



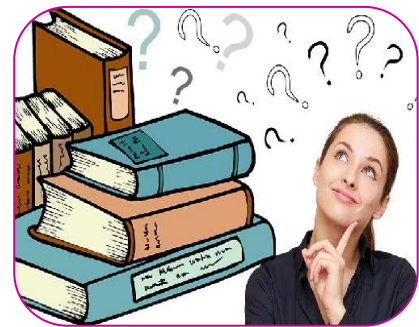
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## AN ANALYSIS OF NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE IN GRAHAM SWIFT'S LAST ORDERS

**Chintan Ambalal Mahida**  
Adhyapak Sahayak in English ,  
Shree S. D. Patel Arts and C. M. Patel Commerce College , Ankav.

### ABSTRACT

Salman Rusdhi said, "Last Orders is a Graham's Swift's finest work to date: Beautifully Written, Gentle, Funny, Truthful, Touching and Profound." It is about the ordinary lives of ordinary people, and the mixture of accident and circumstances which shape such lives, common place events, personal tragedies, laughter, love and death which all are part of their shared memories. The present paper tries to discuss narrative technique of Graham Swift's Last Orders.



**KEYWORDS:** Points of View, Narrative Technique, Interior Monologue.

### INTRODUCTION

Points of View signifies the way a story gets told by the perspective or perspectives established by an author through which the reader is presented with the characters, actions, setting and events which constitute the narrative in a work of fiction.

Last Orders involves the most finally complicated experiment so far with its multiple tellers, all talking to themselves, but also in some magical way to each other. As Swift commits, "Last order is a novel in which six and seven characters collaboratively tell the story". As John Banville observes, "Swift carefully and seemingly effortlessly piles up the layers of narrative by means of a judicious accumulation of small revelations.

The entire novel is narrated in the first person by seven different people in 75 unnumbered sections. The four men who accompany Jack's ashes – Vic, Vince, Lenny and Ray narrate the vast majority of the novel. In the present of the novel, Vince is in his mid forties, the other three major characters are in their late sixties. While these four narrators dominate the novel, the three other characters, Jack who is dead, Amy (Jack's Wife) and Mandy (Vince's wife) also narrate a few sections of the novel. Only June, Amy's daughter remains silent. Collectively, the novel's first person narrative episodes combine descriptions of past and unfolding events with interior ..... that probe and complicate the meaning of these events.

The novel is about group of friends, mourning their friend Jack's death at the pub. Ray is separated and a somewhat successful gambler, who had been dubbed "lucky" by Jack. Ray buys Lenny a drink, and they talk about why Jack's wife Amy isn't joining them. Amy wants Ray to fulfill Jack's wishes to have his ashes scattered into the ocean at Margate. Vic, the undertaker, shows up with Jack's ashes in a box. The men look over the remains in amazement and ponder life, death and good times. Jack's son Vince arrives in a Mercedes. The guys pile in and head out for Margate.

Vince pilots the Mercedes through Blackheath. The topics of discussion vary. Amy has decided to visit her daughter, June, at the hospital. Lenny and Vince are angry with her for not accompanying them. Ray sticks up for Amy, saying she wanted Jack's friends to do the deed. There are added bits of detail. Jack really

wanted to be a doctor instead of a butcher, it turns out. Vince angered him, because he didn't want to follow in his father's footsteps. He wanted to get away from the family business.

Vince remembers being afraid to touch his dying father in the hospital. Jack talked a lot about his good friend Ray and asked Vince for a considerable sum of money as a favor. Ray had a background in the scrap metal business, but had moved into insurance at his father's insistence. Carol was actually his third choice for wife (after Amy and Daisy.)

Vince fought against his father's insistence that he follow on as a butcher. At one point, he actually signed up to the Foreign Legion just to escape the pressure for a few years. Jack was furious and felt cheated and betrayed. A lot of the resentment from Vince came from the fact that he knew he was an orphan whose parents were killed in WWII. Vince went through several years being angry after he learned the truth at a young age. Vince also became friendly with Lenny's daughter, Sally. After returning from the army, he started up his own automotive business to everyone's astonishment. His father got more resentful over time.

Ray thinks about how he met and divorced his wife, Carol. He had actually been in love with her older sister, but Carol had been the only one to show any interest. Much later, his daughter Susie told him she was leaving with her boyfriend for Australia. Ray was angry, but found himself siding with his daughter, when Carol flew into a rage. He later placed a winning bet and gave the proceeds to Susie for plane fare. Ray realized that he had neglected his wife as far as her love of traveling went. He bought a camper van to try and accommodate her, but she left him anyway.

Vince had had an infatuation with Lenny's daughter, Sally that lasted through most of his childhood. When he returned from the military, he asked Lenny if he could date her and Lenny consented. When Vince got Sally pregnant and left her, Lenny was furious. He convinced Sally to abort the child, and she resented him for it. Lenny's grudge against Vince continued from that point on. Vince went on to start Dodd's Motors at Ray's old scrap yard. He worked out an arrangement to pay off Ray if he succeeded, which he soon did. Ray later regretted selling his scrap yard so cheaply to Vince. He thought about the early days, when he first met Jack in the African desert. He received his nickname "Lucky" from Jack in WWII.

Vic remembered how he took over the family business of undertaking and learned to love it. He had a respect for people and for what he did that Jack never would have understood. Jack also took over his family business, but felt trapped, like he never had a choice in the matter. There came a day when Jack closed up his butcher's shop for the day and came over to tell Vic he was actually closing for good. He explained that he was having financial problems and Amy didn't know.

The men visit a naval landmark where they walk up a large hill that exhausts some of the older men. After getting back in the car, Vince takes a detour to a place called Wick's Farm. He gets out with Jack's ashes; the rest of the group has no idea why they are there or what is happening. Only Lenny suspects that something is wrong. In reality, Vince is taking Jack back to the place where his parents met - but only he knows this. When he tries to open the jar to scatter Jack's ashes, Lenny attacks him. They fight for several minutes while the others watch in astonishment. At first, Lenny gets several good hits in on Vince and shouts insults, but then Vince gets Lenny in a chokehold and knocks him down. Vince then opens the jar and lets a handful of Jack's ashes go in the wind. He then reseals the jar, and they all walk back to the car.

The group visits Canterbury Cathedral as if nothing had happened. Lenny and Vince appear to be congenial to each other. Then they drive on towards Margate. Ray thinks back to his infatuation with Jack's wife, Amy. Amy had emotionally detached herself from her husband, because he told her that he wanted them both to abandon their retarded daughter. Amy refused. Ray knew that Jack refused to visit his daughter, June in the institution and started giving Amy a ride in his camper van. This soon turned into a short lasting affair that no one else knew of except Vic. Vic had just happened to be at the institution to pick up a body. He saw Ray with Amy and assumed correctly what was going on. He stuck with his instincts as an undertaker, which meant he kept quiet about the affair.

Ray thinks back to Jack's last days in the hospital. He borrowed money from Vince, without telling him what he needed it for and gave it to Ray to bet it on a long shot race for Amy. Ray felt the pressure and

had mixed emotions about having the responsibility to pick a winner to safeguard Amy's future. Ray did some research and then abandoned it to go with his gut instinct and won a bet that increased his initial wager by more than thirty times.

The men arrive at the Margate pier as a storm makes the going treacherous. They carry on and walk to the end, where they see remnants of the original jetty where Jack requested his ashes be taken. Ray tells Vince that he has the money and Vince is relieved. They all dip their hands into the jar and scatter Jack's ashes.

The narrative sections have titles that either identify the narrator or specify a place. The names of places sequentially trace the route of the London to Margate journey. The four set off from the "Coach and Horses" pub in Bermondsey (its name already suggests a journey) and drive to the town of Rochester.....

If we analyse narrative technique of Last Orders, we can find strong echoes of two other modern novels – Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*.

Just like Last Orders, *As I Lay Dying* feature dead character who is a dead yet narrates a small section of the text. (Addie Bundren / Jack Dodds). Similarly, like *Mrs. Dalloway* by Woolf, Graham Swift uses interior monologue and flashbacks as a part of narration.

Ray Johnson is a narrator of almost exactly half of the novel. He starts and ends the story with the present time narration. Ray's first narration is called by the name of the town, where they live and where they live and where there journey begins, "Bermondsey". The last chapter by the name of their final destination – "Margate"

Much of Ray's narration is about people's private space and territory, about how really alone people are when they go through major challenges in their lives, and especially, when they are close to death.

In an interview, Graham Swift said,

"This is a novel in which six or seven characters collaboratively tell the story, and I as an authorial presence are somewhere in the background. This could be a tremendous challenge to the reader. If there are several characters who each have a first personal voice, the reader's experience is like watching tennis match (moving eyes from out side to side.) thus, you need some sort of central hub.

One more significant feature of the post modern novel is dislocation of time and the perception of time. The narrative in Last Orders is not presented in linearity. It deals with a complex presentation of time as experience. Swift is successful in blending the present and the past in an effected manner. A large part of the novel, especially the conversations and dialogues are presented in spoken language. So, it is full of colloquial English and slang.

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