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BACHELOR THESIS

The theme of memory in *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters*

by Julian Barnes

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this bachelor thesis, titled “The theme of memory in *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* by Julian Barnes”, is completely my own work and I used only the sources that are listed on the works cited page.

Prague, June 26, 2014

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Abstract

The objective of this dissertation is to explore the theme of memory and its impact on how we tend to re-create and perceive history, as reflected in the book *A History of the World in 10 and ½ Chapters*. The goal is to interpret each chapter and make a plausible inference as to what the author intended to communicate concerning the postmodernist view of history. The theoretical groundwork of the thesis draws primarily on Hayden White's *Metahistory*; Paul Ricœur's *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* and *Temps et Récit. Tome I*. Other sources include interviews with Julian Barnes, *Conversations with Julian Barnes* by Vanessa Guignery; an essay by Frank Kermode, *Stowaway Woodworm* and of course the novel itself.

Key words: theme of memory, history, post-modernism, Julian Barnes, Grand Narrative/metanarrative, metahistory, historical imagination

Anotace

Cílem této práce je zkoumání motivu a vlivu paměti na způsob, jakým je tvořena a chápána historie v knize *Historie světa v 10 a ½ kapitolách*. Metodou je interpretační rozbor jednotlivých kapitol a věrohodné dovození toho, že autorův přístup k historii odpovídá postmodernímu pohledu na ní. Teoretické základy práce vycházejí primárně z prací Haydena Whitea a Paula Ricœura. Mezi další použité zdroje patří například kniha rozhovorů s Julianem Barnesem Vanessy Guignery, *Conversations with Julian Barnes*; esej Franka Kermoda, *Stowaway Woodworm* a samozřejmě kniha samotná.

Klíčová slova: motiv paměti, historie, postmodernismus, Julian Barnes, velké vyprávění/metanarace, metahistorie, historická imaginace

Contents

Introduction	1
Theoretical part	3
1. The post-modern criticism of the Grand Narrative.....	3
2. Post-modern approach to history in <i>A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters</i>	7
Analysis of the novel	11
1. Chapter 1 – <i>The Stowaway</i> : A Woodworm’s perspective	11
2. Chapter 2 – <i>The Visitors</i> : The animals came in two by two	13
3. Chapter 4 – <i>The Survivor</i> : And then what?.....	16
4. Chapter 5 – <i>The Shipwreck</i> : How do you turn catastrophe into art?	18
5. Chapter 7 – <i>Three Simple Stories</i> : Voyage of the Damned	20
6. Chapter 8 – <i>Upstream!</i> And Chapter 3 – <i>The Wars of Religion</i>	22
7. <i>Parenthesis</i> : the heart isn’t heart-shaped	24
8. Chapter 6 – <i>The Mountain</i> and Chapter 9 – <i>Project Ararat</i>	26
9. Chapter 10 – <i>The Dream</i> : postmodern Heaven	27
Conclusion	29
Works Cited	31

Introduction

A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters is a novel by a postmodernist English novelist Julian Barnes published in 1989. Julian Barnes has published several other novels, collection of essays and short stories. Since 2004 he is a Commandeur of L'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres.

I chose this topic of memory in the book *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters* because I find the way Julian Barnes breaks down the concept of history fascinating in its simplicity. Within 308 pages, he uses his literary licence with the palpable intent of subverting or relativizing the general view of history as something well founded, objective and unchangeable, through the means of clever and entertaining short stories.

In the theoretical part of this thesis the postmodernist approach to history is explained, mainly on the grounds of Hayden White's interpretation of Michel Foucault's theory of New Historicism in *Metahistory* and Paul Ricœur's theory of emplotment in the book *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* and *Temps et Récit. Tome I*.

The practical part or the main body of this thesis consists of an analysis of each chapter of Barnes' book. Given the fact that one of the most significant traits of the novel is interconnectedness, the order in which the chapters will be analysed, while mostly sequential, will sometimes differ from the original order by being grouped according to their similar themes. The aim is to demonstrate the various literary devices the author used to illustrate the unreliability and to a certain extent even the virtual non-existence of historiography as it is generally understood. As the topic of this thesis is the theme of memory, the primary focus of my literary interpretation will be to use Barnes' literary licence to show how memory is treated mainly in relation to history but also as a whole.

Julian Barnes was born in Leicester in 1946 and he currently lives in London. In 1968 he graduated with honors from Magdalen College in Oxford. After graduation he worked as a lexicographer for the *Oxford English Dictionary* supplement and from 1977 to 1986 he worked as a reviewer, literary editor and television critic for the *New Statesmen* and the *Observer*.

Theoretical part

1. The post-modern criticism of the Grand Narrative

“History isn’t what happened. History is just what historians tell us.” (Barnes 239)

People tend to perceive history as something that is set in stone, as a strict progression of cause to effect that happened exactly the way we think it did. Ordinarily, we do not give much thought to what history actually means, we see it as something compact and changeless and, most importantly, something reasonably objective, having been well-balanced by the privilege of historical hindsight. When children are being educated in history at school they learn about the past the same way they learn that two plus two equals four. Historical events are presented as factual items. Furthermore, people generally do not associate history with memory; it is only when thinking about very recent historical events that we connect the notion of memory with what we understand as history. Therefore, when people think about the past, they see it as something that is not in fact a story told from a specific point of view, that it is not someone’s recollection of what happened. The reason behind this separation of what we understand as history and the concept of memory might be due to the fact that we are aware that memory really is not all that reliable. Memory is not a recording device that captures what is happening at a certain point in time, and yet, conversely, this is exactly the way in which we tend to conceptualize history - as an undistorted recorded succession of events that took place in the past.

The Grand Narrative, sometimes also referred to as Meta-narrative, is a term developed and a concept explored and criticized by Jean-François Lyotard in his book *La condition postmoderne. Rapport sur le savoir*. “En simplifiant à l’extrême, on tient pour « postmoderne » l’incrédulité à l’égard des métarécits”. (Lyotard 7) It means a historic approach that seemingly gives a comprehensive

account to various historical events based on the appeal to universal truth or values. One of the most prominent concerns of post-modernism is the alleged inability of the Grand Narrative to convey the truth, leading to a search for the reason behind it as well as an answer to the question whether any claim to objective truth can possibly be made in relation to history. This is because the mere fact that one story or one side of an argument or a war was stronger does not mean that it was also the truthful one. Many postmodernist writers and philosophers share the opinion that history is not and should not be considered a science. Their main wholesale argument is that our report of history is being tampered with even during the process of recording and the fact that only certain stories and certain interpretations survive, which means that history constantly undergoes the process of censorship.

Hayden White defines historiography as taking an event that has happened and making a story out of it by deciding which details should be left out and which included, while also arranging the proceedings of that event in a plausible order. To specify this prefiguration of the process of creating history White introduces three contributive elements or constructs: *ideology*, *argument* and *emplotment*. Out of these three, argument and emplotment are the most important. Not because the influence of ideology is not relevant, but because its influence is fairly clear and expectable. The argument is divided into four types: formalist, organicist, mechanistic and contextualist. The formalist argument is based on the approach to historical events as individual units devoid of any relation to surroundings identified by classification and categorization. The organicist argument recognizes that historical events are a part of a larger whole and that this larger whole is more important than just the sum of its parts. The mechanistic approach is concerned with identifying the causality of history. The contextualist approach regards historical events in their relationship to each other.

However, according to Hayden White, history is not only shaped by a choice of ideology or argument, but historians also modify history, albeit sometimes unconsciously, by presupposing or even creating causal links between facts. This inclination is then transferred to the choice of style or poetic

structure which historians use, particularly in the choice of tropes. Generally, this means that the choice of a certain style or narrative structure premodifies the perception of described events. Hayden White subsumes these phenomena under the summary term *emplotment*, and he further divides them into the following modes: romantic, tragic, comic and satirical.

“Providing the ‘meaning’ of a story by identifying the *kind of story* that has been told is called explanation by emplotment. If, in the course of narrating his story, the historian provides it with the plot structure of a Tragedy, he has ‘explained’ it in a certain interpretive way. Emplotment is the way by which a sequence of events fashioned into a story is gradually revealed to be a story of a particular kind.” (White 7)

The important trait of Hayden White’s theory of emplotment is that he insists that no historical account is free of emplotment, which goes against every assumption about history people tend to have. “The important point is that every history, even the most ‘synchronic’ or ‘structural’ of them, will be emplotted in some way.” (White 8)

Paul Ricœur is another author analyzing the ability of historiography and history to convey the truth. In his books *La mémoire, l’histoire, l’oubli* and *Temps et Récit. Tome I* he argues the possibility of delivering accurate and credible narrative. Akin to Hayden White, also Ricœur is concerned with emplotment, stating that emplotment is necessary for the reader to piece together and understand, or *prendre ensemble*, the connections between proceedings of events. Moreover, Ricœur sees emplotment as something that drives the story forward, ensuring that there is a plausible causality, and is thus a consequence of narrative structure rather than a tendency. Or more precisely, Ricœur argues that the work of historian consists not only of establishing the facts but also of choosing the most important ones among them and that this process is not concerned with the pursuit of the truth but the pursuit of good, meaning in this case a general understanding of history fit to survive in time: “Le travail de

l'historien, comme tout travail sur le passé, ne consiste jamais seulement à établir des faits mais aussi à choisir certains d'entre eux comme étant plus saillants et plus significatifs que d'autres, à les mettre ensuite en relation entre eux ; or ce travail de sélection et de combinaison est nécessairement orienté par la recherche, non de la vérité, mais du bien". (Ricœur, 104)

More importantly, at least with regard to the topic of this thesis, in the book *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* Ricœur analyses the connection between memory and history. Ricœur insinuates that the relationship between history and memory is greater than the fact that history is ultimately based on someone's recollection of what happened. It is our capacity for remembering events which did not happen to us but which we are able to identify with, nonetheless, that permits us to have the concept of human history. However, at the same time Ricœur explores manipulations and the faultiness of memory, a theme that Julian Barnes addresses in chapter 4 of the *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters*. Ricœur theorizes the tendency of our memory to adjust and fill in the missing details and sometimes even to create false memories, and compares this concept to the theory of emplotment. As humans are able to create false memory, our own history is revised and partly imagined, it is modified to provide easy answers and to tie up all loose ends. "Cette originalité du phénomène mnémonique est d'une importance considérable pour toute la suite de nos investigations. En effet, elle caractérise également l'opération historiographique en tant que pratique théorique. L'historien entreprend de «faire de l'histoire », comme chacun de nous s'emploie à «faire mémoire ». (Ricœur, 68)

2. Post-modern approach to history in *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters*.

Julian Barnes in his book *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters* resonates with the postmodernist criticism of history and uses his literary licence to point out why exactly is our concept of it as an objective and unbiased report of the past deceptive. The title of the book is an allusion to the fact that history is not a matter of fact, at least not to the extent we would like to believe. The first and most noticeable concern is the suspicious, if not ridiculous, number of chapters, mainly the ½ chapter cited. From the moment we read the title *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters* it is clear that the book does not pose as an attempt to depict the whole of history in its complexity because the volume is too small. However, what is perhaps more important than the number of chapters clearly designed to catch the eye, is the indefinite article at the beginning. *A* history as opposed to *the* history of the world illustrates that Barnes' book is not necessarily about the whole history of the world, it is merely a history, one of many possible histories of the world, suggesting right from the start that there might be a problem with how we perceive it. Moreover, it hints at the fact that there might not be only one course of history, that there are probably many possibilities and many different viewpoints and the only reason we have this concept of a singularity of it is because everybody tells us that that is just the way it is.

Throughout the course of the book Barnes articulates some of his concerns about capturing and writing history, focusing mainly on the unreliability of memory, narrative and form. To highlight these concerns Barnes employs numerous types of subjective narrators and vantage points, in order to show how greatly a story can change, based on how and by whom it is told. His uneasiness concerning the fact that we are inclined to take human history as read is obvious many times in the book. He insists that our recording of history is much closer to fabulation than to an objective depicting of events. This

conviction is mostly present in an undertone, yet it occasionally flares up in an explicit outburst, such as the accusatory statement that “you make up a story to cover the facts you don’t know or can’t accept, you keep a few true facts and spin a new story round them” made by the doctor treating Kath from *The Survivor*. (Barnes 109)

From the very start of the book a question is asked or implied over and over again. How can we know that this is what happened and how it happened? In Chapter 2 – *The Visitors* there is an emphatic clash between how different cultures perceive history, each being certain that their historical narrative is the right one. That is perhaps the reason for the indefinite article in the title of the book: history of the world is not singular, there are only histories. At this point we can argue that there is of course evidence that supports every past event we consider history, but Barnes even goes as far as questioning whether we can rely on it. In Chapter 5 – *The Shipwreck* we see how the image of something that happened becomes distorted for the sake of artistic value and, quite paradoxically, for the sake of plausibility. Barnes’ point is that sometimes how things happened is not enough for an accurate description that can survive in time.

As opposed to the traditional way history is usually narrated, most of the chapters of *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters* are in a first-person narrative, including some very unreliable narrators such as Kath, the arguably insane narrator in Chapter 4, and the woodworm’s eyeview of the Genesis flood narrative in Chapter 1. The author even makes a point of showing us the boundaries of a supposedly neutral, didactic narrator in the essay on love in the half-chapter *Parenthesis*. “When I say ‘I’ you will want to know within a paragraph or two whether I mean Julian Barnes or someone invented”, he concedes. (Barnes 225)

However, it is not just the narrative that is a problem according to Barnes and that is why he uses a remarkable range of literary genres. For instance, without even a need for comparison, the reader

can certainly feel that the story from Chapter 8 would be considerably different if it had not been written as a series of letters. The change of narrative structure and literary genre is perhaps most apparent in Chapter 5 – *The Shipwreck*, in which it is obvious how history changes throughout interpretation. This chapter, as well as the whole book, also serves as a testimonial of how historical events are in fact spun together: by comparing various possibilities and interpretations and looking for points of concurrence, recurring motives and connections.

The sense of connectedness is a very prominent motif throughout the book, it is after all that common thread which makes it a novel rather than a collection of short stories. Barnes himself commented on his authorial intent by claiming that the book “was conceived as a whole and executed as a whole. Things in it thicken and deepen, there are recurrent patterns of human aspirations and failings”. (Guignery 21) These recurrent patterns Barnes talked about all come together in the final chapter when the narrator describes all the activities he did in the New Heaven, effectively tying the whole book together. Nevertheless, those connecting elements are not just important as a binding force. They are an evidence that no matter how history is being told, there are always some repetitive motifs that serve as a proof that what we are being told did in fact happen, albeit it is possible that it did not happen exactly the way we are being told. This argument is perhaps best summed up by the novelist’s conclusive rhetorical inquiry, “The history of the world? Just voices echoing in the dark; images that burn for a few centuries and then fade; stories, old stories that sometimes seem to overlap; strange links, impertinent connections.” (Barnes 240)

The questionable credibility of memory as an instrument of preserving history is not the only memory-related interest of Barnes. Memory lapses and the tricks our memory plays on us constitute yet another important and repetitive element in *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters*. It is of course all tied together with the theme of history: How can we be sure that history is veritable if we cannot even be sure that we remember our own lives properly? This issue is explored mainly in Chapter 4 – *The*

Survivor where the main concern is the impossibility of distinguishing reality from fiction if we cannot rely on our memory. “You are what you have done; what you have done is in your memory; what you remember defines who you are; when you forget your life you cease to be, even before your death.” (Barnes 128)

Analysis of the novel

1. Chapter 1 – *The Stowaway: A Woodworm’s perspective*

The first chapter of *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters* is an alternative retelling of the story of Noah’s Ark, told from a seemingly external viewpoint. If we set aside the blasphemous features of this particular rendition, up until the point that the narrator reveals himself as a woodworm, the narrative seems to be objective and factual, mainly because the narrator himself explains at the beginning that due to the fact he was a stowaway he does not feel the need to embellish the story. “When I recall the Voyage, I feel no sense of obligation; gratitude puts no smear of Vaseline on the lens. My account you can trust.” (Barnes 4) It appears as a logical and almost academic (and possibly deconstructive) attempt at setting the well known story straight. Every detail of the story from Genesis is mercilessly dissembled: of course the Ark was not just one ship, it was a whole flotilla. Was Noah a truly good man? No, but the others were much worse. Step by step everything we know of the story of Noah’s Ark is being torn apart. And it is the logical and nonchalant approach of the narrator that makes it believable to such an extent that the reader almost does not question its credibility. Even before we become aware of the nature of the narrator, it is obvious that he exists outside the course of events and therefore there appears to be no reason for his depiction of what is happening to be biased or untruthful. What contributes to this sense of accuracy and plausibility even more is the way the narrator often refers to the reader, asking questions and demanding confirmation, as if to ask whether the delivered deconstructionist narrative is logical or not. It can be readily assumed that Barnes chose a woodworm as a narrator of the story because he wanted to show how easily we are manipulated into believing that something is objective. We tend to forget that history is just another story being told, there is always some perspective and it is always someone’s recollection of how a certain event happened. Just because

the narrator seems to be detached from the story and does not have any motivation to distort the truth, s/he can never be completely unbiased.

An important feature contributing to the sense of objectiveness of this rendition of the voyage of Noah's Ark is that the narrator does not defer from unpleasant details. This might seem as an unimportant detail, but it actually makes a considerable difference in terms of plausibility. The main concern Barnes expresses throughout this chapter is that the reason we cannot be sure that our account of history is accurate is because we are often compelled to forget the unpleasant details that make the humankind look bad, which can be extended to more clear-cut and partisan nationalistic perspectives (the obvious analogy is a nation "turning a blind eye" to some of its past atrocities). Conversely, as the story of Noah's Ark through the perspective of a woodworm indicates, the uncomfortable aspects are what makes a story more believable and realistic. This is the problem with history and historians, Barnes and the woodworm seem to be telling us: disregarding vraisemblance, history often seems to opt out for more elegant explanation to appease our conscience. We suffer from convenient memory lapses that inevitably damage our credibility as objective narrators, yet we feel that our historical records are precise. The argument is that we are simply incapable of being truthful to ourselves and it results in our biggest disadvantage: we lie to ourselves and then we forget that we did. "You aren't too good with the truth, either, your species. You keep forgetting things, or you pretend to [...] I can see there might be a positive side to this willful averting of the eye: ignoring the bad things makes it easier for you to carry on. But ignoring the bad things makes you end up believing that bad things never happen." (Barnes 29)

In the case of Noah's Ark it is of course a hyperbole to talk about factual history, but the observations about human nature and our penchant for fabulation, intended or not, ring true even today. This malfunction of human memory is the reason history keeps repeating itself, it is the reason people tend to make the same mistakes over and over again. If we do not keep record of our past mistakes,

because we want to erase them from our history to ease our guilty conscience, we cannot learn from them and avoid them in the future because we will eventually forget them altogether. Moreover it is not just our own mistakes we want to forget; sometimes we omit things simply because they do not fit with how we want the story to be remembered. This nonchalance is dangerous, the woodworm tells us, because without complete information there are holes in our history that we tend to fill with explanations that are eventually integrated into the story and the original historical truth becomes less and less important. Explanations that are usually based on blaming someone else for our mistakes, some external force that made us do it. “Blame someone else, that’s always your first instinct. And if you can’t blame someone else, then start claiming the problem isn’t a problem anyway.” (Barnes 29)

2. Chapter 2 – *The Visitors*: The animals came in two by two

Chapter two is a fictional story about a cruise liner Santa Euphemia hijacked by a terrorist group called the Black Thunder who are attempting to liberate their members in captivity by killing the ship’s passengers until their demands are fulfilled. The story is loosely based on an actual cruise liner, MS Achille Lauro, which was hijacked by members of the Palestine Liberation Front in 1985. *The Visitors*’ intention is to show how repetitive human history is, regardless of the way we perceive it. The very start of this chapter alludes to *The Stowaway* when Franklin Hughes, the main protagonist comments upon seeing the passengers board the ship: “The animals came in two by two.” (Barnes 31) A comment that becomes relevant later on when the passengers are being separated based on the guilt of their nation. These recurrent patterns of human history is according to Barnes both a sign of our obsession with erasing past mistakes from the history books and a sign of truth value of at least certain facts in our past. It is also a clue as to how our memory works. We are shaped by the stories we remember being told, by our memories and past experiences and we consciously or subconsciously

apply these memories to what we experience, we are therefore able to anticipate the course of our future at least to a certain point.

The main objective of this chapter is to show that there is not just one history of the world, there are different interpretations and different viewpoints even if the facts stay more or less the same. The Black Thunder group's view of history is significantly different from Franklin Hughes' and in extension that of the western world. However both parties firmly believe that their viewpoint is the right one. How is this possible then, when history is supposed to be an objective sequence of known facts supported by evidence? That is the question echoing not only throughout this chapter, but throughout the whole book. Barnes' response to that is obvious, there is not one history, nor is there one amongst many histories that is the right one. We have to look for the connections and that is as close to objective truth as we can get. History is a story, there is little difference between the two words. A story is what we desire after all, we do not need proof or logical explanation, we want to hear a good story. "He felt his audience begin to relax. The circumstances were unusual, but they were being told a story..." (Barnes 55)

The main character of the second chapter, Franklin Hughes, is a popular historian and a tour guide, which is very significant, given the theme of the chapter. From the beginning, he does not seem as a very distinguished man, in fact, he is described as a relatively shallow person that is not as passionate about history, as his job would suggest. "What his special area of knowledge was nobody could quite discern, but he roved freely in the worlds of archaeology history and comparative culture." (Barnes 35) Later on it is obvious that his approach to history is rather perfunctory. His primary concern is to tell a good story, to make the audience captivated. He even admits that it is important to have an overall grasp of things and the details are of little importance. Franklin Hughes is an epitome of a historian in *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters* since he is the only one, however his description is not very flattering to historians as such. Over and over again he is bending history to

serve his purposes, whether it is in order to amuse or appease the audience, or in order to justify the means of the terrorists. The arbitrariness and questionable veracity of history is alluded to even before the main crisis of the story. When describing his usual tour guiding routine, Franklin intimates that some of his more pesky clients tend to challenge the received notions of history: “Excuse me, Mr. Hughes, it looks very Egyptian to me – how do we know the Egyptians didn’t build it?” (Barnes 39)

The most important notion in *The Visitors* is revealed at the very end: After the terrorists are killed and the ship is saved there is no one to provide evidence of Franklin’s bargain with The Black Thunder group beside himself. Franklin is naturally unable to convince his girlfriend Tricia and presumably the rest of the passengers of the goodness of his intentions and as a result she never speaks to him again. “Tricia Maitland, who had become Irish for a few hours without realizing it, and who in the course of Franklin Hughes’s lecture had returned her ring to the finger where it originally belonged, never spoke to him again.” (Barnes 58) This moment shows that things are routinely erased from our historical memory. We can be benevolent when talking about knowledge gaps and inconsistencies in ancient history, because it seems natural to us. This chapter, however, indicates that sometimes events are misconstrued and misremembered directly after the historic moment in question. Within the framework of the story, Tricia and the surviving passengers will always remember Franklin as a traitor and a coward, when in reality he made the choice to save Tricia’s life despite anticipating contempt. And that is how the event will enter history, incorrect from the beginning.

3. Chapter 4 – *The Survivor*: And then what?

“Everything is connected, even the parts we don’t like, especially the parts we don’t like.”

(Barnes 84)

The protagonist of *The Survivor* is the epitome of an unreliable narrator. Kath is a woman that believes she is escaping a nuclear holocaust by sailing the sea in a stolen boat with two cats until she lands on an island where she spends her days and nights hallucinating about being in a mental hospital. Her narrative is highly subjective and chaotic from the beginning, but towards the end it becomes more and more probable that she is in fact delusional. How are we then supposed to trust a narrative that is told by a woman who cannot rely on her own memory because everything she remembers about her voyage might be a hallucination?

In this chapter the reader is offered two different viewpoints, the marginalized logical account of the history of famous men and Kath’s perspective, a viewpoint of the outsider who stands beyond and looks for the fragments and connections that according to her are much closer to the universal truth. Kath’s perspective is in many ways similar to the woodworm’s eye view from chapter one. She is not a part of the events and is therefore able to criticize the general perspective. She is also much like the woodworm underestimated and neglected which is why she is frustrated with the truth offered by those in charge. In a way, Kath is an embodiment of forgotten truths of history (like for example the reasoning behind Franklin Hughes decision of giving the lecture). She claims that there are gaps and inaccuracies in the facts that we are told by the authorities. Everything is connected, she says, and if they omit something because it does not fit their purpose they will soon forget it and then repeat the same mistakes again. She sums up this worldview in the following inner monologue: “All I see is the old connections, the ones we don’t take any notice of any more because that makes it easier to poison

the reindeer and paint stripes down their backs and feed them to the mink. Who made that happen? Which famous men will claim the credit for that?" (Barnes 97)

The motive of guilt previously told by the woodworm is also repeated in this chapter. The reindeer poisoned by the radiation were supposed to be buried six feet under ground, but as Kath observes, that would implicate that something went wrong. Later she remarks that she thinks that they should have buried them, because "Burying things gives you a proper sense of shame. Look what we've done to the reindeer, they'd say as they dug the pit. Or they might, at least. They might think about it." (Barnes 87) The notion of burying things that remind us of our mistakes is the source of the fault in our memories. Whenever there is some distraction that deflects our attention elsewhere, we tend to forget things, much like Kath forgot the rest of the poem about Columbus because Eric Dooley distracted her by chewing her pigtail.

The reindeer that Kath is so obsessed about, make an intertextual appearance in the woodworm's account of the biblical flood and are mentioned in *The Stowaway* as uneasy, as if they could sense that something would go wrong, represent the way we demean history.

The Survivor opens with a verse "In fourteen hundred and ninety-two / Columbus sailed the ocean blue." (Barnes 92) – a perfect example of how history is being diminished and simplified. But history is not simple, it should not be turned into rhymes, should not be learned by heart and obediently recited without thinking. We can hide the unpleasant details by creating art from history and we can believe that reindeer fly, but the unpleasant parts still happened and reindeer still bleed and die from radiation.

The second part of the story, starting with the first mention of Kath's nightmares deals with a different issue concerning memory. If one cannot rely on the authenticity of his own memories, how can he distinguish reality from hallucinations? Neither Julian Barnes nor Kath give any explanation, at

the end of *The Survivor*, as to whether the journey in the boat actually did or did not happen, so the reader is left guessing which version is more plausible. Kath herself obviously believes that the scenes from the asylum are just nightmares created by her own mind, but to the reader the nightmares seem to be the reality because they seem more logical. Once again there are interference points in both versions of what happened, which enable Kath and the doctors from the asylum, respectively, to dismiss the version told by the other party as hallucination, or fabulation as they call it in the chapter. “He’d given himself away, of course. You keep a few true facts and spin a new story round them – exactly what he’d done.” (Barnes 110) Strictly speaking, both versions should have the same truth value, there is no evidence given that would disprove either one or the other. However, people tend to judge everything based on their previous experiences, that is to say, based on what they remember. That is the reason Kath can never believe that she did not sail but unfortunately, that is also the reason why, for the most part, the reader is inclined to believe the alternative reading of the story in which Kath is insane and in an asylum.

4. Chapter 5 – *The Shipwreck*: How do you turn catastrophe into art?

“What is true is not necessarily convincing.” (Barnes 129)

Chapter five deals with the way historical events are being remembered via various artistic media. This chapter is divided into two parts, marked I and II and it deals with the sinking of French naval frigate *Méduse* July 5, 1816. Part I is an account of the sinking of the ship and depicts the fate of the survivors that escaped on a raft. Part II is an essay on the process of transforming historical events into art – concentrating on the painting *The Raft of the Medusa* by Théodore Géricault.

The artistic progression described in the second part is remarkably similar to the way memories change over time. As we are unable to remember everything with absolute precision our memories are simplified and polished. Memory is not a camera recording, parts of what actually happened fade away

and are replaced by plausible explanations or someone else's accounts. A memory is – much like a painting – a momentum, stored away for future use.

The second part of *The Shipwreck* demonstrates, that absolute accuracy is almost always irrelevant in the process of remembering an event in artistic media, and of remembering things altogether. In the beginning of the essay there are listed all the possible scenes from the catastrophe that could have been depicted but were not with explanation that the primary concern of Géricault was not to be “1) political; 2) symbolic; 3) theatrical; 4) shocking; 5) thrilling; 6) sentimental; 7) documentational; or 8) unambiguous.” (Barnes 127) Even though the painter started with the truth to life, delivering the objective truth in a painting is impossible. For instance, if he was to paint the moment of the arrival of the butterfly it would seem invented despite the fact it did in fact happen. The goal, Barnes tells us, is not accuracy but believability. The problem of remembering history is, at least according to Barnes, the fact that we tend to rely on paintings and songs and novels without realizing that in order to evoke the same sentiments in people that did not witness the events themselves, they need to be altered at least to some extent. The fact that history is being tampered with is not, Barnes insists, a problem. It is the fact that we often forget it. “Catastrophe has become art; but this is no reducing process. It is freeing, enlarging, explaining. Catastrophe has become art: that is, after all, what it is for.” (Barnes 137)

Apart from describing the reason behind alterations in artistic portrayal of past, this chapter also serves as a comparison of how a story changes based on the tone in which it is being told. Part I is told in a neutral tone and therefore it is perceived as objective and true. In the second part, when Géricault ponders what scene from the catastrophe he should depict, it is explained that every moment has a different tone and consequently invokes different emotions. For example, if he painted the scene of the Mutiny it would mislead people into thinking that the raft was a place where virtue triumphed, while in fact it was more historically accurate for the painting to emanate strength and mercilessness. “Tone was

always going to be the problem here.” (Barnes 128) This can be seen as a direct reflection of Hayden White and his notion that the account of historical events can be (and often are) shaped by various artistic tropes.

5. Chapter 7 – *Three Simple Stories: Voyage of the Damned*

The notion that a catastrophe happens only to become art that Barnes proposed in *the Shipwreck* is repeating itself in the *Three Simple Stories*. Chapter 7 is divided, as the title suggests into three parts, marked I, II and III. The first story is a portrayal of a survivor from the Titanic, Lawrence Beesley, the second story retells another Biblical theme, Jonah and the whale, and the third story describes the voyage of the Jewish refugees aboard the ship St. Louis during the Second World War.

Lawrence Beesley’s desire to experience the filming of the movie *A Night to Remember* is a desire to see a real-life catastrophe, one that he himself survived, turned into art. “He was keen to be among the extras who despairingly crowded the rail as the ship went down – keen, you could say, to undergo in fiction an alternative version of history.” (Barnes 174) The suggestion of this chapter, is once again the repetitive aspect of human history, but this time it is accentuated that “history repeats itself, the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce.” (Barnes 175)

In this chapter, notably in the second story, Barnes states that history repeats itself not only because we refuse to remember our past mistakes, but also because we remember the myths and stories we tell and seek to approximate them and make them more believable. The most important question posed by this chapter is whether echoes can prove the truth of the thing being echoed. The story about Jonah and the whale Barnes firmly declares is not believable. “Of course, we recognize that the story can’t have any basis in truth. We are sophisticated people, and we can tell the difference between reality and myth.” (Barnes 179) However, the moment a sailor by the name of James Bartley is swallowed by a whale in 1891; Barnes states that the myth of Jonah suddenly becomes more plausible.

The modern day event replaces the myth and goes beyond its symbolic value by reinforcing its plausibility in real terms. People, including the author himself, believe the story of Bartley just like people before believed the story of Jonah, and those who do not will believe it because it will inevitably happen again. This is yet another reason, according to Barnes, history repeats itself - a myth must become reality. It does not exist just because we remember it, but because we want to believe it, and to believe it we need to retell it, adjust it and bring it nearer.

The third story, much like the story of Santa Euphemia in *the Visitors*, echoes the biblical story of Noah's Ark. The myth is redeployed once again to allow us to remember it more vividly. The woodworm in *the Stowaway* said that it is the uncomfortable and ugly aspects that make a story more believable but that humanity has a perpetual problem of remembering those unpleasant details in order to ease our shame. As the third part of the *Three Simple Stories* shows, the myth of the Ark from chapter one with all its atrocities seems more truthful and believable after we read the modern day version of the ship St. Louis. There are several linking elements, the fact that the journey lasted forty days and forty nights, the separation of clean from the unclean, the boat seeking safer land. We do not want to remember the story of the Ark the way the woodworm tells it, but faced with the dreadfulness of the story in part III it is not as easily dismissable. The fact we do not retain or do not want to remember the barbarity of Noah is what allows us to commit them again – we did not accept the refugees, we do not talk about the fate of the passengers of St. Louis and we do not bury the reindeer.

The first story portrays a moment in life of a surviving passenger from the Titanic, Lawrence Beesley. It addresses the need to relive past experiences in order to understand them and find perhaps some truth that did not occur the first time. The assumption of the whole book is that the recurring elements and fragments repeated in history are the testimonies of factuality of those aspects. In the first half of the story there are several presumptions about the nature of the survival of Beesley, such as the matter of him escaping in woman's clothes. This is later on repeated when he attempts to infiltrate the

cast by falsification of the past and dressing in a period costume. Beesley's desire to relive a presumably terrifying experience might seem foolish, but as was demonstrated in *the Survivor*, our memory is not perfect, particularly not in stressful situations. So by experiencing a memory turned into art, simplified and interpreted it would allow Beesley to remember everything he was not able to encompass in the moment of survival. But as we cannot change our own past, Beesley is inevitably condemned to repetition and he leaves the Titanic before it sinks.

At this point in the story Barnes notes what Karl Marx wrote in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* "Hegel remarks somewhere that all great, world-historical facts and personages occur, as it were, twice. He has forgotten to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce." (Marx 5) Beestley's attempt and failure of re-enacting the sinking of the Titanic for himself is without a doubt absurd and his inability to experience the actual moment of submersion is much less dramatic than the first time.

6. Chapter 8 – *Upstream!* And Chapter 3 – *The Wars of Religion*

The third and eighth chapters further develop the theme of interconnectedness and repetition of past. The farcical element referred above is perhaps even more prominent in these two chapters than in the *Three Simple Stories*, despite the fact that the events of *Upstream!* are quite tragic.

The eighth chapter continues the theme of re-enacting historic events for the purpose of artistic portrayal. *Upstream!* Is a series of letters from an actor, Charlie, who is filming a movie in a jungle in South America to his wife, Pippa. The movie is based on a real-life event of two missionaries father Firmin and father Antonio and it is supposed to end, as it did before by the down-throw of the raft carrying the two missionaries and native Indians. During the last scene the actor that plays father Antonio drowns and it is hinted that it was not an accident but that the Indians made it happen. This incident provokes in Charlie a question whether the repetition of past is always meaningful. "The way

I'm looking at it, either there's some connection with what happened a couple of hundred years ago or there isn't. Perhaps it's just a chance coincidence." (Barnes 216) Up to this point in the book, everything seems to indicate that repetition is not random; however here there seems to be a hesitation. The narrator offers an explanation then, that perhaps it is our inability to stay truthful when transforming history in art. That perhaps the Indians did not understand that the re-enactment was not supposed to be real and accurate and since they presumably knew what happened all those years ago they simply wanted to repeat it precisely. This notion is supported by Charlie's previous remarks about the way the Indians do not understand that father Firmin and Charlie the actor are the same person. On the other hand he says that the reason this tragedy happened does not have to be random, but it might not have happened because the Indians wanted to repeat the past. As all those times before, it is an echo of the past: both the contemporary Indians and the original ones knocked the raft for the same reason – to stop father Firmin. This explanation provides the cruel irony of the echo, because the second tragedy happened for seemingly no reason.

In this chapter Barnes once again punctuates the dubiousness of narration and unattainability of the unabridged truth. Everything we learn we see through Charlie's eyes and given the abbreviated epistolary form of the account (Charlie confides all the narrative in a series of letters which he sends to his girlfriend by way of talking her out of a breakup), it is questionable if he is telling everything. The impossibility of getting a full account of events is symbolically underscored by the fact that Charlie's letters either go unanswered by the sulky girlfriend or, in any case, the reader does not have the chance to read her replies.

The wars of religion is an odd chapter, perhaps even more so due to the fact it comes so early in the book. More than anything else it explores the connecting elements embedded in our collective memory. It consists of a transcript of a trial against the woodworms that have infested a church, caused the building to become unstable and ate through the leg of the bishop's throne rendering him imbecile

when it broke and he fell. The trial ends with the woodworms excommunicated on the basis that they were not supposed to be saved on the Ark, therefore God did not intend their survival. The chapter ends with a comical echo as the manuscript of the trial has no ending, because it was eaten by termites. “ It appears from the condition of the parchment that in the course of the last four and a half centuries it has been attacked, perhaps on more than one occasion, by some species of termite, which has devoured the closing words of the Juge d’Église.” (Barnes 80)

7. *Parenthesis: the heart isn’t heart-shaped*

The half chapter *Parenthesis* is an essay on love and its importance. By the time the reader reaches this part of the book Barnes apparently feels like he should offer at least some consolation as to what is the meaning of progress, why do we keep searching for the truth when it is unobtainable and we are inevitably predisposed to repetition. The answer is love he says, but it is also not. Love is not an active force – the heart is not heart-shaped. (Barnes 230)

The remark of the heart not being heart-shaped might seem unimportant, but Barnes insists that that is exactly the problem with our thinking. Everybody knows what shape the organ really has, but our concept of it is still the heart symbol. Just as well, when we think about our history and memory we tend to impose a concept of linearity on them, but that is not how either memory or history work. In the second part of *Parenthesis* Barnes offers the imagery of a photograph being developed. Memory is like a finished photograph, a moment frozen in an instant of time, unbreakable and clear. But it is never the whole story, it does not change, does not develop, does not convey everything. A photograph or a memory is just a fragment. And from these fragments we create history and we do not take into account that it is incomplete - sometimes photographs are destroyed because they do not stabilize, sometimes we did not have time to capture everything, and those moments are lost forever.

“We get scared by history; we allow ourselves to be bullied by dates.” (Barnes 239) The problem with our recollection of history is that we focus on the dates, personages and chronology. We all remember that in fourteen hundred and ninety-two Columbus sailed the ocean blue, but we hardly ever think about why, or what happened next. We reduce history to enumeration and rhymes. Obsessed with learning from the past by simply remembering when something important occurred and ignoring the details and the missing parts we can never understand how to avoid previous mistakes. But still we try and search for the truth and we find the wreck of the Titanic and the *Médusa*, but it does not help us stop the history from being echoed in the future.

The *Parenthesis* offers possibly the most explicit and succinct statement concerning history in the whole book, straightforward loud and clear: “History isn’t what happened. History is just what historians tell us. There was a pattern, a plan, a movement, expansion, the march of democracy; it is a tapestry, a flow of events, a complex narrative, connected, explicable. One good story leads to another.”(Barnes 240) It is not like that, there is no objective course of events, the history of the world is a collection of stories and memories frozen in time, strange links and impertinent connections (Barnes 240). But we refuse to acknowledge that and we fabricate and fill the gaps with reasonable explanations because it calms us down. As if knowing what our history is really made of would undermine it in some way. But the knowledge of what a violin is made of does not banalize and demean music, on the contrary - the knowledge enhances the aesthetic experience. So why not acknowledge that history is made of stories and memories of mostly unreliable narrators combined into an artificial god-eyed version of what really happened?

The answer is the promise of truth. Even though we know that objective truth is not achievable we still must believe it is. And if we cannot believe that, we have to hope that half a loaf is better than no bread. If we do not then we lose hope and there is no history and no morality, because whoever is stronger has the right to promote his or her truth and we will stop trying and stop fighting. As Barnes

surmises in his pseudo statistics, “we must believe that it is 99 per cent obtainable; or if we can’t believe this we must believe that 43 per cent objective truth is better than 41 per cent.” (Barnes 243)

8. Chapter 6 – *The Mountain* and Chapter 9 – *Project Ararat*

The Mountain and *Project Ararat* both explore the echoes of Noah’s Ark albeit differently than the other chapters. Here the stories do not consist of repeating the story, but they are an attempt at rationalization of the myth by searching for evidence. Chapter six is about a nineteenth-century woman named Amanda that sets on a journey on the mountain Ararat to find the remnants of Noah’s Ark after the death of her father, but instead dies in the cave on the mountain. Chapter nine tells the story of Spike Tiggler a former astronaut searching for the remains of the Ark because he believes that God commanded it and instead he finds the body of Amanda thinking it is Noah. Both of those journeys are doomed from the beginning as the reader is aware that the story of Noah’s Ark is in the least inaccurate, but they show how we impose our experiences from past events and memories on our beliefs and what we take as history.

During her journey Amanda repeatedly judges what is taking place by what she remembers from the biblical story, memories serve her as a referential point for evaluating current situations. All the same she is ultimately unable to rationalize the myth and dies on the mountain without finding the absolute truth she was looking for.

Spike Tiggler’s story is an immediate echo of Amanda’s journey, however different the circumstances. In this second story the theme of history repeating itself the second time as a farce is very prominent. Where Amanda’s story and its ending could be taken seriously, Spike’s journey’s end is nothing but absurd. The use of memory as a referential point and even as a device of manipulation is very pronounced in *Project Ararat*. Despite the fact Spike himself admits that his memories from Wadesville resemble a comic strip, he continuously uses those memories to achieve his goal – the

kick-start of Project Ararat. This is somewhat similar to the way Franklin Hughes uses history to justify the means of the terrorists. The matter is that something based on shared memories or shared history almost always seems more reasonable.

9. Chapter 10 – *The Dream*: postmodern Heaven

“I dreamt that I woke up. It’s the oldest dream of all, and I’ve just had it.” (Barnes 279)

As the book is called *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters*, the final chapter is expected to be an ending of history. However since the history of the world is still being written, Barnes opted out for a different conclusion. *The Dream* describes Modern Heaven. The narrator wakes up in heaven where he can do whatever he wishes, and that is exactly what he does for centuries, before he decides to die for the second time, as he is told everybody does.

The portrayal of heaven in Chapter ten is a place that is whatever one wants it to be. It is explained, that there is no hell, because people ultimately do not want it, and that since everybody can do everything sooner or later everyone chooses to die. This version of heaven and this conclusion is somehow unsatisfactory, but as Barnes explains it, much like we need to believe that objective truth is achievable and strive for it, we need to dream of Heaven even though it cannot make us eternally happy.

The postmodern description of Heaven is very similar to the postmodern approach to history. And in true post-modern fashion does not offer any outcome, any final truth. Basically, since there is no singular truth, why not give everyone what they desire?

The last chapter contains every single linking element and pattern occurring throughout the whole book, everything that happened throughout the history of mankind echoes in the experiences of the narrator in Heaven. “ I went on several cruises; – I learned canoeing, mountaineering, ballooning; –

I got into all sorts of danger and escaped; – I explored the jungle; – I watched a court case (didn't agree with the verdict); – I tried being a painter (not as bad as I thought!) and a surgeon; – I fell in love, of course, lots of times; – I pretended I was the last person on earth (and the first).”(Barnes 297)

Conclusion

The theme of memory is predominant in the novel analyzed in this thesis and it is present in many forms in every chapter. The most prominent and noticeable way in which it is explored is within the connection to history. The second and perhaps less articulate theme relating to memory is its elusiveness. Memory lapses and manipulations are important, according to Barnes, within the relation to history and outside of it because our memory is our identity and we have no other choice than to rely on it.

Julian Barnes summarizes the criticism of history in ten short chapters and one essay in such a nonchalant way that an inattentive reader would almost miss it. This is due to the fact that Julian Barnes resonates with several tenets of postmodernism to such an extent that his methodology of writing is exactly what should be expected: he communicates his theory about writing and perception of history without formulating it. His criticism of the Grand Narrative/Meta-narrative is fragmented and concealed in absurd stories and his book does not aim to articulate the postmodernist theory of metahistory - it simply shows the failings of history and historiography and leaves it to the reader to decipher the implications.

The purpose of this thesis was to explore the theme of memory and its impact of how we create, arrange and perceive history as reflected in the novel and to infer what Julian Barnes might have intended to convey in regard to it. This was done by a critical analysis of every chapter of the book, focusing mainly on their relevance to the chosen topic.

The manner in which the theme of memory in relation to history is treated in the book shows that Julian Barnes agrees with the general postmodernist approach to history. *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* deals with every theoretical aspect of postmodern criticism of the Grand Narrative from

the argument that history is not objective to the theory of emplotment. On account of the fact that Barnes is a novelist and not a theoretician or a philosopher his doubts and conclusions about the possibility of objective and all-inclusive history are explored in a purely literary way. Barnes' doubts about history aim attention mainly at the unreliability of narrative, the elusiveness of memory and the deception of form. His artistic rendition underscores the relevance of these doubts throughout the employment of various unreliable narrators and the use of different literary genres, showing effectively the result of such proceedings on the nature and truthfulness of the story.

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