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SEIZING THE PAST IN THE NOVELS OF JULIAN BARNES WITH REGARD TO
THE AUTHOR'S NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

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I confirm that this thesis is my own work written using solely the sources and literature properly quoted and acknowledged as works cited.

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Anotace

Diplomová práce zkoumá pojetí minulosti ve vybraných dílech Juliana Barnesese, přičemž tento jev uvádí do souvislosti s narativními technikami, které autor zvolil. Práce se zaměřuje na ústřední tematické okruhy: beletrizování historie a obousměrnou povahu minulosti a současnosti. Vytyčené okruhy odrážejí autorův přístup k uchopení tématu minulosti v jeho románech. Cílem práce je nejen rozebrat téma hledání historické pravdy, které je společné Barnesovým dílům, ale také vyobrazení minulosti ve vztahu k tématům paměti, pravdy a vlivu těchto faktorů na formování identity jedince i kolektivu. Zohledněna je nejen narativní, ale i tematická inspirace, kterou Barnesově současnému psaní poskytly postmoderní tendence, zejména pak skepticismus vůči historické pravdě a subjektivismus, s kterým na historii nahlíží.

Klíčová slova:

Julian Barnes, minulost, historie, narativní technika, postmodernismus, pravda, paměť, identita

Abstract:

The thesis examines the concept of the past in selected works by Julian Barnes, regarding the narrative techniques chosen by the author. It focuses on central thematic strands: fictionalizing of history and the bidirectional nature of past and present. The outlined thematic strands represent the author's approach to treating the theme of the past in his novels. Besides the common theme of the search for historical truth that Barnes' works share, the aim of this thesis is to examine the depiction of the past in relation to the themes of memory, truth, and how these factors shape the formation of individual and collective identities. The thesis considers not only narrative but also thematic inspiration provided to Barnes' contemporary writing by postmodern tendencies, particularly the scepticism towards historical truth and the subjectivism with which he views history.

Key words:

Julian Barnes, past, history, narrative technique, postmodernism, truth, memory, identity

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1. Introduction

History has served as an endless source of inspiration for artists and authors since time immemorial, and its depiction has been changing throughout the centuries according to its role in defining the *zeitgeist*, as its presence provides succour to researching and explaining the past. Throughout their career, a vast majority of contemporary British authors have written books that focus to some extent on the motif of the past, be it historical novels, biographies, memoirs or various meditations on the collective or personal past, for instance Martin Amis, Salman Rushdie, Graham Swift, Hilary Mantel or Kazuo Ishiguro (Nagy, *Palimpsest* 8). All these authors eventually turned to history as a source of thematic and narrative inspiration in their works and Julian Barnes is no exception (7). Thus, this thesis attempts an analytical look at Julian Barnes' fictional prose, focusing on the motif of seizing the past in the novels presented, proceeding from understanding history as past and narratives, which we tell of it.

Looking at English literature of the 20th century, pattern emerges, namely that each incoming generation of authors has always stood for the continuation of the previous, while at the same time defined itself in opposition to it. When in the 1960s modernism reached its peak up to a point where it had pushed its limits so far that it could not possibly answer the questions it faced in its lifetime, it inevitably had to become an anachronism. At this point, a literary movement, essential and influential in Contemporary Literature, should be acknowledged and that is Postmodernism. Postmodernism, being a term broad and vague on its own, although not standing in direct opposition to Modernism, rejected the history, denied the objective, advocated the ambiguity of subjective, and repudiated the great narratives. This postmodern understanding of history as an entity in its entirety

incomprehensible, fragmentary, focusing on marginal stories and turning away from metanarratives lacked a unifying universal meaning and offered a personal one instead.

Thus, the twentieth-century literary life, shaped above all by such powerful movements as Modernism and Postmodernism with their rejection of history, can be seen as a confirmation of the crisis history found itself in within the last century, which is why we often hear the term *the end of history* in connection with this age. This decline in history naturally had an impact on the reputation of the base of historical fiction, the historical novel. However, *the end of history* did not refer to the end of history as denying the past events of human society, but rather stood for the withdrawal of the former understanding of history as producing a universal knowledge and truth of the past. Therefore, we may assume that the so-called *renaissance* of the historical novel, occurring within the last decades, is a reaction to the years of rejection of history as such. Considering the wave of renewed interest in history, the ultimate answer might be to understand history as a subject not fixed, but inherently subjective, unfolding and firmly tied to the memory of an individual. Therefore, if we were to understand history as a form of interpretation, it would seem advisable to turn to those who interpret history, thus historians and novelists.

In his novel *The Sense of an Ending* (2011), through the voice of one of the protagonists, Julian Barnes shares his view on the power of historians to shape the collective history and individual memory: “That’s one of the central problems of history, isn’t it, sir? The question of subjective versus objective interpretation, the fact that we need to know the history of the historian in order to understand the version that is being put in front of us” (12). What Barnes suggests there, is that people are storytellers, and history in a sense is fiction, a constructed narrative about the past.

Starting his writing career in the 1980s Barnes' works can be ascribed many attributes of the postmodern humanist approach, illustration of which may serve the author's early experimental novel *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984), which he devoted to wandering in the spiritual and material footsteps of Gustave Flaubert. Other Barnes' novels also build on the theme of the past as a highly personal issue (Nagy, "Tragický úděl" 69). The theme of obsession over seizing the past and personal history in Barnes' novels can reach the brink of madness as in *Before She Met Me* (1982), or provide an insight into building a collective history and national identity on a myth in *England, England* (1998) while sticking to the credo: "Getting its history wrong is part of becoming a nation" (Barnes & Noble 18:31 – 18:35).

History is an inspiration to Barnes. He often draws on authentic historical or biographical materials and blends them with the fictional imaginative recreations in building the narrative of his stories as apparent in his earlier experimental novels, which bear the sense of Postmodern influence. For example, one following obsessive attempt of a self-called historian to offer a fragmentary biography of Gustav Flaubert *Flaubert's Parrot* and the second promising history of the world, focusing on the marginal events from our history *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters* (1989). Such an approach is also traceable in Barnes' historical detective novel *Arthur & George* (2005), which features one of the most famous Victorian authors Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and builds its way up to re-construct, yet fictionalize the case of George Edalji, based on true life events. This novel touches upon the theme of the power of fiction namely by proposing the fact, that many people of the Victorian age indeed believed, that as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle has written Sherlock Holmes detective stories, he himself had the ability to solve the Edalji case. Therefore, we shall bear in mind that a study concerned

with the relationship between fact and fiction in contemporary literature is itself only one of many possible fictions, which we call the *Contemporary British novel* (Hilský 6).

In his novels Barnes deals with the theme of the past with an almost philosophical passion, moreover, he likes to intertwine it with the motifs of truth and imperfections of memory. Barnes himself is a great believer in a bidirectional relation between time and memory, that is, that time affects our memory to the same extent as memory affects time. Memory in its nature is inherently limited and selective and life as well as history always succumbs to narrativization, which is the reason why human beings tend to mythologize their lives, and their past. All these aspects and (inter)connections are facets Barnes works with. Therefore, his narrators do not have any other choice, but to be unreliable and there are often discrepancies between the past his characters remember and the past which they have. Thus, the past in Barnes's novels takes on different shapes and forms, presenting the reader with various versions of alternative, partial, collective, or individual histories always succumbing to subjectification.

As far as the methodological aspect of this diploma thesis is concerned, despite the original intention to follow the chronological order of the novels, given the subject matter of the analysed books, it seems appropriate to structure the thesis in a non-linear way, that is, not tracing of certain developmental tendencies of author's conception of past, but rather focusing on the thematic continuity regarding the conception of the past presented in the selected novels.

The selection of the novels covered in this thesis is influenced by many factors. Although history is present in some sense in every one of Barnes' works, I have chosen to select a few specific works from the author's rich repertoire of novels that directly

touch on the theme of the past. In the six succeeding chapters, the thesis aims to depict the way Julian Barnes works with the concept of the past, in his earlier experimental novels *Flaubert's Parrot* and *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters*, concerning form, his rather conventional novels *Before She Met Me*, *The Sense of an Ending*, *Metroland* (1980), and more patriotic novels *England, England*, and *Arthur & George*. Depending on the attempt to analyse Barnes' approach to the past in relation to the narrative techniques, which he used in his novels, the submitted paper addresses the author's influence of postmodern elements, both on a thematic and narratological level. The inspiration provided to Barnes' contemporary writing by postmodern tendencies will be displayed, particularly the scepticism towards historical truth, the subjectivism with which he views history, and, last but not least, the irretrievability of the past, which seems to be extremely appropriate in the context of his treatment of the topic. An equally characteristic influence on Barnes' work is reflected in the postmodern tenets in the form of narratological devices that are frequently present in the novels analysed: historiographic metafiction, intertextuality, the unreliability of the narrator, self-reflexivity, and fragmentation.

In the presented thesis, I attempt to focus on Barnes' treatment of the past in selected novels, in relation to the following themes: truth, memory, and identity. Are there themes in Barnes' novels dealing with the past that are of greater significance than others and that are common to his texts, to the extent that it is possible to enclose these themes in a unifying framework with the central theme of the past? In an attempt to answer this question, I have set out two central thematic strands against which the selected novels will be analysed. The first strand, fictionalizing of history, a concept that occurs particularly in relation to novels in which Barnes takes inspiration from real-life events, whether it is experimenting within the confines of Gustave Flaubert's

biography in *Flaubert's Parrot*, history as a form of fabulation in *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters*, or fictionalizing the historical past in *Arthur & George*. The second strand is the bidirectional nature of past and present, in the novels of Julian Barnes. This relationship is presented in selected novels in relation to obsessing over the past in, from a narratological point of view, a less experimental novel of the range of Shakespeare's tragedies, foregrounding the question of jealousy in retrospect, in the perspective of the historian in *Before She Met Me* or conceptualising the history in relation to national identity and tradition, which in Barnes' terms is shaped by the relationship between the authentic and replica in *England, England*. Tradition, as T.S. Eliot perceived it, is not only a thing of the past, but also the present. The past should therefore not be seen as a thing long gone, but as very present, which makes the relationship between the present and the past ever-changing (Voštová 19). Thus, the novel that this thesis also explores within the second thematic strand is Barnes' first novel *Metroland*, in which the author works with a protagonist looking back on the past and as he himself says, the fact that sometimes "people develop in ways they don't expect to" (Guignery and Roberts 4). The bidirectional nature of the past and the present, that the present is influenced by the past to the extent that the past is determined by the present, is also touched upon by Barnes in the last selected book, which this thesis seeks to interpret and that is the novel extensively working with the motif of imperfections of memory *The Sense of an Ending*, in which the echoes of *Metroland* can be heard.

The last factor to be mentioned concerns the author himself. As Julian Barnes is an author of contemporary British literature, this choice brings with it certain pitfalls in the form of new publications constantly appearing. Barnes began publishing in the 1980s and his last, and very recent novel, *Elizabeth Finch* (2022), was published

in the same year in which this thesis is written. Therefore, due to a large amount of potential material and the limiting factor of the recommended length of a standard diploma thesis, the author's other novels resembling the theme of the past analysed in this thesis will be marginally discussed but will not be given a chapter of their own.

This thesis follows the hypothesis that narrative is always conditioned by the perspective in which it unfolds, and since history is always subjective the narrator in Barnes' novels is also unreliable, therefore the analysis aims to research the question of which are Barnes's main tools for matching the form and content regarding the concept of history in his novels.

2. Experimenting within the limits of biography in *Flaubert's Parrot*

“When you write the biography of a friend, you must do it as if you were taking *revenge* for him”

-- Gustave Flaubert, *letter to Ernest Feydeau*, 1872

This is a statement from an epigraph of Barnes' most famous novel *Flaubert's Parrot*. Barnes, although he did not know Flaubert personally, as centuries drifted them apart, provided a very graceful overview of Flaubert's life in his work. As this thesis will further unravel, Barnes alongside, other British authors for example Ian McEwan, is keen on taking inspiration from Germany and France (Childs, *Contemporary* 21). The novel introduces Barnes' love for all the things French. Although having been born in England, Julian Barnes is mostly associated with France due to the undeniable French influence over his literature. It can be claimed that growing up in an almost bilingual family, as both his parents taught French, he was brought up in a cultured environment, as this Romance language formed his relationship with France, its culture, and history from an early age. Echoes of the author's voice can be heard in his works in the form of his repetitive utilization of France and England, both place and history. Thus, it should come as no surprise that he eventually used his strong respect for Gustave Flaubert, the most well-known French author of the 19th century, in his 1984 homage, *Flaubert's Parrot*.

Flaubert's Parrot, which is often claimed to be the best piece Barnes has written so far, leaves the reader on the borderline between a biography of Gustave Flaubert and an ordinary story of a widower and a retired doctor Geoffrey Braithwaite, who is as obsessed with Flaubert as the author himself. The theme of obsession plays a pivotal role there, as in the novel *Before She Met Me*, where the protagonist becomes gradually

more and more obsessed with his wife's love life and it is to say that with equal vigour Geoffrey Braithwaite embarks on an all-consuming pursuit of Flaubert and his parrot, which Flaubert placed on his table when he was writing *A Simple Heart* (*Un Coeur Simple*, 1877) (Belsey 690). Had not *Flaubert's Parrot* been written in 1984, one might speculate on the author's reflection of his life on the fate of Braithwaite, given both Braithwaite's and Barnes's obsession with Flaubert. Nevertheless, would it be so, the unfolding of events could be considered a kind of foreshadowing, as we learn in the novel that Braithwaite's wife died of illness, and we know that Barnes' wife died in 2008 of a brain tumour.

For his candid interest in the subject of obsession, which is evident to some degree in each of Barnes' novels, he has earned the label of being an author particularly devoted to the topic of obsession. According to Barnes, this label of an author "obsessed with obsessions", gained currency as Frank Kermode, a literary critic, reviewed *Flaubert's Parrot* and decided it for Barnes (Guignery and Roberts 16). Even though Barnes implies he never realized to be a writer obsessed with anything, he admits, a reader who knows the author's work inside out can often read the "themes and obsessions" embedded in these works much better than the author himself (Guignery and Roberts 16).

Barnes' first experimental novel *Flaubert's Parrot*, although third published, serves as a harbinger for his other, not any less successful experimental novel *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters*, which will be further discussed in this thesis. *Flaubert's Parrot* is rather short, which is the case with all the author's novels, as the author does not like overstaying his welcome and appreciates rather "concision in a novelist" (his longest novel so far, *Arthur & George*, counts about 450 pages) (Barnes & Noble 42:38 – 43:05). The novel is significant for its

narratological creativity, serving both art in a form of fiction and history as presenting the (auto)biography of Gustave Flaubert.

Barnes writes Flaubert's story with irony all his own, for it is clear from the outset that Braithwaite's attempts to give an all-encompassing account of the writer's life are virtually impossible. However, in reading this novel the reader must bear in mind, and Barnes regularly assures us of this fact, as in the beginning, when the scene opens with a replica not the original statue, that Geoffrey Braithwaite, is not an entirely reliable narrator. The credibility of his narrative is compromised by many factors: although the story is told from the perspective of a first-person narrator, which entitles the author to certain extremes, in Geoffrey's case he is a very hesitant one and for David Leon Higdon in *Unconfessed Confessions* represents "the *reluctant narrator*, who is reliable in strict terms, [. . .] but who has seen, experienced or caused something so traumatic that he must approach the telling of it through indirections, masks and substitutions" (qtd. in Dobrogoszcz 30). It is worth mentioning the story already presented in the novel, that is, the character who decides to write a biography of a famous author, but fails in doing so, since it is rather protagonist's life against the background of Gustave Flaubert's biography. Furthermore, the narrator in many ways is not honest to the reader, jumping from topic to topic and returning to previously started topics later, thus choosing a "circular structure" and through this retarding the story (35). Higdon is of the opinion that the narrator "blames his hesitation on his typically reticent English nature, on his own embarrassment, and finally on his fear of unmasking himself as a cuckold" (qtd. in Dobrogoszcz 30). Thus, Barnes' protagonist, and Barnes for his narrator, chooses the above-mentioned narrative structure to protect him, to not face his own fears that have accompanied Geoffrey since his wife's death (30-31). Speaking on the behalf of that, Dobrogoszcz concludes, that "the book is neither Flaubert's

biography nor a text on writing a biography as such, but a study of the narrator's concerns, worries, and fears" (34). Therefore, Braithwaite, who is engaged in writing a biography of Flaubert, looks at the famous French author through a different lens, "with different truths about him" than we are used to from the lips and pens of historians (41). "As for the description of Flaubert's life, the narrative is corroborated not only by the actual historical events (after all, the dates and facts can be checked, and confirmed, with the help of any professional biography)" (32). However, as Nagy, points out, if we were to pick up the actual correspondence of Gustave Flaubert, we would soon discover that not all intertextual references coincide (*Palimpsesty* 135). Thus, the narrator's unreliability is compounded in the eyes of the reader not only because we cannot trust his personal story, the biography of the author that he conveys and passes off as credible lacks, in part, a relevant historical basis.

If the idea of biography is dates, names, documents, and events, it above all also is a narrative. Míša in his thesis suggests that a similar connection, which is to be found in history and literature is also present "between fiction and biography as a specific form of historical writing" (32). Fiction and biography thus can work as a mutual source of inspiration. The biographical devices that can be observed in *Flaubert's Parrot*, which are intended to demonstrate to the reader the narrator's as well as the author's knowledge of Flaubert's life and in a sense have an informational purpose, are for instance the diaries or Flaubert's personal correspondence, which as the narrator implies bear evidence of Flaubert's rather weak knowledge of English (Barnes, *Flaubert's Parrot* 36). However, at the same time, fiction can have an influence on biography, as biography may adopt "devices traditionally associated with fiction, for example the direct speech" (Míša 32). On the other hand, the excerpts from Flaubert's private correspondence, as well as excerpts from his novels such as *Madame Bovary* (p. 51) or

The Dictionary of Accepted Ideas (p. 111), testify to the presence of intertextuality, and as such are what makes *Flaubert's Parrot* to be regarded as historiographic metafiction, which is representative of postmodern experimentation (32-33). Altogether, it would take many more pages to list all the intertextual research within *Flaubert's Parrot*, for there is a great deal of such. As the book's title suggests, Gustave Flaubert is the main reference of the novel, therefore the two above mentioned works of the French author will be sufficient. In all respect, employing a real historical figure as the motif of his novel and creating a fictional history, is, nevertheless, frequently presented in Barnes' novels, as for instance engaging the historical figure of the Russian composer Dmitri Shostakovich in *The Noise of Time* (2016) or implementing yet another character of a famous author, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in *Arthur & George*.

What Barnes gives us in *Flaubert's Parrot* is an amateur biography of the French author. And yet the book offers more than a biography of Flaubert; it also provides the life journey of the narrator himself, whose fate the reader learns through the life story of Flaubert. Thus, although *Flaubert's Parrot* is not a biography of Gustav Flaubert in a traditional sense, it researches his life, in the context of a story of a retired doctor, the narrator Geoffrey Braithwaite, who gets inspired in his inquiry by Gustav Flaubert's book *A Simple Heart*. And, as Childs, points out, "[i]n *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984) much turns out to be invented, but there is nothing deliberately untrue about Flaubert" (*Contemporary* 81). Therefore, as much as the unreliability of the narrator is reflected throughout the story, as Dobrogoszcz implies, "withholding the whole truth is not the same as lying" (32).

Before the literary analysis, it might be useful to briefly clarify the approach of the postmodernist movement. First, providing a full-encompassing definition of postmodernism is rather difficult as this movement, as well as the succeeding

contemporary one, is still in process and as such the issue is these terms are broad and vague. However, formally, the Postmodernist movement arose in the second half of the 20th century, was characterized by experiments with narrative, language, and philosophy and as the 20th century came to an end, the Postmodernist movement established its place in philosophy as well as literary theory. “. . . 1980s has generally been seen as the foremost period for British fiction since the war” (Childs, *Contemporary* 11). Prose from that period noted “novelists returning to the postmodernist styles of the 1960s” (10). Julian Barnes, along with his peers Martin Amis, Salman Rushdie, and Ian McEwan, who, much like him, rank among the most successful contemporary British writers, is part of a generation of authors who as Malcolm Bradbury in *The Novel Today* points out have departed “from the provincializing spirit of much post-war British fiction” (qtd. in Childs, *Contemporary* 16). Postmodernism thus opened a realm of rejecting outright meanings in literature, which is exploratory by reliance on such literary conventions as fragmentation, unreliable narration, metafiction, reader’s involvement, self-reflection, and playfulness, much of which, is employed in Barnes’ early novels.

Therefore, experimental tendencies, used to denote doubts about one’s past are present in Barnes’ works. Cornelia Stott summarizes the aspects of postmodernist scepticism with a trend of contemporary approach toward the concept of historical truth as follows:

Barnes’s oeuvre exemplifies postmodern scepticism towards a concept of historical truth in combination with a typical contemporary playfulness. His texts contain historical characters as well as adapted literary texts, intertextual references, a crossing of genre boundaries as well as the attempt to convey a view

of the world in an almost didactic manner which challenges the readers and asks them to be highly active and attentive. Besides, Barnes does not only state the problematic relationship between biographical writing and historical truth, he is also very interested in answering questions concerning memory, finding ways of making the past accessible, and dealing with the tendency of wanting to change the view of the past to fit the present. (12)

To render the reader with something at least pretending to be an ultimate truth of Flaubert's past, Barnes provides a multiplicity of perspectives relating to the same person or event, which may be best observed in the second chapter called "Chronology". This chapter offers the reader three sequential chronologies of Flaubert's life (Childs, *Contemporary* 90). The first and optimistic one, in which Flaubert dies "[f]ull of honour, wildly loved and still working hard to the end" (Barnes, *Flaubert's Parrot* 20), the second and pessimistic one, where Flaubert dies "[i]mpoverished, lonely, and exhausted" (24) and the third one provided by the author himself, conveyed to the reader through excerpts from Flaubert's texts. It is left up to the reader to decide, which one is correct, thus, although the knowledge of both the author Gustave Flaubert and his literary output is not compulsory or presupposed, it is nonetheless highly recommended as it might help the reader to detect at certain points when the author succumbs to fiction and when he follows the historical truth. Needless to say, "[a] different element that is frequently discussed within the postmodern context is multiple points of view" (Míša 33). In this place, it is important to denote, that the central theme of the novel is subjectivism, which supplies the thought, that there are various kinds of history, and as Barnes in *Flaubert's Parrot* demonstrates even various versions of biography.

Commenting on the account of subjectivism presented within Barnes' novel, Childs, concludes, that the perspective within the novel is pivotal, for the perspective of an individual is given more weight than the truth (*Contemporary* 91). Although the information and story of Geoffrey Braithwaite seem to be provided very peripherally, the narrator indeed is the mediator, constructor, organizer, and arranger of the story he tells (89). In *Flaubert's Parrot*, "[t]his plurality of perspectives is [nevertheless, also] matched by the three versions Braithwaite gives of his relationship with his wife" (90): "I loved her; we were happy; I miss her. She didn't love me; we were unhappy; I miss her" (181). "We were happy; we were unhappy; we were happy enough" (186-87). On the one hand, the narrator's pursuit of Gustave Flaubert's life allows him not to dwell on the memory of his wife's suicide, while on the other hand provides parallels that give the reader insight into the narrator's personal life. It may be said, that "[t]he implication is that there are always at least three versions, as in *Talking it over* and *Love, etc*", which mark three focalizers taking turns in telling us the story from their perspective, thus similarly *Flaubert's Parrot* consists of three different narratives the Braithwaite's, Flaubert's, and the parrot's (90):

Three stories contend within me. One about Flaubert, one about Ellen, one about myself. My own is the simplest of the three . . . and yet I find it the hardest to begin. My wife's is more complicated, and more urgent; yet I resist that too . . . Books are not life, however much we might prefer it if they were. Ellen's is a true story; perhaps it is even the reason why I am telling you Flaubert's story instead. (Barnes, *Flaubert's Parrot* 87-88)

Throughout our life, we tend to emphasize either the positive or the negative, when we arrange the plot points of our life and, the same applies to the relationship towards our

world, which is “‘narrated’ and, to some extent, textual” (Groes et al. 118). Delving fully into the secrets of Flaubert’s life, Geoffrey Braithwaite begins to uncover the shadows of his own inner self, his interpretation of his life, and consequently adultery and suicide of his wife. However, the problem with this novel, as it is with every Barnes’ novel is, that we cannot be certain of the narrator’s reliability, as we suspect that he refuses to give us the whole story of his own life. In all respects, the commingling of history and fiction on the background of the narrator’s limited reliability is a common phenomenon that accompanies Barnes’ works, and the genre of historiographic metafiction challenges the validity of history as it does not dwell on factual correctness. Therefore, we may understand the author’s narratological technique as intentionally employing the narrator Braithwaite who directly refuses to tell his own story, nevertheless does so on the background of rendering the reader with information about Flaubert’s life, “mostly against his will and without his knowledge” (Moseley 73). Most of the above-mentioned various interpretations and perspectives in the novel build on verified historical facts and appear to add to the relevancy of Geoffrey’s narrative, yet all of them come to different conclusions. However, as the narrator, at the beginning of the novel, looking back on his earlier decision to start writing Flaubert’s biography (which was impossible because “[y]ou can only do one thing well” (Barnes, *Flaubert’s Parrot* 3), and he chose marriage to a literary career) reminds us: “Mystification is simple; clarity is the hardest thing of all” (108). Thus, the reader is yet again reminded of the ambiguity of history in postmodern writing.

Speaking of clarity, *Flaubert’s Parrot* is a matter of debate amongst critics, as to whether it shall be considered novel, precisely for its form and narrative techniques the author employed (Roşcan 77). This work is written as a biographical novel and a “metafictional inquiry into the ways in which art mirrors life and then turns around

to shape it” (“Flaubert’s Parrot”). “As a narrative, *Flaubert’s Parrot* contains an extremely unusual range of narrative types: apocrypha, autobiography, bestiary, biography, chronology, criticism, dialogue, dictionary, essay, exam, guide, and manifesto” (Childs, *Contemporary* 89). Therefore, while reading Julian Barnes’ novels, the reader is often acquainted with his unusual style of narration and experimenting with form, which vividly comes to a surface in *Flaubert’s Parrot*.

The beginning of *Flaubert’s Parrot* marks the first-person narrator lamenting about the statue of Gustave Flaubert, this statue he describes, however, is not the original one, which is how this scene in a sense works as a harbinger of the main theme of this novel, thus the difference between history and fiction. As it will be analysed in the further chapter dealing with Barnes’ novel *England, England*, one of its main themes is the endeavour of “question[ing] of verisimilitude in fiction” on the background of the relationship between art and history, “as art has a different relationship with reality from history’s” (Childs, *Contemporary* 89). This pursuit unfolds in conclusion that “history aims at a factual truth whereas fiction aims at an emotional one” (ibidem). Peter Childs has written about the distinguishing between the emotional and factual truths claiming, both forms “have much in common – both have to convince and persuade the reader that they are in some sense ‘correct’” (ibidem). Barnes in “*Flaubert’s Parrot* repeatedly exposes ‘fact’ as opinion and ‘truth’ as dominant viewpoint by assembling perspectives and versions, claims and counter-claims” (90).

The narrative flow of the novel depends on the way the narrator tells the story, which in this case is done by the narrator’s interweaving the story of his life and information about himself with the life of Flaubert and France. Thus, the narrative is parallel. The reader gets from all the traditional information one could expect in a biography, to a fictitious personal story of Geoffrey Braithwaite, Flaubert’s amateur

scholar, and his own concerns of his wife's death, enhanced by seizing the access not only to the life of Gustave Flaubert, but also the whereabouts of Loulou, the stuffed parrot, which Flaubert placed on his desk when he was writing *Un Coeur Simple*, 1877. To compare this narrative technique to other Barnes' works, this parallel of stories is also employed in *Arthur & George*, only with the change that here the author visibly alternates between the two stories in the first half of the novel, devotes its own chapters to both characters, Arthur and George, and interweaves the lives of the two protagonists only in the second part of the book. Such process resembles a metaphor about building a house, meaning, to construct a narrative structure is like building a house, you cannot tell a story unless you have the right structure. Thus, as it is implied by Barnes "[s]tyle does arise from subject-matter" (*Flaubert's Parrot* 99).

The moment Geoffrey meets with his friend Ed to discuss Flaubert's personal letters in the third chapter "Finders Keepers", in which, among other things, he asked Mrs. Herbert to burn his private correspondence after his death, the reader gets to know: "He said, If anyone ever asks you what my letters contained, or what my life was like, please lie to them. Or rather, since I cannot ask you of all people to lie, just tell them what it is you think they want to hear" (Barnes, *Flaubert's Parrot* 43). There is an apparent similarity with another European author, thus, Franz Kafka. The last request on his friend Max Brod, before Kafka died, was to burn all his writings. In Barnes' story, Flaubert, similarly, to Kafka, did not want anything left of him that would in the future lead to the discovery of his private life. Therefore, as the reader is often reminded throughout the novel, this is a story about somebody who did not wish to be known for his life. It is indeed a paradox that Barnes combined these two characters, that is, the famous French writer who did not wish to be known through his personal life and the narrator of his life, Geoffrey Braithwaite, who uses the story of Flaubert's life

to hide his own. Besides, Barnes, through Geoffrey, places such questions as: “Why does the writing make us chase the writer? Why can’t we leave well alone? Why aren’t the books enough? Flaubert wanted them to be: few writers believed more in the objectivity of the written text and the insignificance of the writer’s personality; yet still we disobediently pursue” (2). Thus, the question arises: To what extent it is still a biography? What must the author consider when he wants to write someone’s biography? What should he leave out to preserve a certain form of the author’s privacy? Is it even possible?

In reference to protagonist Geoffrey Braithwaite’s undertaking to compiling a grand narrative of Flaubert’s life, the very choice of the animal, the parrot, which is a symbol of repetition without meaning, is itself interesting, as such a feat is simply impossible since what the narrator conveys to us is completely lacking in any coherence and gives us mere fragments of author’s life (Nagy, *Palimpsest* 134). Therefore, we can suggest, biographers indeed are mere parrots of someone’s life, they are thus living life through the lives of others as depicted in Geoffrey Braithwaite’s attempt to tell the story of Flaubert, in order not to have to tell his own. Therefore, is an author any more than a refined parrot?

An affirmative answer to this question is perhaps what makes a biographer a suitable adept to deal with someone’s life, because who else but a parrot can mimic a human voice with such ease? Thus, perceiving Braithwaite as a mere parrot repeating facts from Flaubert’s life, we can, however, attribute an important moment to the author’s intention to convey to the reader the multiplicity of biographical sources, including Flaubert’s personal correspondence, and through this broadening of the perspectives through which Flaubert’s life can be viewed, to give the reader the space to consider which of the presented versions is indeed the real version of Flaubert’s life.

It is to be noted that Barnes does not only make Flaubert the object of his novel; Flaubert is also an object of personal interest to him (Childs and Lea 1). Childs and Lea, argue that both authors share an ironic tone to their works and suggests that Barnes, similarly to Flaubert, seeks “objectivity in art”, “because it signals a purity of aesthetic approach” (1). However, the focus on the objective perspective, which all Barnes’ novels share, presumes one additional condition, for the version to be authentic, Barnes often allows himself to be subjective and works with information from many biographies and supports his story with multiple perspectives. He searches “for something different from the quasi-scientific objectivity” (Childs and Lea 1), as his works are often rather subjective, he does not seize objectivity, but looks “rather for something close to the truth” (Nikl 11).

Thus, there are many different versions of Flaubert’s life, as with great authors. The relationship between Louise Colet and Gustave Flaubert is one version that is noted in *Flaubert’s Parrot* that stand out from other versions. In chapter twelve, “Braithwaite’s Dictionary of Accepted Ideas”, retold by Louise provides the reader yet another perspective of Flaubert, this time as a lover. Nevertheless, “[i]t needs to be stressed at this point, that this re-telling of the exchange between Colet and Flaubert in Croisset is completely fictional” (Míša 35). This chapter can therefore certainly be seen as an illustrative example of Barnes’ work with fiction and historical materials and therefore verifiable facts. However, as is implied by Geoffrey Braithwaite, it may seem to no avail guessing whether the truth of Flaubert’s relationship with Colet resembles, at least a little bit, the one which is depicted in Colet’s fictional account of events in the novel, when “[w]hat happened to the truth is not recorded” (Barnes, *Flaubert’s Parrot* 64). On the account of the story given by the author, Geoffrey capturing the errors within works of such elevated authors

as William Golding and Alfred Lord Tennyson admits: “If you don’t know what’s true, or what’s meant to be true, then the value of what isn’t true, or isn’t meant to be true, becomes diminished” (78). Barnes thus suggests through the number of various apparent excerpts from Flaubert’s correspondence, novels, or biographies that there is no biography, which would encompass the life of Flaubert as a whole. Therefore, there always remains space for a minor uncertainty as when we try to follow clues in the hope that they will lead us to the truth about the past, however, the perception can be influenced by even the smallest detail that has the power to change everything. Thus, it seems appropriate to accede on Barnes’ piglet metaphor, which appears to satisfy Geoffrey’s vigour in finding answers to questions: “How do we seize the past?” and “Can we ever do so?” (5):

When I was a medical student some pranksters at an end-of-term dance released into the hall a piglet which had been smeared with grease. It squirmed between legs, evaded capture, squealed a lot. People fell over trying to grasp it, and were made to look ridiculous in the process. The past often seems to behave like that piglet. (*Flaubert’s Parrot* 5).

The question of whether the past is really something that can be trusted at all is, concerning *Flaubert’s parrot*, a highly topical question, since the past, it seems, cannot be empowered and it can be altered by our memory, as illustrated in another Barnes’ novel *The Sense of an Ending* but the past always remains a question of interpretation.

Barnes in an interview with McGarth roughly quotes Flaubert when saying: “The desire to reach conclusions is a sign of human stupidity” (Guignery and Roberts 18). This statement nevertheless meets the thought of Barnes’ novel that there is no such a thing as a universal truth, as such an interest

in seizing the truth is, in the novel, surpassed by individuals' perspective. Thus, wanting to seize a finite resolved answer based on an individual understanding and coming to a particular conclusion is mystifying. The narrator of Barnes' novel, once he finds himself in a room with not one but three stuffed parrots, each of them looking "a little cranky" must accept the inability to seize the one truth and surrender to the inevitable nature of multiplicity (Barnes, *Flaubert's Parrot* 216): "I pushed carefully between the shelves and then looked up at a slight angle. There, standing in a line, were the Amazonian parrots. Of the original fifty only three remained . . . I stared at them for a minute or so, and then dodged away. Perhaps it was one of them" (ibidem).

If we were to classify Barnes's conception of history as a literary genre, we must recognize that at the boundary between art and history, "the past is autobiographical fiction pretending to be a parliamentary report" (*Flaubert's Parrot* 94). Generally, "in Barnes' books art and life are often contrasted", his novel is interwoven with the narrator's attempt to reconstruct the past, in which he often loses himself and surrenders to fiction (Childs, *Contemporary* 86). As Moseley implies: "There is a difference between the past and an autobiographical novel, a difference between books and life" (Moseley 90). Thus, it seems appropriate to conclude this chapter with an all-encompassing quote of Barnes' narrator Geoffrey Braithwaite: "Books are where things are explained to you; life is where things aren't" (*Flaubert's Parrot* 190).

3. **Historians and novelists: Obsessing over the past in *Before She Met Me***

Whereas writing of *Flaubert's Parrot* made Barnes famous, and the novel to this day ranks among the author's most successful works; *Before She Met Me*, written two years prior, though quite different in form, is nevertheless similar in some ways to *Flaubert's Parrot*, namely in the common theme of an obsessive search for truth concerning the life of others (Barnes, *Jediný příběh* 258).

Every era of world literature is characterized by an important ideal, and British contemporary fiction is marked by “shed[ding] light on British society, culture, or literature since the 1970s” (Childs, *Contemporary* 20). The themes that reoccur within the works of contemporary authors, except for “the perennial trinity of sex, love, and death”, are “war, apocalyptic cities, queer and gender identities, the family in crisis, serial killers, childhood, new ethnicities, and American influences” (ibidem). As for Barnes, his works are characterised by these themes, in which *love*, and *death* predominate, and the American influence is there, thoroughly restored by all things French. It is mainly these topics of his books that make Barnes the author of *mainstream* novels, as they are accessible to a wide range of audiences. Throughout his fiction, Julian Barnes has dissected romantic relationships as well as friendships and family relations. Particularly the themes of existentialism intertwined with life instinct and that of death, which people tend to have throughout different phases of life, are present in his works. Little in his novels is in fact washed away from trying to seize the past and grasp the essence of a sense of life. Geoffrey Braithwaite in *Flaubert's Parrot* commenting on the nature of people in relationships claims: “That's the real distinction between people: not between those who have secrets and those who don't, but between those who want to know everything and those who don't. This search is a sign of love, I maintain” (139). However, in the case of jealousy

of Graham in *Before She Met Me*, the “desire to know everything” is not as much a sign of love as it is madness (Guignery and Roberts 19).

In short, in the first few pages of the novel, the reader is introduced to the character of Graham Hendrick, a middle-aged history professor whose work is not fulfilling to him and who has been married to his wife, Barbara, for fifteen years, with whom he has a daughter, Alice. The mere fifteen pages are enough for the author to bring the reader into the picture of the plot, starting with Graham meeting his future wife, Ann, an unsuccessful actress starring in small roles in rather forgettable movies, at a party thrown by his friend, a novelist, Jack Lupton. The story proceeds with Graham getting divorced from his wife, Barbara, and moving out to start a new life with his newly wedded wife, Ann. At the end of this chapter of Graham’s life and the beginning of a new one, we are told: “He felt happy, but he didn’t feel married . . . Graham held the hand of his neat, kind, unimprovable wife, and repeated softly to himself that he was a happy man” (Barnes, *Before* 23-24). At that point, the plot jumps in time by two years and the reader suddenly realizes something is wrong as we get to know that: “And as the next two years unfolded, Graham duly began to feel married” (24).

A narrative always depends on the way it is narrated. A general preoccupation with Barnes’ narrative technique may give the false impression that, in addition to using very similar types of characters dealing with similar problems, the author employs the same techniques in all his novels. Indeed, a similar story can be seen in Barnes’ later novels, *Talking it over* (1991) and *Love, etc.* (2000), in which a love triangle, human nature, and jealousy are at play. As Barnes incorporates both realist and modernist features into the postmodernist mainstream, his position as a writer within literary classification does remain fluid. There are only few instances in which Barnes conforms

to consciousness, neither does he often adhere to the realist novel model (Childs, *Contemporary* 86). For his story *Before She Met Me*, Barnes chose the “regressive narrative”, which suits his novel very well (Arslan 3). “A regressive narrative links experiences in a way that moves toward the ‘bad’ evaluative dimension” (Sonenshein 499). This in the story embarks at the moment, when Graham starts feeling the jealousy over his wife and continues till the very end when the murder and suicide occur (Arslan 4). In contrast, the beginning of the story shows signs of a progressive narrative as it exhibits a certain forward movement displayed in Graham’s somewhat problematic and duly relationship with his first wife Barbara, progressing to the initial feelings of happiness and easiness he finds with Ann. Not only is the regressive type of narrative appropriate for the story, but it also matches the psychological portrayal of the main character. Merritt Moseley calls *Before She Met Me* a “study in paranoia, exaggeration and unjustified sexual worry” (63). “In addition to being a credible and compelling study of abnormal psychology, [according to Moseley] *Before She Met Me* is also a compelling study of normal psychology” (65). Since Barnes did not choose the first-person narration, but resorted to an omniscient third-person narration, the reader has a glimpse into the consciousness of both the protagonist and the other characters, thanks to the so-called psycho-narration. On the behalf of psycho-narration, Dorrit Cohn, in *Transparent Minds*, points out that:

... one of the most important advantages of psycho-narration over the other modes of rendering consciousness lies in its verbal independence from self-articulation. Not only can it order and explain a character’s conscious thoughts better than the character himself, it can also effectively articulate a psychic life that remains un verbalized, penumbral, or obscure. Accordingly psycho-narration often

renders, in a narrator's knowing words, what a character 'knows,' without knowing how to put it into words. (46)

The novel's analysis aims to accentuate that although the novel is handling a serious matter and heading towards a brutal ending, it nevertheless is considered by Barnes to be his funniest novel as the humorous aspect dwells in "the sardonic wit with which Barnes charts Graham's gradual descent into killing from his initial security" (Childs, *Contemporary* 81). Thus, the novel deliberately sets out to exploit the inner thoughts of the characters, rendering the reader a record of protagonists' path from the sanity to madness, driven by the desire to capture the past, without him realizing it.

Roşcan, commenting on the zeal with which historians and detectives pursue the truth, sees similarities in Graham's obsession with Anne's past, while noting that "the irretrievability of the past" is an axiom of postmodernism (146). Julian Barnes is often considered an exemplar of postmodern writing, and several of his novels have entered the postmodern canon because of their exploration of the boundary between history and fiction and the issue of identity. Postmodernists seek to reflect on the ways in which the past is conceived by both fiction as well as historians and according to Ateş, "[o]ne of the most effective practices that postmodernists use to open the past narratives up to the present is to deconstruct them by having a playful or even anarchic attitude towards the assumptions about the possibility of treating the past in an empirical way" (8). To support this claim, Ateş suggests that to "manifest postmodernism's playful manner", the postmodernist authors make use of irony in their works, "to break the rigidity of the past and show retrospective possibilities in a humorous manner" (ibidem). In this view, the influence of postmodernism on Julian Barnes' fiction is evident in his novels.

The novel's title already reveals the main thematical feature of Barnes' work. The title refers to Graham's jealousy over Ann's sexual past, as implied in the third chapter "The Cross-Eyed Bear", when Jack asks Graham: "No, it's sort of . . . retrospective, it's all retrospective. It's all about chaps before me. Before she met me" (Barnes, *Before* 42). Altogether, the heading of this chapter implies hidden meaning suggested by the character of Jack, thus "[e]very marriage has a cross-eyed bear", therefore a cross to bear (48). The cross that Graham bears in the novel is an unrelenting sense of jealousy – retro jealousy. Julian Barnes in an article "Remembrance of things past" speaking on the behalf of retrospective jealousy, considers this form of jealousy much more resentful:

Retro-jealousy, unlike its more familiar siblings, habitually broadens out into a wider obsession. That previous affair, that earlier lover turn out to be mere nominees for wider areas of baffled resentment: a kind of foolish rage against the immutability of the past, and a metaphysical whinge that things can actually happen despite your absence. (qtd. in Moseley 60)

In the above-quoted passage, Barnes alludes to the irreversibility of the past and suggests the past is simply something that has already taken place, whether in our presence or not, which is something Graham Hendrick cannot accept. Jealousy, likened to the middle ear "only there to make you lose your sense of balance" or appendix "only there to flare up insolently and have to be taken out" (Barnes, *Before* 116), is exhibited there on Graham's addiction and obsession with Ann and her past.

The opening of the novel may serve as a harbinger of the story: "The first time Graham Hendrick watched his wife commit adultery he didn't mind at all. He even found himself chuckling. It never occurred to him to reach out a shielding hand towards

his daughter's eyes" (Barnes, *Before* 9). Cohn's suggests that: "A typical passage of psycho-narration in a narrator-oriented novel starts with a brief sentence or two in the past, followed by several longer and more elaborate sentences in the present" (23). Such instance is illustrated in the above-quoted passage, which serves as the opening to the book and is by Barnes straightforwardly proceeded by the happier present chapter of Graham's life (Arslan 9). Altogether, this is the first paragraph of the novel and as such it among other things also introduces the topic of this book, which is further developed and modified in Barnes' following novels and that is the interconnection between love and jealousy.

Despite the initial love enchantment, Graham felt the marriage with Ann is different from the one with Barbara as he did not start to feel married because so many new things were happening, but precisely because nothing was happening. The feeling that Ann was the only love of his life filled him with easiness. However, it was paradoxically this feeling that planted in him the first feelings of insecurity. Graham began to realize that his fascination with Ann was increasing and materializing in manifestations such as observing her closely: "And when Ann returned, he found himself watching her, studying her far more closely than he had done when they had first met" (Barnes, *Before* 24), keeping a diary of what she is wearing each day to work: "... the first thing I do is take out my diary and write down everything she's got on" (50) or eating her leftovers: "I suddenly find myself eating whatever she's left..." (51). Nevertheless, it is not until Graham, at the urging of his ex-wife Barbara, takes their daughter to the cinema to see a film starring Ann naked in a bed with another man, that these obsessive displays of love will turn into unbearable jealousy. Altogether, these instances are in the novel further followed by escalating illustrations marking the protagonist seizing the evidence that Ann was unfaithful to him with his

friend Jack. To catch Jack and Ann in the act, Graham decides to read Jack's novels in which Ann might be involved, and he believes to find something, in Jack's last novel, called *Out of the dark* starring Jack as Jock:

Pages 367 and 368: Graham ripped them out. The clues were unmissable: the tear in the eye – that had happened a few times; the lifting of the bottom – yes; the clincher, though, was the mole – even if he had moved it from her right shoulder to the left side of her neck (this would be what Jack called imagination)” (152-53).

By the time Graham gets to the point where he has gathered enough of what he calls evidence that his wife is unfaithful to him, he himself, however, wishes to go back in time: “Why couldn't you unknow knowledge?” (Barnes, *Before* 145) Graham's moments of wishing to turn back time and erase the memory, in fact, to rewrite the past are to be related to the ones of Tony, a character from *The Sense of an Ending*, in which the theme of memory plays a central and fundamental role. However, the motif of rewriting history is not only evident in the main character's consciousness, but also in the actions that his new wife Ann resorts to when she visits Jack to preserve Graham's sanity: “‘Jack,’ she said slowly, ‘I've decided we never had an affair.’ . . . ‘I'm sorry to rewrite your past for you.’” (66-67) At that point the reader learns that Jack and Ann have a past together, after all, a past that no one shall remember. And since memory is history, they believe this will at least temporarily change the truth. It is ironic, then, that when Graham, later on, wants to change the past, he turns to his friend Jack, who excels in this field as far as his personal life is concerned, because, as he says: “Every time I tell a story it's different. Can't remember how most of them started off any more. Don't know what's true. Don't know where I came from” (67). It is thus bewildering, the way in which the past can influence our present.

As before mentioned, the motif of rewriting the past is common to many of Barnes' novels. In this novel, Barnes employs the characters of a historian and a novelist to provide a historical explanation and an interesting contrast between the two perspectives on history, at the same time. In fact, it is to elaborate on this matter as these two professions have something similar, since writing stories, whether stories based on evidence or stories that are fictional, is still, at its core, storytelling. Nevertheless, it is to note that those who read history get a different version of the past than those who read novels as while novelists work with a fabricated story, historians rely on facts. Therefore, whereas novelists are required to employ imagination, historians are bound to factuality and must obey the evidence about the recorded past, yet, as displayed in the previous chapter, their record of events may also differ from reality. However, it is not only Geoffrey Braithwaite from *Flaubert's Parrot*, but the historian from *Before She Met Me* also gradually retreats in his views of life from reality and surrenders to the imagination. Conversely, the novelist Jack, a highly creative man by nature of his profession, withdraws from the imagination and gives way to reality as he uses stories inspired by his life to the benefit of his books. In this view, to assume that the presented narrative explains the events is to follow the flow of the narration into mistaking the protagonists' constructed version of the past for real connections. This perspective will as a matter of course be accepted by those who believe that the evidence and explanations presented must, by all means, support the alleged connections obeying the law of factuality. As a novelist, Jack's livelihood is writing stories and although novels are classified in the fiction section, Jack likes to take inspiration for his writing from his own life or the lives of his friends. When Graham starts looking for evidence of an affair between Ann and Jack in Jack's novels, he clings to the fact that it is obvious, and the proof that such a thing happened can be gleaned from his books.

“For a start, he [Jack] simply wasn’t an inventive enough writer: if he wanted a bus conductor for a short scene, he couldn’t produce one without taking a bus ride” (Barnes, *Before* 148-49). Thus, as implied, Jack though a novelist, lacks the power of imagination to convey to him the stimuli for his stories and draws inspiration from reality. In opposition, Graham Hendrick, a history professor, supposed to be an expert on the past by profession, misreads the evidence of reality as he attempts to seize the truth about his new wife’s sexual past. “At first, Graham is aware of the inaccuracy of his sources” (Roşcan 140) when facing the question of the real and the fictional, however, “[t]he more evidence Graham found, the easier it became to find yet more” (Barnes, *Before* 153). Every time Graham strays into a particular point in history concerning Ann’s former partners, whether on screen or in real life, he resorts to the imagination as a means of filling in the rest of the picture of events. “This points to the problem which concerns [both] historians and philosophers of history alike, namely that history is a perceptive activity and perception entails subjectivity” (Roşcan 137). As indicated in the novel, the version that is presented by the historians is also a mere story, hence the possibility that the historians “had got it wrong” persists owing to one’s “suffering from a retrospective sense of injustice” as implied by Graham (Barnes, *Before* 115). Precisely such retrospective perception is to be observed in Graham’s jealousy as “historical discourse is, in fact, an imaginary elaboration on past events” (Roşcan 135). Therefore, it is to perceive certain nuances between *Before She Met Me* and *Flaubert’s Parrot*, thus, Braithwaite, a self-proclaimed historian is reconstructing the past of a famous historical persona, and Graham, a historian by profession, as well is seizing to know the truth about the past of his wife, who is also famous, yet fictional.

Commenting on the matter of subjective and objective truth and the sake of reliability of the ones who preserve and record history for us, in *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters*, Barnes claims: “History isn’t what happened. History is just what historians tell us” (240). Therefore, “we need to know the history of the historian in order to understand the version that is being put in front of us” (Barnes, *Sense* 15). Although retrieved from *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters*, a literal example of the quote may serve Barnes’s darker novel *Before She Met Me*, in which the main character, a historian by profession, attempts to explore the boundary between history and fiction as he is suspecting his wife of infidelity. It shall be mentioned that the motif of infidelity or its possible occurrence is present in almost all Barnes’ novels, which as Moseley points out, is something linking the novels *Flaubert’s Parrot*, *Madame Bovary*, *The Sense of an Ending*, and *Before She Met Me*, for “its protagonist’s overt and violent obsessions with his wife’s adultery” (79).

Although imagination tends to be one of the qualities required of a novelist, the opposite is true in Barnes’s novel. In his almost pathological obsession, Graham can no longer distinguish the blurred line between fiction and history, as he suspects Ann of adultery based on pieces of evidence, he either draws from movies starring Anne as an actress, for which he travels into various cities to see, the novels of his friend Jack, or evidence which are partly a figment of his imagination, namely dreams in which Ann’s ex-partners show up to laugh at him. “So why couldn’t you have post-monitory dreams?” (Barnes, *Before* 84). This is a question Graham poses as he begins to wonder whether his dreams are showing him the reality of what has happened in the past, thus, to ascribe a certain supernatural significance to dreams. Observing the protagonist teeter between reality and the supernatural power he attributes to his dreams; the reader learns to some extent

that Graham is gradually beginning to lose his sanity. As Roşcan suggests: “The book emphasizes the fact that the combination between the hallucinogenic effect of fiction and the absence of historical scepticism is an extremely volatile one, which inevitably builds up to fatal consequences” (133).

In his study *The British and Irish Novel since 1960s*, Acheson states that Barnes, in writing this novel, was inspired by an extensive discussion in contemporary biology in which Paul D. MacLean and Carl Sagan theorise that evolution has equipped humans with not one but three brains (179). His theory is based mainly on the fact that Barnes chose an excerpt from this study as one of two epigraphs for his novel:

Man finds himself in the predicament that nature has endowed him essentially with three brains which, despite great differences in structure, must function together and communicate with one another. The oldest of these brains is basically reptilian. The second has been inherited from the lower mammals, and the third is a late mammalian development, which [. . .] has made man peculiarly man. Speaking allegorically of these brains within a brain, we might imagine that when the psychiatrist bids the patient to lie on the couch, he is asking him to stretch out alongside a horse and a crocodile.

--- Paul D. MacLean, *Journal of Nervous and Mental Diseases*, Vol. CXXXV, No 4, October 1962

Not only does Barnes further embed this brain theory in his book, but he uses the above reference to the crocodile and the horse as the title of the last chapter “The Horse and the Crocodile”. Depending on the theme of the internal system of the body, whether the brain, appendix, or middle ear, discussed throughout the book, it is noticeable that Barnes began the last chapter with the very phrase: “It was only offal . . . it was all offal

. . . it was clever stuff, offal” (*Before* 161). If we consider the latest discussions from the medical field, it is offal, namely the gut, that is now considered a second brain of a human. Graham realizes in the last chapter that his whole life has been mere offal, and his subsequent act is, therefore, more paradoxical because in the last pages the reader observes his friend Jack lying on the ground with several stab wounds at the area “between the heart and the genitals”, thus offal (166). As a matter of fact, this may suggest the implication, that the whole story revolves around the psyche of the main character, which corresponds to the psycho-narration. Psycho-narration is a neologism used by Cohn, 1978, to describe the indirect technique of the third-person narrative of a character’s consciousness (Arslan 9). In this way of storytelling, we do not observe the mental language of the character, but the inner processes and feelings taking place in the individual characters, which are presented to us through the narrator. Since the third-person narrator is omnipresent in this story, through the psycho-narrative the reader learns what the character is feeling and thinking and since the narrator is also not a character present in the story, we can rely on his objectivity and reliability. Moreover, instances from the characters’ lives are conveyed to us through their direct and indirect speech. Arslan in her paper suggests that:

Psycho-narration may be the correct choice because the reconstruction of Ann’s past happened inside Graham’s head and the window inside to his mind is explicit from the beginning to the end . . . Step by step the story line is displayed not only by actions and events but also by the inner thoughts of characters. (9-10)

These thoughts include the indifference towards Graham’s first wife Barbara: “. . . hadn’t felt anything like pride, or even interest, in their relationship . . .” (Barnes, *Before* 11), feelings of happiness when he married Ann: “. . . [Graham] repeated softly to himself that he was a happy man” (23-24), or “. . . how he feels about the trust between him and Ann

before he starts having jealousy attacks” (Arslan 10): “He liked the way she answered him directly” (Barnes, *Before* 36). As the story progresses, we more often see the figure of Graham turning to his inner self, his consciousness, which is depicted in the last chapter, that offers some similarity to the beginning of the story, thus, it evokes a certain atmosphere of cyclicity, as Graham reassures us of the rightness of the situation even in a moment of utter despair after having just killed his friend and in the following moments he is about to kill himself: “It was all right, Graham felt. Apart from it all seeming all wrong, it was all right” (Barnes, *Before* 173).

The novel *Before She Met Me* written in-between author’s debut *Metroland* and the experimental (auto)biography of Gustave Flaubert *Flaubert’s parrot*, is undoubtedly ranked according to the traditional works Barnes ever wrote. Moreover, the novel may be perceived as a step back in the early experimental tone he introduced in his first novel since for its plain plot its reception did not meet with much success. However, apart from rendering a traditional narrative and providing a comic and melodramatic study of jealousy, Barnes’ *Before She Met Me*, serves as an elaboration on the topic of obsession, reaching the proportions of Shakespearean tragedies. And as Moseley implies: “Writing a book this funny which nevertheless turns out to be this savage, without tonal inconsistency or unintended humour, is quite an impressive accomplishment” (55). Elaborating on the matter of the extent to which the main character’s storyline resembles the famous tragedy of the seventeenth-century English Renaissance, the resemblance may be found in the occupations of the two protagonists: “Othello, originally a soldier, is now Graham, a historian who faces battles only on the pages of history books” (Roşcan 144). Thus, similarly to Othello, the motif of Graham’s subsequent killing of Jack is the feeling of betrayal. However, unlike Othello, “Graham needs no Iago; he is Iago to his own Othello” (Acheson 178).

To conclude, it shall be noted that the discussion devoted to the problem of jealousy may seem quite marginal regarding the theme of the past in Barnes' novels. Nevertheless, the topic of retro-jealousy is closely related to the conception of the past as the author in his novels often employs the characters looking back into the past and struggling to grasp the truth about events while dealing with moral decision-making. The end of the novel thus probably expresses the indifference to human life in comparison to the importance of history for the historian. However, in the further discussed novel, *The Sense of an Ending*, Barnes tends to depict the reversed instance, thus, not the path from reality to imagination, but from oblivion to awareness rendering the reader with a picture of a character coming to terms with the real past, not one that never happened.

4. Coming to terms with the mutable past: the nature of Limited and Selective memory in *The Sense of an Ending* and *Echoes of Metroland*

4.1 *The Sense of an Ending*

Barnes' eleventh novel *The Sense of an Ending* published in 2011 by Jonathan Cape, represents his humanistic approach towards an individual's psychological dilemmas by employing the protagonist's "limited self", emphasizing "his imaginative and real worlds" (Satyan 126). The novel focuses on the role of truth and lies, or possibly on a certain form of self-deception in human life, and announces a protagonist, who is "trying to come to terms with the mutable past" (Roşcan 230).

The novel follows the story of Tony Webster, harking back at a time long gone, and consists of two parts, entitled "ONE" and "TWO" the second being twice the length of the first one. The whole story is based on the retrospective narration starting with the first chapter, turning into a form of self-reflection in the second part of the novel. As far as the narrative technique is concerned, Barnes chooses the first-person narration by Tony Webster. Therefore, the events are represented only through the fragments of thoughts and the stream of consciousness of the main protagonist, which is the technique also used in *The Only Story* (2018). The use of this technique allows Barnes' protagonist Tony to indulge "into his memories through the use of flashback[s] and by using the stream of consciousness, he is able to move back into the present and then into the past" (Shamsan Saeid 477). Commenting on the style of narration, the free indirect speech of the narrator, in Semino's reading has "strong distancing effects" ("Representing Characters' Speech" 439). In her dissertation, Sedláková further compares Barnes' employing of narrative gaps within his novel *The Sense of an Ending* to Ian McEwan's, claiming, that although such a narrative

tool is to be observed in Barnes' renowned novel, the author does not use it as extensively as McEwan (24). Regarding Barnes' novel and its narrative technique concerning gapping, she states, that "the reader is left to connect the dots, realize the evident unreliability of the narrator and decide on the parentage of Veronica's handicapped friend" (ibidem).

The chapter "ONE" consists of the narrator's memories of his high school and college years and as the publisher promises, renders a sense of naivete, giving us insight into the mind of a "sex-hungry" and "book-hungry" adolescent hanging out with his clique of four, "trading in affectations, in-jokes, rumour and wit" (Cover copy). The story takes place within the borders of educational institutions and revolves around Anthony (Tony) Webster and his friends Colin, Alex, and Adrian, altogether echoing the feeling of the *Dead Poet's Society*. Boys, fully conscious of the artificial nature of living, are convinced to be holding the pen of their life except for Adrian, who only just joined the close-knit group of friends recently, and as one, seems to perceive life a bit more realistically. After graduation, the friends disperse, each of them swinging through their own way of life. Tony, studying history at Bristol, finds his girlfriend Veronica, a literature student there. Even though he remembers the year of their dating as an affair without full sex, Tony was convinced it was a great love, back then, as he got to spend a weekend at her family's house and got to know Veronica's mother, Mrs. Sarah Ford. During their one-year affair, Tony introduced Veronica to his friends, which he recalls with bitterness because he remembers Veronica's interest in Adrian. Finishing his last year of university, Adrian contacts Tony to let him know about him and Veronica dating, which is a hard pill to swallow for Tony and he writes a letter telling them both that he does not want to see either of them again. After college he goes on a journey across America for six months, only to realize Adrian committed suicide while he was gone.

The second part is in contrast narrated by Tony, forty years older, reflecting on the events of the first part and realizing that he is greatly involved in the tragic end of his friend Adrian. Thus, whereas the first part of the novel presents the reader with the story “in motion”, the second one bears a portrait of “Tony as being reflective towards whatever he did in his young age” (Satyan 126). Meaning, Barnes builds the story for the reader to wait till the coda, to hear about the deeds and misdeeds the protagonist has performed forty years ago.

From the temporal perspective, the novel may be regarded as a condensation of Tony’s life spanning his adolescent years within the first chapter, rejoicing the story with a semi-retiree man. Nevertheless, within his two-part narrative, Barnes intentionally omitted the adult years of Tony, providing the reader with only a summary of the life of the protagonist in-between the two parts, giving a glimpse of information about Tony. This somewhat rushed summary of one chapter of life can already be seen in *Before She Met Me* when Barnes first summarises Graham’s fifteen years of marriage to Barbara before developing the story of jealousy in his life with Ann. It should be mentioned that if Barnes had stuck to the three-part structure in his eleventh novel, as in *The Only Story* or his debut *Metroland*, the author would not have had so much space to elide on the transience of human memory and developing the theme of the past. Whence, the first sentences of every paragraph from the last two pages of the chapter “ONE” may serve as an overview of the protagonists left out forty years:

By now I’d left home, and started work as a trainee in arts administration . . . After the divorce, I had a few affairs, but nothing serious . . . Susie grew up, and people started calling her Susan . . . Margaret’s second husband turned out to be not quite peaceable enough . . . I’m retired now . . . And that’s a life, isn’t it? . . . I survived.
(Barnes, *Sense* 68-70)

Even though the above-provided example serves only fragments, we can read out the most important information of it, thus, the professional occupation of Tony and which way it unfolded, his marriage to Margaret, followed by the birth of their daughter Susie and consequently after many years of an unhappy marriage ending in divorce and shared custody of Susie, who is now all grown up. Regarding Tony's career, within the last pages, the reader is told he has had a long career as a historian, occasionally going on dates with women but nothing serious. Eventually, the years went by, and he became a grandfather, is having a friendly relationship with his ex-wife, and living in a flat on his own. "From this brief summary we understand how insignificant and dull his whole life has been" (Antakyalıoğlu 328):

And so, for the first time, I began to feel a more general remorse – a feeling somewhere between self-pity and self-hatred – about my whole life. All of it. I had lost the friends of my youth. I had lost the love of my wife. I had abandoned the ambitions I had entertained. I had wanted life not to bother me too much, and had succeeded – and how pitiful that was. (Barnes, *Sense* 124)

It is important to point out the condensation of the story, to which the author has resorted. Compared to the fifty-five pages Barnes devoted to the teenage years of the protagonist's life in the first part, he completely omitted the chapter between "ONE" and "TWO", and by condensing forty years into just two pages devoted to summarizing the middle part of protagonist's life, he created space to stretch the reader's curiosity, play with the narrator's memory and reliability but also created a great contrast to the structure of the book.

Tony Webster's narrative of the events unfolding in the second part of the book is set off by a trigger in the form of five hundred pounds and two documents

(a note and a diary) bequeathed to him by Veronica's mother (Antakyalioğlu 328). This occurrence made Tony feel the urge to reminisce about the old days and thus serves as a means of author's providing a new and at the same time disturbing view of the events that were portrayed in the first part of the book, for with each page the reader becomes less and less sure of the narrator's reliability of events he told us before. Moreover, the author explicitly warns us about the reliability of the entire narrative through the character of Tony, the voice of the story, at the very beginning of the novel and continues to do so throughout the book as well: "This last isn't something I actually saw, but what you end up remembering isn't always the same as what you have witnessed" (Barnes, *Sense* 3).

By dividing the novel into two parts, even though each has the same protagonist, we can argue that although Barnes still employs the same person physically, the psyche of the protagonist Tony Webster has changed with increasing age. For instance, when Tony returns years later to the letter he wrote in response to Adrian's announcement that he was dating Veronica, the narrator expresses conflicted impressions of his younger self: "I could scarcely deny its authorship or its ugliness. All I could plead was that I had been its author then, but was not its author now. Indeed, I didn't recognise that part of myself from which the letter came. But perhaps this was simply further self-deception" (Barnes, *Sense* 121). Barnes originally intended the novel *The Sense of an Ending* to be called *Unrest* (Guignery, *Julian Barnes* 223), and despite the author's change to *The Sense of an Ending* the ending of this novel, with its concluding sentences, remains in this vein: "There is accumulation. There is responsibility. And beyond these, there is unrest. There is great unrest" (Barnes, *Sense* 187). Tony and Vesztergom suggest, that this last sentence of the novel and the potential original title of the book illustrate "Tony's state of being locked up in the present without

any prospect for future improvement or possibility of altering the past”, as the reader can tell from the protagonist’s stage of self-consciousness throughout the second part of the novel (40). Regarding the conception and representation of the past in this novel, it is quite prominent of the author’s more experimental era, as it renders an abundance of the elements of postmodernist narrative techniques. It is possible to trace several narrative tools such as self-reflexivity, intertextuality, and unreliability of the narrator there, which are tools also presented in other Barnes’ novels, for example, *Flaubert’s Parrot* or *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters*.

The author chooses the death of Adrian as the catalyst for the events in this novel, which is not a form of a solution or the starting point of the problem because this suicide is only the beginning of the story. In an attempt to reveal to the reader, the real unfolding of the events and their impact on the fates and lives of other characters, Barnes has his protagonist contact people from his past, namely his ex-girlfriend Veronica, who does not seem to be excited about meeting Tony after so many years. The protagonist, therefore, goes through a process that seems to be the only possible way to find the truth and is often used by historians when writing up recent historical events, thus asking contemporaries and people who were present at the event.

Many critics and analysts are treating the main character as an unreliable narrator. However, labelling Tony Webster’s character as an unreliable narrator is arguable, as he indeed is a character with limited knowledge and a character with a strong bias, but also one that is not trying to deceive the reader intentionally. Tony Webster’s self-delusion begins to crack after he turns sixty when reminders of the events of his youth return to him. He is forced to admit that what happened was wrong and as a form of self-preservation, he refused to admit it for most of his life. Moreover, this realization does not come all at once, but in stages, which makes the whole situation all the more

unpleasant. In fact, the protagonist cannot even serve as a reliable narrator, since the events that emerge and force him to deal with a forgotten past happened forty years ago. There, Barnes touches on the fragile boundary of human nature and the process of aging, together with forgetting, which is an inevitable part of human life.

Although many scholars and literary critics suggest the title of Barnes' eleventh novel was borrowed from Frank Kermode's critique of fiction, the author himself disproved such a claim, when for *The Guardian* he stated: ". . . one pointed out that there was a classic work of literary criticism by Frank Kermode with the same title. I hadn't heard of it, let alone read it (and still haven't)" (Barnes, "Julian Barnes"). Nevertheless, the intertextuality within *The Sense of an Ending* is according to Zekiye Antakyalıođlu manifested precisely through the title of the novel (329). Even Barnes states, that he is aware of the fact that his novel is by many put in the context of Kermode's work and often said to pose a conversation with him, whereby the author suggests the concept of intertextuality was acclaimed to his novel due to the chosen title, which shall be "working out his [Kermode's] ideas, or perhaps providing an amical riposte" to his text (Barnes, "Julian Barnes").

In addition, Zekiye Antakyalıođlu, in her article on Frank Kermode and Julian Barnes argues that despite the reader's initial impression, to attribute the title of the novel to its sixty years old narrator, who is searching for the meaning of his life, the title is allusive and "illustrates Kermode's theories on the relationship between reality and fiction, time and memory, genesis and apocalypse" (329). Therefore, drawing on the main thought of Kermode's theory of fiction, in which he claims the nature of the human urge to give shape to a chaotic world and sees the base of the structure of this action in the relationship between the beginning and the end, Antakyalıođlu concludes: "To make sense of his past, he [Tony] has to rewind his memories

in chronological sequence, minding the rules of causality and the dynamics of teleology” (330).

In his work, Barnes alludes to sensitive themes such as the presumed entitlement to peace of mind with advancing age and a form of wisdom that comes with age, disrupting this concept of memory shrinkage. As a trained historian, the protagonist Tony Webster occasionally reflects on time itself, and the theme of memory takes on more philosophical dimensions in the novel. Also, discussions of time and the past are a theme that runs through the book, with Tony Webster’s character reflecting throughout the book on memory in which a high school teacher asked him the question “What is history?” and he perhaps too abruptly in the manner of great literature answered: “History is the lies of the victors” (Barnes, *Sense* 20) to which his back-then teacher replied: “Well, as long as you remember that it is also the self-delusions of the defeated” (ibidem). In the second part of the book, nevertheless, looking back on this incident, Tony’s character, a historian by profession, reflects on this conversation and concludes: “History isn’t the lies of the victors, as I once glibly assured Old Joe Hunt; I know that now. It’s more the memories of the survivors, most of whom are neither victorious nor defeated” (70).

Written from two different perspectives, the book forces the reader to think about how the story unfolds in the first part, however as the narrator himself admits, memory is not reliable and what the reader has read in the first part may be completely opposite in the second part or may not have happened at all. At a certain point in his life, Tony admits: “It strikes me that this may be one of the differences between youth and age: when we are young, we invent different futures for ourselves; when we are old, we invent different pasts for others” (Barnes, *Sense* 100). The protagonist’s inability to understand the confluence of events and the fact that Adrian did not have a child

with Veronica, but with her mother, drives Veronica to make a statement: “You still don’t get it. You never did and you never will. So stop even trying” (181). There the three dimensions of past, present, and future collide (don’t, did and will), “in which Tony’s memories fail him at either” (Shamsan Saeid 479).

It is due to the self-reflexivity, that Barnes managed to establish a psychoanalytical study tracing the life of a man through the various stages. “The author describes how disillusionment and hurt becomes instrumental in developing self-reflexivity in Tony” and “shows how the reflexive self filters the emotions of the limited self and eventually prepares the limited self to accept the truth of life” (Satyan 126). The main problem with an elderly person’s memory, according to Barnes, is not that it lapses, but that its owner becomes increasingly aware of how tricky it is and the character of Tony Webster most definitely finds himself in such a stage of life. In the chapter “TWO”, as Webster, now in his sixties, reviews his previous life, he discovers that he can’t quite rely on his own memory or the image of himself that has formed over time. Satyan in his research implies that: “*The Sense of an Ending* successfully shows how self-reflexivity demystifies self-obsession and helps justify the sense of loss or being deprived of the expected result from Life” (128).

Considering the nature of Barnes’ protagonist, the question arises about another reference, namely to the work of the great poet Robert Frost and his poem *The Road Not Taken* (1915), which is a kind of foreshadowing of the whole novel. In the chapter “TWO”, when Tony reflects on life, he wishes to “go back to that fork in the path and take the road less travelled, or rather not travelled at all” (Barnes, *Sense* 163). This reference is again seemingly reminiscent of the reflections of the protagonist of Barnes’ novel *Before She Met Me*, when wishing to turn back time: “Why couldn’t you unknow knowledge?” (145).

Consequently, the weight of actions that have taken place and words that have fallen in the past fall on Tony in full force and he begins to realize, at the age of sixty, the illusion he has been under for years.

4.2 *Metroland*

The reader may recognize the protagonist Tony Webster (*The Sense of an Ending*) from the author's early experimental novel *Metroland*, which would not be wrong, for the novel most certainly bears many echoes of Barnes' earlier novel, *Metroland*. It can be argued that, as much as *The Sense of an Ending* echoes fragments of *Metroland*, *Metroland* itself is reflexive of Barnes' life. The novel echoes much resemblance with the author's life, for when growing up he lived in "Acton, a western suburb of London, and then in 1956 [moved] to Northwood from which Barnes commuted via the Metropolitan Line for seven years", just as the protagonist of this novel (Guignery, *Fiction 2*). Thus, the author is reflecting on his experience in his novel, which is a common postmodernist technique.

In short, the novel revolves around two friends – Toni and Christopher – whose views on life, though initially similar, subsequently diverge. There are three parts to the story, in the first part, the narrative follows the story of Christopher and Toni growing up in the London city suburbs resisting inclusion among others and society, which they call *bourgeois* with their own condescension. Alike Tony Webster and his clique of four, Christopher and Toni live in the spirit of art and great writers, trying to convince themselves of their uniqueness. Furthermore, the second part of the story, which is something we don't get in *The Sense of an Ending*, introduces us to the life of the protagonist, depicts a withering relationship between these friends as Christopher moves to Paris to work on his thesis and meets his girlfriend Annick, while also meeting a group of three art lovers, one of whom is Marion, his future wife. At this

point we can observe Barnes' pervasive ironic narrative style as Christopher "falls in love with Marion", they have a child together and he essentially becomes an average member of society with a mortgage and "a very respectable job, which he actually enjoys" and gradually drifts away from Toni and his own beliefs from his youth, namely, not to be "one of those hideous bourgeois" people, which he so despised as a boy (David 2:30-3:02). The third part then consequently displays both friends as adults, Christopher matured and experienced by life, and Toni standing by his childhood convictions and judging Christopher for not staying true to his youthful aspiration. In relation to this, the novel touches on "some of the same themes" which we observed in *The Sense of an Ending* such as love, memory, and a certain "obnoxiousness" of the protagonists connected to their adolescent years (David 0:29-0:48).

Vanessa Guignery in *Julian Barnes from the Margins* comments on the resemblance between the author's early work *Metroland* and *The Sense of an Ending* and argues whether Barnes intended to write a sequel, whereby she provides us with the fragments of author's first drafts of these novels (222). She points out indecisiveness of Barnes whether to "envisage *The Sense of an Ending* as a sequel to *Metroland* or make it independent from the earlier novel" (ibidem). Throughout the process of writing *The Sense of an Ending*, Barnes had to write down a list of "pro-stet" and "pro-change", including the following arguments:

Pro change

- 1) Hark back / 'sequel'; better stand alone
- 2) Sexlife now doesn't match: Annick was first --- easy to take her out

Now you have a) girl pre-uni

b) v[eronica] gives in

c) girl during finals year

3) Easy to change names & markers

So change e.g. Marion's name / backstory

but use same character

4) Don't have to worry about e.g. Toni's subsequent history in M/Land (3.3) . . .

Pro – stet

1) Useful to have Marion / school / life in place – & theme of M/land – ending in compromises / disappointment as backstory

2) The Chris/Marion relationship is strong/useful + This is how you've written it (3.3) (Guignery, *Julian Barnes* 222)

These pieces of evidence give us valuable material and insight to show the author's intention and an abundance of reference to *Metroland* within Barnes' later work. Having discussed both novels as part of this thesis, it is clear to the reader, that the writer decided to let go of the many echoes and diverged the protagonists of both novels. Therefore, it is to note that although Julian Barnes did not stick to the statement, he claimed, that no novel should be followed by a sequel (Showalter, "Careless Talk") in the case of *Talking it over and Love, etc.*, he most definitely produced two various novels, when writing *The Sense of an Ending* thirty years after *Metroland*. Hence, since this is not a sequel in the true sense of the word because, despite some similarities, Tony Webster lived and lives a different life than the protagonist the reader knows from *Metroland*, this thesis understands the echoes of *Metroland* in *The Sense of an Ending* as the case of intertextuality.

Altogether, the novel *Metroland* demonstrates that Barnes' use of narrative devices is not unwaveringly progressive. In certain novels, he reverts to the three-part structure narrative, which for the purposes of the thesis will be called a *trptych*, as the term *trptych* is used to denote an artwork, consisting of three parts. As Merritt

Moseley points out: “The tripartite structure seems particularly congenial to Barnes, as well as particularly shapely, and will recur in *Staring at the Sun* and *Talking It Over*” (19). In *Metroland*, unlike *The Sense of an Ending*, Barnes divides the chronological narrative into three sections: “PART ONE *Metroland* (1963)”, “PART TWO *Paris* (1968)”, and “PART THREE *Metroland II* (1977)”, a different voice is employed by each to mark the development of the main character throughout time, whereby this work deserves the designation *coming of age novel*. As for this novel format, it seems common for a first novel to take this form, according to Merritt Moseley: “If a novelist is to write a coming-of-age book, it is probably going to be the first book. Julian Barnes is no exception” (18).

Altogether, the novel boasts two pivotal characters, the importance of which remains equal and the second of which Moseley describes as follows:

Toni is the most important secondary character in *Metroland* – clearly in part 1, where he is the one who shares Christopher’s life and ideas; less clearly in part 2, where he is only an absent inspiration and monitor; and crucially in part 3, where he judges Christopher the grownup harshly for not having fulfilled his youthful ambitions. (21-22)

For marking the character development and narrative analysis of the novel, it is crucial to start with the tone of the voice. Barnes’ narrator in *Metroland* is a first-person autodiegetic narrator, and as such is both the narrator and protagonist of the novel. Moreover, the narrator does not identify with the author, this is a fictive character, whether it had been fabricated for the purpose of the story or not, therefore its evaluative comments and viewpoints tend to bear a subjective undertone, having a great impact on the reader going along with their character. “The tone of the novel is assured

and charming. Always acute about language, Barnes depicts a protagonist who is himself precociously verbal” (Moseley 19). Regarding the age of the main protagonist, Christopher, it spans several decades throughout the story from the age of sixteen at the beginning of the first section, over the early twenties in the second section, up to reaching his thirties at the end of the book. However, although “Christopher is sixteen in the first section, the voice of the narrator is older” (ibidem). Drawing on the older voice of the narrator, Moseley suggests the narrative perspective is that of Christopher, who is about thirty at the end of part three, reflecting onto his young self, bearing the view of the first-person narrator inhabiting the mind of an adolescent, who “is now capable of ironic correction of the ideas and postures of his adolescent self. The first-person narration combines an inhabiting of the mind of the adolescent with an older man’s understanding of that mind’s shortcomings” (ibidem), which very much resembles the narratological technique Barnes employed in *The Sense of an Ending*. Therefore, Barnes’ choice of Christopher as a narrator, allows him “to resist the accusations of smugness and priggishness that have been aimed at the novel” (Childs, *Contemporary* 81).

In terms of the structure of the novel, Barnes had the difficult task of telling the story at three different points in the narrator’s life from the point of view of a man who finds himself in the third stage and thus can reflect on the beliefs of his younger self. Therefore, whereas the previous chapter concerning the novel *Before She Met Me* revolved around the retrospective jealousy, narrated in the technique of regressive narration, what we get in *Metroland* is a retrospective narration, thus narration provided by a “more ordinary man looking back on the youth he once was” and in this sense resembles the protagonist from *The Sense of an Ending* (Moseley 30). In an illustration of both an adolescence and an adolescent, “[i]n part 1, Barnes creates

a telling, detailed, and amusing picture of youth” (Moseley 19). To convey the language and enhance the rebellion of the young protagonists Toni and Christopher, Barnes employs “cynicism, irony, rootlessness, affectation, and a fondness for all that is French” (Guignery, *Fiction* 9). The English critic Frank Kermode in “Obsessed with Obsession” commented on Barnes’ work with language, complimenting the author especially for the precision with which he was able to convey in this novel the humour of adolescents, which can make readers feel “the pleasure of self-recognition” (qtd. in Guignery, *Fiction* 9). In the second subchapter of “PART ONE” called “Two Small Boys”, the first two sentences may serve as an exemplification of the language and prove that French is indeed richly interwoven in Barnes’ work:

Toni and I were strolling along Oxford Street, trying to look like *flâneurs*. This wasn’t as easy as it might sound. For a start, you usually needed a *quai* or, at the very least, a *boulevard*; and, however much we might be able to imitate the aimlessness of the *flânerie* itself, we always felt that we hadn’t quite mastered what happened at each end of the stroll. (Barnes, *Metroland* 17)

The French language emerges so prominently in Julian Barnes’ novels, that it prompts a resemblance with Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, a novel which itself offers an inordinate number of French passages without explanatory notes. Although such an analogy is an exaggeration, the French in the novel *Metroland* is associated with “[t]he literary erudition and affected rebellion of the two teenagers impel them to idealise certain French writers – for example, Gérard de Nerval (1808–55), Théophile Gautier (1811–72), Charles Baudelaire (1821–67), Paul Verlaine (1844–96) and Arthur Rimbaud (1854–91)” (Guignery, *Fiction* 13). However, a person unfamiliar with French might find the abundance of passages in French irritating, as the author provides no

translation or explanation for them. Quotes from two above-mentioned French authors are nonetheless present at the beginning of “PART ONE” and “PART TWO”. An exception of this occurs in “PART THREE”, which distinctly refers to Bishop Butler’s quote: “*Things and actions are what they are, and the consequences of them will be what they will be; why then should we desire to be deceived?*” (Barnes, *Metroland* 131). Therefore, Barnes’ inclination towards the French prevails. It might be that Barnes finds the French words more suggestive than their English counterparts. Nevertheless, here and there, it is precisely the abundance of French phrases, in a form of a secret language code, which might distance the two protagonists from the audience, although in their minds it works to the contrary, bearing the characters a sense of elevation above the others. Be this the case, such behaviour would be consistent with the Barnes-like adage that wanting to be exceptional is part of being an adolescent.

Creating a glance back onto the adolescent years, Barnes manages an amusing picture of young Christopher Lloyd, who seems not to lack any quality of a teenage prototype. ““One thing about parents. They fag you up.”” (*Metroland* 39). “He is offended by his parents, brother, and sister”, whom he suspects of being some sort of impostors, wishing upon the stars to be adopted (Moseley 20): “Could it be that I was really related to all of them? And how could I bear not to point out the obvious differences? ‘Mum, am I illegitimate?’” (Barnes, *Metroland* 40). It is to point out that Barnes devoted a great space to the problem of identity experienced by the adolescent protagonist. Moreover, Moseley further draws on the scene when Christopher “takes genuine delight in being called ‘sir’ and treasures the first time it happened, which was also when he was being measured for his first pair of long trousers”, a milestone in the life of a boy at that time (Moseley 20). Apart from that, Christopher despises not only authority in the form of parents but also people in leadership positions at school or even

his contemporaries, “reserving his respect for older people he does not know, like Albert Camus”, which again adds to his literary erudition (ibidem). “All these are, one might say, generic traits of adolescence, though they are captured in original ways in Barnes’s narration” (ibidem). Although, there is one rather unusual trait, concerning Christopher’s character and that is the fear of death. “I wouldn’t mind Dying at all, I thought, as long as I didn’t end up Dead at the end of it” (Barnes, *Metroland* 54). However, paradoxical statements such as this are not uncommon in Barnes’ novels. A similar thing could already be noticed in the ending scene of *Before She Met Me*, when Graham, after stabbing his friend to death and just before committing suicide himself perceives: “It was all right, Graham felt. Apart from it all seeming all wrong, it was all right” (173). From these two excerpts retrieved from two novels, we can conclude that existential questions concerning death are indeed a matter very close to Barnes as a writer but also as a human being as the fear of death is very raw when displayed in his works.

Part two follows the life of twenty-one years old Christopher, studying in France, during the May 1968 riots, being more concerned with “sampling Gallic passion and Parisian charm than in politics”, which is only supported by the fact, that he misses out on the student’s demonstration in 1968, thus the real historical event, while being preoccupied with writing his thesis and having a romance with Annick, his French girlfriend (Childs, *Contemporary* 80). In the first row, it was the intention of Barnes to marginalize history and put Christopher’s personal story to the fore, as Vanessa Guignery points out: “History is thus displaced to the margins while what may look as incidental, Chris’s personal story, is given central place. The novel thus stays true to the form of the *Bildungsroman*, focusing on the personal development of the main character, especially his sentimental and sexual education” (*Fiction* 10). This fact only

contributes to confirming the impression that history is always subjective, dependent on the perspective of the individual and his personal interpretation of events.

The character of Christopher in the second part of the novel is in many ways very similar to Christopher portrayed in the first part, except for living in a sense the bohemian life he dreamed up in the first part with the main components of art, free sex, and French culture. However, it is the events that shape him in the second part of the novel that subsequently gives rise to the character of Christopher that the reader observes in part three as he loses his virginity to Annick and meets his future wife Marion (Moseley 25-26). This internal change of Christopher's character is marked by Merritt Moseley, suggesting that "[h]aving spent an adolescence building up an image of France as the home of alienation and political toughness, Christopher misses all the reality and substitutes a romantic life of nearly complete domesticity" (25). One of the crucial elements that contributed to Christopher's change of perspective on life was his first love, Annick (26):

Until I met Annick I'd always been certain that the edgy cynicism and disbelief in which I dealt, plus a cowed trust in the word of any imaginative writer, were the only tools for the painful, wrenching extraction of truths from the surrounding quartz of hypocrisy and deceit. The pursuit of truth had always seemed something combative. Now, not exactly in a flash, but over a few weeks, I wondered if it weren't something both higher – above the supposed conflict – and simpler, attainable not through striving but a simple inward glance. (Barnes, *Metroland* 101)

As much as Toni has been of influence on Christopher's early years presented in the first part of the novel, there are other two people behind the primary transformation

of Christopher into a more mature man and that is Annick, his first love, and Marion, his wife. Moseley suggests, that “[t]his comes out most clearly in their conversation about marriage” (27) as Marion has a rather pragmatic idea of marriage seeing it as “[o]ppportunity, meal ticket, desire for children [. . .] fear of ageing, possessiveness” (Barnes, *Metroland* 116), whereas Christopher, whose a rather romantic idea of marriage consisting of meeting “[t]he right girl at the right time” (115) displays “[a] sort of misplaced idealism” (116). This conversation certainly resonated with Christopher to some extent, as at the beginning of the third section we learn that despite Toni’s opposition to Marion and Christopher’s wedding, who in his bohemian anti-bourgeois spirit, felt “unable on principle to attend” (137), the wedding went ahead. This sequence of events confirms to us early on the change that has taken place since the second part in Christopher’s character, which is that he has grown up and accepted the conditions of a middle-class and pragmatic way of life, in which he is diametrically opposed to the character of Christopher presented in the first part. To elucidate, addressing his decision to have the protagonist of his first novel undergo such a change, Barnes points out: “I’m obviously saying that people develop in ways they don’t expect to” (Guignery and Roberts 4). This change could be compared to the change that Tony Webster’s character undergoes in *The Sense of an Ending* when he himself admits that the man who once wrote the letter is not the Tony who stands at the end of the story: “I could scarcely deny its authorship or its ugliness. All I could plead was that I had been its author then, but was not its author now” (121). Commenting on the evolution of characters, Matthew Pateman suggests that the development of the epigraphs preceding the chapters in *Metroland* also mirrors the internal development of the characters “from complexity to simplification, from the desire to search to the desire to accept” (5). Thus, this chapter proves Barnes’ fondness for linking the themes of memory, moral

values, and truth, more specifically in the case of these two novels the truth relating to the individual, the authenticity to himself, and his ultimate coming to terms with the reality of the past displayed both on the character of Tony Webster from *The Sense of an Ending* as well as Christopher Lloyd from *Metroland*.

5. History as a form of fabulation in *A History of the world in 10 ½ Chapters*

Barnes' fifth novel, *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters*, published in 1989 by Jonathan Cape, represents a hybrid with a blurred line between a novel and a collection of short stories, linked by a similar motif. In this novel, Barnes "return[s] to flaunting genres and heterogeneity of style and approach", which he exemplified already in his third novel *Flaubert's Parrot* (Moseley 110). Thus, the novel steps out from the traditional way of writing novels as it loosely diverges from the parameters of such genre, and in this respect, it bears a striking resemblance to Barnes' most famous work, *Flaubert's Parrot*, which was discussed in the second chapter. The objectives that lead many critics to the denial of Barnes' work being a novel are mainly the omission of a character who would rise above the level of the story as there is no such a thing as a connecting narrator or a proper plot (ibidem). The novel also sets a difference to Barnes' early works *Metroland* and *Staring at the Sun*, as the narration is not "held together by a central character and by a predominantly biographical pattern", which is the case of these two previous novels (112). Like history itself, Barnes' *A History of The World in 10 ½ Chapters* offers several parallels recurring towards the motifs of beetles, boats, and behemoths and it is these connecting motifs that make the work classifiable as a prototype of postmodernism. Altogether, a similar form of progression that accompanies the postmodern paradigm is noticeable in other works of Julian Barnes, and at the same time, a certain development can be observed in his literary output since his early novels (Roşcan 34). In her considerations of Barnes' work, Roşcan also further comments on Frank Kermode's disappointed reaction to Barnes' fifth novel, in "Stowaway Woodworm", 1989, marking it "a failed experiment as the connections between the stories are 'coily subtle' limited to the repeated appearances of certain insects, to the Noachian allusions and to some scanty plot

links” (qtd. in Roşcan 107). According to her: “A *History* foregrounds the constructedness and intertextuality of history showing that knowledge of the past can only be obtained through various heterogeneous narratives” (108). In his novel, then, Barnes uses subjectivity, which he inscribes into history through the selection of events and the narrative element, just as he did in *Flaubert’s Parrot*, to achieve the desired effect of a sense of multiplicity. Therefore, this chapter will discuss the marginal histories presented and fictionalized by Barnes in the work *A History of the world in 10 ½ Chapters*.

The subject of discussion about this book is its alleged content, to which the title refers. As far as the title of the novel is concerned, it has both literal and symbolic meaning and is descriptive of each of Barnes’ components: religion, love, and art. There is thus a hidden meaning behind the title, regarding its selection of an indefinite article *A*. As already mentioned, Barnes’s Francophilia is omnipresent within his works, and in the case of this novel, the author’s decision reflects on his perception of history, for the word *histoire* in French suggests history as well as story (Moseley 109). Hence, as Moseley implies, “there is no ‘the’ history – there are only histories” (ibidem). Thus, history is told by the witnessing narrators, who may or may not serve their story as it unfolded, as Childs points out in his interpretation of *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters*, “while history makes humans, humans also make history – through story as much as action” (*Contemporary* 82). This blurred distinction between truth and fiction, which yearns to confuse the reader as to what is history and what is the fabricated story, seems to be present and pertinent among Barnes’ novels as we have already seen a similar case in the previous chapters concerning novels *Flaubert’s Parrot*, *Before She Met Me*, *The Sense of an Ending* and *Metroland*.

There has been a controversy concerning the title of the book in connection to its length because some critics suggested, that “[c]alling your book a history of the world, especially when it is only a little over three hundred pages long, is already a challenging gesture” (Moseley 108). Moreover, Alina Roşcan introduces an interesting argument into the critical accounts of perceiving Barnes’ *A History of The World in 10 ½ Chapters* neither as a novel nor a history of the world as the title suggests, thus she claims the work shall be seen as a “hybrid” for its embedment of “identifiable historical events” (103). Many other critics of Barnes’ fiction have commented upon the difficulty of his narratology, claiming that “he is an essayist rather than a novelist and his experimental books do not question the bounds of the novel but fall outside them” (Childs, *Contemporary* 86). Merritt Moseley in his analysis of Barnes’ literary output, suggests that the author’s restraint in experimenting with “narration, the management of suspense, and a fairly clear moral taxonomy among the characters” within his detective stories, might be the motif for Barnes’ inclination towards the breaking of conventions in his early novels (5). There is thus a dual nature of the author, namely the traditional one, which Barnes applies in Kavanagh’s detective stories, and the postmodern author, keen on experimenting, traceable in Barnes’ early novels. Altogether, Barnes’ style is highly marked by his early experimental preoccupation with historical metafiction making his early novels echo the spirit of postmodern *jouissance* (ibidem).

Indeed, in attempting to analyse and therefore classify *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters* as a novel in this thesis, it would seem advisable to lay out the term *novel* in the first place as to also gain a better understanding of the nowadays’ novel form. Choeda in his research on the novel relies on *The Shorter Oxford Dictionary*’s clarification claiming that a novel is ““a fictitious prose narrative of considerable length

in which characters and actions representative of real life are portrayed in a plot of more or less complexity' (cited in Rees, 1973, p.106)" (qtd. in Choeda 1100). This definition recalls the length and prose style as the main attributes of a novel. Nonetheless, Choeda further argues, that the designation of prose may not be accurate for "there are a few novels written in verse as well", such a claim he supports by naming an example of Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate* (ibidem). Thus, even though, it is rather a series of history-themed short stories, for "[t]here is no main character, no unitary voice, no tight progression in the narrative, no single or even double plot. There is, it is true, a loosely chronological progression" in Barnes' fifth novel (Moseley 113). Therefore, *A History of the world in 10 ½ Chapters*, among academics, marginally qualifies as a novel and in this respect and regarding the above-provided theory of the novel, if prose written in verse can be classified as a novel, then if we have a novel that shows more signs of being composed of individual essays or short stories connected by the same motifs, this thesis will also understand the presented book as a novel.

Despite the length, the structure of the novel is yet another point to mention, for it consists of ten comprehensive fragments of a similar length and one additional "Parenthesis" providing Barnes' meditation on "Love as the Path towards Truth" (Roşcan 100), which will be further discussed in the latter part of this chapter. The theme of the inevitable relation between fabulation and antagonism of love and history and emphasizing the theory, that the past always repeats itself, stressed throughout the book, leads to a reflection on what the novel is about. To elaborate on the message of the novel, it is to retrieve from *Conversations with Julian Barnes*, where Barnes talks about his fifth novel and says, that it "deals with one of the questions that obsessed Braithwaite in that book [*Flaubert's Parrot*]. And that is: How do we seize the past?" (Guignery and Roberts 21). The resemblance of the motif

within these two novels, however, does not remain the only relation there, for these works are also very similar in their form. The form of this novel is the factor, which, according to Moseley implies “an ironic twist” and this impression is only reinforced by the employed half chapter (109). With each fragment of the novel, Barnes serves a different narrator, and as such bears a feat of imagination as there is a wide spectrum of narrators within the novel.

The first chapter is retold retrospectively by a first-person homodiegetic narrator, who, as Moseley points out approaches with “a reader-friendly, eager to persuade rhetoric” (113). Although Barnes is not interested in religious belief, as apparent from his claim in his memoir *Nothing to be frightened of*: “I don’t believe in God, but I miss Him” (1), he is greatly invested in “religious history, which is part of his larger attention to history” as comes to the surface in this novel (Moseley 119). The first fragment of this novel “The Stowaway” anticipates the leitmotif of woodworm that intertwines *The History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters* and reoccurs mainly in the third chapter “The Wars of Religion”. This third chapter is “the transcript of a trial”, discussing the court case against the woodworms who caused the wooden throne to collapse under the bishop’s weight and are thus being tried *in absentia* and threatened with excommunication for this crime, which is very much their nature (114).

The first chapter rewrites the story of Noah’s Ark as we know it from the Old Testament. Through this chapter, Barnes presents the reader with a version of the biblical story of Noah’s Ark, but one that differs from the version we know from Christian mythology in that it portrays Noah not so much as the chosen saviour, but Noah and his family as despots who harass, terrorize, and even eat certain species of animals dividing animals into clean and unclean according to their edibility. “The narrator insists that our

history is wrought with inaccuracies from its very beginning” (Roşcan 79). However, the voice Barnes chooses as the narrator of the story, remains hidden until the very last sentence: “And after all, it’s not our fault for being woodworm” (Barnes, *History* 30). With the very first chapter, Barnes thus manages to rewrite history by adding a perspective of a beetle to the story which has been there for centuries, “suggesting that history is the self-serving construct of the victors” (Roşcan 79).

The second chapter “The Visitors”, “is narrated by an impersonal, heterodiegetic narrator whose narrative is nonetheless tightly focalized in the main character, Franklin Hughes” (Moseley 114). Although this chapter is set in a completely different time-period (1985) from the first one, involving different characters, Barnes manages to connect this story to the previous chapter through the motif of Noah’s Ark, which the narrator relates to his own situation inviting a group of tourists from all over the world to a cruise ship: “‘The animals came in two by two,’ Franklin commented” (Barnes, *History* 33). The main character of this story is a historian Frank Hughes, who is also the tour guide on a cruise ship, which gets hijacked by terrorists. The ship is full of people of different nations: French, British, Japanese, American, Canadian, Swedish, and Italian, that is why the narrator makes a resemblance between the species accepted to the Noah’s Ark and the races of tourists coming to the cruise ship. Barnes based this story on the *Achille Lauro* hijacking, which supposedly was the Palestine Liberation Front’s response to release Palestinian prisoners and gain publicity for Palestinian issues in 1985. In order to get their demands, the hijackers in Barnes’ novel declare that they will start shooting two people an hour, according to which nationality was the most responsible for the Palestinian’s predicament (Finney, “A Worm’s Eye”). There, Barnes again refers to the first chapter of

Noah's Ark, as the hijackers apply the same policy that Noah used when segregating the "clean" species to his ark (*ibidem*). Thus, whereas Noah's family in Barnes' rendition chose the clean animals for their edibility, the hijackers perceive the clearness in the political actions of the selected nations.

The fourth chapter, entitled "The Survivor", begins with a poem epigraph referring to another historical event in the form of the year 1492 and the name Columbus: "In fourteen hundred and ninety-two / Columbus sailed the ocean blue" (Barnes, *History* 83). Barnes completes this rhyme in his chapter called "Parenthesis": "In fourteen hundred and ninety three / He sailed right back across the sea" (239), where he claims to prefer this version to the original one as according to him, historians and teachers base themselves on the date 1492 as if that would solve everything, claiming "they want to make us think we're always progressing, always going forward" but "[d]ates don't tell the truth" (*ibidem*). Thus, as much as the rhyme might suggest a sense of connection to the previous chapter, in which it appeared for the first time, Connor implies that "it evokes not so much the resumption of narrative continuity as its bathetic discomposure" (237). Moreover, the epigraph in "The Survivor" in a sense foreshadows the content of this text. The narrator of the story and the survivor at the same time, Kath, "tells part of her story in a present-tense style cognate with the diary, but it is spoken or thought rather than written; her account is framed and interspersed with another, delivered by an impersonal narrator" (Moseley 113-14). The story slightly touches upon the Chernobyl accident in 1986 and the motif of Noah's Ark reappears as well, but this time it is a ship on which the narrator escapes from the consequences of the nuclear conflict together with her unhappy relationship, taking two cats with herself – a male and a female, which again refers to Noah's selection of an animal pair from each species. During the flee in the boat, the protagonist falls into delirium

and wakes up in a hospital surrounded by doctors who are desperate to understand what causes her state of delirium. Meanwhile, the two perspectives – Kath’s and the doctors – shift from the first-person narration and the third-person narration. At the end of this chapter, it is left up to the reader to decide if Kath is actually on the island or if it was all a dream and she is in a hospital room. The reader is thus offered two perspectives and the level of fabulation within this chapter is very high, as the narrator renders her version of the story partly within the fragments of her diary. Moseley even draws on the appearance of the term *fabulation* in the story as “part of a psychiatrist’s diagnosis of [Kath’s] delusional activity” (112): “Well, the technical term is fabulation. You make up a story to cover the facts you don’t know or can’t accept. You keep a few true facts and spin a new story round them” (Barnes, *History* 109). Thus, although at first glance it might seem that Barnes is trying to invoke the motif of Noah’s Ark at all costs in this story to give depth to his narrative, here Barnes portrays history as one possibility rather than the ultimate truth, alluding to the subjectivity of the individual’s perspective and the degree of fabrication that each individual version necessarily comes with.

The fifth chapter “Shipwreck” is another story based on a historical event and is reflective of Barnes’ interest in the relationship between fiction and historiography as part of the postmodernist practice of metafiction. The text is divided into two sections. The first one, narrated with an omniscient narrator viewpoint, is recalling the catastrophe that happened across our history – the disaster of the *Medusa* in 1816, whose crew was at the mercy of the sea without food or drink for about two weeks. Whereas the second one is dedicated to Théodore Géricault’s canvas *The Raft of the Medusa*, provided with a reproduction of the painting in form of a photograph as is the case with encyclopaedias or historical books. It is important to note that it is the single case

of a picture within this novel. Therefore, “Shipwreck” is intertextual in its referencing the French history, to “Corréard’s and Savigny’s infamous account of the shipwreck, the *Nauffrage de la frégate la Méduse* (1817)” as well as of Géricault’s painting *The Raft of the Medusa* (Alhadeff 276). As a follow-up to an artistic painting depicting the *Medusa* disaster, in the first sentence of the second section of this chapter, Barnes places a question: “HOW DO YOU turn catastrophe into art?” (Barnes, *History* 125) In answering this question, he further provides the reader with a meditation on the nature of the catastrophe and suggests that perhaps the existence of catastrophe is important precisely for the sake of art:

We have to understand it, of course, this catastrophe; to understand it, we have to imagine it, so we need the imaginative arts. But we also need to justify it and forgive it, this catastrophe, however minimally. Why did it happen, this mad act of Nature, this crazed human moment? Well, at least it produced art. Perhaps, in the end, that’s what catastrophe is *for*. (Barnes, *History* 125)

The reader is then further exposed to a flow of thoughts of the author, who chooses a process of elimination, recalling all the aspects the artist, Théodore Géricault, did not include in his painting when creating the account of *Medusa*. At this stage, one could argue about what is actually possible for an artist to depict in his work, where are its limits, what determines the limit of fiction and history, and whether this limit can be crossed at all. Despite the fact that the artist tried to represent the events as he read about them and in the form he imagined them, his account was not faithful to the original and he committed several inaccuracies, but in any case, the image evokes certain emotions in us and this is exactly what the author wanted to achieve, because the image is an entity of the objective spectrum, whereas the feeling is always subjective and all the more distinctive. However, as suggested in the novel: “The [physical] masterpiece, once

completed, does not stop: it continues in motion, downhill” (Barnes, *History* 139). In the concluding sentence of this chapter, Barnes manages to build a connection between the impermanence of time and its effect on the natural wear and tear of things, on an example of the decay of wood just as he did in the case of the bishop’s throne in “The Wars of Religion”, this time using the wooden frame as an object: “Our leading expert on Géricault confirms that the painting is ‘now in part a ruin’. And no doubt if they examine the frame, they will discover woodworm living there” (ibidem). Barnes is thus again, linking the stories through the motif of woodworm. Depending on the events presented in chapters “The Wars of Religion” and “Shipwreck”, we could understand the wormhole motif as a form of impermanence that comes with time and makes our memories of things past incomplete and often damaged in the same way that woodworms work with wood.

“The Mountain”, the sixth chapter, builds up towards the question of a relationship between time and history, linking the perception of time to world events, which opens the space for reflections on misdeeds and errors humans have perpetrated. The echoes of time are apparent within the very first sentence of the story: “*Tick, tick, tick, tick. Tock. Tick, tick, tick, tick. Tock.*” (Barnes, *History* 143) In Barnes’s choice of these words we can look for a certain significance and interconnection with both the story and the author’s conception of history, that is, by using these words, Barnes imbues the story with a certain symbol of mortality, which time evokes in man, and thus reminds us that history, like life, is a highly ephemeral affair. The story is an account of Miss Fergusson, who sets out to find Noah’s Ark at Mount Ararat, which, as presupposed, is its resting place according to the biblical as well as the Barnes’ version of Noah’s story. ““The Mountain’ and ‘Project Ararat’ are the most conventional narratives, given in a social-realistic style with an omniscient narrator” (Moseley 114).

Furthermore, it evokes a feeling of the nature of history to read through the parts of the seventh chapter “Three Simple Stories”. On one side Barnes employs factual and fictional accounts of histories, we all have a general knowledge of, such as the sinking of the *Titanic*, the biblical story of Jonah and The Whale, a story of Jews attempting to escape Nazi Germany, within the three parts in which this chapter is divided. But then, he is mixing these two accounts, unfolding in undermining “people’s certainties of historical knowledge” (Roşcan 76). The first story of this chapter carries a similarly ironical tone to Douglas Adams’ *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* when, reflecting on life and the fear of death, the narrator suggests: “Did it relate in some way to the fact that millions of years ago our gill-bearing ancestors crawled out of the pond, and ever since we have been paralyzed by the thought of a return to it?” (Barnes, *History* 178)

The English author Douglas Adams, considering humankind, came to the following conclusion in his book: “Many were increasingly of the opinion that they’d all made a big mistake in coming down from the trees in the first place. And some said that even the trees had been a bad move, and that no one should ever have left the oceans” (1). However, as much as the stories presented in “Three Simple Stories” provide accounts of real-life events, supported by a number of figures and data: “On 25th August 1891, James Bartley, a thirty-five-year-old sailor on the *Star of the East*, was swallowed by a sperm whale off the Falkland Islands” (Barnes, *History* 179); “At 8 PM on Saturday, 13th May 1939, the liner *St Louis* left its home port of Hamburg” (181); the sinking of the *Titanic* in 1912. The resulting narrative is fictionalized, it does not correspond to the sequence of historical events. Thus, through the author’s blending of fiction and history, the reader can read a certain amount of irony with which Barnes approaches evolutionary change and the nature of the passage of time and our history.

Concerning the dark events of our history in the form of Nazi Germany, and reporting on the accounts of death, in the paragraph regarding the previous chapter, Barnes' next chapter called "Upstream", is in comparison a bit more humorous, though also undeniably dark. "'Upstream' contains a single voice and is epistolary" (Moseley 114). The central figure is Charlie, an actor, filming a movie in the Amazon, reporting on the events accompanying their Hollywood Crew, at the same time keeping in touch with his girlfriend Pippa bearing the reader fragments of letters, telegrams, and notes, which according to Moseley similarly as Kath's narration in chapter four, renders the reader the "presentness, writing to the moment" (ibidem). In her article, Meyer points out the difference of this chapter from the others, for its omitting of the source, claiming that "[t]he author carefully traces historical sources in an author's note at the end of the book. He lists them chapter by chapter and ends with some additional, personal thanks. No source is listed for chapter eight" (163). The basic knowledge of every scholar already tells us that we need to cite and properly quote the source of our information, thus Barnes's treatment of narrative in chapter eight raises a number of arguments in this regard only supporting the evidence of his loose and individual account of histories.

Altogether, the motif of beetles is not the only recurrent theme within the novel. The emphasis should be put on the concept of clearness as well. *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters* implies that this element is present throughout our history, from Noah's division into clean and unclean animals (Moseley 117), the tragedy of the *Titanic* in which countless innocent people died, Chernobyl, or the millions of innocent Jews who paid with their lives during the war. "The last chapter, which is about Heaven, includes a regret by the narrator that there apparently is no judging, no separating of the saved from the damned" for the main protagonist of the last chapter, finding himself

in heaven, meets Hitler there (Moseley 118). Moseley notes this fact and offers an interesting insight claiming it seems to be decoded within human nature to differentiate between clean and unclean, finishing his thought with a strong argument: “Perhaps the distinction between fiction and nonfiction is akin to the separation of clean and unclean, and perhaps it is just as difficult to ascertain” (ibidem). Perceiving the incidents and great events of history only supports the belief that Childs implies, thus “the past is always repeated (most clearly in ‘Three Simple Stories’); the belief that history is cyclical” (*Contemporary* 82), which is in a sense implied by the repetition of motifs Barnes intertwines into the stories in his novel and make it a somewhat connecting motif.

There is a passage within the novel called “Parenthesis”, which this thesis intentionally omitted within the discussion of individual chapters and left until the end. This chapter is in a sense unique since there Barnes becomes a character within his story, thus speaking for himself “without the distancing of narrator or implied author: he says it is himself and calls himself Julian Barnes” (Moseley 121):

History isn’t what happened. History is just what historians tell us . . . One good story leads to another . . . The history of the world? Just voices echoing in the dark; images that burn for a few centuries and then fade; stories, old stories that sometimes seem to overlap; strange links, impertinent connections. (Barnes, *History* 240)

It is discussable, whether the half-chapter is to be understood as an essay on love as many suggest, however, love is a central motif there. Moseley recalls this text “the most didactic piece of prose Julian Barnes has ever published”, for it is reflective of Barnes’ truth as it heavily dwells “on declaring, the unreliability of history” (121-22). It is with this fragment

of the novel, that Barnes provides the point of view on history through his lenses. In his meditation on history and truth, Barnes argues that there are always multiple possible subjective truths, and it is up to the individual to evaluate which of these truths is the objective one. At the same time, he acknowledges that even the apparently objective truth is a mere illusion. However, although he is well aware of this fact, he claims:

But while we know this, we must still believe that objective truth is obtainable; or we must believe that it is 99 per cent obtainable; or if we can't believe this we must believe that 43 per cent objective truth is better than 41 per cent. We must do so, because if we don't we're lost, we fall into beguiling relativity, we value one liar's version as much as another liar's, we throw up our hands at the puzzle of it all, we admit that the victor has the right not just to the spoils but also to the truth. (Whose truth do we prefer, by the way, the victor's or the victim's? Are pride and compassion greater distorters than shame and fear?) (Barnes, *History* 243-44).

Thus, whichever text we read, it is to always differentiate between “what happened” and “what somebody told about what happened” (Moseley 109), which is certainly something to be applied when reading *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters*.

All ten chapters bear a form of irony, whereas the half-chapter entitled “Parenthesis” does not only provide a symbolic meaning but stands for its literal meaning as well, thus serves as an additional chapter for the narrator to speak out his mind without irony and communicate with the reader. Drawing on Ateş's claim that irony is a tool, used by postmodernist authors “to break the rigidity of the past and show retrospective possibilities in a humorous manner” (8), it is to indeed understand Barnes' fifth novel as the experimental postmodern perspective of history, thus fragmentary, ignoring or

marginalising the great events of our history and emphasizing the neglected ones instead (Nagy, *In memoriam* 83).

Nagy suggests a possible interpretation of the “Parenthesis”, claiming that the author is aiming for a more authentic status with this half-chapter than in the other chapters of the book (“Tragický úděl” 68). It is in this chapter called “Parenthesis” the reader gets a narrator, with no sense of irony, distance, or the use of narrative strategies (*ibidem*). A sense of delusion as who is speaking to the reader, however, comes with the “Parenthesis”, for the authorial-narratorial figuration of Julian Barnes is visible. Nevertheless, it is to argue whether the narrator is Julian Barnes (as the book indeed serves multiple references to Leicester City, in which he was born), speaking for himself or whether the narrator of this half-chapter is a fictional narrator reflecting the thoughts of the author, which in itself signifies the author’s intention, which he emphasizes throughout the novel, and that is the importance of perspective.

To conclude, the question of whether this work shall be classified as novel arises against the background of the individual stories, which, apart from the recurring motifs: woodworms, Noah’s Ark, or the transience of time, serve more as a form of meditation on these themes and could indeed be rather analysed as essays or short stories. Nagy comments on history in Barnes’s rendition claiming history, in general, has no meaning, it is ungraspable, the only meaning that emerges for us as humankind from history is the personal one (“Tragický úděl” 68). Thus, it is not possible, to unify all of Barnes’ ideas of history into one main concept. Yet, if there is something the given paragraphs enable its reader to conclude, something as an ultimate form of history, for Barnes, it is the love that is a “remedy for history” as in the “Parathesis” his voice protrudes through the story and speaks to us on the behalf of love (Moseley 120): “We must believe in it [love], or we’re lost. We may not obtain

it, or we may obtain it and find it renders us unhappy; we must still believe in it. If we don't, then we merely surrender to the history of the world and someone to else's truth" (Barnes, *History* 244).

6. History as a puzzle in *England, England*: British past and national identity preserved in the tradition

History is an important aspect of Barnes' novels, a result of the author's longstanding passion for the subject. Although the author often inclines more towards French culture in his novels, he does not deny his nationality, as Englishness, along with issues of identity, permeates his works. Barnes points out that his novel *England, England* is about "the idea of England, authenticity, the search for truth, the invention of tradition, and the way in which we forget our own history" (Guignery and Roberts 27). His eighth novel follows two narrative strands that differ stylistically: "the public story of the Project is farcical, satirical, comic and thoroughly suffused with irony, while Martha's private biography is more serious, melancholic, emotional, philosophical, often moving and occasionally sad" (Tory and Vesztergom 130-31). However, these two narrative strands at the same time complement and intertwine in their conception of the main theme of the past and memory. While one focuses on individual memory, the other completes the story with the theme of collective memory against the backdrop of many individuals within the nation. Therefore, history, whether individual or collective, is always linked to memory. Barnes shows us in his novel the extent to which the memory of history is important in the creation of identity either national, represented by traditions and myths, or personal, consisting in finding one's own self. Thus, according to Barnes: "Towards the end, it's about if and how a nation, like a person, can start again" (Guignery and Roberts 27).

As discussed in the previous chapter, history in Barnes' conception is always a question of interpretation and perspective, which are inherently marginal, fragmentary, and individual entities. Customary as it is in Barnes's novels, this story explores the identity of the individual and their memory in relation to others through

the example of the protagonist, Martha Cochrane. Interestingly, the presented narrative resembles Barnes' novel *Metroland*, as it also consists of three parts in chronological order, including a prologue focusing on the private story of Martha, a bordering middle section devoted to the public story, and a final epilogue which, although largely devoted again to the private story of Martha, includes elements from the public story as well. "As regarding their [the narrative strands] relation to each other, the public story is placed in the foreground and the private story seems to play only a secondary role" (Tory and Vesztergom 131). Divided into sections "ENGLAND"; "ENGLAND, ENGLAND" and "ANGLIA", the story is structured to illustrate the gradual decadence of England caused precisely by the forgetting of memories, things traditional, and touching on the sense of identity.

The prologue, dedicated to the private story of Martha Cochrane, introduces the reader the context of Martha's childhood and presents the protagonist as highly sceptical of the concept of memories mainly "because of their self-deceptive nature" (Tory and Vesztergom 132). The passage quoted below is an example of the implementation of memory into the narrative and at the same time provides the reader with a recurrent theme within Barnes' novels, the unreliability of memory:

If a memory wasn't a thing but a memory of a memory of a memory, mirrors set in parallel, then what the brain told you now about what it claimed had happened then would be coloured by what had happened in between. It was like a country remembering its history: the past was never just the past, it was what made the present able to live with itself. (Barnes, *England* 6)

The provided passage connects the memory with the remote past quite fundamentally and enhances awareness of the germ of an identity that seems to be related not only

to a sense of national belonging but also to a personal identity linked to an individual's family history. For Martha, the memory of her first memory is untraceable. Thus, she puts forward the view that it is impossible to grasp a memory in our memory that marks the truly first one, as “[t]here’s always a memory just behind your first memory, and you can’t quite get at it” (Barnes, *England* 3). Although the prologue is dedicated to the private story of Martha, in his meditations on memory and its volatile nature, Barnes at the beginning alludes to the motif of Englishness and the history of England through the protagonist’s memories of her childhood in the form of “the vivid depiction of a typically English Agricultural Show that Martha visited with her parents; the particular manner in which Martha was taught the subject of History in her primary school; and, most memorably, the memories related to a Counties of England jigsaw puzzle that Martha used to play with as a child” (Tory and Vesztergom 132). In particular, the memory of the jigsaw puzzle and the lost pieces in the form of the individual counties of England, that were somehow always to be found by her father, anticipate a leitmotif for the novel, as here we not only learn about the geographical location and history of England but also through the puzzle we learn about the protagonist’s inner travails, which is what seems to be the protagonist’s true childhood memory. Consequently, the reader gets to know it was Martha’s father, who abandoned the family when Martha was young, who always helped Martha to mysteriously find that lost piece of the puzzle:

Leicestershire, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Warwickshire, Staffordshire – it was usually one of them – whereupon a sense of desolation, failure, and disappointment at the imperfection of the world would come upon her, until Daddy, who always seemed to be hanging around at this moment, would find the missing piece in the unlikeliest place . . . Staffordshire

had been found, and her [Martha's] jigsaw, her England, and her heart had been made whole again" (Barnes, *England* 5-6).

Thus, Barnes also works with the motif of emotional trauma that Martha processes within herself through the novel (Tory and Vesztergom 133). Her identity seems to lie in the one missing piece of the puzzle that her father carried away in a pocket when he left Martha and her mother many years ago. Her reaction at the end of the prologue when she is reunited with her father years later at his initiative still hinges on that memory, one of the few she is certain of: "She asked him for Nottinghamshire . . . 'When you went off, you had Nottinghamshire in your pocket.' . . . 'You don't remember?' . . . 'You really, really don't?'" (Barnes, *England* 24-25). As Tory and Vesztergom point out, "[t]he location of Nottinghamshire on the map of England is quite significant: it sits right at the centre of it, at the very heart of it all" (133). Barnes's choice of this particular county of England was therefore a trenchant and well-considered move to link the two central themes of his novel, the question of England and identity, as it was this missing puzzle piece that influenced Martha growing up without her father, contributed to the person she grew into and in the novel serves as a foreshadowing of the following sequence of events. Martha's mother, after being abandoned by her husband and left alone to raise her daughter, succumbs to cynicism about men, which she by raising passes on to her daughter, and "[t]his cynicism will become a leading feature with Martha throughout the second part of the novel" (Roşcan 113).

Concerning the temporal aspect of the second part of the novel, it revolves around the near future, depicting middle-aged Martha as a focalizer of this story, providing the reader her perspective and version of the events. However, "there are several focalizers used and the progression of the story resembles the way in which we assemble a jigsaw puzzle" (Roşcan 113). This middle part of the novel is further divided into three

sections and is not concerned only with Englishness, individual versus the collective, but mainly with the relationship between authentic and replica as a power determining the roots of identity. In the novel, after a joint discussion with consultant Jerry Bateson, Sir Jack Pitman decides on a new project, England, England, which aims to elevate England's political and economic status through what England has to offer the world, and that is its history (Roşcan 114):

‘You – we – England – my client – is – are – a nation of great age, great history, great accumulated wisdom. Social and cultural history – stacks of it, reams of it – eminently marketable, never more so than in the current climate. Shakespeare, Queen Victoria, Industrial Revolution, gardening, that sort of thing. If I may coin, no, copyright, a phrase, *We are already what others may hope to become* . . . We are the new pioneers. We must sell our past to other nations as their future! (Barnes, *England* 39-40)

Apart from the protagonist's life journey and search for identity, the novel presents a fantasy of, Sir Jack Pitman, a media mogul, and his colleagues of which Martha is one, challenging the idea of “turn[ing] the Isle of Wight into a gigantic theme park called England, England, in which one finds replicas of England's best known historical buildings, sites and figures” (Guignery, *Fiction* 104). In her thesis, Roşcan likens the nature of the project depicted in *England, England* to an existing attraction offered by the city of Las Vegas, Nevada providing tourists with an extensive variety of options “visiting numerous replicas of famous tourist attractions from around the world . . . Such attractions include hotels like the Luxor Pyramid, the Venetian, Caesar's Palace or Disneyland”, all of which are real existing places situated around the world (111). Thus, Barnes builds his novel on simulacra, this very relationship of replicating the authentic, which marks an attempt to attract tourists to the prospect of a less costly

solution offered by the opportunity to experience all of England's major tourist destinations within one theme park. The tourist attraction in the form of a theme park is intended to encompass and summarise the history of England and to create and sell the impression of identity based on tradition. In an attempt to do so, the management even hires a historian to oversee the layout of the park. Matthew Pateman points out that the novel works with motifs seen in Barnes' earlier novels, touching on the similarity to the main character Christopher in Barnes' first novel *Metroland*, in which he claims, "to find in art 'a clutch of capitalised intangibles like Love, Truth, Authenticity' (M. 15). Life imitating art imitating life. . ." he suggests (qtd. in Pateman 74). However, the motif of art bridging into reality is also evident in Barnes' *Flaubert's Parrot*, in which the author again plays with the concept of the nature of multiplicity and truth, which in many cases is untraceable. In a similar vein, Barnes approaches the creation of his characters, who show signs of irrelevance to historical truth and often resort to mythologizing the past in order to build a theme park to meet the demands of tourists (Nünning 10). In the novel, Barnes comes up with the idea that identity, whether on collective or individual levels, as well as Englishness can be constructed in a similar way as both are based on history, traditions, and personal experiences that shape the individual (25-26).

Barnes' fifth novel, similar to *Before She Met Me* or *Flaubert's Parrot*, introduces the figure of the historian in the story, which adds a certain amount of credibility to the presented history. The historian, Dr Max, who is called upon in the story to oversee the theme park project, concludes that depending on the survey conducted on citizens of England, Englishness can be constructed. In fact, the result of research has clearly shown that what people associate with Englishness is more a matter of personal preference and individual connotation than a legacy of history. In the story, Barnes

proposes to reconstruct the concept of national identity and cultural and historical richness precisely by using limited elements consisting of entities that English people conveyed in response to a questionnaire requesting a list of fifty things that are for them a sign of Englishness (Nünning 10). The list of so-called *fifty quintessences of Englishness* is long, but because of the topic central to this chapter, it must appear in full in the thesis:

1. ROYAL FAMILY
2. BIG BEN/ HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT
3. MANCHESTER UNITED FOOTBALL CLUB
4. CLASS SYSTEM
5. PUBS
6. A ROBIN IN THE SNOW
7. ROBIN HOOD AND HIS MERRIE MEN
8. CRICKET
9. WHITE CLIFFS OF DOVER
10. IMPERIALISM
11. UNION JACK
12. SNOBBERY
13. GOD SAVE THE KING/QUEEN
14. BBC
15. WEST END
16. TIMES NEWSPAPER
17. SHAKESPEARE
18. THATCHED COTTAGES
19. CUP OF TEA/DEVONSHIRE CREAM TEA
20. STONEHENGE
21. PHLEGM/STIFF UPPER LIP
22. SHOPPING
23. MARMALADE
24. BEEFEATERSTERS/TOWER OF LONDON
25. LONDON TAXIS
26. BOWLER HAT
27. TV CLASSIC SERIALS
28. OXFORD/ CAMBRIDGE
29. HARRODS
30. DOUBLE-DECKER BUSES/REED BUSES
31. HYPOCRISY
32. GARDENING
33. PERFIDY/UNTRUSTWORTHINESS
34. HALF-TIMBERING
35. HOMOSEXUALITY
36. ALICE IN WONDERLAND
37. WINSTON CHURCHILL
38. MARKS & SPENCER
39. BATTLE OF BRITAIN
40. FRANCIS DRAKE

41. TROOPING THE COLOUR
42. WHINGEING
43. QUEEN VICTORIA
44. BREAKFAST
45. BEER/WARM BEER
46. EMOTIONAL FRIGIDITY
47. WEMBLEY STADIUM
48. FLAGELLATION/ PUBLIC SCHOOLS
49. NOT WASHING/ BAD UNDERWEAR
50. MAGNA CARTA (Barnes, *England* 83-85)

Since it is not possible to comment on all fifty points on the list within the scope of this thesis, the above-provided excerpt will serve as a sample providing insight into the issues presented in the novel, in particular, the farcical Barnesian conception of English traditions and identity. The presented approach to history, therefore, rests more on what people associate with Englishness in modern times rather than historical facts, which is only supported by the research that Dr Max, the historian in the novel, conducts when he asks attendees of the survey about various historical events, one of which is the *Battle of Hastings*, whereupon many respondents give the date on which the battle took place 1066, but are unable to supply any further information about the battle such as who fought against whom or what the outcome of the battle was (Miskei 8). To his unpleasant discovery, Barnes concludes the reality observed by a historian as follows:

Most people remembered history in the same conceit yet evanescent fashion as they recalled their own childhood. It seemed to Dr Max positively unpatriotic to know so little about the origins and forging of your nation. And yet, therein lay the immediate paradox: that patriotism's most eager bedfellow was ignorance, not knowledge. (*England* 82).

This excerpt from the novel revisits a theme Barnes introduced in the prologue – childhood. Just as memories of childhood shape who we are today, so does knowledge and awareness of our nation's history shape our identity as citizens and is

reflected in our relationship to ourselves. Thus, if we were to be radical, it could be argued that without a general knowledge of history and the concomitant learning from past mistakes, the identity of the individual in relation to society would slowly fade away and consequently the identity of each individual would gradually dissolve, and the concept of memory would turn into a mere *tabula rasa*. Barnes, however, is not radical in this respect, in fact, he is surprisingly forgiving and gives a certain amount of humanity and hope in his interpretation when he claims: “Getting its history wrong is part of becoming a nation” (Barnes & Noble 18:31-35).

However, the question of patriotism is another recurring motif in *England, England*. Nünning points out that the way history is taught at Martha’s School stands for Barnes’ satirization of patriotism exemplified in the History of a Nation (8), that is, through “chants of history” (Barnes, *England* 11):

55BC (clap clap) Roman Invasion

1066 (clap clap) Battle of Hastings

1215 (clap clap) Magna Carta

1512 (clap clap) Henry the Eight (clap clap)

Defender of Faith (clap clap) (Barnes, *England* 11)

As for Barnes, he himself rather avoids the term “satire” considering *England, England* and leans towards the term “semi-farce” (Guignery and Roberts 28). Suppose we understand *semi-farce* as a story of a humorous nature in which the characters find themselves in unlikely situations and *satire* as a humorous story as well. However, *satire* with a subtext of constructive social criticism, this thesis tends to incline to the second variant since the motif that is evident and can be read from Barnes’ book is precisely

a certain amount of criticism towards the disruption of England's places by tourism and as Childs, points out: "It is a fantasy, but one that has many recent echoes and real-life parallels" (*Contemporary* 84).

Patriotism is exemplified in the novel by other characters as well. Sir Jack Pitman, as mentioned in the book, considers himself a patriot, expressing his nationality through local dress (Miskei 5), "by his tweed deerstalker, hunter's jacket, cavalry twills, gaiters, hand-crafted doe-skin boots and fell-walker's stave. All made in England, of course" (Barnes, *England* 42). By exposing this fact to admiration through clothing, Pitman's heritage park project can also be understood not only as a way to get rich, which is a by-product but also and especially a demonstration of his patriotism. Moreover, the paradox of his superficial conception of patriotism stands out when Old England declines at the expense of the theme park, which was created at Pitman's instigation (Mättner 9). Thus, Barnes portrays the character of Sir Jack Pitman in his novel with a heaping dose of irony, drawing on Pitman's rather shallow and superficial understanding of Englishness, as the matter of identity is far more complex than being rooted in something as simple as appearance or the "fifty quintessences of Englishness" (Miskei 5) including "the Royal Family, Robin Hood, Manchester United Football Club, historic buildings, natural features, and so on" as comes apparent from the list (Pateman 73).

If we were to go back to the protagonist of the novel and consider one of the items on the list of the *fifty quintessences of Englishness*, namely the *emotional frigidity*, we could say that this is exactly the model by which Martha Cochrane represents the Englishness herself. As was hinted at in the opening section of this chapter, after her father left them, Martha's mother was left to raise her daughter alone, and she passed on her disappointment in men, along with a certain amount of cynicism in her

worldview, to her daughter. From the very beginning, the theme of the search for identity and authenticity is evident in the novel, not only in the identity and history of England but also in the character of the protagonist. It is this truth and authenticity that Martha later tries to find in her relationship with her co-worker Paul Harrison, but consequently discovers that even this relationship did not help her in finding her inner self, her lost piece of the puzzle (Mättner 9). “Barnes thus alerts the reader to the idea that our models of national or individual history are as much an intellectual construction as the fictional world projected in the novel” (Nünning 23).

The Heritage Park project, depicted in Barnes’ novel, incorporates real historical figures (the Royal family, Dr Johnson), myths (the Robin Hood myth), or even typically English foods (shepherd’s pie, fish and chips, bacon and eggs). As part of the presentation of historical characters, actors have been recruited for the park to portray the history. However, Barnes in his novel, similar to George Orwell and his *Animal Farm* (1945), deals with the idea of what would happen if the actors portraying the historical characters started to behave like the original, thus, like in *Animal Farm*, they would take on their roles: Robin Hood and his Merrie Men would start hunting animals for their livelihood or Dr Johnson would start to behave like in real life. As part of a visit to Heritage Park, visitors have the opportunity to spend part of the day with the prolific writer and representative of late English classicism, Dr Johnson. Although the park management hires an actor for this role who has studied the history and behaviour of this personality in detail and gives an extremely authentic performance, it is this authenticity that bothers tourists about the actor and they complain to the management, describing the actor in the following words (Nünning 12):

. . . he was badly dressed and had a rank smell to him; that he ate his dinner like a wild beast, and so quickly that Visitors, feeling obliged to keep pace, gave

themselves indigestion; that he was either bullyingly dominant, or else sunk in silence; that several times, in mid-sentence, he had stooped down and twitched off a woman's shoe; that he was depressing company; that he made racist remarks about many of the Visitors' countries of origin; that he was irritable when closely questioned; that however brilliant his conversation might be, clients were distracted by the asthmatic gasping that accompanied it, and the needless rolling in his chair. (Barnes, *England* 208)

Barnes addresses the issue of the preference of the replica over the original in the novel, as it is evident through the above-provided excerpt that what bothered people about the actor portraying Dr Johnson was his authentic representation, faithful to the original (Nünning 13). The provided image suggests that the novel could be considered a historical novel as it heavily draws on a historical aspect of England and its cultural history, providing a believable portrait of its main national figures. However, contrary to historical novels, in which the information provided refers to research and is somewhat devoid of personal experience, although Barnes to an extent conveys the spirit of Old England and introduces important historical personages and events at their truest, his image of history serves mainly as a farce or satire, whichever you may prefer, providing the reader with a certain critique of contemporary cultural developments and their decadence. This is something that is evident in Barnes' own words when commenting on the matter of the current tourist situation in England, saying that [the Isle of Wight] "was one of the first places in Great Britain to be perverted by becoming a tourist destination. It was a rather undeveloped, old-fashioned, quite primitive offshore island until sunbathing became fashionable" (qtd. in Childs *Contemporary* 84). The fact that people prefer a replica to the original can be seen in real cultural events. Replicas of famous paintings, sculptures, or buildings can be found all over the world.

However, since park management in the novel is particularly concerned with providing a marketable version of Englishness, they run into a problem, since as Nünning suggests: “constructing versions of Englishness that please their visitors imply that the notion of Englishness is nothing but an invented tradition” (18). Thus, although the intention was to convey to people a true sense of Englishness, English culture, and history, the fact that people preferred an adapted version of history over the original influenced the concept of the park. The task of the management was thus to reposition the history and myths for a modern time England. “Since authentic records are lacking and past accounts are always influenced by the preferences of the present, neither the committee nor the inhabitants of Anglia are able to reconstruct the ‘true’ past” (Nünning 23). The principle of sticking to the presentation of pure Englishness is illustrated in the novel by the dilemma that comes with the question of what to include in the theme park. Barnes excludes from this definition of Englishness such things as “non-English specialities like Irish Stew” or porridge as it could carry Scottish connotations (14). What should not be overlooked, however, is that “[j]ust like any other construction of past events, the invention of ‘Englishness’ is primarily a means of coming to terms with the present” (25).

Nünning in her article further points out: “The whole project of rebuilding a replica of Olde England is based on the premise that the authentic has lost its value, that postmodern subjects prefer the well-made simulacrum to the real thing” (19).

. . . the world of the third millennium is inevitably, is ineradicably modern, and that is our intellectual duty to submit to that modernity, and to dismiss as sentimental and inherently fraudulent all yearnings for what is dubiously termed the “original”. We must demand the replica, since the reality, the truth, the authenticity of the replica is the one we can

possess, colonize, reorder, find *jouissance* in, and, finally, if and when we decide, it is the reality which, since it is our destiny, we may meet, confront and destroy. (Barnes, *England* 55)

Although *England, England* deals with the theme of identity in conjunction with English national identity, it is the concept of simulacra in relation to the nation's history and tradition that Barnes explores in the novel. Simulacra, in its essence, carries the meaning of the Latin *simulare* "to make like, imitate, copy, represent" (Harper, "Etymology"). Thus, this thesis understands the term as expressing the surface qualities of one entity – to look and behave like something else, but to lack the inner qualities and values of that unit. Barnes borrows the French word *frisson* in the novel to express what the presence of a replica evokes in a person, unlike the original and quite ironically chooses to retain the word in its original form, since he believes that this term perfectly captures the essence of emotional excitement at the sight of a replica (Barnes, *England* 54). Thus, the replica is not presented in the novel as something less worthy of our attention, in fact, it is quite the contrary. The simulacra is not supposed to be a substitute, but an enhancement elevating and ironizing the world – a re-presentation (55).

The fundamental turning point of the novel occurs at the point when the actors portraying certain historical figures begin to identify with the originals. Tourists visiting the park accept and welcome this change. But the whole Barnes farce culminates at the point where the actors believe that they are the characters they represent and accept this change of identity (Miskei 12). The actor of Dr Johnson even renames himself: "Whatever the actor's original name, he had long ago changed it by deed-poll to Samuel Johnson" (Barnes, *England, England* 210). Matthew Pateman in his study of Julian Barnes chooses to title the chapter concerning the novel *England, England*

“An Island of the Time Before: *England, England*” (72). This title is indeed peculiar, given the sequence of events presented in the novel’s epilogue. In this last part, the story again moves back in time to the future and gives us a glimpse of the character of aged Martha, who moves back after many years of travelling the world. Consequently, we learn that while England, England is enjoying tourist success and prospering to the point of declaring itself an autonomous state and becoming part of the European Union, Old England is in decline. As for the setting of the third part, we are in Wessex, an Old England village that is in a kind of rural state due to the prosperity of England, England, and economic regression. “The world began to forget that ‘England’ had ever meant anything except England, England, a false memory which the Island worked to reinforce; while those who remained in Anglia began to forget about the world beyond” (Barnes, *England* 253). After Martha and Paul discover Sir Jack Pitman’s sexual deviance, they decide to use this information to their advantage, blackmail him, and Martha is about to take his place. However, her disbelief in the project turns against her, and Paul, who is a supporter of the theme park, decides to destroy the compromising evidence on Sir Jack Pitman and betrays Martha. Martha thus is banned from the Island as a result.

When discussing the book’s title, Peter Childs maintains that the novel resembles a wide “range of references” recalling D.H. Lawrence’s short story *England, My England* (1922) and A. G. MacDonell’s *England, Their England* (1993), and points out the pointedness of the lack of “any possessive pronoun” in Barnes’ novel’s title (*Contemporary* 85). If we were to elaborate on this idea, a possible solution would offer the conclusion that it is the lack of a possessive pronoun that indicates that the resulting construct of the history of England belongs to no one. Especially since all the tourists have moved to *England, England* from *Old England*, and thus lose the uniqueness

of Englishness by the multiculturalism. Discussing the matter of the doubling of the word *England*, Roşcan suggests that it “could be read as granting increased value to a fake country over the original England, which eventually loses its place in the history of the world” (113). Depending on this indeterminacy of identity, Tory and Vesztergom link two levels of the story – the personal identity of Martha Cochrane and the collective identity of England: “The loss of the father that generates an all-encompassing mistrust of the world for the protagonist might be seen as a metaphor for the loss of belief in the capacity of one’s fatherland, in this case England, to provide one with the means to unearth, or at least to construct a representation of, the essence of the country” (Tory and Vesztergom 134).

There are many historians who agree with Ernest Renan’s statement that Barnes mentions, “Getting its history wrong is part of being a nation” (Barnes & Noble 18:15-18-23). Barnes partly borrows this statement and claims that: “Getting its history wrong is part of becoming a nation” as much as for instance “getting its history wrong is part of being a family” or “getting one’s history wrong is part of being a person” (Barnes & Noble 18:32-26:20). This idea could be linked to Barnes’ intention in *England, England*. Thus, that even collective history is still history unfolding from the memory, perspective, and experience of the individual. Therefore, as displayed in the previous chapters, the meaning of history is always personal. What is important is not history, but our memory and memories of things past. “Old England had lost its history, and therefore – since memory is identity – had lost all sense of itself” (Barnes, *England* 251).

7. Fictionalizing the historical past in *Arthur & George*

When in 2006 Julian Barnes was confronted in an interview by his Gaelic translator Xesús Fraga with the question of whether his book had been written to tell the story of George Edalji rather than the story of Arthur Conan Doyle, the author replied: “Yes, I was never interested in Arthur Conan Doyle, to be honest . . . I came to it through George, and Arthur just happened to be attached” (Guignery and Roberts 134). This statement by Barnes sheds at least some light on one important aspect of Barnes’ life and work: he was always deeply interested in issues affecting political injustice and sided with those whose fates and lives were marked by it, as he “himself studied law at university”, however, chose the career of a writer instead (Guignery, *Fiction* 129). A work similar to *Arthur & George* bearing a historical dimension is Barnes’ *The Porcupine* (1992), in which the story is set in a post-communist country that puts its former dictator on trial or Barnes’ later novel *The Noise of Time*, which is a fictional history of the Russian composer Dmitri Shostakovich, his life, and his relationship to the Soviet system. Barnes’ tenth novel *Arthur & George* was published in 2005 and it is based on true events of the case of George Edalji, a Parsee and English-origin solicitor wrongly convicted of mutilating horses and writing threatening letters in Great Wyrley, Staffordshire in the late nineteenth century. However, Barnes’ novel offers two parallel narratives, two characters, and two perspectives that are initially separated by time, and their storylines are only just coming together in the narrative. Apart from the character of George Edalji, the other protagonist of the story is the Victorian author Sir Arthur Conan Doyle himself. In fact, it was Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, by then already famous for his Sherlock Holmes series of detective stories, who began to point out Edalji’s innocence and was one of those who initiated a review of the case. “Details of Conan Doyle’s involvement in the Edalji case can indeed be found in Doyle’s *Memories and Adventures* (1924) . . . as well as in *The Story of Mr*

George Edalji (1985) which contains Doyle's first article, published in two parts in the *Daily Telegraph* on 11 and 12 January 1907" (Guignery, *Fiction* 129). Barnes came across the Edalji case by chance when he read a book on the Dreyfus case in France, in which the author noted that a parallel case had taken place in England, and this intrigued Barnes to such an extent that he began to research the subject and find out details about the case (Guignery and Roberts 134). Consequently, "Barnes spent two years researching the story behind his plot" (Childs and Lea 139). However, Childs and Lea claim that Barnes ultimately stayed "truer to the documented Conan Doyle record than the known story of George Edalji's life" (ibidem). Therefore, Barnes' historical novel *Arthur & George*, is indeed a work of fiction, carrying the author's typical elements of mixing reality and imagination.

Literary postmodernism is highly concerned with history; thus, it comes as no surprise that a genre popular within postmodernism is a historical novel. Since *Arthur & George* is a novel based on a real historical event, it is classified as a historical novel. Barnes' approach to writing the historical novel genre is interesting in that it does not rely on an exorbitant amount of historical detail touching on, for example, clothing or home decorations of the Victorian era at the expense of the story. The tactic that Barnes chooses to tell his story is to bring the reader closer to and evoke the period "through the way the characters think and the way that they talk and through the language of the prose" (Guignery and Roberts 135). Considering the theme of the novel, but also Barnes' beginnings as a writer, this novel can be called a detective novel in addition to a historical novel. Many authors issue their works under pseudonyms, and the same applies to Barnes. To this day, he has published several works in the genre of detective stories, including *Duffy* (1980), *Fiddle City* (1981), *Putting the Boot in* (1985), and *Going to the Dogs* (1987), using the pen

name Dan Kavanagh. And it is the echoes of his detective stories that are reflected in “the investigative style” he used to conceive his novel, *Arthur & George* (Roşcan 211).

The temporal aspect in which Barnes sets the novel is interesting in itself. That said, and as Barnes states of *Arthur & George*, it is a novel that “happens in the past” with a “contemporary parallel” (Guignery and Roberts 135). Given that this is a historical novel, it is only natural that the story is set in a historically documented era of our history, namely the late Victorian period. However, from a narratological point of view, it is worth noting that by choosing the form of alternating narrations, the author adapts the narrative of each character and the grammatical tense, shifting Arthur’s action first to the past and George’s to the present (Roşcan 214-15). This is influenced by the eighteen-year age difference between Arthur and George; therefore, Barnes begins with Arthur’s story and sets it in the past as he sticks to the time sequence (215). Arthur and George are two equal characters in the novel; thus, it is important to convey information about both to understand the context of the events. The alignment of the temporal plane occurs only when the two stories become fixed and intersect in time, at which point the reader for the first time reads chapters titled not only “Arthur” or “George” but also “Arthur & George”.

Barnes adopts a dual plot structure to present a novel constructed as a detective story, in which he attempts to explore the nature of the relationship between the present and the past. For the alternating narration, Barnes opts for a third-person narration that allows the reader “psychological omniscience” and insight into the “inner lives” of the protagonists, which creates a sense of their reliability (Roşcan 226). Some might argue that Barnes does indeed devote too much space in the novel to the portrayal of the characters. According to Rees in “The Inscrutable Mr Barnes”, the whole plot moves “maddeningly slow” (qtd. in Roşcan 213). However, this can be seen as Barnes’

intention, to reveal to the reader the pieces of the puzzle, as the real Arthur and George once experienced (ibidem). Barnes' intention, then, is closer to that of a detective story that leaves the reader in suspense until the last moment.

Arthur & George share another theme common to Barnes' novels, which is memory. In the same manner, as Martha Cochrane's character in *England, England* meditates on the theme of memory in the novel's opening: "'What's your first memory?' someone would ask. And she would reply, 'I don't remember.'" (Barnes, *England* 3), George also lacks the remembrance of his first memory. Contrary to George, however, at the beginning of the novel, Barnes presents the reader with the view of young Arthur and his very first memory, in which he finds himself in a dark room with the dead body of his deceased grandmother. Roşcan points out that not only is the character of Arthur introduced to the reader first because the chronological sequence of events suggests that Arthur was born eighteen years before George, but she also points out the interconnectedness of the theme of memory which "is crucial to the rest of the chapter as it sets the contrastive tone, but it also bears on the whole novel as there is little concurrence between Arthur and George or Arthur and the police representative" (210).

In *Arthur & George*, Barnes takes the story to the late Victorian Britain, making the author of Sherlock Holmes stories, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, one of the main protagonists also employing his biographical features as well as those of George Ernest Thompson Edalji. Thus, although, Barnes' penchant for mixing reality and imagination using elements of history, biography, and fiction is also familiar to readers from *Flaubert's Parrot*, in which the story revolves around the French writer Gustave Flaubert, Barnes' tenth novel was inspired by and based on the real-life case of an Englishman with Parsee roots, George Edalji. Unlike in *Flaubert's Parrot*, where

the title of the book also evoked the main theme of the novel, in the case of *Arthur & George* the reader is left somewhat in the dark about the identity of the novel's protagonists. As in the case of the first chapter of *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters*, in which the reader learns only at the end that the narrator has been a woodworm all along, the full name, along with the identity of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, is revealed to us later in the story. Although diehard fans of Doyle's work, as Roşcan suggests, may recognize the famous author before his name is heard in full just by reading the following passage (208): "Arthur even knocked off a short novel, *The Doings of Raffles Haw*, which paid all their Viennese expenses (Barnes, *Arthur & George* 60)".

The novel *Arthur & George* is divided into four parts: "Beginnings", "Beginning with an Ending", "Ending with a Beginning", and "Endings". "In the style of a historical novel, *Arthur & George* mimics the nineteenth-century European novel, which Fredrick M. Holmes [in *Julian Barnes*, 2009] calls 'the Edwardian novel', in its realistic, slow-paced rhythm, 'sober tone and formal prose style" (qtd. in Gholami 116). The first chapter "Beginnings" describes the different childhoods of two boys Arthur and George and their early adulthood in late nineteenth-century England. In this section, Barnes presents the childhood and circumstances that shaped the faiths of the two boys and allowed them to become the men they grew into. In relation to identity formation, Roşcan points out the motif of truth, which the author uses to outline the events presented throughout the novel and suggests that "George is rather unimaginative and being the son of a Parsee Vicar, he" is not capable of lying, nor has he been brought up to lie (211). Therefore, George "is never urged to speak the truth: this would imply that he needs encouragement. [However], [i]t is simpler than this: he is expected to tell the truth because at the Vicarage no alternative exists" (Barnes, *Arthur & George* 5).

On the other hand, Arthur, although he was also brought up believing in God and worshipping the truth that the Bible teaches, preferred more parallel and fictional versions of reality in the environment of his home, encouraged by his mother, who used to tell him various adventure stories from ancient times and thus taught him the difference between good and evil in a playful and stimulating manner (Roşcan 209). In the novel, George's sense of truth and responsibility is illustrated several times through the story of his adolescence, such as when his classmate steals his tie at school, and he is forced to report the situation to his teacher in the interest of honouring the truth: "He knows it is wrong to get a schoolfellow into trouble. But he knows it is worse to tell lies. His father is quite clear about this. Once you start telling lies you are led into the paths of sin and nothing will stop you until the hangman slips a noose around your neck" (Barnes, *Arthur & George* 16). Thus, there is a marked contrast in the upbringing of the two boys. While Arthur was encouraged from an early age to form his imagination and fantasy and was guided to recognise the basic values of truth and lie, George's upbringing was rather strict, for him, there is nothing but the truth.

Barnes' interest not only in English and French culture but also in Russian culture comes to the surface when he recalls the Russian saying "He lies like an eye-witness" in *Talking it Over* (222). This proverb is projected into practice in *Arthur & George* in many scenes throughout the novel, as the protagonist of the novel, George, himself suffers from myopia, which has affected his life since childhood when he first came to school: "On Friday they will be tested and rearranged by intelligence: clever boys will sit at the front, stupid boys at the back; the reward for progress being to find yourself closer to the master, to the seat of instruction, to knowledge, to truth" (Barnes, *Arthur & George* 11). Barnes opens his novel with words: "A child wants to see. It always begins like this, and it began like this then. A child wanted to see" (3).

But because of a visual impairment, George doesn't do well on Friday's tests, and he feels "as if he is being slowly banished from the way, the truth and the life" (12). This feeling then prevails for most of his life, and it is probably his severe myopia, together with his origins, that is the cause of his consequent personal tragedy.

The theme of racial prejudice is one of the main themes of the novel, and along with it is related to another theme Barnes weaves through his works, and that is religion. In the case of the novel *Arthur & George*, Barnes alludes to the identity of the individual who is a minority in the area in which he lives. George Edalji, although the son of Charlotte Stoneham, an English woman, has half South Asian origins as his father is Shapurji Edalji, a Parsee convert to Christianity (Gholami 80). Barnes states in his novel that the events taking place over the years beginning in 1903 had their very start in 1888, a full fifteen years earlier: "In 1888, anonymous letters were sent to the vicarage, where the Edalji family dwelt, and over the following years, threatening pseudonymous letters, hoax orders as well as unwanted items found their way around the environs of the vicarage" (Gholami 80).

The above-provided excerpt describes the realities that took place in relation to the non-acceptance of Shapurji Edalji in Great Wyrley by citizens who did not comprehend how a Parsee could become a Catholic vicar. Barnes uses his favourite satire in the novel when the police are called and tell the Edalji family that other neighbours are also receiving similar letters and claim that it is not merely race prejudice, whereupon George asks his father: "Is that a good thing, Father? To be hated for more than one reason?" (Barnes, *Arthur & George* 57). The police did not concern themselves much with these events at the time, believing that George himself was writing the letters. Therefore, when in 1903 horse mutilations began to occur in Great Wyrley, Staffordshire, in a very violent manner, together with a recurrence of threatening letters, the police

charged George. “George was [consequently] sentenced to seven years’ hard labour, but of the seven he served three” (Gholami 80). George’s sentence was reduced in part because, despite George’s arrest in 1903, lasting until 1906, a series of horse mutilations and threatening letters continued in Great Wyrley. During his time in prison, George had read Doyle’s *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902) and on his release in 1906, contacted the author, already known by then for the fictional character of the brilliant detective Sherlock Holmes, in the belief that Doyle would be able to help him. This assumption was because at that time many people really believed that the mind that could come up with the figure of the brilliant detective Sherlock Holmes, who could solve any case no matter how unrealistic the solution seemed, could also solve real cases. Although Doyle is already used to receiving torrents of letters from his fans who believe he is able to solve cases and turn to him in times of need, he sometimes responds to letters, but always in the negative (Barnes, *Arthur & George* 291). Indeed, George’s case catches his eye, and after reading it he declares: “It’s as shabby as shabby can be” (292). At this point, the narratives collide, and the reader observes the first chapter titled “Arthur & George”.

In a covering letter, George has explained the anomalous position in which he finds himself. The decision to free him on licence was taken by the previous Home Secretary, Mr Akers-Douglas, and implemented by the present one, Mr Herbert Gladstone; but neither has offered any official explanation of their reasons. George’s conviction has not been cancelled, nor has any apology been tendered for his incarceration. (Barnes, *Arthur & George* 292)

Barnes intersperses the book with the life of Doyle, who falls into a state of depression after the death of his wife, Louise Hawkins, which is reflected in his writer’s block, and it was at this time that the opportunity to deal with the Edalji case was a great help to him. Since at that time England still lacked a Court of Appeal, which was not introduced until

1907, Doyle, along with other supporters of Edalji, advocated for a review of the case (Gholami 81). Doyle had indeed begun his own investigation and campaign for George's innocence, as he believed he is not guilty: "I do not think you are innocent. I do not believe you are innocent. I *know* you are innocent" (Barnes, *Arthur & George* 469) His own investigation bore fruit in 1907: "After the publication of a pamphlet entitled 'The Story of Mr. George Edalji', George was eventually granted a partial pardon but no compensation" (Gholami 81). Anyway, there was still the question: How could George, a shy man, lacking the audacity to do something so terrible, "and who was extremely myopic, become the main suspect of animal mutilation which needed extra skill and power?" (Gholami 82)

The theme of racial prejudice is intertwined with Edalji's case, not only does the British legal system not have enough incriminating evidence against George, there is actually evidence in his favour. Weaver in *Conan Doyle*, 2006, discussing the case points out:

All the maimed animals were deftly ripped under the belly and were left to bleed to death. These outrages needed extra skill and familiarity with cattle and horses which, as the known facts reveal, George Edalji clearly lacked. Moreover, all animal killing was carried out during the night which was again impossible for George to perform, because his short-sidedness would have prevented him from finding his way back home in the dark. It was only after George was released from prison and met with Arthur Conan Doyle that he started wearing glasses. (qtd. in Gholami 82)

Since one of the main themes about George is his short-sightedness, we could argue that myopia is not only a physical defect in the case of Edalji but also a metaphorical one

in terms of *blindness* in the legal realm. Barnes places the figure of “George Anson, Chief Constable of Staffordshire”, at the forefront of the aversion and conviction of George’s guilt (Gholami 98). Gholami drawing on Oldfield, 2010, suggests: “Endorsing Victorian racial prejudices as well as Lombroso’s illustrations of inborn criminals, Captain Anson was one of the main figures, who after his appointment as Chief Constable of Staffordshire in 1888, brought about George’s prolonged suffering and the legal proceedings towards his wrongful conviction” (98-99).

The fact that people really do perceive with all their senses and notice differences, which then shape their view of the world, is demonstrated in the novel at the moment when Inspector Campbell interrogates George and subsequently concludes: “The odd thing was, listening to his [George’s] voice – it was an educated voice, a lawyer’s voice – I found myself thinking at one point, if you shut your eyes, you’d think him an Englishman” (Barnes, *Arthur & George* 124). However, George still refuses to see the racial motif behind his accusations. Even when his father tells him: “George, this is true enough. You are an Englishman. But others may not always entirely agree. And where we are living –” (58). Without letting his father finish, George automatically answers according to what he has been taught and guided by his parents: “The centre of England” (ibidem). In George’s eyes, being situated in England is more than enough to be understood and accepted by people as an Englishman. His view does not change even when Conan Doyle later attempts to explain to him that there is a racial motive behind his current suspicion in the case: “You and I, George, you and I, we are. . . unofficial Englishmen.” (303). George does not understand why Doyle does not see himself as a true Englishman, because for him the author himself is the embodiment of all that Englishness means. Barnes alludes here to the fact that Doyle himself was born in Scotland and therefore, like George, is not a pure *Englishman*

in the eyes of society. However, having been brought up in humility, he finds it rude to question another man's categorization, so at least questions that of his own:

How is he less than a full Englishman? He is one by birth, by citizenship, by education, by religion, by profession. Does Sir Arthur mean that when they took away his freedom and struck him off the Rolls, they also struck him off the roll of Englishmen? If so, he has no other land. He cannot go back two generations. He can hardly return to India, a place he has never visited and has little desire to. (Barnes, *Arthur & George* 303-4).

Although George was born into a family of Parsee and English origins, he is sure of his identity and does not consider India his home as he sees himself only as English in matters of appearance, morals, and behaviour. Thus, George is right in what he says, but in the eyes of others, his appearance will always come first, revealing his partial Parsee origin, not his Englishness.

If we want to deal with the theme of Englishness as presented in the novel *Arthur & George*, there is a certain aspect that should be considered, namely the setting. Yang in his review points out that in his tenth novel, Barnes "with its setting in the Edwardian period critiques the nationalistic particularism of English identity and offers the possibility of reconfiguring Englishness" (162). As much as the previous chapter was devoted to the novel *England, England*, which is set in a more or less contemporary England and, in the course of the novel, moves the reader to a future England, bringing the question of Englishness to the fore. In *Arthur & George*, Englishness is not so much about traditions and myths as it is about a shared question of national identity, dealing with an individual's origins and skin colour. Thus, the issue of Englishness is present in this novel as well, as the author did not just

want to write a novel about something that happened, but to bring the idea of the story into the present through the racial prejudice presented in the novel through the case of George Edalji (Guignery and Roberts 135).

Gholami draws attention to Barnes' depiction of the ambivalence of George's identity in his novel while linking this to the contemporary context of Victorian society: "He is at once guilty and innocent, English and non-English, similar and foreign. He is the Victorians' uncanny double" (106). The motif of *the other* or *double* can be seen in many Victorian novels (e.g., Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*), and consists mainly in representing something different, alien, and fear-inducing, which, given Victorian racial prejudices of the time, George Edalji, being of Parsee-English descent fulfilled.

Although Barnes followed the story of Arthur and George very faithfully, he did depart from reality in the question of George's identity, especially in his supposedly Parsee-Scottish origins. In the novel, Barnes seems to place more emphasis on the influence and role of Shapurji Edalji in his son's life and upbringing and misinterprets the role of the mother in George's life. Charlotte Stoneham, George's mother was originally English, not Scottish as Barnes portrays, although Gholami argues that this "distortion" was the author's intention and in his eyes makes her character in the novel more "eccentric" (112). Beyond looking back to the previous chapter concerning *England, England*, in which the question of identity was at the very centre of the novel, here Barnes took pains to serve the reader a pure Englishness free from any Irish or Scottish connotations when looking at the concept of "Englishness" (Nünning 14). Gholami further draws attention to Barnes' omission of Charlotte's efforts to defend and clear her son's name and argues that [e]ven in a documented letter to the Home Secretary she expressed her bitter feelings about the fact that she believed her husband and son were treated unfairly because of their skin

colour” (112-13). According to the records, Charlotte Edalji to the Home Secretary, 1904, said: “I am an English woman & my blood boils at the continued injustice as it seems to be because my husband is a Parsee and my son therefore only half English” (qtd. in Oldfield 266).

Regarding the Edalji household and George’s family, Barnes altered the facts concerning the character of George’s brother, Horace Edalji (Gholami 113). According to the historical document, Horace testified against George and cooperated with the police (ibidem). However, Barnes states in the novel that “During the years of the Edalji family’s prosecution and their painful journey towards trial, Horace distanced himself from the family” (ibidem). He abandoned “his family, his origins, and all association with his brother’s case” (Oldfield 273).

Moreover, in his thesis, Gholami comments on Barnes’ treatment of the history and argues that Barnes portrays George’s sad fate and amplifies the victimization of the Edalji family when he describes the situation in the household as following (115):

He [George] rarely feels the lack of what he does not have. The family takes no part in local society, but George cannot imagine what this might involve, let alone what the reason for their unwillingness, or failure, might be. He himself never goes to other boys’ houses, so cannot judge how things are conducted elsewhere.

His life is sufficient unto itself. (Barnes, *Arthur & George* 16)

According to Gholami, Barnes’ portrayal of Edalji’s situation is not reliable by the very nature of the position of George’s father, the vicar, as “vicarage was frequently used for different social, educational and political purposes, which implies that the family may not have been totally isolated from other locals” (115). Although it is this closed, silenced, and distant nature of the Edalji family that Gholami considers to be

the author's intention, behind which we hear Barnes' satirical voice, which, together with the author's admixture of imagination, serves the reader a slightly different version of the story than the one written by history (ibidem).

Barnes' diligence in studying the details of a case that took place more than a century ago is evident in the author's note at the end of the book, in which he confesses: "*Apart from Jean's letter to Arthur, all letters quoted, whether signed or anonymous, are authentic; as are quotations from newspapers, government reports, proceedings in Parliament, and the writings of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle*" (Barnes, *Arthur & George* 505) Barnes thus worked with the real documents of the Edalji case. The uninitiated reader may fall under the mistaken impression that Barnes' novel presents an authentic story as the author intersperses his novel with elements of fiction to such an extent that it is hardly discernible. As has been mentioned many times in this thesis, although a contemporary British writer, Julian Barnes shows elements of a postmodern author. Regarding the case of *Arthur & George*, Gholami paraphrasing Catherine Belsey in *Post-Structuralism* is talking about Barnes' work as:

His [Barnes'] novels, particularly *Arthur & George*, illustrate this postmodernist tendency whereby they 'show off' their narrative consciousness as well as their theoretical positioning in 'fashionable' and present-day poststructuralist reformulations, such as the plurality of narrative voice, multiplicity of meaning, rejection of essentialist belief in truth, and destabilization of grand narratives. (109)

One might argue that the plurality of form in the words "beginnings" and "endings" denotes the ambiguity of the story. Barnes' novel does indeed begin at the beginning, introducing the childhood of the protagonists, although some form

of ending is certainly present in the form of the death of Arthur's grandmother, which becomes his first memory in life as presented in the novel. "Endings", on the other hand, again closes the story with death, this time denoting the end of Arthur Conan Doyle's life, but in a metaphorical sense, it also brings an end to the old way of looking at the world through George's eyes and opens new beginnings to him. However, "Barnes insists on the fact that once a version of events becomes imprinted on people's minds, there is little room for alternate versions" (Roşcan 216). Thus, through his fictionalization of George's story, Barnes continues the tradition he began with *Flaubert's Parrot*, *The Noise of Time*, *The Porcupine*, and *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters*, presenting the reader with one possible version of historical truth along the lines of Postmodernism. Therefore, in Barnes' novels "truth comes in multiple versions and readers are left to wonder" (229).

8. Conclusion

The presented thesis has focused on several of Barnes' novels reflecting on the theme of the past with a certain amount of *eagerness*, which in conjunction with the past is a central factor guiding this thesis and which, in my view, is complementary to Barnes' postmodern influence on the understanding of the past – that is, as a subjective, fragmentary, and marginal entity. The final decision to discuss the novels in a non-linear way allowed the thesis to connect the chapters through the theme of the past in relation to its depiction in the individual novels and to echo certain motifs that link these works in a meaningful way. Although the chosen topic of the thesis, focusing on a contemporary British author, brings with it certain pitfalls in the form of an ever-growing repertoire of works and changing style of the author, the positive aspect of the whole approach is certainly the fact that Julian Barnes is an author living, active in the world of media and thus it was no challenging task to find relevant sources recording the author's attitude towards his works, which is an aspect that gives the thesis yet broader scope. The stories that Barnes opens in his novels are linked by several thematic strands that occupy Barnes as an author and through which he views the past. Therefore, the ideas presented in this thesis will be summarised in the conclusion according to the thematic treatment of the past in Barnes' novels rather than in individual paragraphs commenting on each chapter separately – I believe such a conclusion would miss the point regarding the conception of the whole thesis. Let us thus highlight and summarize the outcomes of a closer look at the concept of the past as presented in selected works by Julian Barnes in relation to the narrative techniques chosen by the author.

For my analysis, I have set out several thematic areas representing aspects that are brought into relation with the concept of seizing the past in Barnes'

novels, and which, in my opinion, complement and overlap in forming a certain picture of Barnes' understanding and representation of the past in his novels: Truth which is a matter of multiplicity of perspective and does not exist in its unitary ultimacy; a memory which is limited and selective in its nature; and finally identity, either national, thus collective, represented by traditions and myths, or personal, consisting in finding one's own self. Through these themes, I interwove as a unifying moment the central theme: fictionalizing of history, which according to Barnes is nothing but a constructed narrative from the mouths and pens of storytellers. Barnes' most famous early novel, *Flaubert's Parrot*, illustrates this point. Although the story promises to render the reader a biography of the famous French author Gustave Flaubert, it nevertheless reminds us that the past is mainly a question of interpretation, providing us with various fragments of Flaubert's life by the means of "apocrypha, autobiography, bestiary, biography, chronology, criticism, dialogue, dictionary, essay, exam, guide, and manifesto" (Childs, *Contemporary* 89). Thus, this novel differs from the author's later rather conventional novels and reflects the narrative style preferred by postmodernist artists in the second half of the 20th century. Using postmodern tendencies, such as the unreliability of the narrator to emphasize the subjectivity of the perspective, Barnes employs the first-person narrator, Geoffrey Braithwaite, whose reliability is questioned from the beginning and remains so for the rest of the novel. Not only can we not trust the protagonist's personal story he so unwillingly provides, the biography of Gustave Flaubert, which he conveys and passes off as credible, lacks in part a relevant historical basis. It does not dwell on factual correctness along the lines of historiographic metafiction, it challenges the validity of history and builds up toward the ambiguity of history in postmodern writing as well as the motif of a multiplicity of truth.

Barnes' conception of the historical truth is purely sceptical. While *Flaubert's Parrot* attempts to pose as a relevant source on the French author's life, in *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters*, in the title itself Barnes points out that this novel does not pretend to be an all-encompassing, relevant survey of world history, since his rendering is *A history*, not *The history*. Thus, here in particular, the postmodern influence through the view of the past as an object of interpretation, reflecting the individual perspectives in Barnes' work, is already obvious at first glance. In the ten and a half chapters that present fictionalized versions of marginal histories, Barnes points out the issue of the inaccuracies in our history, when he claims: "dates don't tell the truth" (Barnes, *History* 239). Mention must also be made of Barnes' lifelong interest in the history of religion, which is particularly evident in *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters* and functions here as a unifying motif, as allusions to the story of Noah's Ark are present in every chapter of the novel. It contributes here to a certain conclusion about the cyclical nature of history and the relationship between the past and the present, that is that the past is far from forgotten, and just as the past shapes the present, the present influences the past. The novel conveys insights into real historical events: the Chernobyl nuclear catastrophe in 1986, the discovery of America in 1492, the *Achille Lauro* hijacking in 1985, the disaster of *Medusa* in 1816, or the sinking of the *Titanic* in 1912. But Barnes presents these events in his own way, he fabulates and fictionalizes them. At the same time, the events Barnes presents seem to be chosen at random, and so do their narrators. Thus, as much as the story of *Flaubert's parrot* is linked by a character who rises above the level of the story, there is no such thing as a connecting narrator or a proper plot in *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters* (Moseley 110). The stories in the chapters have nothing in common, the only link Barnes supplies are the themes that somehow connect all

the chapters. And it is this concept of heterogeneity that serves Barnes in building up toward the multiplicity of truth. Thus, Barnes refers to history as one possibility rather than the ultimate truth, alluding to the subjectivity of the individual's perspective and the degree of fabrication that each individual version necessarily comes with. History in Barnes' rendering is thus subjective and so consequently in *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters*, the author resorts to that half-chapter in which he seems to speak for himself, without any authorial distance, and mediates a somewhat romantic view of the world. Although Barnes is aware that objective truth is an illusion, he exhorts the reader not to stop longing for its discovery and offers faith in love as a solution, since he implies, that if we stop believing in love "then we merely surrender to the history of the world and to someone else's truth" (Barnes, *History* 244).

Although Barnes' historical narratives reflect the creativity with which he is able to use literary techniques, his stories are based on existing sequences of events. As much as his conception of *Flaubert's Parrot*, inspired by the life of Gustave Flaubert, and *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters* in a postmodern style, are presenting marginal, fragmentary, and neglected events in human history, the author's preference for treating historical themes that are neglected is also evident in *Arthur & George*. Barnes chooses to conceptualize this novel within the confines of the historical novel, serving the reader a story based on a true event, but with his favourite implementation of the blurred line between fiction and history with which he has already approached the treatment of the story in the two previously mentioned novels. The historical inaccuracies that Barnes has committed in his treatment of the story based on actual events can be attributed precisely to the novel's conception as historical fiction, rather than as a primary document recording the Edalji case, which, in order to emphasize certain aspects, requires supplementation with fictional elements. These

elements are noted by the thesis, particularly in Edalji's origins and family relations. Such areas of focus, perhaps because of the emphasis on racial discrimination and issues of identity, along with the motif of *Englishness*, have been in the novel replaced by Parsee-Scottish descent, instead of Parsee-English as the historical documents state. This change in George's origins is probably influenced in part by Doyle's Scottish origin. Moreover, the overall question and definition of Englishness is also addressed by Barnes in his novel *England, England*. The relevance of Barnes' narrative, in the case of *Arthur & George*, is certainly aided by the form the author has chosen, alternating narration, which, through the difference in the grammatical tense chosen in the introduction, reflects the passage of time in the novel and also the age difference between Arthur and George. The author's intention behind this book was to provide a contemporary parallel between racial prejudice occurring a hundred years ago and today (Guignery and Roberts 135). There is a certain similarity in the pattern of behaviour that Barnes detects in the two works which is a certain fixed view reflecting the way of thinking and forms of human experience crystallizing into the form of tradition that is passed down from generation to generation in society. This brings us seamlessly to the second thematic strand I have set out in this thesis, and that is the bidirectional nature of past and present in the novels of Julian Barnes.

Barnes depicts the concept of identity as preserved in tradition and conserved in the collective and personal history. Whereas in *Arthur & George*, Barnes works with the concept of identity primarily in relation to racial bias, in the patriotic novel, *England, England* he explores the concept of identity corresponding to the traditions and history of the nation and arrives at the question of problematizing the identity of the nation concerning repositioning the history and myths for a modern England. Both novels touch on the theme of national identity in conjunction

with the past, whether personal in the case of George Edalji's Parsee-Scottish descent, Martha Cochrane's identity affected by her childhood memory, or collective representing England's national identity in conjunction with its history. Barnes has shown a similar movement of working in these two novels, that is, the implementation of two narrative levels, in the case of *Flaubert's Parrot*, in which the narrator not only provides to some extent the insight into Gustave Flaubert's collective history but also inserts his personal life history into the story.

The provision of personal stories in Barnes' novels is often linked to the concept of memory and its unreliability. In such narratives, characters often return to the past, which Barnes achieves primarily through retrospective narration. In *The Sense of an Ending*, Barnes opens the novel with the character of an adolescent Tony, whose story shifts forty years in the second part of the book, and through whom the reader only learns about his past in retrospect. The narrator's past presented in the first part of the book, however, differs from that depicted in the second part, and as in the case of Geoffrey Braithwaite in *Flaubert's Parrot*, the narrator soon proves unreliable. To make sense of his past, the protagonist Tony Webster revisits his memories chronologically, and it is through the stream of consciousness that Barnes allows him to move to the past and back into the present. *Metroland* is built on a similar principle, except that, unlike *The Sense of an Ending*, it follows the three-part structure that appears also in *England, England* and is common in the author's more conventional novels. This structure, which in *The Sense of an Ending* is shortened to just two parts, allows the reader in *Metroland* to follow the story of the adult Christopher as he presents it to us, in its entirety. The retrospective view of the adolescent years of life through the perspective of an adult in Barnes' rendition, though with the knowledge that every Barnes narrator is unreliable, takes on a certain authenticity, at least in the language

and manner of expression that Barnes imbues his characters with. Moseley calls Barnes' characters in *Metroland* "precociously verbal" (19) and depending on the choice of a narrator who looks back to his younger self he highlights Barnes' narrative style of depicting, a narrator with "the mind of the adolescent with an older man's understanding of that mind's shortcomings" (ibidem), which very much resembles the narratological technique Barnes employed in *The Sense of an Ending*. The author's depiction and representation of adolescent speech fits the theme of the novel and the mentality of the characters to want to be different and stand out from the *bourgeois* society. At the same time, Barnes' love for all things French is mirrored here, as this is arguably the novel that implements the French language most abundantly from the selection of novels presented in this thesis, although it is often somewhat distracting to the reader unfamiliar with the French language due to the lack of English equivalents. However, this factor also adds an element of authenticity to the work, along with the sense that the reader cannot actually understand the characters fully. Language and prose are also major factors in capturing the reality of the late Victorian Britain in *Arthur & George*. A look into the past is captured through the retro-jealousy motif in *Before She Met Me* as well. In particular, the leitmotif of this novel is the obsession the main character faces in trying to capture his wife's romantic past. However, the motif of obsession in relation to the past is presented on a similar scale in *Flaubert's Parrot*. To capture the main idea of *Before She Met Me*, Barnes chooses a procedure that Cohn calls Psycho-narration. This approach allows the author to express the character's thoughts better than the character could express them in his own words and often hints to the reader facts of which the protagonist himself is unaware (Cohn 46). Unlike Barnes' other novels, whose narrative is progressive, this story follows the template of a regressive narrative, tracing the protagonist's path from sanity

to madness. In the novel, Barnes presents the idea, encountered in all his novels, that despite efforts to seize the past in an empirical way, the immutability of the past remains.

This thesis does not present an exhaustive and definitive analysis of the concept of the past presented in Barnes' work. Nor was such a view its intention. It consisted in analysing selected novels across the author's repertoire, with particular attention paid to the relationship between the seizing of the past and the narrative techniques the author chose to achieve this goal. Most certainly, each of the individual novels presented in this thesis could be examined as a separate subject of the thesis. However, I believe that it is the chosen mode of treatment, opening insights into the author's approach to the past in each novel, that will bring the reader closer to Barnes' narrative style along with the influences that shaped his way of thinking about the subject of the past and also influenced his depiction of this subject in the works presented. To conclude, Barnes' novels follow the template that identity is formed by memory and since memories were conceived in history and history, as Barnes points out is what historians tell us, the past presented is only as true as it can be and in itself a highly subjective matter depending on an individual perspective.

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