

CHAPTER – III

**ANALYSIS OF THEMES OF HEROISM
AND INTERGENERATIONAL
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3.1 INTRODUCTION:

This chapter focuses on how heroism is the main cause of intergenerational conflict in the life of Tom Crick, the narrator of the novel and also in the life of his fore fathers in *Waterland*. *Waterland* is a moving meditation on history, on destruction, and on our struggles to shore up our small world against the onrushing forces of time and nature. It is the story of two families, of an entire region in England, of England from the industrial revolution to the present and it is finally, a meditation on stories and story-telling. One critic deemed *Waterland* as

“A significant to the 1980s as the French Lieutenant’s Woman was for the 1970s”.¹

3.2 ANALYSIS OF THEMES OF HEROISM AND INTERGENERATIONAL CONFLICT IN WATERLAND:

Swift deals with the theme of heroism and intergenerational conflict almost in all his novels. In this novel he has dealt with these themes differently. *Waterland* opens like a Gothic novel with a murdered body floating down the river that drains the English Fenland. The narrator Tom is a London history teacher. His paternal forbears were rural lock keepers and tale spinners and his maternal forbears were Victorian builders and brewers on the rise, in league with progress. Throughout the novel he addresses as his readers a class of adolescents who have suddenly rebelled against history as a subject. The young people are frightened by the nuclear fear, the recognition that the future, which is all that makes the past significant, may be fore-closed. Their challenge to the teacher, Tom

crick, culminates two other disasters. His headmaster who believes on a future nuclear power, wants to eliminate the history department and by implication Crick, too. And his wife, Mary returning in her childless, early fifties to the Roman Catholic religion she had grown up in, began a liaison with God whose issue was the kidnapping of another woman's baby from the supermarket.

3.2.1 Intergenerational Conflict between Thomas Atkinson and Sarah Atkinson

History Teacher Tom Crick has stopped teaching the curriculum and started telling his class stories about his family and ancestors in the Fens. In his story about his ancestors there is first example of intergenerational conflict. It is of his great-great- grandfather Thomas Atkinson and his wife Sarah Atkinson.

Thomas Atkinson is William Atkinson's son. He becomes rich from land reclamation projects, during which time the Cricks first come to work for the Atkinson. Thomas builds a malting house and furthers the family beer business. He is also a farmer who opens up the River Leem, formerly a swamp, for transportation of his produce. He becomes a prominent citizen known for his good works. He marries Sarah Turnbull, only surviving child of Matthew Turnbull, brewer of no great fortune, of Gildsey, Cambridgeshire. Thomas is really heroic. He is:

“Man of enterprise, Man of Good Works, Man of Civic Honour”.²

He has really flourished Atkinson's business. In 1819 he is sixty – fifth and his wife thirty seven. There is a generation gap between them. Though in young age Thomas was heroic, now he becomes old but his wife is still young and charming. The playful, girlish looks which once won his fancy have been transformed by the years into something richer and mellower.

“Mrs. Atkinson is beautiful; with a beauty which is apt to remind Mr. Atkinson of the beauty of an actress”.³

The beauty which impresses Thomas now becomes a matter of jealousy for him. Sarah possesses a heroic beauty. She is in her prime; and her husband is growing old.

In his sixty-fifth year attacks of gout confine Thomas within doors and disturb his usually even temper. He cannot accompany his wife on their accustomed walks, drives and visits. He watches her from the window of the house in Market Street. He becomes doubtful about Sarah’s character but she is loyal to him.

“that Mrs Atkinson is innocent, innocent, and has nothing but loyalty and devotion for her husband, whom everyone knows she adores”.⁴

She is truly a heroine having beauty with loyalty and innocence. She is loyal and truly loves her husband like Penelope in Homer’s *Odyssey*. But out of jealousy in January 1820, Thomas Strikes his wife hard on the face. Sarah not only falls out but in falling knocks her head against the corner of a walnut writing table with such violence that though, after several hours, she recovers consciousness, she never again recovers her wit. She lives for the next fifty-four years in a waking coma. Her mind is absent. Thomas cannot tolerate his heroic wife. Her beauty becomes curse for her. She wins the heart of people, of her sons, of her servants. She is kind to everyone. Everyone praises her but these heroic qualities affect her and her husband’s life.

3.2.2 Intergenerational Conflict between Thomas Atkinson and His Sons.

Thomas and Sarah have two sons, George and Alfred. The blow to the head of Sarah had bestowed on her the gift to see and shape the future. George and Alfred blame father for neglecting their mother. They give

much more attention to their mother because she has God's gift. Sarah is called as

"Guardian Angel, Holy Mother, Saint
Gumhilda- come again – yet another".⁵

Thomas does not possess this quality, therefore his sons neglect him. Every individual has his own concept of hero and heroism. Alfred and George's generation gives importance to future. Though Thomas is a successful businessman, a good citizen, these qualities are unimportant for his sons. So they do not care for their father. People observe this;

"Nor does it record whether the people of Gildsey, who so confidently scorned the genuine grief to Thomas for his wife, failed to notice the lack of grief of Thomas's sons for their father".⁶

They do not show any sign of grief over the death of Thomas. George marries Catherine Anne Goodchild and Alfred marries Eliza Harriet Bell. Catherine Anne gives birth to a strapping son, Arthur George and Eliza bears a daughter, Louisa June. Catherine Anne is delivered also of a daughter, Dora Emily. Alfred does not have son of his own. Now Arthur is the only future of Atkinson's business. In the year 1846 George Atkinson was unanimously elected as mayor and in 1848 his brother Alfred succeeded to the same office, would be nominal and official mayor. While in 1874 Arthur Atkinson is elected as a Member of Parliament for Gildsey and concludes his maiden speech with the much-applauded phrase,

"For we are not masters of the present, but servants of the future".⁷

It means that he also gives importance to tell and shape the future like his father and uncle and even the society also gives importance to this heroic quality. There is an Oedipus complex between Sarah and her sons and only because of the mother's love they succeed in their business. Their

mother fixation provides them sexual energy which helps them to flourish their industry.

“In short, the townsfolk might have diagnosed, had they been acquainted with a form of magic not then invented, the classic symptoms of the Mother Fixation, not to say the Oedipal syndrome. And was it not possible that the tireless industry of George and Alfred was nothing other than sexual energy”.⁸

George and Alfred are more attached to their mother than to their father. Mother fixation is the cause of intergenerational conflict between Thomas and his sons.

3.2.4 Intergenerational conflict between Helen Crick and Earnest Atkinson.

Another example of intergenerational conflict is that of Tom's mother Helen Crick and his grandfather Earnest Atkinson. Earnest Atkinson is the son of Arthur Atkinson. He is born in 1874. He experiments with the process of making beer and comes up with a recipe for a new ale, which he begins manufacturing in 1906. A craze for the potent new beer spreads far and wide. Earnest stands for parliament in 1909 for the liberal party but fails to win election. After the Atkinson Brewery burns down in a fire in 1911, he goes into seclusion.

Helen Crick is the daughter of Earnest Atkinson. She trains as a nurse and nurses Henry Crick back to health after World War I. she marries Henry crick and has two children Tom and Dick.

In 1914, she is eighteen. It is the time of World War First. She is forced to live with her wifeless father.

“Helen, far from being swayed by filial motives, was compelled against her wishes to live with her father, indeed was forcibly imprisoned by him, away from the bright and beckoning world”.⁹

Helen is a beautiful girl. She is so beautiful that at the time of parade when soldiers saw her, the silly soldiers with their rifles bump into each other and forget how to march because they all want to look at her. Here Earnest understands his daughter's sudden power. After this incident Earnest falls in love with his daughter. After that inauspicious parade he becomes not only a thorough going recluse but a worshipper of beauty. When Helen becomes a trainee auxiliary nurse, he gets haunted by her beauty.

“He pictures his daughter moving amongst those shattered creatures at the hospital, like some lady of the lamp. He imagines her effecting miracle cures, not by her nursery arts, but by the sheer magic of her beautiful presence”.¹⁰

Like Sarah Atkinson, beauty becomes curse for Helen. Her own father falls in love with her beauty. At the time of war Earnest's brewery burns down. So he goes to live like a banished man with his daughter in the big country house which later on turns to be a hospital. He grows sick at heart, with only his daughter to comfort him. Sometimes, in that lonely house, where to while away the heavy hours, they tell each other stories and dabble still in beer brewing. He tells his daughter that the world is dying; it will never be the same again. All its youth and bloom are being sucked away. Though he is telling these things, he can't deny that his daughter is blooming before his eyes. There is Electra complex in this novel in this daughter- father relationship.

“The Electra complex named by Carl Jung for the Greek myth of Electra, is an extension of Sigmund Freud's Oedipus Theory and attempts to explain female psychological development. In the Greek Myth Electra wanted her brother to kill their mother. In the Jung's theory (based on Freud's work) a girl learns that her father has a penis and she does not, develops “penis envy”, a sexual attachment to her father, and a sense of

romantic love for him. She also begins to see her mother as an obstacle or rival for the father, and may even blame her mother for her lack of penis. Over time, the girl starts to internalize these feelings toward her mother and they start to form a healthier relationship."¹¹

Helen's mother is dead i.e. there is no any obstacle in their relationship. The love between Helen and Earnest begins with adoration, and then turns to desire and desire to cleaving, and cleaving to union. There is physical relation between Helen and Earnest.

"Because one night they stopped telling stories and fell into each other's arms, the way a father and a daughter shouldn't".¹²

It is not natural for a father and daughter. She agrees to all this because she adores her poor father and pities his sorrows. As she is his close and only companion since she was a child, she can't deny him. Again heroism is the cause of this intergenerational conflict. Helen's heroic beauty makes Earnest to think that only such beautiful lady can give birth to a special sort of child, a Saviour of the World. He thinks that his son will have all the heroic qualities including courage, wisdom, physical prowess, valor, patriotism, kindness. He will be the hero of the world. For the sake of world, he will sacrifice his life. He will love the world. Earnest thinks that the world is dying. He feels that his son will save the world by his heroic qualities. Earnest believes that only the world's most beautiful girl can give birth to such a child. He demands a Savior of the World from his daughter. Now Helen is in duality whether she should agree or not. Ultimately, she agrees.

"She loved her father, both in the way a daughter should and in the way a daughter shouldn't, and she didn't want to hurt him".¹³

Helen loves Henry Crick, one of the patients from hospital. She decides to beget his child on the condition that she will marry Henry Crick, and then will beget a Savior of the World.

After their marriage, Helen becomes pregnant but she is in confusion about whose child is in her womb. Now Earnest cannot see his daughter with Henry. He is possessive about her. Deciding to commit a suicide he writes a letter to his putative son. He sends:

“Love and greetings, a father’s confession-a-father’s penitence- and enjoining him to save the world, which was a place in dire need of saving”.¹⁴

Then he shoots himself and commits suicide. This conflict ends with Earnest’s suicide.

3.2.4 Intergenerational Conflict between Mary and her Father Harold.

Chastity and morality are also the traits of heroism. When a person lacks these qualities, it may cause conflict. Mary loses her morality which affects the relation between her and her father. Mary Metcalf is the only daughter of Harold Metcalf. Harold is not only an ambitious farmer but also a Roman Catholic. Mrs. Metcalf dies in the second year of their marriage. Harold never remarries. He has big dreams about his daughter but he does not discuss anything with Mary and sends her to the St. Gunnhilda School for girls. He firmly believes that his outlay and his efforts must have results. Here he does not give importance to Mary’s will.

Mary’s mother had died in giving birth to Mary. It was this common factor- the absence of a mother that drew her and Tom Crick together. Tom likes Mary.

“Mary, with blue, curious eyes’ and brown hair”.¹⁵

They fell in love with each other. But Mary is a sincere student. Sisters of the St. Gunnhilda School praise Mary for being a bright and eager pupil with a thirst for knowledge. It makes her widower father delightful. Harold feels proud of his daughter for being knowledgeable and bright student. He hopes a lot from Mary. But Mary is interested in sexual matters. As a teenager, Mary is curious and sexually adventurous. She tries to educate Dick about sex and becomes pregnant by Tom. Then she buries herself in their lonely farmhouse. Getting shocked, Harold starts hating her. As he is a religious person, morality, chastity, and loyalty matter much to him. Mary breaks his faith. So he punishes her

“Some would say that this withdrawal of hers was not so much a voluntary act of penance as a punishment inflicted by her shamed and angered father, a man capable of stern measures, who, having once had hopes for his daughter, but being now only too aware of her wickedness, determined to lock her away from further mischief”.¹⁶

An illegal act of Mary is the cause of intergenerational conflict between them. But after three years of this incident Harold becomes anxious for his daughter's health and her future welfare. Swallowing his pride he meets Henry and puts the proposal of marriage for Tom who has been working in army and Mary marries Tom. Here the conflict between them ends with Mary's marriage with Tom.

3.2.5 Intergenerational Conflict between Tom, Price and Lewis Scott.

Tom Crick is the narrator of this novel. Born in 1977, he is the son of Henry and Helen Crick and the younger brother of Dick Crick. Tom is highly intelligent, and wins a scholarship to Gildsey Grammar School, where he first becomes interested in History.

Tom becomes a History teacher. He suffers in the hands of his headmaster, Lewis and his student, Price. Both Price and Lewis have their own concepts of heroism which is different from Tom's concept of heroism. Both of them question the value of studying history. Lewis Scott is a good, dutiful and preserving man. He works hard for the school. He is in his mid sixties. He is a teacher of Physics and Chemistry. He wants to be close to his pupils but keeps distance from his staff. Lewis is teaching Sciences. His subjects are practically applicable.

Society gives importance to a person having money, power, good family life, and good position. Such person is a hero for the society. But Crick lacks this. The headmaster Lewis Scott closes the department of History and forces Tom Crick to take an early retirement. Tom's wife is in an asylum. She has stolen a baby from the supermarket. The media has published the news of Tom's wife's kidnapping of a baby from the supermarket. Lewis uses this publicity not only to force Tom's resignation, but also to abolish the pointless information that is history. The pupils of Crick's class question the relevance of 'history', based on their fear of nuclear holocaust. What becomes apparent is that both the teacher and his pupils are at a point where'

"the symptoms of fear".¹⁷

are overwhelming their existence. Price and his fellow pupil live in a world of 'post history' where the threat of nuclear destruction inhabits their waking dreams. Only the practically applicable subjects like Science help them for survival. So they do not give respect to Tom and his subject.

Lewis does not regard Tom as hero. Sean O Faolain defines hero as –

"a purely a social creation' as he represents a socially approved norm, for representing which to the satisfaction of society; he is decorated with a title".¹⁸

Such kind of hero is familiar and realistic. He is positive and inspiring through his familiarity and through the description of a gradual personal development that may provide one with clear ideas about step to take in order to become heroic, to realize one's possibilities.

Lewis expects such kind of heroic qualities from Tom. But Tom's life is barren. He does not have children. There is not any gradual development in his life. No one gets inspiration from his life. Both his personal and professional life is sad one. His subject does not have any practical application. Student will not stand independently only with the knowledge of history. So Lewis rejects Tom as a hero and such kind of intergenerational conflict exists between them

Price voices his concern that the present is important and not the past. He dismisses the study of history by saying,

"The only important thing about history, I think, sir, is that it's got to the point where it's probably about to end".¹⁹

With this statement, Tom stops discussing the history of the French Revolution to discuss his story, the story of his family and the English Fens. Here Tom gives more importance to personal history than the conventional history. John Schad reads *Waterland* as

"an allegorical exploration of post modern theories of the end of history".²⁰

Tom proves the importance of his subject by narrating his personal history. George P. Landow informs,

"Tom Crick's personal history centers on what went wrong. This whole novel, in fact, is an attempt to explain what went wrong".²¹

Landow applies the theories of philosophical anthropologists to interpret Crick's ideas on history. According to these anthropologists the

difference between tribal and modern societies is that tribal societies operate outside of history; for those societies, suffering produces history.

“In a tribal society, one becomes individual; one becomes an individual, only by botching a ritual or otherwise departing from some universal pattern”.²²

These mistakes are not significant for the ahistorical tribal culture;

“interest in the novel, the unique, the irreversible, appeared only comparatively recently”.²³

Thus, modern culture is marked by its interest in history, in figuring out precisely what went wrong and why. This interpretation of history leads Crick to define the History teacher in these terms:

“What is history teacher? He’s someone who teaches mistakes while others say, Here’s how to do it, he says, And here’s what goes wrong. While other’s tell you, This is the way, this is the path, he says, And here are a few bungles, botches, blunders and fiascos”.²⁴

Here Tom insists that history teacher is a guide of the society. He shows a proper way to the society. He and his subjects are not useless; actually they are providing direction to the society. He saves society from repeating mistakes. The history teacher sacrifices his life for the welfare of the society.

Price asks if history is not moving in one direction and is not the story of progress, what is the value in teaching it? Tom’s answers to this question are that history and stories help individuals find meaning in their lives. Crick recognizes that, although the narrative of progress is an artifice, it is still necessary as its functions to assure individuals that their life existence is meaningful. Crick informs Price that this fear has been around since the beginning of history. Crick’s philosophy assures that

humans have endured for centuries with this anxiety and the world has still not slipped away. The world has been surviving only with history.

Secondly, he proves how history helps for the progress of society. Tom Crick's model for progress is the reclamation of land.

"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 reclamation of land. Which is repeatedly, never endingly- retrieving what is lost".²⁵

According to this view of progress, the world is not moving toward a utopian state. Progress simply entails maintaining the world as it is and not letting things get any worse. History, therefore, is recursive, as different individuals and different ages have similar experience as they try to prevent the world from slipping away. Both conventional history and Tom's personal history demonstrate this recursiveness. If history is not there who will save the word that is the question Tom asks his student.

Prices generation also does not give importance to past. They focus on practical application of knowledge. Here from Price's or student's point of view teacher's heroism depends on the importance of subject in which he is master. In post modern world only physical traits are not sufficient for showing heroism. Hero should have knowledge, intelligence which Tom has to prove.

But at the end of the novel, Tom proves how history is important for human being, to save the world and also to be hopeful in life.

3.2.6 Intergenerational Conflict between Tom, Dick and Henry Crick

Tom is the son of Henry and Helen. Tom loves his mother. He misses her after her death. This is the reason of his falling in love with Mary. He also loves his father. But he does not like his father's nature. His father did

not make any effort or outlay for Tom's education. Without considering Tom's wish he declares that his son must have a vision, he should take higher education. Here he imposes his decision on his son.

Secondly, Tom does not like his father's superstitions. He narrates imaginary tales as a real to his sons. When Mary's father puts the marriage proposals, he immediately agrees because he thinks that –

“marriages are made by Destiny, and Destiny is a great force, and where Destiny lends its hand even the most daunting tasks may be accomplished”.²⁶

Tom does not believe on such things.

Who is the real hero of the novel? Is a question, whether Tom or Dick, Tom's mentally retarded younger brother. Apparently Tom is a normal human being, well educated, well settled, history teacher having family life, is a hero of the novel. But, when we compare Tom with Dick, he fails to it. Though Dick is a brainless, he is very strong. He lives in the animal present. He has such an enormous penis that Mary is sexually attracted to him. He is an excellent swimmer. Compared with Dick, who is presented as nature, Tom is much more cultivated and therefore represented as society.

Tom buries himself in his history books. Dick, on the other hand makes use of little reason he has and performs the action he thinks will save the situation. He always shows the necessary courage to make a sacrifice for the well being of others. The real hero is the one who saves the world. Whatever one's individual concept of heroism; one fact is clear that the great men and women who inspire others through their achievements are true heroes or true heroines. Their actions for the welfare of the society reflect their heroism. Dick has this quality.

He is the most significant Christ like figure. He is the result of an incestuous relationship between Earnest Atkinson and his daughter Helen.

Earnest was impressed by the remarkable beauty of his daughter, and started to believe that only this beautiful woman could give birth to a "Savior of the World". Yet, unlike Christ, the child turns out to be a "Potato head" and the murderer of Freddie Parr, his childhood friend, rather than a Savior of the World. Actually Dick is a post modern antihero who is thoroughly neither good nor bad. He has both good as well as bad qualities. After knowing truth about his parents, he commits suicide in the sea. Pamela Cooper believes that Dick –

"gave his life to save his cursed family which suggests Christ's martyrdom for humankind's sins".²⁷

His death is thus,

"Sacrificial; it suggests the possibility of salvation and the incipience, in the everyday world, of miracle".²⁸

Dick commits suicide to wipe out the stain over his family. He is the example of neglected heroism. He has heroic qualities which are neglected by his family and also by the society. So there is not an intergenerational conflict in his life.

Dick is compared to an eel. When he commits suicide, an eel returning to where he was born. The last type of comparison involving Dick is to matter, especially silt, because he always seems to carry the smell of silt with him. Tom concludes about Dick.

"Dick is of a Savior of the World."²⁹

Thus Dick is really a savior of the World and the true hero of the novel. Dick is the example of neglected heroism. Intergenerational conflict is absent in his life.

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