience, but embedded in it also lie excerpts from police files and chapters from Dad's war memoir. Is Dad's autobiography historical fiction or fictionalised history? Prentis doubts whether Dad's account of the escape from the Château Martine is factual, although he acknowledges that these chapters of Dad's book are "more vivid, more real, more believable" (§ 106). By questioning Dad's reliability, Prentis brings to the fore contemporary concerns about history as a record of fact. Through narrative unreliability and metafictional awareness of the subjectivity of historical representation, Swift constructs a mystery story that may exist only in the protagonist's "lurid imagination" (§ 30).

Termed a “psychological thriller” (Hutchison 81) and a “mystery novel” (May 429), Shuttlecock deals in crimes and criminals, but without dead bodies or murderers. Prentis’s investigations into bodies of evidence concern texts, their writers and readers. In this parodic detective-novel the police and the villains, the persecutors and the persecuted, the powerful and the helpless are always the same three characters. Not only Dad, but also Quinn and Prentis are endowed with double identities: spies as well as writers. Quinn secretly investigates and composes reports on dead crimes, Dad is an agent-turned-autobiographer and Prentis covertly interrogates his colleagues and his family along with keeping a record of his anxious struggles at work and at home. Like Bill Unwin in Ever After, Prentis writes his/story, communicating with the reader through the formality of the written word, avoiding the spontaneity or fragmentation of interior monologues. Furthermore, Quinn and Prentis function as readers of the same texts: the Quinn-assembled files, which include assorted cases of blackmail and suicide, and Dad’s narrative of “a succession of daring undercover operations in France,” his capture by the Gestapo and subsequent escape (§ 49).

Apart from Dad’s and Quinn’s texts, fragments of which Prentis makes available by embedding them in his own narrative, Swift’s novel alludes to various intertexts. These include traditional detective mysteries (although Prentis lacks the competence of Sherlock Holmes or Peter Wimsey), as well as three modern classics, namely The Secret Agent¹ (1907), What Maisie Knew (1897), and The Good Soldier (1915). The inevitable comparison of Dad’s patriotic narrative (entitled The Story of a Secret Agent) to Conrad’s parodic treatment of spies superimposes an ironic shadow on Prentis’s text. As with the Ford Madox Ford and Joseph Conrad novels, which are ironically subtitled “a tale of passion” and “a simple tale” respectively, the sadism and convoluted logic of Shuttlecock contest the passionate simplicity which Prentis feigns at the end of his story. Similarly, the implicit comparison between Henry James’s Maisie, a “wretched infant ...rebouncing from racquet to racquet” (Preface) like a “little feathered shuttlecock” (Chapter 2), and Prentis in his struggle with parental authority reveals this narrator’s effort to appear as an innocent child who suffers in the hands of cruel adults.

¹ Conrad’s novel has been linked intertextually to Waterland by Bernard Richards in relation to the Greenwich setting. I find that a more overt and meaningful connection to The Secret Agent exists in Shuttlecock.

Like The Good Soldier, Swift's novel is a confessional narrative rendered in an earnest and innocent tone easily confused with honesty. Both The Good Soldier and Shuttlecock are records of disturbed minds composed by unreliable narrators who invent a past which renders them blameless.² Like John Dowell, Prentis reveals from the beginning several negative aspects of his personality. In "History and the 'Here and Now'" Del Ivan Janik notes some of the elements which exist both in Ford's and in Swift's novels: the existence of a character who has withdrawn into silence, the narrators' unattractiveness, and the metaphoric use of the shuttlecock (79). However, Janik notes that "unlike Dowell, Prentis seems to be a reliable narrator" (80), denying the most significant similarity: the existence in both books of a self-righteous narrator who struggles to create a favourable impression of himself. As authors of stories that seek to debunk the reputations of "good soldiers," Dowell and Prentis generate passionate emotions towards larger-than-life male figures who are hardly given a voice in the narrative or a chance to defend themselves. These narrators use the power of language to create fiction which they promote as truth, hoping to dupe the reader into seeing them as pathetic rather than disturbed, repressed rather than diabolical. In both novels, however, the opening sections include information that shakes the reader's confidence in the narrator's reliability: Dowell offers contradictory evaluations of the characters and situations he is about to narrate, while Prentis relates incidents of torture in a "reasonable and unsurprised" tone (Hollinghurst "Silence" 15) which betrays callousness and sadism.

Although Ford's plot and themes in The Good Soldier differ significantly from Swift's concerns in Shuttlecock, both stories are narrated by men who are overly concerned with their self-image and desire to be heard by "a sympathetic soul" (Ford 12). While Prentis does not specify the qualities of his chosen narratee directly, his confessional tone suggests that he expects sympathy. Ford's and Swift's narrators specify their ideal listeners in the hope that their stories will be believed. While Dowell insists that he is ignorant and Prentis repeats that he is weak, the cruelty of their actions contradicts their self-definitions. "I don't know" becomes Dowell's

² By suggesting similarities between these two narrators, I am attempting to facilitate the discussion of narrative unreliability in relation to Shuttlecock, not to promote a specific interpretation of Ford's ambiguous and highly ironic novel. Dowell and Prentis differ significantly as characters and Ford's novel would require much space to be properly discussed. As Scholes and Kellogg argue in The Nature of Narrative (1966), "the reader who tries to reduce a story like The Good Soldier to a single, absolute meaning becomes a victim of irony" (277). Instead, they suggest that the only possible hermeneutic stance in relation to this novel is to enter the "ironic gap" and accept "an unresolvable ambiguity" (277). Since this ambiguity is created by the narrative technique, Dowell as narrator can be analysed in terms of the power he wields over the narrative.

refrain, and every time we wonder how ignorance could possibly be an option in his situation. This plea becomes Prentis's motif as well because both narrators expect us to equate willed ignorance with innocence as they do. Directly or indirectly, they accuse the other characters of plotting against them. At the end of each tale these narrators are more powerful and successful than all the other characters yet they insist that they have been victimised by elaborate conspiracies. Dowell's view of society, as expressed at the end of Ford's novel, is echoed by Prentis's final choice: "Society can only exist if the normal, if the virtuous, and the slightly deceitful flourish, and if the passionate, the headstrong, and the too-truthful are condemned to suicide and to madness" (Ford 253). Prentis and Dowell group themselves with the "passionate," but their survival and prosperity suggest the opposite: both belong to the "deceitful."

The Narrator as Manipulator

Prentis is the youngest of Swift's protagonists in all the novels as well as the least likeable character: he has few redeeming qualities and more than his share of faults. Prentis divides people into categories: fathers and sons, teachers and schoolboys, the strong, who are brave and dominant, and the weak, who are cowardly and lack self-esteem. He struggles through "enlightenment" to escape the latter category and take what he claims to be his proper place in the former. This enlightenment process includes reducing his wife, through sadistic sexual gymnastics, to a rubber doll and breaking his sons' spirit through meaningless rituals. But dominance at home will not suffice: to become truly enlightened he must prove that Dad may have been a helpless coward who plays the aphasiac now as he played the hero during World War II, that Dad was a Nazi collaborator who was allowed to escape the Château Martine in return for information. Inevitably, Prentis's biased view of life undermines his trustworthiness.

In all facets of Prentis's life, passion is equal to power, not emotion. For Prentis control over others extends even to their fictional selves. If Dad does not speak now, he is forced to speak in Prentis's diary; in the fictional world of Shuttlecock, Dad, Marian, the boys, even Quinn, obey the master's commands. Like the nonexistent rocks that Prentis demands of his sons to dig out of the flowerbeds in the novel's opening section, the truth he provides through his diary is as difficult to discover as the "mysterious large stones" the boys cannot locate (§ 13). Since Martin and Peter do not know that all the stones have already been removed, their efforts are both frustrating and meaningless. Unless the readers, the unspecified "you" Prentis

keeps addressing, recognise that the narrator has sent us as well in search of the “mysterious large stones,” we may continue searching for clues where none exist: in Dad’s Shuttlecock and Quinn’s files.

The manipulation of the reader by the narrator begins very early in the novel. Through frequent use of the second-person personal pronoun, Prentis invents a narratee who will respond to the narrator’s friendliness by showing interest in his plight and eagerness to accept his views. Prentis expects the reader to identify with this narratee and allow the narrator to take possession of the text and dictate its meaning. By engaging this narratee in imaginary dialogue—an effect the narrator creates by asking himself questions and confessing weaknesses—Prentis seeks, through what Gerald Prince terms “over-justifications,” to “overcome the narratee’s defenses” (“Introduction” 234) and promote his own version of events. For this consciously deceitful narrator the relationship between author and text is another power struggle, a battle to be fought and won.

The first reference to the narratee, the first “you,” occurs in the first section of Shuttlecock when Prentis casually reveals that as a child he mistreated his pet: “you see, I used to torment my hamster. I was cruel to Sammy” (S 6). The revelation of the narrator’s sadistic past is so striking for the reader, who has barely begun reading the novel, that this “you see” may be dismissed as a linguistic device that sets an informal tone. Two paragraphs later, however, the “you” is asked to grant the trust and understanding all narrators crave: “Will you believe me if I say it was all out of love and pity?” (S 6). Despite the seductive earnestness of the tone, the reader cannot equate love with torture and trust this narrator. Indeed, Prentis reveals his flaws early, alerting the reader to the possibility that this narrator seeks to hoodwink us into accepting that the mysteries of this book concern Dad and Quinn, not the protagonist himself.

Is this diary the product of a mind in a crisis, of a man who cannot help but talk to himself? Or is this a deceptively casual record of events along the lines of Dad’s war memoir? Prentis’s Shuttlecock is a version written with a distinct audience in mind, which aims at hiding, through storytelling, inconvenient truths. Despite Peter Widdowson’s observation that “there seems to be little indication” in any of Swift’s novels that narrators are “strategically angled to reveal themselves as untrustworthy” (“Novels” 211), Prentis is the first of Swift’s unreliable narrators. Like Prentis, Tom Crick in Waterland and Bill Unwin in Ever After are narrators who make

a sincere effort to pull readers into their worlds, but also unwittingly reveal that their pathology renders them untrustworthy. As Catherine Bernard argues, their “narrative uncertainty” subverts their status, resulting in “their ingrained and programmatic unreliability” (“Dismembering” 126).

Narrative Unreliability

In his double role as narrator and protagonist Prentis dominates Shuttlecock so extensively that when excerpts from Dad’s memoir are presented we are not allowed to forget their subordinate position, framed as they are and frequently interrupted by Prentis’s narration. Moreover, Prentis’s awareness that he is the writer of “this book” (§ 214) makes him a self-conscious narrator³ and renders his dominance over the text absolute. Such a context complicates a discussion of reliability as the reader finds it impossible to discover the authorial parameters of reliability, or, to use Wayne Booth’s term, “the implied author’s norms.” Although Booth recognises that the ultimate qualifier in this quest is “the reader’s powers of inference” (159), a discussion of narrative reliability may be facilitated in the case of a novel like Shuttlecock if we dispense with the notion of the implied author altogether. As Susan Lanser suggests, “the implied author is a reading effect.” Rather than thinking of the implied author as an anthropomorphic entity, this covert authorial representative may be synthesised, in Lanser’s terms, “from the interplay among several characters,” or, as Seymour Chatman claims in Story and Discourse, “through the design of the whole” (148).

An unreliable narrator, according to Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, is “one whose rendering of the story and/or commentary on it the reader has reasons to suspect” (100). However, the criteria Rimmon-Kenan offers as reasons for suspicion—“the narrator’s limited knowledge, his personal involvement, and his problematic value-scheme” (100)—are rather imprecise. They do not offer appropriate guidelines for determining narrative reliability in the case of Shuttlecock or for establishing what Chris Baldick in The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms (1990) more tentatively characterises as “the view that readers suspect to be more accurate” (234). A more detailed presentation of the wide range of textual and extra-textual signals of narrative unreliability is available in two essays by Kathleen Wall (1994)

³ Wayne C. Booth uses the term in The Rhetoric of Fiction (1961) to describe narrators who are “aware of themselves as writers” (155).

and Ansgar Nünning (1997).⁴ Both critics agree that “textual inconsistencies, the verbal habits of the narrator, and discrepancies between the fictional world presented by a text and the reader’s world-knowledge and standards of normality provide the basis for establishing a narrator’s unreliability” (Nünning 85).

An examination of Shuttlecock using the aforementioned criteria reveals numerous inconsistencies and betrays Prentis’s efforts to construct a convincing lie. First, Prentis describes in his narrative not only what he experiences but also what he imagines other characters experience. By turning his father or his wife into characters, Prentis exercises power over situations he cannot control in actuality: his fictionalising does not indicate objectivity or omniscience but the narrator’s need to dominate. A case in point is section nine, in which Prentis not only narrates his own daily troubles but also reconstructs his father’s feelings in captivity as well as his wife’s and children’s excursion to Richmond, although he is not part of either of these adventures. Still, he sees “Marian and the kids walking through the gardens” (S 62), his Dad on an assignment being “picked up, in a moonlit field, by an RAF Lysander” (S 63). Prentis inadvertently reveals his preference for imagination over experience when he claims, “all of this touches me more than if I were really there to see it happen” (S 64). While this comment underlines the ambiguous nature of fact and fiction, a thematic concern common to all of Swift’s works, it is predominantly a way for Prentis to emphasise his knowledge of the other characters. Such tricks expose Prentis’s unreliability as they underline this narrator’s obsessive need to manipulate the other characters.

The narrator’s verbal habits, his “verbal tics” (Wall 19), reveal how he seeks protection through language by concealing his neurosis through the adoption of an informal, casual narrative style, which suggests that we are reading a diary that has spontaneously sprung from Prentis’s present crisis. The narrator guides us in that direction at the beginning of section seven when he confesses to an uncontrollable “urge to set down [his] feelings and try to account for them” although he “never really wanted to put them on paper” (S 39). Yet this chapter begins with a metafictional aside to the audience, a device quite unexpected, not to say ill-fitting, in a diary:

⁴ In his article Nünning acknowledges his debt to Wall’s list of signals and bases his more extended presentation of clues on her discussion of unreliability in Kazuo Ishiguro’s The Remains of the Day. Nünning does not focus his discussion on one novel, as Wall does; his article includes a wider range of signals and examples from various works ranging from Thackeray to Ian McEwan.

Today—

But you will have gathered by now that I am writing all this as thoughts come to me and as things happen. I have broken off since I last wrote, time has passed, and when I say 'today' I mean, of course, today, a day later. (§ 39)

Such obvious reflexivity is as old as, and in its juxtaposition of fictional time to real time reminiscent of, *Tristram Shandy*. Although this technique exposes the artificiality of convention and betokens narrative honesty, the narrator aims predominantly at creating a confessional tone, a narrative imbued with honest exposition. The purpose of the narrator is to involve the reader in the narrativising process, so we accept more readily the 'truth' the narrator provides.

Prentis's verbal habits include the repetition of key words and phrases related to honesty and frequent asides to the reader which create a conspiratorial atmosphere. Prentis is obviously concerned with his trustworthiness since he frequently adds phrases that emphasise his sincerity: "to be honest" (§ 49), "the honest truth" (§ 75), "the truth of the matter" (§ 171), and "to tell you the truth" (§ 67; 74). Prentis struggles to convince us he is not absolute in his judgments by constantly turning his opinions into questions (for example, "how was I to know that I wasn't jumping to conclusions?" § 32), and adding qualifiers, such as "I think" (§ 74) or "you see" (§ 13; 72; 171; 173; 174). At times Prentis's need to dictate the reader's opinion shows more clearly through comments such as "I know" (§ 85), "you know what I mean" (§ 75), and even "you are wrong if you think" (§ 127). When this narrator struggles to appear humble and well-mannered, the effect is ironic: "excuse me if it sounds odd" (§ 27), "I won't bore you with details" (§ 28), "could I be wrong" (§ 20), "my theories could be wrong" (§ 97) and "perhaps I am a naïve and simple-minded creature, after all" (§ 98).

This narrator's favourite word is the personal pronoun: Prentis's excessive use of 'I' reveals his constant self-involvement. Unlike other Swiftian narrators, Prentis never abandons the vantage point of the narrator-as-protagonist. While Tom Crick and Bill Unwin frequently reject the first person and refer to themselves in the third person, adopting the viewpoint of the spectator and creating an ironic distance between their roles as narrator and their actions as characters, Prentis never engages in any distancing. Therefore, Ansgar Nünning's observation about Swift's narrators—that "the stories they tell ...depict, in a very truthful way, the illusions and self-deceptions of the narrators themselves" (94)—suggests that even Prentis, who is too close to the narrating process and too involved in his illusions to recognise them as such, inadvertently exposes his untrustworthiness.

Yet these verbal habits may not be indicative of anything more than Prentis's wish to create a friendly and casual tone. This narrator's "hunger for lies" (Hollinghurst "Of Time" 1073) is revealed when style and tone are used to promote his personal views and cloud the important issues. When Prentis questions his sadistic habits, doubts his paranoid fears or exposes his envy, he seeks, through stylistic tricks, to draw the reader's attention away from the facts: his abnormal behavior and questionable morality. Prentis's discussion of his sexual habits becomes frightening because it is rendered in a casual style and a confessional tone:

Marian sometimes says I'm hurting her. . . . All in all, I'm surprised how little she resists. . . . She's afraid, of course, of what might happen if she did. . . . I'm not extremist, after all. . . . All right, so you've gathered it by now. My sex-life is really a preposterous, an obsessive, a pathetic affair. . . . Systematically and cold-bloodedly, like a torturer bent on breaking his victim, I am turning my wife into a whore. . . . Tell me, can a man do wrong with his own wife? . . . What is healthy and normal in this sphere, after all? (§ 74-75)

If Prentis, the character, is someone we find at fault, this happens because Prentis, the narrator, exposes the character's flaws. Then Prentis excuses and justifies himself, hoping for our polite response and acceptance. Constantly rebutting self-imposed accusations, Prentis hopes to guide the reader to his own point of view, convincing us of his unerring judgement.

Another clue to narrative unreliability is the conflict between the reader's "standards of normality" (Nünning 85) and the manner in which the narrator describes his daily reality and his relationship with nature. Since boyhood Prentis has identified people by their smells, while he considers himself as "odourless and nondescript" (§ 34). For instance, in section three Prentis views the world, through a distorting mirror of phobias, as a threatening maze of underground tunnels inhabited by human animals identified by smells. In reality he is describing his daily journey home on the Underground where, surrounded by commuters, he imagines rodent populations ("rats, lemmings") and impending evil ("something terrible and inevitable is going to happen" § 26). In Prentis's mind people on the train, "like dogs and other animals," look around them "inquisitively" trying to "strip everyone else bare," searching for a secret weakness which "will make it possible for its owner to be humiliated and degraded" (§ 25). Sensing perhaps the abnormality of this view, he interrupts the above description twice to inquire, "am I right?" (§ 25; § 26). Through such potentially disarming honesty, Prentis seeks to maintain his reliability.

Prentis's obsession with animals exposes the possessiveness of his self-confessed desire to be "at one with nature" (§ 73) and accentuates the artificiality of his behaviour. At home Prentis sees himself and Marian "arguing like sparring fish in a

tank" (§ 25) or making love "like the sparrows" (§ 73). Moreover, one of the reasons Prentis craves Quinn's job is because, as he openly admits, "I envy Quinn his cherry tree and his daylight" (§ 17). Instead, at the underground part of the office where he and the other clerks work, he feels that they are "like guinea pigs in some controlled experiment" (§ 121). Prentis finds Siamese cats "sinister" because they are "unpredictable" and "do not ooze affection" (§ 175). As a child, Prentis engaged in his own controlled experiments of terror and cruelty when his gift on his tenth birthday, a pet hamster, turned out to be "a part of nature" (§ 35). He likes animals that are defenseless and cannot rebel against him: the one time that his hamster sought to escape its master, Prentis punished it "severely" (§ 36).

Prentis wants to possess and tame nature as well as people. In section twenty-eight, in a vignette reminiscent of the short story "Hoffmeier's Antelope," Prentis lectures his sons on the usefulness and attractions of zoos. Unsurprisingly, one of Prentis's "favourite places is the Small Mammal House at Regent's Park" (§ 152); but Prentis lacks Uncle Walter's lifelong commitment to the preservation of the natural world. Prentis seeks control over fauna and laments the absence of "Nature Study" as a subject at school. Not only zoos but any artificially natural environment—golf courses, gardens, parks—meets with Prentis's approval because it exhibits signs of human dominance over nature. When Martin argues that animals in cages are not the "real thing" (§ 154), Prentis insists that "wild-but-tame... perhaps ... is the way things must be now" (§ 152). The quality Prentis most appreciates in his wife is her "pliancy," her ability to be moulded "like a piece of clay" (§ 27). In the book's final image from Camber Sands, Prentis discusses both his wife's body and the sand dunes as landscapes to be conquered:

My view was filled with sand, a miniature dune-scape, a whole rippling and sifting Sahara.... It is the landscape of the desert, bleached and smooth-contoured, that most approximates to human flesh. If any landscape can be called naked, it is a landscape of dunes; and perhaps that is the true source of my nostalgia for Camber Sands. (§ 219-220)

Even when this narrator talks of love, he betrays his unquenchable thirst for possession and reveals the biases of an unreliable narrator.

Fictionalising the Gaps

Eventually, the reader realises that Prentis is increasingly paranoid, so his views of the world as well as of the people around him are highly suspicious. For instance, throughout his narrative Prentis seeks to convince the reader that, in the words of Del Ivan Janik, "parallels" exist "between [Prentis's] father's wartime experiences and his own feelings of confinement, victimisation and guilt" ("No End" 178). In order

to accept these “parallels” the reader must overlook the differences: in 1944 Prentis senior was confined and tortured in the Château Martine, while the son is experiencing an attack of claustrophobia induced by his own paranoia in 1977. Shuttlecock is not really a detective story but a parody of a Freudian case study written by the patient himself. Early in the narrative Prentis reveals his objective: he wants “to step into Dad’s shoes. ...to sit in [Quinn’s] leather chair” (§ 71). Yet, he fails to recognise the implications of his desires: he is the son who seeks to destroy and replace the father, biological (Dad) and surrogate (Quinn).

In his effort to replace the father, Prentis rewrites Dad’s Shuttlecock, recasting Dad in the role of the villain and keeping the hero part for himself. In section thirty-two Quinn’s hypothesis about Dad’s dilemma, that is, Dad’s “desire to construct this saving lie and an instinct not to falsify himself completely” (§ 188), applies predominantly to Prentis, who walks the tightrope between honesty and fabrication. As David Leon Higdon suggests in the 1991 essay “Unconfessed Confessions,” in Shuttlecock we are asked to decipher not only the text of Dad’s memoir, but the narrator’s diary as well: “just as he regards his father as a text to be interpreted, Prentis knows that he too constitutes a text” (186). As the narrator travels between memory and imagination, constantly manipulating reality to create a more pleasing fiction, the reader must struggle to separate the characters’ actions from the narrator’s interpretation. When Prentis enquires at the end of the novel “how much of a book is in the words and how much is behind or in between the lines” (§ 214), he is issuing a warning, not an invitation. In case the readers attempt to interpret Prentis’s text in a different manner, the narrator hastily warns us “not to peer too hard beneath the surface of what it says—or what it doesn’t say” (§ 214).

What this narrator “doesn’t say” is as noteworthy as what he chooses to investigate. While Prentis is constantly preoccupied with certain people and events—his Dad’s past, Quinn’s behaviour, the prospect of his promotion, his son’s doubts and his wife’s subjugation—he never dwells upon, or even explains, other equally important issues. For instance, his mother’s sudden death merits only a couple of matter-of-fact sentences: “my mother died quite suddenly and apparently in perfect health. She simply collapsed one day on the kitchen floor” (§ 41). Once again we are shocked by the informality of the diction and neutrality of tone. How can words like “apparently” and “simply” not subvert the importance of the event described? Then Prentis adds in his familiar, confessional manner: “it’s a day, to be honest, I don’t like to remember in detail” (§ 41). No details are added anywhere else in the novel

about his mother's death or that day. The reader cannot help but wonder whether the narrator's desire to forget this event denotes a loving son's pain at the loss of his mother or suggests the occurrence of some other incident which Prentis does not narrate because it is even more painful and he has completely exorcised this memory.

In Shuttlecock the gaps the reader is called upon to fill in are not only the details of torture missing from Dad's memoir. Prentis's story is fraught with subtle omissions concerning traumatic incidents such as his mother's collapse or the manner of Sammy's demise. Prentis's belief in the selectivity of memory is one of the first things he communicates at the beginning of his narrative: "you only forget what you choose not to remember" (§ 5). So what vital episodes in his past does this narrator choose not to remember? Although, as Wolfgang Iser argues, all texts demand that the reader "fill in the gaps left by the text itself" (193), the reader of Shuttlecock becomes consciously involved in the gap-filling process. Prentis not only constantly accuses Dad and Quinn of leaving gaps in their narratives but he appears so secretive about significant events in his life that he gives the impression that he seeks to evade exposure. What this narrator 'doesn't say' seems to be the effect of an elaborate selection process which draws the reader's attention to the narrative gaps. By overly concerning himself with the style and tone of Dad's memoir and by dwelling on Dad's omissions, Prentis pinpoints the elements in his own story which merit investigation. By seeking to expose Dad as an unreliable narrator, Prentis inadvertently exposes the chinks in his own armour. Unless the reader recognises this narrator's unreliability, Prentis's version becomes the novel's theme. David Leon Higdon, for instance, is convinced that "the reader and the protagonist alike become fairly certain that the war memoir . . . cloaks the reality of betrayal and treason" (my emphases) and that "Shuttlecock finds a solution by refusing 'truths'" ("Double" 94). In Higdon's analysis, Prentis is a man who suffers but matures, acquiring, at the end of the novel, a sophisticated understanding of the relationship between past and present.

Del Ivan Janik in the 1989 essay "History and the 'Here and Now'" also agrees that "[Prentis] is now able to live in the present, not because he has conquered history but because he has learned to live with its ambiguities" (82). Janik interprets Prentis's final decision to burn the missing file without reading its contents as the "acceptance of uncertainty" (82). Arguably, Prentis at the end of the novel seems less overtly problematic; but does he not continue to plead with us that we "accept

on trust what is there on the page as the best showing the author could make" (S 214)? Why does this narrator continue to beg for the reader's "trust" until the last page, unless he is aware that his "best" is not good enough? At the end of Shuttlecock Prentis is no more reformed than Stevens at the end of The Remains of the Day: both narrators struggle to convince us of the lessons they have learnt and the meaninglessness of "worrying oneself too much" (Ishiguro 244) but their actions betray them. Swift's characterisation of Stevens as "a character who is articulate and intelligent to a degree" but without "any power of self-analysis or self-recognition" ("Kazuo" 23) is an apt description of Prentis as well.⁵

Prentis is "hardly a sympathetic narrator," as Donald Kaczvinsky notes in his 1998 essay "History in Graham Swift's Shuttlecock." Kaczvinsky's analysis of Swift's second novel is the only one which argues that Prentis is manipulative in "writing 'his' story." Kaczvinsky suggests that in Shuttlecock the aim of Prentis's autobiography is to create a "means of escaping truth, of controlling, manipulating, or destroying certain information that may implicate one in the present." Moreover, Kaczvinsky realises that the narrator is not the only apprentice who must pass a test, but that "we too, as 'apprentice' readers, must learn to question the objectivity of Prentis's story." This critic concludes that at the end of the novel Prentis has "achieved command over his own story" by having learnt to "reveal and conceal information for his own benefit." Kaczvinsky implies that Prentis, like Tom Crick in Waterland, is fallible in the most human way: when pressed, "we all invent our own past."

(Non)Sense of an Ending

Another element which undermines the narrator's reliability in Shuttlecock is the narrative order of events. As Rimmon-Kenan specifies, "the text can direct and control the reader's comprehension and attitudes by positioning certain items before others" (120, emphasis in original text). In Shuttlecock the information contained in the first section of the novel and the narrator's three different attempts to end the narrative in a manner that will convince the reader of Prentis's victory constitute an influential prologue and epilogue. By encouraging readers to interpret the narrative according to "information and attitudes presented at an early stage of the text" as

⁵ In 1989, as a contributing editor to the American periodical Bomb, Swift interviewed Kazuo Ishiguro, who is one of Swift's friends. One of Swift's questions to Ishiguro, which includes the comment on Stevens' lack of self-awareness, relates to Swift's favourable evaluation of The Remains of the Day as a novel which "succeeds in a very difficult area" (23): telling the story from the point of view of a limited character (as Swift himself does in Shuttlecock).

well as “to assimilate all previous information to the item presented last,” Prentis as narrator uses both the “primacy” and the “recency” effects to influence the reading process (Rimmon-Kenan 120).

The ten pages of the novel’s opening section provide the reader with an unflattering portrait of the narrator. Prentis reveals himself as a sadistic, manipulative and secretive man who has changed little since his childhood. This damning profile emerges through two incidents, one of which is a pre-adolescent memory, while the other is an event which takes place in the Prentis home on a typical Monday evening. Although the two events are distanced by over two decades, they are remarkably similar as they present the narrator exercising power and torturing living beings: his pet hamster in the past, his children in the present. Prentis discovers at a young age that “cruelties were no more than a way of making remorse possible” towards creatures he claims to love but which also happen to be “at [his] mercy” (§ 6). In 1955 he reduces his hamster to “a nervous jelly” (§ 6) by simulating predators, suffocating it, even placing it in the oven; in 1977 he acts “like an ogre, a madman” towards his sons (§ 10), terrorising them and assigning psychologically-exhausting punishments, such as their having to dig out large stones from the flowerbeds which he knows are “well-dug” and contain none (§ 11). Prentis fails to note the connection between the way he treated his pet and his present behaviour towards his children: “what made me think of these things?” he asks (§ 10). Instead, he wonders about his current outbreaks: “when did all this begin?” (§ 10). In Shuttlecock the reader is made aware of the narrator’s cruel habits and his lack of self-awareness from the beginning.

As a writer, Prentis botches the ending as well, making three separate attempts at closure. In his article on “double closures” in Swift’s novels, David Leon Higdon finds that Shuttlecock has two endings, one for each of the two narrators who coexist within the novel. According to Higdon, section thirty-one, which constitutes the end of Dad’s memoir recording his successful escape from the Nazis, is the novel’s first ending, while section thirty-five, which records Prentis’s family excursion to the beach, is the second. However, Dad’s memoir—as reproduced by Prentis—remains fragmentary and the ending is incomplete, since Dad’s rescue by the Americans, his return home, and other such details are not provided (as the unfinished sentence and the ellipsis at the end of section thirty-one suggest). Strictly speaking, we do not know how Dad’s book ends to compare it with Prentis’s ending. Conversely,

Prentis's three attempts to end his own narrative occur after Dad's memoir has ended, i.e., after section thirty-one.

The novel's natural denouement occurs at the end of section thirty-two when Prentis returns home drunk and happy from his liberating visit to Quinn: he kisses and hugs his wife, proclaims that "all" is "right" and announces his promotion (§ 204). This section effectively solves all the mysteries and seems to restore the protagonist's faith in himself. Yet, the reader is surprised to discover that the narrative continues for a few more pages as the narrator resumes writing "after a six months' lapse, only to bring [this book] to its conclusion" (§ 214). Why is the reconciliation ending of section thirty-two not conclusion enough for Prentis? This narrator needs to guide the readers to the story's morals, not allow us to draw our own conclusions.

After the natural denouement comes a forced one which seeks to demonstrate the extent of Prentis's new-found power and destabilise the reader's faith in the text. Section thirty-three allows Prentis to gloat over his professional and domestic happiness: "like some captain on the quarter-deck ... my words are a command" (§ 208). This section demonstrates Prentis's current success as well as the power he wields over the narrative and therefore over the reader. Prentis has learnt that words are potent and seeks to imprison his audience, casting a spell made of veiled threats, fatherly advice and paranoid suspicions: "the mysteries don't stop," he warns the reader, and wonders, "how do you know that I haven't made it up, it's not all in my imagination?" (§ 209). Prentis intimates that we had better "accept on trust what is there on the page as the best showing the author could make" since we are probably among "those happily left in peace of mind by [his] 'work' at the department" (§ 214). How can the reader fail to observe the demands of such a kindly benefactor? Prentis's use of inverted commas around the word 'work' suggests self-conscious irony in the narrator's tone towards the destabilising effectiveness of his job both as detective and as diarist.

Section thirty-three offers the most obvious proof of this narrator's demented and untrustworthy behaviour: Prentis continues to invent subtle ways to torture all those dependent on him and he suspects that traitors are lurking in the shadows. Although the admonitions at the end of section thirty-three read like a closing statement, Prentis decides he cannot end his story in this negative climate of paranoia. He opts for a happy ending to convince the reader that he is, as he claims, "a reformed man" (§ 210). So a third attempt is made to bring the book to closure by narrating a

Sunday outing to Camber Sands, striking every happy chord and tying all the references together: images of nature and family life are evoked and celebrated through a baptism in the balm of family love. As he takes his son by the hand, buys the family ice creams, engages in a cricket game and makes perfect love to his wife on a sand dune, Prentis's tone is so earnest that the reader suspects this fairy-tale ending to be an unconvincing lie.

Prentis's final effort to persuade us that all familial strife has been resolved and that he has been redeemed by his choices falls flat not only because the serenity and joy of the tone are unlike any other section of the book but also because the excursion itself probably does not even take place. Prentis claims at the beginning of this final section, which takes place in May 1978, that in order to go to Camber Sands, "I forwent for the first time one of my visits to Dad" (§ 214, my emphasis). We know this is not true: Prentis missed one visit the previous June when he arranged to see Quinn on a Wednesday evening. Is this lie not an obvious sign that the rest of this section is equally untrue? Nor is the Camber Sands excursion the only fantastical claim this narrator makes in relation to the happy-family script that runs throughout his narrative. Several other occasions of outings occur earlier in the text only to be disputed. For instance, at the beginning of section nine, Prentis asks, "did I mention, a little while back, something about taking my kids out on the common at weekends to play healthy games?" only to respond immediately, "it doesn't really happen, of course" (§ 53).

In Shuttlecock the suspended ending—from natural denouement to a forced, didactic conclusion to a fantastic journey through the never-never land of nostalgia—forbids genuine closure. Instead, a reference, in the book's last sentence, to Sammy, "the pale, furred creature who was the cause of [Prentis's] beginning these pages" (§ 220), invites the reader to think back to the novel's first section. The evocation of the terrified hamster and the tortures it suffered in the narrator's hands dispel the idyllic setting of Camber Sands and promotes no sense of an ending. As readers, we "constantly attempt," in the words of Frank Kermode, "to supply the very connections that the writer's programme suppresses" (139). By exaggerating the positive consequences of his choices and fantasising about having the perfect family in the novel's final section, Prentis, the writer, exposes himself as a fabulator through his calculated effort to provide idealised closure.

At the end of Shuttlecock Prentis would like the reader to confirm that the most suitable response to the constant “why” of human curiosity, which reverberates through all of Swift’s fiction, is a willed ignorance accompanied by the destruction of answers. Prentis does not wish for the truth, for a final answer, but for alternative versions of the past that will allow him to rebuild his damaged self-esteem. Whether Dad was weak, hypocritical, unheroic or Dad was strong, honest and brave is beside the point. Prentis wants to be allowed to continue to entertain his theory that his father may have been weak like him or that he can become duplicitous like his father. The answers that Prentis seeks are related to his Faustian need for dominance, not a Promethean quest for knowledge. While the possession of power liberates this manipulative narrator, the reader is left in suspension in the company of an unenlightened character whose actions can never be condoned.

In Swift’s future works the same “whywhywhy” is answered in a more satisfying manner by protagonists who may be weak and self-promoting but are neither sadistic nor conscious liars. After Shuttlecock, Swift’s protagonists, older and humbled by their mistakes, are better equipped to seek enlightenment while executing last orders on waterland, or out of this world, or in the ever after. They do not seek dominance over people but an opportunity to cultivate the quintessential Swiftian virtue: through their efforts to live with the knowledge of the unanswerable questions, these men learn to survive as well as to endure.

Chapter IV

The Redemption of His/story in Waterland: Outwitting Reality Through “Tales of the Fens”

A saying in the Fens: ‘it took only seven days for the Almighty to make the earth; man was two hundred years making the Fens but it took three hundred years to make a good story teller.’

W. H. Barrett “Story-telling in the Fens” (x)

The whole secret with these Fen rivers is to bring back all the water you can into its natural course. Where the old Dutchmen went wrong was in dispersing it into canals and letting it lie about all over the place.

Dorothy L. Sayers The Nine Tailors (259)

If you ask what history means, what is the meaning of the French Revolution, you are not asking for an explanation . . . you are asking what is its meaning for us, for later generations.

Hayden White (75)

Blending past and present, history and story, tradition and experimentation, Waterland (1983), Graham Swift’s third novel and “his most perfect and most thoughtful book” (Bradbury 483), constitutes a novel of ideas as well as an engrossing tale. The most significant episodes in Waterland occur away from the suburban settings of The Sweet-Shop Owner and Shuttlecock in the desolate and empty Fens of East Anglia, the Dickensian “marsh country” of the novel’s second epigraph, where the protagonist, Tom Crick, and his wife, Mary Metcalf, were born and raised. In the manner of Hardy and Faulkner, Swift invents not only the characters and their plight but also the town of Gildsey and its patron saint Gunnhilda, the river Leem and the lock-keeper’s cottage where Tom’s father, Henry Crick, tends the lock. Swift incorporates in his novel the area’s well-documented past, legendary and historical, as well as the engineering feats, begun in the seventeenth century, which produced land out of water and initiated an ongoing struggle between human and natural forces. Weaving the saga of the powerful Atkinsons with the story of the enduring Cricks, Waterland emphasises the need to reclaim the past through the dedicated pursuit of curiosity, the therapeutic engagement in narrative, and the absolving balm of love and compassion.

The setting of Waterland constitutes, in Swift’s words, a “landscape of the mind” (Bernard and Menegaldo 10), an ambiguous world in which the paradoxical

coexistence of opposites is illustrated through the novel's title: water/land, a liquid accumulation of silt where terra firma must constantly be reclaimed, a mythical territory where history and fiction become synonymous. Like all of Swift's novels, Waterland examines the microcosm of Everyman against the macrocosm of history, regional, national and international, here through a protagonist who is a history teacher and an amateur historiographer. Tom Crick, the "most desolate of Swift's main narrators" (Poole "Mourning" 162), abandons history to take refuge in stories and seeks solace in confession. More emphatically than Swift's other "novels of crisis," Waterland revolves around "decisive yet suspended moments" in Tom Crick's past, constantly relived and leading to a "dismembering of reality" and Crick's withdrawal from life (Bernard "Dismembering" 127) until the protagonist learns to reclaim the past and to be vigilant. When trauma stops time and history no longer evolves, revolution begins: "A redemption; a restoration. A reaffirmation of what is pure and fundamental against what is decadent and false. A return to a new beginning" (W 137). Set in 1980, Waterland concerns a decisive crisis in Tom Crick's life, which necessitates the redemption of his/story: the double loss of his wife to insanity and his teaching post to financial cuts prompts Crick to seek the "complete and final version" (W 8) of the events which occurred in the summer of 1943 and which are linked to his wife's madness and his own recourse to incessant storytelling. In 1980 both husband and wife retreat psychologically to their adolescence, inverting the Heraclitean notion of flux: in the Cricks' guilt-ridden conscience nothing flows, time stands still and "we are always stepping into the same river" (W 146).

Another one of Swift's reluctant and unreliable narrators, the fifty-three-year-old protagonist of Waterland strives for meaningful historical investigation as a means of understanding and coming to terms with his past. Crick's testimony becomes, as Malcolm Bradbury notes, "a late history, a search for the way of access to what has gone before" (434). Conducting a belated inquest into the errors in his past and shouldering responsibility at last, Crick engages in a multi-faceted quest for identity and absolution. The protagonist's transformation from peeping Tom, an observer of life and a believer in the "Grand Narrative" of "History" (W 62), to doubting Thomas, a nihilistic and fatalistic historian who claims that the past is irredeemable, that accidents abound, and that any version of past events is equally plausible, to a vigilant Crick reconciled with the necessity to salvage "hopes and dreams" and "stop the world slipping away" (W 336) allows him to confess his guilt and begin the reclamation of the past. The wisdom he gains constitutes Crick's definition of

Historia and explains the significance critics assign to Waterland as a fictional manifesto: Swift's work appears to borrow the basic tenets of post-structuralism, narratology and new historicism to illustrate that history is a fictional human "construct" (Janik "No End" 180).

The stories and histories criss-crossing in Waterland do not extend to one or two generations as in Shuttlecock, The Sweet Shop Owner, or most of the pieces in Learning to Swim, but cover several generations of two families, the Atkinsons and the Cricks. The novel's fifty-two chapters, the titles of half of which begin with the exploratory preposition 'about,' provide readers—in anachronic fragments of varying length—with pieces of a puzzle which spans three centuries (see Appendix III), recording, with obsessive detail and painful urgency, significant events in the lives and times of Crick's ancestors since the seventeenth century. The various narrative strands are intricately woven and the guises of the narrator—teacher, amateur historiographer, naturalist—blend autobiography, historiography and scientific lectures into a multi-narrative that borrows elements from genres as diverse as the Bildungsroman and the Gothic novel. The recursive structure of the narrative and the multi-generic approach to historiography discourage conventional views of history as linear and progressive, promoting the amalgam of mock-dictionary definitions included in the novel's first epigraph as an alternative, all-inclusive Historia: "1. inquiry, investigation, learning. 2. a) a narrative of past events, history. b) any kind of narrative: account, tale, story."

Waterland elaborates on themes introduced in Swift's second novel. Shuttlecock and its detective-narrator, Prentis, first encapsulated Swift's fascination with the desirability of knowledge and the nature of history. Both Prentis and Tom Crick are motivated not only personally but also professionally to examine the past and search for evidence. Their professions offer them the illusion that the past can be reconstructed, causality can be imposed and ghosts can be exorcised. Like Prentis, the young Tom does not lack self-awareness but he convinces himself that the past can be safely locked away and that willed ignorance is synonymous with innocence. While Prentis seeks for definitive proof of his father's identity (hero or traitor?) and eventually settles for uncertainty, Tom Crick investigates three centuries worth of family history in search of the Grand Narrative of the past. Since Prentis is far more troubled in his familial relationships than Tom, the happy ending of Shuttlecock, which finds Prentis renewed and reconciled with the paternal ghost, rings false and parodies the cliché that knowledge equals power. Conversely, Crick's forced

retirement, his uneasy coexistence with his no-longer-trusting retriever and his lonely struggle for the reclamation of the past is an ending that denies closure. Whether they opt for ignorance or for vigilance, both Prentis and Crick search for a consoling his/story that will reconcile them with the past.

The novel's generic variety, the intense preoccupation with the nature of history, and the fragmentary structure are elements that explain why Waterland is widely considered as a "prime example of postmodern fiction" (McKinney 822). The majority of critical essays view the novel, as Linda Hutcheon has defined it in A Poetics of Postmodernism (1988) and The Politics of Postmodernism (1989), as a representative paradigm of "historiographic metafiction." David Leon Higdon speaks for many critics when he notes that the novel "almost seems designed to test and exploit postmodern narratological theory" ("Unconfessed" 187). Another group of critics terms Waterland "an attempt at psychological realism in the modernist mode" (Janik "No End" 179), and a "metafictional comment on Realistic narrative" (Elias 16). The use of realist techniques in Waterland, as Alison Lee argues in Realism and Power (1990), allows the novel to be viewed "first" as a "Realist text" (xii), placing the reader, who negotiates the paradoxical definition of history while engaging with the story, in a "contradictory position" (36).

Despite the award of the Booker prize to Last Orders in 1996, Waterland remains Graham Swift's best known and most acclaimed work to date. A contemporary classic, which has already entered A-level and University curricula, Waterland placed Swift on the literary map as a major contemporary novelist but also became the extravagant success he has been expected to repeat. The achievements of Waterland and the expectations it created remain for Swift "a blessing and a curse," as he noted in a 1996 interview with Anthony Quinn. In 1983 the novel, submitted in page proofs before it was even published (Digilio "Talking" 1), was short-listed for the Booker prize and became a major commercial success. Winning the Booker prize was deemed inevitable by John Walsh, who was impressed by the book's "strange, insidious, unsettling power" ("Telling" 22). Contrary to expectations, Waterland lost to J. M. Coetzee's Life and Times of Michael K although it did win the Guardian fiction prize, the Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize, and the Italian Premio Grinzane Cavour.

In 1983, reviewers in Britain, impressed by the amalgam of genres and intricacy of structure in Waterland, showered high praise on Graham Swift, who was hailed by

John Nicholson in the Times as the “most ambitious of our young novelists” (13). The London Review of Books praised the novel’s “intricate web of interlocking images” (Driver 20). In the Observer Hermione Lee, who had recognised the promise in Swift’s two previous novels, declared this “beautiful, serious, and intelligent” novel to be “ambitious and original” (“Norfolk” 31). All reviewers agreed with Victoria Glendinning that the “elaborate structure is impressive” (43), and with Christopher Hawtree in the Spectator, who remarked that “Waterland suggests artlessness while being meticulously ordered” (26). Familiar with Swift’s previous novels and short stories, Alan Hollinghurst, in his insightful piece in the TLS, found the “quicksand uncertainty” that permeates the novel to be created by a narrator who is “deeply disturbed,” whose “very emphaticness . . . is a warning . . . to falseness,” in a manner “typical of Swift” (“Of Time” 1073). Several reviewers considered Waterland to be a novel of ideas to be read for its symphonic vastness (Gorra; Wood), and viewed Tom Crick as a thinly-veiled authorial mask, communicating Swift’s preoccupations with the paradoxes inherent in life, history and nature (Kakutani; Prescott).

In 1984, Swift’s third novel became the first one of his works to be published on the other side of the Atlantic and met with unanimous critical acclaim. North American reviewers, who had not read any of Swift’s earlier work, were overwhelmed by “this unusual book” (Hill) as well as by the novel’s “passion” and “mystery” (Weeks 14). The approving epithets were superlative, announcing the arrival of a “masterpiece” (Manguel 13), a “formidably intelligent book” (Wood 48), written by a “Faulkner of the Fens” (Prescott 74). William Pritchard’s piece in the New York Times Book Review praised Swift as a “resourceful” novelist and Waterland for its “sustained narrative energy” (“Body” 7.9). Charles Champlin applauded Swift’s “skill at making a first-person narration reveal more than the narrator intends” (8), while the New York Times reviewer Michiko Kakutani characterised the novel as “highly ambitious,” “rich” and “ingenious” (C19). While British reviews mentioned influences from Hardy (Lee 31), Dickens (Driver 20), and Günter Grass (Nicholson 13), Americans recognised affinities not only with the creator of Yoknapatawpha County (Kakutani C19) but also with Melville’s Moby Dick (Gorra 392) and the magic realism of Marquez (Wood 48).

The Generic Hybrid

In Waterland the narrative “continually changes and shifts, adopting features from different literary genres” (McWilliams 75). Intricately woven within Crick’s confession

of the events in his own present (1980) and past (late 1930s and early 1940s), which he terms “Tales of the Fens” (W 42), is a historical project-in-progress entitled A History of the Fens (W 6): an account of land reclamation in this “low-lying region of eastern England” since medieval times (W 8), which constitutes this historian’s “humble model for progress” as well as a record of the “building of empires” (W 336). Since Tom is the last surviving descendant of the Atkinsons, who “made history” by draining the Fens, creating land and navigating its rivers, and of the Cricks, who “outwitted reality” by “telling stories” (W 17) and guarding the land from turning back into water, this History is also autobiography. Interspersed throughout the “Tales” and A History, digressions on natural elements (such as the East wind, the river Ouse, and the eel) termed “Natural History” and “lessons” on the various transformations of history (as discipline, as narrative, and as inquest) constitute the protagonist’s paradoxical theory of the cyclical movement of history (see Appendix III). Crick laments the impossibility of escaping the past, seeking in nature a universal staple to anchor the fluidity of reality.

Chronicle and autobiography are two of the genres from which Waterland explicitly borrows elements. In its preoccupation with the life cycles of eels and the geographic formation of the Fens, Swift’s novel takes an interest in topography in a manner characteristic of the regional novel. Furthermore, by providing the genealogy of the Cricks and the Atkinsons, Waterland follows the tradition of the family saga. The narrator’s certainty that his schoolmate, Freddie Parr, was murdered and his efforts to identify his brother, Dick, as the murderer constitute the mystery in the “mock-detective” aspect of the novel (Bernard “Dismembering” 132). The narrator constantly reminds his “children” that this story is a “fairy-tale” set in a place “both palpable and unreal” (W 8). The insistence on anecdote, legend and superstition, the omnipresent violence, the “witch” who performs Mary’s abortion, the abandoned, half-derelict windmill where the adolescent Tom and Mary make love, the potent 1911 Coronation Ale that drives the town people mad, all these elements combine magic realism and fairytale lore with the Gothic novel.

In Waterland the coexistence of natural history, geography and elements of Gothic serves characterisation and plot, not experimentation. Presented as elements of Gothic or folklore, several events or details are invested with supernatural or surrealistic qualities: the superbly potent Coronation Ale becomes an instrument of revenge that destroys the Atkinsons; catatonic Sarah’s ominous cries of “Smoke!” and “Fire!” prophesy the destruction of the Atkinson Brewery; the eel placed in

Mary's knickers foreshadows the fulfilment of the superstitious belief that such an act causes infertility; and Dick's elemental return to water transforms him into a fish. Despite the existence of such "narrative trickery" (Todd 307), elements of magic realism are used subtly by comparison with the novels of Angela Carter or D. M. Thomas. The novel's generic transformations are recognisable modulations of one voice and are related to the narrator's life, facilitating storytelling and "reinvigorating rather than parodying" the various genres (Head 205). Sometimes a science lecture about geography or navigation and at other times a gossip column, repeating the rumours about the affairs of the Land Girls, Crick's account incorporates any piece of information that promotes his purposes and makes his "children" desire "more of this" (W 193). As Swift admits to John Walsh, he uses techniques that "make" the reader "supply what is being only alluded to" ("Telling" 23). Readers incorporate fenland superstition and science lectures into the basic story, which revolves around the adolescent characters, following the causal connections specified or implied by the narrator. In Waterland, as Geoffrey Lord specifies, the "significant mystery" concerns "character" and "motives" and is found "in the stories behind the facts" (151).

The "Fragile Islands of Life"

In the course of a few months in the winter and spring of 1980, Tom Crick loses his wife, Mary, to insanity and his position as history teacher at a South London comprehensive to financial cuts. At school Crick is much preoccupied with the epistemological challenges issued by Price, the founder of the Holocaust Club, an intelligent but troubled sixteen-year-old in Crick's A-level history class, the special subject of which is the French Revolution. Doubting the usefulness as well as the meaning of history as a discipline in an era of possible nuclear holocaust, Price forces his teacher to defend his faith not only in his vocation but also in his discipline, civilisation and the future. In response to Price, Crick begins to digress from the curriculum by practising on his students the familial remedy of storytelling: a "knack for telling stories" runs in the Crick genes (W 2). Desperate to outwit reality and to demonstrate the indispensability of salvaging the past, Crick substitutes "Tales of the Fens" and lessons in "Natural History" for the teaching of the French Revolution, that is "Artificial History."

At home Tom realises that his fifty-two-year-old wife is "becoming a child again" (W 128) when in February 1980 Mary announces that "God" has told her she is "going to have a baby" (W 130); Crick hardly expects to find an infant in his Greenwich

home a month later. After “three decades . . . without event” (W 123) the childless and menopausal Mary rediscovers Catholicism, her childhood creed, and replaces Sunday walks with her husband “to longitude 0° and back” with church visits and confession (W 129). Identifying with the Madonna and certain that God has promised her a child, Mary abducts an unattended infant at the supermarket. Although the baby is returned a few hours later, the ensuing media ruckus provides a convenient opportunity for Lewis Scott, Crick’s technocrat of a Headmaster, who has been annoyed by Crick’s classroom theatrics and wants to replace Crick’s subject with more practical studies, to force Tom into early retirement. In despair, Tom condenses thirty-two years worth of pupils into the collectively addressed “children” and struggles to silence the incessant wailing of the siren of “whywhywhy” (W 107).

The Cricks settle in London in 1947, away from the fenland setting of their youth, but remain prisoners of their unforgiven and unforgotten past. As the narrator gradually and hesitatingly reveals, a series of traumatic events in the summer of 1943 has scarred the fifteen-year-old Tom and Mary for life. First, the suspicious drowning of their friend, Freddie Parr; then, the possibility that Tom’s brother, Dick, is Freddie’s murderer; Mary’s pregnancy and the gruesome butchery of an abortion that results in her barrenness; the discovery of the incestuous relationship between Tom’s mother, Helen, and grandfather, Ernest, and Dick’s new status as half-brother; all culminating in Dick’s suicide, induced by Tom’s revelations concerning Dick’s parentage. In 1947, after a three-year separation, Tom and Mary reunite and marry but their lives are irrevocably defined by overwhelming guilt. Incapable of resolving tensions or seeking absolution, Mary is unable to forgive herself and rejects Tom’s proposal to adopt a child.

The whodunit in Waterland, however, may not concern murder at all. As George Landow recognises, the narrator “creates a mystery (for us) where none exists” (207). In another Fenland story, The Nine Tailors (1934), a Lord Peter Wimsey adventure by Dorothy L. Sayers, lives are claimed by the church bells and the flooded river, not by the characters. Nature, in Swift’s novel as well, becomes an overwhelming force in the lives of the Cricks and the Atkinsons. After Mary’s confession that she is pregnant and the child is Freddie’s, Dick realises that it takes more than feelings of “Lu-lu-love” to make babies. Dick’s purpose in meeting with Freddie might have been to learn how Freddie has accomplished with Mary the “Wonderful Thing” (W 260). As Tom claims, Dick “would never hurt a fly” (W 248);

his good-giant behaviour throughout the novel suggests that Freddie's fall in the river occurs after Dick and Freddie parted company and is the result of the potency of the Ale and drunkenness, not of a preconceived plan. Emphasising circularity and foreshadowing the events of 1943, the swimming contest in July 1940 shows Dick saving Freddie from drowning. The 1940 incident allows no doubts about Dick's behaviour towards Freddie: "Did Dick push him? No, he dived—sort of. Didn't have to. No one made him" (W 189). In 1943 Tom's suspicion that Freddie's death is not an accident and that his brother is the murderer turns into certainty through Mary's assumption that "Dick killed Freddie Parr" and "we're to blame too" (W 57). Tom's ensuing guilt constitutes proof for the reader that his version is a record of the facts; however, his certainty derives from his interpretation of circumstantial evidence as he confesses early in the novel: "I don't know what to guess, what to believe. ... To know what's real—that's hard. ... Guesswork forms conclusions (which don't quell fear)" (W 58-59). Guesswork is also required of the reader since, as Dominic Head argues, "Swift hands the interpretative effort over" to us (206). Despite Tom's certainty and overwhelming sense of guilt, the novel allows other versions to coexist along with the narrator's beliefs and requires that the reader search for mysteries other than murder.

Fathers and Sons

In Swift's second novel, Shuttlecock, the Oedipal struggle among three generations of Prentis men constitutes the most obvious case of the contention that characterises the interaction between fathers and sons in Swift's fiction. In Waterland the contention is more subtle and symbolic: parents and children coexist more harmoniously than in any other of this author's works. Tom Crick will heed the paternal counsel, concerning the need for compassion and encapsulated in the story that opens chapter one, only after his life has been destroyed. The last surviving offspring of the progress-motivated, empire-building Atkinsons and the humble, cautious Cricks, Tom struggles throughout his life to unite the contradictory forces in his genealogy. Eventually, he embraces the paternal virtues of vigilance and compassion and rejects Atkinsonian arrogance and self-destructiveness. By the end of the novel the achievements of the maternal ancestors that first inspired Tom in his youth to believe in progress and civilisation have been replaced with a Crickian faith in endurance and reclamation.

In the novel the Atkinsons are portrayed not only as shrewd and capable entrepreneurs but also as abusive and demented family men, "powerful but blind

patriarchs" (Wilt 116). Tom Crick's great-great-grandfather, Thomas Atkinson, dies in 1825, a man broken by the guilt of turning his wife, Sarah, with one blow into a human vegetable; his sons, George and Alfred, are fixated on their mother and procreate almost out of duty; Thomas's granddaughters prefer "above all suitors their darling Papas" (W 92), foreshadowing metaphorically the dynasty's unwillingness to become "servants of the future" despite the claims of their brother, Arthur (W 93); Thomas's great-grandson, Ernest Atkinson, the "most desperate" of Swift's "troubled fathers" (Wheeler "Melancholic" 71), has an incestuous relationship with his daughter, Helen, fathers the narrator's half-brother, Dick, and kills himself in 1922. The destroyer of the Atkinson empire, Ernest is the son who defies all authority figures; he personifies the Dionysian elements in nature that destroy to allow rebirth. Born during the floods of 1874, he identifies not with the hills, whence his ancestors came, but with water: he creates the potent 1911 Coronation Ale that transforms into liquid fire and consumes the brewery along with the dynasty's fame and fortune. Ernest bequeaths his son, Dick, a dubious legacy, which will contribute to Dick's destruction: twelve bottles of beer, a letter with the truth of his conception and his mission as "Saviour of the World."

Unlike the Atkinsons, Henry Crick is a loving and watchful father who carries a deep burden of guilt for the deaths of Freddie, Helen and Dick, but also knows forgiveness. A shell-shocked survivor of the Great War, Henry is summoned to taste "the mud of Flanders" in 1917. Henry's subsequent inability to remember and tell stories is cured by Helen's fairy tales, which restore his ancestral knack, so Henry is able to advise his son in 1940 not to forget that each person has a "heart" and drank "mother's milk" (W 1). Henry's metaphor about the need for compassion relates to motherhood as much as to forgiveness: Henry himself feels guilty for any lapse of vigilance and understands the need for mercy. Having learnt love and storytelling, Henry seeks to protect Dick, the boy he has raised as his own, from revelations and assumes responsibility for his son's plight when, minutes before Dick's suicide, he shouts, "Dick, it's all right! I'll be your father" (W 356).

The arrogant and self-destructive Atkinson father figures, whose blood runs in the narrator's veins, contrast both with Tom's father, the phlegmatic and uneducated Henry, and with "potato-head" Dick: "sometimes I watched him at a distance, this strange man who was also my father. ...there arose between Dad and Dick ... a kind of special bond" (W 282). Tom's rebellion against paternal authority is not confrontational but it entails the bitterness of the displaced orphan who envies his

brother and seeks to hurt and defy: “urged by both natural inclination and his father’s attentions, Dick grew up to be a true descendant of his dogged, water-taming, land-preserving Crick ancestors” (W 282). The irony of Dick, the last thoroughbred Atkinson, opting to emulate the Cricks, while the last Crick seeks to follow the creed of the Atkinsons, demonstrates the complexity of the struggle in which Swiftian sons engage.

In Tom’s brother, the “potato-head,” Richard Atkinson and Dick Crick coexist. He is dutiful towards both of his fathers: he lives his short life like a Crick and dies like an Atkinson, consuming, like Ernest, the beer his father has made and accepting his true identity. Until 1943 Dick seems unaffected by reality and unaware of the Here and Now: the loss of his mother in 1937; the revelations about his origins the dying Helen provides; the initial exploration of the chest bequeathed by his father and his first taste of 1911 Coronation Ale; none of these experiences disrupts his existence in Natural History. Until Mary initiates the sexual games that constitute Dick’s “sentimental education” (W 248), Dick appears atavistically drawn to nature and to machines, not to people. “Lu-love” for Mary transforms him from “a numbskull with the dull, vacant stare of a fish” (W 242) into “a lost little boy” (W 257) who begins to ask questions: “Wh-where do ba-babies come from?” (W 256)

Acquiring the curiosity that enables an understanding of time (so he can meet Mary every Wednesday and Saturday evening), Dick enters the flow of history and engages in eventually self-destructive behaviour. Love is the “Wonderful Thing” that breeds curiosity and weds Dick to the world; but curiosity results in death. Reenacting the biblical Fall, Dick is an innocent Adam beguiled by Eve’s sexuality into seeking knowledge and losing paradise. Contrary to Tom’s interpretation of Dick’s suicide as the result of guilt and confusion, Dick, like his father, Ernest, kills himself over the loss of Mary and the child he could not have. Embracing Ernest’s faith in the importance of paternity as well as Henry’s creed of compassion, Dick seeks love and a child, proving his allegiance to both of his fathers. While his father, Ernest, identifies him with the Messiah, and his brother, Tom, transforms his suicide into baptismal resurrection, Dick unites Old-Testament and New-Testament myths and becomes both Adam and Christ, scapegoat and sacrificial lamb, redeeming curiosity and love through his suffering.

Unlike Dick, Tom will take a lifetime to appreciate his father’s wisdom and embrace Crickian values like a dutiful son. As a child and an adolescent Tom learns

storytelling, love and vigilance from Henry. In 1946 in Germany as a soldier Tom has “a vision of the world in ruins” (W 240) but reacts to the rubble of war as an Atkinson would, seeking to rebuild the world and “fathom the secrets of history” (W 119). Tom’s idealism and belief in the need to preserve civilisation, an “artifice—so easily knocked down—but precious” (W 240), reveals that his romantic faith in the myth of progress is not destroyed by his personal tragedy in 1943 or the large-scale trauma of World War II. His ingrained need to “make things not seem meaningless” (W 241) leads him back to Mary and the study of history. “Explaining, evading the facts, making up meanings, taking a larger view, putting things into perspective, dodging the here and now, education, history, fairy-tales:” in Crick’s battle with the sins of the past various escape routes have been tried to “eliminate fear” (W 241). Preoccupied with ancestral sins, Tom Crick opts for the finality of Artificial History and avoids retrieving his own past. He never enquires into Mary’s three-and-a-half years of voluntary seclusion before their marriage and he spends thirty-seven years evading their common history. Haunted by the events that led to his wife’s barrenness, Tom nostalgically retreats to the prelapsarian innocence of their afternoon meetings at the windmill, when “there were steam-trains and fairy-tales” (W 295).

Crick’s fatalistic view of the past is presented in the long chapter “About the Rise of the Atkinsons,” a mock documentation of the decline-and-fall of the Atkinson empire, a “hubristic tale of public success haunted by the spectre of private failure” (Brewer 50). In this chapter, which foreshadows the fall of the last Atkinson descendant, the narrator discusses the “theory of hubris:” a “doctrine” which ensures that there can be “no great achievement without accompanying loss” (W 72). The ancient Greek notion of hubris relates to all mythological heroes, casting the narrator, who lacks a hero’s qualities, as a guilt-pursued Oedipus, struggling to come to terms with an *hamartia*. Tom admits that his “study of history... is the very counter-action of making it” (W 194), that he “escapes to his story-books” (W 207). Although his epistemologically trained mind keeps asking “whywhywhy,” Tom has “reached the limits of his power to explain” (W 241). Without the “gift of amnesia” (that Prentis seems to have acquired), outside the “prison of idiocy,” and aware that to ignore the past is “folly” (W 108), Tom is trapped in “a fight against fear” (W 241). His ability to laugh at himself, even if his sense of humour is bitter, cynical, self-accusatory, demonstrates his capacity for endurance, if not forgiveness.

Tom Crick is aware of the ironies in his life. He prompts his “Children” to be heroic because he cannot be heroic himself. By his own admission, Crick is “no good at action” (W 291) yet he often casts himself in the role of romantic hero, identifying with Hereward or with the fictional characters in the novels he read in his adolescence. In his daily routine his books serve his escapism, his wife mothers him off to school every day (W 122), and his students provide him with an audience for his multiple definitions of history and infinite digressions into his own past and the marvels of fenland nature. Crick is daily surrounded by children at school, yet he cannot have any of his own, engaging in “symbolic fatherhood” with his adolescent pupils, particularly with Price (Knights 177). As an historian and an autobiographer Crick wants to find an explanation, but as a man haunted by the past he avoids investigation. The sole—living but heirless—descendant of the Cricks and the Atkinsons, he is aware that the families and the histories he has so eagerly researched will disappear along with him. As a historiographer he seeks to maintain objectivity in his narrative, but in his life, on Mary’s advice, he needs to “curb his paranoia” (W 124). His half-brother, Dick, was more of a son to Henry Crick than Tom could ever be. By turning Dick’s suicide into apotheosis, Crick strives to forgive himself for his lack of vigilance. The narrator’s ironically exposed shortcomings suggest that Crick has failed to engage in the dredging process and now suffers from the accumulation of guilt. Finally, Crick acknowledges that his life-long recourse to “self-escapology” (W 264), the term he uses for voluntary amnesia, has produced the crisis in his life; having lost everything, he learns the value of curiosity, he accepts the need for vigilance and he embraces the obligation to reclaim the past.

Female Silence

In Waterland’s male-dominated world, three female characters, Sarah Atkinson, Helen Atkinson-Crick, and Mary Crick, are prominent as archetypal feminine icons. Identified through their roles as daughters, wives and mothers, their silent presence and their absence alike verify their feminine appeal and affect the male characters. Related to each other through blood or marriage, these three women inhabit different worlds, represent different generations, even occupy different parts of the novel: the Victorian Sarah, long-living and prescient, becomes the Atkinson nemesis; Sarah’s great-great-granddaughter, the well-loved Helen, a beguiling beauty and loyal daughter, is a healer; and Helen’s daughter-in-law, convent-girl Mary of the “inevitable name” (W 46), a much-desired femme fatale, proves

destructive for the microcosm of the Cricks like the World War during which she comes of age.

Adored and hallowed, martyred and traumatised, the women of Waterland remain mysterious and enigmatic. Does Sarah Atkinson, like Prentis senior in Shuttlecock, withdraw into aphasia to escape the demands of the world or is she the prototype of the battered wife? Is Helen Atkinson a willing participant in her father's schemes because "she loved her father" and "she didn't want to hurt him" (W 228)? Or is she the desperate prisoner of an abusing madman? Does Mary Crick seek to punish herself or the men in her life by her decision to abort, like Anna Beech in Out of This World, who seeks self-castigation for being unfaithful? Victims and victimisers of the men they love, Sarah, Helen and Mary are worshipped in life and sanctified in death. Since they are deprived of voice, however, their differentiating characteristics are eliminated; these three women merge into one, an archetypal woman, a being "equipped with a miniature model of reality" (W 42). In Waterland female sexuality becomes an "alternative to history writing or story telling" (van Alphen 208). Women are defined as an "empty but fillable vessel," in which "much can be made to happen, and to issue in consequence. ... Dramas can be brewed, things can be hatched out of nothing" (W 42). Defined by their ability to procreate, women are seen as possessing a faculty that allows them to make something out of nothing; hence they do not need, as men do, to engage in Empire-building and history-making: their realm is that of fairy-tale and myth.

Sarah Atkinson's story combines elements from tragedy, morality tale and parable. Until she is thirty-seven years old, her life follows the stereotypical pattern of a young girl in the early nineteenth century who fulfils the socially prescribed roles of daughter first and then wife. She begins to transcend these limitations and gradually acquires the legendary qualities of a saint and a demon after her ageing husband, in a violent burst of jealous frenzy, strikes her, causing a state of near-aphasia, which lasts half a century, is interrupted occasionally by cries of "Fire!" and "Burning!" (W 84), and constitutes martyrdom. Although conscious, Sarah withdraws into herself and becomes the living portrait of the community's enigmatic sage, always visible at a high window, seemingly guarding the town. Her wronged sweetness preoccupies her sons, who exhibit the "classic symptoms of the Mother Fixation, not to say the Oedipal Syndrome" (W 88): they see Sarah as their preternatural "protectress" (W 84), their "Guardian Angel" (W 85), and a "Holy Mother" (W 94).

Sarah's innocence and tranquility, interrupted by the Joan-of-Arc visions of destruction prophesying the fall of the Atkinsons, allow the narrator to transform her into a seer and the hand of justice: first she is a "wronged Martyr" (W 83), then she becomes "oracle" and "priestess" (W 84), and after her death she becomes a "ghost," haunting the family home and "imploing entrance" (W 102), in an ironic allusion to Wuthering Heights. The exaggerated accumulation of identities, which secures Sarah's iconic status, grows even greater from the moment she is finally released from the physical into the metaphysical. Not only the coincidence of her funeral with the destructive floods of 1874 but also the premature birth of her great-grandson Ernest Atkinson and the destruction of the dynasty are events attributed to her powers: "It's *her*. It's her work. She stirred up those floods in '74 ...then she got inside those bottles of beer, drove everyone crazy and got the brewery burnt down" (W 219). Having entered the realm of legend and the supernatural, Sarah's final metamorphosis consists of a return to nature: before her funeral she is witnessed by the banks of the Ouse where "she dived 'like a very mermaid' beneath the water never to surface again" (W 104), foreshadowing the other two watery resurrection parables in Waterland. Even the will-o'-the-wisp Henry Crick witnesses on the evening of Ernest's suicide "takes on the flickering shape of a woman" (W 232), representing another one of Sarah's manifestations as a natural element.

Born twenty years after her great-great-grandmother's demise, Helen Atkinson, the "last of the brewer's daughters," is explicitly connected in the narrative with Sarah, the "first brewer's daughter;" Helen is thought to be "in no danger of suffering the fate of that former beauty" by "being turned into a local deity" (W 215). Deified, nonetheless, by her father, her husband and her son, Helen is a symbol of Beauty, a personification of the "Platonic Idea of Ideas" (W 219) with the face of Helen of Troy. The "worshipper of Beauty" in this version of the fairy-tale is both father and Beast, loving parent and sexual predator (W 219). While Helen feels "like a distressed damsel in the forest" (W 228), her father clings to "some left-over fragment of paradise" (W 219): his incestuous love ironically transforms a violated Helen of Troy into a prelapsarian Eve. The nightmarish tale that imprisons Helen also provides her with the escape route; she turns history into her story: "You can't erase it. But make it into a story. ... What's real? All a story" (W 225). Finding a new lover to replace her father, she becomes the healer of a shell-shocked soldier: "Henry Crick, who is learning about love, learns, also, to tell those stories of old Flanders which he will tell again... by the lockside. He retrieves that old knack of his ancestors" (W 225). When the narrator, as a child, hears stories first from his mother and then from his father,

Tom cannot tell if Henry's "knack for telling stories" comes from his Crick genes or from Helen's therapeutic tutoring.

The narrator's last memories of his mother, who died when Tom was nine, relate to storytelling and love: nursing him to health, Helen narrates in "her inimitable fashion" stories to "soothe and console" her son (W 272). A few days later she dies with the story of her own life on her lips, foreshadowing the manner of her husband's demise ten years later. In 1922 Helen's departure from the paternal residence drives Ernest to suicide; in 1937 her loss causes her husband to despair and her son to begin a nostalgic search for replacement. The connection the orphaned narrator makes between his dead mother and his future wife is unequivocal: Tom seeks "in ways of which he was scarcely conscious and over which he had scarcely any control" to find in "new form" his "departed Mummy" (W 283). He finds her in the face of a farmer's daughter: like Helen, Mary is an orphan and the only child of a doting father who raises her to be a "princess" and a "little madonna" (W 46). Instructing both of Helen's sons in the ways of love, she also becomes pregnant out of wedlock and assumes the "air of a martyr" (W 57). In Waterland the women's sexual curiosity and power are closely linked not only to Eros but also to Thanatos: Mary's sexuality and the deaths of Freddie and Dick seem inexorably linked. Unlike Helen who has found the way to cure herself, Mary has no storytelling skills; she does not come to terms with the trauma of abortion and barrenness since she cannot engage in the talking cure. Although God speaks to her, Mary does not speak to her doctors: "she's still in the midst of events. . . . Which is why she can't cross into the safe, sane realm of hindsight and answer the questions of the white-coated doctors: 'Now tell us, Mrs Crick. You can tell us everything...'" (W 329).

The female parallel to Mary in the novel is not only Helen but also Sarah Atkinson, Tom's great-great-great-grandmother. Although Mary and Sarah are not contemporaries or blood relations, they share martyrdom and sanctification. First, both women are married to a doubting Thomas who feels responsible for his wife's trauma—caused, directly or indirectly, by his jealousy—and lives in subsequent guilt. Second, both characters bear similarities to the biblical Sarah: Sarah Atkinson is a model wife, like Sarah in the Old Testament, while Mary wants to be blessed like her. As the biblical Sarah bore Isaac at the age of ninety, fulfilling God's promise that she would be the Mother of all Nations, so Mary expects God to bless her with a child that will obliterate her guilt along with her barrenness. Finally, Mary and Sarah end their lives as mirror images of one another. Frozen before a window in an upper

room “in the paradoxical pose of one who keeps watch” (W 78), Sarah becomes a town legend and acquires saintly attributes; “always in the same corner” in front of the “tall ward window” at the mental hospital, Mary “stares vigilantly and knowingly, at those frail, playground children” (W 330), patients like her who have also retreated into a “second childhood” (W 328). Like Sarah, Mary is transformed by her loss into a sentinel of time.

In relation to procreation Helen and Mary both try to “control Fate” (Costa de Beauregard 63). Although Helen’s incestuous relationship with her father begins much earlier than her affair with Henry, since the hospital where she meets Henry is the result of a plan to “divert” Ernest’s “designs” for a “special kind of child” (W 227), Helen “really hoped” that she “first would get a child by Henry” (W 230). When her hope is denied, Helen must confront the ironic reality of her “special child” and live with the dilemma of whether to bequeath her father’s chest and his/story to her son. Like Helen, Mary is punished for seeking to control reproduction, not with a retarded child but with barrenness. The reasons for Mary’s decision to have an abortion remain obscure, suggesting intense guilt over Freddie’s death and desire for self-punishment, a “ritual of abasement and sacrifice” (Wilt 114). In chapter thirteen a reference to an agreement between Tom and the ten-week-pregnant Mary implies marriage, not abortion: “it was only a little problem, a not even visible problem, and when the time came, we’d sworn, we were going to go first to Mary’s father, then to mine...” (W 131). Rejecting the verdict of accidental death, Mary insists that Freddie’s drowning “wasn’t an accident,” so “everything’s changed” (W 131); without consulting with Tom, Mary alone takes the decision to sacrifice the child as a means of atonement and control over accidents: “And Mary says firmly: ‘I know what I’m going to do’” (W 133).

Mary’s protestations (“too big”) over Dick’s penis size suggest that she does not decide to have an abortion because she doubts her child’s paternity. Tom’s fear that Mary is also Dick’s lover springs from sibling rivalry, the envy Tom feels towards his older, better-endowed brother who inspires Mary with curiosity as well as pity: “that’s Mary’s story. Because how did I know, how could I be a hundred percent sure that when Mary said Dick’s was too big, it really was too big?” (W 262). Tom would prefer to think that the child was not his own and not experience the guilt of this loss. Swayed both by insecurity and by remorse, Tom oscillates between extremes in his view of his future wife: Mary Magdalene and the Virgin Mary. Although Ernest Atkinson identifies his daughter with the virgin who will bear the Saviour of the

World, it is Mary, the daughter-in-law Helen never met, who expects to bear the child that will absolve the world of guilt. When Mary agrees to reconnect with Tom in 1947, she makes him aware of the defining factor in their future: "You know, don't you, that short of a miracle we can't have a child?" (W 122) Mary seems to have waited all her life for a miracle to occur, for the coming of a child, which would signify divine forgiveness and constitute a replacement not only of the aborted foetus but also of Dick. Waiting in vain for over three decades, Mary enters a "troubled menopause" at the age of fifty-two (W 124) and experiences a renewed desire to believe in divine intervention. When she is forced to give up 'her' child for a second time, she retreats from reality unable to withstand the loss and the accompanying sense of renewed guilt. Having lost life and withdrawn into silence like Sarah Atkinson, Mary assumes a vigilant pose when there is nothing left to rescue except the past.

The Paradox of Historia

In Waterland the protagonist's beliefs about knowledge and ignorance, history and storytelling, guilt and the (im)possibility of absolution provide the key to the novel's phlegmatic world. The dictionary definition of Historia, which constitutes the first of the novel's two epigraphs, allows the paradoxical coexistence of contradictory components within the term by using the ancient origins of the word that merge historiography, narrative and inquiry. Tom Crick illustrates this amalgam of meanings by combining a variety of approaches and producing his/story. National and international events, like World War II, are shown to have a regional effect on the Fens and a private effect on the characters of the novel: "in the summer of 1943 ...into Farmer Metcalf's farm... fluttered coveys of Land Girls" who "would often wave to us local kids" (W 45). The impact of the global on the personal is emphasised by making the historiographer visible and insisting on mentioning the research process that has yielded the account: "a day's delving into local archives" (W 10); or, "it's Mary's story, pieced together and construed by me" (W 248); or, "this is no supposition. Not wild invention. I have my grandfather's own authority: a journal" (W 219); or, "rumour is but rumour. But several rumours, of similar vein, from different sources, cannot be ignored" (W 102). The integrity of the recorder and of his resources is insisted upon, whichever type of Historia is practised. Crick also delves into the epistemology of historiography: his record of the past oscillates between fact and possibility, has-been and would-have-been, actions and regrets. Having reached "the limits of his power to explain" (W 108), Crick intends to suggest a view of history which incorporates contradictions and documents not only events

but also the feelings caused when “life has stopped” but people “must go on living” (W 228).

The majority of critical essays on Waterland, applying post-structuralist or deconstructive methodology, view the novel’s theory of history as a New Historicist manifesto; various other readings of the novel have been feminist (Wilt), Marxist (Schad), post-colonial (Cooper), psychoanalytic (Bényei), ecological (McKinney). Ernst van Alphen argues that Swift’s novel moves beyond the “epistemological problematics” (204) on the nature of History presented by Linda Hutcheon in The Politics of Postmodernism, to “performative forces” in history writing and the telling of stories (206). As a historiographer and a dedicated teacher, Tom Crick is concerned both with his personal loss of faith in the existence of Grand Narratives and with his students’ apocalyptic fears of the end of the world that render classroom activities futile. At a personal and professional crossroads, Crick must inspire himself and his students with meaning, thus he embarks upon these unorthodox lectures, the “lessons” which extend throughout the novel (see Appendix III) and constitute a discussion of the potential for meaningful historical discourse. Tom Crick’s double identity as protagonist and historiographer enhances the novel’s ambiguity and mirrors the duality of the past: events lived once and endlessly recalled. As a narrator, Crick has the intellectual potential to be a writer’s mouthpiece: he is educated, intelligent, and eager to investigate. John Brewer and Stella Tillyard assert that it is “all too easy to assume that the views of the narrator are those of the author” (49). In a 1986 interview with Patrick McGrath, Swift insists, “it is Tom Crick who holds these views, and he says contradictory things ...he is in a state of crisis and his once-cherished and fairly coherent views of history are being challenged” (45).

History in Waterland is paradoxical, or, in Gasiorek’s term, “ambivalent” (156): a composite of opposites, a “reality-obscuring drama” (W 40) that is “stranger than fiction” (W 6). History is multi-dimensional and all encompassing: myth, fairy-tale, speculation, fabrication, superstition are as much a part of history as official record; history is fear-inducing but also fear-quelling, the “filler of vacuums” (W 62). History is “the attempt to give an account, with incomplete knowledge, of actions themselves undertaken with incomplete knowledge” (W 108). The emphasis on “incomplete knowledge” suggests that the one consistent element in history’s vicious cycle is unpredictability and the inability to take correct decisions. Crick wants to believe in coincidence: if accidents can explain his miserable present as the

inescapable culmination of centuries of Crick and Atkinson activity, his guilt can be absolved. The narrator continuously links events and people across centuries and emphasises the circularity of history in an effort to prove the inevitability of his actions.

In contrast to the progress-motivated view of human evolution, which is a human construct Crick terms "Artificial History," Crick proposes "Natural History" as an alternative which adopts nature's restorative cycles: history as a spiral rather than a straight line, requiring watchfulness and constant investigation of signs. This vigilance allows the avoidance of "human siltation" (W 10): the deadening of curiosity, the inability to confess, and the absence of compassion and love. The need to combine storytelling with love and vigilance emerges as a theme, explaining the urgency of Crick's message and suggesting the basis for his endurance. In "Parenthesis," the half chapter from The History of the World in 10½ Chapters (1989), Julian Barnes makes a similar connection between history and the human heart, implying the necessity of love as the only antidote to time and nothingness: "when love fails, we should blame the history of the world. If only it had left us alone, we could have been happy, we could have gone on being happy" (246). In Waterland the characters become prisoners of time and history when they abandon Natural History, rituals and activities dictated by nature and instinct (such as farming, fishing, and procreation), and, by the taking of life (murder or abortion), enter Artificial History, the construct synonymous with the disruption of life. Described as "a natural" (W 357), Dick, the character most identified with Natural History, makes such a transition into time, only to return to nature through death. Tom's process is the reverse: he embraces nature when he accepts his identity as a Crick and dismisses the progress-driven finality of Artificial History. This transition occurs through the ritual of storytelling, the recursive narrative reclamation of the past that allows the paradoxical coexistence of the individual in time and in nature. Practising storytelling, an archetypal form of inquiry and vigilance, guards people against succumbing to fatalism and "siltation."

In Waterland Crick's theories as well as his narration serve his "overwhelming need to explain his domestic catastrophe" (Brewer 49). Chapters that seem at first to be digressive, like the ones about the East wind or phlegm, constitute complex metaphors, contributing to the definition of history. The novel's most memorable digression, "About the Eel," a chapter A. S. Byatt characterises as the "most imaginative" and the "most surprising" in the novel (On Histories 70), illustrates

Crick's theory of the cyclical movement of history by using a river organism endemic to the Fens and endowed with remarkable genetic memory. The search for the origins of the eel represents the human instinct for inquiry, a Sargasso Sea towards which we are atavistically drawn, illustrating the human need to satisfy curiosity and to pursue enigmas in the hope of finding an answer to every puzzle. Tom Crick's inescapable "why?" and the need for absolution are essential characteristics that the narrator repeatedly associates with history. He defines man as the "animal which demands an explanation" (W 106) and he advises his students not to give up the search for answers because "curiosity weds us to the world" (W 206). The novel is the testimony of a man who endures in the company of ghosts and builds a paradoxical theory of history to allow himself to withstand the burden of guilt.

In his youth, still an amateur historiographer, Tom escapes to books and to the investigation of history (personal, regional, national and international) in search of the explanation that would allow him to compose the Grand Narrative. Growing disillusioned, Crick realises that History is the record not of progress but of revolution, a constant return resulting from the Nostalgia for a version of the past that never existed: "How we yearn to return to that time before history claimed us, before things went wrong" (W 136). Crick then views reality as emptiness and nothingness and explains activity as a self-destructive leisure activity: "History, the fabrication, the diversion, the reality-obscuring drama" (W 40). Having covered both extremes, the romantic view of history as well as the nihilistic one, Tom settles for a paradoxical combination: Natural History, cyclical, self-renewing and soothing; and Artificial History, constructed, defined by zeniths and nadirs, and hubristic. Through vigilance and storytelling, revolution and evolution merge into his/story, Crick's "humble model" for the "hard" and "inglorious" but "valuable" reclamation of the self from the past (W 336).

In Waterland the patterns of history are constantly projected on successive generations: in 1922 Henry Crick is nursed back to health by a brunette nurse, Helen Atkinson, and eased to death by another brunette nurse, his daughter-in-law, Mary, in 1947. Dick's final dive is foreshadowed by the legend of Sarah Atkinson's watery resurrection as well as the "red spittle" of the foetus "borne downstream" (W 317). The tale of Beauty and the Beast is invoked twice: first, to describe the incestuous relationship between Helen and her father, and then in relation to Mary Metcalf's relationship to Dick. The latter throws a beer bottle in the river shortly after his mother's death in 1937 and again after his last meeting with Freddie in 1943.

The creator of this beer, Ernest Atkinson, drinks many bottles of the 1911 Coronation Ale before committing suicide and so does his son, Dick, before his final dive. Dick's father is prematurely born during the floods of 1874, suggesting that Dick's affinity with water is genetic and foreshadowing his symbolic metamorphosis. The events of the summer of 1940 described in the chapter "Child's Play" (Freddie's intoxication and near drowning, Dick rescuing Freddie) provide an alternative explanation to the mystery of Freddie's death. The bruises on Freddie's temple are two; the brewery fire and Freddie's death are both declared to be accidents; Henry Crick sees a will-o'-the-wisp twice. If history's course is circular it is inevitable that Mary will seek a God-sent infant and Tom find a surrogate son in one of his students: Price is the adolescent Tom once was and the son Tom never had. When Stan Booth exclaims at the end of the novel, "Someone best explain" (W 358), the reader begins to navigate the novel's rivers in backward motion.

Waterland is not only an investigation of the nature of history but also a record of human suffering. Crick's belief that history is cyclical as well as inclusive of natural and supernatural elements exemplifies his need to come to terms with his guilt. The narrator's crisis returns him to the questions that have been ignored for too long. Soothing theories do not eliminate Crick's fear or guilt: as Tom struggles to provide as well as to evade explanation, "contradictory motivations drive the narrative" (Irish 919). Like the New Historicists, Crick appears aware of the limits of knowledge, the subjectivity of narrative and the difficulty of reconstructing the past—one's own or the historical past. Instead of one story his narration provides alternative versions of events and multiple answers. In discussing Crick's theory of the circularity of history, Alison Lee recognises that "the narrator's choice of language and form is responsible for the circularity in a way that the events themselves could not be" (42). Absolution is facilitated by a theory of history that turns Tom into a victim of forces beyond his control. Crick offers a paradoxical definition of history, reminiscent of contemporary debates on the subjectivity of historiography but also revelatory of Tom's psychology. Diagnosing the narrator's ailment and recognising the contradictions in the definition of history, the reader maps Crick's painful process from trauma to endurance through therapeutic storytelling and vigilance: "though it gets more difficult the more you ask it, though it gets more inexplicable, more painful, and the answer never seems to come any nearer, don't try to escape this question Why" (W 130). However significant Crick's insights into the subjectivity of historical interpretation may be, they constitute the escape tactics of a tormented mind, not a scientifically argued theory of history. By removing Crick's paradoxical

definition of Historia from its dramatic context, critics who insist upon the narrator's identity as a postmodernist historian transform a guilt-ridden, paralysed Everyman into a fictional Hayden White.

A Fairytale Place

Waterland begins (and ends) with a childhood memory: readers are transferred to a "fairy-tale place" where anything is possible, where the stars, originally "silver dust of God's blessing" (W 1), hang suspended until people become less "wicked" (W 2). Preparing the ground for revelations, the narrative begins with a request for absolution to be granted to every sinner: "whatever you learn about people, however bad they turn out, each one of them has a heart" (W 1). This emotional request and the fairy-tale setting invite readers to suspend disbelief and accept Crick's revelations. In the Fenland landscape of nothingness that Crick carries inside him, the past is constantly reenacted in memory. In his effort to secure the floodgates of guilt, Tom seeks refuge in the cliché of history repeating itself. This is a reversal of the well-known Heraclitean doctrine of universal flux: an aphorism Crick uses to warn readers that no one can avoid drowning in the rivers of the past. The marsh country of Tom's guilty conscience equalises the events of his adolescence with the present, like water returning to cover the land. In the fenland of memory all the rivers are the Acheron and there are no Elysian fields.

The rivers in Waterland are part of the symbolic setting that juxtaposes liquid with solid. In the chapter "About the Ouse" Tom Crick provides both geographic and historical information about the river that takes the eel—and by the end of the novel Dick as well—to the ocean, even as far away as the Sargasso Sea. In a manner typical of Crick's narrative structure the chapter ends with an emphasis on the circularity that characterises natural phenomena: "while the Ouse flows to the sea, it flows, in reality, like all rivers, only back to itself, to its own source" (W 146). By drawing attention to liquid transformations (the river water runs to the sea, the sun turns it into cloud, the rain takes it back to the river), Crick emphasises a paradox in nature: "that impression that a river moves only one way is an illusion" (W 146). The river Ouse first becomes a synecdoche of all rivers, then a metaphor for memory and the past: "it is also an illusion that what you throw into a river will be carried away, swallowed for ever, and never return" (W 146). Crick knows that guilt is inescapable, because the past "will return" (W 146). The narrator concludes that the remark by "Heraclitus of Ephesus that we cannot step twice into the same river is not to be trusted. Because we are always stepping into the same river" (W 146).

The sudden force of emotion that Crick's disagreement with Heraclitus carries is striking. The ancient philosopher cannot be "trusted" any more: the promised universal flux does not exist; life is a messy recycling.

The arrested flow of Crick's guilty conscience resists Heraclitean aphorisms. However, this philosopher's belief in *harmonia*, a balance achieved through a reconciliation of opposites, and *logos*, the ability of reason to assist in the creation of a pattern of unity-in-opposites through an understanding of the lack of absolutes, constitute basic tenets that Crick must accept. Unlike Dick, Tom Crick is not a "fish of a man" (W 357): Tom cannot achieve harmony until his actions in the past have been confessed and forgiven. Locked in the endlessly reenacted, terror-inducing moments of the Here-and-Now—the body of Freddie in the river, the "red spittle" of a foetus in the river (W 317), Dick's perfectly executed dive into the Ouse—Crick suffers from his rejection of Heraclitean doctrine. Through the metaphor of the constant battle for land reclamation, Waterland proposes a method of coming to terms with guilt that Crick must adopt if he is to endure.

True to its land-and-water setting, the novel juxtaposes opposites to be reconciled into paradoxical coexistence. First water, then, through human interference, waterland, the archetypal landscape of the Fens is inhabited by Crick's ancestors, who evolved from "water people" (W 10)—who sabotaged the draining work of Dutch engineer Cornelius Vermuyden—into "amphibians" (W 13). The narrator describes his ancestors as phlegmatic and "humble servants" who lack vision until he realises that, in tune with nature and true to their "swampy origins" (W 17), they serve the rivers, not the Atkinsons and the myth of progress. As lock-keepers (Henry Crick) and workers of dredgers (Dick Crick) whose uncanny affinity with the liquid element in their bodies allows their symbolic resurrection and metamorphosis when the former drowns in phlegm and the latter in the Ouse, the Cricks are the triumphant survivors of Natural History and personify the title's oxymoron of a waterland. Their ability to exist in the nothingness of reality that the Fens represent derives from their storytelling knack, which fills the emptiness of the landscape and of their psyches. The Fens and their rivers, a setting that constitutes the novel's psychological and symbolic terrain, metamorphose into something "universal" and "dependable" (Smethurst 172), which can inspire, through paradoxical solidity-in-fluidity, fear as well as hope for the individual's place in time.

The Language of the Narrative

In Waterland complex structure and generic variations require that language and tone in the novel vary to suggest the different types of Historia. Some of the novel's chapters are delivered orally, while others exhibit the coherence of a written confession. As a narrator, Crick uses various modes of expression, ranging from the self-effacing, neutral tone of the recorder in his exposition of the saga of the Atkinsons, to the sensational, melodramatic voice of the victimised teacher lecturing for the last time, to the frightened manner of the innocent orphan. Unlike Prentis in Shuttlecock or Bill Unwin in Ever After, who reveal themselves as writers and provide details about the manner and style of their writing habits, Crick is a reticent narrator who does not discuss the creative process. Only from the content and the style of the novel's chapters can the reader surmise that while some of Crick's lectures are spoken in class, other sections constitute interior monologues, and other parts emulate traditional historiographic accounts. These distinct variations allow the grouping of chapters into clusters and enable the parallel development of the different plot strands and types of Historia.

The Natural History chapters employ grandiose diction, elaborate syntax and a lyrical tone, transforming a discussion of geography into epic poetry and revealing Crick's unabashed admiration for nature. As the following sentence from the chapter "About the Eel" demonstrates, Crick's sonorous vocabulary and cyclical sentence structure allow a mythical dimension to emerge from biology and secure the eel's symbolic status:

For whether or not the silver-coated *Anguilla anguilla* ever reaches the Sargasso, whether it performs its nuptial rites there or before, none the less it is true that, just as the young eel is driven not only by marine currents but by an instinctual mechanism more mysterious, more impenetrable perhaps than the composition of the atom, to make for some particular watery dwelling thousands of miles from its place of birth, so the adult eel, moved by a force which outweighs vast distances and the crushing pressure of the ocean, is compelled to take again to the sea and, before it dies and leaves the world to its spawn, to return whence it came. (W 204)

Like Crick's lectures on Natural History, the straightforward history "lessons" he delivers to his A-level class are characterised by paradoxical definitions concerning time, life, and Historia. The style of these "lessons" is less elaborate, full of the shorter sentences and repetition typical of speech, while the tone becomes didactic. For instance, in the chapter "About the Question Why," Tom's need to communicate his theories to his "children" is expressed with the urgency and immediacy of parental advice:

And what does this question Why imply? It implies—as it surely implies when you throw it at me rebelliously in the midst of our history lessons—

dissatisfaction, disquiet, a sense that all is not well. 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. So that hard on the heels of the word Why comes the sly and wistful word If. (W 106)

Tom Crick constantly ponders the “useless ifs of history” (W 106) through interior monologues imbued with a mournful nostalgia for irretrievable innocence. In an aside to his wife, which begins the chapter “About the Change of Life,” Crick expresses his painful loss through poetic diction:

Mary . . . do you remember (can you still remember?) how once we lay in the shell of the old windmill by the Hockwell Lode and how the flat empty Fens all around us became, too, a miraculous land, became an expectant stage on which magical things could happen? Do you remember how we looked up at the sky, into blue emptiness, and how out of the sky . . . God looked down on us? . . . How no one else could see us in our windmill bower but He could; and we let Him? (W 116)

The bitterness deriving from a realisation of the futility of such reminiscences saturates the sections that focus on Crick’s story. When the topic is neither history nor nature but the protagonist’s past, Tom resorts to storytelling in sophisticated language and sorrowful tone, negating the potential for a happy ending:

Once upon a time there was a future history teacher and a future history teacher’s wife for whom things went wrong. . . . He made a living—a life’s work—out of the past, for which his justification was the children to whom he offered daily the lessons that the past affords. To them he presented the equivocal gift of history—burdensome yet instructive—to carry into their futures. And thus the history teacher . . . could always say (he acquires a penchant for paradox) that he looked back in order to look forward. (W 126)

The image of Tom Crick surveying the past while he is unwillingly propelled into the future is reminiscent of Walter Benjamin’s Angel of History and suggests, in language that combines the sincerity of autobiography and the neutral third-person of historiography, an insurmountable sense of personal failure.

Such bitter self-castigation is counterbalanced by resorting to other stories, which, introduced by the urgency of a recurring phrase (“let me tell you”), narrate the plights of his ancestors. Whether the narrator presents the agony of Thomas Atkinson, or the incestuous lust of Ernest Atkinson, or even the silent trauma of Henry Crick, Tom maintains an emotional distance from the characters in these stories by narrating them as fairytales:

Once upon a time there was a father who fell in love with his daughter. . . . And the father—who’d lost his wife many years before—and the daughter lived alone in a former lodge on the edge of the grounds of a hospital. Hemmed in by tall trees and standing all by itself, this lodge was like a house in a fairy-tale—a gingerbread house, a woodcutter’s cottage; but in fact the father had once been a rich and influential man . . . though . . . he’d fallen on bad times; and once he’d lived in the grand building which was now a hospital. Far away across the sea there had been a great war. . . . (W 226)

The lyricism that softens the brutality of incest and war, the simplicity of diction, and the cadence of sincerity inherent in the leitmotif of “let me tell you” (repeated eight times at the end of chapters to prepare “children” for more tales) guarantee the coexistence of inquiry, history and story within the definition of *Historia*.

Narrative Reliability

In *Waterland* fears, discrepancies and contradictions undermine the narrator’s reliability and reveal his fictionalising.¹ As Linda Hutcheon argues, novels like *Waterland* “begin by creating a world ... and then contesting it,” making the “readers question their own interpretations” (*Poetics* 180, emphasis in original text). This observation applies to *Shuttlecock* as much as to *Waterland*. Like Prentis, the unreliable narrator of another mystery story that proves not to be a mystery, Tom Crick manipulates his/story to suggest the relativity and subjectivity of knowledge. Prentis, however, ends his quest for answers by accepting ignorance and feigning contentment; Crick does not end the quest but confesses his trauma and seeks to reclaim the past. Tom Crick’s narrative contradictions are the consequence of his tormented conscience: his intention to arrive at an explanation is impeded by his emotional condition, which suggests honesty but produces confusion. Until the narrator engages in the therapeutic ritual of storytelling, Crick oscillates between despair and confusion: his overwhelming sense of guilt turns him into a “reluctant narrator” who is “simply unable to confront the facts or utter the words” (Higdon “Unconfessed” 188).

In *Waterland* Tom Crick reveals himself as an unreliable narrator who has finally embarked on a much-delayed confession in search of release and absolution from the sins of his past. An intense psychological crisis leads Crick to contradictions and paradoxes: his theorising is the product of a guilty conscience. Dean McWilliams recognises the psychological origins of the “inconsistencies” and the “incoherence” characteristic of this historiographer (72): Crick’s “escapist urge” is the effect of the narrator’s fears (71). Behind the façade of the learned historian hides a “tormented individual” unable to deal with past trauma and confront the facts (McWilliams 72). Centring the trauma of his past predominantly upon his brother’s suicide, Crick appears unaware of the contradictions and discrepancies in his narrative. Hutcheon,

¹ As the discussion of narrative unreliability in the chapter on *Shuttlecock* demonstrated, the wide range of signals which provide the basis for establishing a narrator’s fallibility include “textual inconsistencies, the verbal habits of the narrator, and discrepancies between the fictional world presented by a text and the reader’s world-knowledge and standards of normality” (Nünning 85).

who considers Crick an “overtly controlling narrator” (Poetics 117), explains the presence of contradictions in Crick’s “fictive history” as the effect of the “fictionalising process at work” (Politics 56). As an illustration she uses the example of the weather at Thomas Atkinson’s funeral: first Crick declares that “history does not record” (W 82) whether the day of Thomas’s funeral was a sunny one, but, later in the same chapter, he compares the rain that fell during Sarah’s funeral to the “unbefitting sunshine” (W 98) on Thomas’s day. Hutcheon concludes that such a discrepancy shows that Crick is aware of the “constructive process” characteristic of storytelling (Politics 56).

Crick’s fictionalising is one of the more obvious metafictional elements in Waterland. Hayden White, as Gerald Prince explains in “Revisiting Narrativity,” distinguishes between narrating, that is, “reporting a series of events in chronological order,” and “narrativising,” that is, “imposing ‘story form’ on events” (44). This distinction exposes the self-conscious nature of Crick’s narrative: the narrator constantly engages in imposing narrative patterns with the purpose of establishing order and promoting his interpretation. Crick puts forth one possible explanation only to have it followed by other equally plausible alternatives. When such fictionalising occurs, the narrator engages in the process Hutcheon terms “constructive” and White associates with “narrativising.” For instance, analysing the possible causes of Jack Parr’s alcoholism, Crick relates it to an accident that Parr almost caused: “so terrible was the thought of what might have happened ... that Freddie Parr’s father took to earnest drinking” (W 113). The next paragraph, however, subverts the previous explanation: “but this whole story is possibly only the justificatory fabrication of Jack Parr’s drink-sodden fancy” (W 113). Crick then proceeds to suggest other explanations for Parr’s drinking, such as the “awesome fixity of his duties” or the landscape-induced melancholy of “featureless river-banks” (W 114). In Waterland fictionalising and narrativising differ from discrepancies: errors that Crick does not commit consciously are signs of the narrator’s emotional state, affecting the validity of the historiographer.

Alison Lee interprets narrative discrepancies, which she terms “mistakes,” in a manner similar to Hutcheon’s: as a means of emphasising the subjectivity of memory. As evidence Lee provides not only the aforementioned example of the weather but also another “mistake” concerning Helen’s death. According to Lee, both mistakes show the dangers inherent in the “process of re-creating the past” (44). When the adolescent Crick sees Freddie’s body fished out of the river, the

narrator comments on the novelty of his experience: "For I had seen Mother dying but not dead" (W 30). Nevertheless, in chapter thirty-eight Crick clarifies that both Dick and he were taken, after Helen's death, to "take our last look at Mother" (W 284). Is this a "mistake"? Or a significant memory lapse linked to the painful loss of his mother, identical to Prentis's avoidance of the same topic? Crick forgets having taken that "last look," suggesting that the narrator is capable of suppressing painful remembrances in a manner that is not self-conscious. Lee's conclusion that "narrating makes things real" (45, emphasis in original text) exposes the subjectivity of the narrative and confirms the narrator's unreliability.

At stressful moments the narrator loses control over his own identity: this loss manifests itself through Crick's tendency to place "himself at a distance to become an anonymous 'he'" (Bernard "Dismembering" 124). The use of multiple perspectives, an almost schizophrenic juxtaposition of voices and identities belonging to the protagonist, occurs throughout the narrative at crucial moments of tension, as demonstrated by the following example of a single, fragmented sentence which summarises the Cricks' predicament:

And so it was not until a certain event occurred, an event more bizarre still than your history teacher's new classroom style, an event involving his wife, Mrs Crick, and—given the inescapable irony of the husband's profession—made much of, as you know, by the local press, that my departure became, at last, an absolute necessity. (W 6, my emphases)

Shifting the focus of the first-person narrative away from "I" and incorporating distancing tricks that allow him to refer to himself in the second person as "your history teacher" as well as the third person as "the husband" and "he," Crick pretends to be outside his own story. Crick, the narrator, becomes Crick, the author of his own life, in an effort to regain some control, create ironic distance, but also fictionalise. Such narrative shifts occur frequently throughout the novel at times of crisis. For instance, the chapter "Unknown Country" presents Crick's discovery that his wife has stolen an unattended baby from the supermarket and brought it home as a "Gift from God." The account begins in the first person ("I turn the key... I hear"), but the discovery of Mary in a Madonna-and-Child pose leads Tom to address himself in the second person: "tread carefully, history teacher ... that's your wife over there." The calm authorial voice gives the agitated character advice in vain; Tom is obviously too shocked by his discovery to approach his wife carefully. The distancing is completed with the transition to the third person, which documents the violent struggle to remove the infant from Mary's arms: "he steps forward.... The husband's hands.... He holds the baby" (W 265-267). This other self, this "he" who does not "tread carefully," shatters his wife's illusion of a God-sent child as well as

his dog's jaw. Crick oscillates between the desire to reclaim the past and the "deep longing to absent himself" from history (Bényei 110).

Sometimes Crick talks to himself ("Stop this waffle. Price doesn't want a lecture—and he can see through your smoke-screen" W 139) but more frequently he talks to his "children" (from chapter two until chapter forty-nine). Addressed as "children" throughout Tom Crick's "metafictional quest to understand the 'history' of himself" (McKinney 822), the narratees can be divided into two distinct groups of listeners, one which is actual and exists within the novel and the other a metaphoric reference to the implied reader. The former group is made up of Crick's A-level students ("children—they are going to separate you and me" W 7) as well as all the adolescents Tom has taught in his long career ("after thirty-two years I have rolled you all into one" W 7). The latter is an "imaginary audience" (Wood 48), assumed by Tom to be as guilt-ridden and lost in the labyrinthine corridors of conscience as he is. In Crick's view, we are all "children" who shy away from the stories of our past in fear. With few exceptions, both groups are addressed simultaneously, although each group's understanding of Crick's words and expression differs. When, for instance, the narrator advises "children" to be "curious," he explains that "nothing is more repressive than the repression of curiosity" since it is the latter that "weds us to the world" (W 206). This didactic prompting is not meant only for a naturally curious adolescent audience but addresses those who, like him, have come to regard the search for answers as dangerous. When the narrator uses the plural "we" and embraces our universal brotherhood of woe, Tom redefines himself and the reader as "children" who suffer the repercussions of unattended curiosity and have neglected to reclaim the past.

Tom Crick recognises the need to entertain his students as well as to impart knowledge. Throughout the narrative he offers not only the dramatic but also the melodramatic, the incongruous along with the commonplace. The juxtaposition of the sublime and the ridiculous is another integral part of Crick's linguistic and temperamental idiosyncrasies related to reliability. In Waterland the narrator's voice oscillates between Thomas Crick, Head of History, and his alter ego, the unhinged "old Cricky." Tom's birthplace, the Fens, is not only a "fairy-tale land" (W 3) but also the "sink of England" (W 17). The Cricks are "plumbers of the land" (W 13) who reveal themselves to be "suckers for stories" (W 17). His brother, Dick, is a "potato-head" and a "freak," a "numbskull" (W 242), a "mute brute" (W 248), a "sieve-brain" (W 324). Crick's classroom theatrics are not only the testimony of a haunted man

but also “circus-acts” with the white-faced Price in the role of classroom clown (W 22). The headmaster, Lewis, is known as old “Lulu” (W 7). As for himself, Old Cricky, who is an “old foggy” (W 235) and a “bit of a sad case” (W 239), he has “gone bananas” (W 6), “flipped” (W 6), and “gone off his rocker” (W 21).

Apart from providing ironic distance and illustrating the bleak reality of his life, Tom’s “delightfully subversive humour” (Irish 931) allows the narrator as well as the reader to view Tom Crick not only as the tragic victim of Fate but also as a cowardly escapee. When the narrator cannot transform his story into fairytale he opts for farce, exposing the absurdity of even the most painful human experience. Tom’s discovery of an abducted infant in Mary’s arms and the ensuing tug-of-war amidst the yapping retriever and the broken knick-knacks is not only heartrending family drama but also slapstick comedy. Although Crick’s humour is grim and does not encourage laughter, the comic elements allow the audience to remain positively disposed towards an unreliable narrator. This alternative version, Waterland-as-comedy, allows the reader to distinguish the paradoxes intrinsic to history from the contradictions representative of unreliability, realising that Tom is both Crick and Cricky, Sophoclean hero and Aristophanic beggar.

The Sense of an Ending

In Waterland the intricacies of the plot become more elaborate due to Swift’s experimentation with a cyclical structure and non-linear chronology, arranging the anachronic presentation of the devastating events in the recent as well as in the distant past in fifty-two fragmentary chapters of varying lengths. The protagonist experiences a crisis of memory, not action, as the events of 1943 have already occurred when the narrative begins. Tom Crick hopes to appease the “wretched siren” of conscience that demands an explanation (W 108), although he remains aware of the “deceptive ambiguity of all record” (Bradbury Novel 432). Imitating the backward movement of memory as well as the forward movement of time, Crick structures the narrative in a manner that illustrates his theory of history. A circular narrative constitutes a “strategy of temporal distortion” (McWilliams 75), indulging Tom’s escapist urges and delaying exposition while stressing arbitrary connections, which release the narrator from moral responsibility and emphasise accidents. This strategy allows Crick to postpone narrating the earlier events of his life—Mary’s abortion and Dick’s suicide in 1943—until the final chapters, while incidents that occur in 1980—Mary’s child abduction and his forced retirement—are narrated earlier than the events of 1943, creating the impression that time moves backwards.

At the age of fifty-three the narrator surveys the panorama of his past and that of his ancestors, and presents not only the waterland of his youth but also the waste land of memory. A narrator who routinely suggests a "seeming connection" which is "no connection at all" (Sandbach-Dahlström 170), Crick sees history as moving forwards as well as backwards and models his/story in similar manner. For instance, the catastrophic events that take place during the summer of 1943 are narrated against the backdrop of World War II, which proceeds unrelated to the lives of the adolescent Tom and Mary. The narrative intertwines personal and international histories in a manner which creates an absurd, fatalistic connection: Mary's abortion, Freddie's drowning, Dick's suicide are transformed into incidents influenced by the greater evil at work in the world. The structure of Waterland illustrates Crick's intense remorse: the narration of his teenage troubles is constantly interrupted not only by a parallel narrative of events occurring in the recent past, but also by digressions, which seem to test the reader's skill at discovering the implied connections between the discussion of the eel's reproductive organs and Mary's psychosis.

Like all of Swift's novels, including the ones which, in the manner of Shuttlecock or Last Orders, end the action in the narrative present, Waterland suspends closure by ending the narrative with Dick's suicide, which occurred in the summer of 1943. As David Leon Higdon observes in his 1991 essay "Double Closures in Postmodern British Fiction," the novel appears to have two endings. In fact, Waterland has four points of closure: two endings relate to the past and coincide with the deaths of the narrator's father (chapter fifty) and brother (chapter fifty-two); the other two closing moments are in the fictional present and relate to death metaphorically as the narrator takes leave of his wife (chapter forty-seven) and is forced to abandon his teaching post (chapters forty-eight and forty-nine). The titles of three of these chapters ("The Whole Story," "Goodnight," "And Adieu") clearly specify their function as closing points, while the other two chapters ("About Empire-building" and "About the *Rosa II*") bear titles that ironically deny closure by their neutrality. While the chapters that relate to the present (forty-seven, forty-eight and forty-nine) are positioned in a chronologically forward manner (first Mary is placed under psychiatric observation and then Crick takes leave of his students), the narration of the two deaths is anachronic since Henry's demise in 1947 (chapter fifty) is followed by Dick's suicide in 1943 (chapter fifty-two).

In the fictional present, when Crick takes leave of his wife and his students, he appears to retire not only professionally but also psychologically, retreating into memory and reliving the past through narrative: “to comfort himself he tells himself stories. He repeats the stories he’s told his class” (W 331). Taking lonely walks in Greenwich Park and completing his soon-to-end teaching career, Tom struggles to endure his new separation from Mary, which, though thirty-seven years apart from the first one, bears remarkable affinities to her initial withdrawal into herself after the loss of their child in 1943. Drawing together the three characters who constitute the novel’s emotional centre, the end of chapter forty-seven is so resonant that it is tempting to wonder whether in an earlier version of Waterland these sentences comprised the novel’s final words:

We all wander from the real world, we all come to our asylums.
The March wind tears holes in racing cloud-sails. Blue sky blooms over
longitude 0°.
Mary. Lu-love. Lu-love. (W 331)

The melancholy and desperation of an insubstantial existence away from the “real world” is juxtaposed to memories as the sky and the wind, natural elements long identified with Mary and Helen respectively, remind Tom of his fenland abode and his brother, who had been born in March and “lu-loved” the same women as he did. Much too desolate as an ending, the silent invocation of the dead (Helen and Dick) and the dead-in-life (Mary) at the end of chapter forty-seven becomes the first and the saddest of the novel’s four closing points.

Crick’s final words of wisdom to his “children” in chapter forty-nine (which, together with chapters forty-eight and two, comprise Crick’s departing speech at the school’s morning assembly) complete his “lessons” on history and human nature, which begin with chapter two and develop throughout the narrative. Higdon argues that Crick wins “a major victory for himself” (“Double” 92) when Price stands up to the Headmaster and voices support for his teacher at the end of chapter forty-eight: “No cuts! Keep Crick!” (W 335). Although Tom responds humbly in chapter two (“I do not deserve your protestations” W 7), the short section which concludes his “lessons” (chapter forty-eight) is rendered in language that suggests he is both moved and inspired by Price’s support. Crick’s parting counsel advocates awareness, not oblivion, and implies that his future plans concern a “dogged, vigilant business” which he identifies metaphorically with “the reclamation of land:” “repeatedly, never-endingly retrieving what is lost” (W 336). The sincerity of his advice, the determination with which he endures his predicament and the quiet acceptance of the need to salvage life, along with the biblical invocation to children “who will inherit

the world" (W 335), transform the novel's second ending into a minor triumph, which contrasts the desperation of Tom as lonely husband (at the end of chapter forty-seven) with the vindication of Crick as teacher.

The retrieval process begins with the next chapter, "The Whole Story," in which Crick, finally coming to terms with mortality, narrates the loss of his father in 1947. Henry's death is a lesson in vigilance; this lock-keeper does not abandon his post when the flooding begins but remains watchful beyond the call of duty. A "grotesque gargoyle" stranded on the roof of his flooded cottage (W 340), Henry refuses to leave even when everything has been washed away: "a sailor determined to go down with his ship" (W 339). Rescued eventually but dying of pneumonia, Henry has "escaped the flood, but he's drowning" in phlegm (W 342), reliving his son's death in his final moments as well as anticipating for the reader the tale that follows, the novel's fourth point of closure. Prepared to narrate "that magic tale that must be told at last" (W 343) now that he has reached the end and made sense of his life, Henry becomes the quintessential Benjaminian storyteller: "the first true storyteller is, and will continue to be, the teller of fairy tales" (Benjamin 24). The final words at the end of chapter fifty ("Once upon a time—" W 343) mark a beginning, not a concluding point, as Henry starts to narrate "The Whole Story," "borrow[ing] his authority from death" (Benjamin 19). Redeeming his father's memory and echoing a never-ending his/story, Tom suspends time and denies finality as long as the story lasts.

In The Sweet-Shop Owner the young Willy Chapman's vision of drowning becomes an omen of his failure to comprehend the necessity of vigilance; drowning and the inability to swim, which first occur in Swift's short stories, symbolise an unnatural existence and foreshadow failure. In Waterland Swift endows both Henry and Dick with supreme knowledge of water and of nature's forces, allowing the narrator to transform their drowning into a symbolic return to a natural element. Tom's father drowns in phlegm but survives in memory and in the telling of "The Whole Story," which Henry knows at the moment of his death but the reader learns in the novel's final chapter. The narrator defers this segment of his confession until the end, indicating the severity of his remorse and the intensity of his need for atonement. Having bidden farewell to Mary, Price and his father, the narrator must confront the loss, not of the child he could have had and was never born, but of the child-like brother he drove to suicide. In chapter forty-five Crick refers to the "red spittle" of the foetus he carried in a pail to the river Ouse and which was "borne downstream" (W

317). In the river Tom's aborted child is reborn with the aid of language, foreshadowing Dick's watery end and the manner in which Tom will narrate it.

Chapter forty-five constitutes also the completion of Dick's education, a process which begins when Tom tries to teach his brother to read and write, continues (with Mary's help and Tom's cooperation) with Dick's instruction in sexual matters, and concludes when Dick seeks to learn the mystery hidden in the chest his dying mother left in his possession in 1937. By unlocking matters of the heart and of the past for his brother to exploit, Tom succeeds in inspiring curiosity in him: "D-Dick want know" (W 319). When Tom reveals the contents of the letter penned by Ernest Atkinson and fills his brother's head with astounding details about his origins that even an ordinary person would find hard to accept, Tom disregards his father's wishes to keep his older son ignorant and turns his brother into a sacrificial victim: Henry "is the one who never wanted [Dick] to be educated. . . . I'm the one who had to ask questions, who had to dig up the truth. . . . He would have kept [Dick] happily in the dark" (W 324).

Carrying ten bottles of 1911 Coronation Ale on his back and riding his trusted Velocette, Dick flees to the *Rosa II*, the dredger, placing his trust in the machines he understands well: "He knows his place. . . . This smell of silt is the smell of sanctuary. . . . He's here, he's now. . . . No past, no future" (W 355). Despite Henry's last attempts to reclaim Dick as his own ("it's all right! I'll be your father" W 356), Dick prepares for his return to nature by drinking the ale he has been bequeathed by his biological father and then jumps overboard: "He's on his way. Obeying instinct. Returning" (W 357). Watching Dick plunge into the river "in a long, reaching, powerful arc," the narrator admiringly comments, "here indeed was a natural" (W 357). While Dick's earlier dive (in July 1940) is described as "a loud splash" accompanied by "a hoarse cry" (W 189), his death plunge in 1943 is characterised by such elegance and grace that Dick metamorphoses, through language, not only into "the Saviour of the World" but also into "a fish of a man" (W 357). By transforming Dick's suicide into a chosen return to his natural element, and by implying Dick's ability to be reborn, Tom is not providing an account of the events of August 1943 but fictionalising a traumatic event into a therapeutic narrative: "memory can't keep fixed and clear those final moments. Memory can't even be sure whether what I saw, I saw it first in anticipation before I actually saw it, as if I had witnessed it somewhere already—a memory before it occurred" (W 356). Dick's hybridic transformation represents Tom's wish for absolution from the guilt of having

driven his brother to watery death. Only through Dick's "amphibious apotheosis" (Todd 310) can the narrator experience catharsis.

The chapter's closing statements, which are the novel's final sentences as well as the fourth and most significant point of closure, reveal the narrator's contradictory emotion of painful self-castigation and mournful tranquillity: "Someone best explain.' We trip over empty bottles. Peer from the rails. Ribbons of mist. Obscurity. On the bank in the thickening dusk, in the will-o'-the-wisp dusk, abandoned but vigilant a motor-cycle" (W 358). The narrator describes the scene but not his own feelings: remorse renders him "implacably silent" (W 357). Inviting storytelling to commence again, evoking the ghosts which gather out of the haze of the past, and endowing the Velocette with the vigilance he lacks, Tom Crick rescues the memory of his brother's suicide from oblivion and reworks the dredger of forgiveness through an ending that is both apocalyptic and hopeful. Although closure is suspended and all four endings are saturated with death, another element they share is the narrator's ability to find hope in identifying the potential for honesty in vigilance: at the mental hospital Mary stares "vigilantly" out of the window (W 330); Price lends his support to his teacher and guards the value of education through his awareness of the power of the past; Henry remains conscious of his duty until his final moments and dies with a story on his lips; Dick acquires knowledge and a sense of identity at the expense of his life, choosing to place his faith in nature and in vigilant machinery, his motorcycle and the dredger; and Tom accepts his identity as a Crick, embracing the values identified with his paternal ancestors: endurance, reclamation, and vigilance. By narrating his losses through a tormented narrative that allows him to entertain hope at the end of the day, Crick transforms his/story into a paradigm of struggle.

Haunted by guilt, without an audience of "children" any more and with his wife in an asylum, Tom Crick invents fairy tales as he strolls at longitude 0°. Like Scheherazade, he has to weave a new tale each night, reclaim the past in order to stay alive. As a historiographer, Crick is "no Carlyle clone" (Gasiorek 152) but neither is he Hayden White. A haunted man, Tom turns Historia into his/story: Ernest Atkinson's unnatural love for his daughter is presented as a fairy tale and Dick's final dive into the river becomes a form of aquatic resurrection, a fitting end for this "Saviour of the World." Like the heroes of ancient drama, Tom Crick gains knowledge from suffering (Higdon "Double" 93). By acknowledging Dick's humanity and uniqueness, Tom learns humility; by confessing and uniting story and history, he learns balance; and by admitting the arbitrariness of accident and the

responsibility of choice, he learns to endure the paradoxical side of existence. Teaching a lesson in endurance and vigilance to every Harry, Bill and Ray to follow in Graham Swift's fiction, Tom Crick demonstrates the therapeutic value of confession.

Chapter V

Transforming History into Spectacle: Life Stills and Still Lives in Out Of This World

Arma virumque cano . . . fato profugus
Virgil Aeneid, Book I (262)

Today everything exists to end in a photograph.
Susan Sontag On Photography (24)

Homer's heroes were certainly no braver
than our Trio, but more fortunate: Hector
was excused the insult of having
his valor covered by television.
W. H. Auden "Moon Landing" (843)

In 1988, after a post-Waterland lapse of five years, Graham Swift's fourth novel, Out of This World, was published. Set in April 1982, at the beginning of the ten-week Falklands War, the novel uses a historically resonant present to render all major military campaigns of the twentieth century symbolic of meaningless sacrifice and unquenchable blood-thirst. "Arms and the man" is a theme revisited in Out of This World but, in typical Swiftian mode, epic notions of heroism and love are exposed as media ploys typical of an era when "the cinema [has] replaced the vision of Greece and Rome" (OW 188). This far-reaching historical perspective is made possible through the story of three generations of the Beech family: Robert Beech, arms manufacturer and decorated World War I veteran, his son, celebrated war photographer, Harry Beech, and his granddaughter, Sophie. As in his earlier fiction, Swift's main focus in Out of This World is the troubled relations between parents and children caught in the aftermath of past choices that have kept Harry and Sophie suspended between their inability to forget and their unwillingness to forgive.

In Out of This World the macrocosm of History overlaps with the microcosm of the Beech family: since the creation of the Beech Munitions Company in 1875 and until the fictional present of April 1982, a century of colonial and global warfare is encapsulated. Adrian Poole identifies the war images evoked in Out of This World as the "grimmiest" of Swift's fiction in terms of violence ("Mourning" 160). The mud of Flanders, the bombed-out streets of Nuremberg, the rocks from the Moon: twentieth-century history is recorded in the ashes that constitute, along with air, a dominant element of this novel. If solid and liquid elements united in Waterland to create an

apt metaphor of an ever-shifting model of historical reality, in Out of This World the ashes of history accumulate into a tangible record of destruction.

"I remember, in '69 . . . how we sat up together all night watching those first moonmen" begins narrator Harry Beech, self-proclaimed "visual reporter" (OW 114) and the fourth of Graham Swift's "failed fathers" (Wheeler "Melancholic" 66). This opening sentence evokes the familiar Swiftian interrelation between memory, history and personal testimony with a new parameter added: "watching" is the activity of choice for Harry as well as the other characters in this novel. As Swift specifies in an article published in the Times a few days before the novel's publication in 1988, Out of This World is "full of the paradoxes of visual perception" ("Throwing Off" 20). Can a photograph tell a story by what it shows? And what of the periphery of vision—everything that happens beyond the framing of the lens—that a photograph cannot show? Can a moment frozen in time capture history and communicate meaning or is the immediacy of the visual misleading? These are some of the queries raised to be pondered but not answered in this work.

Barely two hundred pages long, Out of This World is Swift's shortest (and his least critically acclaimed) novel to date: "a book to respect, but not to fall in love with," according to the verdict of Hermione Lee in the Observer ("Shutter" 43). Inevitably compared to earlier Swift work, the novel was found, in the words of the TLS critic, lacking the "resonance of Waterland and the manic Kafkaesque energies of Shuttlecock" (Duchene 275). As the Washington Post reviewer noted, "Out of This World is a much simpler duet" to Waterland's "fugue" (Digilio "Afterimages" B2). For Adrian Poole the novel is a "self-conscious sequel to Waterland" ("So Far" 113). Reviews on both sides of the Atlantic were mostly mixed; few critics lauded Out of This World as unequivocally as Philip Howard in the Times, who characterised it as "a powerful and exciting book that raises uncomfortable political questions" (18), or like Linda Grey Sexton, who termed it an "engrossing narrative" of "simple, startling beauty" (14). In the Sunday Times Peter Kemp found the novel "disappointingly mundane" despite a "tough meditateness" and a "spectacularly wide field of vision" ("Coming" G7). Although Harriett Gilbert felt that "it is refreshing to meet so unashamed a novel of contemporary ideas," she characterised the book "overschematic" (36). Liz Heron argued that the characters' "detachment" turned them into "unconvincing, remote observers" (23). In the Guardian Jonathan Coe "applaud[ed] the scope and ambition" of the novel but found that it lacked a "radical approach to structure." In his detailed discussion of the novel in the London Review

of Books, Patrick Parrinder, who concluded that the tale is told with “deceptive simplicity and a compelling imaginative intensity,” recognised the stark effects of “the weight of history” on this work (17).

Taking a Rest from Memory

None of the characters in Out of This World is more concerned with the burdensome past and the repercussions of a fading sense of reality than Harry Beech, the novel’s principal narrator. As a sixty-four year old widower about to marry his pregnant, twenty-three-year-old assistant, Jenny, Harry seems well aware of the absurdity of his predicament and of his belief in the romantic promise the future holds: “Miracles shouldn’t happen.... You shouldn’t be able to advertise. . . for an assistant and fall in love. . . But I found out that I was still human” (OW 79). Harry’s rediscovery of the heart prompts the novel’s action. Since his father made him feel guilty of being the “instrument” of his mother’s death at childbirth (OW 29), Harry has never much believed he deserves happiness. Harry reciprocates by rejecting paternal authority and refusing to come to work for the family business, Beech Munitions Company, founded by his grandfather in 1875, and taken over by his father, Robert, in 1918. Resolved not to produce weapons—turning his confrontation with his father into an ideological stance—Harry decides to be a witness: “a photographer is neither there nor not there, neither in nor out of the thing.... Someone has to be in it and step back too” (OW 49). Eventually, he turns his military experiences in photography into a career in photojournalism.

When he marries Anna, a Greek translator he meets at Nuremberg during the Trials in 1946, and has his own child, Sophie, Harry’s secret hope is that his new family will fill the gap in his heart and allow him to overcome his past. His wife and daughter, however, develop a loving relationship with Robert, so Harry prefers to remove himself from the family once again rather than compete with his father for the exclusive right to his family’s affection. Caught in a perennial tug-of-war with his father, Harry seems unaware of the extent to which, even as a grown man, he continues to antagonise Robert. Harry envies and resents the love his father seems ready to bestow on everyone else except his own son and takes himself ‘out of this world.’ Paradoxically, he constantly supplies his father with other people to love: Frank Irving, Harry’s best friend, becomes his filial substitute in the family business; eventually Frank replaces Harry in his father’s home, his wife’s bed and his young daughter’s heart. Similarly, Harry allows the five-year-old Sophie to be brought up by her grandfather after Anna’s death in an airplane accident. Harry prefers to travel

the world's war zones, photographing other people's misery as a means of forgetting his own. When an IRA-planted car bomb succeeds in assassinating the head of Beech Munitions Company on April 23, 1972, the Beeches' already deteriorating family coherence also falls victim to the explosion. By that time Harry has spent almost twenty years travelling the globe's hotspots, building an international reputation as a fearless photographer. Having refused as early as 1945 to work alongside his father or take over the family arms business, he has been disinherited. Harry proves to be, by his own admission, "a bad son" as well as "a bad father" (OW 22), and becomes, in Byatt's term, a "tortured betrayer" (On Histories 23).

Like Harry, his daughter grows up resenting her father's absence. Despite the love she receives from the doting Robert, Sophie feels orphaned, especially after her mother's sudden death when she was five. At eighteen she travels to Greece to acquaint herself with her mother's country and establish a sense of selfhood away from the corroding animosity between the men in her family. Instead, she grows lonely and homesick, unable to connect the Greece of myth to the contemporary reality. When she meets Joe Carmichael, another fellow countryman running away from familial misery, she cures her homelessness by falling in love. Just like her father, Sophie seeks to heal the traumas of her past by creating her own family away from home. At nineteen, she marries Joe, who, content to work for a travel agency, refuses a job offer from BMC. At twenty-four, pregnant and ready to follow her husband across the Atlantic, Sophie announces her decision to move to New York on the eve of her grandfather's assassination.

Ten years later, in 1982, Harry resides in a Wiltshire cottage out of which he works, and Sophie leads the neurotic existence of a Brooklyn housewife and mother who seeks to forget her British past and embrace the new world of America which is "man-made" but not "human" (OW 183). Engaging in a series of meaningless adulterous affairs which result in self-humiliation and undermine marital happiness, Sophie seeks to obliterate the past, to take a "rest from memory" (OW 75), by not telling her children any stories about Robert or Harry as well as by forbidding them to play with guns or cameras. However, as the boys approach adolescence, she has become increasingly aware that the "rest from memory" their ignorance provides, which she characterises as "safety," cannot last much longer: soon their questions will require answers (OW 75).

Whether in New York or the English countryside, both father and daughter have spent the ten years since the explosion at the Surrey family home, 'out of this world' geographically and emotionally: away from each other and their common past. They have not spoken or written to each other since Robert's funeral; Joe's periodic letters have been the only source of news Harry has had of his daughter. If such estrangement were likely, it was made inevitable by Harry's instinctive reaction to the car bomb that killed Sophie's beloved grandfather: trained to shield his emotions behind his camera, Harry begins to take pictures of the wreckage as soon as the explosion occurs. In one instant Sophie is witness not only to Robert's physical dismemberment, but more importantly to the psychological violation brought about by the recorder: by fragmenting the personal into photographic stills, Harry objectifies a family tragedy and suspends time. Instead of assisting in the initiation of the mourning process, which would lead the family members to bonding and catharsis, Harry acts as the media man, becoming by his own confession "the true, unflinching, the ultimate pro" (OW 94).

Although these photos are never made public and Sophie is the only witness to his betrayal, Harry abandons his career in self-disgust, having arrived at a forced realisation of the extent to which he has become dehumanised. With his father dead, his daughter emigrating and his self-respect shattered, Harry need no longer travel to the world's danger zones to escape his family. He takes up aerial photography and abandons the present in favour of the "hidden spectacle of the past" (OW 36), working for an archaeologist who investigates submerged Iron Age field systems. Like Sophie, he moves away from the family home—now Frank's BMC "headquarters" (OW 11)—to continue his existence, but is unable to begin another life. A decade later a new wife and the child she is already carrying inspire him with renewed hope for the future; Harry feels the need to reconcile himself to the past by reconnecting with his only surviving relative. In his mind first and then in actuality he drafts a letter to Sophie, asking her to come back to England for his wedding.

While Harry is aided in the healing process by the love of his bride-to-be, a grounding figure in Harry's itinerant life, Sophie has had to seek professional help to deal with the ghosts of the dead and the living. Although she seeks to turn her psychiatrist into a surrogate father as well as a lover, Sophie has begun to reconcile herself to her past. Harry's unexpected missive angers her but also provides the necessary incentive for her to take her children to the ancestral land. Although father

and daughter never address each other in the course of the novel, always communicating through other people, the end of the book, which finds them both literally suspended in mid-air, suggests a real possibility of reconciliation. While flying with the boys from New York to London, Sophie begins to tell them the story of their past, connecting through narrative four generations of the Beech family; in the novel's final section Harry makes his own pact with history by recalling one of the few happy memories of his childhood when, in 1928, his father arranged for him to fly in the cockpit of an Argosy, encouraging his life-long fascination with flying. Although Willy Chapman at the end of The Sweet-Shop Owner dies with the futile hope that Dorry will return, Harry seems to be allowed another chance at healing, even if, as Swift himself suggests, "the novel ends in a very uncertain way" (Bernard and Menegaldo 15).

Seeing, Showing, Telling

Out of This World is concerned with technology's dubious gift of double vision: the world seen through the eyes and another world viewed through reproduction enabled by film. However, a photograph is still and a televised image is two-dimensional: the simulated world of second-hand experience must be rejected if Swift's characters are to transcend the visual stasis which causes their emotional paralysis. The key to recuperation remains Swift's faith in the therapeutic powers of storytelling: the ability of the imagination to unite still lives through narrative. In his first three novels Swift's emphasis has been on man as "the story-telling animal" (W 62). In Out of This World Swift examines the consequences of visual culture on the human instinct for narrative by juxtaposing 'seeing' and 'showing' with 'telling.'

The focus on photography in his fourth novel becomes the means through which Swift records the constant struggle, common to all of his protagonists, between the nature of knowledge and the need for comprehension. A photograph is an image of the real removed from time since "reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition" (221), as Walter Benjamin notes in his famous 1935 essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." A still carries no other meaning than a fleeting impression caught by the lens and interpreted in various ways by various viewers. The photographs that Harry Beech takes of orphaned children in Cyprus or dying soldiers in Vietnam are reproductions of war or human misery, meaningless visitations of events removed from the reality that produced them, the story that can humanise or interpret them. Photography offers stasis in trauma, but only a story can offer meaning, as this photographer realises by the end

of Out of This World. While this novel may seem at first to be “a poetic ode to the powers of the camera” (Crane “I Am” 14), Swift documents Harry’s disillusionment with these powers: “times have changed. . . .The camera first, then the event” (OW 13). Exposure through the camera trivialises even heroic and grand achievements, as W. H. Auden ironically illustrates in his poem “Moon Landing” (1969); like Swift’s protagonist, Auden’s speaker longs for a pre-technology, pre-publicity-saturated era, “where to die has a meaning / and no engine can shift my perspective” (“Moon Landing”).

The inability of one picture to tell a whole story is emphasised throughout the novel as the reader keeps adding stills to the novel’s puzzle. Imitating still photography, the structure of Out of This World suggests discontinuity rather than cohesion (see Appendix IV). Each of the novel’s thirty-five unnumbered sections begins on a new page and constitutes a fragment of an event, replayed in memory, which could conceivably be removed from the novel’s context and read as a story. For instance, the twelfth section entitled “Sophie” (OW 61-68) mingles sweet and bitter memories of childhood as it describes how the loving presence of the grandfather and the painful absence of the father affected the narrator’s upbringing. Read on its own, this eight-page testimony of an orphaned but spoilt only child constitutes a precise mirror of the Beech family dynamics. Although such autonomous parts exist in Swift’s earlier works as well, they tend to be digressions (on elements of natural history in Waterland) or embedded narratives (like Dad’s Secret Agent memoir in Shuttlecock), not integral parts of the lives of the protagonists of those novels. Conversely, in Out of This World there is no discussion of the history of photography, aviation or weapon manufacturing. Moreover, apart from the one time Anna’s voice is heard in section twenty-nine (as Irene Chapman is also allowed to speak once in The Sweet-Shop Owner), there are no extensive memoirs or testimonials by departed family members in the manner of the Matthew Pearce Notebooks in Ever After. By focusing on the memories and experiences of a silently warring father-daughter duo and by suggesting the steps required for overcoming such polarity, this novel offers vignettes of startling intensity that stand alone while forming parts of a puzzle. Swift will resort to more extensive polyphony and fragmentation in Last Orders but in the later novel his characters engage in tale-sharing typical of a pilgrimage. In Out of This World the narrative is fragmented and seemingly incoherent as befits a novel preoccupied with exposing the insubstantiality of air and photography.

Unlike air, words always offer a connecting web. In a 1990 interview Swift unequivocally declares that “words are the best form of communication” (Lashku 37). Significantly, most of the characters in Out of This World are no longer speaking to each other, either because they cannot or because they will not. Even Sophie and Joe hardly communicate since she opts not to discuss Harry’s letter with her husband until she has made up her mind to reunite with her father. Once the characters reestablish verbal communication, they may be able to understand and forgive one another. Love urges confessions: in Out of This World monologues, letter writing or dialogues constitute the psychological processes through which trauma may be analysed and healed. Storytelling, as in Waterland, seems to be the only possible means of recovery, since it is “the telling that reconciles memory and forgetting” (OW 74). Whereas in the earlier works characters cannot or will not engage in telling (like Willy Chapman in The Sweet-Shop Owner and Prentis in Shuttlecock) or they begin to confess too late to save their damaged lives (like Tom Crick in Waterland), in this novel the potential for reconciliation is urged onto Harry and Sophie by the ones they love: Jenny and the twins.

In Out of This World Swift’s primary concern with the meaning of the past and the consequences of choices creates a familiar pattern, wedding story to history. Representative of two generations of estranged parents and children, Harry and Sophie take turns voicing their traumas and revisiting global and domestic warfare through memory. These “unconfessed confessions” (OW 45) reveal a fundamental aspect of family life: blood bonds do not guarantee emotional ties. Swift’s characters are forever discovering that they need to struggle to communicate with their parents or their children. Love is neither automatically generated nor reciprocated—it is nurtured by stories and urged by the fairytales of childhood that create connections among people. When Harry, Robert and Sophie withdraw from family, they also withdraw from history. Harry’s relationship with his daughter is paradigmatic of the extremes of human behaviour inherent in Swift’s novels. When Sophie is an infant, Harry seeks to obliterate all other influences from her life and be the unique recipient of her love. He seeks to protect her not just from danger but from life itself and independence. Eventually, Sophie becomes the trade-off between Harry and his father. Like Agamemnon, he sacrifices his daughter so that he can be allowed to sail away and wage his private war. Sophie becomes another scruple, an appendage from the past, a reminder of love’s potential as well as love’s demands.

Escaping History and Story

Conscious of the need for his 1988 work to differ yet be on a par with its 1983 predecessor which established his literary reputation, Swift produced, in David Profumo's view, his "most outward-looking novel" (G9). Profumo's observation is still valid. References to more keynote events of the twentieth century than in any other Swift fiction to date are included in Out of This World, creating, at least geographically, an immense canvas: the Great War as well as World War II; the moon landing as well as various technological advances in medicine, aviation and photography; Nazi concentration camps as well as the Nuremberg Trials; glimpses of warfare in Vietnam, Cyprus, and Korea; military dictatorship in Greece as well as IRA terrorism; culminating in the Falklands crisis of April 1982, the event which underscores the novel's fictional present. In Out of This World "layers of long, dark, twentieth-century history," as Malcolm Bradbury notes in The Modern British Novel (1994), "are set into a postmodern collage" (434). Bradbury's comment applies to some extent to every one of Swift's novels since all of Swift's male protagonists are concerned with the two World Wars and the quest for one's place in history.

The implication that individual lives are driven as much by personal choices as by historical forces is central to Out of This World: coincidence and fate mark the characters as indelibly as their own choices. Robert becomes the manager of BMC because his two older brothers are killed in World War I. Anna marries Harry in Nuremberg in order to escape having to return to war-ravaged Greece. Her mother's native land is where twenty years later Sophie meets a compatriot who is in the "happy business" of "sell[ing] dreams" (OW 153); she marries Joe because his lightness counterbalances the weight of her family past. Seeking to escape a loveless home, Harry becomes fascinated with the technology of flight as early as 1928. Yet he becomes a photographer, not a pilot, due to his assignment in World War II: although he is assigned to the R.A.F. as he requests, he is not trained to fly and he never experiences battle first hand. Instead, Harry serves as a specialised clerk with the task of analysing aerial photographs of bombed cities and assessing the damage. In 1944 another military decision allows Harry to receive formal training in photography, which prompts his future career as a photojournalist.

In Out of this World Swift is concerned with our current ability to remove ourselves from this planet and our continuing inability to make sense of our world no matter how high above it we can soar or whether we have photographed the Earth from space. The ironic juxtaposition of technological sophistication and spiritual blindness

is equally dominant in Last Orders; the later novel's preoccupation with the mobility offered through various means of transportation is explored in Out of this World through the emphasis on the technologies of flying. In addition, Joe Carmichael's constant need for escape from his parents' unchanging routine is symbolised by Joe's fascination with cars: the "Austin Healey 3000" he drives to the French Riviera (OW 152); the "white Mercedes" he rents in Greece (OW 127); and his partner's chauffeur-driven "big, cool Lincoln" in which they ride across Athens to lunch by the sea (OW 157). Swift's characters seek to escape time and place in order to forget the traumas of the past; thus, they travel, indulge themselves in visual entertainment (television, film, photography) or even seek out the technology of self-destruction (weapons) as a means of physical escape.

The novel's epigraph—"what the eye sees not, the heart rues not"—introduces the issue of ignorance and knowledge which is central to Shuttlecock, yet in Out of this World receives a different treatment since none of the characters is in a position to manipulate knowledge or make decisions that will keep things secret for ever. While Prentis, as an official "custodian" of secrets (S 16), comes to a realisation about the nature and power of information that leads him to destroy whatever evidence he considers dangerous, Harry and Sophie either actively seek out truths that will alter their perception of reality or stumble upon knowledge they may have preferred not to have. For instance, as a nine-year-old boy, Harry discovers a photograph of his mother and begins a life-long quest for images that render him a "witness" (OW 70) to personal as well as national histories and stories. But he also observes or discovers what he would rather not know: he views his wife's infidelity; he suspects his father of having attempted suicide; and he feels his daughter's resentment and fear towards him as his love for her oscillates between extremes. Similarly, Sophie is a half-hearted witness. Although she seeks out her father's war photographs and travels to Greece to find her "mythical mother" among the ancient ruins (OW 124), she cannot come to terms with the knowledge borne of her discoveries. Unable to compromise with the pain caused by knowledge, she yearns for the safety of ignorance: "what you never know will never hurt you.... And what you know, you can't ever unknow" (OW 26). While Sophie seems well aware of the traumas that have caused her breakdown, she needs psychiatric counsel to reenter the flow of time. Like all of Swift's characters, Sophie Beech would prefer not to have seen her father record the family tragedy, so as not to have to learn to live with such knowledge.

Fragmented Voices

In Out of This World thirty-five sections of varying length are divided, unequally, among four voices (see Appendix IV): Swift engages in polyphony that will become much more elaborate in Last Orders. Harry Beech and his daughter almost share the narrative equally with seventeen and sixteen sections respectively. In the sections entitled 'Harry' the ex-photo-journalist engages in interior monologues that include several asides: to Sophie, Jenny and Frank. Conversely, the sections entitled 'Sophie' originate as dialogues between Harry's daughter and her psychiatrist, Dr. Klein, but evolve into dramatic monologues which address her therapist and eventually turn into communiqués between Sophie and her ten-year-old twin boys, Tim and Paul. Finally, two lengthy dramatic monologues that occur quite late in the narrative are given to Joe (section twenty-seven) and Anna (section twenty-nine). While Joe's fragments from his life story are half-spoken to Mario, the bartender at his favourite Manhattan locale, Anna's memories of Greece and World War II have the severity of an unwritten epistle from the great beyond: "Dear husband Harry..." (OW 173). The fragmentation of the novel's narrative technique—none of the narrators tells a whole story and every memory is broken down in parts not presented in chronological order—is a method suitable to the psychological discontinuity of the characters' lives. Caught in an endless cycle of self-blame and resentment, Harry and Sophie seem unable to forgive themselves or each other. Only when other people demand of them to move forward, do they begin the painful process of remembrance that may lead to reconciliation.

Unaware of each other's confessions throughout the novel, Harry and Sophie offer complementary or contradictory versions of the past, underlining the fallibility of memory and the ambiguity of historical record. While this method serves to unify a chronologically fragmented narrative, it also reveals similarities between the characters of which Sophie and Harry seem unaware. For instance, both principal narrators present themselves as unloved orphans in awe of their mysterious fathers. Just as Harry in 1927 searches his father's desk for the secrets Robert will not reveal (and finds a photograph of his mother), over thirty years later Sophie secretly looks through Harry's portfolio to learn about the "sun-tanned" stranger, the "lodger" who is her father (OW 77-78). Similarly, neither Harry nor Sophie wishes to work for the family business or live in Hyfield House where they both grew up. Although the narrators emphasise the events and circumstances that keep them apart, Swift's structure underlines the reasons that can unite them, making the novel's hopeful ending more believable.

The alternating father-daughter narratives in Out of This World vary enough in tone and language (not to mention content) that no doubt would exist in the reader's mind concerning the identity of each narrator even if the novel's sections had remained untitled. Harry's profile (like Tom Crick's) allows Swift to combine in this narrator's sections philosophical musings on visual representation with the emotional doubts of an ageing, guilt-ridden parent who can be at once self-deprecating and pleading, appalling and appealing. Throughout the novel Harry's interior monologues retain the conversational tone and fragmented syntax of seemingly unedited thoughts; yet, sophisticated diction and unconventional sentence structures are equally common in his sections, leading to a stylistic blend revelatory of this narrator's privileged educational and social background and influenced by a long career in journalism and a cosmopolitan lifestyle. The meanderings of Harry's mind produce strings of thoughts and emotions that run the gamut from query to irony to sincerity:

And who, anyway, can say they have a choice over their life?

Okay, Dad, count me in.

To protect Sophie. For Sophie's sake. And Anna's.

It was absurd, that terror that Sophie might die. In Nuremberg, where I met Anna, they were itemising the deaths of millions. As if she were especially prone, as if she alone were up on some thin high-wire of mortality. (OW 31)

From casual expression to metaphoric urgency, this prose is the distinct product of an over-wrought but intelligent mind.

As his meeting with Sophie draws closer, the emotional urgency in Harry's monologues increases. Occurring usually at the beginning or the end of a section, the seven asides this father directs towards his estranged daughter become more frequent in the second half of the novel, culminating in a near dialogue in Harry's last four sections: "what do they say in the States, Sophie?" (OW 185), or, "I was entranced, Sophie. Entranced" (OW 208). As the prospect of reunion forces Harry to practise a fatherly voice he has abandoned in disuse, he begins to narrate for his daughter the family stories he should have told her when she was a child: for instance, "Your mother and father, Sophie. Anna and me dancing in Nuremberg" (OW 136); or, "one morning in March, Sophie. . ." (OW 195), or, "picture your father, Sophie. . ." (OW 203). While Harry in the course of his musings professes or implies his intense love for Jenny again and again (sections seven, eleven, fifteen, thirty-one, and thirty-five), he addresses Jenny only once in an aside in section thirteen which includes also his daughter: "My God, Jenny! My God, Sophie! How terrible to die...." (OW 72). Similarly, Harry confesses his undying grudge against Frank's betrayal and reveals his favourite revenge fantasy in section twenty-eight: "Oh, I

wanted to kill him. ... I'm in this plane. Just me, the plane, and one bomb for Frank" (OW 169); but Harry addresses Frank only once in the beginning of the novel (section three) with the equivocation of a semi-willingly displaced son and cuckolded husband: "You could say I put you there, Frank. ... And it's where you always wanted to be. ... So perhaps you should thank me" (OW 22-23). While Jenny and Frank engage Harry's emotions and influence a part of his present and his past respectively, Sophie is the haunting presence in this narrator's consciousness, revealing Harry's pressing need to reestablish a familial bond that was traumatically severed.

Female Voices and the Talking Cure

As a narrator Harry is assigned all but two (twenty-seven and twenty-nine) of the odd-numbered sections in Out of This World and Sophie speaks all but one (twenty-eight) of the even-numbered sections. The almost symmetrical juxtaposition of these principal voices creates the illusion of a dialogue between two characters who are as distant from each other and as silent as other father-daughter duos in Swift's novels: Willy Chapman and Dorothy in The Sweet-Shop Owner as well as Ray and Susie or Lenny and Sally in Last Orders. In Out of This World for the first and only time in a Swift novel to date a female voice is heard so extensively. Emblematic of the broken bonds between generations, Swift's abandoned and abandoning daughters, who have pulled themselves 'out of this world' are all present in Sophie Beech. True to the wisdom her name implies, Sophie speaks for every woman in Swift's novels when she says "there aren't any safe, separate places anymore" (OW 111). Guilt-ridden and desperate, Sophie recognises that "going back can be the hardest journey" (OW 192). By behaving in a manner similar to other female characters in Swift's novels, Sophie Beech is allowed a voice but not a distinct personality; she is disturbed like Mary Crick, alluring like Bill Unwin's mother, and as ready to abandon her father as Dorry Chapman or Susie Johnson.

For emotional support Sophie seems to depend upon a father figure determined either through biology (Harry or Robert Beech) or psychology (Dr Klein). By presenting psychoanalytic methodology and its positive effects on the patient and allowing the therapist to speak some of the novel's key points about memory and knowledge, Swift demonstrates his faith in the 'talking cure' and the therapeutic powers of confession. However, Sophie's flirtatious behaviour towards Dr Klein implies more than this young woman's dependence on her psychiatrist's approval and guidance. Sophie views her doctor not only as a healer but also as a paternal

substitute. Sophie, like Jenny, is “a girl with a thing about older (much older) men” (OW 80). Both Jenny and Sophie deny their love to the men of their own generation: Joe Carmichael, or the same-age lover Jenny could have chosen. In Out of This World Swift’s insistence upon the need for the bonds of love to restore intergenerational communication extends not only to parent-child relationships but even to marital ones: Harry can only find bliss in the arms of his daughter and a daughter-substitute, as Robert Beech welcomed Anna, his daughter-in-law, into a wifeless home in 1946. Swift’s characters cannot live in the present until they have reconciled themselves with the past and their traumas.

The sections narrated by Sophie in Out of This World are as diverse in tone as her father’s but her concerns are more focused and her style more monochromatic than Harry’s. Sophie addresses her therapist, Dr Klein, mixing within her answers to his questions the traumas and complexities that have driven her to his office. Sometimes their dialogues are presented directly (sections six, eight, and ten) in stark Q-and-A form that makes this daughter’s anger and resentment stand out on the page:

And he’s never written you in ten years?
No.
If you wrote him, would he write you? Is that how it is?
Don’t know. Why don’t you ask him? (OW 41)

More frequently these conversations are reported as Sophie rephrases, doubts, or ridicules the doctor’s dispassionate probing:

The land without a past. For you too, Doctor Klein? . . . Refugee makes good? But—I forget—you don’t talk. You just listen. I’m the one who has to do the talking. . . .
So why this terror of a toy gun, Sophie?
I’m trying to tell you, for Jesus Chrissake! (OW 16-17).

Sophie’s dramatic monologues combine the intense fragmentation of stream of consciousness with the defensiveness of the neurotic patient on the psychiatric couch:

What you never know will never hurt you. . . .
Poor Tim, poor Paul. My poor darlings.
We should turn round now? Stroll back? . . .
And you know what scares me more than anything? That it won’t make any difference, that it won’t have any effect. Look at them watching the TV, while I watch them. . . . Who needs a mother any more? (OW 26-27)

As the preceding examples from Sophie’s sections demonstrate, time for Sophie stopped with that explosion in 1972: memories of the past, near or distant, are overlaid on the events of the present, revealing her urgent need to unify the fragments of her life.

Although Sophie, like her father, has also had a privileged upbringing and a good knowledge of the classics, her diction is more casual and slangy, and her anger is frequently expressed through expletives. While Dr Klein is occasionally allowed some pretentious jargon (“What you are afraid of, Sophie, is to leave the cocoon of surrogate amnesia provided by your children’s ignorance”), Sophie’s inarticulate responses to her therapist’s conclusions (“Wow! And fuck you too”) are partly influenced by the verbal tics of her adopted country (OW 74). Despite her thirty-four years, her upper-middle-class background, her travels and cultural inheritance, Sophie’s aggressive language and pained tone reveal her arrested development. Sophie demonstrates the egocentricity of a child who can love and hate her father with equal intensity but who is willing to abandon life-long resentment when the prospect of long-withheld fatherly affection becomes a possibility: “the truth is I want it to be wonderful. Wonderful. I want to go. . . , I want to throw my arms around him and feel his arms round mine. Harry Dad Father” (OW 145).

As strained as Sophie’s monologues are in the first half of Out of This World, her narrative and her tone become more balanced when she allows happy memories to be recalled: “I remember when the world was just sun and sand and sea and salt air. . . I remember all of us playing games with a beach-ball, and thinking the world was like a coloured beach-ball, you could catch it in your arms” (OW 53). Similarly, the warmth she exhibits when she speaks about the grandfather she adored is characteristic of another self which hides beyond cynicism, angst and bitterness: “feeling Grandad’s hand on my head as I knelt down to look at this hoard of gifts, and looking up and seeing him smile, and thinking. . . He is as happy as I am, he is exactly as happy as I am” (OW 64). Even more exuberant prose is evident when Sophie rehearses versions of family history for the twins: “there are other facts of life. . . my darlings, that your mother has to tell you. So are you listening? Are you ready? You were there at the funeral, but you never knew it. Though without you your mother would never have got through that terrible day” (OW 139). As this narrator’s perspective shifts from disillusioned to hopeful, expression in Sophie’s sections becomes progressively more emotional.

Fathers and Mothers

The quest for absolution unites all characters in Swift’s works, female or male. Despite the importance of a female voice in Out of This World, Harry Beech is the dominant consciousness in the novel, framing this “postmodern jigsaw puzzle” (Antor 154): he speaks the first and the last sections and his parts tend to be longer

and more meditative. The stylistic differences between the voices of the principal narrators create a fragmented narrative that initially threatens to turn polyphony into cacophony and destroy the novel's unity. However, in the first ten sections of Out of This World the linguistic variations and the chronological and geographical distances between the two narrators are subtly brought together by the fact that both Harry and Sophie feel tormented by fathers who seem to have rejected them: Harry and Sophie portray themselves as abandoned children who suffer in exile. In the second part of the novel (sections eleven to twenty), as the loose strands of the narrative begin to intertwine, the father-figure motif strongly emerges through Harry's and Sophie's separate portrayals of Robert Beech. The narrators take turns recounting their contested or fulfilling relationship with the paterfamilias whose assassination and its aftermath become the definitive events in their lives. The novel's final part (sections twenty-one to thirty-five) is the most complex stylistically as two more voices are added; but these fifteen sections are also characterised by more positive emotion than exists in the novel's previous parts as the narrators' interest shifts from the figure of the father (Harry, Robert, Dr Klein) as a defining presence in a child's life towards motherhood, a subtle symbol of reconciliation.

In the last ten sections of Out of This World Harry and Sophie address their children frequently and passionately as they rehearse their own anticipated meeting after a ten-year hiatus. In this part three mothers dominate the narrative and define the passage of time: Sophie's dead mother, Anna, represents the past; Sophie herself is the present; and Jenny, the mother-to-be and Harry's grounding force, signifies the future. Although Jenny's voice is heard only through Harry's monologues, Anna is allowed a lengthy soliloquy which emphasises the motif of the displaced and orphaned exile while simultaneously stressing the need for parenthood to reaffirm blood bonds. Female voices and the demands of the mothers suggest the possibility of an alternative world where salvation becomes synonymous with female love. In the end Harry and Joe appear ready to make sacrifices in order to secure the affection of the women they love as the world of emotion becomes these men's only reality: Harry acknowledges Jenny's importance, admitting "I don't want to lose her" (OW 190), and Joe's parting words to his wife before she leaves for England—"You mean the world to me" (OW 192)—demonstrate his commitment to his family.

At the beginning of the novel Sophie and Harry are separated by nearly insurmountable obstacles of geography and personal history, mirrored in the content and the language of their all-too-distinct narratives. Eventually, through the symbolic

worship of the mother and by succumbing to love, father and daughter find themselves in the air. Reunited 'out of this world,' they express themselves in ways that betray newly-found stylistic affinities: "let's just be together, here, above the world. . . . And it'll be tomorrow sooner than you think. It'll be tomorrow before it's even stopped being today" (Sophie to the twins, OW 202) and "Picture your father, Sophie, walking down Fleet street on a grey, wet day . . . yet his heart is full of colour, his heart is aglow with colour, in that year of your birth" (Harry's last section, OW 203). As Sophie tries to convince her sons to enjoy the "magic" of the transatlantic flight while they listen to their mother narrate the long-withheld story of their past, she becomes as eloquent as her father in her appreciation of aviation: "You're not impressed? You don't think it's so great to be thousands of feet up in the sky in a jumbo jet? . . . A long time ago . . . only gods could fly up into the sky" (OW 201-2). Unlike her sons, who belong to a generation which takes space exploration and in-flight entertainment for granted, Sophie, like her father, still entertains the romantic notions of flight that kept the young Harry "entranced" during his first airborne experience in 1928.

Beyond Spectacle

The juxtaposition of representation and reality that technology has enabled through film, television and photography constitutes the theme of Out of This World. Is a photograph a record of reality devoid of aesthetic value, "no art, just straight photography" (OW 92), as Harry would like to believe? Can a moment isolated in time communicate authenticity or truth? Is a photograph "fact or phantom? Truth or mirage?" (OW 205) Or is it a well-preserved lie belonging 'out of this world'? The contemporary cultural emphasis on the visual has been discussed by thinkers as diverse as Walter Benjamin, Susan Sontag and Jean Baudrillard. Out of This World engages with such concerns but, in a manner similar to the investigation of the various aspects of history in Waterland, Swift seeks to illustrate dilemmas and expose a paradox, not publish a treatise. His photographer is first and foremost a troubled human being, disillusioned if not entirely disheartened, who has been forced to confront a truth that Swift himself succinctly articulates in his 1988 article "Throwing Off Our Inhibitions": "to seek vision implies something more than mere spectacle" (20).

Throughout his career as a photographer Harry's motto—"seeing is believing" (OW 107)—has served to justify his morally dubious, and unwilling, participation in propaganda in order to emphasise the necessity of photography as a means of

procuring evidence. Eventually, Harry realises that the reproduction of an image severed from its context is misleading since it can generate a different reality from the unifying narrative that storytelling secures. In her 1979 collection of essays entitled On Photography Susan Sontag argues that photography has created “a new visual code” that she terms “an ethics of seeing” (3) since it enables the isolation of a moment in time which may then achieve the iconic status of historical truth. Not a story, but the lack thereof, a photograph records “the point at which narrative goes dumb” (OW 92). Even if the real could be found ‘out of this world,’ unless we are able to include it in our lives, unless we can spin a unifying yarn around it, we cannot hope to defragment reality; we must concede to simulacra.

While in his next novel, Ever After, Swift deals with the idea of the substitution of the real by using plastic as a metaphor for all the cheap but durable lies that replace genuine emotions, in Out of This World reproduction is castigated as an equally detrimental technique, leading, through the dominance of the camera, to “an image-choked world” (Sontag 15). In this novel nostalgia for the real thing—for epic love and war, for suffering that brings wisdom, for saintly saints and picture-perfect resorts—is inspired by the very means that have turned ideals into grotesque and farcical reproductions: illustrated brochures of undiscovered paradise in travel agencies, televised images of military campaigns and glossy coffee-table books of earth images from space. Through the camera, Sontag argues, “people become customers or tourists of reality” (110). Swift exposes the lack of authenticity of the media culture by striking from within; the blows come from the high priests assigned the task of simulation: Joe, the experienced travel agent, and Harry, the rich and successful photographer.

Harry terms the captivating view of the Earth from space “the ultimate photo” (OW 15) because it is unreal: to be out of yourself looking at yourself. On the very night of the moon landing Harry wonders whether the scenes on television are actually happening or whether they have been staged and emphasises the irreplaceable advantage of personal experience: “How do we know they’re really there? It could all be happening in some studio mock-up.... To know, you’d have to go yourself” (OW 170). W. H. Auden’s 1969 poem “Moon Landing” makes a similar point when the speaker argues that the Moon is “worth going to see” but not “worth seeing” [emphasis in original text] since the grey desert of craters and boulders revealed on television is far removed from all romantic notions of moonscapes long established in the communal imagination. Harry feels as one of millions of people who

eventually abandon the images of the “moon-men” over the Sea of Tranquility (OW 163) and proceed outdoors to look at the real moon, not the televised simulacrum. Despite the technological debris left on the moon, when Harry looks at the familiar silvery globe on the sky it remains, in Auden’s words, “unsmudged” and “still queens the Heavens.” Auden and Swift suggest that the quest for authenticity, the deep human need for the real, may yet survive intact the scourge of the virtual, or at least overcome, as Baudrillard notes in Simulacra and Simulations (1980), “the characteristic hysteria of our time: the hysteria of production and reproduction of the real” (410).

For all its power the visual is only another aspect of memory; it does not “exorcise” Harry’s “ghosts” or put guilt to rest (OW 187). Harry acknowledges that the desire to take a photograph derives not so much from the need to immortalise, preserve, record or witness but from the fear of taking action and the necessity of self-protection: “a photo is a reprieve, an act of suspension, a charm” (OW 122). As a boy raised without a mother and with a disapproving father, Harry discovers that the only place where he feels safe is in a “transit region” of “numb suspension” where “all you are is your eyes” (OW 121). Long before he becomes a professional photographer, Harry is already a spectator, a *flâneur*, who “looks on life from an inner distance” (Rignall 164). Developing a passion for all the visual media that can protect him from the world around him, Harry makes his armour out of airplanes and cameras, retreating into a cocoon that cannot be penetrated by life. Harry lives in the air and ‘out of this world’ for so long that he sleepwalks through danger zones, a creature of the air, a witness but never a participant. Or so he thinks until his instinctive coverage of his father’s assassination and the realisation that his daughter has been witness to an aloofness that has turned into callousness force him to acknowledge that he is a part of the Here and the Now. Although Harry gives up photojournalism as a result of this realisation and the subsequent shock of his daughter’s rejection, he cannot deny himself the protection of the camera and life in the air. While he sells his London home and studio and changes place of residence, he remains a photographer despite the mounting guilt that forces him to “crawl into the tent of [him]self” in a “picture-book” Wiltshire cottage (OW 60).

In a 1991 interview Swift confesses to “an unsettling idea” (Bernard and Menegaldo 15): the possibility that our current over-dependence on visual records, which turns us into, in Sontag’s term, “image-junkies” (24), alters reality to accommodate the camera. Swift hints at the camera’s ability to stage events, to manipulate reality and

to hold us captive through the machinations of propaganda. The totemic function of vision necessitates, as Harry Beech realises, that without “a task force of cameras [war] could not take place” (OW 189). Swift’s “sinister feeling” that “things happen now in a different way from the way they did before the camera was invented” (Bernard and Menegaldo 15) hints at the blurring between the real and simulacra in contemporary society. In such a sense, as Widdowson notes in “Newstories,” Baudrillard’s 1991 claim that the Gulf War never happened, that it was a virtual war fought on CNN, had already been preempted by Harry’s characterisation of the Falklands campaign as “the TV event of the year” (OW 185).

The novel’s strong emphasis on the visual further emphasises the fragmentation of events and experiences, both personal and historical, as well as the human instinct for self-protection. Harry turns his favourite state of suspension into a professional credo, identifying the camera with a window to the world which can frame reality as well as protect him from it. All of Harry’s memories of Hyfield, the family home, are related to vision and looking through windows: on the train moving between school and home or of his father in the orchard talking to the gardener. Even when the car bomb explodes killing his father, Harry instinctively grabs his camera and leans out of “the upstairs window,” taking photos with “deadly concentration” (OW 112). Yet this willing suspension of the self from reality comes at a high price: as Swift suggests in a 1988 interview with Patrick McGrath, “you cannot just take a picture of your father’s death, and say it’s like any other picture” (20). Since Harry removes himself from history as well as story, he is not a participant of world events anymore: he exists in the periphery, taking pictures. His feeling of not belonging results in total lack of communication with the macrocosm as well as the microcosm. No clarifying narrative can save his marriage when his observer status—“a deep, ingrained reflex” (OW 112)—denies him the ability to formulate words: even when he witnesses his wife’s infidelity he “takes a picture” in his head and walks away “like a sleep-walker” (OW 167).

Opting for observation over intervention, pretending to be “invisible, invulnerable, incorporeal” (OW 121), Harry realises that through photography he has been defending himself against reality. The definitive moment in his career, when a news story explodes right in his front yard, becomes an awakening to the reality of vision’s inability to offer meaningful stasis or true protection. By seeking to immortalise the carnage that was once his father, Harry experiences directly the morbid voyeurism inherent in photography since he literally shoots a “*memento mori*,” to use the term

Susan Sontag applies to all photographs (15). Thereafter Harry stops taking photographs of people because he knows that visual recording is a “simulacrum” of something “you have already partly decided you will lose” (OW 55). He shoots aerial landscapes, waiting for the “ghosts” the camera sees (OW 193) and avoiding his own haunted past.

Outsiders and Outcasts

Whether they produce weapons or images, the Beeches—father and son—shoot and blow up, literally or figuratively, anything caught in their sights until their own arms are blown off or abandoned. The metaphoric coexistence of guns, limbs and cameras is apparent throughout the novel, culminating in a symbol of history vividly realised through the legacy of the artificial prostheses that Robert bequeaths his son. For Harry these “bits of Dad” are a “miniature museum of prosthetic technology” (OW 199) as they range from anthropomorphic to bionic simulations of Robert’s right arm. Unlike the elusive father who ultimately disappears into thin air, the nine artificial arms that Harry keeps in a trunk in his cottage constitute an “index of the twentieth century” (OW 200), “a visual history of progressive dehumanisation” (Janik 183).

Ironically, Robert’s handicap is his only redeeming feature in the eyes of his son. Like Prentis, Harry is awed as much as angered by his father’s hero status. As a young man, Harry searches for ways to undermine parental authority as a means of getting even for being constantly challenged to follow in his father’s footsteps and take over the arms business. Uncomfortable with the knowledge of the source of the family income, Harry comes to resent his father for forcing him to contemplate the dilemma of his own participation in a world of war and destruction. Instead, he seeks to stay “out of this world” and shields himself, through flight and photography, from the moral consequences of his inheritance. Travelling and taking the newsworthy photographs that make him famous are the means which constantly reassure Harry that another life and another world, away from Hyfield and familial obligations, are possible. Yet, photography and flight destroy his sense of reality and alienate him from the only aspect of existence that can invest the visual and the fleeting with meaning: his daughter’s love. While Harry’s exile is voluntary and he willingly adopts the homeless life style of an internationally acclaimed photographer, he fails to acknowledge the destructive combination of cameras and aeroplanes in his life until it is nearly too late. Like the potent weapons his father manufactures, Harry’s flights from family and from love are as disruptive as they are detrimental to his loved ones.

The significant similarities Harry as a father and a husband shares with his own progenitor seem to escape him. Harry does not realise that his father is also an outsider: Robert seeks to remain disconnected from life ever since in a single year he is deprived of two brothers, his right arm and his young bride. Although he continues to live for another fifty years, he is emotionally dead, despite the loving relations he cultivates with his daughter-in-law and his granddaughter. Still, he makes no effort to keep these women in his life when they both fly away to Greece or America. He goes through life as the “perfect English gentleman” (OW 174): a remote observer who does not share with his son the knowledge of his mother’s grave or her photograph. This is a father who is seen but not heard; in essence as silent as the aphasiac Prentis senior in Shuttlecock, a monument to heroism and progress but still an empty vessel.

For this father and son the exchange of vital information occurs quite late. Harry is fifty by the time Robert explains how he lost his arm and received a Victoria Cross: Harry realises that his father’s act of heroism might have been an unsuccessful suicide attempt. Perhaps the reason Robert reached for the grenade thrown next to the unconscious commanding officer was never altruism but an instinctive reaction to the agonising news of his wife’s death that had just reached him. Like Prentis, Harry does not need to know that his father was not brave, so long as he can be allowed to entertain the notion that Robert had his own moment of frailty. In Shuttlecock Prentis removes the television because he does not want his sons comparing him to the ‘Bionic Man.’ This analogy is pushed to an extreme in Out of This World as Harry turns himself into a media hero only to discover that his father, with his artificial arm and his pacemaker, has been transformed into a bionic man. While in Sophie’s eyes Harry is a “faithful knight-errant” (OW 52), Harry himself feels that he can never sacrifice enough to be accepted. Swift’s sons never feel adequate in comparison to their fathers’ extraordinary presence—they rebel and fight against these giants all their lives.

In a world waiting to be “claimed and possessed by the camera,” Swift’s characters long to be transported away from the “all-seeing, unfeeling, inhuman eye” (OW 189) to a world where they are not watched, where soothing consolation comes through stories and mythology has not been usurped by motion pictures. The futility of such yearnings is not lost on Harry and his daughter: as they take turns, unbeknownst to one another, revisiting their common past, the spectre of a materialistic and spiritually barren reality haunts their own recurring nightmares. Not only Harry and

Sophie but all of the novel's narrators are orphans literally and metaphorically. Having become exiles by chance or choice, these characters portray themselves as aliens in a fast-changing world: Harry's rejection of home is initially his chosen path but he becomes a prisoner of his choices and must eventually turn himself into an outcast to do penance for opting to be an outsider; Sophie is displaced by circumstance when a bomb deprives her of the only relative who defined the notion of 'home' for her and she is tortured by the trauma of her loss to the extent that she requires psychiatric treatment to recover; her mother, Anna, is a Greek immigrant who initially flees her homeland due to war and poverty, then escapes her adopted country as well to meet a violent end that condemns even her mortal remains to eternal placelessness; and Sophie's husband, Joe, has run as far away from London as his travel agent's job will take him, first east, through France and Italy to Greece, then west to New York, seeking the "happiness" he believes is "out there" (OW 150, emphasis in original text). Eventually, all of the novel's exiled orphans acknowledge the need to reaffirm their sense of belonging through bonds of blood and geography in order to counter "a progressively fading sense of the real" (Smethurst 272).

Life (and Death) in the Air

England, America and Greece are the three loci which comprise this novel's geographical triangle. A picturesque Wiltshire cottage, the Manhattan skyline and Villa Paradise on Thassos: clichéd images of the Old World, the New World and the Antique World. Land and air in Out of This World constitute symbolic worlds which generate the myths complementing the visual panoramas of the novel. Photography and a life in the air are not the only means of escape that technology makes possible. Travel in its various forms—package tours promising a dream world that no longer exists, or televised lunar walks, or space exhibits in museums—is another way of abandoning reality and seeking safe haven in the make-believe. Like Harry, Sophie lives geographically away from but emotionally close to the epicenter of the explosion. Sophie's trips, first to Greece and then to New York, signify her search for identity away from her father's world. Yet, neither ancient ruins in her mother's land of origin, nor the steel and concrete "edifice" of her husband's chosen abode in the new world (OW 183), offer her the security of Hyfield, the Surrey home she learnt to love as a child. Although she chooses travel to escape the past, Sophie comes to realise that only a journey towards—rather than away from—the locus of her suffering, may provide her existence with the meaning it lacks. Like Iphigeneia, she has been sacrificed but not killed; she must return to her birthplace, embrace her

legacy and make peace with the past. Until the ancestral space fills the emotional void within, both father and daughter remain suspended in the air. For the other three characters of Out of This World, Robert, Anna and Joe, escape is their permanent status as their choices deny them the possibility of safe landing. After World War I and his attempted suicide in 1918, Robert lives 'out of this world:' he severs emotional ties with his only son and eschews the possibility of a new marriage. Instead, his lifelong involvement with the technology of destruction and his constant need for mechanical life support systems—synthetic limbs and a pacemaker which are turning him into a robot—continue until the last day of his life, fittingly terminated by explosives, artificial means that literally transform Robert into thin air.

The Beech home from which Harry seeks to flee constitutes for Anna the means of escape from a war-ravaged country and working-class poverty. She comes to Nuremberg determined never to return to Greece and falls in love with Harry as he happens to be the first man who can offer her the means of escape. The "fairy-tale" of England, related to her by her anglophile Uncle Spiro (OW 174), can be made real by Harry Beech and a family fortune amassed through weapons of mass destruction. But Anna's new family, like her life, is built on thin air: Harry's antagonism with Robert and his inability to accept Anna's and Sophie's approval of the very man he rejects undermine the marriage. Desperate to hold on to the dream, Anna seeks to make Harry jealous through a "tactical desertion" (OW 174): she embarks on an adulterous affair with Frank Irving. Her ploy might have been successful: as Harry admits in an aside to Frank, "if she were still alive I might be sitting where you are now.... Just for her sake" (OW 22-23). Anna does not live long enough to test her husband's devotion; at a highly critical moment in their relationship, Anna flees to Greece to visit her ailing uncle but, more importantly, to contemplate the next escape route: "I want this journey never to stop. I want to stay up here for ever. I have nowhere to go. No home" (OW 181).

Ironically, she dies in an airplane crash on Mount Olympus which offers abrupt closure to her own dilemmas but no symbolic apotheosis, only the fulfilment of a desperate wish. Anna's death acquires no meaning and carries no message for her loved ones: when Sophie travels to Mt. Olympus as "an ordinary tourist, on an ordinary tourist coach," she cannot find her mother: "and how was I to know exactly where? In all those mountains" (OW 126, emphasis in original text). Harry questions the significance of his wife's death on the sacred mountain—"ridiculous or sublime?"

(OW 32)—but dismisses her deification: “I don’t believe that Anna is up there on Olympus, watching Jenny and me descend a breezy hill in Wiltshire” (OW 59). Ultimately, Anna’s absence only widens the gap between her husband and his father, causing the trauma of this relationship to drive Harry even further away from their daughter and from his home.

Both Anna and Robert escape into the air literally but so does Joe Carmichael in another way. As a travel agent, Sophie’s husband travels to Greece or America to get away from his ageing parents and a lower middle-class North London upbringing that meant vacationing at Margate, the quintessential English resort in all its fading glory. Both seedy and symbolic, the seaside town first acquires its mythic status in *Shuttlecock*, which turns the dunes of Camber Sands into a rejuvenating retreat. In *Last Orders*, as the four pilgrims discover by executing their friend’s final request, the potential for reconnecting with the past still exists through the life-affirming vastness of the sea at Margate, the topos of unrealised dreams laid to waste. But, for Joe’s generation, places like Margate are unfashionable backwaters to be endured through childhood and abandoned later for more cosmopolitan destinations. Joe Carmichael participates in the post-imperial exodus of the 1960s when cheap air fares and accommodation allow the British, not as colonials but as tourists, to discover, in Tenerife and Rhodes, new places in the sun, and escape their own ever-shrinking island.

Joe is ideally suited to become a travel agent: he is self-described as a “chameleon” who likes to see smiles on people’s faces and who “float[s] easy” (OW 149). In New York he “sells dreams” of Old England to Americans (OW 153) as he used to sell his compatriots the dream of Greece through Argosy Tours: not an actual place of temples and cypress trees but the escape route into a perfect, brochure-enclosed fantasy land. Joe is a firm believer in people’s need to be offered an opportunity to visit this Technicolor world in the hope that when they step “through the screen” the “pictures” might “come real” (OW 153). Although Joe recognises the artificiality and fakeness of his life, he does not want reality to replace the dream; he prefers to be a “visitor” (OW 147), not a participant. In this novel floating, suspension, and escape are ‘out-of-this-world’ states of being that become synonymous, literally or metaphorically, with death. Both Anna and Robert meet violent deaths that destroy their bodies and turn them into air. Their sudden end, before they can enjoy any reconciliation with their loved ones, is a constant reminder of the randomness of accident. Unless Harry and Sophie spin, through narrative and communication,

unifying yarns before chance intercepts life, their self-protective lightness will transform them, like Joe, into denizens of the air.

Farewell to Myths

In Out of This World the historical dimension is established not only through technological advancements, such as aviation or photography, but also geographically through a juxtaposition of antiquity and modernity. Swift questions the relationship between the ancient heritage that has informed western culture and the contemporary mechanisms that continue to maintain these myths. In the novel Greece is more than Anna's country of origin: it is the land where epic poetry and mythology generated the ideals of heroism and love that survived up to the twentieth century to be tested against a new culture of vision, global warfare and the possibility of mass destruction. While Harry used to think that the camera would be instrumental in ushering in "the age in which we would say farewell to myths and legends," he comes to realise that photography has turned history into spectacle because "the world always wants another world," it "cannot bear to be only what it is" (OW 187).

The symbols of antiquity may have become tourist sights—"Thermopylae now is a pull-in with some road-houses where the Athens-Salonika buses take a break ... a marsh and an ugly monument" (OW 127)—yet the myths survive. Every war is the Trojan War: "someone had raped our precious Falkland Isles, so the ships must sail" (OW 186). Every gift horse, like the pony Sophie receives for her tenth birthday, is a Trojan trap: a token present to mask Harry's absence and another weapon in the undeclared war between father and son. The horror of horses—"a cavalry charge into the teeth of machine guns" (OW 196)—is the only aspect of World War I that Robert ever mentions, in stark contrast to the heroic ideal that identifies horses with formidable war machines. The glorious distant past, "the age of horses" (OW 77), is the era of choice for Sophie who is a "student of the Ancients," looking for her "mythical Greek mother" in Homer and Sophocles (OW 124).

Sophie fails to realise that the House of Atreus is her family's mythological counterpart and she is Iphigeneia to Anna's Clytemnestra, Frank's Aegisthus and Harry's Agamemnon: the daughter sacrificed so the father can sail away, the wife taking revenge upon her husband by taking a lover. Like Iphigeneia, Sophie is rescued by being removed from the presence of the father but is subsequently imprisoned in a barbaric land away from Argos until Orestes and Pylades (her twin

boys, Tim and Paul) give her reason to return to her native land. Significantly, in the myth father and daughter can never reunite: Agamemnon's hubris did not go unpunished. Swift's revisitation of the myth offers the possibility of redemption as Harry, unlike Agamemnon, comes to recognise the errors of his ways: "Agamemnon says yes to war, myth, action, news, classical literature, the death of his daughter. Acts unnaturally" (OW 189). Identifying with the mythological father-figure but acknowledging his own breach of paternal duty, Harry seeks to substitute for the myth his own version of the story and reconcile himself with his daughter.

At the end of Out of This World Harry and Sophie are suspended in the air: we do not witness their landing to claim a definite space in the Here and Now. Does the ambiguity of the novel's suspended closure emphasise the potential for reconciliation or its failure? Adrian Poole argues that this novel is the "most wilfully optimistic" of Swift's works in relation to the potential for the recovery of the protagonists' damaged psyches ("Mourning" 160). Like Waterland, where the narrative's "double closure" (to use Higdon's term) allows the story's structure to maintain its past/present dichotomy, this novel has three endings, all of them related to airplanes. These flights allow the protagonists to maintain a transcended, 'out-of-this-world' status. Closure for Sophie's last section (thirty-four) occurs in a transatlantic flight during which she plans to tell her children the family history. An airplane seems the ideal locus for this fairytale: as flight allows Sophie to "be together" with her boys "above the world" (OW 202), she is liberated from the tyranny of time and her past. Despite the negativity that permeates a major part of Sophie's narrative sections, at the end of the novel she seems to thrive in mid-air revelations that make everything seem possible. Unlike Harry, Sophie does not reach for a happy memory but seeks to transform the present into a transcendent moment: she tells her boys how flight "shorten[s] time" (OW 201) and speaks of a long-gone age when "only gods could fly up into the sky" (OW 202). By combining the contemporary notion of the relativity of time with a reference to a mythical past, the narrative suggests the universality of the characters' plight. Seeking to move back into the world, Sophie begins the healing process by trusting her children with stories of the past that bridge the gap between memory and forgetting.

In the narrative present of the parts narrated by Harry, closure first occurs in section thirty-three: in April 1982 Harry is flown over Wiltshire in order to take photographs. On the particular day Harry's impending marriage to Jenny will finally be announced to Peter and David when they land but this scene is not narrated in the book. The

rest of this section as well as the whole of section thirty-five, the book's final part, present the most significant of Harry's memories: the discovery of his mother's photograph, and the revelation of his father's war accident as narrated on the night of the moonwalk, the memory with which the book opens. By keeping such vital information (hinted at in section one) for the end, the narrative adopts a circular movement that allows the novel to coil back into itself self-reflexively—the same technique used in Waterland as well as Ever After.

Yet, to end the novel Harry travels further back in memory: as far back as a weekend in 1928 when father and son travel to France for the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the Armistice. Harry's happiest memory concerns a moment of "truce" which constitutes the only occasion in the novel when Robert seeks to indulge his son and makes a "genuine, faltering attempt at fatherliness" (OW 207) by arranging for the boy to sit in the cockpit for the flight back to England. In the "ancient Argosy" Harry experiences a transcendent moment of suspension, "of being lifted up and away, out of his [father's] world, out of the age of mud, out of that brown, obscure age, into the age of air" (OW 208). This memory justifies Harry's love of flying and allows him to remain in the same suspended state in the past as well as the present. Thus, the two closing points in this narrator's sections illustrate the title's ambivalence: a final juxtaposition between Harry's world—a life lived in the air and through the eyes—and the reality of mud and ashes, mortality and history. Just as the 1928 celebration unites father and son by literally taking them beyond the mundane, Harry and his daughter begin, in 1982, an armistice to their life-long war on similar wings above the world. Out of This World becomes the second of three novels where Swift uses a pleasant memory to end the narrative at a meaningful moment in the past, allowing the narrators to escape a hurtful present. Although the exaltation accompanying Harry's first flight lacks the gravity of Tom Crick's remembrance of his brother's watery resurrection in Waterland or the significance of Bill's memory of his first erotic encounter with Ruth in Ever After, all three events are definitive moments in these men's lives. Regardless of how traumatic the memory of the narrated incident has become for Tom or Bill the heart-warming lyricism with which these events are described renders them emblematic of the solace these narrators seek (and find) in storytelling.

By the end of Out of This World Harry seems to have become aware that every latter-day Agamemnon must participate in the human sacrifice which will continue to sanctify blood thirst and perpetuate the heroic ideal. In the contemporary world the

archetypal patterns of mythology survive as samples of the distilled wisdom of the ancients but they are not used as such. Rather than assisting people in avoiding the repetition of past mistakes, they exist as moments of déjà vu—recognised for what they are only after they have been relived. Only now the sacrifice will not be narrated by Aeschylus and the war will not be sung by a blind Bard; instead, the event will be recorded by the camera crews and turned into “a show-case war, an exhibition war” (OW 185). The reenactment of myth, the need to invest contemporary events with the significance and symbolism of ancient glory, the desire to model a new tale on an old pattern explains why stories survive against the debris of history.

Another realisation Harry makes by the end of Out of This World is that the land tells its own story: the camera can assist in disclosing the secrets of the soil. In the service of archaeology, photography becomes a “magic lamp” that may reveal “spectral field systems” dating from the Bronze Age (OW 193). Harry discovers that from the air “civilisation as we know it disappears” (OW 194). Like a palimpsest, the present covers a past indelibly carved upon the face of the earth, upon her body: “these vistas... virgin, naked countryside, the bare bosoms of hills and little pubic clumps of woodland” (OW 194). Through the personification of the land, Harry implies not only the diachronic presence of the past but also the ‘telling’ ability of earth, revealing a primitive faith in natural restitution. Only if technology comes to the aid of human geo-historical concerns, only if the one-eyed god is humbled into the service of the past, not the present, can the camera exorcise its demons.

In Out of This World the male protagonists, Harry and Robert Beech, as a photographer and an arms manufacturer respectively, create images as they create weapons: not by participating in reality but by abstaining from flux. History catches up with them at the same moment: when a bomb destroys, literally as well as metaphorically, their lives’ work and demonstrates the emotional fragmentation of their reality. By refusing to tell stories father and son have forced their relationship to rely on images, on a series of photographic stills, without a unifying narrative to give this silent documentary meaning and coherence. A photograph is selective, thus it becomes misleading; it has none of narrative’s healing powers. Unless Harry writes to Sophie, unless they engage in the verbal process of reconciliation, they are not able to inhabit the same world. In Out of This World Swift suggests that vision cannot replace voice: not ‘watching’ but ‘telling’ allows the merging of history and story. Only a soothing narrative that “reconciles memory and forgetting” allows the

hidden patterns of meaning, the relations written in the blood, to unite people, transforming stillness and spectacle into his/story.

**The “Alchemical Quest” for the Real Thing:
Romance, Nostalgia and the Struggle for Existence in Ever After**

... et nos cedamus Amori
Virgil Eclogues, X (94)

We name our fondlings in alphabetical order.
... This was a T, – Twist, I named *him*.
The next one as comes will be Unwin.
Charles Dickens Oliver Twist (23)

The real thing could be so much
less precious than the unreal.
Henry James “The Real Thing” (409)

In his fifth novel, Ever After (1992), Graham Swift continues the familiar exploration of the influence of the past on the present, through intertwining stories, which constitute, to borrow the term Adrian Poole uses to characterise all of Swift’s tales, “complex fables of bereavement” (“Mourning After” 150). Yet another first-person narrator, the fifty-two-year-old don Bill Unwin, self-consciously links his own losses with a Victorian ancestor’s spiritual crisis in an attempt to construct a coherent his/story, define the ‘real thing’ and capture the meaning of existence. Unwin characterises his manuscript, which meanders through past and present, a “hybrid being, part truth, part fiction” (EA 90). Throughout his carefully written confession Bill Unwin is aware that “the past is a foreign country” (EA 229) where memory and fiction are inexorably linked, as his allusion to another bitter and traumatised academic in L. P. Hartley’s The Go-Between (1953) suggests. A lover of literature, not a history man like Tom Crick, Unwin readily acknowledges that he is “not in the business of strict historiography” (EA 90). Rather, he seeks to produce a soothing fiction that will sustain his faith in the fairytale romance of his marriage as well as explain why he opts for memory instead of the Here and Now. Ever After concerns not only the human need to come to terms with mortality and the loss of loved ones; more importantly, this novel juxtaposes the therapeutic function of storytelling with the inevitable and catastrophic deceptions the belief in “happily-ever-after” entails.

Unwin’s account is rendered in the favoured Swiftian mode of confession. While Bill reveals his unsuccessful attempt to take his own life from chapter one, details of the events that precipitated his desperate need to escape even the protective life that a special endowment, the Ellison Fellowship, offers are gradually and reluctantly

narrated. Bill credits three successive deaths in eighteen months for having “shattered, overturned” (EA 3) his life: first, in February 1988, his beloved wife, Ruth, kills herself to avoid the final, debilitating stages of lung cancer; then, in September 1988, his mother, Sylvia, succumbs to the same disease (throat cancer); finally, in June 1989, his stepfather, Sam Ellison, suffers a fatal heart attack in the arms of a prostitute in a Frankfurt hotel room. These deaths rob Unwin of his guardian angels since he has always defined himself through others. Bill has never lived away from a defining human presence: his mother’s initially, his stepfather’s almost unwillingly, and his wife’s most importantly. In struggling to come to terms with grief, Unwin reaches for the soothing patterns of romance only to discover that these deaths have robbed his life of its healing tales.

Ever After constitutes an elegy, in diary form, as well as a desperate celebration of life and love. The recently resurrected Unwin, a one-time lecturer in English and theatrical manager, has never written “anything as—personal—as this” before (EA 4). As his name suggests, this narrator “endures the perception of his impotence” (Levenson 38), increasingly aware that, having identified life with the women he loved, their loss forces him to redefine existence. The emptiness created from Ruth’s death tests Bill’s faith in the supremacy of romance: as his memory of the flesh-and-blood woman fades and photographs “mock” him—“they are, they are not Ruth. I can’t bear to look at them”—he realises that “nothing is left but this impossible absence” (EA 256). Incarcerated in the private gardens of an unnamed Cambridge college, an “appropriate pastoral setting” for his elegy (Wheeler “Melancholic” 72), Bill resorts to confession, forced to reconsider the power of his love for the woman he identified with “life” for thirty years (EA 120).

For three decades of married life Bill was the epitome of the devoted husband, content to be a “perpetual stagehand, a lurker” (EA 75), hidden away in the periphery of his wife’s brilliant career. Yet, he cannot help but wonder whether his love was truly reciprocated or whether love, in the absence of the beloved, can actually survive the temptations that women he has recently met, like Katherine and Gabriella, bring into his after-Ruth existence. Does *amor vincit omnia*, as the clock, made by Matthew Pearce’s father, promises? Or is romantic love a “made-up thing, a concoction of the poets” (EA 111)? The loss of wife, mother and stepfather, the allure of Gabriella’s perfume and the desperate advances of the lonely Katherine, along with the unexpected revelation of his own contested paternity, complete the mosaic of losses, puzzles and thwarted desires that leads Unwin to “attempted self-

slaughter" (EA 3). Bill prefers to kill himself than wrestle with the guilt of betrayal and acknowledge his weakness.

Unwin's sense of loss is exacerbated by three more factors that increase his loneliness and desperation. First, the newly discovered Matthew Pearce Notebooks—testimony of an ancestor's battle to come to terms with the death of a son, Felix, and the loss of his Christian faith, events which destroy his marriage but not his love for his wife, Elizabeth—suggest to Bill that his own passion for Ruth may not have been as powerful as he thought. Then, a double revelation concerning Colonel Unwin—he was neither Bill's father nor a romantic who killed himself for love—implies that the life-long guilt Bill has experienced in relation to his father's suicide was pointless. Finally, the attraction Unwin feels towards his academic rival's wife, which turns to love, and the identification of this new woman with "life" (EA 87), convinces Bill of his inability to meet the idealised standards of romance. These events and coincidences, which befall a psychologically paralysed man, lead Unwin to a crisis of monumental dimensions that he seeks to avoid through "self-slaughter." When modern medicine—"they pumped me, jump-started me, wired me to the latest gadgets" (EA 3)—conspires to revive him to a state of affairs he can neither confront nor deny, he opts for a written confession through which he hopes to come to terms with a new self who must acknowledge the realisations he previously sought to escape: "perhaps these pages will eventually explain. Perhaps they will give me an explanation" (EA 4, emphasis in original text).

Rambling About Life and Death

In chapter one Unwin's first utterance ("these are the words of a dead man"), issued as an explicit warning to the reader, maintains the ambiguity of both post-mortem wisdom and meaningless "ramblings" (EA 1). This narrator's diary, like Prentis's *Shuttlecock*, becomes as much a record of exposure as an attempt to conceal and to deny the revelations lurking between the lines. Like all of Swift's unreliable narrators, Unwin seeks to hoodwink the reader as a method of self-protection, but, unlike Prentis who hides his intentions, Unwin betrays himself in subtle ways. The origins of the half-truths uttered by this "feeble" man (EA 120) lie in Unwin's equivocations, which subvert the narrative from the first chapter: "these words. . . are not mine. . . . This way in which I write is surely not me. . . . You have no means of comparison and only my word to go on" (EA 4, emphasis in original text). In his diary Bill incorporates parts of the Pearce Notebooks, reconstructs various life stories and deconstructs characters' motives; he even suspects "honest" Matthew of lying (EA

212). The reader of Ever After becomes gradually alerted to the narrator's tricks through signs of unreliability, such as omissions, hesitations, warnings and fictionalising.

The narrative order in Ever After, like Swift's two previous novels, follows the vagaries of memory and desire, not chronology: since none of the novel's chapters is the sequel of the previous one, the Eliotian "in my beginning is my end" serves as a guiding principle. The novel begins in the aftermath of Bill's (unsuccessful) end: he has been restored to a substitute life, "born again in plastic," enduring his "benign incarceration" in an "exclusive asylum" (EA 9). In this afterlife Unwin finds it impossible to produce scholarship so he opts for autobiography, hoping to secure posteriority as recompense for his losses. The edition of the Pearce Notebooks is abandoned in favour of the Unwin "ramblings," which incorporate stories in a fragmented format that develops all the plot strands simultaneously. Even Matthew's linear narrative is cut up: the Pearce diary entries are presented anachronically to fit Unwin's thematic preoccupations. Since all the characters are pronounced dead, literally or metaphorically, from chapter one, suspense is maintained through evasions that allow belated revelations and deferred explanations to last until the final chapter.

Within the novel's twenty-two chapters the narrative swings like a pendulum back and forth between the 1840s and 1989, visiting and revisiting through the narrator's memory, or his imagination, incidents, lived or guessed, in the lives of four couples: his mother, Sylvia, and stepfather, Sam Ellison; his ancestors, Matthew and Elizabeth Pearce; historian and fellow don Michael Potter and his wife, Katherine; and Unwin's own thirty-year relationship and marriage to famous actress Ruth Vaughan. Generic variations in Ever After challenge the reader's expectations as Unwin's diary combines the thematic concerns of the elegy, the epic and the Romance novel (life and death, love and heroism) with elements from autobiography, biography, the Bildungsroman, and the campus novel. In addition, multiple quotations and allusions—from the Bible, from the works of Virgil and Shakespeare, as well as from arias and popular ballads—constitute intertexts which derive from the vast canvas of the English literary tradition and European opera as well as popular culture, revealing this Renaissance scholar's weakness for the myths of romance, highbrow or not, as well as his dependence on them.

Like all of Swift's novels, Ever After employs a sophisticated web of structural and narrative techniques: four plot lines, two voices and two points of view—as well as embedded texts—combine in a non-linear narrative which spans almost two centuries. Common thematic concerns unite the various plot strands, allowing the reader to view the widening circles without losing sight of their origins, while the presentation emphasises different aspects of the protagonist's quest in each chapter (see Appendix V). The use of this over-wrought pattern explains the contradictory critical responses relating to the novel's structure: while Ursula Le Guin thought the elements of the story were “woven together with very great skill” (6) and Hilary Mantel conceded that the work was “subtly, skilfully done” (25), other reviewers found that “Ever After has something disjointed about it” (Milne 40), or that the “varying strands... don't seem significantly to cohere” (Wall 26).

The first narrative strand in Ever After relates to Unwin's own family life from infancy to the present (1936-1989) and his uneasy relationships with his coquettish mother and the men in her life: Colonel Unwin, the distant, much-older husband, a diplomat covertly involved with the Manhattan Project, who kills himself in Paris in 1946; his “substitute,” the brotherly step-father Sam Ellison, a successful American businessman who is Sylvia's junior by a dozen years; and the nameless engine-driver from Aldermaston, Bill's “surreptitious begetter, mounted on a giant phallic symbol” (EA 200). The narrator's life is haunted by men but defined by women, as Bill, unable to trace his origins, forfeits biology and history in favour of literature and romance.

The second and third plot lines are almost inseparable, revolving around Matthew Pearce, Sylvia's distant ancestor, and his Notebooks, written in the middle of the nineteenth century (1854-1860). The manuscripts become for Bill the means, as Adrian Poole notes, of “ghostly identification” with his great-great-grandfather's plight (“Mourning” 157). Preparing their edition constitutes Bill's scholarly endeavour, a project also coveted by Michael Potter who craves to complete it himself. Through a heavily fictionalised reconstruction of Matthew's acquaintance with Darwin's evolutionary theory, Lyell's Geology and the fossil of an ichthyosaur, Unwin attempts to identify the motives and the events that lead to his ancestor's gradual loss of religious faith and subsequent destruction of marital happiness.

The final narrative thread concerns the narrator's—fulfilled or frustrated, real or imagined—relationships with women: with Ruth, Bill's successful actress wife; with

Katherine, the beautiful but neglected spouse of “resident whiz-kid” Michael Potter (EA 48); and with Gabriella, the Italian research graduate and latest Potter amore. In this narrator’s eyes each of these women wears the stereotypical cloak of literary heroines: Ruth, the celebrated stage star, is both Ophelia and Cleopatra, sweet innocence and beguiling femininity; Katherine, the ivory-tower wife, is “more like one of those pitying and piteous women of medieval romance” (EA 80), both Guinevere and the Lady of Shallot; and Gabriella, who comes, like Juliet, from Verona, the “balconied city of love” (EA 171), brings promise of the real thing: romantic love that conquers death.

In Unwin’s diary, as in Hamlet (the novel’s dominant intertext), Gertrude outshines Ophelia: Sylvia emerges as the most vibrant female presence; Ruth constitutes a poignant but ghostly absence, more vivid as the yet-unknown Soho chorus girl of 1957 than the famous stage actress of the 1980s. More present than Ruth is Katherine Potter, a more developed and sophisticated version of the suffering and guilty wife who cannot bear children first encountered in Swift’s fiction in the early story “Seraglio” (1977). Katherine blames herself for the miscarriages (“she has this way of being at fault” EA 244) and accepts her husband’s infidelities as an almost inevitable consequence of her infertility. The loss of a child (experienced by two of the four couples in Ever After) as well as the choice to remain childless (the case of the other two couples) are common occurrences in Swift’s fiction. The lack of progeny, a symbol of characters’ inability to step into the future, highlights the preoccupation of the Swiftian male with “anteriority,” as Unwin terms his effort “to know who [he] was” (EA 235), and underlines his inability to come to terms with history and the past.

Ever After was lauded in France where it won the *Prix de Meilleur Livre Etranger* in 1994; upon publication in England and the US the novel received some unequivocal praise by well-known reviewers. Anita Brookner found the novel to be “touching,” “deeply felt and rather haunting” (30); Pico Iyer called it “supremely intelligent” (78); and Lorna Sage praised “Swift’s elaborate and cunning cross-associations” (6). Two other critiques commended Swift for creating “a flawless portrait of an ageing mediocrity” (Dibdin) in “rich, lush and unhurried” prose (Harris 21). Yet, most reviews on both sides of the Atlantic were mixed, balancing positive commentary with doubts about the book’s overall effectiveness. Hilary Mantel best captured the reviewers’ gentle dissatisfaction when she noted, “the book is worthy of respect” but “deprived

of dramatic force” (24-25). Similarly, Rose Tremain found Ever After to be a “subtle book that lingers in the mind. . . . Yet, does not quite seize the attention” (130).

The inevitable comparison of this novel to Waterland found Ever After to be, in the words of Peter Kemp, “substantial. . . but some way from sublime” (“Regeneration” 7.8), or, “somewhat insulated and artificial” (Pritchard “Tradition” 484). D. J. Taylor called it a “puzzling piece of work” and attributed the lack of force to “Swift’s absorption in his chosen narrative voice” (28). Taylor thought the Pearce diaries were “tastefully done” (28), but another reviewer remarked that the contrast between the two voices “heighten[s] the sense of tawdriness when Unwin’s own voice resumes” (Dibdin). The author’s success in creating a voice that exposes the narrator’s “muddle” and “pretensions” was viewed as the most serious shortcoming of this novel (Dibdin). Lorna Sage thought of Bill Unwin as “the author’s reluctant and amateurish alter ego” (6) while Mantel perceived the narrator as “not the most promising company for the duration of a sizable novel” (23). Laura Cumming found Unwin “too meagre a voice to disclose Swift’s ideas,” a narrator who is left “free to squander the novel’s possibilities” (25). Unwin’s “faux-literary rhetoric” (Cumming) was characterised as “unattractive: tangled sub-Jamesian sentences, broken up by quasi-sentences with no main verb” (Mantel 23).

Texts and Intertexts

Hilary Mantel was not the only reviewer to claim that Unwin’s style evokes Henry James. Graham Swift’s thematic preoccupation with the nature of human illusions renders James a constant presence in Swift’s fiction. Bill escapes into the past when his realisation that he never possessed the real thing leads him to a painful conclusion: that the real and the ideal are not always synonymous. The first-person narrator of Henry James’s story “The Real Thing” (1892) concludes that “the real thing could be so much less precious than the unreal” (409). Despite the obvious plot differences between Ever After and James’s story, Swift’s concern with the nature of representation, the battle waged between illusion and reality in art as in life, constitutes a reworking, through the diverging views of the two voices in Ever After, of the Jamesian narrator’s dilemma. Del Ivan Janik also notes the existence of this thematic concern in Ever After when he comments on Bill’s “difficulty of finding ‘truth’ amid the flux of appearance” (“No End” 184). The narrator of “The Real Thing” is an artist who values the lesson he learns, declaring at the end of his story that he is “content to have paid the price—for the memory” (409). Matthew Pearce would agree: his 1860 letter to Elizabeth shows that he stands firm by his (non) belief even

nine years after he opted to sacrifice happiness to truth. Like James's artist, Matthew rejects illusion and embraces a discomfiting truth, while Bill prefers to believe in the potential of "happiness ever after" (EA 121), even when he finds memory an insufficient substitute for the wife he has lost.

In Ever After Swift uses a narrator who shares the author's formal training in literature. Bill's many allusions to various Shakespearean plays, as well as his quotations from Virgil and the Bible, are indicative of the borrowed voices that lurk in this narrator's subconscious, a result of his penchant for romance, and a creative reworking of ancient wisdom, like Tom Crick's assimilation of Carlyle and Heraclitus. Unwin's identification with Hamlet, accompanied by his awareness that he may have more in common with "a man behind the scenes" (EA 70), like Polonius or T. S. Eliot's Prufrock, reveals this narrator's self-conscious inadequacies. In his diary Bill evokes literary or historical characters (such as Hamlet, Matthew Pearce, I. K. Brunel, or Walter Raleigh) in search of alter egos and father figures who can provide him, through their own crises, with answers and emotional support.

A propos the novel's connection to other works, most reviews noted the debt to those Victorian greats, namely George Eliot, Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy, and Jane Austen, evoked by the pastiche of the Pearce manuscripts as well as by the Victorian-novel reconstruction of Matthew's life. In Nicolas Tredell's view, "the fictional re-creation of the Victorian era" has become commonplace, so "Swift is mining, though skilfully, an already well-worked vein" (DLB 268). Inevitably, reviews placed Ever After in the company of two novels which constitute paradigmatic deconstructions of nineteenth century realism as well as "deliberate acts of homage" (Bradbury Modern 4): John Fowles's The French Lieutenant's Woman (1969) and A. S. Byatt's Possession (1990). Harris discovered "a number of curious parallels" between Ever After and Fowles's novel: these similarities concern Matthew Pearce, a "lower-middle-class version" of Charles Smithson, and the existence in both novels of Lyell, Darwin, Mary Anning, fossils and Lyme Regis (21). Pritchard noted that "the echoes of Fowles's The French Lieutenant's Woman [in Ever After] feel so strong as to be obtrusive" ("Tradition" 484). Similarly, Levenson found "the plot similarities between Possession and Ever After striking—the contest over rediscovered Victorian manuscripts, the struggle against academic vultures, the caricatures of American venality" (40). On the contrary, Milne did not discover many affinities between Swift's work and Possession, commenting on the lack in Ever After of "the scholarly sleuthing that powers Byatt's book" (40).

Ever After and Possession share similar concerns relating to the effects of nineteenth-century science on the definition of time and the origins of life. In the essay "Ancestors" from her recent collection On Histories and Stories (2000), Byatt herself locates the "topos" of the Victorian hero's "encounter with a fossilised creature" in Hardy's 1873 novel A Pair of Blue Eyes (72), and argues, "much current fiction springs out of a resistance to the implications of [Darwin's] ideas—a resistance sometimes nostalgic, sometimes combative" (66). Both Ever After and Possession juxtapose a Victorian and a contemporary love story; both describe academic ventures which continue beyond the walls of the academy, affecting the real world of people and emotions; both reveal the weaknesses of historiography and dismiss the possibility of appropriating the past. Yet, the differences between these two novels are equally pronounced. Possession is motivated by fascinating literary enigmas, a stimulating group of characters, and exemplary detective work. On the contrary, Swift's researcher calls himself, in relation to his academic credentials, an "impostor" (EA 43). Unwin is self-consciously uninterested in formal scholarship: "the scrupulously scholarly exercise ceased to matter, if it ever mattered.... It is the personal thing that matters" (EA 49). In seeking to comprehend how Matthew Pearce made his choices, Unwin is driven not by academic aspirations but by his own (now shaken) belief in romantic love and his need to rescue the myth on which he has built his past.

In Possession Byatt's scholars are aware of the conventions of Romance that trap them into stereotypical expectations: "[Roland] was in a Romance, a vulgar and a high Romance simultaneously, a Romance was one of the systems that controlled him, as the expectations of Romance control almost everyone in the Western world" (425). As this extract reveals, the third-person omniscient narrator allows the characters to communicate their thoughts in a traditional manner, but the thoughts themselves are subversive and self-reflexive: "Roland thought...with precise postmodernist pleasure...that he and Maud were being driven by a plot" (421). Conversely, in Ever After the narrator strives to rescue the "plot" which constitutes his source of faith in the power of love. By exposing Victorian pastiche to contemporary scrutiny and testing the limits of realistic representation, writers like Swift and Byatt explore, as Del Ivan Janik observes, the "nature of the historian, his or her motives, methods, and measures of success" ("No End" 187). As in Waterland, history is no longer a Grand Narrative but a record of the historian (or, in the case of Ever After, the literature lover) and his view of the past, communal and personal. As another historian-as-protagonist, the terminally ill Claudia Hampton in

Penelope Lively's Moon Tiger (1987), declares, "fiction can seem more enduring than reality" (6). Bill Unwin's diary is proof of his agreement.

Sally Shuttleworth has coined the term "retro-Victorian novel" to describe the works which followed The French Lieutenant's Woman; Shuttleworth considers both Angels and Insects and Ever After to be "exercises in nostalgia" (267), texts which identify the 1850s with the "embodiment of an era of crisis" (268). In a 1995 essay Byatt identifies the "obsessive recurrence of Darwin in modern fiction" ("New Body" 443) as a contemporary need to reassess the past in the absence of "the old framing certainties of Christianity" ("New Body" 445). Ever After is the work of an author who is as aware as Fowles and Byatt of the literary tradition he is reworking and just as certain that the past cannot be reconstructed meaningfully out of documents without the aid of the imagination. Within a generic variant inaugurated by The French Lieutenant's Woman, novels such as Ever After and Possession, which Byatt terms "historical fictions of a new seriousness" ("New Body" 443), can be identified as literary siblings in their exploration of the relationship between contemporary angst and the religious and scientific debates of the Victorian era. In Peter Ackroyd's novel First Light (1989) the protagonist is a scientist based in Lyme Regis. Byatt's two novellas in Angels and Insects (1992) recreate Victorian debates on Creation and demonstrate how loss of faith may interfere with a couple's marital happiness.

In Fowles, Byatt or Swift, disputes, such as the ones between Charles Smithson and his uncle as well as between Charles and Ernestina's father in The French Lieutenant's Woman, or between Matthew and the Rector in Ever After, are similar in content but differ in terms of each author's purpose and mode. In Ever After, as in all his novels, Swift does not sacrifice character development to polemics or experimentation. The metafictional comments in Ever After derive from Bill's need to reconstruct, in its entirety, a story the details of which are only partially known. Unwin himself is conscious of fabrication; he exposes the artificiality of fiction when he consistently reminds the reader that he is serving his own purposes in his reconstruction of the past: "that is how I like to see it. That is how I wish it to have happened" (EA 103). Swift's narrator is highly dissimilar to Fowles's thinly-disguised authorial presence. Whereas Fowles allows the authorial voice to become highly

intrusive, to interrupt the narrative, and even to place the author in the novel,¹ Swift remains constantly masked, serving the desires of his narrator. When Unwin revisits Dorset, fictionalising Matthew's search for fossils and recreating the origins of Pearce's loss of faith, or when Unwin asks "who is Elizabeth? What is she?" (EA 208) echoes both Shakespeare's "who is Sylvia?" (Two Gentlemen of Verona, IV. 2) and Fowles's "who is Sarah?" (80), Swift is primarily allowing his narrator to tell his story, not indulging in intertextual games or testing the reader's ability to discover multiple allusions.

As expected, Swift denies paying homage to Fowles's celebrated work, or any other, in Ever After: "when I set a bit of the novel in Lyme Regis," Swift argued in a 1992 interview, "I wasn't thinking of any literary tradition or connection" (Smith 44). The famous fossil-hunting territory in Dorset is one of many settings that the novel uses. Matthew Pearce's job as a surveyor in the mid-1800s and his intimate knowledge of mining, his acquaintance with I. K. Brunel and his interest in geology take the reader all over the West Country: Plymouth, Tavistock, Lyme Regis. Unwin's own experiences include Aldermaston and Paris in the 1940s, London in the late 1950s and, in the fictional present (1989), "rising out of the miasmal Fens," the "cherished edifice" (EA 9) of an unnamed Cambridge college. Like the places and the faces in Unwin's past that are reconstructed with the aid of his imagination, the places and the faces in Matthew's past are fictionalised, creating a hero who incorporates all the qualities that Bill craves. As the narrator acknowledges, "I invent all this. I don't know that this is how it happened. It can't have been like this simply because I imagine it so" (EA 109). Bill's constant awareness that his version is story, not history, that he acts the part of romantic hero as well as the part of ironic observer—"voyeur" and "flâneur" (EA 19)—constitutes a reminder that does not allow the reader to suspend disbelief and become absorbed in the plot.

The Patterns in the Structure

The first four chapters in Ever After focus on the narrator's predicament in the fictional present as well as the circumstances in his early life that led to his romantic

¹ Chapter thirteen in The French Lieutenant's Woman is the first instance of such interruption in order for the authorial voice to introduce itself ("I am a novelist" 81) and to discuss the act of writing a novel in "the age of Alain Robbe-Grillet and Roland Barthes" (80). Towards the end of the novel, in chapter fifty-five, the author, identified as a "bearded man" (317), boards the same train compartment as his protagonist and wonders about the end of the story while staring at the sleeping Charles. Finally, the "bearded man" opts for two endings and flips a coin to decide on the sequence.

identification with Hamlet. These chapters describe in detail the deaths of each one of Bill's parents: Colonel Unwin's suicide in Paris closes chapter two, while Sylvia's death in hospital comes at the end of chapter three. This forty-year leap between chapters is a frequent occurrence in the novel. The chronological gap is bridged thematically as well as symbolically: bright sunshine dominates each of these significant days as the "eternal gold" of the Paris spring morning (EA 24) melts into a "radiant September evening" (EA 25). Through the sun's life-affirming balm each chapter closes not with death but the affirmation of life.

The next four chapters (five to eight) follow linear chronological progression—from 1869 to 1989—focusing on love, fidelity and family with each successive chapter devoted to one of the novel's four couples. Chapter five presents Matthew's last letter to Elizabeth written in Plymouth in April 1869 as he prepares to sail to America: nine years after their divorce he declares his undying love for her and their children. Chapter six constitutes the formal beginning of Unwin's autobiography ("I was born..." EA 57) and depicts ten-year-old Bill's new family: Sylvia's marriage to Sam Ellison, based on "sheer carnal compulsion" (EA 62), legitimises their adulterous Paris affair. Chapter seven describes another ten years in Bill's youth, focusing on the meeting between the twenty-year-old Bill and the nineteen-year-old Ruth in 1957: Bill immediately falls in love with Ruth's "presence" (EA 45); in his heart this is a romantic union that should last forever. Chapter eight leaps to the fictional present, Bill's after-Ruth existence, and presents Unwin's thinly disguised fascination with Katherine along with "a brief history of the Potters" (EA 80), reconstructing nearly two decades of marriage. In these four chapters Unwin implicitly categorises these couples, using "romantic love" as his criterion: Matthew's marriage and his own are idealised as unions based on ever-lasting love, while his mother's second marriage and the Potters' are relationships marked by necessity, infidelity and compromise. This good-couple/bad-couple juxtaposition reveals not only Bill's romantic tendencies and illusions but also a lurking suspicion that this dichotomy may not be as rigid or absolute as he has always believed.

Unwin's idealisation of his marriage to Ruth and the need to resurrect the myth of romance explain his decision, declared at the end of chapter eight, to abandon his editing project and present the Pearce manuscripts to Katherine. The rationale behind this gift is not provided until chapter twenty-one: the born-again Bill feels he is no longer the knight in shining armour, but the "wizard Merlin" who tries to conjure "a whole fairy-tale prognosis" (EA 246), hoping to restore, through his sacrifice, both

scholarly and personal, marital happiness to the Potters' marriage. Or are his motives less noble? Unable to find inspiration in his ancestor's tragedy, Unwin has little use for Matthew Pearce and makes the most of the manuscripts as a means of testing Katherine's affections. This gesture, which occurs after a picnic lunch with Potter's wife in the "Fellows Only" garden, signifies the first ending in *Ever After*. The use of multiple endings is a pattern Swift consistently employs in all his novels. In this manner, as Higdon noted in his 1991 essay "Double Closures," "perpetually unresolved tension" (95) helps the author maintain suspense in lieu of a linear narrative structure. With regard to chronology this incident constitutes the ending that comes closer to the novel's fictional present, that is, a period of several July days (three weeks after Bill's failed suicide attempt) when Unwin devotes all his time to writing in his diary, staying outdoors until dark: "sometimes, despite the coolness, I have lingered out here in the garden, my upturned tray on my knee, till it is almost impossible to write..." (EA 234-235).

The next five chapters (nine to thirteen) mirror thematically the previous group, revisiting the same four couples, but placing emphasis (chapters nine and eleven) on Matthew Pearce through Bill's idealised version of his ancestor's married life. Between these two chapters Bill presents his own happy life with Ruth as proof of the existence of "romantic love" (EA 111). This interpolation reveals that Bill's claim on Matthew's life is defined neither through blood nor through scholarly interest but lies in their common experience of marital happiness. To that end Unwin fictionalises the missing details. Only later, in chapter eighteen, does Bill acknowledge that his ulterior motive for imagining that Matthew and Elizabeth fell in love at first sight is his own need to believe that true love and romance are possible: "I invent. I imagine. I want them to have been happy" (EA 212). Again actions reported in an earlier chapter are revisited in a later chapter not only for details to be added but more significantly for the narrator's motives to be elucidated. As information in subsequent chapters enriches one's understanding of the narrator, the reader is constantly encouraged to reconsider an event in order to recognise the structural patterns that provide cohesion.

Chapters twelve and thirteen relate to the other two couples (Sylvia and Sam, Michael and Katherine respectively) and they are also implicitly linked to Bill's past and current life. Sam and Michael are each shown to covet something that Bill has: in chapter twelve Unwin's stepfather inquires after the secret to Bill's marital happiness; in the following chapter Potter openly demands the Pearce Notebooks.

Nevertheless, the most important element in these chapters is not what these men ask of Bill but what they provide. At the end of chapter twelve Sam reveals the secret of Bill's parentage: according to Sylvia, Bill's father was not Colonel Unwin but an anonymous engine driver from Aldermaston. This belated revelation provides yet another level of meaning to Bill's pun ("my father killed my father" EA 11) at the end of chapter one. In chapter thirteen Bill appropriates Gabriella's bottle of perfume and fantasises about a possible relationship with this young woman. Sam's shocking revelation and the potential of Bill's infidelity to Ruth's memory create an anticlimax to the idealised happiness on which the narrator insisted in the previous three chapters.

In the next eight chapters (fourteen to twenty-one) disillusionment begins to creep into Bill's narrative, counterbalanced by his need to maintain his belief in romance. Confused over his origins, Unwin begins to suspect Sam and his mother of lying to him, or to his father, and feels compelled to make a formal request for information from army files. This venture yields no substantial evidence to allow him to favour one over another of a dozen possibilities listed at the end of chapter sixteen: "that she did or didn't know I was another man's son. . . . That he killed himself because of my mother and Sam. . . . That she told him he wasn't my father never thinking the revelation might kill him. . . . That That" (EA 195-196). Since all the participants in this paternity drama are dead, the narrator has no choice but to accept the unresolved ambiguity. Bill's frustration is mirrored in chapter fifteen by the culmination of Matthew's spiritual crisis: his final quarrel over the existence of God with Elizabeth's father in 1860 necessitates that he abandon his family permanently. Constructed in earlier chapters, the myth of the happy homes is now partly deconstructed. In compensation chapter seventeen is devoted to imaginary but loving fathers and strong father figures: Matthew's father, I. K. Brunel, the anonymous engine driver. This is an effort on Bill's part to protect his emotional and ideological status quo, in order to continue to believe that "the world will not shatter because of a single—misconception" (EA 204).

The next two chapters balance precariously between positive and negative thoughts. In chapter eighteen Bill contemplates, only to dismiss, the painful possibility of infidelity on the part of Elizabeth or Ruth, although he reconciles himself to being the illegitimate child of a nameless train-engine driver and accepts even more painful truths: that "species adapt" (EA 223), that nothing outlasts death (EA 231), and that "we cannot all be Shakespeares" (EA 233). In the next chapter,

however, he succumbs to an overwhelming need to redeem his past from doubt and ambiguity, recasting it in the glorious light of innocence, a time when everything in the prelapsarian Eden of his childhood was “divine” (EA 230). In such a context Matthew’s demise in 1869 becomes less significant than the fact that Matthew wrote his ex-wife a love letter (presented in chapter five), and that Elizabeth kept his final declaration of love as well as his Notebooks to pass them on to his offspring (chapter eighteen). Similarly, the sensual pleasure the nine-year-old Unwin derives from watching his mother bite into a Williams pear in Aldermaston on August 5, 1945, is elevated through his narrative into a more important memory than the dropping of the Bomb (chapter nineteen).

Bill’s anguish over mortality expressed in chapter twenty, however, is not cancelled by any happy memory. The reality of his life is rendered with extraordinary intensity in this chapter: he is alone, “a nobody, an heirless nonentity,” a “bastard” (EA 232) who must accept that “a person can become, in an instant, a thing” (EA 235). No thoughts of immortality are entertained in this chapter as Bill prepares to describe the realisation that pushed him to overdose on his “last day on this earth” (EA 237): chapter twenty-one explains how he succumbed to Katherine Potter’s charms, revealing his emotions to her through a “full, hard embrace with nothing restrained or disguised about it” (EA 246). For a man who needs to maintain the illusion that he loved only one woman in his life and he can continue loving her unflinchingly ever after, the sudden realisation that instead of Ruth “it could have been [Katherine]” (EA 245) throws him off balance.

Bill’s realisation has already been foreshadowed in chapter thirteen by his search for Gabriella in the University library and his decision to keep the bottle of her perfume. This bottle remains “on the shelf” in Bill’s bathroom and has “its little released world” periodically “sniffed” (EA 173) while Bill himself retains the illusion that he is firmly devoted to his wife’s memory, assisted by his own admission that he is “institutionalised” (EA 172). In chapter twenty-one Unwin recognises that his encounter with Katherine is not another innocent game enacted mostly in his imagination like his pursuit of Gabriella. Bill cannot live with the certainty that memory cannot sustain his romantic illusions of ‘happily ever after,’ that he cannot remain faithful to his wife’s memory as long as “life goes on” (EA 246) and “the sun shines” (EA 247), the same life-affirming sun he has associated with his parents’ deaths in chapters two and three.

Bill's suicide attempt at the end of chapter twenty one; the pleasant memory of Sylvia's birthday celebration on "the last pre-atomic day" (EA 229) in chapter nineteen; Bill's gift of the Pearce manuscripts at the end of chapter eight; the reassuring reference to Matthew's love letter at the end of chapter eighteen: all these are narrative-stopping points that create momentary closure and each one of them might have served as the novel's ending. Instead, Swift allows his narrator to add one final chapter to his diary so the novel, as the author claimed in 1992, "begins with death" but "ends with love" ("Ending" 377). The last chapter of Ever After includes the most redeeming memory of all: Bill's carefully planned first night of love with Ruth in 1957. Bill recalls the eagerness and tenderness of this encounter but also remembers telling Ruth his secret: that his father "took his life" (EA 261). Eros and Thanatos coexist on the final page of Ever After in a union as inevitable as the passionate embrace of these young lovers who do not heed death and are discovering other ways to 'take' life.

Happily Ever After?

Even for a moment at the end of the novel, the fairy-tale promise of the title rings true. With this ending, as Lorna Sage suggests, Swift hopes to "redeem a sterile, suicidal statement by turning it round into a creative act" (6). One person's ordinary loss is elevated into universal tragedy: this familiar Swiftian technique is used to even more spectacular effect at the end of Waterland when Dick's suicide turns into aquatic apotheosis as well as at the end of Out of This World when Harry is released from worldly troubles through the redeeming lyricism of language. These memories of death and flight, which stand out in memory, become, in Frank Kermode's term, *kairoi*, "historical moments of intemporal significance" (47), which provide the reader with the sense of an ending while forestalling closure. For Bill, as for Tom Crick and Harry Beech, memory is the ultimate escape topos although it is not a pain-proof pacifier. Bill's triumphant retreat to his twenty-year-old self and his first night of love is a ploy which allows this broken man a graceful and hopeful exit.

The novel's title, which, as Byatt notes, "without the 'happy' is and is not an ironic title" (On Histories 83), implies immortality but withholds the fairytale or religious promise that makes the afterlife meaningful. After he has been mechanically resurrected into a substitute life, Bill finds himself in an 'ever after' without happiness or faith, a substitute limbo, not a flesh-and-blood existence: "I have left my former self behind. I am changed. What I do not feel is pain. ...I simply feel as though I have become someone else" (EA 3). In such a context the narrator undertakes any

quest associated with his previous life with hesitation: the Pearce manuscripts are now meaningless as a source of self-knowledge; love (for Katherine, Gabriella or any woman) could reawaken passion but it would hardly have the unadulterated power of innocent romance; and his own dubious origins remain a riddle that cannot be solved. In such a state Unwin travels backwards in time, into his own past, questioning the certainties he lived by as well as his belief in the existence of an ever after which promised bliss and embraced immortality.

In Ever After the title phrase occurs six times and exclusively in the first half of the novel. By alluding, in the context of the Pearce marriage, to the conventional fairytale ending four times (“happily ever after” and “the auguries of happy-ever-afters” EA 47; 49; 89; 107), the phrase is used to suggest the romantic potential of Matthew’s union with Elizabeth in 1845. The novel’s title does not begin to acquire its ironic connotations until Unwin applies it to his own life story and questions its fairytale promise in view of mortality and the absence of eternity: “I might have lived thenceforward happily ever after. (But what does ‘ever’ mean?)” (EA 78). The last time it occurs, the title phrase is subverted through its use in the context of (Ruth’s) death. Ruth’s suicide constitutes the end of their marriage and the beginning of Bill’s doubt. Unwin’s unexpected discovery of his wife’s lifeless body forces the narrator to elevate Ruth’s desperation into a romantic act of heroic proportions: “it is almost inspiring, almost uplifting, at first, to be in the presence of such a momentous event” (EA 121). Seeking to confirm the fairytale promise of “romantic love” even in the face of death (“the first kiss . . . to Girl Number Three. . . . The last kiss . . . to the Queen of Egypt”), Bill desperately refers to the end of their common life in terms of “happiness ever after” to evoke the immortality of their love (EA 121). Ruth’s loss signifies that love may not be the all-conquering force Bill has envisioned and sustained through a steady diet of sophisticated tales by Shakespeare or Virgil. The title phrase occurs only in the first half of the novel since Unwin cannot return to the innocent promise in “ever after” after narrating Ruth’s suicide in chapter ten. In the next twelve chapters the inadequacy of love to sustain the marriages of the other three couples is implied: the Pearce Notebooks reveal a mind haunted by religious doubt, not nurtured by romance; the Potters’ marriage is a façade; Sam’s “fooling around with secretaries” (EA 150) exposes another marriage of convenience.

Alluding to the conventional ending of a fairytale, the novel’s title implies an engagement in the type of narrative that guarantees a happy end. Bill’s nostalgia extends not to his Victorian ancestor’s pre-crisis system of Christian certainties—this

narrator has never been a religious man—but to his own past convictions that seem irrevocably challenged. Having lost his faith in romance, all Unwin has now is memory and his/story. The novel's final reminiscence, the first night of love Bill and Ruth share, is characterised by “tender and inspired fluency” as these young lovers bare their souls along with their bodies, offering each other “the complete and unabridged story of their lives” (EA 260). The ability to engage in storytelling, especially Bill's decision to disclose “what he has never told anyone before” (EA 260), allows the relationship, which that night is at the very beginning, to flourish.

Like Unwin, the narrator of “Seraglio” realises that his traumatised marriage has been sustained through narrative: “for eight years, night after night, we have been telling each other the story of our love” (LS 7). Bill and Ruth feed on literature and acting respectively in order to nourish their marriage with their own narrative. Swift's faith in the therapeutic function of storytelling and the necessity of love is evident in Ever After, as in the other novels, but in Unwin's romanticism a destructive streak of narcissism and melancholy alienates the narrator from the rites of tale-sharing and mourning that could lead to catharsis similar to the purgation Swift's men experience at the end of Last Orders. When circumstances—illness forces Ruth to give up her acting career—deprive Bill and Ruth of their resources, communication between them breaks down: “I didn't want to tell her. If you don't say it, perhaps it won't be true” (EA 115). Rather than dwell on Ruth's suicide, the tragedy which ended their thirty-year fairytale in 1988, Unwin returns, in memory, to 1957. If the fairytale cannot end happily, if the ever after cannot be the real thing, then this narrator opts for once-upon-a-time, for a chance to tell the story again and to shape the narrative into a pleasing substitute.

Substitution and the Real Thing

Unwin's fundamental faith in the power of love, which he defines as a fated meeting between young lovers who will grow old together, define life for each other and transcend mortality into a “happily ever after” (EA 49), is linked to his aversion to substitutes. Unwin denies replacement since he considers it as a mockery of true love: “how can one person take the place of another?” (EA 88). As an adolescent Bill sabotages Sam's efforts to become a substitute father: “achieve (masterwork of substitution) that synthetic breakthrough” (EA 150). Furthermore, Unwin refuses to satisfy Sam's need for “a bizarre substitute for Ed” (EA 59), the younger Ellison brother killed in World War II, as he refuses to become a substitute son in the place of the “real offspring” Sam and Sylvia never had (EA 150). Eventually, he also

rejects Sam's money as well as any involvement in Sam's successful company, Ellison Plastics (UK): "the more he tried, the more I rejected him" (EA 150). This denial of the father, in which Bill engages twice in Ever After, is more than a simple case of Oedipal father-slashing so common to all of Swift's sons. Bill's rejection of Sam reveals his aversion to plastic, "the epitome of the false" (EA 7). The artificial product of a forced chemical reaction, plastic proves more durable and immortal than the real thing, which is "flimsy, perishing, stricken, doomed" (EA 2). In the novel plastic becomes the symbol of the inevitability of the ersatz: "this search, if not for the real thing, then for the substitute thing" (EA 218).

In Ever After the line between the "real thing" and the "substitute thing" is blurred. The novel's "alchemical quest" for meaning (EA 218) is fraught with irony as the identity of characters and belated revelations in the plot constantly require a shift in the reader's perspective. Sam is cast as Claudius but is revealed to be a long-suffering and benign benefactor: "if it were not for Sam, I would not be enjoying... the sanctuary of these ancient walls" (EA 7). After her death Ruth is gradually replaced in her husband's affections when the glamour of her acting roles is revealed to be a substitute for life: "from Cleopatra to a hospital case. From a thousand parts—tragic queen, frothy French-farce flirt—to the only, unfeigned denouement of her stricken body" (EA 116). Bill's new love is Katherine Potter, a woman who reawakens deadened sensations: "when she touched my wrist...it was as though I had forgotten that I still had a wrist" (EA 87). Belatedly, Unwin discovers that we are all substitutes: the "real stuff of life," which he thought he possessed for so long, is an idealised illusion—he has been "born again in plastic" (EA 9). Bill is forced to acknowledge that the "substitute thing ...will do just as well" (EA 218). While Ruth's memory fades, Gabriella's perfume and Katherine's touch fill up Bill's senses with new promise of romance now that he has been "brought back to life" (EA 256).

Sacrificing History to Romance

Bill's faith in romance is exposed as a familial pattern that Bill has almost unwittingly followed. In childhood Bill adopts his mother's self-absorbed demeanour and her passionate perspective on life. Bill respects and resents, almost to an equal degree, his mother's influence on his personality, his choice of literature for a vocation and an actress for a wife. During young Bill's formative years, Sylvia's favourite word, "divine"—"Divine, darling! Isn't it just divine?" (EA 14, emphasis in the original text)—is freely and equally applied to fruit (EA 230), wine (EA 37) or clothing accoutrements (EA 17) to denote sensual pleasure. As a religious term used by a

non-religious person, the epithet implies more than a linguistic affectation indicative of playful decadence and associated with pre-World-War-II merriment. Sylvia's use of "divine" mocks the word's original meaning and suggests a godless, secular universe dominated by the senses, not morality. Simultaneously, the use of the term 'divine' suggests that a superbly pleasing experience is God-sent and reveals the ambiguity of existence in a world still defined by divinity but devoid of religion. The novel's theological debate, the Darwinian context that leaves Bill strangely unmoved, is encapsulated in Sylvia's amoral and sensuality-driven conduct and symbolised by her favoured diction. Bill is raised in a secular world in which romance becomes the substitute for religion and love is christened god.

The fact that Unwin was born during the December 1936 abdication crisis is the first of many historical events that Bill connects to his life in an effort to acquire some link to a Prince, to a fairy-tale, to unadulterated romance. Bill always sacrifices history to romance: in his memories, for instance, the recently-liberated Paris of November 1945 is unspoilt by any signs of the ravages of recent slaughter (EA 18); the eve of the dropping of the Bomb, 5 August 1945, is remembered as a day of sexual awakening (EA 229); the "jolly good bonfire" of 1944, which Sylvia uses to destroy family documents, is only another occasion for young Bill to admire his mother's shapely figure (EA 37); and the Aldermaston protests remind him of the time in his childhood when he "spotted trains" and "took tea" with his mother (EA 256).

Unwin's romantic disposition is conveyed early in the novel through the idealised Parisian setting, a clichéd topos of romance, his infatuation with adolescent ballerinas in delicate lingerie ("a vision made fact" EA 19) and Sylvia's favourite exclamatory epithet "divine" (EA 14). The nine-year-old Bill revels in this magic and ignores the more mundane aspects of his family life: his mother's adulterous affair with a twenty-four-year-old and his own indifferent stance towards his father. Bill stays uninterested until his father commits suicide and reality encroaches for the first time into the fairytale of childhood. Removed from the mundane, Colonel Unwin develops into a stimulating figure: "a spy, an undercover agent...a source of excitement discovered too late" (EA 21). For Bill the ghostly reinvention of the father becomes a far more significant goal than knowledge of the real one. Unwin views his relationships with his parents as partaking equally of Freud and Shakespeare, Oedipus and Hamlet. Until Colonel Unwin blows out his brains and upsets the familial status quo, the young Bill ignores this "distant and sombre figure" (EA 14) as he ignores his mother's lover since neither one of these men makes demands on

the time and affection Sylvia bestows on her son. His father's suicide destroys this delicate balance by bringing to the fore an enigmatic man Bill had barely noticed and creates in the prepubescent son his first feelings of guilt.

Since Bill concludes that his father's suicide was a result of his mother's infidelity, he considers himself an accomplice ("I might have gone to him at any time, like a true, a dutiful, a worthy son" EA 23) but Sam becomes the target of his remorse. When Sam becomes his stepfather, Bill resents the addition of a new father figure as well as a larger-than-life new son in his family and turns Sam into a caricature of the crass American, "Uncle Sam" (EA 6), who believes that "you gotta have *substitoots*" (EA 6). Bill's realisation that his stepfather is included in Sylvia's list of "divine" experiences makes him envy this man as much as he resents him: "that word had only to spring from her lips and I believed it to be so. I thought Sam—six feet of hard-muscled American avarice—was divine" (EA 17). This new father is too prosaic, too demanding of affection and trust, too much like Bill himself to be the real thing. Yet, Sam Ellison becomes the only one of Unwin's many fathers that Bill truly understands and to whom he responds emotionally: "I have always liked [Sam]. I have never been able to help liking him" (EA 6). Nevertheless, Bill remains unresponsive towards Sam's approaches and rejects his gifts. Whenever the opportunity arises, he engages in symbolic warfare: on a Sunday morning in 1947 Bill sets on fire the model aeroplane (a present from Sam, an "exact replica of the real thing" EA 65) he has meticulously assembled over days and hung in his room, sending it flaming over his stepfather's head in dumb-show re-enactment of Ed's fall over the Pacific. This sadistic but eloquent denial of Sam as a substitute father and of a plastic toy as a "piece of history" (EA 66) also constitutes Bill's early rejection of substitution.

Fathers, Stepfathers and Father Figures

In adolescence, Bill embarks into a life-long search for father figures in history and literature: like Hamlet, he seeks 'Hyperion' while constantly rejecting Sam's 'satyr.' As a typical Swiftian son, Unwin invests his stepfather with all the attributes a son needs to wage Oedipal war against his father. First, Sam is the "bold and resourceful" American businessman who "partook of that post-war spirit of inverse colonialism" (EA 62) in order to make a fortune for his rebellious son to reject. Bill's life-long disapproval of Sam's plastics allows Unwin to perpetuate the myth of his own intellectual superiority against a materialistic usurper. Furthermore, Sam is cast as Claudius, the sexually depraved monster who possesses his mother but then

desires Ophelia/Ruth as well: “the man—he can’t help it—has an outsize, unflagging but anxious libido that requires regular attention” (EA 151). Claudius is also a murderer who makes an orphan of Hamlet; Bill experiences the same psychological inadequacy as a number of Swift’s protagonists (Tom Crick, Harry Beech, Ray Johnson) who lose one or both parents early in their lives. By pretending to be the fate-stricken, Dickensian orphan, Unwin indulges his romantic belief that he partakes of the torment allotted to every Victorian urchin. Turning his stepfather into Claudius and a Victorian ogre allows Bill to become the orphaned Hamlet as well as the foundling that will be named “Unwin” in Oliver Twist.

Sam, who remains a “kid-at-heart” all his life (EA 62), is the father Bill understands better than all the other men he posits as father figures. Sam’s honesty and good-natured endeavours to win Bill’s affection are easily dismissed by a son who idolises mysterious and withdrawn father figures, and does not relate to an available, approachable, bigger-brother stepfather. The less Unwin understands, the more he admires: Matthew Pearce, I. K. Brunel and Colonel Unwin acquire mythic dimensions in Bill’s mind since their accomplishments and metaphysical queries stand far beyond Bill’s comprehension. By building railroads, erecting bridges and developing novel weaponry, all three make history and gain immortality. They are “sorting out the world” (EA 15) in pursuit of their individual dreams, but in the process lose both their families and their lives. Unwin stands in awe of these men who make the ultimate sacrifice and opt for the maximum penalty, obeying a moral code which turns them into heroes and becomes its own source of courage.

Unwin can never emulate these fathers: “who am I? A nobody. An heirless nonentity. What’s more—a bastard” (EA 232). His inability to understand their dilemmas and their sacrifices seems linked to his lack of religious faith, the absence of the Father from his life. The belief (or un-belief) in divinity which fuels the actions of Pearce, Brunel and Colonel Unwin implies their intimate connection to a system of values in which even the denial of a god is based upon the acceptance of divine existence. Matthew’s spiritual crisis, Brunel’s blasphemous engineering feats, and Colonel Unwin’s involvement in enabling the atomic age to become a reality are tokens of moral struggles waged within a god-created universe. These men lose their lives in a struggle against the divine presence or the divine absence. Unwin cannot comprehend these fathers’ motivations since his own life and moral code is not defined by a deity but by a female presence, first his mother’s (“I could have lived for, lived in that squeeze” EA 16), then his wife’s (“she was life to me” EA 120).

Bill is sustained throughout his life by the romantic fervour radiated by the glamorous women he adores: the aria-singing Sylvia and the Queen-of-Egypt Ruth. When he loses these women, he loses along with them his faith in the power of love; thus, Bill envies Matthew for retaining his affection for his wife even after he rejects Christian doctrine.

Unwin finds in the “distracting notebooks” (EA 241) of Matthew Pearce release from mourning for the loss of his wife, his mother as well as the fathers he knew (Colonel Unwin and Sam) and the fathers he can only construct in his imagination (the Aldermaston train driver and Matthew). Bill’s identification with Pearce is as much a product of wishful thinking as his adolescent obsession with Hamlet. As Dad’s Shuttlecock is a more accomplished narrative in a more mature voice than Prentis’s account, Matthew’s testimony projects a humanity and depth of emotion that eludes Unwin’s “ramblings.” Unwin constructs Matthew as his alter ego, although he lacks his ancestor’s lust for knowledge. Matthew’s last testimony before he embarks on the fateful journey to America reveals that Pearce continued his relentless pursuit of answers in full knowledge of the price already exacted. Even Matthew’s Victorian metaphysics are beyond Unwin: he finds Darwin “heavy going” (EA 223); he cannot even locate “the bombshell which tore apart Matthew’s life and horrified Victorian society” (EA 223). Bill is unable to comprehend his ancestor and eventually gives up on Matthew: “I don’t understand him. I never sought him out, I could do without him” (EA 132). The affinity Unwin feels to Pearce suggests Bill’s need to participate in a drama that was never part of his own existence, seeking through “anteriority” (EA 235) a self that never existed.

Bill’s fascination with Matthew comes from his inability to fathom how anyone could sacrifice family happiness—a loving wife and three children—to an intellectual pursuit. Unwin’s envy of the moral stamina such a decision requires becomes obvious when Bill acknowledges that he himself “would believe or not believe anything, swallow any old make-belief, in order to have Ruth back” (EA 256). Unwin’s need to believe that romantic love is worth any sacrifice forces Bill to reject the possibility that Pearce’s marriage (or his own) could have been anything less than perfect. Simultaneously, he is naggingly aware that the fairy-tale image he has constructed to complete the picture of Matthew’s marriage may not reflect reality “but a desperate attempt to keep alive its myth” (EA 223). Unwin’s constant comparison of his own choices with Pearce’s and his desire to discover in his family tree a stronger, more determined alter ego, a man who does not believe that

ignorance is bliss, bring forth a dilemma familiar to all of Swift's protagonists. Matthew's credo—"happiness is not to be purchased by a refusal of knowledge" (EA 52)—is a recurring theme in Swift's novels: Tom Crick arrives at the same realisation belatedly; Prentis fails to accept it, but Harry Beech gives up his celebrated career to do penance for his refusal to abide by it. In his pursuit of truth over personal and familial happiness, Matthew dares to follow a path that Bill can barely contemplate. Having failed to kill himself, Bill must come to terms with all the upsetting revelations and self-realizations that suicide would have eliminated. Matthew Pearce rejects romance in order to confront and pursue his haunting religious doubts; Unwin evades his own doubts and seeks to make himself a ghost to keep the illusion of romance alive.

Another, almost imperceptible, reason for Unwin's infatuation with the reconstruction of Matthew's world, with the stealing of experiences from his ancestor, is the narrator's craving for the "neo-chivalric stuff" and "elegiac Romance" (EA 81) of the Victorian era. In his need to replenish his faith in romance and in the mythic power of love to conquer death, Bill finds the Victorian preoccupation with Arthurian legend an apt source of inspiration, even though he is ironic towards his own "nostalgia for the nostalgia of nostalgia" (EA 81). Unwin realises the need which prescribed the Victorian yearning for an epic age of heroic ideals and searches for this "nostalgia" in his ancestor's Notebooks. To Bill, Pearce seems not to have been a man of his time since he did not succumb to the nurturing and comforting tales of Romance that might have saved his marriage. Ignoring Tennysonian optimism and epic glories, Matthew turns to science, not literature, for steadying ground. Pearce is a surveyor bent on exploration, not self-pacification: "where there is evidence, so we must look, so we must examine" (EA 52). The romantic notions that sustain Bill's existence and his constant yearning for a past invested in real emotion are anathema to a scientist who cannot ignore the evidence.

Subverting Nostalgia

Matthew Pearce is not the only character in Ever After who causes Unwin to suspect his convictions. A foil to Bill Unwin, Michael Potter is the incarnation of a familiar Swiftian character present in almost all the novels who functions as an antagonist and undermines Unwin's credibility. Potter subverts the romantic myths in which Bill needs to believe by living and acting in a manner that questions Unwin's choices and his credo. If Unwin defines himself as a "dodo" (EA 2), Potter represents the species that evolves and survives. Potter's academic credentials; his aggressive TV

persona; the flashy and recklessly-driven red Audi; the possession of a beautiful but neglected wife as desirable as his sexy young mistress: all aspects of Potter's personality and lifestyle pose a threat to Unwin's sense of selfhood as well as his masculinity. The Potters' union, which begins under the auspices of "chivalric nostalgia" and turns into "years of pretend marriage" (EA 244), frustrates Bill's faith in romance and ridicules, by its unexpected longevity, the notion of the happy couple. The only one of the four couples that continues to exist in the fictional present, the Potters constitute the focus of the campus-novel plot strand.

As a historian who becomes a television personality and specialises in self-promotion, Michael Potter seems to be driven by his instinct for survival. Unlike Tom Crick's faith in curiosity as the historian's primal force, Potter believes in the survival of the fittest in life as well as in academia. His fierce struggle for dominance does not stop at wining-and-dining Bill Unwin into surrendering the Pearce Notebooks. Potter employs gangster means, such as kidnapping ("A ride, a spin, a chat" EA 163), intimidation ("Fuck the Ellison Fellowship. The Ellison Fellowship is a fucking joke" EA 166), even "seduction by a female agent" (EA 167). Eventually, Potter succeeds in acquiring the Notebooks, having reduced his opponent into a depressed and suicidal academic nonentity.

Bill Unwin shares much with other Swift protagonists. Like Willy Chapman in The Sweet-Shop Owner, Unwin consciously chooses to live in the margins of history, his life defined by his wife, a woman he adores and to whom he feels inferior. Bill feels inadequate, spent, abandoned, like Willy. Chapman's belief in fate is echoed by Unwin: "the people go; the patterns remain" (EA 47). Separated from the people they love, both men seek death in order to escape a marginalised existence. With the much younger Prentis, Bill shares the need for strong father figures, which leads to the quest for the true identity of their fathers, both spies during World War II. Ever After further resembles Shuttlecock in that both works are concerned with the desirability of knowledge. However, Prentis, a less honest and more sadistic individual, is given the chance to choose between knowledge and ignorance, whereas the less ambitious and more self-aware Unwin knows that absolute knowledge is impossible and cannot avoid the revelations and realisations at which he grudgingly arrives in the space of a few months. Bill is more aware that the "gaps" in any story that so trouble Prentis cannot be adequately filled either through the imagination or through research.

Both Unwin and Prentis are writers who consciously manipulate their stories (and other writers' manuscripts) in an effort to appropriate the past and create a self-approving version of history. In each chapter of *Ever After* Unwin focuses either on his own family story and the recent past, or on reconstructing Pearce's life through fictionalising and embedding extracts from the Notebooks in his own narrative. The narrator does not devote a single chapter to all four couples: Unwin never makes explicit comparisons and he keeps Matthew and Potter at safe distances from each other even within the pages of his diary. Similarly, he never compares Katherine's beauty or Gabriella's allure to Ruth's charismatic "presence." The conspicuous absence of such comparative observations guides the reader to a realisation of Unwin's need to keep the present and the past separate while merging history and story. Unlike Tom Crick, Unwin is unable to endure his after-life only with the aid of endless fairytale weaving. As Frederick Holmes suggests, "Bill's need to uncover a source of fundamental meaning and purpose in life... is bedevilled by his awareness that the representation of history is itself a substitute for...the vanished past" ("Representation" 25). Unlike Tom Crick and Matthew Pearce, whose lust for knowledge keeps them alive after the destruction of domestic happiness, Bill's inspiration derives from the physical presence of his wife, a resource that he cannot control.

The Language of Unreliability

Like Prentis, Unwin withholds information from the reader, revealing through his version secrets and fears which render him an unreliable narrator.² Rather than disclose the reasons for his confessional urge—the same reasons which forced him to suicide—Unwin insists until the end of the novel that he is ignorant of the causes of his succumbing to a "jotting urge:" "who are they for, these ramblings? And who am I to seek to go on record?" (*EA* 232). Whenever he must write down one of his recent realisations, his elaborate and often tortuous syntactical mannerisms yield to fragments and broken language. For instance, Unwin allows the reader to suspect that he has fallen in love with Katherine Potter through some comments—"The bare shoulders are infallible. Their appeal goes to some helpless spot at the centre of the

² The theory of unreliability used in previous chapters also applies to the discussion of Unwin as narrator. The wide range of textual and extra-textual signals of narrative unreliability is available in two essays by Kathleen Wall (1994) and Ansgar Nünning (1997). Both critics agree that "textual inconsistencies, the verbal habits of the narrator, and discrepancies between the fictional world presented by a text and the reader's world-knowledge and standards of normality provide the basis for establishing a narrator's unreliability" (Nünning 85).

chest" (EA 87)—but he does not openly admit to his emotion. Afraid to acknowledge that he is weak and cannot be emotionally sustained by Ruth's memory, Unwin tries to undermine his own confession through stylistic tricks: "when I watch [Katherine] walk across the lawn, she seems to me (but don't trust the words of someone newly snatched from the grave) like life itself. Like life itself" (EA 87). The strategically broken sentence and the parenthetical aside diffuse the emotion expressed. The emphatic repetition of the revelatory simile ("like life itself") reminds the reader of another phrase repeated in the previous paragraph ("Not my type. Not my type at all" EA 87) which negates Katherine's appeal. Oscillating between acceptance and rejection, the language of this narrator exposes his fundamental dilemmas. For Bill aposiopesis is as eloquent as confession: "I think she thinks it was because of her . . . I don't know which would hurt [Katherine] more. To tell her that it wasn't because of her, no, not exactly . . . or to tell her that it was because of her, yes, as a matter of fact—" (EA 87-88, emphasis in original text). Instead of providing a "lasting, remorseful truth," Bill prefers to plead ignorance: "I don't know which is true myself" (EA 88).

The same broken language occurs when Bill considers Colonel Unwin's suicide, another anxiety-provoking topic: "he did it because of me. Because of me. Because there I was; and I wasn't—I was the last straw. . . . April in Paris: surely this isn't the end of the world? . . . My father! My father!" (EA 205). Bill Unwin is too aware of the irony of his words and his discoveries to settle noiselessly into the part of the tiresome old fool, into "true donhood" (EA 1). "What you don't know can't hurt you" is the comment that introduces an incident Bill witnesses during Ruth's last acting season, her glorious "Cleopatra summer" (EA 112). On a Sunday outing to a country pub accompanied by a famous actor, Bill sees this man "kissing Ruth on the crown of the head" (EA 112). Bill interprets "a solemn, intense, decorous kiss," which appears to be a parting of lovers, a gentle acknowledgement of the end of an affair, as "a kiss of farewell" (EA 113), the result of Ruth's announcement of her fatal illness to a loyal friend. Then why does Bill note the other man's uncharacteristically "timid mood" at the onset of their drive (EA 112)? Fleeting, Unwin contemplates "the possibility" that his life-long happiness with his wife is a whim of chance, not the romantic union of two people made for each other: "It could have been them . . . all along, not Ruth and me. Them, not us" (EA 112, emphasis in original text). Ultimately, Unwin rejects any thoughts of Ruth's infidelity: "It wasn't what you think. No, it wasn't what you think" (EA 112). A few pages later the narrator is equally emphatic when he guesses that his wife committed suicide because she "couldn't

bear the coming disintegration”—any other possibility is dismissed before it is even phrased: “I can’t think of any other reason. No, I can’t think of any other reason” (EA 118).

Does Unwin suspect his wife of adultery? “No, I don’t believe that she ever—But suppose, suppose. ... No, I don’t believe she ever really—But what if she had? What if she had?” (EA 212): denial, aposiopesis, hypothesis, repetition; denial, aposiopesis, hypothesis, repetition—a vicious cycle of stylistic quirks revealing the narrator’s inability to find comfort or certainty in his past. Unwin abandons the “quixotic search for an original core of identity located in the past” (Holmes *Historical* 63) when he becomes aware that his efforts to reconstruct the past yield only narrative. Bill finds the confession process therapeutic but also recognises that telling is a substitute for the real thing. Unwin’s final decision to give up the Pearce Notebooks shows that he acknowledges his failure to discover a remedy for his own predicament in another man’s past. Unwin parts with Matthew because he has discovered a new “presence,” a new source of romance. In love with Katherine Potter, Bill gives her the Pearce manuscripts as a token of his affection and a test of hers. By the end of *Ever After* Unwin compromises with Sam’s suggestion that “you gotta have substitutes” (EA 59). Resurrected to a substitute life, Bill is ready to consider a substitute wife.

The various linguistic tricks—such as repetition, rhetorical questions, or parenthetical asides—indicate as much as they conceal about the narrator’s thoughts and emotions. Similarly, the use of the third person in an autobiography constitutes an effort to objectify as well as manipulate the past. In his diary Unwin uses the third-person point of view when he reconstructs Matthew’s past or fictionalises the courtship of Michael and Katherine Potter, while the first person is used when he presents his own recent past or his family history. However, on three occasions Unwin talks about himself and his own experiences in the third person, signaling the need to fictionalise and romanticise events he has lived in the past. For two pages in chapter seven the narrator retains his role as author but as a protagonist he distances himself from the past: “I see him now, that former, unformed self of mine” (EA 72). Bill in 1957 is a “callow,” “studious” youth (EA 73), a “creature still in embryo. Neither in nor out of the world” (EA 72). In the same year, but at the very end of the novel, he becomes “this young hero of ours,” in the “classic guise of the indigent waif” (EA 257), who looks for a hotel to house a first night of love. The third instance of distancing concerns the recent past, specifically

Unwin's relation with Katherine Potter as well as "all new, strange (attractive) women" he has recently met (EA 84). Unwin confesses to not knowing "how to deal with them" and experiencing "an apprehension that the universe holds nothing sacred" (EA 84). The use of the third person allows Bill to evade the true meaning of his discomfort as the narrator turns himself into the "Ellison Fellow" and speculates that he possesses, in Katherine's eyes, the "stubborn attributes of a Romantic Figure" (EA 83).

Concerning the narrator but described in the third person, the three incidents relate to Unwin's love life and the women who have been the objects of his desire. The shift from the first to the third person denotes the narrator's need to distance himself as well as intensify the fairytale quality of the storytelling process and romanticise the settings of his meetings with Ruth and Katherine. While in Waterland or in Out of This World such distancing is used to satirise the protagonist's plight, Unwin uses this method in order to invest his former self with heroic qualities and endow his narrative with an authentic aura of romance. By allowing himself to be seen as a Dickensian orphan who deserves shelter, or the protagonist of a Bildungsroman, or even as a Tennysonian knight-errant, Bill Unwin manipulates the past into a fictional his/story which allows him to "view his own life as a pale repeating pattern of other lives" (Mantel 24). Despite the props accessible through literature, Bill questions his ability at self-definition—"I am not me. Therefore was I ever me?" (EA 4)—and reveals an orphaned spirit in need of guidance.

Omnia Vincit Historia

Unwin engages in storytelling by fictionalising his own life as a means of solace: "the fiction of my life may as well serve as the fact" (EA 160). Like Geoffrey Braithwaite's search for the parrot of a dead master in Julian Barnes's Flaubert's Parrot (1984),³ the narrator of Ever After searches for a Victorian's fleeting persona, preferring to focus on Matthew's spiritual crisis than his own lack of self-knowledge. Although Braithwaite is a far more conscious and courageous individual than Unwin, the latter would certainly agree with Barnes's protagonist that "books are where things are explained to you; life is where things aren't" (168). Hiding in academia and nurtured by romance, Bill has learnt to find solace in literature. Unwin's identification with

³ Flaubert's Parrot is a work with which Swift is acquainted. In his 1988 article "Throwing Off Our Inhibitions" Swift praises "the bravura, exhibitionist work [of] recent novels such as Rushdie's Midnight's Children, Barnes's Flaubert's Parrot or Ackroyd's Hawksmoor" (20) as paradigmatic of a new boldness in British fiction writing of the 1980s.

Hamlet is based on the “vengeance theme” (EA 5); the Prince’s eventual acceptance of mortality is not a realisation Bill shares with the Dane since Unwin focuses on Hamlet’s dilemmas, his “meditations on the meaning of life” (EA 6), not his conflicts or his choices.

Despite the many quotations and allusions from Shakespearean plays (particularly romantic comedies, such as Midsummer Night’s Dream or As You Like It), the two tragedies more intimately connected with Bill’s plight, Othello and King Lear, are conspicuously absent. Othello’s masculine self-doubt is echoed in Unwin’s puzzled disbelief concerning Ruth’s motives in choosing to stay with him: “she would always come back to me. Me. I don’t know why, but she did. A dullness for her brightness? A nobody for her somebody?” (EA 111). Lear’s battle with time in a godless universe parallels Unwin’s desperate inability to come to terms with mortality: “Death! You think it is elsewhere but it is suddenly all around you, like a mist, a tide” (EA 194). Bill’s failure to accept death is linked to his ignorance of life. Bill Unwin is not Othello or King Lear; too paralytically self-conscious to be a hero in any Shakespearean tragedy, Unwin feels trapped by time and historical circumstance, traumatised and doomed like an Elizabethan character.

Bill’s “ramblings,” as he ironically defines his meticulously expressed reminiscences and reconstructions, constitute a self-conducted post-mortem. Having failed to overdose on sleeping pills, Unwin reaches an unavoidable conclusion that echoes Walter Benjamin: only after the end of one’s life can the whole story be told. As in Waterland, the end in Ever After is signified for the narrator by the loss of loved ones who forged his identity. In the limbo of Ever After the search for the real thing—love, identity, knowledge—is conducted not only through memory but also via substitutes: Matthew Pearce, various father figures, even historical personae, such as I. K. Brunel and Sir Walter Raleigh. Unwin desperately seeks to create connections, though he knows that we are “not all Brunels” (EA 140).

Bill’s need to domesticate history, fictionalise the past, and turn story into fairytale emphasises his ingrained need for romance. While Byatt’s Roland and Maud are reluctant lovers, who are almost unwilling to succumb to the myth of romance, Unwin self-consciously stages an idealised first night for his lovers: “but the lights are dimming. . . . The curtain is lifting. . . . The young people who command our attention still have a quaint feeling that the world has been saved. . . .” (EA 256). Unwin cannot believe in romance as whole-heartedly as he did in the past, but he

cannot abandon its myth either. In his psyche nostalgia and romance disturb the healing process, defer mourning and betray the sincerity of confession. Instead, Unwin resorts to every romantic cliché by the end of the novel: "I didn't know I loved her till I'd dreamt of her. I didn't know it was the real thing until an illusion had signalled it" (EA 251). Whereas Byatt subtitles Possession "a Romance" to signal the convention used and exposed in her novel, Unwin as a writer is desperate to retain the protagonist's once-unshaken faith: "Happiness. Yes. I commemorate it. Happiness ever after" (EA 121). Ruth's loss results in Bill's realisation of his unrealistic expectations of love's eternity; Unwin's wrath turns towards mortality, a natural force which ends romance by removing the object of his affection: "nothing else. Only the exact filling of the exact space... .When she is gone, you indict the universe" (EA 256). The novel's final chapter documents Unwin's continuing desire to retain his faith in the power of love to transcend human limitations if not in actuality at least through the imagination.

Ever After is the tale of a man torn between the desire to be as romantic and heroic as Matthew Pearce, Brunel, Hamlet, or Merlin, and the awareness that heroism and romance are literary conventions that exist in Virgil but can no longer be reconstructed without the sobering acknowledgement that the "real stuff" is only a substitute. Bill's inability to resurrect Matthew convincingly; his even more serious inability to bring to life, in his memoirs, a glamorous person like his beloved Ruth; his reluctance to confront the attraction he feels towards Katherine Potter: these are the private, paralysing failures that lead Bill Unwin to suicide and plague him in the afterlife. Alone and unable to capture the real thing, Bill Unwin is caught in a sobering ever after whereas all he seeks is the fairytale substitute—romance, immortality and happiness.

In seeking to conceal his predicament, Unwin as a narrator exposes the crux of his dilemma: if substitution is the only available alternative, then Bill may take refuge in a fictional past of his own creation. The narrator's wish is granted through the power of storytelling to reshape, thus momentarily restore, the past: the last pages of Unwin's diary, which constitute the end of Ever After, tell the story of "an indelible night" of love (EA 260), the reenacting of a blood-warming memory, a trick to rob time of its victory. Although the prematurely aged don and the reader know the (unhappy) end of his/story, we accompany the young Bill and Ruth on their escapade. By allowing his protagonist to reconstruct a glorious moment in the past, Swift celebrates the human desire to defer death and affirm life ever after.

Chapter VII

Mosaic of Memory and Desire: Bermondsey Voices Honour Last Orders

Life is a pure flame, and we live by
an invisible sun within us.
Sir Thomas Browne Urn Burial (82)

... if that I mysspeke or seye,
Wyte it the ale of Southwerk, I you preye.
Chaucer "The Miller's Tale" (67)

Death is the sanction of everything that
the storyteller can tell.
Walter Benjamin "The Storyteller" (94)

In Last Orders (1996), Graham Swift's most recent novel to date, decay, gambling and daringly morbid humour meet literary echoes of Chaucer, T. S. Eliot and Faulkner in a tale which the author characterises as "archetypal" and "primitive:" "a story about laying the dead to rest, a story about how the dead apply pressure on the living" (Rosenberg). Last Orders concerns a one-day, four-person "Chaucerian pilgrimage" (Callil and Tóibín 172) from London to Margate—with the inevitable detour to Canterbury—appropriately set in the cruellest spring month: 2 April 1990 constitutes the novel's narrative present. Swift's fiction, as Peter Kemp recognises, is "eager to counterbalance the bleak with the boisterous" ("Top" 7.9). The journey to Margate to fulfil a friend's dying wish evolves into a tragicomic excursion which includes all the contradictions and paradoxes that characterise the familiar Swiftian terrain: the struggle between fathers and sons (or daughters); the silent narratives that unite as well as devastate families; the contested coexistence between the macrocosm of history and the microcosm of individual lives; the uneasy acceptance of accidents that determine human choices, yet also sustain life-long expectations.

The Bermondsey community explored in Last Orders is as meticulously localised as the small-business world of The Sweet-Shop Owner. Swift examines the repercussions of accidents and choices through the lives of a close-knit community of men and their families, who have been brought together by circumstances of geography, age, and social class as well as the most significant historical accident of all: World War II. The "catastrophic events" of this war, as Peter Widdowson remarks in his essay "The Novels of Graham Swift," still "determine the destinies of

ordinary lives" in all of Swift's works (214). In Last Orders Swift adopts once again a historical perspective which associates geography with human actions and re-examines causality in the light of arbitrary forces that forge relationships as strongly as bonds of blood. The places where Swift's characters live, love and die are eventually established as landscapes of the mind and the heart by interior monologues rich with significant repetitions of ordinary observations which acquire the resonance of leitmotifs. In their compounded virtues and vices the characters of Last Orders are rendered believable: Swift treats them with compassion whether he exposes such human failings as jealousy, betrayal, and compromise, or celebrates dignity, endurance and forgiveness.

In Last Orders a day of mourning develops into a cathartic ritual of remembrance that mingles duty with anger, understanding with rage: four men embark on a car journey from Bermondsey, in South London, to Margate, in Kent, in order to honour, as the title implies, a final request. Ray Johnson, Vic Tucker, Lenny Tate, three ageing cockneys, and Vince Dodds, the deceased's adopted son, drive east to scatter the ashes of Jack Dodds, a master butcher. The men form "a guard-of-honour" (LO 22) and are united by the most common human predicament: as John Carey suggests, "they are all trying to take in the ungraspable fact of death" ("Books" 38). As this quartet of quarreling, drinking companions navigates through city and country roads and makes numerous detours to cater for needs both physical and emotional, their past lives, frustrated aspirations and secret relationships are gradually revealed. Wars global and domestic, traumas of the body and the mind, failed marriages and estranged daughters become the building blocks of ordinary lives that resonate with universal themes. Last Orders is a moving evocation of lives lost and redeemed by an author who has become, in Adrian Poole's words, "a master of the terminal" ("Hurry Up").

This Bermondsey-community mosaic comprises seventy-five sections of varying length and scans the collective memory of a dying generation that came of age during World War II. The polyphony of the narrative technique; structural patterns based on repetition and circularity; scrambled chronology: the techniques Swift uses in Last Orders are familiar and mastered in previous novels. The polyphony employed in Out of This World now includes seven voices: more characters than ever before share the first-person-narrator spotlight, contributing between one and thirty-nine fragments each. Following the events of one day as in The Sweet-Shop Owner, the plot in Last Orders unfolds in a chronologically forward manner,

constantly interrupted by past reminiscences. Through flashbacks, the narrators cover events in the past six decades, documenting how their own lives intersected with the lives of the other characters. As in Swift's previous works, long-term bonds of kinship, determined through blood, matrimony, or accident, relate characters to one another. Whether the narrators engage in interior monologues or reported dialogues, memory and desire blend seamlessly. Mingling action with the characters' deferred wishes and fears, the novel becomes, in the words of reviewer John Doyle, a "drama of distinctive voices," a "layered chorus of memory and bitter regret." Other aspects of this novel already familiar from Swift's previous novels include: an important character who lives in a Home but remains silent (June); an aborted foetus (Sally and Vince's); a larger-than-life father figure (Jack Dodds); animal imagery and symbolism (horses, pigeons, seagulls); a much-desired woman who is sexually active and gives birth to a retarded child (Amy); an extraordinary occurrence that can only be explained in terms of metaphysics or magic realism (Ray's astoundingly successful bet on a horse called *Miracle Worker*). Finally, Swift's thematic concerns remain unchanged: the rites and rituals that unite families and friends constitute the undeniable bonds people must honour to endure hardship and reclaim dignity.

With Last Orders Swift conclusively regained his standing as an immaculate stylist with a vibrant imagination. By 1996 more than a dozen years had passed since critical and popular acclaim had made Waterland (1983) the only one of Swift's novels to be widely read and praised. Upon publication Swift's sixth novel was hailed on both sides of the Atlantic as a long-awaited return to form. As Anthony Quinn suggested in the Observer, this novel "confirms [Swift's] reputation as one of the great contemporary chroniclers of landscape and memory." One of ten shortlisted novels for the third International IMPAC Award for fiction in 1998 (Wagner), Last Orders became, after Waterland, the second of Swift's novels to be short-listed for the Booker prize and the only one to have won this honour so far. Plagued by critics' insistent comparison of every one of his books to Waterland, Swift claims in a November 2000 interview that winning the 1996 Booker prize brought balance and justice to his literary reputation (Maglinis 54).

Before being appointed head of the Booker judges that year, Carmen Callil praised Last Orders in her January 1996 review, drawing attention to the novel's "marvelous prose" and "exceptional visual quality" ("Margate"). In his review in the Guardian Adrian Poole designated Last Orders as "Swift's best novel so far" ("Hurry Up"). The

Times reviewer, Claire Messud, called Last Orders a “resonant work of art, an extremely fine novel” (41), the TLS found it to be “emotionally charged and technically superb” (Reynolds 25), while the Sunday Times hailed it as a “triumph of quiet authenticity” (Kemp “Top” 7.9). Most reviewers commented extensively on the novel’s “amazing subtlety of voice and perception” (Krist 688) and Swift’s ability to “tell the stories of people’s lives with a crisp lyricism” (Wood 20). In the New York Review John Banville admired the novel’s “feat of ventriloquism” (8), the Boston Globe reviewer noted Swift’s “exquisite subtlety and restraint” (Caldwell), and Jay Parini in the New York Times Book Review praised the “impeccable authenticity” of the voices (13). For reviewers and critics Last Orders represents, as Adrian Poole suggested in 1999, “the most formally complicated experiment [in Swift’s fiction] so far” (“Mourning” 153).

Intertexts and Timeless Stories

In March 1997 the novel, which had already been termed by some reviewers “a redemptive adaptation” (Messud 41) and “a reprise” of Faulkner’s As I Lay Dying (Parini 13), was unexpectedly involved in a media-led quasi-accusation of plagiarism from this modernist classic. Based on a number of structural and thematic similarities Last Orders bears to Faulkner’s As I Lay Dying, John Frow, an Australian academic, voiced doubts about the novel’s originality. Although Frow was careful not to use the term ‘plagiarism,’ he found Last Orders to be the product of “inert borrowing.” An indignant Swift denied accusations of borrowing or plagiarism in letters to the Times (10/03/1997) and the Independent on Sunday (16/03/1997). Several critics and authors, namely Clare Messud, Malcolm Bradbury, Salman Rushdie, Julian Barnes and Kazuo Ishiguro, provided Swift with their unequivocal support. An informed reader of Swift’s works will agree with Adrian Poole that “Swift’s stature and achievement” do not allow doubts about the originality of this author’s work (“Mourning” 164).

Last Orders is rich in intertextual allusions which call attention to this novel’s literary origins and to the ghosts which haunt it apart from the Faulknerian one. In its painstaking recreation of the minutiae of a fading community, Swift’s novel alludes to the worlds of George Eliot and Thomas Hardy. As some reviewers of Last Orders noted, Swift’s fascination with “communities, their evolution and dissolution” (Parini 13), renders him an “heir of the great Victorians” (Banville 8). In a 1997 interview Swift suggested that a funeral trip “about people dealing intimately with the remains of the dead” is “a timeless story...which has to be retold over and over again”

(Gossmann 156). Concerned with the demands of the dead on the living, some of the most canonical texts of Western tradition—the Odyssey, Antigone, the Inferno—are brought to mind by Swift’s retelling of a timeless story.

However, any journey that begins in the month of April in a “hostelrye” near “Southwerk” and heads for Canterbury predominantly evokes the Chaucerian pilgrimage. Not only the setting of Last Orders—“April sunshine” and the Bermondsey pub where the day’s first ale is had—but also the emphasis on the characters’ appearance and professions as identity indices echo The Canterbury Tales. New dimensions to storytelling are added in Last Orders through Swift’s acknowledged homage to Chaucer: “The Canterbury Tales were there at the back of my mind as something that quite obviously was echoed in my modern day story” (Gossmann 156). In The Canterbury Tales the pilgrims compete with one another in an effort to produce tales that are didactic and entertaining, participating in a ritual that is culturally dictated and psychologically helpful. Their tales reveal the teller’s nature and provoke other group members to react in like manner. In Last Orders the narratives are internal, intersecting with the other tales through leitmotifs and unshared emotion: as Oliver Reynolds specifies, “they each tell Jack’s story in their own way and thus tell the story of their own lives” (25).

Still, the improbability of the Chaucerian motif in the context of Last Orders is significant. Nothing could be further from the minds of Swift’s late-twentieth-century travellers than the medieval ideals encapsulated in the act of pilgrimage. In Last Orders “Thomas à Becket” is the name of a pub briefly glimpsed on the drive down the Old Kent Road (LO 17), not Chaucer’s “holy blisful martyr.” In Chaucer’s time the lengthy and arduous journey from London to Canterbury is as much an act of piety as it is an act of penitence undertaken, physically and spiritually, as a duty, a ritual for making amends for past sins and seeking absolution. While exposing the various ways in which his pilgrims do not live up to this ideal, Chaucer expects his audience to be well aware not only of the conventions but also of the ethical dimensions of such a journey. Conversely, Swift’s travellers lack faith—in religion or their fellow men. In the secular world of Last Orders their journey begins as a day trip, develops into a quest for understanding and is eventually transformed, through a process of sharing and emotional reunion, into a cathartic ritual.

Although Swift’s pilgrims find the world no less fleeting and illusory than Chaucer’s, the men in Last Orders do not have recourse to an established ritual that guarantees

rejuvenation. In the world of Last Orders April's "showres soote" which succeed the "droughte of March" would be taken for a miracle. Chaucer's pilgrims recognised the necessity as well as the usefulness of pilgrimage; Swift's travellers discover the benefits of ritual sharing reluctantly. The men in Last Orders feel obligated to undertake this journey due to a dead man's wishes; in the course of the day they confess almost grudgingly their need for companionship. Their contemporary sensibilities lie closer to Eliot's Waste-Landers for whom "April is the cruellest month." Through the day's events and a climactic visit to Canterbury Cathedral, Swift unites these warring personalities. Although Ray, Vince and Lenny start their journey as Hollow Men, when they reach Margate they have discovered hope and humanity in each other's company, in the memories of absent friends and relatives, and in the silent commands of the dead. By uniting medieval ritual with modernist negation, Chaucer with T. S. Eliot, Swift creates "an inspired novel about love, patience and redemption" (Callil and Tóibín 172).

Structural Patterns and Leitmotifs

As in Ever After and Waterland, the reader of Last Orders participates in a structural and thematic quest. The universality of Swift's themes encourages readers to transcend the protagonists' ordinary lives of car salesman, undertaker, accountant and greengrocer in order to focus on the common elements of their human plight. Like a "master ventriloquist" (Wood 20), Swift gives expression to emotion that his characters may not quite know how to put into words when "it ain't like your regular sort of day" (LO 1). Indeed, 2 April 1990 is an unusual day for a group of men who have been asked, in writing and indirectly, to do a dead friend a favour, to run an errand on behalf of his widow, to embark on a journey unlike any they have experienced so far. The events comprising that day, the memories evoked, the testy discomfort among these men bred over years of silent ale-consumption at the same local are not unfamiliar traits for Swift's readers. Ray Johnson and Jack Dodds have more in common with Bill Unwin and Tom Crick in terms of dilemmas than seems possible at the beginning. The past is lived but it is not quite finished for Ray, Vince or Lenny: Last Orders is a "journey of remembrance" (Reynolds 25) spread across seventy-five sections.

Each of the pilgrims has obvious reasons for accompanying Jack's ashes: Ray has been assigned the task of carrying out the deceased's "last orders" by the widow; Vince provides the transportation, Vic is the undertaker and Lenny is the lifelong drinking mate. These superficial motives are soon supplanted by more meaningful

ones: Ray is Jack's best friend and Vince is his adopted son; Vic is bound by duty to execute a friend's funereal request; Lenny is paying tribute to his daughter's surrogate father and near father-in-law. Gradually, less noble incentives and significant ironies become apparent through what Michele Roberts in her review of Last Orders calls the "dramatic tensions between monologue and dialogue." Ray hopes to win back the widow's affections and is guided by an enormous burden of guilt. By transporting Jack in a royal blue Mercedes, Vince wants to show off the success of his motor business—a personal achievement his father never condoned. Lenny enjoys the opportunity to air the resentment he keeps stored against Vince, who abandoned Lenny's pregnant daughter. Even when these characters are stripped of motivation and pretence, one discovers a final underlying motive: their common human need to share in the mourning process, to dress up old wounds, to "forgive and forget" (LO 8). They come on this trip in the hope that they will lay Jack to rest, but also bury their past and achieve some closure.

As the narrative unfolds in alternating interior monologues, which are headed by the names either of characters or of places (see Appendix VI), the reader gradually pieces together the major events that have occurred in nearly sixty years as well as the incentives behind actions, the dreams that were never fulfilled, the vital discussions that did not take place. As Peter Kemp argues, "what stays unsaid is a telling factor" in this novel ("Top" 7.9). Most sections in the novel, fifty-eight to be exact, are headed by the names of characters, specifying the narrator of these sections: in order of frequency the narrators are Ray (twenty-two), Vince (twelve), Vic (eight), Lenny (eight), Amy (six), Jack (one), and Mandy (one). Seventeen sections with place headings (from Bermondsey to Margate) are all narrated by Ray and are set in the narrative present (in Appendix VI these place headings are in bold). While the place-entitled sections move the plot towards Margate, the various name-headed monologues provide commentary—cryptic, comic or caustic—on events of the past or the present, which explains the desires and actions of each narrator in relation to the other characters. In sections that range from two words (Vince's "old buggers") to eleven pages (Mandy's monologue), characters provide their own interpretations of events in the past and the present: as their illusions and resentments become apparent, the voices become distinct. Yet each section breeds as many questions as it answers, due to the "jigsaw nature" of the structure (Wood 20).

Maintaining a deceptively simple forward movement, the novel's structure allows for meaning to emerge from a labyrinthine construction. The reader often needs to backtrack in order to retrieve a seemingly trivial piece of information located in an earlier section. To illustrate, section ten—entitled 'Blackheath'—includes various references that demonstrate Swift's method of creating leitmotifs, foreshadowing and adding interpretative layers. In this three-page section the four men debate why Margate became Jack's choice as a final resting place and each has a different explanation (LO 29-31). Vince remembers the "Sunday outings in the old meat van," while Ray refers to Jack and Amy's belated "honeymoon" in the summer of 1939. Vic insists that Jack's request is a "mystery," a reference reminiscent of Ray's efforts in section four to find out from Amy the cause of Jack's request; the widow's enigmatic response was that Jack "had his reasons" (LO 16). Later, in section sixteen, Vince presents his memories of the Sunday trips and towards the end of the novel, in sections sixty-three and sixty-six, Amy narrates the significant incidents which occurred during their weekend honeymoon in 1939 and implies Jack's "reasons." Thus, sections four, ten, sixteen, sixty-three and sixty-six comprise a unit which weaves together events that range from 1939 to 1990.

In Last Orders structural nuances are further enhanced by meaningful repetition of the same word or phrase: Vic's "there must be something that makes you look where you look when you look" (LO 82) is memorable because it is simple as well as profound. In this novel Swift creates what he terms in a 1995 interview "a kind of language which is specific to [Last Orders]" (Bernard 221). Through repetition, a technique already familiar from earlier works, a word, a question or a gesture acquires tremendous significance. Swift considers repetition as an element of the structure, an "echo," a "reminder...of things going on underneath," acknowledging, "I explore such things" (Bernard "Interview" 221). For instance, in section ten Ray is identified as "a mine of information" (LO 20), a simple comment that reveals the vital importance Ray has as the principal narrator. Ray is also identified as a lucky gambler: "the last tip I gave came good," he says, without explaining anything else about the tip or its beneficiary. It is not until section sixty-seven that we find out how "good" his tip was for Jack. Instead, in section ten, Ray answers Vic's query with a teaser: "be telling, wouldn't it?" Playfully postponing the revelation of a secret, this phrase turns into a leitmotif as it is heard again and again from different speakers: Jack (section sixty-three), Ray (section sixty-seven), even Nurse Kelly (section twenty-six). Throughout the novel the reader is invited to participate in the

characters' quest for answers, although there is no guarantee that the search will reveal anything more than the repetition of age-old questions.

Similarly, meaningful phrases, such as Vic's "you shouldn't judge" (LO 126), or images, such as the pigeons that look to Ray "like scatterings of ashes" (LO 16), which relate to the themes of forgiveness and mortality, as well as events that are narrated more than once by different voices reinforce the interwoven strands of the narrative. In this novel even the most innocent comment about a Mercedes acquires new meaning when we realise its underlying significance. At the end of section ten, Vic approves of Vince's choice of car for the trip to Margate: "it's a fine gesture, Vince, it's a beautiful car" (LO 31). Vic's comment demonstrates that he recognises Vince's effort to honour a father he has spent all his life fighting. Even if Vince's choice of the Mercedes reveals a selfish, showy motive, it is also evidence of the truth of Jack's final compliment to his son, which is placed at the end of Vince's final monologue (section sixty-nine) and constitutes his last memory of his father: "you're a good boy, Vince" (LO 226). By creating numerous such connections, Swift's narrative subtly exposes the characters' virtues and vices, and connects the present to the past.

Naked Language and Silent Words

At first reading, the voices heard in Last Orders make this novel sound quite different from this author's other novels. As Swift argues in a 1997 letter to the Times, a work's "inherent world" distinguishes "each telling." The London demotic of Last Orders is far removed from the contrived academese of don Bill Unwin or the pained confession of history teacher Tom Crick. The similarities in themes and techniques that Last Orders bears to its predecessors in this author's oeuvre are overshadowed by the departure from narrators whose education and experiences allow them to reflect upon their human condition in verbal constructions that are literary and intellectually challenging. One must turn to The Sweet-Shop Owner, Swift's first novel (1980), for a setting reminiscent of the Bermondsey milieu. That work, however, is dominated by an authorial third-person narrative; the voice of Willy Chapman, who silently addresses his daughter, breaks through only occasionally. While The Sweet-Shop Owner may focus on a tradesman, such characters find their true voices only in Last Orders. As he admits to Scott Rosenberg, Swift attempts for the first time in Last Orders a "nakedness" quite unlike the "system of protection" which sophisticated expression offers in Waterland, Out of This World or Ever After.

In Last Orders the nakedness of language highlights the principal narrators' reticence to engage in conversation that will add emotional weight to their overwrought state of mind. Distrustful of the ambiguity inherent in expression, Ray feels that "everything means one thing and something else at the same time" (LO 111). The men speak as little as possible and when they do their language is dominated by broken sentences; but their elliptical, repetitive exchanges imply more than their words convey:

Then Vic says, . . . 'If he was here, we wouldn't be, would we? It's because he's not that we are.'

'All the same,' Lenny says.

'If it weren't for him we wouldn't be here,' Vince says. 'We wouldn't be here without him.' (LO 111)

Indicative of the characters' psychological state, ellipsis and fragmentation yield discourse rich in double meanings, ironies and contradictions. The reader of this novel is introduced to Ray's Cockney parlance and laconic understatements from page one, line one: "It ain't like your regular sort of day." In Last Orders the narrators' dialect is unlike any Swift has previously created; still, as the author argues, "their language [is] capable of eloquence" (Rosenberg). John Carey, who has chosen Last Orders as one of the fifty most enjoyable books of the twentieth century, agrees that "Cockney speech becomes a vehicle for nuance" and finds that the effect of such speech is "profoundly elegiac, proverbially wise" (38). Similarly, Wendy Wheeler discovers that despite the lack of "elevated language" there is a "glimpse of the sacred and the enchanted" beneath the ordinary voices ("Melancholic" 77). Indeed, the "deceptive simplicity" (Messud 41) of the novel's diction is an eloquent indicator of the characters' predicament.

Ray's occasional stream-of-consciousness signals moments of emotional intensity which require a breaking down of language:

But as I head back into the bar and I see them at the table, with the barmaid collecting glasses, nice arse an' all, and all the bar-room clobber, brass rails, pictures on the wall, of a pub I've never been in before and won't ever be in again, it's as though I'm looking at them like I'm not here. Like it's not Jack, it's me and I'm looking on, afterwards, and they're all talking about me. HaydockKempton. Like I'm not here but it's still all there, going on without me, and all it is is the scene, the place you pass through, like coachload after coachload passing through a coaching inn. NewburyPontefract.

(LO 112-113).

The effect of such transcendent expression is quietly elegiac. Such passages signify the initial stages of Ray's rediscovery of companionship: a loss of the self to a gestalt of friendship. Furthermore, the fragment of a phrase may express the desire to avoid naming the sinister or reveal the fear of putting into words the unmentionable. The significance of Jack's hospitalisation and imminent death is

indicated through omissions and evasions. For instance, Ray explains to Bernie at the pub that he has avoided gambling because “it don’t seem right somehow, does it? What with” (LO 258—my emphasis). Ray expects his listener to understand what is implied and why it is not spoken. Bernie confirms his understanding of Ray’s reticence by alluding in similar manner to Ray’s not attending the Doncaster event: “You’d be there, wouldn’t you? If it wasn’t for” (LO 258—my emphasis). Hospital, cancer, and death constitute unspoken words, as if evil can be exorcised when the arbitrary sounds representing these ideas are excommunicated. In the world of Last Orders superstition breeds aposiopesis.

The paralysing effect of wrestling with the notion of death can only be compared in Last Orders with the struggle to come to terms with defining moments of the past. In such cases aposiopesis reveals the significance of the past as a unifying force that can reveal the oneness of the dead with the living, the coexistence of life and death. As long as the characters are unable to utter the words that signify the difference between “the things that do and don’t get told” (LO 240), they are doomed to a silence synonymous with alienation, not peace of mind. When Amy Dodds silently addresses her adopted son—“Yes it was here, Vince, here. This was where. Here, in the garden of” (LO 240)—she omits the final word (England) as well as a clear reference to the event to which she alludes (her first sexual encounter with Jack in the Kent countryside and the conception of a severely retarded child). The ironic juxtaposition of the clichéd allusion to Kent as an Eden-like setting with Amy’s awareness of the anything-but-ideal result of her pregnancy reveals her disillusionment with a love that began in paradise but did not fulfil its promise. The grief of loss manifests itself through broken sentences and fragmentary language.

At its most extreme this language is made up of barely recognisable linguistic constructs indicative of great anger or anxiety, as in Vince’s “Hussein better damn well an’ all” (LO 23) which metamorphoses later in the narrative into the even more elliptical “So Hussein better” (LO 265). Not only illness and death but also any major calamity, such as the possibility that an important customer like Hussein may withdraw his patronage, is preferably left unmentioned. Similarly, Vince’s fear that the thousand pounds he lent Jack will never be retrieved is emphasised by another unfinished sentence: “You can’t deny a dying man a favour, any crazy thing he asks, but that don’t mean” (LO 265). The gravity of unuttered words, indicative of the hopes and emotions of all the characters in this novel, grounds their language and reveals every dream they dare no longer nurture.

Solitary Voices and Deferred Stories

These Bermondsey pilgrims suffer in their inability to share, through storytelling, the defining moments of their lives. Instead, their tales are communicated by non-verbal means: drinking and eating together, looking at photographs (of Amy or Jack), the sharing of communal space (in pubs, in vehicles or at the countryside) and of activities (carrying Jack's ashes). In a photograph taken near the Pyramids at the onset of World War II, the nineteen-year-old Jack resembles, in the eyes of young Vince, "a kid on a beach" (LO 137). Jack's vibrant youth transforms the edge of the Sahara desert and the solemnity of the colossal ancient tombs into a landscape of merriment that suggests the seaside, not a theatre of war and death. Like photographer Harry Beech, Vince and Ray find solace in photographs but, unlike the protagonist of Out of This World, they remain unaware of the deceptive nature of representation. For every picture there is more than one story, for every attempt at communication there is the danger of misunderstanding. In Last Orders the transformations the dead and the living undergo along with the malleability of the landscape suggest the intense subjectivity of the human gaze which promotes fragmentation.

The Sahara desert and the seaside at Margate become one in Vince's mind, as the body of big Jack has been transformed through cremation into a substance that feels to Ray "like white soft sand on a beach" (LO 294). The metaphoric fusion of life and death fulfils the promise entailed in the novel's epigraphs: Swift juxtaposes the solemnity of Sir Thomas Browne's 1658 treatise on the significance of funereal rites to the upbeat comedy of a 1907 music hall ballad. By running the familiar Swiftian gamut from the sublime to the ridiculous, the epigraphs convey the centrality of ritual in the context of death as well as life and suggest that the atavistic human yearning for the sea is intimately linked to mortality. The seventeenth-century urns which occasioned Browne's meditation and the 1990 coffee-jar container of the cremated remains of Jack Dodds do not differ, since all bodies become "splendid in ashes" and Jack, as Vic recognises, is "just one of the many now" (LO 142). In Last Orders Swift not only portrays death as the most important equalising force in nature but also underlines the similarities that connect the living and the dead. In Browne's Urn Burial the sentence that follows the one quoted as an epigraph in Last Orders celebrates the "invisible sun" that sustains life's "pure flame" (Chapter V). The fire, which burns in Swift's men, is gradually revealed in the course of the day as each one of the pilgrims strives to reconnect with life and with each other. Jack's wish to "be beside the seaside" becomes Everyman's desire and the novel's leitmotif.

As the men begin to listen to one another and prepare for the communal ritual of the disposal of Jack's ashes, the solitary voices mingle and the potential for coexistence emerges despite their lingering differences. When the characters of Last Orders tell stories, this storytelling is forced, unnatural or incomplete. For instance, Jack reveals to Vince the fact of his adoption and the existence of June long after his son "is getting into fight after fight" because children at school have been teasing Vince about the "big sister" he does not know he has (LO 41). Even Lenny's daughter, Sally, learns from her parents of the Dodds's retarded child and the bomb that killed the Pritchett family before Vince hears what to Lenny "sounded half like a fairy-tale" (LO 42). Similarly, the stories that Amy shares with June for fifty years as well as the silent words she addresses to her daughter as she prepares herself for their final meeting remain unheard and meaningless: June "won't ever be the wiser" (LO 228). Mandy's long tale is coloured by the tint of make-believe; the truth of her informal adoption by the Dodds is a narrative that emphasises the inability of this husband and wife to communicate.

Pilgrimage and storytelling constitute rituals, which provide Chaucer's travelers with an opportunity for communication and the chance to develop a sense of community, and which Swift's characters must rediscover in order to achieve the unity that the sharing of ashes at Margate pier necessitates. As Walter Benjamin specifies in the essay "The Storyteller" (1936), these characters lack "something that seemed inalienable" to human nature but has since been "taken from us: the ability to exchange experiences" (83). Benjamin's essay provides pertinent insights into the role of storytelling, which establishes the fundamental need for the interpretation of life as a process rooted in human exchanges and views the "storyteller as a man who has counsel for his readers" (86). While Tom Crick is the quintessential Swiftian storyteller, the narrators of Last Orders, especially the dominant one, Ray, exemplify the common goal of all stories, that is, the human need to confront mortality. Last Orders is saturated by what Benjamin calls "the stuff that stories are made of," since a human life "first assumes transmissible form at the moment of death" (94). In On Histories and Stories (2000) A. S. Byatt makes a similar point on the relationship between tales and mortality when she notes that "we narrate ourselves to each other in bars and beds" (132), an observation uncannily applicable to Last Orders.

In Last Orders the sharing of stories and the reconstruction of history highlights the longing for continuity and communication between generations in an ever-changing world. Events are remembered and retold in an effort to escape the quicksand of

time. Every character in the novel comes to terms with Jack's demise and battles existential fears by narrating in silent monologues the significance of Jack's existence in their lives. The universality of death's force is death's meaning: at the end of the novel the violent outbursts and the peaceful ale-sharing among mute characters are equally transformed, in the face of death, into meaningful coexistence. As Vic has learnt through life-long intimacy with finality, our common end "makes all men equal for ever and always" (LO 142). Whereas Jack is sanctified by his struggle with death at St Thomas's hospital—another echo of the Canterbury martyr—and through cremation becomes Everyman, the last rites his friends share assist their acceptance of human destiny: "we're at the end," realises Ray on Margate pier (LO 293), echoing Vic's statement that "even on land we're all at sea" (LO 125). The transition from solitary angst to communal commiseration is achieved through storytelling that encompasses both extremes of human experience: life and death.

Fathers and Sons

Although all of the men in Last Orders have the potential to become "searchers" for "truth and understanding," as Pamela Cooper suggests these characters already are (Last 23), only Ray Johnson consistently demonstrates the struggle for enlightenment typical of Tom Crick. Little Ray, the would-be-jockey office boy, and big Jack, the would-be-doctor butcher boy, meet for the first time in Egypt as soldiers during World War II. They become life-long friends because they live in the same neighbourhood in London and each recognises in the other qualities and possessions he craves. Jack envies Ray's size—the ultimate "advantage" at wartime (LO 87)—as well as Ray's wisdom in knowing that he should heed his father's advice and "keep [his] head down" (LO 38). Jack attributes to Ray two qualities which the latter will be required to use in his life: luck and brains (LO 88). Similarly, Ray envies Jack's confidence, which matches his size, and wants Jack's wife or at least the photograph of a pretty girl to alleviate his loneliness: "I thought, I want one of those, I want one like that" (LO 89). Ray needs Jack's certainty and guidance, his sheer bulk and stature so that he can protect himself from bullets and other hardships: "I thought, Stick with this man and you'll get through this war" (LO 88).

Another one of Swift's orphans, Ray intuitively guesses the Dodds's habit of "picking up strays" (LO 67) and allows Jack to "choose" him (LO 87). After the loss of his father which coincides with making Jack's acquaintance, Ray acquires a new family

and casts Jack Dodds in various roles: mate, big brother as well as father figure. Embracing the part, Jack takes it upon himself to complete Ray's education: he arranges Ray's first sexual encounter by taking him to a Cairo brothel and he shows Ray a picture of Amy taken at Margate in the summer of 1939. Like a dutiful son, Ray has sex with a prostitute, but falls in love with his friend's wife. Eventually, Ray succeeds in having an affair with Amy, making his friend a cuckold. Like Chaucer's Miller, Jack does not believe his wife is unfaithful to him but prefers not to enquire.

Ray's behaviour towards Jack betrays characteristics of both kinds of son encountered in Swift's fiction: Ray is dutiful as well as defiant. On the one hand, Ray makes Jack proud by growing into the identity Jack invents for him in the desert: Ray becomes a man who has both brains and luck and knows when and how to use each of these attributes. On the other hand, Ray constantly fails Jack as he seeks ways to replace the father in Amy's heart and Vince's affections. Even if Jack never realised that Ray succeeded in having an affair with his wife, Jack is openly critical—"It's Ray's fault" (LO 67)—of his friend's camaraderie with Vince. Jack feels betrayed every time Ray enables Vince to acquire the means to become independent: first, Ray allows Vince use of his camper, then use of the scrap yard, and finally he sells Vince the property although the deal is financially disadvantageous for Ray. In seeking to liberate Amy from the care of a son, Ray provides Vince with the opportunities to start 'Dodds Motors' and allows him to avoid being part of the butcher's shop that has been called 'Dodds and Son' for two generations.

In Last Orders Swift introduces a new twist to a familiar Oedipal motif that exists in nearly all his works: neither Vince, Jack's adopted child, nor Ray is Jack's biological son. Like Vince, Ray develops the same equivocal emotions that all of Swift's sons seem to entertain towards authority figures, so he seeks to dethrone the symbolic father and replace him. Ray craves the love and acceptance of his fatherly friend but also feels the irresistible urge not to content himself with less than the love of Jack's wife. This sensitive balance is dramatically upset when Jack falls ill and dies within a period of a few weeks. Ray is plagued by guilt for all the times he has betrayed Jack's confidence by coming between Jack and Vince as well as between Jack and Amy. Although in the course of the novel he can think of enough excuses for his behaviour, he finds it impossible to forgive himself, especially since he succumbs for a while to the tempting thought of keeping Vince's one-thousand-pound loan to Jack and not telling Amy about the way in which Jack, even from his deathbed, has

managed to settle his debts. Ray's remorse manifests itself in obvious ways. First, he becomes increasingly convinced that the dead can see the living: "they're watching, the dead . . . they're all watching us, even now" (LO 77). Later, in Canterbury Cathedral, he feels exposed as a "miserable sinner": "there ain't no hiding . . . because He's supposed to see everything" (LO 200, emphasis in the original text). Ultimately, he considers himself unworthy to carry the container with Jack's ashes: "I'm holding the jar and I don't deserve" (LO 284). As Wendy Wheeler suggests, Ray needs to acknowledge the significance of "the symbolic father" so as to "re-establish the order" ("In the Middle" 148) and liberate himself from remorse.

Ray's guilt eventually climaxes into an emotional and spiritual crisis, which Ray experiences in Canterbury. Under the weight of history and religion manifest in the symbolic setting of Canterbury Cathedral, he entertains nihilistic thoughts: "what's the lick and spit of a human life against fourteen centuries? . . . Jack's nothing" (LO 201). As a result, Ray gets separated from the others and loses his way. However, he soon realises that he can only be redeemed through the camaraderie of these men despite their uneasy coexistence:

I spot them, looking out for me. I think, Friends. . . .They look like they're glad to be here together, like all's forgiven. . . . I can feel the cathedral behind me, looking at me. (LO 225)

At Margate Ray liberates himself by accepting his responsibility towards his adopted family and being honest towards Vince about the loan. Ray becomes a dutiful son who repays the father's debts, a supportive brother and a potential husband for the widow. Although he is aware that Jack's shoes are a few sizes too big for him, he feels it is Jack himself who is encouraging him to take his place: "These are my shoes, Raysy, go on, step in 'em, wear 'em" (LO 283). At the end of the novel Ray seems determined to make an effort to accept new responsibilities, as in the past he accepted the various identities Jack assigned to him: friend, 'adopted' son, uncle, Lucky.

Fathers and Daughters

The other dominant father figure in Last Orders is the pugilistic Lenny Tate, a character who complements Jack Dodds and maintains antagonistic relationships with Vince and, to a lesser extent, Ray. A dutiful son more out of necessity than choice, Lenny maintains the fruit-and-vegetable stall he has inherited from his father and still works at sixty-nine, "scratching a bleeding living" (LO 40). This hand-to-mouth existence has taken a toll on Lenny's health: of his fellow travellers he seems the most weathered, although he picks a fight with Vince and drinks more than the

others do. Retirement is a luxury he cannot afford; similarly, he has never had the financial means to own a car, take holidays or go on weekend excursions with his wife and child. Consequently, Sally Tate became a surrogate daughter to Jack and Amy for "Sunday outings" to Margate. Lenny is grateful to the Dodds for providing Sally with the fresh air and weekend entertainment he could not afford. Like Jack, Lenny is a man who expresses himself physically. A would-be boxer who had the strength but not the control necessary to become a good athlete, Lenny feels that he has been a failure in every aspect of his life: as a man, as a husband and as a father. In that he is similar to almost all male characters in Swift's works who, as Adrian Poole observes, "mourn an idea of their own manhood...and want to be forgiven for failing it" ("Mourning After" 165). Like Bill Unwin and Tom Crick, Lenny cannot bring himself to negotiate any peace with himself or secure any sense of closure.

By secretly desiring Amy all his life, Lenny feels he has betrayed Joan, his wife. Like Ray, Lenny lusts after Amy and believes that "Jack was the luckiest bastard alive" (LO 209). Unlike Ray, though, he never acts upon his secret passion and remains "jealous" of the affections Amy bestows upon his daughter, "thinking of how she'd kiss and pet Sally" (LO 209). Yet his love for Amy does not extend to Vince, who, in Lenny's view, joins the Army in 1962 to escape not only Jack's pressures but also Sally's pregnancy. Unlike Jack, who agrees to marry the pregnant Amy in 1938, Vince does not assume responsibility for this child or perhaps he is never asked to do so. Although Sally wishes to keep the baby, since she believes that Vince will "do right by her" when his Foreign Legion service is finished, Lenny insists upon her having an abortion: "and she ain't ever forgiven me since" (LO 203). This decision, which Lenny considers to be justified, becomes over time a source of immense remorse. Lenny cannot forgive himself, since Sally is unable to have children as a result of an illegal abortion performed by a "butcher" that Lenny finds and pays with money secured from one of Ray's lucky tips (LO 208). Sally's subsequent marriage to a car thief who ends up in prison and her need to trade off sexual favours for a living seem to be consequences of Lenny's discouraging stance in relation to his daughter's love for Vince. Lenny's disapproval of Sally leads to their estrangement as he "washes [his] hands" and refuses anything further to do with her (LO 204).

Like the other men in Last Orders (with the exception of Vic) who also have estranged daughters, Lenny experiences remorse for severing a family tie and withdrawing from the paternal role. Whether the daughter is retarded (Jack's June)

or healthy (Lenny's Sally), whether she lives as far away as Australia (Ray's Susie) or as close as another part of London (Vince's Kathy), these fathers feel betrayed by their own flesh-and-blood when they discover that their daughters seek independence or retreat into a different world. This other world may be marriage or it may be mental retardation, yet the men feel dejected and respond in a manner that denies emotion and breeds guilt: "best thing we can do, Ame, is forget all about her" (LO 253) are Jack's words but the sentiments apply equally to Ray, Vince and Lenny. Eventually, these fathers realise that even forgetting is a way of remembrance.

Despite similarities in the experiences these men have as fathers, they do not feel united in misery; neither do they share their guilt with one another. Instead, years go by and they remain paralysed in silence and inaction. Eventually, the "extreme repression" of their guilt (Wood 20), produces the saturated remorse which makes them lash out at one another. The animosity Lenny can barely contain towards Vince—a mirror image of his own guilt—inevitably escalates into a fistfight which Lenny wages in the names of Jack and Sally (LO 148). Yet, what could be more satisfying for Lenny than the fact that Vince is a worse failure as a father than Lenny is? Not only does Vince use his beautiful daughter to lure City yuppies into his second-hand "auto showroom," but he expects his customers to repay his daughter's affections by patronising his business. Even if Vince's private guilt and sense of failure towards his own daughter are visible to Lenny, they are not punishment enough.

Sons and Fathers

A failed son and father as well as "the hardest character to like" (Carey 38), Vince Dodds is the second most frequent voice in this narrative. His fellow travellers view him as financially successful and content, yet he is the character least satisfied in his life, as the discrepancy between his words and his thoughts reveals. Full of false starts, swear words and slang, Vince's language is the most fragmented and the least eloquent. The linguistic irregularities in his expression reveal an angry, unsettled sensibility. This son has few redeeming qualities because he rejects all emotional ties. Vince fights against Jack and any other authority figure all his life and measures his personal worth by the degree of hardship he can cause. Even after Jack's death Vince disobeys Jack's "last orders" to have his ashes scattered off the Margate pier by purposely taking a detour to Wick's Farm (where Jack and Amy met

and June was conceived) to allow a handful of Jack's dust to become part of a landscape that Jack is not particularly keen to remember or revisit.

While all the other characters maintain positive feelings towards at least one other person, Vince seems to be constantly escaping emotional commitment. Acting as if his survival depends upon his ability to reject the people he should love (Sally or Jack), he becomes alienated and withdrawn. Furthermore, while Vince's lifestyle—expensive suits, luxury automobiles, gourmet coffee—suggests a solid financial status, he has, as John Doyle notes, “more flash than cash.” His constant worry over the thousand-pound loan to Jack indicates that he only pretends to be successful in a constant struggle to justify his choice of “motors” over “meat.” This overwhelming need to prove himself stems from his inability to come to terms with his losses: his adopted family as well as his biological one. The loss of the former occurs when he learns about the loss of the latter: Jack's belated revelation of the truth of his adoption leads to a severing of all ties. Rejecting paternal authority, Vince refuses to participate in the family business, which he identifies with his adoptive father. Unable to look backwards, Vince identifies his future with machines, not people. The substitution of flesh and blood with oil and spare parts or any kind of substitute is an unwelcome development for characters in Swift's fiction. Like Bill Unwin, Vince rejects substitutes—his adoptive home, Jack's profession, his own role as June's replacement—but does not discover genuine alternatives. So long as he insists on a separate existence, Vince is unable to experience contentment and belonging. Vince becomes humanised when he accepts his filial obligations towards Jack. By lending his father money, providing the transportation to fulfil his father's final request and connecting with his father's friends on Margate pier, Vince reestablishes his emotional bonds with Jack and the past.

Of the four men who share in the scattering of Jack's ashes only Vic Tucker, the undertaker, is allowed a balance of emotion that distinguishes him from the frail and the damaged. This balance derives from Vic's early acceptance of mortality, his professional dedication to the service of death, and his superior understanding of human equality in the light of human destiny. Unlike Jack's and Lenny's forced acceptance of the paternal trade, Vic is “raised to it” and sees it as “a privilege, an education” (LO 78). This lifelong acquaintance with death equips Vic with stoicism and endurance; Vic is well aware of the dread and awe he inspires: “an undertaker's half lord, half leper” (LO 214). Of all the men in Last Orders Vic is the only one who is content: he is successful professionally and in good health; he is married to a

woman of his own choice and enjoys the company of his two sons as well as the knowledge that 'Tucker & Sons' will continue to exist. He is a true Victor, a peacemaker, a dignified arbiter of men.

Swift invests his undertaker with a balanced view of life and of people. Vic is humble yet also demonstrates pride in his own achievements. As a friend he is loyal, understanding and forgiving—a keeper of secrets. Vic's wisdom lies in his ability to reconcile opposites, accept human limitations and maintain his dignity in the face of death. Rarely in Swift's works does the reader come across a character whose inner qualities and conduct are exemplary. This author seems more interested in exposing weaknesses than providing role models. Swift's emphasis on the need to accept mortality requires that his undertaker should be wise. In the struggle between the ephemeral and the eternal there is no doubt where this author stands: Jack Dodds redeems himself in the reader's eyes when he quietly suggests that "ending ain't nothing" (LO 182) and "come[s] to terms" with his own death (LO 220).

A Comic Book

An essential component of Vic's balanced philosophy and a quality he shares with all the other men is a sense of humour. Vic believes that even in his profession "it doesn't do to get too solemn," so when he introduces himself he always adds, "at your disposal" (LO 78). Last Orders is, in the words of the author, "a very comic book" (Gossmann 156); however, Swift also notes that "humour is always serious in the end" (Bernard and Menegaldo 17). In a telling vignette the undertaker remembers how at one time he had so many "customers" that he had to seek the butcher's assistance when "one of them needed seeing to badly." Jack "didn't bat an eyelid," and, "when the eldest son came to view," Vic thought how the son would never know "[his] mum was tidied up by the butcher across the street" (LO 84). As Swift suggests in a conversation with Lewis Frumkes, "the comedy occurs when life gets in the way of death."

In Last Orders more than in any of the previous novels the characters invite laughter and have an acute sense of the humorous and the ridiculous. Apart from the great need for comic relief required in a story that features death on every page, humour serves another purpose as well. Whether Lenny calls the urn "Jack-in-a-box" (LO 49) or on his deathbed Jack borrows a biblical simile fit for a butcher—"lambs to the slaughter" (LO 152)—humour becomes an ironic device used to undermine death's dominance. Swift's purpose in his novels is to achieve a reconciliation of opposites.

In interview the author defines Last Orders as “a novel which is about death in order to be about life” (Gossmann 156). Even in the wake of death, life demands celebration: a visit to a pub or two, some sightseeing, a fast drive in a Mercedes on the way to the seaside turn a morbid duty into, in Malcolm Bradbury’s words, “a comic Chaucerian pilgrimage” (527). As the universal elements in the journey of these ordinary characters mingle laughter with tears, these Bermondsey pilgrims evolve into figures oddly familiar from ancient drama: one part tragic hero, one part Aristophanic beggar.

In Last Orders, as in Swift’s other works, professions and names are deployed as indices of the characters’ nature and temperament. This novel combines these indices with stereotypes and humour, echoing Chaucer’s use of recognisable human types. Like the Miller in The Canterbury Tales, Swift’s butcher is big, loud and crude. As superstitious as a medieval tradesman, Jack believes that life is “all a gamble” (LO 268) and proves it in the manner of his life: he bets his day’s earnings to prove to Vic the seriousness of his decision to sell the shop; he adopts Ray as a human talisman; and he believes that an incredible bet will provide his widow with the means to cover his debts. Jack’s size fits his profession; Ray’s size leads him to a desk job and an aspiration to become a jockey. Vic’s youthful appearance is attributed by Ray to “working with stiffs...it’s all them preservatives” (LO 74). Conversely, Lenny has the “squashy” face of a greengrocer and an ex-boxer. As for Vince, he may wear an expensive suit and silver cuff-links but his initials (V.I.P.) provide an ironic contrast between the image he tries to project and his real financial status: all he has accomplished by his mid-forties is to acquire the “pongy after-shave” and “slicked-back hair” of a flashy, second-hand car salesman (LO 18).

Like Chaucer, Swift defines his characters first as types by emphasising external characteristics that relate to their physical attributes and their professions. Then, Swift’s travellers acquire the archetypal traits of figures in a contemporary morality play: Vic stands for the Grim Reaper, Ray represents Fate, Lenny personifies Wrath and Vince is Vanity. Eventually, these men are invested with individual traits that are unique to each one as well as universally human. Jack’s secret wish to become a doctor, Ray’s illicit passion for his best friend’s wife, Lenny’s overwhelming sense of failure as a father, as a husband, even as a boxer, and Vince’s need to protect a fragile pretence of success are the characteristics which transform these men from archetypes into ordinary people.

Similarly, through humour and irony, names imply character traits or thematic nuances. The all-too-apparent allegory in the names of *Miracle Worker*, the horse Ray chooses for his improbable bet, and Joy, Jack's nurse with "this gleam in her eye" (LO 125), emphasises the significance of chance. Ironically, both Joy and *Miracle Worker* live up to their names, as Ray, Vic and June also do. Ray brings hope and luck while June stays forever young; Vic Tucker cannot help but find meaning in his own name: "We're Tuckers, we fix up dead people. . . .We tuck' em up" (LO 125). Only Vince, whose name echoes Vic's, is not invincible, despite the image he painstakingly protects. Although Vince has enough reasons to consider himself a winner—surviving World War II, building his own business, being raised in a proper home, not an orphanage—he dwells on his losses. His thoughts always return to the families he has rejected, his father's friends who do not approve of his choices, the roles of son, husband and father which he does not adequately fulfil.

Jack is an appropriate name for a butcher who must heed his father's advice to "avoid wastage" and always take into consideration the "nature of the goods," which is "perishable" (LO 283): Jack takes a cleaver to his biological bond with his retarded child, severs emotional ties, and expects Amy to do the same. In the novel's "symbolic language of the spirit and the soul" (Wheeler "Melancholic" 77), Amy is synonymous with emotion: she gives love and creates love, the object of everyone's attention and concern. Even when her love is not returned and she grows embittered, she continues to hope that June will one day acknowledge her presence and call her "Mum" (LO 274) or that Jack, even on his deathbed, will have a parting word for the daughter he never visits. Since Jack cannot reconcile himself with "a living embodiment of damaged happiness" (Poole "Mourning After" 164), Amy's hopes are betrayed.

Amy inspires long-lasting passions because she is ami-able: kind, dedicated, caring. She recognises in Ray not his potential for survival, as Jack does, but the quiet promise of life inherent in his name: "Oh Ray. . . .you're a little ray of sunshine, you're a little ray of hope" (LO 284). While Jack sees in Lucky the insurance clerk who knows about "safe luck" (LO 232) and the "larger mathematics" (LO 127) that secure a profitable bet, Amy can see the "lovely man" who is attuned to "the glory of horses" and can "grab at gold" (LO 232). The gradual transformation from Jack's Lucky to Amy's Ray occurs on the Margate pier in the middle of a storm as Ray overcomes his burden of guilt and allows himself to hope that Jack's demise will also bring closure to his own death-in-life. On the pier he corrects the injustice he has

committed earlier in the day by lying to Vince and accepts the implications of his role as best friend of the deceased. He reconnects with “Jack what we’re made of” (LO 295) and we are led to believe that he may also seek to reunite himself with the women he loves: Susie and Amy.

Wives and Daughters

More female characters participate in the plot of Last Orders than in any other of Swift’s novels. Women’s significance in this novel is as pronounced as their physical absence from the day’s excursion. Throughout the men’s narratives women are talked about and remembered, blamed and resented, worshipped and martyred. All five of the men have wives and four of them have daughters—this younger generation, however, is mostly “lost to perpetual silence,” as Claire Messud notes (41). While some of the wives are loving and faithful (Joan Tate and Pam Tucker), others are secretive and untrustworthy (Carol Johnson and Amy Dodds); while some of the daughters are traumatised and pitiful (Sally and June), others are sluttish and devious (Mandy, Kathy and Susie). The Madonna/whore dichotomy seems to be an inescapable stereotype in the way Swift’s male characters view the women they love, marry, betray and beget.

In Last Orders two female characters are given a voice that is distinct and separate from the men’s memories: Jack’s widow is assigned six sections (five of which come in close succession in the last part of the novel) and Jack’s daughter-in-law speaks the longest section (eleven pages which include powerful insights into family dynamics and nineteen-sixties’ cultural lore). Although these seven sections constitute only a small part of the three-hundred-page novel, the importance and collective power of these two female voices is not in proportion to their frequency. As the ideas in the single section allowed to Irene Chapman in The Sweet-Shop Owner and to Anna Beech in Out of This World reverberate throughout those novels, the concerns shared by the two female voices heard in Last Orders become emblematic and archetypal. Swift has chosen each of these women as representative of their age group and role: Mandy as a daughter, Amy as a wife and mother.

Mandy’s tale is a lengthy monologue, broken up chronologically and structurally to include memories, thoughts and reported dialogues. Appearing in the middle of the narrative (section thirty-nine), it creates a bridge, through the eyes of an outsider who is kindly taken in, between the conflicting viewpoints of the characters who are

already part of Jack's story as friends, relatives or neighbours. Mandy provides novel insights into Smithfield market, where she trades a missing parent (her father Bill) for a surrogate father (Jack), uncle (Ray), and brother (Vince). As she struggles to come to terms with unfulfilled dreams and youthful aspirations, echoes of all the other characters resonate in her voice. In particular, the silent daughters (Sally, Susie and Kathy) find their voice in Mandy's "it's never how you picture it" (LO 161), and in her quiet bewilderment with a world that in "the year of Sergeant Pepper" (LO 161) seemed full of potential. Two decades later she has "a husband in the motor trade, a daughter on the hustle" (LO 161). In her unflinching realism and depressed acknowledgement of faded youth, Mandy deserves as much compassion as the other mothers and daughters who persevere, having come to terms with their lost lives.

Jack's widow is one of them. In Last Orders Amy's voice is so resonant that one is surprised to discover she speaks only half a dozen times. Her six sections constitute a parting speech to her dead husband as well as their only child, a daughter who has been faithfully attended twice a week for fifty years but has yet to acknowledge her mother's presence. As Amy, seated in a number-44 bus, tells her life story one last time, the bitterness and rage that have built up inside her all these years—against Jack, against luck, against life—gradually give way to forgiveness and a sense of closure. Now that Jack can no longer reject her and their child, Amy can forgive his frailty and lay him to rest. Her resilience to an "accident of birth" (LO 97) that has defined her existence, and her unwavering dedication to parental duties command enormous respect: Swift considers her "the strongest character" in the novel and the one with the "greatest power of decision" (Gossmann 155-6).

Amy haunts the novel by her decision not to be the executor of her husband's final wishes, but it is not her refusal to abide by her wifely duties that the male characters resent. Her absence forces them to confront Jack's death not only as an event but as an actual process: they have to carry Jack's ashes in their lap, hug him to their chest against the wind and the rain on Margate pier and feel his grainy powder against their fingers. Forced to deal with the paraphernalia of death, these men cannot avoid thinking of their own end and appraising their lives. By juxtaposing male weaknesses to a strong, assertive female sensibility, Swift underlines the need to embrace mortality and become intimate with the minutiae of death.

Chance and Choice

Male—female; life—death; union— isolation: Swift's characters inhabit the distance between these markers as they oscillate between hope and reality. Landscapes both real and symbolic, traversed in body and in mind, constitute battlefields where memory and desire like "the sky and the sea and the wind are all mixed up together" (LO 294). The ironies of life are always emphasised in Swift's fiction. Reuniting with each other and experiencing the camaraderie bred of the day's adventures, the men on the pier can truly feel that "it's something Jack has done for us, so as to make us feel special" (LO 18). Chance, choice, destiny: Swift's fiction is all about "accidents" and "pickings" (LO 236). Even in a brief commentary entitled "Winning the Booker" (1998), Swift reveals the importance he places on chance and life-as-a-gamble when, half-seriously and in the spirit of Last Orders, he claims, "I didn't expect to win . . . but my number came up" (30).

Last Orders is teeming with meaningful "accidents" of the sort that positions butcher and undertaker ("stiffs and steaks") across the street from one another, turns war into a sightseeing adventure, and "makes you look where you look when you look" (LO 82). In Last Orders the notions of fate and choice interrelate: as Amy realises, "things come together in this world to make things happen" (LO 238). Doubts forever plague the characters about the origins as well as the consequences of their actions, the circumstances that force decision-making, and the repercussions that result in lifelong traumas. "Luck of a summer night" (LO 268) produces June and misery for Jack who can't accept his wife's commitment to their severely retarded daughter. This "accident of birth" (LO 97) not only destroys their marriage but also creates a lifelong need to fill the space created by the absence of biological children through the adoption, literal or metaphoric, of any available orphan: Vince, Mandy, Sally, Ray.

In 1938 Jack and Amy meet in idyllic Kent, the "garden of England," which Swift's rendering transforms into Eden before the Fall: "doing it for free, getting it for free . . . with the sunshine and the fresh air . . . and that feeling of being set loose" (LO 234). When the offspring of this Adam and Eve proves to be anything but ideal, Amy strives "not to take it as a punishment" yet spends the rest of her life doing penance "because one thing leads to another" (LO 238). World War II alters their domestic situation in a most ironic manner as all three survive and an orphan is adopted. In his parting words to Amy, Jack defines life through a metaphor central to Last Orders and synonymous with "accident": "all a gamble, ain't it?" (LO 268). Jack's

salvation and Amy's future, Ray's redemption and Vince's absolution depend upon a bet: Vince lends his father a thousand pounds in exchange for a clean conscience; Ray picks a winner for his mate in the name of friendship and loyalty; and Amy will repay Jack's debts, forgive him their sad coexistence and be allowed a second chance in life. In the realm of organised accident the minor triumphs of gambling counterbalance the "nature of the goods:" as Swift implies, we may be "perishable" but we are also capable of endurance.

And forgiveness. As each of the voices tells Jack's story, and in consequence their own, the realisation of Jack's absence from their lives leads to an understanding of human destiny and an appreciation of the connections existing among the living: "all in our berths going to our deaths" (LO 125). Swift expects us to read "births" into the previous sentence and realise that "even on land we're all at sea" (LO 125). Life and death, land and sea: Vic's "floating coffins" is a metaphor that combines the lyrical with the macabre in order to suggest how all-embracing death is, a liquid other world that constitutes the inevitable ending of life's voyage. As Vic implies, only a light coffin floats. Hence Vic's motto: "you shouldn't judge your fellow men, you shouldn't hold things against them" (LO 126).

Transformations

Like the sea, travelling and transportation are metaphors used in Last Orders to evoke life and death, mobility and immobility, identity and lack of self-knowledge. The plot of this novel focuses on a day trip to a seaside resort to scatter the ashes of a departed friend: even this simplified construction suggests that transportation and transformation become synonymous in this novel. Jack Dodds died and was cremated: what was familiar (flesh) has already undergone its first transformation and through fire has become unfamiliar (ashes). This dust must now be transported to Margate in a plastic container for its final transformation, through the wind, into air. From life to death, from material to immaterial, from known to unknown:

the ash that I carried in my hands, which was the Jack who once walked around, is carried away by the wind, is whirled away by the wind till the ash becomes wind and the wind becomes Jack what we're made of. (LO 294-5)

As in Out of This World, metaphors and metamorphoses concerning transportation abound in Last Orders. Jack frequents *The Coach* which "ain't ever gone nowhere" (LO 9), takes the meat van to the beach on Sundays and has to be driven to his final destination according to his "last orders." Every week for fifty years Amy covers a long distance by public transportation, so she feels "at home" only on a bus: "neither here nor there, just travelling in between" (LO 228). When Ray lies awake he ticks

off in his head all the racetracks he has visited in his camper: "AscotBrighton CheltenhamDoncasterEpsom" (LO 112). Vic affectionately names the vehicles of his trade: "Doris," "Mavis," and "Black Maria" (LO 211). Even World War II operates as "an unexpected sort of travel agency" (Kemp "Top" 7.9) which sends Lenny to "paddle" on the beach at Salerno (LO 41) and makes it possible for Jack and Ray to get their picture taken on a camel in front of the Pyramids. Vince feels that his love of automobiles, which dictated his choice of profession, has been instrumental in placing him in the "right trade, the travel trade" (LO 105).

More than any other character, Vince is into "wheels" (LO 105); he "can't imagine a world without motors" (LO 71). While his relationships with all the other characters are testy, Vince considers his car "a comfort and companion" (LO 71). Since he connects the Dodds household with emotional demands, his home is each car he repairs, drives, and sleeps in. Unsurprisingly, he also likes "doing it in cars" (LO 103): for Vince this kind of sex, "cramped and squashed and hasty" (LO 103), guarantees lack of intimacy and underlines his fear of commitment. In his effort to avoid human ties Vince resorts to motors and turns himself into a machine. In Swift's works the identification of characters, such as Harry Beech and Joe Carmichael in Out of This World and Vince Dodds in Last Orders, with travel and machines represents an escapist, mechanised existence that severs human ties; these characters move forward without acknowledging natural bonds with the past. Vehicles acquire a sinister dimension in Last Orders as they relate to various types of escape from the demands of human relationships. For instance, Ray's camper allows Vince to remove himself from the Dodds family environment, provides the excuse for Ray's wife to abandon an unhappy marriage and becomes the location of Amy's brief liaison with Ray. Similarly, Jack takes the meat van to Smithfield during the week and to Margate on Sundays in a sustained effort to avoid assuming responsibility for the retarded child his wife visits twice a week.

Ray and Carol, Ray and Amy, Jack and Amy, Jack and Vince, Ray and Vince: none of these pairs manages to weather the emotional storms they encounter, since they constantly excuse themselves—physically as well as psychologically—from their partner's side. They escape in cars, meat vans or buses. However, the mobility that vehicles offer is as illusory as the ability of *The Coach and Horses* pub to travel anywhere. Until these characters consider where "we've all got to get to that the coach should be taking us" (LO 9), they do not cover any ground despite the miles they place between themselves and those they should acknowledge as loved ones.

In Last Orders Swift's characters constantly escape through travel until at the end of Margate pier they learn to reconcile themselves to the emotional needs of their human nature.

Ashes Into Air

The ending of Last Orders is reminiscent of Waterland, since in both cases a burial at sea, a watery death, is transformed, through an apotheosis of language, into a symbolic rebirth. However, Dick's suicide, his escape into an element that becomes him better, occurs in the fictional past and is anachronically reserved for the end of the narrative, demonstrating Tom Crick's unrelenting guilt. In similar manner Ever After concludes with Bill's memory of his first sexual encounter with Ruth, a night fondly recollected but tainted by the subsequent remembrance of his father's suicide. Conversely, the scattering of Jack's ashes occurs in the fictional present and constitutes a unifying and communal experience for the participants. The crucial differences between the endings of these three novels suggest that Last Orders communicates a more hopeful viewpoint, "an affirmation of the power and sanctity of endurance" (Doyle).

Forced into communal grief and pilgrimage, Swift's travellers undergo physical and emotional hardships which remind them of forgotten bonds and allow them to reach a "secular communion" (Wheeler "Melancholic" 78) which mirrors the religious bonds familiar to Chaucer's pilgrims and effectively replaces the mute desperation of T. S. Eliot's Hollow Men. As Peter Kemp notes, Last Orders "unflinchingly contemplates human perishability and also pays unsentimental tribute to human resilience" ("Top" 7.9). Acknowledging the Waste-Land qualities of contemporary existence but seeking a way out of modernism's spiritual cul-de-sac, Swift reinvents the ritual of pilgrimage as a unifying human experience which has a place in present-day culture. In the Prologue to The Canterbury Tales pilgrimage is defined first as the body's need for movement and adventure, a biological necessity dictated by the coming of spring and the rebirth of nature. While the "sweete breeth" of Zephyrus brings about the Chaucerian pilgrims' longing, in Swift's contemporary London the ties between forces of nature and people have long been severed. In Last Orders characters have to be forced on their journey by a widow's refusal to execute "last orders." Although the holy has been profaned and natural impulses deadened, the novel insists that, even through "another fool's errand, another detour" (LO 105), one may still find the way to Canterbury Cathedral.

Characterised by Swift's familiar combination of desolation and cheer, the world of Last Orders relates closely to Swift's previous novels. Like Vince Dodds, who went to the seaside at Margate numerous times in the 1950s but seems to be seeing it for the first time at the end of a stormy April day in 1990, the reader finds in Ray Johnson and the other characters populating Last Orders glimpses of Willy Chapman, Prentis, Tom Crick, Harry Beech and Bill Unwin, along with all the pilgrims and hollow men created by Chaucer, Eliot, or Faulkner. By honouring the title's request, a command that involves the men of Last Orders in the catharsis of the mourning process, the characters are forced to acknowledge the bonds of love and obligation that tie them to the dead as well as to each other. At the end of that day there are no Hollow Men on Margate pier. As Ray's tears mingle with rain and wind and Jack, Swift allows the liberating hint of a promising answer about life's meaning, the possibility that the dead can see the living and, more importantly, the inescapability of the need to share, in words and actions, life as well as death. In Jack Dodds's end and his "last orders" Ray Johnson and all of us may find a new beginning.

Conclusion

In the Light of: The “Familiar Terrain” of Graham Swift’s Fiction

When I start something new I like to think it’s completely fresh, some sort of adventure, but you always find yourself coming back to some kind of familiar terrain.

Graham Swift (Lashku 38)

Stories are like genes, they keep part of us alive after the end of our story.

A. S. Byatt “The Greatest Story Ever Told” (166)

The encounter with water is dual in nature. If fishing is a peering into another universe, there goes with it a Narcissus-like in-peering, inescapably yearning, entranced, nostalgic. . . . In water we see the dream, the mystery of ourselves.

G. Swift and D. Profumo The Magic Wheel (15)

In the essay collection On Histories and Stories (2000), A. S. Byatt emphasises the instinctive human need for storytelling by characterising narration “as much part of human nature as breath and the circulation of the blood” (166). The needs of the body and the needs of the mind, survival and fulfilment, are not always easy companions, however. In Graham Swift’s fiction the quest for answers or the convenient avoidance of questions exacts a heavy toll: the tales his protagonists construct are as sharp as the breaths they draw and as circular as the flow of blood in their veins. For Swift’s protagonists who, in the words of Malcolm Bradbury, “live in the aftermath” (Modern 433), the world becomes a confusing array of signs until it is transformed through narrative: their need for storytelling arises instinctively out of trauma. Their story becomes a mirror of the suffering they seek, however unwillingly, to confront by narrativising. The only differences among Swift’s storytellers (Prentis, Tom Crick or Bill Unwin) are the degree to which each of them is prepared to engage in this therapeutic process, and the extent to which they are past rescue.

In over two decades that Graham Swift has been publishing fiction—from his first story, “The Recreation Ground,” in 1976 to his latest, “Our Nicky’s Heart,” in 2000—he has been examining the same human weaknesses and anxieties related to family relations and the quest for identity and has been advocating recourse to the same remedy, the therapeutic balm of communication and tale-sharing. As Swift acknowledges, he has been returning to a “familiar terrain” (Lashku 38), exploring,

through first-person narratives, universal themes: mortality and posterity, ignorance and innocence, suffering and knowledge. Despite the variety of plots and settings, of professions and social milieux, Swift's protagonists—younger (Prentis) or older (Ray Johnson), well-off (Tom Crick) or verging on poor (Lenny Tate), formally educated (Bill Unwin) or streetwise (Vince Dodds), cosmopolitan (Harry Beech) or parochial (Willy Chapman)—are all equally tormented; they feel lonely and abandoned, insecure and unloved, guilty and undeserving. Having spent their lives evading their responsibilities and destroying the relationships that have offered them their only sense of identity—as sons, husbands and fathers—they learn belatedly to mourn a past that, through hindsight, they reconstruct as fairytale. As Susana Onega suggests, in Swift's works, as in other contemporary novels, such as Lively's Moon Tiger, Ackroyd's Hawksmoor and Winterson's The Passion, characters "fight for the integration of their fragmented selves in a labyrinthine world of mythical overtones" (17). If Swift's method, structure, and language vary from story to story, his essential themes and concerns do not, as long as he remains, along with other contemporary novelists, like Martin Amis and Ian McEwan, interested in "the advancement of an ethical world-view," as Dominic Head points out (258).

Swift's insistence on giving readers an "experience" (Bernard and Menegaldo 13) and considering them as his "collaborators" (Walton) but his unwillingness to address or subscribe to any critical agenda derives from his conviction that the novel is a flexible form: "one can put everything into a novel," he claimed in 1985 (Crane Interview 8). Swift and the writers of his generation have tested the flexibility of the genre decisively and with considerable success. The British novel of the 1980s and the 1990s has proven a hybrid form that has absorbed tradition and incorporated experimentation (Gasiorek 181). The post-war English novel has contemplated, according to Steven Connor, "the possibility of its death" and survived, by demonstrating self-conscious concern for "the conditions of its own survival" (244). Realism, invigorated and reinvented, remains the path of the English novel, claims David Lodge in a 2001 interview with Areté.

Swift finds tradition to be both a grounding force and a compass that allows the new writer to explore new territory assisted, not encumbered, by an awareness of the great predecessors:

Whatever course you are steering, you are kept on balance by your feeling of tradition. . . . Because there is a strong tradition of the English novel, contemporary English writers, consciously or not, are kept under a positive restraint: 'Yes, there was George Eliot, there was Dickens, I am doing

something different, but nonetheless it helps that they were there, I would be lost if they hadn't been there.' (Bernard Interview 226-227)

For Malcolm Bradbury one of the "essential secrets" of the twentieth-century novel is that the Victorian novel "did not entirely go away" (Modern 7). If realism, as Gasiorek claims, is "radically open-ended" (14), and the novel as a genre is "in a state of creative expansion," as Head argues (259), then, rather than seeking to define and find traces of the 'postmodern' or the 'post-postmodern' in contemporary novels, we may need to invent new terms to describe an inclusive, not disruptive, development in twentieth-century British fiction, which would accurately represent the fiction of Graham Swift and of his contemporaries.

From Shop Owner to Pilgrim

Swift's literary reputation was firmly established by Waterland in 1983 and critical expectations were again fulfilled in 1996 with Last Orders. These two novels, which Adrian Poole characterises as Swift's "most ambitious" ("Mourning" 165), constitute landmarks in Swift's career as culminations of the two different periods in this author's oeuvre so far. Swift's early fiction, which includes his short stories and the first two novels (1976-1981), is characterised by experimentation with narrative techniques and focuses on themes that look at the microcosm of familial relations more intently than at the world at large. The characters are troubled and traumatised, like Willy Chapman, Kostas in "The Son" and Dr Collins in "The Hypochondriac," but weak and unwilling to confess; or they are manipulative, disturbed and unreliable, like Prentis and the anonymous narrators of "Hotel" and "Cliffedge." In these works characters lack self-awareness, and tend to be selfish: they can function within limits as long as they impose them. Prentis, for instance, a self-described "weak" and "cowardly" individual, finds peace in the "gaps" of history and becomes a destroyer, not a preserver, of stories. At the end of Shuttlecock Prentis opts for ignorance, seeking to recapture the innocence of his past and reproduce the passion of his earlier visits to Camber Sands by manipulating his narrative.

In his early works Swift unites fragmented voices, non-linear exposition and the character's personal and social alienation with symbolic settings, creating enigmatic narratives. The nihilism and bleak outlook of life in this early fiction borrows equally from Beckett, T. S. Eliot and Hardy. In 1983 Waterland marks a departure: the influences of realism and modernism are now explored through a complex and fascinating tale which unites Dickens with Borges and Faulkner. Developing all the

elements of the earlier fiction through an eloquent narrator who not only uses different styles and voices but is also interested in uniting history and story, the past and the present, historiography and storytelling, Swift preaches endurance, not escape. Waterland remains, as Bradbury affirmed in 2001, “one of the best books of the 1980s” (Modern 453), Swift’s most popular novel and for some critics his best to date.

Swift was almost forty when he published Out of This World in 1988 and it was another ambitious novel, more far-reaching geographically, more politically aware, more contemporary than Waterland or any of his other works. Despite the similarities that this, as well as his next novel, Ever After, bear with the earlier fiction, this middle period in Swift’s career, haunted by the ghost of Waterland, produced novels of ideas, narrated by voices which are too disillusioned (Harry Beech), neurotic (Sophie) or pathetic (Bill Unwin) to breathe life into the author’s concerns and engage the reader emotionally. Characterised by a sophisticated amalgam of traditional and experimental techniques (concrete characters and themes concerning families combined with intertextuality, metafiction and Victorian pastiche), these two novels demonstrate Swift maturing technically through his revisitation of “familiar terrain.” In 1996 Last Orders became the second departure point in Swift’s career, constituting the culmination of his middle period.

Although this most recent novel accomplishes, like Waterland, the intricate combination of the personal and the global through intense localisation, the voices are so many and so different from those in his previous works that, upon first reading, Last Orders seems not to belong to this author’s oeuvre. As Adrian Poole notes, in this novel “Swift has found new freedoms for the spoken voice” (“Hurry”). Swift allows the voices of the seven characters who tell their stories to grow distinct, assisting the reader in the navigation of time, place and idiolect through language that first sounds naked and prosaic but which becomes poetic and inspirational. Although the “magic” in the writing (and the reading) of Waterland is more conspicuous, the quiet achievement of the Booker winner is more impressive: the “throwing off” of “inhibitions” which produced the 1983 novel, as Swift characterised his ambition in 1988, has led to a confident writer who dares to revisit Chaucer, T. S. Eliot and Faulkner within the covers of the same book—as his 1983 novel paid homage to Dickens and Borges—and succeeds, each time, in producing work uniquely his own.

His/stories

In all his novels after Waterland Swift portrays the agonising search for enlightenment, a quest that is necessary but rarely successful. Through his fiction Swift seeks to suggest possibilities, not defend an authorial thesis: in his novels ironies and paradoxes that frustrate his protagonists abound, creating, according to Peter Widdowson, a “self-deconstructing sub-text” (“Newstories” 15). Tom Crick, Harry Beech, Bill Unwin and Ray Johnson are looking for answers to the enigmas that haunt them although they may not have the strength to accommodate the truths they encounter. Unlike Prentis and Willy Chapman, these men comprehend the need for confession and strive to reconnect with a traumatic past and redeem themselves. Despite recourse to nostalgia and deeply ingrained myths of romance that imprison them in sterile make-believe—Tom as Hereward, Harry as cinematic hero, Bill as Hamlet, Ray as Lucky—they accept the value and necessity of mourning the dreams they must overcome through therapeutic tales. If Swift’s early fiction offered no remedy for the alienation and despair his protagonists experience, by 1996 he allows his tormented men to participate in a ritual that reclaims the past and reminds them of the bonds—weak, contested but still there—which will allow them to find comfort in each other.

Throughout Swift’s fiction his male characters betray and feel betrayed, compromise and resent their choices, lose control of the present and cannot forget the past. In search of their identities, Swift’s protagonists perceive not only themselves but also their fathers as unfamiliar and seek a non-antagonistic paternal figure. The juxtaposition of father and son, as each generation struggles to unravel the mysteries of the past, reveals the inability of Swift’s protagonists to find peace with history. In Swift’s novels, there are two kinds of male offspring. The one is the dutiful son who does not revolt against his father’s wishes, despite the lure of personal aspirations. Like Robert Beech in Out of This World and Jack Dodds in Last Orders, this son follows the family’s professional tradition and finds fulfilment through his father’s dreams. The other type of son, like Harry Beech and Vince Dodds, is a troublemaker who constantly seeks to subvert paternal authority and establish new rules.

Although Tom, Ray and Harry are failed fathers, hope lies in their ability to develop and maintain new bonds to replace their losses. Parental misdeeds are a staple of Swift’s fiction, which thrives on dysfunctional families symbolic of a dysfunctional society. The “disconnection between the generations,” as Swift himself termed it in a

1990 interview (Lashku 37), is indicative of the human disillusionment concerning the potential for renewal, while the disloyalty of sons and daughters is a sign of lack of faith in the future. Tortured and torturing fathers are essential to an historical perspective of the twentieth century as well as to an illustration of other dominant characteristics of the protagonists: the fear and pain of loss, the awareness of dislocation, the obsession with self-protection. Swift's fathers are always paradoxical in their behaviour, simultaneously doting on and rejecting their children. This inter-generational struggle encapsulates a wider human difficulty in connecting with the future and learning from the past. The desire to know the past holds for Swift's characters the promise of a return to Eden—a time when a crisis in the present has not yet occurred.

In his novels Swift complicates not only the relationship between fathers and sons; every father-daughter relationship, biological or metaphoric, is characterised by lack of communication as well as the addition of erotic undertones that threaten to arrest the natural flow of time and intensify the trauma of betrayal. From Willy Chapman's belief in The Sweet-Shop Owner that his daughter is a gift from a wife who cannot reciprocate his love, to Ernest Atkinson's incestuous passion in Waterland, which convinces him that his union with his daughter will produce "the Saviour of the World," to Ray Johnson's straightforward "If I were a different man . . . I'd fancy my own daughter" (LO 51), almost all women in Swift's fiction are to some extent, literally or metaphorically, involved in the Electra complex. Women in Swift's oeuvre are identified through their relationships with the male protagonists: they are mothers, wives or daughters whose actions and words are usually reported or embedded in the male narratives, not heard directly. In Waterland Tom Crick's mother, Helen, as well as his wife, Mary, have as much in common with each other as with Anna and Sophie Beech, Harry's wife and daughter in Out of This World. The women's silence and their deeds turn them into archetypes of femininity, one part Mary, one part Magdalene and all of Eve: they are all desirable and enigmatic, seductive and adulterous.

In Swift's work offspring are viewed as a repository of the past that survives into the future, therefore children are constantly visited by the sins of the fathers. Sons and daughters—estranged from their parents to varying degrees, healthy or retarded, near or far—become an unwelcome reminder of a painful past. Losing a child as well as choosing, or having, to remain childless are frequent incidents in Swift's fiction. Prentis, a less typical Swiftian male, is the only protagonist who has two

children: Willy Chapman, Harry Beech, Ray Johnson, Vince Dodds, each has a daughter, while the narrators of "Seraglio" and "Hotel," Adam Krepski, Mr Singleton, Tom Crick and Bill Unwin have none but were themselves (along with all the aforementioned characters) only children; some of the men are haunted by their damaged siblings (Neil in "Cliffedge," Dick Crick, June Dodds) who tend to take the place of their own offspring. The lack of progeny and the insistence on searching for the identity of the father symbolise the protagonists' preoccupation with what Bill Unwin terms "anteriority," a paradoxical quest that suspends time as it prevents characters from stepping into the future as well as coming to terms with history and the past. In Swift's fiction escapism succeeds only in promoting the festering of past traumas. When forgetting is not an option, reconciliation becomes a necessity.

Swift's protagonists are not antagonised only by family members, their fathers, daughters or sons. Outside the home, at the workplace usually, another man—aggressive, predatory, oblivious to moral dilemmas—becomes their foil, an enemy they fear as well as grudgingly admire. Frank Hancock, the estate agent, in The Sweet-Shop Owner; Lewis Scott, the headmaster, in Waterland; Frank Irving, the surrogate brother and son, in Out of This World; Michael Potter, the accomplished don in Ever After; and Vince Dodds, the flashy car salesman, in Last Orders: these men antagonise the protagonists by posing dilemmas and undermining their course of action. Frank Hancock rapes and traumatises Irene Chapman for life; Lewis Scott, the father of three children, forces the childless Tom Crick into retirement; Frank Irving has an affair with Anna Beech who gets pregnant; Michael Potter has fame, romantic allure, a beautiful wife and a young mistress; Vince is the adopted son who comforts Amy Dodds emotionally, replacing her husband. As Tom Crick yields to Lewis' pressure, Harry Beech allows Frank Irving to inherit his father's company, Bill Unwin realises he has no use for the scholarly glory Potter craves and gives him the coveted manuscripts, and Ray Johnson returns the thousand-pound loan to Vince Dodds, the protagonists' magnanimity may also be a type of defeat. In all the novels the reader is left with the uneasy sensation that these men surrender what is rightly theirs because they have been beaten out of the survival race by ruthless opponents.

The places that Swift's characters haunt become landscapes of the heart through narratives rich with significant repetitions of ordinary observations which acquire the resonance of leitmotifs. Water in various guises—lakes and ponds in urban settings, summer storms, the fictional river Leem at the East Anglia Fens, the sea at

Margate—mirrors, as Swift notes in The Magic Wheel, the “mystery of ourselves” (15) and becomes a symbol of all natural forces, including death, that exist beyond human control and constitute an archetypal enigma, appealing and appalling to Swift’s characters. Similarly, the titles of Swift’s novels are always fraught with metaphors and double meanings. In Out of this World, for instance, all the major preoccupations of the characters relate to matters that belong ‘out of this world,’ namely flight, photography, death and their interrelation; in Last Orders the melancholic reminder of the end of another day’s drinking is reinvested with positive connotations through the fulfilment of a dead man’s wish, stressing the need for communal engagement in ritual.

Coming Into the Light

Swift has produced very little since 1996, responding occasionally in recent years through short pieces—for the TLS or Granta mostly—to the loss of a friend (Ted Hughes, Malcolm Bradbury) or to a literary issue (“International Books of the Year and the Millennium”). Since Waterland, Swift has published a novel every four or five year, making the current break of six years—it will be seven, in fact, until the publication, in spring 2003, of The Light of Day, his new book—the longest ever. This forthcoming novel has already produced considerable controversy, due to Swift’s change of publishers, and is certain to be closely scrutinised next year, not only evaluated against Waterland but also compared with Last Orders. The brief description of the novel on the website of A. P. Watt, Swift’s literary agency, suggests that Swift is eager to explore new confined spaces—a prison—and female voices—his heroine, Sarah, is serving a life sentence for her husband’s murder—but he is focusing again on contested human relationships narrated post-crisis. Whether Sarah, like Tom Crick, is the only narrator in the novel or whether George, the detective who visits her, shares the narrative with her (as Harry and Sophie did in Out of This World); whether Bob, the murdered husband, is given a voice from beyond the grave (as Irene Chapman and Jack Dodds were heard once in The Sweet-Shop Owner and Last Orders respectively); whether letters, diaries, files are embedded in the novel (in the manner of Shuttlecock or Ever After): whatever variations of techniques Swift invents for the needs of his new work, he will continue to investigate the crimes and misdemeanours of our daily lives.

For a meticulous cartographer of the human psyche, what foibles exist after six novels and a short story collection for his future works to explore? If the short story “Our Nicky’s Heart” (2000)—the only fiction to have been published after Last

Orders—is any indication of Swift's current thematic and stylistic preoccupations, then his new novel will return to "familiar terrain" as well as cover new ground. Accidents lie at the core of this eight-page short story along with other recognisable Swiftian preoccupations, such as familial relationships, loss, suppressed grief and the overwhelming need to protect loved ones through lies. The first-person narrator, Mark Randall, a thirty-eight year old vet, assumes the observer position, like Derek, in "Hoffmeier's Antelope:" his mother and her other son's "heart" dominate a plot concerned with the aftermath of his adolescent brother's accidental death, and the transplantation of his most vital organ. The youngest of four boys on a farm, Nicky, described by the narrator as a "cocky, reckless young stud" (170), is doted on by his mother and seen by "the males of the family" as "an amusement" (170), a "kind of pet" (175). The barely disguised sibling rivalry that Mark exhibits is reminiscent of Tom Crick, a character with whom this narrator bears another important similarity: Mark is educated and has moved away from the family home. He is the one "with the brains" and "keen to show it" (172); he is a "traitor," a "deserter" (171), an "outsider" (173), epithets the narrator attributes to himself.

Like Dick Crick, Nicky buys a motorcycle, with which he identifies, but soon afterwards has a fatal accident at the age of seventeen. At the doctors' request, his mother decides to donate his heart, but finds her intense grief at her son's loss suspended by the knowledge that part of Nicky lives on. When the narrator discovers that his brother's heart was transplanted into a female patient of their mother's age, he withholds the truth to "spare" her from identifying with that patient and wanting to place "Nicky's heart ... safely inside her" (178). Like Prentis, Mark manipulates the facts, becoming a guardian of secrets, but, unlike Prentis, he is aware that this is "the biggest lie of [his] life" even if he justifies his actions: "but [the lie] gave my mother something with which to close, almost completely, that gap" (178). Mark attributes his decision to choose pets, not farm animals, for his veterinary practice to "those weeks after Nicky's death," sublimating his desire to escape the family environment and sanctifying his decision by implying that he seeks to cure domestic animals to restore the loss of their own "pet" (175). The narrator's serene tone and controlled expression is evidence of deeply ingrained trauma; like the narrators of "Cliffedge" and "Hotel," he suffers from repression: "my own grief, I kept it suppressed, even vaguely concealed, like something that had an edge of shame" (175).

In a 1994 interview Swift admits he has not written any short stories “for a long time” and comments that this fact “occasionally troubles” him (Hartung-Brückner 469). In its controlled expression and the use of a voyeur as a reluctant narrator, “Our Nicky’s Heart” is not only on a par with the best of Swift’s tales from Learning to Swim but also belongs to his more mature fiction since the narrator, however repressed, is more aware of the elaborate constructions he has created to protect himself. If Mark’s style is reminiscent—in its sustained rationality and covert self-promotion—of similar voices in Swift’s stories, his declaration about the human heart (“It’s a piece of muscle, a pump” 175) resembles the desperation of all Swiftian protagonists and hardly fits the conclusion reached at the end of Last Orders. Ray’s triumphant sense of camaraderie, expressed by the resonant “Jack what we are made of,” is a most eloquent tribute to the universality of the human condition and the storytelling rituals that will allow this brotherhood to ensue, themes which will arguably remain the cornerstone of Graham Swift’s future novels.

Appendix I
Narrative Technique and Chronology in The Sweet-Shop Owner

Sections (1-39)	3rd person *	1st person * (interior monologue)	Past (1930-1974)	Present (4:30-19:30) (June 1974)
1 ♦	X	X	X (1969)	X (4:30)
2	X			X (6:30)
3	X		X (1937)	
4	X			X (7:20)
5	X		X (1938)	
6	X			X
7		X (Irene)	X (1927-38)	
8	X		X (1940)	
9	X		X (1940)	
10	X		X (1941-44)	
11	X (C)			X (10:30)
12	X		X (1945)	
13	X		X (1945)	
14	X (W+C)			X (11:00)
15 ♦	X	X	X (1945-49)	X
16	X (S)			X (noon)
17 ♦	X	X	X (1949-65)	X
18	X		X (1958)	X
19	X		X (1960s)	
20	X		X (1963)	
21		X	X (1962)	X
22		X	X (1963)	X
23		X	X (1963)	X
24	X (C)			X (13:00)
25		X	X (1969)	X
26	X		X (1970)	
27		X	X (1970)	X
28	X (W+S)		X (1970)	X (14:00)
29 ♦	X (W+C)	X	X (1938)	X
30 ♦	X	X	X (1971)	X (14:30)
31 ♦	X	X	X (1972-73)	X
32 ♦	X (W+C+S)	X	X (1973)	X (15:00)
33 ♦	X	X	X (1931)	X
34	X		X (1931)	X
35		X	X (1974)	X
36	X (W+C+S)			X (15:30)
37	X (W+C+S)			X (16:30)
38	X	X		X (17:30)
39	X	X		X (18:30)

- * = the point-of-view focuses on Willy Chapman unless otherwise specified
♦ = past & present as well as 1st & 3rd person point-of-view exist in the same section
W = Willy; C = Mrs Cooper; S = Sandra

Appendix II
Chronology and the Texts within the Text in Shuttlecock

Prentis's <u>Shuttlecock</u> (35 sections = narrator's diary, father's memoir, police records)			
Prentis's diary			Dad's <u>Shuttlecock:</u> <u>The Story of a Secret Agent</u> World War II, France, 1944
Fictional Present April 1977-May 1978	Files / C9	Past 1945-1977	
1. 25 April 1977 (Monday)		1955	
2. 26 April 1977 (Tuesday)	X	mid April 1977	
3. 26 April 1977 (Tuesday)			
4. 26 April 1977 (Tuesday)	X		
5. ---		1955	
6. 26 April 1977 (Tuesday)			
7. 27 April 1977 (Wed)		1974 –1975	
8. *		1955 –1957	
9. 30 April 1977 (Saturday)			2 May 1944; Chapter 12
10. ---		1975	
11. 1 May 1977 (Sunday)		mid 1960s-1970	
12. 6 May 1977 (Friday)			
13. 9 May 1977 (Monday)	X		
14. End of May 1977		9 May 1977	
15. End of May 1977	X		
16. 26 May 1977 (Thursday) / 27 May 1977 (Friday)			
17. Late May/early June '77	X	1956	
18. ---			Last two chapters
19. Early June 1977 (Wed)	X		
20. Early June 1977	X		
21. Early June 1977			
22. ---	X		
23. Early June 1977	X		
24. June 1977 (Sunday)		1975-1977	
25. June 1977 (Sunday)	X		Last two chapters
26. June 1977 (Sunday)			
27. June 1977 (Sunday)		1944-1945	
28. June 1977 (Monday)			
29. ---			Last two chapters
30. June 1977 (Tuesday)			
31. ---			Last two chapters
32. June 1977 (Wednesday)	X	1940s-1950s	X
33. Early May 1978		October 1977- May 1978	
34. *			
35. Early May 1978 (Sun)			

* = unspecified

Appendix III
Plot Strands, Historia and Narrative Technique in Waterland

52 Chapters	Continued from section	"Natural History"	"Artificial History" (A History of the Fens) 9 th c-1947	"Tales of the Fens" (Crick's childhood & adolescence) 1927-1947	Crick's History "lessons" 1980	"Here and Now" (fictional present) 1980
1. About the Stars and the Sluice				summer 1937; 25 July 1943		
2. About the End of History	48				X	morning assembly
3. About the Fens		the Fens; silt; peat	Cricks & Atkinsons		X	
4. Before the Headmaster						with Lewis
5. A Bruise	1			26 July 1943		
6. An Empty Vessel				1943-1947	X	defining history
7. About Holes and Things	5			26 July 1943; August 1942		
8. About the Story-Telling Animal					X	defining history
9. About the Rise of the Atkinsons	8 3	floods of 1874	17 th c -1874		X	
10. About the Question Why	8				X	defining history
11. Accidental Death	10			29 July 1943		
12. About the Change of Life				1943-1947; 1947-1979		Mary's new baby
13. Histrionics	11			30 July 1943		
14. De La Revolution					X	defining history
15. About the Ouse	14	the river			X	
16. Longitude 0	12					Mary's new baby
17. About the Lock-Keeper			Henry C. 1917-1943			
18. In Loco Parentis	4					with Lewis
19. About My Grandfather	9		Ernest A. 1874-1909			
20. The Explanation	14					with Price
21. Aux Armes	20				X	defining history
22. About Coronation Ale	21 19		Ernest A. 1909-1914			
23. Quatorze Juillet	21				X	defining history
24. Child's Play				July 1940	X	
25. The Bastille	24				X	
26. About the Eel	25	<i>Anguilla anguilla</i>			X	
27. Natural History	26				X	
28. Artificial History	24			July 1940	X	

Appendix III (cont.)

52 Chapters		Continued from section	"Natural History"	"Artificial History" (A History of the Fens) 9 th c-1947	"Tales of the Fens" (Crick's childhood & adolescence) 1927-1947	Crick's History "Lessons" 1980	"Here and Now" (fictional present) 1980
29. Detective Work	7				1 August 1943		
30. The Saviour of the World	22	will-o'-the-wisp	1914-1922			X	
31. Testament	18				1946	X	at the pub
32. About Beauty	31				1937-1943		
33. Who Says?	31						at the pub
34. Too Big	32 33				1943		
35. Unknown Country	16						baby abduction
36. Nothing	33						at the pub
37. Jour de Gloire						X	
38. The East Wind	37	the wind			January 1937	X	
39. Stupid	29				5 August 1943		
40. Contemporary Nightmares	18						student dreams
41. A Feeling in the Guts	36 39				5 August 1943		at the pub
42. About the Witch	41				5 August 1943		
43. Not So Final	41					X	leaving the pub
44. Begin Again	35						returning the baby
45. About the Pike	42				8 Aug. 1943; 5 August 1943		
46. Chest	45				8 August 1943		
47. Goodnight	44						at the asylum
48. And Adieu	43						morning assembly
49. About Empire-Building	48 2					X	
50. Whole Story					March 1947		
51. About Phlegm		phlegm				X	
52. About the Rosa II	46				8 August 1943		
Narrative Technique	1 st p point of view	X	X	X	X	X	X
	1 st p as 2 nd person ("your teacher")			X	X	X	X
	1 st p as 3 rd person ("he")			X	X	X	X
	1 st p plural ("we")	X	X	X	X	X	X
	3 rd p omniscient	X	X		X	X	
	Overt address to "children"	X	X	X	X	X	X

Appendix IV
Chronology and Voice in Out Of This World

Harry Beech Seventeen Sections			Sophie Beech Sixteen Sections		
narrated as interior monologues incorporating seven asides to Sophie (in sections 13, 15, 23, 28, 31, 33, 35); one aside to Frank (in section 3); and one aside to Jenny (in section 13)			narrated as dramatic monologues addressing Dr Klein (DMK) or the twins (DMT) and incorporating reported dialogue; or narrated as direct dialogues (DD) between Dr Klein and Sophie		
Sections	Narrative Present April 1982	Past 1918-1982	Sections	Narrative Present April 1982	Past 1948-1982
1		1969: moon landing; Vietnam war	2	(DMK)	1972-1982: life in NYC; life with JC
3	meeting widow of RB's chauffeur; RB's grave		4	(DMK) relationship with Dr Klein;	memory of Anna's death
5		1918-1953 relation to RB	6	(DD) relationship with Harry	
7	aerial photography, archeology & flying;	1972-1973: abandoning photo-journalism for aerial photography	8	(DD) continuation of Q & A session about relationship with Harry	
9		1939-1945: R.A.F. in WWII	10	(DD) 'earliest memories' session	at Hyfield & on holidays
11		1966-1982: son-in-law; S's wedding	12	(DMK) 1982: relationship with RB	1958: 10 th birthday celebration
13		1945: RB's near-fatal heart attack	14	(DMK + DMT) banning toy guns & cameras	1972: last conversation with RB
15	writing letter to Sophie	1981-1982: Jenny	16	(DMK)	3 May 1972: RB's funeral
17		1875-1982: history of BMC; 1972: RB's assassination	18	(DMK) relationship with JC; relationship with Dr Klein; therapy	H's letter
19		1946: Nuremberg Trials; 1945: H's first photograph of a dying man	20	(DMK)	1972: the explosion; witnessing H photographing the debris
21		1966: TV interview; 1927-1928: train journeys	22	(DMK)	1966-1967: traveling to Greece; meeting JC

Appendix IV (cont.)

Harry Beech Seventeen Sections			Sophie Beech Sixteen Sections		
narrated as interior monologues incorporating seven asides to Sophie (in sections 13, 15, 23, 28, 31, 33, 35); one aside to Frank (in section 3); and one aside to Jenny (in section 13)			narrated as dramatic monologues addressing Dr Klein (DMK) or the twins (DMT) and incorporating reported dialogue; or narrated as direct dialogues (DD) between Dr Klein and Sophie		
Sections	Narrative Present	Past	Sections	Narrative Present	Past
	April 1982	1918-1982		April 1982	1948-1982
23		1946: marriage to Anna in Nuremberg	24	(DMT) rehearsing narrative of family history for the twins	
25		1946: honeymoon; Anna meets RB	26	(DMK) desire for happy-end family reunion	
28		1969: A's affair 1953: discovery of A's infidelity	30	(DMK) relationship with NYC	
31	the Falklands War;		32	(DMT) preparing the twins for trip	
33	aerial photography & archaeology	1969: Moon landing 1918: how RB lost his arm	34	(DMT) narrating family history to twins during transatlantic flight	
35		1948: S's birth 1927: mother's photograph 1928: H's first flight			
27	Joe Carmichael (DM; addressing Mario) 1953: Coronation year; life with parents 1960s: involvement in travel business and Argosy Tours; 1967: meeting Sophie; marriage; 1972-1982: marriage; the twins		29	Anna Vouatsis-Beech (DM; addressing Harry) 1940-1945: war years in Greece; 1946-1953: married years in England; the birth of Sophie; the affair with Frank 1953: fatal trip to Greece; crash on Mt. Olympus	

[H = Harry Beech; S = Sophie; RB = Robert Beech; A = Anna;
 J = Jenny; JC = Joe Carmichael]

Appendix V
Plot Strands, Chronology and Narrative Technique in Ever After

Bill Unwin's 'ramblings'				M. Pearce Manuscripts
Fictional Present Cambridge July 1989 (1 st person)	Unwin's Past & family history (1920 - June 1989) (1 st person)*	The Potters (1970 - 1988) (3 rd person)	Matthew Pearce (1819- 1869) (3 rd person)	(Notebooks: 1854-1860 & 1869 Letter) (1 st person)
1. "under the shade of an Indian bean tree"	synopsis of past life	Michael Potter: 48 yrs old		
2. "I try to remember ..."	Paris, Nov. 1945- June 1946			
3. "late last September"	London hospital, 1988; 1920-1944			
4. "my presence in this place"	1959: MP clock; 1988: manuscript	TV & Radio shows	1845: gift of clock to MP	
5.				12 April 1869
6. "I was born ..."	December 1936- 1947			
7. "that former, unformed self"	* 1947-1957			
8. "dejeuner sur l'herbe" with KP	* 1988-1989	1970-1989		
9. "I invent all this"			1819-1854	June 1854
10. "I'm still here" "Romantic love"	1987-88: Ruth's illness and death			
11. 'dramatised version' of MP's life			1845-1860	1854-1858
12. "he didn't have to tell me"	late 1960s; Sat, 7 May 1989			
13. "innocence"	Tue, 10 May 1989	Gabriella	Lyell	
14. "how do I know"	19 May 1989			
15. "you have to picture the scene"			June 1860	24 June 1860
16. "I wonder"	May-June 1989			
17. "my father!"	Summer 1945		I. K. Brunel	1854; 1859
18. "the way of the world"	ancestors: 1860-1938		March 1860 April 1869	1856; 1857; 1860
19. "divine"	5 August 1945		Darwin	
20. "the sun is beginning to sink"	February 1988: Ruth's suicide			10 July 1857
21. "last day on this earth"	June 1989	Katherine: life story		
22. "in this dimming garden"	* August 1957			

MP: Matthew Pearce

KP: Katherine Potter

* = on three occasions (pages 72-73; 83-86; and 256-261)
the narrator uses the third person

Appendix VI
Setting, Chronology and Voice in Last Orders

Setting			Voice						
Place	Time		Seven Narrators						
Bermondsey to Margate	Present	Past	Ray	Vince	Vic	Lenny	Amy	Mandy	Jack
	2 April 1990	1930s- March 1990							
1. Bermondsey	11:05 am		X						
2. Bermondsey		3 March 1984	X						
3. Bermondsey	11:20 am		X						
4. St Thomas's		March 1990	X						
5. Old Kent Rd	*		X						
6. *							X		
7. New Cross	*		X						
8. New Cross	*	*		X					
9. Smithfield / St Thomas's	*	*	X						
10. Blackheath	*		X						
11. St Thomas's		March 1990		X					
12. Bermondsey		1930s & 1940s	X						
13. Bermondsey		1950s & 1960s				X			
14. Dartford	*		X						
15. Bermondsey		1965	X						
16. Margate / Wick's Farm		1950s		X					
17. Bermondsey		Nov. 1967				X			
18. Gravesend / Bermondsey	*	March 1990		X					
19. Gravesend	*		X						
20. Bermondsey		29 Mar. 1990; 1 June 1989			X				
21. Cairo, Egypt		WWII (1940)	X						
22. Bermondsey		1950s		X					
23. Bermondsey		Mar '90; Apr '66	X						
24. Bermondsey		1967		X					
25. Rochester	2:00 pm		X						
26. St Thomas's		March 1990	X						
27. Chatham	*		X						
28. Chatham	*	1930s & WW II			X				
29. Chatham	*		X						
30. Chatham	*			X					
31. Chatham	*					X			
32. Chatham	*		X						
33. Bermondsey		1950s		X					
34. Chatham	*					X			
35. Chatham	*		X						
36. M2	*				X				
37. Wick's Farm	*		X						
38. St Thomas's		March 1990	X						

* = time or place not specified;

Chatham = place names in bold specify section titles

Appendix VI (cont.)

Setting			Voice						
Place	Time		Seven Narrators						
Bermondsey to Margate	Present	Past	Ray	Vince	Vic	Lenny	Amy	Mandy	Jack
	2 April 1990	1930s- March 1990							
39. Blackburn / Bermondsey		November 1967						X	
40. Bermondsey		*		X					
41. Cheam / Epsom		April 1967	X						
42. Wick's Farm / Bermondsey	*	1940s				X			
43. Wick's Farm	*		X						
44. St Thomas's		March 1990	X						
45. St Thomas's		March 1990		X					
46. Bermondsey		1966-1967	X						
47. Canterbury	*		X						
48. Canterbury	*					X			
49. Canterbury					X				
50. 'Chapel of Rest'		March 1990		X					
51. Canterbury	*		X						
52. *	*		X						
53. Canterbury	*	1962				X			
54. Canterbury	*				X				
55. Canterbury	*		X						
56. Canterbury / Bermondsey	*	1950s; 1960s; 3 March 1984				X			
57. Cheam		April 1967			X				
58. St Thomas's		March 1990	X						
59. Canterbury	*		X						
60. Bermondsey		*			X				
61. Bus No. 44	*	*					X		
62. Bermondsey		March 1990	X						
63. Wick's Farm		August 1938					X		
64. Gosport		Christmas 1945			X				
65. Bermondsey		1968	X						
66. Margate		Summer 1939					X		
67. Bermondsey		March 1990	X						
68. Margate	*		X						
69. St Thomas's		March 1990		X					
70. St Thomas's	*	March 1990					X		
71. Margate	*		X						
72. Bus No. 44	*						X		
73. Margate	*	1940; 1967	X						
74. Bermondsey		*							X
75. Margate	*		X						

* = time or place not specified;

Margate = place names in bold specify section titles

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