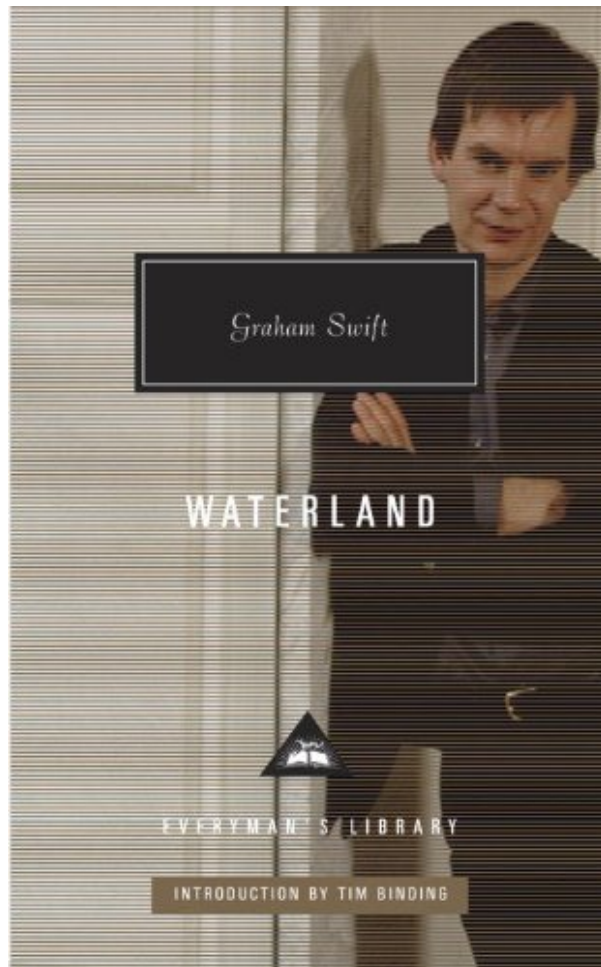
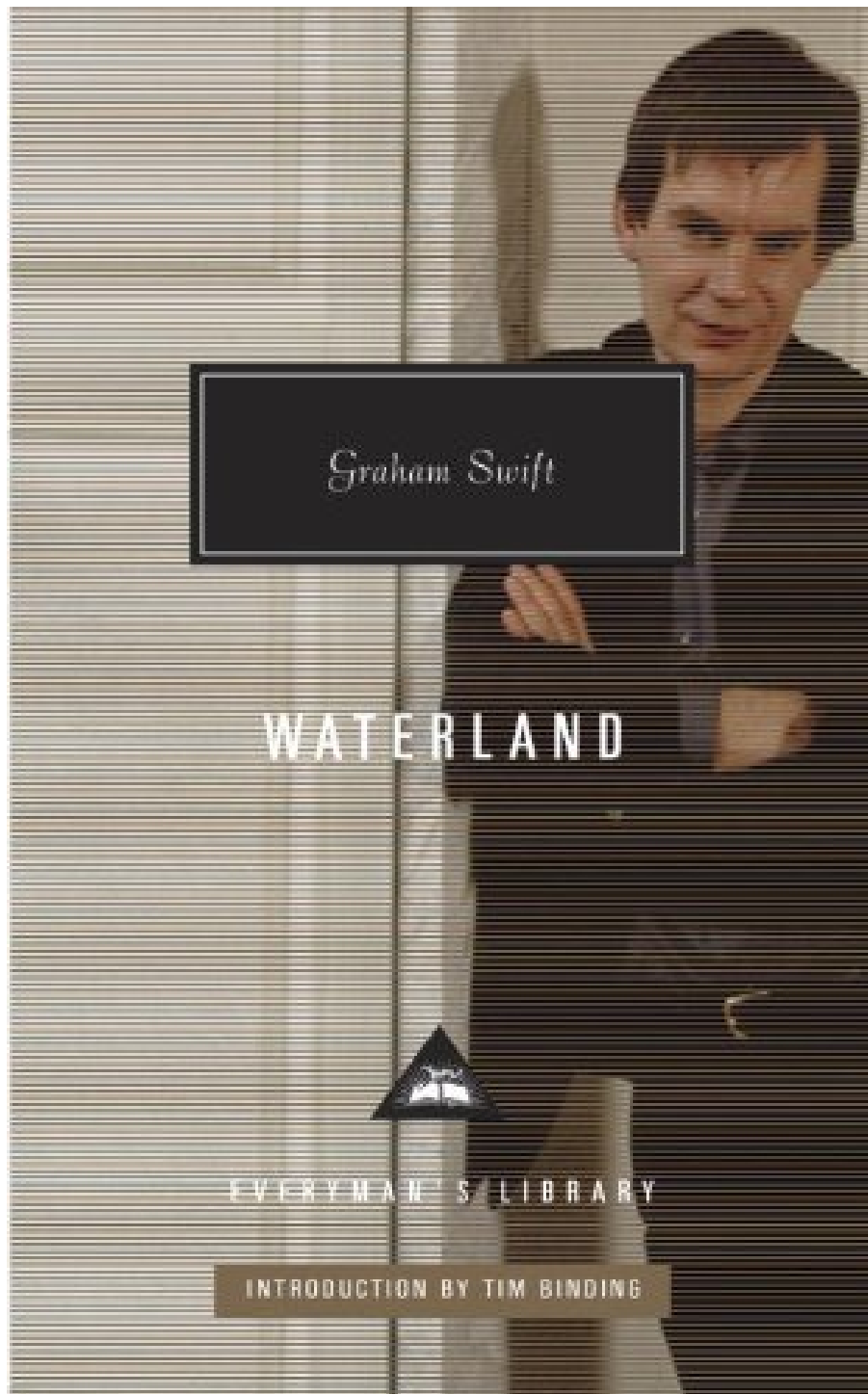


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Graham Swift's extraordinary masterpiece—a finalist for the Booker Prize—**WATERLAND** weaves together eels and incest, ale-making and madness, the heartless sweep of history and a family romance as tormented as Greek tragedy into one epic story.

In the flat, watery Fen Country of East Anglia, a passionate history teacher named Tom Crick is being forced into early retirement from the school where he has taught for thirty years. When a student rebelliously questions the value of the subject to which Tom has devoted his life, Tom responds with his own personal retrospective. His story—intertwined with the stories of the local wetlands, the French Revolution, and World War II, among other things—throws light onto the dark circumstances of the current day, revealing how his wife's tragic youth led to the events surrounding his forced retirement. A monumental tribute to the past, a gripping multigenerational family saga, and a powerful affirmation of the history of self, this exceptional novel illuminates the cycles of time in which we live.

Book Jacket Status: Jacketed

Introduction by Tim Bunting

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- Number of items: 1
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35 of 36 people found the following review helpful.

Those Who Do Not Learn From History Are Doomed to Repeat It

By Shara Klevan

This book was masterfully told in the form of a retrospective by a history teacher, Tom Crick, who is being forced into early retirement under the guise of "cut backs." Crick's narrative takes the reader through hundreds of years of history, painting pictures of youthful sexual experimentation; love; betrayal; mental illness and even baby-snatching. Crick is disheartened by his forced early retirement and disillusioned by life. He struggles to answer the question "Why, Why, Why?" regarding his own life by answering his pupil's question as to why history is important. His student feels that the here and now is important and to dwell on the past is a waste of time. Crick searches for answers by giving his class a history lesson on his youth and his ancestry. The story takes many twists and turns and shows us the consequences of the actions of many of the men in this history teacher's "history." Swift takes the reader through a botched abortion performed on Mary, the love of Crick's life, and we are privy to the physical and mental consequences of that act. Swift provides wonderful characters such as Dick, Tom's brother, who reminded me of Steinbeck's Lenny in the masterpiece "Of Mice and Men." Waterland tells tales of insanity, giving us characters like Sarah Atkinson who goes nuts as a result of domestic abuse and mistrust by her husband who shares Crick's first name. Sarah shows up at various other points as a ghost, adding a sense of mysticism to the tale. Swift takes chances on subjects that are often taboo, such as incest and child abduction. Crick's mother who was adored by his

father, had a sexual relationship with her father. We are given insight into the relationship and provided with her point of view. She is not viewed as a villain in the novel. To the contrary, she is idolized by Crick's father and forever mourned after her passing. Swift gives an account of the process that Mary, who is now Crick's wife, goes through to steal a baby from a young mother. She is not portrayed as an evil, vicious child abductor. The reader is given the story of her life and taken through her history, leading us to her ultimate mental breakdown. We see the affects of this breakdown on our narrator, Tom Crick. Swift goes a long way to show that every action has a consequence and history is something to be learned from if it is not to be repeated. Mary and Sarah Atkinson suffered the same fate of mental breakdown. Crick hopes to convey this lesson in life to Price, as Swift hopes to convey this lesson to his readers. This book was an absolute page-turner and didn't pass judgement on its characters. The unique thing about this novel was that topics that are normally avoided or harshly judged, were presented with their ultimate consequences and left to the reader to be evaluated. Swift obviously trusted the intelligence of his readers to make their own analysis as to the morality of his captivating cast of characters.

32 of 33 people found the following review helpful.

Extraordinary!

By Russel E. Higgins

A reader must have patience and perseverance while reading Graham Swift's remarkable novel "Waterland." Like some of the better authors in British literature, Mr. Swift weaves theme upon theme with great virtuosity and skill; the reader must follow the turns and detours of the expansive plot while dealing with an unusual handling of time. The extraordinary tale is narrated by Tom Crick, a rambling storyteller and ex-history teacher from England's Fen Country. He is the son of a canal lock keeper, and the story he tells - although frequently convoluted, digressive, and rambling - is one of the most fascinating stories I have ever read. Right before he is forced to retire in the 1980's, Tom abandons the history curriculum of the school at which he teaches and relates instead a three-hundred page saga of the Fen Country involving murder, incest, madness, ghosts, revenge, and two centuries of pain and tragedy. He incorporates this remarkable history with references to the French Revolution and to his own painful story of growing up during World War II, becoming involved with a bizarre murder and with a witless half-brother who was conceived in order to become "Saviour of the World." It is a disquieting and painful novel, a work of Gothic proportions in which the reader must maintain the utmost concentration. But the rewards are great. I simply could not get this novel out of my mind while I was reading it. I quickly became enthralled with Tom Crick's touching story, with his striking historical account of his ancestors, and with his marvelously graphic description of the Fen Country and its austerity and often tragic hardships. In fact the Fen Country is a major character in the novel for it acts upon the characters in extraordinary ways. The symbol of water is omnipresent, and the Fens are seen as mysterious, isolated, overwhelming in their effects on the rugged and independent peoples who inhabit them. "Waterland" is indeed an exceptional novel. Despite its chronological complexities, its many digressions, and the rather complex syntax of the narrator, the novel forcefully probes mankind's pain and torment in the twentieth century and presents new perceptions for the reader to consider.

17 of 19 people found the following review helpful.

Once Upon A Time...History

By Nick DeAngelo

Through his sometimes over-inflated, long-winded and dramatic language, Graham Swift tells the story of history in his book Waterland, because history, to Tom Crick, the book's narrator, is just that: a story. "... (135). The fairy-tales of history are constantly returning to claim the present time's mysteries as reoccurrences, soothing those who so boldly demand explanations. These explanations, however, cannot be found in studying French Revolutions or the New World; the purpose of history, education, and fairy-tales is to eliminate fear of what's to come. In the same way that Helen Atkinson soothes her veteran patients to mental health with her stories, the world inundates itself with fairy tales, convincing explanations for the way things are, the way things progress. Once faced with the loss of his job and a rebellious youth named Price,

Crick tells his own story, beginning appropriately with "Once upon a time..." (7).

His story is told in realistic sequence, that is, as it comes to mind, in three parts. The present day conflict with overflowing curriculum loads, fanatical headmasters, and unmotivated students leads Crick to conceal his biggest fears of progression with fairy-tales, his own family history, laborers of water control and land reclamation, giving Crick his roots in the Fens, and also, the rise and decline of the Atkinson name, once a prominent brewing family turned to insanity and incest, tying all three together in an overview of world history.

As this book points out, history is not the only thing to move in cycles. Nature has its own dramatic role in this novel. The deceitful Eastern winds, sometimes bringing ample life to the region, other times signifying death. Stubborn silt landscapes refuse technological progression and falter the human desire to push on. Raging fires claim years of accomplishment in a matter of seconds, leaving an audience to gawk at its awesome ability. Tireless bouts with land reclamation foiled by a few days of rain and the reinstatement of river waters, crushing livelihoods effortlessly. How easily nature can retract what takes history decades to produce.

In doing all of this, Swift takes on an excessively optimistic, but admirable task. His story is one of ingenuity and poignancy, even, at certain points, grace, but his writing style is not an attractive one. Long, complex sentences (frequently interrupted by parenthetical additions that read longer than the sentences themselves) and overly dramatic ellipsis plague this novel. I cannot recall how many times I had to return to the beginning of a sentence, paragraph, or chapter to recapture my thoughts. This was extremely discouraging as a reader and certainly affected the amount of time I spent on this novel. Perhaps my short attention span and fastidious reading style is to blame for this because the content of the novel is wonderful. There were even points where I grew to appreciate the difficult writing style. In the end, the book felt like a lot of work, but because of its message and Swift's unique approach, it was a worthwhile read.

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