

Aneta Chaloupecká, *Theme of Memory in Julian Barnes' Later Works*

BA thesis

The present BA thesis examines three books by Julian Barnes, *Nothing to Be Frightened of* (2008), *Arthur & George* (2005) and *The Sense of an Ending* (2011) in an attempt to find what role memory plays in the work of one of the most distinguished contemporary English novelists.

The introductory part shows that for later twentieth-century literature especially memory became a crucial issue, mostly due to the critical historical moments of the period and the overall transformation of society and life style in Europe at least. Critics such as Whitehall, Nora or Boxall provide sufficient arguments in favour of this notion. Within this context Julian Barnes and other British writers maintain a prominent position, as their principal concern is history and memory. The thesis' topic is therefore perfectly justified.

The student starts her examination with *Nothing to Be Frightened of*, a book inspired by the author's intense sense of approaching death. It is not a novel but a memoir and the student treats it as such; she exploits it basically as a text in which memory, remembering and the past are often discussed by the authorial narrator, supplying in this way a lot of ideas that may prove useful for further discussion. A reader of Barnes, however, knows that it is quite difficult to categorize Barnes' books in terms of genre, and this is the fact the student slightly underestimated. *Nothing...* is not just a personal memoir, it is a reflection of the culture which treats death in a specific way, where such events are remembered by family members but where they also become part of cultural awareness. This is to say that Barnes' books are, as a rule, multifaceted and that one must be alert to this character when studying them.

A similar reservation can be held about the student's treatment of *Arthur & George*. In her account memory is presented rather as an aspect of a broader concern of (post)modern fiction, namely perspectivism (yet the term is not mentioned). Reality can be interpreted in as many ways as there are interpreters and what decides is not just memory and the subjectivity of remembering things past. When she shows how public images of George Edalji are created, she forgets to stress that this is mostly a matter of other factors than memory and that the principal issue is moral responsibility of how we think we remember the past. Because Barnes is first of all a moralist.

The most satisfying thus seems to be the chapter commenting on *The Sense of an Ending*, obviously thanks to the fact that a shorter text allowed more detailed analysis. The student's account is much more concrete than in her treatment of the previous book, where she tends to pass more general statements, and she follows the text consistently. Perhaps more attention should have been paid to the psychology of the main character, especially to his attitudes at the very end of the novel – just because here we have another moral story and the problem of the relation between memory and morality.

Miss Chaloupecká's thesis is a good attempt to specify Barnes's working with the theme of memory in his later works. The task is not easy as Barnes's books are not easy even though they may seem to be. In conclusion, I recommend the thesis for defence and because of the above objections I tend to suggest a preliminary grade to be a very good (**velmi dobře**), but the final result will depend on the character of the student's defence.

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PhDr. Zdeněk Beran, Ph.D.