



## Psychological implications of characters in graham swift's last orders

Silviya R<sup>1</sup>, Dr. R Annie Vidhya<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> M.Phil, Research Scholar, Voorhees College, Vellore, Tamil Nadu, India

<sup>2</sup> Assistant Professor, Voorhees College, Vellore, Tamil Nadu, India

### Abstract

The paper deals with the analyzation of characters in psychoanalytic perspective in the novel *Last Orders* by Graham swift. The characters undergo certain psychological disturbance by the death of the protagonist. The characters worry about their own life and they choose escape as a solution from the relief of stress. They travel with the memory of past which makes them to feel more comfortable than the present. Thus the novel upholds the traumatic implications throughout the novel.

**Keywords:** memory, Lacan concepts, trauma

### Introduction

Characterization is a literary device that is used step by step in literature to highlight and explain the details about a character in a story. The writer introduces the character with noticeable behaviors which leads to an analysis that progress along the story. Author involves characters to express their opinions and ideas and widely shows the personality of a character. Characterization as a literary tool was coined in the mid fifteenth century. A good use of characterization always leads the reader to relate better to the event in the plot.

The plot of *Last Orders* is typically straightforward. After the death of one of their friends, a group of working-class Londoners travel by car to Margate, a seaside town, to scatter his ashes into the sea as he requested. *Last Orders* begins, just after the funeral of Jack Dodd, in Bermondsey a working class area in London. It opens in the pub called The Coach and Horses, where the five men have regularly gathered over many years. As the stories starts the group is gathered in the pub to fulfill the 'last orders' of their dead friend. Ray Johnson, an insurance clerk, Lenny Tate, a market trader, Vic Tucker, funeral undertaker all in their sixties. Vince Dodd, Jack's adopted son a motor trader at forty is the youngest among the group, joins together to carry the ashes to Margate pier.

As they travel, the group visits places like Wick's Farm, where Jack found Amy and married her, Chatham Naval Memorial and Canterbury Cathedral. Through the journey the characters express their past experience with Jack. Jack's wife Amy refuses to join them because Jack was heartless regarding their mentally retarded child June. He place Vince instead of June by adopting him. Jack's life is narrated only through the memories of his friends. Ray narrates most of the stories about Jack. Ray becomes the symbol of hope in the novel since he stands for both past and future. At the end the men reach the sea and scatter the ashes. But still Jack is alive through their memories.

In the world of psychology the ability of mind plays a vital role. The human mind undergoes various traumatic

experiences. It allows them to fall on the suppressive world. A certain incident which imprinted in a human mind later evokes as a memory. The term memory cannot be termed in simple manner as to be viewed merely in terms of reproduction of past experiences. It is quite a complex process which involves factors like retention, recall and recognition. As *oxford dictionary* defines the faculty by which the mind stores and remembers information is memory.

Memory is not a videotape to record of events. Instead, it is complex cognitive or mental process involving the perception. The storage of past experience what is to be remembered and the retrieval of the stored information. It is seldom an accurate record of what was experienced. The reminiscence of past events is drawn from the long term memory. The mind is mute it takes in but does not gives back other than what it takes in. Memory is a kind of way that the mind has got upon it in virtue of which the sensation excited endures a little longer than the cause which excited it. Psychologists have tried to classify memory into certain types according to their nature and purposes served. The impact of trauma can only adequately be represented by mimicking its form and symptoms. As Judith Herman says in *Trauma and Recovery*:

“Traumatic events are extraordinary, not because they occur rarely, but rather because they overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life. Unlike commonplace misfortunes, traumatic events generally involve threats to life or bodily integrity or a close personal encounter with violence and death. Trauma events produce profound and lasting changes in physiological arousal, emotion, cognition and memory” (Judith 24).

Memory is therefore a necessary condition of personal identity. Psychoanalysis furnishes a rich language with which to talk about and to analyse characters, their natures and their motivations. Swift's characters tend to be searchers and most often they search internally. The most important character in

*Last Orders* is missing, although powerfully present in the memories of other characters.

The psychoanalyst Paul Rusell conceptualizes the emotional rather than the cognitive experience of the trauma as the driving force of the repetition compulsion. "What is reproduced is 'what the person needs to feel in order to repair the injury'" (TR 26). He sees the repetition compulsion as an attempt to relieve and master overwhelming feelings of the traumatic moment.

Lacanian psychoanalysis integrates psychoanalysis with structural linguistics and Hegelian philosophy is especially popular in France and parts of Latin America. Lacanian psychoanalysis is a departure from the traditional British and American psychoanalysis, which is predominantly Ego psychology. Jacques Lacan frequently used the phrase 'return to Freud' in his seminars and writings, as he claimed that his theories were an extension of Freud's own, contrary to those of Anna Freud, the Ego Psychology, object relations and self theories and also claims the necessity of reading Freud's complete works, not only a part of them.

Lacan's concepts concern the Mirror Stage, the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic claim that the unconscious is structured as a language. Lacan's psychoanalytic theory is rich with unique terminology. His central concept of 'Desire' employs it to describe the alienated experience. Lacan explains alienation as the product of the initial necessity to be understood and interpreted by others. The baby according to Lacan suffers a long period of dependence in which he cannot sustain his own needs and is dependent upon others.

In *Last Orders* June, Jack's daughter is alienated from her birth since she was born mentally retarded. Jack rejects and alienates throughout his life. June naturally falls on the state of dependence towards her mother Amy. "And the most I've wanted, the most I've hoped in fifty years, believe me I've never asked the earth, is that you should have looked at me once, just once, and said, 'Mum'." (LO 274)

Amy the only person cares about June and her illness. Though June was alienated there was her mother for fifty years to visit her in the home. Because of Amy's desire of June's love she in turn alienates herself from her husband Jack and she refuse to join to scatter the ashes. Thus she involves in the affair with Ray as a substitute father for June who once visited June with her.

Lacan's term *Transference* is the displacement of one's unresolved conflicts, dependencies and aggressions onto a substitute object. The character Mandy Jack's adopted daughter who is substituted instead of June leaves her home towards the hatred of her parents. When she was adopted by Jack she accepts a new family and she accepts Jack and Amy as a substituting parents. "To run away from home and find another home in less than a day, though the new home wasn't a real home, anymore than the one I left" (LO 157).

Mandy was not happy with her father's second marriage and thus she involved herself to dance in pubs and made her parents to hate her. Finally she leaves home and joins Jack on the way to find a new family. Here the substitution takes place to resolve her inner conflicts than to accept the conflict.

The term *Mirror Stage* is a state of the person self identify. The person tries to alienate and understand the self from others. Vince, when he knows his true identity that he belongs

to some other family he alienate himself from Jack Dodds family. He even refuses to hold the family traditional butchering job and prefers motor trade where he becomes successful. Thus he finds his own identity separating himself from others. "I think, he wants me to say 'butcher' but I aint going to say it. I aint going to say 'butcher' (LO 97).

The central characters of *Last Orders* are profoundly sentiment of their responsibility as roles as sustained. Vic is straightforward and Lenny knows the confinement that his daughter brings, Ray becomes aware by seeing Jack that "Nevertheless an important person in addition the man himself, his own man, private Jack" (LO 183). Vince has a tormenting observation by seeing Jack's dead body. The characters stuck between the corpse and individuality.

As the characters travel through the place Kent, they are often psychologically elsewhere despite their actual physical location. These psychological digressions can be regarded as a manifestation of the carnivalesque since the temporal disruption is similar to the disruption that the characters experience on their journey to Margate. In the scenes where the grotesque situations occur, the characters travel through the past in their thoughts as they attempt reconcile incidents from the past. The characters experience a sense of anxiety as well as a sense of veneration.

The psychological detours function similarly to the grotesque. Ray takes a vacation from the present as he recalls a conversation he had with Jack concerning the money that Jack had borrowed from Vince for Ray to gamble. Ray experiences a sense of guilt when he visits Cathedral. Since the money is for the benefit of Amy for her future. This is clear when Ray says, "Thinking, it's like he's looking at me now, knowing. Better make your mind up, Raysy, better make it up quick. It's like it wasn't just the dosh, it was me anal, the two together. There's the money, Amy and there's Raysy" (LO 225).

Lenny realizes that he is responsible for his estrangement from his daughter Sally because he persuaded her to have an abortion in spite of her objections. Lenny later suggests that he will contact Sally after the trip, demonstrating his progression, "Maybe the first I ought to do after we've done our duty by Jack here is go and pay sally a visit. It's me, girl. It's your old dad, remember? It aint just another passing prick" (LO 209). Lenny's psychological detour proves to be generative because he has emotionally progressed.

The psychoanalyst Mario Jacoby argues in his book *Longing for Paradise* that nostalgia is simply an expression of a common fantasy that life was better in the past. The world of wholeness exists mostly in retrospect, as a compensation for the threatened, fragmented world in which we live now. How lovely it is to be a child can be uttered only by an adult who looking backward idealizes the alleged innocence and security of childhood. It is certainly true that for Swift's characters, the old days were better than their present.

Swift's characters experience on the general level is faced with the prospect of mortality as they turn to past. In *Last Orders* the longing for paradise is not retained instead it is recollected. They are also forced to test those convictions in the consciousness of their own. Trauma is not only the cause of identity the characters express their hope for future in terms of the change of identity. The past does not remain as the end for memories instead it hurts the present life. The suppression

allows a person to otherworld where the person gets mentally sick. The past imprinted in the mind disturbs the person and put them into fear of their life.

### **Conclusion**

*Last Orders* raises the possibility that dead continue to exist through the memories of others. The dead are simply gone leaving the grief on the living.

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