

Metafiction and Love in Julian Barnes

Pseudonym: Alchemist

1. Problems

1.1. Introduction

“The word postmodernism sounds not only awkward, uncouth; it evokes what it wishes to surpass or suppress, modernism itself” (*Hassan*¹). The comparative table what Ihab Hassan built between modernism and postmodernism is probably a good starting point to conceive postmodernism as something utterly new and different from modernism. The oppositional characteristics within the two lists embrace ideas from different fields of knowledge all contributing to the uniqueness of postmodernism. These characteristics are mirrored by what Hassan calls “indetermanence” made up from the words ‘indeterminacy’ and ‘immanence’, or as Steven Connor argues, “a kind of Dionysiac virus within modernism” (Connor 1997, 118). This “virus” transformed modernism to postmodernism by altering its characteristics to define postmodernism as its opposite. Hassan’s and Connor’s method of listing the descriptive features of postmodernism resemble Brian MacHale’s procedure of describing the poetics of the postmodern. Their procedures are similar because they do not slip into the jungle of ideology and political context, rather they orient towards the aesthetics of the postmodern. In the “carnavalesque interweaving of styles, voices, and registers” (131), McHale builds up a coherent system of incoherencies and thus defines literary postmodernism as “a riotous cacophony of conflicting discourses or ‘heterotopia’ of incompatible geographies” (ibid).

Linda Hutcheon interprets postmodernism as historiographic metafiction. According to her, by exposing the act of writing and history’s fictionality to the reader, postmodern literature undermines the conventions of the realist novel. Connor claims that the difference between Hutcheon’s theory of historiographic metafiction and McHale’s or Hassan’s is that historiographic metafiction demands “the infiltration of history into literature and the blurring of the distinctions between literature and theory” (132), while in McHale’s criticism literature appears as itself without context. In addition, similarly to Hutcheon, Patricia Waugh highlights the metafictional aspect of the postmodern novel arguing that metafiction is the major characteristic of postmodern fiction.

The ahistorical aspect of postmodernism implied by Post-Marxist critics can be easily debated if we consider the works of English writers branded with the label ‘postmodernist’:

¹ I have marked electronic sources in italics.

Graham Swift, Salman Rushdie, Peter Ackroyd, Angela Carter, Kazuo Ishiguro, John Fowles and many others, where re-making and re-telling history becomes a central concern. Also, the list cannot be complete without Julian Barnes.

The aim of this essay is to give a possible answer to the questions how the “metafictional denaturalization of the realistic plot” (Berlatsky 2009, 175) takes place in Julian Barnes’ books about history and why the issue of love appears in them, an issue that does not appear in standard theorizations of historiographic metafiction. During this analysis I am to concentrate on the genre of Julian Barnes’ books as historiographic metafictions. Although historicity plays an important part of the analysis, I think that the style of Barnes can be best captured in his use of metafiction where he cunningly mingles irony with love and empathy.

1.2. Postmodernism and Contemporary Fiction

Jean-François Lyotard defines the postmodern “as incredulity towards metanarratives” (Lyotard 1984, xxiv). The fiction of the postmodern period is mainly concerned with questioning the cultural ideologies we were born into. Its aim is to waken us to the fact that these ideologies are not natural at all, they are man-made. The postmodern paradox is in fact the consciousness that we are constantly driven by ideologies although we are aware of it. Hutcheon finds this paradox primarily in self-reflexive and parodic art.

“Postmodernism reveals a desire to understand present culture as the product of previous representations.” (Hutcheon 2001, 58) Through postmodern texts we can get to know the sources of history not as facts, but as the truth of a storyteller. History is always fragmentary because our lack of experience of it, but through postmodern texts we can get closer to multiple viewpoints of history. Although the question of truth may define the documentary value of a realist text, it must never overshadow the aesthetic value of a postmodern piece of writing. According to Brian McHale, each period had its own ontological characteristics, and even postmodernism has an ontological theme even if postmodernist discourse “denies the possibility of ontological grounding” (McHale 2004, 27). This ontological theme is called by him “the social construction of (un)reality” and it means that the postmodern condition offers us multiple realities which stand in a heterarchical relationship with each other. “Postmodernist fiction achieves its aesthetic effects and sustains

interest, in the process modelling the complex ontological landscape of our experience” (39). This does not mean that art lost its autonomy. It only tries to connect itself with our world, be conscious of cultural systems and it tries to make sense for the reader.

The novel of the postmodern period changed as well: it left its ontological feature inherited from realism according to which fiction imitates and mirrors reality. The postmodern novel tries to bridge the gap between real life and art as a human-made product through linguistic structures. The classic realist novel fulfils a promise to the reader that it would be complete and more perfect than life itself. The postmodern novel denies the order enacted by the classic realist narrative, it works with ambiguity and chaos, and instead of hiding its fictiveness, it reveals it.

Hutcheon differentiates two types of novels with the words of ‘intramural’ and ‘extramural’. She argues that classic realist texts are ‘intramural’ on a textual level regarding the reader’s freedom of interpretation, while the postmodern novel is ‘extramural’. She also points out how novels of the ‘traditional realism’ make form out of reading a passive activity because the reader has no responsibility in the act of interpretation, his or her only job is to identify the parts of the artefact with his or her surrounding reality. In postmodern texts, the reader, similarly to the writer, takes on an active part in reading, he or she takes place in a self-conscious interpretation of the text.

As the novel is considered the freest literary form, capable of many changes regarding fiction-making, the postmodern novelist is able to take on the role of a magus, where the magic of creating art is also revealed. The novel becomes a popular postmodern genre due to its flexibility and its ability to create a valid, self-contained and unifying heterocosm. (Hutcheon 1980, 89-90)

1.3. Julian Barnes as an Author of Postmodern Texts

Julian Barnes is known to be the most versatile English writer of contemporary and postmodern fiction. Also called a chameleon of English literature and a Francophile, his works are of a great variety. He wrote non-fiction, short stories and crime novels as well, the latter under the pseudonym Dan Kavanagh. However, his most controversial works are his postmodern novels which cover the artistic experiment with which Barnes constantly tests the flexibility of the novel’s limits. In his novels he usually writes about the opportunities and diverse viewpoints of interpreting past events. The tension in his books is given by two major attitudes towards the world: his ironic treatment of cultural ideologies and his overflowing

humanism. This humanism is secular, peculiar and paradoxical: it leans towards atheism and blasphemy when the writer discusses religious themes and it is embedded with scepticism when he writes about the possibility of progress or the evolution of his characters. On the other hand, his stories are about human beings (or sometimes even woodworms), who are capable of surviving the vicissitudes of history and ideology and the hardships of their personal lives. These characters become the emblems of possibilities, failures and need for survival. Barnes points out in his novels, that the only remedy for life and history is love and his characters continuously seek empathy from the part of the reader no matter how ludicrous their situation might be.

The main themes of his books are the relationship between literature, memory and life and consequently the retelling of history and memories. Maybe his literary success can be mostly found in his conception of history as a literary genre – also an ongoing debate in criticism of postmodernism. This way he has the opportunity to tell a story from different perspectives and thus propagate the death of the original past and the autonomy of the copy. In one of his interviews he stated that the aim of fiction is “to tell beautiful, exact, and well-constructed lies with enclosed hard and shimmering truths” (Guignery 2009, 30). He is fascinated to seize the past somehow in his books, but usually binds this attempt with the personal life of the main character, which makes his novels intellectual and entertaining. Due to his intensive ironic and satiric authorial voice revealed in his metafiction, he has a great talent to connect the reader with the narrator or main character.

The two books about which I am going to write are one of his Man Booker Prize nominated books *Flaubert's Parrot* published in 1984 and the similarly acclaimed *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* published in 1989. Although Barnes is known as a novelist trying to evade from writing two similar novels, I think *Flaubert's Parrot* and *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* resemble each other in many points. First of all, both are considered historiographic metafiction. The novels feature historical and biblical figures embedded in fiction saturated with irony. Also, the substratum of the novels which makes them really enjoyable is the well-constructed metafiction through which Barnes problematizes the representation of historical texts. Secondly, their form is pushing the limits of the conventional form of the novel. Postmodern metafiction demands an unnatural style to evolve and shape a canal through which the author and the reader can freely communicate with each other. I think that my choice of these books is relevant because Barnes not just unfolds the postmodern dilemma of representation, but also gives an opportunity to the reader to see further and even beyond the irony of multiple representations.

2. Historiographic Metafiction – General View

The relationship between postmodernism and history is illustrated by Francis Fukuyama through his ominous statement about the fate of history. Western culture, consumerism, economic development, materialism and capitalism spread in the world and become “the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution” (*Fukuyama*). At this state, we only have the possibility to retrospect and acknowledge that positivist and empiricist approaches to the past are too rigid and inaccurate because when making a narrative out of history we inevitably determine a limited perspective.

According to Linda Hutcheon, postmodern texts have a tendency “to denaturalize history” (Hutcheon 2001, 57). “There seems to be a new desire to think historically, but to think historically these days, is to think critically and contextually” (366). When we talk about postmodern fiction, she argues, we can describe it the best by underlining its two main characteristics: its metafictional and historical echoes.

“For the most part historiographic metafiction (...) does not fall into either ‘presentism’, or nostalgia in relation to the past it represents” (71). Nostalgia is usually replaced by parody which helps the reader to form a critical view about historical text he or she is reading. This way we can make a contrast between past and present and acknowledge how past ideologies influence us in the present.

Historiographic metafiction gives us the opportunity to realize that there is no distinguishing line between historical truth and fiction. Both are human-made discourses and both have a truth value from the viewpoint of the storyteller. This way private and personal experiences may also become part of historiography in a postmodern sense.

Self-reflexivity, a grounding part of historiographic metafiction, always bifurcates because it is present in the narrative and in the narration as well. The main aims of self-reflexivity are to problematize the veracity of history and the conventions of writing fiction and “the entire notion of the ‘text’ as an autonomous entity with immanent meaning” (*Hutcheon*).

Realist historical texts were written with the aim of making the past familiar with confident narrative structures. Historiographic metafiction implies that these histories can be conceived as fictions and thus it indicates that we should problematize these so-called transparent texts.

According to critics, especially Linda Hutcheon, the genre of the novels of Julian Barnes can be called historiographic metafiction because the writer unites the acts of history-writing and fiction-writing and strengthens the collaboration of the two with metafiction. Through self-reflexivity and parody, Barnes creates a web of irony from under which an unfeigned revelation of love manifests itself.

3. The Analysis of the Two Novels

3.1. Metafiction

I think that the uniqueness in both *Flaubert's Parrot* and *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* is Julian Barnes' way of using metafiction. Historiography is mainly an addition to strengthen the effect of this kind of narrative. This effect shows that metafiction in these novels is not just a literary device, but the manifestation of a postmodern ironic reflexivity. The voice of the narrator entices us to show a truth, or at least some kind of truth about reality/ history, but at the same time reflects on it not just as a literary artefact but as the cohesion of illusions and lies. The main epistemological dilemma of postmodernity arises from metafiction: we will never reach original reality in Barnes' novels, we just get closer to it through another representation of older representations.

[M]etafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. (Waugh 2001, 2)

There was a tendency to equate postmodernism with metafiction, but metafiction is a more 'ancient' phenomenon than postmodernism. Its history goes back to previous century novels like *Don Quixote*, *Tom Jones* and *Tristram Shandy*. At first, the self-conscious authorial voice in fictions appeared in the preface, but later on it became more and more aware of itself and became the organic part of fiction. This change implied that the novel was interested not just in the mimesis of the empirical world, but also in the processes of writing and reading. Linda Hutcheon argues that if fiction is a kind of representation, then metafiction is subsequently an auto-representation. "The text's own paradox is that it is both narcissistically self-reflexive and yet focused outward, oriented toward the reader" (Hutcheon, 1980, 7). This is why she calls metafiction 'narcissistic narrative', because it is "intrigued with its own reflection" (11).

“Metafictional texts show that literary fiction can never imitate or ‘represent’ the world but always imitates or ‘represents’ the discourses which in turn construct that world” (Waugh 2001, 100). Critics and readers many times problematized fiction’s value of truth. When talking about fiction, we must not generalize and identify realism with truth. While reading mimetic literature, people create illusions which are supported by empirical reality. These illusions act as coherent and autonomous heterocosms but they are only imitations, they have no connection with any literal truth. A heterocosm is the evidence that fiction is not just a verbal artefact, but a world created by the reader and based on his or her experiences and interpretation. But “mimesis is transmutation, not reproduction” (Hutcheon, 1980, 43) so the truthfulness of the fiction should not be measured in how it resembles empirical reality. In metafiction, the direct presence of the authorial voice can be conceived of as a more intimate and self-conscious initiation of the reader into the spatial and temporal territory of the heterocosm.

By claiming that it is nothing but art, nothing but imaginative creation, metafiction becomes more ‘vital’: it reflects the human imagination, instead of telling a secondhand tale about what might be real in quite another world. (47)

Metafiction this way becomes evidence that objective reality can never be attained because we always conceive it through some kind of representation. These representations are based on our knowledge or experiences but interwoven with human imagination. In fiction, this awareness is manifested by the presence of self-reflexivity. As the writer acknowledges that his or her text is an object of representation, he or she inevitably reflects on how our world is similarly constructed based on chains of interpretations which not necessarily equal with truth. Self-reflexivity undertakes the fact that a heterocosm is created by the collaboration of the writer and a reader and without it, there would be no fiction.

3.1.1. Self-reflexivity and Parody

Another effect of the postmodern paradox involves the usage of parody. In historiographic metafiction parody is activated to question the past, not to diminish it. On the other hand, parody is also an instrument to undermine aesthetic norms, because by introducing them into a new context, their value becomes decreased. “Taking as its starting

point a previous work of genre, it inserts a metaphoric version of this into the ongoing (metonymic) literary tradition” (Waugh 2001, 69). The effect of parody can be unveiled also when the author reveals of the creative process of writing within the narrative and thus diminishes the conventions of the classic realist novel. According to Linda Hutcheon, metafictional parody’s most visible operation is ‘defamiliarization’.

The laying bare of literary devices in metafiction brings to the reader’s attention those formal elements of which, through over-familiarization, he has become unaware. Through his recognition of the backgrounded material, new demands for attention and active involvement are brought to bear on the act of reading. (Hutcheon 1980, 24)

I. Denaturalizing History

In his essay, Merritt Moseley highlights the immense provocation which lies in the high-minded title of Barnes’ novel, *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters*. “This self-advertising title is a boast that mocks itself by calling attention to its literary and cognitive form” (Moseley 1997, 110). Writing world history suggests an encyclopaedic, exuberant quantity of data. However, instead of a positivist approach to history, Barnes introduces his readers to the contradiction of endless fictional histories. Barnes demolishes the privilege of the one and only true history by supplying the word with an indefinite article. Instead of *the* history, he writes about *a* history which implies, that the reader is invited to face untold perspectives and hushed up events. Merritt Moseley also mentions the authorial fearlessness by calling such a literary composition a piece of history rather than a slice of fiction. “One of the aims of the book is to unsettle the reader’s confidence about the difference between truth and fiction, between history and story” (112). He also points out the outrageous and the jocose precision of Barnes’ ability to write a world history in no more and no less than exactly ten and a half chapters. The reader might immediately ask about how literary studies define a half chapter. As all the ten chapters are short stories, having a plot, characters, maybe this way the half chapter acts as a medium through which, authorial intentions and disciplines are directly revealed.

In the view of forming a postmodern text, *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* lacks the frame of an ending and of a beginning. The novel is constructed as a multi-level structure of self-sufficient stories among which there is no levelling in hierarchical means. Brian McHale calls this phenomenon heterarchy. Despite heterarchy there are still unifying symbols

within the novel: the ships, waters and sea journeys. The Ark (and all the other ships and boats presented: Noah's Ark, the Titanic, the St. Louis, the Medusa, Kath's boat) is the main unifying symbol of heterarchy.

Flaubert's Parrot on the other hand is a more comprehensible title and does not necessarily induce scepticism. Although, after reading the book, the reader might find him or herself under the same roof of heterarchy. Despite the fact that *Flaubert's Parrot* has a proper beginning and a proper ending, the chapters between them do not witness any temporal linearity. It is true that similarly to *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* the book has Gustave Flaubert as a unifying symbol of the chapters, but the French author becomes only an excuse to conceal an even greater unifying building-block: the narrator's life. The narrator, Geoffrey Braithwaite tries to recollect his memories about his wife Ellen, but every time he tries so, it becomes easier to him to talk about Flaubert instead of Ellen. Brian McHale calls this recursivity the 'Strange Loop phenomenon' which occurs when we move promiscuously within the narrative system, but we always go back to from when we started. The frame story of the parrot fails to lead us to a solution, while nothing alters in the personality of the narrator, only that we learn about his wife and his passion about Flaubert.

II. Mocking the Idea of Single Origin

Postmodern texts are against the "fetishizing of the archive, making it into a substitute for the past" (Hutcheon 2001, 87). "All historical novels, even the most traditional, typically involve some violation of ontological boundaries" (McHale 2004, 16). Both *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* and *Flaubert's Parrot* violate the notion of the single origin.

i. The Voice of the Other

A History of the World in 10½ Chapters opens with the narrative of the Genesis (a Judeo-Christian grand narrative) about Noah and the Ark retold from the perspective of a woodworm whose pedigree and status was not prestigious enough to lawfully be on the boat. The biblical story reinvented as the beetle's guidebook is the confession of the unclean, the outcast.

In the next chapter a feminine perspective and a postmodern, split subjectivity is introduced through Kath Ferris, a young woman, who escapes from her chauvinist partner Greg. Seeking affection and understanding, she sails away in a boat with two cats. Kath is

very sensitive and naïve, she is constantly haunted by the disaster a nuclear war could cause. She also gets entangled in a remorse about how the animals, especially the reindeers become victims of men. She despises men as the main characters of history who have the power to conquer everything but after that, they neglect the subordinated. “Kath could be a prototypical postapocalypse historical materialist; in revolt from her partner and the society he represents, she is literally haunted by the victims of that tradition” (Buxton 2000, 75).

In *Flaubert’s Parrot* as well, Barnes plays with existential freedom regarding how he gives voice to the ‘other’. “The postmodernists fictionalize history, but by doing so they imply that history itself may be a form of fiction” (McHale 2004, 96). Barnes uses the journalistic genre of the report and arranges a meeting between two non-fictional characters made fictional in the midst of his fiction: the reader and Louise Colet, the lover of Gustave Flaubert. Louise Colet becomes a fictional character because her words are invented by the narrator. As Flaubert’s iconic sentence ‘Madame Bovary c’est moi’ formed the heroine of his novel, Braithwaite takes over the spell as well: “‘Louise Colet c’est moi’”(Berlatsky 2009, 194) – and Louise Colet is talking to us, readers directly. The reader is also fictionalized because the narrator forms Louise Colet’s story as if she were answering a universally created, curious reader’s questions about her love affair with the French author. The reader is interpellated by the narrator: “Now hear my story. I insist” (Barnes 1985, 108). The second person pronoun and the informal, direct tone make communication possible literally between the author/ narrator/ character and the reader. “Second person uncannily straddles the ontological divide between the reader’s real world and the text’s fictional world” (McHale 2004, 225).

ii. Questioning the Status of Historical Documents

Brian McHale argues that when there are more repertoires about the real world or history, they tend to differ from each other due to the fact that our signifying systems differ from each other. He calls these semiotized notions ‘realemes’. In the judgement of which realemes mirror truth, ideology and culture-bound processes take place. This is why some realemes become acceptable and thus propagated, while others remain inadmissible and thus sink into oblivion.

“There is an ontological scandal when a real-world figure is inserted in a fictional situation, where he interacts with purely fictional characters” (85). In *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* the same thing happens when we hear the confession of a woodworm on

Noah's Ark. The voice of the 'other' generates a new viewpoint and thus questions the status of the Bible and other religious documents which are in praise of Noah. If we consider the story of the beetle as a piece of fiction, parody intrudes as Noah and his family participate in the course of actions. Noah's prestige diminishes as Barnes forces the reader to acknowledge his invention as 'another' religious realme.

Maybe the best example of questioning the status of historical documents can be caught in the third chapter of *Flaubert's Parrot* entitled *Finders Keepers*. In this part of the novel the Flaubert-fan narrator, Geoffrey Braithwaite, meets Ed Winterton, a professor of literature, who reveals to him that he had all the exchanged letters of Gustave Flaubert and Juliet Herbert. These letters were the evidences for their mutual love and secret engagement. Braithwaite is reluctant to see the letters, but Winterton simply confesses that he has burnt all of them because this was the request of the French writer in his letters for his love-life to remain in secret. Braithwaite is perplexed about the knowledge of the past: if documents are so slippery, who to trust?

"Do the books that writers don't write matter?" (Barnes 1985, 91) – asks the narrator in the chapter entitled *The Flaubert Apocrypha*. Braithwaite provides us with a record of Flaubert's unwritten ideas: his written books with another ending, an autobiography, translations to English, and other projects on writing fictions. The narrator brings these unwritten books in parallel with the things Flaubert wanted but ultimately did not do in his life. When the apocryphal life of Flaubert has ended, he started to write his books. Braithwaite implies that before *Madame Bovary* everything about Flaubert was a fantasy which is not mirrored specifically enough in books about the French writer.

iii. Unveiling the 'Dark Areas' of History

The dark areas of history are those parts "about which the 'official' record has nothing to report" (McHale 2004, 87). The third short story of *Three Simple Stories* in *A History in of the World in 10½ Chapters* is probably the best example in which Barnes reveals a dark hour of history. It presents the vicissitude of the St. Louis ship which departed from Germany in 1939 with hundreds of Jewish refugees who were optimistic about landing on the American continent. Although every country seemed to sympathize with the Jews, they were continuously rejected. Europe receives them back, but mostly, everybody dies during the world war. Duplicity and lack of empathy are the striking ways through which Barnes pictures the absence of Christian compassion. The 'clean/unclean' dichotomy brings the pathos as the

dominant tone enhancing the tragedy of shared fate. The ‘one for all, all for one’ attitude brings out the importance of the equality of human lives. Jackie Buxton calls the ‘trip’ the “voyage of the damned” because it only simulates a slight possibility of the salvation of the Jews.

In *Flaubert’s Parrot*, in the chapter entitled *Chronology*, Barnes presents three chronologies of Flaubert’s life by using different perspectives. The first is similar to a biography found in an ‘official’ history book: it provides us with data which describe Flaubert’s relationship with the outside world and deals with his most important literary achievements. The second one deals with the dark area of his life: his losses, his troubles in the literary world, his disadvantages in love and his illness. If the works of a writer are proclaimed as gems of the literary canon only after his death, the literary academy and the reading public does not usually reveal its own mistake of not acknowledging the writer in his life. At the same time the immoral personal life of the acknowledged author should remain in the past as well. The third part of the chronology is thus cunningly put together with the help of excerpts from Flaubert’s letters and diary.

iv. Personalizing History

In the chapter *A Train-spotter’s Guide to Flaubert*, Geoffrey Braithwaite draws a parallel between the railway and the French writer. “For Braithwaite to identify himself as a train-spotter shows some ironic distance from his devotion to a dead foreigner” (Moseley 1997, 75). The narrator from biographical references, from Flaubert’s notebooks and journals, creates a chapter of Flaubert’s relationship with trains. He writes about how a part of the Flaubert estate was sold to the railway, and how Flaubert loathed the new invention. He hated to travel on it because he thought it was boring, and also, he hated even more that every conversation during a gathering was about the progress of work around the railways. “Superior to everything is—Art. A book of poetry is preferable to a railway.” (Barnes 1985, 85) – wrote the French writer in his notebook. The narrator argues that his attitude towards trains can be drawn together with his tempestuous relationship with Louise Colet. Ironically their relationship and also the jealous outburst of Louise Colet were sustained by the existence of trains and railway stations. The narrator connects his Flaubert train-spotting with his own experience: during a small excursion on a train he imagines the French writer’s attitude towards the situation.

Braithwaite's Dictionary of Accepted Ideas from *Flaubert's Parrot* consists of a Flaubert dictionary made by the narrator, Geoffrey Braithwaite in order to summarize what he thinks is important to him from the life of the French writer. According to Brian McHale

such a catalogue (...) functions to disengage worlds from syntax, thus hindering the reconstruction of the projected world and foregrounding the ontological difference between the stratum of words and the stratum of worlds. But it also has another function, for it forces us to reflect on the principles of selection and order that could have produced such a heterogeneous assemblage. (McHale 2004, 162)

This way the chapter is more likely a glossary containing the alphabetical list of terms connected to Gustave Flaubert through which the narrator can personalize his knowledge of his favourite author's life. On the other hand in the chapter entitled *Cross Chanel* Geoffrey Braithwaite remembers how Flaubert was a master of irony and how he created a dictionary of clichés. This way, his intention is to ironically squeeze the image of the French author into a few words and thus create his own dictionary about Flaubert. Such a genre would expel the presence of the author, but the selection of words will reflect authorial voice and this way irony becomes again inescapable.

v. The History of the I

The metafiction of postmodern literature accentuates the inseparability of art and life. "Reading and writing belong to the processes of 'life' as much as they do to those of 'art'" (Hutcheon 1980, 5). This can be interpreted in a way that through literature we can make sense of life.

Books say: She did this because. Life says: She did this. Books are where things are explained to you; life is where things aren't. I'm not surprised some people prefer books. Books make sense of life. The only problem is that the lives they make sense of are other people's lives, never your own. (Barnes 1985, 131)

Geoffrey Braithwaite, the narrator of *Flaubert's Parrot* reveals the trauma of his life in the chapter entitled *Pure Story*. In parallel with investigating his favourite writer, Braithwaite shares his relationship with his wife, her adulterous lifestyle and her death. Ellen Braithwaite, according to her husband, was not corrupted and thus for the narrator, her death was meaningless. At the same time, Ellen committed suicide and Geoffrey was the one who had to

‘detach’ her from life. Trauma caused torment made him to open up about Flaubert but remain closed about Ellen.

vi. The Repetition of History

“Prophecy, even if only anachronistic pseudo-prophecy with the benefit of authorial hindsight, brings us to the verge of historical fantasy (...)” (McHale 2004, 94). The ninth chapter entitled *Project Ararat* from *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* is an inevitable continuation of *The Mountain*. Spike Tiggler, a pilot and astronaut has a visionary call from God on the Moon to find Noah’s Ark. The story opens similarly to the biblical story of Jonah, only that Spike becomes determined to find one of the greatest relics of Christianity. He goes through an immense change. As a deeply religious, balanced and sensitive man, he organizes the mission to Mount Ararat. He manages to discover the corpse of Amanda Fergusson from a previous chapter entitled *The Mountain* but mistakes it with Noah’s dead body. The holy search ends with the ‘burps’ of the past. Spike’s religious bigotry does not allow him to realize the discovery as a mocking of past events. In the end of the story he is convinced that the cadaver was a step towards finding an evidence to justify the biblical story. “Barnes’ characters look to history for answers and usually only find more questions” (Rubinson 2000, 164).

The repetition of history can be best conceived as regression and within fiction it is manifested through the devolution of characters. According to Brian McHale, “history repeats itself only because we are unaware of the alternate possibility for each historic event: what that event could have been but was not” (McHale 2004, 92). Indeed, the first story of the chapter *Three Simple Stories* exposes a male survivor of the Titanic who managed to escape the sinking ship in women’s clothes. Years later, while making a film from the event, he goes on ‘board’ secretly to contemplate on the past but he gets caught by the director and leaves the ‘ship’ again in disguise. To McHale’s account, one has to add that the bitterness of irony reveals the capacity of how history and past events are able to ‘burp’ into the present. “History repeats itself, the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce” (Guignery 2009, 55). Also, the story is opposed to the general conception of how the catastrophe of the Titanic confirmed the bravery, fearlessness and self-sacrifice of men. The main character became a disgrace two times in his life repeating the same mistake.

III. Mocking Religion

In the opinion of Linda Hutcheon, a mode of creating metafictional parody is the rewriting of an old text from a different point of view. If the reader discovers and recognises old literary forms and historical texts imbued in a new context or point of view, the processes of parody and the destruction of the old text's prestige get activated. This means that the reader must admit the artificiality of the narration. Barnes often plays chiefly with the Bible, the primary metanarrative existent among the ideologies of religious people.

In *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* Christian belief which is practically based on humbleness, being helpful and receptive becomes one of the strongest ideologies which repress the 'other'. The woodworms in the first chapter of the novel crash our idealized image of the last patriarch: they make the reader realize that the idyllic pastoral notion of an old, smiling man housing the two representative of every species is not more than a drunken, imbecile, gluttonous, despot and savage human being. Gregory Robinson makes it explicit how the ideologically constructed Bible demands obedience not for God himself, but for "the various secular and religious authorities who assume the privilege of interpreting it" (Robinson 2000, 166). A whole list of supernatural animals was transported from the living world to the dining table of Noah's family. These creatures were claimed to be unclean because of their hybridity. Also, the emblematic image of the white dove bringing hope to the ship was flicked away. The true bearer of the holy branch was a black raven, but it was considered too 'unclean' to become a glorious Christian symbol. "Noah's fascistic decree annihilates history by rewriting it in a more aesthetically pleasing iconic form" (Buxton 2000, 64). According to Andrew Tate, the rewritten story from the Bible acutely critiques orthodox theological perspectives: determining a hierarchy between species (races) and then perform genocide can be conceived as simply despicable or as the savage ravaging instincts of human beings. The beetles imply that the animals have a greater sensitivity towards life and living creatures than God's chosen humanity.

The second narrative from *Three Simple Stories*, similarly to the rewriting of 'Noah's Ark' (*The Stowaway*), is another desecration of a biblical story. 'Jonah and the Whale' is scrutinized by scientific methods and by the end the impossibility of surviving in the stomach of a big fish is proved. The exalted and eloquent language of persuasion is similar to the narration of *The Wars of Religion*. The aim of the short story is not just the liberation of humour but also a kind of serious induction of the absurdity of religious parables. According to Andrew Tate, God is depicted as "a moral bully and paranoid schizophrenic, (...), an

implacably authoritarian figure who holds all the cards and wins all the tricks” (Tate 2011, 60).

As the first chapter depicted a part from Genesis, the last chapter is about the depiction of New Heaven in *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters. The Dream* begins with a waking up to a new world which at first is not conceived as heaven, but a kind of ultimate utopia where everything is possible and all the greediness of bourgeois aspiration becomes satisfied. Barnes imagines us a heaven in defence of religiosity and historicity as well, because ideologically, if something has started (life, genesis, or anything) it should come to an end in the future. But sardonically, this heaven is not eternal and not spiritual but narcissistic and avaricious. It is without God and thus without guilt and judgement. The narrator incredulously observes that even the most evil participants of human history are there, living the same wish fulfilment as those people who in their ordinary lives were ‘okay’. Human beings live active lives because they are continuously challenged to do something or they have to correspond to some kind of law or rule. Barnes’ transcendental utopia is infinite in the fulfilment of wishes without any compensation. Even the main character wants to be judged but the deliverance of his life disappoints him being too normal. Without any provocation and spiritual influence, life gets tiresome even in heaven. This leads to the ‘suicide’ of the inhabitants. According to Andrew Tate, this heaven becomes a “contemporary consumerist parody, (...) a secular damnation of individualist achievement and satisfaction without love and intimacy” (62). Gregory Robinson attaches the concept of fabulation to this chapter as well. “Our religious narratives, like our historical narratives (...) are fabulations designed to comfort people by making sense of their suffering” (Robinson 2000, 177). As new heaven gives the possibility of death, Jackie Buxton remarks that this heaven “becomes a cyclical hell, an endless present” (Buxton 2000, 82) and in my opinion this is even worse than hell because people there are made to ask for their own death. Religious revelation is presented not as eternal spiritual life, but the recognition of death and the desire to die.

3.1.2. Fabulation

Patricia Waugh gives alternative definitions to different self-conscious writings. One of the types of metafiction is called fabulation. Waugh introduces the notion by accentuating that we are all part of a history. Fabulation happens by “rejecting realism more thoroughly, posit the world as a fabrication of competing semiotic systems which never correspond to material conditions” (Waugh 2001, 19).

The notion appears in one of the chapters of *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* where Kath Ferris, the embodiment of the female other, runs away from home fearing the serious consequences of a nuclear war. According to Brian McHale, “fabulation is fiction that offers us a world clearly and radically discontinuous from the one we know, yet returns to confront that known world in some cognitive way” (McHale 2004, 59). In this story, the created world is one which is threatened by nuclear war. This way fabulation is created through a dystopian future, by the spatial intrusion of a fictional world into the real one.

There are two parallel denouements to the story which is in fact an allusion to how reality can be conceived as multi-faceted histories. In the first one she reaches an island where she recognizes the symptoms of radiance on herself.

The other version of reality is more sordid, Kath wakes up in a men-ruled asylum where the doctors seem to know more about her problems than she does. Kath is diagnosed with persistent victim syndrome. The symptom of the illness is fabulation which according to Barnes is used by the patient to reorganize reality for his or her subjectivity can cope with its abstractions.

The human mind cannot exist without the illusion of a full story. So it fabulates and it convinces itself that the fabulation is as true and concrete what it really knows. Then it concretely links the real and the totally imagined in a plausible narrative. (Guignery 2009, 54-55)

‘Fabulation’ is also a generic description of how Barnes perceives the writing of history and how his own stories are scripted. His explanation of fabulation (...) implie[s] a need to come to terms with the forces of a destructive, even merciless history. (Rubinson 2000, 169)

While Vanessa Guignery and Gregory Rubinson interpret fabulation as a mode of connection between illusion and reality, history and experience, Patricia Waugh claims that fabulation is a method to bring our attention to the fact that not just the characters create illusions within their world but the characters themselves are fictionalized as well. She also argues that fabulation “reveals (...) a ‘stylization’ which enables other voices to be assimilated, rather than presenting conflicting voices” (Waugh 2001, 17). This statement can be applied only partially to the chapter. Although at the beginning of Kath’s story, we hear her voice and we can bring it into balance with the other voices around her, she will get into a conflict with the asylum doctors. Ironically, the reality of the asylum seems more believable, and fabulation is diagnosed as a grievous illness.

3.1.3. Mise en abyme

The structure of a realist novel is usually organized between frames. According to Patricia Waugh, in contemporary metafiction, frames cannot be so easily traced due to the two frame-breakers: parody and inversion. This is what gives metafiction its deconstructive characteristics. In Patricia Waugh's understanding, we speak of intrusion when the writer breaks its fictional world with bringing a piece from 'reality' into the novel. With this intrusion the author questions not just the illusionary existence of reality but also the validity of fiction. Mise en abyme can be caught in metafiction, in the plot, in the literary form, even in the thoughts of the characters.

According to Brian McHale "the effect of mise en abyme (...) is to rob events of their solidity, and the effect of this is to foreground ontological structure" (McHale, 2004, 125). In this view, the mise en abyme foregrounds the bricolage-structure of the book. The only unity which the reader is able to discover in *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* is the overflowing power of water which foregrounds the ontological structure of a metaphorical system. Water represented as flood, seas, oceans, snow, or even drinking water in the novel acts as an archetype of change. This change can be conceived as a change in the conception of history which Barnes introduces to us, or a turning-point in the lives of the characters on the narrative level. If we consider the functions of hypodiegetic narratives formulated by Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, the metadiegetic level in *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* has a thematic function: "the relations established between the hypodiegetic and the diegetic levels are those of analogy, i.e. similarity and contrast" (Rimmon-Kenan 2002, 95).

In Linda Hutcheon's view, the mise en abyme can be called self-mirroring as well and its aim is to challenge traditional realism. Thus it reflects the characteristics of metafictional texts because it can be conceived as the critique of postmodern fiction. When extended, the mise en abyme can take the form of allegory as in the chapter *The Wars of Religion*, where a woodworm is convicted due to religious matters. Manichaeian allegory, also considered a mise en abyme by Brian McHale, is the foot-stone of *The Dream* chapter, where New Heaven is created at the borderline of the Apollonian and the Dionysian. The Apollonian part consists as the narrator takes part in intellectual activities for which he did not have the time or opportunity while he was alive. The Dionysian parallel groups the consumerist lifestyle of the narrator: spending money, eating exotic food, and having sex with different women.

Flaubert's Parrot in general abuses and deconstructs the conventions of history, fiction, biography, autobiography, essay, appendix, dictionary and journalism. It is also built upon

contradictions implying simultaneity: alternative stories and different genres are brought together not always having overlapping or coherent meanings. The whole novel in fact acts as a metafictional collage: “bits and pieces of undigested ‘real life’ appear to float into the fictional frame” (Waugh 2001, 143). This feature is strengthened by the notion what Patricia Waugh calls intertextual overkill, because of the densely repeated references of Gustave Flaubert’s life and works. *Flaubert’s Parrot* is also a great example of the Chinese-box structure and according to the classification of Rimmon-Kenan, the hypodiegetic narrative in the novel has got a thematic function similarly to the other novel.

“Modern self-conscious texts often play with narrative levels in order to question the borderline between reality and fiction or to suggest that there may be no reality apart from its narration” (Rimmon-Kenan 2002, 96-7). First of all, we hear the main character Geoffrey Braithwaite speaking, but sometimes, due to the cunning twists Barnes makes with narrative voices, we tend to confuse the authorial voice with the voice of the main character. The stories Geoffrey Braithwaite tells us are also diversified: he fictionalizes his own life; through the letters, quotations and intimate stories about Gustave Flaubert, he manages to speak from the French novelist’s point of view; and when he takes on Louise Colet’s point of view as well, the narrative gets unravelled into smaller and formally distinguishable pieces. We can call the interpretational shifts between fiction and reality as a *mise en abyme* as well because biographical data about Flaubert is blended with the story of the fictitious narrator. The inner core of the novel is about the life of Gustave Flaubert, but “the mechanical nature of creativity on a scientific level gradually modulate[s] into aesthetic propositions” (Hutcheon 1980, 105).

3.2. Intertextuality and Simulacrum

According to Linda Hutcheon, “intertextuality offers a liberating determinism” because

the reader is forced to acknowledge not only the inevitable textuality of our knowledge of the past, but also both the value and the limitation of that inescapably discursive form of knowledge, situated as it is between presence and absence. (Hutcheon)

She also claims that the word ‘interdiscursivity’ would cover postmodern intertextuality better, because postmodern texts use multiple modes and areas to enact parody. Intertextuality can be the source of parody and irony in metafiction through which the writer can play with

our previous knowledge of historical truth and minimize its value to a representation of past reality, or a simulacrum.

3.2.1. An Ekphrasis

In the first part of the chapter entitled *Shipwreck*, Barnes narrates the brutality of how a few people survived the sinking of a ship. Egoism, rioting, homicide and eating dead bodies take place on a raft, until fifteen people get saved by another ship. In the second half of the chapter we are enlightened by the narrator that this was in fact the story of the Medusa ship and the historical event was perpetuated by Théodor Géricault's painting, *The Raft of the Medusa*.

The painting itself in this context becomes a textual part of history. The narrator accentuates the painter's diligence of acquiring every possible piece of information about the whole event from each survivor. However, the narrator argues that in spite of the painter's effort, the picture does not give a truthful description of what really happened. Neither of them had a direct experience of the case, their conception of a slice of history is shown through their artwork. "The painting, like Barnes's novel, is a mix of genres: a combination of gritty realism and heroic fantasy" (Rubinson 2000, 171). Such a catastrophe and violence cannot be easily made neither into a static picture, nor into a flowing retelling. From the painting we might assume that Géricault's intention was to capture hope, which probably lived more strongly in the minds of the survivors than violence. This way, the painting can become a method to visualise the survivors' trauma, while the text the method to verbalize it.

"How do you turn catastrophe into art?" (Barnes 1989, 76) - writes Barnes and gives a list in an ironic voice, how media is after catastrophes. The narrator of the chapter accepts Géricault's interpretation of his painting, but he challenges the painter, by noting some slips like there are more people on the raft than actually survived (maybe for the sake of the artistic form), and people who were drinking their urine and eating corpses for days seem too healthy as bodybuilders who just left the conditioning room. As the narrator makes a quick trace about the painting and the historical documents, we are forced to realize that only the title may remind us of the survivors of the Medusa. The painting itself, is only a piece of art of a shipwreck. Ironically, the painting seems to become not disastrous enough. Barnes adds that maybe if Géricault would have painted such a pain and human monstrosity, "the painting would be acting upon us too directly" (82).

There is a tension between Géricault's and Barnes' interpretation of the story: while Géricault painted amity, persistency and hope, Barnes described catastrophe and aimlessness in human existence. The tension is most visible when Barnes accentuates the fact that the artistic product of such monstrous past was exhibited in flashy saloons and viewed not as an opinion but as a painting. As Linda Hutcheon points out, "parody can be used as a self-reflexive technique that points to art as art, but also to art as inescapably bound to its aesthetic and even social past" (Hutcheon 2001, 101).

Intertextuality in Barnes' novel is represented by *The Raft of the Medusa* and as the writer reflects on this artwork, it also becomes an ekphrasis. As Barnes twiddles with the importance of the painting, we may realize that most of the readers could be familiar with Géricault's masterpiece, while the historical background behind the canvas may be not known at all. As postmodernism suggests "a panic sense of the hyperreal and the simulacrum," (24) the painting may lead us to think of Baudrillard's theory about the precession of the simulacrum. According to the fourth stage of how signs inhabit our understanding, the painting becomes a pure simulation of the real events without the historical event and the artwork sustaining any relationship with each other. "We prefer the convenient replica to the inconvenient original" (Guignery 2009, 60). This conception might also bring the irony of how the narration of the shipwreck event is itself a hyper-reality. "All the attempts to represent history are futile, resulting in 'simulacral' rather than reliable portraits of past events" (Rubinson 2000, 174). As the original historical event sank into oblivion, the narrator implies that the painting is going to have a similar fate due to decay and the diligence of the woodworms.

3.2.2. The Parrot

If *The Raft of the Medusa* occupies the fourth stage of Baudrillard's theory about how representation became the condition of simulation, the case of the symbolic bird from *Flaubert's Parrot* is more complicated because Barnes plunges his bird simultaneously into all of Baudrillard's stages. This way the animal can hold a manifold and curious web of significations based upon recursion. As it stands under the glass in the Hôtel-Dieu and in the Croisset house, the parrot becomes an intertextual object. Where everything seems ancient and forgotten the bird's flashy and salient existence makes the bystander curious about the past. The parrots, the symbols of communication, are ironically silent in the book and instead of providing answers, they generate the questions.

First of all, the stuffed animal of Gustave Flaubert is a substitute of a living parrot, that is, a simulation. At first glance, we can interpret it as a simple sign, reflecting reality, that is, the first stage of Baudrillard's theory. On the other hand though, Barnes reveals in the novel that Flaubert not just used the bird as a source of inspiration, but he treated it as a real animal and he was occasionally irritated by it as well. This way, the parrot as a sign steps to the second stage, where it perverts the reality of the living bird. This simulated pet of Flaubert is made into an imaginary living bird in *A Simple Heart* which, in the end of the French writer's story, becomes stuffed. Thus living parrots, stuffed parrots and fictitious parrots fly back and forth masking and perverting reality.

Considering the frame of the novel, the relationship between the parrots from the museum as signifiers and Flaubert's parrot as the signified matches Baudrillard's third stage of simulation because the parrots all mask the absence of basic reality. As Barnes guides us through the parrot-investigation, without physical evidence (letters, diary excerpts from Flaubert), the reader may remain sceptic about the real existence of the original stuffed parrot.

The parrot as sign, similarly to *The Raft of the Medusa*, becomes its own simulacrum if we want to interpret it from Geoffrey Braithwaite's point of view. The narrator's aim is to know Flaubert and through this knowledge, to possess him like he never could his wife. He believes that this is only possible if he manages to reveal the connection between the French author and his books. This connection can be best caught by a source of inspiration, which Braithwaite believes, will give him a hint into the personality of the adored writer. This way, the stuffed parrot will have no relation to reality, it becomes the symbol only of an abstract thought captured in the narrator's head.

4. Irony vs. "Love"

In the novel *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters*, Julian Barnes becomes the narrator of one of his chapters, we hear his voice. In *Flaubert's Parrot*, the situation is more complex but, although the narrator is always Geoffrey Braithwaite, there are chapters when we are not quite sure whether we are still listening to the medical doctor, or Barnes has taken his place. As Ryan Roberts argues: "as a result of his continued focus on Flaubert, Barnes keeps open his possibility that readers may confuse him with Geoffrey Braithwaite" (Roberts 2011, 31).

Authorial presence within the novels is filled with ambiguity. First of all, metafiction is a narrative from which irony is inseparable. Secondly, if we want to get closer to the author-narrator of a book, the closest we can get is through metafiction. The naïve reader is after some kind of truth, which he or she can only attain through ironic metafiction. What kind of truth can irony give us? How do we know whether something is intended or not, whether we got the text right? Linda Hutcheon condenses this ambiguity into one sentence. “Irony’s indirection complicates considerably the various existing models of intersubjective communication between a speaker and a hearer” (Hutcheon 2005, 10-11). This way the aim of this chapter is to unmask the ironic English writer. All of Barnes’ ‘distasteful’ comments on biblical stories, bigotry and religious manifestations can be understood as an attack on history and religion as ‘universal’ categories but not as an offence about belief in religion or belief in humanity. The cliché of love transcending time and being the solution for the problems of humanity is the only notion which is independent from the regulatory rigidity of the systems of history and religion. “Love, for Barnes, represents the closest we may come to truth.” (Tate 2011, 62). Only a humanist can talk about love with such a naivety. In one of his interviews, when he was faced with his humanist tendencies and acclaimed by the interviewee, he replied laughing to the remarks: “I think I’m a moralist but you make me sound like a bit of an old hippy” (Guignery 2009, 18).

“The richest exploration of the mysterious nature of faith in the novel [*A History of the World in 10½ Chapters*] – and probably in all of Barnes’ work to date – is the elliptical, audacious ‘half chapter’” (Tate 2011, 61). While the other chapters are all written as short-stories, *Parenthesis* is inserted as a philosophical discussion about love, as “a self-conscious, metafictional essay” (Rubinson 2000, 172). The chapter is immune to history, it is not determined in time and space: Barnes is in search for modes of “salvation from history not salvation in history” (Buxton 2000, 66). The writer proposes three remedies to the hardships caused by history: religion, art and love. He claims that the boundaries of religious belief became ambiguous (illustrates it with the vicissitudes of the woodworms). Although art liberates us from the catastrophes of history and at the same time “art can make us to forget history” (Guignery 2009, 60), artistic understanding is not similarly disposable to everyone (Mr Fergusson could not understand Amanda due to her artistic and religious sensibility). Love is the only remaining possibility to the oppressive forces of history.

The reader is paralysed. Is it allowable for postmodern literature in spite of its highly tinkering tendency to use the cliché of sentimental novels so openly? Does love have the power to add more to Julian Barnes’ novel? Can the reader take love seriously, or it sinks into

the depth of irony? Who is the narrator? Is it the author? Why do we want to conceive it inevitably as Julian Barnes? As the essay is about the unfolding of the personal sphere through opinions about love, it is important to ask about the narrator. It is implied that we are going to hear the direct voice of Julian Barnes. The narrator also mentions El Greco's painting for further confusion, *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz* in which the gazes of the mourners converge upon the dead body of the count.

Only one of them looks directly out of the picture, and he holds us with a gloomy, ironical eye (...). Tradition claims that the figure is El Greco himself. I did this, he says. I painted this. I am responsible, and so I face towards you. (Barnes 1989, 130)

If we consider how Linda Hutcheon differentiates the functions of irony, I think that we can conceive what Barnes does in *Parenthesis* as the "ludic".

When viewed favourably, this is seen as the affectionate irony of benevolent teasing; it may be associated as well with humour and wit (...) and therefore be interpreted as an estimable characteristic of playfulness. (...) Even without this familiar moral frame of reference, irony can be seen as trivializing the essential seriousness of art. (Hutcheon 2001, 46)

The author-narrator in the midst of the night, inspired by his sleeping female partner near him, laments on the importance and necessity of love. Why can love become the inductor of the sublime in poetry while the phrase 'I love you' is so trivial in prose? The narrator teases the reader, because he is conscious that his theme used in prose may easily make the chapter ridiculous. However, if poetry can convey love to the reader, why not prose? And with the question, the chain-reaction of irony starts.

How 'I love you' resonates in different languages? Barnes emphasizes how the different soundings of 'I love you' have the power to signify something between the 'I' and the 'you' which in other languages might remain wrapped because of the language system. His associations within the three-worded sentence are intended as gleeful, rather than serious. Barnes also writes about formalities and movements which might explain why we usually think about love in the terms of a cliché. He also criticizes how the human heart does not have the shape of a 'real' heart. He dissects the heart of an ox, to study it and thus understand it. As he fails, he compares the human heart with our similarly complicated organ, the brain. Ironically again, he comes to no specific conclusion. "You can deal with the brain, as I say; it

looks sensible. Whereas the heart, the human heart, I'm afraid, looks a fucking mess" (Barnes 1989, 139).

The peak of the ludic function is enacted when the writer questions the necessity of love's existence. What is love for? Is love good for something at all? Barnes tries to prove scientifically that our ability of love is not an inevitable characteristic of survival, thus love is only a habit.

We don't need it for the expansion of our race; indeed, it's inimical to orderly civilization. Sexual desire would be much easier if we didn't have to worry about love. Marriage would be more straightforward – and perhaps most lasting – if we were not itchy for love, exultant on its arrival, fearful of its departure. (134)

According to Catherine Belsey, the postmodern condition and materialism in general implies the cliché that everything can be bought, even sex has become a commodity.

Love thus becomes more precious than before because it is beyond price, and in consequence its metaphysical character is intensified. More than ever, love has come to represent presence, transcendence, immortality (...) – everything in short, that the market is unable to provide or fails to guarantee. (Belsey 1994, 683)

This implies that love became something fragile and naïve and thus utterly desirable. Barnes warns the reader to be careful with the usage of the phrase.

Desired as the ultimate good, feared as a constraint, doubted as an allusion, postmodern love is both silent and garrulous. It cannot speak, and yet it seems that it never ceases to speak in the late twentieth-century Western culture. (685)

'I love you', a phrase saturated with inexpressibility can easily become a cliché: banal and empty when it is used repetitively without the justification love really needs. Catherine Belsey argues that desire cannot be uttered, so love cannot be verbally presented in its true form. However, love is "so precious that we must repeatedly speak it and hear it spoken" (687).

If we consider Catherine Belsey's view about a retained postmodern love and the English writer's emphasis on silent love, we once again crash with irony. Barnes speech about love becomes a ponderous philosophical prattle which makes love even more unreachable and inaccessible than it is. The more he tries to figure out the essence of love, the more distance he creates between the sentiment and the reader. Yet as Belsey argues, we are eager to hear it and to talk about it.

All the chapters in the book are about the absence of love. Love does not appear in the stories except for this half chapter, only an instinct of survival among the hardships of history can be sensed in the novel.

On the other hand, as we read the anatomization of love in *Parenthesis* and feel more and more sceptic about reaching a definite conclusion, love becomes more and more desirable. With this paradoxical decoy Barnes offers the reader two possibilities. Either this chapter is as empty of the sentiment of love as the others were (and in this situation Barnes is aware of the fact that love cannot be explained just made ridiculous), or we accept that love, although unfathomable, can be a remedy for the postmodern soul. However, the essayistic and at the same time ironic tone of the writer excludes love as becoming an enunciation of world redeem. It does not have the power to change the world, but it can influence the individual.

From where does love come from? Love is not sex, it does not help the world go round, so how come that it still exists? Barnes, a resourceful postmodern author, “refuses to be silent in the face of what cannot be said” (Belsey 1994, 687). The conclusion to his thoughts is that if we do not believe in the power of love and we are sceptical about love happening to us, it means that we have become subservient to history. People have an inclination to believe in something eternal, universal and timeless. The notion which somehow incorporates these characteristics is truth. In spite of the fact that Barnes argues in favour of the inexistence of a singular objective truth (if we think that objective truth is attainable, we will fall into “beguiling relativity” (Guignery 2009, 55)) and thus the unreliability of history, we must maintain our belief that this truth can be found. We must believe in love as we believe we can obtain this truth. “Barnes commits to the ideal of always improving historical knowledge, but this cannot be achieved by eschewing subjectivity” (Rubinson 2000, 174). Truth in the novel means experiencing something or interpreting a representation. This way truth is inevitably connected to imagination, which Barnes implies, is part of our individuality as love is. So it is not important how we love, or whom we love. Why do we love and why do we seek to build up truth has more significance. Fabulation is not just about fiction making within a novel, it is about truth making in the real world as well. By the end of the chapter, the reader simply cannot take the word ‘love’ light-minded. Although it still resonates as the cliché of postmodern kitsch, it still has things to teach us. Barnes dips love into the sauce of irony and still makes the flavour overwhelming.

In *Flaubert’s Parrot*, the irony and love situation is similarly ambiguous and complicated. If we follow Linda Hutcheon’s workings of irony, Barnes uses the “self-protective” function “to suggest that irony can be interpreted as a kind of defence mechanism”

(Hutcheon 2005, 47). Defence and self-defence may become keywords in the novel which inevitably induce empathy. In spite of the fact how the narrator of the book tries to defend Gustave Flaubert and his works, how he tries to defend his wife Ellen from judgements and how he tries to defend himself for being so defensive, the authorial-narrative voice clashes into irony at every turn.

In self-conscious parodic literature, the reader-character identification circuit is often broken. (...) By reminding the reader of the book's identity as artifice, the text parodies his expectations, his desire for verisimilitude, and forces him to an awareness of his own role in creating the universe of fiction. (Hutcheon 1980, 139)

In *Flaubert's Parrot*, this identification is doubly broken. Firstly we, the existent readers, are made aware by Barnes that the slice of life of Geoffrey Braithwaite is only a fiction. Secondly, the narrator as well becomes self-conscious that a part of the Flaubert oeuvre was created by his own reading and interpretation of the French texts. Thirdly at a point in the novel, authorial and narrative voices create an amalgam and the reader's desire to identify is broken. How can we feel empathy and overflowing love when we do not have a stable character at the first place?

In *Emma Bovary's Eyes*, the narrator introduces the question whether the carelessness of objective reality manipulates our understanding of good literature. Defending the French writer automatically means a defence of literature. The situation is ironical, because of the iconic sentence "Madame Bovary, c'est moi". Although Flaubert's mistaking Emma's eye colour in his novel will never overshadow his literary career, it will weaken his claim of fully understanding his female character. Despite the fact that Barnes claimed in many of his interviews how he admired the literary reputation of the French writer, *Flaubert's Parrot* shows that the English writer has a contrary opinion about women and love.

Thus love also gets a main theme in *Flaubert's Parrot*, but it is extended with the institution of marriage. It is important how Barnes builds up a contrast between the French writer and the narrator and how he plays with the possible conviction of the adulterous woman's prototype. Flaubert never married but was a womanizer and had affairs with prostitutes. He also cheated on Louise Colet, with whom he seemingly cherished a close relationship. On the other hand, he created his heroine to commit suicide as a self-punishment for her deeds, probably without any trouble of his conscience. Although Flaubert was selfish

and sybaritic in his affairs, the narrator constantly contrasts these amour-trips with the writer's devotion and love to his mother, sister and niece.

Braithwaite, on the other hand, although a great admirer of Flaubert, did not condemn his wife for committing adultery. The monograms of the women (Emma Bovary, Ellen Braithwaite) imply that they were both similarly 'poisonous' in their thoughts and inevitably must be treated in the same way. Flaubert in his novel wrote that Emma was the victim of taking her novels too seriously (a sarcastic attitude), while Geoffrey felt that the acts of Ellen were normal because she was a victim of being loved too much. Although the explication was intended to be sincere, being loved too much has also an ironic dissonance. Going back to Catherine Belsey and considering the difficulty of being loved and the postmodern individual's struggle and desire for love makes Ellen's situation and motivation for being unfaithful questionable. According to Geoffrey, she did not love him, so maybe it is more likely she was after some kind of carnal pleasure which she confused with love.

In this perspective the aim of *Flaubert's Parrot* is "to establish a different moral and human connection between art and life for the novel genre" (Hutcheon 1980, 59). At first glance, and this is where irony emerges, Geoffrey seems to become a Flaubert fan because the French writer was independent from women, while the narrator is still stirred by the trauma caused by the adventures of his wife. On the other hand, we can interpret this part of the novel without irony. In this case, Geoffrey was traumatized by the fact that when he ended Ellen's life, he felt that he had to punish her without the intention of doing so. "I loved her; we were happy; I miss her. She didn't love me; we were unhappy; I miss her" (Barnes 1985, 125). As Ellen left a hole in his life, he filled it with his devotion to Flaubert. This way, the conflict of the novel is born from the contrast between how Geoffrey could not read his wife and how he could read Flaubert. He loved his wife, but he also loved the fact that he could form the dead Flaubert according to his taste, which he could not do with Ellen.

Love for Flaubert was a pastime, his relationship with Louise Colet was a farce, his pleasures with women are all described ironically by the narrator. Braithwaite's love for Ellen, however pathetic, was wholehearted because even by employing irony Barnes can make the reader feel empathy for the narrator and his loss. Braithwaite's feeling for Flaubert is more straightforward and protective than for his wife. He conquers the whole life of the French writer and subordinates it to his own understanding. Ironically, he forms a Flaubert whom he can love not just as a deceased man only alive in his books but also as a revived person. Love again in this case is not untinged from 'fabulated truth'. Although Barnes,

similarly to *Parenthesis*, ridicules love, he flutters the fact that at a point we simply cannot dodge the sentiment but have to take it seriously.

5. Conclusion

My primary aim in this essay was to investigate love in two of Julian Barnes' novels, which is brought into evidence through metafiction. As metafiction inevitably generates self-reflexivity and parody, irony and love can create a curious amalgam. For a better understanding of metafiction, I tried to concentrate on the genres it generates, on the interpretation of intertextuality which appear in the books and on historiographic metafiction as well because this is the concept from which metafiction erupts.

A History of the World in 10½ Chapters and *Flaubert's Parrot* present stories unfolded around different main characters but they are also histories "because 'narrative' of the past is subjectively organized and presented" (Berce 2001, 101) according to the thoughts of the fictional main characters. Proceeding from these two novels, I think that the idea that postmodernism may be considered ahistorical can be clearly rejected. The novels dealing with history induce scepticism around the one and only true history. The novels flatter us with a tendency to label history as only another literary genre. Linda Hutcheon's view on postmodernism as historiographic metafiction is probably the best way to reflect and analyse novels where history is rewritten as such. What I think is the most interesting about Barnes is his usage of metafiction, which can be neither neglected nor avoided by any analysis. His style of composing metafiction goes further than just underlining the postmodern idea of the artwork as a representation which will lead us to further representations but never objective reality.

In postmodern metafiction, the process of writing and the process of reading require almost the same creative power. Metafiction is actually brought into life by the collision of these two powers. This is why we find ambiguity in Barnes' novels and can only guess from where does irony end and from where do truth and love begin. Thus the reader may have all the right to laugh on the woodworm's confession, to think sceptically about love and to read Geoffrey's character as the deluded man's who was cheated by his wife. But if we consider that history does not necessarily mean advance and progress but sometimes regression, our interpretation of irony might turn and reveal that individual history and the empathy which it

can generate (no matter how cliché-like it may sound) may have the power to sweep away ideologies and already constructed meanings and truths.

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