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Postmodern Metafiction in Julian Barnes's Novels
Posztmodern metafikció Julian Barnes regényeiben

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1. Introduction

“The word postmodernism sounds not only awkward, uncouth; it evokes what it wishes to surpass or suppress, modernism itself.”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”². 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”³ 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”⁴.

Post-Marxist critics like Frederic Jameson, Jean Baudrillard and Jean-François Lyotard, on the other hand, all wanted to describe postmodernism as a consequence of ideological, historical, economic and cultural change and thus they embedded the notion of the postmodern into the post-capitalist consumer social phenomenon. Jameson sees the postmodern world as a post-capitalist consumer society; Lyotard problematizes the relationship between knowledge, scientific discourse and the function of the narrative; while Baudrillard, problematizes the idea of mass (re)production. But

in the loss of history, the dissolution of the centred self, the fading of individual style and the predominance of pastiche, it proves immensely difficult to Jameson

¹ Ihab Hassan, “Toward a Concept of Postmodernism”, available:

<http://www.mariabuszek.com/kcai/PoMoSeminar/Readings/HssnPoMo.pdf> , access: 22 April 2014.

² Steven Connor, *Postmodernist Culture: An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 1997), 118.

³ Connor, 131.

⁴ *ibid.*

to specify the nature and direction of the postmodernity that he wishes to account for.⁵

As Marxist critics had a tendency to stigmatize postmodernism as ahistorical, 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. Steven 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"⁶, 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 can be easily debated if we consider the works of English writers branded with the label 'postmodernist': 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 who, in his books, returns to history and memories in a critical and ironic way.

The aim of this essay is to give a possible answer to the questions how the "metafictional denaturalization of the realistic plot"⁷ 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.

⁵ Connor, op.cit., 47.

⁶ Connor, op. cit., 132.

⁷ Eric Berlatsky, "Madame Bovary, c'est moi!": Julian Barnes's 'Flaubert's Parrot' and Sexual 'Perversion'.", *Twentieth Century Literature* 5. 2 (2009): 175.

2. Problems

2.1. Postmodernism and Contemporary Fiction

Jean-François Lyotard defines the postmodern “as incredulity towards metanarratives”⁸. 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. As Patricia Waugh understands it, reality

is produced by the interrelationship of apparently ‘objective facticities’ in the world with social convention and personal vision. These social forms operate within particular historical structures of power and frameworks of knowledge.⁹

This way the postmodern paradox is in fact the consciousness that we are constantly driven by ideologies although we are aware of it. Linda Hutcheon finds this paradox primarily in self-reflexive and parodic art.

And this where the self-reflexive, parodic art of the postmodern comes in, underlining in its ironic way the realization that all cultural forms of representation – literary, visual, aural – in high art or the mass media are ideologically grounded, that they cannot avoid involvement with social and political relations and apparatuses.¹⁰

This irony, as Hutcheon argues can be interpreted in two ways. We can conceive it as an essential and defining part of the postmodern text, or we can treat it as trivial characteristic which is very unlikely. Also, parodic elements in postmodern texts are many times stigmatized because of taking the place of literary criticism. In a parodic text, the norm is always shown, but with a deviation which criticizes it.

“Postmodern fiction has come to contest the modernist ideology of artistic autonomy, individual expression, and the deliberate separation of art from mass culture and everyday life.”¹¹ This way, difference and the voice of the other become focal points in postmodern

⁸ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), xxiv.

⁹ Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*. (Taylor and Francis e-Library, 2001), 51-2.

¹⁰ Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*. (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), 3.

¹¹ Hutcheon, 15.

literature. The notion of singular truth loses its originality because inexperienced things always come to us through some kind of representation which have their own ideological saturation. Thus postmodernist texts cast off the conception of transparent reality and through self-reflexivity, they introduce a concept of reality imbued with “cultural conventions that define both narrative and the construct we call ‘reality’”¹². This can also mean that postmodernist texts are self-conscious about the boundaries of representation and this makes us question the truthfulness of an artefact before we consume it. Patricia Waugh argues that we must be aware of “the function of language in constructing and maintaining our sense of everyday ‘reality’”¹³. The postmodern paradox involves the fact and the acknowledgement that we can only communicate through representations. So we must constantly “question the process by which we represent ourselves and our world.”¹⁴

“Postmodernism reveals a desire to understand present culture as the product of previous representations.”¹⁵ 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”¹⁶. This ontological theme is called by Brian McHale “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. This postmodern medium makes of us readers split subjectivities who can interpret these multiple realities as fictions. “Postmodernist fiction achieves its aesthetic effects and sustains interest, in the process modelling the complex ontological landscape of our experience.”¹⁷ 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

¹² Hutcheon, 36.

¹³ Waugh, op. cit., 3.

¹⁴ Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*. (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), 54.

¹⁵ Hutcheon, 58.

¹⁶ Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*. (Taylor and Francis e-Library, 2004), 27.

¹⁷ McHale, 39.

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. In Linda Hutcheon's words,

even if the novel today has (...) died as a traditional realistic narrative genre, there is still the fact that no proof can really be found. There is no corpse; the form has just slipped into another world, in a very similar shape and attitude.¹⁸

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. In Linda Hutcheon's words:

The novel is not a copy of the empirical world, nor does it stand in opposition to it. It is rather a continuation of that ordering, fiction-making process that is part of our normal coming to terms with experience. (...) Since fiction is not a way of viewing reality, but a reality in its own right, the fictive heterocosm will have its own rules which govern the logic or motivation of its parts."¹⁹

¹⁸ Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*. (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1980), 16.

¹⁹ Hutcheon, 89-90.

2.2. 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.

Barnes' novels mainly deal with humour and intense irony and satire, but at the same time, there is a melancholy strand in all of his books, which is not always appreciated by his readers. Also, he became to be known as a multicultural writer, which could be flattering to a European reader because of the possibilities of an easier identification with the characters and of having a greater understanding of the situation and the conflict within the novels. His affection to French literature is understandable as he studied French language and literature at Oxford, and his proficiency in European culture is due to his travels from which neither the central, nor the eastern parts of the continent were left out. Moreover the attitude towards religious thoughts in Barnes' novels may be explained by his unconcealed atheism.

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 enclose hard and shimmering truths”²⁰. 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. Also, many critics acclaim him for his talent of creating believable female characters.

Another ambiguity about Barnes is that he many times pointed out in his interviews that he always tries to write very different books, and thus does not want to be circumscribed by critics as a ‘kind’ of writer like Salman Rushdie or Peter Ackroyd. It may also sound curious to the reader that he usually does not read any kind of criticism connected to his books, or to postmodern literature at all. He is an ‘antiacademic’ writer having a low opinion about criticism: “a first-rate critic is always less important, and less interesting, than a secondary writer”²¹. “Novels come out of life, not out of theories about life or literature.”²² Yet I venture to analyse his two novels by proceeding from literary criticism he is so sceptical about. Although it will never be as interesting as the novels themselves, hopefully it will add another drop to the sea of interpretative possibilities.

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.

²⁰ Vanessa Guignery, eds., *Conversations with Julian Barnes* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 30.

²¹ Guignery, 14.

²² Guignery, 47.

3. 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.”²³ 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”²⁴. “There seems to be a new desire to think historically, but to think historically these days is to think critically and contextually.”²⁵ 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.”²⁶ 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 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”²⁷.

²³ Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?”, available:

<http://www.kropfpolisci.com/exceptionalism.fukuyama.pdf>, access: 04 April 2014.

²⁴ Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*. (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), 57.

²⁵ Hutcheon, 366.

²⁶ Hutcheon, 71.

²⁷ Linda Hutcheon, “Historiographic Metafiction: Parody and the Intertextuality of History”, available:

http://ieas.unideb.hu/admin/file_3553.pdf, access: 22 April 2014.

What historiographic metafiction challenges is both any naïve realist concept of representation and any equally naïve textualist or formalist assertions of the total separation of art from the world.²⁸

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.

²⁸ *ibid.*

4. The Analysis of the Two Novels

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.

Although I am going to use Jean Baudrillard's concept of the simulacrum, I think it is plausible to proceed from Brian McHale's description of postmodern poetics, Linda Hutcheon's understanding of the postmodern as historiographic metafiction and Patricia Waugh's highlighting of metafiction to analyse these novels. Talking about metafiction, we cannot simply evade talking about self-reflexivity and parody within the novels. Both novels incline towards the denaturalization of history by mocking the notion of the single origin and religion. The satiric repetition of history, the voice of the other and the process through which history gets personalized are condensed in these novels and are intensified with the usage of metafiction. According to Linda Hutcheon, the usage of metafiction may inevitably create different narrative structures, through which we can group these stories under variant genres. This may give us more options to unfold further characteristics of Barnes' metafiction. Due to the fact that fabulation, mise en abyme and intertextuality are important characteristics of metafiction and the postmodern novel as well, I think that these features are essential in representing the style of the writer. In the end, irony, another main theme of postmodern and metafictional narratives, is going to be inspected in the two novels as well and contrasted to love.

4.1. Metafiction

[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.²⁹

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.”³⁰ This is why she calls metafiction ‘narcissistic narrative’, because it is “intrigued with its own reflection”³¹.

“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.”³² According to Linda Hutcheon, there are four types through which metafiction is represented in postmodern texts. First of all there are overt and covert forms of metafiction. When an overt form is used, self-consciousness and self-reflexivity are openly exposed within the text. Covert texts, on the other hand are more internalized in showing their self-reflexivity and in most of the cases they are not self-conscious. The other typology according to which Linda Hutcheon classifies metafictional texts consists of the diegetic and the linguistic. “In the diegetic mode, the reader is made aware of the fact that he too, in reading, is actively creating a fictional universe.”³³ “In the linguistic mode, however, the text would actually show its building blocks – the very language whose referents serve to construct that imaginative world.”³⁴

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

²⁹ Waugh, op. cit., 2.

³⁰ Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*. (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1980), 7.

³¹ *ibid.*, 11.

³² Waugh, op. cit., 100.

³³ Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*. (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1980), 28.

³⁴ Hutcheon, 28-9.

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”³⁵ 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.³⁶

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.

4.1.1. Self-reflexivity and Parody

What we tend to call postmodernism in literature today is usually characterized by intense self-reflexivity and overtly parodic intertextuality. In fiction this means that it is usually metafiction that is equated with the postmodern.³⁷

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

³⁵ Hutcheon, 43.

³⁶ Hutcheon, 47.

³⁷ Linda Hutcheon, “Historiographic Metafiction: Parody and the Intertextuality of History”, available: http://ieas.unideb.hu/admin/file_3553.pdf, access: 22 April 2014.

point a previous work of genre, it inserts a metaphoric version of this into the ongoing (metonymic) literary tradition.”³⁸ 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.³⁹

Among the features of overt diegetic metafiction the techniques of parody, mise en abyme and allegory are employed and they are aimed at bringing the narration into the centre of the novel and thus “undermin[e] the traditional coherence of the fiction”⁴⁰.

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.”⁴¹ 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.”⁴² 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.

³⁸ Waugh, op. cit., 69.

³⁹ Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*. (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1980), 24.

⁴⁰ Hutcheon, 28.

⁴¹ Merritt Moseley, “A History of the World in 10½ Chapters.” In Merritt Moseley ed. *Understanding Julian Barnes* (Columbia: The University of South Carolina Press, 1997), 110.

⁴² Moseley, 112.

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.

Metaphorically figuring collective human history as a traditional (Christian) sea journey, Barnes presents a fleet of failed arks aimlessly drifting in the oceans of time. His various ships are leaking, limping vessels that lack proper destinations. (...) For Barnes, the human voyage is an unpiloted drift from disaster to disaster, where the innocent perish and the survivors crew a ship of fools.⁴³

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.

⁴³ Jackie Buxton, "Julian Barnes's Theses on History (In 10½ Chapters)," *Contemporary Literature* 41. 1 (2000): 60.

II. Mocking the Idea of Single Origin

The status of the document has altered: since it is acknowledged that it can offer no direct access to the past, then it must be a representation or a replacement through textual refiguring of the brute events.⁴⁴

Postmodern texts are against the “fetishizing of the archive, making it into a substitute for the past”⁴⁵. “All historical novels, even the most traditional, typically involve some violation of ontological boundaries.”⁴⁶ 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

“Every emancipation is a restoration of the human world and of human relations to man himself.”⁴⁷ This way, “margins and edges gain new value. The ‘ex-centric’ – as both off-centre and de-centred – gets attention.”⁴⁸ In *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters*, with the help of intertextuality, Barnes reproduces a Biblical scene from the perspective of a minority; and in another chapter, he uses feminist criticism to give voice to a spiritually abused woman. In *Flaubert’s Parrot*, although not lacking in irony, Barnes imagines how Louis Colet, Gustave Flaubert’s lover interpreted their relationship.

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

⁴⁴ Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*. (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), 81.

⁴⁵ Hutcheon, 87.

⁴⁶ McHale, op. cit., 16.

⁴⁷ Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*. (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1980), 61.

⁴⁸ Linda Hutcheon, “Historiographic Metafiction: Parody and the Intertextuality of History”, available: http://ieas.unideb.hu/admin/file_3553.pdf, access: 22 April 2014.

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.”⁴⁹

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.”⁵⁰ 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’”⁵¹ – 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. Look, take my arm, like that, and let's just walk. I have tales to tell; you will like them. (...) Come, you're surely not frightened of me? So why that look? You think I am a dangerous woman? (...) Aha...well, it's too late now. You have taken my arm; you cannot drop it.⁵²

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.”⁵³

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 semioticized notion ‘realemes’. In the judgement of which realemes mirror truth, ideology and culture-bound processes take place. This is why some

⁴⁹ Buxton, op. cit., 75.

⁵⁰ McHale, op. cit., 96.

⁵¹ Berlatsky, op. cit., 194.

⁵² Julian Barnes, *Flaubert’s Parrot*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 108.

⁵³ McHale, op. cit., 225.

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.”⁵⁴ 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 realeme.

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?”⁵⁵ – asks the narrator in the chapter entitled *The Flaubert Apocrypha*.

With Flaubert, the apocrypha cast a second shadow. If the sweetest moment in life is a visit to the brothel which doesn’t come off (*L’Education sentimentale*), perhaps the sweetest moment in writing is the arrival of that idea for a book which never has to be written, which is never sullied with a definite shape, which never needs be exposed to a less loving gaze than that of its author.⁵⁶

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

⁵⁴ McHale, op. cit., 85.

⁵⁵ Julian Barnes, *Flaubert’s Parrot*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 91.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

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.

As we read *The Case Against* chapter from *Flaubert's Parrot*, we may consider ourselves as active participators in a hearing where Gustave Flaubert is convicted for his attitude towards life. The accusations are mostly stereotypical truths from his biographies: he hated humanity, democracy, he did not believe in progress, he was not interested in politics and the Commune, he lived in isolation, he was a pessimist, a sadist, a misogynist, but he believed in art and style. The narrator points out that these charges are all superficial and he tries to take up Flaubert's position in defending him. In all of his arguments we realize that these historical documents did not fully cover the position in which Flaubert lived his life.

iii. Unveiling the 'Dark Areas' of History

The dark areas of history are those parts "about which the 'official' record has nothing to report"⁵⁷. 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.

The contemporary ark, however, proves to be a malign mockery of Noah's original navigation. Again, politics and human greed interfere in a seemingly miraculous redemption of the descendants of God's 'chosen' people.⁵⁸

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

⁵⁷ McHale, op. cit., 87.

⁵⁸ Buxton, op. cit., 71.

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

The third chapter of *Flaubert’s Parrot*, is introduced with a Flaubert quote from one of his letters: “I attract mad people and animals”⁵⁹. In *The Flaubert Bestiary* the narrator collects every animal which can be connected physically or metaphorically to the French author. Geoffrey Braithwaite calls the writer a bear and more precisely a polar bear which cannot be tamed to dance. A list of other similarities between a diverse scale of animals and Flaubert are listed: lion, tiger, boa, ox, sphinx, elephant, whale, oyster, snail, hedgehog, lizard, cow, donkey, mule, rhinoceros, lamb, gorilla, camel. “Why the camel? Perhaps because it is a fine example of the Flaubertian grotesque: it cannot help being serious and comic at the same time.”⁶⁰ Flaubert’s unknown and personal characteristics are introduced metaphorically by using animals. On the other hand, the narrator tells us stories of Flaubert’s adventures with different animals: a five-legged sheep, parrots and dogs. As the stuffed parrot became a muse on Flaubert’s desk, the dogs had also an effect on his life. Geoffrey ironically gives names to these dogs to describe in which territories of life Flaubert encountered them: the Dog Romantic (the Newfoundland of Elisa Schlessinger), the Dog Practical (his greyhound companion), the Dog Figurative (Emma Bovary’s dog) and the Dog Drowned/ Fantastical (the peculiar case of two dogs in Greece). The chapter ends with the quote: “What happened to the truth is not recorded”⁶¹. Although the animals are all recorded as historical facts, the discrepancy of similes is created by the author to prove that human characteristics and the

⁵⁹ Julian Barnes, *Flaubert’s Parrot*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 95.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

⁶¹ *ibid.*

ways with which we can capture them are ironically endless, no final drawing of a real person's character exists.

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."⁶² 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."⁶³ – 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.

Irony reaches the top in *Snap!* where Geoffrey Braithwaite with an ironical tone discusses ironical incidents that happened around Flaubert.

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.⁶⁴

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

⁶² Merritt Moseley, "Flaubert's Parrot." In Merritt Moseley ed. *Understanding Julian Barnes* (Columbia: The University of South Carolina Press, 1997), 75.

⁶³ Julian Barnes, *Flaubert's Parrot*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 85.

⁶⁴ McHale, op. cit., 162.

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.

What might we say of Flaubert in this new Dictionary? We might set him down, perhaps, as a 'bourgeois individualist'; yes, that sounds smug enough, dishonest enough. It's a characterisation which always remains unshaken by the fact that Flaubert loathed the bourgeoisie. (...) This demand for authorial absence ran deeper still. Some writers ostensibly agree with the principle, yet sneak in at the back door and cosh the reader with a highly personal style.⁶⁵

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'."⁶⁶ 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.⁶⁷

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

The Visitors from *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* is an example of how easily history can reverse its power labels and the suddenness of how anybody can become "mixed

⁶⁵ Julian Barnes, *Flaubert's Parrot*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 70.

⁶⁶ Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*. (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1980), 5.

⁶⁷ Julian Barnes, *Flaubert's Parrot*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 131.

up in history”⁶⁸ and become its victim. The second chapter of the novel is about a cruise liner hijacked by terrorists. Franklin Hughes, a professional guide and the main character of the story is blackmailed to give an eloquent explanation how history makes dead soldiers from innocent commoners.

Grounding this view is a philosophy of history as a destructive force. (...) Historiographic metafiction is often mistakenly interpreted as suggesting that all versions of history are equal, but in Hughes’s collaboration Barnes presents us with an allegory of the dangers of historical relativism.⁶⁹

“Prophecy, even if only anachronistic pseudo-prophecy with the benefit of authorial hindsight, brings us to the verge of historical fantasy (...).”⁷⁰ The ninth chapter entitled *Project Ararat* 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 (character introduced in a previous chapter entitled *The Mountain*) from the previous chapter 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.”⁷¹

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.”⁷² 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

⁶⁸ Gregory J. Robinson, “History’s Genres: Julian Barnes’s ‘*A History of the World in 10½ Chapters*’”, *Modern Language Studies* 30. 2 (2000): 167.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

⁷⁰ McHale, *op. cit.*, 94.

⁷¹ Robinson, *op. cit.*, 164.

⁷² McHale, *op. cit.*, 92.

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.”⁷³

Given the dense weaving of Barnes’s ‘arkological’ allusions, cross-references, and self-citations, however, it is difficult to distinguish farcical historical repetitions from the tragedies that they supposedly imperfectly recall.⁷⁴

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.”⁷⁵ 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

⁷³ Vanessa Guignery, eds., op. cit., 55.

⁷⁴ Buxton, op. cit., 70.

⁷⁵ Robinson, op. cit., 166.

more aesthetically pleasing iconic form.”⁷⁶ 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 Wars of Religion chapter brings back the woodworms that are determined to undercut the saintliness of Christianity. They kill a bishop by eating through his throne and make him to fall down. The chapter is written in the form of an official trial, in an academic language, which doubles the seriousness of human stupidity. The verdict is constantly delayed because of the debate between the prosecutors and the attorneys, and the absence of the defendants. The lawyer wants to defend the woodworms by implying that they were not on Noah’s Ark, so God’s law cannot be practiced upon them. Irony and paradox are combined here because the readers already know from the first chapter that the woodworms survived the flood as stowaways. Comedy stirs as we realise that we acquired a ‘historical knowledge’ which was never even written. “History, the story suggests, is quite literally riddled with ruination”⁷⁷ because the last pages of the manuscript trials are eaten up by the beetles.

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. In this chapter

Barnes calls our attention to some of the most fanciful elements of the Bible to highlight its dependence on fictional conventions, suggesting that religious texts need to be stripped of the privilege and authority which many believers invest in them.⁷⁸

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.”⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Buxton, op. cit., 64.

⁷⁷ Buxton, op. cit., 72.

⁷⁸ Rubinson, op. cit., 166.

⁷⁹ Andrew Tate, “‘An Ordinary Piece of Magic’ – Religion in the Work of Julian Barnes.” In Sebastian Groes eds. *Julian Barnes: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 60.

As Christianity was ridiculed in the previous chapters, *The Mountain* intends to take it seriously at first glance, but in the end the story becomes a tragic farce. Amanda Fergusson, a middle-aged religious woman cherishes a special relationship with his father. Mr Fergusson is the total opposite of his daughter: he cannot understand her religious sensitivity, her paternal affections and her artistic aspirations. After Mr Fergusson's death, Amanda decides to go to Mount Ararat for a pilgrimage to prevent her father's soul from perdition. The main character proves to be a tenacious heroine possessing all the manifestations of religious ideologies of the nineteenth century of England. The mountain is said to be unclimbable, a dense religious mysticism shadows it. Amanda feels herself god-fearing enough to confront or accept the wrath of God, but ironically nothing happens on the mountain. Amanda's drastic belief in some kind of revelation is self-satisfied. She suffers a minor injury and her bigotry makes her die on the spot and thus atone for her father's cynicism.

In the chapter entitled *Upstream!*, Charlie, a well-known actor travels to the deep jungle with the whole cast to shoot a documentary film about two monks getting lost and being saved by the native Indians. Charlie, who distinguishes himself from the savages as an entity of civilisation, realizes that the barbarous race living in the depth of forests has made him rethink his life. As time passes, he discovers his need for stability, family, children and spiritual love. As his letters remain unanswered, it is implied that his girlfriend left him. The tragedy of the main character is doubled when "Charlie's 'sophisticated' grasp of the distinctions between art and reality begins to come unstuck"⁸⁰ and his fellow actor dies during the shooting of a dangerous scene on the turbulent river. Similarly to *The Mountain* Barnes plays with the cruelty of religious belief which makes death more grievous. When one of the natives dies, the 'others' conceive it as a natural continuity of life, they are not even astonished. The documentary has a religious bearing (two monks spread Christianity between the indigenous people), so if there is a God somewhere, the narrator implies, he should be rather pleased with the crew's endeavours than to let a 'monk' die: "the legacy of Christian missionaries in South America is not one of grace and compassion."⁸¹ The irony lies in the Christian doctrine which is regulated by separatist principles of the 'clean' and 'unclean', furthermore, sometimes even the 'clean' must be sacrificed. "At the stories' conclusion, Charlie's understanding of the Indians is as limited as his understanding of the partner to whom he writes."⁸²

⁸⁰ Buxton, op. cit., 73.

⁸¹ Tate, op. cit., 60.

⁸² Buxton, op. cit., 73.

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. In this chapter Barnes embraces every opportunity to affect our sensory organs. The breakfast which is served to the narrator is so perfect that the reader can taste it in his or her mouth, the bed is so comfortable that we can feel it through our skins, the luxury is so magnificent that our eyes cannot cope with its cavalcade. 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 greedy. 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.”⁸³ 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.”⁸⁴ As new heaven gives the possibility of death, Jackie Buxton remarks that this heaven “becomes a cyclical hell, an endless present”⁸⁵ 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.

⁸³ Tate, op. cit., 62.

⁸⁴ Robinson, op. cit., 177.

⁸⁵ Buxton, op. cit., 82.

4.1.2. 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”⁸⁶.

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”⁸⁷. 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.⁸⁸

‘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.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Waugh, op. cit., 19.

⁸⁷ McHale, op. cit., 59.

⁸⁸ Guignery, eds, op. cit., 54-55.

⁸⁹ Robinson, op. cit., 169.

While Vanessa Guignery and Gregory Robinson 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.”⁹⁰ 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.

4.1.3. 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. While in classic narratology the meaning of mise en abyme is more specific, it is a little story that mirrors the main one, in Linda Hutcheon’s understanding, the mise en abyme is a parodic self-consciousness of conventions which take place in creating the fictional text. The mise en abyme in this understanding has also a mirroring effect but it holds a critique of the main text which is given meaning by both the reader and the author. Within a text there can be more than one mirroring device. Mise en abyme can be caught in metafiction, in the plot, in the literary form, even in the thoughts of the characters.

Merritt Moseley argues that many critics showed disapproval in calling *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* a novel. These critics saw more logic in referring to this book as a collection of short-stories. Barnes unquestionably defines his book as a novel, which notion he conceives as “an extended piece of prose, largely fictional, which is planned and executed as a whole piece”⁹¹. According to Barnes’ preferred definition, this “whole piece” can become

⁹⁰ Waugh, op. cit., 17.

⁹¹ Merritt Moseley, “A History of the World in 10½ Chapters.” In Merritt Moseley ed. *Understanding Julian Barnes* (Columbia: The University of South Carolina Press, 1997), 110.

again criticised. The novel, as a “whole piece” implies a beginning, an ending, and some kind of progression between the two poles. The beginning and ending are symbolically given by the themes working in the first and the last chapters, but “in between, though, chronological order is jumbled”⁹². Furthermore, Merritt Moseley breaks the idyll of unity in the novel by drawing the reader’s attention to the formal inadequacy of Barnes’ novel. “There is no main character, no unitary voice, no tight progression in the narrative, no single or even double plot.”⁹³ Narration is also miscellaneous in the chapters. We can find first person and third person singular, limited and also omniscient narration.

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”⁹⁴. In this view, the mise en abyme foregrounds the bricolage-structure of the book. Merritt Moseley defends the novel by claiming that it is not simply a collage but a symphony. “A musical composition has no plot and no characters and, in the usual sense, no ideas; instead it has themes and motifs, and the repetition and patterning of these provide its unity.”⁹⁵ The only unity which the reader is able to discover in the novel is the overflowing power of water, and 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.”⁹⁶

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

⁹² Moseley, 113.

⁹³ *ibid.*

⁹⁴ McHale, *op. cit.*, 125.

⁹⁵ Merritt Moseley, “A History of the World in 10½ Chapters.” In Merritt Moseley ed. *Understanding Julian Barnes* (Columbia: The University of South Carolina Press, 1997), 115.

⁹⁶ Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*. (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 95.

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.

Allegory has a tendency to slide tortuously back and forth between literal and metaphorical understanding of words, and therefore to focus on the problematical tensions between them.⁹⁷

Flaubert' 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"⁹⁸. 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' 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."⁹⁹ 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"¹⁰⁰. At the beginning, as Geoffrey Braithwaite is in search of evidences of historical truth, we tend to comprehend the facts

⁹⁷ McHale, op. cit., 145.

⁹⁸ Waugh, op. cit., 143.

⁹⁹ Rimmon-Kenan, op. cit., 96-7.

¹⁰⁰ Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*. (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1980), 105.

about the French writer as a mimesis of reality. On the other hand, after the three versions of Flaubert's biography we back off because historical truth suddenly becomes the holder of more than one point of view and thus becomes fictionalized. Even the narrator is a fictional character. Does a fictional character have the right to fumble in the midst of historical data?

The author lets the reader to complete the 'open' work but he still, obviously, retains some control. It is 'open' but in a field of relations (created by the novelist) which imply some sort of inner coherence. The reader never really creates literary meaning freely; there are codes and rules and conventions that underline its production.¹⁰¹

Besides the parallel between the lives of Geoffrey Braithwaite and Gustave Flaubert, Barnes controls the novel by creating a frame for it. This way the first and the last chapter can be attached chronologically within the book. In the first chapter, the main character and also narrator discovers two stuffed parrots: one in the Hôtel-Dieu in Rouen, the other in Croisset. The problem is that both are claimed to be the original bird which stood on Flaubert's desk while he was writing *Un Coeur Simple*. Geoffrey becomes reluctant because he feels that through the genuine bird somehow he could get closer to the creative power of Flaubert. He is sure that if he can find out which bird served as the source of inspiration for the French writer, he will be able to understand him more. He then writes letters to Flaubert scholars with the aim of finding out something about the parrots. He is aware of the fact that after Flaubert finished his novel, he got annoyed with the stuffed Loulou and donated the bird to the Museum of Natural History. In the last chapter entitled *And the Parrot*, the narrator is confronted with evidences that both parrots are from the museum. Geoffrey then finds a scholar called Lucien Andrieu who reveals that the parrots were chosen from fifty stuffed animals similar in colour with Loulou from the museum and nobody knows whether Flaubert's parrot was or is among them.

¹⁰¹ Hutcheon, 152.

4.2. Metafictional Narrative Structures

Metafictional deconstruction has not only provided novelists and their readers with a better understanding of the fundamental structures of narrative; it has also offered extremely accurate models for understanding the contemporary experience of the world as a construction, an artifice, a web of interdependent semiotic systems.¹⁰²

In the systematization of metafictional narratives, Linda Hutcheon distinguished the type of the covert diegetic metafiction where “self-reflection is implicit, (...) it is structuralized, internalized within the text.”¹⁰³ She also defines some characteristic genres of the covert diegetic metafiction like the detective story, fantasy, game structure, and the erotic. However, she also mentions that even the epistolary can be read as the prototype of a metafictional narrative.

Thus metafictional narrative structures may give us the ability to insert the stories of the novels into different genre types. By grouping these excerpts as such, we may apprehend the modes of metafiction in the two postmodern novels from a new perspective.

4.2.1. Detective Story

Detective fictions are metafictional narrative structures because of “the self-consciousness of the form itself, its strong conventions, and the important textual function of the hermeneutic act of reading”¹⁰⁴. Due to frame break, instead of a hierarchical construction of the story, the author lets us know the ending of the story at the beginning. According to Patricia Waugh this way instead of the question “What happened next?” we are curious about “Why did it happen?”¹⁰⁵ This way, I think that *Flaubert’s Parrot* can be read as a detective fiction and the main question could be: why is Geoffrey Braithwaite is so interested in Gustave Flaubert?

The self-awareness in the detective story makes the reader conscious that the things the reader is going to read can only occur in a fictitious world. The plot of the novel and the narration make us aware that the story of Gustave Flaubert and Geoffrey Braithwaite are

¹⁰² Waugh, op. cit., 9.

¹⁰³ Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*. (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1980), 31.

¹⁰⁴ Hutcheon, 71.

¹⁰⁵ Waugh, op. cit., 83.

tightly connected through art: the novels what Flaubert has written but also through the novel in which they appear as characters. There is also a convention how a detective fiction is built up, which fulfils the expectations of the reader. In the novel, the framing story of the parrot gives the main mystery of the book and the reader similarly to Braithwaite has to find and interpret all the clues which connect the beginning and the ending. The mystery is solved in the novel, when we realize that the singular truth of history evaporates from the present and we have too many parrots and thus too many endings to choose from. “How do we seize the past? How do we seize the foreign past? We read, we learn, we ask, we remember, we are humble; and then a casual detail shifts everything.”¹⁰⁶

4.2.2. Fantasy

The ‘fantastic’ temporal and spatial self-involvement of metafictional works of the covert diegetic mode is ultimately emblematic of the imaginative leaps in time and space required in the reading of any fictional work. Such narcissism brings to the reader’s attention to the fact that fantasy is not a deviation from either reality or the conventions of realism. Any text – realistic or fantastic – uses certain conventions in order to create its own reality.¹⁰⁷

To describe unreal ontological landscapes, Brian McHale uses the concept of heterotopia coined by Michel Foucault. Then he argues that fictional worlds can create a type of heterotopian space which “fails to observe the basic rules of world-building”¹⁰⁸. This is why he calls it the zone.

Typically in realist and modernist writing, this spatial construct is organized around a perceiving subject, either a character or the viewing position adopted by a disembodied narrator. The heterotopian zone of postmodernist writing cannot be organized in this way, however. Space here is less constructed by the text, or rather constructed and deconstructed at the same time.¹⁰⁹

This way the chapter entitled *The Dream* from *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* can be a good example of how Barnes created a zone. New Heaven can be conceived as a double heterotopia because it works differently from our real world, and also it deconstructs and parodies our concept of the Biblical heaven as well. Zones do not reflect objective realities,

¹⁰⁶ Julian Barnes, *Flaubert’s Parrot*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 72.

¹⁰⁷ Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*. (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1980), 81.

¹⁰⁸ McHale, op. cit., 44.

¹⁰⁹ McHale, 45.

“but they do faithfully reflect our culture’s ontological landscape”¹¹⁰, which in this case is consumerism.

According to Brian McHale there are different strategies to build a zone. These are juxtaposition, interpolation, superimposition and misattribution. New Heaven can be conceived as a misattribution to the Biblical heaven because the rules we conventionally used to associate with it are replaced by new ones. On the other hand, if we take in unreligious terms that is, in terms of science-fiction, the construction of New Heaven can be interpreted as a superimposition. This way, New Heaven becomes a parallel world to our familiar space. “In order to be manageable, secondary ontologies have to respect as much as possible the inner structure of the primary ontologies they use as their ontic foundation.”¹¹¹

4.2.3. Game

As Patricia Waugh claims, “fiction is primarily an elaborate way of pretending, and pretending is a fundamental element of play and games”¹¹². Game is only possible when there are rules and there is another person with whom the reader can engage into play. In fiction, this requires meta-levels through which, as in reality, the inventor of the game has the possibility to explain the rules. “In using a game model, metafiction calls attention to a free creative activity (...) within self-evolving rules, an activity, that is the same in all fiction reading.”¹¹³

“Reading is not always the pleasant, controlled, harmonious experience that the Classical and Romantic traditions both suggest. It can be disrupting, challenging, not to say threatening.”¹¹⁴ For instance, in *Flaubert’s Parrot*, Barnes introduces a chapter entitled *Examination Paper*, in which the narrator acts as an examiner and thus creates from the reader a student. The aim of the examination is a thought-provoking adventure on Gustave Flaubert, the relationship between art and life and criticism. The chapter in fact begins with an instruction about how many of the tasks should be done and how much time do we have.

The first part of the examination is entitled ‘Literary Criticism’ and the narrator summarizes his thoughts on the topic as follows:

¹¹⁰ McHale, 55.

¹¹¹ McHale, 88.

¹¹² Waugh, op. cit., 34.

¹¹³ Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*. (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1980), 82.

¹¹⁴ Hutcheon, 151.

For some, Life is rich and creamy, made according to an old peasant recipe from nothing but natural products, while Art is a pallid commercial confection, consisting mainly of artificial colourings and flavourings. For others, Art is the truer thing, full, bustling and emotionally satisfying, while Life is worse than the poorest novel: devoid of narrative, peopled by bores and rogues, short on wit, long on unpleasant incidents, and leading to a painfully predictable denouement.¹¹⁵

Then he provides the reader with portions of Flaubert's life which happened on the borderline of art and life. The second task of the first exam question is to evaluate Flaubert's attitude towards critics and literary criticism according to a few Flaubert quotations in which critics and criticism are undervalued and even loathed by the French author.

In the second part of the examination the reader is invited to analyse some parts of Flaubert's life and some references about his books. Each of the excerpts of Flaubert's life are connected to different fields of studies: economics, geography, logic, medicine, biography, ethics, psychology, psychoanalysis, philately, phonetics, theatrical history, and astrology.

4.2.4. Erotic

Linda Hutcheon argues that reading can be characterized as a process of building up control over fiction. On the other hand, novels can be imagined to be gluttonous and seducing entities, who are brought into life by the passion of the reader, who satisfies fiction by reading it.

However, the erotic can take more concrete forms as well: it can be more than the allegory of the reader and book relationship. Most of Julian Barnes' stories deal with heterosexual marriages. The majority of conflicts come from the fact that one of the couples (mostly the woman) engages into an erotic relationship with another human being. Eric Berlatsky reads *Flaubert's Parrot* not just as a book of male bonding between Geoffrey Braithwaite and Gustave Flaubert but as a book of homosexual or androgynous love. He argues that "gender and sexuality are never stable in *Flaubert's Parrot*"¹¹⁶. Eric Berlatsky creates a love hexagon in which he separates two 'groups'. In the first there are Geoffrey Braithwaite, Charles Bovary and Louis Colet, while the second presents Ellen Braithwaite, Emma Bovary and Gustave Flaubert. This way, we can build up every possible love-relationship within the novel. The most prominent I believe is the platonic relationship between Geoffrey Braithwaite and Gustave Flaubert. Although Eric Berlatsky describes it as

¹¹⁵ Julian Barnes, *Flaubert's Parrot*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 135.

¹¹⁶ Berlatsky, op. cit., 176.

an intense homosexual love which leans to necrophilia, I rather call it male bounding or platonic love. Ellen, on the other hand is described by Berlatsky as an object to conceal the homosexual desire of Geoffrey. I think that as Geoffrey defends Flaubert, he defends his wife as well, neither of them become objectified in front of the reader. On the other hand, we cannot neglect the fact that Ellen Braithwaite and Emma Bovary have the same initials and both committed adultery. This association is dissolved with empathy from Geoffrey: the narrator underlines how Emma mistakenly imagined that her romantic novels truthfully mirrored her empirical reality. Opposite to the two wives, the cuckolded position near Geoffrey is thus occupied by Charles Bovary, who in the end feels empathy for Emma. As Flaubert creates Emma Bovary, Geoffrey creates Louis Colet and imagines even her sexual relationship with Flaubert.

4.2.5. Epistolary

According to Linda Hutcheon, the most visible aim of metafiction is to show how the content of the narrative is given a form. “Novels then begin to reflect upon their own genesis and growth.”¹¹⁷ This means that the writer reflects on writing the narrative and on its origins and thus the act of writing will gain an equivalent significance to the plot which it represents. On the other hand, a piece of writing always creates for itself a reader, whose attention will be absorbed into the act of creation and into the mimesis. Hutcheon argues that this way the roots of metafiction may be buried under the form of journals and epistolary novels. Thus we can consider another chapter from *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* having a metafictional narrative structure.

This way we can say that in the eighth chapter of the novel (*Upstream!*) Barnes experiments with the genre of the epistolary. The main character, Charlie (documentary film actor who shoots in the jungle) writes diary-like entries in the form of letters which he addresses to his girlfriend. The epistolary style brings out a rather colloquial, but at the same time confessional sentimentality from the life of a contemporary materialist, sybaritic, riotous and self-conscious man. Charlie reflects not just on the act of writing but also the origins of inspiration and difficulties, even blocks which discourage this tendency.

¹¹⁷ Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*. (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1980), 12.

Although Barnes does not dedicate for it a whole chapter in *Flaubert's Parrot*, he continuously refers to and quotes from Flaubert's diary and his letters to his friends and Louise Colet.

4.3. 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.¹¹⁸

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.

4.3.1. 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

¹¹⁸ Linda Hutcheon, "Historiographic Metafiction: Parody and the Intertextuality of History", available: http://ieas.unideb.hu/admin/file_3553.pdf, access: 22 April 2014.

gritty realism and heroic fantasy.”¹¹⁹ 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?”¹²⁰ - 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”¹²¹. Albert Alhadeff in his essay about *The Raft of the Medusa* writes:

if you are painting a scene of carnage – and the Raft surely is one – and you want it to be well received, you must harness its excess, blunt its hard edges, temper it with [une] douce terreur and do not even think of staining it with un dégoûtant squelette.¹²²

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.”¹²³

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

¹¹⁹ Robinson, op. cit., 171.

¹²⁰ Julian Barnes, *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 76.

¹²¹ Barnes, 82.

¹²² Albert Alhadeff, “Julian Barnes and the Raft of the Medusa,” *The French Review* 82. 2 (2008): 288.

¹²³ Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*. (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), 101.

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,"¹²⁴ 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."¹²⁵ 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."¹²⁶ 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.

4.3.2. 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

¹²⁴ Hutcheon, 24.

¹²⁵ Guignery, eds., op. cit., 60.

¹²⁶ Robinson, op. cit., 174.

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.

5. Irony vs. “Love”

The oscillation between authorial presence and absence characterizes the postmodernist author. Fully aware that the author has been declared dead, the postmodernist text nevertheless insists on authorial presence (...).¹²⁷

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”¹²⁸.

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.”¹²⁹ 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.”¹³⁰ 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.”¹³¹

¹²⁷ McHale, op. cit., 202.

¹²⁸ Ryan Roberts, “Inventing a Way to the Truth the Truth: Life and Fiction in Julian Barnes’s *Flaubert’s Parrot*.” In Sebastian Groes eds. *Julian Barnes: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 31.

¹²⁹ Linda Hutcheon, *Irony’s Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony*. (Taylor and Francis e-Library, 2005), 10-11.

¹³⁰ Tate, op. cit., 62.

¹³¹ Guignery, eds., op. cit., 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’.”¹³² 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”¹³³. 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.”¹³⁴ 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”¹³⁵, 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.¹³⁶

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

¹³² Tate, op. cit., 61.

¹³³ Robinson, op. cit., 172.

¹³⁴ Buxton, op. cit., 66.

¹³⁵ Guignery, eds., op. cit., 60.

¹³⁶ Julian Barnes, *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 130.

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.¹³⁷

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."¹³⁸

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.¹³⁹

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.

¹³⁷ Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*. (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), 46.

¹³⁸ Julian Barnes, *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 139.

¹³⁹ Barnes, 134.

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.¹⁴⁰

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.¹⁴¹

‘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.”¹⁴²

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.

¹⁴⁰ Catherine Belsey, “Postmodern Love: Questioning the Metaphysics of Desire,” *New Literary History* 25. 3 (1994): 683.

¹⁴¹ Belsey, 685.

¹⁴² Belsey, 687.

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.”¹⁴³ 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”¹⁴⁴) 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.”¹⁴⁵ 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.”¹⁴⁶ 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

¹⁴³ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ Guignery, eds., op. cit., 55.

¹⁴⁵ Robinson, op. cit., 174.

¹⁴⁶ Linda Hutcheon, *Irony’s Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony*. (Taylor and Francis e-Library, 2005), 47.

text parodies his expectations, his desire for verisimilitude, and forces him to an awareness of his own role in creating the universe of fiction.¹⁴⁷

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 manipulate our understanding of good literature. Geoffrey Braithwaite propagates that criticism can kill the beauty of a book and brings up a Flaubert scholar who claimed that the French writer was negligent because he confused the colour of his main character's eyes. Do mistakes in literature matter? "Look, writers aren't *perfect*, I want to cry, any more than husbands and wives are perfect. The only unfailing rule is, if they seem so, they can't be."¹⁴⁸ In this quote we can hear the voice of Barnes and the voice of the narrator as well. 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 the mistake of Flaubert 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.

Love also gets a main theme in *Flaubert's Parrot*, but it is extended with the institution of marriage. It is interesting 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 also, he did not trouble his conscience when he had affairs with prostitutes. On the other hand, he creates his heroine to commit suicide as a self-punishment for her deeds. He also cheated on Louise Colet, with whom he seemingly cherished a close relationship. 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.

¹⁴⁷ Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*. (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1980), 139.

¹⁴⁸ Julian Barnes, *Flaubert's Parrot*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 62.

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"¹⁴⁹. At first glance, and this is where irony emerges, Geoffrey seems to become a Flaubert fan because he was independent from women, while the narrator is still stirred by the trauma caused by the adventures of her 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."¹⁵⁰ 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, it was wholehearted because even by employing irony Barnes can make the reader to 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

¹⁴⁹ Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*. (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1980), 59.

¹⁵⁰ Julian Barnes, *Flaubert's Parrot*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 126.

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

6. 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"¹⁵¹ 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. I think that Julian Barnes' two novels fit all the specific requirements of a historiographic metafiction. Firstly, both play with the idea of history conceived as fictive reality. The fading of the borderline between history and fiction is reinforced as the form of the novels question the text as an autonomous entity. Barnes' style of writing contradicts the form of the realist novel and this enables him to define a unique style in which the novel's message can be transferred more effectively. By mocking the notion of a single origin he gives voice to the other fictitious characters of history which would have not been included into the historical canon due to their 'uncleanness'. His method of personalizing history and describing historical consequences as influencing the lives of ordinary people makes us readers to rethink history.

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. As Linda Hutcheon argues,

¹⁵¹ Sanda Berce, "The End of History and the Rise of the Individual." In Sanda Berce ed. *Forms of Attention* (Kolozsvár: Napoca-Star, 2001), 101.

postmodern texts, through metafiction, claim a certain amount of responsibility from the reader and so do Barnes' novels.

As the novelist actualizes the world of his imagination through words, so the reader – from those same words – manufactures in reverse a literary universe that is as much his creation as it is the novelist's.¹⁵²

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.

¹⁵² Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*. (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1980), 27.

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