

Graham Colin Swift



(born 4 May 1949)



Graham Colin Swift



- an English writer
- Born in London, England,
- educated at Dulwich College, London,
- Queens' College, Cambridge,
- and later the University of York

Graham Colin Swift



- Some of Swift's books have been filmed:
- “Waterland” (1992)
- “Shuttlecock” (1993)
- “Last Orders” (2002)

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- The prize-winning “Waterland” is set in The Fens.
- A novel of landscape, history and family,
- often cited as one of the outstanding post-war British novels and has been a set text on the English literature syllabus in British schools.

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- **Writer Patrick McGrath**
- **the "feeling for magic" in 'Waterland' during an interview**

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- But on the other hand there's no doubt that English writers of my generation have been very much influenced by writers from outside who in one way or another have got this magical, surreal quality, such as Borges, Márquez, Grass, and that that has been stimulating.
- I think in general it's been a good thing. Because we are, as ever, terribly parochial, self-absorbed and isolated, culturally, in this country. It's about time we began to absorb things from outside."

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- **'Waterland'** is a 1983 novel by Graham Swift.
- won the Guardian Fiction Prize and was shortlisted for the Booker Prize

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- 'Waterland' is concerned with the nature and importance of history as the primary source of meaning in a narrative.
- For this reason, it is associated with **new historicism**.

Waterland

- contains characteristics associated with postmodern literature:
- a fragmented narrative style, where events are not told in chronological order
- an unreliable narrator is also present

Waterland



- Major themes in the novel include storytelling and history, exploring how the past leads to future consequences

Waterland

- **The plot** of the novel revolves around loosely interwoven themes and narrative, including the jealousy of his brother for the narrator's girlfriend/wife, a resulting murder, the abortion the girl undergoes, her subsequent inability to conceive, resulting in depression and the kidnap of a baby.
- This personal narrative is set in the context of a wider history, of the narrator's family, the Fens in general and the eel.

Genre



- It could be argued that Water/and is a mixture of genres:
 - • Detective novel
 - • Family saga
 - • Romance
 - • Documentary
 - • A historical novel
 - • A post-modernist text

Post-modernist Features

- Questioning of history
- A sense of crisis
- Metafiction
- Cycles
- Acceptance
- Intertextuality
- Self-conscious
- Elitist

Crises in the Book

- The novel has a number of crises:
- • Tom Crick is losing his job
- • History is going to come off the curriculum
- • A murder (7)
- • A suicide
- • A teenage pregnancy
- • An abortion
- • A child snatching

History in the Book

- There is also a mention of the 'Grand Narrative' - "the filler of vacuums, the dispeller of fears in the darkness".
- The theory of 'the end of history' came long before post-modern thinkers. Nineteenth-century intellectuals also imagined that history would end.

History in the Book

- Karl Marx, for example, believed in the idea of the 'Grand Narrative' of progress. At the end of the narrative lies the utopia in which struggle and conflict are unheard of.
- Christian philosophy also ascribes to this narrative; it focuses on a post-historical paradise in which the soul is freed from pain and suffering.

History in the Book



- Tom's personal narrative functions to subvert the notion of the end of history and all ideologies which imagine mankind as following a 'Grand Narrative'. Instead, Tom's narrative is about what went wrong.

Global Crisis



- Juxtaposed with personal disaster, there is also a growing sense of global crisis and distress, articulated by the student, Price. '
- End of Chapter 14: "What we wish upon the future is very often the image of some lost, imagined past" (... as if the hope of paradise is a long, long way off.)

Global Crisis



- Price says that he doesn't want a Utopia, he simply wants a future.
- Price believes that history is irrelevant in a world of crisis and nuclear threat.

Stories



- Tom Crick tells his stories to the pupils in his class. He teaches them his belief that you cannot understand the "here and now" without first understanding the past. In a sense, this is self-gratification and self-validation; to understand his own crisis, he has to deliver his mind back to his past - back to storytelling.

Stories



- The importance of storytelling does not undermine the importance of fiction and history. It just reminds us that when experience becomes a story or a piece of history, it may not be a mirror of reality but it will contain important truths.

Cycles



- A revolution is a turn of a circle, the idea that you get back to where you started but hopefully things will be better.
- • The structure: suggests a cycle in time - the story isn't at an end when the book is finished. The end of the story is simply that Tom loses his job; the end of the plot is disappearing under the water (Dick gone and assumed dead).

Metafiction



- Fiction based on fiction; stories based on stories, etc. It raises the question: WHY DO WE TELL STORIES?
- • To help children?
- • To help ourselves?
- • To impose order on the world?

Metafiction



- Tom's "Once upon a time" history lessons (Chapter 2) help the students to overcome their fears.
- Chapter 41: The idea that when the end of the world comes, we will all be sitting in a bunker with nothing left to do but tell stories.
- STORIES = SURVIVAL, ALL WE HAVE LEFT.

Fairytales



- Water/and is very much about fairy tales. Martha is the witch of the fens and Mary and Tom are like Hansel and Gretel: "A fairy tale land after all".

No Real Explanations

- Who is Dick's father?
- • Whose was Mary's aborted child?
- • Was Dick really dead at the end?
- • Why can't Mary have children?

Women in the Novel



- Generally women are silenced (see 'Feminist Reading' sheet for more details).
- Mary - withdraws into solitude for a number of years.
- Tom and Mary's life ended when they were 16 years old.

QUOTATIONS



- But man -- let me offer you a definition -- is the story-telling animal. Whereever he goes he wants to leave behind not a chaotic wake, not an empty space, but the comforting marker -- buoys and trail-signs of stories. He has to go on telling stories, he has to keep making them up. As long as there's a story , it's all right.

QUOTATIONS



- And don't forget,' my father would say, as if he expected me at any moment to up and leave to seek my fortune in the wide world, 'whatever you learn about people, however bad they turn out, each one them has a heart.

QUOTATIONS



- Up above, the sky swarmed with stars which seemed to multiply as we looked at them. And as we lay, Dad said: 'Do you know what the stars are? They are the silver dust of God's blessing.'

QUOTATIONS



- Children, evil isn't something that happens far off - it suddenly touches your arm. (.p. 35)