Authentic Synthetics: Three Novels by Graham Swift

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Abstract

1996 Booker-McConnell prize winner Graham Swift represents the top end of a new breed of current British writers who are distinguished by their tendency to bring together the antithetical poles of traditional realism and postmodernism, both stylistically and thematically. The reasons for Swift's dual allegiance to realism and postmodernism, and the implications of this conglomeration are my main concern.

Swift addresses the origins and effects of an age in which images are replacing reality and leaving a void at the centre of our existence. He acknowledges that absence has become the substance of our age, and suggests that our only reprieve is in illusions. Creating illusions in the form of literature, history, photography, romance, or myth for example, is a survival reflex stemming from the human inability to accept meaninglessness and randomness. Swift invests faith in the restorative and cyclical rhythms of nature, rejecting postmodern apocalyptic ideas about the end of literature and invoking the imperative of balance between reality and illusion.

The three novels I have chosen are central to this argument: Waterland considers the relationship between fact and fiction in history and reality, Out of this World explores the influence of images on our perception of reality, while Ever After thematizes story-telling as a remedy for loss of faith and identity.

Swift transgresses the border between realism and postmodernism in Waterland, Out of this World and Ever After partly to contradict the apocalyptic postmodern theorists who prophesy the end of history and the
end of art; and, more importantly to reflect the paradoxes of our postmodern present. His tactic of utilizing realist mimetic principles while simultaneously deconstructing and subverting these very principles, imitates the peculiarly postmodern urge to invest faith in illusions. Swift is asserting both the impossibility and necessity of fiction in an age where constructed representations of reality are perceived as truth, and actual reality has become fiction.
Introduction

Do speculations about the destiny of man have a place in the study of literature? Literature speculates about little else. Moreover the avant garde helps to invent the future under the antic guise of experiment. For nearly two centuries now, these experiments have tended toward vanishing forms. They carry intimations of silence, a consciousness spinning loose of history, trying to twist free of words and things. Drawn to a strange vision of itself, the imagination invades the void. -Ihab Hassan

The imagination is there to get you out of yourself, beyond yourself and into worlds and experiences which are not your own. That really is the whole point of fiction. - Graham Swift

Graham Swift is writing in a period of British literary history that David Lodge describes as a 'crossroads'. Certainly it is a problematic time - especially so for those such as Swift, who are to deal not only with the complexities and contradictions of postmodernism, but with negotiating

1 'Postlude: the Vanishing Form', The Dismemberment of Orpheus - Toward a Postmodern Literature. 247.
2 'Nine to Noon: Graham Swift interviewed by Kim Hill'. 
their relationship to the weighty British tradition of realism in literature.
The dilemma, according to Lodge, is whether to continue down the well-
trodden path of empirical-mimetic realism, or whether to turn off on to the
experimentalist track, already worn in by the more adventurous European
and American literary trekkers. The division is essentially one between
two modes or accents of writing: the 'metonymic' (traditional), in which the
primary allegiance is to the real and language is used to depict 'truth' to
experience; and the 'metaphoric' (experimental) wherein allegiance is
directed to the ideal, form and entertainment come before truth, and
fantasy prevails (Lodge, Crossroads: 3). Since the inception of the novel
these antinomies have rotated in cycles of popularity, and have most
recently manifested themselves in their extreme in the mid-nineteenth
century realist fiction, and twentieth century 'fabulation' such as
Finnegans Wake and Gravity's Rainbow. The three novels by Swift I have
chosen to explore - Waterland (1983), Out of this World (1988), and Ever
After (1992) - indicate that Swift has positioned himself in the
experimentalist mode while also (paradoxically) incorporating techniques
and themes congruent with the realist tradition. The reasons for this
transgression form the content of my thesis.

It appears, on examination of many of the recent debates
surrounding contemporary British literature, that the concept of breaching the
apparent gap between realism and experiment is of major current
interest. Unable to withstand accusations of staidness and insularity, the

3 The terms 'metonymic' and 'metaphoric' are derived from linguist Roman Jakobson who
distinguished between the process of contiguity and similarity in language construction.
See Jakobson: 109-114.
4 Fabulation is Robert Scholes' term of description for fiction in the 'metaphoric' category.
5 For example, Professor Lisa Jardine from Queen Mary and Westfield College in London
claims English authors are 'smug and parochial' and write 'narrow-minded books with
British literary fraternity has been forced to widen its perspectives over the last fifteen years in order to retain credibility within the wider literary community. Part of the process of loosening its umbilical ties to the realist tradition has been an upsurge in debates as to the merits of realism and its role in the postmodern era. A.S. Byatt, for example, accepts that it is no longer possible for British writers to carry on mimicking nineteenth century realism, but points out that contemporary writers now face a welter of accumulated great literature and literary criticism, and are therefore profoundly and nostalgically preoccupied with the past in accordance with Harold Bloom's 'anxiety of influence' (People in Paper Houses': 20-22).

Gerald Graff takes a different position by claiming that realism and postmodernism have a lot in common; that postmodernism is actually a 'logical culmination of the premises of romantic-modernism' (Postmodern Breakthrough': 219), and therefore the experimental and realist literary modes are similar in their aims. Indeed, according to Andrej Gasiorek, realism is a 'polyvalent, flexible, and open-ended' (Post-War British Fiction: 179) mode which will continue to be a key part of the literary future.

But herein lies an assumption: as the century crawls towards the millennium and apocalyptic notions about the end of art and the end of literature creep into the literary vocabulary, the possibility of literature's demise becomes feasible. Proponents of this argument such as Alvin

7 See, for example, Jacques Ehrmann's The Death of Literature; Alvin Kernan's The Death of Literature; John Barth's The Literature of Exhaustion; Gianni Vattimo's The End of (Hi)story; and Frank Kermode's The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction.
Kernan, hold that television and electronic media coupled with a decline in global literacy present a viable threat to the survival of the printed book. Jacques Ehrmann claims that literature is a 'bottomless text' ('Death of Literature': 253), and therefore has 'had its day' (248). Indeed, literary criticism is cited by Alvin Kernan as one of the leading culprits in the systematic deconstruction of literature's value:

Within the university, literary criticism, already by the 1960s Byzantine in its complexity, mountainous in its bulk, and incredible in its totality, has turned on literature and deconstructed its basic principles, declaring literature an illusory category, the poet dead, the work of art only a floating 'text', language indeterminate and incapable of meaning, interpretation a matter of personal choice.

Moreover, the excesses of the postmodern anti-novel, with its wildly solipsistic self-reflexivity, lead to a stunted inarticulateness, a frenetic period of experimental play followed by an exhausted silence. In an environment where everything has been tried, the struggle to produce something original has culminated in frustrated parody of old styles; unable to move forward artist's works are becoming increasingly nostalgic for the times when possibilities seemed endless. The problem, according to Steiner, is 'grounded in historical circumstances, in the late stage of linguistic and formal civilization in which the expressive achievements of the past seem to weigh exhaustively on the possibilities of the present, in which word and genre seem tarnished' (Language and Silence: 49). The character Price in Swift's *Waterland* expresses these apocalyptic uncertainties in terms of an impending Armageddon; as art's possibilities are fading, technology and
war weaponry improving and environmental destruction becomes more apparent, history has 'got to the point where it's probably about to end' (Waterland: 6).

This nihilistic mode of thought can be found in Swift's British contemporaries. Martin Amis' novels, for example, express a sense of having reached an end point: London Fields satirises the pathology of the contemporary times by depicting nuclear war as the 'menacing vanishing point of our fears, a threat both omnipresent and almost mythical' (Bernard: 129-130). Synergy and entropy lead towards some undefined moment, like John Self's brain in Money: '... it boils and swells. One day soon it is going to burst' (Money: 30). Swift, however, refutes this notion of history as an unswerving, linear progression which is culminating towards destruction; instead he posits a theory which claims that history moves like a see-saw, rotating from one extreme back to another, and balanced by a central axis. Within these cycles a regular pattern of apocalyptic crises is apparent, suggesting that belief in world destruction is a recycled myth signifying an imminent renewal rather than end. This pattern is apparent in all historical processes, but most pertinently here, in literature. David Lodge observes that the successive phases in twentieth century literature alone are like a pendulum which, having swung as far as possible at the time in one direction, will move in the opposite direction (Alexander: 10).

With this in mind the late-twentieth century 'literature of exhaustion'8 represents not an end, but a turning point in literary history.

This is where Swift's fiction resides: in the crossover from experimentalism back to its antithesis, classical realism. The literary

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8 This phrase is derived from John Barth's 1967 essay of the same name.
evolution that pushed further and further into deconstructive, experimental extremes we call postmodernism, has reached its point of enervation and thus, revolution back to origins. Swift's appropriation of both the postmodern and classical realist contrapositions therefore, can be attributed to three basic suppositions. First, as already suggested, Swift believes that the exclusively metaphoric mode is exhausted, and wants to return in style to literary origins. Second, he sees that both the postmodern and realist standpoints promote equally viable ideas regarding the role and purpose of literature. Third, and most importantly regarding the bulk of my thesis, Swift amalgamates postmodern and classical realist techniques in an attempt to reflect the ambiguities, contradictions and nuances of contemporaneity. What this means is that Swift is utilising realist conventions to imitate society's use of constructed models of 'truth' and reality such as photographic images, literature and textbook history. Simultaneously, however, he challenges their status as absolutes by deconstructing and undermining their foundations, revealing their illusory nature. According to Swift, contemporary society is swamped by images of itself, without a sense of contiguity with the past, and burdened with the loss of its central ordering principle - God. As such, it is a total postmodern environment only that, in an attempt to combat the pointlessness and banality of life, people construct replacement fictions of order and meaning. This habit echoes the realist inclination to assert 'truths', facts, rationality, probability and other (illusory) structuring principles. Swift's technique of upholding a 'mimetic aesthetic goal while paradoxically recognizing the demise of the Real' (Elias: 10), therefore, positions him on the periphery of a literary revolution and simultaneously conveys a contemporary society which upholds false paradigms in lieu of the absence of all notions of truth
and rationality. Swift's use of the phrase 'authentic synthetic' in *Out of this World* (189), therefore, perfectly captures the peculiarly paradoxical nature of our postmodern age.

Swift allies himself with realist doctrine in *Waterland*, *Out of this World* and *Ever After* to reflect the cultural habit of constructing illusions of meaning and order. In *Waterland* the illusion is history, in *Ever After* constructed identities and romance, and in *Out of this World* characters invest faith in the photographic image. We build these models in order to understand ourselves better, and more often to create governing principles to live by. This process can be seen to be similar to that of classical realism which reached its height in the mid-nineteenth century. George Lewes, reviewing German fiction in 1858, summarises the aims of this literary movement as follows: 'Art always aims at the representation of Reality, i.e. of Truth; and no departure from truth is permissible, except such as inevitably lies in the nature of the medium itself. Realism is thus the basis of all Art, and its antithesis is not idealism, but *Falsism*' (Furst: 3). The realists of this particular period believed in the importance of depicting social reality objectively and in detail, in order to capture and record reality as it is, unembellished and useful in its capacity to find beauty in the ordinary; as Edmond Duranty wrote in 1865, 'beauty is the splendour of truth' (Furst: 32). Realism continues in popularity to this day but has distanced itself significantly from the moral fervour of these earlier enthusiasts. Henry James, for example, wrote, 'Humanity is immense, and reality has a myriad of forms; the most one can affirm is that some of the flowers of fiction have the odour of it, and others have not' (*Art of Fiction*: 10). While James, like many modern writers of realist fiction, still considered realism to be the 'supreme virtue of a novel' (11), he also
acknowledged the insurmountable obstacles which hinder a true representation of reality.

The interpretation of realism which most accords with Swift's, however, is that of 'illusionism' discussed by Guy de Maupassant in 1888. Maupassant holds that unless the realist were to record every insignificant, banal detail and nuance of reality, he cannot have an 'irrefutable and consistent truth' (Furst: 47). As this does not make interesting reading, the author must select events and reject others, must alter details to maintain plausibility and continuity, must invoke 'precautions and preparations, of setting up clever and hidden transitions, of fully illuminating, simply by the skill of the composition, the essential events and giving all the others the degree of prominence they deserve according to their importance in order to produce the profound sensation of the special truth one wants to show' (Furst: 47). This is a deliberate manipulation of a disparate, non-sequential, contradictory reality in order to create a more interesting, structured and meaningful image of reality, while still maintaining the pretence of mimesis. This process, termed by Maupassant 'illusionism', is similar to that of the photographic image as portrayed, for example, in Out of this World. Although photography purports to represent reality with absolute fidelity to truth, it actually manipulates the reality though factors such as selection, framing, interference with the subject, context, reproductions, lighting, angle, and post-development image processes such as grain, colour and contrast changes. The eventual image will ultimately represent an ideology rather than a reality; it will bear a semblance of order and significance that the viewer, desperate for such indications of meaning, responds to. The classical realist novel, therefore, parallels late twentieth century 'fictions' such as the photographic image, in its manipulation of
reality to create the illusion of coherence; and it is precisely these illusions that Swift's novels suggest we use, for better or for worse, within our contemporary societies, to provide us with the structure and meaning we crave.

A background for my interpretation of Swift's overall supposition in the three novels is found in George Steiner's *Nostalgia for the Absolute*. Steiner presents a theory that human-kind has been engaged in a desperate search for replacement 'mythologies' since the decline of formal Western Christianity during the mid-nineteenth century. He describes the moral devastation that resulted from the waning of this great doctrine of meaning and purpose, as all-encompassing, an 'immense emptiness'; but 'where there is a vacuum, new energies and surrogates arise' (2). According to Steiner the great twentieth century theories of anthropology, Marxism, and Freudian psychoanalysis, as well as sub-sciences such as occultism, are all carefully constructed 'pseudo-religions' crafted to fill the void: 'the decay of a comprehensive Christian doctrine had left in disorder, or had left blank, essential perceptions of social justice, of the meaning of human history, of the relations between mind and body, of the place of knowledge in our moral conduct' (2). This new social order without meaning, order, justice, or redemption, and the human efforts at dealing with this appears to be the thematic premise underlying all three novels. *Ever After* even goes back to the decades when this process occurred, and effectively compares the growing disillusionment of nineteenth century character Matthew Pearce, with that of his late-twentieth century ascendant, Bill Unwin. Pearce's God-fearing ways are gradually undermined by the growing, irrefutable logic of science, and thus his existential despair pre-empts Unwin's experience of the twentieth century spiritual void.
Waterland, Out of this World and Ever After reflect the current obsession with representations - models of ourselves which preserve an illusion of purpose, feature and content in our lives. These models - extensions of Steiner's 'pseudo-religions' which are concocted to fill the conspicuous sense of absence in our lives - include photographic images, literature, story-telling and history. Common to all of these is their characteristic of artificiality - none of them are natural, rather they are human made constructions with the related factors of ideology and power. In the course of this thesis these constructions will be discussed in detail; in particular the dynamic of contradiction will be analysed in relation to the tendency of characters to willingly adopt fictional paradigms as 'truth'. Swift addresses this dynamic of contradiction literally and metafictionally. On the literal level, he creates characters and scenarios to reflect contemporary society. He examines questions such as why the human-animal seeks truth and meaning, the benefits of various fictions and the (sometimes dire) consequences of investing faith in illusions. On the metafictional level Swift turns the argument in on himself, and examines self-consciously the workings of fiction as part of the system of representation.

Despite Swift's claim that he is 'almost ignorant of the revolutions and counter-revolutions in critical theory . . . and I do not regret this ignorance. I am not very interested in critical theory', his work provides some remarkable scope for interpretation on a critical and theoretical level. Linda Hutcheon's theory on 'historiographic metafiction', Baudrillard's simulacrum, and Susan Sontag's discussion of photography provide the

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most useful elucidations of Swift’s work, while Hassan, Calvino, Steiner, Zipes, and Elias create interesting asides. Ultimately, despite the contradiction and disorder, and despite the emptiness of the ‘nothing landscape’ (Waterland: 15), Swift suggests the ‘authentic synthetic’ realm of the imagination to be a place of magic and redemption. As Hassan writes: 'I do not know how to make our 'desert' a little greener . . . how to give literature or theory a new hold on the world, except to remythify the imagination, at least locally, and bring back the reign of wonder into our lives'.

10 from 'Pluralism in the Postmodern Perspective', Exploring Postmodernism. 32.
Waterland

God, King, Father, Reason, History, Humanism have all come and gone their way... We have killed our gods - in spite or lucidity, I hardly know - yet we remain ourselves creatures of will, desire, hope, belief. And now we have nothing... upon which to found our discourse.
- Ihab Hassan

What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from. - T.S. Eliot

Swift, in his typically broad-sighted, eclectic style, is giving us the 'complete and final version' (Waterland: 6) of history and reality in Waterland. Like William Atkinson, who looks 'down from his hilltop in an expansive and prophetic manner' (W: 58), Swift surveys the landscape and announces its recurrent nature. Just as the Great Ouse moves in perpetual cycles, or as the eel follows centuries-long patterns of degeneration and regeneration, so too does human reality: 'Nothing moves

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1 'Pluralism in Postmodern Perspective', Exploring Postmodernism. 30.
3 Hereafter, all parenthetical references to Waterland (London: Picador, 1983), are abbreviated to W.
far in this world. And whatever moves forwards will also move back. It is a law of the natural world; and a law, too, of the human heart' (W: 63). This distinctly postmodern view is contradicted however, by various ploys which indicate realist leanings. Despite the fact the characters are 'lost in the desert' (W: 118), for example, they still search for 'presence, for feature, for purpose, for content' (W: 35). Despite the narrator Crick's assertion that progress is an illusion, characters continue to work towards a better future. And despite the Fenlander's awareness that the waters always return, they continue to labour against the water. Against all odds, characters struggle to impose their own perception of reality on the immutable, self-regulating forces of nature. Swift's paradoxical combining of deconstructive postmodern, and reconstructive realist ideas, therefore, is a direct reflection of this indefatigable and futile human predilection for order and meaning.

*Waterland* is a complex, many-layered story with multiple planes of reference. It presents itself, simultaneously, as a fairy-tale, a local history, a school lesson, a natural history lesson, a murder mystery, and a journey of personal discovery. In typical postmodern style, therefore, it evades representation. The narrative, however, is frequently engaging and fluent - that is, flowing with a realist-style seamlessness. To this end, Swift is blending traditional realist conventions with postmodern techniques. This approach exemplifies Linda Hutcheon's definition of recent 'historiographic metafiction': fiction that 'asks us to question how we represent - how we construct - our view of reality and our selves' (*Politics*: 42). *Waterland* does this by subverting its own conventions of representation and questioning society's use of ordering narratives. In doing so, *Waterland* reveals the novel's narrative to be a construct which relays through artificial means the illusion of order and meaning, and also uncovers the fictionality of other ordering narratives such as history. Swift is demonstrating, in this way, both the inherent fictionality of many
narratives we accept as given, and their usefulness as purveyors of form in our sodden, Fen-like reality-scapes.

The metaphors of water and flatness provide a perfect evocation of the contemporary postmodern condition - they conjure the sense of emptiness that existence without guaranteed purpose or structure signifies, and by introducing the theme of land reclamation, he captures the dynamic of contradiction that underlies the draining of water and altering of land which will always return to its former equilibrium. This, perhaps, is the ultimate lesson of Waterland - the epigraph's allusion to Dickens' Great Expectations reminds us that just as Pip had to learn to attain a balance between his fantasies and realities, and just as the wise Cricks are amphibious 'half-men, half-fish', so too must Swift reach a compromise between the realist and postmodern contrapositions.

For the setting of the novel Swift chooses the Fens, an actual location in England. He uses verifiable place-names to substantiate the setting, and provides accurate information about silt and peat, the Fens geological constituents. At the same time, however, he describes this setting as that of a good fairy-tale: 'both palpable and unreal' (W: 6: my italics). Hence, just as the Fens is legitimised and given some believability, it is simultaneously de-legitimised, becoming a fantastic creation of the author's mind. As such, the swampy Fens are used by Swift as a metaphor for reality; they are there, but for all their significance they may as well not be: 'Reality is uneventfulness, vacancy, flatness. Reality is that nothing happens' (W: 34).

The chief characteristics of the Fens, water and flatness, are direct symbolic parallels to absence; water is described as a liquid form of Nothing (W: 11), and living in the Fens is to 'receive strong doses of reality. The great, flat monotony of reality; the wide, empty space of reality' (W: 15). In this respect, Swift is creating the setting as a double-bind; as both a signifier of some-thing (land; a basis for the narrative; a metaphor for everywhere; the
book's title), and a signifier of no-thing (illusion, the supernatural, the abstract, the absence). The Fenland setting intrinsically foreshadows the co-existence of the objective and the subjective, the thematic blend of fact and fantasy, and most importantly, Swift's intuition that the real and irreal are inseparable elements of fiction, history and our perceptions of reality.

In a bid to ease the reader into the story, the novel assumes the traditional façade with title page, a dedication, contents page, prefatory quotations and chapter headings. Alison Lee notes that it is characteristic of recent metafiction to use realist conventions, yet simultaneously seek to subvert them: 'Yet they do so from within precisely those conventions which they are clearly trying to undermine' (36). Looking closer at Swift's chosen title reveals an oxymoron: water and land are complete opposites and yet the words are conjoined to create a curiously meaningless, and at the same time meaningful heading. Placed together, the words negate each other, suggesting there is no title. This tactic is highly significant in terms of Swift's standpoint with the novel: first, it shows that despite the reality of absence, or Nothingness in our existence, it is important to feign presence, to create an illusion or artificial model of the traditional title anyway; second, it introduces the prevalent themes of cyclical flooding and drainage and the perfect postmodern metaphor of water; and third it suggests a universal significance - waterland could be (and is) any land. The contents of the epigraph work further to de-stabilise the reader's security, providing a definition of Historia, as '1. inquiry, investigation, learning. 2. a) a narrative of past events, history. b) any kind of narrative: account, tale, story'. This dictionary extract testifies to Swift's task and motive - to investigate the past in order to learn something about the present. It also undermines traditional notions of history as the Grand Narrative by stating that history can be any kind of narrative, including the metaphoric 'tale' and 'story'. The title and the epigraph, therefore, pre-empt the novel's
foremost concerns; to create the illusion of realism while simultaneously pulling it away from under the reader's feet, consequently implying the importance of an illusion of the real, in lieu of the real's ultimate absence.

Another way of interpreting Swift's treatment of the novel's structuring components - title, epigraph, contents page and chapter organisation - is to assume that Swift is imitating the role of author, and that *Waterland* imitates the form of the novel. In this sense *Waterland* is a form of 'pastiche' - Fredric Jameson's term to describe postmodern parody, that is, blank parody of something which no longer represents the norm. Pastiche is mimicry of a certain style, in this case the traditional novel, which has been de-centred and deconstructed by postmodern theorists. According to Barth the modern day writer may well feel that narrative literature has 'just about shot its bolt... it may well be that the novel's time as a major art form is up, as the "times" of classical tragedy, Italian and German grand opera, or the sonnet sequence came to be' ('Exhaustion': 71). Literature therefore, and indeed art, have nowhere original left to go, except endless repeats and parodies in the guise of 'nostalgic art'. Swift's re-appropriation of the standard novelistic trappings is a 'pastiche' of the forms, both in light of their dissolution, and their residual importance as artificial models of stability and order. This metafictional interpretation of *Waterland*'s form can be read, for example, in the use of a dictionary extract in the epigraph. In choosing a dictionary reference, Swift draws attention to the duplicity of having an epigraph at all; just as a dictionary can be considered an authoritative repository of meaning, it is also, ultimately, self-referential. As Lee notes, 'Even the most casual glance at the *Oxford English Dictionary* confirms that language is indefinite, that meaning is a construction, as is language' (41).

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4 See 'Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', *Postmodernism: a Reader*. ed. T. Docherty. 73-74.
The novel's narrative technique furthers Swift's preoccupation with the dual importance of the realistic and the illusory. Written in first-person in the words of high school history teacher Tom Crick, the novel begins with the warning: 'Fairy-tale words; fairy-tale advice. But we lived in a fairy-tale place . . . Far away from the wide world' (W: 1). From this point the reader may become wary as to whether the ensuing story should be taken as an exercise in complete fantasy, or in part-truth. On reaching the end of the novel one realises that these distinctions are no longer relevant, and that these pre-emptive words of advice are more to do with Swift's thesis on the nature of fiction, history and reality, than the inauthenticity of the story. The narrative initially seems to be a series of informal monologues, anecdotes and ruminations about the past made directly to his history class, as the frequent address to 'children' is made as, for example, in this early passage: 'children, before whom I have stood for thirty-two years in order to unravel the mysteries of the past, but before whom I am to stand no longer, listen, one last time, to your history teacher' (W: 4). He then diverges into spontaneous, present-tense thoughts, a fractured stream of consciousness: '(A teacher-baiter. A lesson-spoiler. Every class has to have one. But this one's different . . .)' (W: 5). This is partially a parody of the traditional, infallible omniscient narrator, and partially an example of how rarely we live or experience the 'Here and Now' (W: 51), our minds so often dwelling on the past. Thus the novel becomes a collection of reminiscences, non-verbalised thoughts and current occurrences, problematising the notion that he is addressing just his students. It now appears the reader is one the 'children' as well, placing Crick, and Swift, into a didactic position over the reader: the implication is that the novel is a 'lesson' for the reader to 'learn'. It eventually appears that this lesson of Waterland is not for his 'children's' benefit, but for his own. His motivation for the story is ultimately to make sense of, and
assuage his fear of the harsh present realities. Ironically, the narrator is assuming a position of authority over himself in order to convince himself that there can be a rational meaning to the otherwise inexplicable meaninglessness of his current life. In the absence of his own father he adopts the dual roles of questioning child and all-knowing parent, and what emerges in *Waterland* is a representation of both points of view. Which of the two has more 'truth' is seemingly irrelevant for Swift, the only important fact being that the two need to co-exist together.

The narrative is designed to relax then disarm the reader. Tom Crick narrates with a fluid, 'yarn-spinning' style, frequently starting sentences with 'and', finishing sentences with 'after all', and ending character's spoken dialogues with the ambiguous . . . (notation). He utilises repetition of key statements to lull the reader and to highlight the often telling adjectives:

Children, who will inherit the world. Children to whom, throughout history, stories have been told, chiefly but not always at bedtime, in order to quell restless thoughts; whose need of stories is matched only by the need adults have of children to tell stories to, of receptacles for their stock of fairy-tales, of listening ears on which to unload, bequeath those most unbelievable yet haunting of fairy-tales, their own lives; children - they are going to separate you and me. (*W: 6*)

This excerpt is sermonic in style - the statement 'Children, who shall inherit the world' echoes the biblical phrase 'the meek shall inherit the earth' (*Psalms, 37:11*), invoking another fairy-tale narrative. The rhythmic, dictatorial tone relaxes the reader and allows them a temporary excursion into fantasy and illusion, and a transgression from the real into the 'irreal'. The reader unconsciously assumes the role of a child, and thus becomes
more receptive to fantasy and the mysterious joy of the fairy-tale. Swift's distinctive tone also resembles the child's imagined 'voice of God'. Swift is particularly eager to create the illusion of a God-like figure in the reader's life. In a time without transcendent truths, Jean Baudrillard shows that we create signs of God, of truth and reality as a tangible and meaningful system. He says: 'All of Western faith and good faith was engaged in this wager on representation: that a sign could refer to a depth of meaning, that a sign could exchange for meaning, and that something could guarantee this exchange - God - but, God is reduced to the signs that attest Him' ('Precession': 256). With his authoritative tone, and repetitive use of the term 'children', as though Crick were a priest and the readers the members of his parish, Swift manufactures the comfort and reassurance of being guided by an omniscient, omnipotent Being. He does not disguise the fact that it is an illusion; in fact, he gently reminds the reader every now and then of the artificial nature of the narrative. But he does allow the reader a nostalgic, momentary excursion into a world when God was believed to exist, and a sense of security prevailed.

Swift ends some of his chapters without a full stop and allows the narrative to flow from the last sentence of the chapter into the heading of the next chapter - as, for example, when he says: 'the settings of all good fairy-tales, must be both palpable and unreal, let me tell you/ [new chapter break] About the Fens/ Which are a low-lying region of eastern England . . .' (W: 6-7), and so a new chapter begins. The main effect of this device is to draw attention to the structure of the novel, making it self-conscious of its own workings and pretensions. The moment the author does this he breaks the spell or illusion the reader is held under after becoming absorbed in the story. It is disconcerting, particularly in light of Swift's earlier efforts at creating the spell through use of a seductive, realist narration. But there is a reason for it: despite the benefits of the traditional realist narrative,
Swift must acknowledge his part in an act of deception and fabrication. In playing with, and even parodying, the traditional novel structure, he shows its fallibility and fragility. One little nudge (such as this) is all it takes to reveal that the author is 'pulling one over you', so to speak, working within carefully orchestrated patterns to produce the sense that all these words have been strung together in aid of some higher principle. The shift takes away the former power of meaning the narrative formerly held. By exposing its own foundation stones and underlying structures, the reader is reminded that the novel is simply an organisation of words without reference, and the significance of any mood, feeling or sentiment previously created is undermined.

Another interpretation of Swift's choppy chapter breaks and disjunctive scene changes, is that he is challenging the traditional notion of a linear time-scape. Dominic Strinati writes that '[t]he growing immediacy of global space and time resulting from the dominance of mass media means that our previously unified and coherent ideas about space and time begin to be undermined, and become distorted and confused' (226). By looping back and forward when narrating the events of his life, Swift suggests that time moves cyclically rather than in a straight line, and also invokes the aleatory patterns of memory. The original concept of time as an ever-advancing arrow of progression was derived during the advent of the printed text, according to Nathan A. Scott: 'Historicity could now . . . begin to be a part of the experienced human reality, for the cyclical categories of older mythical perspective's had now to be replaced by linear categories that more nicely comported with the linear structure of the printed page' (4). It is ironic, then, and somewhat contradictory that Swift attempts to challenge this 'mythical linear perspective' within the very system which originally caused it. In order to satisfy the contention that time 'goes in two directions at once. It goes backwards as it goes forwards.
It loops. It takes detours' (W: 117); and the textual demands of linear narrative, Swift subverts and undermines this narrative by telling the plot in a circular pattern, ending where it begins, and complicating the chapter breaks stylistically. His inevitable concessions to the 'progressive' demands of the narrative lead him to comment that 'time has taken us prisoner' (W: 52) - just as the characters are always trapped between their nostalgia for the past and their anticipation of the future, the author too is limited to the linear constraints of the text. Swift has consequently discovered another example of a fictional human construct of progress and order that attempts to colonise an unruly reality:

There are no compasses for journeying in time. As far as our sense of direction in this unchartable dimension is concerned, we are like lost travellers in the desert. We believe we are going forward, towards the oasis of Utopia. But how do we know . . . that we are not moving in a great circle? (W: 117).

Characteristic of Swift's unpredictability, a self-referential device will move straight back into the steady, absorbing and believable realist-style narrative, as if the interruption never happened. But from within this run of realist-style narrative, there lies a more subtle method of undermining its conventions. Through metaphor and allegory, Swift is signalling to us that the text is 'transparent', and its credibility should be questioned. In chapter three for instance, Swift begins by describing in a factual, documentary-style tone, the precise geographical location of the novel's setting, an area that is possible to locate on an actual world map (W: 7). It continues on to discuss the (true) propensity for flooding in the area, before a shift in the narrative is detected: Swift begins to personify the water (it 'licked' southwards); he introduces the word 'silt' by drawing attention to its sound, thus detracting from its signified, and goes on to describe silt as
'simultaneous accretion and erosion; neither progress nor decay' (W: 7). Now that our attention is drawn to the meaning of the word, we recognise that its description amounts to 'nothing', and this in turn is supposed to apply to all the landscape he has previously spent describing. Essentially, and non-obtrusively, Swift is negating everything he is saying.

Another clear example of this subtle undermining of the realist narrative occurs where Crick begins discussing his ancestors. In a bid for authenticity he describes the various origins of his name ('Coricke' or 'Cricke'), before accounting for one of his ancestors that he knew when he was young - Bill Clay. While describing Bill Clay, Crick lapses unconsciously into a child's story-book language:

...a one-time punt-gunner and turf-cutter, who had witnessed in his lifetime the passing of all but the dregs of the old wild fens in our area; who stank, even with his livelihood half gone, of goose fat and fish slime, mud and peat smoke; who wore an otter-skin cap, eel-skin gaiters and whose brain was permanently crazed by the poppy-head tea he drank to ward off winter agues. Old Bill lived with his wife Martha in a damp, crack-walled cottage not far from the Ouse and on the edge of the shrinking, reed-filled marsh known, after the watery expanse it had once been, as Wash Fen Mere. But some said that Martha Clay, who was some twenty years younger than Bill, was never Bill's wife at all. Some said that Martha Clay was a witch...

But let's keep clear of fairy-tales. (W: 9)

The narrative quickly slides into a colourful, descriptive language distinctly reminiscent of fairy-tale narrative, partly indicating Swift's 'tongue in cheek' attitude to the conventions of realism, but also how closely knit myth and fact are in historical discourse, and how easy it is to slip into speculation when you are discussing past events based on memory. Swift's
inability to remain in one 'style' of narrative for long, suggests that an exclusively realist narrative, or exclusively fantastic narrative are never quite complete. Only by finding a compromise between the factual and the fictional will the narrator arrive at a proximate representation of reality. Reality, therefore, must be defined as a mixture of fact and fantasy - an indeterminate, indefinable substance that resists narratological control, and thus manifests itself in Swift's novel in a contradictory, 'fairy-tale' language.

*Waterland* is a fusion of 'made-up stories, [and] true stories' (W: 1) within the content as well as the style. Swift establishes the dynamic of constructing illusory forms out of formlessness in Crick's attempts to impose order and meaning on history and reality; Crick's efforts, resembling the realist attempts to discern a coherent and rational objective world, are simultaneously undermined by his own intermittent concessions that reality is like the Fens: no matter how much you dig and dredge for solid ground, the slippery waters of ambiguity will return to swallow it up. The result of this eternal struggle between reality and the human mind is a combination of fact and fantasy; humans looking for explanations in a water-land will find fairy tale answers (just as Crick, narrating the history of the eel, discovers their origins are a mystery); whilst those hoping that the water will protect them from the facts will find that an unsavoury reality will occasionally slice right through (like the sluice blade). The real and the irreal, representing the realist and the postmodern, are inextricably intertwined in *Waterland*.

Tom Crick is giving his history class a final few lessons before his enforced early retirement. Ostensibly, the termination of his position is based on educational cut-backs; the underlying reason, however, is his wife's sudden mental deterioration which leads her to steal a baby. This is the event which shatters his stable, almost 'embarrassingly comfortable'
(W: 107) life. Mary's misdemeanour is the catalyst which plummets Crick back into the 'here and now' after spending most of his life immersed in 'the pastime of past time' (W: 112). He realises that his perception of 'the flat and uniform terrain of thirty years of marriage' (W: 111) is being turned upside-down; Mary's irrational behaviour brings back to him instant clarity the simple truth that the tenuous reclaimed land of his reality is sinking back into water. Standing by the Observatory in his local Greenwich Park, surveying the miles of 'inscrutable heavens' and 'past panoramas' (W: 112), Crick acknowledges his fear. He dreads going home, weekends, dark evenings; just like his student Price, he begins to believe that everything is about to come to an end. So in order to tame his fears, as well as the holocaust-nightmares of his students, in order to discount the nagging feeling 'that everything might amount to nothing' (W: 233), he begins an attempt at explaining. Like the compass which indicates longitude 0° beside him, Crick is going back to the beginning - 'to that time before history claimed us, before things went wrong' (W: 118).

Thus Crick's history lessons transform into what the headmaster Lewis terms 'circus acts' (W: 19). Indeed, the classes which once addressed 'real' history - the formal, textbook accounts of major historical events - now span an assortment of anecdotes, reminiscences, stories, 'natural histories', lectures, and definitions. Within these 'crazy yarns' (W: 5), both didactically and implicitly, Crick begins to build the 'amphibious' skill of dealing with a reality in which 'history merges with fiction, fact gets blurred with fable' (W: 180). Swift primarily uses the metaphors of water and land to symbolise this inter-play between facts and fictions. Together they represent Crick's reality and, as the Fens can be read as a microcosm, all realities. In his reality, water represents everything insubstantial or abstract: stories, myths, mysteries, and the unknown; while land represents objectivity, facts, the tangible and the solid. Within the Fens, however,
there is no clear division between these antinomies; although generations have laboured to define the difference through sophisticated land-reclamation techniques, nature has consistently restored a balance of murky inter-changeability between the two elements. The natural Fenland environment and the inhabitants efforts at altering this environment are Swift's chief metaphors for the human disposition toward order and meaning. Crick and his ancestors would prefer land and water (fact and fiction) to be clearly delineated. In this way, the 'empty wilderness' may be transformed into something 'regular . . . prostrate . . . tamed and cultivated' (W: 2), something which may be understood and mastered.⁵

This yearning for order is indubitably equated with the novel itself, and the reader's desire for a narrative which accurately (mimetically) converts raw experience into words, and thereby 'mastering' that reality. Just as the Fenlanders would prefer the delusion that the landscape may be tamed, readers too desire a narrative which provides the security of a represented reality which makes sense. This desire for an ordered narrative is based on the hope that reality may imitate it, in the same way that Henry believes 'by his adopting consistently and resolutely enough this posture of optimism, reality might be persuaded to follow suit; as if by never showing that he recognised the truth, the truth might turn out not to be the truth after all' (W: 236). Swift thematises this idea metafictionally through reference to the novel itself as a traditional form of narrative. Earlier in the chapter, for example, I pointed out that Swift creates realist sign-posts with the novel's structure, and extends the promise of a lisible⁶ (readable) script through a smooth, compelling narrative. Alison Lee notes that the

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⁵ John McPhee describes three incredible real-life encounters between humans and nature in The Control of Nature. His discussion of attempts to cool lava, re-direct rivers and control mountains, demonstrates the stubborn and sometimes foolish human desire to control forces immeasurably greater than our own.

⁶ This term is derived from Roland Barthes S/Z.
'story is so engaging and manipulation of affect so intense that it can certainly be read (if naively) on this level' (42). However, through the consistent undermining of these realist sign-posts, through erratic scene changes, non-linear progression of narrative, and self-reflexive references to the fallibility of mimesis - ('these fantastic-but-true, these believe-it-or-not-but-it-happened Tales of the Fens' (W: 35)) - Swift demonstrates that, like the dredging programs, a structured narrative is an artificial imposition of order on what is otherwise a collection of signs. He articulates the standard postmodern contention that narrative is 'a human-made structure - never as 'natural' or given' (Hutcheon: Politics: 62). By covertly referring to his own text as part of the system of 'totalizing' discourse, Swift amplifies his contention that the desire to 'master' all narratives is ultimately a futile process.

Furthermore, readers desire a narrative with a traditional closed structure, that is, a beginning, middle and end. Waterland simultaneously acknowledges and resists this impulse towards artificial structure; the novel suggests a traditional (closed) narrative structure through the standard novelistic trappings, then challenges this promise through various subtle clues. The first sentence of the text, for example, begins with the mid-sentence word 'And' implying the narrative is in continuum; not beginning, but carrying on. Crick admits that, indeed, he is 'in the middle of nowhere' (W: 2), and goes on to prove it by bringing the whole narrative right back to where it began, with neither introduction nor conclusion. Introduction and conclusion are toyed with however, reminding the reader of the author's self-reflexive intent to both install and subvert the conventions of realism, thus suggesting both their usefulness and their

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7 'Totalization' is Linda Hutcheon's term for the process by which writers 'render their materials coherent, continuous, unified' (Politics: 62).
artificiality. The traditional fairy-tale introduction 'Once upon a time' is alluded to, but is narrowly bypassed by a self-conscious substitute:

Fairy-tale words; fairy-tale advice. But we lived in a fairy-tale place. In a lock-keeper's cottage, by a river, in the middle of the Fens. Far away from the wide world. (W: 1)

The real 'Once upon a time', in fact, comes near the end of the story (297).

This completes Swift's hypothesis that all narratives move in cycles, and therefore always present themselves in open form - in continuum as such. It also furthers the concept that the traditional narratological methods imposes artificial order on stories; as Hutcheon says: 'Whether it be in historical or fictional representation, the familiar narrative form of beginning, middle, and end implies a structuring process that imparts meaning as well as order' (Politics: 62).

Crick's discussion of the French Revolution with his history class extends the concept of mastering reality with words, to the way we attempt to master the past as well. This is attempted not only through the translation of past events into words, but through the imposition of significance, relevance, and unity on to these events. By the sorting and subjective assessment of 'happenings', we 'write' history in a manner so as to seem 'natural' and causal, when in actuality, these textbook histories bear little relation to the ambiguous process which actually takes place. 'Metanarratives make absolute, universal and all-embracing claims to knowledge and truth', according to Strinati in Theories of Popular Culture (227), therefore these claims can only be fictional. Crick puts to question before his class the terms and labels we use to categorise and simplify historical events: the event 'French Revolution', for example, loses its clarity and significance when closely scrutinised:
As you try to define the revolution you imitate precisely the action of the revolution itself - eliminating with a mental guillotine those who do not fit some impossibly absolute notion of a revolution ... Where then does the revolution lie? This starting-point of our modern age. Is it merely a term of convenience? Does it lie in some impenetrable amalgam of countless individual circumstances too complex to be analysed? ... the more you try to dissect events, the more you lose hold of what you took for granted in the first place - the more it seems it never actually occurred, but occurs, somehow, only in the imagination ... (W: 120-121)

Hutcheon describes this as the difference between discovering and inventing the totalizing historical model (Politics: 64): as the events surrounding the time described as the French Revolution prove in themselves not to be a matter of fact but interpretation, the entire movement is shown to be an invention, a series of events infused with meaning by historians: 'History: a lucky dip of meanings' (W: 122). In addition, in order to glean easy or appropriate meanings from these events, the historical narrators need to eliminate all the complexities, contradictions and details which problematise their conclusions; in this way the end result is 'Reality made plain. Reality with no-nonsense. Reality cut down to size. Reality minus a few heads' (W: 178).

Ernst van Alphen agrees that '[i]t is not the case that historians discover or find truth about past events. What they do is create events from a seamless stream; they invent meanings which make patterns within this stream rise up' ('Performativity of Histories': 202). Just as Swift questions the process of finding 'truth' in past events, he also questions which events are chosen as significant. Consistent with the postmodern urge to prioritise minority discourse, Swift replaces the 'grand history' with Crick's 'personal history', thereby subverting the authority of the former.
Instead of continuing his lessons on sixteenth century French social upheaval, for example, Crick decides to address the *History of the Fens*, thus legitimising and transferring 'authority' to a series of events that he considers of more importance in relation to himself and his fellow Fenlanders. In this way, history becomes 'his-story' as opposed to 'their-story'. The students are also better able to relate to, and learn from, stories of their own ancestry: 'You listened to old Cricky's crazy yarns (true? made up?) - in a way you never listened to the stranger-then-fiction prodigies of the French Revolution' (W: 5). In *The Postmodern Condition*, Jean-François Lyotard defines postmodernism as 'incredulity to metanarratives', and predicts the eclipse of totalizing narrative by a 'heterogeneity' of minor discourses:

> The narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal. It is being dispersed in clouds of narrative language elements ... conveyed within each cloud are pragmatic valencies specific to its kind. Each of us lives at the intersection of many of these. (72)

So in much the same way as Crick de-legitimises the authority of traditional historical 'meaning', so too he undermines the choice of subjects that construe a 'true' history. Crick's repudiation of traditional historical 'truths' is ironic, however, considering that the dominant discourse is based on the very ideology he represents - patriarchal 'European models of continuous chronology and cause-and-effect relations' (Hutcheon: *Politics*: 53). This contradiction only highlights further that the 'real' world for Crick is not in the 'artificial history' of world events, but the personal narratives which provide a sense of place and identity: 'for each

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protagonist who once stepped onto the stage of so-called historical events, there were thousands, millions, who never entered the theatre - who never knew that the show was running - who got on with the donkey-work of coping with reality' (W: 34).

Lyotard's description of minor narratives as being a dispersal of Grand Narrative into 'pragmatic valencies specific to its kind', is reminiscent of Crick's description of the 'tortuous, reptilian Ouse' (W: 125) running through the swampy back-yard of his youth. The hundreds of man-made 'cuts, drains, lodes, dykes, eaus and ditches' (W: 9) which divert the main channel into innumerable minor water-ways, resemble the diversity of minor narratives that make-up human experience. The comparison not only accounts for the fact that narrative is an artificial construction stemming from the natural and universal flow of life, but the inter-weaving, 'network' (W: 8) characteristic of the flow resembles the way in which narratives inevitably intersect with others. Other comparisons between the water-flow and narrative are evident: Crick observes the Ouse's 'perpetual if unhurried unruliness ... its ungovernable desire to flow at its own pace and in its own way' (W: 125), suggesting the meditative quality of story-telling: 'water and meditation, they say, go together' (W: 11).

In relation to the river metaphor, then, 'narrative' can be seen as the discourse which flows naturally from the source of the imagination. Like water-flow, narrative is a necessity rather than an amusement, however, a necessity which, when blocked, will build in pressure and eventually overflow. This is why Crick needs his students, and why Mary, deprived of a child to relate her own narrative to, goes insane: 'Children ... whose need of stories is matched only by the need adults have of children to tell stories to, of receptacles for their stock of fairy-tales, of listening ears on which to unload, bequeath those most unbelievable yet haunting of fairy-tales, their own lives' (W: 6).
Crick's stories, then, flow one after the other in a steady stream. Just as river is 'unruly', so too is their form; they stop and start, interrupt one another, refer to one another, and all flow toward the same ends - the desire to infuse meaning and order into a stream of experience. Crick's perception of reality as a void arises from his - and humanity's - desire to find solidity: 'And what are the Fens, which so imitate the natural disposition of water, but a landscape which, of all landscapes, most approximates to Nothing? . . . every Fenman suffers now and then the illusion that the land he walks over is not there, is floating . . . ' (W: 11). Crick frequently describes his environment in terms that equate to Baudrillard's 'absence', the ultimate absence of a discernible reality: a 'nothing-landscape' (15); 'life includes a lot of empty space' (52); 'Reality is uneventfulness, vacancy, flatness. Reality is that nothing happens' (34); 'this schoolmaster quaked in his bed at night for fear of something - something vast and void' (15). It is upon the (empty) basis which characters attempt to build their artificial systems, and which Crick, doing the same himself, paradoxically subverts. In recognising that the reason for his need for explanations is because there are no answers, he acknowledges the futility of contriving explanations: 'Because explaining's a way of avoiding the facts while you pretend to get near them' (W: 145).

Swift's primary metaphor for this sense of void is womanhood: 'Children, women are equipped with a miniature model of reality: an empty but fillable vessel. A vessel which much can be made to happen, and to issue in consequence' (W: 35-36). What Crick refers to as Mary's 'hole' can be read as the post-historical void implicit in the phrase 'the end of history'. According to Crick, 'dramas can be brewed, things can be hatched out of nothing' (W: 36); indeed, Crick's recollections of his childhood centre on his, and other's, attempts to explore and fill this hole. However, in line with Crick's theory that with every progression is
regression, these experimentations result in Mary's pregnancy and the necessary task of 'emptying' her 'hole'. John Schad interprets Mary's abortion as evidence that Price's fears regarding 'the end of history' are founded - just as Crick undermines the 'authority' of history, and Price announces it to be 'a fairy-tale' (W: 5). Mary's abortion proves the postmodern, post-historical conviction that we exist in a 'hyperspace without atmosphere' (Baudrillard: 'Precession': 254), where 'nothing happens': Crick says of the abortion that he is waiting 'For Nothing to happen. For something to unhappen' (W: 255). Moreover, as Schad points out, the stuff that 'the future's made of' (W: 267) is discarded into a bucket. These incidents highlight characters' efforts at refuting the perceived absence that envelops them through 'filling' the void with action and drama; characteristically these efforts are 'aborted'.

The characters' attempts at dealing with this void are the key theme of Waterland:

And there's no saying what consequences we won't risk, what reactions to our actions, what repercussions, what brick towers built to be knocked down, what chasings of our own tails, what chaos we won't assent to in order to assure ourselves that, nonetheless, things are happening. And there's no saying what heady potions we won't concoct, what meanings, myths, manias we won't imbibe in order to convince ourselves that reality is not an empty vessel. (W: 35)

Crick provides many examples of this impulse within his accounts of his family and ancestors. One of these meaning-forming myths they imbibe is religion; Crick's father Henry, for instance, makes up stories with a religious slant in order to explain phenomena he does not understand:

"Do you know what the stars are? They are the silver dust of God's blessing. They are little broken off bits of heaven. God cast them down to fall on us. But when he saw how wicked we were, he changed his mind and ordered the stars to stop. Which is why they hang in the sky but seem as though at any time they might drop...". (W: 1)

These are 'fairy-tale words; fairy-tale advice' (W: 1). They are an attempt to counteract mystery with fiction, to account for something that is unknowable with a reason which is equally 'fantastic'. However, for Henry, and for Dick and Tom listening to him, his words impart a sense of reassuring solidity into their lives, fill them with joy, and a sense that the world is both magical and safe. It demonstrates that, when faced with the prospect of the unknown, humans will struggle to rationalise the situation and codify their fear, while inversely, when faced with the mundane, we will attempt to inject drama. So while on the one hand Henry wants a reason for the stars in the sky, something he can understand and believe, he also wants a romantic explanation, a reason which helps him believe that the world is driven by grand and sentimental forces.

Religion is popular as a general ordering principle in the water-land for precisely this reason. Waterland is suffused with religious overtones, beginning with Henry's Divine explanation for stars, and ending with mention of Dick being 'saviour of the world' (W: 308). Religion, in Swift's view, is the foremost fiction used by humanity: 'And it is strange - or perhaps not strange, not strange at all, only logical - how the bare and empty Fens yield so readily to the imaginary - and the supernatural' (W: 15). In the same passage that Crick mentions tales of local myth and legend - The Singing Swans of Wash Fen Mere; the Monk of Sudchurch; the Headless Ferryman of Straithe - he mentions religious beliefs as well. Tales
of a local patroness's demon-repelling, God-communing ways are connected with the 'obscure rites' (W: 15) Crick would observe in his youth - 'When you see the new moon, turn your money in your pocket; help someone to salt and help them to sorrow; never put new shoes on a table or cut your nails on a Sunday'. In this way, religion and superstition are one and the same in Crick's perception. Just as it accounts for everything that does not make sense, and grants beauty and a purpose to life, religion provides solace and retreat from reality. Mary's voluntary withdrawal into religious sanctity after her traumatic abortion, and subsequent 'love-affair' (W: 35) with God later in life, illustrates most of all that the concept of Divinity is used by characters when reality will no longer sustain them.

Crick, however, would prefer to 'labour . . . to refute reality' (W: 27) in different ways; after all, 'God's for simple, backward people in Godforsaken places' (W: 232). One of these ways is avoidance, dodging the issue by pretending the real is not real: 'amnesia's the cure for all' (W: 285). Crick describes how, when confronted with the irrational, his mind stubbornly refuses to accept it; will attempt all manner of explanation in an effort to avoid the simple fact of disorder. When his infertile wife announces that she is going to have a baby, "Because God's said I will" (W: 113), his attempts to avoid the issue are almost farcical. He imagines first she is playing some kind of 'crazy game', then affects a 'pedagogic pose' in order to set things straight. This failing, he considers labelling the irrationality 'schizophrenia', before resorting to registering that his physical environment is still intact: 'He believes: this is Mary; this is a bench; this is a dog. The last thing he wants to believe is that he's in fairy-land' (W: 129). Other characters attempts to avoid reality are similarly futile. Henry applies resuscitation techniques on Freddie Parr's long-dead, waterlogged body, for example: 'He was hoping that if he turned his back, counted ten, whispered a covert entreaty, it would go away. But it didn't' (W: 24). Alternatively,
Lewis manifests his reality-denying behaviour by investing in a nuclear fall-out shelter, a measure which, for all its semblance of reality-awareness, represents the ultimate form of denial - a ridiculously inappropriate response to the all-encompassing threat of nuclear annihilation.

Reality, however, 'is not something to be escaped, avoided, or controlled', according to Hutcheon. It is 'something with which we must come to terms and such a confrontation involves an acknowledgment of limitation as well as power' (Politics: 58). Crick quickly discovers that this is the case; avoiding reality by ignoring it, or attempting to drink his problems away, only allows reality to re-surface at the next corner. It is only through the process of confronting his emptiness by narrating the experiences which led to it, that he may find a sense of reprieve. Unlike other compensatory fictions such as religion, stories do not deny their own fictional nature, and unlike formal narratives such as history, they do not 'totalize' reality. Instead they establish the crucial sense of truth and meaning both the teller and receiver crave, albeit an arbitrated truth: 'truth is being told, with 'facts' to back it up, but a teller constructs that truth and chooses those facts'.

_Waterland_ consequently, is packed with 'made up stories, true stories; soothing stories, warning stories; stories with a moral or no point at all; believable stories and unbelievable stories; stories which were neither one thing nor the other' (W: 1-2). They abate fear, explain origins, create myths, alleviate boredom, but most importantly, stories fabricate the substance that fills voids and remedies the 'nocturnal restlessness' (W: 2) that plagues the Fen-dwellers.

Part of the process of telling stories is an essential interaction between children and adults. The process is a mutually-dependent and mutually-beneficial one which, as Crick discovers, creates considerable distress when

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intervened with: 'now I know the agonies of a mother robbed of her child' (W: 6). Children require stories in order to build the necessary skills for coping with a vacuous reality: 'every Fen-child, who is given picture-books to read in which the sun bounces over mountain tops and the road of life winds through heaps of green cushions, and is taught nursery rhymes in which persons go up and down hills, is apt to demand of its elders: Why are the Fens flat?' (W: 11). This passage suggests the optimistic and purposeful nature of myths passed on to children. When reality clashes with these myths, adults are prepared to counter perplexed queries with further plausible, yet magical-sounding 'answers': 'Why are the Fens flat? So God has a clear view . . .' (W: 12). As children become adults and they discover, like the Crick brothers, that the rest of the wide world 'is not a wondrous fable . . . [but] some evil memory they have always had' (W: 16-17), they must begin to create stories and myths of their own to explain why the world is always 'drowning in mud', according to Waterland. And part of the process of legitimising your stories is having eager receptacles to listen to them, and thus, the cycle is completed. Mary's experience represents a tragic mutation of this crucial cycle. After she bears an ordeal so unspeakable as to not only forcibly remove her child, but to remove her impending adult 'self' as well - 'I yell, "Mary!" But Mary doesn't hear me. Her name bounces back at me' (W: 266) - she renders herself utterly defenceless against reality. Her consequential state of insanity closely resembles that of an aged child; a child without an adult to tell her 'stories', and an adult who has accepted the void into her self: 'Her arms hold nothing . . .' (W: 286).

Compared to other forms of narrative, stories mimic the silty and shifting waters of reality with a greater accuracy. This is why Crick calls textbook history 'artificial history', and the story-telling 'natural history'. Referring to what he perceives of as an important incident in his youth, for
example, Crick tells of a game of sexual prowess and dare which culminates in a moment which would eventually change the course of his life, and consequently, the course of history. He describes this moment, in which Tom, Mary, Dick and Freddie are suspended in barely realised sexual tension, as 'tense with the present tense . . . fraught with the here and now' (W: 179). So significant is this moment in his memory, that official text-history language becomes inadequate to describe it; instead he turns it into a story: 'It's too much for your history teacher's unpractised objectivity, or for his short-lived pubescent boldness. He escapes to his story-books' (W: 179). The moment eventually leads to Mary's pregnancy, a devastating abortion which leaves her barren, both reproductively and emotionally, Freddie's death, Dick's suicide, and later, Mary's insanity. The incident demonstrates to Crick that objectivity, formality, and accuracy are sometimes not enough to yield the elusive 'golden nugget' (W: 53) of a situation. These approaches (signifying the traditional realist-mimetic literary style) cannot account for the fact that there is no division between 'where the stories end and reality begins' (W: 179), and therefore cannot capture the magic of this moment in Crick's memory.

Dick Crick represents an exceptionally strong symbol of the regulating impulses of humanity pitted against an immutable reality. Dick is Tom's partly-retarded half-brother, the 'potato-head' child of an incestuous relationship between Tom's mother and her father. Frequently Dick is described in terms of animal imagery: Crick mentions his 'cow-lashes' and 'fish-eyes' (W: 28); he swims like a fish with a 'long, but finless, scaleless' body (W: 165); his motorbike sounds like a 'wasp-buzz' (W: 181); and he has the 'dull, vacant stare of a fish' (W: 209). Other clues point to his close proximity to nature; other than being referred to frequently as a form of vegetable, a face like a potato and a penis like a marrow (W: 42), his complexion is 'muddy' (W: 23), he has a 'watery gaze' (W: 166), and his
clothes are 'silt-smelling' (W: 183). Swift suggests through Dick's character that humans are differentiated from the rest of the animal-world only by an ability to imagine and self-reflect; it is precisely this ability which makes the human animal restless and unsatisfied in an environment which otherwise perfectly meets its needs. Dick, falling somewhere in between human and animal, being 'half man and half fish' (W: 3), lives 'amphibiously' - comfortable with his nonsensical, regulated existence, yet sluggishly limited to instinct-driven, repetitive behaviour: 'Dick stumbles helplessly or blenches in a kind of puritanical horror at any event which proves that human behaviour is not to be regulated like that of a machine' (W: 32).

Dick's 'kinship' (W: 31) with machines calls into question the process of curiosity and perpetual seeking of knowledge. His close relationship with the motorbike he carefully, almost lovingly pulls apart, polishes and puts back together, indicates that Dick himself 'is a sort of machine' (W: 32); in the same way that the motorbike may be 'mastered', Dick's perception also, is defined and limited. As a miniature model of 'cause and effect', the motorbike represents exactly the type of reality Crick and others desire; however, others more intelligent than Dick seek to 'master' mysteries with secrets less safe than that of the motorcycle's. Indeed, Steiner argues that it is precisely this human predilection towards knowledge that has caused our unhappiness: '[t]he ancient tradition of going after the facts at any price is beginning to come up against walls of absolute social danger and even impossibility' (Nostalgia: 58). Seen in this way, Dick is justifiably 'saviour of the world' (W: 308) - his constitution as that of one who is in a 'regressed' state, like a 'left-over fragment of paradise' (W: 189). Similarly, Henry's speech regarding all people originally being tiny babies sucking their mother's milk, was delivered the same night as he berated Tom for attempting to educate Dick - "Don't educate him! Don't learn 'im to read!"
Henry's vehemence with this point stems from a vague understanding that the factor which enables him to look down 'from his lofty and lucid mindlessness, half in contempt and half in pity at a world blinded by its own glut of imagination' (W: 32), will be eradicated by education. It is education, learning to think, which instils curiosity and dissatisfaction: 'Curiosity begets counter-curiosity, knowledge begets scepticism' (W: 175).

Like the classical literary realists who believed they could master their reality with words, it was the faculty of curiosity and investigation which eventually discredited this belief and left the literary world, thereafter, floundering for methods of appropriation and control. Seen in this way, the character Lewis may be read as a representative of the classical realist sentiment, while Price operates as his diametrical opposite - the postmodern sensibility. Malcolm Bradbury describes the high-Victorian realist period of the mid-nineteenth century as a 'progressive, optimistic' time, riding on pre-Darwinian theological confidence and a post-Enlightenment commitment to truth. Realist George Eliot, for example, often depicted characters 'aspiring to the freedoms of the present and the future' (Modern British Novel: 15). These views complement Lewis' belief that 'history [is] ... the record of inexorable progress ... The future is an ever more glowing prospect' (W: 133), and his dismissal of the past - 'History breeds pessimism' (W: 135). His sarcastic comment: 'And the relevance of the subject to the real world ...' (W: 21) also implies that he believes a single, objective reality exists, another characteristically 'realist' view. His personality is appropriately optimistic and doughty, and he denies the anomalies that problematise his straight-forward world view - 'He'd rather pretend it isn't real' (W: 21). Compared to Lewis' wilfully constructive attitude, Price is positively de-constructive. His habit, for example, of daubing his cheeks with an off-white make-up 'which gave to
his face the pallor of a corpse' (W: 5), expresses his fears regarding the build-
up of nuclear armaments, and parodies the gradual 'extermination of
memory, of history, of the social' described by Baudrillard as symptoms of
the postmodern age (Simulacra and Simulations: 49). Furthermore, his
continual questioning of authority echoes the postmodern urge to subvert
metanarratives and undermine absolutes.

The realist period, according to Baudrillard, 'lived in the march of
history, in the euphoric ... expectation of a revolution - today one has the
impression that history has retreated, leaving behind it an indifferent
nebula, traversed by currents, but emptied of references' (Simulacra and
Simulations: 43-44). Indeed, Price's peers have nightmares of dying 'in a
great big traffic jam' on a motorway (W: 256); motorways, especially the
massive, multi-layered, intersecting kind, are precisely 'currents' emptied
of reference, circuitous networks traversed by desperate travellers heading
nowhere: 'They think that they're going to get somewhere safe. They think
that, even thought they've been told it's pointless' (W: 256). It is within
this 'indifferent nebula' that we need an amalgamation of Lewis and Price's
ideologies. We need Lewis's to 'stop the world slipping away' (W: 291), and
the Price's to point out that it is slipping, always slipping back to how it was.
The fusion of these two efforts can be found in Crick's character; he
represents the middle-point concerned with 'repeatedly, never-endingly
retrieving what is lost. A dogged and vigilant business. A dull yet valuable
business. A hard, inglorious business' (W: 291). Both Lewis and Price, in
their extremes, are wrong. Lewis's conception that what the future offers is
an 'ever more glowing prospect' (W: 133) is as mistaken as Price's holocaust
concerns, because human life will go on in cycles, and our task is not to
'build empires', but vigilantly keep our heads above water and stop
ourselves from sinking.
The ultimate lesson of *Waterland* is that nature will always reach a balance, and this should be the objective of all human endeavours. There are numerous examples throughout *Waterland* of this impulse. The foremost of these is the image of the cycle which, in its very symmetry, is a form of balance. Just as the circle is always going somewhere and going nowhere at the same time, the concept of balance retains, in this instance, an element of ambiguity. Like silt for example, 'which shapes and undermines continents; which demolishes as it builds; which is simultaneous accretion and erosion; neither progress nor decay' (*W*: 7).

According to Hutcheon, 'A more perfect image of the postmodern paradox would be hard to find' (*Politics*: 55) - neither one thing nor the other, yet reaching a kind of 'positive stillness'\(^{11}\) at the fulcrum, the metaphor of silt resembles Swift's efforts to build structures of order and meaning, while simultaneously deconstructing them. Alternatively, Crick mentions the theory of hubris in which 'there can be no success with impunity, no great achievement without accompanying loss' (*W*: 62). And then there is water 'which, however much you coax it, this way and that, will return, at the slightest opportunity, to its former equilibrium' (*W*: 62). And indeed, the characters toil for centuries to alter the level of the water; it is only the wise Cricks who learn to accept the single-mindedness of the waters of reality. With their 'amphibious' ability to find a balance between living half on land and half in water, it is only the Cricks who are mindful that 'however much you resist them, the waters will return ... something in nature wants to go back' (*W*: 15).

T.S. Eliot's comment, 'human kind/ Cannot bear very much reality'\(^{12}\), summarises the overall sentiment of *Waterland*. Consistent throughout the novel is an implicit struggle between humanity and nature;

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\(^{11}\) Hassan, Ihab. *The Dismemberment of Orpheus*. 248.
humanity, desperate and fearful, is 'locked in elemental violence' (W: 230) against an indifferent, 'empty wilderness'. Everywhere there are images of containment and restriction - the 'tamed and cultivated' Fens (W: 2); Crick's students 'encaged like animals removed from a natural habitat' (W: 51); Mary incarcerated in an asylum - reflecting human efforts to impose their will on natural disorder. The characters, burdened by a 'glut of imagination' (W: 32), are unsatisfied with the slow-moving, formless, and inevitably pointless movements of nature; unlike Crick's Golden Retriever which is content with meaningless games of instinct and repetition (W: 113), the characters need to understand why everything is the way it is, and ask to what end it stands for. Furthermore, blind to the cyclical rather than progressive patterns of nature, characters seek to learn and improve, 'build empires' and forge a way towards a better future. However their efforts, by some mysterious law of hubris, always results in a regression, a step back to where they first began.

Jacques Ehrmann articulates the precise sentiment of Waterland:

The 'meaning of history' (and of literature) is therefore only a myth to which we have clung - perhaps out of our weakness and cowardice or of some visceral desire to believe that life has a foundation that could justify it, out of some obscure need to orient ourselves and thereby attempt to protect ourselves from what our society calls madness. (253)

Like the progress-orientated Atkinsons who doggedly work towards land-reclamation, who tirelessly build dams and sluices, cut channels and pump water, humanity uses illusions such as religion, superstition, alcohol and fairy-tales to combat the sense that 'everything might amount to nothing' (W: 233). As Crick learns, 'its all a struggle to preserve an artifice. Its all a struggle to make things not seem meaningless. Its all a fight against fear'
(W: 208). Although a novel which is 'neither one thing nor the other' (W: 2), Swift's opinion that fiction is our best defence against fear appears to be incontestable: after all, if the novel itself is shown to be an artifice, yet still exists as an acknowledged product of Swift's imagination, then fiction is important in Swift's view despite its transparency. Waterland encourages the use of fiction as a tool for the late-twentieth century, a refuge from the expansive sense of void. Fiction allows frustrating ambiguity to become 'inexplicable wonders' (W: 100), flat, empty land to become 'miraculous land' (W: 101), an 'expectant stage on which magical things could happen': 'Because, despite everything, despite emptiness, monotony, this Fenland, this palpable earth raised out of the flood by centuries of toil, is a magical, a miraculous land' (W: 101).
Out of this World

But I think the world cannot bear to be only what it is. The world always wants another world, a shadow, an echo, a model of itself. -Out of this World: 187

Swift's prefatory quote - 'What the eye sees not, the heart rues not' - predicates Out of this World's concern about the intense re-orientation of contemporary culture towards visual representation and the consequential strain it places on our ability to perceive and discern the real. The three main characters in Out of this World represent an 'index of the twentieth century': Robert Beech exemplifies the 'age of mud' and sepia, 'that brown, obscure age' of the early 1900s; his son Harry, a news photographer, experiences the mid-century years of monochrome; while Harry's daughter Sophie is part of the bright, blinding chaos of late-twentieth century colour - 'the days of Kodachrome and technicolour and colour TVs' (OW: 203). As such Swift has used photography metaphors to portray three generations of a troubled family whose deep psychological stresses are implicitly linked with the progressive rise of photography and its manifestations - cinema, television and the media. Along with World War II Swift suggests that photography has become a major shaping factor in the twentieth century; a

1 Hereafter all parenthetical references to Out of this World (New York: Vintage, 1988), are abbreviated to OW.
system of mass-image production which has turned the latter part of this
century into an age of simulacrum wherein a disillusioned society can no
longer differentiate between image and reality.

*Out of this World* identifies photography as one of the key factors
(aside from the 'death of God') responsible for the sense of emptiness found
in the postmodern world. As opposed to *Waterland* and *Ever After*, Swift's
narrative is neither didactic nor solution-orientated; instead, the novel's
form, characterisations and content portray this condition and its
consequences. As such, Swift presents *Out of this World* as a postmodern
'artefact', 'an icon, a totem, a curio' (*OW*: 120). It is narrative imitating the
forms and ideology of photography - a documented record of random
moments in the past presented subjectively in 'snapshot' style - yet it
resembles realist principles in its attempt to mirror this reality and explain
or find logic in experience. While in *Waterland* characters disturbed by a
flat and soggy environment turned to the artifices of home-made history
and story-telling for reprieve, *Out of this World*'s characters invest their
dreams of meaning and order in the empty domain of the photographic
image. The irony inherent within this dynamic reiterates *Waterland*'s
assertion that people caught in the late-twentieth century void of
consumerism and apocalyptic excesses are returning to artificial
constructions of the real. Consequently Swift's preoccupation with both
postmodern and traditional realist literary styles, and his exploration of the
complex relation between fact and fiction, are continued.

Swift sees photography as important in the way it has affected
representation and the way people perceive reality. Primarily, the
proliferation of images has resulted in a state of simulacrum as defined by
theorist Jean Baudrillard: 'a generation by models of a real without origin
or reality: a hyperreal'; that is, a state in which the original no longer
outlasts the simulation, in fact, the simulacrum comes before the original,
thus 'the precession of simulacra' (Baudrillard, *Precession*: 253). As a consequence, people see themselves and their environment in terms of constructed stereotypes promoted by film and the media. Their symbiosis into the image world is motivated by the belief that the illusion of mimesis that photographs project will provide the meaning and order humanity craves. In this way photography is equated with the classical realist doctrine in its apparent collusion with 'truth' and objectivity - its 'authentic synthetic' nature.

*Out of this World* is told by Harry Beech and his estranged daughter Sophie in alternating narratives which enact the dislocation they describe. The interpolated monologues, dwelling mostly on recollections of significant moments in their past, are motivated by a shared need to make sense of a painful familial history comprised of deceit, misunderstandings, resentment and violence. The dénouement which shatters their lives and relationships irrevocably comes when family patriarch Robert Beech is killed in a horrific bomb blast at the family 'fortress'. The literal fragmentation of this referent is symbolically manifested thereafter in Sophie and Harry's narratives, which describe the events leading up to this moment and the years of isolation which follow. Swift uses apophesis and brief passages of paratactic speech to show how, when put under pressure, narrative breaks down and the world becomes literally 'unspeakable':

> Because you don't believe it. You don't believe that one moment - Then the next - Because you don't believe it can have happened. So it goes on happening. Till you believe it. How can I tell you what I don't believe? What do you want me to say? I was there. Heard. Saw. On the spot. How does that help? (*OW*: 109).
Pure experience or reality, especially a reality as momentarily traumatic as this, is a slippery and subjective entity. Fictions such as language that attempt to record this reality are handicapped by the artificial connection between referent and signifier; the emotionally-constricted Beech family is the human embodiment of this handicap to which their surname - '(b)roken sp(eech)' - can testify. The lack of a viable method of interpreting, comprehending and describing such an experience results in a noticeable breakdown in Sophie's linguistic command of the situation. 'Something happens to time. Something happens to normality. A hole gets blasted in it. A hole with no bottom to it' (OW: 109). Sophie expresses this breakdown as a 'hole', thus highlighting the gap between experience and language. The 'bottomlessness' she equates with her existence constitutes an awareness of the non-linear movement of time, her tenuous grasp of reality and her frustration in apprehending her 'true' identity, factors which combine to form a sense of living in a vacuum.

Because there is a language 'hole', some of the characters have turned to photography as a superior method of recording reality. The reason for Harry and Sophie's final separation was that Sophie witnessed Harry taking photographs out the window moments after the bomb blast. Harry's motivation for this is unknown, but the implications of this action are manifold: it shows that photography has the potential to record and display fleeting moments of experience that, hitherto, language could only partially capture. In this way the camera satisfies the human desire for explanation, interpretation and 'possession' of an evasive reality. Unlike Sophie's 'blasted' memory of the incident, the camera's objective eye was able to record and exhibit the scene with accuracy of detail. As Harry comments, 'photography should be about what you cannot see . . . because it is far away and only the eye of the camera will take you there. Or what you cannot see because it happens so suddenly or so cruelly there is no time
or even desire to see it, and only the camera can show you what it is like while it is still happening' (OW: 55). Photographic images, then, have begun to eclipse language as the preferred medium of characters desperate to make sense of senselessness.

Susan Sontag explains that people's preference for images over the real thing is caused by the progressive complicating and weakening of notions of what is real (On Photography: 160). Science and technology are partly responsible for this. Harry's father, who survived the 'full, galloping gamut of the twentieth century', says 'I've lived to see men land on the moon' (OW: 11): from this instance of making possible what was once believed to be impossible, it is clear that there is no border between reality and fantasy, and that there are no limits to what technology can do.

Robert's comment heralds a new age where the notions of belief and make-belief are no longer straightforward: 'There was an expression on his face as if he, too, didn't know what was real and what wasn't' (OW: 14). Later that year in a speech, Robert talks of 'the "courage" (he used that word) of science in penetrating the "strongholds of romance". The Apollo landings, the cardiac transplant. The moon. The heart' (OW: 91). Harry's recollection of this speech suggests not only a bitterness towards his father personally but a scepticism about the benefits of scientific progress. Robert's choice of the term 'strongholds of romance' places him firmly within the mould of the Victorian truth-seeker, spurred by Darwin and the promise of the industrial revolution and resolutely spurning the perceived dead-weights of myth and superstition. As a war veteran, however, Harry has experienced excesses of unromantic reality, and knows both the downfall of too much progress and the redemptive benefits of fantasy.

Out of this World's focus on warfare further demonstrates the manner in which technology contributes to the weakening of people's perception of reality. Both Robert and Harry have direct access to the
influence of war: Robert, after losing his arm in the apparently 'heroic' act of throwing a grenade, inherits Beech Munitions Company, manufacturers of war weaponry. Harry, rebelling against his father's wishes to join the family business, chooses instead to record the devastation caused by his father's products: 'I learnt to distinguish the marks of destruction - the massive ruptures of 4,000-pounders from the blisters of 1,000-pounders and the mere pock-marks of 250-pound clusters' (OW: 47: my italics). 'Progress' which enabled men to view satellite pictures of the lunar-landscape, contributed also to transforming the environment into a devastated version of the moon. Harry uses personification to implicate the human damage equated with the statistical objectivity of aerial damage estimation.

'As the operations progressed, the statistics grew larger, the images more other-worldly, more crater-ridden, more lunar' (OW: 47) - as science and technology improved the effectiveness of munitions destruction became more apparent. Harry's ambivalence towards the march of science and knowledge over fantasy therefore, is based on the fear that the further we progress with science, the further away we move from humanity and the human 'heart'.

The atrocities of World War II depicted in Out of this World indicate improvements in weapon development and a further weakening of perceptions of reality. The enormity of the suffering and the incredible death tally - 'they were itemising the deaths of millions' (OW: 31) - upset general notions of limits and justice. Marguerite Alexander says World War II 'placed a strain on that distinction between the credible and the incredible on which the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century bourgeois realist novel depended' (13), an idea which posits World War II as a pivotal factor alongside photography in bringing about the postmodern literary sensibility. The war revealed a heinous side to human nature that was difficult for most people to accept, and threw them into confusion over
their own morality when the loss of a life on a massive scale became a matter they had sanctioned by supporting their government's declaration of war. Grieving for one person seemed absurd when millions more were in the same situation: 'How do we solemnize one death and ignore a thousand others?' (OW: 22). Harry's experience of war made him over-protective of his young daughter, hoping that if someone must die it be some other little girl. The realisation that war has made life 'tradeable, expendable' serves to further diminish our sense that some things remain sacred: if nothing is sacred then nothing is real.

Aside from their weakened perceptions of what is real and what is not, characters in Out of this World often prefer images to reality simply because reality turns out to be so banal. Continuing with Tom Crick's notion in Waterland regarding '[t]he great, flat monotony of reality; the wide, empty space of reality' (W: 15), Out of this World proffers a similar description of what constitutes the real. Sophie embarks on an anticipated odyssey of discovery as a young woman by travelling to Greece in search of heritage and identity. Well-versed in her classics and proud of her Mediterranean beauty, her hopes are built on the cotton-wool of dreams:

While there was rock-and-roll and Elvis and the Beatles, I became this student of the Ancients. When I wasn't riding around on Hadrian, imagining I was living in the reign of Queen Anne, I was going back a couple of thousand years more, delving into dead languages and imagining I might one day become, I don't know, something which made a virtue out of obsolescence - a curator! A brilliant female archaeologist!' (OW: 124).

Sophie's attempts to find her true identity are paralleled with the youthful passion for rock and roll images such as Elvis and the Beatles. Her naive enthusiasm that her destiny will be revealed in the land of her 'mythical
Greek mother', clearly rests on illusory grounds. Instead of Gods and heroes she discovers 'miles and miles of flat tobacco fields . . . sad stumps of crumbling minarets' (OW: 126). The metaphor of flat land resembling reality is reiterated here to impress Swift's point that the curves and bumps are a man-made construction (like the man-made hills and clumps of woodland observed from Peter's Cessna), impelled by a need for action and excitement: 'But drama is a funny thing, isn't it? You want it. Everyone wants it. Who doesn't want a little drama in their lives? Then when you get it, you find it's just what you can do without' (OW: 125).

Indeed, the characters in Out of this World have come to prefer the image to reality because the substitute world conveyed in images is frequently more attractive. For this reason Sophie's husband Joe is able to make a successful career as a travel agent 'offering credulous Americans the charms of cosy old England' (OW: 58). Joe, who calls himself 'Joseph of the rainbow-coloured coat' (OW: 149), sells images and dreams to people who want to be taken 'away from it all'. But 'away-from-it-all is such a shifting, strange, elusive place. There isn't a point in the world where you can get away from the world, not any more, is there?' (OW: 15). This is a world where people are desperate to escape their personal realities, and their lives have become attempts at integration into the image-world. They come to Joe to get 'away from it all', but as Sophie realises after her own failed attempts to escape reality in foreign countries, reality follows you. The only place to escape reality would be somewhere 'out of this world', and even there, as the astronauts who embraced religion on return to earth illustrated (OW: 13), it does not offer enough. However, this appears to be the nature of the image: it promises everything and delivers nothing. It is a 'come-on, a sales pitch' (OW: 15), that when approached, vaporises into air: thus Harry's sense upon being shown as a child the 'stuff of the future' - an aeroplane control panel - of being lifted into the 'age of air' (OW: 208).
Preference for the image over reality leads to incidents of life imitating the image. Harry's old English cottage in the picturesque town of Wiltshire becomes a parody of itself in Harry's perception, being all too aware that it might be a picture from one of Joe's brochures come to life:

I was lying awake haunted by the noise of owls and foxes. I would go for long, determined walks and watch the silver clouds gliding over green hills, rooks flapping over gnarled trees, and say to myself: I don't believe this. I would come back to the cottage, open the front gate, walk through the picture-book facade and crawl into the tent of myself. (OW: 60)

Harry is disturbed by the unreality of his situation. Wiltshire may well serve as an allegory for Harry's overall perception in that the age of simulacrum has made it an impossible combination of reality and illusion. Now that the 'age of air' has appropriated the Old World into visions of 'thatched cottages and stately homes. Patchwork scenery, sweet green visions' (OW: 15), Harry feels as if he is living in some kind of cliché, as if his reality is conforming to the brochure photos and imitating the image. Now living the image, he ironically wishes to escape into the 'tent' of his self, unsure and insecure about his inability to fathom what is real and what is not, and aware, moreover, that the fantasy-derived perceptions of his situation are based on an illusion that will never live up to its idyllic promise.

Harry's new-found relationship with his young assistant Jenny operates as an extension of this idea. Harry describes a happiness and contentment from being with her that reminds him of images of romance propagated by popular culture and myth:
Miracles shouldn't happen. Picture-books aren't real. The fairy-tales all got discredited long ago, didn't they? ... As if I should have resorted to the lonely hearts columns, and discovered, at the first attempt, lo and behold, my heart was cured of its loneliness ... (OW: 79).

Interestingly, Harry's descriptions of Jenny are juxtaposed with mention of his love of flying. Swift's device for equating the feeling of being 'in love' with the 'magic' (OW: 38) sensation of being airborne. If flying is reconnected with the earlier mention of air as a metaphor for the image, then love too, in Swift's perception, may well be an illusion. Harry and Jenny's behaviour - building a 'love nest' (OW: 35), dawn missions, 'clueless adolescent' infatuation - certainly imitates the popular 'image' of romance, but this time the notion of 'illusion' as something negative, vapid or unfulfilling is complicated. Illusion in this sense enables Harry to gain a focus and perspective in circumstances which otherwise bewilder him with their scale and complexity. He says he could almost be guilty of believing that the rest of the world does not matter, that it 'revolves round that tinier and tinier figure, as it revolves round a cottage in Wiltshire, where she has taken up residence. That I am home, home' (OW: 39). The relief implicit in his words is a direct result of the stress of living in a time where communications and technology have forced us to acknowledge daily the massive scale of existence, like the picture of the earth from the moon 'hanging in the black velvet of space' (OW: 14). Our natural inability to comprehend our place on something this scale is remedied somewhat by illusions such as romance which provide an arbitrary sense of order.

The result of this preference is a destabilisation of the border between reality and image in the characters' perceptions. *Out of this World* portrays the twentieth century as being exhaustively documented: 'this vast display of evidence, this exhibition of recorded data, this continuously running
movie' (OW: 119). The increasing sophistication and availability of cameras, the incredible speed of satellite communication and television media, and the popularity of cinema have triggered a massive proliferation of images. 'Images ultimately have no finality and proceed by total contiguity, infinitely multiplying themselves according to an irresistible epidemic process which no one today can control' (Baudrillard: 'Evil Demon': 194). With advanced cultures conditioned to deal with this welter of images on a daily basis, changes in perception occur; reality seems to become like a movie or an image, and images appear to be real. Sophie, for example, observes that when you see a much-photographed site such as the Parthenon in Greece, 'you're amazed it's really real' (OW: 125). People come to believe that something they have observed so often before as an image, is in fact 'out of this world' and not in it; a two-dimensional myth that exists as image alone, not reality. Conversely, disillusioned with the formlessness and banality of reality, Sophie hopes it will occasionally emulate images of reality - 'what's the point of life, and what's the point of goddam movies, if now and then you can't discover that the way you thought it isn't, the way you thought it only ever is in movies, really is the way it is?' (OW: 145). Characters can be seen, therefore, to be caught in an pointless cycle; they pursue images in order to legitimise, and infuse meaning into their reality, yet simultaneously, these same images are depleting and distorting their perception of reality.

In a sense, then, the proliferation of images stemming from the rise of photography, and the overload of information caused by communications technology has resulted in what may be termed an 'image-system' - that is, new codes of representation and perception infiltrating society. *Out of this World* shows the gradually evolving effects of this image-system on the three generations of Beeches. Like Robert's assorted prosthetic arms, each successive generation moves further away
from a sense of the real: 'earlier ones are shapely, useless bits of sculpture that gradually lose their anthropomorphic wishfulness and their aesthetic pretensions; the later ones look like nothing human, but actually simulate the function of the arm' (OW: 200). Swift implies the twentieth century has reached a state of simulacrum wherein the real has disappeared and been replaced by sophisticated replications. Baudrillard lists the successive phases of the image in a way which traces the basic changes occurring in the past century. First, it reflects basic reality - this stage (represented by Robert) evokes a time when God was a widely accepted notion, a force which helped define truth and provide meaning. Second, the image begins to mask and pervert reality; this is the stage which Harry Beech embodies, the turn of the century years when art for art's sake began to take precedence as an entity in itself, when narrative broke away from its mimetic-realist base, and artists experiencing a lost sense of authentic being sought to find it in their work. The third and fourth stages are the same: the image masks the absence of basic reality and bears no relation to reality at all - it is its own pure simulacrum (Baudrillard, Precession: 256). These stages mark the post-war years experienced by Sophie.

Each generation manifests the effects of their place in the progressive rise of the image-system. Robert represents the (obliterated) times of morality and realism, the late-Victorian age of clarity and optimism. Photography in these years was a new and rare commodity that had little time to make much impact. Robert's attitudes are exemplary in this sense; described by Harry as a staged tableau (OW: 71), their emphasis on duty, fidelity, honour and perseverance reflect a time of absolutes, a belligerent stoicism reminiscent of a confident, theocentric and progressive worldview. Whilst Robert is haranguing Harry about his refusal to join the family company, Harry sees a look of desperation in his father's eyes as if he were pleading to be released from the persona he intractably built for
himself, as if he were suddenly aware in a flash of insight, of his own trap: 'He can't actually change it. He can't come out of it, cast it aside... He's got to go through with it, sound off like some demented Victorian Papa. He's played the part so long he doesn't know anymore if it's him or not' (OW: 72). Robert's secure sense of identity, borne in an age when the notion of real was fixed, wavers only in the later years of his life when he is questioned by his son, firmly ensconced in a different age to his own.

Harry's age is marked by the rise of the image and a gradual disintegration of confidence. His earliest memory is of travelling to school by train and experiencing a feeling of 'numb suspension' of always travelling somewhere but never getting there, 'This is the only place you belong - this transit region, this in-between space' (OW: 121). Harry's thought marks the beginning of times of uncertainty, and suggests his apprehension regarding the future; a premonitory apprehension about a time to come when reality and identity would become an empty, visual, image-based system, a time when, 'All you are is your eyes, all there is is in your eyes, your vision is you' (OW: 121).

The definitive moment that marks the crossover from Harry's modernist period into Sophie's postmodern period is, in Out of this World at least, the moment of the bomb blast. Sophie describes to her psychoanalyst her feeling after the incident of unreality, as if the ultimate inversion had taken place within her and she was now fully complicit in the age of simulacrum: 'This isn't real, I am simply not here. I am still in a white daze, I am still in the white, numb, noiseless daze that follows the blast of the bomb... I'm not here. I'm just watching this' (OW: 85).

Indeed, Sophie has entered a hyperreality where the real ceases to exist, all notions of true identity are dismissed and life is experienced in a daze of surface and spectacle. It is similar to her later description of death; 'the whitest, hottest, blindingest flash there is' (OW: 87), in this case implying
the death of the real, the moment when the last 'real' thing is blasted away. Sophie's age is characterised by saturation of images in a 'well-informed and hyper-communicative world' (OW: 139). She spends hours with her therapist recounting her past in a desperate bid to piece together her family history and gain a sense of identity. Her dialogue is contemporary: she swears frequently and discusses sex openly, she uses colloquialisms and slang, her tone is hard and demanding, fragmented and filled with stock phrases and slogans: 'The facts of life, my darlings. Your parents fuck. They don't fuck. Your Mummy fucks around. Your Dad is good about things. Because he's good, she fucks. Gets fucked. Is all fucked-up' (OW: 139). Being 'all fucked up' is another frustrated attempt to use language to express a time which evades representation, yet desperately requires a structuring force. Sophie is speaking in a postmodern syntax - a language mediated by the image-system which governs it. Her effort at talking to Harry for the first time in years, for example, is symbolically 'shattered' by the intervening bomb (OW: 110-111): although she tries to use language to articulate her fears and posit some form of meaning and order into her fragmented existence, language does little more for her than fragment and obscure things further.

The simulacrum involves a complex inter-play between image and reality. To begin with, people believe that reality is an image: Harry imagines the battle-weary soldiers in Vietnam are thinking, 'I don't like this movie. Get me out of this movie. Someone, for Chrissakes, cut this SCENE!' (OW: 189). Likewise, the real cannot be real unless it is an image; the television coverage of the Gulf war and the Falklands war is accompanied by a 'task-force of cameras . . . As if without them it could not take place' (OW: 189). Alternately, images seem to come alive, step off the screen and live among us like the television soap-operas people watch with the deference of real-life drama. 'The movies you see aspire to the
"actuality" of the newsreel, while TV can never have enough "real-life" footage. So that it's no longer easy to distinguish the real from the fake, or the world on the screen from the world off it' (OW: 188). New York, in this sense, becomes Swift's (quint)essential postmodern city, an imitation of its own image: 'New York! Wow! Is this real? It's just like in all those films' (OW: 150). Sophie's desire to live in New York was predicated on the belief that she could escape from her past, that the 'land of cancelled memories' (OW: 16) would allow her to enter a type of cinematic perpetual-present without origins or memory. Ironically she finds that when you 'step through the screen' of the 'dream city' (OW: 151), you find a reality - '[t]hese clean, hard, soaring, futuristic lines were mixed up with something crumbling, blighted, decomposed' (OW: 16) - thus exposing the real and the image to have become caught in an inextricable, paradoxical bind.

'When did it happen?', Harry asks,

That imperceptible inversion. As if the camera no longer recorded but conferred reality. As if the world were the lost property of the camera. As if the world wanted to be claimed and possessed by the camera. To translate itself, as if afraid it might otherwise vanish, into the new myth of its own authentic-synthetic photographic memory. (OW: 189)

The exact moment of this inversion is undecidable, but a 'new myth' has become apparent - if it is not on film, it is not real. Cameras represent the possibility of 'saving' a world in danger of 'vanishing' into high-tech monotony and meaninglessness. So much so that the constant surveillance of an 'all-seeing, unfeeling, inhuman eye' produces a paranoia; not about being watched but about not being watched (OW: 189). 'The camera first, then the event. The whole world is waiting to get turned into film' (OW: 13). As Sontag observes, 'people in non-industrialised
countries still feel apprehensive when being photographed, divining it to be some kind of trespass, an act of disrespect, a sublimated looting of the personality or the culture, [whereas] people in industrialized countries seek to have their photographs taken - feel that they are images, and are made real by photographs' (On Photography: 161). The sense that images confer reality is not surprising when one considers that all actions undertaken today will inevitably be a replay of Greek mythology. Harry considers the British Task Force setting off for the Falklands to be an event which is willed to happen, rather than a regrettable necessity. He suggests that the spectacle of setting out to war is a 'pantomime', a 'performance' reminiscent of the Greek myth of Iphigeneia. The constructions of myth are preferable to reality because of their flair for meaning and purpose, for promoting action and excitement:

I think of Uncle Edward, the bright hope of New College, who marched off to war in 1915, his head full of the words and the deeds of the Greeks and Romans and the myths which they had filled their own heads. Who knows if that other world in his head made it harder or easier for him to bear... what he found? (OW: 187)

And just as Harry is taught at school that to immerse himself in the world of myth would allow him to 'enter another world', he later finds that the (cinematic) image empowered him with the same heightened sense of reality. The glamours of fictions are the realities we prefer, and confer on our lives.

The consequence of this complicated relationship between images and reality is a struggle for meaning as the postmodern individual, faced with the void of glitter and superficiality, seeks paradoxically to find some substance in the image-system. The images are seductive as a last
remaining promise of fulfilment - as 'out of this world' delights and fantasy escape. When Joe's parents buy a television it fills a gap in their lives and promises Joe a world of possibilities outside his confined family life: 'What the TV said was that a good time was coming' (OW: 151). Within the novel, however, a clear pattern of hope leading to disappointment becomes apparent. Being representative of the age most affected by the image-system, Sophie is the character who suffers most of the let-downs. When she discovers that New York is not the sanctuary the image promised, for example, but a hard, violent, 'broken-land', she acknowledges the same transition has occurred psychologically within her by 'fucking' Nick the plumber and making the corruption complete. Her odyssey to Greece and marriage to Joe as a young woman are further examples of her singular faith in fictions; the fictions of identity and romance consecutively. Sophie begins to identify this pattern of hope and disappointment in her life and her habit of recalling her early childhood in terms of an idyllic Eden: 'You see, I had this wonderful Mummy and Daddy. Straight from a fairy tale' (OW: 51). The process of talking through her past helps her realise that we 'believe we come from Paradise . . . Then it gets fucked later' (OW: 51). Our habit of recalling the past in terms of an ideal, of expecting our parents to be saints, of believing our country of origin holds the secret to our identity or, conversely, that places far away will allow us to escape our selves, are all false promises propagated by the image. What they do not prepare you for is reality, the reality which Harry's 'adrenalized and tensed . . . gaunt, taut' (OW: 12) appearance testifies to. The empty promises of constructed fictions are clearly the common instigator of their disappointments; the promises defer the notion of death and conceal the fact that death will occur without reason or redemption.
The ability to distract from death stands as an important aspect of the image. To be real is to degenerate and inevitably to die, but images are tantalisingly immobile and permanent. Part of the attraction of the image, therefore, is its promise of immortality. To immortalise oneself on film is an automatic attempt to impose control over a reality which is independent and arbitrary. Harry considers the possibility that the only reason for taking photographs is to stop things from disappearing, to halt the interminable and pointless historical process. 'Photographs are a way of imprisoning reality, understood as recalcitrant, inaccessible; of making it stand still' (Sontag: 163). The photo is a 'reprieve [from the motion], an act of suspension, a charm' (OW: 122). A photo may also be an attempt to prevent the loss of family and friends: 'To take a photograph is to participate in another person's (or thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's relentless melt' (Sontag: 15). Indeed, this is the very reason why Harry refuses to take Jenny's photograph, recognising that '[w]hen you put something on record, when you make a simulacrum of it, you have already partly decided you will lose it' (OW: 55).

In this sense, Harry knows that taking someone's photograph is an act of violation comparable to the notion held in primitive cultures that the photograph 'steals' or even 'destroys' an essential part of the person. Harry says, for example, he was trained to use a camera in 'the same manner as a rifle drill' (OW: 49). 'Like a car', Sontag notes, 'a camera is sold as a predatory weapon - one that's as automated as possible, ready to spring' (14). The 'load', 'shoot', 'fire' connotations draw an obvious parallel between photography and assault, but one of the clearest ways Harry's photography may be seen to be complicit with violation, is in his implicit collaboration with the violent events he photographs; after all, to record is not to intervene. An interviewer questioning Harry asks whether his
images could be considered an invasion of privacy. He cites the example of a photo of a Vietnamese woman holding her blood-soaked child which was subsequently published world-wide in the daily newspapers. His reply, that privacy is a notion of the West, overlooks the transposition that takes place when a person becomes an object of photographic contemplation - that is, to photograph or view a photograph of someone is to appropriate and possess them, to place yourself in a position of power and knowledge over them, to abstract a moment in their existence and objectify what is, in reality, a complex, multi-dimensional entity. Harry takes a photograph of a fatally-injured soldier that exudes a 'perverse formality and poise' (OW: 106) characteristic of all abstracted moments: instead of compassion, the photograph evokes fascination or brief pity. This code of appropriation the image holds over its subjects, is highlighted by Swift in order to critique the consequences of image-saturation in our culture.

While a photographer can be seen to be in a position of aggression towards his or her subject, therefore, he or she is also in the process of self-protection. In this way the role of photographer can reasonably be seen to apply to the role of reader, consumer or observer of any kind, locked into the code of mute spectator, participating in a system of silent-semiotics with the spectacle before them. For Harry the distance and objectivity of being 'floating eyes' allows him to avoid risking his carefully constructed wall of security. He watches impartially and records 'objectively' using the rules of the image-system to protect his repressed anxieties. Consequently Harry is using the camera in the same way that all the characters use the 'image-system'; as a carefully cultivated means of repressing their knowledge of the ultimate senselessness of life. The spectator seeks to repress the uncomfortable knowledge that the image is a construct of false integrity: Joe, for example, is temporarily jolted out of his image-secure world at the time of Robert's death - 'He was like a man who'd opened the wrong door
and seen something terrible. But it was okay because you could step out quickly. Quick! Shut the door! Quick! Now he was back, or so he thought, where he belonged' (OW: 137). The image world provides an artificial sanctuary when reality becomes unbearable. Within this world everything is a spectacle for viewing impartially, emotionlessly, 'gazing on other people's reality with curiosity, with detachment, with professionalism' (Sontag: 55). This was the feeling of immunity which impelled the American corporal to take frantic snap-shots of a pile of concentration camp corpses like an agitated sight-seer (OW: 108). This is also what may explain Dr K's role in the text. Like Baudelaire's flaneur, Dr K watches and listens without the threat of having the subject turn on him: 'You see and you're not seen. You take a good long peek, but you remain immune' (OW: 26). The image-system, therefore, provides an illusory sense of immunity while allowing voyeuristic intrusion into other worlds.

This ability to repress the pain of seeing by subsuming oneself into the image leads to a weakened capacity to be surprised, disturbed or entertained. A society which views images of death and suffering on a daily basis, which encounters daily reportings of the paranormal and spectacular, develops an immunity. Nothing impresses anyone because, as Harry surmises, 'people have seen it all' (OW: 20). Watching the first Apollo moon landing and listening to the grave, pre-rehearsed message, Harry wonders why the astronauts do not 'start jumping and bouncing for sheer joy. They are going to start leaping and cavorting in that gravity-less freedom, in those clown suits, for sheer, delirious amazement that they are there on the surface of the moon' (OW: 13). Similarly, Sophie's children, on their first international air flight, are bored: 'a long time ago, they'd have thought what we're doing now was magic. Impossible! Out of this world! . . . And now we get into these things . . . and say: How about something to keep us amused?!' (OW: 202). Brian McHale calls this the
'banalization' of the fantastic, and documents characters' failure to be amazed by exceptional occurrences as a characteristic of postmodern fiction. Although Out of this World does not describe supernatural happenings such as the Coronation ale incident in Waterland, it does emphasise the breakdown in people's ability to discern between the boring and the interesting. 'The possibility of producing the fantastic effect is dependent upon the possibility of representing the real', says McHale (74); thus, characters' attempts to elevate their banal lives into some form of significance and excitement through the discourses of film and television, inadvertently produces the opposite effect.

Raw from his father's rejection and bitterly keen to rebel, Harry begins his career in the belief that he can produce factual evidence of wartime atrocities that link back (in his mind at least), to his father: 'I wanted to be a photographer. I didn't say witness, observer, neutral party, floating pair of eyes' (OW: 70). His aim, like the objective 'white-coated scientist' (OW: 119), is to make documentary images, to '[a]void beauty, composition, statements, symbols, eloquence, rhetoric, decorum, taste. All that is painting' (OW: 92). But, asks the television-journalist interviewing Harry, 'would you say that there is no personal element in your work. Nothing of yourself. No bit of Harry Beech?' (OW: 117). The fictions we create and use to provide a meaningful framework in our lives all in some sense reflect our basic reality. Furthermore, these fictions maintain the pretence that their version of the real is objective and accurate in detail. Narratological constructions such as history and story-telling for example, make claim (at least partially) to some mimetic basis. Of all fictions photography attests to having the greatest power for recording reality as it is. Any image, photographic or otherwise, is a sight which has been artificially recreated or reproduced, and herein lies the contradiction in Harry's assumption. Any sight which is manufactured artificially, however
accurate, is a *selected* sight. The photographer has chosen this particular sight over an infinite number of others, and has imposed his or her own borders or 'frame' on the subject. In this way, the photographer's task is like the storyteller's, or the historian's, in that all he needs to do to transform a tragic into a comic situation is to 'shift his point of view or change the scope of his perceptions' (White: 49), for

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\text{[t]he problem is what you don't see. The problem is your field of vision. (A picture of the whole world!)} \text{. The problem is selection \ldots the frame, the separation of the image from the thing. The extraction of the world from the world. The problem is where and how you draw the line. (OW: 119)}
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The fact that the photographer imparts his or her own ideology into the image is something Harry only gradually ascertains. Harry would not have voluntarily and repeatedly sought out the pain of others unless he was attempting to eradicate his own through a kind of creative purgation. Sontag describes a photographer's body of work as a 'culminative impression of the photographer's consciousness' - collecting images of pain comes from 'the hope of procuring, by means of pain, a strong sensation; those handicapped by emotional or sensory analgesia only prefer pain to not feeling anything at all' (*On Photography*: 40). Alternatively, she adds, they seek it to feel less; Harry, immersing himself in the sorrow of others tries to find refuge from his disordered emotions. The moment of the bomb blast when he quit photo-journalism forever, was when his subjective and creative impact on the image became clear: he realised that a life-time of neglect and loss had impelled him to 'construct' images which reinforced his own emotional turmoil.

This arbitrary 'framing' that is an inevitable part of the photographic process not only 'personalises' the image, but is responsible for a
fragmented cultural perspective. Swift attempts to convey this fragmentation in the text through a number of devices, the first of which is in his portrayal of the Beech family. Both literal and metaphorical fragmentation is rife within the Beech family history, symbolically illustrating a 'break-down' in the twentieth century caused by images. When Sophie thinks of her grandfather for example, she unconsciously links 'home' with 'little bits' (OW: 34). The literal fragmentation of his body parallels a 'broken' family - two generations of missing mothers; the loss of Robert's brothers to war; Anna's unborn child, which turns out to be Frank's; Sophie's dislocation to America; Harry's disinheriance; Robert's missing arm, the family home blown apart - everything in the Beech family is broken or in bits. The second method Swift employs to suggest the effects of photography's fragmented nature, is to suggest that the 'snapshot' style of photographs and the 'spliced' nature of the moving image has influenced the manner in which people visualise. When Harry recalls aspects of his father's life he narrates them in television-documentary style:

Cut to village children on the lawn at Hyfield, mid 1930s (local press material).
Cut to local worthies with R.B. on same lawn, same period. Cut to general view of the house and grounds - "his home for nearly fifty years". Intersperse with film of the bomb-damaged facade, April 1972 . . . (OW: 91)

and so on. Harry's reason for recounting his father's life story in this style may also be a method of distancing himself from a figure whom he feels little connection with. Moreover, the method highlights the impossibility of getting close to the 'essence' of fluid experience and consciousness with images. Ultimately these examples re-confirm the notion that images 'break down' and distort reality while society still ironically invests faith in their ability to stabilise and 'secure'. This may be best imagined in relation
to the trussed and secured family 'fortress' - an artificial and ineffective imposition of order over a family in disarray.

The apparent fragmentation inherent in the collective cultural perception has made its impact most dramatically in the way people understand their past. Popular narratives such as television, radio, film, video, novels, magazines and comics are the main sources used by the postmodern society to help assess, filter and structure the welter of external data they absorb and retain every day. As a consequence cognitive patterns and imaginative consciousness begin to resemble the codes and forms of these discourses. *Out of this World*'s narration is based almost entirely on the mental recollections of its characters who struggle to make sense of and extract meaning from painful personal histories. One of the characteristics of these narrated memories is their segmented and disconnected structure. Harry's sentences are short and clipped like factual statements interspersed with occasional outbursts of emotion. His style, reminiscent of television news-presenter dialogue in its carefully intonated and succinct 'objectivity', operates like an arbitrarily imposed attempt to mask and control his disordered emotions. Sophie's narrative, by contrast, is more confessional in tone, more personal and overt in terms of her feelings, a trait no doubt reflective of the American talk-show cult of free-expression and cathartic disclosure: 'Sure, I'll tell you anything. I'll turn myself inside out for you. Self-respect and modesty haven't exactly been my forte just recently' (98). Their voices are interleaved, cinematically speaking, in short 'takes' so that reading through is like flipping channels on television. As Anne Dûchene has observed, 'What they remember, what they look forward to, and the way in which they project their lives, are all, in effect, a series of visible scenes: still photos or moving pictures captured from a particular viewpoint (their own), developed and fixed, and stored like in a psychic album' (285).
Their recollections are stored like an anthology of images: the past exists in 'traces' - random snapshots in the family photograph album. Instead of taking photos of her children as they grow up Sophie records them on 'mental film' (OW: 75), 'freezing' and 'framing' moments such as a back-yard game of soccer: 'A perfect snapshot. Framed in the kitchen window. The laughing father, the laughing sons' (OW: 76). The aspects of her past Sophie is most likely to recall are the moments which can easily be 'seen' visually in an instant mental 'shot': 'I first menstruated on a horse. So - she told me after Grandad's seventieth: I was drunk and I said, "Snap!" - did Carol Irving' (OW: 77: my italics). Her most vivid recollections of her wedding and her grandfather's funeral is the way they appeared as images. She talks of wanting the 'picture complete' and creating the right image: 'You should see the pictures, Doctor K. Look them up in back numbers. They're great pictures. He with his arm around me and me with my leg bent and my hand to my face' (OW: 85). Sophie has also developed a habit of turning words and ideas into visual form, 'And if half the language that was being used had actually taken solid shape, there'd have been muffled drums and plumes and rifle volleys' (OW: 84). Sophie's 'image-memories' are the logical consequence of a (post)modern mind trying to impose some form of structure on the past. The past returns to her only as parcels of 'truth', representations resembling the forms of photography from which she is able to formulate her own arbitrary explanations and conclusions.

Essentially, this attempt to impose order on her tangled past is futile; after all, the methods we use to represent the past, such as historical discourse, language or storytelling are all fictions in themselves, fictions attempting to make 'truth' out of a remembered past which in itself can only be a fiction. It is like the problem of including Robert's prosthetic arm in a bronze sculpture, 'the problem of artificially representing an artificial arm' (OW: 94). Like the benign dads of the carefully resurrected 'ancient'
university in *Ever After*, caught in an 'illusion of the illusion' (*Ever After*: 9), Sophie tries to turn her past into a fairy tale in order to redeem the present, or at least, make it seem as if life was once perfectly ordered and meaningful - ('[t]he world is safe and small - it only stretches to the next hill! The sky is blue - of course it's blue! . . . And all is as it should be . . .' (*OW*: 66) - that life had order and meaning. This is revealed, for instance, in her twisting of memories to suit her idyllic concept of childhood when 'the world was just sun and sand and sea and salt air' (*OW*: 52). The event, a near drowning incident, is recalled separately by Harry to illustrate that memories are only an interpretation of events. Sophie says she does not remember drowning but later concedes that it is difficult to know 'when you go back that far, that it's really memory . . . not what you were told later' (*OW*: 51). Harry, however, believes she was drowning. The reality remains unknowable but the difference of opinions shows reality to be a text open to interpretation in any way that suits the interpreter: 'That's what I saw: my daughter drowning' (*OW*: 166). This incident serves to highlight that the realist notion of a 'true', objective history that may be accessed through a pursuit of fact, detail and impartial evidence, are in fact 'verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much invented as found and the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in the sciences' (*White*: 42).

The subject of memory and the implications of recalling the past are incontrovertibly a major aspect of this novel. The first line of the text begins 'I remember . . .' (*OW*: 11), and thereafter the narrative enters the present only intermittently. The difficulty of confronting one's past, summed up by Sophie's comment, 'Going back can be the hardest journey' (*OW*: 192), is expressed as a struggle between trying to remember and simultaneously trying to forget. The process of trying to remember is motivated by the characters' desperate desire to understand the present and
the people they are today. It is like getting a vantage point over your life and lending it some perspective, 'To perch at some perfect window . . . with your perfectly chilled Martini, and reduce it all to a vision' (184). However, to survey your past impartially will not reveal a perfectly ordered sequence of 'cause and effect' events, but a jumble of half-remembered tales and incidents. Walter Benjamin says the 'true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again' (Illuminations: 257). Sophie knows that the only way to reconcile ourselves with the past is to learn to tell: 'It's telling that reconciles memory and forgetting' (OW: 74). However 'fictional' the recollections are, the process of imaginatively reliving your past purges repressed anxieties and provides a framework for understanding both the present and the future.

"Should we turn around now?", Sophie unassumingly asks her doctor, "Stroll back?" (OW: 26). Sophie's eventual decision to do just that, return to her past and confront the painful events which bought her to the psychiatrist's couch, was the action which triggered a process of healing, reconciliation, and release. To this end, Out of this World continues Swift's preoccupation with cycles; the idea that in order to move forward we must move backward. Swift expresses this through a variety of metaphors: for example, the narratives begin in 'Spring, 1982' signifying the cyclical movement of the seasons, and the imminence of regeneration. The novel emphasises family generations and Sophie's sons represent the potential for conciliation of the family's problems. Additionally, Sophie describes her childhood vision of the world being a 'coloured beach-ball, you could catch it in your arms' (OW: 52: my italics). Childhood, here, is portrayed as the time of 'wholeness' when the world seemed to make sense, possess meaning and order that inevitably revolves around yourself and your family. The potential to return to this state is only hinted at in Out of this
The closest we may come to regaining this sense of completeness may be through an admission of our own power to forgive, and accept the world as it is in all its flawed magnificence: 'Just stand back and take in the view. You think this is one brute of a city, but it's also magic, it's amazement to the eye. Distance lends enchantment... To rise above it all. To get a little vantage, a little perspective, a little elevation' (OW: 184).

*Out of this World* spotlights the photographic image as a 'fiction' which resembles the classical realist construction of 'truth' and objectivity. The power of the image, it seems, is in its ability to feign mimetic qualities and therefore suggest the principles of order and signification which society, caught in a gap between the real and the ideal, desperately craves. The novel traces the breakdown of linguistic signification as an indirect consequence of scientific progress, the devastating psychological after-effects of war and most importantly here, the rise of the image-system. The Beech family symbolically constitute an 'index of the twentieth century', and their conflicts and dilemmas directly reflect each consecutive age they represent - everything that happens on a small scale within the Beech family parallels the global reality. Harry's mother dies, for example, during his birth on the eve of World War II; thus Harry represents a forewarning of innocence annihilated: the paradox of birth and death transposed signals the new era in which life is branded with an 'emblem of guilt' (3.3), aware of the random chance of existence yet unaware of any higher purpose to it.

Another example is the bomb blast which causes the ultimate severance of the family's weakening ties, and parallels the 'conversion' or turnover of cultural consciousness into the postmodern age. Related metaphors of 'shattering', dislocation, and the 'noise of absolute silence' (109), sum up the contradictions and sense of breakdown associated with the postmodern sensibility.
Overall, despite the signal of reconciliation at the end of *Out of this World*, the novel remains hesitant as to its belief in the late-twentieth century potential for change. The abundance of metaphors of return (signifying renewed hope) which are evident in *Waterland* and *Ever After*, are strangely lacking in *Out of this World*. And although Harry and Sophie's reunion is foretold, the actual connection is never made, thus provoking the suspicion that Swift's confidence in the ability of contemporary society to re-connect our dislocated and empty times, is only partial. Similarly, while in *Waterland* and *Ever After* fictions are shown to be both illusory and useful in their capacity to create systems of order and meaning, the fiction of photography in *Out of this World* lacks this positive potential. Rather, the image-system further depletes understanding of the 'real', and contributes towards an accentuated sense of fragmentation, disorientation and purposelessness. Seen in this way, the governing symbol of air flight relays the ultimate ambivalence of *Out of this World*'s message: Harry's final mental regression to the moment he was lifted up 'out of this world, out of the age of mud, out of that brown, obscure age, into the age of air' (*W*: 208), conveys both a positive sense of release and a negative sense of escapism. The 'age of air', our formless, image-based, emptied times, is an age of leisure, consumerism and hedonism, the full-time pursuit of fun masking what is actually a terrified flight from emptiness. To be 'out of this world', it seems, is to be fully and intractably complicit with the postmodern void.
Ever After

Tales are marks that leave traces of the human struggle for immortality... human marks invested with desire. They... enunciate the speaker/writer's position in the world - dreams, needs, wishes, experiences... The marks are magical. - Jack Zipes

The ability to tell tales is a gift which provides an arbitrary sense of order and meaning in lieu of its ultimate absence in *Ever After*. Swift returns to his concerns regarding the contemporary *Zeitgeist* wherein characters struggle to understand and cope with a reality without theological authority: the result of this absence, as dramatised by nineteenth century character Matthew Pearce, is a demoralising awareness of the arbitrariness, injustice, and pointlessness of life and death without reason. The solution, Swift suggests, is to use the powers of the imagination to transform perception and thus alter the fictional fabric of reality. Swift shows that if God's absence can be considered the key reason for the (post)modern sense of disorder, it may also prove that reality has become fictional and therefore, suppliant to imaginative re-orderings.

In this way, *Ever After* compares with *Waterland* and *Out of this World* in its combining of classical realist and postmodern literary

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1 *Spells of Enchantment*: XII.
concerns. By advocating the benefits of constructed artifices such as storytelling and romance, while simultaneously deconstructing them and exposing their illusory nature, Swift suggests a solution to the anxieties of living in the contemporary void. Like Waterland, Ever After is didactic in intent; imitating the forms and conventions of traditional story-telling (such as fairy tales), the novel consists 'in a moral . . . in some practical advice . . . in a proverb or maxim' (Benjamin, Illuminations: 86). The novel's narrator, Bill Unwin, 'tells' details of his life and those of his ancestors in an attempt to make sense of his 'self', and inadvertently, in the story-telling tradition, to pass on 'words of wisdom'.

The tendency of the novel to reflect self-consciously on its own workings and patterns, not only draws attention to the artifice of the actual text, but also draws a correlation between Ever After's themes and the literary world. The novel, for example, examines the characters' acute awareness of mortality, and through metafictional devices, the imminent mortality of literature is suggested also. Another connection may be perceived between the narrator's identity crisis and the artificial nature of literature; while Pearce's nineteenth century 'fall' from God may parallel the disintegration of the realist paradigm in art. The most important comparison Swift draws, however, is between the narrator's eventual acceptance of make-believe as a construct to live by, and the contradictory dynamic operating within this text, wherein realist 'illusionism' is paradoxically upheld.

'So why all this acting stuff?', the narrator asks, 'Why all this poetry? Why all this imagining it otherwise?' (EA: 116) - the drive to create artistic projections of our basic reality is to counteract its essentially banal and cyclical nature. A gold 'marriage' clock, the embodiment of this unchanging cycle, is passed on through generations in the Unwin family symbolising their unabated determination that a transcendent, 'epiphanic'
moment will eventually be wrested from an otherwise repetitive, time-
locked existence. To re-present the real, therefore, is to amplify, improve,
and add significance to it, albeit artificially. Thus, Swift's description of the
late twentieth-century as a 'plastic' age of 'substitoots' (*Ever After: 7*)
2, echoes Jean Baudrillard's concept of the 'precession of simulacra' - 'It is the
generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal'
('Precession': 253). Within these simulated times, when imitations of
reality have replaced the real thing and left a gap in its place, characters
struggle to find 'truths' such as those of identity and meaning in life. *Ever
After* asserts the need for fictions such as story-telling which, however
illusory, provide a much-needed sense of catharsis, joy and understanding;
words impose the perception of order on disorder and 'link *terra firma* with
*terra firma*; . . . [they] throw a path across a void' (*EA*: 141).

The novel begins with a Latin quotation from the *Aeneid* - '. . . et
mentem mortalia tangunt', ('mortal affairs touch/affect the mind') -
introducing the basic preoccupation of the two central characters - Bill
Unwin and his nineteenth-century predecessor, Matthew Pearce. When
humans begin to acknowledge the reality of their impending death, Swift is
saying, the desire to find or create some form of meaning in their brief
existence can often become an obsessive quest. Following this, the opening
chapter begins with a direct warning to the reader regarding the contents of
the novel: they are 'the words of a dead man. Or they are at least - the
warning stands - nothing more than the ramblings of a prematurely aged
one' (*Ever After*: 1)3. The narrator indicates through reference to his own

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2 Hereafter, all parenthetical references to *Ever After* (London: Picador, 1992), are abbreviated to *EA*.
3 This can be related to Roland Barthes' 1968 essay 'The Death of the Author', *Modern Literary Theory*. London: Edward Arnold, 1992, (112-118). Barthes discusses the 'disconnection' of the narrative voice from the author, and claims that writing 'destroys' its human source. He refutes the notion that literary art is directly in contiguity with the author by pointing to the postmodern concept of text as an open-space of signifiers without reference and without originality. Hence, the sentence
words the novel's status as self-reflexive metafiction, and issues a warning of possible unreliability. The narrator is not, in fact, dead, although by the time he begins the story he has failed a suicide attempt. By directly associating the experience of death with himself, however, we know that his central preoccupation will be that of mortality and its implications. He stresses that they are nothing more than ramblings, albeit those of a wiser man, encouraging the reader to re-assess any assumptions about literature; for example, the common perception of literature as 'grand narrative' is delegitimised and replaced with the humbler role of personal 'his-story'. Indeed, the narrative is an erratic first-person purgation of thoughts, ideas and memories, sporadically interjected with excerpts from Matthew Pearce's recently recovered journal. It is a deliberately unstructured account of the narrator's struggling consciousness in a time of deep confusion. Swift suggests, indeed, that Bill is recording his thoughts as a process of learning and healing, a process aided by the complicity of the reader. The only way he can make sense of the events described is to write them down, and by warning the reader immed implies a deep desire to purge himself of his uncertainties and fears connected with death, and impart a sense of order upon them.

The narrator's self-consciousness about the artificiality of his words is evident in this early passage:

> I am not me. Therefore was I ever me? That is the gist of it. A proof of all this lies before your very eyes. Or at least before mine, since you have no means of comparison and only my word to go on. But that is the point: these words, or rather the tone, the pitch, the style of them, are not mine. (EA: 4)

'These are ... the words of a dead man' can be read as an acknowledgement from Swift regarding the complex, and essentially deceptive, process of presenting a 'truth' in an artificial and abstract code of representation.
Bill is drawing a parallel between his identity crisis and his awareness of the problematic relationship between himself and his words. As such, Swift is highlighting the artificial conventions of literature wherein a 'contract' is adhered to between the author and the reader; the reader accepts a provisional suspension of disbelief which allows the fictional, first-person narrator to become the 'author' of the words. Despite the narrator emphasising his physical act of writing to confuse the delineation between author and narrator, the statement 'I am not me' suggests that Bill is aware of his own inherent fictionality, that his words are Swift's words, as are the 'thoughts which underlie them'. This textual game-playing is congruent with Bill's self-analysis in that both are after-effects of some form of death, physical or literary, and both resemble the concept of identity as a fictional fallacy: 'We are not who we think we are, only figures in some eternal, amoral masque' (EA: 98). Just as the text is fiction, Swift suggests, so too is the construct we call identity.

Bill Unwin is at a crisis-point in life. His wife has committed suicide to cut short a painful terminal disease, and Bill is left with nothing that gives any purpose, shape or meaning to his existence. After attempting his own suicide and failing, Bill decides to write down everything that led up to this frightening turn of events in an effort to make sense of the situation. Thus the story begins with Bill cloistered in the quiet sanctuary of academic life, somewhat apologetically dismissing the relevance of his words and satirising his fellow academics as pampered, knowledgeable curiosities who have no notion of 'real' life. By the end of the novel Bill has lost this initial self-consciousness, having fully realised the worth of this project. The narrative becomes more intense and emotional as it progresses, and the frequent excursions into smutty innuendo and clever, flippant language disappear. Similarly, Bill confesses to initially sounding 'A little crabbed and sardonic ... cynical ... [and] heartless' (EA: 4), yet by the end of the
novel the narrative has transformed into a genuine emotional stream of consciousness, proving to the reader that words hold the power of explaining and healing. Walter Benjamin in his essay 'The Storyteller' asserts that learning to tell, to fictionalise our lives into a construction of words, is the gift of the human animal: 'The storyteller: he is the man who could let the wick of his life be consumed completely by the gentle flame of his story' (Illuminations: 108-109). Perhaps, Unwin wonders, 'these pages will eventually explain. Perhaps they will give me an explanation' (EA: 4). Ever After is an attempt to explain something to the reader and the author of the words.

Both Bill Unwin and Matthew Pearce have carefully ordered lives until the sudden, inexplicable death of Bill's father and Matthew's son respectively. For both characters these tragedies provoked a sudden awareness of their own mortality, and the very arbitrary nature of life. Bill soon discovers a passion for literature and, by virtue of various parallels between the two in circumstances, develops an imaginary affinity with Shakespeare's tortured hero, Hamlet. Aside from Hamlet and Bill's shared propensity for romantic Angst, both characters are split between feelings of melancholy and vengeance, or more specifically, between giving in to life's arbitrary injustices and uncertainties and taking action against them. As Bill words it: 'Hamlet is actuated, or immobilized, by two questions: 1) is there or is there not any point to it all? 2) Shall I kill Claudius? Or to put it another way: shall I kill Claudius or shall I kill myself?' (EA: 5). Claudius, and his counterpart in Bill's life, Sam Ellison, have become the focus of all Hamlet and Bill's frustrations in lieu of any thing or one else to blame. Certainly they are ideal for this part; after all, it is they who seized without permission the position of power in Hamlet and Bill's lives, usurping the 'true' father, and thus becoming the symbol and source of all that is false, unjust and evil in their lives. This split between action and apathy is
analogous to the postmodern literary fin de siècle wherein writers and theorists are split between a sense of futility with regard to literature, and a sense of hopefulness in revolutionary change. In this way, Bill - both as a literary subject and a literary academic - represents the evolution of sensibility from despair to renewed optimism in art's potential as the century draws to an end. Just as Hamlet and Bill rebel against their 'false' fathers, Swift's allegiance is with the 'usurped' dictates of realism; although 'dead', the principles of realism provide a framework for the survival of literature and the redemptive potential of language.

This quandary between hope and despair in art, and Bill and Hamlet's related vacillation between feelings of vengeance and melancholy, originate from similar sources. Hamlet was a true Renaissance man, an intellectual and Christian who embraced the ideal of reason in an ordered and moral universe. This can best be ascertained from his extreme and bitter reaction to his father's death, and the Queen's hasty re-marriage to Claudius, the late-King's brother. Hamlet's grief is so great he wishes to take his own life, prevented only by fear of impinging a religious injunction against suicide: 'Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd/ His canon 'gainst self-slaughter!' (I.ii.131-132). He revealingly compares his new world view to that of 'an unweeded garden, / That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature / Possess it merely' (I.ii.135-137), that is, it is a world without the shape and clarity he formerly believed it to possess, and that a 'beast, that wants discourse of reason' (150), could behave with more civility than his own family. This sudden awareness of the injustices of nature leaves Hamlet believing that the world is 'weary, stale, flat, and

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4 Gerald Graff discusses this division in his essay 'The Myth of the Postmodern Breakthrough', (218). He adds that this vacillation is by no means an exclusively contemporary occurrence; within both the romantic and modernist movements there co-existed doubts as to the value and viability of literature, as well as total faith in the redemptive powers of art (222-223). Similarly, Ihab Hassan describes 'two accents' of postmodern writing, positive and negative (Dismemberment of Orpheus: 248).
unprofitable' (EA: 133), anticipating Bill Unwin's sentiments after his wife dies, nearly four centuries later: 'the world (out there) is lost, doomed, if there is no sense, purpose, rhyme or reason to the schemeless scheme of things' (EA: 256). Matthew Pearce describes a similar transition from belief in the inherent rationality of the world, to disillusionment after he witnesses the unearthing of a dinosaur skull: 'He feels something open up inside him, so that he is vaster and emptier than he ever imagined, and feels himself starting to fall, and fall, through himself' (EA: 101). The 'swamping greyness' that subsequently envelops him represents the logical dissolution of defining concepts such as true and false: 'Everything', he says, 'is lost and confused' (EA: 102).

Like Hamlet and Matthew's, Bill's world moves in a full circle as he unwillingly transgresses from a state of innocence and idealisation of the world, into experience and an assault of the real. His description of his early years in Paris begins in chapter two with reference to 'the glorious, the marvellous, the lost and luminous city of Paris' (EA: 13). In liaison with his mother the young Bill learned to see the world as a self-orientated fantasy, 'a scintillating shop window, a confection, a display of tempting frippery' (EA: 16), and believed 'the highest aim of civilization [to be] ... the loving perfection of the useless: ballerinas, cafe chatter, Puccini operas, Elizabethan sonnets, silk underwear, parfumerie, patisserie, chandeliers, the magic hush when the lights go down in an auditorium ..."Mimi! Mimi! Mimi!" ... and Romantic love' (EA: 20). Additionally, Sylvia's use of the terms 'divine' and 'heavenly' during their adventures, infuses them with a religious authority and adds a sense of completeness to the experiences. Unlike Hamlet, Bill's loss of innocence is produced by a culmination of incidents, rather than one massive shock. The first, his father's death by suicide, prompts Bill to question how much influence age has on wisdom, and leads him to understand that people die when their world will no
longer live up to their expectations. Already he experiences the first pangs of nostalgia for his former complete innocence, to the point that vivid in his mind is the very last moment before the 'axe fell', when he believed that his shapely and perfect world would do anything but end: 'The spring sun falling on Parisian shutters, Parisian cobbles, was gentle, kindly, beyond reproach. It fell on the fur collar of my mother's coat and picked out of its filaments little pinpoints of gold. All that day I seemed to see that the sunshine was made up of countless particles of irreducible, indestructible, eternal gold' (EA: 24).

Bill's response to this awakening was to turn to literature, and then romance. He did not dwell on his father's death, choosing instead to mourn the life he led before his death changed everything irrevocably. A renewed optimism that the world could once again be a place of beauty is fired within him through a developing passion for literature. During the long nights of study pre-empting his academic career he discovers the 'eloquence and equilibrium' of words could touch him with 'pure delight' (EA: 71). In conjunction with this he discovers Ruth, his wife-to-be, and from the moment she asks him with ironic suggestiveness - "Share my taxi?" - he rediscovers the innocence of total bliss: 'I forgot I was Hamlet. I was a puckish soul. The world was no longer weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable ... I might have lived thenceforward happily ever after' (EA: 78). The next, and implicitly inevitable blow to Bill's life, is losing Ruth. The death of Ruth is, in essence, like the death of life for Bill, because 'she represented life to me. I know that now she is dead. She was life to me' (EA: 120). Hence, Bill's life becomes a parody of itself: 'life goes on. It doesn't go on' (EA: 120), as he attempts to continue without the central shaping and motivating factor, his wife. From here on Bill struggles with various other projects and distractions until finally, after both his mother's, then Sam's deaths, he attempts to take his own life. The source of Bill's
long-standing deliberation over the virtues of revenge over suicide, therefore, derive partly from the disorientating effect of his father's death and its surrounding circumstances, and partly, with utter finality, from the horror of Ruth's death, about twenty years later.

The inclusion of Matthew Pearce's story, presented in the form of journal extracts read and commented on by Bill, contributes what can be seen as a 'case-study' of a man's loss of faith during the age of high-Victorian realism: as Bill's mother words it, 'They took things seriously in those days, darling' (EA: 47). The relevance of the journals lies in their representation of the historical period which pre-empted the so-called twentieth-century 'void'. Bill portrays Matthew before his 'fall' from faith in terms of balance and stability, with an 'intuitive sense that all things must have their basis' (EA: 91). Professionally he is a surveyor, a person whose job is to 'provide basis', 'true ground', and 'sure foundations'. Indeed, in every way, Matthew is the embodiment of a contented man who believes in rationality and Divine order. The moment of his mythically-charged 'fall', he recalls, is like a staged-tableau: 'The darkening sky, the lightening flashes at sea, the flapping and straining of the tarpaulin pitched above the exposed skull' (EA: 99). It is at this moment that his doubt about the central ordering principle of his life strikes him and the sensation of 'falling through himself' (EA: 101) follows. The metaphor of falling, as well as alluding to the biblical fall of man, pertains to the 'bottomlessness' that Sophie Beech describes in *Out of this World*. It is the sense of a world without reference points - that is, disorder, disorientation, and discontinuity - the world is seen as a self-perpetuating system of no significance whatsoever. According to Alan Friedman, 'the process which underlay the novel was itself disrupted and reorganised. The new flux of experience insisted on a new vision of existence; it stressed an ethical vision of continual expansion and virtually unrelieved openness in the
experience of life. Matthew's philosophical transition to this point represents the same transition which occurred on a mass scale later that century.

This transition was a massive revision of basic concepts of reality by a society no longer comfortable with its stable, theocentric world-view. The catalyst, Darwin's *Origin of the Species*, challenged belief in a 'solid' and 'safe' world and undermined basic Biblical premises: as Pearce surmises, 'the Book of Genesis is not a history but an allegory - and an imperfect one' (EA: 135). Without the authority of religion to provide the fundamental distinctions between true and false, everyday reality came to seem more like a fiction - that is, something made up, illogical, or to put it another way, a representation of itself. However, as Unwin notes after reading Darwin, species adapt, 'Yesterday's cataclysm is today's absorbed fact' (EA: 223). With the irrepresible human tendency towards progress, the disillusionment and anxieties pertaining to the late-nineteenth century years underwent transformation into a quest for new ordering and signifying powers; as such, a quest for a new 'reality': 'This search, if not for the real thing, then for the substitute thing, the thing that, perhaps, will do just as well' (EA: 218). An assortment of 'substitute-things' emerged; the most obvious of which, arriving hand-in-hand with post-industrial capitalism, was the pursuit of money: 'The money. The money. First copper, then tin. Then - O heir of the Ellisons! O fully lifelike model fresh from the factory of the dead! - plastic' (EA: 218). Unwin is alluding to the eventual arrival of the 'age of plastic' in which the pursuit of substitutes for an unsatisfactory reality has actually superseded the reality itself.

5 *The Turn of the Novel*. (1966).
6 Malcolm Bradbury outlines the rapid social and technological changes which gripped the late-nineteenth century in his chapter 'The Turn of the Novel 1878-1900', *The Modern British Novel*. (London: Secker and Warburg, 1993), 1-67. Aside from the publication of Darwin's treatise, society faced massive acceleration in technology, increased urban population, wealth, and mobility, improved education and literacy, expansion of leisure time and shifting relation of the classes.
In this way, Pearce's dénouement pre-empt the late-twentieth century 'precession of simulacra' (Baudrillard, 'Precession': 253); the state of which Swift describes in terms of Sam Ellison's 'substitoot' world. Unwin's use of the term 'fully lifelike model fresh from the factory of the dead' (EA: 218), represents what Jean Baudrillard and Fredric Jameson refer to as an 'age of simulacra addicted to images, stereotypes, pseudoevents, and spectacles. It is not a question here of preferring representations to realities but of the transformation of 'reality' into representations: there is no independent reality, only discourses about it' (Leitch: 118-119). Sam, for example, owns a successful plastics company which aims (in Unwin's perception, at least) towards 'polymerization of the world': 'the real stuff is running out, it's used up, it's blown away, or it costs too much', says Sam, 'You gotta have substitoots' (EA: 7). This urge to represent the real is part of the underlying need to create mimetic models of reality which appear the same but work better. Sam's plastic substitutes last longer and cost less than the real thing; thus Unwin's conundrum: 'Is a plastic cup less real than a china one? Nylon stockings less real than silk? More to the point, is plastic any more fraudulent than a stage performance? Or a poem?' (EA: 7). Swift suggests that creative representations of reality in the form of poetry or theatre, are 'false' realities in the same way as nylon stockings are not the 'real thing'. However, just as nylon stockings are more utilitarian than silk, mimetic constructs such as literature and story-telling are more useful than the reality they represent in their structured articulations of order and meaning. Hence Swift's alliance with mimetic realist 'illusionism', as a utilitarian model of reality - a model which disguises the inevitably fictional nature of reality in an age without reference.

Like his imaginary counterpart Hamlet, Unwin appears to be particularly concerned with the distinction between true and false and the moral implications of the postmodern simulacrum. He notes with
discomfort, for example, that the university he works in resembles a 'painstakingly contrived film set'; the ancient walls have become 'artificial and implausible' (EA: 2). In this sense, the university looks exactly like the ancient artefact it was centuries before, yet the sense of 'fakeness' Unwin resents is in the artificial lengths needed to maintain this facade. Hence, the university is now a fake version of the authentic university: 'Everything's an exact replica of the real thing' (EA: 65). Swift calls this 'inverse colonialism', a 'grotesque dream of actual assimilation, actual assumption into the true, old world' (EA: 62). This discomfort regarding the arbitrary nature of 'truth' and authenticity is compounded by Sam's predilection for the 'real stuff', such as original Tudor mansions bought with 'plastic' money. Unwin's temerity regarding these strange (post)modern convolutions of fake and real, reflects a burgeoning contemporary nostalgia for 'old world' values and perception. However, this nostalgia for times when real was real, and false was false, is itself a fabrication because, as Hutcheon puts it, 'Our common-sense presuppositions about the 'real' depend upon how that 'real' is described, how it is put into discourse and interpreted. There is nothing natural about the 'real' and there never was' (Politics: 33). Hence Unwin's cryptic description: 'The nostalgia for the nostalgia of nostalgia' (EA: 81).

Swift is suggesting then, that illusion or make-believe is now a reality of existence. However, rather operating as a principle of evil, (as Baudrillard believes), it may be viewed as a final salvation - according to Alvin Kernan, the humanities (propogators of many 'fictions') are receiving enormous criticism at a time when they are needed the most (Death of Literature: 5). Steiner takes this one step further by asserting that '[l]ike never before, today at this point in the twentieth century, we hunger for myths, for total explanation: we are starving for guaranteed prophecy' (Nostalgia for the Absolute: 6). The desperation for an ordering principle in
the late-twentieth century has forced us to re-examine the remedial capacity of our basic imaginative function. Story-telling, for example, operates as an antidote to contemporary disorder by endowing the creator with a sense of his or her own power and providing a challenge to the self-destructive dictates of reason. Story-telling reminds us that we are authors of our own existence; we choose to be who we are and we choose how we perceive things, or as Bill puts it: 'We see what we choose to see, we see what we think we see' (EA: 13). Bill's recollections of Paris as a child, for example, indicate that he was completely oblivious of the warfare reaching its height around him, preoccupied instead with apparent networks of misty, romantic 'scenes' reminiscent of the Parisian operas he would attend with his mother. Had he been in a slightly different situation, his perception of Paris would have been less of the 'divine' and more of casualties, bombs and death. In this way, perception of the same scenario may differ according to your imaginative approach to it: 'To picture how the world might be - how it might fall apart or hold, incredibly, together - in the eyes of other people' (EA: 101). Swift does not see perception as being a matter of chance, however; instead, he suggests that humans have the creative capacity to transform any situation: 'What makes us give to any one belief (since it is only a matter of shifting, tuning the mind) the peculiar weight of actuality? For there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so' (EA: 143).

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is cited by Italo Calvino in *Six Memos for the New Millennium* as an early example of this line of thought: 'For Ovid . . . everything can be transformed into something else, and knowledge of the world means dissolving the solidity of the world' (9). Unwin's ultimate moment of shifting-perception comes when it is revealed that his real father was not the man he always believed to be his father. Forced to acknowledge that he has lived his entire life under false premises, Unwin
feels hugely liberated; he realises that if the entire fabric of his reality and identity was an illusion, and that if he had laboured under this misapprehension for this long, it was possible to create for himself any identity or belief and live by it:

The fiction of my life (if that is what it is) may as well serve as fact. I am my father's son, meaning my father-whom-I-once-knew-as-my-father's son, by whose death my life has been so irreversibly moulded. I am who I am. I am Bill Unwin (there, I declare myself!). I am Hamlet the Dane.

Innocence. Innocence. (EA: 160)

Therefore, when Unwin asks, 'what is real and what is not? And who am I? Am I this, or am I that?' (EA: 90), the answer lies within the story-telling skill for imposing fictional design on disorder - just as much as he is Bill Unwin, he can be Hamlet the Dane. In the same way that Unwin created significance out of the raw data of Matthew Pearce's life, he may do the same to his own.

Swift calls this the saving counter-logic, the 'belief in make-belief' (EA: 144). We require this gift of the imagination precisely because of the existence of our imagination's; unlike the rest of the conscious world, we are a meaning-seeking animal, and therefore, imperfectly adapted to our environment. By nature we are compelled to investigate and seek truths: 'though ignorance may be bliss, happiness is not to be purchased by a refusal of knowledge. Where there is evidence, so we must look, so we must examine' (EA: 52). In addition to this we are the only animal who constantly strives for what we do not have; as Bill's father put it to him as a child, "when you are out on an adventure, you want to be at home by the fire, and when you are at home by the fire, you want to be out on an adventure" (EA: 15). Swift illustrates this human disposition towards
dissatisfaction in a number of ways. Sylvia's lavish spending sprees, for instance, are regular attempts to combat emptiness through frenzied acts of product consumerism and consumption. Sylvia takes an almost ecstatic delight in her shopping excursions: 'when her eyes fell on anything particularly delicious and desirable in a window, she would squeeze me fiercely, conspiratorially, giving an Ooh! or an Aah! as if it were I alone who could tilt the balance between mere looking and rushing headlong into the shop. 'But isn't it just heavenly, darling?' (EA: 16). Similarly, Bill marries a woman with a profession which is the complete opposite to his own quiet, contemplative career in an attempt to get a hold of what he is missing in his life. Ironically he discovers that what he craves is intrinsically empty: 'Glamour, I know, having lived with Ruth, is only a kind of dressing, a trick, a concoction, the promise of something else. (Beauty, love, happiness . . . ) It is as desirable and as meaningless as money' (EA: 42). This constant desire for 'something else' and the compelling urge to examine and make sense of ourselves and our environment is fuelled by the exclusively human ability to rationalise, self-reflect and imagine other circumstances. Ironically, these gifts are burdens that the rest of the animal world do not share. Swift hints through Unwin's personal metamorphoses that it is through the very capacities which burden us with dissatisfaction that we may transcend it; by realising the potential of our imagination to mould our own identity and transform any situation from tragic to comic, we may find reprieve.

Swift is clearly heralding a nostalgic return to the values of story-telling in Ever After. The novel traces in first-person the narrator's life and aspects of those of his ancestors in rambling, anecdotal detail, identical to story-telling. As defined by Walter Benjamin, story-telling is narrative in living speech: it is experience passed on orally through communities and generations, experiences of the lives of ancestors and augmented by the
experiences of the teller. Unwin confesses to be fascinated by 'genealogical investigations' (*EA*: 8), a habit he acquired as a boy voraciously-consuming literature and keenly aware of not 'knowing the full story'. As his awareness of mortality increases, this habit becomes an obsession, fuelled by the desire to build himself a personal (his)story. The title *Ever After*, for example, attests to the human desire to create fairy-tale realities rather than face the true ultimatum of mortality. 'Ever after' is a phrase associated with story-telling which, as Unwin discovers at his mother's death bed, emerges in full-force when awareness of death stirs fear and superstition: 'it was as if, now the end was near, she was driven reluctantly back to the other extremity of her life, to her origins and ancestry' (*EA*: 26). With its emphasis on the fear-inducing powers of mortality, then, *Ever After* both advocates the benefits of, and resembles the forms of story-telling.

Although Benjamin sees the oral story-telling tradition to be in opposition to the novel as a craft, so much so that he parallels the decline of the oral narrative with the rise of the printed equivalent, a hybrid of the two may be achieved with compromise. *Ever After* may well be an example of this: both thematically and in content *Ever After* can be construed as a postmodern written equivalent of pre-industrial story-telling.

Story-telling provides an important sense of permanence in a period defined by transience. As the title *Ever After* suggests, Swift is preoccupied with the notion of time and finitude: '... our need of distinction follows from our fear of extinction and all our dreams of immortality are but the transmutation of our dread' (*EA*: 234). Bill has a family history of ancestors who have tried to outwit mortality: 'O death-defiers of this world! O luminaries, O immortalists! To leave one's mark! To build a bridge, christen a theory, name a pear, write a book. The struggle for existence? Ha! The struggle for remembrance' (*EA*: 231). Swift is suggesting in *Ever After* that story-telling may provide a sense of permanence for those who crave
this illusion. Calvino, for example, points to the technique of repetition and rhyme in children's stories, and story within a story technique in oriental tales as a way of manipulating the continuity of time and helping the reader to imagine their own life as similarly perpetual: 'The digression is a strategy for putting off the ending, a multiplying of time within the work, a perpetual evasion of flight' (Six Memos: 46). That something may spring to life, reach full bloom then wither and turn into a 'thing' is beyond belief for Bill (EA: 235), and it is for this reason, like Matthew Pearce, that he puts pen to paper in the urge to create some kind of permanence. Remembering, relaying and recording stories allows reality to survive at least as myth, like the fossils dug up and preserved in museums. Ultimately all that is created is an illusion of immortality, a feeling of unlimited time, but often this is enough. Telling stories is an effective means of digressing from the issue of death, and as Carlo Levi says: '... perhaps death may not find us, perhaps time will lose its way, and perhaps we ourselves can remain concealed in our shifting hiding positions' (Six Memos: 47).

Story-telling also facilitates the human compulsion to explain. By creating representations of history and reality both the creator and the receptor are better able to fathom these experiences and obtain reassurance through the faculty of reason. It is ironic that story-telling, with its mythical, creative and superstitious connotations, should be attributed the quality of explanation because the utilitarian, rational age of Enlightenment was originally entered with assurance that old-fashioned superstitious explanations would be replaced by the scientific 'truth'. Swift, seeing the necessity of both, is attempting to resurrect a balance between the antinomies by showing that all narratives, both 'factual' and fantastic, function provisionally to explain and order our lives, thereby protecting us from chaos and disorder. Story-telling is an art form in opposition to the
master-narratives such as formal history, the bible, and canonical literature, which formerly dominated the artistic sphere. As Benjamin wrote, 'Grand narrative is out of style, with its rhetoric of truth and progress and its covert corollaries of masculinization and Eurocentrism' (29). Instead writers like Swift are resorting to telling stories about themselves as an individual or representative of a small sub-culture. Calvino talks of the contemporary novel as 'an encyclopedia, as a method of knowledge, and above all as a network of connections between the events, the people, and the things of the world' (Memos: 105). Although didactic in intent, the story is never fully explanatory, however; 'The psychological connection of events is not forced on the reader' (Illuminations: 108-109), and in this way the interpretation of events rendered may differ according to the listener, increasing the story's potential for depth and beauty. In transcribing their own histories the story-teller gains a sense of control and begins to corroborate their own conclusions and explanations for events. Thus, story-telling is remedial in its potential to create an arbitrary order from the shapelessness of experience.

A third attribute of story-telling is its ability to distract and detract from death and other harsh realities, for despite the fact that fiction can give shape to and assimilate individual experience, the fact of mortality remains. In this sense story-telling has the potential to act as a source of relief from the burden of fear, pain and suffering. Certainly this is a major factor influencing Unwin's decision to tell his story; the 'icy, naked shock' (EA: 24) he felt when he learnt the reality of death for the first time was to follow him through his life, through one example of meaningless death after another. His decision to record the 'ramblings of a prematurely aged [man]' (EA: 1), although predicated on a desire to find out why he came to the point of suicide and why he feels a complete absence of identity, is also impelled by the need to relieve himself of the weight of confused,
compounded experience dormant in his consciousness. Walter Benjamin
describes this urge as an instinctive method of remedying distress: 'The
child is sick. The mother puts it to bed and sits down by its side. Then she
begins to tell stories . . . We also know how the story told by the sick man to
his doctor can be the beginning of a process of healing', and draws an
analogy between the natural flow of words and the natural flow of water:
'Considering how pain is a dam resisting the stream of the story, it becomes
clear that the dam will burst when the torrent is so strong that everything
which the river meets on its way is washed into the sea of happy
forgetfulness' (Andersson: 174-175). Similarly, story-telling helps detain
our thoughts from dwelling on the essentially banal nature of existence.
This banality is illustrated in *Ever After* by the metaphor of time: 'A clock
ticks on the mantelpiece . . .' (EA: 104), and by a game of tennis Unwin
observes after saying goodbye to his dying mother: 'the reassuring,
inconsequential sound of the balls began once more' (EA: 40). Forgetting
our acute awareness of the banality and impermanence of all living things
is the healing that words provide, either by allowing the subject to purge
accumulated fears or by distracting the subject through entertainment.

Fairy tales operate as an extension of the theme of story-telling, and
as a motif, manifest themselves at intervals within the novel. Apart from
the obvious allusion in the title, Swift plays on fairy tale iconography such
as the magic of romance, medieval settings (the university), describes Paris
as a 'fairy-tale city' (EA: 57), and infuses a sense of fairy-tale romance in
Bill's birth date. The relevance of this iconography is its tie to the worlds of
imagination and the sub-conscious, and the connection fairy-tales provide
between children and literature. The dictionary definition of fairy tales -
tale about fairies; unreal or incredible story; falsehood' (Oxford: 286) -
accurately identifies the essence of fairy-tales - that they are stories that are
not true to rational probability and are therefore, 'falsehood'. They are
'false' in their fictionality; 'false' in terms of their 'fantastic' content; and purveyors of the 'false' with regard to their collective message: to believe in fiction. Pearce, for example, attained his faith in God through his mother as a young boy: '[t]he world, too, must have its basis, and the nature of this basis had been indelibly intimated to him long ago on his mother's knee. The central fact of life was there. It was a wondrous thing, this central fact, a wonderful clarifier, encourager and liberator' (EA: 92). The central fact, of course, was God's eminence. Fairy-tales operate identically to biblical excerpts, according to Ever After, in their presentation of ideas which encourage and enlighten.

In this sense, children's literature is an invaluable instrument for teaching children important values and skills in coping with life. Bruno Bettelheim attributes to such literature three necessary elements; the ability to entertain, arouse curiosity and stimulate the imagination (Uses of Enchantment: 5). These elements, according to Bettelheim, help to develop intellect, clarify emotions, attune to the child's anxieties and aspirations and thus provide a beneficial springboard for facing future difficulties. In this light, Ever After can be seen as a prototypical fairy tale. Although Ever After's subject-matter deals with darker themes such as death, this is by no means an anomaly: the Hans Christian Andersen classic, 'The Little Match Girl', for example, shows the potential in fairy stories to present realistic and traumatic themes such as poverty, suffering and death. Aside from entertainment and stimulus, fairy-tales share with Ever After the crucial desire to impart order onto chaos: 'both the oral and the literary forms of the fairy tale are grounded in history: they emanate from specific struggles to humanize bestial and barbaric forces, which have terrorized our minds and communities in concrete ways, threatening to destroy free will and human compassion. The fairy tale sets out to conquer this concrete terror through metaphors' (Zipes, Spells: xi).
The excursions into fantasy which fairy-tales provoke is a crucial skill, according to *Ever After* - for Bill, for example, fiction is 'this other world, this second world to fall back on - a more reliable world in so far as it does not hide its premise is illusion' (*EA*: 69). Bettelheim recognises this importance: 'by spinning out daydreams - ruminating, rearranging, and fantasizing about suitable story elements ... by doing this the child fits unconscious content into conscious fantasies, which then enable him to deal with that content ... Even more important, the form and structure of fairy-tales suggest images to the child by which he can structure his daydreams and with them give better direction to his life' (*Uses of Enchantment*: 7). Although it may be possible to live entirely by reason and rationality alone, it cannot be sustained for ever. Bill's father is Swift's exemplary character in this arena; imagining his occupation as 'sorting out the world and "talking with the Allies"' (*EA*: 16), he is described as a distant, sombre and no-nonsense character who fades in the glare of his wife's brightness.

He wanted - I see it now - to be something other than he was. He wanted all the deathly, death-defying magic of recognition, renown. This road to fame; these valleys of death. But he couldn't pretend, he couldn't turn the blind eye. (*EA*: 205)

- later he commits suicide with a vision of himself as a 'duped nonentity' (*EA*: 24). His break-down was prompted by the inability to 'pretend', to use his imagination creatively to deal with his anxieties and fears, and it is for this reason that it is vitally important to teach people the skills for creating their own 'fairy-land', a place of escape and recuperation from life's ills. Italo Calvino describes how he uses his imagination to cope 'whenever humanity seems condemned to heaviness': 'I don't mean escaping into dreams or the irrational. I mean that I have to change my approach, look at
the world from a different perspective, with a different logic and with fresh methods of cognition and verification' (Six Memos: 7). Thus, when Bettelheim suggests that children's literature is useful for teaching children the ability to incorporate their unconscious fantasies into their day to day realities, he is recognising the imagination's potential to remedy difficult and painful experiences that everyone will face.

Just as 'art must tell the truth about life, and contribute to making it better, or at least more bearable' (Lodge: 'Antimodernism': 5), so too may other important illusions: romance is Swift's version of the penultimate method of distraction from death in Ever After. 'Forget the other stuff. Stick to the love-interest. The ever-popular love-interest. What the audience wants' (EA: 220). Indeed, Unwin pays close attention to his own romantic affairs as well as those of his ancestors, family and colleagues. The inordinate focus on romantic relationships in Waterland and Out of this World as well, suggests that Swift considers them to be of some importance in relation to the human quest for meaning and purpose in our lives. Like story-telling, romance operates as another construct of our imaginations that we use to combat loneliness and the sense of pointlessness that pervades the characters' lives: 'Romantic love. A made-up thing. A concoction of the poets. Jack shall have Jill' (EA: 111). The development of Matthew and Elizabeth's Victorian romance, for instance, is dissected with much interest by Bill, as are the interactions of Sylvia and Sam, Hamlet and Ophelia, Katherine and Michael, himself and Katherine, himself and Ruth, and himself and 'Gabriella. A name like a flower. And from Verona. Balconied city of love' (EA: 171). Just as Unwin again and again transforms situations into scenes of high-flown drama and people into medieval players, the spark of passion between two individuals becomes the kernel of endless possibilities for happiness, and the hint of spiritual transcendence to another plane. Ultimately, however, love becomes another reminder
that nothing lasts for ever; all of the relationships come to an end either through the loss of love or the loss of life. This tenuousness is symbolically, and somewhat satirically illustrated by the misunderstood Latin inscription on the back of Bill's family heirloom: *Amor Vincit Omnia:* ('Love Conquers All'). The original Virgilian quotation is actually inverted, so that the true quotation reads, 'All Conquers Love' (*EA*: 123).

Furthermore, a certain cynicism towards the total authenticity of love is suggested, or rather, an admission that romance is a concoction of the imagination to conceal the grittier truth of intimate relationships is implicitly conceded. Sam's marriage to Sylvia, for example, was impelled more by a sense of duty than love, and Unwin depicts their later years being those of infidelity, routine and dissatisfaction. Katherine and Potter's marriage is portrayed as another sham comprised of deceit, infidelity, and separate drives of personal ambition. When Katherine visits Unwin with the intention of seducing him and/or obtaining the Pearce manuscripts, Unwin happens to be reading Darwin's chapter on instinct, a wry allusion to one of the primary and rather unglamorous reasons for romance - effective propagation of the species. Matthew and Elizabeth's courtship, as described by Unwin, is impelled by Matthew's 'healthy animal nature' (*EA*: 108); he falls in love 'heavily, thickly, thankfully' (*EA*: 108), suggesting the reprieve romance offers from his troubled musings. Even Unwin's idealised relationship with Ruth, which he steadfastly maintains is the 'real thing', an authentic transcendent communion of souls, reveals its baser motives during moments where the narrator's stream of thought appears to let slip; he says after her father's death he wanted to put his arms 'irremovably around her, as if I were holding her together, to beg for her special immunity. Be there. Always' (*EA*: 114). By cocooning each other in security each hoped to imbibe a special guarantee of immunity from death: 'I protected her so she would protect me' (*EA*: 115). The seemingly
inevitable factors underlying other romances are apparent in his own - the joining together for illusory protection from mortality. To emphasise this random and instinct-driven human motivation for love, Unwin admits after Ruth's death to guiltily experiencing lust in the presence of attractive women: 'He does not know how to deal with them. He is filled with dismay, a giddy sense of arbitrariness, an apprehension that the universe holds nothing sacred' (EA: 84). Romance in *Ever After*, therefore, is an effective method developed over the ages to instil special meaning and significance into an otherwise instinctive, functional necessity of survival. This again confirms the power of the imagination to create compensatory illusions in the face of an otherwise uninspiring reality.

Swift, therefore, appears to be dealing with two key points in *Ever After*: how his characters may come to terms with their mortality in the absence of God, and how literature should cope with its own impending crisis of representation. By reconstituting a faith in the age-old tradition of story-telling and its original magical properties, his characters must learn to accept that there is no 'genuine' foundation or purpose for our existence. Yet, in spite of the uniquely destructive human penchant for seeking explanations and reason, we are endowed with an equally productive potential for creativity and imagination. Unlike the rest of the living world humans are gifted with the ability to get beyond themselves and into worlds and experiences which are not their own. Therefore, *Ever After* asserts, literature will not reach its end-point on the verge of the new millennium, and humans do have the ability to find redemption in lieu of ultimate absence.

A circular pattern can be deduced from the events in the novel and Bill's journey of discovery, symbolically manifested by the clock bequeathed from generation to generation. Bill Unwin begins his life in a cradle of innocence, an uncorrupted youthful fairy-tale construed of romance,
beauty, music, literature, glamour and the promise of ever more to come. His inevitable descent into reality is instigated by a series of deaths which, paralleling Hamlet's disillusionment with existence, force Bill to question the concept of 'true identity' and the rituals of human struggle with meaninglessness. After attempting to take his own life and failing, he is left in a position of complete neutrality:

I simply feel as though I have become someone else... One part of me seems to have occupied a place of serene detachment. I feel like the ghost of Troilus at the end of Chaucer's poem, which, ascending through the spheres of heaven... looked down with dispassionate equanimity on the scene of all this joy and sorrow. While another part of me... feels the forlorn urge to find and meet my former self again, secretly wondering, as it does so, whether the meeting will be happy or disastrous. (EA: 3-4)

Motivated not by desperation but by a curiosity about his 'former self', he begins his written recollections in a mood of bemused cynicism and nostalgic fervour, recounting his most luminous memories, details of his ancestors and their personal struggles, snippets of opinions and thoughts, and laces them together disjunctively so that the full story of his personal history and character only becomes apparent by the conclusion. It is during this process that Unwin's revolution is achieved, not back to his 'former self', the confused and suicidal scholar, but back to his childhood persona, the self who could recognise magic in war-time.

The difference between the innocent truth of the past and the truth he has rediscovered, however, is the crucial point and the connection back to the issue of literature. For a moment, revelling in his post-mortal indifference, he wonders if 'the world has been reinvented for me in its full potential. This is the Garden of Eden' (EA: 80). But it is not a return to the
first days of joyous inexperience, it is a new outlook weighted with memory
yet lightened by creative dexterity, '... a good deal of twisting and stretching
of the imagination'. The difference between Unwin now and the Unwin as
a child is that now he has a personal history. His suicide attempt did not
induce a state of amnesia and he is in no position to deny or ignore all that
has come before him. To assume then that he may discover a renewed
equaninty by simply ignoring the events which bought him to this point
would be ludicrous; rather, he reaches his new state of consciousness by
recounting his past as a story and discovering its essentially fictional nature.
He realises that his representation of his life is 'part fact and part surmise'
(EA: 80), and as such life itself is partly real and partly made-up. In
analysing Matthew Pearce's similar crisis Bill unwittingly arises at a
solution:

What is the difference? What difference does it make? And even on that very last
day - it was a fine June day - he even found time to note the fleecy clouds and the roses
in the Rectory garden - he might have walked up on to Jacob's Hill, looked down at his
house, at the village, at all that sweet, unaltering make-belief, and, with a simple
turning of a switch inside him and a sealing of his lips, returned to embrace it.

22nd April 1855: Is there not in our minds, no less than in physical nature, a power
of regeneration and renewal? Are we not lopped and smitten only so we will grow
again? (EA: 133)

A combination of our will for regeneration and our imaginative capacity to
alter our perception of reality through a simple turning of a switch inside
ourselves may be our last and best defence against a situation that is not
designed for our comfort, survival or progress. In perceiving ourselves - as
Bill imagines Matthew does in a moment of mocking his own inner-
seriousness - as actors in an 'eternal, amoral masque' (EA: 98), we indulge ourselves the power to re-envision our entire existence. As Ihab Hassan writes, 'There are those who believe that the future of the future can now be anything we want to make it' (Dismemberment: 247). In this way Bill's childhood ability to view the world as magic, a fairy-tale mixture of high drama, beauty and excitement, may be restored by investing the ordinary with a poetic edge. Unwin's mother did this by turning routine shopping trips into lascivious excursions into consumer fantasy. Unwin himself learns to transform his life with literature: 'the words hold us with their poise, their gravity - their beauty. They catch us up and speak to us in their eloquence and equilibrium, and just for a little moment . . . the obvious is luminous, darkness is matched with light and life is reconciled with death' (EA: 71: my italics).

The late-twentieth century quandary between hope and despair in art's potential is addressed similarly in Ever After by amalgamating the lessons learnt from historical literary cycles and aiming for a compromise. Just as Unwin learns to find a crucial balance between fantasy and reality in order to maintain his sanity, Swift suggests a new literature which incorporates both the early-novelistic concern for good story-telling with twentieth century deconstructionist discoveries. The interpolation of these contradictory sides creates what Hutcheon would describe as a peculiarly postmodern paradox; she says, 'What postmodernism does is to de-naturalize both realism's transparency and modernism's reflexive response, while retaining (in its typically complicitously critical way) the historically attested power of both. This is the ambivalent politics of postmodern representation' (Politics: 34). Colin Falck is partly right in asserting that 'true postmodern literature can now be defined only in terms of a head-on rejection of the nihilism which would reduce literature to the status of a game with itself, or with language, on the illusory ground that
there is "nothing outside the text" for it to relate to (151); postmodern writers must certainly reject nihilism in the interests of a future for literature, but not by attempting to deny the irrevocable fact that we are very much on illusory ground. *Ever After* is an example of the type of literature which may survive well into the new millennium, a literature which mimics the forms of the traditional realist-style novel, while simultaneously subverting these and exposing them as illusory. The result is a literature which confirms both the crucially important role of storytelling and words in our lives, as well as the artificiality of these words: in essence, we live in an era where fictionality has eclipsed the real - 'The days of signs, traces - dreams' (*EA*: 255) - and in order to survive we must accept the make-believe, the unknown, and the illusion.
Conclusion

To begin, then, where the vanishing forms of literature end, we may need primary vision more than second sight . . . I can only hope that after self-parody, self-subversion, and self-transcendence, after the pride and revulsion of anti-art will have gone their way, art may move toward a redeemed imagination commensurate with the full mystery of the human consciousness. - Ihab Hassan

Waterland, Out of this World and Ever After are preoccupied with representing the contemporary human condition, and this condition, it appears, has ironically become one of representation. Reality, as Swift sees it, is not a specific or concrete thing, but a perception; a constructed model; a creation of the imagination. The decline of religion, the advancement of technology, the rise of photography, and the occurrence of two exceptionally sobering world wars, has propelled the late-twentieth century into disorder - eroded all foundations, destroyed the delineation between true and false, and deprived a disoriented society of notions of order and meaning. Within this post-structural 'void', Swift situates his three male, middle-aged, middle-class narrators, who are all confronted with a massive personal crisis. Through their intelligent and insightful renderings of their

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1 Dismemberment of Orpheus. 257-258.
past and present circumstances, they combine to create a comprehensive account of the nature of reality and fiction. Swift's conclusions in all cases point to three related ideas: first, that history is a process of cycles - of continual progression and regression, degeneration and regeneration. Second, that the human animal is unsuited to this repetitive and pointless existence; and consequently third, that humanity is perpetually concerned with creating myths of purpose and order to remedy this unsuitability.

What these fictions have in common is a pretense towards mimesis - that is, the ability to imitate or convey reality exactly as it is. Their efforts are only pretense because reality is not a substance which lends itself easily to reproduction, according to the novels; on the contrary, Waterland describes it as that which 'has no taste or colour of its own . . . [it is a] form of Nothing' (WL: 11). Reality's transparency and frustrating elusiveness, is the basis upon which the three novels build their illusory structures. In the same way that Crick seeks explanations from history, that Sophie tries to merge into the image, and Unwin attempts to transcend his fear of death through romance and literature, Swift also is creating an illusory world in his novels. Thus, just as history is shown to be an invention and photography is exposed as a subjective interpretation of reality, Swift undermines his own texts, reveals the techniques which promote the illusion of mimesis, and parodies the conventions that purport to be 'realistic'.

Aside from their obvious leaning toward postmodern, metafictional techniques and themes, the novels are tied together by a number of smaller, yet significant threads. In all the novels, for example, the narrators' tales are built around an act of terrible violence - Mary's abortion, the Beech bomb blast, and Unwin's father's suicide. These referents, which are the driving force in the characters' lives, may represent World War I and World War II in the twentieth century consciousness; events which, in
their very unspeakability, left a stunned silence which is only now being broken by the need to seek explanations, reconstitute foundations and find reprieve - in other words, to start telling stories again. Crick begins 'preaching' to his students, Harry Beech begins speaking mentally to his daughter, and Unwin starts to write his life story - in all cases the narrators break a period of painful silence, and embark on a process of healing. This may be compared to Swift's 'postmodern-realist' style of fiction: the exclusively postmodern mode, with its 'intimations of silence' (Hassan: *Dismemberment*: 247) and exhaustion, may be seen to be revolving back to the realist mode perhaps for no other reason than the survival of the novel. However, just as the narrators' return to 'life' is tinged with a sense of loss, so too is the new realist fiction indelibly marked by deconstruction.

The second major shaping factor in all three novels is a three-tiered model which represents the late-nineteenth century, the early-twentieth century, and the late-twentieth century. These three stages encapsulate the entire spectrum of a revolution, for Swift, a revolution which repeats itself endlessly throughout all historical processes. The 'innocent' (realist) stage is represented by Robert Beech, Matthew Pearce, and schoolmaster Lewis; the 'disillusionment' (modernist) stage is represented by the three narrators; and the 'crisis' (postmodernist) stage is represented by Sophie, Sam Ellison, and Price. In all the novels, this model points to the idea of compromise and return, and forms the basis of the prevalent metaphor of cycles within the novels. The return is always prompted by a sense of nostalgia for a perceived original innocence; just as the French Revolutionaries thought they were taking a progressive step forward, they were actually attempting to create a new Rome: '[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*: 119).
According to the novels, the only way to achieve this return to a 'second childhood' (W: 284) as such, is to develop a new perspective towards life, a perspective which accepts 'the burthen of the mystery' as a source of wonderment rather than anxiety. 'The burthen of the mystery' is derived from Keats' well-known letter to Coleridge in 1817 which discusses the virtue of 'Negative Capability': 'that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason'. Keats is proposing that the urgent pursuit of explanations is an 'irritable' human affliction which presupposes that truth may be wrested from obscurity if the desire is there. Reality, however, is never this forthcoming according to Swift; and although it disallows the satisfaction of absolute knowledge, it does allow the potential for humanity to imaginatively re-create substitute worlds, identities and meanings. The imagination provides the gift of story-telling - the ability to transform mystery into magic. In a recent interview, Swift described this sentiment:

The urge to tell stories and indeed to listen to stories is plainly very deep in human nature . . . I think however sophisticated and modern you get about story telling, basically, it's a very primitive and rather mysterious thing. And also a rather magical thing . . . It's not for nothing that we talk about a story casting a spell.

For literature, as well as late-twentieth century society, the only way to move forward, to safeguard our literary and literal future, is to turn back and re-embrace the restorative and redemptive powers of the imagination.

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