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With His Watch on the Inside of the Wrist

Time in Julian Barnes's *The Sense of an Ending*

Humans are essentially temporal creatures, or “beings in time,”¹ as described by Martin Heidegger. Accordingly, their existence is to be understood in relation to, as well as in awareness of, the passing of time and the unavoidable approach of death. It is precisely this awareness of the distinction between Being and Non-Being that teaches people to value each and every moment of their lives. However, being conscious of one’s own mortality does not necessarily induce action, especially not within the context of postmodernism. Characters of postmodernist fiction tend to be restricted to the realm of passivity, notably so when it comes to Julian Barnes’s creations. Christopher Lloyd in *Metroland* (1980), Geoffrey Braithwaite in *Flaubert’s Parrot* (1984) and Gregory in *Staring at the Sun* (1986) are all characterised by a considerable degree of passivity, a fundamental tendency towards self-reflexivity, and a preference for meditating about life instead of living it. A curious and uniquely Barnesian contrast is generated by the fact that despite their mediocre personalities and undistinguished lives, these characters theorise about highly philosophical matters such as art versus life; history versus reality; time, memory and remembering; the general progress of human life; death and religion – preoccupations which permeate Barnes’s entire oeuvre. Thus, his characters come to function as the author’s mouthpiece, providing him with the means of voicing his concerns and asking questions about them.

Such is the case with sixty-something pensioner Tony Webster, the central figure and narrator of Barnes’s novel *The Sense of an Ending*² (2011). After failing to accomplish his youthful plan to live a life of literary intensity, Tony keeps consoling himself with mantras like “Ti-yi-yi-yime is on my side” (45) and “Every Day is Sunday” (62), and engages in self-reflexive and essentially passive contemplations of the concepts of memory, history, life and death, and the nature of time.

1. Qtd. in H. James Birx, *Encyclopedia of Time: Science, Philosophy, Theology, & Culture* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2009), p. 642.

2. All parenthesized references are to this edition: Julian Barnes, *The Sense of an Ending* (London: Vintage Books, 2012).

Despite his passivity, Tony Webster is a Heideggerian being in that he keeps reflecting on the temporal as well as temporary nature of human existence. The present paper is devoted to analysing the various concepts and images of time occurring in *The Sense of an Ending*, along with the temporal and thematic structure of the novel, as indicators of Tony Webster's attitude to his time-bound existence and, by extension, of Julian Barnes's perception of man as a temporal-narrative being.

Human perception of time is inseparably linked to narrativity: it is through storytelling that one establishes cause-and-effect relationships and conceives of sequentiality; therefore, narratives can be looked upon as a primary means of formalising and structuring human perception and the products of the mind. Barnes expresses a similar opinion when he claims "we are a narrative animal" and "we tell stories all the time" because "we want our human life on this planet to be turned into a narrative."³ Clearly, narratives are used to create a coherent sense of identity, regarding both the individual self and collective identity. Consequently, much of history, culture and literature have been discussed as grand narratives providing the basis for self-definition and creating a sense of coherence overarching the passing of time.

As observed by Frank Kermode, the scientific developments of the nineteenth century resulted in a turn towards the temporal in every field of knowledge.⁴ While literature, one of the grand narratives, had previously been assumed to imitate an existing world order, now it was expected to create a structured world. Meanwhile, the widely discussed modernist and postmodernist – predominantly constructivist – view has been that all perception is subjective; factual and absolute truth is unavailable to human understanding; and all human knowledge is constructed in a way that it matches the current stage of scientific and cultural development. As a result, the representation of reality has also been seen as problematic. In Kermode's terms, the "prison of modern form" is "a place where we accept the knowledge that our inherited ways of echoing the structure of the world have no concord with it, but only [...] with the desires of our own minds."⁵ Clearly, the realisation of the artificial and non-objective nature of all attempts at grasping the world and reality is of key importance. At the same time,

3. "Julian Barnes Interview," *Writers and Company*, accessed 15 June 2013 <<http://www.cbc.ca/writersandcompany/episode/2011/11/20/julian-barnes-interview/>>, radio.

4. Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 167.

5. Kermode, *The Sense*, p. 173.

however, this realisation also results in a state of imprisonment in which humanity admits to the limited and limiting nature of the mind, human knowledge, language and culture, while also facing the fact that there is no way to leave these faculties behind.

Tony Webster in *The Sense of an Ending* articulates a similar problem: "We live in time, it bounds us and defines us [...] But if we can't understand time, can't grasp its mysteries of pace and progress, what chance do we have with history – even our own small, personal, largely undocumented piece of it?" (60). That is, what kind of narrative representation of reality and the passing of time can be created without a proper understanding of time? Though admitting his inability to truly grasp the nature of time – "I've never felt I understood it very well" (3) – and constantly reflecting on the imperfections of his memory, Tony Webster embarks on a journey of recounting his personal history, attempting to create a coherent autobiography. As will be demonstrated, the novel depicts the kind of order Tony's mind desires as only partially accessible.

The Sense of an Ending presents a dual structure: "Part One" provides an overview of Tony's past, emphasising the formative importance of his schoolboy years spent with his friends Colin, Alex and Adrian. A significant period is his relationship with Veronica, described in detail, including issues like meeting Veronica's family; virginity and sexuality; and a break-up followed by an affair between Veronica and Tony's friend Adrian. We also hear about his time spent in the USA, an affair with a girl named Annie and Adrian's suicide. "Part One" ends with a brief survey of Tony's adult life, involving jobs, marriage, parenthood, divorce and retirement. By "Part Two," the narrative reaches Tony's present life: a letter received after the death of Veronica's mother results in the unsettling of Tony's life story presented so far, forcing Tony to face his past mistakes. This re-evaluation of his life takes the form of revisiting and rewriting memories described in the first section. Along the way, Tony arranges meetings with his ex-wife Margaret as well as with Veronica. Eventually, his search for the truth brings some success, leaving Tony in a state of distress and hopelessness.

While attempting to create a coherent life story out of these events, Tony Webster encounters problems like the imperfection of his memory and the complicated relationship between past and present, which also govern the temporal and thematic structure of the narrative. Interestingly, even though it is only in "Part Two" that Tony's account of the past is undermined by Veronica's version, Tony keeps

commenting on the deficiencies of his memory from the very beginning, when he observes “what you end up remembering isn’t always the same as what you have witnessed” (3) and sets out to introduce “some approximate memories which time has deformed into certainty” (4). Later on, Tony laments the lack of evidence and witnesses: “I wish I’d kept that letter, because it would have been proof” (39) and “as the witnesses to your life diminish, there is less corroboration, and therefore less certainty” (59). As a result, the past is seen as increasingly inaccessible and disconnected from the present.

It is important to note, however, that the past is beyond reach not only due to Tony’s unreliable memory, but also as a result of his self-editing. As in the case of most life-writing, Tony himself is prone to distorting the truth in order to present himself in a way that is pleasing for him, especially when it comes to inglorious events. Curiously, he admits his awareness of the phenomenon: “How often do we tell our life story? How often do we adjust, embellish, make sly cuts? [...] our life is not our life, merely the story we have told about our life. Told to others, but – mainly – to ourselves” (95). Thus, regarding his shameful letter written to Adrian, disparaging Veronica, Tony demonstrates considerable reluctance to remember, presumably out of guilt and remorse. However, when Veronica sends him the letter he wrote decades earlier, he is forced to face his own actions: “My younger self had come back to shock my older self” (97–8) and “I could scarcely deny its authorship” (97). Here, the undeniable continuity of Tony’s identity binds the past to the present, and Tony experiences the past as suddenly permeating the present. Though facing his past self is deeply unsettling, Tony’s wish for corroboration quoted above is voiced precisely because of his need to have temporal continuity in his narrative identity.

As can be seen, the nature of the past is rather ambiguous: while Tony is constantly frustrated with the imperfections of his memory and the inaccessibility of the past, he is also forced to acknowledge the omnipresence of the past and his past actions as encoded in his personality. In line with this ambiguity, Tony accommodates two opposing urges: a wish to escape what he finds embarrassing or shameful in his past and, fuelled by the acceptance of his responsibility and the resulting remorse, a wish to turn back time and rewrite his past, correcting his mistakes. Meanwhile, his notions of time and existence in time are illustrated with the traditional image of water: still water stands for the stagnation in Tony’s relationship with Veronica as well as for death in the case of Adrian’s suicide, as in the image of “bathwater long

gone cold behind a locked door" (3); whereas the image of the river is associated with the passing of time and its unquestionable direction. When witnessing the Severn Bore,⁶ "a river rushing nonsensically upstream" (3) caused by water incoming with the high tide from the sea, the younger Tony complains of a sense of unsettlement "because it looked and felt quietly wrong, as if some small lever of the universe had been pressed, and here, just for these minutes, nature was reversed, and time with it" (36). At this point, Tony considers time to be a fixed aspect of the universe along which everything can be ordered, and he is distressed when the order of nature is disturbed. However, even though the high tide causes disorder in the direction of the river, it is in itself a regular phenomenon of nature that reoccurs in well-defined and predictable order. Tony's shock, then, is due to his first experience of the phenomenon. As for the image of the sea, it may stand for cyclicity and infinity, and so the image of seawater coming in and disrupting the orderly progress of the river may be read as a reminder of the opposition between the infinite cyclicity of nature and the finite linearity of human existence, further motivating Tony's distress.

As the story proceeds and Tony meets Veronica by the Thames for the first time in decades, past and present intertwine: "I couldn't tell which way the tide was running, as a whippy crosswind stirred the water's surface" (90). Here, the disguised direction of the flow of the river stands for Tony's confusion regarding past and present, triggered by the presence of Veronica, a figure from his distant past. Moreover, when previously lost memories come upon Tony, he feels as if "time had been placed in reverse. As if [...] the river ran upstream" (122) returning to the earlier image of the Severn Bore and indicating that the memories left behind by past events can create a sense of going back in time and re-experiencing the past.

However, such interconnectedness of past and present is even more problematic when it comes to matters of responsibility: the "chain of responsibility" (149) mentioned numerous times throughout the novel is a firm indicator not only of the direction in which time passes, but also of the irreversibility of time. As Tony observes, "the chief characteristic of remorse is that [...] the time has passed for apology or amends. But what if [...] by some means remorse can be made to flow backwards, can be transmuted into simple guilt, then apologised for, and then forgiven?" (107). Needless to say, Tony is eventually

6. "Introduction," *The Severn Bore: A Natural Wonder of the World*, accessed 11 November 2012 <<http://www.severn-bore.co.uk>>.

compelled to admit defeat: "I knew I couldn't change, or mend, anything now" (149). Inevitably, the confusing nature of his identity, along with the paradox of past and present simultaneously coexisting and being separate, result in considerable frustration on Tony's part.

On one occasion, the image of the river is substituted by blood: Tony wishes to change the past by going back in time, or making "the blood flow backwards" (130). Here, an even closer identification of time and life is suggested by the imagery: time is turned into an integral part of the human being, thereby echoing Heidegger's concept of man as a being in time. Similarly, Tony and his friends at school wear their watches "with the face on the inside of the wrist" because it makes "time feel like a personal, even a secret, thing" (6); they recognise an intimate connection between time and life through blood, wearing their watches close to their pulses. They also find a personalised version of time, which Tony describes as follows: "there is objective time, but also subjective time, the kind you wear on the inside of your wrist, next to where the pulse lies. And this personal time, which is the true time, is measured in your relationship to memory" (122).

The gesture of wearing their watches on the insides of their wrists to make time more personal echoes Henri Bergson's idea of subjective time. In Bergsonian terms, *pure duration*, or subjective time, is related to one's inner life; it is "uninterrupted transition, multiplicity without divisibility and succession without separation."⁷ This inner, unfolding time is not measurable, as opposed to unfolded time, which is measurable "through the intermediary of motion"⁸ and space. In light of Bergson's definition, Tony's idea that subjective time is "measured in your relationship to memory" (122) may mean that one's personal time depends on how continuous one's experience of past and present is and whether one's memory is capable of bridging any gap between them. In addition, the closeness of the watch to the pulse indicates that it is the number of heartbeats, prone to being influenced by one's changing emotions, that dictates the rhythm of the otherwise immeasurable subjective time, making it truly individualised and non-mechanical. Thus, Tony's highly subjective experience of time is not only due to his ambiguous relationship with the past, but also to the emotional content of his present: "it takes only the smallest pleasure or pain to teach us time's malleability. Some emotions speed it up, others

7. Henri Bergson, "Duration and Simultaneity," in *Key Writings*, eds. Keith Ansell Pearson and John Mullarkey (London; New York: Continuum, 2005), 205–219, p. 205.

8. Bergson, p. 209.

slow it down; occasionally, it seems to go missing – until the eventual point when it really does go missing, never to return” (3).

As the entire story is filtered through Tony’s perception, and his perception is defined by the irregularity of time, his narrative is constructed in a way that it reflects “time’s malleability” (3) described above. Thus, *The Sense of an Ending* offers a non-linear narrative with temporal fragmentation and frequent flashbacks and flashforwards. Or, to apply Gérard Genette’s terms related to order, they are *analepses*, instances of “evocation after the fact of an event that took place earlier than the point in the story where we are at any given moment” and *prolepses*, instances of “narrating or evoking in advance an event that will take place later.”⁹ “Part One” in *The Sense of an Ending* covers Tony’s past, with comments of the current self, while “Part Two” focuses on his present, constantly punctuated by analepses and returns to memories already narrated in “Part One” as well as introducing new memories. Meanwhile, the structure of the narrative is highly repetitive, involving recurring ideas, phrases and events. Every now and then certain memories, like the weekend spent with Veronica’s family, re-surface and therefore have to be re-considered. Similarly, the themes of philosophical contemplation discussed above appear again and again. Last but not least, “Time is on My Side,” a song by The Rolling Stones, keeps returning like a refrain, while Veronica’s constantly reoccurring comment “You just don’t get it, do you?” (100) implies cyclicity and a lack of development. These repetitions and seemingly randomly re-surfacing elements follow an associative structure that resembles the operation of the human mind, the workings of memory and how the brain “throw[s] you scraps from time to time” (112). Thus, the typically postmodernist fragmentation characterising the novel serves the aim of representing the mental process of remembering in a narrative format.

The Sense of an Ending presents a considerable degree of thematic coherence, despite its fragmentation. Tony Webster occasionally dismisses elements of his past as irrelevant in terms of the aspects of his life discussed in the novel: “Annie was part of my story, but not of this story” (46) and his current female acquaintances are “not part of the story either” (55). At the same time, the seemingly randomly selected images, themes and memories described in “Part One” gain significance with the benefit of hindsight, considered in relation to the

9. Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), p. 40.

events of “Part Two,” inviting the reader to play an active role in remembering. In particular, the suicide incident of Tony’s fellow student Robson is necessary to provide a point of reference for Adrian’s later suicide. Furthermore, the history classes at the beginning present a variety of ways in which one may deal with the past and the question of responsibility, both of which turn out to be key concerns of the novel. Thus, *The Sense of an Ending* is permeated with recurring images and overarching themes, thereby presenting a carefully structured narrative.

When read as the fictional autobiography created by Barnes for the character Tony Webster, the novel invites considerations related to autobiographical writing. Frank Kermode’s notions of life-writing can be made use of here due to his preoccupation with the temporal embeddedness of human life, history and culture. According to Kermode, writers of autobiographies wish to “achieve some measure or simulacrum of closure, and thus a substitute timelessness.”¹⁰ Indeed, Tony Webster is in search of closure by way of trying to find out the truth and processing the past, though in vain. One technique highlighted by Kermode as central to autobiographical writing is manifested in Vladimir Nabokov’s “artful autobiography,” which is constructed along the lines of repetition because, as stated by Nabokov, “the following of such thematic designs through one’s life should be, I think, the true purpose of autobiography.”¹¹ Kermode agrees that thematic coherence enables the autobiographer to present a unified, single self in the focus.¹² The technique applied by Barnes in *The Sense of an Ending* is precisely the creation of such thematic coherence: to aid Tony’s self-definition, the particular themes and memories to be used are chosen during a process of subjective selection, interpretation and attribution of significance. As a result, certain memories are highlighted as *self-defining memories*, whereas others are dismissed as insignificant and are not included in the narrative. Self-defining memories are described by psychologists Singer and Salovey as “vivid, affectively charged, repetitive, linked to other similar memories [...] related to an important unresolved theme or enduring concern”¹³ that have a key influence on the

10. Frank Kermode, “Memory,” in *Pieces of My Mind: Essays and Criticism 1958–2002* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 289–306, p. 296.

11. Qtd. in Frank Kermode, “Memory,” p. 297.

12. Kermode, “Memory,” p. 297.

13. Qtd. in Dan P. McAdams, “Identity and the Life Story,” in *Autobiographical Memory and the Construction of a Narrative Self: Developmental and Cultural Perspectives*, eds. Robyn Fivush and Catherine A. Haden (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2003), 187–224, p. 195.

self. It is such self-defining memories that make up the skeleton of *The Sense of an Ending*.

In addition to the temporally disrupted structure of the narrative described above, it is revealing to examine the special, subjectively constructed time frame that accommodates self-defining memories. Such a narratological analysis necessitates another concept of duration, suggested by Gérard Genette, which can be fruitfully applied alongside the Bergsonian notion of pure duration. Genette systematises the relationship between *story time*, or the actual time frame occupied by the story, and *narrative time*, or the duration devoted to telling the story in the literary text. Accordingly, the two extremes are *ellipsis*, “where a nonexistent section of narrative corresponds to some duration of story” and *descriptive pause* characterised by “absolute slowness [...] where some section of narrative discourse corresponds to a nonexistent diegetic duration.”¹⁴ In between, Genette defines *scene* as featuring an “equality of time between narrative and story” and *summary* as a text which “with great flexibility of pace covers the entire range included between scene and ellipsis.”¹⁵

In accordance with the vivid nature of self-defining memories, the novel provides extremely detailed accounts of past events, including conversations, locations and circumstances, and the recreation of then-current moods and impressions. Tony’s self-defining memories are presented in the form of distinct, Genettian scenes with slide-like changes between them. Clearly, these scenes are narrated within Tony’s subjective experience of time, with the speed of narrative time depending on the particular event narrated. A considerable portion of the novel is made up of meditative parts inserted into the story which deal with time, death, life, history, love, remembering and storytelling. As these sections are outside story time, they take the form of descriptive pauses. In contrast, the events and periods of Tony’s life considered to be unimportant or irrelevant are either presented in the condensed form of summaries or subjected to ellipses.

The memory that Tony keeps revisiting throughout the novel and that provides one of the fundamental turning points is his reaction to Adrian’s letter asking for his permission to date Veronica. When Tony first presents it in “Part One,” he describes himself as “peaceable” and not wanting “to get involved,” thus only sending a postcard that says “the undersigned begs to present his compliments and wishes to

14. Genette, pp. 93–4.

15. Genette, p. 94.

record that everything is jolly fine by me, old bean" (42). However, his account is permeated with irony, irritation and anger: he is annoyed by Adrian's "moral scruples" and "the hypocrisy of the letter," and upset by the fact that Veronica "had traded up: to my cleverest friend" (41). Furthermore, the degree of his agitation can be inferred from the narrative structure. Having barely mentioned Adrian's letter, Tony switches to theorising about what Adrian's career might be like, only to postpone discussing the letter: "You can probably guess that I'm putting off telling you the next bit" (40-1). After sharing the contents of the letter and his first reactions, Tony's narrative is interrupted by a gap and an asterisk indicating Tony's rage; it is only after the gap that he manages to continue telling the story. Eventually, he replies to it "properly," warns Adrian about Veronica's "damage," and wishes him "good luck" or at least claims to have done so (42). Although Tony concludes they "were now out of my life forever," he devotes considerable narrative time to reflections on Veronica and Adrian (43). Clearly, even though Tony presents this event in retrospect, from a distance of decades, he now re-experiences his then-current emotional state. As a result, the plotline comes to a halt and the subjective time-experience of the present, narrating self of Tony Webster shapes the narrative.

The narrative structure thus affected by Tony's agitation as well as his question for Alex in a conversation – "Did he tell you I wrote him a letter telling him where to shove it?" – can be read as hints at the true contents of Tony's letter, which he is initially ashamed to admit (51). Indeed, as it turns out when the letter eventually resurfaces, Tony's distress resulted in a hostile, rather vicious letter cursing Veronica, Adrian and their prospective child. Upon encountering his own words, Tony's narrative slips off again into his subjective experience of time: "I read it through, got to my feet, took my glass of wine, poured it rather splashily back into the bottle, and made myself a very large whisky" (95). Here, Tony is paralysed with his mind going blank, so that story time stops until he is recovered from his shock. In the meantime, the reader is provided with the letter itself, followed by further comments of Tony's concerning the benefits of drinking whisky. Though postponed first, the revelation of Tony's state of mind arrives after all: a sense of guilt and remorse begins to grow in him the "next day, when [he is] sober" (98). At this point, time is turned back for Tony as his mind wanders deep into the past to re-evaluate it, and he arrives at the conclusion that all the aspects of his life and personality that he previously considered to be special are actually merely "average" (100).

A similar process can be observed towards the end of the novel, when Tony talks in a pub to Terry, the care worker who looks after Adrian's son, and finally finds out the truth: the mother of Adrian's child is not Veronica, but in fact Veronica's mother. As a result, Tony goes into a state of shock; he is petrified: "Automatically, I ate a chip. Then another. There wasn't enough salt on them. That's the disadvantage of fat chips. They have too much potatoey inside" (148). Here, time for him comes to a halt again, while his mind has simultaneously too much and too little to perceive. Then, as if in a trance-like state, he shakes Terry's hand and says a few polite words. It is only after a break in the narrative, a gap on the page indicating the hours passing, that Tony manages to process this crucial piece of information: "And later, at home, going over it all, after some time, I understood" (148). At this stage, time is put into reverse once more as Tony attempts to piece together the story: what Veronica and her mother meant in their messages and what Adrian's equation stood for decades earlier. While acknowledging the cyclical recurrence of memories – "I replayed the words that would forever haunt me" – Tony also conceives of the "chain of responsibility" discussed above that stands for the linear and irreversible passing of time, leading to the realisation that "I knew I couldn't change, or mend, anything now" (149).

The inseparability of the linear and the cyclical is what fuels the final section of the novel as well, which is a brief but pointed evaluation introduced by "You are allowed a long moment of pause, time enough to ask the question: what else have I done wrong?" (149). It is indeed a long moment that Tony takes, filling it with fragments of memories and images that have already occurred in the novel: "I thought of a bunch of kids in Trafalgar Square. I thought of a young woman dancing, for once in her life" (149). To create a framework, Tony also revisits the proleptic images listed at the very beginning of the novel, at first seemingly random and unrelated, but by now shown in an entirely different light. The novel presents some degree of development in terms of Tony gaining access to information and facts falling into their places; nevertheless, induced by regret over the irreversibility of time, Tony claims: "You get towards the end of life – no, not life itself, but of something else: the end of any likelihood of change in that life" (149). Thus, Tony looks upon his life as fixed in its present state, with no future perspective, which is further illustrated by the abrupt ending of the novel: "There is accumulation. There is responsibility. And beyond these, there is unrest. There is great unrest" (150). This final,

desperate state of feeling guilt, remorse and confusion is squeezed into the confines of the present simple tense, illustrating Tony's state of being locked up in the present without any prospect for future improvement or possibility of altering the past. It is important to note, though, that this time the lack of change is not engendered by passivity. Instead, what generates Tony's hopelessness is the derailment of narrativity as a vital mode of comprehending the world and the self, as a result of which Tony ends up imprisoned in his now entangled life story and the resulting absence of a coherent sense of self.

Julian Barnes's *The Sense of an Ending*, then, is a manifestation of the temporal-narrative nature of human existence. Amidst the confusing and rather turbulent encounters between his past and present, Tony Webster presents himself as a survivor: "I survived. 'He survived to tell the tale' – that's what people say, don't they?" (56). However, telling the tale proves to be highly problematic. Although some of the truth is revealed and corroboration is found, no perfect order is reached, as Tony still thinks "of what I couldn't know or understand now, of all that couldn't ever be known or understood" (149); the tale cannot be entirely conceived even by its teller. By quoting his fellow student from decades earlier saying "there was great unrest, sir" (5), Tony comes to realise that there is only this much that can be said with certainty. In fact, Adrian Finn's very first observation that "all you can truly say of any historical [or, in this case, personal] event [...] is that 'something happened'" seems to apply (5). Consequently, any attempt at representing time, reality or order in the mind or in the universe, history or one's own life story, is eventually depicted by Barnes as unavoidably incomplete and unsatisfactory. Ultimately, based on Frank Kermode's concept of the "prison of modern form," meaning the acceptance of the fact that reality can only be echoed by humanity in fictional formats that reflect "the desires of our own minds,"¹⁶ I propose the notion of the prison of the Barnesian mind: the place where we are confined as we try to endure the unrest evoked by the realisation that our ways of echoing the structure of the world can only and exclusively indicate with surety that something is happening outside our own minds, no matter what our own desires may be.

16. Kermode, *The Sense*, p. 173.