

“What silt began, man continued”: paradox and ambiguity in Graham Swift’s *Waterland*

„Co rozpoczął szlam, kontynuował człowiek”:
paradoks i dwuznaczność w *Krainie Wód* Grahama Swifta

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STRESZCZENIE

Talking about his postmodern regional novel *Waterland*, Graham Swift reveals his interest in the nature of ambiguity and paradox which is clearly visible in the very title of his novel. Swift explains that this basic dichotomy of Water/Land lies in the character of the Fens where water and land come together, merge and, occasionally, clash with one another. Apart from the Water/Land division, one may find two more equally important, paradoxically intertwined conflicts in the novel, such as Nature versus Man and Fairytale versus History. The purpose of the proposed paper is to examine these seemingly disconnected contrasts, which derive from the natural attributes of one of the most unique regions of Great Britain, by applying elements of ecocriticism, spatiality theories and the concept of historiographic metafiction.

Keywords: *Waterland*, ecocriticism, historiographic metafiction, spatiality, regional novel.

ABSTRACT

Mówiąc o swojej postmodernistycznej powieści regionalnej *Kraina Wód*, Graham Swift wyjawia swoje zainteresowanie naturą wieloznaczności i paradoksu, co jest wyraźnie widoczne już w samym tytule jego powieści (ang. *Waterland*). Swift wyjaśnia, iż ta podstawowa dychotomia Wody/Lądu leży w naturze Fenów gdzie woda i ląd jednoczą się, scalają, oraz okazjonalnie kolidują ze sobą. W powieści, poza podziałem Woda/Ląd, zachodzą jeszcze dwa, równie ważne, splecione paradoksem konflikty, mianowicie, Natura kontra Człowiek oraz Baśń kontra Historia. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest zanalizowanie tych pozornie niespójnych kontrastów, biorących swój początek z atrybutów jednego z najbardziej unikalnych regionów Wielkiej Brytanii, poprzez zastosowanie elementów ekokrytycyzmu, teorii przestrzennych oraz konceptu historiograficznej metapowieści.

Słowa kluczowe: *Kraina Wód*, ekokrytycyzm, historiograficzna metapowieść, przestrzenność, powieść regionalna.

Introduction

Regional novel as a literary genre refers to fiction that focuses on specific features, such as landscape, customs, history, and people of a particular region. Regional novelists, that is to say, try to capture the spirit of a place. The model and probably the most recognisable example of regionalism in literature is Thomas Hardy and his Wessex novels. On the other hand, we have novels characterised as historiographic metafiction, called by Linda Hutcheon highly contradictory paradoxical beasts. According to Hutcheon, “such novels both install and then blur the line between fiction and history” (Hutcheon 1988: 113). The novels created in the spirit of historiographic metafiction are especially such postmodern works as: *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *Flaubert’s Parrot*, *The Name of the Rose* or *Midnight’s Children*. The aim of this article is to analyse Graham Swift’s postmodern regional novel *Waterland* through the lens of ecocriticism, spatiality theories and the concept of historiographic metafiction, in order to throw a new light on how one of the archetypal subgenres of the novel can be rethought and adapted into the postmodern world.

In *Waterland*, Swift tells the story of Tom Crick, a history teacher who is forced to retire and the subject he teaches is about to be deleted. At the same time, his mentally unstable wife Mary kidnaps a child from a supermarket. Mary becomes mentally ill be-

cause of her infertility caused by the abortion from her teenage years. Finally, after the abduction of a child, Crick’s wife is deported to a mental asylum. Having nothing to lose, Tom narrates to his students various stories from his own childhood in the 1940s and the lives of his ancestors, reaching back to the eighteenth century. All these stories share the same setting, namely, the Fens, a naturally swampy region which lies in the eastern part of England.

On the surface, *Waterland* exemplifies the traditional regional literary convention, but in fact, almost every aspect in this novel is rethought and presented to the reader through the postmodern lens.

Environmental concerns in *Waterland*

“What silt began, man continued”
(Swift 1983: 9).

The very title of the novel, which consists of the two antagonistic elements, Water and Land somehow paradoxically joined together in one liminal word, reveals the ambiguous nature of the Fens. The whole story incorporates many paradoxes and dichotomies that meet in liminal formations. All of these constructs are inseparably intertwined with the innate mechanisms of the natural

environment of the novel opening an opportunity for an ecocritical analysis.

The Fens, which were primarily almost completely underwater, after the centuries of human drainage, became a very vast, flat, swampy region with rich aquatic life. At the beginning of the novel, Swift depicts the process of land reclamation which is the starting point for all the ecological and deconstructive aspects of the story. Along with this description appears the first, basic clash between man and nature. It begins in the seventeenth century with the conflict between the water people (Crick's ancestors) and the land people (Dutch engineer Cornelius Vermuyden's men who started to drain the land). These Cricks from the past were so closely connected with the Fens and their watery nature, that they sabotaged the reclamation and even murdered the land people in the name of the autonomy of the Fens. Swift makes a distinctive caesura in the language he uses to describe both warring sides, namely, he makes different allusions which are implied in dichotomic imageries of the old Cricks and Vermuyden's men. In depicting the water people, Swift uses animal-like imagery. During one of his lessons Tom Crick compares his ancestors to animals when he says that the Cricks from the past "lived like water-rats" (Swift 1983: 17) and then he continues:

my ancestors were water people. They speared fish and netted ducks. When I was small I possessed a living image of my ancestors in the form of Bill Clay, [...] who stank [...] of goose fat and fish slime, [...] who wore an otter-skin cap [and] eel-skin gaiters (Swift 1983: 18).

The situation seems to be reversed when Swift describes the land people. Vermuyden's men are associated with civilisation, pursuit of progress, hard work and their accomplishments. Tom Crick depicts the Dutch as "practical and forward-looking" (Swift 1983: 18) human beings who bring progress to the wild Fens by constantly digging dykes or ditches and draining the land. Furthermore, they begin to rebel against the natural forces of the Fens igniting the conflict of Man versus Nature.

When Tom Crick's ancestors abandon their watery belongingness and aquatic lifestyle and become land people, they, similarly to the Dutch, turn into "builders of sluices, dikes, and canals as well as keepers of locks and windmills" (Oppermann 2008: 250). What is more, the way in which Swift describes the old Cricks no longer resembles "wildlife sights and earthy smells" (Domonoske 2012: n.p.), instead, it reflects the activities performed by civilised people such as: "repairing [...] scouring [...] and cutting" (Swift 1983: 20). As one may observe, the Cricks not only became the modern human beings who chose to rely more on civilisational constructs than on their primal, well-known environment, but they entirely changed the warring sides and betrayed their primaevial cradle as well as all their water-oriented ancestors who sabotaged the drainage and even "were hanged for it" (Swift 1983: 11). They joined the land people in the reclamation process and started to fight against the natural forces of the Fens. But is this really as simple as that? On the one hand, Swift writes that the Cricks:

ceased to be water people and became land people; they ceased to fish and fowl and became plumbers of the land. They joined in the destiny of the Fens, which was to strive

not for but against water. For a century and a half they dug, drained and pumped the land [...] boots perpetually mud-caked (Swift 1983: 11).

On the other hand, the author of *Waterland* introduces an ambiguity by describing Tom Crick's ancestors as amphibians who must understand both water and land in order to survive in the Fens and be efficient in draining the land. By the protagonist's indecisiveness whether his ancestors became the fully fledged land people or just evolved into amphibians, Swift shows that the Cricks make cycles in their existence and oscillate between these two modes. Just after the previous quotation Tom Crick continues his story and complicates the whole situation by saying that maybe his relatives from the past:

did not cease to be water people. Perhaps they became amphibians. Because if you drain land you are intimately concerned with water; you have to know its ways. Perhaps at heart they always knew, in spite of their land-preserving efforts, that they belonged to the old, prehistoric flood (Swift 1983: 13).

After becoming the land people or amphibians, no one can be sure, people of the Fens joined the process of land reclamation and continued the battle between Man and Nature "little by little, changing the map of England" (Swift 1983: 13). They were seemingly reshaping the landscape of Fenland, because thanks to the drainage more and more water could be sucked out of the land but, despite all their striving, the scenery remained flat as it has been before. This defiance of the landscape of the Fens reflects its natural inclination to level up with water as well as its reluctance to be tamed or changed and foreshadows the futility of human effort. The natural environment of Fenland can be compared to a living organism who leads two different campaigns against people who want to reclaim its land. The first one resembles a psychological warfare which consists in driving people to their extremes. It is possible, because despite people's hard work and strong willingness to change the Fens, the landscape stays flat and monotonous as if nothing has been accomplished. Swift describes this depressing influence of the landscape of the Fens when he writes that:

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 unknown in the Fens. Heavy drinking, madness and sudden acts of violence are not uncommon (Swift 1983: 17).

The second campaign between the natural forces of the Fens and their inhabitants focused on the drainage is more like a trench warfare in which the Fenlanders dig ditches and dikes in order to protect themselves from the possibility of flood and the havoc it wreaks. The Fenmen know that such a war demands "ceaseless effort and vigilance" (Swift 1983: 10), at the same time they are aware of the futility of their work which is a never-ending struggle that can be perceived as "a metaphor of the Sisyphean labour" (Touaf 2007: 1). What makes the Fenlanders' work interminable is the silt, depicted by Swift as "the builder and destroyer of land, the usurper of rivers, the foe of drainage" (Swift 1983: 346). As almost everything in

Waterland, silt also has got a dichotomic nature which makes it the double agent of the land reclamation. On the one hand “it raises the land, drives back the sea and allows peat to mature” (Swift 1983: 9), and on the other “it impedes the flow of rivers, restricts their outfall, renders the newly formed land constantly liable to flooding and blocks the escape of floodwater” (Swift 1983: 9). In *Waterland*, silt seems to be the central point of the whole story, because it drives the spiral of postmodern paradox and ambiguity as well as merges ecological processes associated with physical environment with deconstructive nature of postmodernism. Both ecological and deconstructive features of silt have been recognised in *The Politics of Postmodernism* by Linda Hutcheon where she analyses Swift’s novel and introduces silt as a “perfect image of postmodern paradox” (Hutcheon 1989: 55). She explains there that postmodernism in its nature installs some ideas only to subvert them by exposing their ambiguity and instability. The same role silt plays in *Waterland*, it “shapes and undermines continents; [...] demolishes as it builds; [...] is simultaneous accretion and erosion; neither progress nor decay” (Swift 1983: 8-9). Serpil Oppermann in his essay “Seeking Environmental Awareness in Postmodern Fictions” analyses Graham Swift’s novel from the ecocritical perspective and finds silt as:

a perfect metaphor both for postmodern and ecological ideas. In terms of both, silt represents the process of construction and deconstruction of reality in the novel (Oppermann 2008: 250).

Thus every motif used by the author in *Waterland* is meticulously constructed and depicted only to finally become implausible and disprovable. Graham Swift often leaves his readers confused and postmodernistically lost in interpretation by creating many detours from former ways of thinking which usually end in liminal formations.

At the end of this subchapter, I would like to emphasise one pattern, repeated almost like a mantra in the construction of Graham Swift’s *Waterland*, namely, a certain inclination of all major motifs in the story to circularity. The process of land reclamation is presented as an everlasting cycle of retrieving and losing, of drainage and flood; similarly to the cyclical state of the old Cricks who, as the amphibians, are in constant change from the land people state to the water people state. The author of *Waterland* always reminds his readers that the natural world as well as people who cannot deny their belongingness to nature, both undergo a perpetual process of the reversal and progression. Swift says about this inherent predilection of the environment of the Fens and Tom Crick’s ancestors when he writes that the Cricks:

did not forget, in their muddy labours, their swampy origins; that, however much you resist them, the waters will return; that the land sinks; silt collects; that something in nature wants to go back (Swift 1983: 17).

By the exposure of the innate ambiguity of the natural phenomena of the Fens and their strong influence on the Fenlanders, Graham Swift’s *Waterland* proves to be an exceptional example of regional literary tradition. This postmodern/regional hybrid deals with many major ecocritical concerns emphasised by Cheryl Glotfelty, such as: the representation of nature in a literary work; the

role of the physical environment in the plot; the concept of wilderness and its evolution over centuries; the environmental crisis and an ecological wisdom. All this makes *Waterland* a seminal work in the development of regional prose.

Representation of history in *Waterland*

“There are no compasses for journeying in time”
(Swift 1983: 135).

Tom Crick as a history teacher uses two different storytelling modes, one that is in accordance with his profession, and the other in which he breaks the strict decorum of the previous one. These two mutually exclusive modes can be called the historical storytelling style and the fairy-tale storytelling style. What is more, Crick uses them interchangeably, narrating the same story, which makes the whole discourse plausible and implausible at the same time.

In the first oratory mode, Tom Crick describes everything that is connected with the land people whose achievements are painstakingly documented in annals. He mentions historical figures like “engineer Cornelius Vermuyden, hired [...] by King Charles” (Swift 1983: 11) as well as the crucial events from historical records, for instance: “in 1713 the Denver Sluice gave way” (Swift 1983: 12). This storytelling style is rationally oriented and represents a strictly historical account.

The second oratory mode installs supernatural elements and characters into the story and is closely connected with the water people. The best example is the description of Bill and Martha Clay. Tom Crick introduces them as the two last water-oriented Fenlanders who live like outsiders “in a damp crack-walled cottage” (Swift 1983: 11) on the marsh. He also compares the woman to a character from children’s books by indicating “[s]ome said that Martha Clay was a witch” (Swift 1983: 11) and despite reminding his listeners to “keep clear of fairytales” (Swift 1983: 11), Crick himself is unable to stop unfolding the supernatural part of the plot and finally, makes out of Bill Clay, who is twenty years older than Martha, “a sort of Wise Man” (Swift 1983: 13). As one may observe “[f]airytales and history lessons compete for dominance in Crick’s narration” (Domonoske 2012: n.p.).

From the very beginning of the novel these two antagonistic modes coexist in Tom Crick’s narration splitting the plot into the believable and the unbelievable, history and myth. But in *Waterland* nothing is as simple as it seems to be. As the story progresses, Tom Crick weakens the explanatory power of history. According to him:

history is that impossible thing: the attempt to give an account, with incomplete knowledge, of actions themselves undertaken with incomplete knowledge. [...] [B]y forever attempting to explain we may come, not to an Explanation, but to a knowledge of the limits of our power to explain (Swift 1983: 108).

This passage contains implications of history’s defectiveness as a human construct, namely, its subjectivity in interpreting events and shortsightedness in explanation. In this reasoning, history is not to be trusted and taken for granted and in myths, apart from fictional elements, one may find some lore and authenticity. As Linda

Hutcheon says, historiographic metafiction reflects “its theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs” (Hutcheon 1988: 5). On the one hand, history is not plausible enough, and on the other, “in every myth there is a grain of truth” (Swift 1983: 215). That is why these two quasi-dichotomic constructs are united in the liminal word “story” which reflects their common origin, as it was introduced in the epigraph to the novel:

Historia, -ae, f. 1. inquiry, investigation, learning. 2. a) a narrative of past events, history. b) any kind of narrative: account, tale, story (Swift 1983: ix).

Although Swift presents history as an imperfect human construct, he also unfolds the perks of historiography and depicts it as a specific invention which helps to eliminate all kinds of phantasmagoria and focus on plausible deductions and facts of things past. As Crick admits:

Yes, yes, the past gets in the way; it trips us up, bogs us down; it complicates, makes difficult. But to ignore this is folly, because, above all, what history teaches us is to avoid illusion and make-believe, to lay aside dreams, moonshine, curealls, wonder-workings, pie-in-the-sky – to be realistic (Swift 1983: 108).

By this admonishment Swift implies that history’s prime destination is to conquer irrationality and the unbelievable. Therefore history is presented here as the synonym of empirical knowledge, the enquiry towards things that can be touched, seen or experienced. Following this line of thought the history/myth dichotomy reaches a different dimension and is breached by the epochal caesura widely known as the Age of Enlightenment or the Age of Reason. Thus myths, legends, fairytales and everything that is connected with the unbelievable stands for the Enchanted sphere of the supernatural and superstition called pre-modernity, as well as “[t]he idea of rational human progress, marked by names, dates, and victories over nature, reflects the Enlightenment” (Domonoske 2012: n.p.). The antagonism between the two periods is clearly seen in the aim of the Age of Reason. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno write that:

Enlightenment’s program was the disenchantment of the world. It wanted to dispel myths, to overthrow fantasy with knowledge. [...] Knowledge obtained through such enquiry would not only be exempt from the influence of wealth and power but would establish man as the master of nature (Horkheimer 2002: 1).

Similarly in *Waterland*, people who drain the land are the emissaries of rationality and progress. They come to the Fen Country in order to spread the assumptions of the Enlightenment as well as harness and weaken the natural forces along with the supernatural aura of the Fens. But in their boastfulness, they often underestimate nature, which is perfectly seen in another dichotomy. When Tom Crick says that he “lived in a fairy-tale place” (Swift 1983: 1) and then adds that the landscape of the Fens reflects in its “levelness the natural disposition of water [and] of all landscapes, most approximates to Nothing” (Swift 1983: 13), he makes a certain distinction. Although the division is not complete, the implication is

clear, if Nothing is on the one side, the other is nothing else but Something. But Nothing here does not represent just myth or fairy tale. As Tom Crick says to his students:

Man [...] is the story-telling animal. Wherever he goes he wants to leave behind not a chaotic wake, not an empty space, but the comforting markerbuoys and trailsigns of stories (Swift 1983: 62-63).

Therefore stories, namely, both fairy tales and history, according to Crick, are this Something with which people want to fill up Nothing. Then what is Nothing in this case? It can be seen as Natural History which stands in opposition to Artificial History, but it can also be seen as the Here and Now. In both cases Nothing reflects the true face of Reality and as Tom Crick says: “Reality is uneventfulness, vacancy, flatness. Reality is that nothing happens” (Swift 1983: 40). But let me begin with the first case.

Artificial History is for people a scientific tool predestined to recording events and opposing this uneventfulness of Reality proved by Natural History “[w]hich doesn’t go anywhere[,] [w]hich cleaves to itself[,] [w]hich perpetually travels back to where it came from” (Swift 1983: 205). Unfortunately, the aim of Artificial History is only an illusion, because it also goes in cycles. While Cicero said in his *De Oratore* that “history [...] bears witness to the passing of the ages, sheds light upon reality, gives life to recollection and guidance to human existence, and brings tidings of ancient days” (Cicero 1948: 225), he made this description highly idealistic. The picture of history more similar to the one presented in *Waterland* was provided by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel in his *The Philosophy of History*; he writes there that: “what experience and history teach is this — that peoples and governments never have learned anything from history, or acted on principles deduced from it” (Hegel 2001: 19). The Hegelian description proves that Something is not so much different from Nothing. As in Natural History seasons pass in their tedious cycle, Artificial History knows only alternate civilisations with their births, rises and falls, always in the same constant pattern.

In the second case, Nothing can be understood as the Here and Now which is depicted by Swift with a certain resemblance to one of Lacan’s concepts. In accordance with this manner of thinking History can be seen as the Symbolic with all its signifiers and order, Fairy tales as the Imaginary with its fantasy and illusion and the Here and Now as connected with the harsh side of nature and truth. The Here and Now which is equal with the Real is indeed received by human beings as a reminder of the raw reality. According to Lacan, people are usually sucked in their Symbolic order of things but from time to time a certain accident or event which represents the Real can shake somebody out of the organised inner life. As David Rudd explains, the Real:

is the brute stuff of the universe, existing prior to our classifications and categorisations [...] The only time we experience the Real, therefore, is when we have some sort of crisis or accident (Rudd 2008: 8).

Graham Swift depicts the Here and Now in the way similar to the description of the Real. He portrays it as something shocking and disturbing which one cannot predict or imagine. In *Waterland* Swift enquires:

How many times do we enter the Here and Now? How many times does the Here and Now pay us visits? It comes so rarely that it is never what we imagine, and it is the Here and Now that turns out to be the fairy-tale, not History, whose substance is at least for ever determined and unchangeable. For the Here and Now has more than one face. It was the Here and Now which by the banks of the Hockwell Lode with Mary Metcalf unlocked for me realms of candour and rapture. But it was the Here and Now also which pinioned me with fear when livid-tinted blood, drawn by a boat-hook, appeared on Freddie Parr's right temple, and again when, after a certain meeting with Mary Metcalf, I hid a beer bottle in my shirt and, retiring to my bedroom, locked the door (Swift 1983: 60-61).

Describing Nothing as both Natural History and the Here and Now Swift wants to emphasise that Artificial History and myths or legends were created by people in order to fill the gap of reality. Unfortunately, all the stories as well as nature go forward only to come back and close the cycle. The fragment from *Waterland* in which Tom Crick admits that there is no such thing as progress is the best example. He implies there that history is perceived as the account of human progress but it denies itself by going in cycles in the same way as human drainage. According to Tom Crick:

There's this thing called progress. But it doesn't progress, it doesn't go anywhere. Because as progress progresses the world can slip away. It's progress if you can stop the world slipping away. My humble model for progress is the reclamation of land. Which is repeatedly, never-endingly retrieving what is lost (Swift 1983: 336).

As drainers cannot win with nature, history is not able to dispel myths and Something will never replace Nothing, because the process of winning is illusory and all these oppositions are different parts of the same never-ending cycle of repeatability.

Representation of space in *Waterland*

"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" (Swift 1983: 1).

The epigraph to this subchapter captures a specific divide in regional novel as a genre, namely, the duality of regional spaces. It unfolds the division of regions into a core and periphery or city and countryside.

In this passage Tom Crick suggests that the Fens are some kind of periphery "in the middle of nowhere" (Swift 1983: 3), a monotonous exemplification of Nothing, "a flat country" (Swift 1983: 17). But the word "country" is quite ambiguous here because "[i]n English, 'country' is both a nation and a part of the 'land'; 'the country' can be the whole society or its rural area" (Williams 1975: 1). In *Waterland*, Swift implies that the Fens are peripheral only in society's terms, but for those who were "[b]orn in the middle of that flatness, fixed in it, glued to it even by the mud in which it abounds" (Swift 1983: 17) the Fens are central. The Fenlanders treated their

land as the core, the centre of their existence, not a periphery. This kind of connection of a human being with a natural region can be compared to an animal and its nest, namely, it starts to be not only a mere dwelling, but "a place-based cultural identity" (Ball 2006: 235). This might be the reason why the water people started to fight with and even murder the land people. Apparently, the water people thought of the Dutch people as invaders who by changing the landscape threatened their identity. The water people feel just like any other conquered nation in this case, they are deprived of their beloved liminal, hybrid space, their Water/Land.

What is more, Swift emphasises the equality of all places, even those touched by civilisation, and sheds light on their mutual origin. He does so describing Tom Crick at the top of Greenwich Hill, "[a]t zero degrees longitude – the geographical site of the zero hour – the prime meridian [which] is perhaps the exemplary chronotope" (Mitchell 2011: 4). This place turns out to be so important from the point of view of the battle between the Enchanted and the Enlightenment, because its chronotope symbolises the proclaimed ownership of the whole world by human beings as its masters. Furthermore, people do this as the typical western invaders, namely, by giving names. That is why Graham Swift chose this "zero space–time, from which the rest of the world was marked out" (Smethurst 2000: 166), as the place to forget, even if it is just for a moment, about the approved nomenclature and turn the clock back. He writes that:

From the top of Greenwich Hill it is possible not only to scan the inscrutable heavens but to peel back past panoramas (windjammers in the India Dock; royal barges, under Dutch-Master skies, bound for the Palace), to imagine these river approaches to London as the wild water-country they once were (Swift 1983: 129).

In this way, Graham Swift reminds his readers, similarly to Joseph Conrad in *Heart of Darkness*, that all spaces were once untamed as the Fens before the arrival of the Dutch drainers and their conflict with the water people.

What I have written so far in my spatial analysis of the Fens is only half of their nature, additionally, the more superficial one. Up to this moment, I have focused on the Fens as geospace, which is the "[t]erm used by Barbara Piatti [...] to refer to the actual, reference space of the so-called "real world," as distinct from the perceptions or representations of space and from imaginary spaces" (Tally 2013: 156). That is why, in the first half I explained how the Enlightenment and its rational believers (Vermuyden's men) influenced Tom Crick's homeland, while the second half refers to the Enchanted part of Fenland. It can be said that the Fens are a place where two kinds of 'the genius loci' (the spirit of a place) are in constant battle: the first connected with progress, rationality and male/patriarchal side of human nature portrayed in such people as Vermuyden, all of the Atkinsons or Headmaster Lewis, and the second associated with nature, superstition and the female/primaevial part of human nature exemplified by Martha Clay, Sarah Atkison or Mary Metcalf. As Tom admits: "My mother told it differently" (Swift 1983: 218), he also says:

On those nights when my mother would be forced to tell me stories, it would seem that in our lock-keeper's cottage

we were in the middle of nowhere; and the noise of the trains passing on the lines to King's Lynn, Gildsey and Ely was like the baying of a monster closing in on us in our isolation. A fairy-tale land, after all (Swift 1983: 3).

I mentioned in the previous subchapter that Swift in *Waterland* blends two storytelling modes: historiography and fairy tale. That is why, the story seems to be believable and unbelievable at the same time. By leading these two types of narration, Swift creates two kinds of spaces: geospace – (real space) and unreal or magical space. Together, these two spatial creations are fused into one of Edward Soja's concepts called Thirdspace which designates spaces that are "[s]imultaneously real and imagined" (Soja 1996: 11).

All these factors prove that Graham Swift's *Waterland* is a unique regional novel in which "the Fens emerge as an unconquerable natural space, imbued with an innate, magical spatiality that refuses to disappear underneath the drive for progress" (Kern 2013: 41).

Swift's Fens is therefore, a place where water and land come together, merge and, occasionally, clash with one another emphasising the postmodernist nature of the whole universe of the novel in which nothing is unchallengeable or equivalent in thinking.

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