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Masculinity in Crisis: Graham Swift's *Last Orders*[*]

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Abstract

Graham Swift's *Last Orders* (1996) covers the story of a one-day trip of four men from London to Margate to scatter the ashes of a deceased friend to the sea. The narrative is presented in monologue chapters in which multiple narrators, in a confessional tone, introduce their histories, recollections and memories sparked by this death. Almost all of the narrators are fathers and the stories they relate are either about their children or their fathers. Within these narrations, fathers become the symbols of tradition, history, authority and stability. The following generation, on the other hand, symbolizes change, future, individualism and mobility. While these discrepancies introduce a certain level of tension, the crisis that masculinity faced, as in the changing role of fatherhood, in the last decade of the twentieth century becomes another source of the conflict in the novel. This conflict is heightened by the narrator fathers who, by looking back at their fathers in the past, try to continue the old forms of masculinities. The aim of this study is, then, to analyse this conflict and crisis in the novel caused by the ever-changing forms of masculinities and to locate it within a certain socio-economic and cultural frame. A thorough analysis of the male characters of the novel may contribute to the overall understanding of masculinities. Novels are important objects of research as they provide instances to explore the construction of masculinities. The mechanisms at work in the process of this construction may be more visible in literary texts as literature serves to foreground knowledge that has become invisible because of familiarity.

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Kriz İçindeki Erkeklik: Graham Swift'in *Son İçkiler*'i

Öz

Graham Swift'in, *Son İçkiler* (1996) adlı romanı, dört erkeğin vefat eden arkadaşlarının küllerini denize dökmek için Londra'dan Margate'a doğru çıktıkları bir günlük yolculuğun öyküsünü anlatır. Anlatı, çoğul anlatıcıların bu ölüm ile canlanan kendi tarihlerini, hatıralarını ve anılarını günah çıkarırcasına anlattığı monolog şeklinde bölümlerle sunulur. Neredeyse romandaki bütün anlatıcılar babadır ve anlattıkları öyküler ya çocukları ya da babaları ile ilgilidir. Bu anlatılar içerisinde babalar geleneğin, tarihin, otoritenin ve istikrarın sembolü olurlar. Öteki taraftan, takip eden nesil ise değişimi, geleceği, bireyselliği ve hareketliliği temsil eder. Bu farklılıklar belli bir düzeyde gerilim yaratırken, 20. Yüzyılın son yıllarında, değişen babalık rollerinde de görüldüğü üzere erkekliğin yaşadığı kriz de romandaki çatışmanın beslendiği başka bir kaynak olur. Bu çatışma, zamanda geriye dönüp kendi babalarına bakan anlatıcı babaların, erkekliğin eski biçimlerini sürdürmeye çalışmalarıyla daha da yükselir. Bu çalışmanın amacı sürekli değişen erkeklik biçimlerinin romanda yarattığı bu çatışmayı inceleyip belirli bir sosyo-ekonomik ve kültürel çerçeve içine yerleştirmektir. Romandaki erkek karakterlerin detaycı bir analizi, erkeklikleri tam olarak anlamaya katkıda bulunabilir. Romanlar, erkekliklerin inşasını keşfetme bağlamında örnekler sağladıkları için önemli araştırma nesneleridir. Edebiyat aşinalıktan ötürü görünmez olanı öne çıkarır ve bu yüzden erkekliklerin inşası süreci içinde yer alan mekanizmalar edebi metinlerde daha görünür olabilirler.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Graham Swift, Son İçkiler, erkeklikler, babalık, kriz içinde erkeklik.

At the end of the twentieth century, British men found themselves in a crisis of legitimacy (again). The sense of the crisis was not, of course, peculiar to the last decade of the century; indeed men have been told to go through moments of crises for the last two hundred years. However, it was a time when that sense of crisis was manifested in various forms, literary representations, and expressions in British

literature, as in the works of novelists such as Ian McEwan, Martin Amis, Nick Hornby, Julian Barnes, and Graham Swift. The decade witnessed the proliferation of novels concerned with the confrontation of male characters with the everchanging definitions of being a "man". For instance, Martin Amis's *London Fields* (1989) plays off two stereotypically opposite masculine identities, a working-class man, Keith Talent, and gentlemanly Guy Clinch. Theirs is a crisis conditioned by a confrontation with an empowered woman, Nicola Six. On the other hand, Sir Jack Pitman, the business tycoon in Julian Barnes's *England, England* (1998), embodies "the transnational business masculinity" (Connell, 1998). However, Pitman's strong businessman identity is scandalized by his visits to Aunty May's brothel where he dresses like a baby awaiting maternal affection, which utterly contradicts his financial success and the potentially dominant masculinity that he happens to represent. Among the novels published in the decade, Graham Swift's *Last Orders* (1996) stands out with its subtle treatment of the ordinary man in crisis, which is made possible through multiply-narrated confessional monologues. The novel concerns itself with two generations, which also enables the reader to historically contextualize the crisis of masculinity. The aim of this article, therefore, is to explore Swift's novel as a significant literary expression of the crisis of masculinity in the 1990s Britain. It aims to situate the crisis within the scope of generational differences, in the fresh conceptualizations of fatherhood, and in the redefinitions of masculine roles as reflected in the novel. The article will also argue that the novel suggests a correlation between the economic well-being and the level of crisis one suffers. In particular, the study will specifically suggest that the novel develops the theme of mobility versus stability to underscore the fluidity of masculine roles and the importance of adaptational skills.

Swift's *Last Orders*, which received Man Booker Prize in 1996, relates a day trip of four men, Ray, Vince, Lenny and Vic, from South London to the coastal town of Margate. The aim of the journey is to fulfil the last order of a deceased friend, Jack, to scatter his ashes to the sea. The narrative is presented in monologue chapters in which character-narrators introduce their histories, recollections and

memories sparked by this death in a confessional tone. Within these monologues, the characters visit and revision their past in order to make sense of their present selves; however, to whom these monologues are addressed is unclear. According to David Malcolm (2003), "all the speakers in *Last Orders* ultimately speak to no one, apart from themselves. No one hears them; their monologues pass each other" (p.14). There are 75 chapters and the majority of them are narrated by Ray; hence he becomes the dominant voice. Vince, Lenny and Vic are other male narrators and Mandy and Amy are the only two female voices. There is also one brief chapter by the dead Jack.

The language of the novel is colloquial enabling the reader to have access to the inner feelings and thoughts of the characters. For Malcolm, the narrative structure of the novel "allows the reader to see that, beneath unglamorous surfaces and discourse, Swift's characters lead complex and rich emotional lives, and, indeed, grapple as best as they can with substantial existential issues" (2003, p.118). He further comments that "the narrator in a Swift text is almost always a sad, self-scrutinizing man, middle-aged or older, delving into his unhappy past in order to try to work out how he got to the rather dispiriting situation in which he finds himself" (2003, p.14). In a similar pattern, the death of their closest friend reminds them of the existential anxieties they go through. The fatality of life and the impending death create an urge to meditate on the present by looking back to the past and mediate this revision through these monologues. In fact, what they seem to be experiencing is the sense of a void or an incompatibility with their time. They seem to be lacking the crucial skills in coordinating their selves with changing paradigms and patterns, especially those which designate masculine roles. To be more specific, they experience difficulties in reproducing the masculine roles that they observed in their fathers.

For Peter Widdowson (2004), what these narrators experience is "a stirring of 'memory and desire' that is leading them to tell their stories – even if as yet only mentally – to those they most want to be reconciled with and to propose to themselves actions that may break the 'mould' of their wasted lives and so become 'new people'" (p.90). The substantial existential issues, like fatherhood or family, class, na-

tionhood and gender, feed the dispiriting present and identity crisis of the characters. Talking about these issues, though in confessional monologues, may serve to get rid of the old selves to create opportunities to welcome the new person compatible with the new world. However, towards the end of the second millennia, the world had faced dramatic socio-economic changes. For instance, the increasing mechanization and computerization of work patterns that require less and less muscle force, the subsequent changes in the balance between private and public spheres of life that has further domesticated man, and the increasing participation of women in social life thanks to the second wave feminism have played, in various degrees, important roles in the designation of the ideas about masculinities.

As well represented in the novel, the unstable nature of the parameters that would give shape to their identities and provide them with a stable and secure ontology may lead men to a dissolution, even to a crisis. This instability has even been proposed as “the inherent frailty of masculinity” (Horlacher, 2011, p.5). Within this context, in *Cultures of Masculinity*, Tim Edwards (2006) raises the question of masculinity in crisis. Edwards categorizes that sense of crisis into two interconnected areas. He calls the first one “the crisis from without” which refers to the institutional roles of men, like fatherhood, in which men have been giving away their power (2006, p.6). He calls the second one “the crisis from within” covering the felt changes in how men experience their manliness, which “often refers to a sense of powerlessness, meaninglessness or uncertainty (2006, p.6). For Michael Kimmel (1987), men’s confusion regarding the definition “real man”, or the crisis of masculinity, “has become a cultural commonplace” (p.121). The crisis of masculinity worsens as the popular analyses tend to adopt “sex roles” paradigm that ignores historical and power relationships between genders and only allows for two impenetrable categories (Kimmel, 1987, p.121). This approach to the crisis of masculinity cannot defuse it as its premises can be considered as the source of the problem.

Tim Edwards suggests that “masculinity as a set of values” may be in a crisis because, firstly, it is now associated with negativity which causes devaluation. Secondly, it tends to “implode into

femininity, whether through an overall undermining of any gender role distinctions or through feminisation of some forms of masculinity" (Edwards, 2006, p.15). The third and the fundamental reason is that "masculinity in terms of the male sex role is itself *ipso facto* crisis-inducing," which means "masculinity is not *in crisis*, it *is* crisis (Edwards, 2006, p.15, original emphasis). Men's lack of secure base to form their identities, increasing negative associations of manhood, being undertheorized with regard to the femininity, men's inherent fragile condition related to the construction of their manhood, which might be connected with the ever-shifting representations of successful male models and with a justifiable fear of failing to perform roles epitomized by hegemonic masculinity, may all aggravate that sense of crisis.

Andrea Ochsner (2001) also points to the consensus that the 1990s, the decade in which Swift's *Last Orders* was published, was the climax in the crisis of masculinity in Britain (p. 248). Of course, it does not mean that this crisis was only felt in the 1990s because men have always found themselves in a crisis in the entire history (Ochsner, 2011, p.248). What makes the decade significant for Ochsner is that "it was in the 1990s that this alleged crisis was most assiduously discussed against the background of changing gender relationships" (2011, p. 248). She also refers to the proliferation of "male confessional narratives" as an indicator of the heightened sense of crisis in that period (2011, p.248). She further argues that the ambiguity in men's identities in that time may not be fully covered with the term "crisis" and suggests that "it was more a growing insight that it was necessary to rethink masculinity" (2011, p.252). In other words, the sense of a masculine identity crisis is not peculiar to a specific period. It has always been there but always remained unnoticed or neglected. In Michael S. Kimmel's words, "men are the 'invisible' gender" (2005, p.5). It is thanks to the masculinity studies that men have become the object of research and have begun to be perceived as gendered beings leaving behind the unmarked and normative status.

Martin Francis (2002) associates the rising interest in the history of masculinity with the discussion "about whether the close of the twentieth century ushered in a 'crisis in masculinity,'" which

he categorizes as one of the "cultural trends outside the academy" (p.637). In his article, "The Domestication of the Male?," Francis presents a survey of the studies on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries of British masculinities published in the 1990s. In the article, he suggests that male domestication in these centuries had its ups and downs with the interruptions of the two World wars. For instance, Francis states that the immediate period following the Second World War has been acknowledged as the peak of domestication:

> The consolidation of family life after the disruption of wartime was one of the dominant motifs of social reconstruction in the years immediately after 1945. Social and cultural authorities sought to make marriage and the home more attractive to both women and men through the promotion of the 'companionate marriage', in which teamwork and partnership were to replace unquestioned patriarchal authority as the basis of domestic life. Returning servicemen were expected to put the excitement and brutalization of military life behind them, and to take up the sober responsibilities of the male breadwinner, patient father, and considerate husband. (2002, p.644)

For Francis, except for protests coming from a minority group, as best embodied by Jimmy Porter in *Look Back in Anger* (1956), and despite popular representations of men fleeing domesticity for freedom, "the attempt to reclaim the emotionally satisfying aspect of wartime male bonding was much more likely to take place at the level of fantasy" (2002, p.645). Nonetheless, he concedes the existence of "men's ambivalence about demobilization and their reluctance to give up the all-male comradeship of service life" (2002, p.645). Swift's *Last Orders* can be read within the frame of this ambivalence. Firstly, in the novel, mobility serves as a central metaphor related to men's desire to escape from domesticity and, secondly, there is the insistence of the characters on continuing all-male comradeship.

In the novel, the Second World War makes its presence felt as one of the most important determiners in the masculine identity formation in the second half of the twentieth century. Widdowson points out that the Second World War continues to "exert a malign influence over the wasted lives of its characters, all of whom seem trapped in the stasis of their damaged interpersonal relations – bet-

ween husbands and wives, and between parents (especially fathers) and children (especially daughters)" (2004, p.82). Within the monologues, Swift locates two generations of man; the generation that witnessed and experienced the Second World War and the post-war generation. In the novel, while the former, as traditional fathers, is characterized with a strict adherence to stability, which requires the continuity of the given and the demise of individualism, the latter embraces mobility in the hope of self-realization and individuation which, however, necessitates discontinuation and abandonment of the pre-assigned roles cast upon them by their fathers. For instance, Emma Parker (2002) suggests that the former faces "the difficulties of how to live as a man and express maleness when traditional models of manly being have lost their validity, that is, in a world in which last orders have metaphorically been called for masculinity" (p.89). Thus, she argues that "*Last Orders* points to the limits of masculinity and presents patriarchy as a lost order" (2002, p.90). In addition to the deformed masculinity and ineffective fatherhood, the novel also suggests that opting for mobility against stability, which might be social and spatial, does not only fuel the generation gap that also undermines the authority of a traditional authoritarian father but also becomes the major source of the identity conflict. Moreover, generational preference either for stability or mobility is concordant with the socio-economic dynamics of each generation. By trying to reproduce the old patterns of masculinities, which are incompatible with present formulations of masculinity and which may be cited as the principal cause of their failure, the old generation fathers appear conservative and traditionalist while the younger generation's attempt to break the old pattern implies their voluntary commitment to the values of growing free market at the expense of values their fathers would like to impose on them. Relatedly, this generational preference also functions in the formation of characters' identities in the novel.

If the novel had a second title, it could be "Coach and Horses." This is the name of the pub the four male characters spend their evenings together as a daily routine. In the hundredth birthday of the pub, Ray notices that "'they calls it the Coach and Horses but it

aint never gone nowhere," and Jack responds: "'Where d'you think it should be going, Raysy? Where d'you think we've all got to get to that the bleeding coach should be taking us?'" (p.6-10). The pub, traditionally a masculine space, bears a name that indicates movement. Thus, from the very beginning, the theme of mobility versus stability appears. Ray seems to have understood that things have changed, and, in that regard, they must change too. Jack, however, appears as a confused character who cannot perceive these changes.

While Ray is the dominant voice in the novel, Jack is the central character. After all, it is his ashes that will be delivered to the sea and the recollections narrated in the monologues are related to him one way or another. Jack is the local butcher, as was his father. Apart from the time when he fought in Egypt in the Second World War, he has never left England. His geographical fixation is in parallel with his insistence on continuing the tradition he inherited from his father. His choice to follow the footprints of his father makes him the symbol of patriarchy and traditional fatherhood in the novel.

Edwards indicates that throughout history, "work has often stood as the most fundamental foundation of masculine identity" and "successful masculinity was equated directly with success at work" (2006, p.7). Jack tries to justify his choice to continue his father's profession by associating it with his idea of real men. For him, men working in offices are "bunch of bleeding zombies" and it is only in Smithfield, the oldest and largest meat market in England, where one can "see how real men make living" (p.31). Though he sounds to be proud of what he is, it is later revealed that "Jack had never wanted to be a butcher in the first place" because "the old man [his father] wouldn't have it otherwise" (p.32). It is also because of his belief that "there was an order sent down from High Command that he couldn't ever be nothing else but a butcher" (p. 146). Jack passively accepts what is offered and opts for continuing the tradition of his father, which would eventually disappoint him towards the end of his life. For Parker, "when Jack steps into his father's shoes, he sacrifices his sense of self" (2002, p.92). Daniel Lea (2005) similarly comments that "Jack is defined and delimited by his profession, provided with a part to play and then trapped in character for life" (p.176). His pro-

fession does not only feed Jack's identity crisis by imposing a limit on the possibilities of self-realization, but it also fails to provide him with a secure income, which almost emasculates him.

Jack's failure in the public sphere finds its reflection in his troubled private life. Jack is married to Amy. The couple has two children. June, the daughter, is disabled and nursed in a special home. Vince is their adopted son whose parents were killed when London was bombed by the Germans. Jack never visits June and his relationship with Vince is also problematic as Vince declines Jack's insistence on continuing the family business. While this undermines Jack's masculinity and his authority as a father, it also creates the most powerful generational conflict in the novel. Jack's failure to persuade Vince means the end of the family business. Jack's troubled relationships with his daughter and his adopted son also put his marriage with Amy at risk. As a way out, Jack finally decides to "sell up the shop, hang up his striped apron and look around for some other way to pass the time" and promises Amy that they are "going to be new people" only a few weeks before stomach cancer kills him (p. 17-18). In other words, Jack decides to move against the grain, tradition, against his father. He even plans to buy Ray's camper dormemobile, which implies that he finally opts for mobility to break the mould. However, Jack's last-minute disavowal of stability also bears economic motivations in it as he himself reveals to Vic:

> I'll tell her,' he says, like he's still got a trick up his sleeve. 'Or you can keep this.' And he dredges in his pocket and brings out a handful of crumpled notes. It can't have been much more than fifty quid. 'Day's takings,' he says. 'Double pledge. My word and my money. Now you can see how I can't afford to keep on the shop.' (p.96)

Then, it is fair to say that the reason why Jack decides to give up being old Jack and stand against his father is both economic and social. His familial, inherited local butcher shop whose sign proudly displays "Dodds & Son, since 1903" loses the battle against the dominating supermarkets. Having sensed the financial hardship of his father, Vince reminds Jack that a new supermarket would welcome him as "their meat manager" (p.28). However, Jack declines the offer:

> I [Vince] say, ‘If you can’t see what’s under your nozzle. A new supermarket just up the road and they offer you first refusal as their meat manager. Aint got no choice, have you?’
> He [Jack] says, ‘Haven’t I?’
> I say, ‘Stay put if you want. It’s your funeral.’
> He says, ‘At least I’d be my own man.’
> I say, ‘Your own man? You never were your own man. You were your old man’s man, weren’t you? What does it say over the shop?’ (pp.28-29).

Over the shop it says, “Dodds and Son”. It does not say “Jack,” and Dodds stands for Jack’s father. Jack feels obliged to assume the pre-assigned masculine role cast upon him by his father and to continue the tradition for stability, which causes his economic and social doom. Unlike him, Vince opposes the pre-assigned role determined by his stepfather and opts for change. In this context, Lea claims that “Jack and Vince’s difference on what independence entails reveals what Swift believes to be a fundamental ideological breach between the war generation and that which succeeded it” (2005, p.177). As the representative of the generation succeeding the war generation, by rejecting his stepfather, Vince rejects tradition, stability and embraces the values of the free market which is the condition of the capitalist age:

> The world was changing all right, I knew that. I aint unaware. But I said 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. ... Ten years from now the Beatles and the Stones will be old-time music but what they’ll still want is wheels. Wheels. More and more wheels. And I’ll be there to sell ‘em, Vince Dodds’ll be right there to sell ‘em. I’m in the right trade, the travel trade. So don’t tell me I aint with it. (p.117)

Having abandoned the old ways of being, Vince seems to grab the spirit of the age which secures his financial success. However, he becomes an emotionally and socially lacking character who overvalues the free market. He privileges the material objects resulting in his disability to understand the true human nature. He admits that he does not “know how we work inside” and declares that “flesh and

blood aint such a neat piece of work, not always, but a good motor is a good motor." (p.30) For him, motor is the ultimate substitute for what is humane; he uses its potential to fill the void:

> It's the best thing that's ever been invented. If it hadn't been invented we'd've had to invent it. And it aint just a seat on wheels. It's a workmate. It's a mate. It won't ask no questions, it won't tell no lies. It's somewhere you can be and be who you are. If you aint got no place to call your own, you're okay in a motor. (p.82)

Two motivations can be discerned from Vince's refusal to adopt his stepfather's lifestyle. The first one is his irrepressible desire to take a stand against Jack, as the symbol of hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy. He wants to achieve an authentic self, an identity of his own. The second one is the obvious economic failure of Jack's traditional mode of butchery. These two widen the generational gap and become the source of the conflict between the father and the son. However, deep beneath the tension, one can also discern the clash between two different forms of masculinities with claims to hegemony. The first one is the declining form of hegemonic masculinity epitomised by Jack's idea of real men working in Smithfield with bodily power. The second one is the emerging form in the present capitalist order, which, for Connell (1998), is "associated with those who control its dominant institutions: the business executives who operate in global markets, and the political executives who interact with them" (p.16). Connell calls this form "*transnational business masculinity*" which is characterized by "increasing egocentrism, very conditional loyalties (even to the corporation), and a declining sense of responsibility for other" (1998, p.16). In this context, Vince's masculinity appears as all-powerful. In the hospital room, where Jack is able to connect to life thanks to the medical devices and cables attached to him, Vince attempts to flirt with a nurse. At that moment, Vince states that "Jack's dying and [he has] got a cockstand" (p. 41). In a way, Vince's masculinity breaks the hierarchical order and claims the top spot. His having an erection in front of dying Jack also metaphorically points to the power of this form of masculinity which renders Jack's masculinity a subordinated one.

In the novel, however, there is one distinct father-son relationship that proves itself to be healthy in all respects. Vic, the undertaker, and his sons lead a life in harmony. Lenny also admits that "there aint none of the rest of [them] know who [they] really are, except Vic" (p.232). Vic is the shortened form for Victor. Symbolically, he is the victorious among them as he is the only one who succeeds in "passin on the torch" (p.56). In other words, he continues the tradition and preserves stability. His success is clearly associated with his trade as the undertaker. The trade is not only economically successful but also socially satisfying. He thus explains that "the trade itself is a good trade, a steady trade" which "won't ever run short of customer" (p.88). He is proud that "there's more in [his] cash safe than there is in Jack's" (p.90). The trade requires both tradition and authority. According to him, one has "to be raised to it, father to son" and it should run "in a family, like death itself runs in the human race" (p.88). Moreover, it is socially satisfying because as an undertaker, one should be authoritative. For Vic, one "can't run a funeral without authority" (p.89). As a funeral is a time "when people don't know what to do they have to be told" (p.89). The economic success of the trade helps Vic and his sons overcome the conflict caused by the generation gap. In the context of this relationship, the novel suggests that the economic well-being becomes more important in determining the social roles which give shape to the masculine identities and the father-son relationship. In other words, Vic's economic success secures the reproduction of the forms of masculinities he has observed in his family.

As one of the representatives of Lenny, Vic and Jack's generation, Ray, the dominant voice of the novel, is a more flexible father who is open to change and who is more aware of the spirit of the age. Like in the case of Jack and Vic, Ray also assumes the role drawn for him by his father, who was a scrap merchant. Ray is physically small which puts him in a subordinated position and denies him the traditional authoritarian masculine roles. Considering his physical trait, his father tells him to find a job as an officer:

> But he said I wasn't cut out for scrap. He said I should get myself a job behind a desk, with my brains, and I never knew if it was on account of my build or my brains or on account of a desk job being a higher calling anyway, to his mind. (p.44)

The role his father casts upon Ray is again in stark contrast with Jack's sense of real men. Moreover, the job does not provide Ray with a secure income which further undermines his masculinity. However, although his job cannot apparently satisfy him economically, he compensates this lack with the horse races, which is, as a matter of fact, particularly a masculine sport. Even the others resort to his gift when they are in need and that is why he is also called Lucky. However, for Ray, "it may look like luck but it's 95 percent careful clerking, it's 90 percent doing your sums" (p.256). In order to sense the possible winner in a horse race, Ray goes through meticulous calculations; he does not depend on the daily reports but on his great folio of notes he has collected. Unlike the others, Ray is aware that rather than luck, the choices we make matter in life. Moreover, his ability to empathize with the next generation and to understand the conditions of the period enable him to establish a healthy relationship with his daughter, Sue. For instance, Ray allows Sue to travel with her boyfriend through England and later to Australia:

> But you had to give permission on account of it was the permissive age, never mind what your own folks might have said, your own ancestors. … But when they were gone I wished them well. I wished I was them. I thought of them travelling across England. Hampshire, Wiltshire, Somerset, over the hills and far away. (p.62-63)

By making Ray the main narrator and the central voice of the novel, Swift wants the readers to identify themselves with Ray. For Parker, "the novel stresses the importance of change by inviting sympathetic identification with Ray more than any other character" (p. 97). Ray is the only father and the representative of his generation in the novel to embrace the change by perceiving the importance of mobility complaining that they could only travel in the wartime:

> It took a war to make me travel, to make me see the world, if that's what you could call it. But there was him having hopped all the way from Sydney to Somerset, and there was her sharing the journey with him, out on the road, and there was me, still living in Bermondsey. … The boozer, the betting shop, the bus to Blackfriars. And in over fifteen years I hadn't taken Carol anywhere. (p.63)

Ray has a troubled marriage with Carol. For him, the problem is the stability and fixity of their life in addition to their daughter's departure for Australia. To add spice and zest to their relationship, Ray buys "a dormobile. A camper-van, deluxe model. A travelling home for two"' He even announces his surprise to Carol singing "'*I am fancy-free and i love to wander*" (p. 69). Unfortunately, Carol deserts him at this spot. However, the camper-van indeed brings some excitement to Ray's life. He rejects a promotion offer in favour of working two days less for half payment, which again he compensates with horse races. In a week, he works three days, and he saves the rest for his carefree travels. What is more, it is thanks to this camper he could have a fourteen-week affair with Amy, Jack's wife, for whom he has had intimate feelings since the moment he saw her picture in Jack's wallet while they were fighting in Egypt. In other words, Ray, as a family man, is ready to appropriate his masculine roles with regard to the changing conditions and he is willing to embrace new patterns. His illegal affair with Jack's wife also demonstrates the waning of Jack's hegemonic masculinity.

The novel does not only present male characters trapped into routine and stability. The sense of being locked into a socially constructed identity is also experienced by the female characters. As a traditional sacrificing mother figure, Amy keeps visiting her disabled daughter June twice a week. One Thursday, Ray offers to give her a ride, which starts their affair, and which gives Amy a chance to save herself from the stability and fixity of her life. However, the affair ends abruptly when Vince, Amy's adoptive son comes back from the army. Amy's life contains mobility, yet a cyclical one. Her life has two poles; two traditional roles which are equally constraining: at one pole rests her role as a wife to Jack, whom fails her as he resists change: "We should get ourselves out of ourselves. *New people*," she says

(p.23). At the other end is motherhood. She keeps visiting her intellectually disabled daughter for fifty years hoping that one day she would call her mother. However, the journey she has made between these two poles twice a week for fifty years is the only means of her to escape from these roles. Therefore, on the red double-decker-bus, she feels a kind of belonging as she acknowledges that she has been "more at home on a number 44 than [she has] been anywhere else" (p. 253). She feels belonging to "[n]either here nor there, just travelling in between" (p.253). One pole disappears after Jack's death and she decides she should herself destroy the other pole to free herself, which means stopping the regular visits to her daughter and stripping herself of these traditional roles. In a symbolic way, in the last trip to her daughter, for the first time, she travels on the upstairs. She wonders whether this is a gesture to demonstrate that she is "still an able-bodied woman" or a woman who "can still choose" (p.254). For her, this might even suggest that she wants "to get a new view of the world slipping by" (p.254). The novel does not clarify but it is certain that Amy embraces new possibilities of being by opting for change.

The older generation's insistence on continuing the old forms of masculinities for the sake of stability ultimately creates both inner conflicts causing the dissolution of the identity and generational conflicts causing alienation between fathers and their children. The novel suggests that these conflicts between father and children can be neutralized if the economic well-being is provided, as in the example of Vic and his children. The following generation by choosing mobility breaks the mould and pattern to open space for new possibilities of being. It also suggests that masculine roles are dynamic as the changes in socio-economic conditions render it impossible to reproduce older forms of masculinities. That idea is also in tandem with the opinion that "masculinity is not a biological given but is somehow acquired, which explains why its status has become increasingly contingent and inherently ambiguous" (Horlacher, 2011, p.3). Moreover, the process of acquisition is not a bed of roses as it includes "painful initiations, rites of passage, or long and often humiliating apprenticeships" (Horlacher, 2011, p.5). Therefore, being a man is difficult and always prone to failure because of unstable definitions and various expectations.

As the context of the novel also delineates, the 1990s was the decade when the feminist movement forced men "to rethink their role in a society in which the patriarchal rule had been effectively criticized, if not partly overturned" (Ochsner, 2011, p.251). This rethinking had to be performed under the bombardment of new forms of masculinity disseminated by popular culture, and the adopted masculine form should be aligned with the demands of the market-driven capitalist world system. This system has no place for a form of masculinity saturated with bodily strength, exemplified by Jack. While it denounces Jack's masculinity, it fervently supports "transnational business masculinity," epitomized by Vince. However, overvaluation of materialism, as in the case of Vince, may result in economic wellbeing and successful construction of masculinity, but at the expense of an emotional void.

The novel seems to support change. For instance, Jack decides to change but he cannot live to do so. However, his last order for his ashes to be scattered into the sea provides a chance for his friends to travel in which they make detours to visit historical and natural sites of England helping them to revision their past to make sense of their present. For Ray says:

> "We head on past the gas works, Ilderton Road, under the railway bridge. Prince of Windsor. The sun comes out from behind the tower blocks, bright in our faces, and Vince pulls out a pair of chunky sunglasses from under the dashboard. Lenny starts singing, slyly, through his teeth, 'Blue bayooo …' And we all feel it, what with the sunshine and the beer inside us and the journey ahead: like it's something Jack has done for us, so as to make us feel special, so as to give us a treat. Like we're off on a jaunt, a spree, and the world looks good, it looks like it's there just for us." (p.22)

Peter Childs also points out that "travelling functions both to bring people together and to draw them apart, as the journey to Margate does for the four men" (2012, p.247). They stop to drink at different pubs and even two of them fight each other. At the end of the journey, after they scatter the ashes, they seem to come to a resolution, a conclusion to admit the necessity of the change. Thus, Ray concludes: "It's like we aren't the same people who left Bermondsey

this morning, four blokes on a special delivery. It's like somewhere along the line we just became travellers" (p.214).

Overall, it may be said that male characters in the novel, either taken individually or treated as a group, go through an identity crisis provoked by their unsustainable efforts to locate their social positions as men. They either try to reproduce the old models or reconcile their masculinities with the changing paradigms. Being a loving husband, a caring father, a proud son, a successful businessman, a loyal friend are the typical expectations of society. However, performing these roles and bearing the related values create insurmountable difficulties in the present world system in which new models of masculinities are distributed daily and values are in constant erosion and transformation. As Jeff Hearn (2006) summarizes:

> Men, as individuals, groups, and collectivities, now exist with the experience of mass media, education, and corporate, organizational lives; and of struggles and resistances, personal and political, in relation to them. We try to excavate sense, and sometimes a sense of self or selves, within all these confusions and oppressions. Public patriarchies produce alienations from ourselves, as well as the social circumstances that make possible the overcoming and transcendence of those alienations, as individuals and collectivities. (p.14)

The unavoidable outcome is alienation and a permanent sense of crisis. Even so, despite these difficulties, despite being defeated many times to economic and social circumstances, and despite being confused and disappointed, there is always the possibility of finding one's true self, meaning and position in the world. The possibility will be the strongest when man leaves his privileged and invisible position in the gender dichotomy and acknowledges his gendered being, which may start with a reconsideration of masculine identities. At the very end of the novel, when the four men are about to perform the last order of their friend, that is to scatter his ashes to the sea, Vic warns them to "keep [their] hand as dry as [they] can" (p.322). Ray realizes that "it's so Jack don't stick to [them]" (p.322). The last order of Jack provides the four men with the opportunity to step out of the ordinary and reconsider their familial, public and sexual relations to the world. If they want to reorganize these relations,

they should acknowledge the necessity of the change. Vic's warning and Ray's realization suggest that, in order to be "new people," they should leave behind Jack and the traditional models of masculinities that Jack stands for. Leaving behind old patterns and creating a space for the negotiation of masculine identities may serve to overcome the crisis.

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