



## WATERLAND: (RE)TEXTUALIZING HISTORIES AND HISTORICIZING THE PAST

“SU DİYARI”: TARİHİN (YENİDEN) METİNSELLEŞTİRİLMESİ VE GEÇMİŞİN TARİHSELLEŞTİRİLMESİ

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### Abstract

Graham Swift's novel *Waterland* (1983) is about Thomas Crick, a history teacher. In his history lessons, Thomas Crick merges public history with his private history as well as local history of Fenlands where he lives, to face and to solve the mysteries of his past. Thus, by intermingling public, private and local histories, he erases all the boundaries between them and hence gives a different understanding/representation of history and also his history lessons become a journey to his past/history within public and local histories although the only reason for him to do so is to give less boring history lessons. In that sense, the novel meets on the same ground with the New Historicism, flourished in the mid-1980s as a “new” approach which challenges the traditional understanding of history as a grand-narrative and which focuses on how history is represented rather than what it represents. This article aims to analyze the novel *Waterland* which deconstructs and reconstructs the notion of history by focusing on the concepts of memory and time, and thus to elucidate how the novel challenges the traditional appreciation of history as a grand narrative by merging public, local and private histories with multiple representations of history.

### Öz

Graham Swift'in 1983 yılında kaleme aldığı “Su Diyarı” adlı romanının başkahramanı Thomas Crick isimli bir tarih öğretmenidir. Thomas Crick, tarih derslerinde anlattığı/anlatması gereken genel tarihi, kendi geçmişinin gizemlerini çözmek ve geçmiş ile yüzleşmek için öznel tarihi ve yaşadığı Fenlands'in yerel tarihi ile iç içe anlatmaktadır. Asıl amacının daha az sıkıcı tarih dersleri vermek olduğunu söylese de, Thomas Crick'in verdiği tarih dersler geçmişe olan bir yolculuk haline gelir. Bu yolculukta Thomas Crick, resmi, yerel ve öznel tarihleri iç içe anlatarak sözü edilen üç farklı tarih arasındaki sınırları yıkmaktadır. Bu anlamda, roman 1980'li yılların ortasında “yeni” bir edebi yaklaşım olarak ortaya çıkan ve çoklu tarih anlayışını savunan ve tarihin kendisi yerine nasıl temsil edildiği ile ilgilenen Yeni Tarihselcilik kuramı tarih anlayışı ile örtüşmekte ve böylece geleneksel tarih anlayışına meydan okumaktadır. Bu makalenin amacı, geleneksel tarih anlayışından çok uzak olan farklı tarih temsil(ler)ini ortaya çıkaran “Su Diyarı” adlı romanı, Yeni tarihselcilik yaklaşımı çerçevesinde zaman ve bellek kavramlarına değinerek incelemek ve böylece öznel, yerel ve genel tarihin nasıl iç içe geçtiğini ve çoklu tarih temsillerinin geleneksel tarih anlayışını nasıl yıktığını ortaya çıkarmaktır.

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

Graham Swift

*Waterland* (1983) by Graham Swift is about Thomas Crick, a history teacher whose history lessons in which he teaches public history turn into a search for his past and identity as he reveals and teaches some past facts in his private history to exist in his present. He does not hesitate to reformulate history while teaching and to merge his private history with the public one and as a result of this, he and thus the novel disturbs the notion of the conventions of history in the traditional sense, which is unquestionable and holds one truth and one perspective. With Tom Crick's narrations, *Waterland* becomes a series of stories, once told by his parents, reshaped by what he remembers about his ancestors, the Atkinsons and the Cricks and Mary and stories,

memories and friends of his childhood and teenage years which are full of abortion, murder, love and death. Thus, the novel gives multiple perspectives to history as private, public and local histories are given merged and since Tom Crick narrates the stories from his own perspective and with his interpretations; the history in the novel becomes multi-dimensional and involves multiple truths. The purpose of this article is to study the novel from certain theoretical aspects of New Historicist approach by emphasizing various readings of history (local, private and public) which all become one and thus challenge the long-established understanding of history, which shows the problematic representations of history as a grand-narrative.

New Historicism embraces the breakdown of genres and, it believes that there is a blurring line between fiction and reality. In other words, New Historicism questions the past and what it represents and focuses on the fact that the borders between history and fiction, past and present and also between the historian and the (fiction) writer are interchangeable (Veeseer 1). According to H. Aram Veeseer, New Historicism gave scholars the opportunity to erase the boundaries between history, art, politics and literature and it destroys “*the doctrine of non-interference that forbade humanists to intrude on questions of politics, power*” (ix). Thus, the boundaries between cultural texts that are social and political and aesthetic texts that are literary and personal are broken.

New Historicism also raises questions in relation to the conventional representation of history and thus, its objectivity and its universality as a single and unique way of understanding and representing the past events. New Historicists believe that seeing a text/ a work of literature as a concrete separate entity free from the outside effects of the time is impossible since a text is inseparable from the social, political, and cultural elements of its time. Thus, for New Historicists, a text is not self-sufficient and complete but it is a product of the cultural, political and social events of the time in which it is written and as a result of this it is open to multiple interpretations. As a result of this, the reading of history is also problematic as each new reading is done under the influence of the socio-cultural realities and discourse of the times. In view of that, New Historicism totally opposes the classical understanding of history as objective, unquestionable as well as chronological and progressive.

Hayden White, a key figure for New Historicism, makes a close connection between history and literature and he is against the lines drawn between them to show their distinction. He focuses on historical consciousness and structures a pattern that can be used by historians “to gain different kinds of ‘explanatory affect’” and describes these strategies as;

[...] explanation by formal argument, explanation by emplotment, and explanation by ideological implication. Within each of these different strategies I identify four possible modes of articulation. [...] For arguments these are the modes of Formism, Organicism, Mechanism, and Contextualism, for emplotments there are the archetypes of Romance, Comedy, Tragedy, and Satire. (White, *Metahistory* x)

White clearly emphasizes that history and fiction writing have the same characteristics and techniques and the ways of narrating history necessitate the same imagination used in fiction writing. That is, like fiction writing, history writing also needs the same imagination and writing style (or “emplotments” in his words) that the fiction writer uses and because of this reason the written text turns into something more than the past itself (textualizing history), but a reinterpreted and reformulated one with the subjectivity of the historian/history writer. Stephen Greenblatt, a crucial name for New Historicism, underlines the significance of the relationship of past and present as well as the historian and the fiction writer and between historicity and textuality in his “Resonance and Wonder” as such;

By resonance I mean the power of the displayed object to reach out beyond its formal boundaries to a larger world, to evoke in the viewer the complex, dynamic cultural forces from which it has emerged and for which it may be taken by a viewer to stand. By wonder I mean the power of the displayed object to stop the viewer in his or her tracks, to convey an arresting sense of uniqueness, to evoke an exalted attention (228).

Greenblatt believes that the historian/writer feels the wonders and power of the past with a disturbing feeling of present, and resonance is the impression of cultural forces of past and present. That is to say, to deal with the past with great wonder is unachievable for the historian/writer without disregarding the cultural forces of present and the past. The historian, like a fiction writer, has to deal with the cultural system of the past in which all the historical events had happened and has to understand the cultural forces of past and today in relation to each other so

that he writes the historical fact. As a result, the historian/writer not only textualizes history but also historicizes the texts. Hence, although historians claim that they depict the past in an objective way, it is difficult to talk about this objectivity because of their choices of narrative technique, the selective choice of the past events, the multiplicity of the perspectives, the narrator/historian's ideology, beliefs as well as his/her present consciousness and acknowledgment to evaluate and rewrite the past events. In other words, history writing, for the historians, is a way of interpretation of past events. New Historicism, in that sense, challenges the temporal continuity and the authority of the grand-narratives by blurring the lines between history and literature, past and present as well as between public and private histories. Therefore, when studied from a New Historicist viewpoint, it is not wrong to say that *Waterland* is a novel where the lines between history and literature meet and become indistinct and where the continuity of time is challenged by shifts between present and past and thus the authority of history as a grand-narrative is challenged by shifts in private, public as well as local histories.

Richard J. Lane and Philip Tew summarize the storyline of *Waterland* as a novel which “[...] meanders through a social story of family intrigue and illicit sexuality in an attempt to search for some sense of personal identity in a world of flux, as fluid, protean and elusive as the water and eels flowing through the fens of its settings” (12). Although the novel seems to be about Thomas Crick's life story, it gives public, local and private histories (re)told by Thomas Crick, a history teacher, and he intermingles all of them to (re)shape his identity and to reveal and understand the mysteries in his life. He not only confronts with his past but also with his present in his journeys to his memories. Lynn Wells also describes *Waterland* in a similar way,

The novel is primarily concerned with stories from the distant and recent past about irredeemable personal losses and the apparently futile efforts undertaken to replace them. While each of these tales individually seems to preclude any chance of reclamation, their combined revival in Tom's address to his class reveals their hidden potentials for renewal. With its interweaving of occurrences from several time periods, Tom's narration is the “present” in which these past incidents suddenly “flash up” and are seen on their “true” for the first time (84).

As stated by Wells, the novel is mainly about Tom Crick's past (re)told within the public history. His being a history teacher to talk about past not only provides him a good ground to confront with the hidden parts, secrets of his past which are retold, but also helps him to confess and understand his private history positioned in the local and public histories.

Graham Swift, by giving various definitions of "historia" at the very beginning of *Waterland*, gives his readers multiple understandings of the concept of history. Tom Crick investigates the past events by narrating them like a historian as well as a detective who is in search of a mystery buried in his past. Graham Swift clarifies his reason for choosing such a protagonist as follows,

Making him a history teacher gave a direct validation to something else the novel was urging me (ambitiously enough) to do, to explore the whole mystery of 'history' (local, personal and global)- its meaning, if it has any, its distinction, so far as there is one, from mere 'story.'" (Swift vii-viii).

Having been created with this intention, Tom Crick narrates all the events by blending his private history with public history. In this way, in every narration, he (con)textualizes and reformulates his private history and public history because his private history takes place within public and local history. Hence, it is obvious that the novel is a combination of all three histories. As Frederic Jameson states "[h]istory is inaccessible to us except in textual form. [...] It can be approached only by way of prior (re)textualizations" (81) and, in this novel Tom Crick tries to give shape and meaning to his private history by using and re-textualizing public and local histories. As he does this, it becomes doubtful whether the narrated past is public or private, fictional or factual.

As mentioned above, in the novel three different versions of history are seen; personal, local and public. Personal history is Tom Crick's personal stories, and his life story. In the local history, the history of the Fenlands is given, different from the other fens as well as Fenlanders. Public history depicted in the novel is the history of the times (both world history and national history) within which private history is lived. Thus, in the novel, all three histories are intermingled and there are shifts between them, which creates confusion not only for the reader but also for the protagonist of the novel.

The only and the most important connection between Crick's stories from the past and his present existence is the Fenlands where all the events take place. Although the Fenlands is realistically depicted, it is the setting of the fictional story. Yet, the Fenlands in Crick's narration and the real Fenlands are not the same, but they become the same in his retold stories. The main reason for this is that Crick is stuck between present and past and his past influences and reshapes his present. He, in the beginning of the novel, describes The Fenlands as a "fairy-tale land" which is (re)drawn by the stories told by his father and mother. However, the story, unlike a fairytale, begins with the dead body of Freddie Parr, Tom Crick's friend, which is found in the river, which ruins the idealized description of The Fenlands. Hence the difference between the Fenlands in Crick's memories and the real Fenlands becomes more apparent. Crick, himself, brings the difference to the fore by saying "[a]nd since a fairy-tale must have a setting, a setting which, like the settings of all good fairy-tales, must be both palpable and unreal, let me tell you" (Swift 15). Then, he starts to tell the "real" history of the Fenlands with a combination of his family's history, "[The Fens] which are a low-lying region of England, over 1,200 square miles in area, bounded to the west by the limestone hills of the Midlands, to the south and east by the chalk hills of Cambridgeshire, Suffolk and Norfolk" (Swift 16). Following this realistic picture of the Fens in a very detailed way, he talks about his ancestors and portrays them like descriptions of fairytale characters, "When I was small I possessed a living image of my ancestors in the form of Bill Clay, a shrunken, leathery carcass of a man, whose age was unknown" (Swift 18). Then he adds the following statement: "some said that Martha Clay was a witch...", and he pauses and says "But let's keep clear of fairy-tales" (Swift 18). Yet, he continues his fairy-tale description of the Fens. In this way, the real and the idealized Fenlands in Crick's memories/imagination unite and they become the only connection between his personal and public history and also past and present. Crick continues his realistic description of the Fenlands by saying "For the chief fact about the Fenlands is that they are reclaimed land, land that was once water, and which, even today, is not quite solid" (Swift 15-16).

The Fenlands' being "once water and even today not quite solid" is significant for not only the fictional but also for the real Fenlands. Another significant point about the Fenlands is their being "formed by silt" (Swift 16). Silt "*shapes and undermines continents; which demolishes as it builds; which is simultaneous accretion and erosion; neither progress nor decay*" (Swift 16). When silt and water are considered, it can be seen that they are important metaphors for the history of

the Fenlands, both for personal and public history. Crick gives the definition of silt as “*silt: a word which when you utter it, letting the air slip thinly between your teeth, invokes a slow, sly, insinuating agency*” (Swift 16). Both water and silt are crucial constituents of the Fenlands and also of the people living in the Fenlands. They shape and reshape the Fenlands and the life in there and they are both constructive and deconstructive at the same time. They are constructive as they shape/formulate life but at the same time they are destructive since they are dangerous and risky as they destroy everything.

Crick begins to narrate the local history of Fenlands as well as his families' history; however, his narration also includes his own justifications, which makes his narration unreliable. Since he tells the stories of his private history within public and local history, he (un)consciously changes the stories of the local history depending on the event in his personal history. So, it becomes more difficult to follow Tom Crick and what he is narrating and it also becomes difficult to understand if he is telling public or personal history. Hence, the more he narrates, the more he remembers and the more he remembers, the more he interprets what he remembers and thus the more subjective he becomes;

Realism; fatalism; phlegm. To live in the Fens is to receive strong doses of reality. The great flat monotony of reality; the wide empty space of reality. Melancholia and self murder are not known in the Fens. Heavy drinking, madness and sudden acts of violence are not uncommon. How do you summon reality children? [...] If you are an Atkinson it is not difficult. If you have become prosperous by selling fine quality barley, if you look down from your Norfolk uplands and see in these level Fens [...] you can outwit reality (Swift 24-25).

Tom Crick, as a history teacher, is supposed to teach “real” past events, i.e., public history, however, what he does in his history classes is more than this with his subjective position. Hence, it is obvious that Graham Swift portrays his protagonist Tom Crick as a history teacher to challenge the continuity and objectivity of history and also to underline the focus on how history is represented, which lies at the center of New Historicism that claims that as the past is interpreted with the present mind, there cannot be universal or objective histories but, subjective and private histories. In New Historicist approach, it is difficult to talk about the objectivity of the narrated history because of the subjective perspective of the historian narrator. History is a cultural artifact and there is not one history but multiple histories and because of the multiplicity of history, in every

narration of a past event, the historian becomes more central and the past event is reshaped by his narrative technique and point of view. Louise A. Montrose puts forth the meaning of “textuality of history” and “historicity of text” as such;

By the textuality of history, I mean to suggest, firstly, that we can have no access to a full and authentic past, a lived material existence, unmediated but rather presume to be the surviving textual traces of the society in question-traces whose survival we cannot assume to be merely contingent but must rather presume to be at least partially consequent upon complex and subtle social processes of preservation and effacement; and secondly, that those textual traces are themselves subject to subsequent textual mediations when they are construed “documents” upon which historians ground their own texts, called “histories.” (Montrose 20).

Montrose points out that history cannot be a means of access to a “true” past without any indication of complex social processes of handling these texts and documents which are not unimpressed by those who write them. According to Montrose, the meaning of a text is not established, even when it is historically specific and in every analysis of the very same text, there can be a variety of meanings. Therefore, Montrose emphasizes that there are histories of historians; there is not one history which is the same for everyone and for every period but, there are subjective and private histories. Likewise, in *Waterland*, Swift with his protagonist Tom Crick, questions official history as a grand-narrative and traditional perception of the historian (here there is no difference between the history teacher and the historian as the history teacher is responsible for what the historians write as official/public history). Thus, as Montrose claims there is a shift from “history to histories” in this novel too, since there are multiple representations of history and the focus is not on what history represents, but on how past is represented (Montrose 20).

Tom Crick, in the novel is accused of a “complete departure from the syllabus” when he merges his personal history with public history while he is teaching in his (hi)story classes (Swift 29). To justify himself, he explains his reasons for doing this as being in search for “more practical ways” to have less boring history classes for the students. What he tries to do may be explained by Montrose as a crucial task “*for the teacher of a new historical criticism must be to disabuse students of the notion that history is what’s over and done with to bring them to understand that they themselves live in history, and they live history*”



(Montrose 25). Although Tom Crick explains his reasons for teaching history the way he does as teaching in a more practical way, he challenges complete-ness, continuity and objectivity of history. He does not see history as complete, unified and as something he “had become part of” and “began to look into” as a result of curiosity (Swift 67-68). He further explains his interest in history and justifies why he is merging histories as,

So I began to demand of history an Explanation. Only to uncover in this dedicated search more mysteries, more fantasticalities, wonders and grounds for astonishment than I started with; only to conclude forty years later- notwithstanding a devotion to the usefulness, to the educative power of my chosen discipline- that history is a *yarn*. And can I deny that what I wanted all along was not some golden nugget that history would at last yield up, but History itself; the Great Narrative, the filler of vacuums, the dispeller of fears of the dark. (Swift 68) (*my emphasis*)

With these words, Tom Crick is telling not only the reason why he is teaching history as a history teacher, but also why he changes his teaching style and why he turns into a story teller. He sees history as an explanation and he uses these explanations to enlighten the dark sides of his personal history and to find his own historical truth. Accordingly, by textualizing his personal history, Tom Crick becomes a part of this grand-narrative he questions. However, instead of accepting and teaching it, he reformulates, so challenges it and thus, he becomes the only person who knows the truth-ness of what he is narrating. What he does is in Dominick LaCapra’s words “to fill in the gap that was indirectly/naturally opened by the history” which is the duty of a historian/history teacher (23).

Swift, while questioning the difference between history writing and story-telling, is distorting the line between reality and fictionality of the past events. Crick becomes the historian in addition to being a history teacher, so he is both writing and teaching (hi)stories. Hence, the continuous structure of history turns into discontinuous and non-objective histories. What Crick does, according to Linda Hutcheon, is not so different from what a historian does while history writing or what a historiographer does;

Historiography is no longer considered the objective and disinterested recording of the past; it’s more an attempt to comprehend and master it by means of some working

(narrative/explanatory) model that [...] is precisely what grants a particular to the past (*The Politics of Postmodernism* 64).

Hutcheon draws attention to the subjectivity of historiography and she believes that past is studied and narrated and explained by the historians and their “attempts” in doing so is to figure out the past. Similarly, Tom Crick, as a history teacher or a historiographer, instead of fulfilling the expectations of a traditional history teacher whose duty is to teach the grand-narratives, challenges it and subverts histories and he tries to exist and understand and accept his personal history. By retelling past, he also subverts the conventions of narrative and traditional history writing. He reveals his feelings to his students as a history teacher stating,

I always taught you that history has its uses, its serious purpose. I always taught you to accept the burden of our need to ask why. I taught you that there is never any end to that question, because, as I once defined it for you, history is that impossible thing: the attempt to give an account, with incomplete knowledge, of actions themselves undertaken with incomplete knowledge. [...] what history teaches is to avoid illusion and make-believe, to lay aside dreams, moonshine, cure-alls, wonder-workings, pie-in-the-sky-to be realistic (Swift 113).

Although he talks about what history teaches, that is “*to avoid illusion and make-believe, to lay aside dreams, moonshine, cure-alls, wonder-workings, pie-in-the-sky-to be realistic,*” he does not teach any of these but he teaches “yarns” both public and personal. He is teaching in that way to get rid of the burden of his personal history and to find his explanations. As he is clarifying his reasons for his “demand for explanation” which “provides an explanation” and why he subverts the grand-narratives and why he is looking for more practical ways to teach histories, he gives an explanation since he wants to place himself in a historical context to make his life significant, and to provide a subject position for himself because the events in his personal history, according to him, are as important as the events in public history. He further states;

So when your history teacher’s teachings are put to the test, when his wife, who is yet to be branded by local press as “The Baby Snatcher of Lewisham” and “The Child Thief of Greenwich,” delivers herself one Sunday afternoon of an inexplicable announcement, he obeys both human instinct and academic training, he drops everything (even The French Revolution) and tries to explain. But he

already knows [...] that it's not explaining he's doing. Because he's already reached the limits of his power to explain, just as his wife has ceased to be realistic-has ceased to belong to reality. [...] Because when there's no way forward the only way is -- because his children, who have bad dreams, suddenly want to listen, and although he's trying to explain he's really only telling a -- [story] (Swift 113-114).

By saying so, Crick admits that he has changed the route of his teaching history from public to personal to find an explanation and meaning for himself. By making connection between the past and the present he tries to place himself in a historical framework to make his life meaningful, and thus, to historicize himself and his life. Tom Crick's explanation of what and how he is teaching justifies himself both as a history teacher and as a person who is in search for his past and identity. He confesses that he needs to narrate his personal history since he is trying to find out the mysteries in his life as well as a way of accepting his past and his present. This is the reason why he integrates his personal history while he is teaching public history to his students.

The discontinuous structure of history can be clearly seen in Crick's fragmented story telling as a result of the shifts in time. The concept of time is one of the most crucial features of the New Historicist approach. There is divergence between the real time and the time in the protagonist's/narrator's mind. There is shifting time in the novel from the very beginning to the very end which makes time very indefinite because Thomas Crick is shifting in past and the reason why he needs it is as Brian Finney points out "the past is alive in the present" (148). The historical time given in the novel is interfered and misinterpreted by the private time/history of the protagonist; thus, depicted time becomes unreliable and confusing for the readers. The stories which are told in the novel seem to be chaotic and un-chronological, however, the novel has three main events that show the timeline of stories. The reason for three different timelines in the novel is because of Crick's combining all histories and how he links the events in his personal history to the local and public history. The first one is the history of the Fenlands and of the Atkinson and Crick families, from 17<sup>th</sup> century to the time when the narrator's parents got married after World War I. The second one consists of a series of sad and devastating events in the 1940s: that is, Mary Metcalf's sexual experimentation with Tom Crick and his brother Dick (as she claims), Dick's murder of Freddie Parr (since Mary told him that Freddie got her pregnant), Mary's abortion (in an

unhygienic place), Tom's learning about Dick's being a child of an incest relationship, Dick's committing suicide, Tom's coming back from the war and his marriage to Mary. The third and the last one consists of events of the year 1980, which include Mary's religious tendencies, her kidnapping of a baby from a supermarket, her being institutionalized, and Tom's dismissal from school where he has been working as a history teacher. Thomas Crick summarizes the theme and significance of time as such: *"It goes in two directions at once. It goes backwards as it goes forwards. It loops. It takes detours"* (Swift 139). Crick, in his narrative, becomes distant to the chronological order of the past events and his story turns into a fragmented and discontinuous narrative, which makes him move between the past and the present freely. As he is narrating local history, the history of Fenlands, he also narrates the stories of his family and his wife and in this way, the line between present and past disappears. He goes back and forth in time as if he is in the past with present consciousness and the only thing that attaches him to present is his being a history teacher and his stories to tell. He wants to remember, yet he also wants to forget as remembering hurts him because of the sad events in his past. However, still he openly states that he *"he has to go on telling stories; he has to keep on making them [stories] up. As long as there is a story, it's all right"* (Swift 68). During his narration, he remembers this and as he addresses his students, he makes clarifications saying: *"Children, only animals live entirely in the Here and Now. Only nature knows neither memory nor history. But man- let me offer you a definition- is the story-telling animal. [...] So let me tell you another. Let me tell you"* (Swift 68). By saying so, he makes a difference between animals and human beings and he argues that in order to tell stories, these stories should be experienced and this is why man is the "story-telling animal" and now, it is his turn to tell his stories.

Then, Tom Crick begins to recount another story and he goes to the past and stays there until the story ends. In the middle of his story about Atkinsons as a part of local history, he again addresses his students and this time he gives an explanation of a Greek word saying: *"Children, there is theory of history which may be called-to borrow a word from the ancient Greeks-the theory of hubris"* (Swift 77). He continues with personal story again as he addresses his students with further explanations of what real history is about:

Children, you are right. There are times when we have to disentangle history from fairy tale. [...] And above all, let us not tell stories. Otherwise, how will the future be possible and how will anything get

done? So let us get back to that clear and purified air and old Tom tucked up in his new white grave. Let us get back to solid ground... (Swift 91).

Tom Crick travels in time with his stories and as he addresses his students, there becomes a dialogical relationship between present and past and also private and public history. In other words, past and present and thus private and public histories are so mingled that one necessitates the other; one defines and describes the other. Tom Crick, with his journey to the past gains an insight into his past and present acknowledges his past and his historical truth better. Going back and forth in time helps Crick to reshape both his past and present. However, as he is telling stories, the reality of the stories becomes questionable as he himself also remarks;

How did the Cricks outwit reality? By telling stories. Down to the last generation, they were not only phlegmatic but superstitious and credulous creatures. Suckers for stories. While the Atkinsons made history, the Cricks spun yarns (Swift 25).

By saying so, Crick gives the perspectives of the two families to the notion of history and that is also the reason why he is in search of his historical truth and to accept his past. As he cannot go back and experience past, he is telling stories, a Crick way, but like an Atkinson, he is also making history with his reformulation of the histories. Hence, he makes reality and reliability of his stories and histories more problematic by foregrounding the problematic relationship between history and story-telling.

To make a bridge between reality and fiction, public and personal history, Swift, uses an actual person from the past, Johannes Schmidt who is a Danish oceanographer and ichthyologist, and Crick tells the story of this actual person from history, to which he also connects his personal histories and childhood memories. He links his personal history with public history with a historical figure. He says, "*of which the specimen placed by Freddie Parr in Mary's knickers in July, 1940, was a healthy representative of the only, if abundant, freshwater species of Europe-namely Anguilla Anguilla, The European eel*" (Swift 197). After giving some brief information about the eels to make them seem interesting to his students, Tom Crick introduces Johannes Schmidt, a significant historical figure in both public history and local history of Fenlands;

it is said that modern times do not have their Sinbads and Magellans, that the days of great sea-quests went out with Cook.

Johannes Schmidt is an exception. [...] there are those [...] who, indeed, consigning history to the background, turning their backs on its ephemeral compulsions, embark on the most fairy-tale searches after the timeless unknown. Such a man—such a votary of curiosity—was Johannes Schmidt (Swift 200-201).

Crick by talking about a real historical figure seems to teach public and local history, however, he creates a suitable ground to talk about his personal history, his childhood/boyhood memories as well as his sexual adventures which are in many ways connected to eels that is to local history of the Fenlands. He skillfully connects the public/local history to his personal history and this gives Crick a more “practical way” to teach public/local history as he exemplifies his history teaching from his personal accounts as he says,

How long have eels been doing this [birth and sex life of the eel]? They were doing it, repeating this old, epic story, long before Aristotle put it all down to mud. [...] on a July day in 1940 Freddie Parr, picked up out of a trap one of their number [...] and dropped it down Mary Metcalf’s navy blue knickers (Swift 206).

He links Schmidt’s story and adventures as well as his travel and success as a biologist, with his personal and local histories and goes on telling his own history as such;

So it was that when my father became keeper of Atkinson Lock and began, as his forefather Cricks has done, to trap eels in the River Leem [...] Not that he ever learnt, then or later, the truth of the matter. For what did he know, in his English Fens, about a Danish biologist? (Swift 203).

Tom Crick, later, questions the meaning of the history of eels as; “*What is this—a biology lesson?*” and answers “*no I prefer [...] to call it Natural History*” (Swift 206). Swift’s/Crick’s choosing Johannes Schmidt a natural historian as a real historical figure rather than choosing a well-known and “bigger” name from history is unsurprising. Firstly, Schmidt shares Crick’s interest in eels. Secondly, unlike other more important historical names whose histories are written by historians, Schmidt wrote his own history since he writes down his findings and observations during his expeditions about the eels, which later became a significant part of, as in Tom Crick’s words, “Natural History.” Thus, Schmidt too, was both the historian and story teller of his personal history within the frame of public history.

In the middle of his narration of histories, Crick is interrupted by an inquisitive student, Price, the representative voice of the class, who can also be observed as the challenging voice of New Historicism fighting with the grand-ness of history. Price, in his interruptions of the historian/history teacher Tom Crick tries to understand the meaning, purpose and function of history and presents opposing views. These interferences do not annoy Tom Crick; on the contrary, he becomes surer of himself as he is rewriting what he is historicizing. Here, both Price's and Tom Crick's approaches to history may be regarded as New Historicist approaches. Price, with his questions to Tom Crick, is questioning history as a grand-narrative and challenging the grand-ness of it. With his questions, he tries to understand why he is taught past/histories as he is not interested in past but future. He expresses himself by saying "*I want a future. . . And you — you can stuff your past!*" (Swift 123). Price is so bored with the histories that Crick is telling, he continues his attacks to Tom Crick and also history (teaching) when he says "*You know what your trouble is, sir? You're hooked on explanation. Explain, explain. Everything's got to have an explanation.[...] Explaining's a way of avoiding facts while you pretend to get near to them*" (145). What Price says, indeed, explains what Tom Crick is trying to do; that is to avoid the facts of personal history by retelling and arranging them in public and local history. Thus, he, very similar to Price, is, as a matter of fact, challenging the authority and inviolability of history. Crick answers Price's question of why they are being taught history,

And when you asked, as all history classes ask, as all history classes should ask, what is the point of history? Why history? Why the past? [Y]our "Why? Gives the answer. Your demand for explanation provides an explanation. Isn't this seeking of reason itself inevitably an historical process, since it must always work backwards from what came after to what came before? And so long as we have this itch for explanations, must we not always carry round with us this cumbersome, but precious bag of clues called History? (Swift 111).

Crick believes that the justification or the explanation to the "whys" of the history is the reason for his teaching history and for the students' learning about history to have the "bag of clues." They all try to find explanations for history and Tom Crick is also finding/making his own explanations. Carl L. Becker in his essay "Everyman His Own Historian" emphasizes a similar idea and questions the truth-ness of the long-ago-established facts by historians and asks whether the historical facts are just the outcomes of interpretations of the historians "to establish the

facts is always in order, and is indeed the first duty of the historian; but to suppose that the facts once established in all their fullness, will ‘speak for themselves’ is an illusion” (249). As Becker states, Tom Crick as a history teacher/historian is also speaking for himself about his personal history by using public and local histories. He, then, continues to talk about “the grand repertoire of history” (Swift 47) and the reasons for the need of history; however, while he is making his explanation as to his question “whywhywhy,” (Swift 112) he at the same time gives a definition of history;

History begins only at the point where things go wrong: History is born only with trouble, with perplexity, with regret. [...] ‘Historia’ or ‘Inquiry’ [...] To uncover the mysteries of cause and effect. [...] To know that what we are is what we are because of our past has determined it. To learn (the history master’s hoary stand-by) from our mistakes so it will be better, in future... (Swift 111-112).

Since he is trying to uncover the mysteries of his personal history within public history, being a history teacher gives him an opportunity to tell his own stories and make his own justifications to comprehend his past. He is explicitly telling what he is doing when he answers Price as “*You make things plain in the lesson. It’s your show. You are the chief. You do the explaining.*” (Swift 167). Price’s criticism of Tom Crick as the “chief” of the lesson and his “doing the explanation” is a significant evaluation of Tom Crick as a history teacher/historian as well as history and Price unconsciously underlines the similarity between story writing and history writing, as he criticizes historians who are like story writers, “chiefs” of what they are writing. Like a story/fiction writer, the historian/history teacher Crick too is (re)writing the past events from his own perspective and as a result he is reformulating history. Price unhesitantly tells why he does not like this saying, “*Because explaining’s a way of avoiding the facts while you pretend to get near to them-*” (Swift 70). He further adds, “*And people only explain when things are wrong, don’t they, when they are right? So the more explaining you hear, the more you think things must be pretty bad that they need so much explaining*” (Swift 170). What Price means is that the explanation of the past events is actually the interpretation of them, and it is not possible to talk about the objectivity of history since there is the historian’s perspective his/her explanations with which s/he tries to justify and reconstruct the past.



There is no doubt that Tom Crick tries to redesign his personal history by re-narrating the public history as he wishes. He is historicizing his past as some central events in his past hurt him and historicizing them is the only way for him to handle them. For that reason, while telling public history and The Fenlands' history, he also recounts his undesirable-to-narrate stories and he becomes a historical character in his re-shaped stories. He shifts in time moving forward and backward and it becomes more difficult to talk about a chronological order in the novel as he, himself says, *"There are no compasses for journeying in time, which can also be associated with the (dis)continuity of history"* (Swift 146). Due to the problematic narrativization of the chronological order of time by Crick, Mary Crick's (his wife) stealing the baby is given at the beginning of the novel as a mysterious event. This confusing use of time in the novel makes it hard to follow the storyline, however, the seemingly fragmented stories become a whole at the end of the novel and through the fragmented histories, Crick presents multiple perspectives to the same events and makes the readers have an objective understanding of the past.

In the novel, both history and time are fragmented and discontinuous at the same time. However, it is not clear what the truth is, what is told, retold and never-told. The shifting discontinuous journeys in time help Crick to give not only multiple perspectives about past for teaching history but also for facing his own past in order to (re)shape his present existence. He himself gives his reason for his indirect narrations as such;

What do you think all sounding off my stories about, and what do you think all these stories are for which I've been telling as a finale to my teaching career [...] I don't care what you call it—explaining, evading the facts, making up meanings, taking a larger view, putting things into perspective, dodging the here and now, education, history, fairy-tales—it helps to eliminate fear (Swift 241).

What he means by fear is his fear and desire of facing with the never-told stories (truths) of this past in particular the truth behind his wife's being institutionalized as well as her kidnapping a baby. By re-narrating his past from now and moving in past and present, he creates a fictional historia within the real one via unrestricted remembering and forgetting. He tells all his stories as he remembers and wishes to forget. He is like his father who "wants to forget" and his father Henry Crick says, *"it's a perfectly good sign that he thinks he's forgotten, because that's how we put our things, by forgetting"* (Swift 223). His mother, Helen Atkinson is also good at story telling like his father and she also speaks about the

relationship between forgetting/remembering and making stories, saying “No, don’t forget. Don’t erase it. You can erase it. But make it into a story. Just a story. Yes, everything is a story. What’s real? All a story. Only a story...” (Swift 225-226). Thus, making stories out of historical facts is a good way to escape from the reality and to accept the past. Thomas Crick, like his mother, is telling his past by reconstructing it and so he finds a way to understand and accept his personal history.

Thus, the importance of remembering and forgetting and transferring of what is remembered and forgotten into stories, in other words, creating stories by using a selection of memories is significant not only for Tom Crick, but also for his parents who have to first confess, then accept their past in order to be able to go on. It is also a way to escape from reality for Tom Crick and his family. The different perspectives to the same events by different people, though they seem to be fragmented, actually are united in the end and make the novel complete. What Tom Crick says to police officers to defend his wife also clearly summarizes this, “*but officers, there are different versions. (There always are: for example 1789, bread riots, or the millennium). There’s her first explanation (which is far-fetched) and then what she told me in the car*” (Swift 312). In Crick’s mind public history and personal history are confused and his memory is in patches in terms of all histories. Then, he tries to make a connection between French Revolution and his wife’s “revolution” and he sees them equally significant. In that sense, Tom Crick becomes the spokesperson of Montrose’s concepts of “textuality of history” and “historicizing of the texts;” the way he is in his history classes, reformulating all histories, local, personal and public. What he says is not so much different from New Historicists’ view which underlines the relationships between the text and context, historicity and textuality, reality and fictionality as he says:

So I shouldered my Subject. So I began to look into history-not only the well-thumbed history of the wide world, but also, indeed with particular zeal, the history of my Fenland forebears. So I began to demand of history an Explanation (Swift 67-68).

What Tom Crick gives is the focal point of the novel as well as of the New Historicist approach which is the re-evaluation of the past events and the “man-made-ness” of history. That is, histories in the novel are given through Tom Crick so, they are all Tom Crick’s versions of histories. Crick, as the all-knowing narrator, narrates and textualizes all stories. However, he is at the same time, the protagonist of all stories he is narrating. Thus, it is not possible to talk about the reliability Tom

Crick's memories. Thus, the novel clearly shows that the past events can be narrated in multiple and many subjective ways. What Susan Onega says for all the characters in the novel can be considered especially for Tom Crick. She says that the characters in the novel come "into existence within the fictional walls of their own novel, acting as narrator, author and even reader of their own subjective versions of 'world history' (17). Hence, the novel is dubious about the reliability of story-telling, private, local and public histories since they are re-remembered and forgotten, shaped and reshaped in Tom Crick's memories.

To conclude, *Waterland* is a contemporary historical novel which shatters grand-ness of history by mingling public, local and personal histories. Tom Crick's being a history teacher and his teaching public history to his students with bits and pieces of his personal history challenges the objectivity of history. His reformulating public and local histories makes what he teaches as a history teacher unreliable and undoubtedly makes the line between fact and fiction unclear. Thus, the novel when analyzed from the New Historicist approach clearly depicts the problematic textual nature of representations of history.

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