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Eastern Premise: Writing the East of England in the Novels of Graham Swift

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ABSTRACT

This article is a critical exploration of how three of Graham Swift's novels - *Waterland* (1983), *Last Orders* (1996), and *Here We Are* (2020) – offer a literary representation of the (south) east of England, and how his engagement with the locations of Norfolk, Kent, and Sussex in these books informs their themes, characterization, and narrative form. Recognizing how space and place is integral to his writing across the course of his career, the article illustrates how, for Swift, the east means the embodied experience of the past, and is where memory and history coincide within his writing. Through evaluation of how Swift's work is informed by these critical currents of place, the article argues that his repeated focus on eastern spaces guides his portrayal of English national, regional, and individual identities. The emptiness of the Fens, the historical legacy of Kent, and the spectacle and carnivalesque of Brighton create an interrelated geographical portrait of eastern England that spans the twentieth century and beyond, encompassing changes in shared meaning and cultural signification in both place and time during this period of social and political change.

Introduction

Locating Graham Swift, either in the context of his contemporaries or in modern British literature more broadly, leads to somewhat contested ground. Whilst overshadowed, arguably, by the recognition or popularity that Kazuo Ishiguro, Ian McEwan, Angela Carter, Salman Rushdie, and Martin Amis have attracted in the form of prizes and public acclaim, Swift nevertheless remains consistently popular and critically well received.[1] If not necessarily media events, his novels and novellas appear at semi-regular intervals to a not inconsiderable amount of public interest. In part, this is a consequence of literary history and Swift's place in the contemporary canon. In his later career as a novelist, Swift has moved from the position of promise suggested by his early work to one of gentle veneration; acknowledged alongside those same contemporaries as a reliable, if less inventive, voice in literature and one worthy of popular and critical attention alike.[2]

The expectation of reliability here is key to understanding Swift and his writing. Just as with many of his contemporaries, neither do Swift's novels have much in common with those of that slightly younger generation represented by Irvine Welsh and Will Self who want to push at the limits of their own form and style with each successive work, or bend to breaking point established modes of writing in order to fashion those that fit their purposes. Instead, Swift's writing is largely character-driven, an attempt to refine a narrative mode of realism to a point of realization of his efforts to embody the subjective or limited, yet genuine, perspective of another. Swift's approach and his predilection for first person, as he argues in his collected essays, *Making An Elephant* (2010), is to remove himself from the

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equation, stating that "I'd regard it as a mark of achievement if in my work the author seemed to vanish entirely".[3] Whilst he has never quite achieved his aim, Swift's focus is on character, with his role as author to tell their story with emotional subjectivity but as much objective narrative clarity as his form might allow, bringing authority and order to otherwise complex and disorderly lives. Again, reliability and truth are key to such a stance. His novels often consider those communities whose existence is time-limited, or finite, and bound up in a sense of historical dramatic irony, whether the working-class characters of *Last Orders* (1996), the British landed gentry in the interwar years of *Mothering Sunday* (2016), or the postwar heyday of the end of the pier show in *Here We Are* (2020). Swift's approach in each instance uses such historical framing to situate the events of his characters' lives, and to compound the tragedy of their intimate, personal experience against the backdrop of the vicissitudes of British history; what once was true for these characters and true of the world they inhabited can no longer be relied upon.[4]

As such, Swift's fiction explores states of change and flux, whether in social, political, personal, gendered, or physical landscapes, and his books are all, to some extent, condition of England novels.[5] However, his work is attuned to the changing circumstances of Britain in the latter twentieth century without being dominated by overt adherence to the themes that again occupy the work of his contemporaries. Whilst a novelist like Self might plump for the post-apocalyptic setting of *The Book of Dave* (2006), or like Amis pursue the cartoonish and misdirected ire of *Lionel Asbo* (2012) to explore questions of personal and societal uncertainty, Swift adopts an understated approach to similar concerns, exploring the dissolution of marriages, shifting masculinities, and the ending of customs and communities with a quiet, undemonstrative resolve. His methods are less dramatic in execution, but arguably more effective in application, detailing the emotional cost of epochal or national change as it affects his characters in their everyday lives.

Within this preoccupation with a changing England, Swift's novels coalesce around key themes or motifs across his career, many of which are spatial in nature. In particular, his novels reveal a particular tendency to focus on notions of journeying, as well as a recurrence of the (south) east of England as setting or as a significant locale within his narratives. Such themes cut across class and gender within his works, and the journeys taken, such as in novels like *Last Orders* and *Here We Are*, and are always temporal as well as spatial, exploring memory alongside topography. Journeying in Swift's novels is also something distinct from a kind of travel with connotations of leisure and relaxation. The journey for Swift is more in keeping with the connotations of the quest in its more traditional literary sense; it is an arduous process, not without hazards or a cost to the individual that undertakes it, and is often principally (or at least equally) a journey inwards, of self-discovery, as it is about going to a particular place or traveling through a specific landscape.[6]

To date, and despite a growing critical literature on his work, Swift has not been considered through a lens of spatiality much beyond how he "fetishises the liminal" in his novels, and his being claimed as a "London writer" as a result of the city being his birthplace and its frequent recurrence in his work, again linking him to Amis, and others of the same broad period, such as Peter Ackroyd.[7] However, Swift's tendency to return to similar geographical settings has been noted, with David Malcolm, although considering principally *England and Other Stories* (2014), writing that "[i]t has been argued that Swift's England is geographically and ethnically limited, and is restricted in the kinds of action and events that it entails".[8] Swift's repeated return to the east of England, however, should not be read as a limitation entirely, but should also be seen as a statement of deliberate focus, in keeping with the narratological and authorial sincerity that has become associated with his work and his persona. As much as Swift might seek to convince us of his aversion to autobiographical influence in *Making an Elephant*, there is doubtless an affinity with south-eastern England and London in his work that stems from his own upbringing, albeit not necessarily one that places him squarely within the city; instead, Swift's chosen spaces are more evocative of the Sydenham and South Croydon of his youth, revealing an interest in suburban fringes and edges with their parochial rather than metropolitan character.[9] Such spaces do not automatically become liminal in Swift's work in so much as they bring change to bear on the individuals within them; instead, Swift's tendency is to illustrate how it is as much the

spaces themselves that exist in states of flux, spurred by larger tectonic changes to the social fabric of the nation, that their inhabitants then must respond to as best they can.

Consequently, this article argues that Swift and his novels require reappraisal and reconsideration in light of their preoccupation with spatiality and the representation of place. It provides a critical examination of how three of Swift's novels in particular - *Waterland* (1983), *Last Orders*, and *Here We Are* – depict the east of England, and how this representation of space and place influences their themes, characterization, and narrative form. This article illustrates how, for Swift, the east means the embodied experience of the past, and is the space in which memory and history coincide within his writing. Beginning in *Waterland*, but as equally apparent in the later *Last Orders* and *Here We Are*, the east is not an undiscovered country for Swift's characters but always a site of return. Moreover, a return to the east for these characters is thus to journey not simply into a physical space, but rather to venture backward in time too, either into episodes from their personal experience or the muddier territory of familial or social history. The east in these novels is personal, and also ancestral in simultaneity. However, despite Swift's tendency toward the representation of eastern places and of spatiality in general, his work resists the homogenization of the east at the same time, depicting topographical variances and differences in meaning between the three easterly regions represented in these novels. Through evaluation of how Swift's work is informed by these critical currents of place, the article argues that his repeated focus on eastern spaces guides his portrayal of English national, regional, and individual identities. The emptiness of the Fens, the historical legacy of Kent, and the spectacle and carnivalesque of Brighton create an interrelated geographical portrait of eastern England that spans the twentieth century and beyond, encompassing changes in social meaning and cultural signification in both place and time during this period of social and temporal change.

'Nothing moves far in this world. And whatever moves forward will also move back:' Waterland.[10]

Thinking about the spaces of eastern Britain, their recurrence in Swift's fiction requires some effort in definition. The notion of the "easterly" either within the domestic boundaries of Britain or as a broader concept is lacking, or more stratified, unlike its more familiar cultural concept and compass opposite, "westerly." The south and south-west of Britain has typically represented a bucolic or wilder side to the nation and its character, whether in the nineteenth-century novels of Thomas Hardy and his amalgamation of Dorset and Hampshire into Wessex, or the Cornwall of Winston Graham's immensely popular *Poldark* series (1945–53, and 1973–2002) for instance, where, far from London, the traditions of England past remain extant and life moves at its own pace. Such characterization should not be mistaken for realism, however, and such productions of place are imbued with no small degree of romanticism; imagined rural communities and landscapes such as those found in Hardy and Graham have their fair share of hardships, but the people that populate them are generally good and decent and look out for one another. Of course, Kent has likewise laid claim to a similar degree of rustic idyll and place in the cultural imaginary, exemplified in its reputation as the "garden of England" as a result of centuries of fruit and crop production; however, such imaginings are likewise romantic, and it is a garden littered with heavy machinery and under constant threat from encroaching industry. Kent, because of its closer proximity to the capital, has always been far more heavily industrialized than even the mining communities of Cornwall, with the Thames estuary and various ports connecting it with the sphere of commerce, and the wider world of Empire. Moreover, both these easterly and westerly parts of Britain are deeply divided between landowners and the general population, and rather than the unspoiled refuge from the smoky cities of industrial and modern Britain, were often just as parceled up into estates and small holdings as anywhere else.

Alert to these competing understandings and cultural associations, Swift's engagement with ideas of the east, and preoccupation with the effects of spatiality on the individual, takes many forms across his novels. Eastern spaces are a consistent presence stretching throughout his career, acting as destination, setting, and defining influence on his plotting, beginning with his breakthrough novel, *Waterland*. In

terms of its approach to space and place, *Waterland* is set partially in Greenwich in South-East London, where the framing narrative of central character and narrator Tom Crick occurs. In this narrative present, *Waterland* tells the story of Crick's strained marriage and the emotional turmoil between him and his wife Mary after she, tormented by the fact that they unable to have any children themselves, decides to steal a child she finds unattended in a supermarket in Lewisham. However, as the novel progresses, it becomes apparent that there is no way to tell this story of the present without reference to their shared past, and as such, just as much of the narrative is set in the Fenlands of Norfolk.

The novel's concern with the interplay between past and present extends across temporal and spatial axes, and the interrelation of place, people, and the past becomes a defining thematic trope of Swift's writing from this novel onwards throughout his career. In *Waterland*, it soon becomes apparent that the novel seeks to explore the relationship between history and the individual in both a diegetic and non-diegetic sense. Alongside his personal difficulties, Crick is informed that History as a subject is to be cut out of the curriculum in the school where he is employed. Faced with this erasure of professional identity and personal security, Crick turns fulsomely to the past, his memory, and the story of his extended family as a means of compensation, and of making sense of how his life path has led him to the present, remarking "[l]ife is one-tenth Here and Now, nine-tenths a history lesson … For most of the time the Here and Now is neither now nor here."[11] In these forays into memory, Crick asserts that there is no simple way of explaining how his relationship with his wife came to its present state, and that any attempt to understand the Here and Now must begin elsewhere and else-when. Going beyond London and the confines of the temporal and spatial present, Crick returns in memory to the eastern Fenland of his youth to illustrate the link between people and place, and, in the case of the Fens, not just how people are produced by place, but how people make and form the physical conditions of that place itself. In so doing, Crick pursues the past to the seventeenth century and the beginning of the history of the Atkinson family dynasty that eventually led to his birth, illustrating the rise and fall of their fortunes as brewers in Norfolk in parallel to that of the British Empire. Only then, having established this context, is he able to tell of the formative experiences he and Mary shared in their youth. Such efforts are not only the kind of postmodern hypertrophy that might appear in the work of other more ardently postmodern authors but rather part of Swift's acknowledgment of the linkage between people, place, and nation, and how the personal agency of the individual is subject to greater forces of historical and geographical context.

Waterland is then a novel about the broad sweep of historical grand narrative as much as it is about the intimate histories of its individual characters. Moreover, it is deeply attuned to its latter-twentieth-century context and to the concerns of literary postmodernism (though Swift is arguably not postmodernist, or not *consistently* postmodernist), and, given the professional future facing Tom Crick, as much about the perceived "end of history" also.[12] In this collision of the history of individuals as well as nation states, a consistent thread of the novel is to do with end of progress narratives both personal and epochal. As well as the threat of nuclear annihilation that weaves its way throughout the novel, appearing in the dreams of Price, one of Crick's class of sixth formers, and in various narrative asides, the novel represents the psychological state of post-imperial and post-industrial Britain and Britons that are similarly past their prime. *Waterland*'s principal irony is most often reserved for how the scientific and industrial progress of Britain has led to its current impoverished state, either through the shattering personal and political effects of the First World War (on the Atkinson and Crick families, and on the social fabric of the nation) or through the advent of the nuclear weapons that now risks the complete annihilation of the present society, as well as its past and future. Such anxieties, as well as the portrait of a Britain diminished by postwar geopolitics and the decline of its prestige and power make *Waterland* a novel of its time, and places Swift more concertedly within the frame of those contemporary authors like Amis and others who shared similar concerns than is often assumed.[13] Within this declinist context, Crick's life is likewise shown to be in the doldrums; his professional career has stagnated and been devalued, his marriage is at a breaking point, and he too finds himself drawn to considering his past. Such themes are further emphasized by Crick's time spent walking despondently around Greenwich Observatory with his dog, once more echoing the apex of Britain's imperial history, when London could proclaim itself the prime

meridian and international dateline, but also further implying the clash within the novel of the subjective perception and objective measurement of the passage of time.[14]

Key to Tom Crick's return to the past, and the novel's approach to history, is Swift's choice of eastern setting. As well as physically distant from Crick in his contemporary present, the Fenlands serve to substantiate the sense of shifting sands of time and fortune both personal and national that Crick and Swift meditate upon throughout the narrative. Indeed, the importance of this landscape to the novel and its utility as a vehicle for its concerns is established from its earliest pages; in the opening chapter, alongside the introduction to the Crick family and revealing the death of local boy Freddie Parr that structures part of the sub-plot, Swift emphasizes just as much the relevance of the Fens, their isolation, and their intrinsic interrelation with rivers and local communities. Similarly, the contents page and the chapter titles are indicative of Swift's concerns, with the first three chapters addressing the foundational elements of narrative, theme, and setting, most notable in the titles of chapters two and three, "About the End of History", and "About the Fens". Three times as long as the preceding chapters and following so soon after the establishing of plot and characters, "About the Fens" is an extended exploration and exposition on the geography, history and nature of the Fens and the Crick family's inhabitation of them, asserting the significance of landscape to Swift's thematic intentions and foreshadowing their impact on the narrative to come.

Once more in keeping with the novel's place in postmodern discourses of the period, the information Swift presents in this chapter, here narrated through Tom Crick, is in part factual and topographical, establishing the extent of the Fens and its geographical borders, and offering statistical information on their breadth and management. However, unable to keep to such dry information, the chapter, like the watercourses it describes, soon deviates into references to Swift's thematic and philosophical concerns here, namely: time, memory, and history, becoming a more maximal consideration of place, emotion, and human subjectivity within space. Key to Swift's approach is the interweaving of the personal history of the Cricks with the landscape, and the process of land reclamation that shaped the modern incarnation of the Fens that began in the seventeenth century. Crick calls attention to the contradiction of the Fenland landscape in that it is neither land nor water, fixed nor fluid, but rather an intermingling of both created by the "sly, insinuating agency" of silt.[15] Crick describes how silt is a process of "simultaneous accretion and erosion" that "demolishes as it builds".[16] In his use of silt and land reclamation, Swift depicts the eastern space of the Fens as littoral and liminal, signifying metaphorical associations of fluidity, flux, and change, both to memory and the characters themselves but also their various fortunes over the decades and, occasionally, centuries that define them. Silt becomes for Crick, and Swift, comparable to the cumulative experience of history and memory, its impermanence emphasizing a mutability to past experience that comes with continued existence. Crick asks the reader to forget the "grand metamorphoses of history" and consider instead "the interminable and ambiguous … process of human siltation", both in terms of the relationship between communities and place that builds up over centuries, but also the accumulation of life experience and memory by individuals.[17] Thus as Crick grows older, his understanding of his memories continues to change and shift like the silt that underpins the Fens, adding new layers of fixity but also rendering other details less solid, making past recollections and past certainties muddier.[18]

For Swift, memory and an understanding of history in place becomes like land reclamation in that both may be attained through effort but not necessarily retained in the same state indefinitely. Instead, the littoral nature of the Fens emphasizes a state of non-linearity in Swift's understanding and characterization of memory and just as the Fens shift and change, grow and shrink, with the passage of time and also of water, so do Tom Crick's recollections of his childhood, and his relationships with his brother, Dick, his wife, Mary, and the murdered Freddie Parr. Nothing in the Fenlands, nor in Crick's recollections, is eternally fixed; just like the landscape and the water table, they are subject to ebb and flow, and indeed, objects, individuals, memories, and the past itself all have a habit of resurfacing throughout the novel, whether in the form of Freddie Parr's body, the bottle that was used to kill him, or the true story of Dick Crick's parentage.

This state of memory and forgetting, submerging and resurfacing, gives Swift's description of eastern spaces a perceived sense of power in which the Fens become a force throughout the novel that drives the process of memory. Swift outlines the "sly . . . agency" of the Fens that expresses itself in "melancholia and self-murder . . . madness and sudden acts of violence," which, when connected to how the Fens "yield so readily to the imaginary . . . and the supernatural" suggests a hauntology to the landscape of the Fens in keeping with the shifting nature of the landscape and the fluidity of its foundations.[19] Tom Crick's efforts at writing this off as "Fenland superstition. The dead are dead aren't they? The past is done with isn't it?" seems to be a moment where his professional clarity deserts him and takes on a note of assertion in the face of the evidence.[20] Only at the very end of the story Crick tells does something appear to remain submerged when Dick vanishes into the River Leem when he realizes his secret has been discovered. Away from Crick's meditations on the nature of history in the face of postmodernity, the book is one that explores this knowledge of secrets, of sexuality, and of selfhood, leading to a state where, just like the Fenlands themselves, "everything is open, everything is plain."[21] The association between landscape, time, and memory means that the Fens, and the east itself, becomes a space of memory for Crick, and becomes a precedent for the connection between trauma and place across Swift's fiction in general that reflects Pierre Nora's formulation of the "lieu de memoire."[22] The novel's association with trauma has been noted both by Stef Craps and by Philip Tew, the latter of whom calls attention to how its approach to the remembrance of trauma is part of the novel's embeddedness in time and history.[23] However, in light of Nora, Crick's trauma is deeply and inescapably imbricated in connected concerns of place as well as time.

For Tom Crick In *Waterland*, the east of the Fens is fundamental to his personal and familial traumas. It is the site of his discovery of the incestuous family secret that led to his brother Dick's birth, that of his wife Mary's abortion that later prevents them from having children of their own, and also his own role in his brother's death after he signals to Dick his knowledge of how Freddie Parr really found his way into the river. However, Swift explores similar currents of accretion and erosion of memory in relation to place throughout the book in relation to numerous other characters, further reinforcing his linkage of the east and the Fens with the personal and collective past. Tom Crick's father, Henry, returns from the First World War with a superficial physical wound, but a far greater psychological one due to combat trauma and the death of his own brother, George, on the Western Front. For Henry, his trauma takes the form of a blankness and a repression of his experiences in France:

> Henry Crick forgets. He says: I remember nothing. But that's just a trick of the brain. That's like saying: I don't care to remember, and I don't want to talk about it. Yet it's perfectly natural that Henry Crick wants to forget, it's a perfectly good sign that he thinks he's forgotten, because that's how we get over things, by forgetting.[24]

Proclaimed cured, or cured enough, by the military doctors, Henry is sent home to the Fens to resume his pre-war life, with the intervening years left as a void, a pause, or a break in the flow of time and memory. However, as Swift outlines, the spatial act of returning him to the Fens works counter to their expectations: '. . . this flat, bare, washed-out Fenland, which ought to be the perfect home of oblivion . . . has quite the opposite effect on our limping veteran.'[25] Instead of a harmony of emptiness in Henry's memory mirrored by the open space of the Fens, the return to the east brings with it a resumption of memory and a return of his trauma, at first a trickle and then a flood, prompted, as Stef Craps alludes to, partly by the physical state of the landscape (the mud and flatness evocative of his time in Flanders), but also because of its own relationship to times past.[26] For Henry Crick, the open plains of the Fens render his memory similarly open and plain, just as they do a generation later for his son Tom. The Fenland thus forces remembrance on its inhabitants, with the contest between land and water a tension between the permanence of experience and the changeability of its recollection; the rivers and the water of the Fens act, as Tom Crick notes, like that of the Lethe of mythology but with the difference that their effects are temporary, and the act of reclamation in remembering fixes them once again in place.[27] This back-and-forth in time and space means that, for the Cricks both junior and senior, there is no progression without regression and no future without recall of the past; as Tom Crick states: "whatever moves

forward will also move back."[28] As a consequence, in Swift's fiction, there is no getting over things in eastern spaces, and no forgetting, but rather the repeated recall and suppression of memory, as tidal as the estuaries of the Fens, and eternal as the accumulation and erosion of silt.

Filial lines: memory, family, and mortality in last orders

Though *Waterland* was Swift's breakthrough novel, its Booker shortlisting taking him from emergent to established author status, it is his later Booker Prize-winning novel *Last Orders* that cemented him within the canon of British postwar writing. *Last Orders* is a book of its time; published amidst Britpop's semi-ironic reclaiming of nationalistic imagery and governmental efforts at national rebranding that became known as "Cool Britannia", it is an elegiac novel that embodies both the slow, chronic decline of post-Imperial Britain that had been advancing for decades, and which suggests an acute feeling of finality at the approaching end of the millennium. Swift's *Last Orders* is the dark other of "Cool Britannia's" shifting social landscape, a Janus-faced examination of a country in the throes of change and uncertainty. The optimism with which many other authors, artists, and musicians approached the end of the century is present in places, but for Swift it is always in minor key. Its themes struck a chord with the critical and reading public of the period, however, and the novel won not only the Booker but also the James Tait Black Memorial Prize in 1996, and was later filmed in 2001 starring Michael Caine, David Hemmings, Tom Courtenay, Bob Hoskins, and Helen Mirren, suitably self-reflexive casting decisions that mirrored the retrospective approach of the novel and of "Cool Britannia" itself.

This muted approach to postmodernism is reflected in the novel too, where it is likewise acknowledged in Swift's choice of understated form unlike that of *Waterland*, or the preceding *Ever After* (1992). *Last Orders* is a non-linear narrative told chiefly from the point of view and recollections of its principal characters, a group of life-long friends from Bermondsey, and alternates between the contemporary present and different points in their personal and shared history, dating back over the course of roughly 60 years to before the Second World War. The framing narrative in the novel's present is that one of the group, the recently deceased Jack Dodds, the local butcher, stipulates in his will that his ashes be scattered off the end of Margate Pier. Jack's widow, Amy, refuses to take part for reasons she is reluctant to divulge, so his friends Ray, Lenny and Vic, and Jack and Amy's adopted son, Vince, resolve to travel to Margate to carry out his wish. Swift has stated publicly that he sought in *Last Orders* to "echo" William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* (1930) through evoking its narrative construction, central plot, and use of multiple subjective perspectives.[29] Moreover, his use of a single day with frequent excursions into memory in *Last Orders* also calls to mind the work of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, as does its London setting. However, such connections to literary Modernism and display of technique are not Swift's primary intention, and the book is much less concerned with metafictive play and irony than *Waterland* or his other early novels. Even so, *Last Orders* is nonetheless influenced by similar themes, and as the novel unfolds it draws in numerous other associations and links from culture and history, piling them all up at the end of the century where it leaves its characters.

Last Orders is thus another novel defined by its spatial-temporal intersections. Again in echo of Faulkner, the journey that the characters undertake is the principal narrative foundation that permits, enables, and invites them to make forays and deviations into memory, for Swift to include and unite various subplots, and for the effects of landscape on identity and selfhood to be realized in the narrative. Beyond how Swift relies on first-person chapters told by each of the book's principal characters (though only ever once by Jack, who is, fittingly, predominantly the subject of other people's recollections), he also organizes them by location. The location chapters, most often narrated by Ray, are themselves preoccupied with topography and visible landmarks rooted in the real places they represent; for example, as their journey begins in the chapter titled "Old Kent Road", Ray notes that "We head down past Albany Road and Trafalgar Avenue and the Rotherhithe Turn. Green Man, Thomas à Becket, Lord Nelson . . . We head on past the gas works, Ilderton Road, under the railway bridge, Prince of Windsor . . . and we all feel it, what with the beer inside us and the journey ahead".[30]

Further, the landmarks Ray mentions foreshadow the group's travels and the chapter titles, with the Green Man indictive of their journey into Kent, Becket signifying their visit to Canterbury Cathedral, and Nelson that of the Chatham war memorial. Later chapters continue this specificity, and include "New Cross", "Chatham", "Canterbury", and finally "Margate". Such locative choices are in part structural and help situate the reader within the group's geographical progress, but they are also indicative of Swift's consideration of spatiality and the significance of place within the construction of his work. The linearity of the group's physical progression along the A2 and in relation to these locations is then is contrasted with the variegation of their memories, which, although often prompted by the locations they visit and largely anchored in the London they left, range across time and space to include the hop farms of Kent, Epsom Downs, and numerous racetracks, but also those much further afield such as Aden, Salerno, Cairo, Libya, and the desert of wartime North Africa.

Swift's approach to these spaces is two-fold; firstly to illustrate how they are interconnected in both memory and physical presence in space, and secondly how, the spaces that the characters have inhabited are constitutive of their being in the present. For instance, Jack and Ray's wartime experience in North Africa is spatially significant in multiple ways. Initially, it appears that Swift is drawing on the English literary tradition of dislocation and the tropes of the "exotic" east of Orientalism; by removing such local boys from their locality of Bermondsey, Swift is able, like many novelists before him, to create feelings of disorientation and the extraordinary. Jack and Ray visit brothels, ride camels, and go sight-seeing at the Pyramids of Giza, indulging in the various pleasures of spectacle and sexuality familiar to popular mythology and pulp fiction of Empire.[31] However, as well as this dislocation in space, Egypt and Libya become for Jack and Ray a dislocation in time also, a period subject to different rules and behaviors and, which enables, ultimately, different versions and expressions of themselves. The clichés inherent to this section of the book such as Ray's sexual awakening and Jack's discovery of his natural authority are thus not Swift's alone, but rather belong to the characters themselves; they embody the behaviors and attitudes typical of Englishmen in these spaces and correspond to an imperial understanding of the effects of eastern spaces on Europeans and the particular expectations on Britons within them. In how it exceeds the limits of their life experience to date, North Africa is for Jack and Ray an unreal space, and the war itself an exceptional and equally unreal-feeling period of their lives far removed from the monotony of what follows.

The contrast, and collapse of temporal and geographical distance, between these spaces in the characters' memories, as well as the imperial and post-imperial Britain of the period in question, serves to emphasize the gulf between the expectation of Jack and Ray's generation, and the reality of the world that they returned to. After such global experiences, the return to their local lives in Bermondsey and its limited horizons is stifling. Moreover, the specificity of their experiences in North Africa renders them largely ephemeral and irrelevant, or unrelatable, to the real of their everyday domestic existence, and they instead become resigned to other forms of unreality, either a memory without physical substantiation, or a photograph, such as the one of Jack and Ray on the camel, once real but now just representation.[32] Space and the place of the individual within it then becomes the motivation behind and the means of expression for the bathos that characterizes Jack, Ray, and Lenny's selfhood in the present, reflected in comparisons between their time at El Alamein or Salerno with washing down the meat trays on a Friday, or with sitting in the back of a car wending its way down the A2 to Margate.

In contrast to these more global associations, Swift's engagement with eastern spaces in *Last Orders* involves repeated return to the cultural and historical associations of Kent. Swift's spatial motif, as well as that of Faulkner and literary Modernism, is also drawing on much older associations with Kent and the east of England in the form of the group's travel to Canterbury.[33] The evocation of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, both in the spatial-geographical framing of the journey in the novel's contemporary present, but also in the format of narrated stories from the various characters in their turn is readily apparent. However, below this surface association, the impromptu or accidental pilgrimage made by these characters is Swift's way of showing that, although unfulfilled and not always successful or important in the historical grand scheme of things, Ray and the group can and do still create meaning

and act with emotional significance through space. In visiting and inhabiting these places as part of their tribute to Jack, they create a link to the people and personages that went before them, either those distant, celebrated individuals recognized by history such as the Black Prince, Thomas à Becket, or Chaucer but also the more recent, anonymous, or quotidian, such as those represented by the war memorial, or Jack himself. The group's journey is not just imitative in a superficially postmodern sense but carries emotional weight in their act of return and in their affirmation of their route as personal and historical palimpsest. Moreover, as they themselves recognize, the act of returning east to Kent is never truly a repetition, either in the context of their entire lives or that of the day itself. As Ray remarks, they are already "not the same blokes who left Bermondsey" and that "somewhere along the line we just became travellers"; despite their history of association with the area, the time and distance and the lifetime of experience in between has changed them, as has their act of pilgrimage in the immediate present.[34]

Alongside the spatial-temporal significance of the locations that structure the novel and the group's journey, Swift places considerable emphasis on the means of travel through and within the places and spaces the characters visit, as well as the broader importance of the theme of mobility throughout the novel and the changing world of postwar Britain in general. As the various perspective chapters illustrate, the freedom of movement and opportunity for mobility, social, or literal, that different characters are permitted or experience as a consequence of their personal and social circumstances is key to the formation of their identities. For example, Swift presents Vince Dodds as an example of an upwardly mobile, social-climbing ethos typical of the postwar era. Vince, orphaned in the bombing of Bermondsey and adopted by Jack and Amy as a substitute for their own mentally disabled daughter, June. Key within his backstory is that Vince rejects his "birthright" and refuses to become a "butcher's boy" as Jack expects of him. Instead, after voluntary military service in Aden and the Middle East, he buys some land from Ray and starts selling used cars, which eventually becomes a legitimate showroom, Dodds Motors.

Vince's decision is shown to be driven by a host of complementary impulses, a mixture of his perception of the shifting sensibilities and opportunities of postwar Britain, but also the more complicated interrelation between his identity and his connection to his adopted family. Vince's characterization, his personal history, and his determination to go his own way hinges on ideas and methods of change, movement, and mobility. In a perspective chapter, Vince recalls the trips to Margate that he, Jack, Amy, and Lenny's daughter, Sally, used to make and which eventually alter his life path. Swift reveals what is ostensibly a simple childhood trip to the seaside as a complex web of memory, desires, and meanings based on how, where, and why the characters travel. To begin with all of them sit in the front of the butcher's van: "Sally on Amy's lap, me in the middle, Jack . . . That was how Amy wanted it. I saw that."[35] As time goes on and Sally and Vince grow up, Vince is forced to travel in the back of the van "where all you could smell was the sweet, stale, stick-in-your-throat smell of meat." Already cognizant of Amy's desire to replace June with Sally, Vince surmises that he too no longer fits into the picture, but, like the meat and its smell, is necessary for the survival of the business:

> I'd get in and he'd close the doors behind me, the one that said *Dodds* and the one that said *& Son*. Then he'd go round and start the engine and I'd start to hate him . . . I'd lie there on the rug hating him and I'd think I aint going to be a butcher never . . . [a]nd as I lay there hating him I discovered something else . . . that made those journeys bearable. I'd put my ear to the rug, I'd feel the metal throbbing underneath, I'd hear the grind and grip of the transmission, the thrum of the shafts taking the power of the wheels and I'd think . . . I aint me, I'm part of this van.[36]

From Vince's perspective and recollection, he is treated in much the same way as any other carcass; placed in the van and devoid of agency, Vince becomes cargo to be ferried to a destination; in the narrative present to Margate, but ultimately to the counter of Dodds & Son to take over the business. Adopted by Jack and Amy as much for the fulfillment of their own desires as anything else, Vince is dehumanized by his placement in the back of the van and occupies a place somewhere between live meat and dead meat, as Lenny later notes, having survived the bomb that killed his parents but seemingly denied a life of his own.[37] For Vince, it

highlights to him the instrumental nature of his relationship to Jack and Amy in so much as he recognizes that he is flesh, but will never be blood. In his combination of the individual and technology here, Swift evokes the Futurists and their similar synthesis of human and machine in modernity and, whilst Vince might profess his ambitions to be largely socio-economic ones, the desire to be "his own man" is as equally ontological and in this episode the essence of Vince's being is altered forever. For Vince, the journey he makes in the back of the van is also the last of his childhood innocence too; on their next trip, Sally is left behind with her parents, and Jack and Amy take him to Wick's Farm where they themselves met, and explain to him the origins of his birth.

Later still, Swift emphasizes the extent of the effect of this childhood experience on Vince, and also the broader resistance to the traditional fixed ways of life in British society, in spatial terms. As Vince tells Mandy, fittingly a runaway also semi-adopted by Jack and Amy: "I'll tell you what the big change is, the change underneath all the change. It aint the Beatles and it aint the Rolling Stones and it aint long hair or short skirts or free milk and baby stoppers on the National Health. It's mobility, it's being mobile."[38] For Vince, and Swift, the real counterculture is not found in art, the welfare state, or in sexual revolution, but rather in a reoriented understanding of space and movement; Vince looks to be in the vanguard of that change, and cements the association with cars and travel that recurs throughout the novel, from the meat van, via his army service as a mechanic, to living in the camper van in Ray's yard and then eventually to owning his own showroom. Such associations draw contrasts with *Waterland*, where the slow progression of imperial growth is represented by the barges, canals, and waterways of Norfolk, whilst the postwar, post-imperial landscape of *Last Orders* is one of hypermobility, motorways, and Vince's procession of secondhand cars he tinkers with in the hope of ever more speed.

In the novel's narrative present, Vince chooses to transport the group in the best car his showroom currently has for sale, a pale blue S-Class Mercedes. The source of much comment and criticism in the novel, the car acts as a conveyance for the group for the purposes of their journey to Margate but also to convey the public image that Vince wants, and needs, to project. As Jack's son, Vince occupies a place of prominence within the group dynamic, albeit one influenced by the expectation of deference to his father's friends and, historically, by his strained relationship to Jack. By placing himself in the driver's seat for this expedition, however, Vince assumes the vacant position of authority created by Jack's death and seeks to reinforce it through his performance of the "local boy done good." Swift thus casts Vince as a literal and figurative plot driver, beginning with his decision to break with family tradition, and running through to his control over the route, and any diversions, that they take during the journey through Kent.

However, luxuries such as the Mercedes are a projection for the benefit of the group as much as himself, alongside Vince's expensive coat, his suit, slicked-back hair, "pongy after-shave" and his confident, financially secure appearance. Much like Jack and his own financial difficulty in keeping the shop open, Vince is revealed to be holding his business together by a thread, with the fate of the showroom dependent on selling the Mercedes to a wealthy Middle Eastern City trader, Hussein, and whether Vince can reclaim £1000 he lent to Jack. With the dwindling of his business, Vince's own source of mobility, motors, integral to the revolution in British social and industrial life he saw in the mid-late twentieth century, are shown to be at the end of the road, as is his persona, that of the self-made man; a realization reinforced by Vince's musings on his military experiences in Aden against his present-day dealings with Hussein, and the implication that wealth too is now traveling in a different direction.[39] Antagonized by Lenny throughout the novel mainly for his past mistreatment of Sally, Vince's efforts to move on from his background and his past are shown to be superficial; for all the apparent change in his circumstances, he remains derided as "big boy," his childhood nickname, by Lenny until the two of them finally come to blows at Wick's Farm, the site where he was first told he was adopted, and ironically not long after a shared moment of contemplation at the war memorial at Chatham. Instead of the upward social mobility implied in Vince's persona, he is shown to be stuck in the shadow of past conflict, and just as tied to the spaces and places of his personal history as any of the others.

Slight return: landscapes of future-making in Here We Are

In a similar way to how his characters in *Last Orders* appear irresistibly drawn to revisit and rethink their personal and collective past, *Here We Are* suggests that Swift too shares the same impulse. At first glance, the novel is familiar but distinct enough from his previous output, focusing on a love-triangle between an end-of-the-pier magician, the Great Pablo (or Ronnie as he's otherwise known), his assistant Evie, and his best friend and erstwhile performing partner, comedian and compere Jack Robinson. Set in Brighton and against the changing culture of Britain of the late 1950s, *Here We Are* deals with people reinventing themselves in pursuit of an imagined brighter future in a period of social flux. Unlike his earlier work, where he seeks to consider weightier and more philosophically informed themes, in his later career Swift has gravitated toward novellas and shorter fiction, such as *England and Other Stories* and *Mothering Sunday*, often based around a singular and typically simple idea. *Here We Are* is a further example of this lean toward narrative simplicity, albeit explored over the course of a (nearly) full-length novel.

Though more accessible because of its streamlined plotting and tighter focus on fewer characters, *Here We Are* is arguably an inferior novel as a result of its imitative relationship with *Last Orders*. For anyone familiar with Swift's earlier work, the overall effect of *Here We Are* is its capacity to underwhelm. Despite that surface level difference, so many of its narrative and thematic beats echo those of Swift's previous novel; the recently deceased Jack is again the absence at the center of the novel talked about and around but largely silent; Jack and Ronnie meet first in the Army during their conscripted National Service; and Swift's chosen form is a likewise tried and tested approach of non-linear narrative where Evie, the bereaved wife is in the novel's temporal present left to think through her life and their shared experiences, interspersed with episodes from memory and temporal returns to 1950s Brighton, 1940s Oxford, or pre-war London.[40] There is, however, just enough to set these novels apart, even if these differences are themselves mostly superficial. Margate is swapped for Brighton and Kent for Sussex, and, though again Swift returns to the London periphery, Ronnie is from Bethnal Green and not Bermondsey. In his choice of temporal setting, Swift again places his characters on the cusp of change, albeit with a generational shift; in *Last Orders* his chosen watershed was the London of 1939 and the coming Second World War, in *Here We Are* it is the Brighton of 1959 ahead of the Swinging Sixties and their attendant cultural and sexual revolutions, which, whilst coming a little too late for the characters, are a known context and point of dramatic irony for the reader.

A more generous reading might argue that the similarity between the novels and the repetition of such stylistic choices suggests that *Here We Are* can be thought to be almost in dialog with *Last Orders*. Though such a relationship is not overt nor direct (there is no explicit connection made between the characters for example, though they can be presumed to exist in the same fictional verisimilitude of postwar Britain), given that so many of *Here We Are*'s narrative beats appear to draw on Swift's earlier novel, the similarity begins to imply a deliberate reworking as opposed to an accidental, or subconscious repetition. There is a neatness to the symmetry between their focus on the London-east coast connections of Bermondsey and Margate, and Bethnal Green to Brighton, given the meaning of these seaside locations culturally and to the characters involved, as well each novel's temporal setting at points of change in British social life and culture. Such connections seem apparent to Swift too, and who takes the occasional opportunity to subvert a sense of expectation. At one point late in *Here We Are*, Evie recalls how she scattered Jack's ashes: "then, when it was too late, when she'd even thumped the bottom of the jar to get the last bits out, she'd had the thought: In the sea, in the sea, from the end of Brighton Pier even" (sic).[41] Rather than the end of the pier, and in place of the solemnity involved in the farewell pilgrimage to Jack Dodds of *Last Orders*, Jack Robinson instead gets the end of his own garden, and, after a lifetime of adoring audiences, only Evie in attendance.

Beyond such points of irony though, with his focus on working-class characters of postwar Britain in both novels Swift is again making a deliberate reference to the connections between place, identity, and change. In setting these novels in the 20-year span of 1939–59 (incidentally the same period in which a large part of Tom Crick's formative experience takes place in *Waterland*) Swift is essentially

telling an everyman story of aspiration and hope for the future that would have been experienced in countless places by countless people in these periods of social flux. None of the characters in *HWA* are initially exceptional; Ronnie might be a gifted magician, and Jack a witty performer, but their stories and their desires are quotidian, and commonplace. Evie too, like the group in *Last Orders*, is characterized by her ordinariness; Evie's mother tells her "you have the legs and you have the looks" but little else sets her apart from the other girls like her in talent shows and auditions, whilst the group from *Last Orders* are Swift's effort at representing the salt-of-the-earth, respectable working classes, however unrealistic it might be.[42] The point behind the repetition or the overlap is to emphasize that the period in question is about the possibility of change and transformation in location, circumstance, and personal and professional identity. The key, and ultimately significant, difference between the two books is that whereas the desires of Jack Dodds, Vince and Ray are frustrated, *Here We Are* explores what happens to people when their hopes are fulfilled.

As much as *Here We Are* feels like a repetition of many of Swift's stylistic and thematic motifs developed over the course of his career, it can thus also be read as a deliberate revisitation of them too. Again, Swift presents the reader with a littoral space in the east of England in which he sets a story of tragedy and of a disappearance told through the return to the past in memory. Like his previous novels, the coastal location brings with it ideas of ebb and flow, of cyclicality and return, as well as, like Margate, a sense of escape for the holidaymakers and visitors that visit. Differing to both the Fens and Kent, however, Brighton brings new spatial associations and meanings to Swift's depiction of south-eastern spaces too. Key amongst them are the notions of spectacle present in the theatrical setting and the focus on performance that runs throughout the novel. Brighton, as well as the specific confines of the pier theater, is given the character of play, performance but also drama in keeping with Thomas Carter's assertion that coastal spaces are "ludic sites on the edge."[43] Unlike the constant weight of history that presses down on the Crick and Atkinson families in *Waterland*, or the ties of locality that bind together the community of *Last Orders*, the Brighton of *Here We Are* offers its characters the potential to transform themselves. For Ronnie Deane, this transformation is both in stature as well as in name; preparing for his act requires Ronnie to don his costume, apply his make-up and check his props, the act of which alters him, affording him a boldness and fluidity that he does not possess otherwise or elsewhere; as Evie remarks, onstage, "[y]ou would not believe this man came from Bethnal Green."[44] The same is true for Jack Robinson, or, as it is revealed, Jack Robbins; Robinson being a stage name he adopted when he'd "first trodden the boards in June 1945 in Cliftonville, Kent."[45] Although nervous in the wings of the theater, onstage, Jack also transforms himself through "patter … gags … singing … dancing."[46] Brighton then, and the space of the theater, allows these characters a chance at reinvention and to exceed the limitations and expectations of their origins, just as it allows its tourist visitors the opportunity to escape the normal confines and routines of their everyday lives.

However, as Swift makes clear, such transformations are only ever temporary, and impermanent, reflected in their spatial location, and in its intersection with time. As Jack considers before forcing himself out onto the stage once more: "and where was he? He was nowhere. He was on a flimsy structure built over swirling water. Normally he didn't think about it. Now his own legs might have turned to useless struts of rusting iron, clamped in sand."[47] In their place on stage at the end of the pier out over the water, these characters have exceeded even the silt of the Fens, or the jetty at Margate; however, without the foundation of either of those other easterly locations, their position is a precarious one, emphasizing the flimsiness of their newly-minted identities. Their roles, like the pier, are a construction, strong enough to be convincing temporarily but built on sand and lacking permanence. Further, despite the initial promise of agency offered by the theatrical setting, when considered in relation to the temporariness of performance either in terms of their nightly shows or the duration of the summer season, Swift shows how these characters are also subject to the same cycles of progression and regression as the Cricks after all. Brighton offers them a chance at changing their circumstances and their selfhood, but only ever for a short space of time.

Outside of the theater, and in another point of comparison to his previous novels, Swift again pays close attention to how his characters move through space here, however, whereas *Last Orders* centered

on the practical, economic, and metaphorical affordances of the car, *Here We Are* instead features a recurrence of trains and the various significant journeys they enable his characters to make. When contrasted against the bullish individualism of Vince Dodds and his fixation on the cars he sees as his escape from Bermondsey, Swift's focus on trains in *Here We Are* appears old-fashioned and at odds with the otherwise dynamic social context of 1959 that characterizes the novel. However, closer consideration of how Swift's characters engage with trains, and what they mean within their memories and, in turn, their experience of space and place, reveals their utility to his characterization and plot. Much like the car is to Vince Dodds, trains are revealed to be part of a key formative experience for Ronnie that results in a tendency toward passivity that lasts his entire life and is as defining a facet of his character as Vince's restlessness. Swift describes how Ronnie was an evacuee and was sent out of London and away from his mother at the very beginning of the Second World War. Packed onto a crowded train for a destination unfamiliar to him, Ronnie is, again like Vince, freight, and stripped of agency:

> Round his neck was the label declaring where he had come from and where he was being sent. And of course who he was. Though it seemed to Ronnie that during this period of his transportation, of this general harsh reshuffling of lives, even his identity had become uncertain. He had no clear idea of where he was going.[48]

Ronnie, labeled and packaged for receipt on arrival in Oxfordshire by his new guardians, lacks any control over his movement and his fate, as echoed in Swift's choice of passive descriptive terms; Ronnie is an object to be transported, his life is reshuffled by an anonymous hand, and the circumstances that await him a lottery with "many consequences, not all of them benign."[49] It is significant here too that Ronnie's experience as an evacuee is one of the few examples in these novels where a character journeys west, and one where, leaving behind the modernity and dynamism of London and the industry or working nature of eastern counties, into a space of rural quietude and privilege.

The same echoes of how journeying puts a character out of step with their time recur late in the novel, where Ronnie receives news that his mother is gravely ill and has been admitted to hospital. Thinking first of that evening's performance but responding instead as he feels he should, he agrees to take the first train in the hope of arriving in time. Once again, Ronnie's agency is diminished here; he does not go necessarily out of a true desire to be present for his mother, but rather out of a sense of obligation ("what else could he say?") and at the exhortation of Evie and Jack. His movements again decided for him, Swift once more uses passive terms, "Ronnie Deane found himself on a train to London," and makes clear how, despite the temporal distance, Ronnie was still "really eight years old and that in some way, perhaps, he always had been."[50] Ronnie's return from Brighton is an inversion of the forays into memory and space engaged in by characters in *Waterland* and *Last Orders*; rather than a return for understanding, clarity, or to assert control over the events of the past featured in journeys east, Ronnie's journey to London is regressive, and toward a disempowered past self. Whereas the emphasis on cars in *Last Orders* is an effort for the characters to drive their own fate, in *Here We Are*, Ronnie is buffeted by history and events and is shuffled from place to place on the train, as much in 1959 the same little boy he was 20 years earlier. Swift writes of the "particular associations that railway stations and mothers held for Ronnie," suggesting that such subject positions remained fixed for Ronnie and have informed his adult identity.[51] Moreover, the transformation he enacts and the agency he has as the Great Pablo in Brighton, the power over his own selfhood and how he is perceived by others, is removed. In this moment of clarity, Ronnie recognizes that this is the case; Sussex and his future is described as floating by, "ripe, green, drowsy with summer," and he realizes he is "travelling in the wrong direction," away from a possible future and any prospect of self-determination, however temporary it might be.[52]

Arriving too late to see his mother before her death anyway, having cleared her house Ronnie travels back toward Brighton a few days later. In contrast, the opening of the book and the promise of change and possibility suggested by its setting, the last third of the narrative is largely characterized by dramatic irony and a vanishing of such hopes. Swift again emphasizes a closeness between his characters, their landscapes and their subjectivities, as well as between space and time, however, rather

than the typical return to the past, Ronnie's journey back to Brighton sees him also consider his future. Returning back the same way he came Swift writes of how "[a]s he sped back towards Brighton he found himself taking stock of his life as if it too might be over. This was preposterous, he knew. His life was all ahead of him. In a few weeks' time he would be marrying Evie'.[53] Ronnie's misgivings over his relationship, the outcome of which is already known to the reader, are compounded by a reliance on pathetic fallacy, with Swift writing that as he moves through Surrey and Sussex, "the sky was not the blue and benign one of his outward journey. Thick clouds had built up as they so often do in an English summer, and suddenly everything, flashing past him as it was, became tempestuous and dramatic".[54] In this final section, the novel mimics the drama of a performance as it moves toward the climax that its audience have expected all along, with the train journey that Ronnie makes back to Brighton in preparation for the literal showstopper that characterizes the narrative.

Though too for much of the book, Swift's approach had been rooted in a sense of historical realism akin to the narrative mode of *Last Orders*, this final section sees a reassertion of his earlier postmodern approach, if not quite to the same degree as in *Waterland*. Ronnie's misgivings about his future, either with Evie or in general, are coupled with Swift's inclusion of an encroaching sense of an ending, echoing the time-limited nature of their season as well as the decline of the end of the pier show and the approach of the new era represented by the 1960s and after. Hints of this had already appeared, with Jack noting the up and coming acts with their leather jackets and guitars, but his pivotal line to Evie during Ronnie's journey to London again exists at a spatial and temporal juncture; taking advantage of Ronnie's absence, Jack states: "don't you think . . . that all this stuff, the pier, the show, the whole bag of tricks, it's had its day?. . .The future's elsewhere, don't you think?."[55] In so doing, Jack rejects the formative eastern spaces of his past for that of the unwritten future he seeks to make for himself. Ronnie meanwhile, having discovered their affair and recognizing that the future, both personally and professionally, belongs to Jack and Evie, absents himself from it entirely in his last and most impressive feat as the Great Pablo, choosing to disappear along with the postwar world of stage magic and variety shows that made him in the first place.

Conclusion

In its broad approach to Graham Swift's career, this article has sought to reorient critical approaches to his work and to draw fresh consideration of Swift and his fiction as being concerned greatly with the significance of space and place, and their effects on character and narrative more generally. Whereas the existing, albeit few, critical approaches to Swift's novels have cast his approach to spatiality as a shortcoming, indicative of somewhat limited horizons in his fictional worlds that restrict their reach, this article has instead read their locative qualities as a deliberate and focused attentiveness to the east and south east of England, arising specifically in the representations of Norfolk, Kent, and Sussex in *Waterland*, *Last Orders* and *Here We Are*. Rather than a tendency toward parochialism, Swift's repeated focus on such spaces, and the concerns of their typically working-class communities and inhabitants, might be thought instead as adjacent to the postwar Kitchen Sink productions, albeit transplanted further south than typically encountered within that genre. Swift's plotting in these novels, set in times of widespread social change spanning the latter half of the twentieth century, explores the psychological and material effects of such change on otherwise ordinary people across the course of their lives. Key to this exploration is their experience of the shifting state of the spaces and places around them either through inhabitation or through memory, which Swift uses to connect the interior and subjective lives of his characters with the broader state of postwar Britain and draw together the comparative mutability of landscape, memory and identity.

As this article has argued, Swift's representation of the east of England emphasizes his interlinking of past and present, history and memory, and of time and space that occurs throughout an individual's experience, and each of these novels offers a specifically different portrayal of how these ideas are interconnected, albeit with a general cohesive effect. *Waterland*, perhaps Swift's most formally ambitious exploration of this premise, takes an epochal approach to the relationship between

character, landscape and history and considers the rise and fall of Empire and the industrialization and decline of Norfolk through the variable fortunes of the Crick family. *Waterland* embeds its consideration of these themes in the materiality of the Fenland landscape itself, with the shifting silt reflecting the ebb and flow of fortune, of Tom Crick's memories of his childhood, and his understanding of the various family secrets that surface throughout his narrative. Here, Swift asserts that place plays an overt part in driving recollection, and that memory, like history, and like space, is never static nor fixed. *Last Orders* takes a not dissimilar approach to memory, exploring specific events from multiple perspectives of its various characters that emphasize a subjective and changeable quality to human understandings of experiences that are rooted in place. Whilst the process of return and remembrance in *Last Orders* first appears to possess a greater sense of individual agency on the part of its characters as they fulfill their friend's final wish, the re-treading and reliving of their personal experience is increasingly prompted by the return of emotions associated with place as the novel and their journey toward Margate progresses. Whereas in *Waterland* Swift links national and personal history within one family, and within one character, here he creates a bricolage of complementary associations and impressions of personal and collective history within Kent, from the close-at-hand history of Jack's marriage or the Second World War, through to the cultural and literary history of the *Canterbury Tales*. Finally, in *Here We Are*, Swift presents a performance both on and offstage in Brighton, with the theatrical setting and coastal location key to the creation and inhabitation of new, albeit impermanent states of selfhood. The notion that such sites permit characters to reinvent themselves, itself touched upon in the narrative of *Last Orders* with Jack and Amy's honeymoon in Margate, is embodied in Ronnie Deane, whose entire existence as the Great Pablo is created and confined to this littoral space, with Evie's unreliable account of events delivered to the reader in the narrative present further compounding the associations of performance. Ronnie, and Brighton of the 1950s, are both consigned to history and linked only in the conjunction of space and memory.

The various spaces of the east of England represented in these novels become part of Swift's larger understanding of a state of British landscape and identity, of social and political fabric, in the process of continual and irrevocable change in the twentieth, and early twenty-first, century. In each novel, he presents a space that is dynamic, volatile even, and subject to distant forces that affect the livelihoods and happiness of his characters. The overall effect on Swift's portrayal of these communities, and of British identity, in this period is of continual flux and for whom no sense of permanence or security will be immediately forthcoming. Instead, each of the narratives ends on a note of uncertainty, albeit one with a hopeful edge; for Tom Crick, Amy and Ray, or Evie, having reengaged with and come to new understanding of their past leaves them unsupported, no longer tied to the same relationships or obligations associated with their past, but also unencumbered by them either. Swift's suggestion by implication is that the same might well be true for Britain more generally; still in the aftermath of this period of intense change, the return to the personal and collective past might prove emotionally and personally unsettling, but the reward of both journey and destination are worth the undertaking.

Notes

1. It is likewise notable that criticism of Swift's work remains similarly modest, whilst there is a lively emergent critical literature on Ishiguro; for example, see: Yugin Teo, *Kazuo Ishiguro and Memory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), and "Monuments, unreal spaces and national forgetting: Kazuo Ishiguro's The Buried Giant and the abyss of memory", *Textual Practice* (2022); Dominic Dean, "They built a whole lot like that in the fifties and sixties": Ishiguro and the ghosts of English institutions', *Textual Practice* Vol. 36, Issue 10 (2022), 1731–52.
2. Swift has, however, been the subject of major past academic studies including Stef Craps' *Trauma and ethics in the novels of Graham Swift: No short-cuts to Salvation* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2005) and Daniel Lea's *Graham Swift* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), but also, latterly, Tomasz Dobrogoszcz, and Marta Goszczyńska's *Reading Graham Swift* (2020).
3. Graham Swift, *Making An Elephant: Writing From Within* (London: Picador, 2010), 1.
4. It is an approach notable across his contemporaries, and such a schema has been adopted by Ian McEwan in his most recent novel, *Lessons* (2022), with his usual leaden flair for metaphor.

5. Stef Craps, *Trauma and ethics in the novels of Graham Swift: No short-cuts to Salvation* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2005), 18. Craps notes too Michael Levenson's suggestion that Swift's work "allegorizes the plight of post-war Britain" repeatedly.
6. Arthur Frank provides a useful distillation of the principles of the quest narrative in *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, Ethics*, 2nd Edn (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).
7. Lea, *Graham Swift*, 73. Catherine Peso-Miquel, "From Bermondsey to Brick Lane: the variegated Londons of Graham Swift and Monica Ali" in Vanessa Guignery (Ed.), *(Re-)mapping London: Visions of the Metropolis in the Contemporary Novel in the Contemporary Novel in English* (Publibook, 2008).
8. David Malcolm, "The England in This England and Other Stories," 123, in Tomasz Dobrogoszcz, and Marta Goszczyńska (Eds.), *Reading Graham Swift* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2020), 121–123. Malcolm in turn cites Kate Flint, "Looking Backward? The Relevance of Britishness" in *Unity in Diversity Revisited? British Literature and Culture of the 1990s*, ed. Barbara Korte and Klaus Peter Müller (Tubingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1998), 40–41.
9. Swift, *MaE*, 216. Even in his London-set portions of the novels under discussion here, the principal settings are at the margins, whether Bermondsey or Bethnal Green.
10. Graham Swift, *Waterland* (London: Picador, 1984), 63.
11. Swift, *Waterland*, 52.
12. Linda Hutcheon locates Swift's work within a nexus of postmodern concerns regarding historiographic metafiction and the problematization of historical knowledge; see Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 2nd Ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 52–54. Craps, however, offers a critical survey in which he outlines the repeated conflict between Postmodern and Humanist readings of Swift's work; Craps, *Trauma and ethics in the novels of Graham Swift*, 20.
13. See Nick Hubble, Philip Tew & Leigh Wilson (series eds), *The Decades Series: British Fiction* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014); *The 1970s* and *The 1980s*.
14. Swift's acknowledgment of the Modernists is again apparent here with the further thematic echoes of Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907), which likewise considers the importance of the meridian to human subjectivity and ontology in the age of technological modernity.
15. Swift, *Waterland*, 7.
16. Swift, *Waterland*, 7.
17. Swift, *Waterland*, 8. Lea observes that silt likewise become integral to the representation of the "inbetweenness of history;" Lea, *Graham Swift*, 81.
18. The accumulation of memory and experience and the accretion of silt corresponds to Henri Bergson's formulation of the "state of becoming" he explores within his idea of Duration; see Keith Ansell Pearson and John Mullarkey (Eds), *Henri Bergson: Key Writings* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 128.
19. Swift, *Waterland*, 15.
20. Swift, *Waterland*, 245.
21. Swift, *Waterland*, 44.
22. Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory* (New York: Columbia, 1996), 11. For instance, in *Last Orders*, Margate is a pleasure beach, but it is the setting for sadness that defined Jack and Amy's lives; a point of trauma, a knot in space and time that they are drawn to throughout their lives and memories.
23. Philip Tew, "Revisiting Graham Swift's Early Novels: Trauma and Confliction in *The Sweet Shop Owner*, *Shuttlecock* and *Waterland*" in Tomasz Dobrogoszcz, and Marta Goszczyńska, *Reading Graham Swift* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2020), 15.
24. Swift, *Waterland*, 192.
25. Swift, *Waterland*, 193.
26. Craps, *Trauma and ethics in the novels of Graham Swift*, 72.
27. Swift, *Waterland*, 218.
28. Swift, *Waterland*, 117; 63.
29. The similarities caused a minor literary drama in the British press in response to John Frow's criticism of Swift's imitative approach; see Ali Alizadeh, "Regimes of reading: The Practice of Value by John Frow," Sydney Review of Books, 8th July 2014 (https://sydneyreviewofbooks.com/review/practice-of-value-john-frow/). Last accessed: 15/8/23; Chris Blackhurst, "A Swift Rewrite or a Tribute?," The Independent, 9th March 1997 (https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/a-swift-rewrite-or-a-tribute-1271831.html). Last accessed: 15/8/23. Swift seems particularly fixated with such a narrative, returning to the theme for *Wish You Were Here* (2011), although changing direction for Devon and the West Country instead.
30. Graham Swift, *Last Orders* (London: Picador, 1996), 17–18.
31. For an indication of what such tropes entail see: V. G. Julie Rajan: "Indian Writing in the West: Imperialism, Exoticism and Visibility," in Om Prakesh Dwivedi & Lisa Lau (Eds.), *Indian Writing In English & the Global Literary Market* (London; Palgrave, 2014), 85.
32. Swift, *LO*, 178. Elizabeth Buettner's work on former East India Company clerks and Indian Civil Servants who returned to Britain addresses how they often experienced the realization that their Imperial service was largely

useless at home or undervalued by British society; see Elizabeth Buettner, *Empire Families: Britons and Late Imperial India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 197.

33. Stef Craps also notes the associations of Margate with T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), where the speaker can "connect/Nothing with nothing;" see Stef Craps, "All the Same Underneath"? Alterity and Ethics in Graham Swift's *Last Orders*, *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 44:4 (2003), 405–420. Peter Widdowson goes further still, citing a range of correspondences between the novel and Eliot's poem including the April setting, the allusions to Chaucer, the echoes of the Cockney voices and pubs, and the various "unreal" locations such as St Paul's and London Bridge; see Peter Widdowson, *Graham Swift* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), 86–89.
34. Swift, *LO*, 193–4.
35. Swift, *LO*, 62.
36. Swift *LO*, 63.
37. Swift, *LO*, 208.
38. Swift, *LO*, 105.
39. Swift, *LO*, 165.
40. It is implied that the novel is set in 2009, as Evie notes it has been 50 years since the end of the season; Graham Swift, *Here We Are* (London: Scribner, 2020), 148.
41. Swift, *HWA*, 152.
42. Swift, *HWA*, 17. Craps notes Ruth Pavey's observation that Swift's imagining of Bermondsey is more "of the heart than of actual experience;" see Craps, "All the Same Underneath," 413.
43. Thomas F. Carter, "Wading Through the Mangroves: Thoughts on Theorising the Coast" in Paul Gilchrist, Thomas Carter, and Daniel Burdsey, (eds), *Coastal Cultures: Leisure and Liminality* (Eastbourne: LSA Publications, 2014), 32.
44. Swift, *HWA*, 79.
45. Swift, *HWA*, 86.
46. Swift, *HWA*, 9.
47. Swift, *HWA*, 2.
48. Swift, *HWA*, 29.
49. Swift, *HWA*, 30.
50. Swift *HWA*, 126.
51. Swift, *HWA*, 114.
52. Swift, *HWA*, 127.
53. Swift, *HWA*, 131.
54. Swift, *HWA*, 133.
55. Swift, *HWA*, 149. Jack's observation echoes Yi Fu Tuan's argument that spatial-temporal axes are interlinked within human subjectivity through the implicit understanding of the relationship between here and now, and there and then; see Yi Fu Tuan, "Space and Place: Humanistic Perspective," *Springer Philosophy in Geography*, Vol. 20 (1979), 390.

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