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FLAUBERT'S PARROT AS A POSTMODERN NOVEL

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Anotace

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá knihou anglického spisovatele 20. století, Juliana Barnese, *Flaubertův papoušek*, z hlediska postmoderny. Cílem práce je poukázat na postmoderní rysy a charakteristiky přítomné v románu a jejich význam. Dále se práce zaměřuje na analýzu a interpretaci vybraných kapitol, témat a motivů se záměrem hlubšího zkoumání a porozumění textu ve vztahu k postmoderní teorii. Práce je napsána v anglickém jazyce.

Annotation

This bachelor thesis examines the novel written by Julian Barnes, the English novelist of the 20th century, entitled *Flaubert's Parrot* from the postmodern point of view. The aim of the thesis is to depict the postmodern characteristics and features presented in the novel and to describe their significance. The thesis is focused on the analysis and the interpretation of the chosen chapters, themes and motifs with the intention to examine and to understand more profoundly the text according to the postmodern theory.

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1. Introduction

This thesis focuses on one of the most discussed literary work of 20th century written by Julian Barnes, *Flaubert's Parrot*. The aim of the thesis is to analyse the text as a postmodern novel, it intends to examine the postmodern concepts presented in the novel, to study motifs and themes and to interpret some key passages of the text.

The novel, *Flaubert's Parrot* was published in 1984 as his third literary work after *Metroland* (1980) and *Before She Met Me* (1982). Since then, many critics and theoreticians have been arguing about the genre of that book and its place in the “range” of the 20th century literature. It was his first book that was translated and therefore it made him famous abroad. He is considered to be a postmodern author *par excellence*. As is written in *Julian Barnes and the Wisdom of Uncertainty* by Sebastian Groes and Peter Childs:

his work was not postmodernist upon its arrival, but nevertheless became central to shaping the moment of British high postmodernism in the 1980s.

Barnes's work gave a clear sense of the ideas that are key to the period's intellectual history in self-scrutinizing metafiction that challenges established readings of the past and conventional social categories, and, perhaps most importantly, exhibits an interest in the intellectual significance and subversive potential of generic hybridity and serious play. (2-3)

After the publication of *Flaubert's Parrot*, Barnes was established as one of the eminent writers of the second part of 20th century. The novel met with a great acclaim in England, but also abroad, especially in France and thus his position in the literary field and canon was confirmed.

The genre of the text is the most discusses issue because the text cannot be easily classified according to known and given categories. One can take it as a biography with the fictional intrusions or as a novel with many additional passages that consist of various styles and genres. In other words, Barnes tests the limits of the novel form; he explores its possibilities and boundaries ignoring generic definitions and given limitations. He establishes the newness by his sense of innovation and his taste for idiosyncrasy. The use of different narrative forms and insertion of many other styles in

the text helps him to pose the questions concerning our relation to history, what is real and what is fictional and therefore he examines the border between the truthful and fabricated. As Merritt Moseley states: “The reader is at all times caught between the poles of true and not true, so that even the conventional signification patterns (biography presents facts, fiction presents fancy) no longer function.” (76) An interesting remark is made by Head when he points out that:

The different perspectives on Flaubert that Barnes assembles indicate that biographical writing may be a distinctly unreliable form of historical record. Yet the book remains a celebration of Flaubert the writer as personality, not just a shadowy figure from whom notable texts are known to have emanated. (16).

Barnes goes further than other postmodern writers because he approaches the boundary of art and life.

Geoffrey is a homodiegetic narrator who allows the other voices to be heard. For example, the third chronology seems to be uttered by Flaubert himself or the whole chapter 11, “Louise Colet’s Version”, as the title suggests, seems to be narrated by her. Geoffrey’s narration uses many digressions, hesitations and unclear, unfinished utterances. In fact, he classifies himself as a “hesitating narrator” on page 100.

The narrator, Geoffrey Braithwaite is a widower and retired doctor who seeks to understand his personal life via his interest in life and work of Gustave Flaubert. The framework of the text is a search for the authentic and original parrot that was used by Flaubert when writing *Un Coeur Simple*. However, the main theme is the search for truth concerning his wife and more generally, he tries to understand his life and his position in the world.

Julian Barnes also parodies literary criticism in his novel but he cannot evade it. The novel contains many passages that comment on the literature and where he expresses his idea about the writings. For that reason, it is sure that literary criticism is an inherent and inseparable part of the fiction.

The novel consists of three different layers of narration – the Flaubert’s story, the parrot’s story and the one of Geoffrey Braithwaite. These narrations are constantly

overlapping and echoing one another. These diegetic levels are progressing thanks to the use of foreshadowing, flashbacks or leitmotifs. The parrot serves as a paradigm for the whole text. But the real realm and framework of the book is the Ellen's story that serves also as a leitmotif of the novel. There are many direct references and allusions in the text that lead to Ellen and in the chapter 13, she finally becomes the main issue. Therefore, this chapter can be seen as the climax of the novel. In fact, the novel is Geoffrey's quasi autobiography, the narration is motivated mostly existentially because the narrator is seeking for some kind of confession and emotional salvation. At first glance, the novel might seem as an incoherent and unsystematic narration. However, there are some hints and clues suggesting that the text possesses some kind of structure.

2. Postmodernism

In this section, I would like to focus my attention on the aesthetics of postmodernism and its main characteristics. I would like to point out the common features of that movement and the novel *Flaubert's Parrot*.

First at all, it is necessary to state that the definition of postmodernism is not easy to provide because it is impossible to define a movement which is alive and still in process. Literary theoreticians are not sure about its beginning either. According to Linda Hutcheon, it started in the 1960s and 1970s, but firstly this term was employed for a new trend in architecture. Moreover, critics argue whether postmodernism is an attitude, a school of thought, a period or a cultural phenomenon. The only thing that seems to be clear is the fact that this movement succeeds the period of modernism, and Scott and many others ask: “whether it is a movement opposed to modernism or rather its logical successor” (18). Also, Linda Hutcheon stated that: “Postmodernism’s relation to modernism is typically contradictory. It marks neither a simple and radical break from it nor a straightforward continuity with it: it is both and neither.” (18). There is no doubt that these two movements have a lot of features in common, yet many differences can be found, too. The period of modernism brought some changes to the literature like changes on formal or stylistic level (stream of consciousness), blurring of distinctions between genres and focus on fragmented forms and discontinuous narratives. And postmodernism has developed many of these characteristics. But the difference is that modernism saw history and human identity as fragmented, and consequently, there is a feeling of loss and fear of the future. Moreover, there is a revolt against the established cultural norms, but later modernism itself became established cultural form. Postmodernism is against these notions. As we can read in Barry’s *Beginning Theory*:

Both periods give great prominence to fragmentation as a feature of twentieth-century art and culture, but they do so in very different moods. The modernist features it in such a way as to register a deep nostalgia for an earlier age. [...] There is a tone of lament, pessimism, and despair about the world which finds its appropriate representation in these fractured art forms. For the postmodernist, by contrast, fragmentation is an exhilarating, liberating

phenomenon, symptomatic of our claustrophobic embrace of fixed systems of belief. (83-84).

So what are the main features of that movement? I will state the most prominent and important.

2.1. Plurality

Postmodernism no longer respects any universal values; there is a semantic and structural multiplicity. The plurality manifests itself in the use of multiple voices that are often overlapping, in description of marginalized and outcast characters, in the use of various styles and genres within one work.

That notion of plurality suggests the idea of multiples realities or plurality of opinions and ideas about the life. In postmodernism everything is relative. Nothing is strictly and firmly set in the system, therefore, the concept of plurality perfectly corresponds to the needs of that movement to express the disorder and chaos.

For instance, I can cite an example of plurality given in the text that concerns the issue of Emma Bovary's eyes. Flaubert endows her with a spectrum of eye colours. Some critics may see it as author's carelessness but Geoffrey claims that it does not really matter. It always depends on context and situation and different colour expresses different feelings and personalities, according to established clichés, and because Flaubert wanted to create a complex character, he had to use more colour shades to reach his goal. So it is a sign of Flaubert's literary creativity, not an inaccuracy. The reality is not just black and white, there are many nuances and tones, and this plurality is therefore unavoidable.

Another use of postmodern plurality concerns the generic hybridity when one can observe many genres employed within one book. That notion of genre hybridity is highly prominent in Julian Berne's book, too, when he mixes the genres as examination paper, biography, dictionary, fiction and even pastiche. The narrator justifies it by claiming: "Nature is always a mixture of genres." (157). But it is not just the passion for hybridizing the genres that is present in the text. Additionally, multiple voices can be heard through the novel and thus a variety of points of view are offered to the reader.

Another important element is a rejection of a clear and close ending. On the contrary the reader's participation in the creation of the meaning of a text is desired.

Thus, the author does not provide the reader with a general, truthful and objective version of reality. Instead, one has space to create relative and multiple realities. Linda Hutcheon states in *The Poetics of Postmodernism*: “Postmodern novels like Flaubert’s *Parrot, A Maggot* openly assert that there are only truths in the plural and never one Truth.” (109). Therefore, the reader is forced to rethink the propositions given in a text and to manifest a critical distance toward the depicted reality.

2.2. The end of grand narratives

Another key concept in postmodern theory is the death of grand narratives. Postmodernism refuses to accept any structure or, what Lyotard calls, “master narrative”. The enormous philosophical or religious systems that shaped the basis of western societies and their thinking as Christianity, Psychoanalysis, Marxism, Capitalism, Darwinism or Historicism are considered to be insufficient. There is a shift from those grand narratives that no longer satisfy the needs of our civilization to the mini-narratives that concern the marginal and common people. I can quote Cornelia Stott’s words in *The Sounds of Truth*:

In rejecting and deconstructing grand narratives, postmodernism favours “mini-narratives”: stories that explain small practices or local events, rather than large-scale universal or global concepts. Postmodern “mini-narratives” are always situational, provisional, contingent, and temporary, making no claim to universality, truth, reason, or stability. (23)

Linda Hutcheon is speaking about “rethinking and putting into question the bases of our western modes of thinking.” (8). Therefore, postmodernism transgresses previously accepted limits of arts or genres. It changes the center of interest of literary works; it destabilizes the deep-rooted rules and tacit laws.

This concept is applied to the *Flaubert’s Parrot* when the text is centralized around the indifferent and common character of Geoffrey Braithwaite, in the center of interest there is a common and outcast man.

2.3. The problem of originality

The concept of originality is transformed in postmodern literature. Moreover, it is parodied when postmodern works do not pretend to be new and original. On the contrary, they use many devices such as allusion, quotations or pastiche to recontextualize the original meaning in a completely new cultural and linguistic context. In other words, the familiar and known is put in a new and unusual context. Many postmodern authors use not only the old forms and genres to build the meaning, but also they use the plagiarism or false quotations from known texts. In that place it is important to add that plagiarism is not seemed in its negative connotation. It is used in order to create an irony or an effect of parody. That is the reason why many critics are speaking about “pla(y)giraism”, because the playfulness represents an important characteristic of postmodern texts. There is some kind of joy from creation as well as from the destruction. In Barnes’s work, the gap between these two meanings seems to be closed. One can hardly say if he is creating something new and original or if he is just working on already existing texts and abusing the old forms and constructions.

Another major theorist of postmodernism, Jean Baudrillard, speaks about “the loss of the real”, which means that there is a loss of the distinction between illusion and reality or between real and imagined. The idea of stable society disappears; there are only signifiers without signifieds. Baudrillard uses a term “simulacrum”. Simulacra are copies that depict things that had no original. He states that the postmodern society replaced all reality and meaning with signs and symbols. In other words, what we experience is a simulation of reality, or “hyperreality”. That means that in our current society there are no originals, only copies. The topic of authenticity and truthfulness is presented through the whole text. Barnes explains that: “If you don’t know what’s true, or what’s meant to be true, than the value of what isn’t true, or isn’t meant to be true, becomes diminished.” (84) The reader is constantly forced to speculate, what the original is and consider what is the authentic and what is not. Whether the words pronounced are real or invented. Therefore, the blending of reality and fiction, of originals and copies (see the problem of statues and parrots) is one of the key characteristics of the postmodern movement that is represented in *Flaubert’s Parrot* too. Life is seen as a mere parrotry, where all actions of characters are just the mimicry of the real. Therefore the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction and between art and life are crossed.

The unclear distinction between quoted and original words is visible for instance in *Flaubert's Parrot* on page 133. There is continuity between the epigram to Chapter 9 (quotation of James Fenton) and the first sentence of the chapter. I quote:

It is not what they built. It is what they knocked down.

It is not the houses. It is the spaces between the houses.

It is not the streets that exist. It is the streets that no longer exist.

But it's also what they didn't build.

This notion is closely connected with the problem of the Truth. The desire to grasp the truth is highly manifested not only in that text, but also in other postmodern pieces of work. As James B. Scott in *Parrot as Paradigms: Infinite Deferral of Meaning in „Flaubert's Parrot“* states:

Reality and truth are the illusions produced when systems of discourse (especially artistic discourse) impinge on human consciousness. In practice, this has led postmodern novelists to strive to undermine hermeneutic responses to art by foregrounding the discourse that informs their artefact, thereby implying that not only is the final “meaning” of a work of art forever unknowable, but also any orthodox truth is actually a discourse-generated fluke.“ (57).

However, the skepticism about the possibility to find and reach the truth does not mean there is no truth at all. Geoffrey Braithwaite does not deny its existence, he suggests that life does not explain anything; on contrary it is confusing and full of unanswered questions. Therefore he concludes that: “Books are where things are explained to you, life is where things aren't.” (201). Anyway, he shows himself not to be able to reach the truth neither via the books. As he later adds: “Books make sense of life. The only problem is that the lives they make sense of are other's people lives, never your own.” (201).

2.4. Parody and Pastiche

The most suitable form of writing for postmodern writers seems to be parody. This form forces a reconsideration of the notion of originality. One of the main aims of parody is to emphasize a difference between the past and present. This aspect is mainly

manifested by the use of irony. Postmodern parody becomes self-reflexive by referring to other traditional literary genres and myths. Moreover, it gives an alternative vision of reality and history. By transforming and changing the parodied literary work, the reader is forced to reconsider the past and its values and their meaning and sense in the present. Linda Hutcheon states that: “Parody seems to offer a perspective on the present and the past which allows an artist to speak to discourse from within it, but without being totally recuperated by it.” (35). And she adds: “Parody of the classical tradition offers a set of references that not only remain meaningful to the public but also continue to be compositionally useful to artist.” (34) To summarize, to parody is both to preserve the past and to question it.

As an example of parody I can mention Chapter 12, where essential nature of parody lies in a subversion of reader’s expectation that are associated with the form of dictionary, moreover he parodies the Flaubert’s oeuvre, *Dictionary of Accepted Ideas*.

This chapter is entitled *Braithwaite’s Dictionary of Accepted Ideas* but this passage does not represent a canonical dictionary because it is not consistent in many ways. For instance, the entries are chosen by Geoffrey according to his subjectivity and the different concepts are mixed together. Proper names and common nouns can be found together; the definitions of particular entries are fragmented and commented by Geoffrey. Yet he respects the alphabetical order and all letters are included in that “dictionary”. In general, the purpose of dictionary is to explain and to teach the reader, it contains self-content explanation of the given concepts which of course is not the case of the text. And this is what makes it an ironical chapter.

Parody is closely connected with pastiche, a literary work composed from elements borrowed from another writer. But unlike the parody, the aim of pastiche is not to make fun of the original text. It is an intertextual strategy that is usually double-coded because it refers to another older text and to the current society and thus the older, original text is used in a different light of the contemporary world.

Flaubert’s Parrot can be regarded as a sort of parody or pastiche of *Family Idiot*, a monumental and uncompleted biography of Flaubert written by Sartre. *L’Idiot de la Famille* thus represents some kind of urtext for *Flaubert’s Parrot*. Sartre had an intention to seize Flaubert through the relics such as letters or writing about Flaubert. He believes in psychoanalytical, sociological and philosophical methods. Julian Barnes makes fun of those academic procedures and he doubts the passion for the “relics”,

when asking: “What makes us randy for relics? Don’t we believe the words enough? Do we think the leavings of a life contain some ancillary truth?” (3). Yet, he behaves in the same way as Sartre.

It seems to be clear that parody plays an important part in the text of Julian Barnes. He parodies the other texts, the traditional forms; the ideas taken for granted but also he lampoons himself. *Flaubert’s Parrot* is a pastiche of stories with many layers.

2.5. Intertextuality and metafiction

Other component of postmodernism is intertextuality, this concept is not completely new but it is employed in different way. This term was firstly used by Julia Kristeva in 1960s and it designates according to *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*: “various relationships that a given text may have with other texts. These intertextual relationships include anagram, allusion, translation, parody, pastiche, imitation and other kinds of transformation”. According to Linda Hutcheon: “Postmodern intertextuality is a formal manifestation of both a desire to close the gap between past and present of the reader and a desire to rewrite the past in a new context.” (118) Therefore every text is a mosaic of quotations; any text is a transformation of another. Hence, the role of the author is questioned because the text exists within specific cultural and literary context and therefore it is open to multiple interpretations, it is no longer a product of an author.

Closely connected with the notion of intertextuality is the concept of metafiction. Metafictional means that a literary work refers to itself, therefore that work is self-reflexive and self-conscious. Cornelia Stott defines metafiction as “a kind of fiction that self-consciously addresses and employs the devices of fiction.” (40) The main purpose of metafiction is to make the reader aware of the distance towards reality. The familiar is put in an unusual context and thus it forces the reader to rethink the propositions s/he may take for granted. Metafiction usually uses intertextual references, allusions and therefore incorporates aspects of literary theory or criticism. Authors using this technique often violate narrative procedures by making comments on writing, directly addressing the reader or involving himself/herself with fictional character. They employ unconventional and experimental techniques and reject an effort to imitate “real life”. By using the metafiction, the authors indicate a contrast between reality and its

linguistic representation, they point out the fictionality of fiction and they show the gap between the past and present.

The self-reflexivity of the *Flaubert's Parrot* is obvious; one can find many considerations of the function of literature and its aesthetics, such as on page 97:

“Style is not imposed on subject-matter, but arises from it. Style is truth to thought. The correct word, the true phrase, the perfect sentences are always ‘out there’ somewhere, the writer’s task is to locate them by whatever means he can.”

One can observe many direct apostrophes too, for example on page 95, where the narrator addresses the reader by saying: “You expect something from me too, don’t you?” or on page 100: “Listen, I hope you won’t think this rude, but I really must take a turn on deck, it’s becoming quite stuffy in the bar here.”. Therefore, in the postmodern movement the ontological issue such a relationship between the author and the reader, between reality and fiction or more generally between art and life are treated.

2.5.1. Historiographic metafiction

This term was coined by Linda Hutcheon in the late 1980s and it designates literary works that combine historical fiction with devices of metafiction. It mixes the fictional and the historical genre and therefore it manifests its conscious self-reflexivity and its interest in history.

Consequently, the concept of the past is questioned. There is that dilemma of seizing the past when we are according to Hutcheon “epistemologically limited in our ability to know the past, since we are both spectators of and actors in the historical process.” (122) We can touch the past only through texts that are subjective to some extent; they cannot be transparent records of any bygone reality. It invites the reader to re-evaluate a dialogue with the past in the light of the present. History, to some extent, can be seen as a human construct and it does not exist except as text, accordingly its accessibility to us is conditioned by textuality. “History is merely another literary genre: the past is autobiographical fiction pretending to be a parliamentary report.” (101), explains the narrator jocularly. So there is that notion of incertitude concerning our inability to know the past, as Geoffrey asks concisely: “How do we seize the past?” (100) This ontological problem is augmented by the destruction of the boundaries

between the fictional and the real world when the real personae of the past are presented in the text to validate the authenticity of the fictional world. That is also the case of *Flaubert's Parrot*, where a coexistence of invented and real character is usual. I can show this intention when a certain Ed Winterton, an invented persona is mentioned and Dr Enid Starkie, who was a real literary critic. In addition to that, the distinction between fiction and history is violated when the producer of metafiction is both a novel writer and a historian. The reliability of the narrator is therefore highly questioned. In correspondence with Barnes's work, I quote Cornelia Stott, who writes:

“Barnes's oeuvre exemplifies postmodern skepticism 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.” (10)

2.6. The Problem of Reference

In postmodernism, the uncertainty and instability is manifested on the linguistic level as well when the rapport between the linguistic sign and its referent is weakened. It makes us aware of the incoherence between reality and its linguistic representation. It is important to state that in a Saussurian context, language is a system of signs, consisting of signifieds and signifiers. The referent is not a part of that system which of course does not deny its existence. But it presumes that sometimes it cannot be reached immediately through knowledge. This difference between these two systems is close to the post-structuralist theories of meaning like Derrida's idea that there is nothing outside the text or Foucault's antipathy to accept language as referring to any first-order reference. As I have already said, it is not a denial of reference but it suggests that meaning can be gathered from the text through “différance”.

So the new issue raised in postmodernism is how language seizes the reality. Many critics argue that language will be always insufficient, it will never be able to grasp the non-linguistic. Julian Barnes uses a metaphor of “language as a cracked

kettle” in Flaubert’s *Parrot*, this definition was taken from *Madame Bovary*, but it is employed by Barnes in *Flaubert’s Parrot* many times. For example the definition appears on page 11 or 51. That metaphor suggests that there is always something that leaks our ability to catch it verbally.

Subjectivity is a fundamental characteristic of language; therefore the referred reality would be never objective and truthful.

To that point, I would like to summarize and add few more comments on postmodern aesthetics. Postmodernism shares some aspects with modernism such as fragmentation or destruction of “I”; it uses methods of collages, mosaics and juxtaposition. In postmodern writing reality often overlaps with fiction, hallucinations or dreams. The important point is the destruction of clear boundaries between high and low culture, between fictional and real, between genres or between art and life. It emphasizes irony, parody and playfulness. Postmodern pieces of literature are self-conscious, ambiguous and incoherent. This chaos is celebrated and it can be seen as a transgression of previously accepted limits. As David Lodge states: “Postmodernism is a rule-breaking kind of art.” (245)

In the following section I would like to approach the text of *Flaubert’s Parrot* from two different perspectives. Firstly, I will examine the novel from the generic point of view and secondly, I will analyze its structure and form.

3. Approaching Flaubert’s Parrot

3.1. Generic approach

In this paragraph, I would like to focus on the generic structure of the novel. The most obvious distinctive quality of the text is the fact that it is a non-linear fragmented novel composing all sorts of texts. It could be designated as a literary collage because it is a patchwork of various kinds of texts and jumbled collection of literary styles. For instance Chapter 2 looks like biography or chronology, Chapter 4 seems to be a bestiary, Chapter 7 a dictionary or Chapter 14 is presented as an examination paper. Therefore, the text is a mosaic of many elements, a fabric of segments of texts of various aesthetics and linguistic origins. It is not easy to define the genre of the text

because of the lack of generic stability and the lack of univocity. The reader does not know who speaks. Is it Flaubert, Geoffrey or Barnes himself? To concretize it I would claim that the narrator is Geoffrey Braithwaite but as I will point out later, the text seems to be also an essay on literary criticism and as such, it is an author's voice, the voice of Julian Barnes, that is heard. Thanks to the use of quotations, other voices such as Flaubert's can be observed.

The text thus shatters the reader's generic expectations and the variety of writing styles is used to perceive notion of human history and knowledge in completely different light. The polymorphous and innovated text is gained thanks to the superimposition, combination and interplay of multiple genres, narrative forms, styles, registers or voices. Consequently, the text does not fit to any strict classification. As the postmodern work, it emphasizes the flexibility of novels and it rejects the idea about clear boundaries between genres and rigid distinction between high and low culture. Contrary, the postmodern aesthetics focuses on fragmented forms, discontinuous narratives and ambiguity. The important is irony, parody and playfulness of the text. The book seems to accept those criteria. There is no doubt Barnes experiments with extreme forms and therefore his texts evade a strict categorization. The notion of genre is shaped and characterized by reader's expectations concerning its form or styles. The recognition of genre serves as a clue what the reader should be looking for and how the text could be interpreted. However, in the case of Julian Barnes, there is no solid ground for building the meaning because of the multiplicity of "genres" within one book. Moreover, the interpretation is more complicated because of burlesque treatment of each of this genre.

Anyway, there is at least one qualifier that can be applied to *Flaubert's Parrot*- it is a text which means it is a consecution of words, it is the actual wording. Barnes himself makes an ironic reference to that limitation while writing: "Contemporary critics who pompously reclassify all novels and plays and poems as texts [...]" (98). It means that the obsession of categorization of literature is not really needed. The genre and form of literary works are not definitive; on contrary their nature is dubious. There is only one thing that seems to be certain, that all the literary pieces of works are some sorts of text, the ensemble of letters and phrases.

Another dilemma of generic character of the text concerns the fabulation. In *Flaubert's Parrot* the ontological determination between fiction and non-fiction, in other words the boundary between fictional and factual is blurred. The narrator fabulates multiple truths in order to accept and to seize his life more easily and to become more certain about his position in the world. The destabilized effect is created by the lack of distinction between real and fictional characters.

Presence of historical figures creates a “reality effect” defined by Barthes. This caused that fictional characters and events are endeavoured with credibility because of presence of historical figures. *Flaubert's Parrot* seems to be rather a contamination of factual by fictional. Geoffrey's life is better accessed via fiction; I can quote from page 197: “I have to hypothesise a little. I have to fictionalise (though that's not what I meant when I called this a pure story). We never talked about her secret life. So I have to invent my way to the truth.”

To summarize, I can state that Barnes seems to be interested in hybridising the genres of the novel and the biography but biography will always be to some extent a fiction. This idea is expressed in *Flaubert's Parrot* when Geoffrey Braithwaite states in the very first lines on page 35:

“You can define a net of two ways, depending on your point of view.

Normally, you would say that it is a meshed instrument designed to catch fish. But you could, with no great injury to logic, reverse the image and define a net as a jocular lexicographer once did: he called it a collection of holes tied together with string. You can do the same thing with a biography.”

It means that we cannot truly seize the biographee because of the cultural or historical gap that exists between the biographer and his subject and therefore there is some space for him to “fill in” and to guess missing pieces of information.

The structure of *Flaubert's Parrot* is presented as a fictional biography of Flaubert, but if the reader examines the text deeply and profoundly, he or she will find out that in fact the text is a sort of the narrator's biography. That idea is expressed also by Cornelia Stott when she writes:

“So although the double biography nature of the book has been emphasised, it appears to be more of a Flaubert biography than a Braithwaite

novel. Braithwaite as a narrator does not really have much of a story to tell but rather holds the chapters together through his person and with his Flaubert research project.“ (71)

I would like to conclude this section with C. Stott’s opinion that biographical writing “forms one of the most prominent postmodern forms of writing because of its concern with the past and its openness to parody and experiment.” (47) And maybe that is the reason why the biography was chosen by Barnes as one of the most prominent genres for his text.

Finally, postmodernism is an anti-representational and non-narrative movement where the traditional linear plot is missing and elements such as conclusive ending are usually rejected. This “characteristics” is completely in accordance with Barnes’s text.

In the second part of that chapter I would like to draw my attention to the structure and form of the text.

3.2. Structural approach

There is a lack of generic unity in *Flaubert’s Parrot* and lack of distinction between facts and fiction, yet it is not chaotic. The book is divided into 15 clearly entitled chapters while the central chapter is the longest one, it literary “crosses the channel” as its title suggests. This is an important chapter because in that section Geoffrey reveals his inner feelings and presents his personal side more than in other chapters. In that place he also introduces the structure of the syuzhet of the text:

“Three stories contend within me. One about Flaubert, one about Ellen, one about myself. My own is the simplest of the three – it hardly amounts to more than a convincing proof of my existence – and yet I find it the hardest to begin. My wife’s is more complicated, and more urgent, yet I resist that too.” (94-95).

So we have three stories that are central for the book and one additional concerning the search for the parrot, which is a framework of the book. The book

manifests some kind of closeness because the final chapter echoes the opening one. Chapter 1 is entitled “Flaubert’s Parrot” and it introduces the topics such as statue, parrot, the search for authenticity etc. The last Chapter is named “And the Parrot...” and it echoes these topics. Consequently there is a circulation within one book.

Another mark of the structure is an organization of lists that are highly employed in the novel. The criteria for that organization are various but clear, I can mention alphabetical (“Braithwaite’s Dictionary of Accepted Ideas”), or chronological (“Chronology”) order. The use of listing manifests some kind of ironical colouring because there is no clear significant combination principle. For instance, Chapter 4, “The Flaubert Bestiary”, there is no principle according to which the listed animals are organized, the same idea can be applied to Chapter 8, “The Train-spotter’s Guide to Flaubert”. The use of lists creates an ironic effect in the novel because it parodies their function; it means the effort to stabilize and to maintain the structure. “[Lists, compendia, etc.] inevitably foreground the struggle to maintain a secure categorical border and to stabilize an enclosed data pool constantly threatened by structural collapse or chaotic intrusion” (40) writes Vanessa Guignery in *The Fiction of Julian Barnes*.

The author makes an attempt to keep chaos at bay and he tries to unify the text with one “totalitarian” project that is the search for the original parrot that was used as a model for Flaubert while writing *Un Coeur Simple*. It can be noted that the parrot functions as a framework for the text.

Reader’s interpretations and constructions are constantly challenged by abnormality of its constituents and by diversity of texts inserted in main text. Consequently, the reader is in an instable position, the narrator plays with its expectations and the implicit contract of “lisibilité” is broken. For that reason, *Flaubert’s Parrot* is a demanding text that plays with conventions which is one of the main postmodern characteristics. I extract that idea from Roland Barthes theory of readerly (lisible) and writerly (scriptible) text. According to him, readerly text does all the work for reader, therefore the reader is a passive consumer. Contrary to the writerly text that forces the reader to work and it resists to the conventions of readerly (realist) textuality. In other words, it breaks the assumptions of linguistics transparencies and self-evidences of meaning.

To make it more clearly, I can quote from *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* that:

“Contrary to the readerly text to which the reader’s response is more or less passive, a writerly text makes demand on the reader, s/he has to work things out, look out for and provide meaning. It tends to focus attention on how it is written, on the mechanics of it, the particular use of language. It tends to be self-conscious; it calls out to itself as a work of art. It also makes the reader into a producer.”

To summarize, I would state that although one can consider the text as a structural and thematic deconstruction, the text is not a complete chaos. But there is a demand on the reader to cooperate and to construct its own interpretation.

In next chapter I will focus on the novel itself. I would like to analyse more profoundly the selected chapters and to interpret the themes presented in the text regarding to the postmodern theory.

4. Reading *Flaubert’s Parrot* as a postmodern novel

“Postmodern art similarly asserts and then deliberately undermines such principles as value, order, meaning, control and identity that have been the basic premises bourgeois liberalism.” (13) argues Linda Hutcheon and I would claim that the word “postmodern” in that statement could be easily replaced with “Flaubert’s Parrot” and the utterance would be still completely true. The destruction of traditional premises, instability of concepts and enigmatic link between ineducability and dissemination of knowledge is typical for the postmodern theory as well as for this text. Postmodernism concerns with the nature of knowledge and with an access to it, this phenomenon is also highly presented in the book. I can remain Geoffrey’s effort to find out the authentic parrot and any pieces of information concerning Flaubert.

Another concept in common is the problem of originality. In postmodernism, there is an idea that signifiers always point to signifieds, where resides the reality, is no longer true due to the fact that there are only signifiers and thus reality disappears.

There are no originals, only copies and this declaration is crucial for the text. The problem of originality is adumbrated by Stott:

“In the text the parrot is called “an emblem of the writer’s voice”, a statement which can be seen as based on Barthes’s theory but also on Saussure’s theory of language, according to which a writer does not create anything new but only makes use of the existing system according to his aims or wishes. This position is quoted by Braithwaite when he says “The parrot / writer feebly accepts language as something received, imitative and inert...on est parlé - one is spoken. (11).” (94)

Accordingly, no work is original because everything is just a collection of quotations and paraphrases from earlier texts or thoughts.

4.1. Analysis of themes and motifs

In the next section, I would like to draw my attention to some themes and motifs that are presented in the text. I have chosen just few of them that I consider being the most important regarding to the postmodern aesthetics and its possible interpretation.

4.1.1. Desire in *Flaubert’s Parrot*

Desire designates a strong wish; worthy or unworthy, for something that seems to be out of reach. This sense of longing is constantly present through the text. I can distinguish few different types of lusts that will be discussed in the next lines.

The most prominent is a desire for Flaubert as an author, for his original, authentic voice. Geoffrey’s desire for Flaubert as a source of the Logos is illustrated in his fixation on object of creation. In the front place, it is a fixation on the parrot as a symbol of the logos. This fixation usually leads to the extreme form of fetishism. From that point of view, Braithwaite also manifests some kind of desire for Flaubert as a man. As examples I can mention a series of fetishist fixations like: belongings to Flaubert, places or houses where Flaubert lived or visited. Geoffrey makes a pilgrimage from one place to another in hope to find more about Flaubert’s life. He is also

interested in his body and anecdotes/ quotations from his life. “The search is a sign of love, I maintain.” (148)

Another sort of desire presents in the text is a lust for knowledge. This desire takes sometimes form of “encyclopedism”. The narrator very often manifests a collector’s syndrome, Geoffrey collects elements about Flaubert and he is fascinated with the perspective of having more. This attitude is illustrated in his meeting with Ed. Next, I can refer to a desire of biographer for material, which is of course connected with Geoffrey’s fetishist attitude toward Flaubert. The narrator is working on hypothesis, hypothesising is a manifestation of desire in the biographer’s work, and he is in need of material.

Desire can be also defined as a sexual appetite or sexual drive. This meaning is obviously presents in the text too, the narrator demonstrates a lust for others, also for women, more precisely for his wife. He experiences frustration and alienation in encounter with an adultery of his wife and that frustration causes that a desire takes form of perversion. The perversion has many forms, for instance the interest of knowing the worst. “Or is it, more simply, that wanting to know the worst is love’s favourite perversion? [...] I loved Ellen, and I wanted to know the worst.” (147) Moreover, his perversion is shown in his obsession with sex and sexuality. For instance, the fixation on female body like in the Chapter 6 that is dedicated to Emma Bovary’s eyes. He has got voyeuristic attitude and interests in Flaubert’s sexuality (Chapter 11). Moreover, the text is full of references to perverted relationships (Chapter 10), thanatophilia and lunatic allusions.

Last but not least, I would like to pay attention to the narrator’s desire for authority and mastery. Geoffrey longs for an absolute control, as a narrator, over the reader’s reading. He interrupts the narrative with various intrusions in order to lead the reader. Thus he plays a role of a dictator of literature, who makes his literary projects and dreams come true. For instance, on page 95 we can read: “You expect something from me too, don’t you?” that shows us that Geoffrey anticipates reader’s reactions. Moreover, he comments on reader’s participation on the plot, page 99-100: “That’s what I call offering the reader a choice of endings, but you may find me quite unreasonably literal-minded.” Therefore the narrator proves himself to be self-reflexive.

The insecurity and instability alongside to the desire for mastery creates a perfect irony, so desired in postmodern aesthetics.

4.1.2. Death in Flaubert's Parrot

Another theme that seems to be visible through the whole text is the theme of death. One can read the novel like a text dominated by death and text suffused with morbid lexicon.

Geoffrey Braithwaite is a widower and writing Flaubert's Parrot helps him to overcome the trauma of his wife's death. Writing thus amounts to mourning and can be considered to be sort of a therapeutic method. In other words, writing about Flaubert enables Geoffrey to talk about the unspeakable; the text is woven about and above a central ellipsis, namely the circumstances of Ellen's death, more precisely her committing suicide. The mystery or the enigma of her death is progressively revealed in the cracks of the text, like series of prolepses – "But I'll keep that for another time." (82)

From that perspective, the narrator possesses an obsessive fascination for morbidity, it would be hard to make an exhaustive list of all words and expressions related to death in the text, but this is one of the prominent lexicons in *Flaubert's Parrot*. One can observe his fascination for morbid details, for instance, the second chronology is mainly focused on death and disease, Flaubert is said to be "born *entre deux morts*"(22), similarly, the third chronology abounds with references to Flaubert's decaying body: "I feel uprooted, like a mass of dead seaweed tossed here and there in the waves" (33), "I feel I'm liquefying like an old Camembert. (34) All above that, Geoffrey expresses the fascination for physical or spiritual degeneration, attraction to patterns of decay, for example ruined monuments, but also allure to dejections and excrements. This can be shown in page 32-33: "There is a Latin phrase which means roughly, 'To pick up farthing from the shit with your teeth.' It was a rhetorical figure applied to the miserly. I am like them; I will stop at nothing to find gold." On the other hand, the narrator expresses the positive point of view of death too. "For the religious, death destroys the body and liberates the spirit, for the artist, death destroys the personality and liberates the work." (95) Although, the idea of the death as the liberator is more or less an exception in the text.

The most significant for the narrator is his interest in the circumstances of people's death and this morbid passion culminates in Chapter 7 when Geoffrey bluntly utters the words of death: "Use the short, simple, true words. Dead, I say, and dying, and mad, and adultery. I don't say passed on or slipping away or terminal [...] or personality disorder, or fooling around, bit on the side, well she's away a lot visiting her sister." (102)

In this macabre game, *eros*, designating desire, pleasure principle or vital impulse, and *thanatos*, that has connotations to death are closely intertwined.

These connotations and symbols connected to the death are rather obvious. However, the theme can be interpreted on much deeper level and so it makes it more complex and significant. In my opinion, this theme designates also the death of the author. The question of authorship and originality is typical for the novel as well as for the postmodernist period. This complicated text is apart from the biography and novel also some kind of manifestation of literary criticism. The collage of these stories is filled with the author's comments on the aesthetics and principles in the literature. "Style is not imposed on subject-matter, but arises from it. Style is truth to thought. The correct word, the true phrase, the perfect sentences are always 'out there' somewhere, and the writer's task is to locate them by whatever means he can." (97) In addition to that we read on page 15 Geoffrey's statement: "The writer's voice – what makes you think it can be located that easily?" The reader is left alone in this literary labyrinth, with the various corridors and he or she has to orient himself/herself nearly without any help. He makes us think over the complicated plot and its sub-plots but also we are forced to wonder about the literature as a phenomenon.

The author is always absent in literary texts, in analogy, the author is not more than the instance writing, which means that s/he does not exist before and does not survive after the very moment of writing. The reader is confronted to the "Death of the Author" and is left with his remains – that is, with the text: "Nothing much else to do with Flaubert has ever lasted. [...] all that remains of him is paper. Paper, ideas, phrases, metaphors, structured prose which turns into sounds"(2). In other words, Flaubert's texts and writings amount to "litter" for

Geoffrey who cannot retrieve the author of *Mademme Bovary*, his original voice in his text. Roland Barthes explains in *The Death of the Author*:

“Linguistically, the author is never more than the instance writing, just as I is nothing more than the instance saying I: language knows a ‘subject’, not a ‘person’, and this subject, empty outside the very enunciation which defines it, suffices to make language ‘hold together’, suffices, that is to say, to exhaust it.”
(145)

The literary historians provide us with knowledge that Gustave Flaubert tried to be really invisible in his texts. “The author in his book must be like God in in his universe, everywhere present and nowhere visible.” (98) Another irony of the text lies on the fact that one of the Geoffrey’s quest is to understand Gustave Flaubert as a man and as an author. That is the reason why all the relics, such as letters or parrots are so important for him. However, Barthes claims the opposite: “Writing is the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing.” (142) Therefore, Geoffrey quest is impossible to fulfil. One may ask with Geoffrey: “Is the writer much more than a sophisticated parrot?” (10).

Finally, I would like to claim, that there is another postmodern message in the novel, death of the Logos, the word as a concept is a failure.

The parrot is a key symbol of the book, it is its framework. Yet, as a symbol, the parrot is the most ambiguous and ironic one for many reasons. Firstly, it is stuffed, which means that it has lost its voice and therefore it is speechless. Then, it is inauthentic, or maybe I would rather say that its authenticity is questionable, which suggests that the true, authentic voice is never to be heard. Parrot is the most human animal with its faculty to “speak” but still it is idiotic or inane because it is bound to mere reproduction as opposed to creation. Geoffrey himself states on the page 15 that: “the parrot, representing clever vocalisation without much brain power”.

Irony lies also in the fact, that it represents an ever-elusive symbol. Its status as metaphor is ruined by absence; it is constantly lost, absent and missing.

From another point of view, the death of the Logos is represented as an inadequacy of language. It is the same for its recalcitrance or for its transience. The emphasis also falls on things unutterable, where the repetition looks like a symptomatic figure whenever Geoffrey approaches a nodal point that means something which proves unutterable. For instance, on page 107: “We were happy, we were unhappy, we were happy enough”.

Consequently, the parrot is an emblem of the writer’s voice. To parrot according to *Oxford Learner’s Dictionary* is to: “repeat what somebody else has said without thinking about what it means“. The language is never original; it is just collection of quotes from earlier texts. This is an issue I will discuss in more details in the section 4.2.4. Use and Abuse of quotations in *Flaubert’s Parrot*.

4.1.3. Obliquity, Obliteration and Oblivion in *Flaubert’s Parrot*

In that section I would like to focus on other key theme of the novel, obliquity and oblivion.

Obliquity designs a state of being oblique, or it is the divergence from right, moral conduct, it is indirectness in action or speech, it can design a deviation from a rule or order and finally confusing or obscure statement or passage of writing.

Obliteration is defined as the act of removing all signs of something, either by destroying or covering it completely, it means getting rid of in the mind completely, blotting out.

Oblivion is a state or fact of forgetting or having been forgotten or no longer being considered important. It also could denote a state in which something has been completely destroyed.

These three terms are to be applied to the central character, Geoffrey Braithwaite, in his relation to the past, and in particular in his relation to his personal past. The whole text weaves together these aspects in intention to express Geoffrey’s desire to make his past less painful, and possibly to forget it. This leads to his attempt at least to obliterate it by means of obliquity. In other words, obliquity and indirectness in

speech and actions are part of a strategy, the purpose of which is to obliterate the past, to cause it to disappear from view, if not to cancel it and forget it.

This attitude seems to be similar to the Flaubert's philosophy that is conveyed in his novel *L'Éducation sentimentale* while writing: "By immersing himself in the personality of others, he forgot his own, which is perhaps the only way not to suffer from it." (202).

Geoffrey's personal life is dominated by the twofold trauma of Ellen's unfaithfulness and suicide. The experience of Ellen's death is unutterable because it questions Geoffrey's masculinity and arouses a strong feeling of guilt in him. As such, it is close to what Flaubert (in a letter to Louise Colet) called the "indisable" as opposed to the "indicible" – that is, what cannot be told (indisable) versus what words cannot adequately tell (indicible). Indeed, Braithwaite's narrative revolves around a central ellipsis, he weaves words around and above the unspeakable betrayal that means Ellen's adultery and her death: "My wife... died." (3) Nearly from the first pages the narrator mentions the fact that his wife died, but the causes and reasons are revealed to the reader nearly at the end of the novel. Moreover, the experience of Ellen's death is unfathomable. His wife represents the feminine enigma, thus the narrative represents Geoffrey's desire to put together the fragments of this in-articulate experience. In the text, there is a clear distinction between the "pure story" and "history". Ellen's story cannot be told as a story, it is not accountable. "Ellen's is a true story, perhaps it is even the reason why I am telling you Flaubert's story instead. (95) This last quotation clearly shows how obliquity is used as an option to fill in the void in his personal story.

Altogether, Geoffrey's search for Ellen's secret and his search for peace and recovery after Ellen's twofold betrayal (adultery and suicide) are thwarted by immovable barriers like Ellen's preserved intimacy, the silence following her death or the paralysing sense of guilt. So his only alternative is to re-focus his quest, to change targets. In other words, we are told the story about Flaubert instead of his wife's one, because it is too traumatizing for him. There is an attempt to postpone the story and to distract himself as well as the reader, but finally this effort failed and he ends up with telling the "real" story. At the first glance, Geoffrey may be considered as the main character, but his story is put aside as well as his search for the Flaubert's data. All of these aspects are just the side stories, subplots that complement the story about Ellen.

The obliquity is more complicated when Geoffrey re-defined his target to the quest for Flaubert's parrot instead of the search for Flaubert himself. Therefore, Geoffrey obliquely attempts to obliterate and abate the consequences of Ellen's death thanks to his interest in Flaubert: "And still you think about her every day. [...] Or else you try to sidestep her image. Nowadays, when I remember Ellen, I try to think of a hailstorm that berated Rouen in 1853" (191-192).

This is a typical psychic process called "displacement", when Braithwaite's psychological trauma is displaced and translated into an obsessive monomania. What is frustrating is pushed away. Intellectual monomania is an obsession with only one kind of idea or ideas, which of course in the context of that novel means a mania for Flaubert. It has to be noticed that obliquity is constantly combined with other delaying strategies.

According to Cornelia Stott in *The Sound of Truth*, Geoffrey tries to seize Flaubert indirectly, thanks to the process of an approximation while we can observe some parallels between Emma Bovary and his wife. Firstly, both have the same initials (EB), both were unhappily married and therefore they committed suicide, they were unfaithful and left their husbands who are not able to understand them.

Whether he tells the story of Flaubert to displace his trauma or to approach Flaubert more directly, the aim of postponing the uttering of his wife's death fails anyway.

The strategy of obliteration through obliquity is evident; Geoffrey's obsessive interest in Flaubert is not oblivion. Details of Flaubert's personal life keep recurring and surfacing in the text as interferences, but the text is in fact marred with intrusive symptoms of haunting drama that can be considered as the return of unconsciousness. He is not able to escape from his past and to suppress his memories. These recurrent symptoms point to something irrepressible, for Geoffrey, the writing is only partially cathartic. Total oblivion is impossible and obliteration proves really imperfect. Maybe one of the clearest signs of this impossible catharsis in writing is the presence of some sort of monstrosity in the text, which can be interpreted as a demonstration of the narrator's powerlessness. Examples of these monstrous instances are numerous and varied, I can cite monstrous animals like the stuffed parrots, the pet bear's monstrously human attitude towards his master (54)- this can be seen as a metaphor for Geoffrey's

attitude towards Ellen, the five-legged sheep (56) or abnormal sexual intercourse between animals (57). Other illustration can be the thanatophilia, most lousily shown in the pages 101-102 with the lunatic person copulating with female corpses. Another monstrosity is evoked in the quotation on page 202 when Geoffrey compares lovers to Siamese twins: “Lovers are like Siamese twins, two bodies with a single soul, but if one dies before the other, the survivor has a corpse to lug around.”

These cases of bluntness can be employed in order to conceal his strategy of obliquity.

Nevertheless, indirection and obliteration tell something about the nature of narration in this novel. They can be seen as an emblematic of narration in *Flaubert's Parrot*. As a literary critic, Higdon said in *Unconfessed Confessions*, Barnes's novel is indeed characterised by

“the creation of a new type of narrator, the reluctant narrator, who is reliable in strict terms, indeed often quite learned and perceptive, but who has seen, experienced or caused something so traumatic that he must approach the telling of it through indirections, marks and substitutions” (174).

This seems to be confirmed by the narrator himself while stating: “As for the hesitating narrator – look, I'm afraid you've run into one right now. [...] I...I...Look at that seagull up there.” (100). Geoffrey Braithwaite is more than a hesitating narrator; he is a reluctant one too. He manifests desire to confuse the reader when proposing contradictory versions of story or when he gives references without any sources. Therefore he creates, as David Lodge stated “labyrinth without exit” (245).

Obliquity and indirectness are traceable in the multiplication of metonymic shifts in the narrative: those metonymic shifts are paradigmatic games which develop at the expense of syntagmatic construction. Several examples are to be found: bestiary as paradigm (10-11), paradigm of French writer's death (199-200), philately (212). Obliteration is traceable in the multiplication of untimely interruptions and breaks in the narrative as can be seen in the key example on page 120: “My wife... Not now, not now.” but also in the proliferation of words and quotations in an attempt to blot out the

truth. The combination of these elements leads to the “literary monstrosity” of the text, its generic hybridity, its excess in words and its cacophonous and confusing polyphony.

As an exemplary postmodernist novel, the text is highly fragmented and Barnes constantly puts the responsibility into the character’s hands.

This indirectness means also that the sub-texts, the texts “below” are more important than the overt text. In this respect, J.A. Cuddon definition of the sub-text is really appropriate while stating that the sub-text is:

“what is not said or done (the “non-dit”). A reader tends to construct a sub-text for him/herself, interpreting what is not said or not done (and how it is not said or not done), what may be implied, suggested or hinted, what is ambiguous, marginal, ambivalent, evasive, emphasised or not emphasised, etc. In doing all this, the reader exercises insight into the “unconscious” element in the work itself and thus elicits additional meanings.”

And *Flaubert’s Parrot* is indeed a text fraught with a strong unconscious.

Additionally, I would say that *Flaubert’s Parrot* is not just a novel, it is also an oblique essay in literary criticism, it is brimming with metafictional and metalinguistic comments which are as many oblique intrusions of Julian Barnes himself in the narrative. I can quote from the page 202: “A maxim upon maxims. Truths about writing can be framed before you’ve published a word, truths about life can be framed only when it’s too late to make any difference.” Therefore we can see sometimes Julian Barnes hidden behind Geoffrey; he speaks in the mask or vicariously via Geoffrey. It’s an oblique play on the author’s own passion for Flaubert, on Barnes’s own quest for Flaubert’s relics and substances hidden behind Geoffrey Braithwaite’s voice.

Using indirectness, Julian Barnes demonstrates, in very postmodern way, that indirectness can be a mode of approach of the truth. Analogically, it shows a very postmodern negation of pure mimesis: “[Y]ou can’t define yourself directly, just by looking face-on into the mirror.“ (107). This is the idea of definition of oneself indirectly through the *simulacrum*: the face in the mirror that is, and is not, myself.

Both Geoffrey and Flaubert are known obliquely in the novel, through their writings, through speculations, through their relationships with others, through testimonies or through symbols.

4.1.4. Use and Abuse of quotations in *Flaubert's Parrot*

Flaubert's Parrot is a text brimming with quotations, quoting is what Geoffrey does all the time; therefore I designated the use of quotations as another key element of the text.

There are several quotations that recur in the text: “language is like a cracked kettle” (11, 51, 191). The repetition of words creates an effect of insufficiency of vocabulary and lack of linguistic competence. From the different point of view, the application of the same phrases in the different context shows us their variety and richness of meaning. Quotations of all sorts can be found in the book, quotations from texts, for instance from Flaubert's correspondence, Flaubert's novels or essays, criticism about Flaubert etc. or from speeches like exclamations by Flaubert, comments by his entourage or sayings.

The parrot, as a central figure in the novel, is the emblem of this quoting habit because a “parroting” is defined as “to repeat mechanically”. Although the habit of quoting is not genuinely inventive, contrary it is a mere repetition of somebody else's words, Geoffrey Braithwaite's use of quotations in book is very creative. Thanks to quotations, several voices are to be heard. Flaubert's voice as a historical character, Louise Colet's voice, Julian Berne's voice while Geoffrey being his mouthpiece. The only voice that is never heard is Ellen's; this is undoubtedly to be put in relation with such themes as the enigma of her death and her “otherness”. This allows the narrator to create a polyphonic text, where several voices are heard and whence it follows that several point of views are expressed and thus many various possible interpretations and meanings are offered to the reader.

Quotations also allow for a mix of styles, registers and language. English in the text is woven with French or Latin, I can cite from the page 87: “But then, quis custodiet ipsos custodiet?” Usually, words or expressions in the foreign language are brought to the reader's attention with a typographical marking such as italics, capital letters, quotation marks etc.

The employment of various quotations enables a juxtaposition of several jargons. The author uses medical, technical terms: “The spleen consists of units of *lymphoid tissue* (or *white pulp*) plus the *vascular network* (or *red pulp*).” (209) as well as terminology common in literary criticism. As I said before, mix of styles/registers like sophisticated, poetical, vulgar or colloquial cohabit in the text: “Merde pour la poésie!” (200).

In that context, I would like to mention a theory by Gilles Deleuze about self-germinative value of repetition, when considering enunciation only and not the enunciated. The enunciation means a unique irreproducible act and the enunciated stands for and objects that is reproducible. Repetitions necessarily imply differences and thus a production of meaning.

Yet, the multiplication of quotations leads to a form of cacophony. On many occasions, the limit between quoted words and original ones is blurred. For instance, the third chronology of Flaubert’s life merely consists of quotations from Flaubert’s correspondence, yet no quotation marks are used to signal Geoffrey’s borrowing those words. Apart from the brief indication of “[Mme Bovary]“ (28), Geoffrey does not speak in this section at all. The question is therefore: whose enunciation is this? Who speaks? Braithwaite’s work as mere editor here and his use of quotation verges on plagiarism. His use of quotations is literally abusive.

In *Flaubert Parrot*, doubt about the actual source for the text is in fact recurrent. The incipit to Chapter 11 is supposedly Louise Colet’s voice: “Now, hear my story. I insist. Look, take my arm like that and let’s just walk.” (162); but her discourse reminds us of Geoffrey’s own voice. Several of the quoted voices are also ambiguous; Louise Colet’s voice is completely made up. Indeed, at the end of Chapter 10, the narrator asks: “why not reconstruct Louise Colet’s version?” (159) and immediately he does so in the following chapter. His posture in that Chapter is thus an imposture, in other words he speaks in the mask.

Quotations in the text are sometimes mutually destructive, they undermine each other. For example, in the page 50, Flaubert embodies all sorts of animals: “feeling a rare plenitude of strength, he is an ox, sphinx, bittern, elephant, whale”. On the other hand: “he is an oyster in its shell, a snail in its shell, a hedgehog rolling up to protect itself”.

Altogether, there is strong sense of cacophony in the novel if not “xylophony”. The excessive use of quotations is counter-productive or creative.

Just with few words, I would like to highlight the deconstruction of the Logos again, while the enunciation is put in question. The abundance of quotations, often the same ones repeated several times, partially contributes to kill off the meaning of the quoted words. This abundance thus takes part in the deconstruction of the Logos. The excessive use of quotations in the text suggests that our speech is never inaugural, never completely original. As Bakhtin states:

“Our speech, that is, all our utterances (including creative words) is filled with others’ words, varying degrees of otherness or varying degrees of ‘our ownness’, varying degrees of awareness and detachment. The words of others carry with them their own expression, their own evaluative tone, which we assimilate, re-work, and re-accentuate.” (90)

The abuse of quotations in Flaubert’s *Parrot* is a convincing reflection and illustration of Flaubert’s conception of language. If the parrot is the best possible “emblem of the writer’s voice” (12), if Flaubert believes that “on est parlé- one is spoken” (11), then the most efficient way of capturing Flaubert’s voice is to be a parrot oneself:

The writer’s voice is not an original voice but a parrot’s voice. If that is so, then what the biographer has to do in order to capture the writer’s voice is to function as a parrot. This Braithwaite most effectively does. [...] Moreover, if it is true that even a novel by Flaubert is a web of quotations and even Flaubert a copyist, then Barnes has created the perfect analogue of the Flaubertian text in as much *Flaubert’s Parrot* is *un tissue de citations* and Braithwaite *le copiste d’un copiste*. (Bell, *Not Altogether a Tomb*, 171)

Geoffrey himself runs to the conclusion that Flaubert “was really just a parrot” (180).

4.2. Analysis of selected chapters

On the following pages I would like to comment on some chosen chapters. More precisely, I have chosen the incipit, chapter 3, 13 and 15 because, in my opinion, they encompass the main ideas of the novel and I can use them as the examples of postmodern aesthetics and as the demonstration of Julian Barnes style of writing.

4.2.1. Commentary upon the opening pages

The incipit of *Flaubert's Parrot* is perfectly emblematic of the novel as a whole. These opening pages represent a patchwork of several types of texts: the first three paragraphs resemble the classical opening to a classical novel; there is a description of six Africans playing boule and the description of Flaubert's statue. Then, progressively, in the next three paragraphs there is a shift towards a reflection upon a literary essay, when the narrator asks the questions such as: "Why does the writing make us chase the writer?" (2) or "I had five days in Rouen, and childhood instinct still makes me keep the best until last. Does the same impulse sometimes operate with writers? Hold off, hold off, the best is yet to come? If so, then how tantalising are the unfinished books." (3) The last paragraph on page 3 finally marks a new shift towards fictional autobiography: "I thought of writing books myself once. But I was a doctor, married with children." Thus the incipit is a multi-layered text that is characterised by prominent intertextuality both with primary material, which means texts written by Flaubert himself and with secondary material like criticism upon Flaubert. As such it is an echoing text. To say it differently, the text possesses some kind of metafictional colouring. Consequently, from the very first pages, the reader is aware of the generic hybridity of the text.

Another important characteristic of the text is its indirection. There are shifts from the "boule" player to Flaubert's statue, from Flaubert as a writer to Flaubert as a man, from the Rouen statue to those of Trouville and from Flaubert to Geoffrey himself. Digression thus appears as a mode of writing. "Directness confuses." (116), concludes Geoffrey Braithwaite. And then he justifies it: "Mystification is simple; clarity is the hardest thing of all. [...] I don't mean art should be as clear as the instructions on the packet of seeds, I'm saying that you trust the mystifier more if you know he's deliberately choosing not to be lucid." (116).

Significant object of the first pages is of course a statue that has a symbolic value. One cannot but be struck by inaugural hesitation between a “living statue” and the stone one. The juxtaposition of two statues emphasises the question of authenticity, the idea so eminent in the novel. “This statue isn’t the original one.” (1) says the narrator. The original source is the vanishing point in the novel, it is impossible to seize the real statue, the real parrot of real Flaubert. All this leads to the feeling of void quest for the authenticity. One cannot but have an impression of fragmentation or dissemination because there are at least three different parrots as well as three different statues. The implied references to replication are particularly fruitful in the rest of the text, if only with regard to the parroting, reproducing somebody’s words, parodying... The statue created with the use of the “plaster cast” represents an image of a likeness, a simulacrum. It is not a real object, it is an imitation of a real, original object.

Whence it follows that Geoffrey’s quest for Flaubert is very likely to fail. Geoffrey’s encyclopedic syndrome is defeated by missing elements and uncertainty. The accumulation of erudite details (for instance on the composition of the statue) is defeated by uncertainty that is epitomized by the anaphoric repetition of “perhaps”, by the use of modals suggesting approximation: “or so, might” etc. It is important to note the accumulation of unanswered questions and the fundamental failure of language to encapsulate reality. Number of neologisms and portmanteau words like “baggy-trousered” or “floppy-tied” is used in order to be adequate to the richness of reality.

Further, I would like to mention the relation between permanence and impermanence that is connected with a sense of transience. The statue is a monument, and as such, it is meant to commemorate, to last, in other words to defeat time and oblivion. Yet, for Flaubert case this is not completely true. The statue was missing for a decade and it wears badly in time. From that perspective, the French author escapes, he cannot be seized easily. One can see that “statue” story as a metaphor of Gustave Flaubert himself. When Geoffrey cannot grasp the authentic and real statue, he cannot approach Flaubert directly.

At the end, I would like to comment on Geoffrey as a narrator and his technique. The incipit is written in the first-person narrative but this visibility proves deceptive. Geoffrey represents a homodiegetic narrator. The portrait that Geoffrey draws of

himself is fundamentally elliptic and incomplete. He provides the reader with small amount of information about himself. He hides behind his quest and he remains completely silent about his wife and the circumstances of her death. The patent evasiveness suggests that part of his life is traumatic for him and thus unutterable. Internal focalisation allows the reader to see through Braithwaite's eyes but one has to doubt the reflector's reliability. Another mark of the text is the fluctuation of narrative voice, there is a shift from "I" to "we" in the fifth paragraph, where desire and fetishism are at stake.

Just to conclude in few words, the passage encapsulates most of the themes of the book and the questions raised in the novel. For instance, it deals with the problem of authenticity, originality, permanence etc.

4.2.2. Chapter 3

In this chapter entitled "Finders Keepers" Geoffrey become acquainted with Ed Winterton, an unsuccessful academic when they both reach for the same book in the shop. They share the bibliophilic lust, Geoffrey for Flaubert, Ed for Gosse. Later, he contacts Geoffrey in order to tell him that he has in possession some materials concerning Juliet Herbert, Flaubert's niece governess. Geoffrey finds out, that Ed gains the correspondence between her and Flaubert that represents for him an enormous amount of new pieces of information. Anyway, he also finds out that Ed has burnt all the letters because it was Flaubert's wish. Therefore, hope that he will gain the missing pieces of information and answers to questions concerning Gustave Flaubert's private life and his personality is shattered.

This chapter is a key chapter because the reader is told for the first time the full name of the narrator and because the chapter deals with one of many postmodern problems, the question of (auto)biography. It means the problems caused by temporal gap between biographer and his subject of study. Moreover one can ask "how do we seize the past?" (100). Past is a subjective truth that is unconditionally inaccessible due to the fact that we see things from culturally and temporally different perspectives, in other words, we cannot grasp the past exactly.

That chapter illustrates Geoffrey's overwhelming desire for knowledge that is also affirm with vocabulary such as: "fascinating", "beyond glee", "astonishment" etc.

The prospect of discovery of new information raises great expectations and wakes up Geoffrey's bibliophilic lust. The preamble to the chapter formulates Braithwaite's reflexions upon the biographer's art. He employs a metaphor of the net to qualify Julia who represents a blank in Flaubert's existence, a missing point in his life and this missing link is interpreted in diametrically opposed ways by different biographers. At this point, the list of epistemological problems of the historiographer is presented. The most delicate issue is, as I have already stated, the inaccessibility of the past. In Geoffrey's case it means, the insufficient amount of material such as letters. Another problem concerns with the selectivity of historiographers and then the ambiguity of historiographical material. This idea is illustrated when Geoffrey states that: "Hypothesis is spun directly from the temperament of the biographer." (38). As Cornellia Stott states:

"Barnes uses this chapter to do what, according to Virginia Woolf, all biographers do when they run out of information: they invent it. The information the reader receives about the fictitious letters Ed Winterton burnt is partly precise and partly vague, a cunning ploy to give the reader the impression of having learnt something of value without actually committing the sin of fabrication. Again Barnes can be seen to play with one of the conventions of traditional biography." (85)

Therefore, the traditional vision of biography is changed and used in completely different perspective. The accurate and faithful pieces of information are mixed with invented and false ones and thus the limit between what is real and what is fictional is completely blurred, which represents another mark of postmodern novel. Moreover, with the references to academic writing, Barnes parodies the excessive research and traditional procedures employed for writing a biography. Barnes's quasi-biography is not the classical form of historical writing, it is more a playful mosaic, a game, but still it fulfils the purpose of biography that means that it gives the reader the impression that he or she learns something about Flaubert. Desire for knowledge mingles with an interest in Flaubert's sexual affaires. This intimacy between intellectual and sexual desire is illustrated by the proximity of the questions: "And was she his fiancée?" (43) and "So he could manage the language?" (44) or "Did he search out English writers?"

Did he search out English brothels?" (40). From that perspective, Geoffrey Braithwaite is more than a biographer, he functions also as an "autobiographer", because a desire for Flaubert hides desire for his wife, it is his wife's inner life he tries to understand the most. In other words, he writes in order to come to terms with his life, precisely with his wife's death.

Again, one can see that Julian Barnes just takes use of the form of biography to reach completely different goals. This deconstruction of traditional patterns is what makes the text so complex and ranges it among postmodern novels.

4.2.3. Chapter 13

This chapter is mostly about Ellen and about Geoffrey's suffering that is caused by her death. The narrator tells us about her as a person and as a wife. We are allowed to insight into their relationship and later to Geoffrey's heart. Anyway, the story is not told coherently and directly, there are many digressions which lead towards Flaubert and towards the literature.

This chapter entitled "Pure Story" can be considered as the climax of the novel. Ellen's death should be regarded as the main plot of the story disguised as a sub-plot, for that reason the chapter 13 can be seen as the final chapter of the novel because the reader finally finds out the circumstances of her death. The title of the chapter "pure", which means not mixed with anything else, nothing added, marks another irony of the text because the story is not very "pure". The narrator uses many digressions and sub-stories. The procrastination of narrator is used in order to put on telling the story of his wife. Geoffrey is trying to justify himself, while he manifests feel of guilt. "Here is a pure story. I switched her off." (200) He is trying to make a confession and that passage corresponds to page 109: "No, I didn't kill my wife. I might have known you'd think that." More generally, this chapter is to some extent related to Chapter 7 that is important for the contextualization of the text and for its structure. As I have already mentioned, this chapter seems to be the final one because the story about Ellen is the key one. The character of this passage is circular which helps to create the impression of the finality too.

Procrastination is an important element of the text, the chapter is rambling, and there is a lot of talking without clear purpose except to save some time. Geoffrey uses

various types of digression to gain more time. For instance, he shifts to the direct speech on page 190: “What do we doctors say? I’m deeply sorry, Mrs Blank...” he uses an irony of a reverse situation, Geoffrey is in situation of controller while he needs to be consoled. Another digression abuses the literature to evade a reality when he is speaking about Madame Bovary or about the literary discussion concerning the treatment of adulterous woman. He also inserts other stories like the story about Betty Corinder. When he describes the hailstorm in Rouen, he illustrates the concept of the screen memory. It means that one can remember any detail of no importance instead of the whole situation which can be too traumatic to integrate this memory into brain. This represents some kind of mental protection. And this is exactly what is happening in that passage, Geoffrey prefers to speak about the storm instead of his wife’s death because it is still too painful for him.

Bereavement is sub-sequential with love for him. The mourning process is described quite in the details. According to Braithwaite, it is like chronic illness, it’s unbearable and several strategies how to cope with this pain are explored: talking, silence, alcohol, Flaubert’s device such as “apocryphal reality” etc., anyway all of this seems to be insufficient.

Another key message of the chapter is a failure of the language, an issue highly discussed in postmodern theory. This failure is explicitly emphasised in the text, an alleviation through language is impossible because we have in possession just ordinary and common phrases and words. “The words aren’t the right ones, or rather, the right words don’t exist. [...] You talk, and you find the language of bereavement foolishly inadequate.” (191)

Language is defective both when is written or spoken and Geoffrey’s strategy to escape the pain related to Ellen’s death with the narration of another sub-stories is undoubtedly a failure.

4.2.4. Last chapter

The final chapter has a cyclic character; it closes the circle of the story. As Chapter 13 finishes the story in terms of its content, this chapter does so in terms of its form and structure. Firstly, the narrator returns to Rouen, where he can observe again the statues. There is a word for word repetition of the opening pages and the sense of conclusion is obvious from phrase such as: “It was time to pay farewell.” (227) and the

circularity is conveyed through words such as: “I made the rounds of Flaubert’s three statues.” (227) Thanks to these, Barnes creates some kind of microstructure of the novel.

This conclusive chapter entitled “And the Parrot...” echoes the title of the first chapter “Flaubert’s Parrot” and thus forms a macrostructure of the book. There is a focalization on the same details and elements as in the first chapter that is the parrots and the statues. Yet, the repetition is slightly different and this fact creates another sense of destruction.

Therefore, the conclusion is nothing but inconclusive because there is no certitude about the authenticity of the parrot. In other words, Geoffrey reaches delusive and false conclusion, he is just able to describe the parrot but he cannot identify the right one. Therefore, his quest to find the original and authentic parrot is a failure. On the other hand, he manages to prove the multiplicity of truths and plurality of possibilities how we can see our lives and our reality.

The reader has an impression that the story has evolved as Geoffrey points in future a derivation of the various statues. In that sense, the evolution is synonymous with destruction, with decay. He examines the statue as a doctor his patient and this observation are used for conclusion, but it is not sophisticated, it is based just on that observation and thus his justification is arbitrary and the conclusion is groundless. One can notice the destruction of the parrots too because of the deterioration of parrot’s colours. Moreover, there is a question of loss, because only 3 parrots remain of original 50. Geoffrey is not just obsessed with the problem of originality but he challenges the problem of loss too. The number three seems to possess some kind of symbolism due to the fact that there are 3 parrots, 3 statues, 3 chronologies. Generally, this number is interpreted as a perfect one symbolizing the unity and perfection. These phenomena are supposed to be found in the end of the story but this text is not obviously that case. The only unity resides in the cyclic character of the book.

I would like to comment on the choice of the location chosen for the final scene. One can say that it is an ambivalent place what perfectly corresponds to the ambivalent ending. The location is described as a dark room full of obscurity which resembles to a burial chamber and so we have again connotations to the death. “So it was an ambivalent room, half-morgue and half-purgatory.” (228)

To conclude, I would like to state that Geoffrey fails as a man as well as a writer. He fails as a man because he is still obsessed with the death of his wife and still

manifests sense of guilt. After all, he does not manage to understand Ellen and she remains for him a mysterious and misunderstood personae. This emphasises his attitude to parrot that became for him some kind of obsession. He states that the parrots “gazed at” him, which of course is not very possible owing to the fact that the parrots have been already stuffed and thus they cannot gaze. Anyway, he “dodged away” without any further effort to find out which one is the right one. That is because the search of the true parrot was not really his main quest and so this ambivalent result is for him sufficient. The main reason of writing the story was to make a confession and to get over the sadness caused by his wife’s death. Moreover, the pursuit for the parrot was a pursuit for Ellen, because if he reaches the real parrot he will reach “real” Flaubert because parrot represents a remaining link between him and “hermit of Paris” and thus he can approach to his wife. The excellent use of “echoing the echo” makes the book so playful and puzzling. What happened to the parrot is untrappable and elusive to him as what happened to his wife. Anyway, the parrot became a part of Geoffrey’s life and that is another important key concept of postmodernism. That is the indistinct boundaries between art and life. This problematic relation is suggested in the Chapter 14, The Examination Paper. Otherwise said, the remedy for his personal crisis is a fusion of fictional lives of Emma and Charles, or Flaubert with his own and his wife lives.

He fails as a writer because he did not manage to meet Flaubert; he did not reach his appropriate and correct voice. Still, he did not understand him. “The bird has flown.” (63) as well as Flaubert, whose life was full of contradictions. On the one hand he was a literary genius on the other, he was social outsider, he longed for the adventurous life, but he adored solitude and finally, he loved profoundly one woman, but he was not able to be faithful to her. Geoffrey is speaking about: “Flaubertian double life, being happy in his dreams and unhappy in his real life.” (138). Altogether, Geoffrey is not able to seize this persona as a man neither as a writer.

As a consequence, I can designate this passage as a typical ending of postmodern novel because the author comments upon the foolishness of “vouloir conclure”, that means to be obsessed with the desire to conclude the story clearly. The reader is left with an ambiguous end that is open to various interpretations. The text left us in dark without a solution to the real parrot or to the Braithwaite’s character. So the ellipses and unanswered questions are the final Barnes’s answers that did not provide the reader not even the character with satisfying ending. One can observe some kind of resignation when Geoffrey comments on the question concerning the original parrot:

“Perhaps it was one of them.” (229). In other words, he finds out, that it does not really matter which one is real, because there is not the only Truth as well as there is not just one parrot.

5. Conclusion:

On the preceding pages, the thesis aimed to depict Julian Barnes’s novel, *Flaubert’s Parrot*, as a postmodern piece of literary work. I would like to outline and summarize the most important postmodern features and elements that are employed in the text.

The period of postmodernism started approximately in 1970s however it cannot be defined precisely because of its elusive and paradoxical nature. Even today, the characterization remains a challenging task due to the fact that the instability, scepticism and irony are the main traits of that movement. The publication of *Flaubert’s Parrot* in 1984 therefore provided a new item worth discussing from postmodern perspective.. At the present day, it is sure that Barnes writing can be easily labelled as postmodern for many reasons. In this thesis I tried to list few of them.

The novel embodies postmodern characteristics such as intertextuality, plurality, metafiction or playfulness and it wipes the established conventions and expectations. It uses the postmodern devices such as parody, collage, irony, pastiche etc. Many postmodern topics and questions are raised in the text. For example the problem of originality, the search for authenticity, the issue of reference or the problematic relation of present to past are treated. Julian Barnes forces the reader to occupy its mind with the concept like Truth, Love, Past and Knowledge. However he did not provide the reader with the definite conclusion of those philosophical issues, he just suggested that all these concepts are relative and no absolute answer could be stated. Nevertheless, it does not mean that these concepts are not worth discussing, on contrary he wants us to ponder about these phenomena.

Flaubert’s Parrot is a witty and elaborate novel that deals with the problematic issues of the end of 20th century. Julian Barnes confronts with those topics in original and untraditional manner that pushes the reader to cooperate and to take an active part in the interpretation and understanding of that text. His never-ending playfulness,

intertextuality and destruction of given forms and standards create this unconventional, uncommon and extraordinary text.

The end of 20th century is interwoven with incertitude, nearly every conception and theory of western civilization and culture were put in doubts. This feeling of incertitude is constantly present in the text too. There are doubts about the real statues, incertitude concerning the past events, impossibility to understand Geoffrey's wife psyche and his own life, powerlessness to orient oneself in the world and finally impossibility to find out the authentic and real Flaubert's Parrot.

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